

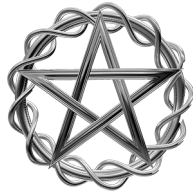
INNER DEMONS

GLORIA
OLIVER



Free Sample

Inner Demons



Gloria Oliver

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DEDICATION

To all the awesome folks responsible for the show "Supernatural." My very first obsession.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the folks at Mundania Press – thank you for having faith. It was sad to see you go. You will not be forgotten.

CHAPTER ONE

“Getting a little excited, are we?” I couldn’t keep the grin out of my voice as I kicked off my shoes and dug my toes into the carpet and stretched. Getting home in the evenings was one of the best perks of the day. Switching the phone to my other hand, I picked up my low heeled pumps and stepped into the bedroom.

“Yes. No? Mostly I’m totally stressing out! Richie is useless at this stuff. He’s got no idea that Peach, Taffeta Peach, and Candy Peach aren’t in *any* way the same color.” Debbie sighed from the other end of the line. “Honestly, he could try a little harder. We’ll only get married once.”

I didn’t have any idea what the differences between those colors were either but figured it wasn’t the time to say so. I tucked the shoes away in the closet and grabbed a pair of gray sweat pants and an old Beatles t-shirt, feeling the day slide off my shoulders as I changed. “You’ve known he’s been color impaired for years, love won’t change that. Or have you forgotten his color choices for the college mixer two years ago?” Drifting to the kitchen, I pulled down my favorite cup, chipped handle and all, and filled it with water and stuck it in the microwave to heat.

A stifled giggle came from the other end of the line. “What a disaster! That won’t ever be happening again on my watch.”

“I should hope not.” Grinning, I brought out my tea colander and opened the cabinet to pick the flavor of the evening.

Blueberry Cheesecake Tea seemed just the thing.

“We’re still on for this weekend, right?” A slight note of insecurity bled through.

I worked hard not to smile. Though I usually wasn’t much into fashion or agonizing over what cake flavoring would please most people, I’d do almost anything for Debbie. “Of course, looking forward to it.”

“I love you, Tam.”

“I love you, too. But don’t tell Richie, he’ll get jealous.”

Debbie laughed. “It’s a secret. Pick you up at nine.”

I hung up just as the microwave dinged. Pulling out the mug, I put it on a tray with everything else needed, and went to the living room, looking forward to stretching out on my gray couch and sipping my tea.

I’d just set the tray down when I noticed an odd smell...like rotten eggs. I half turned, then...

A pair of headlights was coming right for me.

I froze, my breath catching at my throat, my brain refusing to accept the impossible change.

The car swerved at the last moment, and time slowed around me as a flush of adrenaline hit my system. The blare of a pressed horn crashed into my ears.

The dark blue Oldsmobile missed me by mere inches, the glow of streetlights reflecting from its sides. Humid wind whipped over me, trying to drag me along in the car’s wake. The stench from the exhaust coiled about me, and I spun around to watch the trailing red tail lights.

“Lunatic!” An arm shot out the window, the middle finger held up as an extra commentary on the near miss.

The car never even slowed.

This was real.

Other pairs of headlights bore down my way. Fear spiked through me, yelling at me to get the hell out of there. I tripped when I took my first panicked step, the shoes on my feet feeling strange and awkward. I glanced down and saw I was wearing white boots with six-inch heels. Worse, I was also wearing a dark sequined dress that only covered a small part of my upper thighs.

I wasn't a prude, but I had taste, dammit, and this get up just wasn't me. I stumbled toward the sidewalk to my right, only too aware of the traffic heading toward me.

I almost collapsed once I made it, the high heels messing with my center of gravity. A Shell gas station and a combination KFC/Taco Bell sat in front of me. The location didn't look familiar, though, at the moment, nothing did.

How did I get here?

Panic nibbled at the back of my mind, confusion clouding everything.

I slowly turned where I stood and spotted a freeway with an overpass on my right. Across the blacktop street was a bank and several grassy lots set back from the curb. The street sign said Beechnut Street. That rang a bell—could I still be in Houston? Just thinking it gave me hope. At the moment, though, it wouldn't have surprised me to find out I was on another planet entirely.

Chilled, I rubbed my arms, even as a bead of sweat ran down my neck. A small purse on a long chain strap smacked against my thigh. I brought it close, never having seen it before, and opened it. Wads of loose cash lay inside, as well as a tube of lipstick and a

set of keys hanging off a skull keychain. There was no driver's license or other type of ID. No cell phone, either. I couldn't tell if the purse was even actually mine. Yet the shape of one of the keys looked familiar. I was pretty sure it belonged to my apartment.

It looked like I had cash, what I hoped was my key, and I was possibly in my city. This meant I could get back home to things I knew.

Home—yes, getting home sounded excellent right now.

Taking a deep breath, I felt slightly more in control. Yes, home, I needed to get myself home. That was a plan, something to aim for. I half walked, half waddled toward the KFC/Taco Bell, hoping to find a pay phone or beg to borrow someone's cell. I'd never worn such tall heels. They tried to sink into the grass as I cut across the strip to the parking lot. As I neared the bank of glass windows advertising value meals and combo platters, I spotted my reflection and came to a complete stop.

The image that mirrored my movements was and wasn't me. I had screaming platinum blonde hair. Straight and startling in its color, it dropped down to my shoulders. It couldn't be real. No matter how many straighteners I used on my hair, it'd never been that cooperative. A shaking hand with platinum, luminescent nail polish rose up to touch the hair. After a quick inspection, I realized it was a wig. Though I wasn't considered that dark-skinned, especially when compared to the rest of my family, out here, my face and eyes seemed to suck out the light, especially with my face being framed by the platinum hairpiece, my eyes shaded with glittering eye shadow and lips with matching lipstick. The black and way too short sequined dress showed stripes of

startling white and matched the tall-heeled white boots that rose up to my knees. I wasn't sure if I looked more like a hooker out of a cheap 60's cop show, an extra out of an old Soul Train rerun, or some exotic alien in a B-movie showing on the Syfy Channel. Either way, it wasn't me.

I swayed where I stood, the surreal feeling of it all making me dizzy. I leaned against the glass door, no longer trusting my legs. How did I come to be dressed like this or be at this place? I liked to have fun as much as anyone, but I wasn't a raving party girl. Some might even call me boring since my idea of a good time typically consisted of staying at home dressed in my sweats, curled up on the couch with a good book. So why?

Darkness prickled at the edges of my vision, so I scrunched down and placed my head between my knees while trying to force my breathing to slow, sure I was close to hyperventilating. The accountant in me whispered that all numbers added up, even if you didn't have every bit of data. All you had to do was find them. What came in always had to balance what came out, even though it might not look like it. I just needed to hold it together long enough to find all the pieces—then everything would make sense. Everything.

But to do that, I needed to keep it together—I needed to stick to my plan of getting home. My breathing slowed, and that in turn brought down the hammering in my heart.

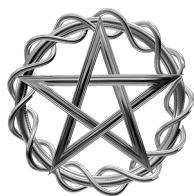
Feeling slightly calmer, I gingerly stood up.

The night air pressed in around me, hot and sticky with humidity, not the usual norm for April. But with Texas, you just never knew. The odd thought, however, helped ground me.

I reached out for the handle on the glass door and then went

INNER DEMONS

inside to try to borrow a phone and get back to things I knew.



CHAPTER TWO

The pimple-faced kid behind the counter ogled me as I came up trying to keep my balance on the boots' high heels. You'd think he'd never seen a psychedelically dressed black woman before. The thought made me giggle, which only served to scare me. I was losing it.

"What's the street address here?"

"Uh, 9836 Beechnut."

Then the hard part. "And the city?"

That got me a raised brow. "Houston, of course."

The wave of relief at hearing I was still in my home city made me weak at the knees. "Do you have a pay phone?"

Instead of answering he pointed back toward the bathrooms. He was no longer ogling but stared at me to determine if I was about to cause trouble.

"Thanks." I put as much heartfelt gratitude as I could to try to ease his suspicions, already having had more than my fill of weirdness for one night. "I'll have a medium Coke, please."

The ten I put on the counter seemed to alleviate his worries more than my smile had. As long as he gave me some change for the phone, I didn't care.

I took the empty cup and my money and made the call. The cab showed up less than twenty minutes later.

The Yellow Cab added to my sense of ease, the bright cars a

familiar part of the Houston landscape. The driver didn't bat an eye at my 'loud' appearance, for which I was grateful. I gave him my address, and we got underway.

My eyes stung as we came within sight of my apartment complex. I'd never been so happy to see anything in my life. I paid the driver and then just stood at the security gate staring at the white clubhouse with its dark red Spanish tiled roof. I managed to make it to the clunky keypad without falling on my face and slipped inside the complex.

My steps echoed eerily into the dark as I followed the sidewalk amidst the manicured trees and lawn toward building 4C. My eager steps slowed as I got close. Growing dread bubbled up past my previous elation.

I came to a stop five steps from my apartment door.

My last memories, before finding myself on that dark street alone, were of the apartment. So whatever had happened to me had started here. There was nothing to say it couldn't happen again.

My arms and legs broke out in goosebumps.

The red door with its silver 102 below the peephole, the tiled entryway covered by the dark wood underside of the stairs leading to the apartment above—it had always been a welcomed sight. Yet for reasons I couldn't name, it now seemed alien and menacing. I shifted from one foot to the other, rubbing my arms with my hands while staring at it, feeling cold though the night was warm.

I'd never been one to back down, though—not with the pushers trying to hook us on drugs in middle school, not with the racists that harassed me in high school, or even the few

prejudiced college students or teachers at Rice. I hadn't run from any of that then, and I wouldn't start doing it now. Nothing was going to stop me from going into my own apartment. There might be answers there.

Yet those last few steps ended up being harder to manage than anything I'd done before. Dread and fear mingled inside me, throwing warnings at me, yelling at me not to do this, that I'd be sorry, and I didn't understand why. My throat clogged up tight.

Concentrating on keeping my breathing steady, I took the last step to the door. The spot between my shoulder blades twinged. I glanced behind me, but there was no one there. I reached for the key in the small handbag and felt my fear double as I saw the skull keychain again. It wasn't me, it wasn't mine. My hand shook as I inserted the key into the lock and turned it.

The euphoria because it worked lasted less than a moment, for an open door meant I could go inside. It was the last thing I really wanted to do.

I pushed the door open but didn't go in. The twinge between my shoulders grew painful. The interior of the apartment was dark. Taking a deep breath and holding it, I reached past the threshold and flicked on the interior hall light.

I exhaled with one long breath of relief as the light showed me nothing but the familiar. The space before me was still the same white, gray, and red tile of the foyer, the plush gray carpet filling the hall. I could even see the edge of my comfy couch just where it should be. Chiding myself for my bizarre apprehension, I took a tentative step inside.

Nothing changed. Everything looked exactly as it should.

I closed the door behind me and locked it.

Never taking my gaze off the hallway before me, I unzipped the uncomfortable boots and took them off. I held onto one of them, twisted around with the spiked heel in front in case I needed an impromptu weapon. Though I knew this was home and everything seemed fine, that heavy sense of dread was still clamped tight to my chest. I inched forward, listening for anything untoward.

My hand went around the corner and switched on the kitchen lights. Brightness flooded the room and bled out into the living room over the open counter.

I spotted a red flowing lava lamp on the coffee table. A shiver ran down my back. I didn't own a lava lamp. Had someone broken in here while I'd been gone? Steering away from the thought, I quickly moved around the room and switched on every light then surveyed the place again. The twinge grew into a yank between my shoulders as I noticed other little changes.

Food stains on my gray couch. Water rings on my polished coffee table. Dust on the picture frames and floor corners.

Dust...

I'd only been gone for a few hours...why would there be dust? I shied away from the question, sure I wouldn't like the answer and instead moved from room to room turning on more and more lights.

At my bedroom, I swayed at the doorway, my chest so tight I couldn't breathe. The room was nothing like I'd left it. Gone were the off-white, comforting, textured walls. Instead, it was currently painted in blood red with a black crackle overlay. A metallic black four-poster bed with red satin sheets and comforter had replaced my maple sleigh style bed. A huge flat

screen TV took up a chunk of one wall where I'd had several oil landscapes. Video recording equipment sat beneath it, as well as standing lights. New shelving on the walls held more lava lamps of different colors and an assortment of accouterments that only belonged in X-rated or gothic films.

I stepped back, shaking my head in denial. This couldn't be my apartment. That wasn't my room.

Turning around, I gazed at my home office. Before I could think about what I was doing, I stepped inside, the familiarity of the room making it that much easier to ignore the other.

The computer was on, a screen saver of running half naked nuns flashing on the screen. I leaped forward and hit the mouse to make it go away. Popups for AIM messages were all over the screen. The login was for someone called ChocolateLover. I scanned a few of them thinking they might hold a clue. I quickly regretted it.

Requests for sex talks. Queries as to when ChocolateLover would be on tonight. Demands she give in to their fantasies. Some even offered money or goods if she'd only meet with them in person.

Grabbing the mouse, I frantically closed all the rest of the boxes, having had enough. Then I moved the cursor down to the corner for the system date. My eyes grew wider and wider until I thought they'd pop out of my head. The computer said it was Friday, July 23rd.

I let go of the mouse as if it'd bit me. No, it was April, April 15th! It couldn't possibly be July. This was all a joke. A sick twisted joke.

I grabbed the mouse again and double-clicked the icon to pull

up my browser. I clicked the Favorites folder and then the link to the US Time website. The screen pulled up showing the time, day, and date—July 23rd.

No... No...

My knees quivered. Then I fell down to the carpet, my hands shaking, my brain numb.

This couldn't be happening. This couldn't be right!

Someone had to know what was going on. Someone had to be able to help me. Debbie! The thought of my best friend gave me a jolt and I could think straight again. Debbie would have some idea, some clue.

Despite the tiny voice in the back of my head saying that was unlikely, it was still something to cling to. I rose shakily to my feet and stumbled back out to the kitchen. I hadn't seen a trace of my iPhone, but I'd kept the landline after setting up DSL so I could use that instead.

The phone had changed from a non-descript cordless to a giant set of red lips. Trying not to think about it, I picked up the top.

I punched in Debbie's number, heart racing, ideas popping up one after the other as to what might have happened and being dismissed just as quickly. Lost Time. I'd heard the term but couldn't remember if it related to aliens or mental conditions or what. Aliens, that was an even more remote possibility. This wasn't the X-Files. Aliens made great TV but didn't hold up to reality. Split personalities though, schizophrenia, those were real things, documented, studied. But I wasn't mental. I would have noticed something before this, wouldn't I?

The phone started ringing on the other end and I forced my

thoughts to still. I held my breath as the other end picked up. Tears prickled the corner of my eyes as I heard the familiar voice.

“Hello?” She sounded hesitant, and that’s when I realized I’d never called her from the landline before. My name didn’t show on her cell phone, only the number.

“Debbie, thank God. I’m so glad to hear your voice!”

There was only silence from the other end. It’d been three months, (oh god, three months!) maybe she didn’t recognize my voice? “Debbie?”

“Who is this?” The question was hard, cold. I didn’t understand it.

“It’s Tamara. Listen, something weird is going—”

The phone went dead. She’d hung up on me... I pulled the phone from my ear and stared at it, dread chomping at me from the inside.

I redialed. The phone rang three times then went to voicemail. I didn’t leave a message, just disconnected and tried again. Why wouldn’t she pick up? My sense of dread jumped up a couple of more notches. By the third time, I was desperate. “Debbie, please! I don’t understand. I need your help! Something weird is going on. My apartment, my clothes, the time. Look, I, I don’t get any of this, but if I, if I somehow did something to offend you... I can come over if you don’t want to talk on the phone. You’re my best friend, and I really need your help.”

I hung up and stared at the phone, willing her to call me back. But as the minutes ticked away, the certainty that she wouldn’t grew inside me. Yet why would I think that?

The lip phone shrilled out, making me jump though I’d hoped for a call.

Caller ID on the answering machine flashed Debbie's number. I felt a shot of hope. It didn't last long.

"*If*? You say *if* you did something to offend me?" Her breathing was fast and heavy. "Don't you dare get within a hundred feet of my house! If I see you, I'll shoot you dead!"

She was mad, more than mad, furious. I'd known Debbie since we hooked up as lab partners in college. As all friends do, we'd had some fights on occasion but never had she sounded so full of rage. "Debbie, I...I don't understand. What happened?"

There was a harsh laugh on the other end of the line. It was full of bitterness, and thorns, and wasn't anything I'd ever heard from her before. "Okay, I'll play." Another bark of a laugh. "Richie. You remember Richie, my fiancé, don't you, bitch?"

It wasn't anger. It was hate, pure unadulterated hate and it was aimed at me. I almost dropped the phone at the realization. How long had this been building inside her? How long had she been waiting for an opportunity to vent her rage? "Y-yes?"

"And June first, June first rings a bell, doesn't it?"

Oh no, I'd missed the wedding. Debbie had talked of nothing for months except being a June bride. I was supposed to be her maid of honor. Was that where all of this was coming from? Deep from inside me a whisper said 'no.' I was cold all over. "Yes."

"And I bet you remember the night you went to see him, too. The one where you got him drunk. And gave him pills. Where you had sex with him?" Again the bitter laugh rang in my ears. Numbness crawled up my arm and spread all over me. I'd done what?

"How you then brought him to my house at three in the

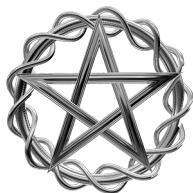
morning and left him on my doorstep naked and bombed out of his mind for me to find? Is any of that ringing any *bells* for you?"

No, it wasn't. But what was worse was the fact I didn't doubt her in the least. As if I already knew it was true. Which made no sense at all. I would have never done something like this to her, never. Yet seemingly I had.

Disgust and horror swelled up my throat. "Debbie, I..."

"Just die, *bitch*, and never, ever call me again!"

The line went dead, but I barely noticed. I slid to the floor, the phone falling from my hand.



CHAPTER THREE

I don't know how long I just sat there and stared at nothing, the unhooked phone bleating at me in protest. But at some point, I crawled to the doorway and used the doorjamb to drag myself back up onto shaking legs.

Stumbling into the bathroom, I closed and locked the door as if the flimsy prefab could hold the awful world at bay.

I stripped, kicking the alien clothes and thong underwear into a corner, throwing the platinum wig after them. Avoiding my reflection, I turned on the shower and climbed inside while it was warming up. Goosebumps flared over my skin. Reaching for the soap, I cringed as I saw that had changed as well. Rather than the simple soap dish and hooked bottles for shampoo and conditioner, there was a shelved contrivance. My bar of Oil of Olay was gone, replaced by some brand I didn't recognize and which smelled of musk. There were at least six brands of hair products as well as small flasks of oils and perfumes. A vibrator sat at attention in the corner of the highest shelf.

Turning away, I stepped under the stream of water, a shiver wracking through me. My home, my whole life, had been violated. But why? How? If only I could understand what was happening.

I scrubbed my face, my hair, every last inch of me. I kept staring at the drain thinking I would see something coming off of

me, something to explain why everything had changed, but there was nothing.

Shivering as the water eventually turned cold, I shut off the shower and stepped out. I flinched as I reached for a towel, only now noticing their blood red color. Pushing myself, I took it anyway and used it rather than drip everywhere. Wrapped in it, I stared only at the carpet as I returned back to that awful bedroom to search for some clothes.

Opening drawer after drawer I just grew more and more disgusted. I'd always believed in having certain lacy items in reserve for special dates, but what I found bordered on the ridiculous, and so many of them looked to have been used as regular wear: thongs with the barest strings, crotchless panties, edible underwear, bras so sheer they left nothing to the imagination. There were even a few items I possessed no idea what they were or how anyone would wear them. I tore through the drawers' contents, dumping the things on the floor as I grew more and more desperate to find something, anything close to normal.

Fighting back tears, I turned to the closet, already sure my search there would fare no better but refusing to give up. On one side I was surprised to find all my work jackets, slacks, skirts and blouses intact. Yet all my casual wear was gone, replaced by other things. As I shied away from leather items and slick black and white plastic get-ups, I noticed a box half hidden in the back. Not daring to hope, I pounced on it. The word 'useless' had been written on the side in my handwriting. I'd never seen it before.

Opening it flooded me with instant comfort. I'd found my non-work clothes—some of them, anyway. At the moment that

didn't matter, I was just thrilled to find something I knew without a doubt belonged to me, the 'me' I'd known all my life, not whatever or whoever I'd been for the last three months.

Because that really was the only explanation, wasn't it? That I'd been someone else. Despite the fact it still made no sense whatsoever.

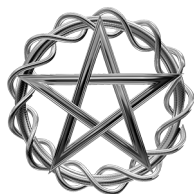
But I couldn't deal with that, not at the moment. It was hard enough just swallowing the fact I'd somehow lost three months of my life. The likelihood I might be insane would have to wait.

After dragging out the box from the closet, I put things back where they belonged, kicking or throwing the other stuff toward the tiny trashcan in the corner. Some Hanes for Her and my flannel pajamas worked beautiful magic on my frightened soul. Going to the hall closet, I grabbed one of the extra blankets I kept there and headed for the living room. No way was I spending the night in that metallic four-poster bed.

I wanted, needed normalcy, and of the few rooms I'd braved looking at so far, the living room was the least changed, or unchanged enough I could pretend the rest of it away—for a while.

So I snuggled into the blanket on the couch, leaving all the lights on and stared at the mottled ceiling and wished for sleep to come so I could escape all this.

It was a long time coming...



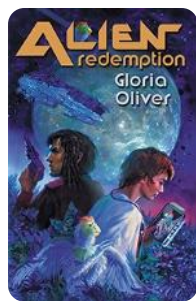
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Science Fiction



What if the savior was the one who needed saving?



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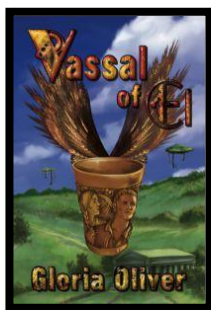


It took everything from her, except revenge!



BAM!

[Sample Chapters](#)

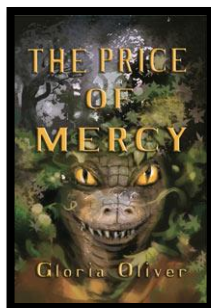


Torn between two worlds, will he be able to save either of them?



BAM!

[Sample Chapters](#)



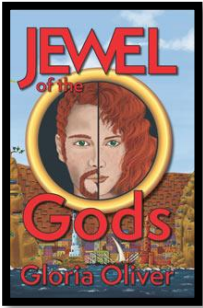
Which is worse...the monster within or without?



BAM!

[Sample Chapters](#)





Long Live the King! But will he?



BAM!

[Sample Chapters](#)



Young Adult

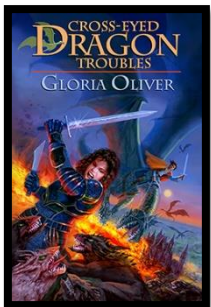


The choice: Serve the undead or become one of them.



BAM!

[Sample Chapters](#)



Talia didn't want to be apprenticed, not even to the prestigious Dragon Knight's Guild.



BAM!

[Sample Chapters](#)





To save the world, she must die! Or must she?



BAM!

[Sample Chapters](#)



Horror/Alternate History



Trapped in a loveless marriage, will Elizabeth's sacrifice to regain Robert's attention be in vain?
(Novelette)



[Sample Chapters](#)



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