

# Hope

## Lucifer's Daughter

There was a time in my life when the prospect of watching a man die would have filled me with horror. Now, as I shivered beside the cenotaph, knowing death was coming, what I felt was very different.

Only knowing it was too late to stop what was about to happen kept me from screaming a warning as I clutched the cold marble.

“Did you bring the money?” the first man asked, his voice tight with an anxiety that strummed through the air. He was around thirty, and wore dress slacks an inch too long, hems pooling around scuffed department store loafers. His old leather jacket was done up against the bitter March night, but misbuttoned. I could picture his fingers trembling as he'd hurried out to this midnight meeting.

The other man was a decade older, his jogging suit hood pulled tight around his red-cheeked face. Beside him, a Chow panted, the chuff-chuff filling the silence, black tongue lolling as the dog strained the confines of its short leash.

“Did you bring the money?” the younger man asked again as he glanced around the park, his anxiety sharp against the cold rage blowing off the other man.

“Did you really think I’d pay?”

The blast of fear, so intense my eyelids quivered, and I almost missed the older man’s lunge. A gasp, rich with shock, then pain. Chaos rolled over me and moonlight sparked red against the knife blade. The stink of voided bowels filled the air as the younger man staggered back against a spindly maple. He tottered for a moment, propped against it, then slumped at its base.

The killer pulled his dog closer. The Chow danced, its chaos fluttering past me, confusion warring with hunger. The man shoved its head to the wound, steaming blood pumping. The dog took a tentative lick, then—

The vision broke and I reeled, grabbing the cenotaph. A moment’s pause, eyes squeezed shut. Then I straightened and blinked against the bright morning sun.

At the foot of the cenotaph, a shrine had started, with plucked daffodils and scraps of paper scrawled with “We’ll Miss You, Brian” and “Rest in Peace, Ryan.” Anyone who knew Bryan Mills well enough to spell his name was still at home, in shock. The people hugging and sobbing around the shrine were only hoping to catch the eye of a roving TV camera, say a few words about what a great guy “Ryan” had been.

As I circled the crime scene tape, I passed the fake mourners, and their sobbing rose . . . until they noticed I wasn’t carrying a camera, and fell back to sipping steaming coffees and huddling against the icy morning.

They might not have made me for a reporter, but the closest cop guarding the scene did, his glower telling me not to bother asking for a statement. I’m sure “Hey, I know what happened to your dead guy” would have been a guaranteed conversation opener. But then what would I say?

“How do I know? Um, I had a vision. Psychic? No. I can only see the past—a talent I inherited from my father. More of a curse, really, though I’m sure he thinks otherwise. Maybe you’ve heard of him? Lucifer? No, not Satan—that’s a whole different guy. I’m what they call a half-demon, a human fathered by a demon. Most of us get a special power, like fire, telekinesis or teleportation, without a demon’s need for chaos. But that chaos hunger is all I get, plus a few special powers to help me find it. Like visions of past trauma, which is why I know how your victim died. And I can read chaotic thoughts, like the one going through your head right now, officer. You’re wondering whether you should quietly call for the ambulance or pin me to the ground first, in case my psychotic break turns violent.”

So I stuck to my job: reporting the news, not becoming it. I found a likely target—the youngest officer, buttons gleaming, gaze following the news cameras, shoulders straightening each time one promised to swing his way, then slumping when it moved elsewhere.

As I approached, his gaze traveled over me and his chin lifted to showcase a square jaw. A smile tweaked his lips. When I took out my notebook, the smile ignited, and he stepped forward to intercept me, lest I change my mind.

“Hello, there,” he said. “I haven’t seen you before. New at the Gazette?”

I shook my head. “I’m national.”

His eyes glittered, envisioning his name in Time or USA Today. I always felt a little bad about that. True News was a national publication, though . . . a national supermarket tabloid.

“Hope Adams,” I said, thrusting out my hand.

“Adams?”

“That’s right.”

A flush bloomed on this cheeks. “Sorry, I, uh, wasn’t sure I . . . heard that right.”

Apparently, I didn't look like this officer's idea of a "Hope Adams." My mother had been a student from India and met my dad at college. Will Adams, though, was not my biological father, and half-demons inherit their appearance from their maternal DNA.

As I chatted him up, a man lurched from behind the cenotaph. He peered around, his eyes wild behind green-lensed glasses. Spying us, he strode over, one black-nailed finger jabbing.

"You took him, didn't you?"

The officer's hand slid to his belt. "Sir, you need to step back —"

"Or what?" The man stopped inches from the officer, swaying. "Shoot me? Like you shot him? Take me away, too? Study me? Dissect me? Then deny everything?"

"If you mean the victim—"

"I meant the werewolf."

The officer cleared his throat. "There, uh, was no werewolf, sir. The victim was—"

"Eaten!" The man leaned forward, spittle flying. "Torn apart and eaten! Tracks everywhere. You can't cover it up this time."

"A werewolf?" said a woman, sidling over as she passed. "I heard that too."

The officer slid a small "can you believe this?" smile my way. I struggled to return it. I could believe that people thought this was a werewolf; that's why True News had sent their "weird tales girl" to cover the story. As for werewolves themselves, I certainly believed in them—though even before the vision I'd known this was no werewolf kill.

"Sorry about that," the officer said when he'd finally moved the conspiracy theorist on.

"Werewolves? Dare I even ask where that rumor came from?"

"The kids who found the body got all freaked out, seeing dog tracks around the body and they started posting online about werewolves. I have no idea how the dog got involved . . ."

I was already mentally writing my story. “When asked about the werewolf rumors, an officer on the site admitted he couldn’t explain the combined signs of canine and human . . .”

That was the trick of writing for a tabloid. You take the facts and massage them, hinting, implying, suggesting . . . So long as no one is humiliated unfairly, and no sources named, I have no problem giving readers the entertainment they want.

Karl would have found it entertaining too. Of I’d been assigned this story a couple of months ago, I’d have been waiting for his next call, so I could say “Hey, I got a werewolf story. Can I get a statement?” He’d make some sardonic comment, and I’d curl up, settling in for a long talk, telling myself it was just friendship, that I’d never be fool enough to fall for Karl Marsten. Kidding myself, of course. The moment I let him cross that line past friendship, I got burned . . . and it was just as bad as I’d always feared.

I pushed memories of Karl aside and concentrated on the story. The officer had just let slip a lead on the kids who’d found the body—two girls who worked at the 7-11 on the corner—when clouds suddenly darkened the day to twilight. Thunder boomed, and I dropped my pen. As the officer bent to grab it, I snuck a look around. No one was looking at the sky or running for cover. They were all carrying on as they had been.

The officer kept talking, but I could barely hear him through the thunderclaps. I gritted my teeth and waited for the vision to end. A storm moving in? Possible, if it promised enough destruction to qualify as chaotic. But I suspected the source was a Tempestras—a “storm” half-demon. One offshoot of my “gift” was the ability to sense other supernaturals through their chaotic powers.

I cast a surreptitious glance around. My gaze settled instead on the one person I hadn't noticed before. A dark-haired man, at least six foot three, with a linebacker's body ill-concealed by a custom-tailored suit.

He seemed to be looking my way, but with his dark sunglasses it was impossible to tell. Then he lowered them, pale blue eyes meeting mine, chin dipping in greeting. He walked over.

"Ms. Adams? A word please?"