

DEMONS AT DEADNIGHT

The Divincus Nex Chronicles: Book One

by

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DEDICATION

To you, the reader. We hope you're entertained!

CHAPTER ONE

Someone's car was totaled and it wasn't my fault.
But who's going to believe a teenager?

"The demon did it" excuse, while more creative than "the dog ate my homework," was still as unbelievable. And much more likely to get me sent to the psych ward. So when the fang-filled flying hellion barely missed me and dropped like a wrecking ball onto the SUV, exploding shattered bits of glass and vehicle parts in my direction, I ditched the scene pronto.

And didn't look back. The savage grunts and metallic squeals provided a hefty deterrent. Like I needed more nightmare material.

I shot from the trailhead's near-empty parking lot and booked it down the road. A log-rail fence lined the thick woods, and when the demon's furious screech closed in from behind, I cut right. One hand planted on the top rail, slick from a recent rain, I swung my legs sideways, up and over. Home free.

Until my bottom foot clipped the post, and I spun as if caught in a crocodile's death roll.

Good news? The spongy forest floor cushioned my fall.

Bad news? Momentum slammed my torso into a tree trunk. Couldn't breathe.

But good news again. I'd rolled under a fat, bushy pine, which, along with the fading twilight, concealed my position. I heard the beast fly overhead in pursuit, taking out a few treetops on its way by.

Yeah, that was my plan all along. Man, I'm good. Except my body. It hurt.

My pity-party lasted until I could suck in a breath, then I pushed to my feet and headed for home. Demons salivated over remote locations like this. I needed to move.

Side aching, breath choppy, I shuffled-limped-jogged into town, made it to my neighborhood, and relaxed. Civilization. Where the demon wouldn't follow and—

Talons clicked an ominous rhythm on pavement.

Wrong had become my default choice.

I ducked behind an oak, huddling, chilled in my fear-and-sweat soaked T-shirt.

A malicious laugh churned through the air.

“Hide and seek. My favorite. How thoughtful of you to commence a game.” A touch of crazy tinged the demon's smooth voice. Panic twisted my heart. “Ironic, is it not, that the great Divinicus Nex cowers in fear from that which should be her fated prey? A decidedly diametric circumstance.”

What? It's irritating when the monster hunting you has a better vocabulary than your own. Maybe it could do my eulogy? This was crazy. I'd seen demons before but they were small, ignored me, or ran away. But this one? Well, it was a different breed. A psycho on steroids, and it wanted me dead.

Its chances looked good.

With my Amazonian height and auburn curls highlighted bull's-eye-red, all I was missing was an "Eat Me" sign taped to my back.

"You've got it wrong. I'm Aurora. Just some girl you don't want kicking you back to your hellhole." My plan to go on the offensive stemmed from my defense amounting to less than diddly and squat combined. Dusk began to devour precious daylight. My eyes ached from the frantic attempt to penetrate the emerging shadows. "Think of the embarrassment. The other demons will laugh and point, make fun of you behind your back. Your self-esteem will suffer and I'm late for dinner, so for both our sakes, I'll let it go. Just walk away and I won't come after you."

I hoped I sounded confident but I think my voice cracked.

Diffused light flickered to life from the surrounding houses. The ornate streetlamps lining the empty streets of the quaint mountain town buzzed to life reflecting on the shimmering fog that slithered across the ground. A sporadic drizzle hummed against the leaves on the branches above.

"I believe you suffer confusion, Nex." The volume of its voice lowered. Had it backed off, thinking I had something up my sleeve? "I harbor no trepidation but that you remain alive. And my immutable predilection is to deliver your corpse in a profusion of pieces." Then that laugh.

I couldn't comprehend much of what it said, but overall, I wasn't getting a warm and fuzzy vibe.

I fought a hysterical burst of laughter. I had nothing, nothing, but long legs and adrenaline. The spattering of drops above changed harmony. Feathering down through the branches, a grey mist swirled into a vague form my eyes strained to focus on. Mesmerized by its grotesque and lethal beauty, I almost waited a second too long. I

ducked. With a menacing crunch, bark chunks splintered as the demon's claws gouged into the tree where my head had been seconds before.

I launched into a graceful ninja-like front roll, then stood my ground to face the monstrous heathen, fearless in my determination to vanquish the deadly foe.

Nah, just kidding. I bolted, discretion being the better part of not getting dead.

I'd been seeing demons for a few years now. Yeah, those nasty creatures that should be in hell but instead are wreaking havoc on earth. If they were close by, sometimes I could even locate them using this weird second-sight that I wished would go Helen Keller. It was the crappiest superpower on the planet, but I'd dealt with my unfortunate situation in a mature and responsible manner. I ignored it. And so did the demons.

Until tonight when this one changed the rules and attacked while I was on my run. I'd tripped and stumbled over a rotting log which is why the SUV had taken the death blow meant for me. Wish I could say it was a deviously clever move, but the truth is I've got grace management issues.

A guttural hiss vibrated the leaves. Ancient wings slapped the air with fury. The scary monster noises threatened to paralyze me, so I ignored them and concentrated on running. Fast. Counting houses to keep the panic at bay.

Something darted out from my left, ground level. I swerved right, nearly falling, but kept going. I glanced back. A dog, one of those tiny, foo-foo things, scampered out on stubby legs, planted its feet, and started barking skyward. The demon diverted its sights from me and swooped down on the yappy mutt.

Dogs aren't my thing.

I hate dogs.

And if this one was dumb enough to sacrifice itself for me, hallelujah. I kept running.

After I reversed course.

Stupid dog.

I dived head first and scooped up the mongrel as I slid by, feeling a rush of air from the giant beast passing overhead. A reddish sheen covered my eyes. I'd cut it so close the demon's talon sliced through my ponytail elastic and released an onslaught of thick massive curls that cascaded over my face.

On foot again, I flung back my hair and continued my retreat, the squirming dog growling protests against my chest.

"Ungrateful mutt," I growled back.

I sensed a presence looming overhead and dodged into a driveway, happy to toss the annoying pup into a garage where it tumbled under a sedan. A blow from behind lurched my body forward. I would've gone down but instead found myself airborne. And gaining altitude.

Not good, because last I checked, I couldn't fly.

CHAPTER TWO

On the positive side, the beast hadn't gutted me when it snatched me from above. On the negative, its massive three-toed chicken feet trapped my shoulders and torso in an excruciating vise. It leveled out and glided, letting my feet skim just above the ground, its laugh triumphant. This flying thing would've been kind of cool except for the sulfurous rotting stench that seared my throat and watered my eyes.

And the fact that it was about to kill me.

My hands shot up and wrapped around thick legs, reptilian cold, rubbery, and rough with warts. Fingernails digging into the demon flesh, I squirmed and twisted, fighting for leverage.

"Now that I have you," it dipped its hideous beak-face toward me, hot breath sweet as a sewer, "I'm disinclined to sanction your liberation. Our peregrination has just begun."

"Oh, shut up!" I swung my legs harder. Momentum and determination finally carried my feet high enough to land a couple of solid kicks to its belly which only seemed to launch us higher.

I raked my nails down its legs and sunk my teeth into the monstrous flesh. A bitter acid burned my tongue igniting a ferocious

need to spit. The demon gave one surprised grunt before its grip tightened to rib cracking proportions. The leathery wings lifted. The monstrous body heaved for a powerful flap, ready to propel us high in the air and me to my doom. It would probably strip my flesh while giving me vocabulary lessons. I'd be dead but smarter. How's that for glass half full?

Frustrated, panicked, I inhaled for a guttural scream—that never came.

A sudden intense pressure cemented my lungs, enveloped my body, and threatened to squash me into two-dimensional proportions. A tingling shimmered from my gut and spread through my body. Heat emanated from the inside out and rippled over my skin, gaining momentum, striding down my extremities. An expanding glow blanched my vision into blinding white. I smelled something burning. I hoped it wasn't me.

The demon's angry bellow echoed an instant before its claws jerked open. Good news, except it left me plummeting through the air. I reached for something to break my fall. The ground obliged. I rolled on my back, anticipating another attack. Vision still sketchy, I made out the snarling creature circling, then swallowed hard when it dived, its mouth split wide, fangs bared. I could breathe again, but that didn't look like it would last.

A flash of dark orange lightning jolted across the sky, its jagged length spitting sparks and flames like fireworks off a rocket. The bolt smacked the demon from the side, which jarred it off its murderous course and spiraled it backward. No time for shock and awe. I grunted to my feet and high-tailed it toward home.

CHAPTER THREE

I silently cursed my mother's green thumb. I'd swear the hedges lining our lawn had grown three feet in the week we'd been here. I doubted I'd make it over the gauntlet, but it was my only chance of avoiding a slow and torturous death offered up by my local Demons-R-Us.

Something slammed me from the side. We catapulted in slow spirals through a thermal pocket of warm air toward my next-door neighbor's lawn and landed with a brain-rattling thud, rolling out of control. A demonic shriek slashed through the night, then silence.

Our bodies stopped spinning before my head did. I shook off the dizziness and pushed up. My head swiveled like a crazed bobblehead, searching sideways, back, above. I checked every angle of approach, narrowing my eyes to focus into the shadows. Nothing. No danger lurked.

I closed my eyes, concentrated, but couldn't feel the demon. I knew it was gone. Which meant...what exactly? Maybe someone showing up scared it off. I chewed on that thought and the inside of my cheek as adrenaline evaporated. A voice broke my mental train to nowhere.

“Uh, do you mind?”

I glanced down and saw something far scarier than any demon. A guy. My age. All smoldering good-looks and gorgeous. And I was on top of him. Straddling his hips. Oh, jeez. Adrenaline reserves kicked in but only punched the air from my lungs and left me frozen in...fear? Shock? Embarrassment? Take your pick.

My vocal chords refused to vibrate. I could only stare. Smooth skin, cheekbones chiseled by the gods, strong jaw, straight nose. The tumble hadn't mussed his so-black-it-shone-blue hair styled in a rakish devil-may-care look. He should've been sauntering half-naked along a South Pacific beach, all glistening skin and casual sensuality, a lazy smile filled with promise playing on full lips.

But it was the eyes that kept me staring.

Fringed by thick lashes, the deep brown shimmered with crimson and amber hues that sucked me into their simmering depths. Intrigued by their luminescent quality, I leaned in for a closer look, pulled by the kind of curiosity that no doubt put the cat six feet under. My head was still fuzzy from all the excitement, and when earthy aromas of fresh cut grass, leather, and a pleasurable musk filled my senses, I almost sighed.

Just as my hands noted the soft cotton of his T-shirt and the hard muscles rippling underneath, I felt a flash of heat where our bodies touched. His jaw set. He ran his hands up my thighs and settled just above my hips. His fingers dug into my flesh and pulled my upper body forward. I wondered with vague panic why I wasn't pushing away from the kiss he was about to pull me into—when his torso tightened and he flung me into the air.

Hmmm, read that one wrong.

I landed with a thud for the umpteenth time that evening and laid on my back trying to catch my breath and soothe my ego. Damp grass chilled my skin through the wet shirt. Salty perspiration stung my eyes. I pushed back the long mass of matted curls plastered against my face. Sweat. My new hair gel. Yummy.

The exotic guy stood and turned a full circle, eyeing our surroundings in a slight crouch. Finally, he turned away, dropped his head, relaxed his broad shoulders, and inhaled slow, deep.

“Sorry, didn’t see you in time.” His voice rumbled deep as he turned around sporting a frown that took the sincerity out of the “sorry.”

“Sure.” I got up, prepared to haughtily refuse his offer of help. It never came. Instead, he backed away.

Unwilling to meet his gaze, I checked out the rest. I’m taller than most guys my age but he beat me by several inches, easily over six-feet. His black leather jacket fell open to a grey T-shirt decorated with an artfully rendered black skull. Black pants dripping with chains, a brushed-silver belt buckle with some intricate design, and combat boots finished the ensemble.

He looked like trouble. Dark sexy trouble. The kind of trouble smarter girls than me had fallen into with disastrous results—and few regrets. I retreated a step to distance myself from the allure. Then something other than his swoon factor caught my attention. Something weird. It looked like hazy grey vapor coiled off his broad shoulders. I squinted.

“I think you’re smoking.”

A heavy silence followed. When I caught his gaze, his eyes were only a dark rich chocolate and sparked with nothing but

amusement. That lazy grin I knew he possessed slid across those sensuous lips. It was even better than I imagined.

“Wow.” He crossed his arms over his muscular chest and cocked his head. “Forward. Aggressive. I like it.”

It took me a second then my intestines cringed.

“No, I—I didn’t—”

“Don’t be embarrassed.” His gaze imprisoned mine, that mischievous smile wreaking havoc on my composure. “I’m flattered. Girls around here aren’t usually so...bold. It’s refreshing.”

My cheeks flamed nuclear. “I didn’t mean you were hot.”

He raised a doubtful brow. “You didn’t?”

“No. I mean, not that you aren’t,” my hands fluttered, “kind of good-looking. I suppose.” Great, Aurora, let’s choke that humiliation noose even tighter.

“You’re quite the smooth talker.” His grin never slipped. “Thanks.”

I knew he was mocking me. Irrsomes, but I was too out of sorts for snappy repartee. “You’re welcome.” I looked around half hoping a demon would show up to get me out of this mess.

“So what did you mean?”

“Oh.” I cleared my throat. “Well.” One hand went to my hip as I tried for nonchalance but doubted I could pull it off. With the other I swung a finger back and forth at his shoulders. “I thought you were, um, literally...” I dropped my hand, unable to finish shoveling myself further into the muck. “Never mind.”

“Literally smoking?”

“Yes, but...” Yeah, like that didn’t sound nuts. I waved my hand to erase the absurdity.

His look changed. The amusement gone, his gaze sliced into mine, sharp, extracting, intruding, as if trying to elicit some information from my soul. Icy tendrils of discomfort skittered between my shoulders.

“What’re you doing here?” asked a new voice.

My neighbor had the look. Boys next door were supposed to be fresh-faced with fair skin, butterscotch-blond hair they brushed out of clear blue eyes, and a smattering of freckles. They were also supposed to be friendly. We’d moved in a week ago and this kid had avoided us like we were a family of spitting cobras on crack.

“Tristan!” the dark-haired boy exclaimed and gestured to my neighbor. “Come on over. This is...” he trailed off, looking at me.

“Aurora,” I said.

“This is Aurora. And she thinks I’m smokin’ hot.” Mr. Exotic’s hand slid across his mouth in an effort to cover the mischievous grin he couldn’t, or wouldn’t, fight.

“Yeah, right.” Tristan shoved his friend. But horrific mortification must’ve shown on my face because he frowned. “Really?”

“Noooooo,” I said too quickly. “Not exactly.” Before I could explain, something laced across my legs and frightened me into an awkward jig, arms flapping, and an odd warbling noise strangled from my throat. Not embarrassing at all.

Both boys smiled at the threat. Van Helsing, my cat, hair all on end. Whenever demons were around he looked like he’d stuck his paw in a light socket.

“What’s your last name?” Mr. Exotic said.

I blinked. “Uh, Lahey.”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Anyone who says this mother-daughter team doesn't mesh has only seen them trying to put out the fire from the stupid wires behind the television that should've been more clearly labeled in the first place.

Alyssa, the A in A&E, has gone from mucking out horse stalls and taping her eyes open during college lectures, to writing novels. When she's not writing, reading, or running down the halls flapping her coat while singing the Batman theme song, she's either dancing or immersed in anime.

Eileen has much more class. Even a degree. Fancy. Mother of three lovably peculiar children—all of which like to point out how short she is, but she really isn't, they're just freaking giants. Happily married, she enjoys ~~escaping like a bat out of hell~~ horseback riding at a leisurely speed around the mountains surrounding their California home.

~~eating bon-bons and watching TV~~ *Demons at Deadnight* is their debut novel, and currently they're diligently working on the next epic Divinicus Nex adventure. You can visit them online at **AEKIRK.COM**