

DARK PARADISE

A REVELATION SERIES NOVEL

RANDI COOLEY WILSON

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DARK PARADISE (A Revelation Series Novel)/

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INTRODUCTION



Someone once told me that a soul never truly ceases to exist. That those we love, who've died, live on in the imprints they leave on the world. And only when those imprints disappear is that soul truly gone and at peace.

My scars are her imprints.

But they'll never fade.

And in turn, neither will her ghost.

Both will haunt me for all eternity.

Gage Gallagher,

Leader of the Paris Clan of Gargoyles

PROLOGUE

GAGE



The smell of clay mixed with pine from canvas frames hangs in the air. A deep ache settles in my chest as I breathe in the familiar combination.

With heavy steps, I make my way over to the enormous statue that sits in the middle of the wide-open gallery. With a sigh, I run my fingertips over the dark gray stone. It's polished and smooth, cool to the touch.

Making a small tight circle, I take in the familiar artwork in the studio. Oversized colorful canvases are displayed on the tall stark white walls. Each is highlighted by dim spotlights. Lights I hung, before she was taken.

Taken from me.

Taken from my world.

Taken from this studio, *Mi Alma*, which I gifted to her, and she loved. It's what I used to call her, *mi alma*, which means my soul. A fitting nickname, given that I am a

being without a soul—a gargoyle. That’s what she was, though. For the brief time she existed in my world, she was my soul. In a cruel twist of fate, now her soul haunts me.

With each step I take as I move around the quiet art studio, my heart beats faster and faster in my chest. To the point where it becomes hard to breathe. I know what happens next. It’s always the same. There is no escaping it. *Her*. I see her every night. Every time I close my eyes, she appears—a ghost in the darkness. Haunting what’s left of my existence. My sleep. My dreams.

I stop dead in my tracks when I see her. She’s sitting in a corner of the vast space, working with clay on a spinner. Her silky dark hair is tied up in a messy bun. The studio lights warm her flawless golden skin. As if all this is normal, she happily hums to herself.

Sensing my presence, she lifts her light brown gaze and meets mine. The sight of her sparkling eyes, so damn full of life and happiness, fucking slays me.

Cuts me wide open.

Her beauty is forever ingrained in my memory. In the dim light, her peaceful face looks angelic as she smiles brightly at me. It takes me a matter of seconds to look over every inch of her.

“Camilla?” I barely whisper as my throat tightens.

“Were you expecting someone else?” Her Spanish accent is heavy, teasing.

The sound of her voice floats through me and I swear my heart stops beating for a second.

My gaze remains fixed on her, as I dare to hope that I've finally awoken from the painful nightmare I live each day. Except I know I haven't. It's not real. Not anymore.

Seeing her is like a punch in the gut—it hurts.

More than it should at this point.

Tears fill my eyes and I can't help but hold my breath as my heart fills with guilt. I would have done anything—anything to keep her alive.

“Come,” she whispers, beckoning me over to her.

When she holds out her hand for me to take, time seems to stand still. Nothing moves, including me.

The world around me ceases to exist.

All I see is her—Camilla Gallagher.

My dead mate.

The love of my life.

My soul.

I take in a rough breath and with the back of my hand, wipe away the tear that has fallen. As I approach her, I try not to fall to my knees and weep like a small child at her feet. The closer I get, the more pain my heart feels. Her floral scent lingers in the air and I take in another deep breath. My body begins to tremble as I take the final step, standing in front of her.

Camilla pushes off the ground, standing to her full height. As she does, she lifts her gaze and meets mine from under her long dark lashes. When I look down into

her loving eyes, my own fill again with unshed tears. Her hands lift and when her warm palms cup my face, I close my eyes, savoring the feel of her touch.

It's been ages since I've truly felt it.

"Do not cry, my love." Her voice is gentle.

Long fingers wipe away the dampness on my face.

When I reopen my gaze, Camilla frowns as her fingers slide off my face, down my neck, and over the chain around my neck that holds the cross pendant. I slowly breathe in and out at her touch, basking in it.

"You still wear it?" She smiles up at me, pleased.

"It's the first piece of art you ever made. I'll wear it forever."

"Your pain and sadness hurt my heart, Gage," she says quietly.

I stare at her, afraid she'll disappear. "I fucking miss you. So goddamn much."

"I am always with you," she speaks softly.

"I can't feel you anymore."

"Perhaps you are not meant to feel me anymore."

"Don't say that," I plead.

"Life is meant for the living."

I shake my head no. "I am no longer amongst the living. My world has faded to black without you. Since your death, I've struggled to any find peace. There's only darkness."

A ghost of a smile tugs at her lips. "Maybe that's all part of the plan for you. Maybe you're supposed to fall

into the darkness before you can be pulled back into the light.”

At her words, my breath hitches and I drop my chin, ashamed. “You’d be so disappointed in me. In who I’ve become without you.”

“Impossible.” Her accent becomes thicker with her firmness.

“They say I’m reckless.”

She laughs and the sound vibrates through me, taking away my ability to breathe again. All I can do is just look at her face, memorizing it for what feels like the last time.

“You have always been reckless, Gage Gallagher.” Camilla gifts me with an amused look. “It’s what I love most about you. You protect love, not righteousness or nobility.”

“This dark wildness within me . . . it’s different. I’m different.”

Her eyes soften with understanding. “Someday, my love, there will be a young protector who will rely on your recklessness. He will need you to help him protect love. Above all else. And you will. Light will come back into your life again. I promise,” she whispers. “And when it does, it will not diminish the love you had for me. Or mine for you. It will simply intensify what we shared,” she states. “You won’t be forlorn forever.”

Unable to hold her intense gaze, I look around the studio. Since her death, this is the first time I’ve seen her here. Normally, when Camilla’s soul visits, we’re in Notre

Dame Cathedral, where she sits on the floor, working on restoring crumbling statues as we talk.

That was her happy place, when she was alive. At least twice a week, I'd wake up in the middle of the night to discover her missing, only to find her at the cathedral, immersed in the calm and happiness she found by restoring the church's old broken sculptures.

Camilla has always believed that even the most broken of things could be repaired with patience. It's what I loved about her. It's also why I never questioned where she was the night she was stolen from me. I'd woken in a cold sweat. My body felt empty and my heart hollow. It was as if my nonexistent soul had left me.

And I knew—she was gone.

Later, I'd discovered her death was at my father's hand. His men ripped her from me. Raped her. Slit her throat and then left her lifeless body at my doorstep to find the next morning. All a cruel reminder that I was the heir to the Paris clan of gargoyles. Love for a human, the woman I was assigned to protect, was not allowed. Her death was my punishment. A warning to submit to an existence of duties, oaths, and clan above all else.

After she was gone, I walked away from everything. My clan. My protector duties and title. My oaths and vows. I became a traitor to the gargoyle race. Until the day the London clan pulled me back into our dark world.

As the new *leader* of the Paris clan.

With a heavy exhale, my eyes fall onto the pile of wet

clay sitting on her spinner. “What is that supposed to be?” I ask, refocusing our discussion.

Her eyes light up. “It’s not finished. It’s just the start of something.”

I shake my head, amused at her excitement.

“Of what exactly?”

“A buttercup.”

With a questioning look, I run my thumb over my bottom lip, staring at the pile of wet mud. “Since when do you sculpt *flowers*?” They aren’t normally her thing.

“Do you have something against buttercups?” she muses.

I shrug and meet her eyes. “I’ve never really paid any attention to them.”

“Perhaps it’s time you did.” She looks at me with a strange look.

“Why is that?”

“They are wildflowers,” she explains with a quiet, thoughtful calm to her voice.

“Wildflowers,” I repeat on a mutter.

“They look delicate and fragile,” she continues. “But they aren’t. They’re strong. And if properly cared for, they will bloom forever under your protection and love.”

I arch an eyebrow. “You’ve given this a lot of thought.”

“And you haven’t given it enough,” she counters.

I miss this—being with her in the quiet of the night.

Talking about nothing and everything.

Leaning in, I kiss her cheek.

“I’m lost without you, Camilla,” I whisper.

“You are not lost, my love,” she replies sadly. “You just don’t know it yet.”

“I’m tired. So. Fucking. Tired.”

A shaky breath escapes me as she steps back, looking me in the eyes. “Then close your eyes,” she encourages. “Rest.”

“I’m afraid to. Afraid this moment of peace will leave me as quickly as it came.”

Camilla steps closer and brushes her fingers over my eyes, forcing them closed.

I remember the moment she became mine.

The moment I owned her, and she owned me.

I remember all the small moments between us that I refuse to ever let go of as she presses her lips against mine for what feels like the last time.

“I love you, Gage Gallagher. Even in death.”

THE DARKNESS

GAGE



Lost between reality and fantasy, I sit up in bed and roughly exhale. My eyes dart around the room, wild and unfocused as I try to figure out where I am.

After a moment, the blackness I'm suffocating in disappears. Clarity returns as I blink my way back into reality. She's gone. Camilla is gone. It was just another dream. Another fucking cruel one.

Like all the memories that find me in the dark.

Camilla's face, her eyes, flash behind my own, and the ache of loneliness fills me. My dreams are a painful reminder of the sense of loss her death has caused.

Bitterness and guilt crawl up my throat, as they always do after I see her. Pushing my hands through my hair, I try to force away the sting of my grief. Her death is like an open wound and the dreams are salt, burning

the lesion. I wait for the numbness to take over, the way it does whenever I dream about Camilla. Like always, once it settles in, all I want to do is disappear. Fade into the night and keep pretending like I still exist.

I glance over to my right at the sleeping woman next to me. Her long black hair is spread across the pillow; the purple highlights appear even darker in the now fading moonlight. Even asleep in the pitch-black room, her beauty shines brightly, demanding my attention.

My gaze skims down and over her body, taking her in. At some point last night, she must have gotten up to put on her boy shorts and the vintage band T-shirt she's wearing. It's her favorite. This woman is so different from Camilla. In every way.

Choking back a laugh, I shove away any notions that the sorceress next to me can protect me from the darkness that shadows me. Believing so would be foolish.

Besides, I have no intention of pulling anyone else into my ominous hell of an existence. Not ever again.

Doing so would be a death sentence for them, and more heartache for me. Especially not Nassa, the sorceress of prosperity. Even if I am in awe of her remarkable intelligence, quiet strength, and unique beauty. Christ, even her rebellious independence and fierce magical skills are something to stop and admire.

Which, I'm ashamed to admit, I've done more often than I should. Still, at the end of the day, no matter how

powerful and strong she is, Nassa is better off without me tainting her future.

And I'm better off alone.

Drowning in self-loathing and endless darkness.

Like always, eventually the numbness gives way to anger—so much anger. I'd given everything up for Camilla. Who I was, and who I was to become.

Only to have my own kind, beings who *protect* mortal souls, my own flesh and blood, betray me by ruthlessly ending her existence.

Needing to wash off the torment eating away at me courtesy of my dream, I slip out of bed, careful not to wake Nassa, and head into the attached bathroom.

Once inside, I make my way over to the shower and with a quick twist of my wrist, turn on the hot water before stepping back. As steam fills the room, I twist around and walk over to the concrete counter.

Leaning over the sink, I stare at myself in the mirror, hating what I see. It's been a while since a dream has shaken me to my core. Since Camilla's death, I've had no peace, but seeing her as vividly as I did tonight, actually touching and smelling her—it was all a harsh reminder that there will never again be any peace for me. Only an empty existence filled with sadness and cruelty.

"The Paris clan fell because of you. I will not see that happen again. You are expelled from your protector oaths. All gargoyle rights and claims are hereby revoked. And your sentence, banishment."

Lord Falk's voice echoes in my head, along with the memory of the council. Guilt and grief flicker across my face in the mirror. All I do is exist, a dark shadow in the realm of the living. With Camilla's death, my world has been shattered beyond repair.

I lower my head and take in a long, deep breath.

Stretching my neck from side to side, I push off the counter and stand to my full height before I remove my pajama bottoms. As I do, I look down at my calf, taking in the Celtic cross tattoo that now sits on my leg with a frown. It's a symbol that I've aligned with the Spiritual Assembly of Protectors, to help an old friend, Asher St. Michael, protect his human mate, Eve Collins.

Then, like a fucking moron, I helped him destroy the council before I reclaimed my title as the leader of the Paris clan of gargoyles and offered my allegiance to the London clan—the future rulers of the gargoyle race.

Damn Eve and the way she wormed her way into my life. Before her human drama, I was a being without an identity. Without a conscience. All I wanted was retribution for Camilla's murder. And the St. Michaels—well, while we were once close, the trust between all of us had turned fragile at best. Now, I'm entangled with them.

I lift my chin in the air and shake my head.

"I don't even recognize you anymore, Gallagher," I chastise my reflection.

With a final heave, I step into the shower and let the hot water try to wash away my sins. My mistakes. My

failures. My shortcomings. While the Royal Gargoyle Council of Protectors and its leader, Lord Falk, no longer exist, my readmittance into the protector world has not come without its price.

With Camilla, I failed as a mate and as a protector. I knew someday I would have to atone for my past sins. Helping Asher protect Eve was supposed to be my redemption. In both the eyes of the St. Michaels and the entire gargoyle world. An undeserved second chance that, to be honest, I never wanted or asked for.

Closing my eyes, I try to drown out the sound of Camilla's voice still lingering in my head. As I do, I feel two small hands slide up and over the lion tattooed on my back in black ink from my shoulders to just above my ass—the Paris clan's mark.

With a growl, I place my palms flat against the shower's stone tiles and keep my eyes closed. I don't want to see the worry and concern that I know will be written all over Nassa's face if I open them and look back at her. As it is, I can feel the intensity of her gaze as her eyes trace the outline of the lion. The air is heavy, almost stifling, laced with her unease and concern. Nassa remains quiet, knowing that I won't talk to her about it.

The sorceress has been corrupted by my darkness.

She sleeps with me knowing that is all we'll ever have between us. Sex. Her touch soothes the endless hurt.

Right now, there's nothing I want more than to drop to my knees and devour her, losing myself in the small

moments of peace that fucking her brings me. But I can't. Not with Camilla's voice and face haunting me—lingering. It wouldn't be fair to either one of them.

Needing to regain control, I open my eyes, turn, and grab her upper arms, throwing her against the wall as I press into her. In response, she narrows her deep emerald gaze at me in consenting challenge.

At the same time, her dark purple lips press together with displeasure at my rough handling of her, not that she couldn't kick my ass if she wanted.

"Go away," I whisper hoarsely in her face.

"No." The word is final.

"I mean it. I don't want you here," I lie.

"Then make me go," she defies in her deep, sexy voice.

Part of me wants her gone.

The other part wants her to just fucking save me.

Nassa's presence in my life is a harsh reminder of everything I have lost and a future that I'll never have.

Wet dark hair cascades down the sides of her face and her creamy skin shines bright against the soft amber lights of the bathroom. Sultry green eyes slide over me.

It's both comforting and unnerving, the way she looks at me with understanding.

"I'm not leaving, Gallagher," she rasps, sucking in her lower lip.

My eyes roam over her body, taking in every last inch of her before I bring my gaze back to her fiery, defiant

one. My breath hitches as I take her in. Nassa is fucking gorgeous, but she isn't who I want, or need in this moment.

I lean down and whisper in her ear, "I don't want you here, buttercup."

She flinches at the nickname I gave her long ago, annoyance bleeding into her expression. Pissed, Nassa snarls at me and her lips turn pouty.

The sorceress and I met in New York City at a nightclub her demon uncle, Asmodeus owns, The Midnight Temple. I'd walked into the club one night looking for a corrupt gargoyle named Deacon—he had a reputation for hanging out with darker-souled creatures and sinners.

Deacon had answers I needed regarding Camilla's death. All I had to do was infiltrate the Declan clan—which I did—and learn everything that Deacon and his clan knew about my love's brutal murder.

That knowledge came at a price, though. A sexy, beautiful, unexpected one. One that is currently throwing daggers at me with her eyes.

Deacon introduced me to Asmodeus—they were working together. The moment I walked into the demon lord's office, my gaze tangled with a set of deep, emerald eyes and I couldn't look away. It was the first time since Camilla's death that I'd felt . . . *something*.

Something other than immense pain and a deep sense of sad emptiness. At my reaction, Nassa smiled at

me sexily. I hated that smile because I fucking loved it. I hated her because she made me *feel* again.

Immediately, I knew she was someone who would ruin me. Her chest rose and descended as she hung on each word that left my mouth that night, turned on.

Drunk, and in desperate need of an escape, we slept together. It was only supposed to be a moment. Just one.

A moment when I could get lost in someone else and forget my pain. Like the asshole I've proven myself to be, after fucking her, I slipped out without another word.

Nassa let me.

She never asked, needed, or expected *more* from me.

She never assumed we were anything other than a sexual encounter. I didn't ask for her name, because I didn't care. Instead, I called her *buttercup*, inspired by a tiny tattoo she has on the back of her neck.

Later, I came to learn the golden-yellow wildflower is the mark of her coven, the Black Circle. The sorceresses believe the flower symbol protects their coven against greed and vanity, and promotes prosperity. Every coven member wears it.

Nassa exhales roughly, pulling me out of the memory, forcing me to focus back on her. As I look down into her eyes, my lips curl in amusement that I've pissed her off.

I like her mad. Mad is an emotion I can handle.

Pity, sorrow, and concern, I don't want or like.

"I'm not leaving, Gallagher."

"Why not?"

"I'm not scared or put off by you when you're like this. I know how you truly feel, in here." She places her hand over my heart. "So, just stop . . . stop trying to push me away."

"Nassa." I place my hand over hers and pull it away from me.

"There are no sins for you to atone for—"

"Enough," I blow out, cutting her off, wanting her to stop seeing inside of me.

"Fine," Nassa sighs and backs off. "You win."

"It's about time," I spit out, and step away from her.

"*Tonight*, you win," she whispers. "Tomorrow—tomorrow is a new day."

I fall silent, frustrated knowing that she'll never stop trying to gift me deliverance. Regardless of how many mistakes I make, Nassa thinks I am savable. She's wrong, though. I'm not a being that can be delivered.

Not with my history, not given what I've done.

Annoyed, she slips out of the shower. Through the glass door, I watch her wrap her body in one of my oversized towels—it swallows her up. When she reaches the door to leave, she pauses for a second, looking back over her shoulder at me in the shower.

"I live with her ghost too, Gage. Camilla's death haunts both you and *me*," she states matter-of-factly. "But that's all she is now. A memory you keep inviting into our bed."

"*My* bed," I correct.

With a sad smile she nods. “At some point, it won’t be so hard.”

“What won’t?”

“Us. We.” She pauses. “*Our.*”

After she leaves, I stand in the shower, alone, for I don’t know how long, contemplating everything she said.

Taking in a few deep breaths, I try not to let my temper rise at the fact that she spoke Camilla’s name.

No one does.

Not in my presence.

Once I’m finished, I dry off and stroll into my bedroom to find Nassa gone. Another good thing about the sorceress—she knows when I need her to disappear.

The sun’s first rays peek through the window, signaling dawn’s approach, as I look around. Even though I wanted it this way, I’m oddly disappointed that I’m alone again in my loft, in Paris.

The silence feels lonely—Christ, does it feel lonely—like the first week after I lost Camilla. When all I could do was force myself to take in a breath every so often, to remind myself that I still existed.

I shake off the empty feeling and get dressed, throwing on my signature all-black outfit: tailored dress pants, nice shoes, and a button-down shirt. I roll the sleeves to my elbows and leave open the top two buttons before I readjust the cross necklace Camilla made for me out of my healing stone, hematite. Grabbing my ciga-

rettes, wallet, and cell phone off the dresser, I prepare to teleport to my business meeting in Ireland.

Right before I leave, I catch my reflection one last time in the mirror. As I do, I wonder if there will come a day when the darkness won't shadow me. When I will truly be someone worthy of deliverance.

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