

Wicked Blood
Novel Excerpt

By: Amanda Zimmermann

(616) 402-2272
amazimmermann@gmail.com

Prologue

“You can’t be here anymore, Appollion. You never belonged here.” The words cracked across the room like a whip, making Appollion visibly cringe. Michael stood a few paces away in the middle of the open room. No one ever came to the old ruins, that’s why Appollion spent most of his time honing his control away from the judgemental eyes of the others. They had never trusted him, and despite doing everything he could to fit in, they always treated him as different. Dangerous.

“Michael...” He turned to face his golden brother. Nothing good could come of this exchange.

“Father made an exception for you, but it is only a matter of time before you lose control. We all know it is going to happen.” Michael’s crystalline eyes, so much like Appollion’s own, flashed and flickered with light that had nothing to do with the white hot flames that suddenly sprang to life around Appollion.

“No...you can’t do this.” The words came out barely above a whisper as Appollion slowly fell to his knees. He could feel the strength slipping from his body as the holy fire drew his grace out of him.

“Oh, but I can dear brother.” He spat the word out as though it left a bad taste in his mouth. “In a few minutes you’ll be no more than a half-being.” Michael’s laughter echoed unevenly off the ruins around them, giving it a slightly deranged quality. Weak and humiliated, Appollion pulled his wings about him in an attempt to shield himself from sight but as the glow they normally held began to fade he felt his willpower slip. The tight control he held at all times cracked and his dark essence seized the opportunity, smashing through his carefully built defenses.

The resulting scream that ripped from his throat would have brought fear to Metatron himself as he doubled over in pain. Reason left him as he screamed and his thoughts filled with an uncontrollable rage. The skin of his back split open as the flames around him rose higher, changing from a bright white to an ominous scarlet flecked with tongues of black.

“Yesss...” a voice whispered in his head, “let it all go. Let the anger consume you!” Leathery wings unfolded themselves from the tears in his back, enveloping the fading angelic wings.

“Demon-spawn!” Michael hissed, taking a few steps back. Appollion’s head snapped up at his words, the fire’s light danced strangely over his black, oil-slick eyes.

“Worthless angelic trash.” The hissing voice from his head came out of his throat as he rose to his full height. He stepped through the flames, as though they were nothing, and towered over Michael. “You will never be a match for the likes of me.” With a flick of his fingers, Michael was lifted off the ground and careened across the open space until he slammed through one of the thick stone walls. Rubble crashed to the ground sending up clouds of dust as he struggled to lift himself off the ground. Appollion kicked him in the ribs, sending him tumbling across the rough ground until he crashed to a stop against the sharp edge of a boulder.

“Appollion...stop.” Michael coughed, ruby drops of blood splattering across the mosaic floor.

Appollion hesitated before smiling eerily, "But you made me like this, Michael dear. Take credit for your beautiful handiwork as I tear this world down around you!" The ground shook around him, sending more chunks of stone crashing to the ground.

"Appollion! No!" The cry rang out before a fiery ball of light crashed into him, knocking him to the ground. The impact of the two figures smashed a crater into the ground around them before everything went black.

Appollion's gasp echoed through the cave as he jerked awake, then immediately regretted the movement. Every nerve-ending in his body was screaming with pain. A whimper escaped his lips.

"Easy there, tiger." A figure came into view, hovering over him, but he had recognized the voice before seeing her.

"Raphael..." Her name came out a rasp that sent him into a coughing fit that only doubled the pain coursing through him already, which made him cough more. A never-ending cycle of pain. He probably deserved it.

Gentle fingers grasped the sides of his head and held him in place as soothing waves coursed through him, calming his pain. "You tried to kill Michael." She said into the quiet.

"Shit."

"Literally. I'm pretty sure Mr. High-and-Mighty crapped his robe at one point." She chuckled softly, removing her hands from his face and rocking back on her heels. She pushed her warm brown hair out of her face so it cascaded down her back between sleek golden wings. Her golden eyes sparkled with their normal humor but it was subdued with sorrow.

"What happened?" He sat up carefully, the pain was down to a dull, manageable throb.

"We had to bind you. Michael pulled out enough of your Grace before I got there that you lost control of your...other side." She glanced away uncomfortably. "You tried to kill him and you would have pulled down Heaven to do it." Appollion dropped his head into his hands. "Your Grace is back, but you can only access enough to keep things in check." She motioned to his hands. A simple gold ring circled each of his thumbs. Shackles. Leave it to Heaven to be classy about it. "And..." She twirled a lock of hair around her finger.

"And?"

"You've been exiled. Per Metatron." The words fell between them like stones, laying there in the open, heavy and final. "I'm sorry."

Chapter 1

I wasn't sure at what point the evening had gone from 'delightful first date' to 'something out of a Romero film' but standing under one of the park bridges, pressed up against the wall in fear I couldn't help but wonder. I watched as Calvin's, aforementioned first date, body stretched and

reshaped in grotesque ways as I stared on in horror, too shocked to even scream. His skin turned a dark, blotchy plum that faded into black in places, like a fresh, deep bruise. I could hear the sickening snap of bones breaking and watched as they reformed at inhuman angles. His body stretched and elongated till he had to crouch - shoulders tucked up against the bottom of the bridge - on legs that bent backwards like a horse. Wicked looking horns split the skin on his forehead like overripe fruit and curved up and over his head.

My voice finally managed to squeeze past the terror gripping my throat in the form of a gasp when...the *thing*, turned its hideous, sunken face toward me. Its eyes were gone, leaving gaping black pits. It leered, a grin full of black jagged teeth that split its oblong face nearly in two.

Its voice rattled and hissed out of its chest in a guttural language I couldn't understand as it reached long, spidery arms tipped with sharp claw like fingers towards me. My mouth opened in a silent scream, eyes wide.

Run, you idiot! My thoughts screamed at me, but my legs stayed frozen in place. *Jesus Christ! Run!*

As if a switch clicked, my body started responding to my urgings. I ducked under the outstretched arm and booked it down the path as fast as I could. Thank God I'd opted for flats instead of the high heels I'd thought about wearing. The creature-that-had-been-my-date let out a roar that echoed through the park and shook the ground. I felt it rattle around in my ribcage and used the fear-inspired rush of adrenalin to will my legs to move faster. I glanced over my shoulder and regretted that decision. It was on my trail, eating up the distance between us with surprisingly graceful, loping strides belied by its awkwardly angled limbs.

Shit. I wasn't a distance runner and I could feel my legs tiring. My lungs burned with each gasping breath and my heart felt like it was going to burst out of the side of my chest. I needed to find a place to hide or some way to lose this thing, I wasn't going to last much longer at a flat out run. Across the grassy field to my right was the wooded section of the park; maybe if I could get into the trees and underbrush I could hide! A quick turn had me flying across the grass toward possible safety. I heard the monster grunt and skid across the gravel as it tried to follow my sharp turn.

I was so close that I could make out individual leaves on the bushes that would hopefully offer my reprieve when I felt my legs slip out from under me. The ground came rushing up to say hello to my head but I managed to cushion most of the blow with my arms. I tumbled across the grass, limbs flailing awkwardly until I lay there stunned. The few moments I spent trying to get my bearings was long enough for my pursuer to catch up to me.

Large hooves hit the ground with bone-jarring thuds on either side of my body and I stared up into the maniacally grinning, grotesque face crouched over me. Its breath reeked of rot and decay and hit me like that first rush of heat when you open the oven door. It spoke again in that raspy, hissing language, grinning all the while. I watched out of the corner of my eye, too terrified to look away from its face, as it reached down with one of the long black talons and run it over my bicep. The pain was instantaneous, blinding and fierce, as my skin split with the resistance of tissue paper. It raised the talon, dripping with my blood, to its cracked, too thin lips and licked at it delicately with a forked tongue.

“Yes,” it hissed in garbled English, “*Exquisite!*” It dipped its clawed finger into my arm again, eliciting a scream of pain as the open wound began to burn and throb. Through the haze of pain I thought I heard the low rumble of thunder. *Wouldn't it be funny if it started raining right now.* I started laughing and crying; why couldn't I just black out? Why wouldn't this thing just kill me outright? What *was* this thing?

Apparently unsatisfied with cleaning its fingers of my blood, the damn thing leaned down and started licking the wound with slow, measured flicks of its tongue.

Oh God! It felt like acid was eating through muscle and bone, disintegrating flesh. I tried to curl myself around my injured arm but its large hand kept me flat on the ground, talons digging into the flesh of my other shoulder.

Blinded by pain, I barely heard the second rumble of thunder; didn't notice when the monster was ripped off me and tossed, like a discarded toy, across the field, digging a deep furrow in the grass where it landed. All I could feel was the stinging burn as it spread through my body. Suddenly, with a painful flash of light the world around me came into crystal clear, hyperfocus. A figure stood over me, a silhouette against the starry sky. For a brief moment, the length of a slow blink, I could have sworn I saw the figure framed by a pair of pitch black wings; the feather edges glowed with a rainbow of colors, like sunlight on gasoline. The colors were mesmerizing and beautiful but another staggering bolt of pain tore my eyes away from them. When I looked back the wings were gone, but the figure still crouched protectively over me. In the ambient light from the city I could make out the shine of eyes and a strong, masculine profile in the deep shadows of the hood he had pulled up over his head. Had I imagined the wings? I was sure they were there a second ago.

From where I lay, curled on my side in the cold grass, I could see the creature staggering to its feet. It shook its head once, sharply, and swiveled back around to face me, and its attacker. Its hooves cut into the dirt as it began to charge, churning up the ground.

“Please stay down.” The voice rumbled out of the hood as the stranger drew a sword from over his shoulder. The silver blade glistened in the darkness as though lit with its own inner glow. He lept over me easily and met the monster head on. The sword flashed with a flurry of sparks when it came in contact with the black ridged horns and the monster staggered back holding its head. The man lunged forward, plunging the sword into its chest with the ease of a practiced swordsman. The monster roared, shaking the ground, and staggered back. The sword slid out easily and a spray of dark liquid hit the grass with a hiss, steam rising from the ground. The man spun the sword around in a lazy, practiced arch as the monster readied for another run. What I could only assume was blood ran down its torso, leaving more hissing drops on the ground.

It charged the man again, this time he sidestepped it and the sword caught it in the abdomen, slicing its stomach open and spilling its contents across the grass. It fell to its knees and took a swipe at the him with its elongated arms; instead the arm hit the ground with a thud as he easily severed it from its body. He reeled back and kicked the creature in the chest, knocking it to the ground before he reached down and *ripped its chest open with his hands.* I gasped through the pain and winced, trying to watch as he reached in and pulled a massive glowing thing out of its chest. With each pulse it would glow a bit brighter than normal. With what appeared to be little effort, he

crushed the thing, which turned to ash in his hands. The body followed suit, slowly collapsing into dust on the ground before disappearing entirely.

Pain pulsed through me again, causing my muscles to spasm. The small movements made the excruciating pain reverberate through my limbs ten fold. Whimpers escaped my throat unbidden, and when something touched my arm I screamed. Starbursts flashed behind my eyelids and I felt my control slip, nearly blacking out from the pain; it would have been a welcome respite.

“Please, stay quiet. It’s not safe here.” The voice broke through the pain, washing over me like soothing waves, taking the biting edge off the pain. I opened my eyes and found the man crouched over me again, his face still in shadow. I wanted to pull away from him, I mean, he just tore a monster apart with his bare hands, but I couldn’t make my body respond.

“Who are you?” I managed to force out through gritted teeth. Though the pain had lessened I still burned all over.

“I can help you, but we have to move.” As if on cue an unearthly howl rose into the night around us, joined quickly by others, rising and falling in an eerie, terrifying song. I felt the hairs on the back of my neck and arms stand at attention.

“What is that? What’s going on?”

“Hellhounds.” He quickly looked over my injuries, careful not to touch any of them. “They’re answering the demon’s death cry.” He slid his arms under my body, “Please stay quiet, we need to move now.” I gritted my teeth against another cry of pain as he picked me up, cradling me against his broad chest as gently as he could. Each point of contact felt like a hot brand against my skin. Had he said ‘demon’? A demon attacked me? Not only was this guy crazy strong, he was also bat-shit crazy. “You have demon poisoning. I can help you, but we need to find a safe place.” I only nodded slightly in response, I was in no shape to protest, and going someone safe with my crazy-ass savior was better than dying from whatever was wrong with me on the ground, alone in the park. He *had* saved me so I could trust him, right? It wasn’t like I had another option and the baying of dogs was getting closer by the moment.

Each step sent shooting pain through me but I bit my lip until I tasted blood. The man moved quickly and silently, running through the park. I tried to distract myself by watching the stars through the trees. They shone brighter than usual in a multitude of colors, it was probably just the pain.

The trees disappeared and were replaced with lamp posts and the sides of buildings cutting against the sky at blunt angles. Barks and howls echoed off the buildings around us making the origin hard to pinpoint.

After what seemed like an eternity of painful jolts, we finally came to a stop under the soaring spires of a church. We climbed the front steps and with as little jostling as he could manage, my rescuer finagled open the bright red door. When it shut behind us the church was silent, the echoing barks muffled by the thick stone walls. The man seemed to heave a sigh of relief and walked into the nave. The interior was shadowed, faint light coming through the stained glass windows high

on the walls and from a few candles lit at the front of the church.

He set me down gently on the back pew. I sucked in a sharp breath as my body protested the change in position. He looked the wound on my arm with greater care, pulling a flashlight out of a pocket in his jacket. In the stark light I could see into his deep hood and took the time to study his face. His expression was blank, calm even. His skin was a flawless creamy brown and his hair was a bright orange that couldn't have come from anywhere but a bottle. His eyes were his most striking feature, though, a clear crystalline blue that you see in pictures of glaciers and the like; only they carried a tired weight in them. This guy had seen a lot in his life.

"Who are you?" I whispered. Something about churches always made me feel like I needed to be quiet and respectful, but at this moment it seemed even more necessary. His eyes flicked to my face momentarily, and then back down to my arm. They seemed unearthly pale against his dark skin.

"You may call me Appollion."

"Appollion..." I tested out the name. He leaned back and unzipped his jacket, the inside of it was lined with small pockets. He unzipped a few and pulled out a bizarre array of items; some dried plants, and chalky white stone, and a vial of clear liquid. "What was the thing in the park? You said demon."

"Yes, a demon."

"Demons aren't real." His eyes flicked to my face against and one of his eyebrows shot up in a question.

"I'm sorry, but this is coming from the girl who just got her arm ripped up by a mid-level power demon." A small smirk made his lips quirk up. "If not a demon then please, enlighten me." I opened my mouth to retort but I couldn't think of anything, not even a smart aleck comment. I'd watched Calvin change into that...demon right in front of me.

"I'll give you that one, but I still don't believe in demons." He smiled again, returning his attention to my arm.

"This is going to hurt." He grabbed the leather of his sleeve and offered it to me. "I'd suggest you bite down on this." I looked at him, but obliged. As soon as my teeth were clamped on his sleeve I was glad I had, he uncorked the bottom and up ended it over the wound. It burned like someone had shoved a hot poker into my arm and I yelled into the leather. I saw a black vapor drift out of the wound just before the pain subsided. I relaxed into the cushioned seat as the burning in my veins finally washed away.

"What was that stuff?"

"Holy water. It cleaned the poison out of your system." He crushed up the dried plants and the white stone together and smeared the mixture over my arm before wrapping it up with a white bandage.

He leaned over me to check the talon wounds on my other shoulder and I caught of whiff of him. He smelled like the air before a thunderstorm, all charged and heavy with the promise of rain, dark woods, and a heady musky scent. He smeared some more of the plant powder on the smaller wounds then leaned back again.

"There, you're not poisoned anymore, but it'll be sore for a while. Make sure you change the bandage regularly and put some ointment on it."

“Thank you.”

“Sure.” He stood up and moved out of the pew.

I sat up too quickly and my vision spun momentarily, “Wait!” He turned back to face me, “What are you?” His face remained blank.

“I told you my name.

“No, *what* are you? I watched you rip that...demon open with your hands.”

“You shouldn’t ask too many questions.” He took a step backwards, toward the door and I...I panicked.

“You can’t just leave! You-you owe me an explanation or something!” I grabbed the railing on the end of the pew and used it to pull myself up. My legs felt like jelly but I stood facing him anyways.

He smirked again, just that little upturn of the corner of his lips. “I fixed you up, you’ll be fine now.”

“But what if another demon comes after me?”

“Lightning never strikes the same place twice.” He turned away to leave and without thinking I lunged forward and grabbed the first thing I could, his hand.

The interior of the church exploded with light. I shut my eyes against the glow until my eyes adjusted a bit. The glow was coming entirely from Appollion; his skin glowed golden from the inside out and his hair was like flames. His eyes were even more startling, the left was the same blue glowing an unearthly hue, but his right eye was a solid black. Even the white was gone. The most surprising part were the huge wings that spread out around him. The same as I had glimpsed in the park. Appollion was staring at me in shock. All of this happened in span of a few seconds before he snatched his hand away from me. I clasped my hands over my chest, just as startled by what had just happened. The light faded away and he look just as normal as he had before.

“What the hell was that?” He snapped, backing further away from me.

“I-I don’t know...that’s never happened before.” My legs chose that moment to stop supporting me. I sat down on the bench hard and started at my hands. “What is happening to me?” I looked up hoping that Appollion could tell me something, anything, but the place where he’d been standing was empty.

This is a really nice start to a YA book. I love the level of detail and the tension in the action. It is developing really well right now. Considering it is the start of a longer piece, I do wonder if it might be developing a little too quickly at the moment, but that’s just a gut feeling. I’d wait until you had the rest done before I made any real judgment on that. Otherwise, I don’t really have anything critical to suggest to you. This is looking great so far. Nice work.