

Devil's Eye

A Novella of the Mirus

Kait Nolan

Devil's Eye

Written and published by Kait Nolan
Smashwords Edition

Copyright 2010 Kait Nolan

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or portions thereof, in any form.

Cover Art by Robin Ludwig of Robin Ludwig Designs

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The following is a work of fiction. All people, places, and events are purely products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual people, places, or events is entirely coincidental.

License Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. The ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without a number of supportive people.

Susan Bischoff, best crit partner ever, who pushed me to look beyond the cliché and take another pass until this story was one that was truly worth reading;

Claire Legrand, enthusiastic sounding board, New Orleans consultant, and fabulous writing sprint buddy, who pushed me to actually get the words on the page;

Maria Zannini, without whom I would have no title and the story would be very, very different;

Lauralynn Elliott, Sheri Meyer, Deniz Bevan, and my other enthusiastic blog followers, who consistently cheered me on through all my assorted struggles and interruptions with this story;

And finally, to my husband, Allen, who has been an unflagging support through all my writing endeavors. I love you, baby.

Chapter 1

“**Hurricane** Roy has been upgraded to a category three as it continues to veer off its projected path to Florida and curves toward the Louisiana coastline. Meteorologists are scrambling to explain the sudden change in direction.”

Storm shutters rattled as another clap of thunder announced the coming storm.

Nothing good can come of this, thought Mick as he tore his eyes from the huge high def TV to take in the patrons jammed practically shoulder to shoulder in his bar as they danced to the zydeco band raising the roof.

It wasn't that New Orleans couldn't take another beating. She'd survived and come back after Katrina, scarred but stronger. But storms didn't naturally change tracks like this. Not without . . . outside intervention. The whole thing made Mick twitchy.

He covered his unease by sliding a pint of Bass down the bar, where it slapped into the waiting hand of a customer. The warlock lifted the glass in salute and took a sip. Mick nodded and turned to scan the crowded tables of his bar, noting the mix of Mirus and human patrons as he filled orders on autopilot. The fiddle was hot and fast, and across the room feet tapped, hands clapped, and couples swirled in impromptu dancing. It was a full house, locals mostly, who'd decided to settle in for a last-minute hurricane party in the event the storm bitch slapped New Orleans. There was a betting pool on where Roy would hit and what category it would be when it did. *Le Loup Garou* was on the high ground and was buttoned down tight, so even if things went bad, everybody inside would be safe. That was exactly the way Mick liked it.

He continued to mix drinks and draw pints, being sure to send a tray of the band's preferred beers over to their table with one of his waitresses. It was best to keep their vocal chords lubricated. They were earning every penny of their fee with this gig. The last hurricane party he'd hosted had lasted 'til dawn, and the musicians had played long after the power had gone out, keeping the fear and worry at bay with their instruments and voices.

Mick's attention shifted to a group of frat boys on the far side, and his sense of dread ratcheted up a couple of notches. They weren't being rowdy, but they looked annoyed. One ham-handed guy reached out and snagged a waitress as she walked by. Charlotte covered her irritation, listened to the complaint: where was the service? She calmly took out her pad and scribbled down their orders. Not until she was on her way back to the bar did she absently rub her wrist. Mick's eyes narrowed.

Charlotte set her tray down on the bar. “One Jack and Coke, two Bud Selects, a G and T, one Bond-style martini, and a bloody Mary for Table Six.”

Mick listened as she continued to rattle off orders, part of his brain filing and categorizing as he waited for her to finish. “You okay, *chère*?” His eyes flicked to her wrist.

His waitress rolled her eyes. “Fine. Just a little overactive, underfed testosterone. It's Liza's station. Apparently they've been waiting a while.”

He flicked his eyes around the other tables in Liza's section, noting the waiting patrons, and frowned. “Liza isn't in yet?”

Tracy, one of the other waitresses, sidled up, orders for the kitchen in hand. “No, she's late. Helluva night to do it, too. We're jumpin.”

“Either of you hear from her?” he asked. Both women shook their heads. Liza was never late. Could

be she got delayed from the storm, but she'd have called.

Mick loaded Charlotte's tray. "Keep your eyes peeled. Divide her tables among yourselves. I'll see what I can find out."

It took a while to process all the orders, but eventually he squeezed into his small office in the back. Blistering fiddle licks chased him as he shut the door, blocking out the bulk of the noise so he could call Liza's cell phone. It went straight to voicemail. He left a message for her to call on the bar line and hung up.

It didn't necessarily mean anything was wrong. She might've let the thing die, or she hadn't answered the last call. But he didn't like it.

As he stepped back into the bar, the band finished a rousing rendition of *Hot Tamale Baby*. The moment of silence before the audience burst into applause and cheers was interrupted by a sharp *crack!* up near the front.

Mick's eyes went to the windows first, thinking one of the storm shutters had come loose to whack against the brick. Then he saw her standing in the doorway, hair whipping around her heart shaped face as the wind and rain poured in at her back.

Trouble.

That's all Mick could think as he stared at her, mouth going dry. If she'd lifted her hands to send walls of water crashing over his customers, he wouldn't have been at all surprised. And he wasn't sure he could move to stop her. For that moment he was absolutely at her mercy.

Then another patron wrestled the outside door shut and she was just a woman.

A wet, slightly bedraggled and incredibly sexy woman, Mick corrected. He called himself a fanciful fool as she combed the dripping hair back from her face with both hands and took another step inside.

She was exactly the kind of trouble he liked between the sheets on long, hot summer nights when hurricanes weren't threatening the city he loved. Though she was dressed casually in jeans and a leather jacket, she carried herself like she wore a suit, stiff and purposeful. He wanted to peel those wet layers off and make her forget whatever worries had pulled that lush pink mouth into a frown.

It was then he noticed the temper practically steaming the water off her. Mick tore his eyes and his mind away. No time for play tonight. No time for whatever kinda trouble she brought with her. She wasn't a local and that meant she wasn't for him. He had a business to run and a waitress to find.

~*~

Sophie hung back near the entryway, feeling almost as buffeted by the music as she had by the storm outside. She was off-balance and unprepared for the bar full of happy, dancing people. Were they crazy? Didn't they know a hurricane was bearing down on them?

Her eyes flicked up to the big screen TV on the wall, as the band declared they would be back after a short break. The meteorologist announced that Roy had picked up speed and was predicted to make landfall by six AM. . Okay, yeah, they knew, they just weren't going anywhere. *Obviously. Because the logical thing to do in a natural disaster is have a drunken party. With a band. Gods.*

She scanned the crowd, looking for a familiar dark head and not seeing it. Not that Liza was easily seen. She was just as vertically challenged as Sophie was, barely topping 5'2".

There were humans mixed in with the Mirus present. Quite a few, actually. Which meant that *Le Loup Garou* was not one of the establishments that cloaked its presence from humans. That made the situation an iota better for Liza. It meant she wouldn't stand out as much. When Mom had called earlier

in the day to say that baby sis was working in a Mirus bar, Sophie had imagined the worst and come racing to New Orleans to bail her out of trouble. Again. But clearly this wasn't the kind of place where young, impressionable human women were on display like gyrating sides of beef. It was just a bar. And chances were Liza was just a waitress.

Not that that was going to keep Sophie from ripping her sister a new one at the earliest opportunity. "We're pretty packed, but you could probably squeeze in up at the bar."

Sophie turned her attention to the waitress, who'd paused, heavy tray balanced expertly on her shoulder. "Thank you," she said, raising her voice to be heard over the music.

Before Sophie could ask about Liza, the woman nodded and sashayed onto the other side of the bar to deliver food. The spicy scent of jambalaya and gumbo lingered in her wake, reminding Sophie that she hadn't eaten since breakfast in Atlanta, and that was hours ago. Maybe she could at least get a bite of *something* while she figured out how she was going to drag her sister out of here without making a scene.

When she reached the bar, a skinny guy in a bright Hawaiian shirt flashed her a smile and immediately stood up, drink in hand. He gestured at the stool. "You look like you could use this more than me, sugar."

Sophie worked up a smile that she hoped didn't resemble a snarl. "Thanks."

She braced herself to fend off any flirtation, but the guy only saluted her with his beer and hollered down the bar. "Hey Mick! This one needs a nip to warm her up."

Glancing down the bar, she saw a flash of tanned, muscled forearm passing a drink to someone before a shoulder leaned in and blocked her view. She slid onto the stool, grimacing as the wet denim of her jeans clung to her thighs. A change of clothes would be awesome but wasn't in the cards. The rain was coming down so hard now, anything she could pull out of her car would get just as soaked. Besides, she wasn't planning on staying.

The same brown arm thrust into her line of vision, a dishtowel clutched in his hand. Sophie blinked and followed the arm, past the faded blue chambray shirt, up to the very broad shoulders, and finally settled on his face. He wasn't handsome. Not by any kind of movie-star standards. He was all sharp angles and flat planes that should have come together to look like some kind of backwoods hit man. But his eyes—golden as the whiskey on the shelf behind him—and the slight curve of a surprisingly sensual mouth softened everything enough to make him appear just this side of civilized.

"It's not much, but it might help a li'l bit." His voice flowed over her like spiced honey, warm and sexy. He shook the towel in a *take it* gesture.

Sophie realized she was staring and closed her mouth, reaching for the towel. "Thanks." Embarrassed, she dropped her eyes, using the towel to squeeze water from her hair. She had often heard people speak of the animal magnetism of the Wylk, but this was the first time she'd experienced it herself.

She sensed, rather than saw, the wolf-shifter move on down the bar, continuing to tend other customers. *Oh brilliant. This is really the perfect time for your libido to wake up and decide to tango. You're here for Liza.*

She plucked a menu out from between the napkin holder and a ketchup bottle and spun around on the stool to survey the bar's patrons, still trying to find her sister. Instinctively she started categorizing people, pausing on each of the Mirus to identify their race. Felis. Witch. A couple of vampires. Was that a selkie? Damn, he was way far south. They tended to prefer colder climates.

The band had moved on to something more upbeat. Sophie observed, assessed, and paused when she

saw a small plastic packet of bright yellow powder and a wad of cash changing hands.

Oh come on. Seriously? You're going to sell drugs right under the nose of the IED?

Not that they were aware she was part of the Investigation and Enforcement Division since she was in plainclothes and wasn't flashing her badge. And she wouldn't unless it became absolutely necessary. Getting recognized as an agent while she extricated Liza from her latest harebrained adventure was the last thing she needed. It'd be just her luck that somebody would report back to headquarters and get her ass canned for her sister's actions, what with the Council's whole *thou shalt not let humans know we exist* edict.

"What else can I get you?"

The bartender was back, and Sophie realized she hadn't even looked at the menu. She turned back around and studiously pretended she hadn't been ogling him a minute ago. "I'm looking for someone."

"Ain't we all, *chère*?" His mouth curved into a smile with enough kilowatts to fry an alligator.

Put that away, Cajun, Sophie thought as her blood heated with something other than temper. "One of your staff members, actually. Liza Cunningham?"

The smile didn't fade, but his eyes chilled. "What you be wantin' with Liza?" Suspicion snaked around the easy tone, but Sophie couldn't tell whether it was in the name of saving his own ass or something else.

What are you hiding?

While she debated for a long moment about whether to reveal their family connection, another of the waitresses leaned over. "I tried Liza again from my cell, Mick. Still no answer. Looks like we'll be doing without her tonight. I need a long neck Michelob . . ."

Sophie tuned out the order. Her brain was too busy focusing on what the girl had just said. Liza wasn't here. She wasn't answering her cell or her house phone. Sophie had tried both, of course, several times since she'd left Atlanta, but she'd assumed Liza was screening her calls and knew perfectly well that her ass was gonna wind up in a sling. But if she wasn't answering for work and hadn't called in . . . Well, that wasn't like her. She might have a wild hair, as their mother was liable to say, but she always met her responsibilities.

When Mick finished handing over the latest order of drinks to the waitress, Sophie pulled out her badge. "Is there somewhere we can talk in private?"

Chapter 2

Mick glanced at the badge in her hand. IED. *Merde*.

She didn't look like an assassin. Not their usual sort anyway. That's who the Council of Races normally sent to deal with humans who'd found out about their world. They never cared about the hows or the whys. It was black and white for the Council, and the bulk of its members valued human life about as much as the lowest form of swamp rat. Mick had little respect for the government of the paranormal world, and less for those sent to do their bidding. He'd spent years working to circumvent their laws through his work with the Underground. He sure as hell wasn't about to let this piece of work get anywhere near one of his own, no matter what Liza may have seen or figured out.

Suppressing a growl, Mick gestured her down to the pass through at the end of the bar, his brain frantically calculating the best means of damage control. Liza wasn't on the premises and maybe that was a good thing just now. He'd do his damndest to get rid of this agent, and then for gods' sake he had to find Liza and get her the hell out of town. How that was going to work with a bar full of customers, a hurricane bearing down, and without knowing exactly what Liza already knew, he wasn't sure, but he wasn't going to let her die.

He didn't like having the compact little assassin at his back as they made their way down the length of the bar and to his office off the other end. She wouldn't pull a knife or cast a spell in front of so many witnesses, but feeling her eyes on him made his shoulders twitch, which was an unacceptable show of weakness. Before closeting himself in with her, he caught the eye of his second in command. Jeanette nodded once. She would keep watch and have the rest of his motley Pack at the ready should they be needed. He prayed they wouldn't be. The memory wipe and damage control for this volume of people would be a real bitch.

There were no decent defensible positions in his office, being that the room was little more than a closet with a desk and file cabinet jammed in cheek by jowl. It wasn't something that had come up before since he only used it for paperwork, ordering, and the occasional private conversation with members of his staff. As he shut the door behind himself, Mick felt as if the square footage had shrunk by half. The woman eyed the spindly chair on the visitor's side of the desk and continued to stand. Mick didn't move around her to his own chair.

Deciding that a good offense was the best defense, he didn't wait for her to speak. Instead he launched in, dropping the thick accent he slathered on for customers. "Liza Cunningham is not the only human in my employ, Agent . . ."

"Hayden. Sophie Hayden. And I had noticed that Mr . . . ?"

"Micajah Guidry. My place is entirely on the up and up. I have both human employees and Mirus, and while they fraternize on the premises, no rules have been violated. None of my human employees, including Liza, know anything about the Mirus world. If you'll allow me to get to my file cabinet, I can show you all the proper paperwork that was filed with the Council regarding my set up. I've got the proper permits for hiring humans—"

"I'm sure you do, Mr. Guidry. I'm not interested in your paperwork or permits. I'm interested in Liza."

He couldn't stop the wolf from rising up inside him. She threatened one of his Pack. When he spoke, his voice was edged with a growl. "Liza's done nothin' wrong. She's broken no laws."

Sophie lifted one well-shaped brow. “Not recently anyway.”

That brought him up short.

“What is your relationship with Liza?” she asked.

“She’s my employee.”

“Your employee. Why is it, then, that I get the sense you’d be happy to rip me apart if I proved to be a threat to her?”

Mick dug deep for patience and some measure of civility. “She is alone in this city. No family. Few friends. Same as most of my other employees. We make our own family, Agent Hayden. I protect what’s mine.”

She tipped her head, curiosity plainly etched on her face. “You speak of them as Pack.”

“Family is more than blood and race,” he replied.

Something like approval flashed in her eyes. What the hell was going on?

“You can stand down, Mr. Guidry. I’m not here in my professional capacity. And while I came here with every intention of dragging Liza away whether she likes it or not, it isn’t for the reasons you seem to think.” She blew out a long breath and seemed to exhale some of the stiffness with it. “Liza is my sister.”

“Sister?” Mick repeated. “But she’s . . .”

“Human, yes. We share a mother. She has a propensity for getting into trouble in our world, which, as you are well aware, she isn’t supposed to know about.”

Studying Sophie, he could see some subtle similarities. The similar soft mouth. Same diminutive stature. Maybe the same shape to the face. But the same could be said of many women, and Liza had never mentioned a sister. Was this some kind of trick? Some means of sniffing out his affiliation with the Underground?

“Is Liza in some kinda trouble?” asked Mick, his mind and body shifting to deal with a different kind of threat.

Her cell phone rang and she held up a finger in a *just a second* motion as she checked the caller ID before shoving it back into her pocket. “Sorry. I was hoping you’d be able to tell me. She hasn’t come in tonight?”

“No. Nobody’s heard from her.”

She leaned back against his desk, crossing her arms. “I’ve been trying to reach her all day, but I figured she was just avoiding my calls. When was the last time you saw her?”

“Last night. Or this mornin’, dependin’ on how you look at it. Several of the girls live within walkin’ distance, so me and a couple of the boys rotate to make sure all our girls get home safe. I walked her home at two, after clean up,” he explained. “I didn’t sense anything that set off my radar. We realized she wasn’t in about an hour and a half ago. Been tryin’ to get her ever since.” *Why didn’t I send somebody to check on her sooner?* The gnawing sensation in his gut was rising. He had a bad, bad feeling about this.

“Do you remember anybody hassling her at all last night? Watching her? Anybody who shows up regularly and sits in her section?”

Mick sifted through his memories of the last few weeks, but they were hazy, all running together. “I’d have remembered anybody givin’ her grief. I don’t tolerate mistreatment of my people. As for regulars, we’ve got a lot of ’em. We’re a neighborhood place, so we’ve got a lot of the same folks in several times a week. She’s an attractive woman, so a lotta men watch her. But none of ’em ever made

any kinda pass at her, as far as I know. It's somethin' I generally discourage."

"Is she seeing anybody?"

"Not that I know of. She doesn't talk about her personal life or family overmuch."

"At least she followed one rule," Sophie muttered. She shoved away from the desk and dug in a jacket pocket. "Look, I'll leave my card. Call if you hear from her. I'm going to check out her apartment."

"Keep it," said Mick. "I'm comin' with you."

Her eyes met his. "This is not your problem, Mr. Guidry. And in case you hadn't noticed, you've got a full house out there."

"Mick. And my people can handle it. I told you. I protect what's mine."

~*~

Liza lived a few blocks from *Le Loup Garou*, in a second story, walk-up apartment above a bakery about a block off South Carrollton Avenue. The lower level was dark, but, despite the rain, Sophie could still smell a faint scent of fresh baked bread as they climbed the stairs. Her stomach grumbled again, reminding her that she still hadn't eaten. In her pocket, her cell vibrated. Her handler calling again, no doubt. Well Leif was just going to have to wait for an explanation as to why she'd dumped a personal leave form on his desk before business hours this morning.

All thoughts of food and her handler vanished, as she plowed straight into Mick's rigid back. He'd paused a few feet from the top of the stairs, nose lifted. She picked up his low growl, even over the drumming of the rain.

Not pausing to ask why, Sophie pulled her gun and switched off the safety.

Mick moved slowly then, up to the landing, where he laid his ear against the door panel. A few moments later he motioned her back and took aim. The ancient door casing gave way easily under the snap of his kick, the door flying open and banging back into the wall.

Mick was through it in an instant, and Sophie was right behind, gun held braced and at the ready. He skidded to a stop so fast, she almost ran into him again.

"*Mon Dieu*," he breathed.

The apartment was ransacked, furniture overturned, pictures and knickknacks broken.

Keep it together. Do your job. Work the scene. Suppressing the nausea of anxiety, Sophie carefully picked her way across the littered floor. She led with the Sig that was loaded with specialized bullets designed to slow down at least half the Mirus population. If anyone else was in the apartment, Mick would probably know it, but protocol was deeply ingrained. He fell into step on the other side of the room, movements soundless.

She peeked into the galley style kitchen, finding nothing but a pile of dishes on a drip rack. "Clear," she called softly, knowing Mick would be able to hear her.

He skirted the trashed living room and headed for the bedroom, his face set in hard, unforgiving lines. For a long moment, he stared at the knob of the closed door. Listening, maybe, or perhaps steeling himself for whatever was on the other side. A muscle jumped in his jaw as he reached forward to open the door.

Sophie signaled for him to wait. Whispering a brief incantation, she generated an energy shield that would block any spells that might get thrown at them in case someone was inside or had left the room booby trapped. She nodded a go ahead. Mick glanced at her briefly in speculation, then threw open the

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

