

**I am excited to share with you the first three chapters of *Spirit Born*, a paranormal steampunk romance. Although I am currently working on this project I have polished up the first three chapters to give you a glimpse. Please let me know what you think and grace my guest book with your thoughts!**

**~ Elizabeth**

## Chapter One

Wiping a grimy hand over my eyes in a largely unsuccessfully attempt to clear my vision from the mixture of rainwater and blood running in thick streams down my face, I catch a brief glimpse through the haze of something heading straight at me. In a reflex so quick it makes my head reel my body drops into a crouch narrowly missing a foot intent on connecting with my face. Sweeping my left leg up off the mud covered pavement a shower of filth flies over me as my foot delivers a powerful blow to my attacker's stomach. The force of it stuns him enough allowing me to scramble forward over the slippery surface making a desperate lunge for the gun that was forcefully kicked from my grasp earlier on in the fight.

An involuntary cry is pulled from my throat as a sharp sting, followed by searing pain flashes through my right shoulder. Perfect. Falling into a drop roll on the hunch that there will be more where that came from, my suspicions are confirmed as the breeze from a second blade flows inches past my skin. I hate being right. Fucker!

A flash of satisfaction invades at the achievement of small victory as the smooth metal of my gun slides into my fingers. Overshadowing my happiness at being armed again is

the terrifying mixture of throbbing pain and numbness in my right arm. Rolling to avoid the second blade shoved the other one almost completely through my shoulder rendering my right arm pretty much useless. Good thing I am ambidextrous.

Really pissed off now I turn towards the man I am suppose to be saving from a premature death and fire at him. In theory my shot won't kill him, but maybe it will keep him off my ass long enough for me to put a stop to this madness. Sure enough he drops. Walking over to him I can see the fear in his face, radiating off of him in waves. The poor guy is barely out of college and has had the misfortune of getting into a bad situation. Wishing there had been a way to save his life without the terror, I focus on the fact that he now has a few more years to live.

Crouching down to stroke his hair in an effort to comfort him I whisper, "Don't worry sweetie you will live for awhile longer. This is all a bad dream." Dropping a kiss to his forehead as an apology I knock him over the head with the butt of my gun hard enough to render him unconscious.

Standing with a groan as every muscle screams at me in protest as the adrenaline fades. Not needing to be slowed down right now I shove my discomfort to the side along with

the dripping strands of blood and mud matted hair obscuring my vision. Surveying the damage it doesn't look encouraging, the surrounding area looks like a small war was waged. Lucky for me it's not my job to provide a plausible explanation for the authorities to find. My purpose for being here is complete, the bad guys are unconscious and tied up and my objective is injured, but alive. One mission down, forty-two more to go...God my life sucks.

How did my life go from a fabulously famous and rich rock star to this? Once answering to the name Jordan, I now go only by the code name: Raven, a name given to me by my boss the Grim Reaper. Let me tell you that when the day of your death comes if the Grim Reaper utters the words "I am a fan," do whatever the hell you can to get yourself to the other side quickly. Otherwise you will end up like me. Covered in blood and freezing your ass off in the drenching rain. Living a pathetic existence forever chasing the small glimmer of hope that one day you will be able to rejoin humanity.

Slipping my gun into the holster wrapped around the thigh of my now torn, filthy leather pants I calculate how long its going to take to get the smell of this dirty alley out of my hair. Next time someone offers me a contract in

exchange for life the answer will be go fuck yourself. Now my life revolves around completing fifty missions for the Grim Reaper, going back in time and saving people from premature death. You may not know this, but death has a schedule that must be adhered to. If these missions are completed, I get my human life back. At the time it seemed like a good idea... thinking back now the better solution would have been to accept my fate.

Rubbing my locket gently with my thumb all the memories it invokes bombard me. My mother who knew more than she ever let on left its contents with me days before my death. It helps anchor me when the loneliness threatens to consume me.

Rescinding to the shadows to tear off my sopping tank top in private or more accurately concealing my struggling efforts of shredding it with my good hand and my teeth into strips should someone come by. Wrapping one of the strips around my good hand in an effort to protect it as I grasp the portion of the blade protruding through the front side of my shoulder. Taking one deep breath and then gritting my teeth hard I begin pulling it through with a strangled scream. In the midst of the mind numbing pain I am vaguely thankful that the handle is nearly as thin as the blade. Feeling a little light headed from the pain and blood loss

the blade drops involuntarily from my fingers to the ground.

Wrapping the remaining cloth around my wounded shoulder that is now flowing blood freely to the ground the thought of so many more missions and injuries looms before me. Smearing the blood around with the toe of my combat boot in an effort to dilute it into the muddy sludge caking the pavement it creates a morbid homage to what occurred here today. If someone runs DNA samples on it won't they be shocked to find out it belongs to a dead rock star.

Smiling grimly at the irony of it I whistle three times for the Corvus, my ride out of here. The rustle of wings reaches my ears almost instantly and within seconds a damp, bedraggled raven drops onto my uninjured shoulder. There is a good-natured mirth in his beady eyes as he appraises my mainly undressed, filthy state. "Don't ask," explaining isn't high on my to do list. "Unless you are planning on escorting me out for a greasy hamburger and a beer." Pausing for effect before I continue with, "It will also be your job to explain it to Grim when I am late getting back so I suggest you send me through."

The raven cocks his head as if considering my request, instead he opens his beak and sends forth his call three times. In an instant the blackness begins pulling me,

dragging my body back to the realm of the spirits. Leaving me feeling deader than ever.

## Chapter Two

A shower leaves me feeling semi more like myself, even though what or who I am isn't clear any more. Gingerly pulling on a fresh pair of leather pants in an effort to not reopen any of my wounds the questions of how they carry with me to the spirit world still baffles me. Then there is a lot about my new life I still don't understand. Pouring myself a generous tumbler of whiskey I take a long, languid swallow hoping it will take the edge off the soreness my poor battered body is experiencing. Setting the tumbler aside I decide to finish getting dressed so I can stop scaring myself by catching glimpses of my bruise mottled skin in the mirror.

Glancing longingly at my lovely corsets practicality takes over and I struggle into a soft, snug t-shirt instead. Twisting the top off a bottle of black nail polish with my teeth I am about to touch up the chips in my nails that I acquired earlier when a knock on my door reminds me that the boss is probably here to see me. Gathering my long black hair into a quick ponytail I push the button to slide the door open. Grim has a wicked sense of humor and has designed his domain to resemble a bad sci-fi set.

As Grim strides through the door his usual cheerfulness has been replaced with an insane look of panic. Judging by the disarray of his usually impeccable clothing something has him worried. "What the hell is wrong Grim?"

"You had better have a seat Raven." Pacing restlessly Grim's angry movements are punctuated with random swearing.

Falling into the nearest chair a curse slips out of my mouth as my injured shoulder bangs against the hard metal of the chair's back. "Is it something I did Grim? I know my last mission wasn't exactly pretty, but it was successful." Grim seems to be completely inarticulate as he keeps up his angry stride. He looks more terrifying than I have ever seen him look, you could almost call him psychotic. You wouldn't think it, but Grim who is in essence death isn't ordinarily frightening or scary. He is just a nice guy that got stuck with a shitty job.

Sinking onto the bed Grim's head falls into his hands, "They are all gone."

"Who is all gone?" Fear snakes up my spine one vertebrae at a time leaving shivers in its wake as the dread at hearing his answer swamps over me.

"Everyone!" Standing back up he resumes his pacing, "Every human on earth is dead!"

The very thing that my brain was screaming no at has been confirmed and it doesn't want to accept it. "Did you say everyone? How the hell did it happen!" The blow hits me harder than a fist to the gut even though I already knew it was coming. That means my mom and everyone I loved is now like me, dead. However unlike me they are going to be headed into a new horizon, starting life over traversing the after realms. Leaving me behind stuck in limbo.

After a few unsuccessful attempts at speech Grim closes his eyes and lets the words flow. "There is a society called the Ebon Dawn. It's a group of dangerous people that have been around since 1888 originating in London and they have been dabbling with the notion of opening the fabric between Earth and the Spirit World, amongst other things. Recently there have even been a few that could traverse through time. These people are frowned upon, but they haven't done anything really wrong to date so we have let them be." Sinking back to the bed Grim scrubs his hands over his face and through his dark wavy hair, sending it shooting up in chaotic spikes.

"So you knew about these guys, yet you did nothing?" Trying to hold myself back so as not to be too hard on the poor guy, I can't help thinking he should have done something!

"Its not my department until someone dies. I had absolutely no control over them. No one actually thought they would get anywhere." A single tear slides down Grim's pale cheek, "Now they are all gone and I am going to become as extinct as they are."

Jumping up unable to contain my rage I begin shouting, "You are only worried because you are now out of a job!" The thought of punching him in the face to make myself feel better briefly crosses my mind, "Millions of people were extinguished because it wasn't your job! What the fuck Grim?"

"I don't expect you to understand Raven. There are rules that must be followed, an order to things." Standing up he pulls me into a hug pressing my cheek into one of his expensive silk shirts. At this point I am about as huggable as a cat during a rainstorm. Plowing ahead while holding my ridged body in an embrace I can tell he is trying to make me understand. "The last time we tried to intervene into affairs the Ice Age and world wide destruction occurred, almost spoiling Earth from ever having life again."

"Well not helping out hasn't seemed to do any better!" My anger is becoming a frightening, palpable force driving me, inciting all of my newfound power making me want to destroy something. Grim's hands slide tentatively over my

shoulders as he begins a slow massage trying to relieve my building pressure.

"You can feel the uncontrollable power in yourself can't you?"

Nodding numbly as understanding of what he is getting at begins to process, "If you guys went off of emotion worse things would happen because you can't control your power under extreme emotion?"

"Yes that is why all of us in charge of running the universe have individual jobs and before any major decisions are made we must all vote and agree. Many civilizations have suffered the consequences of our folly, we are trying." Pulling my numb body into another embrace he adds, "There may be a way to fix this though."

"How the fuck could this possibly be fixed?"

"By you my darling. I can only travel to earth when collecting a soul, but you, you can go back and track down the people that did this and change it so the event never happens."

"Me save the world?" Disbelief laces through each word. "One person at a time is one thing, but are you sure this isn't out of my league?"

"It won't be easy, but I believe you can do it. The moment the demons tore through and began to take over we

tracked a time shift to a different era. We believe these to be the men responsible. If you can track them down and kill them, destroying any evidence that they were there as well as collect any information in the past that is related to this incident, we can restore life to earth once more."

"It was demons that killed everyone?" Thoughts of the horrific deaths everyone must have faced invade my thoughts bringing forth a solid lump followed closely by bile rising in my throat. Pushing back the hot sting of tears behind my eyes I know they will accomplish nothing at this point. Needing some liquid courage I reach for the tumbler of whiskey I set aside earlier and toss back the entire contents in one gulp. As the heavenly liquid burns a trail of fire down to my belly I try to concentrate.

"Yes, demons. The Ebon Dawn were trying to tear into my realm, but they missed and opened into the inferno releasing the monsters into the world."

Shock is taking over and shivers are racking my body uncontrollably despite my trying to stay emotionally detached to the situation. I haven't felt this way since my own death six months ago. Reaching for my trusty bottle of Jack Daniels I pour myself a second generous tumbler full. Downing another impressive gulp I can feel it mellowing my nerves slightly.

"Hades did get them rounded up, but not fast enough. Everyone is dead and earth is burning."

"Just give me the run down on what I need to do and I will get right on it boss." Despite my false bravado the sadness shines through as I whisper, "When you pass my mom over will you tell her I love her?"

"Of course darling." Pressing a quick kiss to my forehead he takes the glass from my hand and swallows it's contents before he makes the transition to being all business. "I have put a special Corvus named Phoenix in place to help you fit in and get around. He is the only one I trust enough to have help you with this mission."

"Fit in? Where exactly are you sending me?" Something tells me I am not going to like his answer.

"To one of the most romantic eras in history darling."

"Stop playing games and just tell me!" Slightly exasperated at his evasiveness my foot begins a quick tapping conveying my frustration better then words.

"1888 London to be precise, it's really a fascinating time. One of my favorites." He lets a cheeky smile spread across his face almost masking the concern still etched in his brow.

"How the fuck do you expect me to blend into the bloody freaking Victorian era?" Gesturing at myself in an

encompassing motion showcasing my exposed pierced navel, visible tattoos and skimpy t-shirt that says, "Fuck you". I think he will get the point, its not feasible. To emphasize the point I add, "I am gothic rock and roll girl that enjoys whiskey, not a proper social tea drinker."

"Well you can just say you were on a world wide safari before returning and you were pierced and tattooed by the natives. The aristocratic circle in London will be simply mad about you."

"I have never worn a tea dress or ball gown in my life!"

"Don't worry darling you totally have the figure for it."

Smacking him I find that despite the horrific news of the day I can still muster a giggle. "Grim, we make a terrible pair you know that?" Throwing my arm good-naturedly around his shoulder I add, "Although I still don't believe even this miracle worker of yours can make me fit into the era of bustles and weirder fashion then even I wear."

"There is no weirder fashion then you sport darling, the average public doesn't go out looking like an extra from a vampire movie and trust me Phoenix will make you fit

in!" Wincing a bit he seems to have a personal knowledge of his statement.

There is a tone in Grim's voice when mentioning Phoenix that makes me wonder if perhaps there is something about Phoenix that makes him different than the ordinary Corvus. My curiosity piqued I am anxious to meet him.

Grim makes a step towards the door as if he is leaving when he turns back and says, "I almost forgot to mention, if you do indeed save the world, you can rejoin your fellow humans as one of them."

"No fifty missions?" I can't believe what I am hearing and I need to clarify before I get my hopes up.

"Yes, no fifty missions."

In a rare moment of true joy I can't stop myself from flinging myself into Grim's arms and planting a spontaneous kiss on his lips. "I love you forever for this!"

"I see that you seem to have forgotten your injuries, such is your happiness at the thought of being rid of me," he says dryly while untangling himself from my enthusiastic embrace and straightening his clothes. "I suggest you get some rest, you will be leaving in two hours. You also won't be able to bring any of your clothing or weapons with you."

"Um, Grim. If I can't bring any clothes or weapons, how exactly am I supposed to kill the bad guys and save the

world?" Mimicking his signature eyebrow raise I ask,  
"Dazzle them with my breasts to distract them and then beat  
them to a bloody pulp with my bare fists? Cause that theory  
isn't really working for me."

Unable to hold it back, Grim chokes on a chuckle and  
quickly covers it up by saying, "Phoenix will port you into  
a safe place and help dress you and equip you with weapons.  
Honestly the things you come up with Raven." His  
exasperated sigh is mostly good-natured. I think.

"Aren't you afraid this Phoenix guy is going to get  
too excited if I drop in naked?"

"Trust me he isn't the sort to get, how was it you  
phrased it, "dazzled" by a pair of breast," no matter how  
perfect they are."

"I never knew you felt that way about my breasts  
Grim!" Wiggling my eyebrows suggestively at him I lower my  
voice to a purr and ask, "Perfect huh? I feel all warm and  
fuzzy now!"

"Raven, you are going to have to watch your mouth and  
the insane things that come out of it on your mission."  
Gliding to the door with his elegant stride he pauses to  
say, "Don't worry I am sure Phoenix can find an era  
appropriate substitution for your favorite curse word."  
With a small bow he exits the room.

Left alone to ponder the whirlwind discussion with Grim I lower myself to my bed and lay there wondering why after the initial shock of what he said has worn off all I feel is numbly aware. There isn't any emotion in me right now, no anger or sadness; it just feels like my body is housing an empty void. Perhaps the chance at real emotion was lost along with my life? Hating myself for being able to joke around with Grim after hearing such terrible news and I hate him more for the same reason. Rolling over on the bed I cocoon myself in the thick comforter embracing the pain as I jar each wound in my attempt to burry myself. I will allow myself to wallow for the next two hours and then I will go save the world.

Chapter Three

Shivering from the cold and shock of being transported through time, a feeling that can't be embraced with any sort of dignity. Apparently the further back in time you go the worse it is. A warm blanket connects with my bare back and has me turning quickly with fists raised. I find myself staring straight at a man that is quite boyish in his physique and looks. He has unruly sandy colored hair, wire rimmed glasses and a leather apron, and there is also the added bonus of him being only slightly taller than my five foot four inches. I could defiantly kick his ass if necessary.

"Easy girl, you will be a bit disoriented for a few minutes. I am Phoenix by the way," he says with an adorable English accent while pushing up his wire-rimmed glasses in a nonchalant matter as if some naked girl from the future drops in on him all the time.

"The fucker didn't even give me any warning before sending me through!" The anger bubbling up in me has me wishing Grim were here so I could connect my fist to his pretty face! It seems I fell into a deep sleep despite my anger and depression about the way things had ended up

after my chat with Grim and he took advantage of it and sent me through. No bye or good luck or even a hint of warning. Fucker!

Giving me a good once over I can tell the result is less than acceptable to Phoenix. "Oh my god! You are a walking disaster, you look utterly mused! I am going to kill Grim for this." Phoenix's eyes dance in a perfect blend of disgust and disdain, he obviously doesn't like my eyebrow piercing. "There is no way I can get you turned out for a soiree that is to take place this very evening!" Gesturing wildly at me I think he may be on the brink of a nervous break down, "Not only do you look like you have been through a street brawl, but you have tattoos and piercings! Fuck me!"

"Grim told me that you would provide me with an alternate word to use other than fuck, Mr. expert." Judging by the eye roll my comment is less than welcome.

In a flurry of movement Phoenix starts flittering around the room snatching up an odd variety of frilly confections and gadgets that look like something from a fantasy movie. Oblivious to my presence he is muttering to himself, from the bits I gathered he is cursing Grim. It seems we share at least one thing in common.

Still distracted Phoenix throws more clothing in the pile while talking out loud this time. "Ok here is the deal, you are an exotic world traveler. You have spent time amongst the natives and adopted some of their more eccentric proclivities." Throwing another heap of clothing at my feet he takes off again and starts arranging the odd gadgets and weirder looking guns on a table.

Sorting through the pile of things that aren't even identifiable as clothing I realize I have reentered a time in my life where I cannot dress myself. "Clearing my throat I tuck my pride down into the deepest recesses of my being, "Um, Phoenix. I hate to admit this, but how the fuck do I even begin to put these things on?"

Throwing his hands up in surrender he stalks over to me prepared to do battle. "It's excellent knowing that Grim's existence hangs in the hands of such a competent woman." Disdain ripe in his voice he snatches up the first item of clothing from the pile and studies it and then me. Shaking his head he throws it to the side. "If you are going to be an eccentric we must walk a fine line between acceptable and outrageous."

"That shouldn't be a problem for me," I mumble while trying to see if there is anything that resembles an article of clothing that looks familiar.

"Ok, first things first, we need to get you into a corset and a bust enhancer. The men here don't like flat chested women." In a no nonsense matter he motions me to turn around I believe his intention is to begin strapping what appears to be a torture device to me. I have to say for someone that wears corsets on a regular basis I have never been scared by one before. I am not quite ready to give him that much leeway.

"I don't think I qualify as flat chested and are you seriously going to tell me there were wonder bras in this point in time?" I find the concept oddly soothing; if they had push up bras then maybe I could hack fitting in.

"Your breasts are like pebbles, we need to make them more like boulders. Sadly the bust enhancer, or as you call it wonder bra, and yes they have been around since this era, will not be enough to give you a lovely voluptuous figure. It's going to require some extra stuffing or a very low bodice. How daring are you miss Raven?"

"Considering I have posed in nothing but a top hat, bra and a pair of panties on the cover of Rolling Stone for millions of people to see, I would say daring enough for your low bodice Mr. Phoenix."

"I knew a girl once that posed nude for an "artist model" photograph. It completely ruined her. She ended up

as a prostitute selling herself to whomever offered her a shilling. Now drop your blanket and grab that bed post we need to lace you up."

"You are indeed an encouraging mentor Phoenix, how have I survived with out you..." My breath leaves me in one fell swoosh as Phoenix begins yanking my corset laces with strength that would rival the mighty Hercules. Surprising for someone without a muscle in sight.

"I hate to be the one to point this out, but you obviously didn't survive with out me seeing as how you are technically dead." Giving my laces one last tug Phoenix begins shoving me into piles of petticoats topped by an unusual wire form he attaches just above my ass.

"What the hell is that for!" Managing to choke that out was a feat of no small importance since my lung capacity has officially been squeezed to nothing.

"It's a bustle, trust me it is important, now we just need to attach your bust enhancer, then the real fun begins!" Despite his disapproval of me Phoenix is like a kid in the candy store as he gleefully shoves me into layer after layer of fine clothing.

"I don't work out seven days a week so you can make my ass look enormous!" I am however getting a little more encouraged as he pulls out a much fancier, elaborately

beaded black corset with wide gathered shoulder straps. It does look daringly low, but very sexy especially with the blood red ribbon that winds across the front. Wiggling into the yards of red silk with a sheer black beaded overlay that constitutes the skirt I allow Phoenix to artfully arrange it over my bustle. I have to admit that it feels kind of sexy to be swathed in so much expensive fabric. Phoenix piles on the accessories that include black lace fingerless full arm length gloves and a beautifully elaborate choker.

“Almost finished.” Glancing up to see if I am paying attention he continues his lecture, “you need to watch how you walk, don’t have such a free stride like you have been wearing trousers all your life,” Phoenix instructs in a very professional tone.

“But I have been wearing trousers all my life! Don’t worry I think I can manage that, what I really need is some excellent swear words that are acceptable so I don’t slip up and say fuck.” Shoving my feet into some fabulous purple beaded boots I am appreciating the fashion more and more.

Speaking around a mouthful of hairpins Phoenix artfully begins winding my thick black hair into an intricate undo while explaining what I dreaded most.

“Sadly, ladies in polite society don’t curse that much. So

just try to watch your mouth and not reference anything that was invented after this time period. "I shouldn't even tell you this but the word fuck has been around forever, so if you slip up and say it, people will know what you are talking about. They might be shocked, but you aren't going to be a trendsetter."

"What the fuck am I suppose to do now?" Jumping up despite his protest I walk over the table of gadgets and weapons, "you had better say these are mine, because right about now I feel like shooting someone!"

"Be careful with those!" Dashing over to stop me from grabbing something from the table Phoenix shields his obviously precious items from what he fears is my unappreciative touch. "I designed these myself and they are one of a kind, so treat them as such!"

"Yes sir," I say with all the seriousness I can muster. "Will you explain to me how I can treat them with the proper reverence and what they are exactly!"

Holding up a pair of bulky, yet fantastically detailed pistols he strokes a finger lovingly down the bronze barrel. These are my solution to a semi-automatic handgun. You however are not allowed to use these tonight. They require a steam-powered backpack to give them the extra boost they need to pump out the bullets. It is too bulky to

fit under that snug bodice of yours, so tonight you get these!"

I catch what appear to be some really fabulous looking upper armbands. "I am suppose to defend myself with these?"

"The little metal pieces slide off and pop open into small blades. There are six on each arm band." Holding up a feather hairpiece he walks over and slips it into my hair. "Use this only when absolutely necessary, but if you need to, pull it out and jam it as hard as you can into your target. The tip is filled with a fatal poison and will inject upon impact."

"I am not sure I feel comfortable with that so close to my head!" My scalps tingles with the thought. I know I am already dead, but from what I gather if I die again I am not going to like the outcome.

"Get over it." Phoenix's sympathy is overwhelming. "I also want you to take this." He hands over what appears to be a small compact.

"You are concerned my make-up will get mussed?" I say with a smirk throwing his word to describe me back in his face while examining the ornately etched surface of the compact for a way to open it.

"Nice use of an acceptable word, maybe you aren't completely hopeless." His lips tug into a slight grin as he

goes on to explain the use for the compact. "Toss it to the ground if you ever get into a spot where you need help, but we need more discretion than me turning into a raven and flying to your assistance. It will open into a mechanical spider and return to me." With the first real sparkle of humor in his periwinkle eyes he adds, "I don't want to be summoned just because you need a substitute for fuck." His boyish charm shows through as the tiniest smirk crosses his lips.

"Why does it have to be a spider!?" An involuntary shiver courses through me. "I hate the fuckers!"

"Don't let François hear you say that!"

"François? You named the mechanical spider?" Slipping "François" into the small evening clutch Phoenix provided me with I can't keep back the grimace at having a spider, mechanical or not stowed in there.

"Yes I named him and you had better be nice to him!" Gesturing towards the door Phoenix motions me that direction.

"It's time for the ball now?" A sudden flutter of nerves surges through me as I prepare to step far out of my element.