

## The Darkness

It was a beautiful, sunny Sunday when the Darkness decided to show the world who Lilly really was. It was ironic, really, to expose her devilish alter-ego on a day that was dedicated to God. However, she didn't have a choice. The Darkness had a plan.

"So, you just want to stroll down to the seafront murdering random tourists?" Lilly asked the empty flat, as she laced up her boot. Her legs took her to the front door, a silent response to her question. "Can I ask why?"

There was no answer.

"Okay, but don't blame me if the humans shoot at us," she shrugged. She paused in the hallway to apply a fresh coat of lipstick. "Is this okay?" Her reflection nodded.

This routine was common. They got ready together for the Darkness to do its thing. But this morning was a little different. Usually the victims were unknowns – druggies, or drunks, or criminals.

Lilly stepped out into the sunlight. With dark glasses perched on the end of her nose and her dress sweeping the pavement, she walked towards whatever fate would greet her by the beach.

Men, women, and children - they'd all come for a day at the seaside, completely unaware of the immense danger that they were in. Lilly surveyed her surroundings. Her focus landed on a girl sitting on a bench. The girl glanced around, watching passers-by and tapping her foot.

"Her?"

Nothing.

"Are you sure?" She didn't know why she asked. She knew the answer. Once the Darkness had chosen its target, it was set in its decision. Still, this girl wasn't the usual kill. She was no older than 16. Lilly's boots moved swiftly forward. The girl looked up when Lilly sat next to her.

"Can I help you?"

"You sure can," Lilly smiled, patting the girl's knee. "What's your name?"

"June," the girl replied, "I'm waiting for my boyfriend, so if you don't mind..."

“This won’t take long, June,” Lilly said, trying to sound even slightly comforting. Again, she didn’t know why. She’d been doing this long enough to know the Darkness had a reason for each kill. But she couldn’t help but feel sorry for this girl, if that was what sympathy felt like. She wasn’t sure the Darkness had let her feel that before.

Lilly didn’t have long left. She could feel the Darkness getting restless.

*“I’m going to make a scene,”* it warned.

Lilly removed her sunglasses and placed them on the bench beside her.

“It’s been a pleasure to meet you, June,” she said, holding out her hand. June took it, just as Lilly vanished, her eyes rolling back in her head when the Darkness came forward. It pulled June towards it, then wrapped both its arms around her and squeezed her tightly against it.

“Get off me! What are you doing?” June protested.

The Darkness ignored her and stood, taking her with it.

“Hey!” a man’s voice shouted. June’s face was quickly turning purple, as the Darkness gripped her. “Stop that!” The man was right behind them now. He grabbed the Darkness by the shoulder, but it shoved him backwards, sending him flying over the seafront wall. He landed on the rocky sands with a crack. Someone screamed, but the Darkness didn’t stop. June’s body was shattering in its arms. Her ribs went first, then her spine.

“Okay, stop now,” Lilly’s voice came from inside the Darkness. Although her words were empty and useless.

When it was sure she was dead, it dropped her to the floor. Usually, it would stop after one or two. However, today it needed to make a grand spectacle for its plan to have the desired effect.

Sirens echoed in the distance. It smirked.

There wasn’t much time left, so it chose its next victim. A group of teenage boys were balanced on the seafront wall, seemingly unaware of the multiple murders that had just occurred metres away from them. They were engrossed in a pack of cigarettes. The Darkness sauntered towards them, clearing its throat. That caught their attention. There were a few wolf-whistles and crude comments,

which were silenced instantly when one boy was grabbed. The Darkness snapped his neck in less than a second and the group scattered in all directions. That was when the screaming really began.

The Darkness smiled. It was having way too much fun.

"Why are we doing this?" Lilly's voice broke through. The Darkness pushed her back.

The sirens were getting closer. The Darkness needed to act quickly. It pulled one of the boys towards it by the back of his hoody, and took a small blade from inside Lilly's dress. The knife ran along the boy's throat and he slid to the floor.

Police cars sped into view, signalling that it was time for the Darkness to go. Lilly took control, her eyes returning to normal, and looked around at the mess. "Shit," she huffed.

"Drop the knife and put your hands behind your head," a policeman yelled. Lilly let the knife fall to the ground with a clatter.

Slightly out of breath, she raised her arms in surrender, "Take me in boys."

It took three officers to restrain her, as the Darkness made frequent appearances just for fun. Eventually, they got Lilly in the back of the van and sped towards the station.

A few hours later and she was in a cell, throwing herself around and shouting, "*Lock me up! Lock me up with the crazies!*" The Darkness dictated her every word, but with no hint at its final plan.

"Please, make her stop," a convict in the cell next to hers grumbled.

The Darkness laughed. "*You don't like me?*" it asked the wall, "*I thought we could be friends. Prison buddies!*"

"I didn't kill people," the convict replied.

Lilly returned. She tutted, "Very true, sir. You didn't kill anyone. All you did was molest a few kids. I read about you in the paper. Your parents must be so proud." She waited for a response, but none came. She nodded, satisfied that she'd wounded her neighbour enough.

"What now?" she asked, "How do we get out of this mess?"

The Darkness pulled her towards the bars and ran her fingernails across them, the noise echoing. "*Bring the guard to us,*" it ordered.

Lilly hesitated, not completely comfortable with the lack of knowledge she had of the Darkness' plan. She'd killed enough people for one day.

*"Do it."*

"I won't stop until you give me what I want," Lilly called.

"You're a murderer, love," the guard said, "Trust me, you're not getting anything you want."

Lilly sighed and slumped to the floor. She lay on her back and stared at the blank, grey ceiling and contemplating her next move. *"Don't give up,"* the Darkness whispered.

"But what do you want?"

*"Stop asking questions and get us out of here,"* it said. Lilly was about to ask where they were going, but thought better of it.

She jumped to her feet, yelling, "Hey, grumpy! I need to speak with you." There was a moment of silence, before she heard heavy footsteps approaching. The guard came into view, one hand on his truncheon, his mouth pulled into a thin line. "Oo, someone is in a bad mood," Lilly teased.

"What do you want?"

The Darkness grinned, *"I want to tell you a secret."* It beckoned him forward. The guard leaned in and it seized its moment, grabbing him by the collar and pulling him hard against the bars. Lilly's grip was tighter than he expected, as the Darkness took over fully. *"I'm a witch,"* it whispered, *"You are going to take me to Rosewood Psychiatric Institution because you think I am delusional. Inform your superior."* It let go of the guard and Lilly returned, a bright, happy smile on her face.

"Sorry about that," she said. The guard looked at her blankly. There was nothing behind his eyes. He simply walked away.

"You're getting what you wanted," Lilly told the Darkness, "But I don't understand. Why are you sending us here?"

*"There's a witch, far greater than us, which threatens to end the power we have."*

Lilly perched on the end of the bed. "The power we have?" For 348 years, she'd had no control over her own body, thoughts or actions. Would it really be such a bad thing if that all came to an end?

The Darkness flung Lilly's body against the wall with a smack. She crumpled like a rag doll, blood trickling down her forehead. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

She stayed like that, on the floor, not even bothering to wipe away the blood that had made its way into her eyes. That was how the guards found her, when they returned to give the Darkness what it wanted. They lifted her up, her body becoming dead-weight. The Darkness didn't fight back this time. This was how things were supposed to happen. It let Lilly be put in a straight-jacket and thrown in the back of a van. It remained silent when she was dragged into the institution and locked in a room. Once the key had turned in the lock and the footsteps of the men had grown faint, it took full control. Lilly wasn't allowed to see this.

The banging of a door and sound of a chair scraping against the cold, stone floor woke Lilly from her deep sleep. Her body ached and her head pounded. She slowly sat up, blinking to adjust to the sudden change in light.

The room was bright white, with padded walls. The only furniture was the small bed she was led on. A single bulb swung from the ceiling. Propping herself up onto her elbows, Lilly took in her surroundings. That was when she noticed the Doctor. He sat on a chair at the end of the bed, one leg crossed over the other, a notepad balanced on his knee and a pen tucked neatly behind his ear. His dark hair was carefully slicked back and a thin moustache rested above his upper lip. His skin was smooth and youthful, but there was knowledge behind his green eyes.

Lilly pulled her knees up to her chest. There was a thick, uneasy tension in the room and she didn't know why. She observed the Doctor, with a curious stare. There was something about him that she couldn't quite put her finger on.

Finally, he spoke, "Lilly, do you know why you're here?"

Her heart beat quickened when he said her name. It had been a long time since someone had addressed her directly.

When she didn't reply, he said, "I can't help you if you don't talk to me."

Lilly thought for a moment, absentmindedly biting her nails. "What if I don't want your help?"

“Then I’d be rather confused as to why you asked to be brought here,” the Doctor chuckled. He leant forward and placed a hand on the edge of the bed. “I want to help you get rid of your intrusive thoughts, Lilly. You told a police officer that you were a witch. Just because you’ve done bad things, doesn’t make you a witch.”

Lilly smirked. “Doc, I’ve killed people. That doesn’t happen by accident.”

She balled her hands into fists, then winced. She looked down to see one of her hands wrapped tightly in a bandage. Tiny specks of blood had leaked through the white fabric. “What hap...” she trailed off, already knowing the answer.

“You broke down your door last night, Lilly. You attacked another patient. Do you remember any of that?” the Doctor asked. Lilly bit her lip and stared at her feet. The Darkness didn’t let her see anything when it was in complete control. That was its time.

“It’s okay,” the Doctor said, his voice kind and gentle, though he had no reason to be, “We can discuss that later. For now, just tell me about yourself.”

“*Lie to him,*” the Darkness whispered. A shudder ran down her spine when it spoke. *That’s new,* she thought.

“I can’t,” she muttered.

The Doctor frowned, with something resembling pity in his eyes. “Take your time,” he said, opening his notebook. He took the pen from behind his ear and scribbled something, then closed it again.

“*Lie,*” the Darkness repeated, more forcefully this time. Lilly clamped both hands over her ears, letting out a small squeak when pain seared from behind the bandage. “Why are you doing this to me?” she whimpered. The Darkness let out a low, throaty laugh, “*You need me, Lilly Dawson. You always have.*”

Lilly had almost forgotten the Doctor was there, until he cleared his throat and stood up. “Lilly, I see that this is quite distressing for you. I understand. You’re in a new place and you’ve been through a fair amount of trauma. I’ll have a nurse come by later to give you something that’ll help you stay

calm.” There was the sympathetic smile again. Lilly stared up at him. Her eyes were pleading. There was no 50/50 anymore. The Darkness had control.

The Doctor reached into the pocket of his blazer and produced a small, black book and a pencil. “I’ll come and see you tomorrow, but until then I’d like you to start writing a journal. It’s a good way for you to express these confusing thoughts you’re having. It’ll also help me to learn how best to treat you.” He dropped the book and pencil on the bed. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” He left the room, shutting the door behind him, leaving Lilly alone with the Darkness.

Lilly picked up the book. “Do you want to write in this?” she asked, “Or can I?” Her hands moved automatically to open the first page. The pencil glided across the paper with ease.

*Find the threat and eliminate it.*

“Who’s the threat? The person you hurt last night?” Lilly asked.

*It doesn’t matter. You have to do as I say.*

“Do you even know who you’re looking for here?” she asked. When the pencil remained still, she laughed emptily. “Is this your plan? To attack everyone in this place, until one of them fights back? Until someone uses magic?”

*Do you have a problem with that?*

“I don’t get a choice.”

She thought for a moment, before saying, “Why are you so threatened?”

The Darkness pushed her back against the wall. She winced at the impact. It wrote:

*Why are you questioning my authority? Do you want to lose me? You are nothing without me. You’re weak.*

It squeezed her palm into the pencil. Fresh droplets of blood were seeping through the bandage from the intense pressure. Lilly grimaced. “Are you not talking to me anymore? You know the Doctor will see this. He’ll sedate us and medicate us until we won’t be able to stand.”

*Human medicine can’t stop us.*

“Last night it did. Otherwise I wouldn’t have been unconscious. I doubt you *let* them put us to sleep,” Lilly retorted.

The Darkness paused. It flipped the pencil and erased the last few sentences. Not seeming happy with the result, it ripped out the page and tore it to shreds. The pieces fluttered over the bed. It then took the nib and pushed it into the palm of Lilly’s hand. She cried out in pain, tears rolling uncontrollably down her cheeks.

*“Never doubt me again,”* the Darkness commanded, releasing its hold over Lilly’s hand. The pencil fell to the floor and rolled across the room.

Lilly curled into a ball, clutching her hand to her chest. The white sheets beneath her were now spotted with red. If she couldn’t control what was happening in her own mind, then this other witch didn’t stand a chance. The Darkness was asleep for now, but the minute she closed her eyes, Lilly knew it would be back on the hunt.

She caught sight of the pencil, which had hidden itself in a corner. She darted over and grabbed it, before running back to the bed. If the Darkness caught wind of her plan, it wouldn’t give her any control at all. She opened the notebook and managed to scrawl, *‘Help’*, before it saw what she was doing. It took her hands and threw the book and pencil. They smacked against the opposite wall, the pencil snapping in half.

*“Don’t undermine me,”* it warned, *“You don’t need help. You only need me.”*

After that, the Darkness was quiet. Lilly didn’t dare speak to it.

An hour later, as promised, a nurse arrived in a pristine white uniform, with a little cup of multi-coloured pills. The Darkness let her take them without question. Small mercies.

And when the nurse caught sight of Lilly’s hand and asked, “What have you done to yourself? I told the Doctor not to give you sharp objects,” Lilly said nothing. She stared at the wall, her face blank. The nurse cleaned and re-dressed Lilly’s wound and picked up the broken pencil.

“I’ll bring you something yummy later,” she said, a sickly-sweet smile on her face. She tutted when she received no response and left the room, muttering, “So ungrateful.”



In 348 years, Lilly had never felt the need to break away from it. The Darkness was a part of her and always had been. Perhaps it was the change of environment, or maybe the endless killing sprees, but it was all becoming too much.

As she lay there, trying to come up with some way of escaping, an idea struck her. If the Darkness was right and this other witch had greater powers, then that meant they *could* help Lilly. She sat bolt upright at this sudden revelation, then remembered.

*"What are you doing?"* the Darkness spat. Slowly, Lilly led back down.

"I was just thinking of ways to help you find the enemy," she said. The Darkness let out a low chuckle, "Glad to see you're suddenly so on board."

Lilly squeezed her eyes shut, as her vision blurred. Whatever pills the nurse had given her were starting to come into effect. Either that or the Darkness was going to go on another adventure around the hospital. She hoped it was the first.