Childhood Demons - Wounded

An alternate opening for the Accidental Assassin series based upon the Childhood Demons premise.

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In the deep blue light of earliest dawn, Morgan fought for her sanity. The demons of her childhood had their claws dug deep into her psyche, resurrecting a helpless girl too scared to fight back. Wounds long healed in the waking world ripped open and agony as fresh as new spilled blood poured forth. Her body writhed and arched, fighting the peculiar gravity of dreaming. Her arms trembled under their own weight, unable to rise to her defense and useless against the onslaught unleashed upon her soul. In panting breaths, she fought to frame the strongest word of denial known to a child.

"No," she breathed, a voiceless denial repeated like a mantra. "No, no, no, no."

In her mind, she raced through a labyrinth of ruins, pursued by ghosts and demons--and death in the form of a dragon. A part of her woke up, recognizing the nightmare for what it was, but could not break the spell that paralyzed her. She tried to scream, to cry out for help--anything to snap her awake--but only a faint rasp in her throat escaped. Desperately aware of how near the haven of waking lay, she pried desperately at the barriers between consciousness and slumber. A simple shift of mental state and her wounded soul would be spared this unbearable…

Pain. Her eyes flew open.

The pain was too real, a throbbing agony pulsing in time with the heavy hammering of her heart. She could feel the stinging echoes of every cut and scrape she had suffered so long ago. A half formed thought protested that people were not supposed to be able to remember pain. She resisted the urge to moan. An edge of danger remained in the air as she struggled vainly to assert *here* and *now* over the chaos in her mind. *It's just a dream,* she thought. Unfortunately, that did not make what had happened any less real. She closed her eyes and allowed the beginning of the dream, the memory of her final moments with her mother, to return. The rest she carefully banished with tears of bitterness and loss.

Her mother had died almost ten years ago, becoming the first ghost she had ever seen, and the only ghost that visited her regularly. The first of many things that made her sanity suspect. While many people had considered her a haunted child, few were willing to believe that her ghosts were real. Believing in one, her elders warned her, only lent the others more substance. Morgan did not care. It was worth the price to have that one comforting presence slip quietly around her and sooth away the sorrow.

Morgan smiled and shook her head, then frowned as the motion caused her body to flinch in pain. She sat up hesitantly in bed and caught a troubling glimpse of herself in the mirror, in the dim, predawn light. Gesturing at a lamp on her bedside table, and muttering an incantation, she summoned a flame. Golden light spilled forth, banishing the deep blue and violet of night into the shadows. Her eyes widened in horror, as she finally connected the lacerating pain, the actinic smell of copper, and the shocking image in the mirror, together.

All of the wounds she had suffered in the course of her childhood ordeal had literally revisited themselves upon her. Clenching her hands into fists, she groaned, “This is a bad sign.” As terrible as the trauma had been, she had never believed the memories could become painful enough to override a lifetime’s worth of self control and training; or that nightmares could become harsh enough to crack the discipline of a mind strong enough to alter reality.

Reaching within for that power, she held out her hand and silently called the blood back to her body, asking her flesh to forget and forgive her wounds. That was one of the differences between magic and psychic abilities. Magic imposed order on the universe, and was expressed in commands. A psychic was simply in tune with the universe, and recognizing that it had its own order, tried to work *with* it--or *inspired* it--to achieve a desired result. Her body, wanting to be whole and healthy, and her blood, wanting to be a useful part of her body, eagerly adopted her plan and a few moments later Morgan opened her eyes to see unblemished skin and unstained sheets.

She sighed in relief, making a mental note to talk to her mentor. Inflicting past wounds on herself in her sleep was not a normal occurrence.