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Paradox Child (Paradox Child Series)

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Chapter 1

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Halloween

Lilly and her mum, Rose, sat in front of a log fire in their small red brick house on a rainy Halloween afternoon. The year had been unremarkable so far.

Upstairs, Iris, Lilly's Grandmother, was coughing loudly in bed. The two spaniels, the family pets, were pacing up and down restlessly, as they could hear the streams of small children knocking door to door trick or treating.

Lilly loved Halloween; her mum had always made a big thing of it. In their household it was more important than Christmas. As long as she could remember, Lilly had liked to dress up and carve a pumpkin to go in the window.

Rose threw another log on the fire, the sparks flew up the chimney and the fire crackled happily. It was a horrid afternoon outside; they could hear the wind blowing heavily through the trees and rain hitting against the windows.

Lilly did not go trick or treating; she preferred to stay in and do spells with her mum.

Rose lit a small green candle and drew a chalk circle on the floor with white chalk. Lilly got up and brought through some bread, oil and salt from the kitchen. Rose opened up a large chest in the corner of the room and took out a cone shaped red cloth bag.

'This red cloth is very important in magic,' she told Lilly. 'It was made a long time ago in a factory in Stroud and has been traded and sold all over the world being used for many ritual purposes. The Native American Indians sewed it on their shields believing it would protect them in battle and deflect any arrows. In Africa, kings would have small pieces of the red cloth sewn to their robes as a sign of status.'

She handed the bag to Lilly. The texture was rough looking, but felt soft and silky as she rubbed the cloth in between her fingers.

All the things were laid out on the floor in front of the fire place in readiness for the spell to begin. Everything was quiet in the house apart from the occasional cough from Lilly's Gran.

Rose drizzled some oil and sprinkled some salt onto the bread and started chanting in Latin. Lilly stood up and walked around the room clockwise, sprinkling lavender oil and joining in with the chant.

Rose put the bread into the bag with some herbs and hung it on a nail by the hearth; she lit a small green candle and placed it on the fire-place.

Lilly stopped walking and sat in front of the fire, poking the logs with a poker. Rose clapped her hands and they both stared long and hard into the flames

'What do you see?' Rose asked.

With her eyes squinting, Lilly looked into the fire, 'Horses, beautiful horses,' she said, 'and lots of trees.'

Her mum smiled, 'Well, it looks as if you will be going on a wonderful and important horse ride in the countryside very soon.'

Lilly looked pleased; she had been riding horses since she was seven but had not been for a few months now. 'That will be nice.'

Rose swept the ashes that had fallen out of the fire and blew out the candle. 'You'd best take a cup of tea up to your Gran and see how she is feeling.'

Just then a group of young children trick or treating knocked at the door. 'Trick or treat', they said in unison. The spaniels rushed to the door, jumping up and down excitedly.

Rose held tightly onto the spaniels' collars while Lilly handed the children a basket full to the brim with cheerfully wrapped sweets for them to pick from.

The children said thank you and left. Lilly was smiling. She said to her mum, 'I am glad some children are out trick or treating. I thought this house was too far from the main road for anyone to come.'

'Well', Rose said, 'it's nice to see the children dressed up and having fun.'

She handed Lilly a small wooden box; 'Best take this up to your Gran along with the tea'.

Iris was sitting up in bed with the curtains open looking at the rain. There was a large candle alight, and the smell of incense filled the room. She smiled when she saw Lilly come in. She opened the box and took out a hair brush. Lilly sat with her back to her Gran while Iris brushed her hair.

'How are you Gran?'

'Oh fine', she replied, 'That is, apart from this wretched cough'.

Lilly cuddled nearer to her Gran. Iris started singing in time to the brush strokes. She sang in Latin and, as she did so the flame from the candle appeared to dance in front of them.

After a while, Iris stopped singing, put the brush away, and took out a small silver pair of scissors and handed them to Lilly. 'Best cut your nails; they are getting a bit long.'

'I'll do them later,' Lilly said, slipping the small scissors into her pocket.

Iris reminded her that nail clippings are important and magical, as they provide a personal, sympathetic link with the person who they belong to. Iris said she was tired now, so Lilly kissed her on the head and went back down stairs.

Her mum was sitting in front of the fire eating some stew that Lilly had helped to make earlier. Lilly didn't want any of the stew, when there were so many sweets around.

Her mum looked up and told her how lovely her hair looked.

'You have your Gran's hair,' she said in a gentle, almost envious voice.

Lilly's hair was beautiful; it was long with small perfectly formed curls, and the dark brown colour complemented her hazel eyes and contrasted against her very pale skin. Lilly went to sit down by her mum. 'Tell me a story?'

Rose stood up; 'I can't now, I have to go out as it will be a full moon later, but I will be back tomorrow and I'll tell you one then.'

Lilly tried not to look disappointed; she walked with her mum to the door, and watched as she put her coat on and grabbed her bag that was sitting next to the door. Lilly had to hold on to the spaniel's collars to stop them following her as she walked out the door.

'Happy Halloween', her mum whispered and she disappeared from view as quickly as a leaf blowing in the wind.

Lilly went back inside. She felt quite tired, but it was a long time until her bed time. She sat on the stairs by the door, waiting for the last few trick or treating children to come, then stood up and locked the door, picked up her book and sat and read until it was ten o'clock.

...excerpt....

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