

THE DARK NOCTURNE 2

ÉTUDE



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ÉTUDE
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You have read: SERENADE

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Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Thank you for reading Étude](#)

One

NOVEMBER PLACED her hands on the rock, the surface rough and gritty beneath her fingertips. Little granules dug into her nails, and she ran her hands along the cool surface, feeling as if a heartbeat came from within. She breathed in and exhaled. The forest quieted around her. No birds in the trees. No river rushing. Just her and the rock.

She crimped her fingers onto a couple holds and pressed off the ground. Her stomach immediately tightened, and she reached upward, catching good footing beneath her. She crossed one arm over the other, traveling to the side, keeping her weight into the rock as she hopped up to another hold, keeping her legs up and underneath her. She'd almost reached the crux.

Sweat slid down the sides of her face, salt on her dry lips. Gritting her teeth tight, she pressed into the rock, preparing for the last jump. Weight in. Press down. And jump. Her body disconnected with the rock for a split second until she sailed upward.

Tension ricocheted through her arms as she caught herself on the large sloper at the top, and she pulled herself up and over on top of the boulder.

Everett stood at the base of the rock, a large grin on his face. He shook his head in wonder. "You're amazing! I don't know how you do that!"

A smile lifted on her lips. "Just trying to show off. I'll be right down." She descended along the backside of the boulder, jumping onto the ground. The moment she circled the boulder, Everett rushed into her arms, picking her up off the ground, spinning her around.

"Have I told you I adore you?" he asked. He planted a kiss on her lips. November responded, kissing him back full force. Everett was light. Everett

was warm. Everett cut through any darkness that tried to creep in. After everything that had happened at school last year...

She squeezed her eyes shut. She didn't want to think about that now.

"What next?" Everett asked. "More bouldering? Or some lunch?"

November peered over to another boulder she'd been dying to try for weeks, and her fingertips itched. But she blinked and zoomed back on Everett's hopeful, tanned face.

"Some lunch would be great." He had watched her climb all day, and she didn't want to put him through any more waiting. Climbing couldn't be that interesting to him. But that's who he was. Supportive. Understanding. Giving.

Everett's white teeth flashed in the sunlight. The light streamed down through the orange and yellow leaves, the towering trees surrounding them. The smell of fresh pine wafted in November's nose, and she inhaled deep. This was her place—her home.

"Good, because I brought a picnic."

"What?"

Everett moved over to his backpack and pulled out a blanket. He spread it on the dirt floor, smoothing out the edges. He then pulled out several tupperwares of food, opening the lids, placing them neatly around the blanket.

"My mom made this for us, so don't be too impressed," he said. "But she loves you and wanted to help."

"That's so nice!" November rushed over and planted herself down. Pasta salads, fried chicken, fruit, and chunks of bread lay out before her. She picked up a tupperware of fruit and began munching on the grapes. "Your mom is the best."

"I know." He sat down next to her and slid his arm around hers, light brown hair and tanned skin in her peripheral. He smelled like fresh dirt and sunshine.

"How's the writing going?" November asked.

Everett had a gift, and she envied it. She wished she could create poetry on the page—craft beautiful stories and worlds that came to life like he did.

Everett shrugged. "I'm pretty close to finishing a novel. I'm not sure how good it is though. And I'm not sure how to finish it. The whole thing came rushing out of me like water—I've never had that experience before—now just to complete the thing."

“And you think you could get it published?”

“At my age? I’m not sure. I highly doubt a publisher is going to want to take on a seventeen-year-old kid.” He snatched up a piece of watermelon from her tupperware.

November nudged him. “Of course they would. You’re amazing.”

Everett’s fingers gently touched her chin, and he turned her face, so she was peering up at him. “You think so? Because if I am, then it’s because of you. Because you’re my muse.” He lowered his lips down onto hers again. The sweet taste of fruit mingled on their lips between them.

She and Everett had been together for the summer, but it felt like an eternity longer. They’d met at the new public school she’d attended at the end of last year, after everything that had happened last spring.

She squeezed her eyes shut again. She didn’t want to think about the musical boarding school. The kids. The place where the deaths and the ghosts and the horror had happened.

“Let’s go for a walk, shall we?” November said, shaken. She jumped to her feet and pulled Everett up along with her. A ring buzzed in her pocket, and she cursed. “Hold on.” She pulled out her phone and peeked down through the sunlight. It was her uncle Mason. “I better get this.”

Everett nodded. “I’ll clean up.”

“Hello?” She held the phone to her ear.

“November.” Her uncle’s voice was terse, and short. The tone sent a series of shivers down her spine. She hadn’t heard him sound like this since... before.

“What.” The word was flat. Emotionless.

“I need you to come home. Now.”

Irritation swept through her, and she gripped the phone tighter. “Why?”

“Nothing I can talk about now. It needs to be in person.”

“Uncle Mason, now isn’t a good time. I’m with Everett. We—”

“That can wait. November, this is important.”

She hesitated on the balls of her feet, and she bit the inside of her lips. “Fine. We’re coming.”

“Not we. You. Everett can go home.”

November forced her grip to relax on her phone. It ached from holding it so tight. “Fine.” And she hung up.

Everett had finished packing up and swung his backpack over his shoulder. “What was that about?”

“N-nothing,” November said. “Just that he needs me home.”

She picked up her own pack and started to march to the trailhead when Everett gripped her elbow and stopped her. “Wait.”

She paused.

“I want to give you something first.” Everett swung his backpack down and dug inside the contents. His mouth flicked upward as he pulled out a small, velvet box.

November’s brows shot up to her hairline. “What’s that?”

Everett knelt down on one knee and lifted the box in front of him. He grinned up at her with his white pearly teeth.

November laughed and a hand fluttered to her throat. “So soon? I thought you’d never ask.”

Everett’s laugh echoed hers. “Just accept my token of admiration, will you?”

November gently took the box from his hands and ran her fingers over the smooth, black velvet. She peeked over at him, smiled, then opened the box.

A necklace sat before her, its silver shiny in the afternoon light. It was a key, with intricate swirls that adorned the end of the key, looking like one of those old-fashioned ones from the fairytales. Her eyes flew to Everett, her heart skipping in her chest.

“I found it online,” Everett said, rising to his feet. “So it’s not too big of deal, but I wanted to get you something. I could say something cheesy like you being the key to my heart or something.”

She half-laughed, but swallowed, her throat tight. She’d never been given such a thoughtful gift. “What’s the occasion?”

“Because I want to show you how much I care for you. I know we’ve only been together a month, but it feels like my whole life. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me. When I saw you for the first time that day at school...”

“I know,” November said. Her mouth twisted up. “Me too.” Everett had been an instant light in her life. A light that she needed.

“Then let me put it on you.” Everett took the necklace from her hands and slowly circled around her to the back. His body stood close to hers, his breath on her neck. He gently pushed back her red hair from off her skin and lifted the necklace around her throat. He squeezed her shoulders. “There.”

She spun around and threw her arms around him. "Thank you."
His teeth flashed white again, and he offered her his elbow. "Shall we?"
"We shall."

Two

THE DEVIL'S REVENGE

NOVEMBER **CROSSED** along the gravel driveway to her old country house that sat in the back woods of Crescent City. The home was removed from the shops and small town, sitting inside a thicket of trees, tucked into the shade of a high mountain. Peeling paint and a large porch, November loved this old house. It had been her place of comfort after her parents had died.

Her uncle Mason sat waiting on the porch in a wicker chair, polishing his gun. She rolled her eyes. Could he get any more cliché than that? Everett pulled away, giving a small honk as his car departed down the road. Uncle Mason ran a rag up and down the weapon, cleaning it, his handlebar mustache turned down. He lifted his head as November approached, wariness in his eyes.

“Alright, so give it to me,” November said as she walked up the steps. Birds twittered in the surrounding trees. She lowered herself down onto the top step. “What is it.”

Her uncle cleared his throat, setting the gun down by his feet.

“It’s...” He expelled a long breath. “It’s Vincent,” he said.

November flinched, and her body went still. Her stomach tensed, to the point she could barely breathe. She hadn’t heard his name said out loud since last spring.

“What about him?”

“He’s gone dark.”

“What do you mean gone dark?”

Her uncle sighed, running a hand over his face. “Cam’s been looking for him for months. He disappeared right after... well, everything.”

November remembered. She remembered the connection she and Vincent had. Deep underneath the Huntington manor, the time they spent together with his music and her climbing. The dancing...

She blinked.

He had lied to her. He had deceived her. In the end, she’d learned that Vincent was an almighty being who could live for eternity, walking through this world and the next, in the body of a seventeen-year-old kid. He’d kept his true identity from his son, Cam, posing as his brother. It was complicated.

“And why should I care about Vincent?” November asked. “I don’t want anything to do with that world. And I don’t want anything to do with him.”

“Maybe you do, maybe you don’t, but it affects you, so you need to know.”

November groaned, setting her head in her hands. “I just barely got over this, Uncle Mason. Do you know how hard it’s been to get over him? I trusted him. I cared about him more than I realized. I died because of it. I’m lucky to be here. And Everett is the only thing that’s pulled me out of it, and I can’t go back to that. I just can’t.”

Her mental health had never been the best. Suffering with depression was an everyday battle. It took a combination of meditating, medication, good nutrition, and therapy to keep her stable. It was manageable, but it took her a long time to figure things out.

“Losing Vincent sent me spiraling, just like it did when my parents died.”

His mouth flicked downward. “I know. I was there.”

“And you want to put me in that position again? To what, find him? Help him?”

Her uncle’s eyes lifted up to the sky before they returned to her. “He’s rallying an army of dark spirits. He’s attacking children’s dreams. He’s—”

“No.” November shook her head. “He’d wouldn’t do that—dark spirits are what killed my parents. My dad still *is* a dark one. My dad killed April. He—”

“Vincent’s coming for you, November.”

The words sent a chill right through her. “What?”

“Kids from all over the world are posting on social media about these recurring dreams they keep having,” he said. “The dreams are *all* the same. They’re about a redhead girl, who climbs to the top of a cliff, and jumps off onto the ocean rocks below... and she... dies. The kids describe the blood. They describe a dark mist she falls through. They describe the screams.”

“*All* of these kids are having the same dream?”

Her uncle nodded. “I’ve seen it online myself. People are freaking out. Several news stations are even catching wind of it.”

“And why do you think it’s Vincent? And since when does he have the power to attack people’s dreams? How do you know all this?”

“Cam saw him.”

November froze. “What?”

“Cam visited me just this morning.”

“Cam... he was *here*? At this house? But...” She had a hard time picturing Cam standing in her tiny living room. He was accustomed to living in a mansion, and his handsome, privileged demeanor didn’t fit in this house.

Her uncle stroked his mustache. “He’s been helping over at St. Paul’s. He and Conroy have been trying to put the school back together.”

“But...” She shook her head. “Why on earth would they want to put the school back together? The school was only a front for guarding the veils to the other side. What would be the point in opening the school again? The afterlife is at peace. There isn’t a threat anymore. All the kids went home and returned to their normal lives.”

Her uncle stood up from his chair and started pacing on the porch. The floorboards squeaked underneath his feet. Birds still chirped out in the forest, bits of color dotting the fall trees.

“Because of the dreams, November. Kids aren’t just having this nightmare. These kids... these teens who are reporting the dreams are later falling into comas. They’ll post on social media one day, saying they had the dream, and the next... they’re gone. Dead asleep. Unresponsive. Experts are blaming it on vaping or other drugs, but when Cam saw Vincent, Vincent said they had it coming for them.

“We know it’s Vincent. No one else would have the power to do this. And if Vincent’s gone dark, then he wants us all to be miserable like him.”

“And how did Cam respond?”

“I think he was as shocked as you are right now. He hasn’t seen or heard from Vincent since that night. Of course he hasn’t wanted to. Not after—”

“After Vincent pretended to be his brother and then revealed he was really his dad? Yeah, I don’t need a reminder.”

Her uncle nodded. “Anyway, we don’t know what is happening to these kids who are falling into comas, and what Vincent wants with them. We assume he’s using dark spirits to attack these dreams. And Conroy and Cam want to gather the students back to the school just in case we might need them. To fight.”

“And you’re sure this dream is about me?”

Her uncle gave her a pointed look. “A redhead climber? Yeah, I think it’s safe to say it’s talking about you.”

November moaned, pressing her palms into her eyes. “So what do you want me to do about it?”

“I think you need to go back to the school, where we can protect you.”

“What?” November sprang to her feet. “I’m not going back there! I have a life. A *new* life. I’m finally happy. With Everett. I’m not giving it up!”

“Then what do you want me to do?” Her uncle’s voice heightened. “Just let you sit around here waiting for Vincent to strike? He must have some vendetta against you—I don’t know, maybe you broke his heart when you chose not to be with him. All we know is, he’s an immortal being who can do anything he wants to do, including sending you to your death, so we need to do something.”

“I’m not going back to that school.”

Her uncle growled in the back of his throat, smoothing down his mustache. “Fine. Stay here. For *now*. But we still need to figure out something.”

November rolled her shoulders, the tension easing slightly. “Okay. We can look into it. But that’s *all* I want to do. If we find out that these kids and this dream has nothing to do with me, then I want out.”

Her uncle gave one sharp nod. “Okay.”

Three

DEAD CRACK

NOVEMBER SAT on her lumpy mattress inside her small bedroom. Her gaze roamed over the bookshelves, her dresser topped with climbing gear, the dusty mirror in the corner, the posters of her favorite climbers hanging on the walls. This place was a comfort to her, it was safe, a haven. She wasn't going to give it up and go back to that music school because Vincent might or might not have a vendetta against her.

It didn't make sense. He'd saved her life. She'd died, and he'd asked his father to restore her life. She squeezed her eyes shut, remembering what it had been like. Vincent had taken her to a world she'd never seen before—a world that seemed to exist on another plane. It had rolling green hills, and flowers more vibrant than a rainbow. Puffy white clouds covered an impossibly blue sky, rushing clear rivers snaked around the landscape. The air had been still, with no temperature, no sensation of it passing over her skin.

She never saw Vincent's father's face—only the ivory robe that cascaded down his body. She remembered kneeling in front of him, him placing his hands on her head and the warmth that had flowed through her. She had felt her body come alive bit by bit, life slowly seeping into her veins. He'd said she'd only experienced a mental death by the Sylphs, which had allowed her to come back alive. It was the physical deaths you couldn't come back from. The brightness and warmth had overwhelmed her until she woke back up here at her uncle's home.

She hadn't looked back. She had been given a second chance at life, and she wasn't going to waste it. She'd ran away from the school and the

Huntington manor and anything that reminded her of her old life and found a new one here.

So why did Vincent have it out for her?

His haunting face came to mind—his wild black hair and cheekbones that hollowed out in the middle. His severe eyes that were stark against his pale skin. His cane that helped him walk, his white bony fingers that always stood out against his skin. His demeanor that made any room pause when he entered. He'd told her he'd cared for her, and then she'd walked away. She didn't need his darkness and deception in her life.

November sighed, falling back onto her bed, staring at the ceiling. The ceiling fan spun round and round, the air cooling her face in the stuffy room. She was making the right decision, wasn't she? If she looked into these kids and their dreams and why they were falling into comas, it wasn't going to ruin her happy life with Everett. She needed to know if those dreams were about her—and why she always died at the end of the dream. But the thought of getting wrapped up in that world again was enough to send her over the edge.

November pinched the bridge of her nose. Her mind wouldn't stop spinning.

"Knock, knock."

Everett poked his head into the room, a small smile lifted on his face.

November sat up, leaning on her elbows. "Everett, hey."

He entered and lowered himself down onto the bed next to her. "You okay? You left in such a hurry yesterday. After you spoke with your uncle, you seemed off."

She arranged her face into a smile. "I'm great. Just happy I have you."

Everett dusted off his shoulders. "Well, I am a catch."

November barked out a laugh, snuggling up to his chest. He wrapped an arm around her and began scratching her back. Chills erupted down her spine.

"You know you can talk to me, right?" Everett said after a moment. "I care about you. And I care about what you're going through. If you ever need anything, I'm here."

November listened to the beat of his heart, his chest rising and falling. She stayed silent, relishing in his warmth.

"I know," she finally said.

“Oh, I almost forgot.” Everett gently sat up and she straightened. He pulled a notebook out of his back pocket. “I wanted to share a part of my novel. If that’s okay.”

“Are you kidding?” November bounced on the bed, hopping up onto her knees. “You’re always watching me climb, and I never get to see what you do. Please!”

Everett’s mouth slid upward. “Okay.” He opened the small leather notebook, where pages of words were written in disarray. He paused on one page, and his mouth flicked upward again. “You ready?”

November nodded, her heart suddenly making an appearance in her chest. She’d never known a deeper piece of Everett before. She knew he was kind and attentive and caring, but she’d never known what was in his heart.

Everett cleared his throat and started to read.

The group stood on top of the cliff, tombstones scattered at their feet. Moonlight shone down, highlighting the dead grass, wind whipping furiously over their faces. The three children stood holding hands, peering up at the moon, whispering to themselves.

But she stood off to the side, standing at the edge of the cliff. She peered down into the ocean below, jagged rocks at the base. Waves crashed to and fro, a dark mist hanging on the air. She continued to stare, knowing she was about to meet her death. She had climbed this beast, and now it was time to sail through the air...

“Whoa,” November said, interrupting. Her lips twisted upward. “A climber? Is this about *me*?”

Everett laughed, the low sound echoing through the room. “Maybe. I can’t help it if you rub off on me. You are my muse, after all.”

She nudged him in the shoulder. “Stop it. Pretty dramatic though. You’re so talented.”

Everett’s long fingers tightened on the book before he ran a hand through his curly hair. “You think so?” He peeked at the necklace around her throat and slowly brought a hand forward. He picked up the key that was looped through a chain and turned it over in his hands.

“You’re wearing it,” he said.

November glanced down. “Of course I am.”

He leaned in and planted a kiss on her lips. His lips were warm and smooth. “Thank you.” He sat back and linked his fingers through hers,

setting his book on her bed. “Come on, let’s go for a walk.”

He pulled November off the bed, and they headed out of her room, through the living room filled with outdated furniture and a TV from the 1990s, and stepped out onto the porch. Fresh wood air filled November’s nose, crisp and clean. Autumn was creeping in, bits of color splashing the forest around her home. Thick trees stretched out before them, and Everett led November down the front steps. Their feet crunched on the gravel until they entered the woods.

The Redwoods weren’t too far from where November’s house was tucked away, and even though her trees were smaller than the giants the tourists went to, the trees here still towered over them, thick trunks, shaded wood.

They walked along a small path with no sun, sticks and rocks and leaves beneath their feet. Chills rippled along November’s arms as they headed deeper into the forest, and the world quieted further, nothing but the crunch of their footsteps sounding.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

Everett shrugged. “I just wanted to steal you away out from underneath your uncle.” He glanced over at her with a sly smile.

Heat warmed her cheeks, and she wondered if Everett wanted to take their relationship to the next level. She and Everett had only kissed, sometimes made out, but nothing more than that. She’d never gotten too far with a boy, her uncle had made sure of that.

He wrapped his fingers through hers and they twisted and turned through a few more trees until they approached a large flat rock close to the ground. Everett hopped up onto it and lowered himself down. He patted the spot next to him, leaning back on one elbow, a grin on his face.

November mirrored his grin and sat down next to him. Within seconds his lips were on hers, with a ferocity he’d never had before.

So he *did* want to take things to the next level.

November answered back, moving her mouth with his with equal intensity. He reached around her back and drew her body closer until her chest touched his chest. He cupped her head and rolled her onto her back, his mouth still attacking hers. The rock was cool underneath her back, but a jut from the rock jabbed into her ribcage. She squirmed, trying to get out from underneath the sharp piece of rock, but his body was too heavy on top of hers.

“Everett,” she said between kisses, “Can you ease off a bit?”

But he was kissing her with full intensity, clearly lost in the kiss.

“Everett,” she tried again.

His tongue slipped into her mouth, and she squirmed again, trying to push him off.

“Everett—” she growled once more.

She tucked her hands underneath his body and pushed, but he wouldn’t budge. He was concrete on top of her. He moaned, a small noise in the back of his throat, his eyes closed, and November tried to shove him off one more time until his body gave out. Everett went completely limp, collapsing on top of her.

“Everett?”

His face sagged onto hers, his mouth open, his eyes glazed over.

“Everett!”

November shoved on him again, and this time, she was able to scoot out underneath him a tad. She continued to turn him over until he was flat on the rock, unresponsive, his body as limp as wet spaghetti.

“Everett!” She shook his shoulders. “What is going on?”

Her hands trembled above him, hovering over him, and her heart thumped wildly. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to breathe. She needed to run for help. But she didn’t want to leave him alone. But she needed to help him.

Footsteps sounded to her left, crunching on the fall leaves, and her eyes shot open.

Cam appeared from the woods, his dark hair swept over his forehead. His mouth was tight, his skin extra pale in the light. A jolt went through her at the sight, the shadows from the forest casting a myriad of shapes on his face.

“Cam, what are you doing here?”

“Making sure you’re alright.” He reached down and set two fingers against Everett’s throat. His face twisted in concentration, until his eyes flew over to November’s. “He got another one.”

“He? Who? He? What do you mean?”

His face tightened further. “Vincent. Now come on.”

Cam bent down and picked up Everett, slinging him over his shoulder, Everett’s arms dangling by his sides. “We need to get him help. He needs medical attention. Do you have his parents’ phone number?”

November stood, her legs shaking. She could barely think. She could barely move. Cam was here? He'd appeared like it was a normal thing. Like his appearance shouldn't be startling.

"Well?" Cam asked.

November fumbled with her phone. "Y-yes," she said. "His mom."

Cam nodded once. "Good. Let's go."

Four

THE LONG LEAD

NOVEMBER SAT SHAKING on the couch in her living room. Her uncle's voice echoed from the kitchen, his feet pacing on the floor. Cam sat in the old rocking chair across from her, his hands linked in front of him, eyeing her. His shiny dark hair was combed back in a whoosh, his facial bones severe. She couldn't believe Cam was in her house. She hadn't seen him since that night. She didn't think she'd ever see him again. The clock ticked quietly on the wall.

"It's weird that you're alive," Cam finally said, his voice loud in the small room. "You have no idea how horrible it was to see you dead."

November nodded, staring at the floor. She didn't want to look at him. He looked too much like Vincent. His handsome face only reminded her of her past and what she'd left behind.

Cam continued, "It's still strange to me that I'm part of that bloodline—part of a family that could actually bring someone back from the dead."

November nodded again, her eyes still down.

"It's still weird to know who my father is."

"*What* are you doing here, Cam?" November said abruptly. "I mean, really?"

Cam stayed still. Calm. He didn't say anything for a few moments. "I knew he'd come for you," he said softly. "I knew he'd attack those who were close to you. I thought it'd be your uncle. Not your..."

"Boyfriend?" November finished for him.

"Yeah." He stood up from the rocking chair and began to pace in front of her. She finally lifted her eyes. His jaw was clamped tightly together, the

bones standing out against his skin.

"It's why I came to see your uncle," he said. "To make sure he was alright. To see if he'd had any dreams."

Cam paused and peered down at her. She stared back, and his blue eyes poured into hers. He must've gotten his eyes from his mother, Isabelle, because Vincent's eyes were black—two bottomless pits.

"Well, now you know he's fine," she said. "You can go back to your—"

"Life?" Cam said. "And leave you here with your boyfriend? Which, you moved on pretty fast, I might say."

November rolled her eyes, looking away. Tears gathered, burning. "I needed to move on, Cam."

"Still."

Silence settled between them, and he began to pace once more. November shifted on the couch, crossing and uncrossing her legs. Cam muttered to himself and shook his head.

"What do you want me to say, Cam?" she burst out. "That I still care for Vincent? That I still care for you? Because I don't. I don't want anything to do with you and your world."

Cam nodded, his face unreadable, his dark hair falling over his forehead.

Footsteps sounded from the kitchen until her uncle appeared. He held the phone in his hands, fiddling with it.

"I just spoke to Everett's mother," he said. "She's at the hospital. The doctors confirmed he's in a coma." Her uncle stilled as he looked down at her. "November." He moved up next to her and sat down on the couch, taking her hands. "Did Everett tell you about him having the dream?"

She shook her head, swallowing a thick knot in her throat. "No. And we don't know if he did." She let go of her uncle's hands and played with the key necklace at her throat. Her mind spun furiously, trying to think if he ever *did* say anything about a dream. He hadn't, had he?

Her eyes shot to her room, and she froze. The journal. Everett's story. She sprung up from the couch and marched past the two men, before retrieving Everett's book from her bed, quickly flipping through the pages. She reread the words he'd read to her earlier that day, and her heart squeezed. Her fingers shook as she continued to turn the pages.

She paused on one page, her brows shooting upward, and she slowly moved back into the living room.

“He did,” she said, pointing down to the page. “Here. He wrote about it. I... I can’t believe it.”

Her uncle snatched the book from her and stared down at the page. “A girl climber. A girl preparing to jump off a cliff. A dark mist.” He lowered the book. “He must’ve been inspired by the dream.”

“See?” Cam whirled on her. “I told you it was Vincent.”

She stood hovering between the two men, her legs shaking. She gripped onto the doorframe for support.

“This is why we need you to go back to the school,” her uncle said. “You’ll be safe up there. We don’t know what Vincent is planning with these kids and why he’s after you. You can’t be out here exposed.”

November stared out in front of her, her vision blurring at the sides. She knew deep down they were right, but she didn’t want to admit it. The school was the last place she wanted to be. The school reminded her of Vincent and everything that had happened last year. The school was her worst nightmare.

St. Paul’s Academy of the Arts towered in front of her as her uncle drove through the wrought iron gates that led to the school. The building sat on top of a large hill, looking almost like a cathedral, its Victorian spires stretching up into the sky. The car moved past the pathways that snaked around the structure, around statues and dried flowers, the leaves crumbling on the ground. The building stretched large, from east to west, archways jutting off from the sides of the stone, where the pathways led and disappeared around the back of the school.

The car pulled up to the front of the school, where Conroy waited on the top step, a long flight of stairs leading up to the large set of double doors. Wind swept over Conroy’s sandy hair, his green eyes piercing down behind his thin-framed glasses. His wrinkled red shirt was halfway tucked into his khaki pants. She wondered how long it’d been since he showered.

The doors slammed and November, her uncle, and Cam walked up the front steps. Conroy gave them each a nod as they approached, the gray clouds above him moving fast over the sky. Conroy wouldn’t take his gaze off of her.

“I’m glad you’re here,” Conroy said. “We’ve had some developments.”

November’s eyes slid to the sides of her, peering out at the dead landscape again, before she ducked inside, entering the school.

Everything was as it had been the last time she was here—except darker. The massive chandelier above them was unlit, the silver tarnished, the diamonds dim. The smooth white marble floors seemed to be a shade of gray as their footsteps echoed off the vaulted ceiling. The two grand staircases in front of them were empty, and the green plotted plants that usually were live and vibrant were wilted and brown.

“This place... has changed,” November said.

“Everyone’s gone,” Conroy said. “Even Roderick.” His voice caught at the end. “He’s gone to investigate his kind—the dark ones—and see if he can get any information.”

Roderick and Conroy had finally become a couple—at least she thought they had—but she obviously didn’t know what had happened after she left.

“Come on. I’m using Roderick’s office,” he said.

The group moved down the hall, their footsteps soft, no words exchanged between them. Dust layered the gold-painted leaves that ran along the walls, and November ran a finger along it, leaving behind a trail.

Conroy brushed past the dark curtain that led into Roderick’s office, and November remembered how the school didn’t believe in doors, because it “stifled creativity.” Of course after she had spent time here, she’d learned that the school wasn’t really a musical prodigy school at all, but one of the seven places on the Earth where the veil was thin and the dead could enter their world.

Conroy motioned to where several wood chairs were lined up on the other side of Roderick’s large ebony desk, and she lowered herself down next to her uncle. Cam stayed standing in the back, his arms crossed, leaning up against the wall.

“I’ve been tracing the kids who have been falling into comas,” Conroy stated right off the bat. He took out a large map and spread it across his desk. Her uncle rose from his chair and November followed. On the map, numerous red dots scattered over the parchment, making several large circles around the world.

“Here are where the seven tectonic plates are located,” Conroy continued. “And here are each of the kids who have been affected.” He

pointed to the small red dots. “Notice how each of the dots circle the plate.” His finger traced along the path of the dots. “It can’t be a coincidence.”

November took in the seven groups of kids who circled the seven plates. Her eyebrows squished together.

“What does it mean?” she asked.

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out.” Conroy adjusted his glasses and glared down at the map. “What would Vincent want with these kids? And what does it have to do with the seven plates?”

November glanced over the map. She knew the other schools like hers resided on top of the plates, but she’d never thought about where they were located before. Iceland. Italy. Nigeria. Antarctica. Australia. Peru. And Crescent City.

“I don’t know,” her uncle said. “But it forms a perfect circle.”

Conroy nodded. “And the surrounding hospitals. The media is having a field day with this.”

November didn’t know *how* she’d missed this in the news. Though her life pretty much consisted of climbing, Everett, and more climbing. She wasn’t the typical teenager glued to her phone.

“Are we sure this is Vincent? Could it be the seven who were after Vincent?” her uncle asked. “They seemed to leave peacefully in the grove last spring, but maybe they have something to do with this?”

The seven.

Seven men and women who were neither alive nor dead. They were supernatural beings who sought Vincent’s eternal life for their own. They were all different in their own way—how they each represented the different beings that existed in this world. Witches, Blood Walkers, Fairies, and Shifters, to name a few.

Conroy shook his head. “The seven don’t have a vendetta against November. And as far as I can recall, none of them have power over dreams. No, Vincent’s the only one with the motive and power to do this.”

She didn’t even know that much about Vincent. He had never disclosed where he came from and who he was. He was more powerful than these seven, but what was he? All she knew about him was that he had a powerful father that could restore life.

“Whoever the culprit is,” November said, “we need to stop it. And we need to figure out how to wake these kids up.” The thought of Everett dead

in a coma was still too fresh, and tears burned in the back of her throat. She played with the necklace around her neck again.

“If Vincent doesn’t want to be found, he won’t be,” Cam said from the back. The atmosphere in the room stiffened, and November spun around. He pushed himself from off the wall. “He visited me, yes, but that was because it was his choice. He could be anywhere. We’re talking about a guy who can live on this side of the veil or the other. He can walk in between both worlds. He clearly has a relationship with the dark ones, which means he has an army on his side. Whatever he’s planning with these kids means we can’t stop it. We’re powerless against them.”

“No.” November shook her head. “There *are* light spirits. There’s people like the twelve, remember? We were able to defeat the Sylphs.”

“That was different. We had Vincent on our side. Now, we don’t.”

Silence settled between them. Everyone shifted uncomfortably.

“So what do we do now?” she finally asked.

“We do have one thing,” Conroy said. “There’s a girl who’s had the dream but hasn’t fallen into a coma yet.”

“What? Who?”

“Where do we find her?” her uncle asked.

“She’s already here. We had Quincy pick her up this morning.”

“Well, then let’s go talk to her!” November said.

“It’s not that easy,” Conroy said. He ran his fingers through his hair. “But yes, I’ll take you to her. It’s best if I just show you.” He circled back around the desk and motioned the group to follow. They headed for the curtain.

Cam didn’t move. “I’m staying here,” he said. “The last thing I need to see is a girl whine and cry about a dream my brother—I mean my *dad*—caused.”

Conroy frowned, holding open the dark curtain. The rest of the group walked through, while Cam stayed alone.

November and her uncle followed down the marble hallways after Conroy, the paintings dusty and crooked on the walls. They passed room after room, circling down the halls, until they passed the hallway that led to the ballroom. November paused at the end of the hall, zooming in on the double doors that led inside. Visions of ballgowns and music drifted through her mind. Vincent standing in front of her in a tux, his body close to hers. The ghosts breaking through the veil, live and dead waltzing together.

Her fingertips itched to rush down the hall and step inside that room. To feel the molecules in her body come alive, warm, consuming.

She blinked, and forced herself to continue forward.

Conroy slowed to a white curtain at the end of the hall, and he gently parted the translucent material. "She's right in here."

November stepped into the small room, where a girl sat by a crackling fire, her long stringy hair hanging over her face. The firelight cast shadows over her grim expression, her eyes fixed into the dancing flames. She didn't turn her head when they walked in.

"This is Deva," Conroy said, his voice loud in the small room. "Deva, meet November and her uncle."

Deva finally turned, her blank gazing roaming over them. Her eyes slid back to November and her forehead creased.

"I was wondering if I'd ever meet you," she said.

November held still. "Nice to meet you."

"Well it *isn't* nice to meet you." Deva pinched her mouth.

November lifted her brows.

"*You're* the reason for all of this," she spat. "You're a demon sent to possess us all. You're *death*." She bared her teeth, her eyes dark.

"Whoa." Her uncle stepped between them. "Deva, the dreams aren't November's fault. She's as innocent as you are."

Deva shook her head quickly. "She's not innocent. My sisters... my friends... all of their lives are on her head. They've all fallen to the dream because of her."

November's pulse quickened, and she set her chin. "No, they haven't," she said. "This isn't on me, and I don't need to explain myself, but you do. Conroy said you had the dream. So why aren't you in a coma like the rest of them?"

Deva's mouth lifted up in a small smile. "She doesn't know?"

Conroy frowned, and waved a hand in the air. "She's a witch," he said plainly.

Deva smirked.

"A... witch?" November asked.

"Many of her sisters fell into the dream also," Conroy said, "but Deva was powerful enough to stop it from happening to herself."

A witch.

Like one of the seven. She remembered the gypsy-like woman that had spoken in the alcove that night.

"I recognize you." Her uncle marched forward and took her hand. "You're a Halldora witch. Your coven isn't too far from here. In Eureka, right?"

Deva nodded. She allowed him to hold her hand until she pulled it away.

"I was the seventh in my coven to have the dream," she said softly. "The others... it was too late for them." Her eyes narrowed at November, glaring at her through her tangled hair.

"They tried to sacrifice Deva," Conroy said. "Because she was able to stop herself from falling into the coma, her coven decided that she needed to be sacrificed to release the other girls from their prison. A small price to pay for the lives of the other six."

Deva snorted. "A small price to pay. Like my life meant nothing. My own mother blessed the knife that would slit my throat."

November wrapped her arms around herself, shivering. She'd had some close calls with death herself, but she'd never tried to be murdered by her own parents before.

"I'm so sorry," November whispered.

"Don't," Deva snapped. "Just... don't."

"How did Roderick find her?" her uncle asked.

"He's connected with his kind. With the dark ones. There was an unusual amount of activity around that coven, so he checked it out. He instructed Quincy to retrieve her, since he was too far away." Conroy ran a hand through his unruly hair. "Quincy was able to save her."

"Well I'm glad he did," November whispered. The old man had saved her too, once. "So what kind of spell did you use to stop it? Can we use it on others to wake them up?"

"I don't care about any of the others," Deva bit out. "And I'm not going to be your test subject. I want to be alone. So leave me alone. Especially you."

Her uncle set a hand on November's shoulder and squeezed. "Maybe she's right. Let's give Deva some time to recover."

November was the first one out of the room.

Five

QUIET SOUL

LATER THAT NIGHT, November couldn't sleep. She paced inside the small alcove where Conroy had laid out a sleeping bag for her. Apparently he was sleeping at the school too, instead of heading back to the Huntington manor. She didn't blame him. She wouldn't want to go there either—not with April, his sister gone.

As November paced, she kept having visions of herself falling off that cliff, of splattering onto the ocean rocks before being swept in the tide. She shivered at the thought of all these kids dreaming the same thing. Was the dream so disturbing that it rocked all of their subconsciousness to the point that they couldn't even be coherent anymore? She tried to imagine all those kids in hospital beds, unmoving, brain dead, while she walked freely. Was it really her fault?

She shut her eyes, shaking out her hands. She needed to get the images out of her head. Maybe it really wasn't her in the dream. It could be someone else. It could be a coincidence that the girl was a redhead climber.

"Knock. Knock."

Her eyes flew open, and Conroy stuck his head inside the curtain. "I could hear you pacing."

November sighed, motioning him in. "I don't know how I *could* sleep. You clearly can't. I honestly can't remember the last time I did. Not since —"

"Since April? Yeah." Conroy's face scrunched up at the sides.

"I miss her too." November stopped pacing and faced Conroy dead on. "I still feel like her death was my fault."

Conroy didn't move. He only stared her down, but a lump bobbed in his throat. "I don't want to talk about it."

"It was my *dad*, Conroy. My dad did it. It had to have been personal. Hence, me knowing it's my fault."

He swiped a hand over his face, the lines around his eyes tired. Silence beat between them.

"So what are your plans with the school?" November asked, changing the subject. He clearly didn't want to talk about April. "My uncle said you and Cam were trying to piece it back together."

Conroy nodded. "So far the veils are quiet. We wouldn't need to bring students back to guard them like before. And although a lot of students have gone off to other music schools, fulfilling their dreams of living normal lives, with everything happening, we figured it might not be a bad idea to have some kids on our side. So far very few of our students have fallen victim to this dream—most of them have been from the other schools surrounding the tectonic plates. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to who is targeted. But what we do know is that we can't be too careful with Vincent. He's targeting these kids for a reason, and any of us are in danger."

"Vincent. I'm so sick of that name. And I still don't understand why he'd do this."

"November." Conroy's voice was soft, comforting, like a father, but there was pain in his eyes. He stepped further into the room and hovered in front of her. "We all can experience a time of darkness. No one knows why we can become people we don't wish to become. Perhaps it's heartache, perhaps it's loss; regardless, there's always a period in our lives when we become strangers to ourselves."

November tilted her head, peering at him curiously.

Conroy ducked his head, scrubbing a hand through his hair. "Well, that's enough deep talk for tonight. I'm going to go not sleep somewhere else." His mouth flicked up into a half smile before he left.

November stared at where the curtain had closed for a long while, until she laid down and her eyes finally drifted closed.

The next morning, the backs of November's eyes hurt, and a headache crept along the back of her head. Her hand immediately went to her key necklace, making sure it was still there. Everett's face and curly bob of hair drifted through her mind, along with the deep dimples that appeared whenever he smiled. An ache throbbed in her chest, and she tried to rub it out, but it wouldn't leave.

"I'll figure this out," she whispered to him. "We'll get you back."

Shouting came from outside her room, and November jerked upright. She quickly scrambled to her feet, and rushed out to the foyer, smoothing down her hair.

Cam and Deva faced each other, hands clenched into fists, murder on their faces. Cam's strong jaw flexed back and forth, his blue eyes narrowed.

"I told you, I won't help you!" Deva shouted. "I want out. I don't want to be here!"

"What good is it to have a witch at our fingertips and not use your power to help us? You need to do a locator spell to find where Vincent is! You will do what we say if you want to stay safe... and *alive*."

"Is that a threat?" Her eyes narrowed. "I don't have to do *anything* you want me to do! Besides, my coven will *know* if I use magic. Our magic is connected, and they'll be able to find me here. And I'm sure you don't want a whole coven of witches showing up on your doorstep."

"I'm sure they'll be of more use to us than you. Maybe we'll trade you for their help."

"You will do no such thing!" Conroy rushed into the foyer with her uncle. "Mason, take Deva back to her room. Cam, you're with me."

Deva and Cam glared at each other, bodies still strumming, breathing hard, until Deva huffed away. She bumped Cam in the shoulder on the way out, and Cam shot her another dark look. November stayed hovering at the edge of the grand room.

"What's the point of having a witch if we can't use her?" Cam barked out. "We need to get to Vincent before he gets to us."

Conroy lifted his palms to the ceiling, stepping closer. "We're still figuring things out. Which means we need to keep the girl safe. Besides, we have students coming today and I'm going to need your help."

Cam groaned, scratching his jaw. "The last thing I want is more kids to take care of."

“Then leave,” Conroy said. “We don’t need negative energy around here. For all we know, these kids around the world are going to continue falling into these comas and you can either help us figure this out or you can go off on your own like you always do. It’s your choice.”

Cam kept his face tight, the chords sticking out in his neck. “I’ll be in my room,” he said, and stormed away. He didn’t look at November as he departed. Didn’t even acknowledge her.

Conroy rubbed his shoulders, rolling them. “Can anything go right?” he said. “I’m at such a loss. I don’t know where to begin or how to figure this out.”

“Why do you care so much?” November asked, her voice echoing off the vaulted ceiling. “This isn’t on you.”

Conroy twisted his mouth. “It is on me. I’m in charge of this school. And it’s my job to make sure you’re all taken care of. Now, go and rest up. The other kids will be arriving soon.” And he turned and strode from the room.

She stood in the foyer in silence, the beat of her heart for company. She looked around at the abandoned school, shivers crawling up her arms. This had once been a place filled with music, full of life, full of... dancing.

Vincent’s face surged to mind again. The way she felt in his arms when they danced. The way his dark eyes bore into hers, his intoxicating presence. The way every inch of her felt alive. It was the same feeling of being able to open the veil to the other side through her dancing. The warmth that gathered in her chest. The sight of seeing others on the other side. It all felt like a surreal dream. She didn’t even know if she had that ability anymore.

A horn honked outside, and she jerked. She moved over to the towering double doors of the school and creaked one door open. Quincy’s sleek black car was parked out front, with several kids unloading luggage from the back. Margaret’s bright red hair shone in the sun, which was practically orange in the sunlight. Ty’s small frame stood next to her, his skinny arms struggling to pull out a duffel bag. A set of twins exited the car, followed by another young man, none of whom she recognized. The twins had straight black hair that shimmered down to their shoulders, and the young man’s hair hung down over his forehead, covering one eye. November’s brows squished together.

Margaret's eyes darted up to November and she squealed, waving her hands over her head. "Nov! Hi! It's me, Margaret!"

November sighed, taking in her friend. They certainly hadn't been friends last year, not until they discovered that they were both part of a group of twelve that would save the spirit world from imploding. November still couldn't get the sight of Margaret's dead body out of her head. Margaret was as lucky as she was—that she could be brought back. She had traveled with November to Vincent's father's world. April, however, hadn't been so lucky. Dying from a dark spirit attack was different than dying from a Sylph attack.

November lifted a hand and waved. Ty continued to struggle to get his bags out of the car and the guy next to the twins glanced up. Their eyes connected, before she skated her gaze away.

Margaret gripped her bags and rushed up the front steps. "Nov! Hey! I can't believe how long it's been!" Her breaths were fast.

Behind her, Ty finally yanked his bags from the car and toppled over onto his backside. His freckles stood out dark as he blushed.

November leaned into Margaret. "I can't believe Ty is here. Especially after..."

"April?" Margaret sighed. "Yeah. Ty doesn't talk much. I know he's still completely depressed over her death."

She nodded. She was sure none of them would ever be the same.

"But enough of that," Margaret said. "Here we are. Come to save the day!"

November opened the door further, welcoming Margaret inside. The twins and the guy started to head up the stairs, each of their faces solemn, blank.

"Who are they?" November whispered. "I don't remember them at school."

"It's because they're not from here," Margaret said. "They're from Reykjavik. Apparently they heard about us rallying, joining a team to stop these attacks from happening, and they decided to come over here. The dreams are pretty bad over there in Iceland."

"Reykjavik?" November's forehead pinched.

"I know, right? They're triplets. I've never met triplets before."

November took in their dark hair and dour expressions, high cheekbones and full lips. Triplets. She could see the resemblance now with

the guy.

The three stopped on the top step, where November held the door open to the school.

“Where are our rooms?” one of the girls asked. The other two stood silent, gripping their bags, waiting. November’s eyes slid up to the guy again before she blinked.

“Oh. I’ll have to ask Conroy. I’m not sure.”

The girl huffed as she brushed past. “What kind of operation is this?”

The three stepped inside and November shut the door with a click. The sunlight dissipated in the foyer, everything dimming a shade, and the vocal girl peered up at the dusty chandelier.

“Not much to this place, is there?” the girl said. “And here I thought we were joining a group of people who knew what they were doing.”

“And who are you?” November asked, crossing her arms. It was one thing to have new people come here, and another to have them insult them.

“Genevieve,” she said. “And this is Marcus and Clementine.”

Marcus and Clementine stayed silent, glancing around the foyer.

“And do they talk?” November peered at them pointedly. “Or are you the only one?”

Marcus’s head snapped to hers, and his brows dug together. “When I feel like it, yes.” He turned his attention back to the room.

Ty stumbled into the foyer, dropping his bags at his sides. His chest rose and fell in quick breaths.

“I’m here,” Ty said.

“I’m so glad!” November rushed over to him. She threw her arms around him in a hug, and Marcus gave them a curious look.

“Our rooms?” Genevieve asked, tapping her foot.

“I’ll take you to Conroy’s office,” November said tersely. “I’ll let him deal with you.”

She exited the foyer, not caring if the triplets followed behind her or not.

Six

AFTER MARGARET and the others were settled, Conroy called an emergency meeting up in his old classroom. Sofas scattered the room, bits of sunlight streaming through the large, open windows. A breeze wafted inside, fresh against the heat of the autumn sun. It felt strange to be in here. Conroy's voice from the past resonated in her mind, talking about chords and cadences and Picardy thirds. She could still see Vincent's presence limping through the classroom, could still hear Cam's voice whispering in her ear.

"I've gathered you all here because as you know, something is happening between our world and the next," Conroy said. She snapped back to the present. "We're pleased to have the Jonsson triplets here, alongside you, Margaret and Ty."

Margaret beamed in her seat, and Ty lowered his head, scratching it.

Genevieve's hand shot up into the air.

"Yes?" Conroy called on her.

"As you know, I'm Genevieve, and I'm the best flautist in the world. If we're to use our music again like we did at our own school in Reykjavik, I want you to know you're in the best of hands."

Ty's head lifted, and heat burned behind his gaze. "*Second* best flautist. *No one* was better than April. No one."

The room silenced, and Genevieve glared at him.

Conroy stepped forward. "Whoa there, Ty, let's not put Genevieve down because of April." Though his voice caught at saying her name.

Ty lowered his head again, staring at his lap.

Genevieve straightened her shoulders and nudged Clementine next to her. “Go on, tell them what you do.”

Clementine tucked a piece of her long dark locks behind her ear.

“She’s a singer,” Genevieve said before she could speak.

Margaret stiffened in her seat, her head darting over. Margaret was a singer too. She lifted her chin, staring Clementine down.

“But she’s not just any singer,” Genevieve said. “Her voice is so lovely, she’s able to lull men to sleep. Her gifts have never worked with the dead—but the living.”

Everyone stared at her, and her pale face peered down at her fingers twisting in her lap.

“And I’m a siphon,” Marcus spoke up. His voice was smooth, deep. “I’m able to draw on anyone’s power at any time. Just by touching them.”

“Impossible,” November said. His gaze slowly slid to hers. “You’re saying you could do anything we can do just by touching us?”

His mouth quirked upward, and he stayed silent.

Conroy cleared his throat. “All things that might come in handy when we’re to find Vincent and try to stop him. But first, we need to find out why and how these kids are falling into comas and what we can do to stop it.”

“Maybe they’re locked in some sort of trance,” Margaret said.

“Or they’re probably just dead asleep,” Genevieve said.

“Or they could be trapped in a spell.” Deva entered the room, her long strands of hair covering her face. The room turned, and she stayed hovering in the doorway. “Sounds like magic to me.”

“And what do you know about magic?” Genevieve said, nose turned up.

“She’s a witch,” November said. “So I’d watch yourself.”

“Guys. Please,” Conroy said. “Deva, continue.”

Deva rolled her neck, and the loose T-shirt she wore slid off her shoulder. “I’ve seen it up close. I witnessed my friends fall into these comas. I sensed a magic around them that couldn’t be denied. All of my people could. It’s why they thought an offering of my magic—my sacrifice—would appease the Earth, or our ancestors inside of the Earth. You see, all of our magic is gained from our buried ancestors. So maybe something unworldly is pulling these kids into another state of mind—something more powerful than our Earth magic—or Ancestral magic.”

Genevieve snorted. “A pretty far-fetched theory.”

Deva threw her a dirty look.

“Deva clearly knows what she’s talking about,” Conroy interrupted. “If this is true, and if we have any prayer of stopping this magic from affecting these kids, maybe we need to find out what kind of magic is more powerful than Earth magic. If it exists.”

“That’s easy,” Deva said. “Blood magic.”

“Blood magic?” November asked. “What is that?”

Deva stepped deeper into the room, gliding around the chairs, her tangled hair down to her waist. She kept her gaze forward, as if living in another time.

“Blood magic is another term for ‘Sacrificial magic.’ It would definitely overpower our Earth magic. There was a group of people centuries ago that went against nature—they were called Blood Walkers. Unlike mankind, they did not live off of the Earth. They lived off of blood. They were a bloodthirsty and ferocious people, killing for sport, consumed with drinking as much blood as possible. The more they drank, the more blood they spilled, the more powerful they became.

“But back in the 1400s, these Walkers were stopped. The witches were able to gather them in one location and trap them deep within the Earth, using their own Blood magic against them, and sealing their magic with them. They haven’t bothered mankind again. But the spell to trap them took a hundred witches... and it killed them all. No one could survive using that much power and expect to survive.”

“So what you’re saying,” November asked, “is if some of this Blood magic was released, it would have enough power to put these kids to sleep?”

Deva laughed, and the sound tinkled through the room. “Blood magic would be able to do much more than put a dozen or so kids to sleep. It’d be able to put the whole world to sleep.”

“But we don’t know that this is true,” Genevieve said. “You’re just telling stories.”

Deva shrugged. “You can believe what you want to believe. All I know is, the witches wouldn’t do something like this, which is why I don’t think it’s Earth magic. They’re only interested in keeping their magic safe. Someone else is behind it, and if it’s this Vincent you’re all talking about, sounds like he is powerful enough to bring Blood magic to life again.”

The room fell silent, every pair of eyes sliding to each other.

“Then maybe we start by figuring out *why* he would’ve released this Blood magic,” Conroy said. “And if there’s any left. We’re going to need that magic on our side if we have any chance at stopping this.”

“*If* the Blood magic even exists,” Genevieve said.

“Well, it’s a place to start. Deva, you said that the Blood Walkers were sealed away with their magic. Where were they sealed?”

Deva paused by the window, peering out onto the grounds below. Sunshine shimmered on her milky skin. “I have no idea. Only the witches would know—their leader, Sariah, in particular. And I’m not going back to them to find out.”

“Then we send in a team,” Cam said as he stepped into the room. Deva stiffened at his sight. He leaned against the doorframe, crossing his arms. “I’m game. Who’s with me?”

November couldn’t believe she was doing this. The car’s headlights lit the dark road in front of them, shadows playing against the forest trees. Ty sat in the backseat, while November was in the front, Cam driving with his seat kicked back, a smooth expression on his face. While Ty had readily agreed to go with Cam, probably wanting to get away from Genevieve and her self-proclaimed genius with playing the flute, November hadn’t volunteered until Cam volunteered *for* her to come. She was still surprised Cam had decided to help at all.

The last thing she wanted to do was go scout a witch camp and try to get information out of them about where the Blood magic could’ve been hidden. Even if they got the location, what would they do with that? Go get the magic themselves and expect to defeat Vincent with it?

It was about a ninety-minute drive from Crescent City to Eureka, and the car ride was silent, except for a Bach piano concerto playing on the classical music station. The music floated inside the car, doing nothing to relax her stiff shoulders.

She shifted in her seat, the mathematical rhythm pounding behind her eyes. The notes moved up and down, the different counter melodies twisting in and out of each other. A vision of Vincent at the piano drifted through her mind.

“I can’t listen to this anymore.” November quickly turned off the volume knob.

Half of Cam’s mouth lifted. “Not a fan of Bach?”

November shifted again. “No.”

Towering redwood trees shot up from the ground, surrounding them, nothing but the line of trees and twisting road out in front of them. The trees eventually dispersed until the road came to a four-way stop. They exited the highway into a small town that was only a smudge on the map. Industrial buildings spread out over the town, with a few run-down motels. A few streetlamps lit the road, and they drove quietly, until they pulled into a small parking lot. Cam cut the engine.

“Deva said it’s right in here,” he said.

A Motel 6 stretched out before them, a buzzing red sign with ‘vacancy’ lighting the office window. The rest of the rooms were dark, covered with curtains. A few stars shone overhead, and November peeked up at the night sky as she exited the car. Ty stepped up next to her, his freckles dark under a streetlamp.

Cam’s door slammed, and he moved around with them.

“I’ll go in first,” Cam said. “You guys can wait out here by the car.”

“And let you find out information you might not share with us? I don’t think so,” November said. “You’ve always been sketchy about your plans.” He’d tried to use her to open the veil up for him last year. He’d lied his way through everything and had almost got everyone killed.

Cam ran a hand through his sleek hair, the line of his jaw flexed. “Fine.”

The three of them moved across the parking lot. Through the window, a girl with smooth dark skin sat behind the front desk. Her braided hair fell over her face as her head dipped into a magazine. A bell dinged when they walked in.

The girl’s head lifted, and she set the magazine down. “Sorry guys, but we’re all full for tonight.”

November peeked back at the ‘vacancy’ sign and the empty parking lot, and her brows pushed together.

Cam waved his hand. “Is there someone we can talk to? Like, your manager or something?”

The girl tilted her head, and her earrings dangled. “It’s just me. Is there something else I can help you with?”

“We’re looking for Sariah,” November said tersely.

The girl leaned forward, her thinly muscled arms flexing. On the edges of her tank top, a moon-shaped mark was tattooed onto her shoulder.

Cam also noticed. He nudged November and whispered in her ear. "That tattoo is the sign of the moon. Witches draw on its power for certain spells. We've found the right place." Ty overheard Cam, and his skin whitened a shade.

"There isn't anyone here by the name of Sariah," she said. "Sorry, you have the wrong place."

Cam leaned forward, meeting her gaze. "If you don't bring her to us, then we'll go find her ourselves."

The girl clamped her lips together tight.

"It's alright, Lizzie." A door opened from the back room, and a woman with matching dark skin entered, her hair also in braids, but piled on the top of her head. A jewel pierced her nose, and her large eyes narrowed as she took them in. "Can I help you?"

Cam leaned back, shifting his stance.

November held her ground. "You're Sariah?"

The woman smiled. "I think you already know the answer to that question."

"We know about Deva," Cam said right off the bat. "She told us we could find you here. We know you tried to sacrifice her to appease your ancestors and bring the other kids back to life."

Sariah lifted a slim black brow. "Oh? And what business is that of yours?"

"It's our business because we know who is behind it," November said. "And we need the location of where you witches locked away the Blood magic."

In a burst, Sariah slammed a hand down on the counter. November flinched. Sariah's eyes darkened as she leaned forward. "You think you can come in here and demand sacred information from us? That location has been kept private for hundreds of years, and you expect us to turn that over to three..." Her eyes slid to each of them. "Three musician mortals?"

"I'll have you know that my father is Cedric," Cam said. "I have his blood running through my veins, so I'm not your average mortal. You don't know what you're up against."

Sariah's lips curled up. "Cedric's son or not, we'll take our chances. And now that we know who Deva is with, we know where to find her." She

snapped her fingers. "Lizzie, grab him." She pointed to Ty.

Lizzie threw out her arms, and in a flash, pain exploded inside November's head. She staggered back, covering her ears, Cam also faltering back. Ty was also bent over in pain and Lizzie hopped over the desk and gripped him by the upper arm. She yanked him toward the back room, and he wriggled and writhed, crying out, until he disappeared behind the door.

Sariah stood with a smirk on her face, her arms crossed.

November straightened as the pain started to ebb, and Cam glared, breathing hard.

"Bring us Deva or your friend dies," Sariah said. "Don't *ever* underestimate a witch. Now leave."

Ringling banged around on the insides of November's skull, and Cam clasped her arm, dragging her out of the small office. November could barely feel her feet as he dragged her toward the car.

"Stop!" November cried. "We can't leave Ty!"

"We have no choice," Cam growled. "They're too powerful. We'll have to exchange Deva for him."

November shook her head, but Cam pushed her down into the car. Cam started the ignition and the car peeled out of the parking lot before her vision cleared.

Seven

POWER GAME

MARCUS WAS PLANTED on the front steps of the school when they returned. Early morning light glowed on the horizon, stars still twinkling in the lightening sky. November and Cam marched up the steps, while Marcus twiddled a toothpick in his hands. His features looked extra sallow in the dim morning light, his hair swept down over one eye. Cam disappeared inside the school without a word.

“I take it wasn’t much of a success,” Marcus murmured, and his voice had a slight accent to it. “Looks like you’re down a number.”

November let out a huff. “Yeah, thanks for stating the obvious.”

She started to march past him when he grabbed her ankle, stopping her. “You’ve made yourself a target, which puts us all at risk.”

She yanked her foot away. “Again, thanks for stating the obvious.”

“Genevieve isn’t going to take this well,” Marcus said.

“And you think I care what Genevieve thinks?”

Marcus shrugged. “You should. If we’re to work together, it’s best if we try to get along.”

“I didn’t ask for you guys to come. And I barely know you, so why should I trust you?”

Half of Marcus’s mouth lifted up. “Because you need us. I don’t see any of your other classmates rushing to your aid.”

November pressed her lips into a thin line. “They deserve a break. After what they went through this last year...”

“I heard about that. Everyone heard about that. How you opened the veil and let out dozens of ghosts? How the ballroom became a

slaughterhouse as the dark ones passed through? I would've thought you more powerful to be able to close the veil before mayhem broke loose."

November clenched her hands into fists. "You don't know anything about what happened, so don't pretend you do."

"I know that if we had been there, we'd have been able to stop anything bad from happening. With Genevieve's flute and Clementine's voice, our school in Reykjavik has been sealed off tight from the other side. We've never had any problems."

"So that makes you an expert on all things supernatural? You think you could've done a better job with the witches tonight, too?"

Marcus slowly rose to his feet, his nose inches from her face. His hand shot out and he gripped her arm, and an immediate burning sensation radiated through her skin. She tried to yank away, but his hold was too strong. The heat on her skin intensified, and she glanced down, a red glow emanating from her skin to his. The glow started draining from her, traveling up his arm.

"What... *What* are you doing?" November struggled to get out of his grip again.

Marcus's lips curved upward. "Fancy taking a trip to the other side?"

The air behind Marcus started to shimmer, like a mirage in the desert, and November paused.

"No." Her eyes widened. Like a zipper in the air, the veil began to peel back, revealing light from the other side.

"I'm a siphon," he said. "I can absorb anyone's power while touching them, remember? Including opening the veil like you can do."

She finally yanked away, and the veil immediately closed. She stared at where his touch had been.

"I need..." She coughed. "I need to go." She darted through the main doors, leaving Marcus behind.

Inside, November headed through the grand foyer, passing the large staircases and marble benches, her breaths fast. Marcus was powerful. More powerful than she had originally thought. What had she just witnessed? It could be a mistake to have him here—to have all the triplets here. There was no reason to trust them.

She turned down a hall, heading past the dried plants and dusty tapestries, her footsteps soft in the empty hallways. She knew where she needed to go. She had put it off long enough. She didn't know why she'd

been too afraid to visit here—probably because it reminded her too much of the past. She turned corner after corner, until she entered the long hall that led to the ballroom.

She stopped at the end of the hall, facing the only pair of double doors inside the school, and her heart thumped wildly, hammering against her ribcage, the ends of her fingertips tingling.

She hadn't been in the ballroom since that night—since she'd waltzed with Cam and danced with Vincent. The vision of the ghosts waltzing swirled in her head, their translucent beings hovering in her mind. They'd danced to the steady beat of her heart.

Marcus had drawn power from her, which meant she still had to have her power to open the veil.

She slowly moved one foot in front of the other, then again. She continued to inch forward, her nerve endings buzzing, her mind alert. All the noise in her head disappeared as she stepped into the ballroom.

Mirrors lined the walls, the floor a golden glass beneath her feet. The chandeliers on the ceiling were dim, but the dripping diamonds still sparkled in the dark light. A golden piano sat off to one side, and November couldn't help but picture Vincent sitting there, eyes closed, head dropped back. He'd deemed this space his.

His sculpted face floated in her mind—his cut cheekbones, angled jaw, and dark eyes. His lean stature, with one hand that always gripped a cane. November's breath caught in her throat at the thought of him, and she placed a hand on her rapidly beating heart.

"Vincent..."

She crumpled to the ground and placed her hands on the glass floor, curling her fingers in. "How could you do this to us? How could you do this to *me*? I thought..."

She thought he loved her.

"What happened to you? What drove you off the edge?" Tears built in her eyes, and she continued to talk to herself. "I just don't understand."

Tears escaped and they slid down her cheeks, falling onto the floor. The mirrors reflected her crumpled form forever, bouncing back and forth.

After a time, she slowly stood, wiping the tears from her face.

"I'm an idiot," she whispered out loud. "I'm an idiot for *ever* thinking there was anything real between us. And I'm an idiot to think I could move on with Everett." She had never stopped caring for Vincent, no matter how

hard she'd tried to hide it. "But you never cared about me. You clearly only care about whatever scheme you're concocting."

But he had brought her back to life.

Probably out of guilt. Or probably because she was part of his plan for revenge. He needed her alive.

She'd been so wrong about him.

November reached down and took off a shoe. She gripped the tennis shoe hard in her hands, turning it over, before she wound back her arm and threw it. Hard. The shoe smacked right into the mirror and cracks spidered out from the impact. She stared at her distorted reflection in the mirror until her breathing slowed, and she decided to never care about Vincent again.

November walked numbly through the halls, following the voices that drifted down the hallway. She wasn't sure if she'd ever be okay again. Vincent's deception had affected her more than she realized, and his betrayal was starting to sink in, taking root deep into the pit of her stomach, making her feel down in a way she hadn't in a long time.

Depression was a familiar feeling—one that had eaten her up and stolen a couple years of her life away. She hadn't felt it to the severity since her parents had died, but now the heaviness was pressing down onto her chest, suffocating her. She knew that depression shouldn't have anything to do with outside forces—therapy had taught her that—but apparently Vincent was a trigger, and she wasn't sure when she'd be able to climb out of the new darkness settling over her.

She stepped into the library, and Margaret noticed her, rushing over.

"Hey," Margaret said. Her red hair was high in a back ponytail that swished. "I heard about Ty. I can't believe it. What do you think those witches are doing to him? Do you think he's okay? After everything with April, and now this. His luck. Seriously."

November waved Margaret off, zooming in on Conroy, Cam, and Marcus who were circled around a table in the middle of the room. Books piled the table, and Conroy adjusted his glasses as he peered closer at a page.

"What's up with them?" November asked.

“They’re researching. After you and Cam failed to find the location of where the Blood magic is sealed away, they needed to take it into their own hands.”

“And they really think disturbing the Blood Walkers’ resting place just in order to get a hold of the magic themselves is a good idea? I don’t know, there’s something about getting close to such evil that makes me uncomfortable.”

“Tell that to *them*,” Margaret said. “Of course I don’t know what else we can do. If Vincent really is using this magic, then we need to be equally as powerful.”

November groaned and stepped up next to the table. She pushed her way into the circle. Conroy was running his finger down page after page, while Marcus and Cam scanned through several documents.

“This is the right time period,” Conroy said. “Early 1400s. This entry speaks a lot about a time of great pestilence. Fires. Bloodshed. Plagues. Entire villages destroyed. It is estimated that this century witnessed the death of more than forty-five million lives either from political or natural disasters in Europe and the Mongol Empire. It talks about a group of people who were bloodthirsty and ruthless, destroying anything and anyone that came into their path. This has Blood Walkers written all over it.”

“Any clue where the witches would’ve sealed them away?”

“No, but it has to be in Europe somewhere.”

“Or not,” Deva said. She sat in the corner, watching them with lids narrowed to slits. November hadn’t seen her. She slowly stood and wandered round the room, running her fingertips on the tops of the tables that circled the space. Her hair still wasn’t brushed, tangled down and framing her face. Cam eyed her warily, a grim expression on his face. Deva’s eyes flicked to his and her lips pouted.

“Think about it,” she continued, “the most powerful witches are *here*. The Halldora coven, and the Zodiac coven. *This* is where the ground has more magical properties than anywhere else. Don’t you think that it’s possible the witches back then knew of this land, and that this would be the place to trap the Walkers? If they had been able to gather them in one place, it wouldn’t have been too hard to trap them here. Witches are capable of that.”

“Or the witches could’ve killed them anywhere and brought their bones back here to lock away,” Marcus said, his accent slight. “Where there are

bones, there is magic.”

Deva tilted her head. “There is that too.”

“Regardless, it’s not a bad thought that their bodies are sealed away here, near the witches’ land. It might be right underneath our noses.”

“Well, we can’t go back to the witches again,” Margaret said. “That failed miserably.”

“Then we find the location on our own,” Conroy said, voice tight. “Before they hurt Ty.” He turned back to his book again.

“Or I could do a locator spell,” Deva said.

Everyone paused.

November pursed her lips. “You said if you used magic, your coven would be able to track you.”

Her mouth twisted grimly. “Not if they’re distracted. If you can distract them enough to not notice me using my magic, it would work.”

“And how are we supposed to do that?” Margaret asked.

“We visit them again,” Cam said. “We take a team. I can open the veil. A few spirits trying to escape would keep them distracted.”

“No,” November said. “We know nothing good comes from that. The Dark ones are still out there. What if you’re attacked?”

“Then we cause a ruckus the old fashion way,” Conroy said. “Margaret, Genevieve, Clementine, and I will use our music. Music has magical properties that are powerful enough to keep them busy. It’ll distract them long enough to let Deva do the locator spell. Plus, we can try and save Ty in the process.”

“We’ll give them a concert like they’ve never had before.” Margaret laughed, flipping her red hair off her shoulder.

“It might just work,” Cam agreed.

“November, you’ll stay with Deva and make sure the locator spell works,” Conroy said. “We’ll stay in touch with our phones. We’ll make this work. Tonight.”

Eight

LONG SHOT

QUINCY SAT WAITING outside the front gates of the school, his sleek black car now a getaway car. The old man's gray hair stuck out behind his ears, his wrinkled face lifted in a smile as Genevieve stepped into the car, instrument in hand. Clementine and Margaret stood next to each other by the vehicle, not talking. Margaret was stiff, her chin lifted, while Clementine shrunk behind her hair.

A deep sadness still hung on November's shoulders, pressing heavier by the minute. Vincent's presence seemed to hover around her like a cloud, and she couldn't shake it. She should've been more focused on Everett and Ty—they were the ones who needed her attention, but all she could think about was Vincent.

The darkness had settled in her belly, and it spread through her chest, weighing down like a heavy blanket. She didn't know how she was going to get rid of it. The last time the depression lived within her, it had taken her over two years to pull out of it.

"You ready for this?" Cam asked as he stepped up next to her outside the main doors. Marcus and Conroy brushed past them, heading down to the waiting vehicle.

"You're staying?" November asked.

"I'm not leaving you alone with Deva," Cam said. "I still don't trust her." His dark brows pushed over his forehead. November matched his expression.

"What's between you guys, anyway? That day when you were arguing in the foyer... you seemed pretty upset with her. More upset than normal."

Cam stayed silent, looking out over the gardens that wound in front of the school, at the clean-cut sidewalks that circled the grass. Gray clouds moved over the sky, a slight breeze in the air. The side of Cam's jaw was tight, a muscle jumping in his cheek. He looked so much like Vincent, November had to tear her gaze away.

There had been something between November and Cam once, but it hadn't been real. He'd only been using her, and there wasn't any chemistry between them now. It almost felt like they were friends.

The car doors slammed and Conroy, Marcus, and the girls disappeared inside the vehicle. Quincy gave November a wave and bent inside the car. November wrapped a hand around her throat, trying to breathe. They were all putting themselves in danger because of her. If it weren't for the dreams and the comas, they wouldn't be venturing off to battle a coven of witches.

She lowered herself down on the top step, and Cam sat down next to her. They shared space for a long while on the top steps of the school, watching the light slowly dim. Just a hint of orange glowed through the dark clouds on the horizon, until the sun disappeared completely. They sat in silence, not speaking, just absorbing the sunset and the slight breeze around them.

"Deva is set up in the back of the school," Cam finally said after a time. "We should go. It's getting late."

November nodded as they started down the front steps and made their way around to the back of the school. Moonlight lit the white pathway in front of them and they twisted in and out of several marble statues, overgrown bushes, and dried flowers. They stepped underneath a large archway that extended from the school, and continued on, stars beginning to peek through a few dark clouds in the sky. A large fountain rushed in the courtyard, its water the only sound in the night. A maze of gardens extended out in front of them, and November and Cam headed up to a gazebo that was planted in the middle of the gardens.

Deva was kneeling down in the middle of the gazebo, several unlit candles placed around the circular space. Moonlight shone down, lighting the soft features of her face. A circle of salt had been poured inside the placed candles, where a map sat in the middle of the arrangement. A bowl of dark powder sat next to Deva, and she glanced up as they approached.

"Here to babysit me?" Deva asked, her face twisting.

“Just want to make sure you give us the right location,” Cam said, crossing his arms.

Deva turned back to the map in front of her, muttering under her breath. November peered closer. The map was of Crescent City and its surrounding areas. Mountain ranges and roads, names of the cities and landmarks.

“This better work,” November said. “Everyone else is risking their lives going to the witches. They’re your freaky people, and if they tried to kill you, who knows what they’ll do to *them*.”

Deva snorted, but didn’t respond. She bowed her head, holding her hands out in front of her. November kept her phone tight in her hand, waiting for the go ahead.

The text came faster than expected. A buzz vibrated and she peered down at the screen to see Conroy’s message: *Do it now*.

“Go,” November said, her heart suddenly pumping.

Deva closed her eyes, concentrating, and in a beat, the candles around her erupted to life. The flames flickered in the small space, lighting the map in front of her. Deva reached down and took a handful of dark powder in her hands, holding it up over the map. She began to hum, a low throaty sound, before it turned into words.

Sanctus seripeum, noctuse um. Sanctus seripeum noctuse um.

She repeated the phrase over and over again, holding her hand out over the map. Slowly, she let the dark powder slip from her hands, and as she repeated the phrase, it was as if an invisible force guided her hand around the map—like there was a magnet between her and the parchment.

Sanctus seripeum, noctuse um. Sanctus seripeum noctuse um.

The words continued, and her hand continued to hover. More black powder fell onto the map, creating a pathway, a long line that led through the cities, circling around, until her hand paused. The remainder of the black powder fell onto the page, a pile at the top of the map.

“Is that it?” November asked. She peered closer at the parchment. “It says the Ichor Caverns.”

“The Blood Caverns,” Cam murmured. He stroked his chin. “Well, if that couldn’t have been more on the nose.”

Another buzz rocketed through November’s hand, and she peeked down at the phone.

Stop!

“They’re done!” November burst out, nearly dropping her device. Her hands shook and she gripped onto the phone tighter.

“There,” Deva said, sitting back. “Satisfied?”

Cam gave a sharp nod. “Very.”

It seemed like an eternity before they heard the car pull up. November had been pacing inside the front foyer, with Cam leaning against the far wall, arms folded, ankles crossed. The rumble of the engine sounded outside, then car doors slammed.

“They’re here!” November rushed over to the double doors and threw them open.

The group limped up the front steps, hair disheveled, clothes torn. Dirt smudged their faces, though they each wore wide grins, except for Marcus, who kept his face blank. November frantically counted the number of bodies, sagging back in relief as she realized everyone was still there.

Except for Ty. He was still gone.

“Did you do it?” Conroy asked as he stepped inside the school. He ran a hand through his ruffled hair, before adjusting his glasses.

“Yes,” November breathed. “Are you guys okay?”

“We’re in one piece,” Genevieve said. “You have no idea what we went through.”

November ignored her, focusing on Conroy. “We know where the Blood Walkers are buried. It’s in a cave called the Ichor Caverns. Just north from here.”

“Well, then our run in with the witches was worth it,” Marcus said. He glared at the group until he walked to the door. “I’m going to bed.” And he left the room.

Genevieve marched after him, Clementine following behind.

Margaret beamed next to Conroy. “You should’ve seen us! Right in the parking lot of the motel. Genevieve played her flute, and Clementine and I sang. You should’ve seen the number of witches that left their rooms at the motel to see us. Can you believe *all* those witches live there? They circled us and attacked—at one point I didn’t think we’d have a chance against them. They did this pain thingy that attacked our brains, and they called

windstorms out of nowhere, white blasts flew through the air, but we were able to hold them back. Just like we guard the veils with keeping the spirits out, we were able to keep their powers off of us, too! I didn't know we could do that! We kept playing and singing and it was all wham! And bam! With magic flying everywhere.

"I felt like I was in a Marvel movie! They tried to advance on us, but any time any of them got close, all Marcus had to do was grab them—and you should've seen it! He's got some serious power with his siphon abilities. Bodies were flying backwards, everything became chaos, but we kept playing and singing, until Marcus got hit. He landed on his backside, and Conroy rushed us all out of there to the car. Quincy drove us out so fast the witches weren't able to stop us. But man, if we hadn't left when we did, and if we hadn't had Marcus on our side, there's no way we would've been able to survive them."

November stood silent, tingles erupting over her skin. That was quite the story.

"If we hadn't already put a target on our backs, we have one now," Cam said from the corner. "And they know we're interested in the location of where the Blood Walkers are buried. Which means we need to beat them to it. We need to get to the Ichor Caverns before they do."

"Well, we're not doing anything until we get some sleep," Conroy said. "We'll reconvene in the morning."

"But what about Ty?" November asked. *Why was no one thinking of Ty?*

"We'll get him," Conroy said. "The witches won't harm him until they get what they want—and that's Deva. I'm sure of it."

He stepped out of the entryway, his footsteps clicking softly on the marble floor. Margaret followed after him, yawning, but still a bounce in her step. A heaviness settled on November's shoulders, as she and Cam stood in silence. A sick feeling twisted in her stomach as Vincent still lingered in her mind. Seeing Cam standing there, leaning against the wall, once again, reminded her so much of him.

"Why does he hate me?" November asked, her voice trembling.

Cam stayed silent for a few moments before he shifted on the wall. By the expression on his face, he knew who she was talking about. "I don't think he does. I just think you broke his heart."

"He loved Isabelle," she said. "Sure, he confessed his feelings or whatever for me, but how could I be with him after everything? How could

I really believe him? You of all people get that.”

Cam shifted again. “Trust me, he cared about you. I grew up with him, I knew him well. That night on the roof when I kissed you... the expression on his face... I’d never seen him look like that before. He cared about you more than you know. Trust me.”

“And do you think that’s *why* he’s doing what he’s doing? Giving these kids these dreams? Did I hurt him *that* much that he’d react this way? That he’d torture these kids just to scare me before bringing me to my own death?”

Cam’s mouth flicked downward. “I don’t know. Sometimes part of me feels like he couldn’t do such a thing. That there might be another explanation.”

“But no one else would be out for my blood,” November said. “Who else could hate me so much?”

“Again, that word... hate. I just can’t believe it.”

November nodded quietly. “Maybe.”

“You should rest,” Cam said. “I can tell you don’t seem yourself.”

November nodded again. She couldn’t help the darkness that was continuing to grow around her. It made her want to sleep for a week.

Nine

TERROR VISION

NOVEMBER REACHED up to the hold above her head, pulling herself upward. The rock was cool and gritty beneath her fingertips, and she dug her climbing shoes into the rock, jumping up and in, pressing herself upward. She crossed one arm over the other, continuing to scale the rock, the wind whipping her hair over her face. She tasted salt from the ocean breeze, the violent waves underneath her. She climbed further, not harnessed in, free soloing above the rocks and water below.

Finally, she reached the top, and a smile spread over her face. Her legs wobbled on the top of the cliff, but she shook out her arms, gaining her balance. The wind continued to whip, howling on the air. Dark clouds traveled fast over the sky, shards of lightning in the distance.

She stepped up to the edge of the cliff, peering down at the waves crashing against the jagged rocks at the bottom, her heart fast in her throat. It was at least a hundred feet down. In the water beneath her, dozens of kids swam in the turbulent waves, laughing, smiling, splashing water around their faces.

Everett was in the middle of the group, treading in the water, and he waved up to November.

“Come jump down!” Everett called out. “The water is warm! It’s so fun!”

November stared down at all the kids, and others began to notice her.

“Yes! Join us!” several other kids chanted. They motioned her downward, begging her to jump.

November inched closer, her head spinning as she peered downward. Her toes lingered over the cliff, small rocks escaping out beside her, tumbling through the air and disappearing below.

“Join us!” the kids continued to chant. “Join us!”

November felt a warmth begin to spread through her chest. It flowed from her core out past her fingertips. Every part of her longed to jump—to be with them—to see Everett again. To be part of a group having fun, warm in the water, free from the darkness above.

“O-okay!” November called down, and a haze settled over her mind. All she could focus on were those kids and their welcoming faces.

She edged closer off the cliff, before lifting one foot out in front of her.

And she stepped off the edge.

Wind surged into her face, and she plummeted down at a fast pace. The wind blinded her eyes, blew in her ears, until a voice whispered, “November.”

She jerked awake, sitting upright in bed. Her chest heaved fast, in and out, sweat on her forehead. She gripped the sleeping bag tight in her hands, the small alcove she slept in dark.

Marcus stood in the doorway, his body a silhouette in front of the curtain.

“I could hear you from down the hall,” he said quietly.

November gripped her sleeping bag tighter, her heart still pounding. She blinked, and Marcus moved deeper into the room, before sitting on the edge of her makeshift bed.

“What were you dreaming about?”

November opened her mouth, but her reply stuffed in her throat like cotton.

“I...” She shook her head. “N-nothing.”

Marcus made a small noise in the back of his throat. “Hmm.”

“What are you doing here?” November asked, shaking the dream from her mind. “It can’t be because you heard me moaning in my sleep.”

Marcus turned, and bits of the hallway light lit his face, sculpting the bones in his cheeks. “You’re right. I have a favor to ask you.”

November tilted her head to the side. “A favor?”

Marcus held still, barely moving. “It has to do with my mother.”

Her brows squished together.

“Seeing what you’ve done—knowing what you did last year to close all the veils... and helping the way you are now... I’m not sure anyone else can help but you.”

She opened her mouth, but he motioned her down. “Just hear me out, okay?” He blew out a breath. “We grew up without a mother. Me and my sisters. My mother ran off when we were young. Our father raised us in Reykjavik, but he died when we were early teens. Our mother’s abandonment hurt Clementine the most. She barely ever speaks, she’s so closed off. And our father dying affected Genevieve the most. She witnessed him die. She hides her hurt with snark.”

“And you?” November asked.

“I’m the one who holds them together,” he said. “I may not be the oldest triplet, but I might as well be.”

She nodded. “And what is it you need help with? And why do you think I’d help you?”

“My mother—Ester is her name—is a powerful witch,” he said. “One of the most powerful the Zodiac coven has ever seen.”

“Zodiac coven?”

“Not quite as large as the Halldora coven, but still powerful.”

“And you think your mother is still out there? And you want to find her?”

Marcus kept his back straight, his body frozen. “Yes.”

November shook her head. “Listen, Marcus, I’m already consumed with figuring out why Vincent hates me and how to save my boyfriend from his coma because of a dream—”

She paused.

The dream.

Icy chills ran down her arms and she hugged herself. She didn’t realize it until now, but she’d just had *the dream*. Except she’d been the one living it. The rock climbing. Standing on the cliff. Jumping...

Marcus had woken her before she’d hit the rocks at the bottom.

Did this mean she was next? Was she about to slip into a coma at any moment? Or was it just a vision of the future? Her jaw chattered.

“You have a boyfriend?” Marcus asked, jerking her back to the present. He raised a brow and a chunk of his hair covered one eye.

“What? Oh. Yes.” But she barely paid attention. She couldn’t get the dream from her mind. Everett had been there—he’d been *in* it.

“November.” Marcus set a hand on her knee, and she flinched. “I’ve said your name three times.”

She blinked, and the chills running down her body started to ebb. She blinked again and zoomed in on Marcus’s chiseled face.

“I need you to help me find our mother because we’re going to die if you don’t.”

She scrunched her nose. “What do you mean?”

He let his hand fall onto the covers. “I mean, that the three of us have grown up our whole life knowing that only one of us would survive the Harvest.”

“What’s the Harvest?”

He ran his hands through his hair. “When twins are born, it is a gift to the magical community. Witches take pride in the gift of twins because on their eighteenth birthday, one twin’s powers will be joined with the other. The one with the strongest mind and heart will take on the weaker twin’s abilities, leaving the stronger twin alive, and the other... dead.”

November waited in silence until he continued, “But with triplets...” He released his breath, and his shoulders softened. “Triplets are rare. Triplets mean triple the power. One of us—either Clementine, Genevieve, or I will absorb the others’ abilities and the other two will die.”

He dropped his head, and his hair flopped forward. “It’s called the Harvest because bits of magical properties are scattered during the transition, and the witches gather them up and keep them for themselves after the transition is complete. Death always brings magic to the Earth.”

November swallowed. This was horrible. She’d never had a sibling, but the thought of killing one was too much.

“And what does this have to do with your mother?” she asked.

“My mother can stop it. At least, she’s our only chance.”

“But she abandoned you. Why do you think she’d suddenly help you?”

“Our mother was forced to leave us. The Zodiac coven doesn’t support a bond between a witch and a nonwitch—and my dad was a musician, like Genevieve. Mother left us, yes, but I believe it was also to protect us. Our mother put a protection spell on us so the Zodiac coven couldn’t find us and make us reside with them. We were given the most normal childhood we could have. It makes me believe my mother still cares.”

“And where is this Zodiac coven?”

Half of his mouth twisted up. “Not too far. They sort of... compete with the Halldora coven. There is only so much magic on the land, and let’s just say, they don’t want to share.”

November expelled a breath. “Oh great. So your mother is part of the group that wants you dead. And the Halldora coven wants *us* dead. So we sort of have two covens against us.”

“So will you help me?” Marcus asked, and for the first time, emotion shimmered behind his eyes. “We need to find her. We need to get to her. And convince her not to go through with the Harvest.”

November’s mind was doing jumping jacks. It flipped from one thought to the next at an impossible speed. As if she didn’t already have enough on her plate. And aside from everything going on, she needed to focus on herself. She needed to make sure she was okay. But she also didn’t want Marcus, Genevieve, or Clementine to die, even if she didn’t get along with them.

“Fine,” November said. “Fine. I’ll help you.”

November played with the necklace at her throat while everyone at the school stood in front of Conroy. They were in a grand ballroom—not *the* ballroom—but another ballroom that sat adjacent to it. Crown molding trimmed the white walls, and an extravagant mural was painted on the top of the ceiling. Ladies in flowing robes, and strange creatures twisted around each other, with flowers and trees. The ceiling towered above her, adorned with three chandeliers that lit the room. She shifted her weight on the smooth marble floor.

“I know some of you have expressed interest over retrieving Ty, but we need to focus on the Ichor Caverns first,” Conroy said. “We won’t have a chance at saving him without power on our side.” He stood with his feet planted, and his sandy hair wild on top of his head. He crossed his arms in front of him, his lean muscles stretching through his T-shirt. “We don’t know what kind of magic we’ll encounter in the caves, only that we must be prepared. Deva has refused to come, and I have to agree. She needs to be kept safe from the witches.”

“We can’t just leave Ty there to rot,” November said, crossing her arms, mirroring Conroy. “Who knows what they’re doing to him. If they were willing to kill Deva—one of their own kind—what do you think they’d do to Ty?”

“Yeah,” Margaret said. “We need to get him.”

“No,” Cam said, cutting in. “Conroy’s right. I read online this morning that a couple more kids have fallen into comas in the country. There isn’t time to waste.”

“If Deva isn’t coming, then how are we supposed to find this Blood magic—if there’s any left, that is?” November asked.

All eyes slid to Marcus, who hovered off to the side.

Her forehead creased. “What am I missing?”

“I’m a siphon,” he said smoothly. “I’ll be able to siphon the magic.”

November threw her hands up in the air. “Oh, great. Let’s just allow Marcus to absorb dark magic. That’s not a bad idea at all.”

“It’s the only one we have, if we have any prayer at stopping Vincent,” Conroy said. “So like I said before, we need to be prepared for the caverns. We don’t know what we’ll encounter, so we need to discuss our abilities to make sure we’re ready.”

Genevieve and Clementine had been watching silently in the back through the exchange, but with the mention of abilities, Genevieve said, “If there are any spirits to face, they won’t be able to harm us. No one can play music like I do. And if we encounter any men that might harm us, Clementine’s voice will lull any man to sleep.”

Margaret squared her shoulders, biting her lips. “Well... I can sing too.”

Genevieve let out a snort, and Margaret’s cheeks turned bright red.

“And we have November and Cambridge to open and close the veil if we need to,” Conroy said.

Cam nodded.

“And that leaves me,” Conroy said. “I can help out any way that I can.”

Conroy had the gift of being able to play any instrument—even sing; he was a Renaissance man.

“We only have one thing to be careful of,” Cam said, and his voice rung out into the room. “We can’t disturb the Blood Walkers at any cost. If we make a mistake, if they’re awakened and brought back to life, if we allow them to pass from their world to ours, we’ll have a much bigger problem on our hands.”

“Well, then we won’t let that happen,” Conroy said. “And speaking of abilities, I don’t want us using our talents now. We don’t want any of the witches to sense us. They’re aware of us, and we don’t want them to track us. Though I don’t think they know where we are yet, or else they would’ve already come for us.”

The group nodded, though a sick feeling had planted itself in November’s stomach. She felt that going to the Ichor Caverns was a mistake, and that getting close to anything dark—anything that Vincent might be involved in—would only lead to destruction.

Ten

PANIC ROOM

NOVEMBER STOOD JUST outside the main doors of the school. Thick dark clouds hung over the sky, blocking the sun. Splatters of rain plopped onto the ground, a heavy breeze chilling her arms. She stared out in front of her, not able to hide from her thoughts. The dream still lingered in the back of her brain. Was she in danger? Would she fall into a coma any moment? Or was Vincent just taunting her? She felt exposed, like she was dinner ready to be served on a platter, and there was nothing she could do.

She checked herself every few minutes, feeling along her arms and legs, making sure she was still there, that she wasn't caught in some sort of endless nightmare. The thought of being trapped in Vincent's prison world was enough to push her over the edge. She would be helpless—as helpless as Everett. Thoughts of him sent a pang through her heart. She hoped he wasn't in pain. Was his brain conscious? Or was he simply floating in a dark abyss, unaware of what had happened to him?

Anger rose up her throat again at what Vincent had done, and the thought of him only made the pit in her stomach sink deeper. She was beginning to think about walking away—not wanting to continue with any of this. Her mind was beginning to slip further. Did she care if Marcus and his sisters merged and only one survived? Did she care if Vincent got to her and she died like the dream foretold? Was it even possible to save Everett, and was it even worth it?

She was so exhausted. All she wanted to do was crawl away and hide in a hole. Seal herself away from the entire world and live in peace, live in

quiet, where no one would bother her.

Margaret joined her on the top step of the school. She wore sleek black pants and a black sweater, dressed the part for a secret mission. November also wore black—jeans and a turtleneck that made her throat itch. She brushed back her auburn hair.

“I really hate those Jonsson triplets,” Margaret said. “They think they know everything. They think they’re God’s gift to the universe.”

A smile played on November’s lips. “All three of them? Or just Genevieve?”

Margaret scrunched her face. “Well, she definitely doesn’t help. I don’t trust them. They just waltz in, volunteering to help, when we don’t know what their true motivations are. For all we know, they’ve been sent to distract us. For all we know, they could be working with Vincent!”

November nodded. Though now she knew why they were really here. They wanted her help with finding and convincing their mother not to kill them.

She peered upward, dark descending fast, and a fresh set of chills ran down her back. There seemed to be something in the air. Something alive—something waiting. She squinted out across the front grounds of the school, feeling as if someone were watching her. Another breeze skimmed off of her shoulders, and she relaxed some. There wasn’t anyone out there.

Conroy, Cam, and the others joined November and Margaret, also dressed in black, backpacks slung over their shoulders.

Cam peeked down at her, a line between his brows. “You okay?”

“Fine.”

But she wasn’t fine. Even if none of this were happening, she wasn’t okay. There was too much noise in her head. Too much darkness settled in her soul. It was boiling inside of her, heating up, intensifying.

Cam pressed his lips together, but didn’t say another word.

“Let’s go,” Conroy said, and led the way down the front steps. November rolled her shoulders and followed, though the thought of someone watching her still tingled along her spine.

Two large jeeps were parked at the front of the school, one red, and one a dark green. The Jonsson triplets hopped into the red one with Conroy, and Margaret and November hopped into the green one with Cam. Quincy was staying back with Deva.

Cam's fingers gripped the steering wheel, his knuckles white, and November clicked her seatbelt on in the front seat, glancing up at the towering school. Deva stood behind a window at the top of the building, peering down, her silhouette dark against the light behind her. She stayed frozen, watching them, before she turned and disappeared from sight.

Conroy's jeep peeled down the curved driveway, while Cam followed.

"Well, here goes nothing," Cam muttered to himself.

They drove for a couple hours, heading north, the road disappearing fast beneath the jeep's wheels. Margaret, Cam, and November sat in silence, just listening to the hum of the engine, watching headlights pass by every so often. The road was hypnotizing in front of her, and she let her mind drift away, until all she could see was Vincent's face in front of hers.

Hollow cheeks. Clear-cut bones. Strong jaw, and dark eyes. His face seemed to float in front of hers, and her heart ached at the sight of him. She longed to touch the grooves of his face, trace her fingers along his pale skin. He stared at her with his cold eyes, his expression dark, never able to read his face.

Cam pressed on the brakes and November blinked. They'd pulled off onto a dirt road that headed up to a tall mountain. The headlights showed Conroy's jeep in front of them, bouncing on the rough terrain. The wind breezed past from the open jeep, and November sat on her hands, trying to warm them. They continued to twist on the dark road until they entered a thicket of trees.

Complete darkness stretched through the forest on either side of them, moonlight hitting the tops of the trees, a swirl of black on the bottom. The sky above them seemed extra large, a huge black canvas, with specks of stars scattering over the sky.

They drove on the bumpy terrain for what felt like a mile before Conroy's jeep slowed in front of them. He pulled off to the side where the dirt road narrowed, parking up against a clump of trees. Cam followed and cut the ignition. Silence swallowed their surroundings, nothing but a few crickets chirping and the light breeze through the trees.

"We'll have to hike it from here," Conroy called out. "The road is too narrow."

The jeep doors slammed, echoing out into the night, and everyone slipped on their backpacks. November knew the packs either contained

instruments or water and food—they didn't know how long they'd be out there or when their musical abilities were going to be needed.

Conroy took out his phone and zoomed in on a map. "It's northeast from here. We'll have to cut through the forest." He flicked on the flashlight setting on his phone and began to lead the way.

Genevieve let out a groan and tromped after him. Clementine and Marcus were silent as they moved ahead with Margaret, Cam and November the last to follow.

Sticks and branches brushed past November's shoulders, with the occasional whack to the face. Her feet crunched on leaves, as she moved up and around small boulders on the ground. Though many of them had their phones out, the moonlight was plenty for November's path, and she stretched her legs up the mountain, Cam behind.

"Do you ever wonder where he is?" Cam asked quietly.

November knew he was talking about Vincent.

"We spent so much time hating each other," he went on. "And just when I thought we might be on the same page, he turns around and stabs us all in the back. But yet... it's like I can't get him out of my mind. I'm constantly worrying where he is. And I keep hoping he'll emerge and tell us this is all a misunderstanding. But then I know if it was, he'd already have surfaced by now. He knows this is going on, if he had any good in him, he'd be helping us."

November knew the feeling. She couldn't get Vincent out of her mind, either. His face taunted her, like he was always hovering over her back shoulder.

"We misunderstood him," she said. *She fell for him like Isabelle did.* "He's clearly been out for power this whole time, and he's toying with us. Whatever happened to him, he's using his emotions to rule him."

"It's still weird you had a thing for my father," Cam said wryly.

November barked out a laugh. "Ha. Yeah. It's weird. Good thing I don't anymore." But the lie stuck in her throat.

They continued onward in silence, and the ground turned upward at a slight incline. The tops of November's thighs flexed, her hands holding onto trees as they climbed over large boulders. She tripped a few times, scraping her palms, but she was an athlete, and could easily stay with the group.

Finally, the hiking slowed, and the greenery opened up. November dusted off her palms as she stepped into the clearing. A massive slab of rock towered above them, with an opening cut in the middle. Pitch blackness stretched out inside the opening, and she stuck her hands underneath her armpits.

Several rocks were placed before the entrance, piled on top of each other, circling before the cave entrance in a circle. The towers of stones piled above November's head, and she glanced up, bits of moonlight shining on the smooth stones.

"What does it mean?" Margaret asked.

"Deva warned me that there might be some sort of protection spell in front of the cave," Conroy said. "Looks like this might be it."

"Or it's just a warning," November said. She stepped up to the nearest pile of rocks and gently traced the shape of the rocks in front of her. "Look at the indents here. If you look closely, it kinda looks like a face."

Conroy squinted, holding up his flashlight closer. He then swung his flashlight around, taking in the other towers.

"It's true," he said. "They look like people."

November bravely took a step forward into the circle, turning around. Each stone face was hardened, their expressions chiseled tightly. Their mouths were straight lines, some turned down, furrowed divots that looked like eyebrows above their eyes.

"Maybe it's telling us something. But I don't know what."

The "v" between Conroy's brows deepened. "Maybe. Regardless, we have to go in. I doubt the Blood magic is sitting out here for Marcus to siphon."

"I'll go first," Marcus said. "If anything happens, I can protect the rest of you." He gripped his backpack tighter over his back and moved through the stone towers and ducked into the cave. The rest of the group waited in silence for a few heartbeats until Marcus called out, "Come on in."

Conroy moved first, followed by November. The rest approached. Nothing happened. Perhaps there wasn't a protection spell after all.

Inside, they traveled down a narrow corridor, water dripping from the walls, the black rock slimy and wet. A musty smell hit November's nose, whirling inside, making her cough. The flashlights bounced off the walls, and they each walked closely together, Marcus still leading the way.

The cave soon opened up into a space bigger than November could've imagined. The ceiling hung forty feet above them, with stalactites and stalagmites jutting everywhere from top to bottom. Water rolled down the cave walls, forming pools on the cave floor.

"What now?" November asked, and her voice echoed through the large space.

Marcus moved forward, his brow pinched, his legs long as he investigated. He stepped up to a wall and placed his hands on the surface, his eyes closed. He stayed there in silence, and it reminded November of when she would attempt a climb. She liked to connect with the rock, feel its invisible heartbeat, as if she were trying to become one with the boulder.

"There's magic here," Marcus said quietly. "A lot of it. We'll need an object to put it in. I won't be able to siphon this much power and keep it for myself. It'll leave me the minute I take my hands off the wall."

"I have my instrument," Genevieve said. "Or a hair clip."

Marcus shook his head. "It can't be so generic. It needs to be an object that is special to someone—on a personal level. Somewhere it can be kept safe."

Eyes slid to each other, searching, until Cam's eyes stopped on the necklace around November's throat.

"What's that?" he asked.

November's hand flew to her chest. "This?" She glanced down at the key that shone dimly in the light. "No. Not this. It was a gift from Everett. I can't—"

"So it means something to you," Marcus said. "That will work."

Everyone waited, feet planted, silence thick between them.

"Fine." November marched forward. She removed the necklace from around her neck and handed it over to Marcus. She suddenly felt a loss.

Marcus placed the necklace between his palm and the wall, and November hovered off to the side, itching to grab it back.

"I need to concentrate," Marcus said. "So stay quiet, everyone. Try not to move."

Marcus closed his eyes again and his face tightened. His lips pressed firmly together, and his fingers dug into the rock. The silence hurt November's ears as her pulse pounded.

An orange-red glow began to emanate from Marcus's hands, seeping deep into the rock. The glow began to spread outward, and Marcus's lips

moved as if whispering. The glow separated, spidering out like veins into the rock, traveling fast, shooting outward. The group watched in awe, all but his sisters clearly not realizing the power that Marcus had.

The ground beneath them began to shake, rumbling under November's toes. She staggered to the side, regaining her balance, just as the walls also began to rattle. Marcus kept his hands fixed on the rock, his lips still flying. The shaking intensified, bits of rock and sand falling from the ceiling to the ground. Margaret yelped, jumping to the side as a chunk of stalactite tumbled toward her. The group moved in tight to each other, glancing around, trying to stay silent so Marcus could continue his work.

The orange-red glow had now illuminated the room, shadows playing off of each other's faces. Another shake rocketed the cave, and Margaret yelped again, gripping onto Cam's arm. He steadied her, as more chunks fell from the ceiling.

The glow was now a bright light, making the room look as bright as day, the necklace blaring red. The walls seemed to be on fire.

Then everything stopped.

The shaking ceased and the ground calmed. There was a beat of silence, then Marcus removed his hands from the walls. Margaret was still glued to Cam, her jaw chattering. Genevieve and Clementine had linked their arms and were pressed up against each other tightly.

"We need to leave," Conroy said.

Marcus nodded. "I've got it." He clasped the necklace tight in his hand. November eyed the necklace, her fingertips desperate to grab it back.

The group edged back toward the exit, their footsteps quiet in the large cavern, when a deep pounding reverberated from within the walls. The sound was slow, heavy, and with each pound, the ground vibrated beneath them. Conroy motioned everyone to stop, his head cocked to the side.

"What's that?" Margaret whispered, her arm still linked through Cam's.

"Stay calm," Conroy said. "Whatever it is, we'll be gone before we see. Let's go."

The group started to head out once more, feet shuffling quick, but the pounding continued. The pools of water on the ground rippled, the deep sound jarring November's teeth. They continued to hurry through the dark cave when a large blast rocketed through the area. White light seared November's eyes, and she blinked back, waiting for her vision to clear. The

group paused again. The pounding continued from the walls, vibrating her bones, and everyone scrambled back in confusion.

“Keep going!” Conroy yelled, but everyone seemed frozen.

The walls began to shimmer as the pounding intensified. November placed her hands over her ears, clamping her teeth down together tight. The noise had taken over her brain, it was hard to focus on the present.

Move your feet, November thought. *Run*. But she seemed to be as paralyzed as the rest of them.

Very slowly, faces began to appear on the rocky walls. Eyes. Lips. Noses. Cheeks. The faces solidified, pushing outward from the rock, until their bodies also surfaced, pushing outward. They looked skeletal in the dim light, and the pounding continued on. November’s eyes were glued wide. None of the group moved. They couldn’t breathe. It was as if their lives were tied to these men—if such they were—who were peeling themselves from off the rock.

Soon, one man emerged fully, his eyes two deep sockets, hair clean and black, slicked back off of his wide forehead. He glanced over the group, an amused smile on his face. More men emerged, all wearing clothes that were outdated. Some in tunics and weapons at their hips, and some in white puffy shirts that were open to their emaciated abs. They each had the same look to them—bony faces and dark eyes, slicked black hair, lean statures. They reminded her of Roderick, but in a more sinister way. The energy surrounding them was dark, thick in the room, she could almost see it.

“We wondered when we would waken from our slumber,” the first man said. “I am Samuel, the leader of my men. We thank you for your service.”

The group stayed alert, weight on the balls of their feet, glances exchanged.

“Who are you?” November asked, and Samuel’s eyes snapped to hers.

“You do not know? You did not come here for us?”

“We...” November swallowed, glancing to either side of her.

“You didn’t know,” Samuel said in a smooth voice. “You didn’t come for us. This was an accident.” Specks of light lit his dark eyes.

“We don’t want any trouble,” Conroy said, holding up his hands.

Samuel’s eyes slithered to him, his head cocking to the side. “So you’re the leader then.”

Conroy straightened his shoulders.

“Well then, *leader*, even though we are indebted to you, we’re also hungry, and so you will serve us once more.” He advanced a step, and veins appeared beneath Samuel’s eyes. The veins bulged from his skin, seeming to move, like blood was flowing within them. His gait was smooth as he traveled forward.

The other men also advanced, circling the group, their bodies taut, veins also appearing beneath their eyes. They moved like oil, slippery and gliding, but deadly. November’s mind spun as she frantically tried to remember what Deva had told them about Blood Walkers. They lived off of blood, they’d caused mass destruction back in the 1400s, but that’s all she knew. Would they kill them? Would they see their attack coming? And how painful would death be?

Her body racked with shivers, her teeth chattering, but she adjusted her stance, solidifying her feet into the ground. She was fast. She could run. But she didn’t know about the rest of the group. They all stood tense beside her, eyeing the exit. Cam’s jaw was locked tight, his eyes narrowed. Margaret was shaking, her eyes clenched shut.

“It will be quick,” Samuel said, still advancing. “You won’t feel a thing. We usually like to play with our prey, but we are too hungry for that.”

Fangs flashed in Samuel’s mouth as he flew forward. He grabbed Margaret faster than she could blink, and yanked her up against his bony chest. He bit down hard into her neck, and Margaret screamed, writhing against him. There was no blood, just his lips sealed perfectly around her throat. She continued to scream, until her struggles began to weaken, her body falling slack.

The other Blood Walkers lunged.

November stiffened, her heart thumping wildly. Before she could run, a Walker gripped her around her upper arm, his long nails digging into her skin. Panic hit hard, and she tried to yank away, but his grip was concrete. In one fluid motion, the other Walkers also descended upon the group. Genevieve screamed, and Conroy called out, their cries piercing November’s soul. Cam had thrown himself toward Samuel, but Margaret still hung limp underneath Samuel’s lips. More fangs flashed, and November planted herself into the ground, ready for the inevitable.

A soft voice cut through the mayhem, soft and sweet, angelic. The sound was pure, gliding up and down in a melody. Clementine had started to sing, the melodic sound crisp and clean, hypnotizing. Confusion washed

over the Blood Walkers' faces, before their grips loosened, including Samuel's. Margaret sagged to the floor, and the Blood Walkers staggered back. Clementine continued to sing, the melody floating on the air, circling around them.

The Blood Walkers continued to retreat, their bony faces drooping, their black eyes glazing over.

"We need to get out of here," Genevieve said. "The song won't last forever."

The Blood Walkers' eyes began to fall closed, their bodies swaying to the song.

"Let's go!" Conroy yelled.

Cam helped Margaret struggle to her feet, and she clasped her neck, her skin almost glowing in the dark she was so pale. Cam pushed her forward, the rest of the group also following. November was the last to move, giving the Samuel and his men one last glance before she disappeared down the cave tunnel.

Eleven

DEAD BLACK

THEY HAD RUSHED DOWN the trail and out of the forest so fast, November hardly remembered running. She barely felt the branches scrape her face as she followed Conroy and the rest of them down to the jeeps. They hopped in, November in the backseat this time as Cam drove with Margaret passed out in the front. November couldn't believe Clementine's power. She really did have the power to sing men to sleep. Genevieve hadn't been exaggerating. They would all be dead if it hadn't been for her.

The jeeps raced down the highway, making their way back to the school, though November still felt as if she were back in the cave, Samuel's face stuck in her mind. She had never felt so scared—so paralyzed—which was saying a lot, seeing that she had faced Sylphs and dark spirits head on not too long ago. The vision of her father unhinging his jaw and ripping out April's throat came to mind.

The school appeared just as early morning light started to grace the sky. Splatters of pinks and oranges rose up from behind the towering building, though November still shivered, even as the warmth was settling on her skin.

Margaret hadn't woken up yet. She was still passed out in the front seat, and every few minutes, Cam glanced down, concern knit between his brows.

They pulled up to the front of the school, and car doors slammed as the group headed up to the front doors. Cam scooped Margaret up in his arms,

and November hurried faster than usual, still feeling as if the Blood Walkers were after them.

“Cam, bring Margaret into Roderick’s office,” Conroy said.

November followed Cam into the office, where he set Margaret on a large couch that Conroy had brought into the room after Roderick’s departure. She wondered if that was where he slept.

Margaret’s head flopped to the side as she was lowered down, and the wound in her neck was two neat holes, though red streaks had begun to spread outward from the bite.

“Will she be okay?” November asked.

“I’m not sure,” Conroy said, his mouth turned down. “I don’t know anything about Blood Walker bites. But she’s alive.”

“The bite could be lethal,” Cam said. “We need to research. Maybe Deva knows something. We can’t let her die over this.”

November’s forehead tightened as she peered over at Cam. If she didn’t know any better, there was more than concern in his voice.

Marcus stepped into the room, brushing past the dark curtain in the entryway.

“Can I speak to you for a moment?” He gently touched November’s shoulder.

She peeked between Margaret and Marcus, but nodded, following him to the side of the room. He lifted up the necklace, and it dangled from his fingers.

“You need to have this,” he said. He looped the necklace around her neck. “This has dark magic in it. The first person to wear it won’t be able to take it off. And it needs to stay with you. Not me.”

“What do you mean I won’t be able to take it off?” Her hands flew to her throat. He had already placed it around her.

“Dark magic clings onto the first life it’s connected to. And with it being close to your heart, it’ll cling to your life. No one will be able to remove it but you.”

“How do you know this?”

A smile teased his lips. “I’ve lived long enough to know such things.”

Her hand touched the key at her neck, and she paused. The last thing she wanted was to be responsible for dark magic. And now she was the only one who could take it off? She lifted the necklace up, but it pressed down onto her chest, like a heavy magnet.

Marcus gazed at her intently, as if silently communicating. Her brows pushed together until realization dawned. He trusted her to have it, but he expected her help in return with his mother and the Harvest.

Margaret moaned, and all eyes flew to her, but she wasn't coherent. She remained passed out, sweat shining on her face.

Cam's fists tightened, his fingers pumping in and out. "I'll be in the library," he said, and his long legs strode from the room.

November's gaze shot from Marcus, to Conroy, to Margaret, then to the doorway. "I'll be back."

The dark curtain slid past her face as she caught up with Cam. "Cam, wait."

He paused, his shoulders stiff, his feet planted to the marble floor.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

Cam spun on her, his eyes and mouth tight. "No, I'm not okay. How could I be?"

She blinked, surprised by his intensity.

Cam groaned. "All of this is my fault. I pushed for us to do this. If I hadn't, if I had thought of another way, then Margaret..." He swallowed.

"Cam, it was *all* of our decision to go," she said. "This isn't on you."

"But Vincent is my father. Maybe this *is* because of me. I rejected him as much as you did, if not more. And..." He waved his hand. "You and I had a thing. Maybe Vincent is trying to get payback on us both. I don't know, it's so complicated."

She shook her head. "No, Vincent knew what you and I had wasn't real... it was just a blip in time, Cam. You and I both know that. Vincent knows he's the one I cared about. And *I* rejected him. If it's on anyone's shoulders, this is my fault."

"I just..." Cam exhaled deeply, then looked at her intently. "How long are we safe here? Not only do we have Vincent to worry about, but the witches are also aware of us and wanting retaliation, let alone now we have a pack of Blood Walkers out for our blood. I don't want the rest of us ending up like Margaret." His voice echoed in the empty hallway.

Silence settled between them, and November peeked down at her hands.

"Can I tell you something?" she asked.

Cam peered down at her, hurt in his eyes. "Anything."

"I..." She swallowed a lump in her throat. "I had the dream."

Cam went still. "What?"

“The dream. I was climbing, and then... I jumped from the cliff. Just like all the other kids have described. I’m so... I’m so worried that I’m next. That I’m going to fall into a coma at any moment. Maybe Vincent really is about to have his revenge on me.”

Cam’s face softened. He moved in closer, reached his arms around her, and brought her into a hug. “Oh, November.”

Tears immediately sprung to her eyes, and she was surprised by the sudden emotion. Telling Cam had knocked down a barrier she didn’t realize she had put up, and everything flooded out.

“And it isn’t just that,” she said. “I haven’t been okay. Mentally. Emotionally. I feel like I’ve fallen into a darkness I can’t pull myself out of. I care about Vincent so much, I can’t get him out of my mind, but I’m... I’m so terrified of him.” Sobs erupted, and her chest raked.

“Shh,” Cam stroked the top of her head. “That’s what Vincent does. He reels you in, making you think he cares about you, and then turns on you.” His voice turned bitter. “It’s best to shove him from your mind.”

She nodded through her tears. It was exactly what he had done to Cam. Pretending to be his brother, developing a kinship, then revealing that it had all been a lie. It was just hard to believe he had done it to her, too. He’d really seemed genuine that he’d cared about her. She remembered when he’d fixed her arm after she fell from the rock wall. He’d given her her own climbing wall deep underneath the Huntington manor. The way he’d been so jealous when she and Cam had kissed. The way he looked at her...

She shook her head. Cam was right. She couldn’t let Vincent have any more power over her. He was the enemy. And if it meant defeating witches and Blood Walkers in order to stop him, she would.

Later that day, November stepped into the library, where Cam sat a table, his head in his hands. Conroy leaned over him, his hair mussed over his forehead, his lean muscles apparent through his T-shirt. Genevieve and Clementine sat across from the room, their heads dipped into a book, while Marcus sat alone in the corner.

November hovered on the balls of her feet, glancing everyone over, before she headed in the girls’ direction.

“Hey,” November said as she approached. “Mind if I sit?”

Genevieve eyed her warily, while Clementine gave her a small smile. None of them said a word. November sat down anyway.

“What are you looking at?”

“Trying to see how lethal a Blood Walker’s bite is,” Genevieve said.

“You’re helping with that?”

“Conroy set us to it,” Genevieve said, shrugging her shoulders. “Besides, I want to know if I have a chance if I’m ever bit by one.”

November twisted her lips. She zoomed in on Clementine. Her black hair matched Genevieve’s, both straight and shimmering to their shoulders, though Clementine’s hair had clips in the front, pulling her hair off from the sides of her face.

“I wanted to thank you,” November said. “You saved us back there. We’d all be dead if it weren’t for you.”

Pink dotted Clementine’s cheeks, and she gave a slight nod.

“I can’t believe you have power over men like that,” November continued.

“She’s saved us multiple times,” Genevieve said. “Back at our school in Iceland... we had attacks from powerful men who wanted to shut our school down. But she can focus her attention on certain men—notice how Cam, Marcus, and Conroy weren’t affected.”

November nodded. Thank goodness.

“Gah!” Cam slammed his hands on the table. “There’s nothing here!”

November’s brow tightened.

Conroy violently ran a hand through his hair and stepped away from the table, groaning.

Marcus eyed her from across the room, his dark slicked hair hanging over one eye. His gaze was fixed on hers, intent, and November shivered, looking down. She peeked up at the two sisters again.

“I know about the Harvest,” she said quietly. “Marcus told me.”

“He *what*?” Genevieve punched the table. “How dare he?” She whirled around and gave Marcus a glare. “You *told* her?”

Marcus shrugged and he returned his gaze to November.

“He wanted me to help you,” November said.

Genevieve scoffed. “And what can you do? You think you can waltz in and save us from nothing you know about? We’ve known our whole life what is to become of us, so there’s nothing you can do about it. Two of us

are going to die and one of us is going to live. And I, know for one, that death is not going to overtake me. So forget about helping Marcus.” She slammed her book shut and abruptly stood up from the table, marching away, before disappearing out from the curtain in the doorway.

November stared after her, blinking. She couldn’t believe Genevieve cared more about herself than her siblings. How could she not want to stop this? It was like she was resigned to their plight and was determined to be the last one standing—no matter what happened to Marcus or Clementine.

“She doesn’t really mean it,” Clementine said in a soft voice.

November spun to her, eyes wide. It was the first time she’d heard her singing voice.

“She loves us more than anything. She just has a hard time showing it.”

“I don’t know how you put up with her.”

Clementine’s frail shoulders lifted before they dropped. “She’s my sister. I don’t have a choice. But Marcus and I would do anything for her.”

“So... what do *you* think of all of this? Marcus seems to think that the Harvest can be stopped if we can get to your mother and convince her.”

Clementine shook her head. “Mother won’t stop it. Nothing is more important to the witches than keeping their power. And by our deaths, our power is an offering to them. So I’ve resigned myself to my fate. I’m not nearly as strong as Marcus or Genevieve, so I already know I won’t survive it.”

“Are you kidding? I saw what you did to those Blood Walkers back there. You *saved* us. Of course you’re strong enough!”

Clementine rolled her neck. “It’s okay. I’m just grateful I got to live at all.”

Cam yelled again and shoved his book away. He sprung to his feet. “There’s nothing in here!” He yanked his hand through his hair again and paced away from the table.

“I don’t know what to do,” November whispered.

Clementine shook her head, and her straight black hair swished. “There’s nothing to do. Just like the Harvest, it is what it is. It’s best if we all accept the reality that Margaret will most likely die from this bite. We should only focus on what we can control. Which is waking these kids up from these comas before anyone else is harmed.” Her face fell and she peered into her lap before she stiffened. She tilted her head, and her eyes widened. “Do you hear that?”

A low whistling came from outside the windows, soft, deep, and resonate. It carried on the air like a low hum—like a swarm of bees surging toward them.

Cam paused, also tilting his head. Marcus straightened in his seat.

“What is it?” November asked.

Cam’s face went white, and Marcus darted up from his chair.

“Everyone get down!” Marcus cried out.

Cam and Marcus dove for Clementine, and Marcus knocked November down to the ground. His body pressed up against hers, pinning her, the air knocked from her lungs. She tried to breathe, her ribcage crushed, but she didn’t have time to think what Marcus was doing.

In an instant, the roof of the library was ripped off, and a swirl of dark cloud whipped high over the sky above them. Dark flashes zoomed in and out of the whirling black cloud, like mini ghosts caught in a tornado. Books and papers flew all around the library, scattering up into the air and flying out of the room.

November’s hair whipped around her face, Marcus still holding her down tight, as she yelled, “What is going on?”

“They’re Shades!” Marcus yelled back. “They’re like spirits, but they don’t live on the other side. They live high up tucked away in mountains and hills. If you get too close, they wipe your memory!”

Shades?

Another whirlwind of dark cloud surged into the room, tables scooting side to side. The deep humming buzzed all around her, cutting straight to her bones. Chairs tipped over, and more books and papers swirled up into the air. The humming resonated loudly in her head, and she couldn’t help but stare into the dark tornado. The beings zoomed in and out of each other, wraith-like.

Through the chaos, Marcus drew November to her feet, tugging her toward the door, but her eyes connected with one Shade. Its gaze seemed to catch hers too, because the Shade separated from the pack. As Marcus drew her backward, the Shade floated forward, its eyes and mouth two hollow sockets, stretching like black pieces of cotton. Inky mist flowed in and out of its mouth as if it were breathing, and it continued to approach until it hovered over November’s head. The ghosts reminded her of the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. She was living a movie. This wasn’t real.

“Come on!” Marcus yanked her further.

November's eyes were caught in the Shade—an endless black, pulsing and dark.

“November!” she heard Cam scream.

But she couldn't rip her gaze away. The Shade seemed to draw her in, its black tendrils slithering into her mind. Dark fog swallowed the corners of her vision, until all she could see was black. Her feet felt removed from the floor, and her body seemed to sail upward, wind still surging around her.

“November!” someone else yelled, but she wasn't sure who.

A set of arms gripped her by the shoulders and shoved her backward through the exit. The black fog in her vision dissipated as her gaze ripped away from the being. She continued to travel backwards, the humming leaving her brain, until they left the room completely, normal sights and sounds returning to her once more.

Twelve

THEY RUSHED FROM THE LIBRARY, footsteps pounding down the marble hallway. The low din stayed behind them, becoming distant, so November knew the Shades weren't after them. Cam led the way, with Clementine running by his side. Marcus still had a firm grip on her.

"Why..." November choked out. "Why were they here?"

Cam didn't stop racing. "Why do you think?"

"The witches set them upon us," Marcus finished. "Which means they've found us."

"Witches have the power to do that? Control them?"

Marcus gave a dry laugh. "One of the many things they're capable of."

They turned a corner and rushed into Roderick's office. November paused and peered upward. The roof had also been torn off, the desk overturned, Margaret on the floor by the couch. Conroy held Genevieve in his arms, her body limp.

"No!" Marcus shouted. He rushed over to his sister. "What happened? They got to her?"

Conroy nodded. "The Shades. There were too many of them. I saw them suck the memories from Genevieve's eyes. Once you lock gazes, it's almost impossible to get out." He gently lowered Genevieve to the ground, and her dark hair splayed against the crisp white floor. "We need to leave. The witches will retaliate again."

Marcus nodded.

“But...” Clementine cleared her throat, still staring down at her sister. “Where will we go?”

November saw the resolve on Conroy’s face. His eyes connected with November, and she stiffened.

“No,” she whispered. “I... I can’t.”

Conroy gave a sharp nod. “To the Huntington manor.”

Dizziness attacked November full force and she staggered back. She set a hand on her beating heart, her breaths racing.

The Huntington manor.

It was where Vincent lived. It was where she had all her memories of him. It was where April lived. She couldn’t walk those halls where everything would remind her of them.

Too many memories.

She suddenly wished the Shades *had* gotten to her.

“I’ll call Quincy,” Conroy said. “Hoping the old man is okay with Deva. Then we need to get Genevieve and Margaret loaded up. Everyone meet me out front in five minutes.”

Clementine and Marcus both went for Genevieve at once, as Cam went for Margaret. November stood paralyzed, watching them lift the two girls and exit from the room.

Conroy stepped up to November and squeezed her shoulder. “I know this will be hard on you, but it’s the only place we have to go. I haven’t stayed there since that night, either.” His mouth flicked downward before his lips pressed into a straight line. He patted her again before he strode from the room.

Quincy drove a large black van, its surface as shiny and sleek as his usual black car. Conroy sat up front with him while November stayed in the back with the others. Deva was stiff as a board next to her, her long, tangled hair framing her face, her eyes distant as she gazed out the window. The dark forest sped by quickly, nothing but a dark flashes in the descending light. The Huntington manor wasn’t too far from the school, but it seemed to take an eternity to get there.

Finally, the van pulled to a stop in front of the Victorian-looking home. Everyone stayed silent as they exited the vehicle, and the group stared up at the Gothic-like structure, and the intricate carvings that adorned the outside of the building.

“There are a multitude of rooms inside,” Conroy said. “So go and pick one. We should be safe here from the witches. I’ve asked Deva to do a protection spell.”

The group headed up the steps while November lingered by Deva’s side. The night air was crisp around them, cold stars starting to dot the black sky. She pushed out a few breaths, white air escaping from her lips. She hadn’t really spoken to the witch, but she wasn’t ready to enter the manor just yet.

Deva knelt down and picked up a handful of dirt by a nearby tree. She sprinkled it out in front of her, letting it slip through her fingers.

“Thank you,” November said. “For doing this.”

“I’m not doing it for you,” Deva’s low voice said. “Like I said, you’re the reason this is all happening. You’re the reason six of my friends are braindead. You’re the reason my coven wants me dead. You have no idea what it feels like to have a knife at your throat ready to be slit.” She swallowed in the memory.

“That must’ve been horrible—seeing your friends fall before you.”

Deva nodded slowly, the dirt still slipping through her fingers. “I still can’t get my mother’s face out of my mind as she approached me with a knife.”

“Quincy saved you. How? He’s just an old man.”

“I don’t know. Maybe they didn’t expect an old man to wander into their territory. He wasn’t threatening. They paused the sacrifice just long enough for him to move in close to me and pull me to safety. I don’t know why the coven didn’t stop him. It almost was as if... they were afraid of him for a moment. They’d easily be able to use their power on him.”

November’s brows pinched together. “You’re right. That doesn’t make any sense.”

Quincy wasn’t part of this world—he wasn’t a musician, a witch, a spirit, a Blood Walker or any of the sort. Why would he have power over the witches? He was just an old man.

“Now if you’ll excuse me,” Deva said to November and stepped away. She picked up another handful of dirt and began to mutter to herself. The

words rolled off her tongue, echoing out into the night. November couldn't understand what she was saying—it was clearly in another language. Deva walked side to side, dropping the dirt in a straight line in front of her.

November shivered, wrapping her arms around her torso. She wasn't ready to go inside yet, but she also felt an uneasiness settle over her shoulders as she stood outside with Deva alone. She slowly backed away and marched up the front steps.

The moonlight lit her path as she mounted the steps, and her fingers circled around the large iron knob before she stepped inside.

Just like the last time she had been here, a cacophony of ticking sounds attacked her from all sides. The entryway was filled with clocks of all shapes and sizes. They hung on the walls, all set to a different time, ticking in sync.

Memory hit November hard, and she saw herself dancing in this very entryway. It had been the first time she'd danced. She peered up at the skylight on the top of the ceiling, remembering the way the moonlight had fallen onto her as she'd waltzed around the room. Fingers stretching to the sides, feet smooth beneath her. It was her calling. It was how she opened this world into the next.

And she hadn't done it since that dreadful night.

And she missed it.

Her heart ached to be in the ballroom again, whirling around—to feel the warmth that spread through her entire body when she danced. It was like she was carried away to another planet, every inch of her alive, like she could do anything.

But it reminded her too much of Vincent. She could never dance again.

She wandered into the adjacent room, taking in the obsessive amount of Blue Ridge plates and cups that were piled up on every inch of space—the tables, chairs, and mantel full of the delicate china.

November knew these eclectic rooms were because of the ghosts Clifton Huntington housed to protect them in case a large war between the spirits were to break out. He wanted to have a spirit army on his side, and spirits lingered where their earthly prized possessions were.

She moved through the room, running her finger along a small teacup as she passed by and entered the long hallway outside of it. She had a vision of April running in front of her, a large smile on her face, so excited to show November the house. She tiptoed down the hallway full of portraits where

she had seen her parents' pictures come to life. But the hallway was dead silent, no sign of life there—just ordinary pictures on the walls.

Her feet drew her forward, and she ascended the steps to the second floor. She tried not to think of the basement two floors down, the underground lair where Vincent stayed. The piano and the rock walls. Their conversations and the music.

No.

She wouldn't think about him. She didn't care about him.

November passed room after room until she faced her old bedroom. It felt strange to be here, like she was caught in some sort of dream. Gathering herself, she expelled a deep breath and pushed her door open.

It hadn't changed.

A large tree extended in from the side wall, with a king-sized bed beneath the branches. The first time she'd seen the room, she thought it absurd that a *tree* could be inside the house, but now it seemed normal. She quietly walked in, eyeing the extra clothes in her open dresser, grateful to have them. She didn't have time to grab her bag from the school earlier. Her eyes slid to the floor across the room, where a pile of her old rock-climbing gear sat. She rubbed her palms on her jeans, itching to use it.

"Knock, knock." Conroy stuck his head inside the room. It only reminded her of the past. "I thought you'd be in here."

"It's strange," November said. "I never thought I'd see this place again."

Conroy's expression fell. "It's hard on me too."

November nodded.

"We have Margaret and Genevieve set up in my father's old bedroom."

"Any improvement?"

Conroy rolled his neck. "They're both still incoherent. Margaret's bite is looking worse. The infected area has spread down to her shoulders. The wound is open and raw. I had Deva try to put a healing spell on it, but nothing has worked."

"And Genevieve?"

"I've only read about Shade attacks," Conroy said. "I've never witnessed one. But from what I've read, Genevieve should wake up and know nothing about her life."

November clenched her eyes shut. She had never liked Genevieve, but that didn't mean she wanted her hurt.

They were falling in numbers. How long until everyone was incapacitated? And would she be the last one standing? Or the next one on the chopping list?

“Any more dreams?” November asked. She hadn’t been able to make herself look online.

“I’ve been watching the news closely,” he said. “Numbers are still appearing. The news is all over it. No one knows what’s going on.”

“Except the witches and us.”

“Seems like it.”

November let out a long breath. “I don’t know what to do, Conroy. It might be... it might be time for me to just offer myself up to Vincent. End this once and for all.”

Conroy quickly shook his head. “No. I won’t let you do that. Roderick is out there getting more information where he can. Talking with dark spirits, traveling around the country. He’ll figure something out.”

Silence settled between them for a few moments. “How is Roderick?”

Heat brushed Conroy’s cheeks. “He’s... good. I miss him though. If anyone can come up with a plan, it’d be him.” He cleared his throat and shifted his weight. Bits of moonlight lit the room, streaming in through the window. A breeze drifted in through the open window, the curtains moving softly. The leaves—now a bright yellow—rustled on the branches above her.

“I think it’s time that you use your gift again,” Conroy said. “We can’t put all our faith in Roderick. I spoke with Cam earlier. Obviously he knows what it’s like to dance. He said it takes you to an unworldly place. He thinks...” Conroy paused before continuing, “He thinks you might be able to travel to another plane—to the dream world. You might be able to figure out what’s happening to these kids.”

“What?” November burst out. “Dance again? No... I can’t.” Thoughts of Vincent bombarded her mind.

“You need to figure out what this dream means. And if you can travel to where the kids are experiencing these dreams, then maybe you’ll be able to stop it. We can hit Vincent where he wouldn’t suspect. Think about it, you pass through layers to open up the veil to the dead. It would make sense that you might pass through a dreamlike state before you get there. We have to try.”

November's hands shook and she wrung them out in front of her. "I can't believe you want me to do this. Dancing was... it was what connected me to Vincent. My heart... my heart couldn't take it."

"Cam will help you. He agrees it's the best thing to do."

November held silent. She couldn't speak anymore.

"Think about it," Conroy said. "Just think about it."

And he shut the door behind him.

Thirteen

MIDDAY LIGHTNING

“COME QUICK! SHE’S WAKING UP!”

Marcus’s voice boomed down the narrow hallway, and footsteps squeaked on the old, battered carpet. November rushed down the hallway to Clifton’s old room and passed through the open door. Margaret lay on the large king-sized bed, thin curtains hanging from the four posts. Genevieve moaned on a couch against the far wall, Marcus and Clementine by her side.

Cam bolted in after November, nearly bumping into her, and Conroy dashed in, his hair wild.

“She was mumbling words,” Marcus said, his hands on his sister’s shoulders. He stroked her hair off her face, urging her to open her eyes.

“It might be too soon,” Conroy warned, mouth twisted downward.

“No,” Marcus said. “She was mumbling about spaghetti. She hates spaghetti. Maybe she’s okay after all—maybe she’s remembering things about her life.”

The group waited as Genevieve continued to moan, her body restless, until she peeled open her eyes. When her gaze connected with Marcus hovering over her, she sat up in a rush.

“What are you...” She glanced around. “What am I doing here? Who... who are all of you?”

Marcus’s hands still hovered over the couch.

Clementine cleared her throat. “It’s me... Clementine. Please say you remember me.”

Genevieve's brows squished together, her forehead creased. "No..." She shook her head. "I can't... Get away from me."

Marcus sat back on his heels, his face white. Sweat shone on his brow. "It's no use, Clementine. She doesn't know us. Conroy was right."

Genevieve stood up from the couch and edged around to the side wall. "I want... I want to see my mother."

Marcus got to his feet, and his shoulders straightened. "You remember our mother?"

Genevieve backed up another step. "What do you mean *our*?"

"We're siblings," Marcus said. "I'm your brother, this is your sister." He glanced around the room before his eyes lit up and he rushed over to the nightstand. He picked up a small mirror and placed it in her hands. "Look. Your face is identical to Clementine's. We're triplets."

Genevieve stared into the mirror, her long face and dark hair staring back at her. She blinked, then took in Clementine. Her brow stayed pinched. "How do I not know this? Is this a trick?"

"Tell me what you know about mother," Marcus urged. "Why did you mention her?"

"Because she's my mom," Genevieve said. "Why wouldn't I? She..." She swallowed. "I can't believe she's the only thing I remember. *Why* do I not remember anything else? My brain... it's not working." Her hand dropped and the mirror slipped from her hands, crashing to the floor. Glass shattered everywhere.

"There was a Shade attack," Conroy said, and her head turned to him. "They sucked away your memories. But don't worry, we'll find a way to fix it."

Genevieve shook her head. "I don't believe you."

"Let's give her some space," Conroy said. "I'm sure this is all overwhelming."

Genevieve's eyes continued to flick around the room. Her gaze paused on Margaret. "What's wrong with *her*?" Her eyes widened at her open wound, and her hand flew to her own throat. "Is that what's wrong with *me*?"

Conroy held up his hands out in front of him, as if speaking with a child. "No, of course not. Margaret was bitten by a Blood Walker. We're trying to help her too. Come, let's get you your own room."

Genevieve wrapped her arms around herself, but allowed Conroy to touch her back and gently lead her out the door. Despite Conroy's want to

give her some space, Marcus and Clementine followed after them, leaving the room.

Cam and November stood in silence, standing next to Margaret's bed. November watched Cam's soft face as he peered down at Margaret. His eyes were lined with worry, his mouth set. November cocked her head to the side.

"You care for her, don't you?"

Cam ripped his gaze away. "What? No. I..." His shoulder's heaved as he let out a breath. "She's quite obnoxious, really. Her bubbly personality. And I know how horrible she was to you before. It's just... I don't know, I'm impressed she was able to change. It gives me hope."

November's mouth curved up. "It seems like more than that."

Cam let out a humorless laugh. "What, you think I have a thing for redheads?" He lifted his brow. "Maybe I do." He winked.

Heat rushed up November's neck.

"No, it's just... when we were attacked the other night, she clung onto me like I was her only safety. It felt nice to be needed. Like I could actually protect someone. You know that I wasn't able to protect Marybeth. When she died right in front of me, I didn't realize a part of me had died, too."

Silence fell between them.

"Well, regardless of what's happened in the past, I can assure you that you're not dead, Cam. You feel more than most people. You're selfless. You've changed, too."

His mouth twitched downward, though she could see hope in his eyes.

"Maybe you're right," he said. "I just feel like... I don't know, if I can save Margaret from this, it might be penitence for everything that I did to you last year. For everything I've done my whole life. The lies... the deception..." He spun on her suddenly. "I'm so sorry."

November reached down and took his hands. They were warm and large in her own. "All is forgiven. I promise."

His presence relaxed. "Thank you. But..." He cocked another brow. "I know Conroy spoke with you earlier. We need to work together now."

"You *really* think that we can enter the dream world?" November asked wryly. "If that place really exists."

Cam squeezed her hands. "Of course it exists. I'm surprised you wouldn't believe that after everything we've been through."

She chuckled. “I suppose you’re right. Witches. Ghosts. Blood Walkers. Shades. It’s getting pretty overwhelming.”

His mouth flicked upward. “We’ll go to the studio then.”

The next day, November headed down the hallways of the Huntington manor. Like the rest of the house, with every room being eclectic in its own way, there was a dance studio. November had known it existed, but she and Cam had never used it.

She changed into some sweatpants and a large T-shirt, meeting Cam in the back room on the far side of the house. She had passed the aqua room, where Conroy had set Genevieve up, a waterbed and tanks of fish circling her. November moved down the empty hallways, peeling wallpaper on the walls and cobwebs in the corners. The lights flicked and flickered above her, and her footsteps squished into the soft velvet carpet.

She passed a few more rooms, including the bird room, which was now empty. No chirping. No bright colors. April hadn’t been there to take care of her birds, and she wondered what had happened to them. Perhaps Conroy had arranged for them to be taken elsewhere.

November finally reached the studio, and inside, Cam stood in the middle of the floor, staring at himself in the large mirror that extended on the long wall in front of him. His chiseled cheeks and indented cheekbones looked so much like his father—it was still weird to think of Vincent as his father, given that Vincent still looked like a seventeen-year-old guy. His dark hair swooshed to the side in a swish, and his mouth was turned down in thought.

“You okay?” November asked, her voice loud in the quiet.

Cam jerked, his eyes connecting with hers through the mirror.

“Yes. Thank you for coming.”

November tentatively crept into the chilly space, and she rubbed her arms. Several windows were open along the far wall, and a gust of wind blew in, daylight spilling inside.

The studio floor was cool underneath her feet as November slipped off her shoes, the marley floor beneath her smooth. She moved up to Cam and stood next to him, staring at herself in the mirror.

“So how do we do this?” she asked.

“We use control,” Cam said. “We try and stay in sync as we tap into our ability. We just need to be aware as we fall into the dance—and not get too close to the veil.”

She nodded, though she didn’t know if she could control it. Once she fell into the dance, it was nearly impossible to control the feeling that overtook her. Opening the veil had always been the point of her dancing.

Cam reached over and took her hand. He drew her around to the front of him so they were face to face. He gently pressed his palm into the middle of her back and drew her close. Her breath sped as she remembered what it was like to dance with him.

“I never thought we’d do this again,” Cam said.

November nodded, her body already tingling in anticipation. “Me neither.”

Cam brought his foot forward as she slid hers backward. He stepped to the side and November followed.

The waltz.

It was the deadliest dance.

Cam led her slowly around the room, their feet smooth on the floor, their arms extended out to the side of them. Cam kept his gaze locked on hers as a steady beat began to flow between them. Down. Up. Up. Down. Up. Up.

Their heartbeats echoed in the silence, as November allowed herself to feel the warmth that started to rush from her core.

Cam seemingly felt it too, as his face relaxed in pleasure. At first, November wanted to fight the feeling—it reminded of her of Vincent—but this was necessary. If this could help stop the kids from falling into these comas, then it’d be worth it.

Warmth continued to spread inside her veins, stretching through her whole being, her skin alive and buzzing. The feeling seeped into her, stirring an awareness to every part of her body. She allowed the feeling to overtake her, send her mind spinning.

“Do you feel it?” Cam asked, his voice rough.

“Yes,” November answered.

“Open up your mind, try to control the feeling. We need to search on the different layers we slip through.”

Cam's hold on her tightened as if willing them to stay on the same plane. His jaw was clamped tight, his teeth grit together. November tried to follow Cam's lead, focusing in on her mind instead of the dance.

Everything was cloudy—hazy images and sparks and blurring shapes. The visions flicked from one to the next, blending together inside her head. It was impossible to stop the layers that were slipping from one to the other.

"Focus harder," Cam bit out.

Their dance had turned to fury, their steps fast, Cam's hold on her keeping her upright. She continued to zoom in on the thoughts inside her head, pain beginning to radiate in the middle of her forehead. Cam's face matched her own, like he was experiencing the same pain.

Images of buildings and people clarified in her mind. Dinosaurs and spiders. Screams and butterflies. People running. Trees swaying in the breeze. A maze made of bushes. Cars driving. Horns honking. People watching TV and balloons floating in the air.

The pain grew, stabbing, like a hot knife inside her head. November cried out and her feet tripped. Cam stumbled with her and his grip on her released.

"No," Cam said.

November staggered back and rubbed her forehead. The studio in front of her cleared and the visions dissipated. "I couldn't do it."

"Neither could I."

"It was there though," November said, still kneading her forehead. "There were images. Do you think... those were dreams? Like we were inside people's heads?"

"I saw them too. I used to have dinosaur nightmares as a child." His lips quirked upward.

"Then maybe we're onto something. Maybe we can find my dream and figure out what is causing these kids to slip into comas."

Cam nodded. "Let's try again."

Fourteen

SPRING LOADED

NOVEMBER AND CAM practiced for the rest of the afternoon. They were able to find the images again, and even stay on the images longer before the pain became too much and they ceased the dance. November was impressed that they'd been able to stay away from the veil. Usually the urge to travel all the way to the veil was impossible, but with Cam's strength, they were able to sync their brains and move through the planes with their minds together.

After a long session, Cam said he wanted to stay in the studio for some quiet time, so November left him. Sweat stuck her T-shirt to her skin, and she wiped her forehead, knowing she needed to change her clothes.

The floors creaked and the walls seemed extra alive today. Maybe it was hope. She and Cam were getting somewhere, and the act of doing anything at all gave her hope that they could stop Vincent, that they could save these kids.

She turned a corner and paused.

At the end of the hallway before her was the trapdoor to Vincent's underground lair. She eyed the slight crease in wood that lifted the door on the floor, and she shivered. She remembered the first time she had agreed to be alone with him and follow him down into the depths. Her breaths accelerated and her body ached to move forward—to see his lair again and find out if it looked the same. But could she? What would it do to her? Would it unravel her completely or help her resolve whatever feelings she had left in her? She took a small step forward, her heart pounding.

“Hey.”

November yanked her gaze away, and spun around.

Marcus leaned against the other end of the hall, his head cocked to the side. A chunk of inky hair hung over one eye, so she could only see half of his face. "What are you doing down here?"

"I..." November glanced behind her, then back to Marcus. "Just exploring."

Marcus lifted a brow. "Didn't you live here? Shouldn't you know every inch of this house?"

She shook her head. "Did you need something?"

"Maybe I'm exploring too."

She rolled her shoulders, setting her hands on her stomach. "How's Genevieve?"

Marcus frowned. "Not well. She won't leave her room. She doesn't remember or trust any of us."

"And you really think it was the witches that sent the Shades on us?"

Marcus nodded thoughtfully. "Without a doubt. Only witches would have the power over Shades."

"Do you think they'll find us here?"

"I think if the witches knew where we were, they would've come for us already. No, I think Deva's cloaking spell is working."

November swallowed, her throat suddenly tight. "So what do we do?"

Marcus pushed himself from off the wall. He stared down at her with his dark eyes, his mouth tucked inward. "How's that necklace there?"

November's fingers unconsciously went to her throat. The metal was cool to touch, heavy in her hands. There was dark magic in it. She knew eventually they would have to use it.

"The same. I don't feel any difference with it being *evil*."

"Keep it safe until we need it. For the Harvest."

"For the *Harvest*?" November twisted her mouth. "It's not for the Harvest. It's to be used against Vincent."

"No, it needs to be saved for the Harvest," he snapped. He stood breathing hard for a moment before he relaxed. "I have another idea that might help with Vincent."

She stared at him, eyebrows raised. "Really? And you're just telling me this *now*?"

Humor played on his lips.

“My father used to tell us stories about Blood Walkers, Shades, and witches growing up,” he said. “After our mother left, my father wanted us to be prepared for the world. He told us of a weapon that could defeat all supernatural beings. A stake—a stake made of Pink Ivory. It’s from a tree that grows predominantly in South Africa. It has magical properties that can vanquish any enemy, if it’s stabbed right into the heart.”

“A stake? Really? Like we’re in some sort of... vampire movie?” She let out a dry laugh. “And you think it really exists? That it can defeat all supernatural beings?”

“I do. It’s said that it has traveled from coven to coven through the years, but that it was stolen—or disappeared at the turn of the century. The last person to have been seen with it was an old clockmaker named Lief Richardson. He worked with wood and sought the stake for his own collection. No one knew what he did with it. It disappeared with his death.”

November stopped dead. “Lief Richardson?”

Marcus’s forehead creased. “Yes, why?”

“I can’t believe it,” she whispered. “It’s too convenient. Too easy.”

Marcus’s brows lifted again.

“Lief Richardson was one of the ghosts that lived here,” she said. “This house was filled with ghosts. Lief is the one who lingered in the front entryway. Those clocks were his.”

Marcus slowly peeled himself from off the wall, taking a long step forward. He slunk toward her, his eyes staying connected with hers. “You’re telling me the Pink Ivory stake might be *here*? That it might have been here all along?”

“I... I don’t know. I just know all of his other crafts are here. So maybe it is here! It’s just got to be hidden somewhere.”

Marcus continued to sidle up to her until his face was inches from hers. November held paralyzed, her eyes locked with his. His sudden presence made her feel as if every inch of her skin were alive.

“You’re a genius,” he whispered, and his breath fell on her cheek.

November searched his eyes, shocked by his proximity. Her mind was reeling, and she couldn’t move.

“I’ve been watching you,” he said. “And I think you’re impressive. And I don’t get impressed by anyone.”

November swallowed. “Thank you?” It came out as a question.

“Shall we?” Excitement lit his eyes and he stepped back, waving his hand out in front of him. “Let’s go find this thing.”

The entryway was as it had always been—a cacophony of ticks clicking together at once, the different variations of clocks hanging on the walls. Round clocks, square ones, long ones, and funky shaped ones. Two grandfather clocks mirrored each other on the sides of the room, next to the staircase that ascended upward. November eyed the snake carving at the end of the banister and shivered. That thing always gave her the creeps.

Marcus’s long legs drew him around the room, and he peered up at the display of clocks around him. The ticks seemed to beat in time with November’s heart as she followed his gaze.

“Where would an old clockmaker hide such a prized possession?” Marcus murmured. He continued to circle around.

“Who knows,” November said, and her voice echoed off of the vaulted ceiling. “Maybe the stake is tucked away behind one of the clocks?”

“Possible.” Marcus frowned as he edged up to one clock and traced his finger along the edge of the wood frame. He gently removed the clock from the wall and peered behind it. “Seems... too simple.”

“If only we could ask Lief,” November mumbled. She wondered where the old ghost was—where *all* the ghosts were that had lived in this house. Maybe now that the war between the light and dark spirits was over, they had a safer place to reside on the other side.

Footsteps sounded from the back hall and Cam walked in. His brows creased at the sight of them together. “What are you two doing in here?”

“November was giving me a tour,” Marcus said easily. He pushed back the chunk of hair over his eye before it fell forward again.

November’s head shot over to him, her eyes narrowed. “I was?”

Marcus let out a low laugh. “You weren’t doing a very good job of it.” He raised his eyebrows.

November pressed her lips in tight.

Cam glanced between the two of them, frowning. A crease pinched his brow. “Maybe I can help?”

“November is doing a fine job of it.” Marcus puffed out his chest.

Cam rubbed a hand along his jaw. "I'm sure she is." Cam darted a look to November, waiting, before he shook his head. He brushed past them and headed back to the hallway that led to the music room. "I'm going to find a flute," he called out. "Genevieve's got destroyed in the attack. They think if Genevieve hears her instrument, it might jar a memory. Conroy knows how to play so..." He coughed and disappeared down the hallway.

November spun on Marcus. "What was that about?"

Marcus ran a hand through his hair. "Do you think it's wise to let others know what we're doing? I know *you* trust everyone here, but I don't. Especially Deva. I don't want her knowing about the Pink Ivory stake. She could use it against us—we don't know. We need to keep this a secret."

November searched Marcus's face for a moment, and she hovered on the balls of her feet. Conroy should know about this. Cam should know about this. She trusted them with her life. But what if Marcus was right? She didn't know Deva. All she knew was that she claimed her life was in danger from the witches. She hadn't trusted her fully since she'd gotten here, too. She was definitely keeping a secret.

November sighed, heaving out a breath. "Fine. We'll keep this between us."

A smile lifted on Marcus's lips. "Good. Now let's find this thing."

The two separated and wandered through the room, picking up clocks off the walls and looking behind them. November walked along the old floors, peering down, seeing if there was any kind of trap door that would lead to a hiding place. They stayed silent as they searched, just the two of them wandering through the room.

Sunlight filtered down through the sky window at the top of the ceiling, and the heat warmed November's skin. She was still in her sweaty clothes from dancing earlier, and she pulled her T-shirt away from her skin, trying to get fresh air.

Then she paused.

The two grandfather clocks on either side of the room came into focus.

"Marcus," she said. "There."

He saw her gaze and surprise lit his face. "Of course!"

They both rushed over to their own grandfather clock and searched around the structures. Marcus opened a door at the front of his, searching in the panel where the large weights were held. November did the same, but there was nothing inside. A small door sat at the top of the clock, and

November peeled open the small wood door, but still, it was empty. She circled the large clock and stopped in the back. A large wood panel held the back of the clock together, and her brow furrowed.

“Check the back,” November said.

Marcus moved around the back of his, and his fingers began to dig in the crease between the back wood panel and the side of the clock. November did the same, her fingers aching from pinching the crease so hard. Finally, she pulled the wood out from the clock and paused.

Tucked neatly in the shadows, a stake made of pink ivory sat in the back of the clock. She carefully reached down and picked up the wood. Intricate swirls circled the thick wood, the weight of it heavy in her hands. She ran her fingers along the smooth surface, turning it over.

“I can’t believe it,” she said. “It’s really here.” Her fingers continued to trace the small lumps jutting out from the wood.

Marcus marched over and snatched it away. “I’ll keep it safe.” He slid it into the back pocket of his pants. November unconsciously grabbed for it, but Marcus had tucked it away. “You get the key, I get this.”

Another set of footsteps approached, and the sitting room door opened. Conroy moved inside the entryway and his eyebrows shot up at the sight of Marcus and November. His hair was mussed to the sides, and he adjusted his thin-framed glasses.

“What are you two doing in here?”

Marcus waited, as if seeing how November would respond.

She eyed him before she turned to Conroy. “Just giving Marcus a tour. Come on, Marcus you should see the armory next.”

And they edged out of the room.

Fifteen

NEMESIS

NOVEMBER SAT by Margaret's side, on the edge of the massive bed. Margaret looked so small, tucked inside the four-poster bed and translucent curtains. Large white pillows squished under her head, and the heavy down comforter puffed out at the sides where she slept. Sweat ran from her forehead to her neck, her skin shimmering. The large gaping wound at her neck was open and raw, an angry red. Margaret moaned, tossing slightly from side to side. Her eyes were clenched shut, her skin pale. November wanted to stroke her forehead, to comfort her, but she was afraid to disturb her further.

No one else was in the room. Genevieve was still settled in the aqua room, where Marcus and Clementine spent most of their time trying to help her regain her memories. Deva usually lingered on the porch along the backside of the house, looking over the large lawn and sparkling lake. Conroy seemed to be everywhere, checking in on everyone, making sure they were safe, and Cam was always lingering in the shadows. They still had their dance lessons every day, trying to break into the dream world, but he appeared different since he'd caught November and Marcus in the entryway that day.

Several days passed, each day the same as before. They all had settled into a routine, each focused on their own troubles. November hadn't spoken to Marcus about the Pink Ivory stake since that day, but she wanted to. She wanted to know *how* they were going to use it. She wanted to know *when* they were going to make a move. They couldn't stay locked in this house

forever. They needed to do something. But too many dangers lurked outside.

Quincy made them meals, but they all ate separately at their own times, which seemed to frustrate the old man. A frown was permanently painted on his wrinkled face, replacing his usual light smile.

It was in the quiet when November knew she wasn't okay. The darkness was always there, lingering, a deep depression in her heart. She still took her meds every day, she made sure she ate and tried to meditate, but the claustrophobic state she was in was smothering. She needed air. She needed to be outside. She needed exercise. She needed to climb.

She needed Everett.

She hadn't been making him her priority, and she hated herself for it. He had been such a light for her, and he was trapped in a coma because of Vincent, but Vincent had been consuming her thoughts, and she was hardly getting anywhere. She owed it to him to save him, but she felt useless. He had been a target because of her—and he didn't deserve this. Everett was a good soul who had brought happiness to her life when she needed it the most.

And she wasn't doing anything fast enough.

Yes, she was trying to break into the dream world with Cam, but then what? Even if they got there, it's not as if they'd know what to do.

Things were beginning to seem hopeless—and not because of November's dark mood. Any sane person would feel discouraged. They were trapped, Marcus was wanting her to keep secrets from the others, and Marcus had planted a seed that she didn't know if she could trust Deva or not.

She had Conroy. She had to focus on Cam and Conroy. They were the ones she could trust.

"She's not doing any better, is she?" Conroy's voice fell soft through the room.

November shook her head, peering down at Margaret. "No. She's getting worse."

Conroy sighed. "I think it might be time for us to break the barrier and go out then. We're not finding any information here on how to heal her. The witches must know how."

"Go out there?" November's eyes widened. "Again? Aren't we the ones trying to keep them out? Besides, there's Shades... and Blood Walkers..."

and who knows what else. We'd be walking right into their hands!"

Conroy ran a hand through his unruly hair, and his muscles flexed under his T-shirt. "I know. But we have to make a move some time. I've watched you, November. You're not okay. You need to get out."

November opened her mouth, but then closed it. He was right. She wasn't okay, but that didn't mean being reckless. But was doing something better than staying here?

"O-okay," she said tentatively. "What do you have in mind?"

"I'm going to send you with Cam and Marcus back to the witches. You need to convince them to tell you how to save Margaret and Genevieve. I'll stay here with Margaret and the others. Clementine can continue to help Genevieve remember who she is."

"Did you try...?"

"Playing a flute to her? Yeah. We also tried to have her play. She remembered a few tunes, which is promising, but it hasn't helped."

November peered across the room to the open window. Daylight poured inside, sunbeams dancing on the air.

"Okay, so Cam, Marcus, and I leave." Which was insane. But they did have the Pink Ivory stake. Maybe they could use it. "Okay. What then?"

"I know about Marcus," Conroy said softly.

November's head darted over to him, and her heart suddenly pounded. "Know what?"

Her mind immediately went to the stake.

"I know about the Harvest, and I know he asked you to help him. Do you really think I'd let three kids into our school if I didn't know their past?" He eyed the key around her neck. "Just be careful, November. I don't know what that necklace can do. Only use it when you have to."

She sucked in a heavy breath. "Is that all?"

"When you face the witches, remember that they won't hurt Marcus without his sisters. They need all three of the siblings for the Harvest to work."

A sick feeling twisted in November's stomach, and she placed her hands over her torso. She wondered if she should tell Conroy about the Pink Ivory stake. The thought bounced in her head from side to side, itching to burst out, but he continued on.

"I'll go tell Deva you're leaving. Maybe she can put some sort of protection spell on you while you travel."

November sat still on the squishy bed, her hands still glued to her stomach. She was leaving. She was going to get the air she needed. Away from this house. Away from Vincent's presence lingering in the walls. She finally expelled a breath.

Late afternoon sun pounded down on top of November's head as she left the manor. Cam and Marcus each carried a backpack of supplies, matching the one on her back. They didn't know how long they would be out, so Quincy had packed them food. November eyed Marcus's pack and knew the stake had to be inside. They threw their gear into a jeep, and slid inside, Cam in the driver's seat.

November sat in the front, with Marcus in the back, and she couldn't help but scan the countryside around the house. The gardens were now crumpled and dried from the cool fall weather, the vines shriveled as they ran up along the archways that extended from the house. She envisioned the tangled gardens that were located at the back of the house—the place where Isabelle, Vincent's first love had died. Vincent had loved her, but he hadn't tried to harm her. Did that mean Vincent had never really cared for November?

She had Everett, she reminded herself. Even if Vincent had only been playing her all along, Everett cared about her. He was real. He needed her help.

Cam started the engine and turned to November and Marcus. "You guys ready?"

Marcus mumbled in the back seat. "If we all have a death wish."

November nodded silently, her throat too thick to speak.

They peeled away from the manor, the towering structure shrinking in size as they drove away. Soon they were immersed in trees, the falling light cutting through the forest trees around them. Light sparkled on the road in funny shapes, the Redwoods seeming to grow the further they traveled. As the light continued to descend, a thin fog began to roll on the ground, drops of rain plopping down from overhead. The roads twisted and turned until they reached the main highway.

Only about an hour left.

The three stayed silent on the drive, Cam's knuckles extra white on the wheel. He seemed uptight, on edge, which made sense since they were walking straight into enemy camp. Again. Marcus sat like a live wire behind her. Electricity sizzled in the air between him, and she was aware of his every move, every shift in his seat. She felt like he was keeping a secret, with his eyes light as he stared out in front of him. The road was hypnotizing with the wheels gliding fast, and her eyes glazed over.

Soon, the jeep slowed to a stop, and they pulled up to the middle of the parking lot of the Motel 6. Doors slammed as they exited the vehicle, the moon round and bright above their heads. The rain had ceased, but the scent still hung heavy in the air. Streetlamps circled the parking lot, casting a yellow glow down onto the damp pavement.

"I can't believe we're back here," November said. "What do we do now?"

"They'll come," Marcus said. "They already know we're here."

As if on cue, one by one, the motel doors started to creak open, and heads popped outside.

Lizzie—the girl with the moon-shaped tattoo—exited the office, her long dark braids hanging down over her face. Sariah followed, her smooth dark skin creamy in the moonlight, hair piled up on top of her head. The other witches lingered by their doors, eyes wide and watching. Tension hung thick in the air.

"You're back," Sariah said, her voice echoing out into the parking lot. "Not wise. Considering your... recent visitors. Have you not had enough?"

November's gaze tightened.

"And you," Sariah said to Marcus. "Your birthday is almost near. We know the Zodiac coven wants you, as do we. Our ancestors are getting anxious. The Harvest needs to begin."

Marcus's bones were prominent in the dim light, the lines of his jaw tight. "If you think you'll reap the rewards of the Harvest, you're wrong," he bit out. "Number one, the Zodiac coven has already claimed the magic, and two, it isn't going to happen."

Cam's head shot to November. "What is she talking about?" he whispered. "What's the Harvest?"

November motioned him down, and he pressed his lips together.

"Oh, we will reap the rewards," Sariah said. "We both know you're the strongest out of your siblings, Marcus. Your power is greater than theirs."

When the three of your powers combine, you will prevail, and your sisters will give their lives for you. You will survive.”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” he replied. “You’d just love my power to scatter the Earth and be ready for your reaping. Forgive me if I don’t want that to happen.”

“We don’t want to hurt you—we don’t want to hurt any of you.” Sariah’s eyes flicked to Cam and November. “In fact, we’d love you to join us like your friend here.”

Lizzie stepped aside, and Ty exited the main building. Two witches walked by his side, a small girl with curly brown hair that brushed her shoulders, and a girl with creamy dark skin that matched Sariah’s.

“Ty!” November screamed.

Ty gave her a wave and his mouth spread into a wide grin. “Hey! Good to see you!”

November started forward, but then stopped, her brow furrowing. He was acting like everything was fine. Like he wasn’t being held hostage by a group of witches. She hadn’t seen him have such energy in him since before April died.

“Ty, what’s going on?”

“This place isn’t so bad,” Ty said. “The coven has even given me a violin. They’re teaching me how to use it to tap into our Earth’s powers and control elements around me. You wouldn’t believe what I’ve been able to do. Create wind, make water move. I haven’t been able to start a fire yet, but we’re still practicing. This is way more fun than guarding veils. I’ve never felt more important and needed in my life. These witches know what they’re doing, Nov. They lost their young witches to the comas. They can bring them back, if they complete the sacrifice with Deva. You need to bring her here. I know it may seem harsh, but it’s for the greater good.”

November’s mouth dropped open. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. He was on their *side*? He thought they should kill an innocent girl? What had they done to him?

“Ty, you need to come with us now. We need your help.”

He shifted his weight, and he rubbed the back of his neck.

Finally, he shook his head. “Sorry, Nov. But I’ve never been happier. I haven’t been okay since... since you know. I’m not going to give this up.”

She blinked at him several times before she nudged Cam. “Do something!”

Sariah's lips curved up into a satisfied smile. The witches from the motel doors started to edge forward, entering the parking lot.

"We came because one of us has been bitten by a Blood Walker." Cam's voice rang out into the night. "We think you can help us. How do we save her?"

Sariah's brows lifted in surprise as humor played on her lips. "So you want our help? After you steal Deva away? After you attack us? You have some nerve."

"And *you* have some nerve for sending the Shades after us!" November yelled.

Sariah barked out a laugh, the sound tinkling out into the night. "A necessary precaution. You needed to know what you were up against."

"Well, then you should know that Genevieve, one of the triplets was injured, and that she has no idea who she is," Cam said. "She won't be able to use her powers in the Harvest unless she is healed."

Sariah stilled, and the color drained from her face. She turned to Marcus. "Is this true?"

Marcus gave a tight nod. "It is. And wait until Ester finds out. She won't be happy with you."

Sariah paled further. She took a step back.

"Who's Ester?" Cam mouthed.

"His mother," November whispered back.

"Tell us how to defeat the Blood Walkers," Marcus said. "Or I'll go to Ester myself and tell her what you've done."

"You're bluffing," Sariah said. "You don't know where she is. The Zodiac coven hides themselves from here. Our protection spells keep us invisible from each other. And even if you *did* know where she was, she wouldn't let you go. She wants you for the Harvest, too."

"Well, then that's a chance we'll have to take. We'd hate to have you be exposed to her. She would love to know where you're located."

Tension hung in the air between them. No one said a word. Marcus lifted his brows.

"Fine," Sariah said at last. "To cure a Blood Walker bite, you need their blood. If you drink their blood, you're healed. Simple as that."

November flinched back, her stomach turning. "That's disgusting!"

Sariah's eyes snapped to hers before returning to Marcus. "We have a deal? You won't go to Ester?"

“You have a deal.”

Sariah stared them down for a few moments before she motioned to the other witches. “Now leave, before I change my mind and decide to set the Shades on you again.”

The witches slowly departed, disappearing back behind their doors. Sariah and Lizzie headed back to the main office, while Ty stayed paralyzed. He looked them over, before glancing back to the witches.

“Ty... please,” November whispered. “Come back with us.”

He scrubbed his hands on his jeans, his weight shifting from side to side.

“Ty, you belong with us,” November tried again.

“Come, Tyler,” Sariah called out after her. She held the office door open.

Ty glanced behind him again before facing November once more.

“I’m... sorry,” he said. “But I have to do what’s best for me. You of all people should know that.”

And he headed across the parking lot, disappeared back inside, leaving the three alone.

Sixteen

NIGHTSTALKER

NOVEMBER SAT SHAKING as they drove away. She couldn't believe what she'd just witnessed. Ty wasn't returning to them. He wanted to stay with the witches. He felt like he was a *part* of them. How could that be? They were the enemy. Ty had to know that deep down. So why was he choosing to be with them? He'd chosen them over *her*. She was the only one who knew his sadness over April. They needed each other.

Darkness stretched on either side of the car as they entered the highway full of trees again. Her eyes scanned out into the shadows, willing to see reason. It just didn't make sense.

"You've got to let him go," Cam said, his voice soft. "We have other things we need to focus on right now."

"Like going back to the Ichor Caverns?" Marcus said from the backseat. "Pardon me if I don't want to walk into another death trap."

"We survived the witches just fine," Cam said. "I'm sure we can corner a Blood Walker and extract his blood without any problem." He paused before he said, "Okay. That sounds ridiculous saying it out loud. I'm with Marcus."

November groaned, setting her face in her hands. An overwhelming surge of panic hit, her chest tightening. She tried to breathe, but her breathing only sped further. The panic and darkness was too much. She couldn't handle it. This world, the people in danger, it being all her fault. Tears started to escape and roll down her cheeks. But she wouldn't let the boys see. She couldn't be weak around them. They needed to know she was strong. Cam glanced over to her, but she kept her face in her hands.

“Whoa.” Cam slowed the car to a stop. “Nov, are you okay?” He set a hand on her back.

Marcus huffed in the back seat, like he was annoyed.

“I’m fine,” November said. She discreetly wiped away her tears.

“You don’t seem okay.”

“I said I’m fine!”

Cam gently peeled her hands away from her face and lifted her chin toward him. Tears still stained her cheeks. She felt Marcus soften in the back seat and he slightly leaned forward.

Cam squeezed her hands. “It’s going to be okay, Nov. No matter what. We’re going to get through this. I know it seems overwhelming, and it’s hard to focus on which battle to tackle first, but we take it one step at a time. We’ll get the blood for Margaret and we’ll be fine. We’ll figure out how to walk in the dream world and find a way to save these kids. We’ll face Vincent together. Everything will work out.”

The tightness in her chest began to loosen, knot by knot unraveling. Maybe everything would be fine.

“So we’re really going back to the caverns?” she whispered quietly.

“I don’t think we have a choice,” Cam said. “If we want to help Margaret, then it’s what we have to do.”

Marcus grunted in the backseat, but didn’t say a word.

Cam pressed on the accelerator again, and they continued to drive in silence, heading north instead of east. November knew she should feel tired—it was the middle of the night—but her eyes ached, and her body felt like she was sitting on a dozen needles.

Cam kept his gaze focused out in front of him, the jeep accelerating fast, taking the corners tight. November shook at the thought of seeing the Blood Walkers again. Their pale faces, with deep hollow circles under their eyes, their thin bodies like they hadn’t eaten for years, their midnight hair slicked back and hanging around their shoulders. She’d never get the vision of them out of her head.

She sat on the edge of her seat, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes wide as the road swirled out in front of her, the trees speeding by fast.

Cam took another fast turn, when the jeep’s headlights lit two objects right on the road in front of them. Panic hit hard, and November gripped the seat.

“Cam, watch out!” November cried, and Cam slammed on his brakes.

The car skidded over to the side of the road, barely missing the two unmoving objects. The car rammed to a stop and November's seatbelt cut into her chest. They stayed frozen for a few heartbeats, sitting, waiting, breathing.

"We should check it out," Cam said.

November nodded, though she didn't want to. Adrenaline was still pumping through her veins, and she felt glued to her seat.

Cam peeled open his door, and Marcus hopped out the back. She finally followed, her hands shaking.

The gravel crunched beneath their feet as they circled the car, and the headlights shone down on two bodies splayed out onto the road. November gasped, faltering back a step. The light highlighted a man and a woman, blood soaked into their clothes, spilling out onto the road. Their throats were sliced open, two gaping wounds in their necks. Their faces were blank, eyes open up to the starless sky.

"Are they...?"

Marcus crept forward, and knelt down by one body. "Definitely dead."

November squeezed her eyes shut. She tried to push out even breaths.

"Blood Walkers," Marcus continued. "Without a doubt. Look at the teeth marks."

"Then they're not by the caves anymore," Conroy said. "They're traveling. And they could still be near."

The three glanced around, deep into the pockets of the forest. Marcus slowly rose to his feet. Darkness stretched on for miles, a light breeze rustling through the trees.

"I don't feel good about this," Cam said. "We shouldn't be out here unprotected."

"But we need to get their blood," Marcus said.

"Not without having the upper hand. Right now, we're prey to them."

A rustle came from the bushes, and a dark flash surged in front of November. Laughter rumbled through the air. She stiffened, alarm bells clanging in her head.

"We need to leave, now!" Cam yelled.

The three raced to the car, swinging their doors open, but another flash zoomed past them, and November took in the shape of a man. She had never seen a person move that fast.

"In the car!"

But something gripped November's arm, yanking her backwards. She screamed, adrenaline pumping fast, but the hold on her was so tight, she couldn't resist.

She screamed again, and she heard Cam cry out, but his voice was disappearing fast as she traveled backward. Branches brushed past her face, and her heels dragged on the ground. She felt as if she were flying in reverse, cold wind biting her cheeks. Dark flashes zoomed out to the sides of her, and she knew there were more of them.

She prayed Marcus was running after them. He had to have the stake in his backpack. He could stop them. He could kill them. But there was no way he was this fast.

She seemed to travel forever, trapped in her own doom, the air chilly, her arms and back aching. She wished it would just end. Stopping and facing them would be better than this torture.

She got her wish.

The Blood Walker holding her stopped abruptly, and she rammed into his bony chest. He still kept his grip on her, piercing her skin. His face shone down in the moonlight, trees still surrounding them. His bones jutted from his features, his eyes two black pits. His lips peeled off of his teeth, revealing bright pearls.

"Samuel wanted to see you," the Blood Walker said.

"Help!" November screamed, but she had traveled too far. There was no way Cam or Marcus could hear.

The Blood Walker laughed, and dragged her along.

He led her through the forest again, slower this time, and November pushed back, trying to get out of his grip, but he was too strong. Other Blood Walkers walked along with them, silent and gliding through the forest, their forms nothing but shadows.

Soon the forest opened up to an old wood cabin that seemed to appear out of nowhere. It looked like it had been abandoned for years, with broken windows and a pile of old wood in the corner. A fire pit was on the outside, untouched, and no vehicles were in sight.

The Blood Walker tugged her forward, marching her up the creaking steps of the cabin and pushing her through the front door. Inside, a fire crackled on the far side of the room, its orange flames casting a warm glow. Several candles lit the space, highlighting the meager conditions. A battered

rug on the floor. Two torn-up couches. A single wood chair in the middle of the room.

She was shoved down into the chair, and she sat frozen, knowing she'd never be able to push past the Blood Walker if she tried to escape.

Samuel entered the room from a back bedroom, slowly, methodically, his feet carefully placed. His hands were linked behind his back, his spine straight.

Like the last time she had seen him, his pale face seemed to glow in the dim light. He would've been handsome if it weren't for his deadly features—the sunken in cheeks and eyes. Shadows played off of his strong bone structure and shiny black hair.

“So sorry for our pitiful accommodations,” Samuel said, stopping in front of her.

He towered over her, his presence long. November stared up at him.

“This was the only arrangement we could find on such short notice. We knew you would come back for us, so we've been waiting, biding our time.”

“What do you want with me?” November asked. “If you're going to kill me, just do it.” Though she didn't mean it. The words just came out. It was something heroes always said in the movies.

A slow smile spread on Samuel's face. He leaned down so his eyes were level with hers.

“I have another plan for you,” he said simply.

Samuel straightened and waved his hand to the Blood Walker that still stood by the door.

“Zane, take her to the back room. Make sure the windows are locked and that the others are standing guard outside. It's time to prepare.”

Zane glided forward, his white shirt opened, bones pushing through his chest. She flinched back as he gripped her again and pushed her into a back room.

The room was small, with nothing but a tattered blanket on the floor. There was no bed, no chairs, and a single window on the far end of the wall. Trickle of moonlight filtered in through the dusty window, barely casting any light. Dirt crusted the edges of the room, and cobwebs hung in the upper corners. She staggered inside, and she wrapped her arms around herself, circling.

“So this is it?” November asked. “You’re just going to keep me prisoner?”

Zane moved around the room, as if checking to make sure there was nothing she could use to escape. He checked the window, shoving it down, and the windowpane shook. Just like their apparent super speed, she realized that these creatures most likely had more strength than a normal human.

Zane’s lips curled back, in what November imagined what must’ve been his version of a smile. “You’re going to wish you were never born.”

He gave her one last look and locked the door behind him.

Seventeen

IT HAD BEEN HOURS. Long enough that the moonlight had disappeared, and muted sun trickled through the glass window. It barely gave off any light, the tall dark trees of the forest cutting off most of its light.

November paced around the insides of the confined space, her feet wearing out the wood planks beneath her. She was relieved Samuel hadn't bitten her like he did Margaret that night, but she also shook at the thought of what they'd do to her. She never imagined that she'd be held captive by a bunch of bloodthirsty Blood Walkers. Of course, she'd never imagined that she'd have the power to dance and open up veils and travel to dream worlds.

Her hand unconsciously went to the necklace around her throat, and she wondered how she'd be able to use it. She was sure it could help her escape, but she didn't know anything about it. Marcus had told her no one would be able to remove it, that it was linked to her, but she didn't know *how* to use its magic. She wasn't a witch. All she could do was dance. And climb.

More time passed. Enough time that the light through her window slanted in a warm glow. She had rattled the doorknob more times that she could count, and her fingers were raw from trying to pry the window open. She'd circled the room at least a hundred times, her fingertips running along the cabin wall, but none of the boards were loose. The cabin was sturdy, despite its clear age.

Her stomach rumbled and ached in the pit, her throat dry with thirst. She hadn't gone this long without food for a long time. She needed to have a

steady calorie count to stay stable. She swallowed a smidge of panic down that she didn't have her backpack with her. Her meds were inside. What kind of withdrawals would she have? How long would she be here? What would happen to her mind and body being locked away? Having the condition she had, she needed them to be healthy. She already had enough darkness in her life, she didn't need any more.

She pressed her palms to eyes before she finally crumpled to the ground. Her back pressed against the cool cabin wall, and she leaned her head back, focusing in on her body. She was fine. She was going to be fine. Cam and Marcus would find her, and she'd be back to her meds and out of the Blood Walkers' hands before she knew it.

Darkness fell and the moon appeared once again. Only a sliver of light poured through the dirty window, and November curled up on the chilly wood floor. She didn't dare touch the mangy blanket provided, so she wrapped her arms around herself, her jaw chattering and her fingertips numb. Cold bit her skin, making her body shake, and no matter how hard she tried to sleep and fall into the abyss for a few moments, it wouldn't come. Her mind wouldn't stop jumping, and the nagging fear of what Samuel would do to her ate at her from the inside out.

Morning came and the little bits of sunshine warmed her some. She sat in the middle of the floor where the meager sun filtered through, trying to warm herself. More hours passed. Her stomach was wrenching now, twisting in on itself, morphing from rumbling to sharp pains. She finally stood again and continued her pacing. Walking helped her think, and it helped ease the hunger pains. But the afternoon light descended downward, falling, until evening showed its face again.

Darkness swallowed the room once more, and this time, as November lay on the cold ground, fitful sleep overtook her, spinning her into wild dreams. Margaret screaming on her bed, her wound more open and raw. Genevieve yelling that she didn't know anyone. Ty practicing magic with the witches, and walking away from her all over again. Veins bulging underneath the Blood Walker's eyes. Vincent's face floating in front of her, a wicked smile on his face.

And then she was climbing again. Her hands gripping into the rock, the weight of her body straining her tendons as she pulled herself upward. Dark wispy clouds surrounded her, making the rock barely visible. She continued to climb, feeling the rock cut into her skin, her feet struggling to find

footing. But she climbed up through the dark mist until she reached the top. She peered down from the top of the cliff down at the waves crashing below.

Smiling faces beckoned her from below, including Everett's deep dimples flashing in his cheeks. He waved an arm, motioning her to jump.

"Come on in, Nov!" he called. "You'll love it down here! The water is so warm!"

Like before, other faces appeared. She didn't recognize them, only April as she appeared out of the dark mist surrounding the jagged rocks, her pale features and dark, wet hair clear in the water. But instead of a smile on her face like the other kids, worry creased her eyes.

November edged forward, her toes hanging off the cliff. The kids continued to chant below her.

"Come in!"

She wanted to jump in. She wanted the pain to end. Standing here all alone on the cliff, she wanted to be warm. She wanted to be loved. She didn't want to feel isolated. Lifting one foot forward, she allowed herself to fall. And like the dream before, wind pushed fast into her face until she woke up, cold and shivering on the floor.

She scrambled upward, pressing her back against the cabin wall. Tears burned in her eyes, as she clamped down hard on her teeth. This couldn't be it. This couldn't be her end. Maybe the dream was some sort of sick metaphor that she'd die at the Blood Walkers' hands. Her shoulder's sagged and she laid her forehead down onto her knees. More tears escaped. She couldn't do this. She couldn't face this alone.

She didn't know how long she cried, sitting alone in that room, but it was long enough that the third day came, and the light finally appeared. Her throat ached and her eyes felt like bricks. But instead of pacing, she stayed on the floor, too weak to stand upright.

Finally, by late morning, the door creaked open before her.

Zane slithered inside.

His lips pulled up into a sly smile, his inky eyes sparkling. "Samuel wants to see you."

November's head felt fuzzy, like she couldn't think straight, and Zane's presence blurred in and out of her vision. She had to be in withdrawals.

When November didn't move, Zane reached over and yanked her up from the floor, his long black hair framing his pale face. Her head spun and

the earth shifted beneath her feet. Zane kept her upright. She blinked, trying to clear her vision, as Zane pulled her from the room.

In the main area, the fire crackled, orange flames licking upward, and Samuel stood in the middle of the floor, his white bones pushing against his skin. His jaw ground back and forth, his long bony fingers linked behind his back.

November scanned the room. Another Blood Walker stood by the door, another by the fire, and...

November stopped dead.

Marcus sat on the couch, his usual chunk of charcoal hair hanging over one eye.

"Marcus?" November exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

Samuel moved in front of him, blocking him from sight.

"Marcus is here to do me an errand," Samuel said, his voice scratchy.

November pushed her brows down together.

Samuel kept his hands linked behind his back as he began to pace. November lifted her brows at Marcus, but he only shook his head.

"I want your necklace," Samuel said bluntly. "You took our Blood magic from us and now we aren't as powerful as we need to be. So I want it back." He stopped pacing and faced her. "But the necklace is bonded to you. It can't be removed by anyone but you, which means we're in a predicament. Unless you'll willingly hand it over on your own?" He lifted his brows.

November glared, and Samuel's lips curled upward.

"We've spent the last three days hunting Marcus down," he continued. "It wasn't easy, but we knew he and that friend of his would come searching for you. So we bided our time until we could retrieve him."

November's stilled, and her mind was doing somersaults. Her gaze shot to Marcus. "Is Cam okay?"

"He got away," Samuel said darkly. "But never mind. We don't need him."

"Then what do you want with Marcus?" November asked, her throat thick. She tried to swallow, but it was too tight.

"There's something special Blood Walkers can share with humans," Samuel said. "It's called a blood bond. When one of our kind drinks from a human for a certain period of time, it links the two together. It connects the human to the Blood Walker, giving him full power over the human."

Darkness twinkled in his eyes. “And that is precisely what I plan to do with you.”

Sights and sounds stopped, and her head spun again. Samuel wavered in her vision before he solidified once more.

“You might be wondering how we can feed on you—bond with you—without giving a death bite like we did your friend,” he continued. “How is she, by the way?” He smiled. “I doubt she has much time left.”

November scowled, her vision continuing to focus.

“Our bite is lethal, yes,” he went on. “But when we feed, we use a different kind of venom. A more... pleasant one.” His lips twitched. “However, I’m not strong enough to create a bond right now. You’ve taken our Blood magic, which puts me at a disadvantage. We need someone who has strong Blood Walker blood running through their veins.”

November’s gaze shot to Marcus and her hands clenched into fists. “You?”

Samuel chuckled. “Marcus’s father was a Blood Walker. His mother a witch. He’s refused to welcome his true self, but we’re going to change that.”

Marcus sat still, his face seemingly unaffected, but sweat shone on his brow.

“And why would you want Marcus to create a bond with me?” November choked out.

“To retrieve the necklace of course. Once he’s bonded with you, you’ll have to do anything he asks. Anything at all. Including giving him that necklace.”

November couldn’t move. She couldn’t think. She couldn’t breathe. Marcus was half Blood Walker? How was this possible? Did that mean his sisters were too? And why hadn’t Marcus said anything? They’d fought the Blood Walkers in the cave, he’d helped them retrieve the Blood magic. Did he have an ulterior motive? Was he playing her this whole time? Her gaze flicked around the room. His backpack was at his feet. Did he still have the Pink Ivory stake with him? And what did Samuel mean... *drink* from her? Though she already knew.

“Enough talking,” Samuel said. He swung his arm toward Marcus and motioned him to stand. His eyes lit with excitement.

Marcus slowly rose from the couch, his body smooth and slow. Emotion shimmered in his eyes, and she silently pleaded with him to say something.

Did he want to do this? Be bonded with her? Of course not. He was a victim as much as she was.

Marcus stepped up to her, their faces a foot apart. He stared her down with his dark eyes, and November could suddenly see it—he resembled a Blood Walker with his black hair and deathly pale skin. His sunken in eyes and hollow cheeks.

“I’ve never done this before,” Marcus murmured. He didn’t show fear, but a lump bobbed in his throat.

Samuel patted him on the back. “It’s time to embrace who you really are. When you experience blood for the first time, you will realize what you’ve been missing. You’ll never be the same again. Now lift her wrist and bite.” He yanked November’s wrist upward and exposed it to Marcus’s mouth.

November wrenched her arm away. “No!”

Samuel retrieved her wrist again, this time with a stronger grip. She tried to pull away again, but he was too strong. His fingers dug into her skin. Samuel peered down at Marcus with anticipation in his eyes, licking his lips.

“Go ahead.”

Marcus stayed frozen. He stared down at November’s exposed wrist, at the delicate veins under her white skin. He met her eyes before he glanced back down.

“Marcus, please don’t do this,” she pleaded.

“If you don’t,” Samuel said to Marcus, “then I’ll find your sisters. I’ll find the others you’re working with. And I’ll kill them all myself.”

For the first time, fear lined Marcus’s face.

November struggled again. “Marcus, please, no!”

But Marcus reached down and drew November’s wrist closer to his mouth. He placed his lips on her fragile skin and he sniffed, as if inhaling her blood. His body shuddered, and small fangs jutted out from his lips, scraping her skin. She couldn’t believe this. Marcus was a Blood Walker. This wasn’t happening.

Pain slashed down into her wrist as Marcus’s fangs pierced her skin, and she instantly reacted.

The most wonderful feeling overtook her. Pure euphoria washed over her, a jolt of sudden warmth filling her whole body. It reminded her of when she fell into the dance, but this was a hundred times more potent. She didn’t

feel her legs anymore. She was floating, sailing through some unknown world, trapped in the bliss that overtook her. She wanted to stay there forever. Shivers ran up and down her spine, and the warmth continued. She felt her lips part.

It was over too quickly.

Marcus's mouth released and November jolted back into her body. She blinked, and her vision slowly cleared.

Pure wonder washed over Marcus's face, as he licked his lips, wiping his mouth. His hand hovered over his lips, his fingers trembling. His gaze shot up to November, and his eyes hardened in hunger.

"That's good," Samuel said. "That's enough for today. Tomorrow, we'll continue the process. It can take some time to complete the bond."

November was shoved back into her cell without saying another word.

Eighteen

SPLIT FINISH

NOVEMBER SAT SHAKING in the dark, the moon blanketed in black clouds that covered the night sky. Wind whipped outside, rattling the windowpane. She shivered, drawing her knees up closer to her.

She was disgusted with how she had reacted to Marcus's bite. She had welcomed it—she had *wanted* it. What kind of sick person was she?

As she sat there, shaking in the dark, she wanted it again. She couldn't get the memory of the pleasure out of her mind. The way the warmth had overtaken her, sailed through her, made her feel as if everything was right and everything was okay, it was the first time she'd had complete peace in her mind since she'd died last spring.

There had been no chaos in her brain. No darkness. No noise. The depression had lifted, and she felt free.

She *had* to feel it again.

But she couldn't. She couldn't allow herself to be bonded to Marcus. He'd kept his identity a secret from her. He was *one of them* and hadn't said anything. And now he was helping them? She had to be strong. She had to figure a way out of this.

She kept her eyes glued open through the night, planning an escape. If she could just get to Marcus before he fed on her again, she might be able to convince him to make a break for it. Two were better than one. There had to be some hope with convincing him to stay on her side. They could overpower the guard at the door and run. But the look of euphoria on Marcus's face couldn't be forged. Maybe he *wanted* to feed on her again.

By morning, the clouds had departed, and slivers of sunshine cut through the window. Her stomach rumbled furiously, the sharp pains inside gutting her. Were they starving her so the bond would happen quicker? She tried to focus on what was next. Zane would come in, take her to Samuel, where Samuel would force Marcus to feed on her again. That's when she'd try to communicate with Marcus to run for it. They could escape. She was sure of it.

She waited, watching the sunlight shift through the room, the silence pounding in her ears, but no one came. She continued to stare at the door. What were they waiting for? Though part of her anticipation was *wanting* to see Marcus again. She shook her head.

No.

Her eyes began to glaze over, the silence settling into her, when shouting erupted from outside. Her eyes flew open. The shouts echoed out from the forest, and she scrambled to her feet, edging to the window, trying to see outside. Blurry shapes ran back and forth, and she tried to clean the glass with her sleeve, but she still could hardly see. More cries sounded until one voice became clear.

Cam.

His deep voice called out to her. "November, back away from the window!"

She rushed back, pressing her back against the door. Her heart hammered as adrenaline shot right through her.

Cam was here.

A loud crash exploded as the window burst open. Glass flew everywhere. Fresh air hit November's nose and she inhaled deeply, soaking in the fresh scent of pine. A large rock lay on the floor at her feet and Cam popped his head inside.

"Nov, hey. I've got you. Come on." He reached his hand inside the cabin, and she quickly darted over, allowing Cam to help her out the window. Her feet hit soft earth and Cam took her hand and drew her out into the forest. Shouts continued to resonate around them.

"What's going on?" November cried. "What's happening?"

"It's Conroy and Deva. I went back to get them after we lost you. They're here. You should see the number Deva is doing on the Walkers. She's torturing them somehow. The minute they tried to rush her, she threw out her hands and they all dropped to their knees. That witch has got skills."

November peeked over and saw Deva with her hands stretched out in front of her, Blood Walkers curled over, crying out on the ground. Deva gave them a nod, and motioned them out of there.

They raced through the forest. Branches brushed past her face, scraping her skin, but she didn't care. The air gave new life into her veins, new strength coursing through her.

"The jeep is right up here," Cam said, breathing hard.

Soon enough, the vehicle appeared on a dirt road, and Cam threw November's door open, for her to enter. He hopped in the driver's seat and started the engine.

"Now we wait," he said. "They should be here any minute."

She sat on the edge of her seat, peering out into the forest. She had visions of Blood Walkers rushing forward, and her stomach wrenched. She couldn't go back to that room. She bounced her legs, willing Conroy and Deva to appear soon.

More cries echoed in the distance, and two silhouettes approached through the brush. Conroy and Deva came into view, a large smile on Conroy's face, his hair ruffled in all directions.

"That was fun!" he said and jumped into the back of the jeep. He helped Deva in, and Cam wrenched the car into gear.

"Tell me about it when we get on the road," Cam said. The vehicle squealed as they turned.

"Wait!" a voice shouted from the forest.

Cam slammed on the breaks, the engine rumbling, and Marcus pushed his way through the shrubbery. "Take me with you. Please."

Cam's face hardened. "It didn't seem like you were helping much with trying to free November. You disappeared. You were with her and you didn't do anything. Why should we trust you?"

Marcus lifted up his palms. "I'm with you. I promise. Please don't make me go back to them."

Cam gave November a sidelong glance. "What do you think?"

Marcus caught November's gaze and the two stared each other down. His palms were still lifted up to the sky. His backpack was swung over his shoulder, and she knew the stake had to be inside.

"Let him come," November said. "We need him."

Marcus didn't wait. He hopped in the back seat and Cam zoomed through the forest until they were in the clear.

“So what happened?” Cam asked, as they pulled onto the highway. The three in the backseat were silent, just the hum of the engine between them. The sun pounded down above them, sparkling in the trees along the sides of the road.

November peeked back to Marcus, and their gazes caught, before he shifted uncomfortably in his seat. His head gave a slight shake, his eyes serious, and she spun back around. She couldn’t tell Cam about what happened. It wasn’t her secret to share. Marcus obviously didn’t want the others to know he was half Blood Walker, or maybe he just didn’t want them to know that he’d fed on her—*she* didn’t want them to know. But she didn’t know if she could trust him. But maybe he didn’t want to be aligned with the Walkers. He hadn’t really wanted to feed on her.

“They just kept me in a room,” November said. “I’m starving. Who has food?”

“In the backpack at your feet,” Cam said, brows cinched together, not put off by her change of subject. “They didn’t say why they kept you there?”

November found a granola bar and quickly unwrapped it. She shoved the gooey oatmeal and chocolate into her mouth so fast she nearly choked.

“No,” she lied, finding another bar. “I have no idea what they wanted with me.” She peeked over at Marcus again, and his face relaxed in relief.

Cam’s brow furrowed further. “That doesn’t make sense. Why keep you for days and not say what they wanted with you? Why not just kill you?”

November swallowed, then wrapped her arms around her, shivering in the cool air that brushed past her face. “I... I don’t know.” She hated the lie that sat in the back of her throat. But she couldn’t tell Cam about Samuel wanting to bond her to Marcus—that they wanted the necklace. It all came back to them knowing Marcus fed on her. And she needed more information first before she was honest.

Deva coughed in the backseat, and November’s eyes slid back to hers. Deva stared back at her through her long strands of hair, her eyes locked. November couldn’t read her face, but she looked as if she knew something. *Did she know?*

November shivered again and spun back around.

The car fell silent once more, Cam with a scowl on his face, and Conroy gazing out into the afternoon sun. She could still feel Deva's gaze on her, a hole boring through her back. She wanted to thank the witch for helping in her rescue, but there was an unspoken tension between them that made November stay silent.

She let out a huge sigh of relief when the manor approached, its dark silhouette high on the hill before them. The sparkling lake shimmered off to the side in the afternoon light, fall leaves beginning to scatter on the large lawn. The vehicle pulled to a stop, and they exited the car.

"Any news with Margaret and Genevieve?" November asked. She slammed her car door.

"Not since we left," Conroy answered, slinging his pack over his shoulder. "Margaret isn't looking good. I'm afraid she won't last a day. Hours at most. With everything that I've read on Blood Walker bites, their victims only survive a week. Tops."

November sucked in another breath of fresh air, holding it tight. The smell of rain hung in the air, cold and damp. A few leaves rustled in the breeze, and she exhaled, white air puffing out in front of her.

"We were just with them. The Blood Walkers were *right there*, and we didn't get their blood."

"Saving you was our main priority," Conroy said.

A solemn feeling surrounded the group as they headed up the front steps. They'd succeeded in rescuing her, but they hadn't been able to do anything for Margaret or Genevieve. Her feet felt heavy as she clomped upward, the reality of the past few days catching up with her. Cam pushed open the sturdy door, disappearing inside, followed by Deva and Conroy. November started to follow when Marcus caught her arm.

"Wait," he said.

She paused, and a cool breeze drifted in, tickling her hair over her face.

"I want to thank you... for not telling anyone. I couldn't bear it if everyone knew what happened between us."

November rolled her shoulders, then nodded. "I don't want people to know either. But I do think you should tell them what you are."

Marcus pushed the chunk of hair off of his one eye, his chiseled features turned down. "I suppose."

"Do you..." November stopped. "What happened between us... am I... already bonded to you?"

Marcus's mouth flicked upward. "It takes multiple feedings to link two together. I suppose there might be something between us, but no, we're not fully bonded."

November heaved out a breath. "Well, that's good."

Marcus met her gaze. "Is it? I don't know..." He looked at her sheepishly. "I'm ashamed for what I did, but..." He glanced down at her wrist. "I can't help but..."

November's heart exploded in her chest as electricity suddenly sparked in the air between them. They stood in silence, their eyes glued to each other. Was he going to grab her and feed on her again? A sick part of her wanted him to, but she was also mortified at the thought. She tucked her hands into her armpits, and Marcus shook his head.

"Just... thanks again," Marcus said and stepped inside.

She stayed out on the porch for a long while, watching the sun slowly descend, the cool wind biting her cheeks, until she finally went inside.

Nineteen

REBIRTH

NOVEMBER PEELED her eyes open and stared up at the branches hanging above her head. The yellow leaves were golden in the late afternoon light, little bits of sun shining on the surface. She'd slept for the whole morning after eating three bowls of cereal, two pieces of toast, an egg, and a banana. Quincy had muttered under his breath, something about irresponsibility. Her stomach rumbled again, and she sat up in bed, kicking her feet to the side until she stood up on the cool floor.

Voices drifted from outside her door, and her brows pressed downward. Two people arguing, their voices heightening. November crept forward and gently opened her door. Deva and Cam stood at the end of the hall, their voices lowered. They clearly didn't know she was there.

"I only helped you because you threatened that if I didn't, you'd send me back to the witches. What kind of host are you?" Deva hissed.

"I'm not your host," Cam whispered harshly. "You're a burden that we have to bear. You're the reason the witches are after us. If it were up to me, you'd already be in their hands."

"So you'd rather have me dead than face me? You've either ignored me or criticized me since you got here, and it's pretty childish in my opinion. We *were* betrothed after all. Except you had to go fall in love with some nobody at the school and then kill her. Maybe I am lucky I didn't marry you. Everyone you get close to *dies*."

"That isn't true." Cam's voice was tight, but his sentence caught at the end.

“Oh?” Deva hissed. “First Marybeth and then November. November’s lucky she came back, but she still died. And let’s not forget Margaret. She’s on her death bed, and I saw you eyeing her.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. You can’t blame me for the witches wanting you dead. That’s on you, not me.”

Deva huffed and she stomped her foot. “You’re pretty blind, do you know that? There is so much going on around you that you don’t see.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that November is keeping something from us. It was clear as day on the drive home. She and Marcus have a secret. There’s no way nothing went down between the Blood Walkers and them.”

Cam’s voice softened. “Well, that I can agree on. Something doesn’t feel right.”

“So maybe you’re not so blind after all.”

Silence fell between them.

Cam released a loud breath. “Listen, Deva. I know we don’t see eye to eye on most things—we never have—but you should know, back then, I was consumed with finding my father. When Clifton set up our marriage, I didn’t want anything to do with him or you. All that mattered was finding my dad. And I did care about Marybeth... but I used her to get to my father. Same with November. Trust me that I’m not happy with what I’ve done. I regret it every day.”

“Do you know how embarrassing it was in my coven to be rejected by you?” Deva said. She sniffed. “My mother wanted to merge with your kind. She thought it would be smart if we were allies.”

“Which we know doesn’t work,” Cam said. “The witches should understand that. *You* should understand that.”

Cam fell silent.

“I... I need to go,” Deva said. “To make sure the protection spell is still strong. You’ve come in and out so many times I don’t want to risk my coven finding me. Even if you want them to.”

Her footsteps clopped away, disappearing down the hall.

November held frozen by her door, her heart thumping against her ribcage. Deva and Cam had been *betrothed*? How could she have not known this? Did anyone know? And why hadn’t he told her? She and Cam had been through a lot together. Even though they had a history, she thought they had a friendship where they could tell each other anything.

If Cam could keep this secret, what other secrets was he keeping from her?

She stood breathing by her door, hoping Cam didn't come and check on her. She couldn't face him right now. He hovered out in the hallway, but he didn't make any move toward her room. Maybe he was deciding whether to corner her about Marcus. If he did, what would she say? Should she continue to lie to him? And was she any better than him? They were both lying to each other.

After a moment, Cam's footsteps walked away, disappearing softly until he was gone.

November sat alone by Margaret's side, holding her hand. Sweat ran down her friend's body in sheets, dampening her bed. Margaret had stopped moaning, she seemed to be in another place entirely. Her wound was festering, an angry red with green, exposed to the bedroom. Her breaths were shallow, quick and tight, her face as pale as the pillows around her.

November squeezed her hand, willing her to be okay. She was too young to die. She had just been given a second chance at life, and it had been taken away from her so quickly. Laying there, she was so fragile and weak. Everyone was vulnerable. Six months ago, November would've never thought that this world existed. But there were creatures out there that could take a life as easy as breathing.

Any of them could be in Margaret's place. She just happened to be the one Samuel attacked. And any one of them could be hurt by something else at any moment. Comas. Witches. Ghosts... Vincent. None of them were safe.

No one knew how much time they had. How much time had she wasted, obsessing over climbing or Vincent when she should've been living. She wondered if Margaret had done that. Had Margaret lived her life to the fullest? Or did she have regrets? She would never know.

The door creaked open and Marcus entered, his face pale in the afternoon light. His cheeks seemed extra hollow, his eyes sunken in. But it was in an attractive way, she realized. She'd never looked at him that way before.

He slunk forward, his lean figure dressed in black from head to foot, his shoes clapping softly. His mouth twisted when his eyes skated to Margaret.

"How is she?" he asked.

Tears burned the back of November's throat. "It shouldn't be much longer now."

Marcus nodded, quiet. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and rolled his neck.

"You know... I could heal her," he said softly.

November snapped her head back to him. "What do you mean?"

"I'm part Blood Walker. My blood heals her. She can be saved."

November blinked, before his words hit.

"Then *what* are you waiting for?" she cried. "Why haven't you come before now!"

Marcus's eyes darkened as he took November in. "Because I didn't want people to know. But now... I could save her, if you'd like. But only on one condition."

November stood up abruptly from her chair, and it nearly toppled over. "Seriously? You want something out of it? To *save* someone?"

"Like I said, I don't want anyone else to know I'm a Blood Walker. So it needs to be done in secret."

"And...?" The tone of his voice said he wasn't done.

He swallowed, and his eyes bore down on hers. "And if you let me feed on you again, I'll do it."

"*What?*" Her pulse hammered in her head, ringing in her ears.

"I can't get you out of my mind," he said, taking a step forward. "I'm... *starving* for you. Ever since that moment we shared together, it's all I can think about. I'll only do it one more time, I promise. Just... one more time and I'll save her."

November couldn't move. She could barely breathe. Her body subconsciously leaned toward his as energy pulsed between them. She wanted him, too. She'd do anything to feel that feeling between them again. But she couldn't. It was wrong.

"I..." She couldn't speak.

"Just say yes," Marcus said, closing the distance between them. His fingers brushed against her arm and shivers erupted. They glided down toward her wrist, and he gently picked it up.

"I don't want to be bonded to you," November said.

“This won’t bond us,” Marcus assured her. “It’ll only be our second time.”

November’s pulse was hammering through her whole body now, strumming with tension. Marcus kept his gaze locked with hers, willing her to say yes.

“Think of Margaret,” he murmured.

November glanced to the door. What if someone walked in? What would they think? She peeked back down to Margaret. Her breaths were shallower, a raspy sound coming from her mouth.

She clenched her eyes shut, unable to believe she was doing this.

“Okay,” November said quietly. “One more time. Okay.”

A combination of excitement and surprise lit in Marcus’s eyes, like he didn’t expect her to say yes.

“Thank you,” he whispered. He stared at her skin, a deep hunger in her eyes, before he lowered his lips down onto her wrist.

Pain sliced through her for a moment, before the ecstasy began. Like before, an overwhelming surge of pleasure raced through her, to the point she could barely breathe. Warmth melted through her, heating her, she could hardly feel her feet. She sagged against Marcus’s hold, willing him to never stop. Shivers ran up and down her entire body, little prickles that made goosebumps ripple along her skin. She seemed trapped in the euphoria forever until it stopped.

Marcus removed his lips from her arm.

“Thank you,” Marcus whispered again and wiped his mouth. November stumbled forward a step, drawing even closer to him. Their eyes searched each other’s for a moment, a silent communication hovering between them.

“Why...” November started.

“I know,” Marcus said. “I know.” He stood silent for a minute, as if relishing in the moment.

He turned to Margaret and straightened his shoulders. “Now to hold to my promise.” He walked smoothly over to the bed and lowered himself next to her. November held paralyzed, watching the scene before her with wide eyes.

Marcus lifted his own wrist up to his mouth and bit down hard, puncturing his skin. He reached over and put his wrist to Margaret’s mouth, forcing her to drink. Her body stayed unmoving for a moment, until her lips began to move. She stirred, swallowing, moaning, until her eyes flew open.

Her hands reached up and grabbed Marcus's wrist, pulling his arm closer to her mouth. She moaned again, her body becoming more alert, and Marcus forced his arm away, retrieving it.

Margaret sat up in bed, blood drizzling down her chin, her red hair wild out to the sides of her. Her eyes stretched open as she glanced around the room. The wound in her neck began to heal at an impossible speed, closing in on itself until nothing but smooth skin shone under the chandelier light.

November clasped her hands over her mouth. "Unbelievable."

Margaret rubbed her eyes. "What... what happened?"

"Margaret! You're okay!" November exclaimed. She rushed over to her side.

Marcus backed away, dusting his hands on his black slacks. Margaret's brows squeezed together.

"You don't remember?" November asked.

"Remember?" Margaret kneaded her forehead.

"You were bitten by a Blood Walker," November said.

"I... I don't remember," Margaret said plainly. She continued to rub her forehead until her hands slid to her throat. She winced, coughing. "I'm so thirsty. Can I get something to drink?"

A few water bottles sat next to her bed, where they'd tried to make her drink earlier.

"Right here," November said and rushed over. She screwed open the lid and shoved it in Margaret's hands.

Margaret gulped the water so fast, it spilled down the front of her shirt. After she downed the container, her hand continued to circle her throat.

"I'm still so thirsty," she said. "More."

November eyed her warily, but handed her another bottle.

Like the first, Margaret downed the water in a matter of seconds.

"Better?" November asked.

Margaret coughed again, the sound dry. "No."

"It's because it's not going to get better," Marcus said bitterly. "Not until you feed on someone's blood."

November whirled on Marcus. "What do you mean? *What* did you do?"

Marcus ducked his head, running a hand through his dark hair. "You wanted to save her. This was the only way I could. When you drink a Blood Walker's blood, you... I'm sorry, but you turn into one of them. She's in transition. If she chooses not to drink from another human, she dies."

Margaret sprung out of bed, her clothes rumpled and torn. Her eyes were wild, her red hair tangled out in all directions.

"I'm a *what*? I have to do *what*?"

Marcus shrugged unapologetically. "My father made me feed when I was born to keep me alive. Every Blood Walker needs to... to live."

"I can't believe this." Margaret ran her hands over her face.

"But you don't... feed on people regularly," November said to Marcus.

"I'm only half Walker. I'm different."

Margaret was pulling at her hair.

"She needs to complete the transition," Marcus said. "If she does, she can have a full life. If she doesn't..." He broke off.

Margaret was pacing around the room furiously, muttering under her breath.

Marcus glanced between them, cracking his knuckles. "I'll... leave you to it. It can be you she feeds on, or someone else." He headed for the door before he stopped and said, "Oh, and remember, don't tell anyone about me. Let them think Margaret healed on her own. And let's keep our secret, a little secret." His eyes softened before he left the room.

Twenty

FACE TO FACE

MARGARET STARED AT NOVEMBER, tears gathering in the corners of her eyes. “*What* am I going to do?”

“We’ll figure this out. We will.” November was trying to convince herself.

“I don’t... I don’t want to be a monster. I can’t be. One of those... *things*?” She covered her face with her hands.

“Maybe you can live a normal life. Look at Marcus. He’s fine. You’re not going to turn into one of them. Maybe you’ll have control over your... desires?”

Margaret shook her head, her face still covered. “I’d rather be dead.”

“Don’t say that!” November burst out. “You can drink from my blood. You have to live.”

“I won’t do it,” she said through her hands, her voice muffled.

The door flew open, and Cam rushed into the room. His eyes flicked frantically around the space until his gaze landed on Margaret. “You’re okay? She’s okay? Marcus told me... How?”

He was across the room in two strides. He gathered Margaret up into his arms and held her in a hug. “I was so worried. I couldn’t have another death on my head. I felt responsible. I...”

Margaret gave a small laugh, though it was laced with sadness. “I’m fine, really. I’m going to be fine.” Her voice dropped off at the end.

Cam pulled out of the hug and turned to November. “How?”

November bit her lip, a myriad of thoughts bouncing around inside her head. She didn’t want to lie, but she wanted to keep Marcus’s confidence.

Besides, Cam had kept Deva's secret from her.

"It was a miracle," November said. "Maybe the bite wasn't as potent as we thought. The Blood Walkers had been locked up for so long. They're probably weak."

Cam nodded, seeming to accept that answer. "Well, then you should both come. There's word from the witches. And we could use your brains."

He started forward when he stopped and turned to Margaret. "You sure you're okay? Do you need to rest?"

Margaret's lips curved upward. "I'm fine, really."

But November eyed her warily. She wasn't fine. Not if she refused to feed. But she held silent, following Margaret and Cam from the room.

They met the rest of the group in the library, where Conroy stood holding a sheet of paper in his hands. His green eyes studied the paper behind his glasses, his lips moving furiously as he read.

"Quincy found the note on our doorstep this morning," Cam whispered to her. "They know where we are."

A cold feeling rushed down November's body and she rubbed her arms up and down.

"They say they want to meet," Conroy said. "On neutral ground. They want to trade Deva in exchange for Vincent's location. They've agreed to do a locator spell to find him. But only if we meet them in the woods at these coordinates."

"A locator spell to find Vincent?" November asked. "But couldn't Deva do that for us? If they know where we are, there's no point in hiding anymore."

Conroy shook his head, and his sandy hair bristled. "I've already spoken to Deva. She says that she's not powerful enough to do such a spell on her own—that it would take the whole coven to do such a thing. Vincent is powerful, and he's a master at hiding when he doesn't want to be found. We need the power of the witches to find him."

November's heart was beating triple time. Vincent. They could find Vincent. But in exchange for Deva's life? They couldn't do that. November wasn't a fan of Deva, but they'd be sentencing her to her death. But they *needed* to find Vincent. He was the only one who could stop all of this. Was trading one life worth saving dozens? Hundreds?

"We can't do this to Deva." Cam stepped forward. His lips pressed together tight. "We have to find another way. Trick them into doing the

locator spell without giving her up.”

Conroy shook his head. “We can’t fool the witches. Either we bring Deva, or we keep this feud.”

Cam’s face fell, and his fists pumped in and out. With the way he was reacting, he clearly still cared about Deva. Maybe there was something between them after all.

“We’ll have to do it,” Conroy said. “There’s no other way.”

“No!” Cam yelled. “There has to be another solution!”

“I’ll go,” Deva said, stepping into the room. Her mussed hair hung around her face, her large eyes resigned. She twisted her fingers out in front of her, slowly stepping further into the room. “I’ll go to them.”

“What? No!” Cam yelled again.

“This isn’t your problem,” Deva replied. “This is between me and my coven. I need to face them. I might be strong enough to overpower them. You’ve all...” She glanced around the room. “You’ve all been kind to keep me here as long as you have. But now I need to go.”

The room fell silent. No one said a word. Seconds ticked. Cam and Deva exchanged glances, and Deva set a hand on her heart.

Finally, Conroy coughed. “We’ll meet them tomorrow night then. I’ll have Quincy send word.”

Cam’s jaw ground back and forth, keeping his eyes on Deva. Everyone watched him, clearly surprised by his intense response.

“I’m going to figure another way out of this,” he said, and marched from the room.

Later that night, November sat outside on the back steps of the manor, looking out over the gardens, including the tangled dead section that only reminded her of Vincent. The thought of finding him sent a shudder through her.

Moonlight filtered down through thin, wispy clouds, highlighting the stone pathways that cut in and out of the shrubbery. A light breeze whistled on the air, and November relished in the silence, trying to sort out her brain.

She’d been able to get back on her meds, which had helped clear her head, but she still felt a heavy depression pressing hard on her chest. Seeing

Vincent again... facing him again... would be a trigger, and she didn't know if she could handle it.

How would he respond?

Hey, sorry for torturing dozens of kids and taking away their lives just to get to you. That dream is your real fate. I am going to kill you now...

She pushed out a heavy breath. She still didn't understand why he was doing all of this. What had she done that would make him hate her so? She tipped her head back and peered up at the stars—small sprinkles on a black page.

Marcus stepped out of the house and slowly glided down the steps, hovering above her. His dark eyes stared out into the night, his chunk of hair covering his eye.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he asked.

"I suppose. If beautiful is sending people to their deaths." She thought of Margaret. She thought of Deva.

Marcus let out a humorless laugh. He lowered himself next to her. Energy sizzled between them, and it crawled along her shoulders. She was suddenly aware of his entire presence, like his body next to her was wired with electricity.

"I can't get you out of my mind," Marcus said.

His words washed over her, and suddenly all she could see, feel, and hear was him. Thoughts of Vincent dissipated, and her mind became a cloud, with only Marcus hovering inside.

He reached over slowly and took her hand in his own. The warmth of his skin melted her own, and she allowed him to hold her hand, the two of them sitting in the silence. His breaths were even, his body still, his eyes gazing out into the night.

Her pulse pounded heavily through her body, and she imagined the pathways of blood moving through her veins, aching to be given to Marcus. She felt as if she existed for him, and she *wanted* to give herself to him.

She tried to shake her head.

"Tell me about your childhood," November said, trying to ignore the burning feeling between them.

Marcus gave her a sidelong glance, his eyes flickering to the necklace around her neck before returning to her. "You want to know about my childhood?"

November nodded, waiting.

He heaved out a breath. "It wasn't a normal one. As you know, my mother... well, she's the leader of the Zodiac coven. She wasn't very faithful to my father—"

"Who was a Blood Walker."

"Yes."

"So are Clementine and Genevieve part Blood Walkers too? I thought you said your father was a musician."

His mouth turned downward. "Nine months before I was born, my mother had... *relations* with several men before my conception. One was with another witch, another with a musician, and then... my father."

"So what are you saying?"

"I'm saying that my mother used magic to ensure that all three of her children—me and my sisters were each sired from these different men. She became pregnant with triplets, all three of us from different fathers."

"But that can't be possible!" November exclaimed.

Marcus lifted a brow. "It was for a powerful witch like Ester."

"So Genevieve is..."

"From the musician, yes. Clementine is from the witch, which is why she has such power over men. And me... well, you can see why I'm me."

November sat digesting all of this.

"It's why the Harvest is so important. We have powers from three types of beings. When two of us die and give our power to one of us—the strongest of us—then we will be the ultimate being. Can you imagine one of us having the full powers of a witch, a Blood Walker, and the gift of music to control the dead?"

November could. That kind of power... would be like Vincent. Even though she still didn't know where Vincent was from. Who he came from. He was still such a mystery.

"My mother and all the other witches obviously want to use us as a weapon. If they could have us at her fingertips... well, who knows what they'd do with our power."

"I can't believe all of this."

"Trust me, me and my sisters can't either. It was hard growing up knowing that only one of us would live to our eighteenth birthday."

Silence fell, and another breeze whooshed in. Her hair tickled over her face, and she pushed it back.

“It’s why I’m glad I’ve found you,” Marcus said. “I know it’s strange, but if I have to die soon, then I’m at least glad I got to experience what I’ve been able to experience with you.”

Marcus’s words hung over her. She wasn’t sure if it was him talking, or if a bond was being created between them.

No.

They’d only been together twice.

There was no way there was a bond between them. Yet, the feeling between them was undeniable.

He gently let go of her hand and drew his arm around her. He pulled her in close and she tried furiously to think of Everett, but there was only Marcus. He filled her whole being—her whole mind.

“I should go,” Marcus said. “Before...” His eyes flicked down to her wrist. He abruptly stood from the step, clearing his throat. “I should go.”

He turned and left November alone in the night, only to wish he would come back.

Twenty-One

MARGARET WAS SITTING at the piano in the music room when November walked in. The last time she was in here was when April introduced the dozens of instruments to her, trying to help her find her talent. The thought of April sent a pang through her, and she tried to push it away. Margaret's orange-red hair was piled up in a fluffy bun on top of her head, and she pressed down on the keys, a soft tinkling melody drifting out into the room.

She lifted her head when November walked in. Her hand paused, and the melody stopped, hanging on the air.

"I've been looking for you," November said, edging up to the shiny black piano. "I wanted to know how you were feeling."

Margaret shrugged, her features turned down. "A bit weak, I guess. Not myself. But that's to be expected."

November leaned against the piano, taking a closer look at her. From the outside, she appeared normal, but as she took her in further, dark circles framed her eyes, and her face seemed extra pale.

"Margaret..."

"No," she said. "I know what you're going to say. And I haven't changed my mind. I'm not going to live as one of those blood-sucking freaks. I'd rather die."

November shook her head. "I'm not going to lose you. I've already lost April, and you're my oldest friend here. I care about you. You've only just begun to have a life again, and I'm not going to let you throw it away."

Margaret shrugged again. “Sometimes life sucks and we just don’t get what we want. We have to accept that and be okay with that.”

“No!” November’s voice echoed off the walls. “That’s when you push through. When life deals you a bad hand, it’s *your* choice to keep fighting. No matter how much...” She broke off and her throat thickened. “Just trust me that I know how hard it is to push through.”

A crease lined Margaret’s forehead. “Like what? The Vincent stuff? That’s on all of us, Nov.”

She held quiet. November had never spoken out loud about her internal struggles before—not to anyone here—not to anyone except Vincent.

“I... suffer...” she began, “from depression. A type of depression. It’s with me every day. It never leaves me alone. And I have to choose for myself to fight it. You have no idea how easy it would be to give into the darkness and be swallowed up in it. But there’s... tools... ways that I can help find a way to live with it and be okay. But I have to constantly be on my guard. I can never live a normal life, Margaret. You wouldn’t understand the chaos in my head that I have to deal with. It’s not the outside forces that plague me—sure it’s hard—but it’s internal, too.”

Margaret softened, and her eyes shimmered. “Why have you never told me this before?”

“Because I didn’t want you to look at me differently. Whenever anyone finds out about it, they either think I’m being dramatic, or they don’t understand. It’s better to keep it to myself.”

Margaret tucked her lips in. “I guess I can see that. I think you’re wrong, but I can see that.”

“So can you believe me when I say I think *you’re* wrong?”

A small smile lifted on Margaret’s lips. “I see what you did there.”

“Then can you fight?”

Tears built up in Margaret’s eyes. “I love that you’re strong enough to fight what you fight every day, but I’m not. So no, I can’t change my mind.”

“Margaret, please!”

Conroy poked his head inside. “You guys ready?”

November and Margaret stared at each other, eyes narrowed, until Margaret finally broke loose.

“For the exchange?” Margaret stood up from the piano bench and marched quickly away from November. “Yeah, I am.”

“Good. Because we’re going to need all the back-up we need.” Conroy exited the room, leaving the door open.

Margaret headed for the exit at a quick pace.

“Margaret—” November started.

Margaret paused, her back to her.

“Just think about it,” November said. “Okay? Just think about it.”

Margaret didn’t say a word.

The two headed down the hall and into the main foyer, the clocks ticking on the walls, echoing off each other. Conroy and Deva stood in the middle of the room, with Cam hanging off to the side, his arms crossed and a scowl on his face. Deva peeked over to him every few seconds, before she turned her attention straight to Conroy.

“We make the exchange next to the corkscrew tree in the Redwoods. That tree is filled with magic, and they think they can draw on that source from the earth to do the locator spell.”

“Off in the middle of the forest?” November said. “That doesn’t sound safe. They’ll have the advantage with all their ancestor earthy power stuff.”

“It has to be done,” Deva snapped. “It’s the only place where they’ll be strong enough to give you what you want.”

“And we don’t want you to die,” November said. She never thought she’d say those words, but it was true.

“She’s not going to,” Cam bit out from the corner. “I’m going to make sure of it.”

“Then you’re staying here,” Conroy said. “This is happening whether you want it to or not, Cam, and I won’t have you ruin this.”

Cam kept his mouth pressed into a thin line.

“Let’s go,” Conroy said.

Fresh air hit November’s face as they walked down to the waiting car. Quincy held the doors open, looking sharp in his gray suit and skinny tie. His gray hair was swept back, with bits of hair fluffing out behind his ears. He shut the doors behind them as they lowered themselves into the vehicle.

The car raced down the driveway as Cam waited behind on the top step right outside the manor, his body a silhouette on the top porch. November stared out the back seat of the car until he disappeared from sight.

The car ride was long and silent. Margaret and Deva sat in the back seat, gazing out the windows, while Conroy and Quincy sat stiff in the front. Marcus had stayed back at the house with Clementine, watching over

Genevieve, and who knew what Cam was doing now. Probably wearing out the ground with his pacing. Deva and Cam had been betrothed. He'd rejected her, but they'd been *betrothed*. This exchange had to affect him. Deva was being sent to her death.

The headlights twisted and turned in front of the winding road, Quincy driving fast, the turns smooth. November was reminded again that the old man knew how to drive.

"Do you think Cam will miss me?" Margaret whispered to November.

November held silent until she said, "Cam? Um..." Her brow furrowed. "What do you mean miss you? Oh." She was talking about her death again. November pressed her lips together. She didn't want to think about Margaret dying.

Deva peeked over at them, her thin brows pinched together, but she stayed silent, not saying a word, just the hum of the car between them.

Vincent started to drift through November's mind again, but Marcus's face suddenly shoved its way to the forefront. Marcus's sallow features and inky black hair took root in her brain, and she focused in on his demeanor. He had this... smooth presence to him. He was dark, hardened by his circumstances, but she couldn't help the sympathy she felt for him. She felt alive when she was with him. And when he fed on her...

November shook her head and clamped her teeth down together. She wouldn't think about that now. It was funny how Vincent had always consumed her thoughts, but now she could hardly keep the thought of him inside her head. He had consumed her life all last year, and now it was like there wasn't any room in her mind for him. It was a relief, a respite, not having his darkness in her head. Then there was Everett. He had been the first light she'd ever had in her life, and now, just like Vincent, she couldn't get his face in her mind, either. It was all Marcus.

The car soon pulled to a stop, off to the side of the road, where gigantic trees shot up into the sky. Their trunks were impossibly thick, all grouped together with narrow spaces in between. November had visited the giants before, but it had been a couple years since her uncle Mason had taken her. She hoped her uncle was okay with Roderick, and that they were having success.

The car doors slammed, echoing out into the night, and Conroy spotted the wooden sign that led to the corkscrew tree. Quincy stayed by the car while the others ventured out into the forest. Flashlights out, the group of

five stepped into the trees, Deva with her back straight and chin lifted as if walking to her slaughter.

Their feet crunched softly on the ground, and no one spoke. Conroy led the way with Margaret tailing in the back, and November kept an eye on Deva, watching to see if she'd bolt at any moment.

Cool air swirled around the trees, darting in and out, chafing her cheeks. It was only about a five-minute walk into the forest until they approached the corkscrew tree. The group stepped up in front of the tree whose trunk looked like several different trees that had grown up twisting around each other, stretching steady up to the night sky. They hovered ready, standing on the dirt pathway, everyone on guard.

"So what now?" November asked, another breeze drifting in. "Looks like they're not here."

"No, they're here," Deva said, her lips pursed. "I can feel them."

As if on cue, a couple dozen figures emerged from the dark forest—off the path—stepping out from the trees. Their outlines were dark, and they looked like shadows extended from the trees. They didn't make a sound, their footsteps soft as they seemed to glide toward them.

Soon, moonlight pushed its way down through the thick trees and lit several of their faces. November spotted Lizzie and Sariah, both with their hair in long braids down to their waists. Each of the witches wore white sheaths that barely covered their skin. White wispy material dipping down to their chests, short against their thighs. Their bare legs and feet must've been freezing in the night. These witches were crazy. They all drew to a stop, their faces hollowed out in the moonlight, a slight breeze between them. She searched for Ty, but didn't see him.

"We're ready to make the exchange," Sariah said, her voice seeming extra deep. "Hand over Deva."

Deva stayed unmoving, staring her coven down. "So you can murder an innocent girl?"

"One sacrifice for the life of many. A worthy way to die."

One witch stepped forward, and her dark curls were lined with gray, pulled up on top of her head. She held a knife at her side, the blade shimmering in the slight moonlight. Deva narrowed her eyes.

"Hey, Mom," she said.

"Daughter."

November's eyes skated between the two, ending on the knife. Deva hadn't been lying. Her mother *had* tried to kill her.

Sariah's hand suddenly shot out in front of her. "Give her to us."

Conroy straightened his shoulders, taking a step forward. "Not before you do the locator spell."

Sariah let out a laugh, the sound echoing out through the trees. "I don't think so. Besides, we need Deva to do the spell. The greater our number, the greater chance we have at finding Vincent. It will take a lot of power to find someone like him."

Conroy fell silent, his body strumming, his hands in fists. His head darted to Deva, and he lifted his brows. Deva nodded back.

"Okay."

Deva set her chin, seemingly unaffected, but a lump bobbed in her throat. "It's fine, Conroy. I'm not afraid." She slowly drew her feet forward.

Sariah smiled wide, her teeth flashing white. Deva's mother marched over and gripped her daughter by the arm, yanking her up against her.

"I will use the power of the corkscrew tree," Sariah said, placing her palm on the twisted trunk.

More witches emerged from the forest, beginning to tighten in. Their white sheaths seemed to glow in the dark, like an orb of light around them. They carried six bodies—teenage girls—each wrapped in white cloths. The witches lowered them to the ground and laid them out in a straight line in front of the tree. November stared in horror down at the young girls' faces, all dead asleep, faces relaxed and slack.

Deva held still, gaze intent in front of her, though her lips trembled.

Ty appeared from the circle of women and joined Sariah's side. He held his violin in hand, hanging down by his sides.

"Ty!" November cried out.

His gaze flicked to her for a moment, but then slid away and downward.

"Tyler, if you will," Sariah said. "The location spell."

Ty lifted his violin to his chin and placed his bow on the strings. He drew the bow long and hard along the strings, a resonate sound coming from the instrument. It sung out into the night, its tune weaving in and out of the bodies surrounding them. Ty continued to play, the melody rising up and down, as the group of witches began to sway.

Deva's eyes widened, and she said, "No! You guys, sto—"

Her mother clamped a hand over her mouth.

The location spell. It had begun. The thought of discovering Vincent's whereabouts created a knot in November's stomach that kept on tightening. She wrapped her arms around herself, trying to breathe evenly.

At once, the witches began to hum with the melody. A deep wind swished in, the branches swaying around them. Conroy stood on guard, and Margaret faltered back a step.

Ty continued to create the sad melody, and the wind whooshed in further, branches rustling. The witches' humming increased, the sound deep and resonate. It seemed to fill her bones, filling her up from the inside out. She didn't know how this locator spell would work, but she held silent as the witches continued to work.

Deva still struggled, fighting against her mother's grip, trying to speak, but her mother kept a tight hold over her mouth.

The wind continued to surge, the trees bending side to side, the witches glowing in the night, and white sparks began to sizzle in the air around them. The sparks glittered like tiny fireflies that danced all around them. They whirled in the air, before drifting to the ground, lighting the earth like stars dotting the forest floor.

The melody heightened, the wind increasing, until all November could see, feel, and hear were the sensations that the witches were creating. Deva struggled further.

November turned to Conroy. "I don't have a good feeling about this. Something doesn't seem right."

Margaret shifted her weight. "I agree."

"No," Conroy said. "We have to trust them. We *need* to find Vincent."

In unison, the witches all raised their arms out in front of them, and Deva's mother brought her around in front of the twisted tree. She shoved her to the ground in front of the six bodies and held Deva's chest pinned to her body. Deva's eyes were wide with fear, her mouth still covered.

November took a step forward. "Conroy... what's going on?"

"Don't," Conroy said.

In a burst, the witches flicked their wrists, and a blast of light extended from their fingers shooting up to the tree. Like lightning, a large flash of light zipped down through the tree, spreading out along its roots into the earth.

Deva's mother yanked Deva's head back, bringing the knife around to the front of her exposed throat. Shouts came from the forest and several

witches scattered.

“Stop!” Cam rushed from the wood, shoving aside the witches in his path. His eyes immediately connected with Deva, and he sprinted toward her, his dark features set in determination. He dove for Deva’s mother, but in a heartbeat, the woman yanked Deva’s head back further and slid the knife crisp and clean along her throat. A red line appeared on Deva’s skin and she gasped, her eyes wide with shock, before blood oozed from the wound.

“No!” Cam shouted.

Deva gasped for air, her mouth opening and closing, her eyes wide in horror, until she crumpled to the ground. Her body heaved up and down a few times until it went still, blood seeping into the earth. Sariah let out a wild cackle.

A deep rumbling came within the forest floor, and Cam collapsed to the ground in front of Deva. His hands hovered over her body.

“I’m so sorry,” he cried. “I’m so sorry.” He lifted her up and held her in his arms, blood soaking into him.

Ty stopped the music and the witches cut off their hum at once. The wind ceased, and Sariah stepped away from the tree. Time seemed to freeze for a moment.

In the moonlight, the six sleeping girls began to stir. Their eyes fluttered open, and they slowly sat up, blinking, some wobbling to their feet. They glanced around the forest, their bare feet on the cool earth, their eyes wide, dresses flowing around their ankles.

Sariah lifted her arms up to the black sky. “They’ve risen. Let us thank our ancestors.” She slowly walked over to the girls, placing her hands on each of their faces, welcoming them back. The girls still looked around themselves, confusion clear on their faces.

November stood paralyzed, anger stirring within her. She narrowed her eyes, grounding her jaw back and forth.

“You lied!” November yelled. “How could you? Where is Vincent?”

Sariah slowly turned, and her lips curved upward. “Vincent is impossible to contact. You should know that. You think a being like him can be found? I only promised you that information to get Deva back.”

“No!” November shouted.

Conroy moved over to her quickly and gripped her upper arm. “Nov, we need to go. The witches have what they want and we’re in danger if we

stay. Come on.” He pulled her backwards toward the path.

“No!” November shouted again.

Conroy dragged her from the witches, while Cam stayed crumpled on the ground, holding Deva in his arms.

November struggled against Conroy, writhing. She bumped into a witch, who growled, shoving November back. Margaret inched back with her.

“They know too much,” the witch said to Sariah. “They need to be killed.” Her wild eyes stayed fixed on November, moonlight lighting their depths.

“They’ve given us what we want,” Sariah said. “Let them suffer the consequences of their actions.”

The witch continued to glare. “They put us all at risk. They hold the triplets. Let’s kill them now and the triplets will be ours to take.”

“The Harvest will happen with or without them in our way,” Sariah replied, voice firm, but she flicked her wrist. “Though if it’s blood you thirst, I won’t stop you.”

The witch grinned in November’s face, her teeth gappy. Her dark hair fizzed out at the sides, in disarray around her head. She motioned to her sisters.

“Come! Rise up with me! We’ll show the world that we are the most powerful coven—more powerful than the Zodiac. Let’s take their lives away and take the triplets as our own!”

Heads snapped over to them, and more witches gathered. Murmuring resonated in the crowd, and November edged back. Sariah turned back to the six girls, leaving her to the witches. Cam still hovered over Deva, her body in his arms.

The group of witches advanced on November, Conroy, and Margaret, the group thickening, more witches stalking forward from the forest.

“Cam, come on,” November hissed. They continued to back away, but Cam remained frozen, shaking over Deva’s dead body.

The witches continued to advance, their long fingers stretched out in front of them, their gazes wild. Their bare feet crunched on sticks and pine needles, the moon glowing on their white sheaths. The wind picked up once more, swirling leaves up into the air.

“Now!” the witch screamed.

The witches lunged, springing themselves toward Conroy, Margaret, and November. Margaret screamed, and Conroy pushed a group of them back. November stumbled free from the crowd, but Margaret got stuck in the middle of the surrounding witches.

“Go!” Conroy said to November. “I’ll get Margaret out.”

But November couldn’t move. Her gaze darted to Cam, who still held Deva’s lifeless body in his arms.

“Cam! Help!” she yelled.

Cam slowly lifted his head, blood stained on his cheeks.

The witches began to pull at Margaret’s hair, pushing her body from side to side. They picked up rocks and threw them at her thin body, and she cried, curling over.

“No!” November rushed toward them, pulling one witch back, but the witch smacked her in the face, and she fell onto her backside, a rock ramming into her hip.

More witches moved forward, circling November and Conroy, and Cam seemed to wake up from his daze. He gently set Deva on the ground and began to draw toward them.

Margaret continued to yell, her shouts heightening, until she began to fight back. She hissed, snapping her teeth, her eyes darkening, and she shoved one witch back. The witch tumbled away, and the other witches advanced further. Margaret growled, and her eyes became feral. She pushed another witch back and she, too, fell backward.

The witches were beginning to take notice.

Margaret was strong. Really strong. She fought witch after witch, shoving them away, sending them to the ground. The witches that had been prowling around November and Conroy turned their attention to Margaret, including Deva’s mother, who still held a knife in her hand. Her face twisted and she bolted forward, the knife flashing, cutting downward toward Margaret’s back.

“Margaret, watch out!” November cried.

Margaret spun, there was a light November had never seen before in her eyes. Margaret tackled Deva’s mother to the ground, and in a growl, bit down hard into Deva’s mother’s neck. The witch cried out, the knife dropping from her hands. Margaret’s gaze darkened—becoming nearly black, and veins bulged underneath her eyes, pulsing.

The witches screamed.

“She’s a... Blood Walker!” one witch cried out.

The witches immediately scrambled away, fear lining their faces, separating. Some rushed into the forest without looking back, while others stayed frozen.

Deva’s mother began to sob, trying desperately to fight Margaret off, but it was as if she were a weak animal beneath her. Margaret gave one last growl, bent down, and ripped out the witch’s throat. Deva’s mother went limp, blood spilling in the moonlight. Margaret rose to her feet, wiping off her mouth.

Conroy and November took a step back.

Margaret stood breathing hard, her eyes still wild, blood staining her lips, until she focused in on her friends. The veins disappeared from under her eyes, and her face relaxed into the face they knew. She shook out her arms and moved toward them.

“Shall we?” she asked.

November gave a slight nod, swallowing.

And Margaret led the way back into the night, back to where Quincy waited at the car.

Twenty-Two

LET IT BLEED

THE CAR RIDE was long and silent. No one spoke about what Margaret had just done. November sat with her hands between her thighs, bouncing them. Trees blurred outside the car windows, the headlights on the road in front of her. Cam sat adjacent to her, with Margaret on her other side. Conroy stared intently out the windshield, with Quincy driving next to him. The old man peeked back through the rearview mirror several times, but he didn't say a word.

"I don't want to go to the manor," Margaret finally said, the night speeding by around them. "I... I want you to take me back home."

"What?" November turned on her.

"I'm not going to put any of you at risk. I've tasted blood. I'm now transitioning into a real Blood Walker. Who knows what I'm capable of."

November shook her head. "You won't hurt us. You need us. And I'm so glad you're alive."

Margaret kept her jaw tight. "I *want* to go home. I..." She peered over at Cam. "I don't belong here anymore."

Cam kept his gaze fixed out the window. He didn't move as Margaret spoke. November knew he felt responsible for Margaret's misfortune—for Deva's misfortune—he felt responsible for any misfortune around him. She wished he'd speak up. If he really cared about fixing things, then he'd tell her to stay. They could help her. She needed to be with them.

"My parents are gone," Margaret said. "I'll be alone. I'll be alone where I can figure this out."

The car fell silent again. No one tried to argue anymore. More time passed. Just the humming engine and the swirling headlights around them.

Instead of Quincy taking the road up to the manor, he passed one more exit and drove onto a rural road that led to a small white house at the end of a lane, separated from the other houses on the street. Decorative railings and turned posts, the house was old—Victorian house old. It had a wide wrap-around porch that circled the home, with walls and paneling that were all irregular shapes. It seemed to glow in the late evening air.

Quincy put the car in park, and they all sat in silence. Too many thoughts bubbled up in November's throat, but she didn't know what to say.

"Don't worry about me," Margaret said quietly. She twisted her fingers in her lap. "I'll be fine. Go find Vincent. Save the kids. Don't worry about me."

Before November could respond, Margaret got out of the car and slammed the door. She gave one last glance to November before she crossed the ground to her house and let herself in. Quincy wrenched the car into gear and pulled out of the driveway.

"I can't believe we just let her go," November said.

"It was for the best," Cam finally spoke. "She was right. She could be a danger to us. And she could've ended up dead like..."

Like Deva.

"At least now she has a chance to have a life."

As they traveled to the manor, shards of light began to pierce through the cloudy sky on the horizon. A fury began to build in November's chest at everything that had just happened. They'd walked into a trap. The witches had tricked them and now they didn't know Vincent's location. They'd just lost Margaret. They'd already lost Genevieve. They weren't getting anywhere. How were they supposed to move forward and stop these comas without finding him?

"We go back to our training," Cam whispered softly as the car pulled to a stop. He answered her as if he'd known her thoughts. "It's our only hope. We figure out how to enter the dream realm and see what's going on with these kids ourselves. I'm not letting anyone else get hurt."

Conroy and Cam exited while November stayed in the car with Quincy. She couldn't bring herself to move. The old man didn't make any effort to move either. Silence stretched between them.

“Remember what I told you in LA? By the pool at the motel?” Quincy asked. His voice was scratchy, but had the wise tone to it he always held.

November’s forehead pinched as he stared her down through the rearview mirror.

“I told you that sometimes it’s good to run away and leave the world you’re in if it’s better for your mental health. I can see the anger starting to build inside of you. I’ve seen the darkness you’ve been struggling with these past couple weeks. It’s important to decide when to stop and not destroy your own soul in the process. At what point do you look after yourself?”

November tightened her lips, narrowing her eyes. “If you remember, I decided to not run after all. Are you saying I made the wrong decision?”

The old man’s feathery hair ruffled as he shifted in his seat. “No, I’m saying that you’ve been pushing yourself for far too long. Maybe you should take some time away, like Margaret. Gather your strength. You don’t have a prayer of saving these kids, of saving your Everett if you aren’t at full capacity. Take a few days off. Figure things out.”

November dug her nails into her palms. The last thing she needed was a break. Quincy was wise, but he didn’t understand. These kids were losing their lives because of her—because Vincent clearly had a vendetta against her—and she wouldn’t rest until she stopped him.

“I’m sorry, Quincy, but *you* have it wrong.” Every muscle in her seemed to tighten, like she would snap at any moment. “These kids need me, and that’s more important than myself.” She yanked the door open and slammed it shut.

She marched up the steps, heat burning her skin. Multiple images flashed through her head. Deva’s dead body on the ground, Margaret’s departing form, Ty staying with the witches, and Everett at the bottom of the cliff. The images burned through her mind, on repeat, appearing over and over again until all she could see was red. She picked up her pace, skipping two steps at a time and threw open the manor doors.

Marcus was standing in the foyer, finishing a conversation with Conroy. When Conroy departed, Marcus turned, his eyebrows shooting up his forehead.

November didn’t slow her pace. She marched right toward him and wrapped her fingers around his wrist.

“Come on,” she said, pulling him from the room. “I need you.”

Marcus's eyebrows furrowed, but he followed without complaint. He allowed November to pull him down the hallway and up a flight of stairs. She didn't say a word until she led him into her bedroom. The leaves from the tree glowed a bright yellow in the early morning light, moving softly from the breeze.

She held out her wrist to him. "I need you," she repeated.

Marcus stared down at her wrist, and his skin whitened a shade. "I don't... I can't..." His head shot up to hers. "What are you doing?"

"Marcus, I'm not okay. And if I'm going to be okay, then I need you. *Please.*"

A hunger lit in Marcus's eyes as he took in her delicate skin again. A heartbeat seemed to pound between them, invisible in the air. He swallowed, then peeked up at her again.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure." She forcefully lifted her wrist up to his mouth and silently begged him to follow through. She couldn't handle all of the pain. She couldn't handle the images that taunted her. She couldn't handle her mind and the way it was spinning out of control. She needed a fix, she needed Marcus, and he was the only one who could take the chaos away.

Marcus gently took her arm, placed his lips to her skin, then bit down. A slice of pain rocketed through her before the pleasure began. She was immediately transported to a peaceful place, the warmth surging through her, spreading from her core to the tips of her fingers. She wanted to moan, but she didn't want anything to distract from the feeling she was experiencing. She didn't care if it would bond her to Marcus. All she cared about was that she got this escape, this feeling, and she would do it again and again to be okay.

Marcus's lips lifted from her wrist, and the hunger was still deep in his eyes. He abruptly wrapped his hands around her waist and drew her up against him. "I can't help it."

His mouth descended down onto hers roughly, and he pulled her into a kiss. His lips moved over hers furiously, taking, wanting, not letting her have a say. But she didn't care. The residual feelings from the bite still coursed through her and she didn't want to let it go. Her hands moved up to his face and she traced the light grooves, from his cheekbones to his smooth hair, brushing it off his forehead.

Finally, he pulled away, and he wiped his mouth. A crooked smile lifted one corner of his lips before his face fell.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean... but... I had to.”

“Same here,” November said and pulled him down into one more kiss. Her lips danced over his and he responded once more. His hand went to her neck and played with the key around her throat. The power inside of it seemed to throb between them.

Her door creaked open, and November and Marcus pulled away. “Hey, Nov. I’ve got a que—” Cam broke off and stopped inside her doorway. Shock painted his features, before his forehead tightened.

“Are you *serious*?” he exploded. “You... *him*? Now? After Vincent? After me? And Everett? What is *wrong* with you!”

November fumbled back a step, her hands over her lips. Clarity swept through her head, and her recent passion beginning to ebb. Heat flushed her cheeks.

“I... I don’t know,” she said.

“Yeah, clearly you don’t.” Cam glared, his jaw tight, until he stormed from the room.

Marcus and November stood unmoving for a long time, until he finally turned to her and said, “I should go.”

And he left the room.

Cam paced in front of November, his feet eating up the marley floors beneath him. November stood inside the doorway of the studio inside the manor, her fingers twisting, her reflection staring back at her on the far side of the wall.

“Cam, please. I know that must’ve been shocking, but we need to work together on this. Like you said, our only chance at finding Vincent is to keep dancing. Forget what you saw with Marcus. That was a mistake. Just...” She was lucky he had only seen the kiss. If he had seen him feeding on her...

She changed topic. “The secret *has* to lie in the dream, and I can’t do this without you.”

“I don’t think I can dance with you,” Cam growled. “I’m disgusted.”

“It’s hardly worse than you walking away from Deva,” November snapped.

Cam paused. “*What* did you say?”

“It’s hardly worse than—”

“Yeah, I heard you,” he said. “How do you know about that?”

“That you were betrothed to her? I heard you out in the hall speaking the other night.”

Cam waved a hand, brushing her off. “Me walking away from an engagement because I wasn’t emotionally ready is hardly worse than you... kissing Marcus. Do you not care about any of us at all?”

If Cam only knew the truth.

If he knew Marcus was a Blood Walker. If he knew that he *fed* on her...

November swallowed the thoughts down. “Whatever. What’s done is done. We *have* to focus on the present.”

“Oh, because the past is the past? Because you’re all smart with your therapy stuff and know how to ‘live in the present’?”

November blinked back. She felt like she’d been slapped. “Are you kidding? You’d... make fun of me?”

She didn’t know Cam knew about her condition. She’d suffered for years, dealing with what she was dealing with. And he would throw it in her face?

He must’ve seen the expression on her face.

“I’ve seen your meds. It’s not hard to know that you’re...”

“Weak?” November finished for him.

He wiped a hand over his face. “No, I didn’t mean that.”

Tears built behind November’s eyes, but she didn’t move to wipe them away. She lifted her chin and stared him down.

“Then you’re right,” she said. “I don’t think we’re meant to work with each other after all. I’m done.”

“No, November.” He lifted up his palms. “I’m sorry. Wait—”

“No,” she retorted. “It’s better I’m not with you. You might kill me again like you do everyone else you touch.”

And she slammed the door behind her.

Twenty-Three

OUTER LIMITS

“GET AWAY FROM ME! I’ve had enough!” Genevieve’s voice echoed down the hall.

November sat in the kitchen, eating a bowl of cereal when a crash sounded, and footsteps hurried outside. She groaned and dumped her bowl into the sink. Genevieve was on another rampage today. She was getting restless and making their lives miserable in the process. Her temperament was getting worse, as Clementine and Marcus were unrelenting with trying to get her memory back.

“I want to get out of here! I don’t belong here!” Her voice heightened.

November moved down the hall, peeking her head inside the library. Genevieve picked up a book and threw it at Clementine. She tried to dodge, but the book smacked her in the chest, and she curled over, crying out. Conroy stood off to the side, the lines of his face pulling tight.

“It’s getting worse,” he said when November walked in.

“There isn’t any improvement?”

“Nothing—except for one thing. I had her try playing the flute again the other day, and she’s continuing to remember some songs. It’s the only connection she has to who she once was. Though it’s still not much. Shades are powerful creatures. And I haven’t found a cure to them yet.”

Marcus now had his hands on Genevieve’s shoulders, trying to calm her down. His gaze flicked over to November for a moment, and heat rushed to her cheeks. She quickly darted her gaze away.

“I’m afraid she’s just going to take off,” Conroy continued. “Though if she does, maybe it wouldn’t be a bad thing. Keeping the siblings together

will only ensure that the Harvest happens. Maybe if they're separated, it's a good thing."

A slam echoed from down the hall, and her uncle's voice boomed from the entryway. "What is all that ruckus?"

Conroy stiffened, his face going white.

"Is that...?" November started.

"Your uncle. And Roderick." Conroy smoothed down his shirt. "Come on." They exited the library in a rush, and wove down the halls until they stepped into the foyer.

Her uncle stood tall, his salt and pepper hair and handlebar mustache ruffled. "Uncle Mason!" She rushed up to her uncle and threw her arms around him. He patted her head and pulled her back.

"It's good to see you, kid."

Roderick stood ramrod straight, a cravat around his neck, and a slim suit that made him seem extra long. His dark hair was slicked back off his forehead, and his black eyes lit up as Conroy stepped inside.

November hadn't seen the sophisticated dark spirit of a man since that dreadful night. Uncle Mason had clearly found him, and they'd been traveling together. Conroy and Roderick hovered in front of each other, not embracing, just staring each other down.

"Roderick," Conroy said.

Roderick gave a firm nod. "We're back."

Conroy swallowed, rubbing the back of his neck. "I'm... glad."

November peered at them curiously. Why weren't they embracing? They'd been apart for too long. Shouldn't they be happy to see each other?

Roderick's gaze skated away from Conroy, landing on November.

"We have news," her uncle said, and November turned to him. His mustache twitched and he ran a hand over his jaw.

November eyed the two suspiciously. "What news?"

"We saw Vincent."

November's body went cold. Her limbs went numb. She couldn't think. She couldn't feel.

"V-Vincent?"

Roderick gave a sharp nod. "Your uncle and I traveled to the other side. We went to get information from the dark spirits."

"And?" November asked.

“The other side is deadly still,” Uncle Mason said. “I’d never seen it before, but it wasn’t what I imagined.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, we know before the twelve restored peace, the dark ones were feeding off the light ones. The light ones were in mayhem trying to escape. It was absolute chaos. But now... it feels suspiciously quiet. All the dark ones linger in their crumbled palaces on the other side of the river of diamonds. The light ones stay in their kingdom of fields and towers. There isn’t any fighting. They all... coexist.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

“It would be except the Shades are wandering among them. Here, Shades are a dark whirlwind of chaos, but on the other side, they’re calm. They are following all of the spirits like long black shadows. A dark fog covers the ground where each of the spirits live. The spirits seem to be... brain dead. Like puppets. Like someone is using the Shades to control them. Like they’re keeping them at bay for a purpose. Controlling them for something.”

“Get to the part where you saw Vincent,” November said, her throat tight.

“It was only for a brief second,” Roderick said, his eyes slithering back and forth between November and Conroy. “We were traveling along the road through the field of black roses when we saw him. He was just standing there, in the field, picking a rose and holding it up to his mouth. We only saw his profile, but it was him. When he noticed us, he vanished within a second. He saw us. He knows we’re gaining on him.”

“A field of... black roses? What on earth would he be doing there?” November asked. She’d pictured him sitting on an evil throne, cackling as he plotted his revenge against her. She shivered.

“Who knows?” her uncle said. “But now we know where he’s lingering. He’s on the other side. And is it a coincidence that the Shades are controlling the spirits?” He lifted his brows.

“You think Vincent is controlling these Shades?” she asked. “But isn’t it the witches who have power over them?”

Her uncle’s brows pushed downward. “Maybe Vincent and the witches are working together. We don’t know.”

November still couldn’t breathe. Her chest ached, and she tried to rub out the tension. The thought that they had seen Vincent ate through her skin,

attacking her insides. He was actually out there, and he didn't want anything to do with her. For the first time, she realized how much that hurt. Yes, she'd chosen not to be with him, but that was because she needed the darkness out of her life. That didn't mean she still didn't care for him. And the thought that he'd moved on from loving her to hating her so quickly made her stomach twist. A secret part of her wished he still *did* care about her.

"So what do we do now?" she choked out.

"Like I said, we continue our training," Cam said as he stepped into the room. His eyes stayed out in front of him. "We find these kids and beat Vincent at his own game. We let him think that we're clueless."

Conroy frowned. "And how far have you gotten?"

"We're close," November said, and Cam's eyes connected with her for a brief moment.

"We're close."

"You sure you want to do this?" November asked. Her voice echoed off the studio walls.

"I'm not happy with you, but I've decided to let it go," Cam said. "Whatever you have going with Marcus isn't my business. But saving these kids is." He ran his fingers along the barre at the end of the room.

November agreed. But she couldn't understand how Cam had let it go so quickly.

His mouth twisted at the sides. "I felt bad for what I said. I should've never have thrown your depression in your face like that. I didn't mean it. In fact, maybe I'm just jealous. I'm struggling on my own, but you seem to be doing just fine. I don't know how you do it."

"Are you kidding?" November let out a small laugh. "I'm not okay. I'm failing, Cam. I'm an absolute mess."

His lips curved up wryly. "It doesn't seem like it."

"Trust me, I have no idea what I'm doing. With Marcus. With Vincent. With anyone."

Silence settled between them for a moment.

Cam coughed and ran his fingers through his dark hair. “Anyway, let’s focus on the task at hand.”

“I’m not sure how we’re going to be able to do this,” November said. “We’ve failed multiple times.”

Cam nodded, but a knowing look reflected in his eyes. “Remember when you were having trouble opening the veil last year?”

“Yeah...”

“Well, music always seemed to help take you to a different plane. So I was thinking... we need music on our side. Someone talented enough to transport us to where we need to be transported.”

November’s forehead creased. “Who?”

Cam motioned Genevieve in as she stepped into the doorway.

“What?” November’s mouth fell open. “Her? She doesn’t even know her own name!”

“Yeah, but remember what Conroy said? She remembers how to play. It’s the only thing that’s linked her to her true self.”

Genevieve lifted up the flute and stepped deeper into the room. “Let’s do this. I don’t really want to be here, but you two have annoyed me the least, so... I’m here.”

Twenty-Four

SHATTERED DREAMS

THE THREE STOOD in silence until Genevieve held up her flute. “Are we doing this or not?”

Cam held out his hand, and November stared at his palm. She peeked at him curiously before she slid her hand into his.

“We might as well try.”

Genevieve placed her lips onto the small instrument and a light, airy tune began to sail through the air. The sound only reminded November of April, and her heart cracked a bit. April had played beautifully, too.

The melody wove in the space around them, Genevieve taking the song to unexpected heights, and Cam’s hand tightened in her own.

“Come on,” he said.

He immediately spun November into a twirl away from him, and the mirror on the wall caught her reflection. He brought her back in close and started a few steps, feet forward and back, November following him. His hips swayed as he led November around the room, and she kept her posture perfectly straight and her arms extended with his as her heart rate picked up.

She had always enjoyed dancing with Cam. They’d always had chemistry. Things always seemed to click with them—until Vincent had taken over.

The music continued, the flute light through the room, the melody beginning to take a new turn—a minor turn. The notes moved up and down chromatically on the air, the tune becoming haunting, rippling along November’s arms.

Cam led her quicker, his eyes never leaving hers. She stared back, sweat trickling down her back. But she couldn't rip her gaze away. He stared at her deeply, two black holes boring into her, and the room seemed to disappear around them.

She felt as if her feet no longer touched the ground. The world spun around them, blurring at the sides, the only solid thing Cam's face in front of her. The usual feeling that accompanied dancing filled in the spaces around her. Warm. Comforting. Inviting. It buoyed her up, kept her locked into place.

The melody continued its haunting tune, dark, and the world seemed to disappear further until the only outside force she could see was the mirror next to her. Their reflection followed their every move, every step, every turn, and with each movement, they began to travel closer to the mirror. There seemed to be an invisible force that drew them toward it, and November welcomed it, itching to dance right up alongside it.

As they traveled forward, the mirror seemed to bend, melt, warp. It appeared as if the surface were molding around them, swallowing them inside.

"Cam... what is happening," November said between breaths.

"I don't know, but it feels right," he said.

They continued toward the mirror, and it warped further around them, pulling them in deep. Genevieve's music became distant, hollow inside November's head. It was a faint melody until it disappeared completely.

The mirror dissipated and November blinked. Cam stopped the dance, and November spun around. The mirror was behind them, Genevieve's blurry form back in the studio. They had... danced *through* the mirror. This wasn't possible.

November spun around and out before them was a field of pure white. Translucent grass, trees, and leaves. The sun was a large white pearl in the snowy sky, with the air so still she could barely feel it pass over her skin. An ivory pathway jutted through the white grass, going up and down hills through the countryside.

"What is this place?" November asked.

"I think we might have found it," Cam said. "The plane where dreams exist."

"This can't be it. There's nothing here."

Cam frowned, his lips pushing outward. "It's a white canvas ready to be painted on. Think about it. I think if we were to travel further, the paintings—or the thoughts of others would appear."

"This can't be right." Though November felt in her gut that it was true. If another plane to a spirit world existed, and she could be brought back to life by an almighty force, then surely there could be a layer where dreams existed. "We need to find these kids."

Cam gave a quick nod. "I say we start with the pathway then."

November tentatively led the way, stepping onto the white path. It moved through the field of white grass, the tall translucent trees around them still as glass. No breeze. No sensations. Just silent air as they traveled. The pearl-like sun didn't produce any heat, it was only a marble in the sky, offering light.

They came up and over a large hill, which only extended another long plane of white. November shivered, although it wasn't cold. The landscape seemed to go on for eternity.

The further they traveled, the more Marcus's face hovered inside her mind. His dark sweep of hair, his one eye that always poured into hers, his angular features. Her body ached to be close to him again, and a pull stretched tight between them, willing her to go back to him.

You're bonded to him.

The thought hung in her mind, but she didn't care. She'd made her choice and it was worth it. She shook at the thought of being close to him again, of feeling that bliss again.

"What are you thinking about?" Cam asked.

November snapped her head over. "What? Why?"

"You have a funny look on your face."

Heat rushed to her cheeks, and she ducked her head. "Nothing. I'm only focused on finding these kids."

Cam gave her a doubtful look, but stayed silent.

"Where do you think they are?" she asked after a moment.

His mouth turned down. "This is out of my realm. Just because my father is some almighty being doesn't mean I have the knowledge he does. Clearly these kids' minds are trapped, and I'm hoping we can find them in one place. What we'll do if we find them... I have no idea."

They fell silent again as they continued to travel.

The blur of white around them seemed to mesh together, a glob of white paint, and her eyes began to ache, longing for color.

Soon, the sky began to darken, and gray wisps circled the ivory sun. She blinked, her heart suddenly apparent in her chest. She never thought she'd be excited to see such a grim color.

A slight wind started to pick up, the chalky trees moving around them, though she didn't feel any air push over her skin. The more they traveled, the darker the sky became. A low whistle began to echo in the air around them, and the leaves on the trees also started to darken. An uneasy feeling settled in November's chest, and she shook her arms out to the sides, continuing to walk.

Cam's jaw was tight, his teeth glued together, and his eyes glared out in front of him. After they took another bend, November paused. Out before her, a large cliff jutted out in front of her, with billowing dark clouds moving in fast over the sky. Below the cliff, violent waves crashed into the rock, tossing and churning, a black pit below. Darkness itched on her skin as she took in the sight.

"Cam..." A heaviness pressed into her chest, weighing her down. "This is the cliff. This..." She moved up to the edge of the rock and peered down. Dozens of bodies floated beneath her, still and silent in the waves. Their expressions were blank, eyes open, unmoving. Everett's body lay in the middle, the waves tossing him to and fro. "Cam!"

He joined her side, peering down next to her. "These are them, aren't they?"

November's throat sealed off tight. She nodded quickly, unable to speak.

"They... seem unresponsive," he said. "Like they don't know that they're there."

She tried to push out even breaths. "What do we do?"

"Nothing," a voice came from behind.

November went cold. The voice was smooth and deep, but rough around the edges. It melted her insides, skimming along her shoulders, before it jabbed right into her heart. She didn't dare move. She didn't dare turn around.

"What are you doing here?" she choked out, without moving. She felt every inch of his presence behind her, a sudden surge of electricity in the air between them.

“I’m here to warn you.”

November slowly peeked around, and she immediately shut her eyes. He was even more beautiful than she remembered. The darkness of his hair matched the deep grooves of his cheeks, stark against his pale skin. His expression was severe, his dark eyes staring her down, lips pressed together tight.

“Vincent,” she breathed.

He held his cane in one hand, his knuckles white against his skin. His head was cocked to the side, as if taking her in deeply.

“Why?” she asked.

His black eyes narrowed, and his expression darkened. “You know why.”

She swallowed.

Because she abandoned him. Because she didn’t choose him. He’d professed his love to her, and she threw it in his face. She thought she did it softly, she thought he understood that she needed to walk away from this life and start a new one, but clearly, he still held a vendetta against her.

“It didn’t take you long to move on,” he said.

“So you get back at me by torturing these kids? You aren’t who I thought you were, Vincent.”

He stayed unmoving, staring her down. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t I?” Her voice heightened. “You’re letting whatever... *conflict* we have between us hurt these kids. I thought I knew you, but I clearly don’t.”

He barked out a dry laugh. “Is that what you think?” The wind whipped again, but his wild hair stayed unmoving.

“Then help those kids. Release them from whatever sick prison you’re holding them in.”

Vincent’s hand tightened on his cane. “You’re seeing this cliff—this scene—because I’m allowing you to see this. They aren’t really here.”

November’s mouth fell open. “Then *where* are they? Where are *we*?”

“We’re in your mind,” Cam said. “Aren’t we?”

Vincent gave a single nod. His eyes slithered over to his son, and November shook her head. She still marveled at how similar they looked.

“I knew you wouldn’t stop searching for me, so I brought you here. To tell you to leave me alone. I know what I’m doing.”

“So we’re... not in the dream plane?” Cam asked.

Vincent shook his head. “No. And that’s not a place you can travel to. Not if I have any say.”

November gripped the edges of her shirt. “Why are you being so difficult?”

A flicker of softness sparked on Vincent’s face, before his expression went hard again. “Just be careful with who you trust. And stop searching for me. I know what I’m doing.”

November opened her mouth again, but he waved his hand out in front of him, stopping her.

“Goodbye, November.”

In a flash, the world went white, a bright light searing her eyes. She blinked, and a chill erupted along her body. Her vision cleared, and she stumbled backwards, taking in her surroundings. She was back in the studio at the manor. Her reflection stared out into the mirror before her. Genevieve had left, and she was alone. Cam was nowhere to be found.

November stood shaking in the middle of the studio, her feet glued to the floor, chills running up and down her arms and legs. Her jaw chattered, but she didn’t move to rub out the cold. She felt bloodless—lifeless—like she would never be okay again.

She had seen Vincent. After all this time, after searching for him, she’d *seen* him. And he’d played her once more. He’d let them think they were entering the dream realm when he’d only been toying with them in his mind. Just like he always did. He was always in control. Things were always just a game to him.

She’d seen Everett. But she hadn’t. Vincent had planted an image in her head, making her think she saw him. And where was Cam? Vincent had obviously kept him. What was he doing to him?

She stood trembling for a long while, until she heard footsteps rushing down the hall from outside. Marcus appeared, out of breath, his chest pumping up and down. His eyes connected with hers before he pushed back a chunk of charcoal hair.

“I could... I could *feel* you,” he said. “You’re not okay.”

November shook her head, tears starting to gather. She wanted to speak, but her throat was too tight. It was hard enough to breathe.

“What happened?”

November hiccupped, still trying to inhale and exhale through the lump in her throat. She shook her head, tears slipping down her cheeks.

Marcus marched forward and wrapped his arms around her. He pulled her in close, and her tears stained his black T-shirt. More tears came, and her breathing came out in gasps. She started full-on sobbing, and even though she didn’t want Marcus to see her like this, she still couldn’t move. She allowed him to hold her.

“It’s Vincent, isn’t it?” he asked. “You’ve seen him. I can see... fuzzy pictures of him in your mind. It must be the bond.”

November nodded between sobs.

“I’m so sorry.” Marcus pulled her in tighter. “You cared about him, didn’t you?”

Again, November nodded.

“And he strung you along?”

Another nod.

Marcus gently pushed her back until he held her shoulders. He lowered his head so he looked her in the eye.

“We need to destroy him,” he said.

She shook her head. “We can’t,” she was finally able to choke out. “Nothing can hurt him. He’s immortal. He’s all powerful. He can’t be stopped.”

“We have this.” Marcus reached into his back pocket and pulled out the Pink Ivory stake. The afternoon light sparkled on its ivory surface. “It kills any supernatural beings. Don’t you think it could kill Vincent, too?”

November’s lips parted as she took in the stake, at the carvings and swirls that ran up and down the wood.

“Do you think it would work?”

“All we can do is try.”

She wiped the tears from off her cheeks, and her despair turned to fire. Vincent had said that he was there to warn them. He’d *threatened* them. He clearly wasn’t going to stop until he got what he wanted—her dead at the bottom of the cliff.

She sniffed and wiped her nose. “Yes. Yes, we need to try.”

Marcus pocketed the stake again, then took her hands in his own. He lifted up one of her wrists, and gently placed a kiss on top. “Then we’ll figure out a way.”

Twenty-Five

NEVER BELIEVE

“HOW ARE YOU DOING?” her uncle Mason asked as he stepped into her room.

The bright yellow leaves from the tree had started to drift down onto her bed and floor, scattering all over the room. The window sat open on the far end, fresh air wafting inside, a few leaves rustling overhead. She stared above her, not turning at her uncle’s voice. Marcus had told the others what had happened—that she’d seen Vincent and how it wasn’t good. He’d still kept the Pink Ivory stake a secret, but they all knew that Cam was missing. Again, she wondered what on earth Vincent would want with him.

“Obviously not well from your silence,” her uncle said. He stepped deeper into the room, before sitting on the bed next to her. He stroked his mustache.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” November said.

“Really? Because I think you should. You’re bottling things up. You’re not facing your emotions. I don’t want to see you spinning in a spiral downward. Don’t forget I was the one with you when you had your first episode.”

“Yeah, I remember,” November said bitterly. “But can you blame me for being triggered after my parents died?” She didn’t want to think about that.

“Besides,” November continued. “What do you want me to say? That I’m terrified? That I obviously shouldn’t be okay when someone I cared about is out for my blood? That I’m completely helpless against him? And yeah, I am spiraling. I’ve had this... darkness in me that I can’t get rid of. It

carries with me *all the time*. You wouldn't even want to know the things I've... done."

Her uncle's thick brows pushed together. "What do you mean *done*?"

Marcus's handsome face came to mind. "N-nothing. Never mind."

Her uncle frowned. "If there's something you're keeping from me, you should tell me."

Silence beat between them, November holding her tongue. She had an addiction to Marcus, and he could never know that.

Uncle Mason hefted out a breath. "Fine. But you should trust me. No one else has your best interests at heart."

Again, Marcus's face came to mind.

He does.

Marcus understood. He cared. He'd sensed when she was hurt. He could see her own thoughts in his head. They were bonded, and she ached to see him again.

"Anyway," her uncle said, "I'm here because as you know, I've been traveling with Roderick. We've been visiting the families of the kids in the comas, seeing if we could find any connection between them. We discovered something. We found out that these kids have all been musical. But not only that—they've all played the flute. I know it doesn't make sense, but it's the one connection we've found."

November sat upright in bed, and the leaves rustled again. "What? Everett didn't play the flute! That's absurd!"

Her uncle Mason nodded. "For a brief stint in the fifth grade, he did. We researched it."

The thought of Everett playing the flute as a little boy was hard to picture.

"But... why would Vincent attack kids who all played the flute? That's crazy!"

"I don't know. I agree that it doesn't make any sense."

Silence settled between them again.

"You should be aware of something else," her uncle said tentatively. "Just because... you should know why things might be... awkward."

"Awkward?"

"Roderick broke up with Conroy. At least, they're taking a break."

"What? But they're so perfect for each other!"

"Something went down between them."

“No wonder things seemed weird between them when Roderick returned.”

Her uncle nodded. “Roderick didn’t even want to return, but I made him. I told him he needed to make things right, whether or not they ended up together.”

“I still can’t believe it.”

“Anyway, I thought you should know, so you didn’t say anything that embarrassed you, or them.”

“Sure. Yeah. Thanks.”

Her uncle stood up from the bed and it bounced. “I’ll leave you to it. Just try and keep your head steady, okay? I don’t want to see you fall into a place you won’t come back from.”

He closed the door softly, and November laid back down on the bed, the pillows squishing around her. The bright yellow leaves moved hypnotizing above her, the sound of the breeze lulling her eyes closed. The floorboards creaked and her head darted over. A figure stepped into the room, and for a moment, she thought it was Vincent returning to her.

“It’s just me,” Marcus said.

He lowered himself onto the bed next to her and laid down, his body inches from hers. She was suddenly aware of his entire presence, a charge in the air between them. It wasn’t like the feeling she felt when she was with Vincent. This was different, more... addictive. Like she couldn’t breathe a sigh of relief until she was with him. Vincent was more intense. Like she didn’t trust herself when she was around him. He carried a darkness to him that ate through her exterior, even though she *wanted* him to love her. She *wanted* him to feel the intensity she felt when she was with him. But with Marcus... he gave her peace of mind. And Everett, well, Everett didn’t compare. He had just been sunshine.

Marcus reached over and played with the necklace around her throat. His fingertips brushed just underneath her neck, as he turned the key over in his hand.

“I wonder what Samuel wanted with this,” he murmured. He turned it over again and the cool metal touched her skin. “I mean, obviously he wants his Blood magic back, but what would they do if they got it?”

November shivered. She didn’t want to know.

“All that matters is that we keep it away from them,” she said.

Marcus nodded, then slid his hand through hers as they both lay staring upward through the fall leaves. Her muscles relaxed into the mattress with him by her side, and she relished in the sudden comfort she didn't realize she needed.

"This is nice," she murmured. "Being next to you."

"I know," he said. "It's like I can't breathe until I'm with you."

"Like everything isn't okay unless I'm in your presence."

"Exactly."

"It sounds like a cheesy love story," she said and cringed. "But it's true."

The two waited in silence, both of them knowing what they wanted, an unspoken communication between them.

"You know I want to..." Marcus began.

"Then do it," November breathed.

Her heart beat hard against her chest, she was sure Marcus could hear it. An immediate sense of shame jolted through her, and a sick feeling planted itself in her gut. Why was she feeling this way? There was nothing wrong with what they were doing. It was good for her. She needed it. Without Marcus, she wouldn't be okay right now. He made all the pain go away.

"I'm becoming more bonded with you," Marcus said, unmoving. "I know I should feel guilty, but I don't."

She wished she felt the same. Guilt tingled underneath her skin, lingering in her chest.

"I know," she said. "Me too." The lie felt like acid in her mouth.

Maybe she should tell Marcus that she was done. That what they were doing was wrong. Was she *too* addicted to him? When would it stop? Would she just keep bonding herself to him until it was too late to get out of it? Would they be linked for the rest of their lives? And did she care?

They laid in silence for a long time, enjoying each other's presence, until Marcus turned to her and bit.

A loud banging came from the downstairs front door, and November jerked up, startled. Bright light seared her eyes, and she rubbed them, her room slowly coming into focus. The window had been shut, and a blanket placed

over her. She peeked over to where Marcus had been the night before and she sucked in a ragged breath. She really shouldn't have been with him like that.

Another loud banging resonated, and she jumped out of bed, the floorboards cool under her feet. She rushed across the room and out the doorway, leaping down two stairs at a time before entering the main foyer. Her only thought was Cam and if he was back. Conroy threw open the door. Ty stood on the porch, small and frail, freckles splattered on his cheeks. Conroy didn't move to let him inside.

November gripped the wood banister next to her. "What are you doing here?" As she peered closer, she took in his ruffled hair, a few holes in his clothes, a red rash on his cheek. "What happened to you?"

"I told the witches I didn't want to be with them anymore. After what happened when they sacrificed Deva..." He swallowed, wincing. "I couldn't get it out of my head. I couldn't believe I wanted to be with a group of people who would hurt others to get what they want. And they used me."

"You helped them," November said. "They deceived us, they said they would help us, and they stabbed us in the back. *You* stabbed us in the back."

Ty nodded solemnly. "I was blind. I felt welcomed by them, but when everything went down, I realized you would never turn on your own like that. And when I told them I was leaving... they punished me." He touched his cheek.

"You can't expect us to just let you come back here," November said. "You could've helped. You could've stopped Margaret from becoming a Blood Walker. Now she's gone, Deva's gone. Cam's gone. Genevieve might as well be gone. And you were gone, too. Why should we welcome you with open arms?"

"Because we need him," Conroy said.

"Conroy's right." Roderick appeared into the room, and the clocks around him chimed.

Conroy stiffened, slowly sliding his gaze over. The color drained from his face, and he stayed silent.

"The boy has information on the witches," Roderick continued. "The witches were able to bring the girls in their coven back to the living, perhaps he knows how to help the rest of the kids get back."

Ty nodded quickly. "I can. I will. Just don't throw me out. It's not safe out there."

"If we can trust you," November said. "How can we trust you?"

"B-because I know about the Harvest, and b-because... I met Ester."

November's grip tightened on the banister. "What do you mean? Ester? Marcus's mom?"

Ty nodded again. "Ester came to the Holdara coven. She came bearing a message. She said that the Harvest was theirs, and that they wouldn't share."

Roderick straightened the tie around his throat, observing the conversation with watchful eyes. Conroy ran a hand through his already mussed hair.

So Ester *did* want the Harvest to happen. Marcus's only hope was to try to convince their mother to stop it. He'd be devastated.

"What else do you know?" November asked.

"I... I know where the Harvest is going to happen. I'll... I'll help you."

November narrowed her gaze at him. "I still don't trust you."

"I want to know," Marcus said, and he stepped into the room. He crossed his arms and leaned against the wall. "We know it's to happen on my eighteenth birthday, but knowing the location could help stop it."

Conroy still kept a tight grip on the door, not allowing Ty inside.

"Please let me in," Ty said. "I promise I'll help." His eyes stayed glued to November's, and he pleaded. "After everything we've been together. After losing April. Of course I'd go crazy for a brief moment in time. I'm sure you can understand that."

November clamped her jaw down together shut, but gave a single nod. "Let him in. And make sure he tells us everything he knows about Ester and this Harvest."

Twenty-Six

REUNION

“IT’S in a graveyard just outside of town,” Ty said as they settled into the library. “That’s where the Harvest is going to happen.”

“Really? A *graveyard*? Could it get any more cliché than that?” November said.

“No, it makes sense,” Marcus murmured. He pushed back his black hair from off his forehead. “It’s where the Zodiac coven are most connected to their ancestors. Earth magic is their choice of magic.”

Conroy and Roderick stood off to the side, both their backs straight, clearly trying not to acknowledge each other. Uncle Mason had his feet kicked up onto a chair in front of him.

November planted herself down into a chair next to her uncle, crossing her arms. “So this Harvest is to take place in this cemetery. What else did Ester tell you?”

Ty went pale, and his freckles darkened. “She told me to tell you exactly what I’m telling you now. The location of the Harvest.”

November threw up her arms. “I told you we shouldn’t have let him in! He’s doing exactly what Ester wants him to! We clearly can’t trust him!”

“No, it’s okay.” Marcus motioned November down. “I’d rather know what my mother wants us to know than be blind. I don’t trust her as far as I can throw her, but we can work off of this.” He turned to Conroy. “What do we know about this graveyard?”

“No,” November interrupted. “I know this Harvest is important, but we should be focusing on these kids. Did you all forget that I just saw *Vincent*?”

And that Cam is gone? We can't just forget that and leave these kids to die—leave Cam to that madman.”

Marcus's eyes tightened. “You told me you'd help me.”

“And I told you—” She broke off. Marcus's glare shot straight through her, making her insides freeze. A cold rush went through her as he kept his gaze locked with hers. Tingles erupted down her arms and back. She couldn't move. Even though she believed they needed to focus on these kids, Marcus's pull toward the Harvest was too strong. She felt her thoughts shift in her head, agreeing with him, until she nodded.

“Yeah,” she said. “Okay. I get it. The Harvest.”

A flicker of a smile lifted on Marcus's face before he turned back to Conroy.

It was Roderick who spoke.

“The graveyard is a resting ground for dark spirits. I checked it out myself. Everyone who has been buried there has turned dark in the afterlife.”

“And where is this graveyard?”

“The Aurora graveyard is just outside of town.”

November sucked in a ragged breath. “So a dark spirit graveyard filled with Earth magic for the Zodiac coven to draw on.”

Marcus nodded. “Though maybe it isn't Earth magic they're wanting to tap into at all. Dark spirits leave behind Sacrificial magic because whenever they choose to turn dark, their tie to their earthly bodies is severed when they sacrifice their humanity. Sacrificial magic isn't as powerful as Blood magic, but it's a heck of a lot more powerful than Earth magic. I bet they plan on using that magic to make sure the Harvest goes through.”

“How much time do we have?” Conroy asked, finally speaking. Roderick shifted, his eyes sliding over to him before they darted away.

“Two days,” Marcus said. “Our eighteenth birthday is in two days.”

Quincy placed a steaming plate of hot food in front of November later that evening. Vegetables, rice, and some sort of meat decorated the plate, with a basket of rolls in front of her. Everyone sat at the dining room table, including Genevieve, who was chewing the ends of her hair. It was

Quincy's idea that the household needed to group together and bond by having a nice dinner with each other. Though by the wary looks on each other's faces—particularly Conroy and Roderick purposely staring in the opposite direction—no one wanted to be there. Not even November, whose stomach rumbled at the sight of food.

Marcus sat across from her, holding his fork, staring her down. She shifted underneath his look, aching to be closer to him. But a small part of her knew that what she felt for him wasn't healthy. She didn't want to break the bond between them, but there was a small, sane part of her that knew she needed to. Her gaze darted away.

Clementine set a hand on Genevieve's arm, pulling it downward away from her hair. Genevieve glared, and picked up a dark chunk again, analyzing the split ends.

Uncle Mason lifted up his glass and held it out to the group. "To friends—no, to family. Because family is what we are. And family is what matters." He winked at November.

She resisted the urge to cover her eyes with her palms. This didn't feel like family. Her family had been her parents. Her family had been April. Now, they were just a bunch of individuals trying to work towards different goals, for different reasons. All Marcus cared about was the Harvest, and all Conroy and Roderick cared about was avoiding each other. Clementine only seemed to worry about bringing Genevieve back, and November was a broken record, knowing that she needed to stop Vincent. Yet it was as if no one seemed to care anymore. Wasn't this what brought them all together? To save these kids? To save Everett? Though she wasn't even sure Everett was her motivation anymore. She wasn't sure if she had *any* motivation. All she could think about was Marcus and getting her next fix.

She shoved her plate away. "I can't eat," she said, standing. She banged her knee on the inside of the table and winced.

Marcus stood along with her. "Neither can I." He gave her a hungry look.

"No," November motioned him down. "You stay and eat *this food*. I need... I need some air."

Marcus's brows pinched together as she departed.

November aimlessly moved down the dim hallways, turning corner after corner. She ran her fingers along the peeling wallpaper, her footsteps soft on the torn carpet beneath her. Cobwebs hung in the corners, and dust

lined the crown molding. She wandered through the home, throughout the upstairs and then back down to the main level. Each room was quiet, nothing heard but the wind as it whipped outside, creaking the walls. The lights flickered, and she knew she should go to her room to rest, but she couldn't sit. Every part of her buzzed, like a hundred cc's of caffeine had been shot into her heart, and her mind jumped from topic to topic, not knowing how to settle.

She let her legs carry her forward, wandering without purpose, without thought, until she stopped at the end of a long hallway. Her feet rooted to the ground and her heartrate accelerated. She stared down at the wooden trap door at the end of the hall, sitting still and silent.

A vision of Vincent motioning her downward into his lair flashed to mind and her breath caught. She could still see him hovering at the end of the hall, his cane in hand, his eyes dark. She knew what lay in the lair beneath her, and her muscles snapped at the chance of going down there again.

She swallowed, staring at the small door, her heart now hammering.

She slowly slid a foot forward, and then another, creeping toward the end of the hall. Her entire being pounded, from the backs of her eyes to her fingertips. She didn't know why she suddenly felt so compelled to go down there, but she knew her subconscious had already made the decision for her.

She continued to creep forward, until she reached the end of the hall. She gently bent down and dug her fingertips underneath the small wooden door. Creaking the door open, she peered down into the pit below. Her pulse sped faster, but she knew she couldn't stop. There was no going back.

November disappeared underneath the trap door and gripped the cool iron railing beneath her fingertips. She lowered herself down the metal stairs, her footsteps echoing down into the dark. When she reached the bottom, she peered up into the small light from the hallway above, before she crept further into the dark.

The floor was a cool stone beneath her, the walls also stone, until the narrow corridor opened up into a huge cave. She took the candle that lay just inside the massive space and used a match from the box that Vincent always used to lighten the room. After striking the match, the cave came alive, light flickering off the towering walls and high ceiling. She moved around the cave, lighting each of the small candles that were interspersed throughout the space.

Soon, tiny flames danced all over the cave, bits of light dancing back and forth, reflecting on the smooth wood floor that stretched in the middle of the room. A shiny black baby grand piano sat neatly on the wood floor, the candles reflecting on its glossy surface.

The vision of Vincent sitting by that piano, playing a haunting melody, drifted through her mind. The eerie tunes of his compositions still seemed to play on the air, linger between her and the instrument. She remembered what it was like to climb to the music that flowed from his deft fingers, what it was like to climb in the room close to *him*, and she clutched her hands to her chest.

His melody still resonated in her mind, and she let her arms float outward, as if the invisible tune carried them upward. She allowed her feet to sway side to side, to glide throughout the room. She let herself begin to dance, her heart aching to hear his music again, her soul longing to be in his presence. She wished things could be as they were, not the way they were now.

What if she hadn't rejected him? What if she had told him she loved him and wanted to spend her life with him? Would everything be different? They could be dancing together right now, instead of him hating her, instead of her being bonded to a Blood Walker that only confused her. Vincent had been real. He hadn't been an addiction. Yes, he had been darkness, but life was full of darkness. Wasn't darkness necessary to see the light? And now she didn't have any light—not with him out of her life.

She continued to allow herself to move—to glide through the dark—nothing but her and the beating of her heart. She'd do anything to see him again. She'd do anything to hear his voice again—in the way that she remembered. He'd stared at her with such intensity, such fondness, and now he only looked at her with disdain. All because she'd rejected him?

Tears burned behind the backs of her eyes, but she wouldn't allow herself to stop. She needed to feel connected to him somehow—even if it was just through this pathetic dance all alone. If only she could rewind time. If only Vincent hadn't lied about his true identity. If only she'd thought to give him a chance instead of shutting him away.

"I wondered when you'd come back down here."

November stumbled out of her hypnotic dance, setting her hands on her stomach.

That voice.

It was velvet through the dark, still gliding along her skin. Had she imagined it?

“Don’t stop on my account. I love to watch you dance.”

He emerged from the dark, the candlelight shifting over his face. The shadows played off of the deep grooves of his bones, his eyes just as dark and intense as she remembered.

“V-Vincent? What are you...?” She broke off, blinking. She wasn’t sure if she was seeing things.

He stepped deeper into the cave, his cheeks and eyes hollow in the dim light.

Her jaw tightened. “Where’s Cam?”

“He’s fine,” he said plainly. “I needed to speak with him. He went on his way. I expect he’ll return soon.”

She shook her head, still not able to believe she was seeing him. “What do you want?”

“I wanted to make sure you were okay.”

November barked out a laugh, and it echoed on the cave walls. “Are you kidding? See if I’m okay? After... after everything? Vincent, you’re trying to *kill* me. You’re hurting dozens of kids. I can’t believe you have the nerve to ask me if I’m okay!”

He tilted his head to the side, his lips pursed. “Why do you think these things of me?”

“You said so yourself that I knew why you were doing this. You already admitted to harming everyone.”

“I did no such thing.”

“Then what... *what* were you talking about?”

His fingers tightened on his cane. “I care about you, November. Just because you rejected me doesn’t mean I don’t care about your wellbeing.”

She narrowed her eyes. “So you’re saying you have nothing to do with the dream and these kids falling into comas?”

“Of course not. I can’t believe you think that of me.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“You can’t know my heart.”

“Then *where* have you been? Why let us think that you’ve been behind it all?”

“I’ve been lingering on the other side, trying to sort out my brain. I... I haven’t been okay since you left me. But I wanted to give you as much

space as I could. It wasn't until I heard about the dream that I came back. I didn't want you involved. I told you I could fix this on my own. I don't want you getting hurt."

"But..." Was he telling the truth? Did he really care about her? Was he not trying to murder her or hurt these kids? It was too much to wrap her mind around. She'd been adamant that he was the culprit. He was, wasn't he?

"Then why are you here now?" she asked. Her body raked with shivers, and she wrapped her arms around herself.

"I spend a great deal of time down here when I'm not on the other side. Maybe I'm pathetic, I don't know, but I hoped you would find me here." His voice lifted up at the end, hopeful.

"I'm still not sure I can believe you."

Shadows played over his face as he took a step forward. "Believe what you will, Huntington, believe that I'm a psychopath, as I know you think I am, but I'm not here to convince you. I've already said too much. I'll let you be. This will be the last time you see me."

He started to turn, his lean figure limping away when November called out, "Wait! No!"

He couldn't leave. Her mind was spinning. Or did she want him to leave? It wasn't as if they had a future together. But maybe he wasn't harming these kids. Maybe he *could* help them. He was Cedric—Cam's father—an immortal being who could walk in and out of this world, the only living man who could do so. Did she really want him to walk away? Her life had had an emptiness to it since he'd left. She'd had a darkness in her that she hadn't been able to get rid of. But that didn't have to do with him, did it? She just wasn't mentally stable. She'd suffered through a lot, and now her mind was taking a toll.

"Don't go." The words came out before she could stop them.

He paused, his back to her, his fingers white on his cane.

"I don't want you to go," she repeated.

He slowly turned, the candlelight illuminating his profile. He looked like a god, his presence all commanding, even though there was a vulnerability to his face she hadn't seen in a long while.

"Why?" His voice was soft, a whisper.

She opened her mouth to say because she cared about him, but footsteps clomped from the dark, and Marcus emerged into the light. His hair covered

one eye, his face pale. His gaze immediately went to Vincent, which then darted to November.

“What is this?” Marcus demanded.

Vincent straightened, and his lips curled in. “Blood Walker.”

“Marcus, what are you doing here?” November asked.

“I followed you down here,” he said. “After you left dinner, I had to know what was wrong. I saw you go down here, but... I wasn’t sure if I should follow. I clearly made the right decision.” He threw a glare at Vincent. “You’re him, aren’t you?”

Vincent pushed back his shoulders, a muscle jumping in his jaw. “And why would November be your concern?”

Marcus grinned. “November and I... we have a *special* connection.”

Vincent went still, his hands still tight on his cane. “Tell me what you mean now, or I’ll rip your head off.” His voice was quiet, threatening.

Marcus marched forward, sticking his face right up into Vincent’s. He peeled his teeth back, veins bulging in his neck.

“Threaten me one more time,” Marcus growled. Vincent held his ground. He didn’t move. Didn’t flinch.

“Stop!” November said. “Stop. There isn’t any need to fight. We’re all on the same side!”

“Are we?” Vincent spun back to her. “He’s a Blood Walker. They can’t be trusted. If you’re not too careful, you can be...”

“Bonded?” Marcus grinned again. “Yes, we wouldn’t want that, would we?” His eyes lit up with mirth.

Vincent’s jaw ground back and forth. “What are you not telling me?”

“Exactly what I just implied,” Marcus said. “We’re bonded.”

Vincent paled, and a tick jumped in his cheek. His teeth were clamped down together so tight, she was sure his jaw would crack. “Is this true?” He didn’t look at November, he kept his gaze locked on Marcus.

November shifted, rolling her shoulders. “It’s...”

“It’s true,” Marcus said. “Jealous?” His smile deepened, before he turned back to November. “Let’s go. Leave this coward to cower down here alone.”

“No,” November said. Her voice was loud in the dim light. “We need Vincent. He can help us.” Now that she knew he wasn’t out to get her. Now that she had him back, she couldn’t leave him.

“I said let’s *leave*,” Marcus repeated. He stared her down, and November felt a pull between them. He wouldn’t remove his gaze. Tingles erupted down her back, and she slid a foot forward. She didn’t want to leave, but Marcus’s desire to do so was too strong.

“O-okay,” she said. “I’m coming.”

An easy smile spread over Marcus’s face. “Later, V.” He punched him in the arm as he turned and disappeared into the dark. November followed, leaving Vincent alone.

Twenty-Seven

RED DEVIL

"I'M TELLING YOU, he was here."

Conroy ran a hand through his messy hair, before adjusting his thin-framed glasses. "I don't know, November. I guess I believe you, but why would he show up? Especially now? Seems fishy."

November remembered the intensity in Vincent's voice—the sincerity in which he described his feelings toward her.

"I don't think he's out to get us. I think he wants to help."

"That may be, but I don't think it's a good idea."

"Neither do I," Clementine piped up from the corner. She sat by Genevieve's side, playing a game of checkers. She made a move, and Genevieve slammed her hands down on the table, growling in frustration. "Maybe he's here to get Genevieve. She plays the flute like the other kids who have fallen into comas. Maybe she's next." Her upper lip trembled.

"I'm sure she hasn't fallen victim to the dream because she's out of her mind," November said darkly. "It has nothing to do with Vincent."

"I'm with November," Roderick said as he entered the room. His suit slid along his skinny frame, his usual cravat at his neck. "Perhaps we've been wrong all along. Perhaps there is another culprit."

"No one asked you," Conroy snapped.

"I wasn't asking for permission to speak."

"Well, maybe it's *you*," Conroy bit back. "You *were* a dark spirit after all. Maybe you've decided to return to the dark side." Conroy turned away, keeping his eyes fixed out in front of him.

Roderick lifted his chin. “It’s not a bad idea to explore other options. Who else would have a vendetta against all these children?”

“That’s not what we’re focusing on now,” Conroy said. “Whether or not Vincent has returned doesn’t concern us. We’re not going to work with him. We’re going to focus on the Harvest and helping Marcus and his sisters. I lost April... and... and I don’t want to see any of these siblings lose each other, too.”

“They’re not going to have to,” November’s uncle said as he stepped into the room after Roderick. “Look what I found.” He marched inside and slammed down a book on the table. “I found this old journal in Clifton’s study. It’s from a witch named Elizabeth Ainsworth. She lived in the 1600s before the Salem witch trials. And... she was a triplet.”

November’s forehead creased. “You think she was part of the Harvest?”

Her uncle nodded. “She and her two brothers were cursed to participate in the Harvest. But she wasn’t just any witch. Elizabeth was gifted in dreams— meaning, she had power over them and was known for toying with her fellow coven, making them dream things they didn’t want to dream—particularly nightmares. But Elizabeth, loving her brothers more than life, refused to give in. The night of the Harvest, on the triplets’ eighteenth birthday, they cast a spell under the full moon.

“Anyway, the night of the Harvest, the triplets joined forces and tapped into not only the power of the moon, but Elizabeth’s power, too, sending their whole coven into a deep sleep. Elizabeth and her brothers lived, escaping their fate. The coven never did wake up. Elizabeth hid their bodies until they desiccated and were swallowed up in the earth. The siblings were able to escape the Harvest, but not untouched. Each of the triplets received a mark—a mark shaped like a moon. It describes in here that by saving their lives that night, they became a slave to the moon.”

“Don’t tell me you’re going to say that werewolves exist, too?” November asked. “Because if that’s the case, I couldn’t handle that.”

“No, nothing like that. At least, that’s what I’m assuming.” Her uncle stroked his mustache. “I’m only saying that if there’s a spell, something Marcus and his sisters can draw on, there might be a way to stop it.” He flipped a page in the book. “It says here that all the Harvests that take place after hers *must* be completed for Elizabeth and her brothers to keep their immortal lives. If any future Harvests are stopped, then she’ll lose her eternal life.”

The room settled into silence, as Clementine and Genevieve stopped their game. Conroy and Roderick continued to ignore each other, but there seemed to be a new softness between them. Her uncle stared her down, lifting his brows.

“The dreams,” November said. “She had power over dreams.”

Her uncle gave a sharp nod. “Do you think it’s a coincidence that there’s a witch who survived the Harvest *and* has power over dreams?”

“You don’t possibly think she could still be alive today. That her eternal life is real?”

“Vincent is immortal. Who’s to say she isn’t, too?”

“So this... Elizabeth might be running around wishing me dead,” November said. “That doesn’t make sense. I’ve never even heard of her! How would we even find her? And this means Vincent is innocent after all.” She squeezed her fists in tight.

“This is ridiculous,” Conroy said. “Just because there was a witch long ago that had these powers doesn’t mean she’s the one behind it.”

“It’s all we have to go off of,” November said tersely. “And if this is right, it means the Harvest is linked to the dreams involving me. The comas and the Harvest could be connected!”

“This is still too far-fetched,” Conroy repeated.

“We go to Marcus and his sisters,” Roderick said, his voice smooth. “If we can figure out a way to stop the Harvest, it’ll draw Elizabeth out. She will want this Harvest to go through so she can keep her life. And if we can draw her out, then we can make her stop the dreams. It’s all linked.”

November planted her feet out to the sides of her, crossing her arms. “So we stop the Harvest, draw out a psychotic dream witch, then we find out a way to save Everett and everyone else.”

Roderick gave a sharp nod.

“Yeah, sure. No big deal.”

“Knock, knock.”

Marcus stepped into the doorway at the back of the manor, lingering under the doorframe. November sat on the back steps, her view overlooking the gardens and shimmering lake. Moonlight reflected in the lake, a large

golden orb, the water still as glass. A light breeze skimmed across her shoulders, and she took in Marcus's silhouette in the doorway. The light from the inside hall shone behind him.

"What do you want?" She didn't like how grumpy she sounded, she didn't like how grumpy she seemed to feel all the time, she just wasn't in the mood for Marcus—not yet anyway.

He stepped out into the night and lowered himself down next to her. He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, hands linked in front of him. November peeked over and took in his clear-cut bones and handsome features.

"Your uncle and Roderick want my sisters and I to start practicing spells," he said. "Since we're each half witch, he thinks that if we can use our abilities to stop the Harvest like Elizabeth did, then it'll stop Elizabeth."

"Seems like a convenient answer to this all," November mumbled.

"Maybe. But it's a win-win, right? Stop the Harvest *and* the dreams?"

"Yeah, I guess." She squinted over at him. "But no one knows you're a Blood Walker. Aren't you afraid that's going to come out while you're practicing your abilities?"

"For all they know I'm just a siphon. Clementine and Genevieve don't know who my real father is. It wasn't disclosed to them as children. As long as you don't say anything, no one will know."

November pursed her lips. She didn't know how she felt about Marcus still keeping his secret. She was *sick* of secrets. Secrets made her feel dirty. Especially their... secret.

"I didn't appreciate what you did back there with Vincent," she said. "I didn't want to leave the cave, but you made me. You used..." She pushed out a breath. "You used whatever bonding power that exists between us to make me do what you wanted. I don't appreciate that."

Marcus let out a small laugh. "I'm just protecting you, okay? We can't trust that dude. And you can trust me."

He turned to her and took her hands, his eyes finally meeting hers. Chills rippled down her arms, and his eyes were as dark as the sky behind him. They stayed in silence for several moments, and November tried to swallow, her throat dry.

She slid her hands out from his and she coughed. "Yeah, well, okay... I think I'll go in for the night." She started to stand up.

Marcus reached over and tugged on her arm, motioning her back down. "Don't you want to..." He lifted his brows. "You know?"

Her gaze flicked to his mouth then down to her wrist. Her heart sped and anticipation, before a wave of disgust hit.

"No, not tonight," she said. "I can't. Not tonight."

"Come on," he murmured, pulling her back down next to him. He cupped his hands behind the back of her neck and lowered his head to hers. "We need the escape."

Every part of November buzzed with awareness, her skin a live wire. All she could feel, hear, and see was Marcus, and the pull that he had on her. But a sick feeling twisted itself in her gut at the thought of being with him again. She *hated* being helpless around him. She didn't want him to have power over her anymore. She shook her head and pushed him away.

"No," she repeated. "Not tonight."

A small line creased between his brows. "I thought we had an understanding."

"We do. I don't know. Maybe tomorrow. I'm just not up for it tonight."

Marcus sat back, the line digging deeper. Hunger lit his eyes as he looked her over.

"No," he murmured. "I won't take no for an answer. You know you want this. You know you need this."

He grasped her shoulders and yanked her toward him. But instead of reaching for her wrist, he lunged forward at an impossible speed and plunged his teeth right into her neck. Pain sliced through her, and she called out, before the immediate pleasure followed. Warmth surged right into her core, spreading outward, spilling like blood, flowing through her. She let out a small gasp and leaned into his body. The feeling that filled her was more exquisite than any of their previous encounters. She held captured, paralyzed to the sensations that rippled through her.

She silently begged him to continue. She prayed this would never stop. She could live the rest of her entire life trapped in Marcus's hold.

Marcus drew her closer, his own moan escaping his mouth.

"Hand over the necklace," he said against her neck. "I want the necklace."

Her hands fluttered to her throat, and she touched the key around her neck. Her mind was spinning. *He wanted the necklace?* Samuel had wanted it, too. And now Marcus wanted it?

More pleasure washed through her as Marcus continued to drink.

“The necklace,” Marcus said again. “Hand it over.”

November didn’t have any control. She didn’t have any thought. Like a puppet, she ripped the necklace from off her neck and placed the key into Marcus’s hands. A small part of her brain knew this was wrong—that it was a red flag handing it over to him—but she couldn’t think past the colors that swam in her head.

Marcus lifted his mouth from her and licked his lips. A glint shone in his eyes, as he wiped his mouth.

“Now,” he said. “I forbid you to tell anyone that you gave this to me. And I forbid you to tell anyone what I am.”

“But...” November shook her head, trying to clear it. “Are you serious? This was all a ploy? To get me bonded to you so I’d hand over the necklace?”

“Not at first, no. Samuel gave me the idea, so I ran with it.” He grinned. “He convinced me who my real family was. I have to stop the Harvest somehow. And I’m not leaving it up to some spell that may or may not work. There is Blood magic in here,” he gripped the necklace, “and I intend to use it. And Samuel and the others are the ones who can truly help me.”

November’s head cleared a tad more. “No. You can’t trust them. Samuel... he’ll take it from you. He’ll use it for his own purposes. It’s better that we work together. We’ll work with your sisters. We’ll work with Conroy and Roderick. There’s an answer to this, Marcus.”

His lips twisted wryly. “I’m not leaving it in the fate of those who don’t understand. My real people, the Walkers, will want to help me.” He stood and held the necklace to his chest. “Remember, not a word.” And he turned and disappeared back into the house.

Twenty-Eight

FLESH AND BLOOD

“MARCUS IS GONE.” Conroy walked into the dining room the next morning, his arms crossed over his chest. His lean muscles pushed through his skin, his T-shirt tight. He stared the room down. “Does anyone know why?”

November swallowed hard on her bite of oatmeal, and it stuck in her throat. She opened her mouth, worked her voice, but her words only piled up on top of each other. She swallowed again.

“He’s *what*?” Clementine’s fork clanked to the table. “Where would he have gone?”

“Good riddance,” Genevieve said. “That kid gave me the creeps, always staring through that one eye of his, and his depressing demeanor. Who is he, the grim reaper? We don’t need him.”

Clementine slammed her hands down on the table. “Yes, we do! He’s our brother! And I can’t figure out a spell without him. How am I... I can’t...” Her breathing sped. “I can’t believe he abandoned us!”

Genevieve shrugged and went back to her food.

“You do realize we’re going to die, right, Genevieve?” Clementine’s breaths were still accelerating. “I can’t believe this.”

Conroy unfolded his arms. “It’s okay, Clementine. We’ll work it out. We’ll figure it out.” He turned to November. “Are you sure you don’t know anything? You two have been spending a lot of time with each other.”

He’s a Blood Walker. He took the Blood magic. He’s been feeding on me. We’re bonded. And now I can’t say anything.

Her thoughts repeated over and over again in her mind, but still, her voice was sealed shut.

"I can't say," was all she could muster.

Clementine was still hyperventilating. She had her palms pressed over her eyes, hiccupping.

"I'll find him," November said, standing abruptly up from the table. "He couldn't have gone far."

"The jeep is gone. He took off some time in the middle of the night."

"I'll..." November glanced over the room. "I'll still find him."

She brushed past Conroy's shoulder and stepped into the hallway, Clementine's sobs starting to fade away the further she traveled.

November pumped her fists in and out as her legs strode fast. How *dare* he? He'd used her to get what he wanted, and she'd fallen for him. Well, become addicted to him. She'd begun to have a level of trust with him, and he'd only shoved it in her face. He didn't care about her or anyone else here. Not even his sisters, who he'd abandoned. It was all about him and what he wanted. He'd played her so well.

Anger rose up her throat, and she tried to breathe. She wouldn't let him control her anymore. She could still put a stop to this. He was definitely going back to Samuel and the other Blood Walkers, and she couldn't let them get their hands on that Blood magic. Marcus didn't know what he was up against.

She hurried into her room and picked up the backpack on the floor. It had her climbing gear inside, along with a box of granola bars and a water bottle. She hadn't touched it for weeks, but it had been sitting in her room as if waiting for a moment like this to arise.

She rushed down the stairs two at a time, itching to leave before anyone could stop her. This was between her and Marcus, and she didn't want her uncle to tell her she couldn't go. She marched into the front entryway, and pushed the doors open.

November jerked, stumbling back a step.

Vincent stood in front of her, his weight leaning to one side, his cane planted out to the front of him.

"I'm coming with you," he said simply. Early morning light filtered down from the clouds above him, highlighting the lines of his face.

November blinked. "You're..." She glanced behind her. "Excuse me?"

“You’re going after Marcus, and I’m coming with you. I’m not letting you go alone.” His dark hair spattered out in all directions, his body strumming with tension.

“Why?” she asked simply. She still couldn’t believe he was right in front of her.

“I know what you’re going through. I saw you... last night with him. I saw him feeding on you.” His face darkened. “You’re trapped in an addiction, and I understand that, and I don’t blame you. I shouldn’t have left you. I shouldn’t have left you vulnerable. I should’ve stayed and fought for you.”

Silence beat between them, and the wind ruffled his hair. November couldn’t rip her gaze away.

Vincent knew.

“How?” she choked out.

“The Sylphs,” he murmured. “You walked in on me just a few months ago, caught in their presence. I can say that I was just learning to control them, but... I was just as addicted to being in their presence. You helped me see that. When you saw me with them, I had never been more mortified in my life.”

“But you...”

“Rationalized? Yes. Am I ashamed of it? Yes.”

“I’m...” Her gaze flittered downward. “I’m ashamed too.”

He took one lopsided step forward. “So let me help you. It’s time you have someone on your side who is looking out for your best interests.”

Her gaze lifted again, and she searched his face. Did she want to work with him? She’d gone the last couple weeks thinking he was out to kill her. But did she trust him now?

Peace fell between them, and her shoulders relaxed. There was a softness to Vincent that Marcus didn’t have. There was a clarity in Vincent, where there was only obsession and need with Marcus. She could trust him. She *did* trust him. With her life. Her heart bloomed at the thought of him wanting to help her.

“Okay,” she said softly. “Okay. Where do we go first?”

His lips twitched. “I think you already know.”

Their vehicle sped into the early afternoon, the clouds above them a fat blur, the trees around them shooting up into the gray sky. Shadows played in the corners of November's vision, extending deep into the forest, dancing out onto the road. She kept her eyes fixed, unable to rip them away from the highway. Vincent took his turns fast, the car smooth, until she finally peeked over at him.

The line of his jaw was cut tight, his teeth glued together. His dark eyes were narrowed, his fingers gripped onto the wheel. They hadn't said anything for the entire car ride, and she was afraid to say something now.

"How long have you been bonded?" Vincent's voice broke the silence, his voice loud in the quiet car.

She remembered that Vincent already knew. She could talk about it openly with him.

"I... I don't know," she said, eyebrows crunched. "It didn't seem like we were really bonded, until I was completely trapped. And the worst part is, I really didn't care."

"That's normal," he answered. "Don't blame yourself."

She ripped her gaze away and stared back out onto the road. "I've messed everything up. If only I had been honest, Marcus wouldn't have been able to get that Blood magic. Now, who knows what will happen. If Samuel and the others get their hands on it, there could be another rampage like they had in the past. Hundreds of people died, Vincent. I would be responsible for *all* of those deaths."

"We'll find him," he said tightly. "And we'll stop him. Or have you forgotten who you're in the car with?" His lips lifted.

November's stiff body relaxed slightly into the back of her chair. She still didn't know what he was capable of entirely, he'd always been so elusive with where he came from, but she knew there was no one else like him.

"So you've been hanging out on the other side," November broached softly. "Have you been... spending time with Isabelle?"

Isabelle had been his true love. Until Clifton Huntington, April's father, had had an affair with her. He'd killed her, and Vincent had never recovered.

"No," he said quietly. "I didn't want to. I couldn't. Not after I met..." His eyes flicked to her.

You.

The word hung unspoken between them. November shifted in her seat.

"You broke me," Vincent said quietly. "I acted like I didn't care. Like it was the for the best. And I wanted you to go out and find happiness, but it broke me. I'd never laid my heart out on the line like I did to you. Not even Isabelle. The only way I could take solace was to wander in the field of roses on the other side. That field, has the ability to heal hearts. Many spirits will walk that field, hoping to resolve whatever unfinished business they have on earth."

November's throat sealed off tight. "And did it work?"

He stared out onto the road for a long moment. "Would I be here if it did?"

She clenched her eyes shut, and shapes danced behind her eyelids. He really did still care for her. She didn't know how she felt about that. He had been everything to her. But then after his deception...

She needed someone like Everett.

"I don't expect you to say anything," Vincent said. "It's my problem. It's on me. And I still want what's best for you."

November gave a tight nod, still not able to speak. She couldn't think about all this now. She needed to focus on the Blood Walkers and getting that necklace back.

They drove for another half hour until Vincent turned off the side of the road. Dirt kicked up beneath the vehicle's wheels, and he quietly turned off the engine.

"What's the plan?" November asked.

"We go on foot. We approach them from behind. I can sense their presence in there." His eyes narrowed as he peered out into the woods.

They exited the vehicle and began their trek through the forest. Even though it was afternoon, it appeared as if it were dusk. Shadows hung around every tree, the sunlight muted by the clouds overhead. November stepped over boulders and tree roots, her hands gripped to the straps of her backpack. Vincent's silhouette was a long form in front of her, a silent shadow in the forest. With each step, the colder she became. Chills rippled along her arms, but she continued onward, focusing on her footing.

After a time, Vincent paused, holding up his hand. November nearly rammed into him.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"They're up ahead. I can hear them."

November cocked her head, listening. In the distance, the echo of beastly growls drifted out toward them, cutting into her core. Cheers roared, slicing the air, and November faltered back a step. Smoke stung her nose.

“They’re feeding,” Vincent said. “They’ve found victims.”

She wrapped her arms around her stomach, her insides lurching. “Who?”

“Probably some hikers. Campers. They’ve been traveling.”

“It sounds like they’re celebrating.”

“Maybe Marcus has already found them. Come on.”

They edged toward them once more, slithering in and out between trees, the movements hypnotizing, like she wasn’t walking toward her death. She stayed as closely as she could to Vincent, not wanting to be separated from him.

Soon, a fire billowed upward in the distance, and the fire grew the closer they approached.

“The smoke will disguise our scent,” Vincent said. “They won’t know we’re coming. Just stay silent.”

November nodded, her muscles snapping. She flexed her hands in and out, trying to calm the trembling in her arms. Her jaw chattered, and she squinted as the scene before her came to life.

The Blood Walkers circled the fire in the late afternoon light, jaws snapping, bony faces peeled open in delight. Veins ran underneath their eyes, blood on their mouths. Four bodies were at their feet, lifeless, eyes blank up to the smoke-filled sky. Blood ran freely on the ground, staining the dirt, with Samuel standing silently off to the side. Marcus stood next to him, a smug smile on his lean face, hair as black as the dark shadows of the forest behind him. The smoke billowed heavily into the air, moving through the trees, and Samuel watched silently as his Blood Walkers celebrated by the fire.

Vincent drew her up behind a thick tree, and the two waited, watching the scene.

“They’ve just fed,” Vincent said. “Now look at them. They’re stronger.”

“They also have...”

“The Blood magic is in their possession. Look, the key is around Samuel’s neck.”

November’s eyes shot to Samuel, and the key glinted in the firelight.

A muscle twitched in Vincent's cheek, and he stepped out from behind the tree. "There's no time to hide." His long legs drew him forward, his hand gripped on his cane, as he limped into the camp.

"Vincent what are you—?" She stumbled out after him, unable to believe she was following him. She rushed to keep up, tripping on small sticks and rocks, but halted when Vincent paused just inside camp.

Samuel's eyes widened at their approach, and he lifted a hand. The Blood Walkers immediately ceased their celebration. They all turned, pausing, the veins still bulging beneath their eyes. The flames crackled, and November coughed, waving smoke away from her vision. Marcus's gaze tightened, his expression unreadable.

"This is a surprise," Samuel said, his voice velvet. "You're brave, coming here into our territory. You're lucky my fellow Walkers are full."

November eyed the blood still stained on their mouths, to the bodies at their feet. She forced her gaze away. Vincent planted his cane out in front of him, and tilted his head to the side.

"We want the necklace back," Vincent said plainly.

Samuel's lips curled upward. He clapped a hand on Marcus's back. "I'm sorry, but we already have an arrangement. You see, I feel bad for Marcus's plight. I'm going to help him use the Blood magic to stop the Harvest. I've promised him a place at our side if I get to hold on to the necklace myself." His long, bony fingers touched the key at his neck. "Marcus has proven his worth by bonding himself to that—" his eyes glimmered at November, "that girl. I'm surprised how easy it was for him to gain possession." His eyes lit with amusement.

November grit her teeth together. "I *trusted* you, Marcus. How could you? How could you abandon your sisters like that?"

"I'm *not* abandoning them," Marcus answered. The flames danced over his pale face. "I'm stopping the Harvest. I'm saving their lives."

"You're choosing to live with your father's people—these monsters over your sisters! Clementine and Genevieve need you. They're your true family!"

"Don't tell me what I can and can't do. That's my job to *you*." He chuckled, his lips curling in.

Her eyes narrowed. Vincent set a hand on her arm and her head snapped over to him. What was he planning?

Vincent turned his attention over to Marcus, and he adjusted his weight, bringing his cane to the side.

“November is right, Marcus. The idea of living with your father’s people may sound appealing, but these people aren’t your own. There is nothing but darkness here. Do you truly wish to become one of these?” He waved a hand out at the scene before him. “I know you may have fallen victim to what it’s like to taste human blood, but those are carnal desires that don’t lead to happiness. You’ll be swallowed in those dark ways until you don’t know how to climb out of it. Choose to join us now and we’ll figure things out. Your sisters need you. You can choose peace.”

“As if you know anything about peace,” Marcus spat. “You’ve been in hiding because you weren’t strong enough to take what you wanted.” His lips lifted up at November. “I know what I want. And it’s my freedom—my life—and I’m not putting it in the hands of someone like you.”

Marcus reached into his back pocket and pulled out the Pink Ivory stake. He held it out in front of him, fingers gripped tight.

Vincent’s eyes widened, and shock washed over Samuel’s face.

“Where on earth did you get that?” Samuel asked.

Marcus’s grip tightened. He kept his focus on Vincent. “I’m going to kill you with this.” His gaze slithered over to November. “You know I’m the one you should trust. You’ve wanted Vincent dead this whole time. Join me and let’s finish this together.”

November shook her head. “You’re mad.”

His eyes darkened and turned seductive. “I said *join me*.”

The air shifted, and November felt an invisible pull in the air. Like a rope tied between them, it tugged on her torso, wrenching her forward. Her feet moved without her will, and she tried to scramble back.

“I said, join me!” he repeated.

Heat surged into November’s veins as she allowed herself to be pulled forward. Her insides seemed to melt, as she stepped past the fire, her feet crunching on the ground. She joined Marcus by his side. She hated that she was with him. She hated that she had abandoned Vincent. He stood alone across the fire, shadows indenting his weary eyes and sunken cheekbones.

Samuel’s gaze stayed locked on the Pink Ivory stake, hungry, as he licked his lips.

Marcus began to stride forward, and November followed, trying to stop him, until he spun around and said, “Stay!”

She halted, her stomach twisting.

Marcus sidled up to Vincent, sticking his face right up close into his. He inhaled deep, as if breathing in his scent, and Vincent stayed unmoving, his face blank. Marcus started circling him, his eyes daggers.

“Believe it or not, I care about her,” Marcus said. “And you broke her heart. For that alone I should kill you.”

Vincent peeked over at November, and her heart was beating its way up into her throat. Her head gave a slight shake, but she couldn’t speak.

“November and I have a bond that no one else could ever understand. Not even the all-powerful *Cedric*.”

The mention of Vincent’s real name sent a jolt through her.

“I’m assuming you’re here because you want to prove something to her,” Marcus continued. “Make amends. Be the hero. Show her what a *good* person you are.” He paused and stuck his face right up into Vincent’s again.

Vincent’s eyes tightened, but his lips stayed pursed.

“You’re not the hero in this story,” Marcus spat. “You’re the guy who lied. The guy who left. The guy who broke the girl’s heart. Only to have the girl move on and find what it really is to trust and be connected to someone.”

Marcus gripped the stake, his knuckles bony against his skin. Sweat shone on his brow, while Vincent stayed cool and collected.

“Say something!” Marcus shoved Vincent back, and he stumbled, catching himself on his cane. The fire continued to roar around them, the Blood Walkers watching the scene, Samuel’s face fixed intently.

Vincent straightened, and his expression turned murderous. Every muscle in his face tightened, his lean body a taut string. He limped forward at full speed, but Marcus growled and shoved him back again. Vincent paused once more, breathing hard.

“You have no idea what you’re up against,” Vincent said. “You have no idea of who I am and what I’m capable of. You don’t want to do this.”

“Oh, I think I do!” Marcus tried to push forward once more, but Vincent blocked him with his cane, before jabbing an elbow into his chest. Marcus stumbled back, gasping, and Vincent limped forward, before gripping him by the throat. Marcus’s eyes bulged, the stake limp at his sides.

“I am eternal,” he said. “I am unending. I existed before you were born and I will continue to exist until you are long dead, *Blood Walker*.” The

name came out in disgust. "It's comical that you think you can threaten me, when I could easily put you all in your graves."

Vincent lifted his arm up and Marcus's feet dangled from off the earth, Vincent's fingers still wrapped around his throat. Marcus's face turned a bright purple, the veins bulging in his forehead.

"Vincent, stop!" November shouted.

Vincent kept his focus locked on Marcus, the cords standing out in his neck.

"See?" Marcus ground out, voice strained. "She cares about me. She's choosing *me* over you."

Vincent faltered, his grip slackening, before it tightened again. His eyes narrowed further.

"She'll never choose you," Marcus squeezed out. "Like she didn't that night. Even now, she's choosing me."

"It's because she doesn't have a choice!" Vincent shoved him back and Marcus fell onto his backside, nearly missing the fire. Vincent stalked forward, his eyes intent, the forest a dark green around him. "But if you're dead, then she won't be bonded to you, so there is a solution after all."

Marcus tightened his grip on the stake again and scrambled to his feet. He backed up as Vincent continued to advance.

"You're right," Marcus said. "She doesn't have a choice." His gaze flicked to November, and he tossed her the stake. "November, plunge this into his chest."

November caught the stake and her fingers trembled. She stared down at the smooth wood, and at the intricate carvings that ran up and down along the grain.

"What? No!" Her eyes widened and she let the stake tumble from her hands. It hit the cool dirt at her feet.

Marcus tightened his jaw. "Pick it up. And plunge it into his chest."

November stared down at her feet, her pulse pounding through her whole body. The Blood Walkers were silent statues around her, the fire roaring in her ears. Every part of her hummed, from the tips of her fingers to her toes. She could feel Marcus's pull pulsing through her, the weight of his influence heavy in her chest. She had no choice. She would have to obey him. Their bond gave him complete control over her, and now she had no choice but to obey.

November slowly bent down and retrieved the stake at her feet. Her hand gripped the smooth wood, and she turned it over in her palm. Her eyes lifted to Vincent, pleading, begging him to just leave. She didn't want to hurt him. Not after everything they had been through.

"Vincent, please go," November whispered, edging a step forward. The dirt kicked up underneath her feet as she took another step forward. "I don't want to hurt you."

Vincent stayed unmoving, not saying a word. He just stared her down, the smoke curling around his head.

"Vincent, please," November tried again. She continued to edge forward. Her palms sweat and her stomach cramped tight. The trees seemed to spin in dizzying ripples around her. Marcus's pull pushed her onward.

Vincent continued to stay silent, staring her down.

"Vincent, why aren't you saying anything? Why aren't you moving?"

"Because you can't hurt me, Huntington. Not physically anyway."

November's feet continued onward, creeping slow and silent. She tightened her grip on the stake.

"Don't underestimate me," she responded. "Vincent, I don't have any control over this bond. I..." Her throat swelled thick. "I can't help it." She pushed forward.

Vincent kept his ground. Body straight, hand glued to his cane. He stood as if he could be spending the day in the park, not waiting for his death. November had almost reached him. Samuel stood off to the side, his mouth parted, shiny fangs appearing in his mouth as if ready to feast on Vincent once blood was spilt. The other Blood Walkers inched forward.

November finished the distance between them until they were only a breath away. Her chest rose and fell next to his, his eyes never leaving hers.

"Why aren't you moving!" November pleaded.

One half of Vincent's mouth flicked up. "Because I don't need to."

"What? Vincent, please!" Without her will, her arm raised out in front of her, pressing the tip of the stake into his chest. The wood dug into his black long-sleeved shirt, right over his heart. She held it there, breathing hard. Her eyes searched his, willing for an answer.

"You won't hurt me," he said simply.

She squeezed her eyes shut, shaking her head. Heat radiated from the stake in her hand up to her forearm. Her grip tightened.

"Vincent, please..."

He held unmoving, eyes never leaving hers, a concrete wall.

“Now!” Marcus yelled, and his voice reverberated through her. “Do it now!”

Marcus’s words were like a jolt of lightning through her body. They pierced her soul, electrifying her insides, and November felt the heat of his bond course through her. She shoved the stake forward toward Vincent’s chest, and she waited for the inevitable.

It all happened too fast.

A wild scream came from the woods and before November could blink, she was knocked to the forest floor. The stake tumbled from her hands, and a tangle of red hair swam in November’s face. Margaret lay on top of her, veins bulging beneath her eyes, her teeth snapping, before her eyes cleared.

“You’ve made a crap ton of mistakes in your life,” she said, “but I’m not letting you make another one by killing Vincent. Come on, let’s go.” November felt the power of the bond dissipate, as Marcus had probably lost focus on her. Margaret hefted November to her feet, and Vincent gingerly bent down, retrieving the stake by his feet. He flipped it in the air, catching it, before sliding it into his back pocket.

“Margaret’s right. Killing me would be a mistake.” His mouth slid up sideways, and he reached over and took November’s free hand. “Let’s go.”

“No!” Marcus roared. He charged forward.

“No, we can’t!” November cried. “The necklace.”

Marcus dove toward them, and Vincent shouldered him, knocking him to the ground.

“We’ll worry about the necklace later,” Vincent said. “Right now, we need to get us out of here before that bond of yours kills us all.”

“He’s right. Come on!” Margaret pushed them forward.

Marcus scrambled to his feet again, and the Blood Walkers started to rush forward. Vincent, November, and Margaret took off back into the forest, the Pink Ivory stake in their possession.

Twenty-Nine

RUPTURE

THE ROAD SPED fast beneath the car's wheels as Vincent drove down the highway. November sat in the backseat with Margaret, her back glued to the seat behind her. Her breaths still hadn't slowed. Her arms and legs shook, the memory of what she had just done still rocketing through her.

She'd almost killed Vincent.

Killed.

She'd almost become a killer.

"You didn't hurt him," Margaret said, probably watching her face. "He's fine. Vincent's fine."

Vincent kept quiet up front. He continued to drive as if he didn't hear a word.

November slowly slid her eyes over to her friend. "How... why... *how* are you here?"

Margaret sighed and tucked a frizzy piece of hair behind her ear. "I'm a Blood Walker now. I have... I have a mental connection to them. Like I can *sense* them somehow. I could see you and the campsite in my head, it was so strange. I came as fast as I could."

November nodded, willing her body to stop shaking, but her jaw was chattering now. She didn't want to know how the voodoo Blood Walker stuff worked, but she believed her.

"We need to detox her," Vincent said from the front seat. His voice cut through the early evening light. "As soon as possible. A bond only

strengthens over time. We were lucky today. Lucky you found us, Margaret.”

November kept her gaze fixed on the side of Vincent’s face. The lines of his bones were tight, his cheeks hollow. “Why didn’t you move? I almost killed you.”

Vincent’s eyes caught hers in the mirror. “It was a gamble. Part of me was hoping that you had feelings strong enough for me that would overcome the bond. I was wrong.” His jaw clamped down together and returned to the road.

November’s whole body was trembling now, large shakes running up and down her back. Margaret wrapped her arms around her. November didn’t respond. She continued shaking.

“She’s not okay,” Margaret said in the backseat.

Vincent’s shoulders softened a bit. “We’ll take her to your place. I don’t want to take her to the Huntington manor like this.”

Margaret nodded, pushing back a piece of November’s hair off of her face. “You nursed me back to health, I can do the same with you.”

November didn’t know what she was talking about. She didn’t need to be nursed back to health. She was *fine*. Though she couldn’t stop shaking. Why was she shaking?

They drove for a time until they pulled up to the gated community where Margaret lived. The house loomed in the dark, still and silent, no light inside. A small pathway led up to the front door, lace curtains in the windows.

The car doors slammed, and Margaret helped November up the front steps, her body still vibrating. Vincent limped behind them, his cane clicking softly down the front sidewalk.

“In here,” Margaret said, and took out her key. Total darkness stretched inside the house when they stepped inside.

“Bring her into the living room.” Vincent limped ahead and flipped on a light switch.

Dust puffed up around November as she sat down on a velvet sofa, but she barely registered it. She wrapped her arms around her knees, pulling them up to her chest.

She’d almost killed Vincent.

Marcus was too powerful.

Their bond was too powerful.

“We should be safe in here,” Margaret said, moving around the room. She closed the shutters. “I can keep an eye on the Blood Walkers inside my mind, and see where they are.”

Vincent nodded. “I highly doubt they’d come racing after us now that they know we have the Pink Ivory stake.” He took it out of his back pocket and flipped it over in his hands. “Even if they do have the Blood magic.” His jaw flexed and he sat down in the far chair in the corner.

“I’m going to get her some water,” Margaret said and hurried from the room. Clanking sounds traveled down from the hall, and November and Vincent sat in silence. It pounded between them, beating thick in the air. She stayed curled up on the couch, refusing to look at him. What was she supposed to say? Sorry I almost killed you? It won’t happen next time? His dark presence in the corner was like a sliver underneath her skin.

Margaret returned, and shoved a cool glass into November’s hands. She blinked, the cold glass clearing her head a little. She drank, and the fresh water cleared her head further. The shakes began to subside, and she finally allowed herself to peek over at Vincent.

He sat still in his chair, back straight, eyes dark. His expression was unreadable, but his body thrummed with tension.

Margaret took the glass and lowered herself next to November. “Is there anything else I can get you?”

“No,” November said quickly. “I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine,” Vincent finally spoke. “I meant what I said in the car. We need to detox you. And it isn’t going to be pretty.”

“What do you mean?” Margaret asked.

“I won’t let her live the rest of her life bonded to that... animal. She’ll have no freedom. No life. And we need to sever that connection.”

“And how do we do that?” Margaret asked again.

November couldn’t keep her eyes off of him. The intensity in his voice cut straight to her core. He stared back at her before he returned his gaze to Margaret.

“We need another Blood Walker. We need you.”

“Me?”

Vincent gave one slow nod. “Like you said, you have a link to the other Walkers. You can sever the link November has with Marcus. You need to go inside Marcus’s mind, find November, and cut her out.” His eyes slid to November. “It will be painful.”

November met his gaze. “You think I’m afraid of a little pain?”

His lips twitched. “If a little pain is feeling that your brain is being ripped apart from the inside out, then sure.”

November swallowed, pressing back into the couch.

Margaret shook her head. “I wouldn’t even... I don’t know how to do that!”

Vincent leaned forward, before slowly rising to his feet. His fingers gripped his cane and he re-pocketed the stake. “It’s second nature to you. Just like your need for blood. You also long to stretch deep into the mind of others. Blood Walkers *like* to be connected to their prey—physically and psychologically. It’s why Marcus is so connected to her. Though I’m not sure which connection is stronger.” His eyes slid to November again.

She shivered, glancing away. Vincent was judging her... judging her for getting involved with him. She knew she shouldn’t have, but it had been so... exciting. He’d helped take the pain away for a while—the pain of Vincent. She remembered what it was like to have Marcus drink from her, and she shivered again, a sense of longing flooding through her.

No.

She would do whatever it took to not be connected to Marcus anymore.

“Do it,” November said. “Whatever it takes.”

Margaret’s face went white, but she nodded.

Vincent paced inside the room, limping back and forth, his head dipped to his feet. The lamps behind him glowed dimly, making his form seem extra dark. Margaret sat next to November, holding her hands. Margaret’s palms were clammy, and November itched to slide her hands out from underneath hers, but she remained still, waiting.

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” Margaret said, voice trembling. “I... I just know what it’s like inside the other Blood Walkers’ heads.”

“Then go to that place,” Vincent said. “Find Marcus. Then you’ll find November.”

Margaret’s chest puffed up before she let out a long exhale. “Okay. Yeah. No biggie. I got this.”

She shut her eyes, and a little line creased between her brow. Her lips pursed and her jaw tightened, the line in her brow deepening. Her eyes moved back and forth beneath her eyelids as if she were searching. Silence echoed in the room, nothing sounding but Vincent's soft pacing and November's beating heart.

"There," Margaret said quickly. "I see Marcus. He's next to Samuel. They're arguing. Fighting for possession over the necklace. Marcus says it's his, but Samuel won't give it up."

"Good," Vincent said. "Now get inside Marcus's mind."

Margaret's face scrunched, and her grip tightened in November's hands. She bit her lips.

"It's... hard to see..." Margaret began. "But... I... I see Genevieve! I see Clementine. Maybe I *am* in his head. Genevieve is... dead on the floor. There's blood... everywhere. Clementine is crying. She's covered in her blood."

"His fears," Vincent said. "What else do you see?"

Her face scrunched further, her nose pinched. She waited in silence for a few moments before she gasped.

"I see November," she said. "But she's... That can't be right." She tilted her head. "She's a statue. Frozen, in stone. But it's her. It's definitely her. The stone features are exactly like hers."

"Go to her." Vincent's voice was gruff.

The line in Margaret's forehead had nearly cut her face in half.

"Almost there," she muttered.

November watched the exchange between Vincent and Margaret, prickles on her seat. She felt like she was sitting on a chair of spikes, slowly digging into her skin. When would the pain begin? Vincent said it would be painful. If Margaret could do this. A twinge of doubt twisted it in her gut. How would Marcus feel about this? No. She didn't care. She shouldn't care. She *needed* to be cut off from him.

"I'm right up next to her," Margaret said.

Vincent's pacing quickened. "Can you touch her? Try to touch her inside your mind."

Margaret lifted a hand out in front of her, and her fingers brushed through the air.

"Yes, and no," she said. "I can touch her face, it's hard as stone, but..." Her hand slid downward, "I can't feel her arms. When I try to touch her, my

hand goes right through her.”

“Good.” Vincent exhaled and ran a hand through his wild hair. “That means the bond hasn’t solidified fully yet. There’s still a chance. But it’ll still be difficult.” He continued to pace. “I need you to find something heavy. Is there anything around you that you could use as a weapon?”

Margaret’s lips tightened. “I’m standing outside. There’s... trees. But Genevieve and Clementine are over there... I can’t...” She paused. “There’s rocks.” She went silent for a few moments. “I got one. I have a rock.”

“Make sure it’s a heavy one,” Vincent said.

Margaret paused again and nodded. “The heaviest I could find.”

“I want you to smash November’s statue,” Vincent said, voice tense. “Hit her with everything that you’ve got. We need to destroy the November that is taking root inside Marcus’s head. Crumble her to pieces. Leave no trace of her there at all.”

“Are you *serious*?” Margaret went pale.

“Yeah... are you sure?” November’s voice shook. Even though it wasn’t real, the idea of a fake version of herself being smashed to pieces wasn’t all that appealing.

“Do it,” Vincent said.

Margaret quickly nodded, her eyes still closed. She let out a grunt as her arm swung forward.

Pain immediately slashed through November’s skull like a searing blade and she immediately screamed, gripping her head. Margaret brought her hand down once more, and November screamed again.

Pain exploded from all sides of her—ricocheting from her brain all the way down to her toes. It pounded over and over again as Margaret continued on, cutting, scraping, digging, crumbling. If she were a statue, it felt as if a chunk of her was being taken out at a time, ripping her skin, her flesh, her blood.

“Stop!” November cried. She gripped her hair and pulled.

“Keep going,” Vincent said.

Another explosion of pain came, and November curled over on the couch. Hot knives continued to sear into her skin. “Make it stop!”

Margaret paused, arms shaking, her eyes flying open.

“Keep going!” Vincent roared.

Margaret squeezed her eyes shut again and refocused.

“Wait—” November choked out.

Another blast of pain hit, and tears sprung to her eyes. With each hit, she felt a part of herself breaking. It was more than physical pain—it was like a piece of herself was being ripped up and shredded. A part of her essence—a part of who she was—being torn out of her completely. Her breaths sped and she couldn’t find air.

“Please...” November panted. “Please stop.”

“Don’t!” Vincent growled.

She hated him. In this moment, she *hated* him. Vincent was the reason she was in pain. If it had never been for him, if she had never met him, she wouldn’t have fallen for him. If she hadn’t fallen for him, her life wouldn’t have ever spun to a place where she needed Marcus as a distraction. Marcus was a drug, an addiction, and it was too impossible to break. She would never last through this pain. Vincent was to blame.

“Keep going!” Vincent roared again.

Margaret gave one last hit, and November screamed a final time. The sound pierced the room, echoing in her head, reverberating down to her toes. White seared into her vision, pulsing and blank, nothing but her heartbeat and pure white. November blinked, the pain slowly ebbing. She stood on a field of white grass, translucent trees shooting up from the ground. The air was frozen around her, the white clouds and pale sky above her unmoving. Ivory pathways wove in and out of the milky grass, the sun a white pearl above her.

She’d been here before.

The last time she’d traveled to this place, she’d thought she was on the dream plane, instead, she had been inside Vincent’s head, him allowing her and Cam to think that they’d reached the dream realm. But this was different. A woman stood before her, her short blonde hair almost white in the light. She wore a tailored white business suit, the skirt pencil thin, and white high heels. Her ruby lips lifted up into a warm smile as she reached her hands forward.

“November,” she said. “I can’t believe we haven’t met.”

November scrunched her nose. “How do you know me?”

“You were one of the twelve. You’re the daughter of David Huntington, and you were bonded to my son.”

November’s eyes stretched wide. “Ester?” She swallowed. “Marcus? And... were? As in past tense?”

Ester waved a hand out in front of her. "I apologize for my son's behavior. I'm not too pleased he went with his carnal natures and decided to join those Walkers. Of course his father was..." Her face drifted far away. "Quite dreamy. A real charmer. Stubborn."

November blinked. "What are you doing here? What am *I* doing here?"

"I took the opportunity to bring you to my level of consciousness while you're out."

"Out?"

"Passed out. In Margaret's home. Don't worry, you'll be fine, though I would've loved you as a daughter in law."

November's mind couldn't keep up. "What?"

She waved her hand again. She moved along the ivory sidewalk, running her fingers along a silvery white branch, white leaves on the tree next to her.

"I'm here to have a... discussion of sorts..." Her voice was light like a soft bell, though her thin brows pinched. "I wanted to make sure you have nothing else to do with my son. Or my daughters."

November let out a relieved laugh. "I can assure you, I don't want anything to do with your son."

Her lips lifted. "But my daughters? I know you want to help them stop the Harvest. Save their lives. And I'm telling you to leave it alone."

November's mouth slightly parted. "You want them to *die*?"

"They have a purpose. And they need to fulfill it. My children were not born to live their own lives. They're lucky that I've given them the freedom they've had until now. But now it's time for them to complete what they were born to complete."

"As in... die. Like... dead. So you and the coven you hide behind can get their power. I may not like Marcus right now, but I do care about Genevieve and Clementine. And I'm not just going to let them fall victim to your whims."

Ester smoothed back a piece of her white-blond hair off her forehead. "My whims?"

November lifted her chin. "Yeah, obviously you're the type of mother who only had children for ulterior motives. It's not as if you care about them—have raised them. You're more focused on what they can do for you instead of having an actual relationship with them."

Anger flashed in her eyes, the lines around her mouth creasing. “You have it all figured out, do you? You’ve known me, what, two minutes, and you’re skilled enough to be my shrink?” She let out a dry laugh. “I’m *warning* you, November, if you get involved with trying to stop the Harvest, I will make sure everyone *you* have ever loved suffers as slowly and as painfully as possible. Vincent. Cambridge. Margaret. Your uncle. I can even have an effect on your mother’s afterlife. She hasn’t turned dark like your father. Perhaps I could help persuade her to make the change? Make her resting place miserable?”

November clenched her fists together and she marched forward. “Leave my parents alone!”

Ester laughed, and the sound tinkled out into the white void. “You really don’t know how powerful I am, do you? I am the leader of the Zodiac coven, which means I have not only Ancestral magic at my disposal, but Sacrificial magic too. And now that Marcus has joined his family, it wouldn’t be too hard to get my hands on the Blood magic, too. You might want to be careful with how you speak to me.”

“So what,” November said, “you bring me here to threaten me? You think I’m actually going to listen to you and just hand over your kids to be slaughtered? You don’t know me very well at all.”

“I’d focus on the *other* kids you’re killing,” Ester said darkly. A spark lit her eyes. “Or have you forgotten all about them?”

The other kids. The comas. The dream. Everett.

“What do you know about them?”

“I know *that’s* what you should be focusing on. Let me and my children alone. Your real battle is with who really has a vendetta against you. I don’t want to hurt you, November, I just want you to leave me alone.” She smoothed back her blonde hair again, backing away into the white field. “I’ll let that digest.” Her mouth curved up as she continued to back away.

“No, wait.”

Ester paused, her red lips stark against the white background.

Too many thoughts raced through November’s head. She couldn’t let Ester stamp all over her. She couldn’t let her harm her daughters. But maybe she was right. She *had* let her focus slip regarding the dream and these kids and what she really should be focusing on. Had her priorities *once again* been wrong all this time? She didn’t want to get in the middle of some family feud, especially when Ester could hurt others.

November squared her shoulders, keeping her chin steady. “You’ll leave me and the others alone? Including my parents?”

A dark smile twisted on Ester’s lips. She gave a single nod. “As long as you hand my children over to me.”

Thirty

BLACK SUNSHINE

"SHE'S WAKING UP."

A cold hand touched her forehead, and November's eyes fluttered open. Margaret's face hovered above her, her red hair a tangled swirl hanging around her blurry face. November sat up and blinked, her vision clearing.

"What happened?" November rubbed her forehead, a dull ache throbbing along her skull.

Vincent paced in the corner, his limp prominent, the sides of his mouth turned down. He paused, taking her in, question in his gaze.

"Do you think it worked?" Margaret asked. "Nov, are you still bonded to Marcus?"

The thought of Marcus sent everything rushing back.

Ester. Her kids. Her threats.

November groaned, the throbbing in her head intensifying. She pushed off the couch, wobbling, and rubbed her forehead.

"What else do we know about the kids in comas?" November asked. "We know that they're all flute players. What else? There has to be something else!"

She started pacing, and Vincent followed her with his eyes.

"They're all kids, right?" November continued. "Around our age? And that it's linked to the Harvest? We know Elizabeth might be the one after me. She's the one with power over the dreams. It all links to the witches. What *else*?"

"Nov, why are you asking?" Margaret slowly stood up from the couch.

“Because we’re not doing anything!” She tugged her hands through her hair. “Everything keeps getting in our way! Blood Walkers. Witches. Bonds. Sacrifices. Stakes. Magic. This isn’t what I signed up for! Someone is hurting kids because of me and we’re not getting anywhere! Everything always seems more important than actually helping these kids and I’m sick of it! We need to forget about the Harvest!” She continued pacing furiously.

Vincent continued to stare her down.

“Honestly, are we any help at all? What are we even doing?” She couldn’t stop rambling. “We’re just running around like a bunch of clueless chickens without heads thinking we’re actually helping people when we’re not. We’re just making it worse! At least last spring we could stop the dead from imploding into our world, at least *then* we could do some good for mankind, but now? We’re only stirring up trouble and making all these evil people mad at us and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

She halted her pacing, breathing hard. All of the events from the last couple of weeks rushed in, making her head pound harder. The deep sadness that had been building up pressed down on her chest, sucking the life out of her. What was the point? She had been trying and trying and trying and nothing good was coming from it. At what point did she stop? There wasn’t any light ahead. No matter how hard she tried, how much she cared, there wasn’t any hope. Yes, every part of her yearned to help. The last thing she wanted to do was walk away, but the darkness that had been boiling beneath the surface bubbled to the top, exploding throughout her mind. She couldn’t handle it anymore. Quincy had said there was a time to walk away. Had she reached that point? At what point did she sacrifice her own sanity? And if she removed herself, would it make the threat dissipate? Ester had said if she backed away, her loved ones wouldn’t be hurt.

“I give up,” she whispered. “I’m not doing this anymore. I don’t want a part of any of this. People are only getting hurt because of me and if I remove myself from the equation, then whoever has it out for me will stop. They have to stop.”

Margaret shook her head, and her hair fluffed out to the sides. “Nov, you can’t give up. We need to help Genevieve and Clementine. We need to help all those kids. We need to fix all of this.”

“Genevieve and Clementine aren’t our problem anymore,” November snapped. “The Harvest is happening whether we like it or not and that’s their problem.”

“You can’t be serious!”

November whirled on Margaret. “Oh, believe me, I’m serious. I’m not touching that with a ten-foot pole.”

Margaret opened her mouth, but nothing came out.

November spun away, continuing to pace, her heart still hammering.

“Coward.” Vincent’s dark voice came from the corner.

November paused. “Excuse me?”

“You’re a coward,” Vincent said plainly. “You’re running because things are getting hard. You can’t handle it emotionally. I thought you were stronger than this. I thought you had the ability to rise above the hardship and find a way to be okay. You battle an internal battle every day that we don’t know about, yet you were always able to keep one foot forward and press on. If you stop now, then maybe I don’t really know you at all.”

Silence beat between them, and tears burned behind November’s eyes. She stared him down, swallowing the lump in her throat.

“Well, then maybe you really don’t know me,” she said. “And maybe you shouldn’t have come back. I’m... I’m done.”

She marched forward and snatched up the keys on the side table. She beelined it for the door without looking back.

“Nov, please!” Margaret called.

But she had already closed the door behind her.

November didn’t know what she was doing. She felt like she was still being controlled by someone else. So much heat and hurt and rage was flowing through her, yet she knew in the back of her brain if she just waited for the emotions to pass, she’d have a clear head. She didn’t really want to leave, did she? No, she meant what she’d said. She was done. If she took herself out of the equation, it was for the best. That was how she could help those kids.

The headlights glowed out in front of her in the early morning light, lighting the dim road in front of her. Her foot pressed on the gas, the pedal nearly touching the floor. The faster she traveled, the quicker her rage disappeared. The adrenaline was leaving her system, bit by bit, slowly releasing. Wind from the cracked window blew inside, chilling her skin.

She was doing the right thing. She needed to walk away—from everything. Quincy was right. She'd reached a point where being a part of this world wasn't healthy. She could handle the chaos when everything happened last year, but she couldn't handle this. This... this was too much. Then, so many lives had been at stake, and that had just been happenstance, but now... it was because of *her*. She didn't know what to do with that. She'd tried to fix it, and she'd failed. All she'd cared about was herself and her own addiction to Marcus, and she'd failed everyone outside of herself.

November drove for a time, until more light started to appear on the horizon. Towering trees lined the highway, thick and lush, their trunks the size of ten people squished together. Her eyes burned and her mouth went dry. She glanced around the car for water and eyed her backpack on the floor. She pulled off to the side of the road and put the car in park.

She reached over and unzipped the pack, pulling out a water bottle. She downed the bottle in two gulps, spilling water down the front of her shirt. She snatched a granola bar and stuffed the food into her mouth before drinking another half of a water bottle. She sat back in her seat, the events of the night catching up.

Silence settled around her, and the fresh forest air wafted in through the window. She allowed her muscles to relax, and the tension drained from her neck. It felt nice to be alone, away from everyone, away from noise. This was where she'd always been okay. Up in the mountains, alone. No pressure. No looming demises. No Blood Walkers or witches or magic. Just her and the trees around her. She eyed her backpack once more, her climbing shoes peeking out from the top. Bouncing her legs, she quickly snatched up her backpack and exited the car.

She hiked through the forest, the shrubbery around her damp in the early morning. White air escaped her lips every time she exhaled, but the cold felt good on her skin. It cleared her head. It made her realize what was most important.

Living in the present.

Her feet squished on the forest floor as she moved deeper into the trees. Sunlight peeked through the branches overhead, the bits of sun warming her skin. Sticks and leaves crunched underneath her, the only sound in the forest around her.

After a time, she approached a large redwood tree that had fallen over on its side. The trunk and roots lay ripped up from the earth, the bottom of

the trunk exposed before her. It was twice her size, both in height and diameter, the bark a deep red. She ran her hands along the grainy wood, bumps and grooves over the surface. A small smile lifted on her lips, and she mapped out a route in her head. This fallen tree could be a boulder problem.

Begin at the bottom in a sit start, press up, reach, pull, cross, reach pull, and hop on top. She rubbed her palms together and pulled out her climbing shoes. She'd never climbed a tree before—at least the backside of a fallen tree. But she didn't see any boulders around, and she *needed* to climb. It was what made her okay.

November lowered herself to the ground, her backside on the cool earth, and found good footing and holds on the fallen trunk before her. Her fingers gripped into the wood, little slivers sliding underneath her skin, but she hefted herself upward, her muscles immediately tensing. She caught the hold above her, pulling herself up further, before securing new footing. She crossed one arm over the other and kept her weight in close to the trunk. The wood dug into her fingers as her tendons pulled, but she reached over again, scaling upward once more. It was over in one more move. She leapt over on top of the trunk, standing on top of the fallen tree, and lifted her arms above her. She let her head fall back, breathing in the fresh air. A laugh escaped her lungs as she stood on top of the structure.

Everett would've loved to have seen her climb a tree like this. He would've cheered her on from the side, admiring her with his deep brown eyes, smiling at her with warmth. A vision of him lifeless on a hospital bed flashed to mind, trapped in a coma, and she squeezed her eyes shut. She shook her head, before peeling her eyes back open. It wasn't her problem. She was helping him by stepping away. Elizabeth had to stop torturing these kids if she knew she had walked away.

She needed something else to climb.

November lowered herself down the backside of the trunk, and her feet hit the cold earth. Dusting off her palms on her thighs, she picked up her pack again and ventured out further into the forest.

She meandered into the shade, where the morning sun was cut off from above. The trees grew thicker, closer together, the earth damp beneath her feet. It was several degrees cooler in the shade, and goosebumps rippled over her arms.

Sticks crunched underneath her as her pace slowed, and she peered in between the thick trees into the shadowy pockets of the forest. The air seemed to shift somehow—change—like it was suddenly alive. She peered deeper into the forest, and more chills spread over her skin.

She wrapped her arms around her, pausing. Sweat gathered on her brow, and she suddenly realized her stupidity with coming out into the forest alone. Hadn't she just been attacked by Blood Walkers? And who knew where the witches lingered. And Ester had just threatened her. She was an idiot for being alone. But she was walking away. She couldn't live the rest of her life in fear.

Another breeze blew in, rattling the trees. The breeze changed directions in a whoosh and attacked her from the other side. She stumbled, regaining her footing. Tingles erupted all over her body as an awareness settled between her shoulders. Someone was there, and she hated herself for being so stupid.

She scrambled back a few steps, changing directions, going back the way she came, when she saw him.

Lean and dark, Cam stood between two trees, looking so much like Vincent her heart dropped.

"Cam?" She blinked. "Cam!" She rushed over and threw her arms around him in a hug. "There you are! Vincent said he'd released you, but you've still been gone. What did he want with you? Where have you been?" She hugged him tighter.

Cam gripped her arms and pulled her out of the hug. He kept his hold on her arms, his face dour.

"I... I went and visited all of them," he said. "After you left... when Vincent sent you away, he kept me there with him. He wanted to speak with me."

"What do you mean *visited* all of them?"

"Vincent showed me the plane that exists between this world and the dead. We weren't wrong to try and find a dream plane. It exists, Nov. Vincent took me there. He showed me how to find all of the kids and... I was able to speak with them."

November stilled. Everything froze around her. "You what?"

"Vincent sent me on a mission. Nov, we can trust him. I know we didn't trust him at first, but—"

"I know. I trust him, too."

But she'd left him. She'd abandoned him.

"But what do you mean *speak* with them?" she asked once more.

"I found your Everett. I found the others. Vincent sent me there to gather them. They were each wandering aimlessly on the dream plane. I went and I found them all. They're together. Waiting."

"Waiting?" November asked. "Waiting where?" *And why didn't Vincent trust her to go?*

"In the field of black roses," Cam said, dropping his arms. "The same field Roderick said he found Vincent lingering in that day. Something big must be taking place there—if Vincent wants everyone affected by the dream to stay there."

November scrunched her brow, shaking her head. "It doesn't make sense."

She wondered again why Vincent didn't trust her to go with Cam.

"It was too dangerous," Cam said simply.

"What?"

"I can see your face. You're upset you didn't get to come with me. Vincent was scared you'd be too vulnerable there. He told me about the witch, Elizabeth, and her power over dreams. These kids are all trapped in a dream-like state, and anyone who ventures into her territory are subject to her will. If she knew you were there, it's possible she'd trap you there, too. He wanted me to gather them on my own."

"But..." November set a hand on her forehead. "Are they... Is...?"

"Everett's fine," Cam said, his gaze softening. "He says he misses you, but that he's okay."

A shudder went through her as she exhaled.

Everett was fine.

She didn't realize it until now, but guilt at her betrayal with him—at moving on from him so quickly—ate at her. How could she not think of this before now? They were together. They'd been together. And her and Marcus... Vincent...

If Everett knew.

She squeezed her eyes shut. Is that how Vincent felt with her moving on with Everett?

"So what now?" she asked.

"Vincent must have a plan. I've fulfilled what he wanted, but he didn't tell me anything else. I was... hesitant to trust him at first, but..."

“But what?”

Cam ran a hand through his inky hair. “But I saw his face, Nov. The look in his eyes couldn’t be faked. He was terrified. He’s afraid for your life and trust me, you’re his number one priority. And he’d do anything to protect you—even reunite you with Everett.”

Silence fell between them, and November nodded. Another light breeze drifted in, tickling her hair.

“How did you find me out here?”

“The dream plane is... it’s interesting. You can sense your loved ones. Your friends. Your family. You can see them all in your mind’s eye, and it’s easy to travel to them. It’s like looking through an opaque piece of glass. Everything is blurry, but you can see and sense who is beyond the pane. It wasn’t that difficult to find you.”

She nodded again, though what he said was still confusing. “So what do we do now?”

“We go back and find Vincent. Like I said, he must have a grand plan and we need to trust him. We’re going to stop Elizabeth and whoever else is behind all of this. We’re going to get you your Everett back and then you can walk away from all of this if you’d like. You deserve to be happy. You deserve to have some peace for once.”

Tears built in the back of her throat, and she tried to swallow. “No. I can’t go back. The idea of peace is everything, but going back definitely wouldn’t bring me that at all. I’m done, Cam. It’s why I’m out here. I can’t be a part of that world anymore. I just want things to be normal. I want to climb. I want to have light in my life. I’m sick of darkness. I’m sick of not feeling like myself. I left Vincent before because I couldn’t handle his darkness in my life. I’m not going back to that.”

No matter how much she wanted to.

But Vincent was starting to not feel as dark as he once had. *Marcus* was dark. Her addiction was dark. Vincent was just...

She was afraid.

He made her feel things she didn’t want to feel. He made her see herself in ways she didn’t want to see. He was too perfect for her—too almighty and too good—where she was insignificant around him. She couldn’t live up to being in his presence. She felt small next to him, and she needed to be confident in who she was so she could have the mental clarity that her life so desperately needed.

He muddled her thinking.

But being around him was unlike anything else. He kept her alive—he kept her on the balls of her feet. She was aware of him to the tiniest detail. Every move. Every angle of his head. Every word he spoke. She *cared* of what he thought about her, and she *wanted* him to be impressed by her. His opinion mattered, and she wanted to be important to him.

She was just too afraid to be with him.

“Ah, there it is,” Cam said. “Whatever you just thought, hold on to that. I can see the revelation on your face.”

November groaned, covering her face with her hands. “I can’t do this, Cam. I shouldn’t like him. I shouldn’t want to be with him. I mean, you get it. He deceived you, too. But why do I still care about him? I’m such an idiot!”

“What? No. Hey.” Cam reached out and took her shoulders, his hands warm through her shirt. “You’re not an idiot for caring about him. I care about him, too, even though everything in me tells me I should still be mad. But he had great reason to do what he did. He was afraid to tell me he was my father. But did he keep me in his life? Yeah, he did. He didn’t want to leave me. Just like he doesn’t want to leave you. He hasn’t abandoned us, like most people would. He sticks around and shows that he cares... in the only way he knows how. We need to give him credit for that. And he really is trying to protect you.”

“What if I’m sick of being protected? What if I decide I’m really not strong enough for all of this?” She remembered Vincent’s words and how he’d said that maybe he really didn’t know her at all.

“Then we can both be not strong enough together,” Cam said. “I know I live every day not knowing if I can keep on.”

Tears burned behind November’s eyes, and she sniffed. “You do?”

He let out a laugh. “Yeah, I do. Every time I think I start to understand this world and my purpose here, I’m thrown a curve ball. Everyone I touch *dies*, Nov. I was supposed to marry Deva, for goodness sake, and I thought we’d spend our lives together at one point. But I was too afraid and now look where she is... she’s dead. And you know what happened with Marybeth. I’d hate for that to happen with you and Vincent. Or you and Everett... whoever it is you’re meant to be with.”

“I’m sorry about Deva,” November whispered.

Cam sucked in a ragged breath. “Me too. And I’m sorry you’re caught up in all of this. Sorry that I really am a curse.” He dropped his chin.

November stiffened and pulled back. “You’re not, Cam. Life happens. Sometimes crappy things just happen but it isn’t our fault. Deva’s life *wasn’t* your fault. Neither was Marybeth’s. Yes, we can make poor choices, but that doesn’t mean that we’re cursed. We’re not punished for our wrong doings. The universe isn’t out to get us for every wrong move we make. All I know is that we have to do the best we can and hope for the best outcome.”

His lips twitched. “Well, look who’s being the motivator now.” He peeked up at her.

She tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. “Yeah, well, you should know Margaret’s fine, too.”

His head snapped up. “She is?”

November twisted her mouth. “Different, but fine. She was definitely dealt a bad card, but she hasn’t allowed herself to be crumpled by it. She... she saved me.”

“She did? How?”

“That isn’t what matters now. What matters is that you’re right.” She took a shaky breath. “I shouldn’t run away. Margaret didn’t. You haven’t. And I shouldn’t either.”

Cam squinted his eyes, taking her in further. “You’re pretty wise, you know that?”

“You’re only as wise as the people you surround yourself with,” she said and smiled.

Thirty-One

THE NIGHT'S WATCH

LATE AFTERNOON SUN descended in the sky, as Cam drove the car back to the manor, fall leaves blurring outside of the window as they sped by. November itched to venture back out into the forest and climb again, but she'd made her decision. She couldn't run. She needed to face whatever the fates had in store for her. She'd already died and come back to life, could anything be worse?

"So where is Vincent now?" November asked, the hum of the engine beneath her.

"He's back at the manor with Conroy and the others. I just got off the phone with Roderick. Vincent wants to attack the witches. Getting to Elizabeth is key, since she's most likely the one behind the dreams. But we also need to stop the Harvest from happening. If they get more power, if Ester gets her hands on the triplet's powers, then whatever she has going on with Elizabeth will worsen."

"You think they're working together?"

"I don't see why not. Witches are a seclusive bunch. They're secretive and separate from the world, but they usually know each other's business—even if they're in different covens."

"And you're sure we should get involved with Ester?"

The road continued to disappear beneath the car's wheels.

"I know that she's bad business, and that's enough for me."

He pressed on the accelerator.

November sat back, her mind spinning. It didn't make sense that Ester and Elizabeth would be working together.

They reached the manor, and dark clouds swirled over the sky, drops of rain plopping down on the windshield. The ominous home blurred outside her window, drips of rain sliding down the glass. How would everyone receive her? She had abandoned Vincent and Margaret. Would Roderick and Conroy hold it against her? What would Vincent think?

Cam pulled the car to a stop, the windshield wipers moving fast.

“You sure you can do this?” Cam asked, turning to her. The shaded light highlighted half of his chiseled face, his cheekbones prominent.

“You mean face Vincent and admit that I was wrong for running and bailing on everybody? Sure, why not.”

Cam’s lips curved upward. “Let’s go then.”

November opened her car door, and a flash of lightning struck the sky. A whoosh of wind blew in, and the trees around the manor bent to the side. She gripped onto the car door, steadying herself, the clouds churning fast above her. Another jolt of lightning struck, and a zing surged through her body. Her head darted up, rain still hammering down.

“Let’s get inside!” Cam yelled.

But as November slammed her car door shut, another whoosh of wind hit, and she stumbled backwards, her back against the car. Dirt, leaves, and sticks flew up into the air, swirling around her like a mini tornado.

“Come on!” Cam held out his hand to her, motioning her toward him.

She pushed herself from off the car, but another surge of wind blasted into her, pinning her against the car again.

“This isn’t normal!” November yelled.

Cam glanced up at the sky, the clouds darkening, the rain increasing. His eyes widened, fixed above him.

“No, not again,” he said. His eyes snapped to hers. “Come on, let’s go.” He reached for her, gripping her arm, trying to pull her away from the car, but another blast of wind hit, keeping her pinned. “It’s like the wind is targeting you!” he said. Cam backed away from her, clearly able to move through the whirlwind.

“Nov, stay where you are. I’m going to get some help! Vincent will know what to do!”

She blinked through the rain, and shook her head. “No!”

But Cam raced up the front steps, his back disappearing inside.

The trees violently bent side to side, November’s hair whipping across her face. The clouds were churning faster, a thick dark whirlpool mixing

together. A low hum began to vibrate on the air, starting deep underneath her toes, buzzing up her legs. It resonated in her ears, echoing in her head, jarring her teeth. She'd felt this hum before.

November pressed her palms up against the car's sleek surface, her heart pounding, her eyes wide as she waited for the inevitable. She continued to try and peel herself from the car, but the wind was too strong.

A dark mist moved over the ground, swallowing up her feet. It covered the ground like a wool blanket, bits of the black fog tossing up into the air. Above her, a funnel began to create, stirring and roiling, until the dark figures surfaced. Black, wraith-like beings zoomed around inside the black cloud, their bodies paper thin, faces stretched open, nothing but black holes for eyes and mouths. The humming intensified, and November covered her ears, pressing up further against the car.

Shades.

The Shades zoomed around inside the black tornado, howling, until they separated, darting around the dark sky above her. The wind whipped them to and fro, one zipping right past her face. Black mist exited its mouth, in and out, as it breathed.

She remembered the Shades attacking Genevieve until she had lost her mind and November swallowed down a hiccup. She fiddled with the car door handle behind her, but it wouldn't budge. More Shades zipped around her, the wind violent, and she clenched her eyes shut, willing herself to not lose her mind. This couldn't be how it ended. Her, being a victim to the Shades, only to lose her mind in the end. To forget who she was and what she cared about. To lose herself completely.

A Shade appeared from the whirlwind and zoomed right for her, its eyes and mouth hollow as they stretched open. It came at her at a quick pace, and her eyes locked on the distorted face, her heart trapped in her throat.

This was it.

This was the end.

The door clicked open behind her, and someone tugged on her arm, yanking her back into the vehicle. She gasped as the car door slammed closed and Ty sat in the driver's seat.

"I'm not letting you get eaten alive by those things," he said and wrenched the car into gear. The windshield wipers sped to life, and November's back pressed into the seat as Ty floored it.

"Ty... what... what's going on here?"

Ty's freckled face frowned as he glared at the windshield before him. November eyed his violin in the backseat.

"Sorry, Nov, but I had to conjure the Shades here to get you away. And it worked. The others were so distracted they won't even know you're gone before it's too late."

November glanced behind her at the departing driveway, before peering back out into the rain before her. "*You* did this?"

He motioned to the violin behind him. "The witches taught me loads of stuff. Including how to use my music to control the Shades."

"But... why?" Heat burned behind her eyes, and her throat went dry. Not again. Not another deception. Had Ty been with them this whole time?

"Let's just say that the witches promised to bring April back if I delivered you to them. So I had to make a choice. And yes, I choose April."

"Ty! What? No! You know they don't have the power to bring her back. If Vincent didn't, then there's no way the witches can. Think of April. She'd be disgusted if she knew—"

"Don't talk about April!" Ty slammed his hands down onto the steering wheel, pressing harder on the accelerator. His fingers slowly curled and uncurled around the wheel, and he pushed out a breath. "Only *I* get to talk about her. I'm the one she loved, not you. And I'm going to do this."

November sat back, shaking. She fell silent, and the rain splattered on the roof.

"You still don't need to take me to them," November whispered after a moment. "Vincent had a plan. We were going to fix this. Once we destroy the Harvest and—"

"You can't stop them," Ty interrupted. "They're too powerful. I've seen what they can do. And we are *nothing* compared to them. You think a little music and dance is going to do anything against them?" He snorted. "We may have been good at protecting the veils—but that's where our talent stops. Even with everything I've learned..." He broke off. "I know nothing compared to them."

The engine roared beneath them as Ty zoomed around another corner, the dark clouds covered the sky, and the headlights glowed out on the road.

"You saw what the witches did to Deva," November tried again. "You really want to take me back to that? Ty, listen to yourself. You're talking crazy talk. It's *me*, November. Your friend."

Ty's face scrunched, and tears started to run down his freckled face, his skin red and splotchy. "I don't have friends. Not anymore." He shook his head, tears still streaming down his cheeks. "She was the only one who understood me. She was the only one who truly got me. No one else understands."

The memory of April's pale face and long sheet of dark hair came to mind. Her bright smile and light eyes. Her excitement over the smallest things. April did understand. She took the time to understand. She cared.

"She still wouldn't want you to do this."

Ty held silent, glaring out at the road, his knuckles white on the steering wheel.

The rain and the winding roads lulled their conversation, and they both fell silent, November's mind racing. She couldn't just allow herself to be delivered to the witches like a pig for the slaughter. They weren't afraid to hurt, manipulate, or kill. They had proven that. But she didn't know how to get away. She couldn't very well jump out of a moving car. She'd kill herself in the process. She sat on her hands, fidgeting her legs, staring out at the twisting road in front of her.

Memories flashed through her head. Deva's mother coming at November from behind, slashing a knife across her throat. The witches chanting, raising up their arms as her blood ran cold onto the ground. Her own face blank, expressionless, lifeless.

Ty turned another corner and November yelled, "Stop!"

Out in front of them on the road, a silhouette of a man stood in the middle of the road, the moon shining behind him. Ty slammed on the breaks, and the car skidded to a stop, nearly missing him.

November set her hand on her chest, her heart thumping wildly. The silhouette still stood in front of the car, unmoving, staring them down. At first, November's mind went to Vincent, that he had found her, that he was saving her, until more figures emerged from the forest. One by one, dark silhouettes exited from the trees, stepping out onto the empty road. A light fog rolled on the ground, curling around their ankles.

"Who are these guys?" Ty's eyes were wide, his skin extra pale in the dark.

The silhouette in front of the car shifted, and the headlights shone right into his face. Sleek dark hair covering one eye. Sharp bones and pale features.

“Ugh! I so do not need this right now!” November slammed her hands down onto the seat. She’d rather take her chances with the witches.

Her car door yanked open, and a Blood Walker pulled her out of the front seat. Another Blood Walker did the same with Ty, and they shoved them in front of the car where Marcus stood. Samuel moved up next to Marcus, the rest of the Blood Walkers circling them. The headlights shone bright, cutting through the fog that tossed up over the ground.

Samuel stepped further into the light, and November eyed the key necklace around his throat, the metal shiny against his bony chest, his shirt halfway open. His midnight hair was slicked back, accentuating his bony face, and he stared her down with his pinpoint eyes.

“Search her,” he said smoothly.

Several Blood Walkers slithered up to her and patted along her legs and back, she assumed checking for the stake.

“And the car,” Samuel said.

The others went for the car, ripping it apart, throwing things in the backseat, searching the trunk. November lifted her brows.

“Where is it?” Samuel asked.

Her eyes slid to Marcus, who stared her down darkly. He had his hands stuffed into his pockets, the muscles in his forearms straining.

“And what do you want with it?” November asked. She hated that her voice shook.

“It’s the only thing that can kill us. Of course we want it in our possession. And after having lived that past few hundred years being locked away, forgive me if I’m not ready to have my freedom taken away just yet.”

Fog continued to circle their feet, churning along the ground.

“I’m not ready to hand over something else to you when you already have my necklace.”

Samuel let out a smooth laugh, and the sound echoed out into the night. “Marcus, tell her to retrieve the stake and bring it to us.” Excitement lit in his eyes. She faltered back a step. Marcus could make her do anything if they were still bonded.

Marcus stepped forward, his dark gaze connecting with hers. He squared his shoulders and cleared his throat. “Bring me the stake,” he said, voice raspy. “Take your friend here and go get the stake and bring it back to me directly.”

November waited for the warmth of his command to surge between them, and persuade her to do his will, but nothing came. Marcus's words fell flat out into the night.

Her lips twitched. "I think I'm fine not to. I'd rather you not have it."

Marcus narrowed his eyes. "I said *go* get us the stake and bring it back to us."

"Hmm," November said, crossing her arms. "Let me think about it... nope."

Marcus whitened a shade in the dim light, and his eyes flew to Samuel.

Samuel's face turned murderous. "What happened?" His bared his teeth before snapping to November. "You're not bonded to him?"

She slowly uncrossed her arms, realizing her mistake. She should've just pretended to go get the stake. At least then she could've left and gotten the help she needed. Now, Samuel had all the cards.

"I..." She swallowed, peeking around her. The Blood Walkers held still as death, the white fog continuing to swirl, the forest trees around them spiking up into the black sky.

"Take her," Samuel ordered. "Kill the boy."

"What?" November started to edge back, but the Blood Walkers were too fast. She was tugged forward, nails biting into her skin, yanked away, as a group of Walkers descended upon Ty.

"Ty!"

He screamed as he was swallowed up in a circle of Walkers. They descended upon him fast, and he screamed again, crying out.

"Ty!"

She tried to wriggle out of the hold the Walkers had on her, but they kept her glued to them, dragging her backwards, her heels kicking up dirt.

The Blood Walkers growled, wet gurgling sounds coming from them, and Ty continued to scream. November cried out again, begging them to stop.

"Please!" she yelled. "Let him go!" She writhed, struggling.

Ty's cries diminished slowly, his voice fading, until it ceased completely. The Walkers kept their grip and November stood frozen in the middle of the road. The Walkers surrounding Ty backed away, blood on their faces, dripping down their chins. Ty lay dead on the ground, unmoving, his face blank up to the cloudy sky.

“No!” November screamed. She yanked away from the Walkers holding her and started to rush toward him, but Marcus caught her arm.

“Just come with us and do what Samuel says,” Marcus whispered. “Ty’s gone. It’s time to think about yourself now.”

“No!” She shook her head, waiting for the tears to come, but they didn’t. She felt dried up, dead, drained just like Ty had been.

“Come on.” Marcus led her away from the car and out into the dark afternoon.

Thirty-Two

DEAD MAN WALKING

NOVEMBER'S FOOTSTEPS crunched softly on the path of leaves and sticks in front of her. She followed Marcus, Samuel, and the other Blood Walkers into the dim light, staying silent. Her heart was still thrumming with what she had just witnessed. One minute Ty had been alive, full of hope and want with helping April, and the next... he was gone. Just like that. A snap of a finger.

Marcus walked right up behind her, and even though they weren't bonded, she could feel every inch of his presence. He loomed behind her like a poison, close enough that she could smell his cologne, tangy and sweet. Samuel followed in the back of the pack, and Zane led the way in front of her. She hadn't seen the Walker since she'd been held captive in that cabin.

That felt like an eternity ago. Back before Vincent had come back. Back before Ty and Deva were dead. Back when she actually thought she had a chance at saving the kids and stopping the Harvest. She had no idea where Vincent and the others were and what they were doing. There was no way they'd know how to find her. She'd been lucky to escape Samuel's clutches the first time, it'd be impossible to do it again.

She scrambled over rocks and tree roots, the air crisp on her skin. They traveled in silence, just the crunching leaves and natural rustles of the forest sounding around her. The ground soon turned up at a slight incline, and the tops of her thighs burned as they hiked upward.

"Where are we going?" November finally asked. If she was walking to her death, she'd at least like to know where it was going to happen.

Marcus grunted behind her.

“Was that an answer?” she asked again. “Because I don’t speak grunt.”

He held silent for a few moments before he asked, “How did you break our bond?” There was a tinge of hurt in his voice.

“Oh.” Her footsteps crunched further. “Margaret did it.” She left it at that.

She could almost feel Marcus’s frown. “A bond was supposed to be forever. I don’t like that this is happening. I feel... empty.” His words drifted out into the night, but November didn’t answer. He’d taken advantage of her, was she supposed to give him sympathy? Apologize that his life suddenly seemed empty without her?

“Tell me where we’re going.”

“We’re traveling up to the top of the mountain,” Marcus said. “Samuel wants me to restore the Blood magic back to him and his people. I told him I couldn’t unless I had the full power of the moon. I’m only half witch, and my abilities lie in siphoning, not necessarily restoring, but...”

November widened her eyes. “...but if *Elizabeth* could use the moon’s power to cast a spell to stop her and her siblings from participating in the Harvest, you think the moon will give you... Wait.” November stopped and she spun on him. “You don’t plan on giving Samuel back the Blood magic,” she whispered. “You’re just trying to stop the Harvest. You want to get the full exposure to the moon so you can stop the Harvest.”

“Shh! Lower your voice!” Marcus pushed her forward once more and they continued walking. “Do you want to get me killed before I even get a chance to stop this? Of course I’m going to take the chance I can get to stop the Harvest. If the moon could save Elizabeth and her siblings, then it can save me and my sisters, too. It’s all I’ve cared about from the beginning. Saving their lives.”

The vision of Clementine and Genevieve dead inside Marcus’s head came to mind. It was his greatest fear. He really did care.

The thought of Marcus using the Blood magic to stop the Harvest was a lot more appealing than placing it back in Samuel’s hands. But did Marcus have the ability to do it? To deceive him? Siphon it from him?

“Our birthday happens at midnight, so there’s not much time left.” His voice drifted off as they continued hiking.

Sweat gathered on her forehead, and her T-shirt stuck to her skin despite the cold. Her thighs continued to ache the further they climbed.

“You’re insane if you think you can fool Samuel,” November whispered harshly. “How long until he finds out your real plan and kills you?”

“Someone dies either way,” he answered. “So I might as well try.”

Silence fell again and soon the trees became scarcer. They separated, rocky land between them, the grey clouds still churning above them. The wind whipped, chilling November’s skin further, goosebumps running up and down her back. They continued to climb upward, now scaling large boulders to the top of the mountain. Soon the mountain plateaued at the top, and they moved on the flat land for a time. The further they traveled, the more violent the wind became, tossing November’s hair around her head, a chill deep beneath her meager clothes.

At the top of the mountain, several tombstones lined the area, crosses and stones sticking out from the earth. They were crumbling and worn with age, the site clearly void of any new burials. It was probably a hundred years old.

November’s mind jumped from thought to thought until she paused. Her eyes widened at the sight before her. “Marcus, this has to be the Aurora graveyard. This is where the Harvest is supposed to happen.”

“I know.”

November blinked. “Why would you take us here?”

“It’s the place of Sacrificial magic. I know if I were to stop the Harvest, I’d need as much power as possible.

The pull between the waves and the moon should do the trick. We just have to wait until midnight.”

November stopped dead. “Waves?”

She squinted out in front of her and sucked in a sharp breath. Out before her stretched ocean, long and deep, a deep blue against the white frothy waves. The waves tossed back and forth, and she crept forward, her feet on the rocky ground. She came to the edge of a cliff and peered down.

“No, no, no,” she said, scrambling back. “This can’t be happening.” Her chest tightened and she placed a hand over it, trying to breathe. “You brought me here?”

Marcus gave her a curious look.

“Bring the girl over here,” Samuel ordered, and Zane came and gripped her by the upper arms, dragging her back.

“No! Marcus, what have you done? Do you realize where we are?”

He tilted his head, confusion clear on his features.

“The cliff... the...” She broke off, swallowing.

“Shut her up,” Samuel said.

Zane slapped her across the side of her face. November held in a cry, pain throbbing in her cheek.

“I’ve waited long enough,” Samuel said. He removed the necklace from off his neck and held it out to Marcus.

The Blood Walkers all stood in a circle on top of the cliff, wind whipping their ragged clothes, their oily hair greasy in the muted light. Marcus slowly walked forward, every eye watching him. No one said a word.

Marcus reached out and retrieved the necklace from Samuel’s hands, but Samuel gripped onto it, stopping Marcus from taking it.

“If this doesn’t work, then you’re dead.”

Marcus kept his gaze steady and nodded once. “Don’t worry. I’ll get you the magic.” But a lump bobbed in his throat.

Samuel released the necklace and Marcus knelt inside the circle of Walkers, smoothing the dirt out in front of him. He placed the necklace on the ground, and drew a circle around it in the dirt, before placing his hands in his lap.

“Now we wait,” he said. “As soon as the moon is full, I will have enough power to siphon the Blood magic for you.”

November watched the descending light in the sky. Stars began to appear, and clouds covered the moon. It wouldn’t be long now. She wrapped her arms around herself, standing on top of the cliff, Zane’s clammy hand gripping her upper arm. She couldn’t stand here waiting for her death. This was where it was going to end. This was the very cliff in her dream. It ended with her sailing through the air, plummeting to her death.

She wasn’t ready. She wasn’t ready to say goodbye to this world and everyone in it. She’d just gotten back, and she’d barely made any difference. She’d failed Everett. She’d failed Ty. And Deva. And Margaret. Cam. Conroy. And...Vincent.

Her intentions had been good, she’d wanted to save everyone from the heartache they were experiencing, but intentions weren’t good enough. You had to *act* to be a hero, and she’d just been drifting—allowing circumstances to overpower her and she hadn’t taken control. Now, it was too late. Everett and all those kids wouldn’t be saved. Margaret was a Blood Walker, and Deva and Ty were... dead. And Vincent? Well, she’d only been

lying to herself. She knew she would never be able to care for anyone else as much as she cared for him, despite how many lies she told herself.

She didn't know how long she stayed standing on that cliff top, watching Marcus kneel by the necklace, but it was long enough that the clouds parted over the sky, the moon shining bright. Vincent had to find them. Margaret knew how to read the Walkers' minds and find them. They had to be on their way.

The wind continued to whip, a chill deep in November's bones. Moonlight cascaded down onto the circle of Walkers, the orb a full, bright glow. Marcus still hovered over the necklace in the middle, and November marveled that what had once been a token of endearment from Everett was now a capsule of Blood magic—the most powerful type of magic that existed on this earth.

"It's time," he whispered.

Samuel stood straight behind him, observing him with watchful eyes. His lips were curled back onto his face, his bony fingers linked out in front of him.

Marcus lifted his hands, hovering over the necklace, his fingers stretched tight. He closed his heavy-lidded eyes, and began to mutter soft words to himself, as the wind whistled around them. Samuel stood on the balls of his feet, his fists clenched, his bony jaw tight. His eyes resembled two black bruises, his face caved in in the moonlight.

Marcus continued to mutter strange words quietly to himself, as a red-orange glow began to radiate from his hands. The necklace appeared as if it were growing hot, the glow starting to travel up into his arms. He threw out a hand up to the moon, the light bright on his face. He kept one hand up to the moon while the other stayed hovered over the necklace. More orange began to glow within his skin, crawling up through his arms.

Samuel stood on edge, his face tightening, his brows drawing together. "What's happening?" he demanded, but Marcus didn't take notice. He continued on, the glow growing brighter.

"Why does it look like it's moving into *you*? Transfer it to me!"

November stood tense, her body an electric wire. Every inch of her buzzed, waiting. Marcus owning the Blood magic was definitely better than Samuel, but she still didn't trust Marcus fully. Maybe he had more motivation than just using the magic for the Harvest.

The glow spread until it seemed to fill Marcus's whole being. His hands trembled and he staggered to his feet, as if the power surging through him was too much to handle.

Samuel growled, baring his teeth. "Stop this!" He motioned a few of his men forward, but when they tried to set a hand on Marcus, they hissed, curling back in pain, as if touching him were like touching real fire.

"I said *stop* him!" Samuel growled again.

The Walkers edged forward once more, but each time they tried to lay a hand on Marcus, they cowered back, hissing, shielding their eyes from Marcus's bright light.

Zane let go of November's arm, and also tried to attack Marcus, but he cowered back like the rest of them. The wind continued to whip, intensifying to a howl, and she eyed the waves tossing in the ocean below.

"No!" Samuel let out a war cry and threw himself toward Marcus. Veins bulged underneath his eyes, and his face contorted as he leapt forward, his long fingers and nails wrapping around Marcus's throat. Marcus's eyes flew open as he fell back onto his backside, hitting hard onto the ground. The glow diminished in Marcus's body, but a glow still pulsed in the necklace. Samuel grappled for it, clasping it securely in his hand.

"No!" Marcus yelled.

November slid a foot backward, edging away from the scene. The trail wasn't too far from here. She might be able to make her way back down in the dark. Black clouds began to close in over the sky, covering the stars. They moved in at an impossible speed, as if sealing them all in a tight bubble, but the moon still shone bright, the clouds parted around it. Marcus and Samuel continued to fight for the necklace, and November continued to back away.

"November, help!" Marcus called out. "If I don't get all of it, I can't stop the Harvest!" They continued to fight for possession, Marcus throwing out a fist, but Samuel shoved him back. The necklace slipped from his fingers and landed on the ground a few feet away from him. Samuel dove for it, but a pair of slender hands picked it up first.

"You won't be stopping the Harvest," a light voice rang through the chaos.

Everything paused.

The fight.

The wind.

The yelling.

Ester appeared next to November, her blonde hair bright in the moonlight. She turned the necklace over in her hands, analyzing it.

“You’ve been busy.” She eyed her son.

Marcus scrambled to his feet, dusting off his legs. Samuel unfolded from the ground, his teeth flashing in the moonlight. Ester looped the necklace around her own neck and gave a satisfied smile.

“There,” she said. “We can’t be too careful, can we?”

Samuel’s bony fists open and closed, veins still bulging underneath his eyes. Blood flowed inside of them, moving over his skin.

More witches appeared next to Ester, spreading outward, surrounding the circle of Blood Walkers. The Zodiac coven. They all resembled Ester, with white blonde hair, milky loose clothing hanging off of their bodies. Clementine and Genevieve stood in the middle of them, the witches holding them secure. Clementine’s eyes were wide with fear, while Genevieve looked bored.

On the other side of the cliff, a few more witches appeared, Sariah and Lizzie at the head. Their hair and skin were dark, their teeth bright in the moon as they smiled. Shades hovered in the sky, floating around them, swirling with the dark clouds above. They looked like thin strips of cotton drifting around, even though the wind had ceased. Ester glared at the Halldora coven, but didn’t seem too concerned. She kept her attention fixed on Marcus.

“Thank you for your willingness to come here tonight, son,” Ester said. “You made it much easier to be gathered.”

She motioned to the witches who held Genevieve and Clementine pinned. They drew them forward, into the middle where Marcus stood.

“No,” Marcus said. He started to rush forward, but his mother held up her hand, stopping him. He struggled to move—but it was as if there was an invisible force surrounding him. He snapped his teeth and veins bulged underneath his young Blood Walker eyes.

“It’s midnight, it’s time.”

Clementine fought against the witch holding her, tears gathering in her eyes, while Genevieve strolled forward, her lips pressed in a thin line.

“All three of your fathers would be proud to witness this moment,” Ester’s voice rang out. “It’s a shame I had to kill them to keep our secret. Three children holding three separate powers will be the most monumental

Harvest in history. Which will make me the most powerful witch in the history of the Zodiac coven. Thanks to Elizabeth here.”

Lizzie stepped out from the Halldora coven away from Sariah, and Sariah’s dark brows creased together. “Lizzie, what are you doing?”

Lizzie’s sleeve hung down over her shoulder, her moon tattoo shining in the moonlight.

November’s eyes stretched wide. “Lizzie?”

Lizzie.

Elizabeth.

It was her. She was the witch who had stopped the Harvest all those years ago. She had the power over dreams.

Ester glanced up at the moon. “Long ago, Elizabeth was able to stop her coven from killing her and her siblings, but as I’m sure you’re aware, she can’t let another Harvest fail or she’ll lose her eternal life. She’s spent years making sure each Harvest has occurred, ensuring her life, so I’m pleased to have her working with us.” She peeked up at the moon again. “Let’s begin.”

Clementine was shaking. Her jaw chattered and she wrapped her arms around herself. Genevieve yawned. She had no idea what was about to occur—that her life was in danger. Only one triplet would survive. The triplet that was the strongest. Who would that be? It had to be Marcus. He was the one with the ability to siphon. But would he allow it to happen? He didn’t want his sisters to die.

“Join hands,” Ester ordered, but the triplets didn’t move. Marcus stayed with his hands down to his sides, while Clementine kept her arms wrapped around her.

“I said join hands!” Ester threw out her arms and it was as if an invisible blast sailed through the air. The triplets unwillingly reached their arms toward each other and linked their fingers through each others’. Ester slowly raised her arms, and the wind picked up again.

The Shades hovered above them, and Ester smiled up at them. “I’ve been preparing them on this side and the other for our ultimate takeover. But first—” She slowly pointed her finger toward Genevieve.

“You know what to do,” she said to the Shades.

The Shades swooped down in a rush, the dark creatures opening their hollow eyes and mouths. Black mist pulsed out of their beings as they zoomed toward Genevieve at full force. Genevieve’s eyes widened as they

attacked her, loud humming resonating off of them. Genevieve stiffened, a silent scream trapped in her throat, as her body convulsed.

“Stop!” November yelled. “What are you doing?”

Ester shrugged. “She needs to be aware of who she is and what her power is. I’m simply restoring her memories.”

When the Shades had finished, Genevieve sagged, her hands still linked with her siblings. The Shades departed, disappearing out into the night. Genevieve slowly straightened, and her face paled as she realized where she was and what was happening.

“No!” she said. She wriggled and writhed, trying to unlink her hands, but they were glued together. “I’m not doing this! I’m not doing this!”

Ester laughed, a light, tinkling sound. “Just like her father. A coward.” She warmly motioned her coven forward. “Come, let us also join hands. The Harvest is about to begin.”

November bounced her weight from side to side, itching to do something. But what could she do? Rush in and try to break the siblings apart? Ester was too strong. Her mind spun furiously, willing herself to think. Willing herself to breathe.

Then she heard it.

Footsteps crunching from behind, and two silhouetted figures emerged from the trail up onto the cliff. She recognized the figures immediately.

Conroy and Roderick appeared, both tall and dark, Roderick with his back stiff and regal, and Conroy with his wild hair out to the sides. They moved together in sync, stopping just outside the witch’s circle.

“Conroy!” November yelled. Relief swept through her, and she rushed over to join them. Conroy would know what to do. He always knew what to do. She gave Roderick a nod, and he gave her a sharp nod back.

Conroy shifted his feet, ducking his head to the side. He ran a hand through his hair, before straightening his glasses. “I’m sorry, November, but I’m not here to save you or rescue the siblings from what has to take place tonight. I’m here to make sure it happens.”

Roderick’s head snapped over to Conroy, his eyes narrowing.

November placed her hands over her stomach. “*What* do you mean?”

Roderick faced him, and his expression turned murderous. “You?”

It was the first time she had seen Roderick so shocked. He always seemed to know everything, be in control of everything.

“What am I missing?” November asked.

“Conroy helped bring everything about,” Ester said smoothly. “Our interests aligned, so he worked with us. He needed to distract you, so he could have his revenge. He and Elizabeth have been very busy.”

November bit down hard on her teeth. “*What* is she talking about?”

Conroy stuffed his hands into his pockets and shrugged his shoulders. “I’m the one behind the dreams,” he said simply. He peeked over at Roderick before his face hardened. “None of you seemed to care that I lost my sister. *No one* cared. April was just... gone. I needed to make everyone pay. She was the best flautist any of us had ever seen. No one else deserved to play. Only her. Her memory needed to be revered. So I teamed up with Elizabeth. Her power over dreams and trapping kids was easy for her. She helped me get rid of anyone who threatened April’s memory. Especially, *you*, November.” His eyes tightened. “You were her friend. You were the one she was closest to. And you just moved on like it was nothing. Consumed with boys and your own happiness. You can’t see anything outside of yourself. It’s all about you. Why did you not mourn her?” His gaze tightened further.

“I did!” November yelled. “You have no idea what April’s death did to me! Trust, me I miss her more than anything. But you want to punish me for it?” Her gaze darted to Roderick. “And what about you? Were you in on this, too?”

“Of course not,” Roderick said, affronted. “I knew Conroy had gone off the rails, consumed with April’s death, it’s why I broke up with him—or told him we needed space so he could heal. But I had no idea about his true motivations or that he would go this far. I’ve been investigating the murders with your uncle. I don’t condone this.” He lifted his chin.

November held paralyzed. She couldn’t believe Conroy would do this. She trusted him. He’d helped her numerous times, giving her words and strength to continue. And here he was the one who wanted her death. He’d been toying with her all along, waiting to bring about his revenge.

“So what now?” November asked. “You going to make sure your dream plays out? Me to my death off the cliff?”

Conroy’s eyes flicked to the cliff, and he swallowed. “Yes. No. I...” Indecision flashed over his face, but he slowly moved over to Elizabeth’s side, leaving Roderick and November standing alone. Another gust of wind blew in, and chills rippled down her whole body. So this was it. The

Harvest would take place and she would die here on this cliff this night. Where was Vincent? And Cam? Why weren't they here?

Ester turned back to the witches, with Conroy pale next to her side. Samuel and the other Blood Walkers were still trapped inside the witch's circle, when the veins underneath Samuel's eyes relaxed back into his face. His shirt exposed his bony chest, and he lifted up his palms out in front of him.

"This is witches' business," he said. "Allow me and my brothers to depart. We won't give you any trouble. That boy—" He glanced to Marcus. "Isn't one of us now. We hand him over to you."

Ester thought for a moment, thoughts crossing over her face, before she cocked her head to the side. "Go. I don't need you. Besides, I have your Blood magic around my neck. You aren't a threat to me."

The witches opened their circle and allowed the Walkers to depart. The Walkers slowly filed into a line and exited the scene, disappearing out into the night, leaving Marcus alone. Hurt washed over his face, and he kept his eyes locked on his father's family. They'd abandoned him. They didn't care enough about him to try and save him.

Ester glanced up at the moon again. "It's time."

She took a step out to the side of her and began a circling motion around the triplets, the other witches following. They slowly walked in a circle, Marcus and his sisters still linked, staring at each other with wide eyes.

November peeked over at Roderick, willing him to do something, but he only shook his head.

"There's nothing we can do," he said quietly. "They have Earth magic, Ancestral magic, and Blood magic on their side."

"Then call on your dark spirit friends. I can open the veil, and they can come out and help us."

He shook his head. "They wouldn't care. The land of the living isn't their business."

"Then *what* are we going to do? We can't let the witches get away with this! We can't let Conroy get away with this!"

Roderick kept his mouth clamped shut, staring hard out in front of him. Conroy stood across the way, still pale. His eyes darted from Roderick to November to the scene before him.

The witches continued to circle the triplets. Sariah stood off to the side with her coven, glaring at Lizzie, who had clearly deceived her. Lizzie

stood with her chin held high, eyes dark as she watched Ester and the others. Marcus, Clementine, and Genevieve stared at each other, their fingers clutched together, trembling.

"I'm so sorry," Marcus whispered. "I thought I could stop it. I tried."

"It's not your fault," Clementine whispered back. "We've known this would happen our whole life. It's fate."

"I refuse to believe in fate," Marcus growled out. "Elizabeth stopped the Harvest; we can, too. We just have to use our abilities together. She used the moon. It's got to be powerful enough to help us."

Clementine shook her head. "It won't work, Marcus. You're a siphon. If you try and use your ability, then you take our powers from us. You'll win and we will die."

"Then *you'll* have to do it." Genevieve's voice rang clear. "Clem, you always say how Marcus is the strongest, but that's not true. It's you. You have power over men. You can make them buckle at their knees. We all know that I'm not a match for any of you, but you are a match. Use your ability against Marcus. You can overpower him—you can use the moon's power to stop this. Break us apart. Stop the Harvest."

"I'm not sure about this," Clementine said.

The witches continued to circle, a throaty hum coming from their throats.

"Do it!" November called out. "Clementine, you can do it!"

Her eyes snapped to hers, and the two stared at each other in unspoken communication. November silently pleaded with her. She was right. If Marcus drew on his powers, he'd only suck the life out of his sisters, completing the Harvest. Maybe Clementine could stop this. She did come from the line of witches after all.

The three siblings stared at each other as the wind began to pick up. Scattered leaves blew up into the night air, swirling around, the witches continuing to circle. Their hum still resonated out into the night, thrumming low and deep, jarring November's bones. Clementine squeezed her siblings' hands and took a shaky breath.

"Okay," she said. "Okay."

She opened her mouth and a light, airy song sailed from her. She sung, the melody smooth, but haunting, scaling up and down in intricate notes, playing on the air. The melody resonated above the witches' low humming, cutting through the din. A soft glow began to radiate between the triplets,

floating above their heads, dim at first, but then pulsing brighter. It was like a white orb floating above them, and Clementine continued her song, her voice ringing loud and clear.

Ester continued to circle, her head darted up to the glowing orb. “Faster! Circle faster!” she called out to her coven.

Clementine continued to sing, focusing on her siblings. Marcus stared at her vehemently, while sweat glistened on Genevieve’s forehead. The moon glowed high and round in the sky, its glow matching the glowing orb above the triplet’s heads.

“Keep going!” Ester shouted. “Go! Faster! Louder!”

The witches’ hum turned into chanting, strange low words, circling faster. The chanting heightened, drowning out Clementine’s voice, the orb above them diminishing. The triplets tightened their hands, and Clementine raised her voice, the orb flickering brighter, but the witches circled faster, chanting louder.

“They’re too loud!” Clementine broke off, panting. “I can’t do it!”

“You *can* do it,” Marcus said.

Clementine nodded, breathing heavily. She opened her mouth once more and another melody drifted out, but it was drowned out by the chanting. She broke off again, the orb above her flickering out.

“I can’t.”

“You can!” Genevieve cried.

Clementine’s knees buckled, and more sweat ran down Genevieve’s brow. Marcus stayed fixed, glaring out in front of him.

“I’m going to have to try then,” Marcus said.

“Marcus, no!” November yelled. He couldn’t. He was too powerful.

He clamped down hard on his jaw and raised his chin up to the moon. “I’m going to try and siphon the moon’s power instead of absorbing your own,” he said to his sisters.

The girls trembled as the chanting continued, the witches spinning faster, their feet dusty on the rocky earth.

November couldn’t keep up. The air around her buzzed with energy, the night air alive, making the little hairs on her arm stand. She didn’t dare move. She didn’t dare breathe. Marcus’s face contorted as he focused above him. His eyes tightened, his mouth pressed inward. He clenched his fists tighter into his sister’s hands and as he focused above him, his forearms beginning to shake.

An invisible force emanated between the trio, and the wind picked up faster, swirling the girls' dark hair over their heads. Marcus was doing something. Or maybe it was the witches. She didn't know which was more powerful—Marcus's connection to the moon, or the witches' Harvest spell.

Marcus's whole body was trembling now, and his sisters were barely upright. The bright orb above them began to swirl as more wind whipped around them.

November stood on the balls of her feet, her heart racing fast. It seemed as if what Marcus was doing was working. The orb glowed brighter, pulsing in the night air.

Ester's face contorted as she ripped the necklace off her neck. "I won't let this happen!" she screamed. She held the necklace high above her head and began chanting her own tune. The witches continued their own chant until it was a cacophony of noise echoing inside November's head. Ester's face scrunched together tight, her fingers gripping the necklace.

She was drawing on the Blood magic.

"Marcus, you got this!" November yelled. "Don't stop!"

Sweat shone on his brow, but he nodded, his attention returning back to the moon. But the necklace in Ester's hands began to glow a bright red, a beam of blood-red light shooting straight up into the sky. Her chanting heightened and Marcus trembled further.

Clementine's body sagged forward, only held upright by their hands linked together. Genevieve's eyes drifted closed, also falling forward, while Marcus continued to focus up toward the moon.

The witches came to an abrupt stop, and each threw up their hands in unison. A red blast ricocheted outward, and the bright orb above the siblings' heads exploded. Marcus, Clementine, and Genevieve all collapsed, their hands breaking apart. The three lay still on the ground, moonlight shining down on their lifeless bodies. Eyes closed, faces slack. They stayed unmoving, silence pounding through the night.

"No!" November screamed.

"It is done," Ester said, lowering the necklace. "Now we see which of my children will awake."

November's gaze was glued to the siblings. Every inch of her stood stiff, her throat sealed off tight. She strained her eyes for any sign of movement, but the three held lifeless.

“What have you done?” November whispered. She didn’t think anyone could hear, she could barely speak.

“It’s too late,” Roderick said. “The Harvest is complete.”

November shook her head. “No. I refuse. This isn’t fair. This isn’t...” She broke off as a movement caught her attention.

Marcus stirred, slowly sitting up, blinking. He glanced around him, his eyebrows pushed together, and he ran a hand over his face. Then realization dawned.

“No!” He scrambled to his feet, horror on his face. His sisters lay dead at his feet, unmoving. “No!” His head darted to his mother. “How could you?”

Ester lifted up her palms, welcoming her son. “You were the strongest. Your sisters gave their lives for a good purpose. Now you hold their power and will be a great asset to the Zodiac coven.” She turned to her fellow witches. “The Harvest is ready for the reaping. Magic is scattered in the earth. Attain it for your own.”

Excitement lit the witches’ faces, except for Sariah who still stood off to the side. She’d been helpless through this whole exchange, with Lizzie by Ester’s side.

Marcus stood with his hands in fists, his jaw glued together tight. He glared out at his mother, moonlight shining down between them.

“This isn’t over,” Marcus said. “This isn’t over.”

Thirty-Three

WIND WHISTLED in November's ears as silence settled over the cliff top. The witches were scrambling over the earth, placing their hands on the cold ground, absorbing the scattered magic that the Harvest brought. Light glowed deep within the earth, pulsing through the dead earth and grass, swirling around the gravestones. The magic traveled into the witch's hands, little bits swirling up into the air. Sariah still wasn't moving. Her coven stayed by her side, watching the other coven gather the magic. Clearly Lizzie's deception had rocked her.

Marcus's eyes were wide with terror, his sisters still listless at his feet. Lizzie grinned next to Ester, her moon tattoo highlighted in the moonlight.

"How can you be okay with this?" November said to Lizzie. "You just murdered two young girls. And all because you wanted to extend your own life. It isn't fair. And not only that... all the kids in comas. You've trapped them. Why?"

Lizzie shrugged. "Like Conroy said, he wanted his revenge, and he promised me that he'd make sure the Harvest took place if I helped him."

November turned to Conroy, who stared in horror at the two lifeless girls. His body shook under the moonlight. "But you were helping us."

"Was I?" Conroy said, swallowing. He yanked his gaze away and focused on her, the lines around his mouth deepening. "Did I not allow Deva to go to her death? Did I not let you believe that Vincent was behind all of this? Did I not encourage us to find the Blood Walkers as a distraction? Did I not try and steer you away from focusing on the Harvest? Oh, you may have thought I'd been helping you, but I was only... guiding

you.” But there wasn’t joy in his features. Sadness lined his face, weariness around his eyes.

He was right. He had guided them. This whole time. Every move they’d made had brought them right here to this moment. She just couldn’t believe that his hurt over April would make him lash out like this.

“Did you really avenge April’s death by doing this?” November asked. “No. You’ve only put more deaths on your conscience!”

He swiped a hand over his face. “It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter how many lives are destroyed. April is gone. Everyone else might as well be, too.”

November turned to Lizzie. “It’s over. You’ve gotten what you’ve wanted with the Harvest. Tell me how to save the kids from their comas.”

Lizzie lifted a slender brow up to her hairline. “You want my help? My magic only goes so far. Yes, I have power over the dream they are all trapped in, but it’s more difficult... to stop it.”

“What do you mean?” November asked.

Lizzie’s mouth curved upward. “I mean that in order for one of my dreams to stop, the dream needs to play out. It must be fulfilled. If the dream comes to an end, the kids will be all be released.”

“What?” A gust of wind blew in, spreading chills down November’s back.

Lizzie’s brow arched higher. “I think you know. I’ve lived long enough to know how my powers work. If you want this dream to stop, then you need to make the dream become a reality.”

November eyed the cliff a few feet away. The waves crashed and roared beneath her. Her entire body went cold. She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t jump. She couldn’t make the dream come to life.

“Your choice,” Lizzie said.

Ester clapped her hands together. “Looks like my work here is done. Come,” she said to her coven. Let us retire. Marcus, come with me. I’ll let you...” she waved between November and Lizzie, “figure this out.”

Marcus still stared down at his sisters. His eyes were glued open, unmoving.

“Marcus,” his mother said again. “Let’s go.”

His eyes snapped up to hers before they narrowed. “No.”

Ester paused, her face freezing, her lips a deep red in the moonlight. “Excuse me?”

“I said no,” Marcus repeated. “I don’t know why you think I would help you and your coven after everything you’ve done.”

Ester laughed, the sound trickling out into the night air. “Your Blood Walker family has already abandoned you. Your sisters are gone. I’m the only family you have left.”

“You’re *not* my family,” he spat.

His mother slowly took a step forward. “I didn’t prepare you your whole life for you to walk out on me. I didn’t ensure that I had triplets from three different men to give you three different sets of powers for you to try to change things now. You will come with me. Besides, if you don’t, I still have this.” She held up the necklace. “I won’t be afraid to use it on your friends.”

Marcus turned to November, softness in his gaze. “I’m sorry,” he said. “For everything. But right now, I have to leave. I *won’t* be a part of their coven and I already know I don’t have a place with you anymore.” He bit down hard on his jaw and faced his mother once more. “Then you’ll have to find me,” he said. “Because I’m not coming with you.”

Marcus took off into the night, brushing past Sariah and her coven. He disappeared down the backside of the mountain, sprinting away.

Ester glared after her son, her fingers gripping the necklace, the cords sticking out in her neck. She motioned to her coven next to her. “Find him and bring him to me.” She marched down the mountain after her son, the entire Zodiac coven with her. The Halldora coven still stood on the mountainside.

November didn’t have time to think about Marcus and his fate. She wanted to help him. Even after he had deceived her, she still felt sorry for him. He’d lost his sisters. He’d been abandoned by everyone. And he truly did seem to have remorse regarding everything they’d been through. But Lizzie remained alone on the cliff, peering at November, as if challenging her.

“Well?” she asked. “What do you decide? Face your fate or continue to let numerous kids fall into an endless sleep? It doesn’t matter to me.” Her mouth flicked upward before she headed back to Sariah and the few witches who still stood with her. “Let us go. There’s nothing here for us now.”

Sariah pinned her lips together. “So that’s it? You’re with us again?”

“You are my coven,” Lizzie said. “I did what I needed to do to stay alive. Let us go home now.”

Sariah glared through the dark, but she nodded a tight nod. "This isn't over."

The Halldora coven moved swiftly through the night, heading in the opposite direction as the Zodiac coven, disappearing down the mountain. Lizzie's lips lifted as she passed by November, before she too, vanished into the dark.

November stood silent, with Conroy and Roderick behind her. She stared them down for a few moments, silence stretching between them, before she slowly walked over to the edge of the cliff.

"November, what are you doing?" Roderick asked.

She took a few more steps forward, until her toes hung over the edge. Moonlight reflected in the violent ocean below, waves crashing against the rocky bottom.

"Do you think she's telling the truth?" November asked quietly. "That if I..." She swallowed. "Is Lizzie telling the truth?"

"I can't imagine why she'd lie," Roderick said. "Now that..." His eyes slid to Conroy. "Now that she's gotten what she's wanted, there's no reason for her to keep the truth from you."

November swallowed again, nodding.

She wasn't ready to die—for real this time. There was no Vincent to save her. This wouldn't be a Sylph attack, a mental attack, this would be a physical death. You couldn't be brought back from that. But could she really do it? She thought of all those kids. She thought of Everett. They didn't deserve to live the rest of their lives trapped in an endless dream—not when she could do something about it.

She remembered what it was like to die last spring. There had been peace. The noise and depression had disappeared from her head. She'd had respite, until she'd chosen to live again. Maybe she wasn't meant to live. Death seemed to follow her wherever she went. What if she was just living on borrowed time? That she wasn't really supposed to be here?

Her parents were gone after all. April was gone. Ty was gone. Deva was gone. Maybe it was her turn, too.

She could still see Vincent. He'd come visit her in the afterlife. Except she wouldn't be able to truly live. Now that she had him back, now that she'd finally admitted her true feelings for him, she wouldn't be able to have a life with him. But they were probably never meant to be anyway. If anything was ever meant to be. Did fate exist? Or was it truly her choice?

She continued to peer down at the tossing waves.

She already knew what her choice would be. She'd seen herself jump in her dreams. Maybe it was her subconscious telling her that this would be her end.

She wouldn't live and let others suffer. She knew what it was like to suffer, living every day in her head. And if she could ease someone else's suffering, she would.

She slowly turned and faced Conroy and Roderick, the wind blowing in another chill, goosebumps rippling down her arms.

"You'll never be happy, Conroy," she said, her voice catching. "If you live the rest of your life seeking revenge. And I'm not sure I can ever forgive you for what you've done. You threw your life away, and you ruined mine." Her eyes slid to Roderick before returning back to him. "And now you'll have to suffer the rest of your days knowing what you've done."

Conroy's face went ashen, and he took a wobbly step forward. "November, what are you doing?"

Roderick narrowed his gaze. "You can't possibly be thinking about this..."

She edged back further, and a few rocks under her feet slid off the cliff, tumbling down into the ocean below.

"Don't try and change my mind. I know what I need to do. Just like you know what you need to do," she said to Roderick. "Bring back the school." She glared at Conroy. "If you want to honor April's memory, create a place for her peers and old friends to live and develop their talents. She would've loved that. Maybe you can have penance by living the rest of your life as you should."

Conroy took another step forward. "November, I'm not letting you do this. I shouldn't have... I put my anger on you. I wanted you to suffer. I wanted everyone to suffer. But that doesn't mean you should..."

Her gaze softened as she slowly turned around. He didn't deserve any more words from her. He had put her in this position.

November lifted a foot off the cliff before her, her body shaking, willing herself to keep her eyes open. She wouldn't face her death afraid. She would face it head on, the way she wanted to be remembered for her life. She took a quick breath and lunged forward, her feet disconnecting with the earth.

Thirty-Four

VANISHING SMOKE

COLD WIND PUSHED into November's face as she plummeted downward. The wind blinded her eyes, her eyelids fluttering, as a surge of cold air whooshed into her lungs. She couldn't catch a breath. She was going to suffocate before she even hit the water.

Too many thoughts spun into her head at once. Would it hurt? Would she be aware she was even dying? How much longer did she have? She didn't know how it was possible to have all these thoughts at once, as the water and jagged rocks were approaching fast.

Her eyes stayed wide open as she waited for the inevitable, but just as she was about to reach the end, she felt herself being yanked backwards, breath escaping from her lungs. Darkness hit and she went blind, her first thought being that she had hit the water. But her breaths pumped in and out of her chest, her airway clear, and she appeared to be standing.

Solid ground was beneath her, and she blinked, shaded figures coming into view. A sweet smell wafted into her nose, and she realized it was roses. Hundreds of them. Maybe thousands. As her vision cleared, she realized she was standing in the field of black roses, bits of silver lining the dark flower petals, with streaks of silver lining dark blades of grass around them. The air was calm and smooth, no sense of it over her skin, the temperature perfect. The sky was pure black, but the glowing silver from the roses and grass illuminated the scene, her eyes still adjusting.

The shaded figures separated, and Vincent stood in the center of the group, the shine from the ground highlighting his indented cheeks. He peered at her with his dark eyes, his body tense and unmoving.

“Vincent?” Her voice was scratchy, like she hadn’t used it for a week.

He gave a slight nod and motioned to the people around him. “They’re going to be okay.”

One person stepped forward, and Everett came into view.

“Everett!” November exclaimed.

“Nov!” Everett rushed forward and pulled her into a tight hug. He lifted her up off her feet and spun her around before setting her down and pulling back. “It’s so good to see you.”

November’s hands went to his face, then slid down his shoulders, squeezing them tight. “How is it that you’re here? Where are we? I mean...” She turned to Vincent. “How is this possible? What is happening?”

Vincent shifted his stance, easing his weight onto his cane. His eyes darted to Everett, his mouth turned down, before he returned to November.

“I brought them here because the field of black roses is a place of healing. It’s where the dead come to reconcile things of their past to find peace in the afterlife. All of these victims’ lives were stolen from them. If anyone has unfinished business, it would be them. I knew if I could gather them all here, then they could connect with their true selves—their physical bodies again—and not be lost souls wandering in the dream realm. I also knew that Lizzie would reveal to you what needed to be done to break the dream, and that you would do anything to stop this.”

“So how am I here?”

“I’m not going to let you, die, Huntington.” He said it plainly, clearly, emotion in his voice.

“I’m in your head again, aren’t I?” she asked.

“No, you’re really here, transported for a moment in the dream realm. But just for the time being. I can’t keep you here forever.”

November nodded slowly. “You’re allowing me to say goodbye before I’m gone.”

His mouth pressed together tighter.

“Everett.” November squeezed his shoulders again. “It’s so good to see you, and I’m so glad you’re going to be okay.”

His brows slanted inward, creasing together. “But you’re not going to be?”

Emotion swelled inside her throat, and she took a step back. “Excuse me.”

November headed across the field of roses, the dark petals brushing past her legs. The silver continued to shine—almost flicker—in the field that went on for miles. She stopped in front of Vincent, only a few breaths between them.

“Will I see you again?” she asked.

“Like I said, Huntington, I’m not letting you die.”

She shook her head. “The minute you release me from here, I’ll crash into the waves below. I’m not going to make it, Vincent.”

He tightened his gaze, and he took one step forward. “You seem to forget who I am. You don’t really understand who I am and where I came from. Maybe someday I can tell you. Maybe someday you’ll know the truth. But I’m not all powerful. Just because I *can* live forever doesn’t mean I will. I’m going to take your place so the dream can play out. I’m going to keep you here while I finish out what you started.”

Silence beat between them as realization dawned. Vincent was going to sacrifice himself? Take her place? After everything? After her hating him for all this time?

“What? No, Vincent—that’s not possible! You can’t—”

“My choice is already made. Once I hit my watery death, you’ll have only a few moments to take these kids and escape, because my power to bring you here won’t last forever. You need to get them out.”

November couldn’t stop shaking her head. “I won’t let you do this. This is *my* fate. Not yours. You can’t give up your life for me.”

Vincent slowly moved closer and took one of her hands in his. He stared down at her with his dark eyes and hollow cheeks, his lips pulling up to the side. “You’re the one who has given me life. For so long, I lived a lost existence. Even these past few months, without having you in my life, I was hopeless. I couldn’t go on living again without you. I would rather die knowing that you got to live—that you got to save these children’s lives—than me living a pointless existence. Please, do this for me. If you’ve ever cared about me at all, do this for me.”

November’s mouth opened and closed. Her throat had swollen in so tight she could barely breathe. “Vincent...”

He gave her hand one final squeeze. “Just get the kids out, okay? You need to get them out before I’m gone completely. You’ll only have a few seconds.”

November kept shaking her head. “No.”

“November!” Everett called from down the way. “Come on!”

Vincent leveled his gaze with hers again. “You ready?”

Tears burned behind November’s eyes. “No. Please, no.”

“Please live, Huntington. Please live.”

And he vanished, in a heartbeat, the air empty before her.

“Vincent, no!” she screamed.

The silver pulsed around her, illuminated in the dark field. Pitch black encased her, as black as the feeling in her heart. She stood frozen for several moments, her knees buckling and her heart pounding heavily in her chest.

“No,” she whispered, and every inch of her shook. He couldn’t be gone. He couldn’t. She stared at where he had been. Nothing but a long stretch of dark.

Only a few seconds. She only had a few seconds to get the kids out.

But he was gone.

Vincent was gone.

It was too late to stop him. He had left and was plunging to his death this very moment. The vision of him crashing to his death flashed through her mind and she winced. She couldn’t focus on that now. Not with all these kids.

“Everett!” She found her voice. “We need to get everyone out!”

She raced over to him, the black roses brushing past her ankles, her heart still pounding. She motioned for everyone to follow. “Come on!”

Her feet ate up the ground, but she could barely feel them. They raced through the field of roses until the grounds opened up and white light appeared in the sky. They passed crumpled buildings and a gray flowing river until the grass whitened and the sky turned milky. It was just like it had been inside Vincent’s head when she and Cam had traveled. Perhaps he had been showing her the dream realm all along.

“Come on!” November pushed onward.

The kids continued to follow her, racing up and over a white hill, translucent trees and flowers. White sidewalks cut through the pale grass. Everything was a blank canvas.

They were close.

November pushed onward until she skidded to a halt. A mirror lay before her, with Cam’s blurry form on the other side. He had a hand pressed up to the mirror, peering through the glass as if searching for someone.

For her.

“Come on!” November yelled again.

She stopped at the glass and motioned the kids to step through.

“Through here?” Everett paused next to her, his eyebrows crunched.

“Yes. Just walk through,” November said, panting.

Her mind still couldn’t catch up. She felt as if she were still standing in that field of roses, Vincent in front of her, holding her hand. He couldn’t be gone. Not after everything. They’d spent so much time apart. She’d misjudged him. He was a hero. He’d given up his life—given up eternity—for her and these kids.

She clenched her eyes shut, trying to breathe. Her head wouldn’t stop spinning.

“You okay?” Everett asked.

“Yes,” she said quickly. “Yes, I’m fine. Go inside.”

Everett gave her one last look, but shrugged and stepped through the glass.

Thirty-Five

REST IN PEACE

CAM STOOD BEFORE HER, silent in the studio at the Huntington manor. The room was empty, just him standing next to the mirror, relief plastered on his face.

“You’re okay!” He gathered November up in a massive hug, but she held stiff, unmoving. “Vincent told me to wait here. That you’d be coming.” She still held frozen, her body straight. He pulled back abruptly, a crease between his brows. “What’s wrong?”

What’s wrong?

She was alive. She didn’t deserve to be standing there. Vincent had sacrificed everything and now she was alone. It should’ve been her that crashed into those waves. She shook her head, her throat swollen.

Understanding flashed over Cam’s face. “Come here.” He pulled her into another hug, and she collapsed. Everything that had happened since Everett had first fallen into the coma rushed to the surface, flooding out of her chest. She sobbed in Cam’s arms, allowing every feeling, every dark, scared, guilty, terrifying moment escape and flow out from her.

She stayed in his arms for a long while, shoulders shaking, knees trembling. If he hadn’t been holding her up, she’d be a pile on the floor.

“It’s okay,” he said. “Shh. It’s okay.”

She shook her head against his chest. “No, it’s not. Vincent... he... Why did I waste so much time? I’ve done nothing but judge and misjudge and hurt people and deceive people and think of myself.” She thought of her

addiction to Marcus. She thought of how she'd moved on from Everett. She thought of painting Vincent as the bad guy. "I'm a terrible person."

Cam stayed silent, stroking her back, his chin resting on her head. "You're not a terrible person. You saved those kids."

Everett.

The others.

She pulled back, sniffing. "What happened to them?"

"I saw them on the other side—through the mirror—I could see them. But only you came through."

November sagged, and she felt as if she was going to crumble all over again. She had failed.

"But then I got this." Cam pulled out his phone. "Kids are waking up all over the country. It's everywhere in the news. All of these kids waking up from their comas at the same time. Coincidence?"

November wiped her eyes. "Really?"

A smile spread on Cam's face. "Yes, really."

"But it isn't enough," she said. "So many people have died. Margaret turned into a Blood Walker. Conroy and Roderick hate each other. The witches are still out there, and Ester still has the necklace. The Blood Walkers are still roaming free. Not to mention the Shades and the fact that my dad is still a dark spirit. And Vincent..." She broke off, her voice catching. "Vincent's gone."

Pain washed over Cam's face, but he composed himself, keeping his eyes fixed on her. "We still have each other, Nov. Margaret will figure things out. Conroy and Roderick will get through it. The witches have no reason to be against us now that the Harvest is complete. Ester's problem is with Marcus. And we'll find a safe place to stay away from the Walkers. There is hope for your dad. And Vincent—he gave his life so you could survive. Because that is what matters. No matter how horrible life gets, no matter how hopeless things seem, there is always an answer. And the answer is never to give up."

November nodded, wiping her eyes. Cam was right.

She would survive.

It's what she did.

End of Book II

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