

A MONDAY MOODY NOVEL

THE CHRONONO UNIT



MORGAN W. SILVER

The Chrono Unit

by

Morgan W. Silver

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

THE CHRONO UNIT

First edition. December 3, 2019.

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ISBN: 978-9083038810

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I dedicate this novel to you.

Chapter 1

*“I am by no means an ordinary person,
but considering the fact that the world is
strange, I think it is a good thing I was
prepared early.” ~ Monday Moody*



THE CALL COMES IN AT 2.36 minutes past ten in the morning. My watch, like any other CU officer's, is exact because time is of the essence and every second counts. The screen projects the necessary information. Code 103 at Fox Lane 15. That's Mr Woodacre's farm. The last time I went anywhere near his sheep, he chased me off his land with a pitchfork and such vigour that he lost his toupee. Unfortunately, his farm is close to where I'm enjoying my tea and scones, an unhealthy start of a disconsolate day in Yorkshire.

I could pretend to ignore the call, but who am I kidding? If I responded the time I had a fever, the most delectable scones of the county aren't going to make a difference either. That had been an interesting case since I had hallucinated yellow penguins and dancing daffodils.

“Chip,” I call to the blonde waitress, a little person who always wears red clothes because she says it's the colour of seduction—something she maintains, even after having seen the horror that is my frizzy ginger hair after a drizzle. She hurries over, her blue eyes large and inquisitive, probably because she knows that even death can't separate me from my favourite food.

“I’ve just got a call. Can you bag this for me?” I say with an apologetic smile.

She raises her thin eyebrows and grabs my plate. “My scones not good enough?” Her voice is soft and low, as if her words are carried by an undercurrent.

“How dare you even suggest that? I sometimes dream about them. Even my dreams have dreams about them. No, I’m afraid duty calls.”

“You work too hard,” Chip says as I follow her to the counter. She disappears briefly and returns with a paper bag while I put on my bright yellow raincoat.

“I think I work the right amount.” I clutch the bag to my chest.

“So you think you should take a call on your birthday?” she asks.

I smile at her. “Since I hate my birthday, yes. Thank you for the free scones.” I bend down and kiss her on her soft cheek.

“Be careful,” she calls after me, but the rain drowns out the last few letters. It is starting to let up a little, but I still have to run to my light blue Beetle. It takes me a while to straighten my sharp bob every morning, and I will not let a drizzle undo that hard work.

I gently place the bag on the passenger’s seat and check that my red lipstick is still okay. I turn the ignition. It takes a few tries but then it purrs like a constipated, fat tabby. I tap the steering wheel lovingly before I reverse out of the parking space and drive towards the edge of town, to Mr Woodacre’s farm. There is a fat chance he hasn’t noticed the rip, but still I harbour hope that he will be absent.



DESPITE THE FACT THAT the morning started with gloomy feelings—I really don't like my birthday—and gloomier weather, luck appears to be on my side, because Mr Woodacre is nowhere to be seen. In fact, apart from a herd of sheep, the paddock is empty. In the distance is his cottage, his green truck gone. I exchange my red heels for red wellies and head over to the rip.

It is small, tiny, in fact, so it was probably someone's first time. Either that, or it is someone very skilled. The yellow and orange colours indicate that it is not a rip in time, but only in space. Though messing with time travel is far more intricate and disastrous than messing with parallel universes, both are equally illegal. I hold out my scanner, but it comes up with nothing new. Parallel rips are easier to read, but in this case I can't tell if someone went to another world, or just came back from one. Filing reports on parallel rips makes root canals look like fun. This tiny rip will take me a few days, at least.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand on end, and I turn around. By my car is a young girl, about seven years old, in a long woollen jumper that is too large for her and an open coat that has sagged off her right shoulder. Her two braids hang limply beside her pale face. Her brown eyes are large and even from here I can see that she's trembling. She must have been hiding in the woods at the edge of the field.

"Hi," I say in my most gentle tone. It is a tone that I have to use often, since most offenders are adolescents and scared at the realisation that they can manipulate space and time, and by having done so, committed a crime. This is the first time, though, that one is so young. And even if all of them remind me a little of me, this one does so even more. I inch towards her, but stop when her eyes dart towards the woods.

"I am Monday. Monday Moody," I say in a cheerful voice. "I suppose you made that happen?"

She says nothing. "I just need to do something, okay? Hold still." I hold out my watch to her face and after it scans her, it beeps. I check the screen. She appears to be from this world, since her name is immediately displayed.

"Hi, Lovelace. Did you make the rip happen?"

The girl looks at the rip and then at me. Her eyes tear up.

“Don’t be sad,” I say. “Listen, I need you to do me a favour.” I check my watch. Six minutes have passed. “I need you to run home, okay? And don’t mention what you did to anybody. Perhaps your mother, or someone you trust, but nobody else. You might be in trouble, you see? And I don’t want you to be in trouble. I wish I could help you, but all I can say is: try not to be too upset. Your abilities are linked to your emotions.” That sounds like lousy advice, even to me, but time really is of the essence. “Run, go.” I nudge her arm gently and point at the woods. She runs off after a moment of hesitation, becoming smaller until she is swallowed up by the first line of trees.

The moment she is out of sight, another car comes up. A blue Hudson Hornet. Saoirse. She parks her car behind mine and at first her black curls come out above the car door. Then her pale face with sharp eyes and a lopsided grin. “Beat me to it,” she says in an Irish accent.

“Can you believe I was eating Chip’s scones when I got the call. Lousy timing.”

“And on your birthday no less,” she says and slams the door shut. She walks up to me and surveys the rip for a few moments.

“Ugh. I don’t like to be reminded of the fact that my life is flashing me by with great speed,” I say. That’s not the only reason I hate this day. It may also have something to do with the fact that I nearly died on my 18th birthday.

“Oh, please. That’s what happens when you have kids. You can at least do whatever you want.” She squeezes my shoulder. “How I’d love to go back to a time of one-night stands and drunken make-out sessions, just for a day.”

“Saoirse,” I say, my mouth falling open.

“What? A mother of four can have desires.” She chuckles and walks closer to the rip. “You haven’t closed it yet, then?”

“I was conversing with Shaun over there about the reason for our existence.” I point at the nearest sheep who is grazing languidly.

She chuckles. “Don’t tell my kids. They’ll get jealous.” She takes out her Sonic gun and aims it at the rip. As soon as she pulls the trigger, the edges of the rip start weaving their way to each other until it disappears entirely. It is the only weapon we carry, and it’s not even a weapon.

“The paperwork is going to be hell.” She sighs. “I’ll request some Ladybug Drones to survey the area for anything unusual, just in case.” She swipes her watch a few times, then turns to me. “So, even if you don’t celebrate your birthday, I still got you something months ago. I saw it, and it’s perfect for you.” She grins.

I can’t help but smile. Though I hadn’t expected to make any friends as soon as I joined the Chrono Unit, she made it so damn easy. She is also the best partner I could have asked for. “Fine. Because it’s you, I’ll allow it.”

She rushes back to the car and comes back with something hidden under her coat. “You’re going to be so happy in a second.”

“Stop stalling and give it to me.” I hold out my hand.

In it she places a book, and I nearly topple over. An actual book. “Oh, wow. Alice in Wonderland,” I whisper. “Where—how—?”

“I have friends in high places. Well, only one. She was doing this cleanse—yes, that’s what she called it—for her house and she got rid of loads of stuff she doesn’t want. She’s loaded and has been hoarding crap for a while now. She was donating everything, but I fished out this copy when I spotted it.”

“This must have cost her a fortune. Especially a book like this.”

“Yeah, beats 3-D holograms, right? Well, you think that. I like holo-books.”

I narrow my eyes at her. “They’re not books.”

She chuckles. “Welcome to the 21st century. Now give me a hug already.”

I smile and give her a bear hug. “You’re amazing. Thank you.” She smells like smoke, as if she’s been burning wood in a fireplace. “I can’t believe you have a friend like that. You have to tell me the story sometime.”

“It’s a very boring one. I once helped her when someone Travelled back in time to Alter knowing her by crashing a party and inserting himself into her life. He didn’t do a very good job and became frustrated that it hadn’t worked out the way he wanted and became a stalker.”

“I see. So you arrested him?”

“Yep, Collared and arrested. Though he’s free now. Still Collared, of course. Thank goodness.”

“Thank goodness,” I mutter, glancing at the woods, certain I’ve done the right thing, but sad that I can never confide in Saoirse completely.

Both our watches beep as we get another call. The screen shows a 101 in progress, which causes Saoirse and I to frown. Two rips in one day? Usually we had two a month, at most a week. The address is a thirteen-minute drive. “Let’s go,” I say and hop into my car. I glance at the woods one more time before I turn around and follow Saoirse towards the town centre.



“MONDAY MOODY AND SAOIRSE Cavanaugh,” I say as I point from me to Saoirse. We both tap our watches and a holograph of our badge with a serial number, name, and a photo appear above it. The constable barely glances at it, his face pale and his chin covered in a dab of ketchup. “I was—it’s in there,” he says and physically backs away as if he can get sucked in himself.

Inside the pub is a much larger rip that isn’t a rip at all, but a portal. The size being the difference between the two. The cause the same. The black

and red colours swirl in a mesmerising fashion. A time portal.

The fact that it is still open means that someone is inside. We both take out our scanners. The rest of the pub is empty. Soft music is playing in the background. The person that steps through the portal has a certain feel to her or him, being from this time. The scanner shows it as the colour purple, a thread that leads into the black and red portal. All we have to do is follow the thread and forcibly remove the perp, though it only works if the person is still close to the portal.

Saoirse hates doing this and always calls it a hassle, but I know it's because she's afraid that something will go wrong and she'll be stuck in some past or future, lost to her loved ones. Which has happened to some of our colleagues. I have a similar concern, but I do not let myself get deterred. I don't like fear. I also don't have to worry about getting stuck in a different time or place, though I can't tell Saoirse that.

And so I step into the portal, surrounded by swirls of light and an immense pressure that soon subsides. A wave of nausea sweeps through me, and forces me to double over. I press my hand against my lips and wait for it to pass. Since the portal is still open, it means that the person stepped through, expecting to be but brief and in the vicinity of the portal itself. It has been open since the time it took for us to drive over, so something must have gone wrong.

"Hello," I say. The pub is empty and much seems unchanged except that I can sense it is not, and my scanner makes lots of gurgling noises, much like my old cat Sourpuss used to do when snoring. Something has disturbed this place and it feels heavy, as if weights have been put on my limbs.

"This is CU officer Monday Moody, please respond." My voice is firm and unshaken. One never knows what to expect on the other side of a portal, but to me, that is part of the challenge. Then, out of nowhere, I get tackled by a black blur. I scramble around on my back and realise it is not, in fact, a blur, but a woman dressed in black, trying very hard to incapacitate me.

"This is very rude," I manage to articulate with strain as her hands have found themselves around my neck. I poke her in the eyes with my fingers

and knee her in the stomach before I push her away. She falls on the floor, giving me a brief moment to observe her. She has short, blonde hair and an athletic body. She's not afraid to attack a CU officer, so she might have had run-ins with the law before. Was she waiting for me?

By the time she gets up, I crack a bar stool over her head. It breaks. "Please, don't get up."

I don't like that she managed to knock me off my feet, but at least she is unconscious now. Despite her athletic body, I've faced bigger and stronger enemies. I adjust my dress and glance around. I can sense that it is her that opened the portal, but I can't help but wonder what it is that took her so long. Did she want to hurt me? Or is there something else? Why Travel back to an empty bar?

I search for any signs that might tell me what she was doing, and it takes me a few minutes before I find the reason for her outing.

A bomb. Strapped to the toilet on which there is an 'out of order' sign. I do not know much about bombs, but I know they are bad.

The timer says twenty minutes. I press my watch to check the time. It shows me the time here and the time where I came from. We have Travelled twenty minutes into the past which means it is set to go off as soon as we go back. Interesting. Was her plan to kill us? Members of the CU? If so, she didn't know who she was messing with. I can't disarm the bomb, but I can buy myself some time.

Now, this next trick requires a huge amount of concentration and an even bigger amount of guts. Luckily, a near-death situation is enough motivation to produce both. With sweat on my forehead and several knives from the kitchen, I manage to peel off the bomb from the tiles under the two sinks.

Then I close my eyes and focus. Going back a minute or so is enough. A tornado of feelings sweeps up inside of me until the momentum reaches a climax, and I hold out my hand. A portal opens, and I step through, nearly throwing up this time. I place the bomb in the toilet and peer out from the bathroom to check if the woman is indeed gone now. It means I have pulled

her through in the near future. Then I step back through my portal which closes afterwards, and this time I turn slightly green. I have no time to throw up, though, and run towards the woman, dragging her through the portal.

I feel Saoirse's hands on my hips as she helps me pull the perpetrator through. As soon as we're through the portal, she stops pulling, but I don't. "Quickly, we have to get her out of the building, there's a bomb. We have about a minute."

Saoirse turns a shade paler and after a split second of surprise, she grabs the other leg, and we pull her out of the pub. The cold weather is welcoming after the sweat explosion caused by stress and nausea. Similar feelings I experienced on my first ever date.

"Did it go okay?" the constable asks, but I shout for him to get back. I shout for everyone to get back. And just as we push the majority of onlookers towards the opposite side of the street, the bomb goes off. It produces a deafening sound, and its force shatters the windows and blows the door off its hinges. It also pushes the first line of people, me and Saoirse included, back into the nearest car.

A loud ringing in my ears is the least of my worries, as my nausea catches up with me. I throw up next to the car and nearly over the constable's hand, who has also fallen down. Unfortunately this also reminds me of my first ever date.

Not a bad start to my thirtieth birthday.

Chapter 2

*“There is one kind of robber
whom the law does not strike
at, and who steals what is most
precious to men: time.” ~ Napoleon I*



AS FAR AS BOSSES GO, mine is pretty okay. After all, she did once save my life. It also wasn't an easy task, because at the time I was pretty drunk, and the entire debacle involved a wedding cake knife and a clown. Fiona Steele calls me into her office at my earliest convenience, which means that I can freshen up first before giving an oral statement of what went down at the pub. Luckily, nobody was injured, but still, it was serious. Especially since no Traveller has ever tried something this destructive.

When I enter her office, she stops typing and presses twice on her typewriter, deactivating the holo-screen. Her desk is neat and minimalistic with only a mug of steaming coffee. She goes through about five cups a day, even though she claims she doesn't like it. The dark circles around her eyes indicate that she really does need them. I wonder if it's the job or if she and her wife are having troubles. They have an open marriage and have been together for a long time. As far as soulmates exist, they are soulmates, so I hope it's the job that's causing her stress.

Fiona smiles at me, and it reaches her grey eyes. Her hair is dark, but has lightened over the years due to grey streaks. "Are you alright?" she asks. She has a quiet voice, but any temerity travels through her eyes, not her lips.

“I am still a bit shaky,” I say, not one to lie. “I am relieved that nobody got seriously injured.”

“Me too. What happened exactly? Can you walk me through it?” She folds her hands in front of her and nods at the chair in front of the desk. Her office smells like coffee, and her sweet perfume lingers in the air.

Omission is key when handling sensitive information. “I entered the portal and something felt off. Before I could have a good look, I was attacked and we struggled. I knocked her out with a bar stool and then had a look around. I spotted the bomb in the bathroom and bolted. I mean, I ran and took the perp with me.”

“How long did it take you to get there?” she asks. Her nail polish is a dark grey and matches her outfit.

“Seventeen minutes.”

“And the perp had not left the portal then,” she states.

I nod.

“Taking a bomb takes some time, but hardly seventeen minutes.” She blinks at me, waiting for my input.

“I agree. Perhaps she had doubts.”

“What time did she go to?”

“Not too long in the past. The moment I pulled her through, we had to hurry out of there.” The large clock behind her desk makes no sound as it ticks on.

“It sounds like a trap. I don’t like that.”

“Neither do I, but we’ll know more once we interview her.”

Fiona drums her fingers on the glass desk. “Yes, but you won’t be the one to do that. I need you elsewhere. Or specifically, someone else needs you.”

“They do? Me? Are you sure?”

Fiona smiles. “No need to be diffident. You’re a good officer. There’s a case in Sheffield and the Head Officer asked for you specifically. It probably helped that you were in the news a few months ago.”

“Hmm.” I don’t know what to say. I like working with Saoirse. I know I can rely on her, and we have a good chemistry.

“It’s just one case, and we’ll put you up in a nice hotel.” Fiona activates the holo-screen, reverses it and types on the long keys to show images of a gorgeous Georgian estate where the rooms are spacious and old-fashioned. They also have a spa. She knows I love that.

“You know my weaknesses, don’t you?”

She laughs. “Happy birthday.”



MY DESK IS RIGHT ACROSS from Saoirse. As Level 1 Chrono Unit officers, there are six of us, each assigned to a partner. Most of the time we file paperwork on the people we Collar, arrest, or give a Warning to. Every registered Traveller only gets one Warning before being Collared.

Saoirse shoves a plate of biscuits in my face. “I brought extra since it’s your birthday and was going to give them to take home with you, but I figured you can use them now.” She smiles, the lines around her blue eyes visible.

“Thanks. I do need them. Badly. Did you know that hagfish eat their dead prey from the inside out? I wouldn’t mind doing that with your biscuits. They are that good.” I smile at her as I pick one up. It’s a chocolate chip one with salt.

“You say the...sweetest things,” she says as she makes a face. “You’re lucky I’m used to your style of weird.”

“It seems that someone else will have to get used to it. I’m going down to Sheffield. My help was requested for a case. Can’t imagine why.” I take a bite out of the biscuit and close my eyes. “Yeah, definitely want to burrow inside this biscuit and eat it,” I say with my mouth full, yet skilfully comprehensible.

“Can’t imagine it either.” The corner of her mouth turns up. “Do you know what the case is about?”

“No, I’ll find out when I get there.”

“Don’t your parents live in Sheffield?”

“Yeah, it will be nice to see them again.” I call my mother every week, but with things being so busy the past few weeks, I haven’t stopped by.

“Then come over for dinner tonight. It’s your birthday, and I know you’re not going to celebrate it otherwise.”

“You got that right.” I think about the four rug rats at her house and her husband who is always keen to discuss with me the dangers of air conditioning. Why he would think I find that interesting is beyond me and the rest of the universes. “No, thanks. I do actually have something planned that I would like to do instead.” I take another bite of the biscuit and blink at her.

“It’s sleep, isn’t it?”

“How do you know me so well?”

“Time.”



I RUB MY SHOULDERS and look up at the white ceiling. Saoirse left earlier to take care of her kids. Filing the report of the rip at the pub took up more time than I'd hoped. I press the button on the lift and contemplate if I should take a nap before dinner or after dinner when Gary appears next to me.

Tinkerers from the Parallel Division are interested in all sorts of things and are eager to spread that interest. Gary is no different and has a knack for running into me just when I am least thrilled to see him. His moustache trembles with excitement. I don't have to see it, I can feel it.

"Hi, Gary," I say without looking up.

"Monday. Have you seen this?" He holds up a small square with a screen and buttons below it. It also has a long wire attached to the front that leads up to two small buds.

"Yes, I see it, Gary."

"It's what they call an MP3-player in PU-39613. This is a mini device they use to listen to music. Instead of something like the chunky holo-radio, they have these. Aren't they adorable? I really like that parallel universe."

"They're a bit clumsy and big, don't you think?"

"Isn't that half the charm, Monday? Think about it. Twisting a few knobs and choosing any music from the HoloNet is so boring. This makes you put in an effort if you want to listen to music. They even have to download the songs." He chuckles. "Isn't that cute?"

"Yes. You're so lucky you can actually take things from the parallel universes." I mean those words. Despite his poor timing, I do actually find the objects he shows interesting. It reminds me of the stories my mother used to tell me about the places she's visited. And of the places I've visited, though most of that was for training, not leisure.

“Do you want it?”

The lift announces its presence with a ding and the door slides down into the floor. I narrow my eyes at him. “Is this some test? I know I’m not allowed to take things like that.”

“It’s frowned upon, but not forbidden. I requested this especially for you. Happy birthday.” He winks at me conspiratorially and hands me the device.

I stare at it and then at him. “Thank you,” I say and lean forward to kiss him on the cheek.

He turns a shade of red, mumbles something, and dashes off.

I chuckle and step into the lift. It brings me down to the garage, and I tuck the new device into the pocket of my yellow raincoat. It takes me a few tries to start the familiar rattle of my car, and I drive home, to my semi-detached house with three bedrooms. Being in the Chrono Unit earns a lot of money, mainly due to the fact that one of the occupational hazards is death. And we have notoriously bad coffee.

It is still light out, and the sky is dotted with clouds, but it’s not cold. I lock my car and run up the steps to my front door. The front garden is surrounded by hedges; I like my privacy, and my neighbours are fox breeders. Despite the fact that many people don’t know what noises they make, they do in fact make a lot of noise. As do their breeders. They keep wanting to chat about them, or about their collection of antique tea cups. I may love foxes, but I don’t need to know about their mating habits.

I reach my door when I realise I’m not alone. I turn around, preferring a serial killer over my neighbours. My eyes widen. It’s neither. “Hi, Lovelace,” I say after a moment of hesitation. How did she find me? Also, why? Does she not have a home?

The little girl from earlier today says nothing. She is dressed in the same outfit as before and looks just as upset as before. She says nothing and stares at me.

I walk up to her and ask her if she needs my help. She still doesn't reply. "Okay," I say. "Why don't you come inside." I let her past me and look down the street. Why do I have the feeling we're being watched? I wrinkle my nose and let the girl in. She looks around my hallway as if she's never seen one before. Mr Woodacre's farm is close to a lot of residential park homes, so that might be possible.

I help her take off her coat and hang it up. She follows me into the kitchen where I put the kettle on. "So, Lovelace, why are you here?"

The girl says nothing and looks at her shoes.

"Yeah, I get it," I say. "I like silence too. That's why I have a very relaxed pet. Do you want to see him?" I don't wait for her reply and head into the dining room and from there into the conservatory.

On a wooden sideboard is a case that houses my turtle. "This is Mr Turtleneck." I glance behind me. The girl has followed me. "You can pet him, if you want." The noise from the kettle grows louder. "I'll get us tea."

I pour us both a cup of herbal tea that is calming and relaxing. It will help her sleep. I sigh. What am I going to do with her? I can't keep her here. But I also can't have her running around. At least she's safe with me. I have to figure out what her story is.

I put some biscuits from Saoirse on a plate and turn around to put them on the breakfast table. The girl has quietly taken place at the table with her back to me. I startle and drop the plate. It shatters and the biscuits are lost to the floor. I curse under my breath and look up at the girl, ready to reassure her that it's okay. But she hasn't moved. She hasn't so much as twitched a muscle. That seems familiar. I step over the broken plate and my delicious victims and clap my hands behind her head. Nothing.

Then I tap her on her shoulder. She shrugs her shoulders, as if she's worried I might hurt her and then slowly turns around. She has question marks in her eyes.

"Are you deaf?" I sign.

Her eyes widen. “Yes,” she signs back.

I smile. “Don’t worry. I know how to talk to you.”

“Only my aunt knew sign language.” Her hands are hurried, as if she’s been waiting to communicate to someone, anyone.

“Did she? What happened to her?”

The girl’s face scrunches up like an accordion.

“Something bad?” I sign.

“Yes. I lived with her.”

“There was a portal when we met. Did your aunt go through it?”

She nods.

“And you created that portal?”

The girl says nothing.

There is more going on here. “What’s your name?” She doesn’t know that I already know her name, and I feel like an introduction is in order. I want to make her feel comfortable and strike up a conversation. The more I know about her, the better.

She spells her name slowly. “Lovelace Thomson.”

“What a nice name. Very memorable.”

The girl manages a feeble smile.

“My name is Monday Moody.”

At this her smile grows wider. “No, that’s a memorable name.” She clasps her hand in front of her mouth as if she wants to stop herself from giggling.

I laugh. “You’re quite right. What was I thinking?”

Lovelace turns serious. “Will you help me? I don’t have anywhere to go.”

“Why did you come to me? And how did you find me?”

“You are like me. Your energy tastes like strawberries.” She smiles.

Travellers, Illusionists, and even vampires have more core energy than normal people. Some are talented enough to sense that energy in others, and it always evokes one of the senses. A taste, a smell, an image. For everyone that taste or image is different. Apparently to Lovelace, my life energy is sweet. With her I can see snowflakes.

“You just sit here for a bit,” I sign. “I’ll be right back.” In the corner of the living room I have a desk with a typewriter. I sit down, activate the holo-screen, and type in her name. I need to decide what to do with her. She won’t tell me much, but she’s clearly in trouble.

I check her address and next of kin—her aunt—as well as the list of times that the police had to stop by because of noise disturbances or because her aunt hadn’t come home. Her aunt was also arrested a few times for public indecency and the destruction of property while being drunk. She’d also gotten into trouble for locking Lovelace out while she entertained a guy. What a stellar role-model.

Did she treat Lovelace poorly because she is a Traveller? Or is she simply a very bad caretaker? Either way, it is impressive that Lovelace managed to create that rip. She could have found someone to train with or perhaps she just happens to be that talented. It is possible.

It is likely that Level 3 officers will bring back her aunt, and she’ll be pissed and eager to point the finger at Lovelace. She will be in serious trouble, if the aunt even reports it. She sounds like someone who might just enjoy making Lovelace’s life even worse. Regardless of what will happen, nobody is going to protect Lovelace. She doesn’t have anybody on her side. Except maybe me.

Things could have been far worse for me without my mother. Things can easily become worse for Lovelace. She doesn't deserve that, she's just a girl.

The air cracks and a static tingles my skin. A portal? Here? I turn around. There is a bomb on the coffee table, much like the one I came across this morning. However, there is no rip to be seen. That would mean it's a very skilled Traveller. I get up and walk over to the coffee table. My breathing quickens as I glance at the timer. Less than a minute. Shit. I turn to run to Lovelace, but when I glance back at the bomb, it's gone. And still no rip. Did someone teleport here to remove it? Why? How? What? And why use a portal first?

I know time is the most elusive thief in the world, but this is a bit of a stretch. At least I know one thing for sure. Someone really is trying to kill me.

Chapter 3

*“People told me that giving
birth would be most painful. They
were wrong. It was giving up coffee.”*

~ Mrs Eleanor Moody



THE FOLLOWING DAY I ring my parents' doorbell bright and early in the morning. I couldn't sleep last night anyway, and since they live in Sheffield, the choice was easily made. I glance at Lovelace, who is holding my hand, and think about the second, but poor attempt on my life. I'd rather stay with people I trust than in a hotel room. Though it is a good thing that anybody else might think that that's exactly where I'm staying.

I glance to my right where Beth, my parents' nosy neighbour, peers over her hedge. She's holding a pair of shears to make it appear as if she's doing garden work, but is in fact cutting air while gawking at Lovelace and me.

A shuffling sound. The door opens. My mother stands there in a purple dress and a black cardigan. She always looks fashionable. I doubt even a rainstorm could diminish her looks. Her black hair is done up and her eyes twinkle when she sees me, then widen as she spots the girl holding my turtle. "You weren't joking when you said you'd bring a visitor. I thought you meant Mr Turtleneck." She hasn't blinked yet. "Come in, dear. Come in."

"Nice trimming, Beth. The air looks better already," she shouts before slamming the door.

I remember Beth was washing her windows when I went to prom. And when I had my first date and he picked me up, she was painting her front door. Even if it was dark by then. She also once washed her windows and fell off the slippery ladder as she was so focussed on the chat my mother was having with a handsome new neighbour. In fact, a similar accident occurred with a nail and a birdhouse. Clearly her trips to Homebase are sponsored by her curiosity.

After my mother sets us up in the kitchen, I share the highlights of my birthday while feeding Mr Turtleneck a piece of lettuce.

“I don’t like this, Monday. Cheese-fisted attempt or not, it was still an attempt on your life. Nobody is allowed to kill you, only I can do that.” She chuckles.

“It’s ‘ham-fisted’ and why? Because you’re my mother?”

“That’s right. I gave birth to you. Even if it only lasted two hours.” She smiles at Lovelace, who is playing with her tea spoon.

“I’m not letting anybody kill me, Mother. I am too stubborn to die prematurely.”

She lets out a bark of laughter and places her manicured hand in front of her mouth, in an attempt to appear delicate. “You get that from me. That’s why I’m not worried about you. We’re strong. It runs in the family.”

“Speaking of parental heritage, where is Dad?” The house is suspiciously plain.

“He’s in his shed. I’m telling you, retirement actually makes me see less of the man.” She shakes her head, then uses sign language to ask Lovelace if she wants more biscuits. She eagerly nods her response. I leave them to it.

The garden has a pool in the middle and a heap of begonias in the far right corner. On the opposite side is my dad’s shed. He spends most of his time working on his Illusions since that has always been a passion of his. He’s got several Illusions going on right now, mostly to protect our privacy from

a certain nosy neighbour. The begonias are very real, though. My mother's pride.

The shed door swings open, and I'm about to greet my father when a raptor comes out. The dinosaur stops in his tracks and cocks his head to assess me. Threat or snack? Unfortunately this is not the first time. Calling out for my dad won't help.

"Don't you dare," I say firmly. "I am not afraid of you." The quiver in my voice gives me away. The creature leaps forward, and I shriek. With a few quick steps, I jump into the pool. I stay underwater for as long as I can hold out and then resurface.

I curse under my breath, but at least the dinosaur is gone, and I can climb out of the pool. My father stands in the doorway, and his eyes widen as he spots me. He rushes over and helps me out. My dress is dripping wet and my shoes ruined. I push him away. "You knew I was coming over and you know how much they scare me." He can read lips, so I don't have to sign.

"I'm sorry. I was trying a mixture of Illusions, and this one sort of escaped. I am getting a bit forgetful sometimes, and they take advantage. I'm so sorry. Are you okay?" He wasn't born deaf, so people can't tell just by hearing him speak.

"Yeah, I am." I know they're not real, but fear doesn't work that way. That's why dangerous Illusions are forbidden. "You do know where I work, don't you?"

"I renew my license every year, and I know what I'm doing. Except for now. Really, I'm sorry." He adjusts his blazer nervously and eyes my drowned-cat look.

Apart from my red hair, I am nothing like my dad. Which is probably why we get along so well. "It's okay." He still wears his blazer and neat trousers every day even though he's been retired for months now. "Hasn't Mother bought you new clothes?"

“I’m used to dressing like this.” Then he smiles and hugs me, despite the fact that I’m soaking wet. “Are you cold?”

“No. I’ll be fine. Show me what you were working on.”

“First, get a towel and dry yourself. Otherwise you can’t enjoy it.”

“So I am going to enjoy it, then? Sure you’re not trying to kill me?” Too.

“Come on, I have a lovely birthday surprise. Just go and get a towel, and I’ll wait in the shed.”

“Wait.” Before he can walk off, I tell him about Lovelace. If anyone can get her to open up a little, it will be my dad.

He frowns as he listens. “She must be very scared. I’m sure we can get her to talk about what happened, but it might take some time. She’ll be safe here.”

“I have a gut feeling that she could really use our help.”

“I’m sure we’ll get to the bottom of it.” He touches my shoulder, then frowns as if he’s forgotten I’m soaked. “Go inside and dry off.”

I try my best not to leave a disastrous amount of water in my steps.

“The raptor again?” My mother asks as she eyes me over the rim of her tea mug.

I grumble incoherently as my high heels make squishy sounds with each step. In the guest room I dry myself off and change into a new outfit.

Instead of going back to Dad’s shed alone, I take Lovelace with me. Hopefully her stay here will make her lower her guard. Either way, my dad is one of the best Illusionists I’ve ever seen, and his surprise will no doubt be beautiful. I have the feeling Lovelace could use something like that. She follows me obediently, holding my hand again. Despite never having been particularly fond of children, I find this quite touching, and I squeeze her

hand reassuringly. My mother stays in the kitchen, flipping through a magazine and wishing Dad hadn't made her throw out the coffee maker.

We enter the shed. Lovelace frowns as she looks around the large space, then she looks at me.

"It's larger on the inside, yes. You're not mistaken," I sign.

Her mouth opens.

"You ain't seen nothing yet." My dad is turned away from us, so I have to tap him on his shoulder. He turns around with a smile, then adjusts his glasses to peer down at Lovelace.

"And who is this lovely young lady?" he signs as he speaks along.

I introduce them to each other and let them spell their name to each other. Lovelace asks him how long he's been deaf.

"For a long time. You?"

"I got sick when I was three," she signs.

"I'm sorry. Don't worry. You're in good hands. Monday is the best. The only downside is that she's afraid of dinosaurs."

Lovelace sniggers.

"I'd like to see how you do in the face of a dangerous predator."

Lovelace just smiles shyly at me.

"Now, my surprise, please," I sign to Dad.

My father holds up his finger, then turns his two armchairs away from the fireplace and towards us. "Sit down."

As soon as I do, my ChronoWatch beeps. I jump up. "Sorry, Dad. I thought I had time, but it waits for no woman. Please take care of Lovelace for me

and ask Mother about my day. You'll want to hear it. If you wish, you can show the surprise to Lovelace without me, but I'll leave that up to you," I say, knowing my dad can read my lips.

Then, to Lovelace, I sign goodbye and let her know I'll be back for dinner. She waves and looks at my father expectantly, much like I did when I was her age. They'll get along just fine.



THE UNPARALLELED AFFAIRS building in Sheffield looks exactly like the one in York. All buildings across the country do. They do it so that even from afar it is recognisable. It has occurred that a stranded agent ended up in the wrong place and time. Without any bother they can find their headquarters, no matter what division they are in.

I tug on my sleeve and adjust my fringe. The Chrono Unit is always on the twelfth floor, so I take the lift up. It is filled with four other people. Based on their demeanour, outfit, and watches, I can tell what division they are in. For instance, the man dressed entirely like a burglar is from the Narcotics Unit. He is wearing gloves and a ski mask that only shows his eyes. They are currently battling a drug that makes you instantly addicted just by touching it, hence the outfits. As if confiscating such a drug isn't challenging enough, it doesn't help that their officers stick out like a lighthouse on the shore.

I smile at a man who is clearly from the K-9 Division. He winks at me as his irises transmogrify into a golden colour.

I am the only one to stop at the twelfth floor. The first desk I come across is of the receptionist. "Monday Moody. I've been called in."

The woman's—her name tag says Susan—eyes grow wide. "Monday Moody, as I live and breathe. You look even prettier in real life. You were in the newspaper for fighting off a werewolf during an arrest." She gets up

from her chair and walks around her desk to face me. Her round body is complemented by a dark blue dress that flares out at the bottom. She clasps my hands. “How did you feel when that happened?”

“I was rather upset that he was trying to eat the perp I was about to arrest.”

She chuckles. “Yes, I’d imagine so. Goodness, you’re funny. Listen, Janine from Level 2 wants to meet you. I told her you were coming, and she had to fan herself. I promised her you’d give her your autograph. You’re kind of her hero. In fact, I think you inspired her to kick out her husband.” She leans in, her breath minty. “He cheated on her. Nasty business.”

I glance at the door marked LEVEL 1, hoping someone will pop out and rescue me. I’m eager to learn what this new case is about and why they need me, but if everybody from the CU thinks of me like Janine does, that might explain why they’d request my help. Somehow I doubt that, though. “Sure,” I say with a warm smile.

We head through to the LEVEL 2 section, which is a long corridor filled with doors and their different tags. We pass Wars, Famous People, Deaths, Inventions, and then stop at Crimes and Criminals. Susan swings open the door and immediately the smell of smoke and lemons assault my nose. In the middle of the room sits a thin woman. She’s typing on her typewriter, which means she’s discovered an anomaly and therefore a reason for Level 3 officers to investigate a possible Alteration.

The room holds nothing but the table, chair, and one filing cabinet. Janine doesn’t look up. Instead she finishes her final sentence with her cigarette bouncing up and down between her thin lips. “And done,” she says in a soft-spoken voice before she looks up. She lets out a yell when she spots me, dropping her cigarette on her lap, and immediately rushes over to hug me. She smells just like the room itself. It is an unpleasant combination, at least for me. But I’ve never particularly liked cigarettes or lemons.

“Monday Moody, as I live and breathe.” She looks at me as if I’m the prodigal daughter who has finally come home. She’s also clearly thick as thieves with Susan. I smile at them both as Susan looks on proudly.

“It is indeed me,” I say. “Here.” What else can I say? Good for you on leaving your husband? That werewolf wasn’t that big? I’ve faced bigger and hungrier creatures? Do you have biscuits?

“How was it? Killing that rogue werewolf? It must have been terrifying.”

I gasp for air so I can give some vague, general answer, just like I did when I was interviewed after the incident. Paige Pageant, a reporter who now has her own talk show, eagerly shoved her microphone in my face and made the whole ordeal seem ten times more exciting than it was for me. In hindsight, after watching it myself, I realised I could have acted a tiny bit shaken. However, it made me a hero for a few weeks. Now, two months later, I hope most people have forgotten.

“I bet you were shaking in your boots, but you saved that person’s life, even if they were a criminal. I mean, that just shows the world that us pencil pushers can be dangerous as well. We may not see a lot of the action, but we are also heroes.” Janine smiles.

I nod, understanding now why she cares so much. Why anyone cared. I just wanted to move on as quickly as possible, uncomfortable with the sudden attention, but everyone wants to be a hero, right? And I reminded them that even normal people can be heroes. Except that I’m not normal. But they can’t know that.

As I sign a piece of paper for her, the file cabinet shoots open and Janine jumps up. “Oh. Again?” She walks over to the cabinet and pulls out the file. “Bonnie and Clyde again. They are so popular.”

“Altering it so they survive?” I ask.

“Yep. This is the third time.” She types on her typewriter, immediately logging the new information and any possible suspects, though they rarely make the file. Not because there aren’t any, but it’s difficult to track Travellers near a Time Scene. Each Warning puts Travellers into the system, but there is no device that can track their exact location. Not unless they leave a rip, and even then we may know who did it, but not where they are at that moment. She swipes on the holo-screen and sends the info along

to Level 3, who then dispatch their people as quickly as possible to undo the Alteration. Some events are meant to be, and cannot be Altered.

“For all we know it could be the same person, but so far they haven’t caught anyone. Level 3 is too distracted to fix the damage rather than arrest the Traveller responsible. I don’t like it.”

Susan nods her head. “They should make a Retrieval Unit for rogue Travellers as well. I mean, it wasn’t bad before, but there are more and more Alterations, not to mention any insignificant changes.”

“You’ve noticed that as well,” I say, thinking back to the amount of Warnings I’ve had to give in the last month alone.

“Anyway, dear. Thank you for your autograph,” Susan says. “We’d best leave Janine to it.”

By now she’s furiously typing, a drop of sweat on her forehead. “I’m so sorry, Monday,” she says as her fingers fly across the keys. “I wish I could spend more time with you, but time waits for no woman.”

With that we return to Susan’s desk. “P. Hosokawa. Monday Moody here for you,” she murmurs into the chunky office speaker phone. “Wait here, dear. And thank you for obliging me.” She winks and resumes typing.

“You’re welcome.” Not befriending the receptionist would be a bad move on my part, even if I’m only here for a short while.

In a few seconds a man pushes open the doors to Level 1. He strides purposefully and keeps his warm eyes on me. When he reaches me, he breaks out in a smile and holds out his hand. I shake it. “Perrin Hosokawa,” he says. “My father was Japanese and my mother English, hence the unusual clash of names. You are Monday Moody,” he says before I can introduce myself. “Daughter of Eleanor Moody-Parker, who has worked as a Level 3 officer for the UA, and Pip Moody, a well-known Illusionist.”

“Indeed I am.” Damn, he’s done his homework. It shouldn’t be a surprise since he requested me. I would have done exactly the same. Still, I better be

extra careful.

“Excellent. I knew you were coming, and not a moment too soon. We have quite the situation on our hands.”

“I see.” I pause. “You’re still holding my hand.”

He looks down. “Ah, yes. That does seem to be the case.” He slowly lets go, as if with reluctance. Then he sticks his hands in his pockets and smiles again. It is a charming smile.

“What’s the problem?” I ask.

“There is a problem with the original Chrono Unit here.”

Hmm. That indicates he isn’t part of the usual six people who work here.

“A problem? Are they in trouble?”

“Quite.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Is it serious?”

“I’d say so. They’re dead.”

“Yes, I do hear that is a serious affliction.”

Chapter 4

*“Your time is limited, so don’t waste
it living someone else’s life.”*

~ Steve Jobs



“YOU’RE NOT JOKING? All six of them? Killed?” I ask as I follow him into the office. It looks exactly like the one I work at, which makes it all the more unsettling to know that these people died. It could have been me and Saoirse.

Somewhere a phone rings, but nobody answers. A woman comes out of the chief’s office. She must be in her fifties and has dark curly hair that she’s managed to subdue into a bun. She shakes my hand. “Victoria Delano. Thank you for coming.”

“Monday Moody. I’m sorry about your team.” I can’t imagine how Fiona would react to losing her team.

Sadness flashes behind her eyes, but then she is all professionalism and nods at Perrin, who clears his throat.

“All six of the officers who are part of this Chrono Unit have died in what appear accidental deaths,” Perrin starts. “But for all six of them to die within two weeks is too much of a coincidence, even if we can’t prove it’s murder. They are all officers who aided me in the investigation of Blayze Caden, a Traveller who has committed serious crimes and a name that should sound familiar to you.” Perrin’s gaze darts across my face.

I immediately think back to primary school where several boys and girls had formed a circle around Blayze, calling him a freak. “Yes, I know him. We were friends in school. Are you sure he’s killed those people?” I shiver at the thought. He was so fragile back then, so wounded. What the hell happened to him to make him a killer?

“Unfortunately, yes. He Travelled to parallel universe PU-34987 and met the love of his life, Phoebe, there.”

That universe is similar to ours, and also has a UA building. Years ago we branched out to similar universes and sent agents to live and work there, with even some of their children eventually joining the UA as well.

“She was far worse than him, quite brutal, actually. She was quite good at fomenting his darker side. Together they wreaked havoc across England until they were hunted by every division of the UA. They came to this world, his world, and we managed to catch her. She’s Collared and residing at the most secure prison in this world.”

“Big Ben,” I mutter, having only heard about the underground prison with the same name as the giant clock under which it is located. “And he wants to get her out?” I ask.

“Indeed. But it seems his attempts make matters worse. I am from PU-34987 myself and am also a Level 3. I followed Blayze’s Travels and watched his attempts at saving her. There was little I could do to try and stop him. Yet it didn’t seem necessary since his own attempts failed and her capture or death are both ineluctable situations. Now he keeps going back further in time, slowly killing himself by straining himself in such a way. This is as far as he’s able to go back without dying. Since this is his last attempt, I’m sure he’s even more desperate. And he’s trying to get rid of anyone who could have anything to do with the death of his lover. So far there have been 8 Outcomes, all of them resulting in her death. Outcome 7 and 8 involved the agents he has now killed. There was a stand-off in both situations and it didn’t end well for most parties involved.”

“So he got rid of them, hoping to eliminate that possibility. But in doing so, he is creating new ones. Who knows what will happen now? It could be far

worse.” My mother has always taught me that what is meant to be is meant to be. Even going back in time can’t change everything. Time is tricky. So is fate.

“Some things are fixed, some are not,” Perrin says, as if reading my thoughts. “One thing is for sure, in other Outcomes you have been there as well.”

I glance from Perrin to Victoria. “Ah. So he’s the one trying to kill me.”

His eyes darken. “He’s already tried?”

“Definitely. Two attempts with a bomb. With the first one he used the help of someone else. My partner and I arrested her. He must have paid her to do it. The second time the bomb just showed up and then also disappeared. It was quite outlandish.”

“He wouldn’t have changed his mind, surely?” Victoria asks, a frown etched between her thin eyebrows.

“I doubt that,” Perrin says, still observing my face.

“So, are we going to stop him? Is that the plan? Because I’m in.”

Victoria chuckles. “That’s what I thought. Your boss speaks highly of you.”

Perrin touches my arm lightly. “Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on you. We’ll get him.”

Both Victoria and Perrin stare at me with a mixture of hope and concern. I really don’t appreciate attention. If I could be an animal, I’d be a Dead Leaf Butterfly. Very difficult to detect and in the possession of a cool name.

“Welcome aboard, Monday Moody.” Victoria shakes my hand again.



PERRIN TAKES ME TO a pub not far from the UA headquarters where he orders me a lemonade and some chips. It is pretty depressing to sit in the office of six people who have all died, so I am grateful for the change of scenery. I nearly spill mayonnaise on my green dress, and when I look up to see if Perrin noticed, he smiles at me.

I smile back. "It must be strange to be in a different world."

"I've been here a while now. Luckily this world isn't too different from mine. Thank you for wanting to help us. You didn't have to accept."

"Of course I do. He's a threat. He's already killed six people that we know of. I never would have thought he would, but I guess love makes people do strange things."

"It's not love, it's manipulation. Phoebe Malone doesn't give a shit about him; she cares about nobody but herself. She just knows he's crazy about her and will do whatever she wants."

I sigh. "He could have been someone very different."

"But this is what happened. Fate had other plans."

"Some things can't be changed," I say, repeating my mother's words.

"We'll need to keep an eye on you since we know he's going to try and kill you. He's tried a direct attack, so be very careful of places where accidents can occur. In the meantime we need to think of a plan to get to him."

"We know what he wants. Perhaps we can use Phoebe." I eat another chip and just as I reach for my napkin to dab the mayonnaise off my chin, Perrin reaches forward and removes it with his thumb. He then sticks it in his mouth and directs his attention to his plate, which is good because I'm fairly certain that my cheeks are on fire.

"I was thinking about that," he continues. "Perhaps we can release a statement that she's already dead, forcing him to do something rash. But that could be disastrous. We know he's spent most of his energy, and he's

wearing himself down. Perhaps we can force him to overuse his abilities and kill himself. But that's also a bit of a stretch. The problem is, we don't know where he's hiding."

Our watches beep, and we both check our screens. "Damn. Since we're the only CU officers in York, we have to take this," Perrin says.

"That's okay. Maybe it will help us clear our heads."

"I like the way you think, Monday. Let's hope we don't get killed on the way."

"It takes more than death to kill me, sir." A joke my father always made at the dinner table, much to the chagrin of my mother. Mainly because it was a joke about my mother's cooking skills.

We drive to a cul-de-sac outside the city and stop at number 432. There is a blue bike in the front garden and a yellow Buick Roadmaster is parked in the driveway. Everything appears calm. Perrin leads the way and rings the doorbell.

A woman with short brown hair opens the door. She stares wide-eyed and chuckles nervously. "I'm sorry, I think you have the wrong house." The rip is upstairs. I sense it, which means Perrin can too.

"I don't think so, miss. Please stay here." We walk past her to the staircase while she tries to keep us downstairs by offering biscuits and tea. She rambles on about how delicious they are and an older woman, a relative perhaps, comes out of the living room to fetch her. Her voice keeps getting higher the more steps we take up to the first floor, and by the time we've reached the landing, only dogs can hear her.

We stop in front of the door with the sign that warns us to keep out. There are posters of obscure bands around it and I knock to announce our presence. A teenage boy with black hair in front of his face and a lip piercing sits on his bed. He doesn't look up. The wallpaper is black, the bed covers are bright red. In the corner of his room is a glass case with a pet tarantula, the lid open.

A rip of a few feet is in the middle of his room. Perrin scans it so it's easier to write the report later, then holds out both hands and closes it. He is a skilled Level 3.

Perrin takes the lead and explains that he's violated code 569214 of Time Alterations under section six of UA Legislation. "Please press your thumb on the surface of my watch," Perrin says.

The boy balls his fist, and we both get ready for an altercation, but then he relaxes his shoulders and lets out a sigh he's probably been holding in for a while. He presses his thumb, covered with black nail polish, on the screen.

"Simon Clarkson, you're not a registered offender. That's good news. It means you only get a Warning. It also means we leave behind a number that you can call if you need to talk to people who understand and can help you if things get difficult to control. They have great tips." Perrin takes out a card from his breast pocket and places it on his cluttered desk. "You can officially apply for a permit when you're eighteen, but you'll be tested first, like everyone else."

"Right. Show what I can do so you can Collar me like a dog." Simon's voice is soft, but his words reverberate with anger.

"I assure you, we just want you to be safe, as well as those around you," I say.

The boy looks up, one brown eye still hidden by his hair. His stare is void of warmth. "I'm sure that's what you lot told my boyfriend. Six weeks later he was Collared. He's not been the same since. You bastards trapped a part of him," he spat out the words, getting louder.

"Now, hey, calm down," Perrin started, but I lose focus when a wave of pressure builds up from my feet. I look down and gasp. A large number of tarantulas are crawling up my legs. I glance at the case where loads of spiders are crawling out of the case and are heading towards me in an ominous stream. "Stop it," I say loudly.

Perrin turns to me. "Excuse me?"

My eyes are on Simon. “Stop it now. You’re making things worse. You’re just getting a Warning, you’ll be fine. Stop it.”

“What’s happening, Monday?” Perrin glances from me to Simon.

In the next instance Simon gets up and moves to attack Perrin, but I am faster. I get out my Sonic gun and shoot at him. Right in the face. It disrupts him for a moment, and he falls back. His eyes roll back in his head. “A Traveller and an Illusionist, that’s rare.”

Perrin reaches forward and drags him to the floor while I’m relieved to find I’m spider free. He puts the cuffs on him and looks up at me. “Are you okay?”

“Peachy. You get used to expecting the unexpected when your father has a nightmare and unwittingly turns the entire interior of the house into a house of horrors. I never got up to pee in the middle of the night again.”

Perrin winces. “Sorry.”

I smile. “Don’t worry. I got over it.”

We take a semi-conscious Simon downstairs. I go down first, so I can calm the mother down. She’s already yelling at us as I descend the staircase. The older woman tries to calm Mrs Clarkson, but instead she starts sobbing. This is my least favourite part of the job, but he gave us no choice. He’ll either be Collared and released after community service, or—and this is more likely—trained to be a Level 3 officer. If reluctant, the UA wasn’t above brainwashing. I am not supposed to know that, but my mother told me.

Mrs Clarkson keeps crying while her friend comforts her. I tell her what’s going to happen now but doubt she picks up on any of it. “Is there anything I can bring for him?” I ask.

She sobs and wipes her nose on the sleeve of her woollen cardigan. “His HoloGamez is in the living room.” She starts crying loudly again and hugs her friend, who makes soothing noises.

I glance back at Perrin, who's already by the car and gently ushers the boy into the back seat. At least there are no casualties. I stride into the living room and spot the device on the armchair. My heel gets caught on the carpet, and I trip. Luckily nobody sees me. The floor looks spotless, just like the rest of the living room, which makes me feel slightly better. I push myself off the ground and check my dress. It looks okay.

An eardrum-shattering crash makes me throw myself towards the fireplace where I curl up in the foetal position as I cover my head. The whole house shakes, and I hear the two women in the corridor scream. I stay still and wait until the house stops quaking. My ears ring as I look up. It appears as if it's snowing. There's white dust everywhere. Then I see it, as the dust settles. A massive tank. It resembles an M1 Abram. And it went right through the roof and landed on the armchair, where I would have been standing if I hadn't tripped.

I cough and get to my feet. My dress is definitely not okay anymore.

"Monday!" Perrin shouts with panic in his voice. "Mo—"

"I'm okay," I shout back and cough again.

He grabs my arm and pulls me out of the living room, out of the house. As soon as I feel the fresh air, he hugs me. "Thank goodness, you're okay," he says. "I'm sorry. I should have stayed with you." He gently strokes my back.

"Err. I'm okay," I say. I have been through worse. Granted, a tank falling from the sky is a first. But I had once Travelled to a parallel universe where a ruling tribe of cannibals wanted to marry me off to their leader and eat my fingers. "Really, I'm fine."

He lets me go and clears his throat. "Of course, I'm sorry. I was just worried."

"I know. Thank you." I glance back at the house. "And I thought you said I had to look out for accidents that could easily happen." The two women

stand by the car, in complete hysterics, while I step back to survey the house. The right side of the roof is caved in.

Mrs Clarkson calms down long enough to ask rather loudly: “Do you think the neighbours will notice?” Then starts sobbing again.

“Who would have known that a tank could have such a ruinous effect on a house?” Perrin asks and cracks a small smile to lighten the mood. “It must have fallen out of a military cargo aircraft. Which is indeed a very random and unusual accident. And yet you are alive. That makes you very lucky.”

“Yay,” I say with the level of enthusiasm of a sock.

Chapter 5

*“This is my final chance. I
can’t let the past stand in the
way of the future.” ~ Blayze Caden*



THE FIRST TIME I REMEMBER seeing Blayze was during a lunch break. A group of six kids from my class had formed a circle around him and were calling him names. I didn’t like it. They had no reason to do so, and it was unfair. They called him a freak. I despised that word, and still do. My mother has always said that people judge you, but that you could control what they’d judge you for. That is why she later taught me how to style myself. Not out of vanity, but because that way the worst that people could say about you is that you were conceited.

I stayed close to the group, within earshot. The boy remained quiet. He was scrawny and short, even for a seven-year old. It also made me want to protect him. Within a minute of the kids calling him freak over and over again, I dashed to the largest of them. Philip. He was big and not too bright. Really, all he seemed good for was bullying and baking muffins. Later he’d become a baker and would die of a heart attack at the age of thirty-four, but I didn’t know that back then.

I ran to him and pushed him to the ground. The others gasped, and I literally snarled at them, just like I’d seen the werewolf girl do once before. She was here for only a week and then got home-schooled.

They all ran away, even Philip, and I turned to Blayze. His eyes were as big as saucers, and he smiled.

I held out my hand. “I’m Monday Moody. Stay close to me, I’ll protect you.”



“TOMORROW THERE WILL be four new CU officers who will resume normal duties while we continue to focus on Blayze,” Perrin says as he parks at a petrol station, opposite a bar. “It will definitely make things easier. We lost an entire afternoon filing reports.” Perrin makes a face as if biting into a lemon. Clearly he enjoys the paperwork as much as I do.

“It’s okay. Tanks don’t usually fall through roofs and besides, this place wouldn’t have been open in the morning or early afternoon.”

“Still. Leads are best when they’re hot.”

“And reliable. How trustworthy is this lead?” I ask.

“Chris Hogan has been believed to be a bomb-maker for over three years, but the good women and men of the Explosives Unit have never gotten enough proof. Right now, we don’t need it. We just go in and ask questions. Some blackmail here, some insults there, and we’ll get a reaction.”

“Hopefully the right one. They are vampires, are they not?” I check the bar’s sign. ENERVATE. “If there are loads of vampires in there, your approach might not be tenable.”

“Just because the crowd are largely vampires doesn’t mean they’ll cause trouble. They aren’t rogues.”

“No, they just hang out with a bomb-maker. I’m just saying, as far as enemies go, you don’t want them to be more powerful than yourself. We might need a better plan.” Mother didn’t raise no fool.

“A tank nearly killed you. We don’t have time to braid these people’s hairs.” Perrin gets out of his Jeep, and I follow with an uneasy feeling.

“Just follow my lead,” Perrin says.

“Of course,” I say. My mother’s warnings about vampires still echo in my head each time I spot one. Their aura reverberates with energy. They are incredibly charismatic and dangerous. Lower-level ones not so much. Most people don’t even realise they are vampires. They barely notice they feel drained after so much as a conversation with them, or simply by standing close to them.

I really hope this bar is filled with lower-level ones. Those I can easily handle in a fight. Higher levels I can also handle, but only if I go all out, and that would mean blowing my cover in front of Perrin.

The bar smells stale and musty. In total there are five people on the ground floor. A metal staircase leads to the first floor. They just opened, so there are only employees. It should make them a bit more talkative than if the bar was packed, but I don’t have high hopes.

Perrin heads to the bartender and asks for Chris Hogan. The gorgeous man with long brown hair stops polishing the wine glass and glances from me to Perrin. I look around and notice the eyes of the others on us. Vampires have good hearing. Specifically higher level vampires.

Crap.

The bartender’s eyes start glowing a deep indigo. Perrin reaches for his Sonic gun and slowly aims it towards his own head. From close range it could do some permanent damage.

“No, no, no,” I shout at him and from inside my sleeve I grab two acupuncture needles I place at the back of his neck. He collapses to the floor, but I catch him and lay him down gently. Passing out is a better option, right now. It also means I’m surrounded by five vampires who look at me as if I’m their favourite snack. Goodie.

The bartender tries to mesmerise me as well, but I wink at him. “Sorry, my dance card is full.”

He lifts his eyebrows in surprise and grimaces.

To my left, one of them adapts his stance. He’s going to come at me, super speed. The air cracks, and I teleport behind him. Smoke lingers around me as if I’m a candle that someone blew out, but it disappears quickly. I kick him in the back of his knee. Strapped to my thigh is a dagger—another reason to wear a dress—that I yank out in one swift motion and stab through his heart. He turns to dust. It smells terrible. Like seaweed mixed with hot sauce.

Two of them appear at my side, and I close my eyes. The music comes to a halt and time has stopped when I open them. It’s like grasping the strings of time, except they cut like hell into my skin. Every time I do this it feels like I’m being torn apart from the inside. That never gets better.

I stab them both in succession, then release my hold on time. They crumble into ash as “Goodnight Irene” plays from the dancing JukeBot. The bartender has disappeared, and I have a feeling he won’t come back. The last standing vampire rushes to me, but I have anticipated his move. He doesn’t feel as strong as the others, so he’d have to touch me if he wanted to try and drain me. If I were him, I’d pop up behind me. So I whirl around, and by the time he touches my shoulder, I’ve already stabbed him in the chest.

If the bomb-maker is in the building, he would have to be upstairs, but I can’t leave Perrin alone. I rush to his side and try to lift him. He’s too heavy, so I grab his ankles and drag him out of there. Just then I notice smoke coming from the top of the stairs.

“Oh, great. Just what I need.” I drag Perrin out of the building a little faster and once outside, I switch to his shoulders and pull him to the nearest car. I lean against it, panting like a race dog while Perrin’s head is on my lap.

A few moments later, the fire department shows up. Nobody has left or entered the building at the front, or they would have passed us. By now,

there is a lot of smoke coming from the roof.

If this bomb-maker did supply the bombs to Blayze, he's dead now. I'm sure of that. And this whole visit was expected. And a setup.



“I’M HOME,” I SHOUT deflated as I slam the front door shut. It is strange residing with my parents again, but I also feel incredibly safe in this weird time where the whole world seems to be after me. Blayze is not that little boy anymore, even though some part of me had hoped he was. That it was a misunderstanding, that we could chat and sort this whole thing out, laughing about it over a pint.

But no. He is calculating and devious. Also, whatever loyalty he may have once felt for me has been obliterated by his love for this Phoebe. He is a dangerous criminal, and I need to let go of that image of him as a boy, standing in that circle.

When I enter the dining room, the table is set and my dad folds his napkin over his lap. Lovelace and my mother are apparently in the kitchen. I hear my mother chatter away even if Lovelace can’t hear her. I kick off my heels and take place next to my dad. I kiss his cheek.

“How was your day?” he asks.

“Fine,” I reply. “We got a lead that turned out to be a trap, and then I had to kill some vampires. I also arrested a teenage boy for creating a rip and Illusion. That was my least favourite part of the day.”

My dad squeezes my hand. “I know. Your mother hated that too, but the rules are there for a reason. The bad people always screw it up for the good ones. You didn’t get hurt?”

“No, of course not. Mother trained me well.” I smile at him. Unfortunately, near-death experiences are common topics for the dinner table. Although, before my mother retired, she was the one sharing them.

Mother and Lovelace enter the dining room. Both their faces light up when they see me. Lovelace nearly drops the empty glasses as she wants to wave at me, but manages to contain herself and places them on the table.

“Welcome home, dear,” my mother says as she puts the pitcher with lemonade down while Lovelace sits down opposite of me and reveals a shy smile.

“I made dessert,” she signs. “With your mummy.”

“How impressive,” I sign back. “What did you make?”

Lovelace frowns and looks at my mother.

“Lemon cheesecake,” she replies for Lovelace.

“Since you helped make the cheesecake, it’s going to be extra delicious,” I sign to Lovelace, and she beams.

In a way she reminds me a bit of Blayze. She can easily turn out as screwed up as him in the future, whether she stays with her aunt or a foster family in the future. Although a foster family doesn’t have to be that bad, they will report her if she uses her abilities. She has potential. The training I received from my mother was difficult, but also the best thing she could have done for me. Doesn’t Lovelace deserve the same? She’s already been through so much.

We take turns scooping up the pasta pesto and eat in silence. “How was your day?” my mother finally asks, not a fan of quiet contentment.

I share what happened today and pick at my food. Just thinking back on everything makes me feel like eating ice cream instead. Not that my mother would ever allow ice cream in the house. If there were to be any desserts, she’d make them herself, and she rarely did so. Working hard on one’s appearance was part of her teachings. When I was a teen, she regularly

checked my weight until we had a huge fight about it when I realised other mums didn't do this.

It is also the reason I gained a lot of weight when I moved out. After I got it all out of my system, I started living healthier and went back to being on the slim side, but definitely not thin. I like it this way. I get to eat ice cream.

My mother is a good mother, but she also taught me what I would never do if I were to have children. I glance at Lovelace. What the hell am I going to do with her? Can I really keep her? Is it bad that I want to?

"Blayze Caden? Your Blayze Caden?" Mother asks incredulously.

I nod. "I didn't see it coming either."

"Well," my mother says as she tilts her head. "He was very fragile and tractable. I always thought it could go either way, but felt you'd pulled him onto the right path."

"Me too. When we lost touch after I went to uni, it turns out it was because he went to a different world."

"And met his worst nightmare," Mother says. "Love is very...unpredictable. I never thought I'd fall in love for that very reason. I simply told myself I wouldn't."

"And then you met Dad," I say with a smile.

My mother raises a thin eyebrow. "No, no. His name was Gregory, and he broke my heart. Unrequited love is the worst."

"What?" I shriek and glance at my dad who simply shrugs, having followed our conversation.

"Then I met your dad and punched him in the face." She chuckles. "It was all a misunderstanding, and we became friends for a while." She smiled at my dad with a warmth she rarely displayed.

"Sounds nice," I say with a dash of longing.

“I feel that you’re just like me, Monday. When you least want it, love will bite you in the ankles.”

“Ouch.” I imagine love in the form of Boomer, a terrier from a few doors down that used to try and bite me as I rode my bike to school. He died due to a lawnmower accident.

“Just be careful, Monday,” Mother adds. “I don’t like that vampires are involved. You don’t want the attention of Marquis. Anything to do with other vampires, and he’s on it like a horse on a table. He’s sharp.”

And also incredibly handsome, due to his many years of being a vampire. His aura practically explodes around him, and that’s just in an image. His picture is in the UA news regularly since he also works closely with the K-9 division, and as of late also with the Chrono Unit. He of all people—or in this case, vampires—isn’t allowed to know what I’m capable of. His ties to the CU would mean he’d tell them, and it would be a huge violation of trust, not to mention a conflict of interest that would make my entire team reopen every case I’ve ever closed. The press would have a field day with the CU officer who is a Traveller herself.

After dinner and a very lovely dessert, we all go out to the shed so Dad can show us the birthday surprise. He has been showing tricks to Lovelace, but he has saved this special surprise for all of us. My mother comes along this time. Usually she can’t stand my dad’s Illusions, which I think is because he’s so good and can really make you question what’s real and what’s not. I reckon as a standard control freak, she doesn’t like it.

The air around my dad cracks much like when I teleport. Grey fog surrounds him, and the interior of the shed alters. We’re in a meadow, and it’s night time. The sky is littered with stars and near the horizon are swirls of purple and blue. There are chairs behind us, and we can sit on them because we believe them to be there. My dad puts blankets over us. “Enjoy,” he says.

My dad kisses my cheek before he sits down next to Mum. And then it happens. The ground shakes, there’s a movement. To our left a herd of

mastodons appear. Smaller than the mammoth, but very similar in appearance, they all run across the meadow.

I glance at Lovelace who stares in awe.

Just like my dad I've always appreciated extinct animals, even if I don't like the dangerous ones up close. If I believe it's real, my body can also believe there's actual damage when they attack. It can be fatal. And though my dad has trained me to see through Illusions, it can still be tricky when they catch me off guard.

The herd disappears and are followed by a few saber-toothed tigers. Lovelace claps as they run past. A few glance in our direction but keep running. My dad has them under control, of that I have no doubt. After a few moments of silence, a flock of Gastornis hurry past. The birds are slightly larger than humans and can't fly. As a kid I wanted them as a pet, and my dad arranged that—through an Illusion—and then drove my mother and me insane. As soon as my dad was out of range, it went completely wild. Without his influence it crapped everywhere.

“Well done, Dad,” I say to him, but he isn't looking at me and of course can't hear me. He abruptly stands up as a breeze sweeps past us and then claps his hands. Instantaneously we're in a forest and sit down on a large tree trunk. The trees around us have lanterns in them, and lights dance everywhere. Until I realise they're—

“Fairies!” exclaims Lovelace. She's never uttered anything in front of me before, and I turn to her.

“She's been saying a few words today,” my mother says. “I guess she's getting comfortable.” She looks at me as if she's not sure whether or not that's a good or bad thing. Neither am I.

The fairies dance around us in tiny bright lights until elves appear from between the trees and play an airy tune on wooden flutes. Some of them sway gently in the wind, and it is utterly relaxing. Something I definitely need.

My dad ends his Illusion with a fireworks show on top of an old castle overlooking water. Lovelace holds my hand and occasionally jumps and points. I smile at her and despite the current issues, I'm happy.

Like usual, I'm saddened when the Illusion ends. My dad really is the best. I hug him tight and thank him profusely. We chat for a while, but then I take up Lovelace for a bath and put her into new pyjamas. My mother has taken her shopping today, and she now has clothes that fit her.

I tuck her into bed, with Mr Turtleneck next to her, and spend about half an hour reading Alice in Wonderland to her. She loves it, and especially my exaggerated facial expressions. Then I kiss her forehead and wish her goodnight. She waves at me and closes her eyes smiling.

Downstairs my mother is sipping tea in the living room while Coronation Street is on in the background. Dad's in his shed. She is right, he really doesn't come out.

I grab my own tea and plop down next to her with a sigh.

"So. What are you going to do with her?" my mother asks casually.

"I don't know."

"Have you looked up her family situation? Where she lives? Anything?"

I blow on my tea. "Yes."

"So have I," she says.

"Has she said anything more about her situation?"

"She mentioned her aunt had been homeschooling her, but from what I understand it wasn't very successful. Her aunt was borderline neglected her. She doesn't want to talk about her abilities as a Traveller, though. I think that will take more time. It's possible the aunt found out, and Lovelace panicked, sending her to a different world."

“That’s why I’m worried about her. How do you think she’ll feel when the aunt comes back? She’ll be terrified. Who knows what that woman will do to her?”

“That still doesn’t answer my question.” She takes a sip of her tea. “Want a biscuit?”

“No, thanks.” I bring my knees to my chest. “What do you think I should do?” It’s a dangerous question, but I have to ask.

“Actually asking for my advice? You must really be in a bind,” she says and smiles at me. “If she has nobody, Monday, why not ask her what she wants? You’ve already gone to the lengths of hiding her. Clearly you care.”

I bite my lip. “I suppose I could ask her what she wants. I just want to do right by her.”

“Spoken like a true mother. Welcome to the club.” My mum squeezes my arm lovingly and I smile at her.

“I love you,” I say.

“I love you, too. More than anything.”

Chapter 6

*“Time is the most valuable
thing that a man can
spend.” ~ Diogenes Laërtius*



AROUND MIDNIGHT I MAKE my way up to the attic and take a brief shower before going to bed. Just as I am putting on hand cream by my waterbed, the air around me cracks and shifts. I snatch my small revolver from under the pillow and whirl around, but my arm is blocked, and I'm kicked backwards. The man is dressed in a hood, and he's holding my gun. I'm stretched out on the bed and am about to teleport when he pulls the trigger. The gun clicks and nothing happens.

“Of course,” he mutters, and throws the gun on the ground. “It seems that nothing goes right when I try to kill you, Monday Moody.” He takes off his hood and though there's something familiar about him, I wouldn't have recognised him in passing. His hair is half long and shaggy, his dark eyes bloodshot and troubled. His stubble makes him look older than he is.

“Blayze,” I say and push myself out of the waterbed with the grace of a drunk bullfrog. “You have some nerve, you sick bastard.”

He chuckles. “I'm glad I have a chance to talk to you. I felt kind of bad for trying to kill you without a goodbye.”

“I'm touched,” I say dryly.

“Believe it or not, but it took some effort to kill you. I started with the Monday from the previous world. Say hi to Perrin for me, by the way, but it helped make it easier when I came back here. Still, you were kind to me when I was a pathetic excuse of a human being, so thanks. Although, really, helping people can be a terrible flaw. I hope to use that flaw against you soon.” He reaches out a hand, and I don’t flinch. I am not afraid of him.

With surprising tenderness, he touches my cheek very slowly as his eyes dart across my face. For a moment, the look in his eyes is like I remember, but then it hardens again. “Goodbye, Monday.” Mist lingers briefly after he disappears.

I exhale slowly and rush to pick up my gun. It is loaded. But then why did it jam? Either I am incredibly lucky, or he is very unlucky.



THAT SATURDAY MORNING I make banana pancakes with Lovelace. My parents left early to go to an antique market. I used to join them as a teen, until I realised it’s boring. Just as we sit down to enjoy our pancakes, the phone in the kitchen rings.

“Monday Moody.”

“Hi, there. You’re still alive,” says Perrin.

“How are you doing?” I ask, feeling a twinge of worry.

“I’m doing okay. I insisted I didn’t need to be kept overnight, and I am free to leave the hospital in about five minutes.”

“Good. I’m glad you’re okay.” I couldn’t tell anyone I’d used needles, so the report I was forced to write yesterday was hell as I tried not to lie. In the end I opted for something along the lines of: I was distracted by the vampires, who seemed ready to attack. Perrin hit the floor before I knew it.

Our temporary boss went through it with me and then approved it without questioning it any further. It hasn't erased any guilt I feel.

"So, you're kind of a badass, aren't you? Taking vamps out on your own?"

"My mother taught me how to fight from an early age."

"Still, to take out vampires... You're either impressive, or you have a secret." He chuckles, but sounds serious.

"The first lesson my mother taught me was to make sure people underestimate me," I say. "Now, what's our next move?"

Perrin sighs and suddenly sounds dead tired. "I don't know, Monday. This was my best and only lead. I'm pretty sure Caden paid them off to kill us, but on the other hand, they could just have a problem with officers snooping around."

"But the fire was pretty suspicious. The entire top floor burnt down, taking with it any evidence. Someone knew we were coming. They wouldn't have tried to kill us if their plan was to burn it and run. Someone else started that fire and wanted to get rid of those vampires as well."

"And still the bartender got away, right?"

"Yes. Were any bodies discovered upstairs?"

"I heard they found one. My guess is that it's the bomb maker, but I'm not sure."

"It would fit." I glance back at Lovelace who is already going for seconds and is eyeing my stack of pancakes.

"I have to go. We should both brainstorm this weekend and regroup on Monday."

He sniggers. "I guess I'll see you Monday, Monday."

"Like I haven't heard that one before," I say.

“Oh, wait. Oliver Marquis stopped by late last night. Or this morning. I honestly don’t know what time it was. He asked me what I remembered. I’m pretty sure he’ll want to speak with you too.”

I swallow. “Yes, thanks. Have a nice weekend.”

“You too. Stay safe.”

“I will.” I hang up and return to the kitchen table. Lovelace assesses me with raised eyebrows, and I smile reassuringly. “Work call,” I sign. We continue to eat in silence with the TV on in the background.

The talk show host Paige Pageant has a male and female visitor who wrote a book together about equal rights for men. I catch bits and pieces.

“...men are simply not earning as much as women...”

“...just because they’re physically stronger, doesn’t mean they’re not clever...”

“...look at the societal hierarchy with vampires...”

“...and many people still believe that men belong at home...”

After breakfast Lovelace helps me clear the table and while she settles down in the living room with lots of colouring books that my mother has bought her, I make tea as I contemplate the best way to ask Lovelace what she wants with the rest of her life. No pressure.

I join Lovelace on the floor beside the coffee table as I watch her colour in the tail of a mermaid. Then after I’ve summoned enough courage, I wave my hand over the page. She looks up with a smile.

“Where would you like to live?” I ask, opting for a relatively simple question.

“With you,” she replies.

“Are you sure about that?”

She nods.

“What about your aunt, then?” I sign.

She turns a shade of pale and shakes her head vigorously.

“Okay, calm down. I filed the paperwork on your rip, as did Saoirse, my partner. They will send a Level 3 officer in to trace anyone that’s not from there. If they find her, they’ll return her. It’s a long, complicated process but can be done.” There are regular TV and radio ads on what to do if for some reason you find yourself in a parallel universe. If the aunt has paid attention, she’ll stay close to where the rip was, and they’ll find her fast.

At this, Lovelace starts to tremble and tears well up in her eyes. “Don’t make me go back there. She called me a freak and hates me.”

I curl my hands into fists. “She what?” Okay, calm down, Monday. Not the time. “Don’t worry, if you don’t want to go back, I won’t make you. But if you want to stay with me, I’ll have to forge official documents and change your name. We’d have to...live a lie.”

She pauses as she considers this, then smiles. “That’s okay. As long as I’m with you.”

Now it’s my turn to tear up. I grab her hand and squeeze it. “That’s what we’ll do then.”

My parents return in the afternoon, and we take a walk. Afterwards, we have a late lunch at the pub The White Seahorse. It all feels delightfully normal. When we return home, I get a call. A code 100: unidentified anomaly. The address is of the abandoned church near the large cemetery. I reckon I’m the closest officer, but it’s the weekend, and I’d be alone. Not that that has ever stopped me before. Also, Blayze literally took a shot at me and still hadn’t managed to kill me.

I say goodbye to everyone, gather my stuff and head out. Perhaps my favourite floral dress isn’t the right choice for a dusty church, but I don’t want to bother changing. Plus, I’ll be wearing my coat. I’m in my trusty car

within five minutes and drive off. It takes me seven minutes to reach the cemetery, where I park.

When I make it to the church, I first survey the surroundings. The cemetery is quiet, so are the church and the small, empty parking space in front of it. There are a few terraced houses surrounding it. The weather is gloomy, but it's not raining, and I would have thought there'd be more families out. Then again, they would hardly hang out here. It isn't exactly a cosy street.

I feel nothing abnormal, but to be on the safe side—and out of habit—I take out my scanner. Again, nothing abnormal. The double doors creak as I push them open and a gust of wind sweeps past me. It smells musty, and there is some graffiti on the walls but nothing legible. I keep scanning as I make my way down the aisle. Halfway through the church I stop. I feel it. A presence. Not a Traveller, but she or he has a lot of energy, so a vampire. Just one. But very strong. The energy feels soft, like velvet against my cheek.

I turn, pretending to leave, forcing whoever it is out of hiding. A blur knocks me off my feet, and I fall against one of the benches. I struggle to regain my posture. I barely felt it coming. Fast bastard. “This is CU officer Monday Moody, and you're committing violation OA-1139. If you continue assaulting an officer of the—”

Another incoming, but this time slower, I see and feel it coming. I brace myself and am purposely turned away from the vampire. Just before he reaches me, I turn to punch him. He catches my fist in his warm hand. From the corner of my eye I spot his half-long, white hair and light eyes. He looks my age, though he's hundreds of years older. Even if it's a split second, I recognise him. Oliver Marquis.

I'm so screwed. He's testing me. Trying to find out how I could have taken out those vampires on my own. He's an extremely puissant person, so it's vital he underestimates me. Yet, if I succeed in that, he'll know something shady is going on. Perhaps I can do both.

He becomes a blur again and shoves me in the back. I stumble forward. He's definitely playing with me. His aim is not to hurt me but to see what I

can do.

There are a few tricks up my sleeve.

Number one. I take out playing cards from my breast pocket and step forward, creating space between us before I whirl around. I throw a few of the cards forward, not wanting to hurt him too much. The cards spread out, fold themselves into origami birds and swirl around him, pecking at him. He uses his speed to dart across the church, a blur followed by paper birds that nearly match him in speed.

I shuffle the cards from one hand to the next, and they return dutifully to the deck, playing cards once more. As I return them to my pocket, I get ready for him.

He is standing still in the middle of the aisle, several metres away from me. He is dashing and terrifying at the same time. His aura exudes power, his features sharp and strong. His hair is tied back and he wears a handmade baroque gilet that is so expensive that I'd have to sell my kidney in order to be able to purchase one.

He grins at me.

I grin back.

Number two.

His muscles shift, and he's about to launch himself at me. The air cracks around me and everything slows down. I even slow myself down. It feels like a million paper cuts on the inside of my body. This is a trick I can only do every so often or it would wear me down too much. Time is slowed, except for my senses and my brain. Even though time is slowed, he still comes at me with what would be normal speed if time was back to normal. My body moves much slower than him, but since I can think and see in normal time, it will make anticipating his moves easier.

He reaches for my shoulder again, and I block him while pushing him away with my other hand. He easily grabs it and pulls me to him. I move

agonisingly slow, taking in his musky scent. His eyes are on me. I look up at him and step on his toes. He smiles and turns me so that he's dipping me in his arms, like a dance partner. Then I release the strings of time and everything resumes as normal. I gasp from the pain and clear my throat. "You know, there's one I didn't call back."

He frowns as his light eyes search my face. The origami bird hits him from behind, and he loses his balance, falling on top of me. By now I have my dagger at his throat. "Oops, you're dead," I say, lightly pressing it against his skin.

He arches his eyebrow and smiles. "Colour me impressed," he says in a warm voice.

I remove the dagger. "Does that mean I passed your test?"

He grins. "Your reward is a kiss. Where would you like it?"

This catches me off guard, and he chuckles at my expression. "What's the matter? A beautiful woman such as yourself should be used to attention."

I push him off me and jump to my feet. When I turn around, he's leaning against one of the benches with his arms folded in front of him.

"I do not want a kiss, thank you very much," I say.

"Why ever not?" he asks as if I've just declined a million pounds.

"I'm not interested in," I gesture at him, "that."

He pushes himself off the bench with his hip and takes one large step towards me. His face is inches away from me. "What do you mean by that?"

"Your look just isn't my—jam." I scrunch up my face. "I guess you're not my type. I like men who are a bit more normal and can make me laugh."

He gapes like a fish on land. "H—what are—I'm not some—how dare you? Do you have any idea who I am and how popular I am? Women fly in from

other countries just to catch a glimpse of me. And you say—you dare say that I'm not your JAM?"

I laugh. "I guess it's a good thing that someone offers some counterbalance then. Before it, you know, goes to your head. You don't want it getting any bigger."

A smile tugs at his lips for the briefest of moments. "Are you implying it's currently at the perfect size?"

"It is. Barely."

"So you might say I'm handsome?" he asks, his face getting closer.

I start leaning back. "You are, yes. That's just not the sort of thing I go for."

He stands up straight. "My dear girl, why settle for a Vauxhall when you can have a Chevrolet?"

"They're too fast. Just when you've having fun, you've already reached your destination."

He stares at me for a second, then laughs. It sounds light, like rustling leaves. "You're not who I expected you to be."

"What did you expect, Mr Marquis?"

He smiles. "Ah, so you do know who I am?"

"Every CU officer knows who you are." I realise I am still holding my dagger and lift up my dress to strap it back to my thigh. I don't shy away from the leering vampire. Whatever shallow attraction he might have could come in handy.

"I still think you should claim your prize," he says when I'm done and steps forward. "I'm an excellent kisser. Also, please call me Oliver."

"Okay, Oliver. You can kiss me on my hand."

He raises an eyebrow. “Are you sure?”

“Positive.” I hold out my right hand.

He smiles a charming smile and takes my hand into his. He brings it to his lips without breaking eye contact and kisses me slowly and softly. Holy cupcakes. It sends tingles throughout my body.

“Thanks for my prize,” I say and yank my hand back. “Are we done now?”

“No, no, Miss Moody. We’re not done. Since you managed to take out a few vampires and just found a way to best me, I need you for something. It will be dangerous, it is most probably a trap, and it takes place in thirty minutes. And I want you there.”

“Okay,” I say. “And please call me Monday.”

Chapter 7

*“Her flowing dress wasn’t even
the most beautiful thing about
her, nor her skilful moves. It
was her smile. That dangerous
smile.” ~ Oliver Marquis*



RAIN FALLS FROM THE sky like tears. Oliver has driven me to a meeting point in the woods south of Sheffield in his Chevy Bel Air of which I am insanely jealous. The tapping of raindrops on the roof is a reassuring sound and a sharp contrast to the mixture of emotions residing in my chest.

We are parked at the side of a winding dirt path, surrounded by tall birch wood trees and shrubbery. We remain in his car where I fidget with my silver bracelet and keep checking the side mirror.

“Nervous?” Oliver asks with that playful grin on his face. I wonder what would happen if I pissed him off. I have fought vampires before, and when they are enraged, they resemble monsters more than people. Even if Oliver is now a respected member of society, even the human society, I can’t help but wonder if he has ever killed someone, even if it was by accident.

“I am alert. There is a difference.” I continue scanning the woods, trying to ignore his relentless gaze that is burning a hole in my head.

“I have faith in your capabilities and if need be, I’ll protect you.” His voice is smooth, perhaps containing a hint of mockery, yet I don’t doubt the truth behind those words.

This time I look at him. Vampires are always plotting and scheming to rise to power within their ‘ranks.’ I wonder if he’s lonely. I can hardly picture him chatting around the water cooler with other vampires about how annoying it is to forget to pee before going to bed.

“No,” I say. “I’ll protect you. That’s why you brought me, isn’t it? Backup? Or is this another test?”

“There are several reasons I brought you. One of them being that you’re beautiful.”

I pretend to gag. “Keep saying stuff like that, and I’ll develop diabetes.”

He lets out a short laugh. “And that’s another reason.” He opens his mouth to say more, but a jeep shows up in the rear-view mirror. I make out more than one person sitting in that car. They switch off the headlights and then kill the engine.

“Do we get out?” I ask, but in the blink of an eye Oliver is already outside and opens the car door for me. I get out while he keeps an eye on the jeep.

The rain is about to turn my hair into a monstrosity, so maybe that will send these people running without any bloodshed. Oliver has told me little about who we are meeting and why. The only thing he divulged was that I would find out soon and that I should follow his lead. This meeting could end up being productive, or incredibly violent.

Two men and a woman step out of the jeep. The woman draws my attention straight away with her Mohawk and her lip piercing. The two men are very different. One is dressed like a lawyer, the other reminds me of my very popular psychology professor. His brown leather jacket fails to hide the firearm on his hip.

The rain continues pelting down as I reach out to their energy while shielding myself. I don't want them to do the same. It tastes familiar, even if there are minor differences per individual. They are... Travellers. I glance at Oliver who looks cool as a cucumber while I feel the sun explode inside of me. Thankfully the rain immediately cools me off.

"You've been given time to think about our demands, Mr Marquis. What do you say?" The woman's voice is deep. Even if she is the one talking, I get the feeling she's not the leader. None of them are. I glance around, making sure that nobody is watching us. I don't feel anyone, but I do feel something hovering on the edge of my subconscious.

"I don't take orders from the likes of you," Oliver says. "My job is to protect this city, and I will not let your egomaniac boss decide how I do that."

"That's a pity. We are not your enemy, we just want our freedom," she replies blandly.

"Every Traveller has at one time committed a violation."

"Are you joking? Our skills need to be developed. We need time, ironically, and practise. Just like you, just like werewolves, just like Illusionists." The woman's voice is sharp, her words cutting through the air.

"And that's why you need to be monitored, just like werewolves, just like us. You are no exception." Oliver smiles.

The woman's eyes practically shoot fire. She gets ready to attack. The problem is that if I do the same, they'll know. Also, Oliver told me to follow his lead, and so far he's not showing any sign of attacking.

The woman is the first to move, but Oliver is ready. His eyes turn violet, and his entire aura shifts. Everything about him becomes cold, dead. Like a magnet, he draws their energy, their light towards him like a black hole. Even standing near him feels unnatural. Yet, I feel something shift behind me. I turn around as time turns to quicksand and slows down.

Rain falls from the sky like tears. Oliver has driven me to a meeting point in the woods south of Sheffield in his Chevy Bel Air of which I am insanely jealous. The tapping of raindrops on the roof is a reassuring sound and a sharp contrast to the mixture of emotions residing in my chest.

We are parked at the side of a winding dirt path, surrounded by tall birch wood trees and shrubbery. We remain in his car where I fidget with my silver bracelet and keep checking the side mirror. There is something I feel like I should remember, but it's huddled somewhere in a corner of my mind.

“Nervous?” Oliver asks with that playful grin on his face. I wonder what would happen if I pissed him off. I have fought vampires before, and when they are enraged, they resemble monsters more than people. I am certain he has killed before.

“I am alert. There is a difference.” I frown. “Do you feel that? Like a déjà vu?”

Oliver raises his eyebrows. “Really?” He glances around. “That’s not entirely impossible. It would imply that they went back in time.”

“Who? What are you talking about?”

A jeep shows up in the rear-view mirror. I make out more than one person sitting in the jeep. They switch off the headlights and then kill the engine. This feels familiar. My mum always told me that a déjà vu was indicative of someone going back in time. Did I reverse time? I don’t feel like I have. It takes an enormous amount of energy, I’d feel it.

Oliver is already outside and opens the car door for me. I get out while he keeps an eye on the jeep.

The rain is about to turn my hair into a monstrosity, so maybe that will send these people running without any bloodshed, though I doubt that. Oliver still hasn’t told me who we are meeting and why. The only thing he divulged was that I would find out soon and that I should follow his lead. Either way, I don’t have a good feeling.

As soon as the woman and the two men step out, I remember. Whoever turned back the last few minutes must have lost a considerable amount of strength by doing so, which benefits us. However, it also means that he's had time to give them new instructions.

"Oliver," I whisper. The rain is loud.

He glances at me, and I shake my head.

His jaw tenses, but he turns his attention to them regardless. I'm sure his guard is up, but I doubt it is good enough. That unsettling feeling has made itself home in the pit of my stomach. I look back at where I remember the energy coming from. A figure moves behind the tree. It is a man and undoubtedly part of this group, if not its leader. And then I spot the other man, right behind the scope of a sniper rifle. The red dot is aimed at the back of Oliver's head. That's certainly one easy way to kill a vampire.

I don't have time to think. This might alert them to what I am, but perhaps I still have a shot—pun not intended—at convincing Oliver if I do it this way. Time slows around me as I grasp the tight strings of time. The rain drops fall less quickly, my body feels disconnected. Again it feels like a thousand cuts inside my body, like knives are being pushed from the inside out.

I take an agonisingly slow step to Oliver, grab his sleeve and tackle him to the ground, but the shot is already fired as I grab him. Very slowly we fall to the ground.

And fall to the ground.

And still fall to the ground.

I land on my knees and already have my playing cards in my left hand. A second shot is fired while I throw my cards. The first bullet has passed us, and is going straight for the headlight of the jeep. The other one is moving at us. I get in front of Oliver and move to hold up my arm. It's the only thing I have time for. The bullet is going too fast.

But not for Oliver, and he whisks me out of the way. He runs to the sharpshooter, the same speed as the bullets. Now that I know he's safe, I let go and gasp in pain as time resumes as normal. I feel battered and bruised on the inside, and my mind pounds. Twice in one day is stretching it, and everything goes to black as I lose my eyesight. Dammit. It would have been better to lose my hearing, I can chalk that up to the gunshots.

Now I am extra vulnerable, and how the hell do I explain this to Oliver? It is a common fact that the senses can be lost momentarily after a Traveller strains her—or himself.

The other Travellers are screaming as my origami birds cut them up. It can be painful, but when I set them on Oliver I made sure the wounds were superficial. Even that last one didn't penetrate his long coat.

I hear a man screaming to my left. Oliver is efficiently handling everything, I'm sure. But it means he'll soon check on me.

There is only one thing left to do. I fall to the ground and rummage through my pocket until I feel the small vial and the needle gun. I know how to do this by heart and insert the vial. This time I double over, so that if anybody happens to look my way, they won't see that I'm sticking this thing in my chest.

"Monday," Oliver shouts.

As I sit up straight, I put the needle gun in the pocket of my coat. "I'm okay," I say and look at a blurry person approaching me. My entire chest feels like it's on fire, and the sensation is spreading. Luckily, I'm used to it and manage a feeble smile as he gets down on his knees in front of me. He grabs my shoulders and then touches my cheek.

"You feel cold," he says, "And you look pale."

"Pineapples are green," I mumble and feel a dizziness come over me. I let myself fall into his arms.

There are voices I don't recognise, and I open my eyes. Jeff, a former colleague of my mother's, and some other Level 3 officers are putting cuffs on the Travellers. "Hey, Monday. Say hi to your mum for me," Jeff says when he sees me looking at them. The Travellers are probably sedated since they aren't moving. I touch my pocket and feel my cards in there. My other pocket holds the needle gun.

I sit up, my vision having improved drastically and I feel more like myself. "I'm so sorry about that, I just got a bit dizzy."

Oliver grins at me. "That's okay. I don't mind beautiful women leaning against me."

"Don't say that. Beautiful women can be dangerous," I say.

"That is true." He leans forward and brushes a strand of wet hair from my cheek. "You look adorable, but you are dangerously good with those cards. Like a kitten with sharp claws. Although you look like a drowned kitten, right now."

I don't know how to respond to that. "Thanks?" The cold makes me shiver.

He helps me up and pulls me close to him. "Don't worry, I'll keep you warm."

"Oh, please. I'm fine." I push him away, but instantly lose my balance and fall back. He catches me with the grace of a dancer.

"You were saying?"

I sigh. The silence around us, apart from the rain that continues to pour down, makes me realise the officers have taken the perps away. Level 3 officers are allowed to teleport, so it makes doing a job much easier.

"How about a spot of tea?" Oliver says brightly.



HALF AN HOUR LATER, we sit in his office. It is in the right wing of his mansion, his private wing. I've only seen his human assistant as we walked in, a beautiful woman who glared at me as we went up to his office. I wonder how many women Oliver's taken to this side of his mansion. I also can't help but wonder who else lives here. Does his assistant?

His office is cosy. The fireplace is burning, the House of Fall crest above it, and the decor is more country style than Gothic Victorian, which might be cliché but what I expected. The yellow and brown tones give it a cheerful, earthy vibe. We sit in armchairs by the fire, opposite each other. The scotch he's sharing with me is strong and old, which I drink more to prove a point than because I like it.

Oliver stares at me with his glass pressing lightly against his lip. He has given me a towel and a blanket and didn't take no for an answer. I only have twenty more minutes before my vial wears off, and then I am definitely screwed.

"I really should get home," I say and put my glass down.

"Tell me about this Blayze Caden," Oliver says.

I swallow and lean back. "I'm sure you've read the file we have so far. Even if it's very thin."

"I have, but I want to hear it from you. You knew him, did you not?"

"He was bullied as a kid, and I took care of him. We were friends, but then lost touch. He was a kind guy, though a little lost."

"What is his problem with you?"

"I apparently will have something to do with the death of his girlfriend."

He takes a sip of his drink. His hair is still wet, and he's changed into all black clothes. He looks so handsome, which I'm beginning to get used to.

"Was he ever in love with you?"

"He once kissed me, but we both laughed about it. It was one of those awkward situations we didn't realise we didn't want until we tried it."

"Hmm." His stare is intimidating, like he can read my mind.

"I really must get home. Can we chat about this some other time?"

"No. I want you to join me. Well, my team. You know about Retrievers?"

I nod. "Quite loyal pets."

There is the beginning of a small smile that he stops. "No. Rogue Retrievers, part of the Retrieval Unit."

"Yes, I know about them. They are basically bounty hunters that try to arrest—but will otherwise kill—werewolves without a pack, or vampires without a House."

"And now there will be Retrievers for Travellers who do not follow the rules."

I swallow as my throat turns dry. "You want me to help you catch Travellers?"

"Illegal ones. And no, you won't just catch them. You'll arrest or kill them, depending on the choice they give you."

"Right. That sounds lovely. However, I must say that I do like the job that I have. The one that does not involve killing people."

"Travellers were rare at some point, but haven't you noticed there are more and more? And if they are good enough, they leave no rips behind. Level 3 officers have never been busier. In the last month three Key Moments were Altered and had to be rectified." He leans forward. "I would like to talk to

you about this some more. About how people like Blayze Caden need to be stopped. About how you can make a serious difference in this world, and about how you can use your full skill set.” He downs the rest of his drink. “Think about what you want with your life before we have our next chat.”

I do want all that. I do want to do something meaningful and exciting. Work that involves less sitting and paperwork. However, do I really want to exchange that for killing? Killing people like Lovelace and myself? For some strange reason I find myself saying: “I’ll think about it.” I really hope I say that just so I can leave.

Chapter 8

*“Time can be an ally
or an enemy.” ~ Zig Ziglar*



OLIVER’S DRIVER IS a lower level vampire. He’s bald and quiet. We drive in another Chevy, which is hardly a surprise since they sponsor the House of Fall. I’ve got less than five minutes, and I can’t fall to pieces in front of this man. He’ll either drive me to the hospital or back to the mansion. Both options are unacceptable. There really is only one thing I can do.

“I don’t feel so well, I’m just going to lie down. Let me know when we’re there.”

The driver doesn’t respond, so I lie down and wait for about thirty seconds when I’m sure he’s not paying attention to me. I create a portal below me with my waning energy and just as it’s big enough for me to fall through, I do. Luckily nobody is on the sofa as I fall right onto it and bounce off, hitting the floor face down. The portal closes behind me, but the effort is starting to hurt.

“Monday,” my mother exclaims with a hint of panic in her voice. She knows I wouldn’t just activate a portal unless it’s bad.

“Pineapples are green,” I mutter.

“Oh, no.”

I remember being in my dad's arms. The bed. And then everything turns to black.



IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT time it is when I wake up. The curtains in the attic are closed, and it takes a while before I realise where I am. A small bed light shaped like a ladybug is on. Lovelace sleeps next to me, curled up like a cat with a blanket pulled over her.

She opens her eyes when I sit up straighter and puts her arms around me. We stay like that until we both fall asleep again.

The next morning my mother brings me tea and scones, which is not a bad way to wake up. I feel crappy, but my five senses are functioning, though I don't see colour. Everything is in black and white except for my mother's bright red lipstick. She sits down while Lovelace starts munching on scones. Yes, plural. She takes after me.

"What happened yesterday?" I ask.

"That's what I was about to ask you. What the hell made you use that vial as well as a portal to get home? I taught you better than that."

Disappointment is practically wafting off her. It is about to get worse.

I lift up my chin. "I helped the mayor with a small task and was forced to hide the fact that I was losing my sight."

"Oliver Marquis? You were with vampires?" Mother shouts. "And you used your abilities?"

I hold up two fingers. "Twice." When I was younger I hated the thought of disappointing my mother, but now I just bulldoze right over those scars.

Her mouth opens and shuts as if she's a gaping fish. Any moment I expect her head to explode. Her eyes dart from left to right as she chooses the right words.

"Okay," she says through gritted teeth, and lets out a long breath. "What happened exactly?"

I tell her everything apart from the fact that Oliver is as flirtatious as a fox during mating season, but without the loud barking and screams. Though that may still come.

"You mentioned an increase in Warnings and Collars. Which is odd, because you'd expect the opposite."

"How so?"

"If these Travellers want something bad enough to kill someone like Marquis for it, then you can expect they're organised. If they want total freedom to use their abilities, I would have thought that they've been planning this for a while and that they'd been finding new Travellers and training them like I did you. Then there would be fewer arrests, not more." My mother studies her nails as the cogs turn in her head.

I think about Simon and how angry he was. "Unless they want the public to become outraged. For budding Travellers to be afraid of us, angry."

She simply nods. "It's not a hard thing to accomplish. But that would imply that the UA has a mole. Perhaps several."

"Or simply people who don't agree with what we do. Who might have a loved one who is a Traveller. Or perhaps someone like me." I swallow.

"I highly doubt that. No Traveller would be foolish enough to join the UA. Regardless of who their mother is." She grins at me.

The arguments we had over me following in my mother's footsteps were plenty. Ultimately, we both knew that I'm too much like her. I crave excitement. My plan has always been to climb the career ladder and land a

position that will make me change the rules for the better. To have it be less strict than it is now. To treat Travellers better. Yet, some part of me understands the rules. Some part of me thinks they are for the better, but only because of people like Blayze. Should the rest of us suffer because of that? I really don't know.

"Thanks, I love you too," I say dryly.

"Anyway, all we have is speculation. If this Marquis is so impressed by you that he wants you on his team, then perhaps you can share your suspicions, but other than that the only task you have is to stay alive and catch Blayze. You owe the mayor nothing. He better not know what you are. Ever."

I shake my head. "I don't trust him. You told me not to trust them."

"For a reason. They only look out for themselves, and we're quite literally their food. They feed on our life's energy. They're—"

"—monsters." I finish the sentence for her, having heard it many times before. I don't dare tell her that I nearly risked it all to protect his life.

"Elite monsters at that. They want to be in control, they care about status and hierarchy. They have ancient, ridiculous rules, and they are way too beautiful." She smiles. "Those are the most dangerous ones, the ones that wear masks."

I smile back. "I know."

"Now, it's Sunday. You should spend some quality time with Lovelace. You've earned some relaxation. How are you feeling?"

"Fine. Much better. Still a bit tired." I have flashbacks to sick days where my mother read to me and brought me fruit and tea. "I guess you'll have to spoil me." I make puppy eyes at her.

"That will not be a problem," she says and messes up my hair. "I've been projecting all my nurturing behaviour onto your father and that might be

one of the reasons he resides in his shed so much.” She closes the door behind her.

The plate on my lap now only has one scone left. “Lovelace!”

She notices my immediate shift in attention and straightens. Her bottom lip sticks out as she looks up at me through her eyelashes.

“Holy cowbells, you are making puppy eyes. Well, it’s not going to work,” I sign. “I think. Maybe it’s working a little. Okay, I forgive you, but I am eating that last one.” I snatch it away and take a bite. Lovelace continues to stare at me like a lost puppy in the rain.

“Okay. We’ll share it.”

We spend the rest of the morning in bed together while I read Alice in Wonderland to Lovelace, which is tricky since I have to sit in such a position that she can see me sign, but also see the book pages. She occasionally looks up and signs excitedly when things take an unexpected turn.

“I think I’d like to go down the rabbit hole,” she signs.

“Why?”

“Because it’s so wonderfully strange there. I like the talking bunny.”

“Yes, he is cool.”

“If Mr Turtleneck could talk, what would he say?” she asks and glances at him. He’s at the end of the bed, munching on lettuce and minding his own business. Which he usually does, unless I am watching reality TV. Then he judges me silently and with contempt.

“He would probably say that he likes it when you pet him. And that he also likes bunnies in waistcoats.”

Lovelace giggles. “Do you think he would like a waistcoat?”

“He probably prefers a turtleneck.”

She looks at me and then laughs.

After we finish a large part of the book, we go down for some tea and then snuggle up on the sofa. My mother has retreated to the conservatory to read.

“I’m going to have to get you some fake documentation soon,” I say.

Lovelace nods.

“So think about a name you’d like to have. Other than Lovelace.”

“Alice. Just like Alice in Wonderland.”

I smile. “It’s a name you’ll have to hear for the rest of your life, so you have to be certain.”

“I am.” She slurps her tea.

“Alice it is,” I mutter and hope this won’t bite me in the ass. The last thing Lovelace needs is to lose even more. It also better be worth going to see him.



IT’S MIDNIGHT ON THE dot when I stand in front of the Sheffield Winter Garden. The square in front of the entrance is decorated with a silver orb. The energy around it hums. By now I can see in colour again, and I feel a lot better in general. I walk around the orb a few times, making sure nobody is watching me. Then I walk through it. There is a hole in the ground with a pole, just like in a fire department. I wrap myself around it and slide down. It’s only a short way down till my feet touch the concrete floor.

There is the deep drumming sound of music. The fluorescent lights and concrete don't do justice to the rooms that are underground the Sheffield Winter Garden. My parents never told me how exactly they got to know Chester, and even though he's a criminal, he's been a tremendous help on occasion. Not without a price, of course.

At the end of the hall is a double door. I have to go through the club to get to Chester. I push open the doors, and my ears are immediately assaulted by techno, which is just a load of noise to me. Flashy lights scatter over the 60 or so grinding bodies on the dance floor. There are about twenty more people in the booths on either sides. The walls are clad in velvet and there are two round plateaus with a woman and man dancing on them. They're barely dressed and both dance with large snakes around their necks. The snakes are Illusions. If I remember correctly, Friday is Feline Friday, featuring panthers and tigers.

This club, Phantasm, is for exclusive people, and is known through word of mouth. It's not necessarily large, but that is half the appeal. The other half is that people feel they can be themselves.

To the left of the bar is another door with the logo of a jester sprayed on the wood. I make my way to the door unhindered, though I am certain I've already drawn attention to myself. The fact that I'm wearing my little black dress probably doesn't hide the fact that clubs really aren't my thing. Plus, I can't help but feel that after what happened yesterday, my name is on people's lips. Especially in the vampire community. It is easy to describe what I look like, thanks to my face full of freckles and my ginger hair.

I press the print scanner on the side of the door, and it scans my thumb. A few moments later the door slides to the left, and I enter Chester's office. It looks the same as it did years ago when I was here last. My heart starts beating faster. The gaudy stuffed animals seem to stare at me as I walk further into the room until I can see his desk around the corner and him behind it. He looks up with a half-smile.

"If it isn't Monday Moody," he says in his Scottish accent.

“Chester,” I say. His dark hair is cut shorter and the scar on his right cheek is clearly visible. He always used an Illusion to hide it, and I wonder if it was our last conversation that made him change his mind. I can’t help but like that thought.

“How long has it been?” he gets up and walks around his desk.

“Six years?”

“That long? You look really good.” He stops right in front of me, his eyes scanning me as if he isn’t sure whether or not he should touch me.

I hold out my hand. “Good to see you.”

He glances at my hand as if it’s a rotten fish and then searches my eyes.

I smile politely, hoping he can’t spot how nervous I am, which I hadn’t expected to be.

Instead of taking my hand he returns to his desk and sits down. “Well, Miss Moody. How may I be of service?”

Okay, clearly the handshake was the wrong approach. Though it is perhaps good to keep things strictly professional. I sit down in the brown leather chair and tug on my dress. “I need a fake ID for someone. I have a picture of her and the details. Of course I can also pay.”

“Okay.” He activates the screen above his typewriter.

I grab my Organiser, sized and shaped like a compass, one that can’t be linked back to me in any way, and one that I can use to store information. With a few swipes he has the documents, and I put the device back under the skirt of my dress, attached to my dagger’s strap. I catch Chester glance as I do this, but he pretends to be focussed on the screen.

“How are your playing cards treating you?” he asks without looking up.

“They’ve saved me a few times. Thank you.”

He says nothing as he continues his work. It takes him only a few minutes.

It still amazes me how skilled he is. “What will you require as payment?”
My voice trembles for a moment.

With a tap the screen disappears. He leans forward, his face without emotions. “Eight hundred pounds.”

I stare at him, assessing how serious he is. “Isn’t the usual rate five hundred?”

“Yes. Did you think that the price would be different because of our history?”

“Perhaps.”

“Well, you’re right.” He grinned.

I take a breath to reply when a beep interrupts us. Automatically, his screen pops up again. It must be his scanner showing him someone’s at the door.

Chester chuckles. “This should be interesting.” He taps the screen and the door slides open. Since we’re just around the corner, the wall obscures my vision, but the footsteps would hint at a man entering the room. As the man approaches, I can’t help but feel like a mouse in a trap, and then I see why.

Oliver stops as his eyes land on me. He grins. “If it isn’t Monday Moody. Alive and well.”

I may be alive, but I’m definitely not well.

Chapter 9

*“Some things are meant
to be. And I am meant
to kill Monday Moody.”*

~ Blayze Caden



I SWALLOW AND GLANCE at Chester who simply leans back with a smile, as if he’s looking at an old friend. Perhaps he is, for all I know.

“What brings you here, Oliver? Usually you show up later in the night.”

He does? My mind constructs images of him making out with a woman in one of the booths and doing body shots with half the club. I fold my arms and avoid eye contact with Oliver.

“Yes, but my ears caught whispers of a beautiful Chrono officer paying you a visit.” He sits down next to me in the leather armchair. “Forgive me for interrupting, but seeing as how she mysteriously disappeared on her way home, I rushed over. How are you doing?” The latter is addressed to me.

“Fine,” I say without looking at him.

“Will you look at me then?”

I look at him. “There, I looked. Now, since I’m done here, I’m leaving.” I get up.

“What’s the rush?” Oliver gets up as well. “Are you upset with me?”

“I am not.”

“Then why are you acting like you are?”

“How do you know what I’m like when I’m upset? You barely know me.”

Oliver grins. “That can easily be rectified.”

I make a face. “How about you get to know a Bigfin squid? They’re lovely, but hard to find. Should keep you nice and busy.” It doesn’t make sense, but it’s the only insult I can think of.

“I’d rather get busy with you.”

“I’d rather lick a plugged in toaster while taking a bath.”

Chester clears his throat.

I turn to him, having momentarily forgotten his existence. Oliver must be unusual if he can manage that.

“If you need anything let me know,” he says to us both. “If not, please leave. Your bickering reminds me of my parents.”

“Oh. Are they still together?” Oliver asks.

“No. My mother killed my father in his sleep.” He grins. “Goodbye.”

Oliver and I exchange a look and then walk back out. The music is too loud to communicate and Oliver grabs my hand. He leads me to the VIP booth which isn’t empty, but whoever is sitting in it—I don’t recognise them—clear out at the sight of Oliver and make room for us. Oliver tips one of the employees, though I don’t make out how much, and he then settles down next to me. He presses a button above us and the music immediately falls into the background, being nothing more than a subtle hum.

“So, what was your business with Chester. Or was it pleasure?” Oliver asks. He places his arm on the back of the seat, behind me.

He smells nice. “We are old friends.” I tap on the table and a holo-screen appears. I order a daiquiri.

“What does that mean?” He leans in a little closer, and his breath tickles my ear.

“If you must know, we had a relationship once. It didn’t last long. Please, order. First drinks on me.”

“Aren’t you generous? But the drink I want is probably half your salary, so I’ll pay. And if you don’t mind me saying, Chester doesn’t seem like your type.” He finishes the order and the screen disappears.

“What would be my type, then?”

“Good question. Some goody two-shoes who is all about the rules, but would do anything for you.”

“Is that because that’s what you think I am? A stickler for the rules, but passionate about those I love?”

“Aren’t you?”

I say nothing for a moment. “I don’t have a type. Do you?”

“Oh, yes. Yellow raincoat, red hair and freckles. Handles herself in a fight.” He smiles at me. It’s a beautiful smile.

I want to look away, but also I don’t.

A scantily dressed waitress approaches with our drinks. She winks at Oliver and takes the time to let him know that if he needs anything, anything at all, he should let her know. Right in front of me. The audacity.

Oliver grins his grin and looks her up down as she walks away with swaying hips.

That's right, Monday. Don't fall for his pretty words and prettier smile. It's all bull. "What did you want to talk to me about?" I ask him and feel my moodiness from a few minutes earlier return.

"I was worried about you when you disappeared on your way home. Was it Blayze?"

Oh, great. "It wasn't. It was nothing to do with you. I'm fine, and that's all that matters." I barely remember anything, but I do remember drinking with him and his job offer. "Did you mean it about the job?"

"I did. And I still want you on my team. Literally. You're a good officer and you can handle yourself."

"Why not ask a Level 3 officer?"

"I have one already. I want you." He says those last three words with such intensity that he might as well have shoved those words through my chest.

"Right." I take a sip of my drink. It's sweet and has alcohol, so just what I need.

"Think about it. Until you know for sure, I'm going to help you catch this Blayze guy. It seems like you could use the help. He's a serious threat, and I don't like anyone messing with this city. Or with you."

I take another big sip. "How are you planning on helping?"

"Ah, right on time." He waves to someone in the crowd and a man with dark hair and dark eyes strides our way. He is dressed in a suit, but it can't hide the muscles underneath. Definitely K-9. Or perhaps former K-9. He arrives at our booth and shakes hands with Oliver.

His dark eyes set on me, and he scans my face before greeting me as well. "George Owens. You must be Monday Moody."

"I am," I say and give him a firm handshake. Werewolves try to establish dominance early on and don't like weakness.

He sits down on my other side. “I heard you have trouble with a certain rogue Traveller.”

“We do.”

“I have several informants and one of them spotted him. He had a hotel key that my informant recognised.” George looks at Oliver meaningfully. “He’s got a room at the Golden Hotel.”

Oliver inhales sharply.

He owns most establishments in the city, I’m sure. But the one Oliver is associated with the most is the Golden Hotel. He frequents it during events and many celebrities stay there. This is a low blow.

“He’s probably not even there. He’s messing with us.” I down the rest of my drink.

Oliver also finishes his drink. “I am inclined to agree. It’s probably a trap, but we still have to check it out. Even if it’s a message, it might provide a clue.”

George grunts. “I’m more than ready. And if he’s been in the room, I’ll be able to pick up his scent.”

“How do you know his scent?”

“I’ve met him before,” George says, lowering his voice as if he’s divulging a secret.

“I’m one of the officers that originally arrested his girlfriend. Along with a few others.”

My eyebrows shoot up. “What is she like?”

“A cold bitch. And she trained him well, apparently. The faster we take him out, the better.”

“You mean kill him?”

“No, take him out to a nice restaurant, maybe a spa afterwards. Of course kill him.” He looks at Oliver as if to question why the hell I’m here.

“I’m the mayor. This is my task force. My team have the right to take him out, no questions asked. The threat level is that high. Are you really surprised?” Oliver asks me.

“No, I suppose not. I’m just not used to it. We work with permits and arrests, nothing more. The one time my partner got punched, it was all we talked about for two weeks.”

“You don’t seem like the type to let your partner get punched,” Oliver says with a smile to soften his words.

“I’m not. They spoke for three more weeks about how I smashed him in the face with a melon.”

George lets out a deep laugh.

“Okay, I’m beginning to see why you brought her on,” he says and winks at me.

I smile at him. “Great. And when are we doing this?”

“Right now.”



THE GOLDEN HOTEL IS smack dab in the middle of the city, surrounded by shops and a patch of green that is a park. The building resembles Oliver’s estate in the sense that it also looks like a mansion, or perhaps more like a castle. The windows are of a Gothic style and the decorative colours are red and golden. Just looking at the building makes me feel like royalty.

Blayze booked his room using his real name, which infuriates Oliver even more. He is scariest when he's quiet and calm. He looks like a predator ready to strike. We wait in the lobby while Oliver searches the files on the typewriter to find out who booked his stay. I do not want to be in that person's shoes.

We are not waiting on Oliver, though. We're waiting on an Illusionist and a Level 3 officer that Oliver has hired as part of his team. He doesn't share their names, currently distracted by his anger.

George studies his cufflinks as we sit in the leather armchairs. He is actually quite handsome. In the multicolour of lights at the club he seemed less impressive. Perhaps because he didn't stand out compared to the people that frequent the club. Now, I realise he'd be someone I'd notice in a room straight away. He's also the type of man my mother would love to see me with. Composed, well-dressed, successful. Much like Oliver, except not a vampire.

"You're staring at me," George says without looking up.

Oops. "Yes, sorry."

"Don't be. But why are you staring?"

"I was just lost in thoughts." I shift in my seat. "How do you know Oliver?"

"We met when I was on a case. It was related to drugs that plagued the city fifteen years ago. They were drugs specifically designed for vampires and turned out to have lethal side-effects. Oliver was very involved in the case. We didn't get along at first, but then I saved his life and he saved my daughter's. The rest, as they say, is history."

"You have a daughter?"

"Yes, twelve years old."

"I...I have a daughter too," I say and smile. It is the first time I say it, and it feels good.

He raises his eyebrows. “You do?”

I pause. “Yes.” He seems surprised, and I don’t like that. It means that he’s read my file before I visited Chester.

“How old is she?”

“Eight.” She’s actually seven, but the more inconsistencies between Lovelace and Alice, the better.

“You look very young to have a daughter that age.”

“I’m not that young, but she’s adopted. The papers were quite recently approved.”

George studies his cufflinks again. “What adoption agency?”

Oh, he’s definitely read my file. And he’s going to check it again. “Happy Home.”

“I’ve heard about them. Their HQ is in London, isn’t it?”

“No. Manchester, actually.” Bastard.

He looks up and smiles at me. It doesn’t reach his eyes. “My bad.”

I smile back. “No worries.” In my head I give myself a high five. Thank goodness I’ve done my homework.

Two people approach us. Two people I recognise. I jump out of the chair. “Chester? Perrin?”

Perrin smiles sheepishly.

“Monday,” Chester says. “George.” He nods at him.

“Nice to see you again, Chester.”

“You know George?”

“Yes, we’re all acquainted.”

Perrin takes a step forward. “Chester had a hand in apprehending Phoebe, and since I have a connection with both Phoebe and Blayze, Mr Marquis wanted my help. He just informed me you are temporarily on the team as well. Thank you for wanting to help. Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on you.”

“As will I,” Oliver says and places an arm around me.

Perrin shoots him a dirty look.

“I needed people I could trust, so I know half of you well, and the other half have skills and knowledge that come in handy.”

“Yes,” Chester says, “Even if you’re not a Traveller or anything.” He smiles.

Damn it. “Right.” I narrow my eyes at him. He would never blow my cover like that, but he sure as hell would have fun messing with me.

Oliver moves towards the lift, and we follow him. “Now that we’re all here, let’s go pay a visit to the room Blayze paid for. It stands to reason that it is most likely a trap, but that doesn’t mean we won’t find clues. I’ve cleared the entire floor for safety reasons, as you may understand.”

Oh, I understand. I just hope I don’t die. I’m not wearing the right dress for that.

Chapter 10

“You may delay,

but time will not.”

~ Benjamin Franklin



WE ARE COMPLETELY SILENT in the lift as it takes us up to the thirteenth floor. I occasionally steal glances at Perrin, since I didn't expect him to be here at all. Judging from the way he's staring at me, I reckon he's still surprised about my involvement as well. Though, if I were Oliver, I'd have done the same. We both have ties to Blayze. We can use that. Besides, knowing he's after me basically makes me excellent bait. Of course he'd want me on his team.

And here I am, a delicious, wafting sausage being dangled in front of a savage hound. I curl my fists at the thought of Blayze attempting to shoot me in the face when I had always comforted him, listened to him, seen him. Clearly, he is not the person I thought he was. And somehow that still disappoints me. And here we are on the way to his hotel room, undoubtedly being ambushed.

If a tank could fall through the roof at a suspect's house, I really don't know what to expect anymore.

Oliver's cold hand brushes against mine briefly and takes me out of my musings. I glance at him, but he looks ahead, a faint smile curling his lips.

I wish I could read his thoughts. There is very little I know about him. The things I have read in the news were always standard boring things about

meetings he would attend, or charities. His reputation was that of a handsome bachelor who had reduced crime and was all about a safe, happy city. He's a vampire to boot, so of course, he's charming. Yet, there is also something vulnerable about him, even if I can't put my finger on why that is.

The lift door slides down as we reach the thirteenth floor, and Oliver and George are the first to step out. The corridor is eerily silent as we traipse to room 906.

"There's definitely movement inside," Oliver says as he cocks his head to the side. "It sounds weird though."

George sniffs the air. "Ugh, it smells like crap. And that's not a jab at Blayze, though I do smell him as well."

"Well, at least we're at the right place, then," Chester says. "How about I create an Illusion and lead that through the door first, before we actually go in there?"

"I second that motion," Perrin says. "He's visited a bomb maker, remember? And right now his sole mission is to kill Monday and save his girlfriend."

I definitely have to have a chat with Perrin sometime about the Monday from his world and what havoc Blayze and Phoebe wreaked before they came here. "Don't worry," I say. "I'm not that easy to kill. Just because he wants a certain outcome, doesn't mean that's what will happen. It doesn't work that way."

"Allow me," says an Illusion of Chester. I see it straight away, but only by not looking at him directly. It's like the edges of this new Chester shimmer from the corner of my eye. It's only a split second, though. The actual Chester leans against the wall, looking smug.

"It remains freaky, stuff like that," George says and glances at Oliver, who simply smiles. I'm sure he's happy with his unusual team, and I'm sure he's used to working with all kinds of people and skill sets.

The new Chester opens the door with the skeleton key and walks into the room. We all crane our necks as he walks towards the bed and looks around. It looks like a normal hotel room. Except there is some noise coming from the bathroom. A crash of something dropping to the floor. A glass? Then banging.

Without hesitation everybody but me takes out a gun.

I gulp. Despite the firearm at home, which belongs to my mother, I am not used to handling serious weapons. As a Level 1 Chrono Unit officer I've never needed one. The Gadgets and Weaponry Unit have some serious impressive stuff, but they are reserved for the kinds of jobs that see more action. Whereas the most serious injury we usually encounter is a paper cut.

"Guys, do you really think that Blayze is just waiting for us in the bathroom?"

Perrin puts a hand on my arm before the others can respond. "Don't worry. I know it's daunting, but we can't take that chance. We have to be prepared for the worst."

Clearly he doesn't know me, since I feel mostly thrilled. I'm ready. "Yes, okay."

Oliver glances from me to Perrin. "Don't worry," he says. "Monday is more than capable. Otherwise I wouldn't have asked her on this team."

"Right. And it has nothing to do with the fact that Caden is after her, and she is the perfect bait? Could have fooled me." He narrows his eyes at Oliver.

Oliver smirks. "She certainly is per—"

Chester shoots forward and closes the hotel room door, his Illusion still in there. We turn to look at him.

"Err, yeah. I figured out what's in the bathroom." He scratches his chin and presses his lips.

Not a good sign.

“Well, what?” George asks. “Are you waiting for a written invitation to share the news?”

If he talks to Chester like that, then it means they’re better friends than I thought.

“It’s a raptor,” Chester says flatly.

“They are a popular choice for Illusions,” I say, shrugging.

“No,” Chester says. “This isn’t an Illusion. It’s an actual raptor.”

“You mean like a raptor raptor? The dinosaur?” George asks.

“No, he means a rollercoaster. Of course the dinosaur,” Perrin says as he curls his hands into fists. “He actually opened a portal to PU-012231 and lured a velociraptor into the bathroom of your hotel, just so it might kill Monday.” He is turned to Oliver.

“Yes, I put two and two together, thank you,” Oliver says coolly.

“Guys, let’s direct our anger to the person who actually deserves it.” The door handle slowly opens. “And also let’s focus on that.” I point to the door handle.

“Crap,” George says. “I have been in a lot of fights, but with a prehistoric dinosaur? Nah.”

“Don’t look them in the eyes?” Chester says.

“No, that just means you don’t see them coming before they rip your guts open,” Perrin says.

We step back as the door slowly opens. Chester and I are on one side of the door and the rest on the other side, divided by an incoming dinosaur. Luckily the corridor isn’t narrow.

“So, what’s the plan? I’d like to know,” Chester asks, his voice higher.

“I’ll send it back to it’s world,” Perrin says and steps in front of George and Oliver. The raptor comes out of the room slowly. It cocks his head. First at us, then at Perrin, before settling his gaze on me.

Of course. “Why, oh, why did I have to wear my tasty meat perfume today?” I say dryly.

Chester chuckles nervously. “Or it could be that he simply finds you scrumptious looking?”

The creature does look hungry. Who knows how long it has been in that bathroom? It must realise it’s in a strange world. I wonder if it’s scared.

Perrin starts moving his hands focusing on the ground beneath the raptor, except that Perrin isn’t that fast, and the raptor isn’t standing still.

“Chester,” I whisper to him.

“I know.” He casts the Illusion of a wall between us and the dinosaur. The dinosaur will believe it to be real, and that’s good enough.

“What are you doing?” I hiss at him.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Has it always been a childhood dream of yours to become dinosaur food?”

I can see through the Illusion, so can Chester. We watch as the creature turns to Perrin, but Perrin still isn’t fast enough. It takes a huge amount of power to create a portal and even then it depends on where the portal leads to.

I step forward and get ready. I’m the only one that can create the portal in time, but Chester puts a hand on me and shakes his head.

“I—” my words don’t make it to my lips.

Oliver steps in front of Perrin and holds out his hand. His eyes turn dark. Around him everything seems to turn darker as well. Looking at him makes me feel empty, cold. Oliver sucks the creature's life force with ease as his essence glows brighter and brighter.

The raptor falls to a heap, an empty shell compared to what it was a moment ago, and we stare at it for a good while before George says: "Do you mind getting rid of the wall? Not all of us can shatter an Illusion."

"And that's a good thing," Chester says with a grin as he collapses the Illusion.

"Are you okay?" Oliver asks, his eyes on me.

Chester puts a hand to his heart. "Why, yes, thank you so much for asking. Your concern for me is touching."

"Clearly," I say dryly. "Now, let's check the hotel room for any clues and then figure out how to get rid of a raptor body." I sigh. "That's a sentence I didn't expect to say."

"And I bet you'd never expect to find one in a hotel bathroom either," Chester says. "I know I didn't. A chamois maybe, but not a raptor."

"Isn't that a type of blanket?" Perrin asks.

"Close," Chester says. "It's a goat antelope."

"And on that note..." George opens the hotel room door, and we follow him inside. It looks like a normal hotel room, except for the bathroom. It makes a crime scene look cosy. Judging from the amount of dino poop, which could have been worse, it had been in there for a few days. It means that Blayze wasn't exactly sure when we'd show up, but that he was certain we would.

Soon we look in the drawers and under the bed, but it isn't until we are brave enough to venture into the bathroom that we find a wooden box in the bath. It is one of those boxes with a handle. You wind it up and something

pops out and plays music. Because the smell in the bathroom is enough to make us pass out, we go into the bedroom and place the box on the double bed.

The men erupt in a debate on who should open it since they are certain it's a trap designed to kill me, if not all of us.

I stare at it. I gave this exact box to Blayze for his twelfth birthday. He cried when he got it and said it was the most beautiful thing. I spent ages looking for something at second hand shops until I stumbled upon this box. My dad carved a tree on the lid, and I painted the entire box green. On the bottom I wrote our initials. If you wind it up, a fox, a hedgehog, and an owl pop up and dance around a tree.

He wouldn't use this to try and kill me, would he? Would he really?

I look at the bottom. Our initials are still there, though less legible than all those years ago. Click, click, click as I wind up the box. The men don't even realise what I'm doing until the cheerful tune starts to play. The music is an eerie contrast to the grim reality of the situation. They turn to me in silence as I hold the box in my hands, fighting to hold back the tears. I need to know.

The tune comes to an end.

First, nothing.

My heartbeat is in my throat when the lid pops open, and a grey mist sprays out and onto me. I drop the box, and it bounces off the bed and onto the floor. It breaks. Along with any hope I had.

Everything goes black, and I fall to the ground. Someone catches me, and yet, I still feel like I'm falling.

"Monday," Oliver says in my ear, but soon there is nothing but darkness.

Chapter 11

*“To know that she still gets
herself into trouble, worries me.
But to know that I still care, worries
me more.” ~ Chester*



EVERYTHING AROUND ME is hazy. It's as if the edges of my being are made of fog. That isn't the only unusual experience. Then I realise.

I'm falling.

I'm falling for a very long time and
struggle to keep my skirt from going over my face.

As I'm still falling, I swear

I see the walls of
whatever hole I fell into lined with books.

And I am still falling.

Falling.

Falling.

A steaming cup of tea is falling beside me. I grab it out of the air

and peer into it. The liquid
is still in there. It isn't moving a bit. I smell it and take a sip.

Lovely. Earl Grey with

a hint of lemon.

I put the cup back onto the saucer as it stays in place, falling next to me.

It is very handy. I should get

one of these cups at home.

Then again, I don't have this bottomless pit at home.

Do I?

No, I don't think so.

I feel like I'm reaching for something in the back of my mind, but it's

like grabbing smoke.

Something with music. And a tree.

Just then I land on the ground with a thud. Yet, I feel no pain. I scramble to my feet and look up at a large tree that has been painted green. Someone is resting against it. His hat covers his face, but his feet look like paws.

"Excuse me?" I ask, not feeling alarmed in the slightest. Somehow, it is what I expect to find.

The fox looks up with his round eyes and spits out the long piece of grass. He adjusts his hat and jumps to his feet. His three-piece suit looks snazzy. "Why, good—" he pauses and takes out a watch from his breast pocket. "Afternoon, milady."

"Kind sir," I say with a courtesy. It feels appropriate.

He bows. "My name is Oliver," he says. "Nice to meet you."

"Oliver? What a nice name. Don't I know someone with that name?"

"Yes. Me." He laughs.

I laugh too. "Of course. I'm Monday. Monday Moody."

"Okay, Monday Moody. Let's go."

"Where to?"

"We're going to catch a dangerous criminal." He holds out his arm so I can take it.

"How exciting," I say with a grin.

"It sure is." The fox and I walk down a winding path, deeper into the woods.

We talk about his soft fur and beautiful eyes when we come to a halt in front of a hedgehog with a cane. He looks quite dignified even if he isn't as well-dressed as the fox. I suppose it is difficult with his spines.

We exchange our names and some general pleasantries. The hedgehog introduces himself as George. It is also a name that sounds familiar, but I can't think of anyone named George besides this hedgehog.

"Where are you off to?" he asks.

"We are going to catch a criminal," I say proudly.

"How exciting. May I join you? I am excellent with my spines."

The fox and I exchange a glance. "Of course," we say in unison.

And so we go on, the three of us, until we reach an iron gate. Clouds appear in the sky and I get a chill. The birds have stopped singing and the forest looks grim now.

The fox puts his arm around me. "Don't worry, we'll protect you."

"Thank you," I say. "I'll protect you too."

"How lovely, but there is no need," says a black cat with a purple bow-tie. It lies atop the gate. Its tail sweeps from left to right. "You simply have to answer my riddle and you may pass through unarmed."

"Don't you mean unharmed?" I ask.

"That too," the cat says.

"We do not have time for your nonsense," Oliver says. "We have a dangerous person to stop."

"May that as it be, but you must still solve the riddle. Otherwise, I cannot open this gate." The cat stretches one paw, its claws protruding.

"Fine, what is the riddle?" I ask and nudge the fox. "Don't worry, I'm good at riddles."

"Or are riddles good at you?" The cat says, having overheard.

I raise my eyebrow. "I'm not sure. Perhaps both."

"The riddle," the fox hisses.

"Ah, yes. The riddle is as follows: What lasts forever and yet can be killed?" The cat's tail starts sweeping faster, and its eyes dart from me to Oliver to George and back.

"Tick tock, tick tock," the cat says with every sweep of its tail.

Oliver and George start talking to each other. "It has to be love," Oliver says.

"No, trust," George says.

I bite my lip as I think to myself.

“Enough. You must answer now. Monday.” The cat sits up and stares at me.

“Time,” I say. “The answer is time.”

The cat yawns. “Fine. You win.” The gate opens.

Oliver and George cheer and start dancing around me. I laugh.

“Please leave before I throw up a hairball on you all,” the cat says and starts licking its paw.

“Thank you, Chester,” I say as we pass through the gate and continue down the winding path. It isn’t until later that I realise he never told us his name. Again, I feel like there is something in the back of my mind that I have to reach. It’s as annoying as having a piece of food stuck between my teeth.

My foot hits something and I shriek as I lose my balance. I close my eyes, but Oliver and George grab my arm on either side and pull me upright before I hit the ground.

“Thank you,” I say and stare at the big puddle of mud I would have fallen into. I turn to look at what I stumbled over, and it’s a small creature with large eyes. “Isn’t that a Slow Loris?”

“Is it?” the hedgehog asks.

“Yes. They are very adorable, but they can release venom from the side of their elbows and mixed with their own saliva it can cause death by anaphylactic shock. Quite cute and deadly.”

It stretches out its arms to me and blinks rapidly.

“It’s so cute.”

“Maybe don’t pick it up,” Oliver says and makes a face.

“How can I not? It needs me.” I pick the creature up, and it nestles its face into my neck.

“Thank you,” she says. Her voice sounds young, like a child.

“You’re very welcome. Don’t worry, I’ll take care of you like my own.” I pet the little creature.

Oliver shakes his head at me.

“What? She needs me?”

“Or do you need her?” he asks.

“Who cares?”

A tree appears before us. It’s not us who have walked up to the tree, it’s as if the tree has walked up to us. There is a mirror in the bark of the tree.

“Ah, here we are,” Oliver says. “The tree will show us the dangerous criminal we have to catch. It is a Traveller, you see. Very dangerous.”

“I know. I know who we are looking for,” I say, even if I can’t come up with the name. Things are a bit fuzzy in my head.

“Don’t worry, we will see. The tree will show us. The tree is honest,” George says.

We wait and lean forward towards the mirror, eager to await what it will show us.

Swirls of pink and purple drift in the mirror and a figure emerges. It is...

Me.

I gasp and stumble backwards and land on something soft. A bed. The Slow Loris is still in my arms, but it’s licking me. The poison. It’s poisoning me.

“Sorry,” she says.

“Don’t poison me.” I try to get up, but I can’t.

Flashes appear in my head. Oliver's voice. His cold hand squeezing mine, assuring me that it will be okay.

Pain that makes me leave my body.

Visions that can't be true.

The wooden box with the tree.

The fox. The hedgehog. The owl.

I look down at my body and I'm the owl. I can't move. The fox approaches me. This time, he isn't wearing any clothes and he's on all fours. He approaches me with a hungry look in his eyes.

"Oliver, don't," I shout, but it's too late. He leaps towards me, his teeth bare.

I scream.

When I wake up, I'm in a soft bed. The room has a fireplace and wallpaper that is a soft pink. It smells like lemon as if it's just been cleaned. The window is ajar and birds are singing in the distance. It is morning.

The door swings open and Oliver's assistant walks in. I've seen her only once before, and she looks exactly the same. Even her black dress and makeup. The last time I saw her she was glaring at me, but now she has a tight smile on her face and a concerned look in her eyes.

"You are awake," she says. She rushes over with a wet towel and replaces the one that was on my head. It is warm by now and falls off when I move my head.

"You shouldn't move too much," she says and sits down on the queen-sized bed.

"Wh—what's going on? And also, what's your name?"

She smiles more sincerely this time. "Summer."

“Right. Sorry we didn’t get introduced last time.”

“That’s alright. Oliver rarely introduces the women he brings home.”

Ouch.

Her brown eyes dart over my face. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine. Apart from feeling like I’ve been hit by an asteroid.”

She gently wipes the cloth over my face and my neck. She uses slow, smooth movements that make me feel warm. “Not quite,” she eventually says. “But from what Chester said you’ve been hit with a hallucinogenic drug. Perrin teleported all of you to his office so he could get an antidote. Then they brought you here. You have been asleep for over 24 hours. It’s now Tuesday morning.”

“What?” I feel the blood drain from my face. “Are you joking?”

“No.”

I smack my lips together. “It explains why my mouth is so dry.”

Summer immediately hands me a glass of water. “Oliver has been by your side for a while,” she says with a hint of bitterness. “Until he had to work. Work always comes first with him, you know? I’ve been here instead.” She smiles at me.

Much like a lioness at a gazelle. If they smiled.

“Great,” I say dryly, but add a smile to make up for my tone. “My parents must be worried. I should leave.”

“Don’t worry. We informed them. They’ve been here ever since we called them. They’re staying in one of the many rooms we have here.”

“They are?”

“They are. In fact, they’re having breakfast right now. Also, shouldn’t you ask about how you are doing instead of worrying about your loved ones?”

“Why? Is there permanent damage?”

“No, but there could have been. Oliver had to feed on you before the antidote was administered. The substance attached itself to your energy and started corrupting it, so the only option was to take away your energy, even if that was also risky. You’ve been recovering from two serious things at once. You’re very strong. I advise you to take it easy the next few days. You might feel woozy or dizzy, but other than that you should be fine.” She sighs. “You are very—”

“Lucky,” I finish for her. “So I’ve noticed.”

Chapter 12

*“The two most powerful
warriors are patience and
time.” ~ Leo Tolstoy*



I SIT UP STRAIGHT. “If Oliver fed on my tainted energy, is he okay?”

“He’s fine.” Summer is about to leave my room, but I have to ask. “You said that Oliver is at work, but where is he now? Where are they with the search for Blayze?”

She stares at me for a few seconds as if she’s unsure whether or not to answer. Which only makes me want to know more.

“Tell me,” I say firmly.

“They had a lead and followed it to a warehouse. They think this Blayze Caden is staying there. I’m sure we’ll hear from them soon. Sit tight.” She turns on her expensive high heels and leaves.

A lead. A warehouse. That doesn’t sound creepy at all. I don’t like it. But what can I do? I feel depleted. I feel like I’ve danced with death and not in a good way. Is there even a good way? Focus.

Some things in life are worth fighting for, even worth dying for. I have to decide what I am willing to risk my life for. Nobody can die any more. Not because of Blayze. I failed to protect him, but I can protect the others.

I focus my energy on myself, but outside of me. I know my own energy, better than I know Oliver's, and since he has mine, this should work.

After a few seconds, I sense him. He's still alive. He must be feeling strong and powerful now that he's fed on me. I hope he doesn't know now. My energy should have remained shielded, even if I was drugged. He might just think it's the drug, or that I'm one of those people with a lot of light.

Some of my energy has replenished, but whereas I used to have a vat of energy, I now have like a bowl. And I have to be careful. Or I won't be able to make it back.

Them not knowing what I am is just as important as me stopping Blayze. Or is it? I can't risk my cases being meaningless, but I certainly can't lose these people. They're good people.

I throw the covers off and assess my attire. I'm in pyjamas. A woman's. I hope it's Summer's and not something one of Oliver's conquests has left behind. I make a face.

It takes me three minutes to find socks, and I struggle to put them on quickly. I inhale deeply and focus on Oliver. I don't want to show up too close. It's risky, but I sense where it's safe to appear. This takes practice, but is a necessary skill or you can end up in a wall.

I pop up in the warehouse, hidden behind a wall with a crack in it. My whole body hurts, as if teleporting was too much, too soon. It smells like rain.

I hear George shouting something to Oliver.

"No, nothing," Oliver replies. "It's just this tape, I guess."

I take a few steps on the wet floor and move so I can look through the opening. There he is. Oliver has his hair tied back now. Even when he's turned away from me, I can tell he's handsome. My mother would scold me and tell me it's because he's a vampire. But it's not his looks that appeal to

me. It's the way he sometimes looks at me for 0.8 seconds when he thinks I'm distracted.

Not that I like him or anything. Not at all. He's just...interesting.

In front of him is a large tape recorder on a wooden table. When Chester and Perrin pass by the crack in the wall, I flinch. George joins them as well as they stare at the large device. A sudden movement causes me to look down. A mouse scurries towards my feet and I clasp my hand in front of my mouth to keep from gasping. It sniffs my socks and scurries off.

One of them must have turned it on, because the large discs are turning. Blayze's voice echoes through the space.

"Hello, people. I'm so glad you guys are taking your sweet time tracking me down. Is Monday there as well? I hope so. If she has succumbed to one of my earlier death traps, then all the better."

"Bastard," Perrin says.

"In case she hasn't, here's a lovely surprise for you all. See, it's rather comical that you want her to catch Travellers."

Chester visibly stiffens.

Oh shit. Shit shit shit. If he can't kill me, he'll out me. Actually very clever. I'll be sacked and have no reason to come after him or his Phoebe. Or so he thinks.

There is nothing I can think of that I can do that will stop this train wreck. I'll just have to deal with it. I don't have the power to stop time right now. At least not long enough to get to that tape recorder and destroy it.

"You see—" Blayze starts, but the recording is cut off with static.

"Let me," Chester says and steps forward to examine the thing. They're all in the way, so I can't see what's actually happening.

Then George sniffs the air and turns to me. I move backwards, nearly knocking over a wooden plank. Before he comes to investigate, I focus on the room I woke up in. I blink and I'm there, back at Oliver's. Pain slams into my head as spots dance right in front of me. I stumble over to the soft bed. At least I'm alive and nobody knows what I can do.

Thank you, Chester.

After the dizziness disappears, I take off my socks, which are very dirty, and kick them under the bed. My muscles feel sore, so I do some light stretching next to the bed until I hear rapid footsteps down the corridor. They sound light. The door flings open and Lovelace runs in. She stops and stares at me, then bursts into tears and dashes towards me.

"Lovelace." I hold out my arms for her and she jumps right into them. I lose my balance and fall on the carpet. Pain spreads throughout my back, but I don't care. I hug her tightly and she hugs me back. After a few minutes my parents walk in. By now I'm in bed with Lovelace as she informs me of all the naughty things Mr Turtleneck has been up to.

"See, right as rain. I knew you would be," my mother says, though the vein in her forehead is throbbing. "Now we can leave this...place." She wrinkles her nose.

Right. She hates vampires.

My dad walks over and kisses my forehead. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I am. Thanks. I'd like to stay and thank Oliver," I say.

"You will do no such thing," my mother says.

"Aren't you coming home with us?" Lovelace asks.

"Yes. I'd just like to thank the person who took care of me. That's all. What's wrong with that?" The latter is addressed to my mother.

"What is wrong with that? He fed on you. His stuck-up assistant told us that. You really want to thank him for nearly killing you?" Her voice was

high. Never a good sign.

“I prefer confident assistant,” Summer says. She’s standing in the doorway, hands folded in front of her.

How long has she been standing there?

My mother turns back to me, ignoring her.

“He did that to save me, so yeah. Look, I’m sure he won’t be long, Mother. How about you guys wait downstairs and have some tea or something. I’ll get changed and join you. As soon as he shows up, we leave.” I smile at her.

“Fine. Fine,” she mutters and holds out her hand for Lovelace, who complies dutifully after giving me another hug.

“I’ll be right down,” I say once more as my dad is the last to close the door. He winks at me.

I don’t think he’s ever cared much about vampires either way. As long as they didn’t try to suck my energy, which Oliver did, but to save me. Now we’ve both saved each other.

I stay in bed until I don’t feel dizzy anymore, then get up to find my clothes in the wardrobe that is otherwise empty. I seriously hope that Summer changed me into my pyjamas. The thought of Oliver seeing my stretch marks makes me uncomfortable, and I don’t like that he has that power over me. Normally, I don’t give a hoot about stretch marks and who sees them. Although, it probably helps that only I see them.

I creep down the broad staircase and pause to admire the oil painting of Oliver. The last time I was here I was distracted by the injection I’d given myself and the impending havoc it would wreak on me. The painting was expertly executed, as if the frame is a window I’m looking through. Any moment he could wink at me, or grin that careless grin of his. I find myself smiling. He looks so...Oliver.

What kind of life has he led so far? Who has he loved? Who has he lost? What is his favourite food? Ugh. Why am I wondering about these silly things? It doesn't matter. It is important I don't forget to keep my guard up. He can potentially ruin me, along with the help of my childhood friend.

The image of the wooden box flashes through my mind and I close my eyes, thinking of my Mr Turtleneck and Lovelace sleeping together. That soothes me enough to ignore the pain in my heart.

My mother's voice drifts towards me. "Saved her? In what world do you save someone by feeding on their life's energy?"

Oh, no. No. No. No.

I rush down the stairs and catch Summer in the broad doorway to the reception area. Undoubtedly, one of many reception areas. I join her and am forced to bear witness to my mother pointing her finger at the mayor of Sheffield while the muscles in her jaw are tensed. Her eyes carry flames that only time can cool, and I hate that the person who has to bear this is Oliver.

I used to dread her anger. Fighting with her was like being buried under a lexical avalanche of hot ashes.

Oliver has his arms behind his straight back and a calm smile on his face. It could have easily been smug, but he pulls it off. I doubt it would be enough to diffuse my mother's wrath.

"I can assure you that I would not have done it if it wasn't for the dire circumstances."

"Honey, he already explained," my dad says.

"I don't care. He could have killed her."

Lovelace is staring at Oliver as if he's the most beautiful thing she's ever seen. He probably is.

“Except I didn’t. I have excellent self-control, and your daughter is extremely strong and talented. I followed the advice of someone I trust and someone who also cares about Monday and it worked.”

“Chester? Why would he care about her?” Mother asks.

That’s my cue. I step forward and hold out my hands. “Mother, please don’t talk to Oliver as if it’s his fault. He saved my life, of that I’m sure.” I also don’t relish the thought of him feeding on me, but he wouldn’t have done that if he had a choice. I don’t know how I know for sure, but I do.

“Are you seriously defending a vampire?” My mother wags her finger at me now.

I feel Oliver stiffen beside me.

“Yes, I am. Because he’s not in the wrong. I’m sure it makes you uncomfortable to know that he fed on me, but he didn’t hurt me. Blayze hurt me. And we both know his intentions are to kill me. So if I’m alive, which I am, then it is thanks to the guys who helped me. That includes Oliver. Now, please apologise for being rude to him, and we’ll get out of his hair.”

My father shifts his weight as my mother’s face turns pale. “You want me to—to apologise?”

“He’s been very hospitable to all of us, and you just accosted him.”

“Fine. I am so terribly sorry that you had to feed on my daughter while she was poisoned to the point of nearly dying. Any inconvenience we caused, I hope is forgiven due to the fact that you at least got a nice meal out of it.” Then she storms off, leaving behind a hint of her subtle flowery perfume.

It is silent for a moment until my dad speaks up. “I’m so sorry, but she was terribly worried about Monday. I hope you’ll forgive her.” Then he steps forward. “Do you care about our Monday?”

“Dad,” I hiss under my breath.

“I do,” Oliver says.

I glance at him, feeling my cheeks grow warm.

My dad studies his face, then breaks into a smile and shakes his hand.

“Good. It was nice meeting you.” He then winks at me conspiratorially and leaves as well. Summer follows him out.

Lovelace is still staring at Oliver.

“Err, I’m so sorry about all of that,” I say and glance at my hands, wishing I’d put some makeup on. Not that my guest room had any lying around.

“Monday, all I care about is that you will forgive me.” He puts his hand on my cheek, which should be on fire now. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad you’re alive, but that is not something I enjoyed doing.” His expression is unreadable.

“I don’t remember it anyway. All I know is that you saved my life. All of you guys did. So thank you. And there’s nothing to forgive. Please remember that.” I smile at him.

He smiles back.

We stare at each other a little too long.

I clear my throat and look away, right at Lovelace and startle at the sight of her. For a moment I forgot she is here. “Err, this is Lo—I mean, this is Alice,” I say, while signing so she can follow our conversation.

“Right. This is your...offspring.” He makes a face as if he smells something bad.

I chuckle. “Children aren’t your thing?”

“It’s a...well, they’re tiny humans. Basically.” He waves at her. “She’s deaf, then?”

“Yeah. She can speak, but she doesn’t do that easily.”

“Tell her it’s nice to meet her.”

I translate.

She signs back.

“What does she say?”

“She asks if that’s your real hair,” I say and bite my lip to keep from smiling.

“I say. How dare you even ask? Of course it’s my real hair,” he says as I translate. “Do you think I’d go to the salon each month if it wasn’t?”

I giggle.

“What? What did she say?”

“She said that if you go to the salon each month, it should look even better.”

He gasps dramatically. “I see where she gets her manners from,” he says to me with a sparkle in his eyes.

“What can I say? She must like you as much as I do.”

He inches closer to me. “I sure hope that’s not true.”

I look down at my hands, feeling my cheeks heat up again. My hands nearly touch his stomach. Without thinking I play with the button on his gilet.

“Thank you,” I murmur. “For saving my life, you know?”

He lifts up my chin with his index finger. “You’re welcome, you know?”

We stare a moment too long again.

A car honks outside. My parents.

I clear my throat and take a step back. “I should go.” Lovelace takes my hand and we walk out together. It takes me effort to walk casually because

my knees are shaking, even though it's silly. I couldn't like a vampire.

Chapter 13

*“When this case is over, I’ll
have to go home. And I’m
not sure I want to go to a world
that has no Monday.” ~ Perrin Hosokawa*



THE DRIVE HOME IS AN awkward and quiet one. My mother is fuming behind the large steering wheel of their Ford Thunderbird, while my dad looks out the window, stealing the occasional glance at my mother.

Lovelace is holding my hand in the back seat and has a smile on her face. She occasionally giggles and then looks at me. She probably has fantasies of me and Oliver running to each other in a meadow.

It will remain a fantasy, though. I can not be with him if it means lying to him about who I am, and telling him is simply not an option. Even if he did start to care about me enough to keep the secret as well, vampires had ancient rules centred around honour and integrity. That includes honesty. If Blayze really wants to out me, Oliver could be forced to appear in front of the High Council, and he would not be able to lie. Not even for me.

In fact, if I am to work for him officially, I’m sure we can’t be together either. Romance for vampires also contains a lot of rules, just like most aspects of their lives. My mother hadn’t known much about it and was never able to teach me anything noteworthy, but back home I briefly befriended a vampire after saving his life from a bunch of thugs who had

followed him down an alley and accused him of feeding on them. Just like there are groupies, there also those who hate vampires.

He told me about a woman he'd fallen in love with, but she was human and there were even more rules pertaining to vampire/human relationships. Since a vampire is immortal, and assuming she or he won't be killed, the human will die before the vampire. In the unlikely event they'd get pregnant—vampires weren't extremely virile—the child would most likely be born human, rather than a vampire. Therefore serious commitments were not to be taken lightly, for the vampire's sake.

In that vampire's case, they were dropped in the wilderness with one tent and no food. The rules are apparently meant to test the commitment. If both are willing to jump through ridiculous hoops, then it is probably the real deal and worth the trouble. In my opinion, vampires are bored.

When we get home, my mother starts working in the garden, vigorously removing weeds that I'm pretty sure are actually plants, but it will calm her down. She has a deep suspicion and dislike of vampires and to be honest, if I were her, I would have reacted the exact same. It doesn't change the fact that I am not her, and Oliver didn't do anything wrong.

My dad goes into his shed, but not before kissing me on my temple and squeezing my shoulder. He knows she'll come around, and I know that too, but it might take several light years and only Oliver has that kind of time.



IT IS WEDNESDAY MORNING and not that busy on the road. I take Lovelace to a toy shop where she can pick out five items. My mother got her plenty of colouring stuff, but she doesn't have any toys whatsoever. She picks out a doll, a teddy bear, a jumping rope, and two barbies that look like warrior princesses. I like her style.

When we get home, I join her in playing with the barbies, even if she takes ten minutes to brush their hair.

“Are you having fun?” I sign.

She puts down the dolls. “Are you going to marry the hair guy?”

“Oliver? No, why do you say that?”

“You like each other,” she says.

“I don’t think he really likes me.” It’s not like I can tell her I’m certain he just sees me as a fun plaything to bed and then move on from.

“Why not?”

I think about this. The staring at other women, the flirty personality. The fact that he’s a vampire. Though they still don’t mean he couldn’t, or wouldn’t, care about me. “I don’t know. I guess I just can’t take any chances.”

“Why not?”

“He can’t know I can do what you can do. My mother told you about this, didn’t she? When I went to work after we first got here?”

Lovelace nods. “She told me a lot.”

“Yeah. She trained me. And one of the first lessons was to trust nobody.” I shake my head. “It doesn’t matter. He doesn’t like me that much anyway.”

“I think he does,” Lovelace signs. “He looks at you like you are his favourite stuffed animal.”

I laugh. “That’s sweet.”

“I had a favourite stuffed animal. My aunt tossed him in a bonfire after she got angry with me.”

I curl my hands into fists. “What?” I ask through clenched teeth, then realise she can’t hear me and instead sign: “I am sorry. You didn’t deserve that. Unfortunately, a lot of bad things happen to people that don’t deserve them. Don’t let it stop you. Keep doing what you want to do, okay? I’ll always fight for you, so don’t be scared to go for what you want.”

Lovelace smiles and my heart lights up.

We continue to play for an hour until we go downstairs, and I make her a sandwich with some crisps. She eats it eagerly, her new teddy bear clutched under her arm.

I look out through the sliding doors and spot my parents arguing. My dad’s hands move swiftly and abruptly, a clear sign. The topic is Oliver, as I could have guessed. I can’t make out my mother’s response because she has her back turned to me, but my dad is defending my ability to judge who is trustworthy and isn’t, and tells her that Oliver genuinely cares about me. He saw it in his eyes when he asked him. My dad’s intuition has always been on point.

It makes me feel like I ate a large rock. If Oliver truly likes me, that only makes it harder. I swallow and push down any feelings I might have for him and decide to act like a professional. After all, I have not just my life to protect, but also Lovelace. Leaving her, involuntarily or not, would break her fragile heart. As it would mine.

I kiss Lovelace’s forehead as she feeds a crisp to her teddy and go into the corridor to phone Chester. It takes a while for him to pick up and when he does, he sounds gruff.

“Hangover?” I say with a smile.

He sighs and the line crackles for a moment as he is probably trying to sit up straight.

I wonder if he still sleeps naked and shake my head at the thought, hoping it tumbles out.

“I wish,” he says. “More like a long and pointless hunt for a certain Traveller.”

“Yeah. Thank you for saving my life. Twice.”

“Twice?” he asks.

I tell him about my brief visit and the tape.

“Yeah, well, you’re lucky I’m such a talented Illusionist. And that I think on my feet. And that I’m intolerably handsome.”

I laugh. “Yeah, I’m immensely grateful for all those things. That goes without saying.”

“Anyway, he’s not gonna quit. You better be careful. He’s switched tactics.”

“I know. It’s time to balance the scales.”

“What does that mean?” he asks.

“Don’t worry about that.”

“Monday.”

“Thank you again. If you ever need anything, anything at all, I’ll have your back. You know that, right?”

He pauses. “Because I saved your life?”

“No. Because you loved me once.” I hang up slowly and keep my hand on the phone a moment as I collect my thoughts. I do have a plan. I’ve been thinking about it ever since I got here, but only as a backup. It’s time to stop chasing him, I’m only going where he wants me to be. So instead, I’ll go where he doesn’t want me to be.



AFTER DINNER, I CALL Saoirse to see how she's doing. It kills me that I can't tell her half of the stuff that's been going on, but it's a relief to hear her chipper voice and have her tell me everything I've been missing. It isn't much, but still. It makes me think about what I really want to do. Part of me has been entertaining the idea of joining Oliver's task force, but after hearing Saoirse, I miss home. Then again, having to hide Lovelace isn't something I look forward to. Could I ever invite her over? Could I give Lovelace a huge makeover and make up some story?

I help my mother clean the kitchen while my dad goes out to his shed again and Lovelace watches TV with her teddy.

"You know you matter most to me, right?" my mother says while scrubbing the pan.

"Yeah, I know." And with that, it is all okay. I clean the counter tops, and when I'm done I give her a kiss on the cheek. She makes tea while I join Lovelace on the sofa and joins us a moment later. Even my dad comes out of his shed after an hour or so, and we all watch a comedy film.

Lovelace snuggles up against me, and my mother smiles at the sight. I wink at her. I'm not going to let Blayze ruin what I have.

Right before Lovelace's bedtime, the doorbell rings. I'm halfway up the stairs with Lovelace when my mother opens the door.

"Perrin," she says sweetly.

Lovelace has reached the top of the stairs. I sign to her that my mother will take her to bed and switch places with my mother, who squeezes my hand as she passes me on the stairs. "Thanks, Mother," I say.

Even in his personal time, he looks like he's at work. He wears the same shirt and wrinkle-free trousers, polished shoes.

"Everything okay?" I ask him.

“Yeah, just looking out for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I just got a call from Chester. He said you have a plan and he thought you might do something stupid.” He holds up his hands when he sees my narrowed eyes. “His words, not mine.”

“Taking the team spirit seriously. Always pegged Chester as someone who would only look after himself.” I sigh. “Come on in.”

I make Perrin some tea, and we sit outside on two wooden chairs while the stars are barely visible above our heads. It’s a cloudy night, but not too cold.

“The guys are actually very nice,” Perrin says as he stares into his large mug. Steam rises from it. “When I first got here, Oliver reached out to me and let me know if I needed anything, he’d help. I thought it was just to be polite, but he actually meant it.”

“Shouldn’t you feel threatened by him?”

“Why?”

“Because he has it out for Travellers. You’re one.”

“I’m a Level 3, not a rogue Traveller. I just want to catch Blayze and then go back home.” He looks sad as he says this.

“There is a reason we have rules, but it’s not always...I don’t know. It’s not always that black and white, you know?”

“Yeah, that’s true. But that’s the price you pay when people screw up.”

I sigh. He is right. This is what I’ve believed while working for the UA as well. Except that sometimes I don’t believe it.

“So,” I start. “What exactly happened in your world with Blayze and Phoebe? And the other Monday?”

His head shoots up, but I bury mine in my mug. I refuse to meet his gaze until he decides to talk. If not, I'll just change the topic and start chatting about how to plant the Corpse Flower.

He shifts in his seat. "Monday was also a Traveller, we worked together. In fact, she was my partner. A great one at that. I fell for her hard, but I never suspected she felt the same. Then one day we made an arrest, but the perp got away and we chased him down. I got hit by a car. She let the perp go and stayed with me. She kissed me all over my face and instructed me not to die." He laughs.

"Well, you followed her order." I smile.

"I did. And then we kept our relationship secret until we knew for sure that it was serious, but I think we already did. We just didn't want to ask for different partners. Anyway, when Blayze and Phoebe started killing people, robbing places, and what else, the entire CU got involved, as well as other departments. During some unsuspected moment, Blayze killed Monday. I'm not sure why. Except that, well, she looks like you."

I swallow. "Yes, I know." How could I even utter the words that Blayze wanted a test run for killing me? This was so unfair. I grab his hand. "I'm so sorry. Really, I am."

"It's not your fault. It's his. It's all his. And we're going to take him down. If it's the last thing I do."

"It won't be the last thing you do. He's not going to hurt anyone any more."

"How can you be so sure?" he asks.

"I'm not. I'm just stubborn, I guess."

"I'm glad we've got help. Normally we don't go after people who create portals without leaving rips. Or even when they do, since it's impossible to track them based on the rip unless they're still there."

"Until now. It won't be easy, but if we can do it with Blayze..."

“That’s probably why Oliver wants to do this as well. Sort of like a test drive,” Perrin says and takes a sip of his chamomile tea. “We’ll probably implement it in my world as well.”

“Probably any parallel universe that has the UA.” Which means that really no Traveller will be safe, and rules will probably become even stricter.

“You don’t have to worry. If you’ve gone this long without blowing your cover, you’ll be fine. Besides, I’ll look out for you.”

I stiffen. “What do you mean?”

He smiles. “Monday was a Traveller, so I kinda figured you were too.”

I say nothing.

“I’ve been watching you before I requested you for this case. I’m the one that got rid of the bomb in your living room.”

My mouth falls open. “What? That was you?”

“Yeah. I couldn’t protect my Monday, but I sure as hell won’t let anything happen to you.” He places his warm hand on mine.

“Thank you,” I say, wanting to add something more meaningful, but find the words elude me.

We sit like that for a long while, until we finish our teas. Then he gets up slowly, and I walk him to the door. He kisses me on my cheek. “Get a good night’s sleep, Monday. Tomorrow we’re going to talk to someone who likes to torture people for fun.”

“Then it’s fitting that she’s about to have a devil of a time.”

Chapter 14

*“We must use time wisely
and forever realise that the time is
always ripe to do right.”*

~ Nelson Mandela



THE DRIVE TO LONDON is a three-hour road trip just for one brief conversation with a sociopath, so I make sure to pack snacks. Perrin shows up at nine in the morning, and we take my car. He doesn't want to Travel there because he wants to play it by the book as much as possible. So instead, it's a long drive to London with a light drizzle and a cloudy sky.

While we are doing this, my mother is taking Lovelace to have her hair cut, so she looks slightly different, and then she's going to enrol her into a school for after the summer. She wants to take the time until then to teach her the basics about her skills. I'd rather teach Lovelace myself, since I know how tough my mother can be, but right now I have no choice.

To keep the drive light, I share the engrossing adventures of Mr Turtleneck. For instance, the times he had to battle a curious bird for his piece of lettuce, fell on his back, or had to race inside because I told him one of the neighbour's foxes was coming. He hates them.

Perrin chuckles. "I once had a pet. Then I realised I don't like animals."

"Oh." Except for the occasional polite chit-chat, we drive on in silence.

London itself is busy, but I've had work conferences here, so I know the quickest way around and it is not by car. We park near an Underground station and take the tube to Big Ben. Right under the large clock, we enter through a secret door that responds to our watches. A desk is placed in the middle of that room, behind which sits a large woman with bright blue eyes and a beauty mark above her lip. She wears a pencil behind her ear and is typing on her typewriter. She doesn't look up, and we wait for a full ten minutes before I can't take it any more and clear my throat.

She looks up. "Names?"

We show our watches and say our names.

She studies our identification and then our faces, without changing her expression. It betrays no emotions. If I am correct that is partly the job description, and partly because she's an automaton. Under the desk there's undoubtedly nothing but cogs. As UA officers we've been trained to give specific responses and any deviation means we're not allowed to enter the prison. The automaton is there so that no vampires can try to manipulate their way inside, or anyone else for that matter. It is incredibly challenging to destroy an automaton. She's basically the first line of defence.

After a moment of silence, she presses a button under her desk and to our left, lift doors slide down into the ground. We enter as the monotone hum accompanies us all the way down to the visitor's area. "Let me do the talking," I say to Perrin.

"With pleasure," he says as his shoulders tense.

We wait ten minutes in an open area with several tables before Phoebe shows up in handcuffs and a grey outfit. We are the only ones apart from five guards in total.

Phoebe is what I expect her to be. She looks pretty, but her eyes are cold and there's a sneer on her lips that she probably couldn't hide if she wanted to. Her blue eyes dart over us, and she takes her time heading over. She's slim and has light-coloured hair.

“Monday Moody,” she says as she sits down. “I thought you were dead. Oh, wait. That was another Monday. Your fiancée, right, Perrin?” She smiles at him.

If he decides to hit her, I will not stop him.

“So, what brings you to my lair?” her rough voice demands.

She’s trying to make it sound like she owns this place, like we are in her territory. That tells me she finds it important to be in control, to have a position of power. Being in prison must be killing her then.

“Your lair, huh? You like it here? I understand. Being Collared must be somewhat of a relief. You don’t have to worry about where to go next, or what to do when you end up at the edge of a volcano or surrounded by dinosaurs.”

She eyes my Chrono watch. “Are you a Level 3 officer as well?”

“I can be your best friend or your worst nightmare, that’s up to you.”

“I like her, Perrin. You must appreciate her a lot more than that drab version you had back home. Still dead, is she?”

I feel the anger coming off him in waves, but he remains surprisingly calm. I would have banged her head against the table by now.

“Just like you will be,” Perrin says. “I mean, your boyfriend keeps trying, but he also keeps failing.”

“He always was a slow learner, but at some point, something’s gotta give. Otherwise you wouldn’t be nervous.”

It is true that visiting her shows we’re running out of options, but she doesn’t know that for sure. This is her way of finding out. “Why would we be nervous? You’re still in here, aren’t you? And I’m still breathing. Almost as if our Blayze doesn’t want me dead.” I smile calmly at her even if I’m nervous on the inside. Reminding her of her fears will make her feel vulnerable.

She cocks her head. “Enlighten me, then. Why are you here? I doubt it’s to see what I look like in grey.”

“I’d just like to see for myself what all the fuss is about.”

“Why? Still have a crush on my man? He told me about you, how you always used to follow him around like a puppy dog.”

He wouldn’t have told her that. He genuinely loved me. Which is probably what bothers her. Deep down, she must be scared he isn’t trying to kill me hard enough. Good. I can use that.

I lean forward. “Quite the other way around. That’s why he was probably so emotional when he visited me the other day.”

Her eyes widen for a brief second. She probably hopes I didn’t notice, but I did. Perrin also looks at me in surprise, but quickly regains his cool composure.

“We reminisced and hugged goodbye. But not before he told me a bit about you.” The next part is tricky. I have to convince her I know enough, but stay vague or risk revealing I know nothing. “He said you were lonely and lost when you first met. A loose canon. Yet, he wanted to give you what you wanted, thinking that if he pleased you, you would love him. I mean, he was just as lonely, wasn’t he? Without me. That much is obvious.”

She scoffs. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.” But the throbbing vein in her forehead tells me I do.

“You want to be admired and loved. You want to be the centre of attention, to do whatever you want and be applauded for it. Unconditional admiration and love. But you don’t get that, do you? People don’t want you.”

“Stop it,” she says through gritted teeth.

I raise my voice slightly. “So instead you want to destroy and hurt people so they’ll feel what you feel inside. Which is a gaping black hole that no

amount of love or admiration can ever fill. Just admit it to yourself already. You're damaged goods." I bang on the table.

"Stop it!" she shouts and reaches for me. One of the guards is at our table within seconds and wrestles her to the ground. He presses his knee on her back as she screams obscenities. The words are quickly muffled until all she does is groan.

Another guard puts his hand on my shoulder. "You guys better leave," he says in a cockney accent.

"Yeah, we better," I say and we follow him to the lift.



"I'VE NEVER SEEN HER that upset before," Perrin says. "This is—no, you are amazing." He munches on a biscuit as I'm driving us back to Sheffield.

"It was nothing," I wave a hand. "I've taken a few psychology courses. She was easy to figure out."

"It is still amazing. The worst insults I've flung at her head were 'bitch'. I'm not very creative, I guess."

"That's okay. Women generally dislike a man who has a wide range of swear words for women at the ready."

He smiles sadly. "I'm not sure if that matters."

"You don't want to get yourself back out there?" I ask, but instantly regret the question when I see him wince.

He mumbles and bites into his biscuit.

“Never mind,” I say. “At least we know a bit about her issues, but I wish we could visit her childhood home or the place she lived at with Blayze before they came to our world.”

He looks up at me. “Well, we could go there. I could take you.”

“I don’t know if we’ll find anything useful.”

“We never looked for the things pertaining to her character. We literally just chased them to your world. We arrested her there, and I stayed on to catch Blayze. He went back in time a few times when he couldn’t save Phoebe, but I was always right there as well. Not that I could do much, she always just died anyway. And you were usually the person who killed her, but the longer ago those timelines were, the more I forget them. They feel like dreams, and most of the time when I try to remember they slip away like sand through my fingers.”

“I know. That’s how Reversals works. Anyway, once we catch Blayze, will you go back home?”

“I’ve been here for three years, but I don’t miss home. Probably because I haven’t allowed myself to. If I go home, that means I have to deal with—what’s not there any more.”

“Wow. Very honest. But you do realise that dealing with your fiancée’s death is actually a good thing? Like, not a happy event, but necessary.”

“Yeah. I know.”



WE ARRIVE AT MY PARENTS’ house around lunchtime, and the kitchen smells like scones. My parents and Lovelace are at the table, stuffing their faces. The scones must still be warm, I realise as my mouth begins to water.

My mother looks up. “Just in time, please join us.” She gets up to fetch a drink for Perrin who walks with her to the fridge.

“What do you think of my hair?” Lovelace asks me when I sit down next to her. She has had it cut into a short bob, just like me. No fringe.

“Wow, that is amazing. You look beautiful.”

She smiles proudly. “Do I look very different now?”

“Different enough,” I say, and hope her aunt never crosses her path again.

“Can I take Mr Turtleneck for a walk in the garden today? I made him a leash.”

I smile, picturing the scene. “Sure, that’s fine, sweetie.”

“Did you make progress today?” Dad asks after he finishes his last scone.

“We’re going to Perrin’s world to check out some stuff belonging to Blayze’s girlfriend. Perrin is taking me after lunch. Perhaps some snooping will tell us more about her. Hopefully we find something we can use against her somehow.” I shrug. “I don’t know. It’s all we can do right now.” Apart from setting some sort of trap, but I’d hate to think of how that will go, considering the fact that Blayze always seems a step ahead of us.

All five of us have a nice lunch with conversations about boring things, which is very welcome since most of my thoughts are dominated by Blayze and rebel Travellers. And Oliver. What? Nothing.

After lunch, we go out into the garden where Perrin takes two minutes to create a portal to his world. He has a bloody nose afterwards and my mother rushes to give him a tissue, having observed the whole thing. She exchanges a glance with me, and I’m pretty sure it’s one that says ‘Aren’t you glad I trained you?’ And I am. Granted, portals to parallel universes take a lot of effort and much more time than a portal to somewhere on this world, but I can do it in under thirty seconds. And when you’re chased by a group of hungry cannibals and you need to get home, not only because you

don't want to get eaten, but because you have a history test the next day, the skill comes in handy.

Perrin is the first to enter the portal, I follow. There's pain and pressure on my insides, and it feels like my head is filled with cotton. When I step out the pressure is immediately gone, making me dizzy. My stomach flips around and nausea sweeps through my upper body. We're in an alley and I run to the brick wall to throw up, but my stomach settles on its own, much to my relief. I can't throw up in front of people twice in one week.

"Are you okay?" he asks, looking green himself. Then he holds up a finger and turns around to hurl, which in turn is making me nauseous again. I gag, but after I cover my ears and think of the seaside and fresh apples, I feel better.

"We're quite the pair, aren't we?" Perrin asks when we've both settled down.

I manage a smile.

"Let's go. We stored all their things in a storage container as required by law, since they are officially fugitives." We emerge from the alley and he points to a grey, dull building with a lot of garage doors. "Those are the containers. I should be able to enter with my ChronoWatch." Perrin leads the way and I follow.

The buildings look the same, the ground looks the same, the few people I see in the distance look the same. It isn't until I look up at the sky and see the two moons that I have confirmation we're not home. Two moons and a... flock of large stingrays that gently sail through the sky. And here I have always been worried about bird poop.

Chapter 15

*“Even the monster under the
bed is afraid of something.”*

~ Monday Moody



PERRIN PRESSES A FEW buttons on the side of the door, after which he shows his identification to a small camera hidden in the keypad. A smooth voice denies us access and then shuts down.

Perrin swears under his breath.

“Could be because you’ve been in another world for over three years?”

He keeps pressing buttons, but the keypad no longer responds.

I hold out my lock pick set.

“I doubt that will work,” he says, but steps aside to let me mess with the keypad. It’s not very advanced. These storage units are old and are usually used to store things that nobody wants. I’m guessing that’s not different in this world.

It takes me three minutes before the door opens upwards, earning me an apologetic smile from Perrin. One of the lessons my mother always taught me was to come prepared. For most girls that might mean they always carry a pad with them once they reach a certain age, for me it meant I started carrying weapons and lock picks.

The inside of the storage unit smells musty and dust tickles my nose, making me sneeze. The dark, small space is cramped with boxes. There is no furniture. They probably sold that.

Perrin pulls a cord and the light flickers on. It is dim, and the corners of the room remain hidden in shadows.

He picks a box at random and opens it up. I start doing the same.

We sort through kitchen utensils and books. Books made from paper. I flip through them and inhale the pages when I'm sure that Perrin isn't looking. They are informative books on all sorts of topics, but also romance books. There is also a pregnancy book. They didn't have a child, otherwise that would have been in the file. So they either lost it, or they were about to try. I can hardly picture either of them pushing a swing, unless that swing is made of barbed wire and their enemies burn in the background.

Between a couple of thick books on steam engines, there is a small notebook. I take it out and flip through it. It's a kind of diary, with all of her thoughts. That will come in handy. I doubt she writes about how she did the dishes. If I can find out more about what makes her tick, then I can use that against her.

I get up and share it with Perrin.

"Excellent. See if you can find more." We both go through two boxes of books, seeing if we can find similar notebooks, but there is only one. Still, it might be enough.

"Do you want to look through all the other boxes?" I ask him, hoping he'll say no as my lower back is throbbing.

"There's a box marked blankets and one marked pillows. I doubt we'll find anything else, other than keepsakes."

"Do you think there could be something she would value enough that we could bribe her?" I wonder out loud.

“She’s hardly the sentimental type.”

“Okay, let’s go then.” I put the small notebook in my inside pocket and we step out. I freeze. As Perrin bumps into me, he follows my gaze and then freezes too.

Did he follow us?

All three of us stare at each other for a brief moment. Blayze has his hands curled into fists and his jaw squared. He makes his move on Perrin. They take turns disappearing, trying to pop up behind the other, until they get sick of it and go for a full frontal attack. Blayze’s blows land harder, but Perrin is quick on his feet. I take out my cards and the folded birds attack Blayze, tipping him off balance.

Perrin sees his chance and dives on top of him. With a smirk, he takes out his cuffs to arrest him, which will act as a temporary Collar. However, Blayze teleports behind me and with his hand firmly over mine thrusts my blade towards my stomach. I struggle as the tip pierces through the soft fabric of my dress. I’m losing strength.

“If only you were a Traveller,” Blayze whispers in my ear.

He doesn’t realise Perrin knows about me, and he’s right. It would be easier to teleport out of his grip. It’s just that the knife would go through Blayze. And damn it, I don’t want to kill him. I kick myself mentally, then twist his arm. Perrin pops up behind us and helps me get the knife away from me. I spin out of Blayze’s grip and kick him in the groin.

He doubles over and my origami birds, having fluttered above us, attack him again. Perrin puts one handcuff on his left wrist as I return the cards to their deck. I’m about to read him his rights when he uses his other hand to stab Perrin in the chest.

“No!” I shout and kick Blayze in the face. He falls back.

Perrin has doubled over and though I hate to do this to him, I yank the dagger out of his chest, turn and plunge the knife in Blayze’s stomach, but

he twists his body and it ends up in his side. He yells out, but is gone the next second.

I'm left with the bloody knife. I hope he bleeds to death, the bastard.

Perrin has collapsed onto the ground. "Perrin." I start hyperventilating. Not useful when you need to save someone's life. Every time I've been in trouble, it was just me. That was easier, somehow.

With trembling hands I create a portal underneath him as I sit on top of him, pressing hard on his wound. There is a sofa in the corner of Chester's office and that's what I aim for. Perrin falls on it with a thud whereas I roll off it with an even louder thud. "Ouch," I groan, stretched out on the wooden floor.

"Monday Moody. Always in trouble—," Chester's voice trails off as he spots all the blood.

It takes Doc three minutes to arrive. I've only met him once, but it was long enough to know that Doc has illegal stuff that can make ouchies go away better than they could in a hospital.

Chester's bouncer, Rich, I believe his name is, and the doctor both carry Perrin into a back room linked to Chester's office where they can work on him. I remain in the office with Chester. My trembling hands are covered in blood, and I look down at them. Then I burst into tears.

Within a few seconds I feel Chester's arms around me. He rocks me back and forth. "There, there. Don't cry," he says softly as he strokes my hair. He does this until I am calm again and then gently nudges me into the armchair in front of his large wooden desk. He gets me a green tea and sits down next to me.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"There's nothing wrong with crying," he says.

“No. Not that. I’m sorry I left you without saying goodbye. You deserved better.”

He exhales slowly. “I did. But you chose your job over a life with a crook. I get that.”

“It didn’t mean you’re not good enough. It’s just that joining the UA has always been important to me.”

“Why? You can’t even be yourself. Not really.”

“I get the reason why there are rules. My mother went on so many adventures as a Level 3 officer, and she gave me those adventures too, as a teen.” I shrug. “She was so hard on me because every single world out there is hard. There is no greener grass. There’s just survive or die. I guess I want something reliable. I wanted to have rules and structure with clear bad guys and good guys. Except, there are never clear bad guys or good guys. There are just people and sometimes they do good things and sometimes they do bad things.”

“Is that what you really want then? Unyielding rules where everyone is a victim?”

“No, I guess I just want to make things slightly better. But I don’t think people really have the power to change things to their liking because everybody has a different idea of what the perfect world would be. And that’s the good thing about being alive. The freedom to be yourself. I mean, there will always be others that judge you, but that’s because they think their view is the best view. If you were to take that away and live according to what another person thinks is right, what do you have?”

“Deep, Monday. But by stopping Blayze you’re still imposing your view that you don’t think people should change the world. Or kill.”

“I know. That’s the problem when there are so many people. It’s inevitable to impose your own ideas of what is right. Personally, I draw the line at murder.”

Chester shakes his head. “Very noble. I don’t think that’s it, though. Not just.”

I turn to him. “Enlighten me, expert of all things Monday Moody.”

“You crave the adventure. You want to use your abilities. You want to be put to the test.” He smiles. “You are just like your mother.”

I gasp. “You take that back.”

He laughs. “What? I like your mother.”

“That’s because you only met her once, and she didn’t realise we were...” I let my voice trail off.

“You’re not blushing are you, Moody?” He leans forward and gently pokes my cheek.

“Shut up,” I say, unable to prevent the corners of my mouth from going up.

When I feel like my legs have stopped shaking, I go to the bathroom to freshen up. When I return Chester continues to take my mind off what’s happening in the other room until Doc emerges. His large moustaches trembles as he speaks and his gloves are bloody. “He’ll live. He lost a lot of blood, but he’ll live. You should keep him here for a while, or better yet, take him to the hospital.”

“We will, as soon he’s ready to be transported,” Chester says. “Unless there is a reason he can’t go to the hospital?” He eyes me.

“No, I just came here because I had to create a portal and because Doc’s the best.” I smile at him. “Thank you so much.”

He nods at me. “I assume you will take care of the payment,” he says to Chester.

I open my mouth to protest but Chester nods at him. Doc leaves.

“I’m sorry. I’ll pay for it if you want.”

“Don’t worry. This one is on me.”

“Thank you. Really.” I sigh. “Now I just have to go home and come up with my next move.” I tell him everything that happened up until now, without crying.

“I’ll go with you to Oliver. We’re a team, remember? Even if it started out of boredom and personal gain for me.”

“Okay, but what about Perrin?”

“My man Tyler will look after him. He’s called a bodyguard for a reason. He’ll look after him until we’re back.”

Right, that’s his name. I was close.

“Fine.” We enter the back room where there’s a large table in the middle and a glass case with lots of vials containing swirling liquid. The blue ones are the ones that keep me from losing my senses when I’ve overexerted myself. There are many things I’m grateful for when it comes to Chester.

Perrin is in the middle of the table, pale and bandaged. Tyler is leaning against the wall and stands up straight when we enter. Chester walks over and quietly discusses Tyler’s new priorities while I go over to Perrin and gently stroke his hair. “Don’t worry. I’ll take care of Blayze, and you just worry about getting better. We’ll get him, I promise.”

In my mind I profusely apologise for getting Perrin into this mess. I should have killed Blayze when I had the chance.

We step back into Chester’s office, and I hold out my hand to him. He looks down at it and grins. “You know, I always get nauseous when teleporting. I think it helps if I have something to hold onto.” He pulls me into a hug and holds on tight.

This is how I remember him. Cocky and sweet. In the blink of an eye, we’re in the hallways of Oliver’s home. He’s probably in the right wing of his mansion, in the work section. I have no idea what it is he does exactly.

When I picture his day-to-day chores, I imagine him sitting at a large table with other vampires, talking about how delicious humans' energies are.

"You can let go now," I say and Chester slowly lets go.

"Okay, follow me. I know what to do to get him to come to us," he says.

"Err, phone his office? Ask one of the maids? I'm sure he has people walking about here. Or, you know, actually walk to the other side of this mansion?"

"Where's the fun in that?" Chester grabs my hand and we run up the broad, winding staircase. He goes straight to the small office Oliver received me in last time and sits down behind his desk.

"Blasphemy," I say. "That chair is probably antique, belonging to his great-grandmother or something. It could be worth thousands of pounds and sat on by great people."

Chester looks down at the chair. "No, it's from IKEA."

I chuckle.

"Now, let's see." He looks under the desk and then leans back in the chair with a huge grin.

"What?"

"I pressed the button. It's like an alarm button. I'm sure he'll be here any second. Or someone will."

"You're mad."

"We're all mad here."

Chapter 16

*“Time is free, but it’s priceless.
You can’t own it, but you can use
it. You can’t keep it, but you can
spend it. Once you’ve lost it, you can
never get it back.” ~ Harvey Mackay*



“WHAT ARE YOU DOING here?” Summer asks. She’s wearing the same black dress as before. Her skin is a bit grey, and she has circles under her eyes. She seems too tired to even look annoyed.

“We came to see Oliver. Is he here?” I stare at her face, wondering if Oliver feeds on her. Which is a stupid question, because of course he does. It is most likely part of the job description. It’s normal.

Yet, I don’t like it.

“Is it important?” she asks, her voice soft.

“Of course. We wouldn’t be here otherwise, love.” Chester spins around in the chair. “Run along and fetch him for us will you? There’s a good lass.”

Summer narrows her eyes at Chester and then leaves, closing the door behind her.

“You’ve made a friend today,” I say dryly.

“Ah, everywhere I go.” Chester gets up and strolls over to the window. He looks out over the large lawn with freshly cut grass and apple trees not far in the distance. This is a beautiful place to live and yet I wonder how much Oliver actually gets to enjoy it. Although, if you live long enough you’ve seen it all and perhaps become blind to the wonders of the world.

The door swings open and Oliver steps in, looking crisp as ever in his expensive burgundy gilet and his hair partly down. His eyes automatically go to me. “Monday. How delightful to see you again.” He walks up to me and kisses my hand, taking his time.

Chester takes a few steps towards us and holds out his hand. “What? You’re not going to do that to me?”

Oliver turns to him. “If you wish,” he says with a twinkle in his eye.

Chester folds his arms in front of his chest and backs away.

“Thought so, my friend. Now, George is on his way. I gather you’ll want him here for this.”

“Does George live here?”

“He does. He’s the former alpha of Sheffield. When he was the alpha he moved in here after we became friends. He never left.”

“Does that mean the current alpha also lives here?” Talk about awkward. The only way someone replaces a living alpha is through a fight. Usually till death.

“No.” Oliver turns his back to me and moves to sit behind his desk, signalling that this is the end of that topic.

Noted.

“So, Perrin got stabbed by Blayze,” I blab.

His eyes widen. “What?”

“He’s at my place now,” Chester says.

“What the hell happened?” Oliver’s voice is lower.

George enters the room and surveys us all. “Did I miss anything?” He takes place next to Oliver’s desk.

“They were just about to tell us how Perrin got stabbed by Blayze,” Oliver says and folds his hands in front of him.

George growls.

I tell them what happened at the storage unit and don’t explicitly mention who created the portal.

“And he managed to create that portal while bleeding?” George asks, eyeing me with as much scepticism as he can probably muster.

“Yes, and then he collapsed on my sofa and got blood all over it,” Chester says while making a face.

“Are you hurt?” Oliver asks with a surprising amount of kindness in his voice.

I shake my head and smile at him. Then I remember my cry fest at Chester’s and cringe. “But I have a plan. First of all, I’ll read this.” I take out Phoebe’s journal. “I think it will only confirm what I already think.”

“Which is?” Oliver asks.

“That she wants to be in the spotlight. She wants power. If we make her think she’s got that, we can use that against her.”

“How so?”

“If we tell her that we need her help catching Blayze in exchange for a bit of freedom and/or publicity, then I think she’ll go for it. Once Blayze sees she doesn’t really care for him, well, we’ve got the upper hand.”

“Or he loses it completely and tries to cause even more damage,” George says.

“More than he is now? We’ve got to at least try,” I say.

“Alright, how about you give that journal to Summer. She’ll make copies so we can all read it. It’s important we’re up to date on our common enemy. That way we can all weigh in on the course of action required. You’re not the only one to come up with plans.” Oliver smirks at me.

“I don’t doubt that at all,” I say.

As if Summer was eavesdropping, she enters the room and holds out her hand. I hand her the notebook.

“Why don’t you relax for now, I can bring you the notebook tomorrow.”

“I’ll wait,” I say. “It’s okay.” I feel like Travelling straight back to Big Ben to chat with Phoebe. I think we can get something out of her, but how to make excuses about a six-hour trip done in twenty minutes? Unless I act on the piece of info on my own, but that’s too risky. If she gives me a location or some way to reach Blayze, it will be too dangerous to go and find him on my own.

“Excellent, how about a stiff drink while we wait?” Chester asks, rubbing his hands together.

“Just give me one minute with Monday, if you please.” Oliver stands up and eyes me.

“Sure,” I say, and watch Chester and George leave. I can swear George lets out a little growl as he passes me, but it’s probably my imagination.

Oliver makes his way over to me. “Do you remember those Travellers that attacked us?”

“How can I forget?”

“We’re questioning them, but we’re not making much headway. Once we catch Blayze, this group that identifies themselves as the Red Roses—I know, I was expecting a cooler name too—will be our next priority. I hope you’ll officially work for me by that time.” He gives me one of his charming smiles.

“I promise I’ll let you know once this case is over. Don’t get your knickers in a twist, okay?” I say with a grin.

He leans in close. “What makes you think I wear underwear?”

“Thanks for that image. Now I have to get a bucket of soap and wash my mind.”

He places a hand on his chest. “Kitten, how you wound me.” Then his face turns serious. “It must have been awful watching Perrin get stabbed. Are you sure you’re okay?”

I shiver at the memory and Oliver rubs my arms. “Anything I can do?” he asks.

“Make the world a better place?”

“I’m trying,” he says. Then he pulls me closer and kisses my forehead. “You’ll be alright. You’re strong.”

“I know. I just don’t always want to be.”

“Then don’t. Anytime you don’t want to be strong, just come to me.”

I search his eyes. He actually means it, I can tell.

Then he slowly leans forward, his lips getting closer to mine. I put my hands on his chest and push him back. His eyes scan my face, assessing me.

“I’ve got to go.”

He nods. “Of course.”

I leave the room and quietly close the door behind me.

Chester raises his eyebrows at me, but I smile to let him know everything's fine. It's not, though. My heart is on fire, and I don't know how to put it out.

We hang around downstairs until Summer finally finds us, handing Chester copies of the notebook's pages, and me the actual notebook. When she leaves, we find a restroom and in the blink of an eye we're back at Chester's office again.

"You start reading while I go check on Perrin. I assume you want to stay close to him," Chester says and fills a glass with whisky. He hands it to me.

"I do, but why are you giving me alcohol, it's like—"

"Just drink it. I won't tell anybody." He disappears into the back room.

I wonder if Perrin is still so pale. He looked so fragile. I down the drink and make a face. The cold liquid burns my throat unpleasantly, but then it warms my stomach. I make myself comfortable in the armchair and start reading the diary. I don't even notice when Chester comes back and starts working at his typewriter until after some time.

I continue reading, placing a few post-its at pages that tell me something significant. So far her focus is on how wonderful she is and how capable. She loves her Travelling abilities and uses it to hurt the people that have somehow wronged her in the past. She's vindictive and at the same time wants everyone to love her and look up to her.

I flip through the pages and place the notebook on the desk when I'm done. It's not a large notebook, and it's not full either. "I've highlighted the most important bits. I was right about her. I think my plan would work."

Chester picks up the notebook while I get up. "While you look through that, I'm going to check on Perrin."

"Sure," Chester says.

Perrin is awake, staring at the ceiling. He turns his head when I enter.

“Monday.”

“Perrin,” I say. On the table closest to him is a needle gun with an emptied vial inside. Chester must have injected him. That would definitely make him feel better. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Chester said I should lie down, but I feel antsy.”

“He’ll probably get you to the hospital soon.” I eye Tyler who stifles a yawn. This must be a boring part of his job. Babysitting an injured man.

“Are you okay?” Perrin asks.

“You’re asking me if I’m okay? Yeah, I’m fine. Just don’t die or anything. I’ll be very angry.”

Perrin smiles.

I stroke his hair again and bend down to kiss his forehead, but as I do, Perrin grabs me and pulls me towards his lips. He kisses me, long and hard. When he lets go, he closes his eyes with a faint smile on his lips. I can’t tell if he’s pretending to be asleep or not.

I stare at him for a good few seconds and then look away, confused. I meet Tyler’s gaze who nods at me as if to say ‘nice’, except it isn’t nice. First I almost get kissed by someone I...and...ugh, since when do things like this happen to me?

When I re-enter Chester’s office he gets up to hand me the notebook. “You should take this and go back to Oliver. I believe your plan is good enough to try. It will take too long to go to London, though. You could either phone Phoebe, or Travel there on your own. Except then it will be difficult to explain how you spoke to her. Unless you lie and tell them she gave you info over the phone.”

“I think I’ll have to do this in person and hope they don’t ask me too much about it.”



PHOEBE LOOKS SMUG AS ever when I enter the visitor's area. We are alone, apart from the guards. She smiles sweetly at me, as if what happened last time never happened at all.

"Where's your boyfriend?" she asks.

"Where's yours?"

She chuckles. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"I would. That's hardly a secret. In fact, loads of people want to find him. Ever since he's gone after me it has created a buzz. Media are curious, neighbours whisper over their hedges. Quite the party starter."

"There will be even more of a buzz when we get out of here. We'll be famous."

"I don't think so. You're not the only Travellers who want freedom. There is more and more focus on a group of rebellious Travellers, trying to make changes through violence. Soon you'll be yesterday's jam. Except of course if there's a new development." I tap my finger against my chin.

"What are you playing at?" she practically purrs. She's interested alright.

"Think about it. You could be famous. People love stories about criminals who become good. It reminds them that their own mistakes can be forgiven and that anybody can change. If you actually were to help us catch Blayze and close one of the hottest cases, then that would make you a celebrity. And celebrities have certain privileges." I shrug. "Just think about it."

"You must be really desperate if you're asking me for help."

"Not desperate. I am presenting you with a second chance, something you may or may not deserve." I get up to leave.

“There is something,” Phoebe says. She taps her fingers on the table as she thinks. “I doubt it will be that easy, but perhaps you can prove your worth.”

“Go on.”

“We used to hang out at a certain spot in the woods, by a stream. We called it our happy place. I’m sure he visits that place now and then. Might be worth checking out.”

I nod. “I appreciate it.”

“Regardless of the outcome, I want toast for breakfast, with bacon. Because I have more tips to share.” She smiles.

She’s starting out small, but she’s already thinking of all the things she can and will ask for. I can practically see the cogs turning, just like the automaton at ground level.

I smile back. “You get what you give, Phoebe.”

Chapter 17

*“I like this Monday. She has
the kind of hunger in her
eyes that I can work
with.” ~ Phoebe Malone*



“I’M SORRY, HE’S OUT on business,” Summer says as she surveys my red wellies. The weather forecast predicted rain. Even if they don’t flatter my flower printed skirt and white top.

I sigh. “What could be more important than capturing Blayze?” I ask.

“Discussions about taxes,” Summer says.

I laugh, but she keeps a straight face. “Not joking?” I ask.

She shakes her head.

“Great.”

“Why don’t you come in and have tea. I’ll fetch George. He said that if you needed anything, George would help.”

It would have been nicer if I could do this with Oliver. After this case I will turn down his job offer and probably never see him again. Even though I like the excitement, it’s too risky when I have to hide my identity and Lovelace’s. Will Oliver miss me? Or will he easily forget me?

I follow her into the living room and sit down on the velvet sofa. The room is adorned with old landscape paintings and some antique vases. "I don't want tea, I just want to get a move on."

"We have scones."

My eyes widen. "Okay, I'll have some tea. Tea is lovely." My mouth waters at the idea of clotted cream and jam resting on a warm scone.

"Excellent," she says and leaves the room. I watch her go with a sting of envy. She's so tall and thin. There's no hint of a tummy anywhere to be seen, unlike with me. Does she exercise? Do they have a gym here? Or is she simply blessed with good genes?

Moments later she arrives with a tray of scones and tea. She is followed by a girl of about twelve years old, if I have to guess. She has dark curly hair and braces. "Hi," she says.

"Hi, I'm Monday. Monday Moody."

"I'm Celeste," she says and comes forward to shake my hand. She looks me over. "I like your outfit."

"Thanks," I say and take off my raincoat, which I forgot to do because I was busy contemplating whether or not to join a gym.

"My dad's coming down to help you," she says, and it's then that I realise she's George's daughter.

"Wonderful," I say and try to sound sincere. He is definitely low on my list of people I'd like to hang out with. Probably even lower than Blayze, since at least Blayze knows my secret already and I don't have to pretend.

"Are you single?" she asks as she sits down opposite of me and grabs a plate with a scone. Summer has disappeared again.

I nearly choke on my tea. It takes me a moment to catch my breath. "Yes, I'm single."

She smiles. "So is my dad."

Oh, boy. Luckily, before I can reply, George strides in. He takes a look at his daughter and then at me. "I hope Celeste isn't bothering you. I told her she should spend her break outside. She's home-schooled. Emphasis on 'school,'" he says while glaring at her.

"It's going to rain soon," I say to him and wink at Celeste.

She beams at me. "Plus, there are scones, Dad. Scones."

Oh, I like this girl.

"You can't deny a girl scones, George," I say. "They are a quintessential part of every day."

Celeste giggles.

"I see you girls get along, then," George says and sits down next to me.

"She's single," blurts out Celeste.

I feel my cheeks warm.

George shifts in his seat. "And why would that concern me?"

"Because you could go on a date together."

I burst out laughing and quickly pretend to cough when George glares at me.

"Thank you for your concern, love, but we're both fine. Aren't we?"

I nod. "So fine. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that we'd probably be blissfully happy not to be dating."

"But how do you know?" Celeste asks, her voice getting shrill.

“Good question,” I say and look pleadingly at George. This is worse than the time that my mother invited the postman in after he got divorced.

“Dad, don’t you think Monday is pretty?”

George’s cheeks turn red for a brief moment. He squirms in his seat again and wrings his hands. “I—well, she’s—you know, it doesn’t matter.”

“What your dad is saying so eloquently is that we will go out together.” Not a lie.

Her eyes widen, and she smiles so broadly that her braces nearly blind me. George looks horror-stricken. I don’t blame him.

“In fact, we’re going right now. That’s why I stopped by. Just don’t get your hopes up. If afterwards we decide we don’t like each other, then that’s it. We’ll just be friends instead. Okay?”

She nods vigorously. “But wait, Dad, you don’t have any flowers. If you’re going on a date, you need flowers. I’ll get some from the garden, wait here.”

George tries to protest but she runs off. He then glares at me. “What are you playing at?”

“Oh, George. Always such a ray of sunshine in my dreary life. She’s not going to pick out a wedding dress for me just yet. She just wants to try and make you happy. She loves you. If we show her that despite her best efforts things don’t always work out, she’ll be fine. Let her have this tiny win.”

He leans back on the sofa. “Fine. Where are we going?”

“Hmm?”

“On this date then?”

I chuckle, but his expression doesn’t change. “It’s not really a date, though. I mean, we’re both going somewhere and we’ll have to bring snacks, but other than that, there will be no romance of any kind.”

“I don’t know,” George says. “I don’t want to lie to my daughter. Besides, it’s not the worst thing in the world if we got to know each other.”

Suspicious George should be his new nickname.

“It’s not a lie. I never used the word ‘date.’”

He thinks about this. “That’s true. Where exactly are we going?”

“I’ve got a clue about where Phoebe and Blayze usually went to get away from it all. It’s in the Ecclesall woods. We’d have to stake it out. It’s near a river. There’s a small cabin.”

“How long could this take?”

“I don’t think it will take long. In fact, I think Blayze is staying there. Think about it, it would be perfect. He wouldn’t have to watch over his shoulder, and he’ll be nice and alone with plenty of time to keep plotting my demise. But we can’t be sure he’ll be there at that exact moment, so we should bring snacks.”

“And we can get to know each other,” he says without smiling.

I sigh. “Yeah, I so look forward to that. I’m about to pee myself.”

“Please, don’t. That sofa is nice and so is that skirt.”

“Oh, my goodness. Did you just compliment me?”

“No. I complimented your skirt,” he says.

Hurried footsteps approach and Celeste flies into the room holding a bouquet of wild flowers. She’s tied a ribbon around the stems and presents it to George. “You have to give it to her and tell her she looks pretty,” she whispers.

Oh boy.

George gets up and takes the flowers. “Okay, Monday. Let’s go. Here.” He presses the flowers into my hands. They are actually quite beautiful. I wink at Celeste. “Thank you, George.”

“Say she looks pretty,” Celeste says and nudges her father.

“You look...pretty,” he says through gritted teeth.

Wow, he really does not like me. This will be fun.

“Oh, George, you’re the sweetest,” I say and lean forward to kiss him on the cheek.

Celeste lets out a squeal and George blushes.

“Let’s go,” I say and head out to my car just as the rain starts pelting down.



WE TRAIL THROUGH THE woods as the rain continues on. I pull the hood of my raincoat over my head, but George isn’t bothered. His woollen coat is getting soaked, just like his hair, but he’s focussed on the smells in the air.

“What do you smell?” I ask.

“I smell sage, burning sage.”

“That’s weird,” I say.

“Not really. It’s what rogue werewolves use to hide their scent.”

“Oh, oh.”

“Exactly. So stay behind me and do exactly as I say if anything happens.”

I swallow. I've encountered werewolves before, but even when using my skills it was difficult when they operated in packs. "Okay," I say.

We follow the stream of water until we see a small cabin in the distance. "There," I whisper and pull George behind a tree.

"If there are werewolves, there is no point in whispering. They'll have smelt and heard us by now." He turns around and checks out the cabin. "I don't see anyone, nor do I smell anyone due to that sage. It's stronger here. Could Blayze be working with werewolves, you think?"

"It would be smart. The bomb maker was hanging out with vampires, it could be that that's why he chose him. I don't know." I take off my backpack. "If there are werewolves here, I assume we're not staying long."

"No. We'll check out the cabin and then decide what we do." He walks out from behind the tree and then stops. I bump into him.

"Why did you—" I shriek and drop my bag. Before us is a naked man. A very naked man. I take off my hood and open my coat so that if needed, I can take out my cards.

George and the man just stare at each other.

After a full minute I can't take it any more and open my mouth to say something, when George says: "Run, Monday. Now."

I walk backwards and then turn to run. I don't get far. From the corner of my eye, I see movement on both sides and whirl around. I look back at two humanoid wolves. Two monsters with sharp teeth and even sharper claws. I can't tell which one is George. They snarl as they fight.

Shit.

George can surely handle one of them. Perhaps even two, but so far I count three heading for them. They are blurs, zigzagging through the trees. I take out my cards and run back towards them, but only make it two steps before there's a sharp pain in my leg. I fall forward and turn on my back. A

werewolf stands behind me. His large snout is dripping with saliva and his left claw is covered in blood. My leg is bleeding.

“Damn,” I say, blinking away the tears of pain. I flick out the cards, but he moves forward to swipe at my neck. In the blink of an eye I’m at his side, my dagger in hand. I jam it in his side. The origami birds swarm around him and work him to the ground. His wounds don’t have time to heal, except the one in his side.

I only get one shot, and I have to be quick. I stab him in the face with the blade. He transforms into his human form, albeit lifeless, and I gather the cards again. Then I flick them out towards George and the pack of wolves that are circling him. He is the biggest of them all. Occasionally one of them swipes at him, but they can also sense his strength. He wasn’t an alpha for nothing.

I take my needle gun, and this time use a red vial. I inject it in my leg. It numbs the pain instantly. It’s risky because I might not notice any new injuries and could easily bleed out. I’ll have to be careful and quick. I run towards them. They are attacked by the origami birds and George is now in a vicious fight with one of them. They swipe and bite at each other and are so quick that it’s impressive and terrifying at the same time.

The adrenaline is making me tremble, no amount of skill can stop that reaction, but I will have to work with it. While George is distracted I have to take out at least one of them. I pop out behind one of the werewolves that is taking a go at George from behind, despite the origami birds repeatedly attacking him. They manage to keep the werewolves wounded, but they heal so fast that the wounds are shallower than I’d like.

I grab his tail and cut it off with one fell swoop. He howls in pain and turns with a swipe of its claw. I dodge it, but it still grazes my chest. It doesn’t hurt at all and costs me no reaction time. I thrust the blade up and pushes it through its chin. The light in his eyes go out, and he turns human again.

I yank the blade back, and see the next one coming just in time. I hold up my arm and instead of my head, he bites my forearm. He works me to the ground, and I wait until I have the right angle to stab him in the head. The

cards return to me again; the difference they make is too small. Three down, one to go.

George and the other werewolf are making awful noises, as if they're ripping each other apart. I pant as I follow the fight, making sure George doesn't lose. That would be an awful date indeed.

George gets the upper hand and has his teeth in the other werewolf's neck. He pushes him to the ground and then gets up to claw at him. He's got his arm up in the air when out of nowhere another werewolf dives on top of him. George yelps as the werewolf bites his neck.

The other werewolf is about to get up again, so I teleport behind him and thrust the blade into his head. Then I charge at them both like a bull and knock the other werewolf off George by throwing my entire weight and my dagger into him. We tip over, but I roll off him, my dagger still stuck in his body. The werewolf is up in a flash and snarls at me. He yanks the dagger out and throws it away. He's large and pissed off.

George gets up as well. I can't teleport now or George will see it. He better hurry up or I'm dog food.

"Any chance we can hash this out over a cup of tea? Some scones?" I say as the rain continues to pour down.

He grabs my leg and pulls me towards him, but George grabs him, pushing his claws into him and throws him against a tree. Then he drags him away and disappears down towards the small stream of water and I can't see them from here. I look down at my body. There's blood everywhere. I can't make out where the wounds are. Also, my outfit is ruined. Bummer. I like this skirt.

I lie down on the ground, listening to the awful growling until there is a sad howl that cuts right through my soul, and then there's nothing but the sound of rain and my breathing. Someone approaches me and I try to get up. As soon as I see a naked George I let myself fall back again. I still don't feel pain, but it's already wearing off. There is a dull throbbing coming on.

“Monday,” he says.

“You’re naked,” I say and chuckle. “I’ve seen you naked.” The second sign that it’s wearing off. It’s like being drunk.

“Monday, you’re bleeding. I’ve got to get you back to the mansion. We’ve got someone who can work miracles.”

“So does Chester. Did you know I used to date Chester? He was my first real boyfriend. It was a secret. Not even my parents knew,” I say as George lifts me into his arms.

“My mother hates vampires. She probably hates werewolves too.”

“It’s going to be okay, Monday.”

The car ride is unpleasant as the vial has officially worn off and I’m groaning with pain. George has put a blanket around me tightly, but I doubt it helps much. “Oh, my dagger. I need my dagger.”

“Don’t worry about that. Just stay calm. You’ll be fine. Try to keep your heart rate low.” His knuckles are white on the steering wheel.

“I’m trying,” I say. “At least you’re okay. They didn’t get you. That’s go—” my voice trails off as a darkness pulls me away.

“Monday? Monday!”

Chapter 18

*“Time and health are two precious
assets that we don’t recognise and appreciate
until they have been depleted.” ~ Denis Waitley*



THERE IS A LOUD CLATTERING and someone swears under their breath. My eyelids flutter open, and it takes me a moment to adjust to the fluorescent lights. It smells like chlorine. I try to sit up, but it hurts. “Ouch,” I say, but try again.

“No, no, no,” a female voice says. A chubby woman with a round face scuttles over to me. She’s wearing a long white coat and has pink lips. “Don’t move. You need your rest and the wounds need time to heal.”

“I’m kind of busy,” I say.

She chuckles. “Aren’t we all? But your body is important. You should take care of it.”

I mumble something incoherent.

“What’s that, dear?”

“I’m hungry,” I say.

“Excellent. That’s a good sign. I’ll make sure you get something, and I’ll tell the others you’re awake. I’m Dee, by the way. And I saved your life. You’re welcome.” She turns on her heels and walks off.

I'm not sure I like her. But that will change once she brings me food. Despite her order, I sit up straight and check out the bandaging around my forearm. They put me in some sort of grey gown. I doubt it's flattering, but neither is nearly dying. If only I didn't have to lie about what I can do. What if George had gotten seriously hurt? It would have been my fault. Just like with Perrin.

"Good evening, Sleeping Beauty," a familiar voice says.

Oliver is leaning against another bed. This room has six beds in total and is basically a mini hospital, which leads me to believe they do far more dangerous things than pushing paper and suffering paper cuts.

"No 'Kitten'?" I ask.

"How are you feeling, Kitten? Is that better?" he says with a smirk and saunters over to my bed, his hands in his pockets.

I smile. "Is George okay?"

"He is worried about you, but yes, he's fine."

"He's really worried about me? I thought he didn't like me," I say.

"You saving his life might have made him like you a bit more." He brushes his fingers over my cheeks.

"Did you call my parents again?" I ask.

"You missed dinner so they called here, and I told them. They are on their way."

I sigh. "I must worry them a lot."

"I think they know how strong you are. Give yourself some credit. Besides, your mother was a force to be reckoned with as well back in the day. Still, actually." He smiles.

"Yeah. Wait, you've met her before?"

“Our paths have occasionally crossed in formal settings,” he says, not really painting a clear picture for me.

My eyes widen. “You haven’t—like...” I can’t finish the sentence.

Oliver laughs. “No, don’t worry. I never made a pass at your mother. Though I can’t promise that I’ve never made a pass at one of your ancestors. I am a big flirt.”

I chuckle. “I’ve noticed. You’ve never had a family?”

His eyes darken for a second, and he looks away.

“I’ll take that as a yes. Sorry I asked.” I stare at my hands.

“It’s alright. Did you know that most vampires, if they manage to conceive, bear human children?”

“Yes. Female vampires can’t have kids and if a female human carries a vampire, she usually dies before the first trimester is over.”

“Exactly. But I had two very human children with a human woman. Which in a sense is a blessing, except that...” his voice trails off.

“You have to watch them die,” I whisper.

“Ah, well. That’s life,” he says casually, but still looks miserable.

I take his hand and squeeze it. “It is, but that doesn’t make it any less sad. I’m sorry.”

“You’re very sweet, Monday.” He leans forward as if to kiss me on the lips, then stops and studies my face. He’s probably come to the conclusion that I look as awful as I feel. Irregardless, I can’t help but lean forward a little. Instead, he kisses my forehead.

Ouch.

“Since your parents are coming, I’ll get the bed rolled out to the reception room. That way it’s not so depressing,” Oliver says and wrinkles his nose at the room.

“I’d love that.”

By the time my parents and Lovelace are here, we are all situated in the reception room. There is tea, scones, biscuits and even soup, though so far only the tea and biscuits have been touched. Even Lovelace isn’t eyeing the scones. She’s sitting on the carpet with Celeste, playing with two dolls and a small doll house. Even if they can’t communicate with ease, they get along just fine and sometimes giggle.

Both my parents are actually making conversation with Oliver, which is a miracle in itself. George keeps quiet as he follows everything, occasionally glancing over at me. They’ve put me near the fireplace and I’ve had tea and toast, and some painkillers. All of which combined makes me drowsy. And happy.

My parents are convinced that I’m in good hands and around midnight they finally go home. By that time, Lovelace is asleep and my dad carries her out without waking her. George checks on me before he takes Celeste up. She is already begging him to see Lovelace soon, and I hear the mumbling of affirmative sounds as they disappear into the corridor.

Oliver sits down on my bed and smiles at me. “Looks like we’re having a sleepover. Again.”

“Don’t let it go to your head.”

“Ah, yes. You said it was already perfect.” He pinches his own cheek.

“I said no such thing. I did imply that the size suited the rest of your body.”

He makes a doubtful face. “Oh, but you haven’t seen the rest of my body and you certainly haven’t seen the size of anything.”

I don’t want to, but I laugh.

He beams. "I made you laugh, good."

"Not really, it kind of hurts."

"Sorry," he says, but remains smiling.

I close my eyes for a second and when I open them again I'm unsure if I've slept. Oliver is still there, looking at me.

"Have you heard from that group of rebels?" I ask him, rubbing my eyes.

"Yes, they sent a letter to my typewriter. In it was information that they weren't supposed to know."

I raise my eyebrow. "Such as?"

"That doesn't matter. What matters is that there are moles."

I don't know if it's the painkillers or my sleepy head, but I say: "You can ask my dad for help, he has this spray that you use on the soil."

Oliver smiles. "Not that kind of mole, my dear. I wish it were that kind of mole. It means that there are rogue Travellers working for me."

My heart rate goes up. "Really?"

"It could be anyone close to me. I'm looking into it, though progress is slow. What's the matter, you're a bit pale?"

I swallow. "I need some sugar, I think."

He gets me a left-over scone. It is still delicious, I discover as I take a bite. "Hmm."

"You really like scones, huh?" He grins.

"Oh, yeah. They're the way to my heart. If you keep feeding me scones, I might have to marry you. Mind you, I'll definitely get bigger." I moan again as I take another bite.

“If you keep making those noises, I’ll get bigger too.”

I frown. “What?”

“What?” says Oliver. “Anyway, tell me something about yourself.”

“I don’t think I like werewolves very much. Apart from George and Celeste. They are nice. How exactly did you become friends?”

“Our paths crossed once or twice, but we didn’t become friends until he married a good friend of mine. Celeste’s mother. She was a CU Level 1 officer like you.”

My eyes widen. “No kidding.”

“She died when an arrest went south. Soon after, the rebel group made itself known. George has been eager to help ever since, as you may understand. They’ve lived here for a while now. Celeste is home-schooled. She’s also a bit bored, I think. Ever since her mother died, George didn’t want to stay alpha anymore or work for the K-9. He was very depressed. He’s part of a pack with two other werewolves who have families, so he hardly sees them and that’s the way he likes it.” Oliver sighs.

“In a way, I understand Blayze. I get the desire to want to bring someone back and wanting to fight for them. Of course, he’s going about it the wrong way, killing innocent people and all. But still, I get it. He was very lonely as a kid. I was his only friend. We all want to find our ‘pack’ and when we find them, we want to stay with them as long as possible. I don’t like Phoebe one bit, and I don’t believe she cares for him, but she was his home and he’s trying to get back to her.” Aren’t we all trying to get home?

Oliver touches my cheek. “You are a very kind woman, Monday. But Blayze Caden doesn’t deserve your empathy. He made his choice and these are the consequences. We must all live with our own choices, regardless of intentions.”

“Right,” I say in a small voice.

“Don’t be too kind, Monday. The world is filled with hungry wolves. You don’t want to be the hare.”

I’d rather think I’m the fox. A wave of fatigue sweeps over me and I yawn.

He gets up. “I’ll let you rest. Do you want the bed moved or stay here? I’ll keep the fire burning.”

“Okay. I’ll stay here, then.”

Oliver says something, but I fall asleep and dream of hungry wolves.



THE NEXT DAY I FEEL slightly better. Oliver has scheduled his day so that he works mostly at night and therefore has the time to look after me, as well as invite my parents and Lovelace over for lunch. My mother brings me a bag with my clothes, at least until I feel good enough to be brought back home. She also brings me an extra dagger and sticks it under my pillow. Always be prepared.

Without Perrin and I, who will do all the Level 1 stuff? Perhaps Oliver has arranged something. I don’t want to think about it. It hurts my head when I do.

Lovelace spends time cuddling me. She even gives me a band-aid with fish on it since she knows I’m hurt. The wounds are already bandaged, so I point at my face and she sticks it on my forehead. As soon as Celeste comes down for a break, they go play outside. George also shows up and is sucked into small talk, which he is not very good at.

“What do you do, George?” my mother asks.

“This and that.” He clears his throat.

“Ah. Well, your daughter is lovely.”

“Thank you.”

“Is she doing well at school?”

“Yes.”

“The weather is lovely today.”

“Is it?”

I’ve had better conversations with Mr Turtleneck.

After two hours they go on their way and take a reluctant Lovelace with them. I promise her I’ll be home soon and that I’m already feeling better. It takes some convincing, but then she leaves. I miss her already, but at the thought of going for a drive, I scrunch up my face. I fall asleep again, and wake when the bell rings around dinner time. Summer has given me my watch so I can track time.

Voices drift my way and Perrin walks into the room.

“Perrin, hi,” I say with a smile. He is followed by Oliver, who must have been here again. He shows up at random moments, but I lose track of when and how long since I keep falling asleep. The visit from my parents was welcome, but it tired me out.

We hug and Oliver takes place at the end of the room. It’s very large so it’s not like he’s hovering, but I know he has good hearing. Perrin must know too, but he seems undeterred.

He gives me a bunch of poppies and then a small vial. It looks like something that came from Chester, except the vial is extremely pretty, with silver swirls around the top and bottom. It looks old.

“Chester said to give you this, it will help you heal. It helped me tremendously. I still have to wear this sling, but it feels so much better.”

He does look better. He's regained the colour in his cheeks and smiles down at me.

"I'm so glad you're okay."

"Are you kidding? I'm so relieved you are alright. First you survive vampires, now werewolves. I'm very glad." He smiles at me a little too sweetly.

Why does Oliver have to be here?

I take the vial and down it. Its warmth spreads out throughout my body and it tingles. "Thanks," I say.

"Of course." He looks down at his hands. "Listen, about our kiss," he starts, and at the back of the room Oliver spits out his tea.

I press my lips together.

"I thought I was dying. But I don't regret it. I was wondering, when you feel better—" his voice is cut off when Oliver shows up by his side.

"I just forgot, I have important company coming over, so you can't be here right now." He ushers Perrin out of the room. "Terribly important and you can't be here." He mumbles on while Perrin is trying to protest. The door slams a moment later.

When Oliver returns, he looks rather smug.

"Really, Oliver. You must learn to behave."

"I behaved perfectly fine," he says, jutting out his chin defiantly.

"You were rude."

"I'm as polite as a raccoon."

"Oh no. Don't tell me you're just like my mother. Only instead of sayings, you mix up your similes."

“I don’t mix up anything, especially cats.”

“Cats?”

“Siamese.”

I shake my head. “That’s not what I said.”

“What did you say then?”

“That you should mind your own business. We’re friends.”

“We are? Hmm. I suppose that’s good enough. For now.”

“I mean Perrin and I. And yes, us too. So be nice.”

“But not too nice,” he says.

“No, not too nice.” I have to remember that if I am a fox, I’m a hunted one.

Chapter 19

*“She may not realise it yet,
but she needs me. And I need
her.” ~ Wynter*



A WEEK GRADUALLY PASSES and by the end of it, I feel like my usual self. My wounds are shallow now and there is no more pain except for when I wash my hair in the shower. I've spent most of the time thinking of the next potential move and occasionally watch my mother train Lovelace. She is doing much better than I did at her age. My mother says she's a natural.

On Friday evening the Powells come to visit. They are old friends of my parents and are quite generally a hoot to hang out with. My mother has told them I've adopted Lovelace before they show up, to avoid too many questions. They are delighted and bring her a whole bag of all kinds of different toys. Lovelace picks the robot dog and starts playing with it in the living room while we gather in the kitchen and share appetisers before dinner.

Despite the years of friendship, I still refer to Mr and Mrs Powell by their last names, out of pure respect. Mr Powell is an inventor and has collaborated with my dad on some occasions. For my eleventh birthday he made me an automated hairbrush, which overheated and blew up three months later. Luckily, I was just leaving my room as it happened. Mr Powell made it up to me by buying me a kitten. I've been grateful to him

ever since. Puddles is dead by now, but he was a wonderful companion to me all those years.

Mrs Powell is an expert gardener. She has a lush garden with a small pond. She once hinted at the fact that her garden has fairies, so anytime we visited them I searched for them feverishly. I never found them. Part of me still resents her for giving me such false hope.

“I’m working on a new project, Monday,” Mr Powell starts as he admires the slices of tomato and mozzarella. “I’ve no name for it, mind you, but perhaps you can help with that.”

“What does it do?” I ask, curiosity rising. Despite the tragic ending of the HairBrush2000, I thought it was pretty damn cool.

“It’s a cutting board with a hole in it, then below the hole is a tube you stick outside your window, leading to a cup. That way birds can eat the crumbs. I’ve also got a broad belt that you can fill up with boiling water. It’s basically a hot water bottle. That one I’ve called the Hot Belt.”

“I see.” I contemplate what kind of name would befit a cutting board that would contribute to feeding birds.

“Bird Board,” Mr Powell suddenly says as he snaps his stubby fingers. “Thank you, Monday.” He pats my head as he did when I was a child.

“I didn’t do anything, but you’re welcome. Didn’t you recently sell one of your inventions?”

“Yes, I read that too,” my mother says.

“I most certainly did, indeed. I sold the MoreBell, which is more than just a doorbell.” He laughs while his wife shakes her head. She’s probably heard this a thousand times over.

“I’ve made several designs,” he continues. “A doorbell which is basically a large red self-destruct button, one that is a few piano keys that can all be pressed, creating different sounds. Let’s see, there’s the small gun of which

you can pull the trigger and then a shot sounds, quite fun. There's the cord you can pull for the whistle of a steam train, and many more." He laughs again. "Actually, I've created that self-destruct button with you in mind, Pip. It briefly flashes red in every room in the house, perfect for deaf people. I can have one installed for you with a huge discount, if you like."

"I'll think about it," my dad says, but I already catch the gleam in his eyes.

"I keep urging him to make slippers with a light since he always knocks into every piece of furniture on the way to the bathroom," Mrs Powell says, her slight accent betraying her Birmingham roots.

"Pish," he says, waving his arm. "I'm not so old that I need that. I'm sixty. Young as a baby chick, with the eyes of a hawk."

We move into the living room as my mother tells them of my recent adventures, embellishing the attack of the werewolves and the way I took out the vampires. Soon thereafter, my dad takes Mr Powell to his shed and my mother and Mrs Powell gossip about acquaintances they share.

I join Lovelace in playing with the robot and am ashamed to admit that I do eavesdrop on all the gossip. Most of these people I know as well. Like Susan B. who once pulled my hair and is now getting divorced for the third time. Or Melanie K. who ate dirt and grass, but who now owns a four star restaurant. I bet all of them would be surprised to know the truth about me. Not just my abilities, but what my job entails, and that I am taking care of Lovelace. Or maybe they wouldn't be surprised since I always got into fights with bullies.

Dinner is pleasant and uneventful, for which I am grateful after these lively past few days with blood and the looming of death. After I put Lovelace to bed, we share one drink before the Powells leave. As we say goodbye in the corridor, Mr Powell presses something into my hand. "This is for you," he whispers. "I'm sure you can use it on your enemies." It feels and looks like a pen, but I wait until after they've left to go up to my room and check it out.

“It just looks like a regular pen,” I mutter as I stare at the black pen. I hold it out towards my bed and click it. Out shoots a dart and there’s a flash of electricity. “Lovely,” I say with a grin and that night I dream of electrocuting Blayze as he’s choking me. I win the fight, but I still wake up by falling out my bed, sweating. My mother said the nightmares would hold up for a while. There are no shortcuts when your mind is processing things.

I am not the only one having nightmares. Nearly every night, Lovelace crawls into my bed after waking up screaming. She keeps dreaming I die, and it takes me half an hour to calm her down enough for her to fall asleep again. I hate that I have to put her through that, or rather, I hate Blayze for that.

The next day I take Lovelace to one of my favourite parallel worlds as a kid. My mother didn’t just send me to the terrible ones to test my survival skills. We dress as if we’re going camping, with baggy trousers and laced boots. I wear an empty backpack, which I know we’re going to fill up while we’re there. Lovelace knows very little about where we’re going, just that it’s fun and we’re going to eat lots of food.

I create the portal while my mother waves a casual goodbye from the kitchen as she’s sipping on herbal tea, wishing it were coffee.

We go through it and I close the portal, managing to keep from throwing up. Lovelace is even stronger than I am and just blinks at me. The world, on the surface, looks normal. We’re in the woods, surrounded by oak trees and pink flowers that are strewn across the dirt path. Except that if you look closer, it doesn’t look like it should.

“Do you see it?” I ask Lovelace after I tap her on the shoulder to get her attention.

“No.”

I walk towards one of the trees and snap off a branch. I hold it up to her and then take a bite.

She stares at me.

“Yummy. Tastes like chocolate,” I sign with difficulty since I’m still holding the branch. She rushes over to me and I hand it to her. She sniffs it carefully but after my reassuring smile, she takes a tentative bite. Her eyes widen again. She eats the whole thing and starts looking around at the flowers, at the ground.

I pluck a flower and eat it as I saunter along the path.

She follows me, taking a bite of everything. The ground tastes like cocoa butter and almonds, while the flowers taste like chai tea for some reason. We keep walking until we reach a cabin with a rocking chair and yellow daisies out front.

“I hope you still have room for more,” I sign and we enter the small gate. It is easier to step over it, but I do the civil thing.

The small cottage doesn’t have a door. We go inside and our eyes have to adjust to the lack of light due to the trees covering the small windows. A few candles are burning and Lovelace is eyeing them warily. Even they can be eaten, apart from the flames, of course. The second Freya steps inside, Lovelace hides behind me. The woman is long and thin like a needle and her hair looks like threads of wool. Her real name is Io_395xMiw{p but not something we can pronounce.

“Welcome, Moody Monday,” she says.

That is the way she always pronounces names, and I’m not fond of it.

She stares intently at Lovelace and as I’m about to introduce them, Lovelace signs back at her. “Thank you. I like your home. But it’s very dark. Don’t you get lonely?”

Freya stares at her.

After a moment, Lovelace smiles and nods.

Okay, I did not know that Freya had this kind of trick up her sleeve. She motions for us to sit down at the dingy table with the red cloth draped over

it. If I recall correctly, it tastes like a mixture of raspberry and strawberry sweets. I rip off a piece and share it with Lovelace while Freya grabs tea. It is as if she was expecting us, or she just always has tea ready. The few times I've visited, there was always tea.

I look down at the cloth again, and the pieces have regrown. Something this world needs, since all creatures have a horribly fast metabolism and still look like they're starving, despite their overeating. Once the people grow older, their metabolism slows down a little and they eat until they explode, literally. From their exploded bodies grow new lives that usually look exactly like them and carry their memories.

Lovelace takes a nibble at everything within her reach, realising it would be rude to get up and start chewing everything, but I know that's what she really wants to do because that's what I wanted to do when I visited here for the first time. This parallel universe was one of the first ones I visited with my mother. I have fond memories of the woman we named Freya and her woollen hair that tastes like cotton candy.

When we've finished the tea and whatever conversation they're having, neither of them have involved me in in, we leave to go to the well at the back of the house. She lets Lovelace lower the bucket in the well and then bring it back up, like she did with me. The well gives you what ever it wants to give you, from whatever world. For me, the first time it was my dagger, though it terrified me at the time. The second time, years later, it was Mr Turtleneck the baby turtle.

My mother was happier when I got the dagger.

I need to help her reach the bucket and hold it so she can reach in. She takes out a small, crescent-shaped device. We both take a moment to study it. "I'll ask the Tinkerers from the UA. They'll figure out what it does," I sign and Lovelace puts it in her pocket.

We fill the bag with lots of items that we can eat later. I pick the ones that are actually delicious. For instance, towels and paintings taste horrible for some reason. Ladles aren't that nice either. Surprisingly, fruits taste like nuts. We say goodbye to Freya and walk back the way we came.

“Did you have fun?” I sign.

“So much. Thank you for taking me. She talked in my head.”

“Yeah, who knew she could do that?”

“Are you upset she didn’t talk to you?” Lovelace asks.

“Not at all. This visit was for you.” I wink at Lovelace. “Mission accomplished.”

When we get home, Lovelace takes the bag from me and runs straight to my mother to share the details and the food. My mother points at a letter on the kitchen counter. I open the letter as I go upstairs to change.

Meet me at the church, it says. Nothing else. It must be from Oliver. But why a note? And why the church we met? Perhaps he has found out something about the moles, or something about Blayze.

I change into a dress with lemons on it, it has pockets and is flowy enough to let me move whichever way I want. My dagger is securely strapped to my thigh and I hurry out the door, but not before hearing my mother call: “Don’t put out!” to which I can’t help but snigger.

The church doesn’t look any less different than when I last visited. A couple is taking a stroll in the distance, but otherwise it is quite deserted. I enter the church and make my way to the front, my heels echoing throughout the building. In the front is a woman with black hair. She is sitting on one of the benches, her back to me.

I approach her warily, but sense nobody else. If she wanted to hurt me, she wouldn’t have her back to me. Then again, she could change her mind and hurt me any second. Regardless, I sit down behind her.

“Thank you for coming,” she says, her voice soft and feminine. “I’m Wynter and you may have arrested a few of the people who work for me.” She doesn’t turn around.

The ones that attacked me and Oliver. Interesting. “You are the rebel leader.”

She chuckles melodiously. “That term is so oversimplified. I’m going to make changes to this world, for us. You’ll see and you will join me. But the sooner you do that, the better.” She turns around. She has an eyepatch over her right eye and dark lipstick. She looks pretty with her black hair cut off straight above her shoulders.

“Why do you want me to join you?”

“You’re a skilled Traveller. You are also forced to hide who you are. You deserve better than to be forced to live a lie. You have never done anything wrong.”

“You have. You wanted to kill the mayor. You probably still do.”

“That was then. But it didn’t work and there must have been a reason. Some things are meant to be. Like you helping me, and me helping you.”

“I don’t need your help, Wynter.”

“So far, Blayze expects you to fight him, to fight Phoebe. That’s what all his setups are for. He’s pushed dominoes that will eventually push you over if you do what he thinks you’ll do, so what if you do the opposite? What if you help him?”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

She tilts her head. “Yes, that’s why I’m suggesting it. The UA is paranoid about Travellers changing events that they believe should not be changed, but here’s the thing, there are some things that even Travellers cannot prevent from happening. No matter how hard they try. So, we’re not as dangerous as they think.”

“I certainly hope that is true, but you hurting innocent people will mean I’m coming for you.”

“Some things are necessary, but we are not the enemy, Monday. Again, you’ll see.” Then she disappears. In the blink of an eye, she’s gone. Her sweet perfume still lingers in the air. First the mayor of Sheffield offers me a job, now a rogue Traveller. I am certainly popular.

Chapter 20

*“Let your life lightly dance on the edges
of Time like dew on the tip of a leaf.”*

~ Rabindranath Tagore



“IT’S ALREADY DEAD, you don’t have to check,” I say to George who is manning the barbecue.

“I just want to make sure it’s well-done. A few of us can handle our raw meat, but not everyone.”

I make a face. “Definitely not me, no. But you’re doing fine.” We look up as Celeste runs by, chasing Lovelace. I’ve made her swear to me that she does not use her abilities, and together with some drilling from my mother, I’m convinced that she won’t slip up, even in her enthusiasm. At least, I hope so. She’s also forbidden to speak of yesterday’s trip to the snack universe, as I like to call it.

“I hope the weather is holding up.” Oliver pops up next to us, surveying the dots of grey clouds.

“I think we’ll be fine,” I say. “Too bad Perrin couldn’t join us.”

“Is it now?” Oliver asks with raised eyebrows and a wicked smile.

“Yes, because we are also friends.”

Summer is setting the picnic table with Chester, and she's laughing at something he said. I don't like it, but that has more to do with our history than any current feelings I have. Oliver is watching me, so I smile at him.

"Care to take a stroll with me?" Oliver asks. "I'd love to show you my rose bed."

Is it me or did he just emphasise the word 'bed'? He probably did.

"Sure," I say.

"Don't be too long," George says without looking up from the smoking meat.

"We won't," Oliver says. He puts his hand on my lower back and escorts me to the side of the mansion where, alongside the length of the building are several rose bushes and other colourful plants. I don't know half of the names of any of them, despite having a family friend who is an expert gardener.

She once chatted with me for forty-five minutes about begonias. I tuned out after six minutes and feel a headache come up every time I spot them.

"You know," I start, "I got an invitation from the woman who runs the Red Roses. Those rogue Travellers that attacked us."

"What? When?"

"Yesterday."

"When is the meeting?"

I look at the ground. "Also yesterday."

"What?" he says again, louder this time. "And you went?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

“Because I thought it was you. I mean, she hadn’t signed the message and it was in a beautiful old-fashioned script. It seemed like a thing you would do.”

“And why would I not just phone you or stop by?” He folds his hands behind his back and gives me a scrutinising look.

“I don’t know. It was at the church where we first met.”

He stares at me and then relaxes his shoulders with a sigh. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, she just wanted to chat. Her name is Wynter and she said I—well, she wanted me to help them. She also said that she no longer wants to try and kill you. Apparently if you were meant to die, you would have died that day in the woods.”

Oliver frowns. “And what would she need you for?”

“Probably the same reason you need me. Or perhaps she’s trying to lure me away because you need me. She also gave me some advice with regard to Blayze, but whatever angle she is playing, I obviously don’t trust her. And don’t worry, she didn’t rattle my cage.”

“Good. I didn’t think she had, though. In case you hadn’t noticed, I have a high opinion of you.”

“Do you now? Feel free to mention what you like about me all the time.”

He grins. “Your hair, your smile, your fighting skills.” He takes a step closer. “You know, they say that if you’re a good fighter, you’re also a good lover.”

“Too bad you’ll never find out.”

“You sure about that?”

“Yes, I’d rather lick a porcupine.”

“I can assure you that a night with me will be much more pleasurable.”

“How can you be sure? Have you licked a porcupine before?”

He chuckles and so do I. “How come I can’t influence your mind or make you blush like other women?”

“I don’t know what kind of women you meet, but I guess I’m not like them.”

“Clearly.” He smiles. “Anyway, you must be happy to be home again. See your parents. And old...friends.”

“I didn’t have that many friends. I had Blayze and when I went to uni I had a small group of mates, but we drifted apart.”

“What about Chester?”

Oh, that’s what he’s referring to. “We never stayed in touch after I left to work for the UA. I kinda left without saying goodbye.”

“That doesn’t seem like something you would do.”

“Well, I did. I was too scared that if I said goodbye, he would convince me to stay. And I really wanted to join the UA and have adventures. Instead, I am usually stuck doing paperwork.”

“Except for now. And if you were to accept my job, you’d definitely have adventures all the time.”

“I know.”

We continue to walk on and when we make it back, lunch is served. Everyone is already sitting down. The girls are farther away, sitting on a picnic basket. Lovelace runs up to the table for a drink.

“Oh, hang on. The lemonade is inside,” I say. “I’ll get it.”

There are two large pitchers on the wooden table, and I pick them up when there’s a sharp sting in my neck. I drop the pitchers. One of them tumbles over the edge of the table and shatters on the ground. Cold lemonade spills

over my shoe. I turn around, my hand on my neck as a painful feeling rushes through my body, gathering in the pool of energy in my lower abdomen, my core.

Blayze grins at me. He holds a golden dart in his hands and my eyes widen. I try to teleport and immediately feel myself choke, as if someone is pulling a cord around my neck. It worked. He actually did it.

“You bastard,” I say, panting.

“We’ve already established that. Now isn’t this poetic justice?”

“It’s not. You’re a murderer. This is the opposite of justice,” I hiss.

“To you maybe. To me, not so much. I just want to save the woman I love. And you’re in the way. No matter what I do, you’re always there, messing things up for me. Now that you’re powerless, it will be so much easier to kill you.”

A portal grows right next to me. Unfortunately, it can’t be me, and judging by the way that Blayze is eyeing it suspiciously, it’s also not him. We turn our heads to Lovelace, who is standing in the corner of the room, her eyes on Blayze. Surprisingly, she doesn’t look scared. Her fists are trembling with anger as she scowls at him.

“Lovelace, run,” I say and fling myself at Blayze before he decides to kill her. I pull his hair and bite his shoulder, but he knees me and then shoves me against the table.

I clutch my stomach as pain echoes through it and grit my teeth.

“Monday,” Oliver shouts and Blayze is knocked away from me. He lands against the wall, crashing into a cabinet with fine china. Or what is now tiny pieces of porcelain. Oliver stands in front of me, gathering his power which he focusses on Blayze. In the blink of an eye, Blayze is in front of him and stabs something in his leg. Oliver shouts out and by now the others are in the room as well. Things get confusing.

The portal is growing next to us. George and Chester run our way, but by now Blayze is situated between us and them. The room isn't that large, and when George and Chester collide with Blayze, he gets pushed into us. I fall into the portal and Oliver tumbles in right after me. It closes immediately after that, which is Lovelace's way of protecting me, except that now I can't help them.

He better not touch Lovelace.

It is scary to know that someone so new in my life can incite such fear simply by getting hurt.

We are surrounded by darkness and the smell of ashes. It is a smell I'm familiar with because I've been here before. This is one of the worlds my mother sent me to to train me. It is not a pleasant place, although it is quite lovely once outside of this cave. If we make it out. I don't see how we can without my abilities. Then again, I can't sell Oliver short.

I lie still and listen, but there is nothing except for a groan from Oliver. He crawls over to me to check that I'm okay.

"Shh, I'm trying to listen."

"For what?" he asks. His cheek is covered in a streak of dust from the ground. He scans my face.

There is a roar that echoes through the cave.

"For that." I get up to my feet and so does Oliver. He groans when he stands on his leg. It is bleeding.

"Is it a deep wound?"

"It's already healing, but slower than usual. I think he used a special weapon."

"Yes, probably." Since he used one on me as well.

Another roar. This time closer. “We better run,” I say and grab Oliver’s hand. We run until we reach a large boulder that looks like a heart. I recognise it.

“This way,” I say and pull him through a crack in the wall that leads to a ledge above a small stream of water several feet below us.

“How do you know where to go?” Oliver asks.

“Just be quiet. She has good hearing,” I whisper.

And how do you know that? he asks, in my head.

I freeze and whip around. I had no idea he could do that. Can you hear me?

Yes. It’s because I fed on you. We’ve established a link. I can talk to you. You can talk to me. I wasn’t planning on using it, but here we are on a ledge, followed by a monster in a strange world that you seem to know stuff about.

We have to be quick, just follow me. Lovelace could be in trouble and I want to hurry up, though getting home will still be a problem. I turn to continue, but he tugs on my hand. I look down at the small river. If we follow it, we can make it out, though this path will lead us to a very unpleasant area first. There is nowhere that we can have this conversation comfortably. Nothing about this conversation will be remotely comfortable. But he’s asking me directly, and there’s hardly anything I can say that will sound more logical than the truth. Could I even lie to him? I glance back at him and smile sadly.

I’ve been here before.

What do you mean? How?

My mother brought me here.

He frowns. Why?

To test me. She's trained me and then she'd take me places where I had to get out alive.

Trained you for what?

She trained me to be a very formidable Traveller.

But then that means that you are, in fact, a Traveller.

Yeah, it does. I am.

Chapter 21

*“Knowing that she lied isn’t the worst
part. The worst part is not knowing what
was real.” ~ Oliver Marquis*



OLIVER LETS GO OF MY hand. We stand on the ledge, listening to the sound of rushing water and our breathing. There is no going back now. I’ve said it, and now comes the ultimate test. If we make it out, of course.

“You’ve been lying to me all this time.”

“No. I just never told you what I can do. I’ve never told anybody, except for Blayze.”

He scoffs. “You’re the mole.”

“I most certainly am not. I just told you, nobody knows. Certainly not any other Travellers.”

There is another roar.

“Look, right now I can get us out of this cave. Which is quite important, since that dragon wants to eat us. She can’t see very well, but she can smell and hear well, so keep that in mind. We’re going to come out to the place where she...collects her food. It’s not pleasant, and it certainly doesn’t smell pleasant, but we can make it out.”

“So I’m supposed to trust you now,” Oliver says. His sharp eyes survey my face, taking in any hints of malice.

“I’d like us to make it out alive, yeah. Oliver, you don’t really like Travellers, so can you blame me for not telling you?”

“No, Monday, I get that. What I don’t get is how you can then be nice to me, or work for the UA. Or even consider working for me, when clearly that can only be the case if you have some hidden agenda.”

I sigh. “That just proves how little you know me.”

“Because you haven’t let me get close.”

“Fair enough. Since when did we start talking out loud?”

“Since our emotions got the best of us.” He smiles at me.

I raise my eyebrow. “You’re smiling. Why are you smiling?”

“I’ve been wary of you. Ever since I heard you took out those vampires. And yes, I offered you a job, but I still had my guard up as is customary with everything I do. There is always someone somewhere who wants to go up against me.”

I think about the few things I’ve learned about vampires. It is all about customs and being polite, while stabbing someone in the back. The higher you are in ranking, the more tempting it is for others to take you down. It has always been another thing I’ve disliked about vampires. However, Oliver doesn’t seem to be that way, though I can’t picture him climbing to the top without stepping over a couple of bodies himself.

“But now?” I ask.

“Now I realise that in some way I did have faith in you. That’s why I’m disappointed.”

I feel my shoulders hang. Never thought I’d rather have him yell at me. “I’m sorry,” I say and to my surprise, I mean it. Or perhaps I shouldn’t be

surprised at all. “I respect you, if that makes a difference. And the job offer is very tempting because I do want more excitement in my life. But I also think that comes down to me wanting to use my skills. Something I can’t do now that Blayze has Collared me.”

“He what? How did he get Y-309?”

“At this point I’m not surprised by anything any more.”

“And then he created this portal to let us get eaten by a dragon. Great.”

For the life of me, I want to tell him about Lovelace, but I really can’t. Protecting her is bigger than protecting myself. No matter what, I can’t risk telling him. I tremble.

“Don’t be scared,” he says as soon as his watchful eyes see me shake. He takes my hand again. “We’ll get out of this.”

“I’m a good person. I’ve never hurt anyone. My mother has trained me ever since I was little. Say what you will about Travellers, but we aren’t all bad.”

He sighs. “I know that. It’s just that for those who are, we have to create a stricter protocol. Nobody should have the ability to mess with time.”

“And nobody should have the ability to suck the life out of someone, but here we are.”

His expression darkens. “Monday,” he warns.

“Oliver,” I warn back.

“I’m not having this discussion with you now.”

“Well, we have to have it soon, because if we do make it out alive, I’m dependent on the decision you’ll make about me.”

He sucks in his breath as if he hasn’t contemplated that until now. He nods slowly. “Just show us the way out of here.”

“Yeah. Fine.”

We continue along the ledge in silence as it is getting colder. Oliver doesn't let go of my hand and I hold on firmly as well, even if the ledge isn't so thin that we need to.

I stop when we reach another crevice. It's been a while, and I'm not sure if we're already at the correct place. The air smells stale, but it doesn't stink of rotten flesh. Then again, it has to be the first crevice. Did it smell last time? I can't remember.

“I think it's this way. It will be a huge open space, with some water further back, if I remember correctly. There were a lot of bodies of livestock and also...people.” I press my lips together at the memory as a wave of nausea sweeps up to swallow the rest of my composure.

“Why did your mother do this to you?” he whispers and rubs my arms. It's then that I realise I'm shivering.

“S-survival skills,” I say. My teeth chatter.

“Kitten, you're terrified.”

I smile at the nickname and tears fill my eyes.

“Shh. Don't cry.” He presses his forehead against mine, and we stay like that for a moment.

After I've calmed down, I look him in the eye. His expression is unreadable once again. “Just promise me you won't die.”

He grins, the look in his eyes softening. “I'm not so easy to kill and neither are you. Now, what's the plan?”

“There's a spot of light, a hole in the ceiling, that leads to the woods. Right now, we're in a cave in a mountain. That is the closest way out. This should be where the dragon keeps her food.”

“So there really is a dragon here, huh?” Lines appear around his eyes as he smiles. “Like an actual dragon?”

“It’s not funny when you actually see it. And yes. They exist in this world. Apparently. My mission was to take one of its scales and then make it out.”

“Your mission? Is that what your mother called it?” The look in his eyes isn’t one I recognise.

“Yes, but I made it out because I had my full use of my skills. Not so much right now.”

“Except that you have me, Kitten. I’m kind of a big deal, lest you forget.”

“I think your head just got bigger.”

He sticks out his tongue. It feels just like normal. Except that my secret is out, and we’re about to square off against a dragon.

“You’re still shivering.” He touches my cheek and gently pushes me against the wall. Again he puts his forehead against mine, but this time I feel his mind trying to connect with me. There is an automatic resistance on my part.

Let me in, he says.

I inhale. This goes against everything my mother has taught me when it comes to the mind control stuff that vampires can do. The mind is a vulnerable thing. I am about to open it up to someone who can play it like a piano.

And yet I do it. I focus on my mental barrier and lower it enough for him to reach in. He still has to struggle to do so, but I can’t make it too easy, now can I?

Immediately a sense of calm washes over me, like a waterfall of Xanax. As soon as I am relaxed, he retreats and my barriers go up.

He smiles at me so genuinely that it warms me.

My gaze flickers to his lips. There is a roar, closer this time. My eyes widen. “We should hurry, I think she’s smelt us.”

“I’ll go first,” he says calmly. As if we’re simply about to take a stroll through the park. He takes my hand and shimmies through the narrow crack in the wall. I follow.

The good news is that there are no longer carcasses in this area. The bad news is that there are now about a dozen baby dragons sleeping. They are as large as horses, but a hundred times deadlier. I clasp my hand in front of my mouth and exchange a look with Oliver. Then my eyes search for the bit of light in the right corner. I point. There are a lot of boulders underneath it and we could make it up there, especially Oliver.

He spots it and nods at me. Let’s be quiet and quick.

I’m so glad you said that. I was about to Riverdance my way over while playing a bagpipe.

Oliver glances back with a smile on his lips.

Just then the ground begins to shake. It is barely discernible at first, but then we both feel it and come to an abrupt halt. I clutch Oliver’s arm and press myself closely against his muscled back. Thanks to his trick I am still calm, as if I’m simply observing my fear instead of letting it control me. If this is what Oliver always feels, it explains his tranquil demeanour.

The paws hitting the ground aren’t the only sound we hear as the dragon gets closer. There is a huff of breath, a predatory purr, and then yellow eyes light up in the darkness as the head emerges. She is as terrifying as I recall. For many years I had nightmares about her chasing me, and it took me a while before I looked back on the ‘mission’ as cool, or successful. And now I’m reminded of why.

Her claws are large and dark whereas her scales are a mixture of purple and red, though I can’t see clearly in the darkness. But I remember. She has large horns coming out of her head and sharp teeth that protrude from her mouth. Her tail sweeps playfully back and forth.

We stand frozen as the creature moves towards her offspring. She stops and smells the air, then turns her head towards us and growls. She makes George's seem like they're coming from a puppy. Her power emanates from her effortlessly.

She lets out a deafening roar and Oliver stretches out his hands in response. He uses all his powers, I can sense it, but to no avail. And then she lurches forward.

Oliver lifts me up and within the blink of an eye we jump from boulder to boulder until he pushes himself, and me, through the hole in the ground to the surface. I close my eyes, the dirt washing over me.

The sun immediately warms my body and birds sing in the distance. The grass feels soft and relief rolls over me. I lie there stretched out on my stomach like a starfish, my head covered in dirt. I look up to see Oliver grinning at me, in a similar position. He is holding my hand, his head equally covered in dirt.

We start laughing.

The ground beneath us trembles, and there is another roar. Oliver gets up and pulls me to my feet. He has a frown between his eyebrows and pulls me behind him. I follow his gaze to the line of trees not far from us.

A group of people stand there, about eight of them. Some with swords, some with bows and arrows at the ready. They are dressed in various shades of green and look enigmatic. They remind me of vampires, except that they have pointy ears, and I know they are elves.

Just then, we lose our balance as the earth beneath us shifts and mother dragon hits the now wider opening. Her face and neck make it through, but her body not so much. She pushes a few times, while the elves spring into action. Oliver picks me up in his arms and makes it to the nearest tree in record speed. The dragon makes it through, the wind of her flapping wings nearly knocking him off his feet. She is followed by her babies this time and before we know it, the beautiful green field above her lair is turned into a battlefield with fire and arrows.

Chapter 22

*“Here we are, trapped in the
amber of the moment. There is
no why.” ~ Kurt Vonnegut*



OLIVER TURNS AND WITH a speed that makes me sick, zigzags through the woods, avoiding trees and fallen branches. His earlier wound is definitely healed by now.

“Stop. Now!”

He stops. “What? Are you hurt?”

“No. Those elves. We can’t leave them to fight on their own. It’s our fault that dragon made it to the surface.”

“This is their world and their fight. Not ours. We’re not risking our lives for ___”

“What? Strangers? If you don’t care about strangers, then why bother chasing dangerous Travellers?”

“That’s different.”

“Why? Because it’s your world?” Early on my mother told me a story of Travellers and how they were once thought of as helpers. People who would go from world to world and help those in need, then move on again. I don’t know if that is actually true, especially since I’ve mostly done

missions that my mother assigned, sending me to dangerous worlds. But I do know I can't walk away from situations like this. "Oliver, we have to help them. They did nothing wrong. And you are very fast. You might save a life or two. Please."

His light eyes scan my face, taking in every pore and freckle, as well as the pleading look in my eyes. Am I pouting? I hope I am. "The things I do for you, Kitten," he mutters. Within a flash we make it back to the treeline where we observe the field.

The elves are still battling the dragons. The baby dragons can not fly high and choose to fight on the ground, circling and separating the elves, attacking simultaneously. Two elves are already down, covered in blood and burn marks. With a panicked look I turn to Oliver.

He growls. And then he's gone. A blurry line makes its way through the field, knocking into the smaller dragons while avoiding the fire of the big dragon. She gets hit by arrows and there is one elf, still near the trees, who is moving his hands, swirls of colour around them. He's using magic. The dragon, though, seems largely unaffected. And then she lands. It will make her more vulnerable, but it might have something to do with the fact that all her babies are now dead. So is half the group of elves by now.

She lets out another roar. Oliver is at her side, assessing her. Looking for weaknesses. I remember the scale that I had taken off her all those years ago.

Her left side. That's where I took off one of her scales. That's where she'll be vulnerable. Or under her belly.

Thanks, Kitten. He's a blur as he makes it to one of the bodies of the elves and picks up a sword. He circles the dragon while the other elves advance and cause a distraction. The dragon breathes smoke, not fire, and when I glance back at the Mage, I figure he's the cause. He's slumped against the tree, his magic exhausted.

She moves back her head in another roar and two elves simultaneously shoot two arrows into her neck. She staggers. With a desperate cry she falls

onto her side. Oliver has plunged the sword into her side and looks on as she breathes her final breath.

Such a beautiful and terrifying creature. She was only defending her home. And trying to eat us. It was us or her, I know that. I have killed several creatures in self-defence because my mother was eager to teach me how predatory any world can be, but I've never liked killing them. I suppose that is a very good thing.

Oliver is by my side. "I believe I just killed a dragon, milady." He bows with a flourish.

"What would you like as a reward?" I ask.

At this his head shoots up, a wicked grin on his handsome face.

The four remaining elves approach us, the only woman in the group limping. The one I suspect to be the leader addresses us. He has fair, long hair and a cut across his face that is still bleeding. He also has blood on his left thigh and his hands. The others don't look any better.

"I am Asriel. You have my thanks for your aid, Traveller," he says in a syrupy voice.

Oliver and I exchange a glance. "How do you know what I am?"

"Your clothes are different. You feel different. There is but one explanation. We have encountered Travellers before. It is an honour to finally run into one again."

I wonder if he knows my mother, but realise it doesn't matter. What matters is that we get home. Lovelace is probably our only hope for that. She better be okay, and not just because she's our ride home. In fact, I hope they all are okay. Did they manage to catch Blayze? Despite my worries, my stomach growls.

Asriel smiles. "You are lucky to have escaped the dragon, and luckier to live after fighting it. Why don't I reward you with some food and shelter?"

There is nothing we can do now anyway. Someone will have to come for us, that's the only way. "That would be lovely," I say. "I'm so sorry about your friends. We didn't expect the dragon to follow us."

"That is alright. We came here to defeat the dragon and her offspring. It has become a ceremony for us. Every hundred years she lays eggs that hatch. We start by killing the offspring, usually luring the mother away. And then we try to kill the mother."

"So, you've not succeeded in killing the mother until now," Oliver says.

"Exactly. Which is why when we return, there will be a feast."

"And if you'd all died?" I ask.

"Then it would have been a very depressing feast." He smiles wryly.

It is a three-day journey back to their tribe, but we have nothing better to do than wait, so we join them. Since the woman, Vesra, has a broken ankle, Oliver offered to carry her in the interest of speed and though her initial pride stood in her way, Asriel's subtle impatience made her waver. I wonder if her initial reluctance to be carried was her attempt at impressing him, but it could be my imagination. She does steal the occasional glance at Asriel.

Oliver walks ahead of me, Vesra looking rather uncomfortable to be in a stranger's arms. I don't know how Oliver feels about it, but I like the look of him when he's helping someone. When the sun begins to set and my stomach grumbles even more frequently, we set up camp in the middle of the woods. I've also had to pee for a while now. Everyone but Vesra fan out to collect berries and extra water. They apparently know their way around these woods and who are we to argue?

Oliver has laid down his handkerchief for me on a fallen trunk covered in moss. The handkerchief is too small for me to sit on, but I appreciate the gesture.

Vesra stares at Oliver. "So, what are you?" Her voice is melodious.

He raises a perfectly plucked eyebrow.

“You were so fast back there. You’re not a human, or an elf.”

He smiles. “You wouldn’t know what I am, so it doesn’t matter.”

I fidget with my hands in my lap.

“Are you okay?” Oliver whispers to me.

“I have to pee.”

“Then go.”

“Where?”

He chuckles. “Anywhere.”

I wrinkle my nose. “I can’t. I need toilet paper and water and soap to wash my hands.”

“I have some leaves in my pouch that you press together in a bowl of water. It cleanses,” Vesra says.

“There you go,” Oliver says. “Crisis averted.”

I stare at him, assessing the glint in his eyes. “You’re mocking me.”

He laughs. “I wouldn’t dare, my Kitten.”

“Bite me.”

“If you wish,” he says, leaning forward.

I gently nudge him and chuckle.

When I catch Vesra’s gaze, she looks wistful and quickly averts her eyes.

“Alright, I guess I’ll go find a spot.” At least I am wearing a dress. That will make it relatively easy.

Vesra takes a piece of cloth from one of the pouches around her belt. “Here, you can use this.”

I nearly hug her. “Thank you.” I manage to sound composed. When I’m behind Vesra, I triumphantly hold up the piece of cloth to Oliver, who shakes his head with a smile. The sun has almost set, but there are still streaks of red and yellow painted across the sky. It makes it easy to see where I am going. I find a quiet spot and a tree with a low-hanging branch. I can lean into it and assume a semi-sitting position. How did women do this in the middle ages when wandering around forests?

It takes me a while to get situated, and then a while before my body realises it’s truly okay to pee. Afterwards I throw the used cloth into a bush and hope I didn’t just startle any poor creatures living there. It is dark by now and it’s getting colder. I long for the warm fire and the feeling of Oliver’s shoulder brushing against mine. It completely escaped my mind that I’ve told him my most treasured secret and somehow still feel utterly safe with him.

Then again, he did kill a dragon for me.

With a big smile on my face, I make my way back. Except that I don’t. I’ve been walking for a few minutes now and there’s no campfire, no chatter, none of the other elves. Am I lost? Just as I’m about to call out, someone knocks me on the back of my head.

I stagger as someone puts something over my head in complete silence. I grunt, feeling dizzy.

He lifts me up and carries me, picking up his pace the further along we get. I start wriggling when the dizziness subsides.

“Oliver.” I try to shout, but the bag he’s put over my head muffles the words and in return the man squeezes me so tight that I find it hard to breathe.

He dumps me in something and there's a squeaky sound. A gate? We move. I'm on a cart. A cart with a gate?

A cage. Wonderful.

I remove the bag and notice my hands are tied. When did he do that? Did I pass out? I don't remember losing my consciousness. Things are getting blurry when I try to think back at what happened, but I know there was a campfire. And Oliver.

I lick my lips and clear my throat. "Oliver!" I shout. He's got super hearing, he'll find me. He has to find me.

I glance back at the driver. I can only see his broad back as he leads the horse. He spurs it on, probably because of my shouting, making me fall against the cage.

Oliver, find me.

Where are you?

I nearly cry when I hear him, even if it is in my head. I don't know. Someone hit me and put me in a cage. I'm on a cart. He's got a horse.

What do you see?

Darkness. Trees. I grab my blade from under my dress and cut my hands loose. It is not an easy task when travelling over a bumpy road. Wait. We're passing a stone bridge. I see a lake.

"Where are we going?"

"Shut up, wench," the man says in a gruff voice.

"Someone didn't learn any manners," I mutter.

He stops soon thereafter, at a small campfire where there is an outburst of laughter. It is unrelated to our arrival, but it still feels like they are laughing at me.

The man comes around the back. I dutifully hold my hands in front of me, the rope draped around them to appear like I'm still tied up. If he lets me out, I'll play with him.

He's heavy-set and has sideburns. It indicates he doesn't live out here in the wilderness, but somewhere he can regularly get a haircut. This must be pure business for him. A delivery man. Of women?

Great. First a dragon, now this. Have they been talking to my mother? I can just imagine my mother interviewing the dragon. 'And how are you going to make things challenging for my daughter?' and 'You will have to provide your own lunch. Will that be a problem?'

He yanks on the cage and I slide off the cart, hitting the ground with a thud. He sneers at me and joins the others. "I've brought fresh meat," he says and the men all cheer.

"It's dark, Portho, come sit with us," another man says. He is slurring his words.

"I think I've earned it," he says and the men laugh again.

Just as I am about to communicate with Oliver, there is a rustle. Something moves close to the ground and is approaching me. My heart rate goes up. I grab my blade tightly. I lose sight of whatever it is. I scan the area where I last saw it move, several feet from me, by the nearest bushes.

"Poof poof," says a high-pitched voice next to me.

I look down at my side. "Poofie," I say, and touch the small creature through the bars. Its body is similar to that of an owl, except that it has large ears and a tail. Its eyes are big and cute. I've encountered them before and have dubbed them Poofies because of the sounds they make. They're very soft, love to be touched, and are purple or blue. I suspect their colours signify their gender, but I'm not sure. They are usually in groups, except that some can be cast out by the group and picked on. I once encountered one like that and brought it home, much to the chagrin of my mother. She

forced me to return it. I spent three days finding a group for him that finally welcomed him.

I tickle him under his chin and he makes more “poof” sounds. When I look down again, I see that his whole group has followed him. Five other Poofies. That are hopefully hungry.

“Hey, you guys want to help me?” I ask and they all start jumping up and down.

“Poof poof,” they chant.

The men roar with laughter again. Good. They won’t hear us then.

“You guys eat anything that’s not alive, right? Well, I’ve got this nice cage you can chew on. Here.” I tap on the bars.

The first Poof opens its mouth three times the size of its small body and takes a large chunk out of the cage. I have to move back. The others also take a bite. It makes a noise and the men have grown silent. Just as I’m worming my way out of the hole in the cage, I stare at a pair of dirty, brown boots.

I look up at the man who kidnapped me. Portho. “What’s up?” I say, and stab him in the foot.

He yells out and staggers backwards, falling on the ground.

I grab the pen from inside my bra and click it, aiming for Portho. He flops around like a fish on dry land and then passes out, foaming at the mouth.

“Poof, poof.” The Poofs jump up and down.

The other men show up as I scramble to my feet. I stare at them. They stare at me. One of them throws up and then passes out.

“Charming,” I say and get my pen ready.

“Get her,” one of the men shouts.

The closest one to me steps forward, but a blur intercepts him. He is knocked back and soars through the air screaming. The darkness swallows him up, but there is a nasty thud that cuts off his screams.

Oliver's eyes are glowing. "Don't you dare touch her," he says quietly. Too quietly. He is seriously pissed off.

"I'm fine," I say. One of the Poofies rubs up against my leg, and I pick him up to pet him.

Oliver yells in anger and draws back their energy. He is sucking it out of them in heaps. They don't scream, even if their mouths are open and their faces contorted with pain. They fall to their knees.

"Oliver," I say, but he continues.

I put down the Poofie and rush to him, putting my hand on his arm. "Oliver, I'm okay. Stop." He feels warm and cold at the same time, I can't describe it any other way. He is a walking paradox. Light and darkness, life and death.

Good and evil.

Please, Oliver. For me.

He abruptly stops and turns to me, his eyes still glowing.

I smile at him. "I'm fine, silly."

His eyes return to normal, but they carry a pained expression.

"Are you okay? Did they hurt you?"

"They hit me on the back of the head, but other than that I'm fine."

His eyes change again. "Which one? Which one did that?"

I place my hand on his cheek. It's warm. In fact, he radiates heat now. "We've gotten back at them. This is enough."

“It is not enough. They hurt you.”

“Would you really bring a flamethrower to destroy an anthill?”

“You are not an ant. You are the opposite of that, Monday.”

I inhale. “Does that mean you won’t blow my secret?”

“Don’t change the subject,” he says, but he sounds calmer now.

I hug him. “Thank you for coming for me.” He smells amazing as always.

He hugs me back. “I promise I always will.”

“Poof poof.”

We both look down at the Poofie wedged between our feet. He looks up with his large eyes. “Poof poof.”

“What the hell is that?”

“A new friend.” I look up at him.

He stares at me.

Then, there it is. The buzz and crackle of a portal, right under me. I look down and the faint outline of a circle glows beneath my feet and spreads out to Oliver. He looks down as well.

“A portal. Is it Blayze? I’m going to kill him.” His eyes start glowing.

“Wait. Let’s just wait and see before you come out swinging.” I put my hand on his chest.

“Monday,” he says. “Monday, I’m—”

Gravity takes over and we fall through the portal.

Next, we're surrounded by water and I nearly choke on it. It's chlorine and has to be my parents' pool. I wave my arms and legs around, trying to get a bearing on where the surface is when a hand grabs me and pulls me up. I gasp for air as soon as I reach the surface and cough as some of the water went down the wrong pipe.

"It's okay, you're okay," says Oliver in my ear, and he has his arm tightly around my waist. Other hands lift me out of the pool, and I hear my mother making soothing sounds. My dad helps Oliver out of the water. I catch my breath and lean against my mother while the sun is shining down on us. Lovelace sits next to me, her nose bleeding. I squeeze her hand.

"Thanks," Oliver mutters to my dad and then looks from me to Lovelace. He registers her bloody nose and I know he knows.

I must look frightened because he smiles reassuringly at me and says: "See. Now you'll just have to work for me, Traveller."

"Oh, hell no," says my mother.

"Mother," I say angrily.

"You did not bring one of those things back," she finishes.

"What?" I look back at her and then follow her gaze to the pool where a piece of purple fluff is bobbing on the water.

"Poof poof," it says.

Chapter 23

*“I have been many things in
life. A hairdresser, a fireman, even a
dog stylist. But by far, the strangest
thing I’ve ever been is in love.” ~ Oliver Marquis*



AFTER EXPLAINING THAT Blayze got away without seriously hurting George, Chester, or anyone else, my mother puts me and Oliver in the conservatory with a pot of chamomile tea while trying very hard not to spy on us. I can't blame her, that's exactly what I'd be doing if I were in her shoes. I've changed into a simple outfit, while Oliver is wearing my dad's clothes. They look adorable on him.

Poofie is sitting on a cushion in the armchair beside us. His hair is fluffy, and he looks twice his size after drying him with a towel. My father has given him some bolts and screws from the shed which he guzzles up contently.

Lovelace immediately wanted to play with him, but mother has now distracted her with biscuits. My dad is in his shed, though this time I'm sure it's not out of boredom, but out of pure anxiety after the last couple of days.

Oliver holds out a beautiful necklace to me. It looks like the pendant is made of glass and there are miniscule lights dancing around in it. "The elves said they needed to recover and didn't want to join my rescue, but as payment for helping them with the dragon, Asriel gave me this. He said if

we ever need anything, we can show this necklace and elicit a favour from them.”

I take the necklace and study it. “Wow. Cool.” We have both been dried and given hot water bottles while I’m still reeling from Oliver’s promise to protect me and Lovelace. After I told him everything about Lovelace, he was even more convinced I should join him, proving he wants to protect both of us. For me.

I think even my mother’s hands were shaking when she set down the tea pot. She can never say anything mean about vampires again.

“You keep it.”

“But you fought the dragon, not me.”

He shakes his head. “I don’t like jewellery. It would look beautiful on you, however.”

I smile, hoping I don’t blush.

“So, this is the plan. We fake your death, so that anyone in York won’t come looking for you. Then we set you up as part of my secret team of Retrievers where you are free to use your skills as you see fit. Though you are forbidden to change the course of history for your personal gain. That goes without saying. There is definitely paperwork involved as you report to me, but there will also be a hell of a lot of action. That won’t be a problem for you, though.”

“No.”

“No?”

“I don’t want to feel like I have to look over my shoulder. Also, I don’t want you to be attached to a lie. We are the first Retrievers for Travellers. All eyes will be on us. On you. I don’t want to get you into trouble.”

“Monday,” he starts.

“The best thing will be to just let me quit in York and then you will employ me. I won’t work for the UA, I’ll work for you. I mean, that’s how it works for Chester and George, right? They work for you. They answer to you. I won’t have to worry about introducing myself, afraid someone might recognise my name. If they do, all they know is that I used to be a Level 1 officer for the CU.”

“And what if someone wonders what a former Level 1 officer is doing working as a Retriever?” Oliver asks.

“Being a Retriever doesn’t mean that I have to divulge what I do exactly. It’s all classified. So nobody will ask me whether or not I’m a Traveller. You could have hired me for a number of reasons. Like my dashing smile and sense of humour.” I wiggle my eyebrows at him.

He leans back with a grin. “I suppose that will work.”

“And that way we won’t have to lie.”

There is a moment of silence while Oliver processes this new plan. “I’ll quit for you and I’ll arrange it so that your records are difficult to access. Just in case.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“But it will make me feel better.”

“It might make people more curious if you do that.”

“Not necessarily. Just leave it to me.” He smiles enigmatically.

We sip our tea in silence.

“And you’re sure you can free me from the Collar?”

“Yes. Just another injection and a three-day recovery period.”

“And if I ever stop working for you, will I be Collared again?”

“Why would you be Collared?”

“That’s what happens after every Level 3 officer retires from the UA,” I say.

Oliver frowns. “No. If they have an impeccable record and outstanding performance history they are let go without restrictions.”

“But then—” My voice trails off.

“Did your mother tell you that retirement equals Collaring?”

I nod slowly.

“So, secrets run in the family, huh? Good to know.” He smiles to soften his words.

“Apparently.” I study Oliver from the corner of my eyes. He appears relaxed, sipping on his tea, but his shoulders are tense and there is a thin line between his eyebrows.

“Are you okay? You didn’t get hurt, did you?” I ask.

He looks at me. “Why did you want me to go back for those elves?”

“Because it wasn’t right to leave them there.”

“And that’s how I know you’re a good person, Monday. Your moral compass works just fine.”

I smile.

“And I understand why you didn’t tell me. You did that in order to survive in this world. I get survival, Monday. I’ve done far worse than keep secrets in order to survive.”

There is no doubt in my mind that that’s true. “Thank you for understanding.”

“But now that we’re working together, no more secrets. I think we’ve established we can trust each other.” He smiles.

“Cheers to that.” We clink our tea mugs together.

“Still, I’m a bit disappointed that you decided to work for me because I can protect you and Lovelace, and not because of my dashing good looks.”

“Oh, no. Never. Blegh.” I pretend to shiver.

“Charming as ever. You know, one of these days I’ll believe that your repulsion for me is real and that you have absolutely no good taste whatsoever.”

“Good. Then maybe you’ll leave me alone.” I stick out my tongue at him.

He chuckles and watches me carefully while I finish my tea. By the time we’ve both finished our drinks, I am eager to take a shower and get rid of this chlorine smell. I assure Oliver he can use the shower as well, but he wants to go home. He promises to return with the Antidote tonight, as well as return my dad’s clothes. His driver is waiting outside and I watch him take off. All things considered, it’s not all bad.

When I come out of the shower, lost in thought, Lovelace is sitting on my bed with Poofie. She’s tickling his tummy, and he’s making sneeze-like sounds that are utterly adorable. I smile and sit down next to her. I also scratch Poofie’s tummy. “Are you okay?” I sign.

“Yes. I was just worried about you. Did that man hurt you?”

“Blayze? No. He did momentarily take my abilities away, but Oliver is helping me get them back. Why did you open that portal?”

“I wanted to protect you. I wanted to send you somewhere he couldn’t hurt you. But I didn’t control where I sent you. I was too quick and didn’t think. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I know you meant well. And you got us back, so thank you.” I stroke her hair.

“Your mother helped me. She was nice, but I could tell she was nervous.”
The corners of her mouth are pointing downwards.

“Yeah, that’s because she loves me. But I’m fine. I promise. And it’s not your fault. You were trying to protect me. You did really well.”

She looks up at me and smiles. “Really?”

“Really.”

Poofie snuggles up against her stomach. “Can we keep him?”

“Poof poof,” he says.

“I’ll think about it.”



MY MOTHER IS DOWNSTAIRS drinking tea at the cooking island. She doesn’t look up when I enter the kitchen. “I’ve put Lovelace to bed, she fell asleep as soon as she hit the pillow.”

“Good,” my mother says.

“Poofie is sleeping right next to her.”

“Hope it doesn’t eat her.” She corks an eyebrow at me.

“They don’t eat people.”

“How do you know?”

“They don’t eat living beings. Just stuff. Don’t you remember how the last one ate a chunk out of the sofa?”

“How can I forget?” she mutters.

A pause.

“Mother. Do you have anything to say to me?” I fold my arms.

She sighs. “Fine. I guess Oliver Marquis isn’t too bad. For a vampire.”

“I’ll alert the media,” I say dryly. “But no. Something else. You said you were Collared because you retired.”

She freezes as she’s about to put her steaming mug of tea to her red lips. “I did.”

“But that’s not true.”

She pauses. “It’s best if you don’t press this.”

“I’m your daughter. Do you really think I won’t?”

She smiles, but it doesn’t reach her eyes. “Yes. You get your tenacity from me.”

I sigh.

She puts down the mug and stares at me. She looks pale and older than usual. Perhaps that is what keeping secrets does to someone. It roams around, scratching at your insides as you can only suffer in silence. Whatever she kept from me, I’m sure she wants to share it with me deep down.

“Remember how I told you that some things are fixed?” Mother says.

“Yes. Of course. It’s one of the first things you taught me. Next to: don’t trust anyone. Didn’t realise that included my mother.” That last bit sounded bitter even to me. I look down at my hands. “Sorry, go on.”

“Remember the car accident on your 18th birthday?”

“How can I forget?” A feeling of dread settles in my stomach as if I’ve swallowed a ball of barbed wire.

She casts down her eyes, something I don't think I've ever seen her do.
"You did in fact die, originally speaking."

"O-originally speaking?" The dread turns to a blanket of ice cast around me.

"By a twist of fate, me and my former partner John—you remember him—were there and I turned back time, making a minor adjustment. John didn't want me to do it, obviously, but he let me because he was in love with me."

"He was?" Not the important thing here, Monday.

"Yes, it was obvious, though I've always pretended not to notice. But it worked to my advantage."

"So you turned back time and saved my life. But how come you only got Collared when you retired?"

"Because that's when he died. When he died, he left a confession. I guess he couldn't carry it to his grave. It was too long ago for any officer at the UA to attempt to change it. Plus, you were not meant to die. You're still here. Even a homicidal maniac can't get to you. I think it was meant to be that I saved you."

I swallow hard. "That's why you were upset that I went to work for the UA?"

"After I saved you, I questioned the work I'd always done. I liked using my abilities to 'fix' things, but what if those people went back in time to do something that was meant to happen and we just stopped them because we decided that it was not to be? The UA decides what major world events don't get changed, but why them? And how do they decide? I've never gotten answers to those questions, and I doubt anyone ever will."

I think back to all the times I felt conflicted. In her shoes, I would have done the same. Hell, I already went far for a girl I didn't even give birth to.
"But even when you trained me, you always taught me not to time travel

back more than a few minutes, and even then not to make too big of a change.”

“And I believe that was the right thing to teach you. Time is tricky, you never know what you might change for the worst. But I just couldn’t live in a time where you don’t exist.” Her eyes tear up.

“You saved my life, but it cost you the job you loved and the use of your abilities.”

“And that is nothing compared to losing you.”

I tear up as well. “Honestly, I would have done the same for you if the roles were reversed.” I smile.

“I know.” She grabs my hand. “Anyway, don’t worry about any of this, alright? I know you enjoy a challenge, and I trained you to use your skills. Whether you use them for Oliver, or yourself, I support any decision. But first, go arrest that bastard.”

I chuckle. “I love you, Mum.”

“I love you. More than anything.”

“More than anything.”

Chapter 24

“With endless time, nothing is special.

*With no loss or sacrifice, we can’t appreciate
what we have.” ~ Mitch Albom*



IT IS CLOSE TO MIDNIGHT by the time Oliver shows up with the Antidote. He is dressed in his own clothes and returns my father’s outfit. My mother is still watching television, so I take him up to my room in the attic.

“George must have been happy to see you alive and well,” I say while Oliver studies a few pictures that are hung up on the wall. It is the only decoration in this room, though I’ve put up a few of Lovelace’s drawings on the door.

“You look adorable as a kid. And yes, George was very relieved. I told him about you and he was very surprised. I’m sure he’ll come to terms with it soon. If he acts differently around you, you know why.”

“I figured George isn’t too happy about it. Did you tell Chester we’re okay too?”

“I did. He helped me get the Antidote. Otherwise, I would have had to jump through too many hoops, and it would take too much time. I’d rather get you this quickly, before Caden decides to make use of your vulnerable state.”

“I’m hardly vulnerable.”

“Perhaps so. But let’s not take any chances.” He takes a small black case with a syringe in it. “Apparently this one will burn a little.”

I shrug. “I can handle pain. Just do it quickly.”

“Flashback to my very first time with a woman.” He grins.

“You think you’re so funny, don’t you?” But I can’t fight my emerging smile.

“Alright, I’d prefer it if you lie down before I prick you.”

“And now I’m having a flashback to my first time.”

We giggle like schoolgirls. It’s probably the nerves for what’s about to come. I know about the Antidote, and I know that the burning sensation is putting it mildly. My mother has trained me most of my life, and that includes on how to handle pain. I’ll just have to get through it without waking up the house. Or the entire street. How to explain that to the nosy Beth? ‘Why, yes, I just discovered a broken nail. Worst night of my life.’

The injection itself isn’t bad. He places it in my hip. A pleasant warmth spreads throughout my body, growing hotter and hotter in sensation until it feels like I’m being burned alive. I start writhing in pain and grab my pillow. I turn on my side and nearly fall off the bed, but Oliver catches me and lies down next to me. He holds me tight and I feel his breath on my cheek. He’s so strong that I can’t move.

I focus on my breathing. Images of Lovelace, my parents, the beach. Even walking home from school with Blayze are happy memories. I think about Oliver and his lovely smell. The pain doesn’t go away for a very long time. It feels like an eternity. Afterwards I tremble, but I can also feel the flow of energy. Thank goodness. It felt so alien to not be able to access that part of me.

Oliver starts stroking my hair, my arms, even my stomach. It isn’t until he says, “Don’t cry. You’re killing me,” that I realise I’m sobbing. We lie like this until a little after the sun comes up. Without saying anything, I get up

and run a bath. My knees still feel weak when I get out, but I do feel slightly better now. Knowing Oliver is close also helps.

When I return to my room, it's empty. I get dressed and rush out of my room to see if I can still catch up to him somehow, but when I get downstairs he's having breakfast with everyone. They are pleasantly chatting away like they've known each other for years.

I sit down at the table and my mother immediately gives me two boiled eggs and toast. Her eyes are still on Oliver as he's telling a story on a festival he went to in the sixties. She throws her head back and laughs occasionally while my father signs with Lovelace about a dream she had about Poofie. Poofie is sitting on her lap, and she occasionally feeds him whole pieces of toast. Mr Turtleneck is staring at them with narrowed eyes from the kitchen counter. Poor Mr Turtleneck.

With his speed, Oliver manages to clear the table in under two minutes, with the eternal gratitude of my mother who observes it with fascination. She's probably never seen a friendly vampire before. This is her chance to learn things she otherwise wouldn't. She is nothing if not curious.

"You are as fast as a bee to lemonade," my mother says.

"Dare I say even faster?" Oliver says.

She chuckles.

Oh, boy.

I get up, my chair scraping over the hardwood floor. "Oliver, may I speak with you?" Yesterday was a weird day, but it did make me decide our next step. I also want Oliver's help. I'm not sure if it's because I want him to see something for himself, or if I want to see something for myself. I'm not even sure what that something is.

We head into the corridor at the bottom of the stairs.

“Want a moment alone with me, Kitten?” He leans in close, a grin on his face.

“Listen. I have a plan to stop Blayze. It is bold, dangerous, could end in disaster and I want to do it today. With you.”

His lips curl upward. “I’m in.”



PERHAPS I REALLY WANT to test the stretches of fate. Perhaps I’m mad. The automaton asks our identities the way she did when I visited last time. Oliver and I show our IDs and a moment later we are in the lift, descending into what feels like the belly of the beast. We are silent the whole ride down, but the tension is palpable. Someone could throw a knife at us and it wouldn’t be able to cut through the air around us.

Oliver has shared with me a vital piece of information for this plan, and the fact that he’s helping me again, despite the odds being against us, says something about him. Something good. Oliver says he cleared the information with some higher up from the UA that he trusts, so that we are protected to some extent. However, if this plan doesn’t work, I’m in some hot water, as is Oliver.

We’ve requested another visit with Phoebe and so we are escorted to the visitor’s area. It is true that the walls contain a substance which is also found in the drug that Collars Travellers and that prevents anyone from entering or exiting the prison. Therefore, no Travellers can ever help someone escape. Yet, this is exactly what we’re going to do now.

Oliver, however, knows of a place in this prison that allows for Travelling. It is highly secret, not even the guards know. The reason for that unprotected spot is in case of emergencies, or more specifically, riots. It happened in 1992 and it required the immediate assistance of Level 3 CU

officers. This allowed them to enter the prison immediately and fan out underneath, swarming them from all sides.

The trick now is to get all three of us there in the first place. It is a boiler room one level beneath us and it might not be the suspected escape route, but no guard will let a prisoner and two visitors wander off towards it. Some of the guards are Travellers, ones that didn't make the cut to become a Level 3 officer, or ones that were being punished without actually being in a jail cell. Other guards are human, with perhaps an occasional lower level vampire.

Vampires do not like to work for humans generally, but the UA is as diverse as its leaders, whoever they consist of. I've suspected that Oliver is a member of the Board because influential vampires usually make the cut, but I can't be certain. It would explain why he got the all clear to do this with me. However, if he is and this goes wrong, he'll probably be replaced. The members of the Board alternate over the course of years anyway, to ensure that the power doesn't go to anyone's head, but also to prevent ideas from getting stale. They also believe that they need people who still remember what it's like in the field, which is good.

It is also the Board that I've always wanted to be a member of. Joining them is the only way I can make changes. It is believed that members consist of a human, vampire, werewolf, and Traveller, though the identities are never revealed for their safety. It is all very hush-hush and there are some conspiracy theories that they don't even exist. I highly doubt that myself.

Either way, the guards will not be a problem for Oliver. He is strong enough to influence anyone down here. And I have my pen.

When Phoebe enters the visiting area, her eyes are immediately drawn to Oliver. They practically begin to sparkle at the sight of him. I can't blame her, except that I do. I shift in my seat and glance at Oliver who luckily does not switch on the charm. I imagine he has a deep dislike of her, but it wouldn't have surprised me if he tried manipulating her with his charisma.

She walks up to us with a limp and there is a bruise on her face. Apparently someone did a number on her. It doesn't surprise me. She'll eventually rub anyone the wrong way. Especially in a place like this, where she'll undoubtedly want to be top dog.

"Who's the eye candy?" she asks me, but her eyes are trained on Oliver. She sits down.

"Fancy a walk?" I ask.

She glances at me, her face immediately tense. It takes her a moment to assess whether or not I'm pulling her leg. She decides, quite accurately, that I'm serious.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to end this. Give Blayze exactly what he wants. You."

She smirks. "What he do? Kill someone you love? Keep someone hostage?"

"No, he keeps losing. For a reason. Trying to fight him is equal to fighting fate, so it's time to do the opposite of what he expects. I'm giving you to him."

The smile wavers for a second, but then she regains it. "You think you're so right, don't you? Well, I'll show all of you what's really meant to be. I'm still here, and I refuse to die."

"Some things cannot even be changed by a Traveller." I leave out the part where I also believe that some Travellers should change certain events, but right now I'm 90% certain that she will not live, no matter what anyone does. Okay, 87%.

"What's the plan, then?" she leans back and glances at one of the guards.

"All you have to do is exactly what we tell you to do."

"I don't like taking orders, but I'll do my best. This should be fun."

Oliver and I exchange a look. He then gets up from the picnic-style table and moves to the centre of the room. His eyes turn violet and he stretches out his arms. The energy dissipating from him is like a magnet even when it's not directed at me. I can't look away. After a moment, the four guards in the room walk towards him, the vampires somewhat slower, trying to resist. Their eyes are wide and vacant. Then they all knock each other out with their baton, leaving the last for Oliver to knock out.

I grab Phoebe's hand, recoiling from having to touch her. The woman who killed the other Monday and whoever else, the woman I'm now helping to die even if she doesn't believe that. We rush out of the room, Oliver leading us through the corridors. Each time we encounter a guard, he mesmerises them and we either lock them up or knock them out. Phoebe chuckles along the way, each sound an ice cube along my spine.

Two guards surprise us and I use my pen while Oliver is distracted by another guard. They get shocked and fall to the ground, writhing around like snakes on drugs and then they pass out.

We make it to the staircase that dwindles down to the boiler room, where a feeling of trepidation arises. There are so many bad repercussions that can come from this, yet I have to prove, more to myself than anyone, that fate exists. That I was indeed meant to live, and that she is indeed meant to die. There has to be some order in the chaos, some higher purpose, a line to follow.

Oliver and I look at each other. Are you sure about this? he asks.

No. Yes, I say in his head.

"You guys are so cute together. You should join us in our killing sprees, they're so much fun and you guys would be excellent."

Let me kill her now. It will be so much easier.

No, it wouldn't. That could send Blayze into a rage. She will die and we have to prove to him that even if we help him, she is still meant to die. Trust me, he will give up.

“Are you guys communicating?” Phoebe asks, leaning in towards us. “That is fascinating. I have so much to learn about vampires. This world is fun.”

Before she can piss us off further, I grab Oliver and Phoebe by the arm and in the blink of an eye we are in the woods, near the cabin where the werewolves attacked me and George. It is the only place I can think of that Blayze could be. Why else would there have been werewolves? I also have a sneaking suspicion that there is something here that will allow her to contact him.

“Ah, fresh air,” she says and twirls around with her eyes closed. She is still Collared, that is the only advantage we have right now. That, and hopefully fate.

“Have fun,” I say and take Oliver’s hand. The next moment we are gone. We pop up behind a fallen tree trunk near the river. We have a perfect view of the cabin and Phoebe. As soon as she’s alone, or thinks she is, she runs towards the cabin. Instead of going in, she rummages through something near the front door.

She’s digging, Oliver says.

If I have to guess, it’s something from their world that they can use to communicate.

She puts something against her ear, but we can’t see what it is from this distance. Then, he’s there. His long hair just as I remember from the last time I saw him. For a moment they just stand there, looking at each other. Then, as if the spell is broken, they run towards each other and dive in each other’s arms. It would have been cute if they weren’t homicidal maniacs.

Despite the fact that I stabbed him not too long ago, he seems fine. And since he managed to get me Collared, I imagine he’s got access to a lot of stuff he shouldn’t have access to. Then again, he’s been here for a few years, he’s had time to make himself comfortable.

Gag. Oliver rolls his eyes.

And here I thought you were a romantic.

This isn't romance. This is an unhealthy codependent relationship based on loneliness.

All of his years roaming this world have certainly made him perceptive.

Now what? Oliver averts his gaze as Blayze and Phoebe start making out. Even I feel my stomach turn. To think that I had once kissed him. I shake my head.

We wait.

For?

Fate.

Blayze lifts Phoebe up and carries her to the cabin, he closes the door with his foot and the worst part is that my imagination will probably fill in the blanks of what they're about to do. Stupid imagination. Also, Fate, hurry up before I throw up my breakfast.

"What if you're wrong?" Oliver asks. "What if she dies, but in a year, or a month, after several other people have died?"

"How about we gave fate ten minutes and then we kill them?" I glance at him. A breeze picks up a few strands of his hair and pushes them back.

"And thank you."

"For what?"

"For keeping my secret, saving my life, helping me do something very dangerous and possibly stupid. You've gone above and beyond for me."

He doesn't say anything and I can't read his expression. I hate that.

"Why do you do all these things for me? I'm not special." I raise my eyebrow. "Or do you want to get into my pants that badly?"

He chuckles. “You are definitely high on my to-do list, but no. I guess nobody is special, but I find that you are special to me.”

“High on your to-do list? Really? How charming.”

“That’s what you choose to focus on?” He says with exasperation.

I smile and grab him by the collar, gently pulling him towards me. “No,” I whisper. Our lips are getting closer. It’s like the earth is moving beneath us. Wait, it is. I let him go and glance around. The trees are moving, and so is the ground.

“Earthquake,” Oliver says and we both lose our balance, bumping into each other on the ground. He puts his arms around me, ready to bolt in high speed if any trees come tumbling down. There are several loud cracks and a tree not far from us falls against another one. In the distance there must be more. There is a louder crack and I push myself closer to Oliver. It lasts about thirty seconds and then the world is deadly silent.

I glance back at the cabin. “Look.”

A tree has fallen right onto the cabin, half of it crushed. I’m still looking at the cabin when Oliver stands next to it. Damn, he’s fast. But so am I.

“I don’t feel any energy,” he says, as I show up next to him.

“Neither do I. Do you think they made it out?” We look at each other with alarm and after Oliver calls for backup, three Level 3 CU officers show up. Altogether we work to clear out the cabin. The Level 3 officers team up to teleport the tree away. I do the same, but with the debris while Oliver reaches deep within, summoning his strength as swirls of violet dance around him. He only has to point at something and it lifts up in the air. With a sweeping gesture, he flings it away. Another thing Oliver Marquis can do.

Then there they are. Phoebe’s body is on top of Blayze’s. His eyes are still open, staring up at the sky. I see the small boy that cried after kids threw his lunch on the ground, the boy that held my hand when we walked home. Tears fill my eyes. She was supposed to die, not him too. Had I caused this?

Was this fate or my interference? Was my mum's doing interference?
Should I be dead now?

I start hyperventilating and Oliver pulls me into his arms. "You guys know where to take the bodies. Go," he orders the officers.

He strokes my back. "Take us anywhere you felt comfortable."

I hug him back and smell his musky scent. I don't have to look up to know we're in his office. The one where we had drinks and I couldn't wait to leave and fall apart. Now I am feeling much the same, only I don't want to leave. I want to fall apart in his arms.

Chapter 25

*“My mother may have taught me
that some things are inevitable, but
she never taught me how to deal with
that.” ~ Monday Moody*



OLIVER LEAVES ME WITH chamomile tea after I'm calm enough, to take care of things on his end. He'll undoubtedly notify Perrin and our current boss, as well as George and Chester. The case is now over and everyone will be pleased. And I'll just have to live with the image of a dead Blayze projected in my mind.

I knew Phoebe would die, yet I feel no guilt about that. Perhaps because I know nothing about her except for the horrible things she's done. And perhaps because I know Blayze as the fragile, sweet boy that he once was, I feel sorrow. Yet, that boy died a long time ago. And I'm mourning that boy, not Blayze.

He made his choice and I'm sad about the one he made. But some things are meant to be.

They were supposed to die, I was supposed to live. Even Travellers can not change what is meant to be. We are also part of the web woven by Fate. But where does that leave me and my new job? As long as Travellers aren't hurting anybody, I believe they should be free. Will Oliver see it that way? Regardless of his opinion, I have doubts that he will send me after someone

who hasn't killed anyone or is otherwise a serious threat. If I were him, I'd start with the most dangerous Travellers at large.

The only question is: where will it stop?

Rogue werewolves are hunted for not belonging to a pack, but that is because getting kicked out of a pack is a serious thing. But werewolves, just like vampires, also have archaic rules that don't always make sense in the 21st century. Except, they are more susceptible to changing them, unlike vampires. I'd always assumed rogue werewolves or vampires were dangerous criminals, but I had come across different stories. Vampires on the run because they refused to partake in ridiculous power struggles with peers, or werewolves that wanted to get married to a human when the law forbade it back then.

And yet, we as a society deem them criminals to be arrested or killed.

It has always added to my dislike of vampires and werewolves, but now I'm about to do the same to Travellers. To people like me and Lovelace. My mother.

Can I really do that?

And will Oliver still protect me and Lovelace after I decline his offer?

A gentle knock brings me back to the present. Summer peeks her head in. She is dressed stylish as ever, her makeup putting that of the likes of Paige Pageant and other TV presenters to shame. "Are you feeling better?"

How much has Oliver told her? Or was my sobbing heard throughout the whole building? I feel my cheeks burn. "I'm much better," I mumble and quickly down the last of my tea. "In fact, I should go." I put the mug on the small table by the chair, suddenly desperate to go home and check on my family, ask my mum for advice.

"Oliver instructed me that you could stay the night in the guest room, if you so wish." Her face scrunches up as if she smells something bad. "Or...in his room." She refuses to look me in the eye.

And just when I thought we were getting along.

I smile, simply too tempted. “Yes, perhaps I will stay in his room. But I’ll need some supplies.”

“Supplies?” Her sharp eyebrows are pulled together.

“Oh, yes. I’ll definitely need them if I am to stay in his room. Let me see,” I say as I pace around the room. “A hooded spandex full body binder sack. Rubber Gates of Hell penis harness. A pair of tweezers. Rubber duck. Seven pieces of lettuce. Exactly seven. And a watering can.”

Her eyes widen for a second, then she narrows them at me. “Very funny.”

I laugh. “It was. Your expression was priceless.”

She folds her slender arms across her chest. “Will you be staying or not?”

“No, I should get home and check on my family. But I will stop by later, I need to talk to him.” Just thinking about declining the job makes my heart sink. I’m not sure why. Is it that I feel like I am disappointing him? Or the idea of not seeing him any more? The fear of him exposing me? No, deep down I know he wouldn’t do that.

Why did he even invite me to stay in his room? Well, I could think of a reason or two. Perhaps three if I wasn’t so tired. I shake my head.

“Alright, I’ll let him know. Are you sure you’re okay?”

I want to say something sarcastic, feeling my inner turmoil reaching for my lips, but I swallow the words in time and smile at her instead. A genuine smile this time.

“Thanks, I will be.” I move past her, towards the door.

“You know, he saved my life when I was a kid and stayed in touch ever since. I decided to work for him because I wanted to be by his side.”

It would explain the moments where she seems jealous. I thought she was in love with him, but apparently it's a different kind of love. To my dismay I feel relief. Things would be so much easier if I cared nothing for him.

She takes a step towards me. "Just don't hurt him. He's a good guy," she says without malice.

Regardless, I feel annoyed.

"I don't govern his feelings, Summer. I can't foresee what will hurt him and then go out of my way to spare him. Life is a bitch and sometimes she bites. All we can do is be cautious." Then I grunt and add: "I'm sorry. I'm having a bad day." Without awaiting her reply, I storm out of the room. I stride through the dark corridors until I'm calm enough and teleport to my parents' back garden.

My eyes widen as I notice the broken heap that is my dad's shed. Then I turn to the house. It reminds me of the house that the tank crashed through. Half of the roof is caved in. A heavy branch of the neighbours' tree has fallen on top of it. The sliding doors are broken, but the glass has been cleaned up.

Panic rises up through my body like a heatwave. "Mum!" I shout and run straight to the kitchen. Instead, I find my dad, sipping tea with a large band aid on his forehead.

"Are you okay? Where are Mum and Lovelace?" I rush to him and hug him.

"They're at the hospital. Lovelace got hurt in the face. Your mother rushed her to hospital. With her driving, I'm pretty sure she got there in two minutes." When he sees my horrified face, he pats my arm. "Don't worry. Lovelace was a trooper. She wasn't even crying."

I feel tears sting my eyes and blink them away rapidly. If Lovelace can get through it without crying, so can I. "Should I go after them?"

"They left a while ago, so I'm sure they'll be back soon. I could use some help with the house." He looks at me pleadingly. My dad likes his quiet, he

likes routine and things to be the same. The fact that his home, no, his shed is in shambles, must give him the heebie-jeebies.

“I’ll help.” I start with his shed and check my watch. It was exactly forty-seven minutes and thirty-two seconds ago that the earthquake happened. That is within the sixty-minute limit. It means I can rewind up until that point and make the shed whole again. I glance back at the neighbour’s home and check to make sure nobody is watching.

I summon the energy from deep within me and hold out my hands. It is like grabbing hold of the time strings that the shed is currently in and then spinning it back forty-seven minutes, except that I can’t hold it. It is like water through my fingers. The Collar. I can teleport—and even that hurts—but I can’t do much more than that. Not yet.

I clean out as much stuff as I can and survey the damage. The walls are destroyed. This means a new shed for Dad. He’ll take months picking out the right one, just like he had with this one. It had to feel right. I get that, it’s just that the restless time in between is frustrating. For everyone in the household.

When I go back into the house, I make my way upstairs. The attic is damaged, as well as Lovelace’s room beneath it. The window is shattered, her bookcase toppled over and it takes me a while to spot the drops of blood near the window. If she was standing near it...I shiver at the image. She should have teleported, but she was probably scared. My heart aches to know I wasn’t there for her.

There is a muffled poof poof sound.

I look under the bed, but nothing. I pull out the drawers of the night stand. Nothing. There is a small desk in the corner with drawers. It isn’t until the bottom drawer that Poofie jumps out and into my face. I grab him and hold him in my arms where he makes his poof sounds for about two minutes in a row. He is clearly upset.

“Poor Poofie. You’re safe now.” I stroke him and plant kisses on top of his head. It takes him a while to settle down in my arms. The doorbell rings and

by the time I make it down, my dad is talking with one of the neighbours. I overhear them talking about a plan to help each other out. The whole street. There are a few carpenters on our street, so they will definitely come in handy.

I can practically feel my dad calm down.

They talk for a while as I sit down on the sofa with Poofie. Petting him is calming me down as well, though I'd rather have a large shot of something strong. I'm not a huge fan of alcoholic drinks, but I'd welcome one right now.

At some point my mother's voice drifts into the corridor. "Mum," I call out and get up straight away, letting go of Poofie, who shrieks with dismay and bounces onto the ground. He hops after me, still making disgruntled sounds.

My mother is in the corridor, taking off her jacket with Lovelace standing behind her. "Is she okay?" I ask as I fight the urge to knock my mother out of the way.

"Don't worry," she says. "She's a fighter. But you should know that there was some severe damage to her eye. She'll remain blind in one eye." My mother looks at me with a hint of sympathy and the usual dose of 'suck it up'.

I gently nudge my mother out of the way and bend forward. Lovelace clutches Mr Turtleneck to her chest, her knuckles white. I'm guessing she hasn't let him go since the accident. His paws are moving even if his head is in hiding. At least he's okay too. I gasp when I look at her face. Not because she looks that bad, but because she's wearing an eyepatch.

An eyepatch.

I hug her and she hugs me back. She taps me on the shoulder when I hug her too tightly. Reluctantly, I let go and study her face. I'd only seen Wynter's face for a short time, and I was focussed on the conversation, the hair, the eyepatch. Not the brown colour of her eye, or the upturned nose that is so similar to Lovelace's. But I could be wrong.

It could be a coincidence. Yes, Wynter had her back to me and still she could hear me. She couldn't miraculously hear.

My heart stops. The device from the well. It would fit behind the ear of an adult. It's a hearing aid.

Shit.

I hug Lovelace again.

The rest of the day is a nightmare. I help my parents and neighbours clean up the worst of the mess while my mind is a tornado. If Lovelace is Wynter and vice versa then Wynter comes from the future. Which is why she spoke like she knew things. And here I was thinking she was a deranged leader of a bunch of rogue Travellers. Hell, maybe she is. Why is she here? Why is she with the Red Roses? And what the hell am I supposed to do with this information?

Right now, Wynter is Oliver's enemy. No matter what she's planning, he'll try to stop her. In fact, he's asked me to stop her. Arrest or kill. Those are my options. If it's someone else, they'll definitely kill. Me, however, I could figure out what she wants and keep her safe. Enough.

Picking a side was easy against someone like Blayze and Phoebe. But Wynter? Perhaps there was no middle ground, no way to please both sides. I had always wanted to climb up the ranks, change the rules, make things better for Travellers and not have them punished for simply using their abilities. Intention matters. But now, now it seems I am running out of time and I have to choose a side.

Travellers or the UA?

Lovelace or Oliver?

Chaos or order?



SUMMER HAS PUT ME IN the parlour at Oliver's mansion. After a mere five minutes I hear familiar rapid footsteps across the thick carpet.

"Hi, Celeste," I say before she turns the corner.

"Monday," she says. "I smelt you."

My eyes widen. "Wow, charming." I sniff my clothes.

She laughs. "You know what I mean."

"I do." I wink at her.

"How's Alic—I mean Lovelace?" she asks. "My dad told me the story."

Inwardly, I wince. "She got hurt in the earthquake, but she'll be fine." She's just blind and I have the task to kill her future self, but that's just an average day of the week.

"Oh, good. I got hurt too." She holds out her arm to reveal a scratch that is already healing.

"Did it hurt?"

"A little. I don't mind pain."

"Good," I say. "The world is filled with it."

"I know," she says, casting her eyes downwards. "But I'm glad you're here." She looks to the side as if she's heard something I haven't. She probably has. "Say hi to Al—Lovelace for me." And she dashes off without a word.

I brace myself for whoever it is she heard approaching. I assume it's Oliver, but it's actually George who enters. His dark eyes scan my whole body.

He sits down opposite me. “You caught Blayze and Phoebe,” he says.

“Not really. They died.”

“But you arranged that, didn’t you? Because some things are meant to be.”

“It’s because he kept trying to save her life and she kept dying, from what Perrin said. That suggested she was meant to die. I just had to prove it to Blayze. Anyway, now he’s dead.” I look down at my hands.

“And you’re a Traveller. Just like him.”

“I am nothing like him. And you should know that.”

“If you had used your...skills, you could have saved me and yourself when those werewolves attacked.”

“Yeah, well, I figured you’d be okay enough with my regular skills. We both would be.”

“You nearly died.”

“Please. I’ve been through worse than a werewolf attack. I once was chased by cannibals and ended up in the territory of a creature three times the size of a werewolf.”

He frowns. I can’t decide if that frown means he doesn’t like what he’s hearing or that he doesn’t believe it.

“And to answer your question, I couldn’t use my skills because I’ve never been able to use them. Not without anyone noticing. Think about what you would have done if I had used my skills. I doubt you would have been grateful that I saved your life and instead would have Collared me. I’m a good CU officer, regardless of being a Traveller, maybe even because of it.” I stick up my nose, ready to pick a fight if he wants it.

“Do you think my wife’s death was meant to be?” he asks. There is no anger in his words. Just sadness.

“I don’t know. I really don’t know. I’m struggling with death myself, right now.”

I wait for him to say more, but he doesn’t. When Oliver appears he quietly gets up and leaves. I’m not sure what the purpose was of this little chat, but I reckon it was his way of saying his piece. A truce is better than nothing.

I glance at Oliver, dressed impeccably as ever, with no hint of fatigue or stress, while I feel like I’m being eaten alive by insects. Okay, that might be an exaggeration, but my heart is pounding rapidly in my chest. I really don’t want to keep secrets from him.

With graceful steps, he makes his way over to me. I get up and manage a smile.

“Are you okay?” he asks. His light eyes are staring at me intently. As if he can read me like a book.

“Lovelace got hurt in the earthquake. She’s blind in one eye.”

He frowns. “I’m sorry. How is she taking it?”

“Like a Moody.”

“Well then. I’m glad.” He smiles at me, tucking a strand of my hair behind my ears. “If you could send me your report on what happened today, I’ll pass it along. That way you don’t actually have to go into the UA. I’ve already handed in your notice for you. From now on you’ll stay with me. In fact, the whole team will stay at my place. It’s certainly large enough. What school does Lovelace go to?”

“She doesn’t have a school yet, but she’ll go to a new one after the summer break.”

“Perfect. She can be homeschooled, or I can sign her up to a very prodigious school. Either way, you’ll have all the privileges you want. All of you. And you get shiny new badges.”

“Will Perrin join the Retrievers?”

His expression changes. It's barely perceptible. "No. He's going home tomorrow. Chester will spend most of his time at the club, but he'll have a room here and George already lives here, as you know. Celeste will be happy to spend time with Lovelace."

"Yes, she will." I nod.

"And I will be happy to spend time with you." He leans a little closer.

"I'd love to work for you," I say. "But it means that we cannot be together."

He frowns as if he doesn't understand. "We're together now."

"You know what I mean."

He laughs. "Relax, Kitten. I'm not asking you to marry me. Maybe a little kissing, some touching." His eyes turn violet for a moment.

Wow. Sexy.

"No, thank you. I told you, I want to be your friend."

"Ah, yes. So braiding each other's hair and having pillow fights in our underwear. Sounds good too."

"You don't give up, do you?"

"Never." He says, leaning forward and sniffing my neck. "You smell delicious, what is that?"

"Repulsion."

He laughs again. "Living with you is going to be fun. I look forward to it."

I swallow. "Yeah, me too." So much fun.

Chapter 26

*“They always say time changes things,
but you actually have to change them
yourself.” ~ Andy Warhol*



SATURDAY MORNING BRINGS a whole new bag of emotions as we say goodbye to Perrin. He shows up to the mansion with some minor bruises left, but overall he's as healthy as before. I wonder if he's bothered that he couldn't be there when Blayze and Phoebe died. If I were him, I would be.

We are standing outside, because my parents are due to arrive any moment with a bag of Lovelace's stuff. Oliver has arranged for all my stuff in my Yorkshire home to be moved here.

My parents are staying over for the weekend, probably to make sure that me and Lovelace are being left in good hands. Or perhaps to enjoy the sauna that Oliver has in the basement, next to the swimming pool. His mansion also has a massive library with a secret passageway to our meeting room where we discuss new cases. It is impossible to teleport in and out of it, for our protection. I don't blame Oliver's caution, plus I love the secret passage.

Perrin shares a few quiet words with Oliver and George, then takes me aside. I'm sure Oliver and George can hear us just perfectly, but assume they're polite enough to not bother eavesdropping.

“Listen, thank you for being my partner. You are a very good one.”

I smile. “Thanks. So are you.”

“I also realise that you’re not her. I’m sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable.”

“Don’t worry, I can only imagine what it must be like for you. I’m sorry she’s gone. Death doesn’t end a relationship, that’s why it’s so hard.”

“Yes, it is.”

I glance back at Oliver and George. “Look, I can’t promise you the pain will go away, but at some point you find that you can live with the pain. And you’ll also find that there is plenty of love in your heart as well. Don’t be afraid to feel it.”

Perrin smiles, sadness in his eyes. He kisses my cheek. “Anytime you need anything, you know where I am.”

“I know.” Though I doubt I want to remind him of his dead fiancée any more than I already have.

Just then my parents’ car comes up the driveway. Lovelace has her head out of the window and waves at us.

“That’s my cue. See you later.” He says goodbye to all of us once more and then is gone. He’ll create a portal somewhere a lot more private than the front steps of Oliver’s mansion.

“Ready for your new and exciting life, Kitten?” Oliver whispers in my ear.

I swallow. “I’ll have to be.”

“Don’t worry. All will be well.” He smiles at me, making me believe him.

“Thank you. Really.”

“Feel free to express your gratitude by—”

“No,” I say firmly, cutting him off.

He chuckles.

Lovelace comes running up to me and hugs me. My mum follows in her purple dress and golden heels, clutching nothing but her purse while my father is forced to follow with three suitcases. George rushes over to help him.

“Ready for a sleepover?” I ask, as we all make it into my new home.



TWO WEEKS LATER AND I'm settled in nicely in Oliver's mansion. Lovelace is having the time of her life with Celeste and my parents visit every Sunday. It has more to do with Lovelace's training than because they miss me. But also because they miss me. Poofie and Mr Turtleneck took a moment to adjust to another change, but both love the space they now have.

Mr Turtleneck keeps popping up at random places, taking casual strolls throughout the place. Much to the chagrin of Summer, who shrieks every time she notices him. She claims he's following her around, staring at her.

I've also explored the wing of Oliver's mansion that is now my home. There is a room with darts and a pool table. A large library with sofas and a chess table, as well as the secret passage. A huge kitchen with loads of snacks, and of course the medical room where I was patched up before. The doctor, Dee, also lives here, but only during the week. I've only seen her once so far. The woods behind the mansion are lovely. They're perfect for clearing one's head. And mine needs a lot of clearing.

I haven't seen Wynter since I've moved in, but when I'm taking a stroll on a Wednesday morning, not too deep into the woods behind the mansion, she's there, casually leaning against an oak tree. She smiles when she sees me. In the daylight, I can see her clearly.

Lovelace really does grow into a beautiful woman. With a heavy heart, I walk up to her. “Hi, Lovelace,” I say.

“Ah, yes. I knew you’d have figured it out by now. Good to see you again, Mum.”

At those words, my heart constricts. “Lovelace, what do you want? Why did you go back in time? Why are you part of these rogue Travellers?”

“I’m not part of them. I am their leader. I am them. Just as you are. It is time we reclaim our freedom. That is why I’ve come back. Because it all goes to hell, and I’ve got to make it right.” There is venom in those words.

I have so many questions about the future, but I doubt she’ll lay it all on the table. She came back, biding her time for a reason. She also wanted to kill Oliver for a reason, even if she says she doesn’t now. “Have you ever killed someone?” I ask. “Or do you just have people do it for you?”

“That’s rich coming from you. You’ve killed vampires, werewolves, and a few Travellers. Or at least, you will.”

“I will?”

She smiles. I’m beginning to dislike that smile. She’s enjoying my ignorance.

“Just tell me what you want. I can help you. Why aren’t you asking me for help? We should be in this together.”

“You took the words right out of my mouth. You should be helping me. And that’s exactly why I’m here. There will be a case in a few weeks. The man you have to capture is someone we need. Alive. I need you to keep him that way. He’s special. You’ll know when you meet him. He’s a Traveller, but not a Traveller.”

I frown. “Why? What has he done? Who is he to you?”

“To us, Mum. We’re in this together.”

“Cut the crap. I don’t want you to get hurt, but I don’t trust your motives. I can see it in your eyes and I don’t like it. There’s something malevolent going on. The fact that I don’t know what has happened to you is exactly why I’m wary. You either inform me, or you can kiss your hopes of me doing errands for you goodbye.”

She smiles. “There’s the mother I know. Fierce, strong. It is you I’m doing this for.”

“Me?”

“Yes. I’m doing this to save you. And if this is what it takes, so be it. I don’t care who I have to hurt, as long as I get you back.”

“Back? I die?”

She shakes her head, the tears in her eyes disappearing as she smiles again. A smile that doesn’t reach her eye. “Keep the Traveller alive and we’ll talk more later. Just trust me, Mum.” She turns as if she’s going to disappear.

I grab her and pull her against me, holding her tight. “You’ve turned into such a beautiful woman,” I whisper while stroking her hair. Tears are welling up in my eyes and when I look back at her, she has tears in her eye as well.

“I love you,” I say.

“I love you too.” Then she disappears.

As I return to the mansion, Oliver is waiting for me. “We’ve got our first case,” he says with a grin. He’s buttoned up the top button of his shirt wrong and I’m guessing he was sleeping before now. His usual rhythm from what I’ve gathered is going to bed at five A.M. and waking up at one P.M. I feel a surge of trepidation and excitement battling each other in my body.

I smile. “Wonderful.” Without thinking I redo his top button while his eyes dart across my face like a pinball in a pinball machine. He leans forward

and I pull back.

“What are you doing?”

“Kissing you. You are familiar with that concept are you not? If not, I’m happy to show you.”

“Oh, I’m sure you are. But keep your lips to yourself or I’ll teleport you into an active volcano.”

He laughs and I laugh too, despite myself.

“Poof poof.”

We both look down at Poofie who is chewing on the last leg of one of the armchairs.

“Hey, I liked that armchair.”

“Sorry about that,” I say, feeling my cheeks warm.

“That’s okay. You can make it up to me by paying for the cinema tickets.”

“You made me pay last time as well.”

He shrugs. “You don’t pay rent and you are paid handsomely for your services.”

“And you have more money than you could ever spend in a hundred lifetimes.”

“Better not try then.” He grins. “Now, let’s go take on our first case. Well, really second, but who is counting?” He holds out his arm and I take it.

“Yes, let’s do this.” It’s not like Wynter told me that I should help anyone escape or anything like that, she simply told me to keep someone alive. Since I am not thrilled about killing anyone, it’s not as if I’m doing anything different than what I would have done anyway.

And yet...

I'm back to living a lie again. The only difference this time is that I am not alone. And maybe, just maybe, that will make all the difference.

“Poof poof.”

THE END

(FOR NOW)

Acknowledgements

UNICORN. Sorry for that outburst but I always skip these because I don't want to be reminded of the fact that the book and its characters were just that, especially after just finishing it. So I promise to keep this interesting.

First of all, I want to thank Kim Segers and Mallory Moss for being exceptionally good beta readers and Monday's first fans. My other beta readers have also been amazing, so thank you.

Special thanks to the characters for being so well-behaved. Although Poofie was very difficult to control. He's a bit of a diva.

And also a thank you to Monday for being such a champ, despite all the things I threw at you. Apologies in advance for what I'm going to put you through in the next novel. It will be fun.

Special thanks to my parents for believing in me, the love of my life for being the love of my life and a thank you to the purple dragon behind you. Just keeping you on your toes.

Also, I'm grateful for my muse for showing up, even though she was almost always drunk. It probably only helped.

And last but not least, thank you reader. Thank you for stepping through the portal to Monday's world and for giving my characters a reason to get up and perform. They were getting sick of just looking at my face. Yes, I could tell, Chester. (He is so easy to read.)

If you loved this, please keep an eye out for me (or have your pet dragons do it), because I am not done telling my stories. And neither are my characters.

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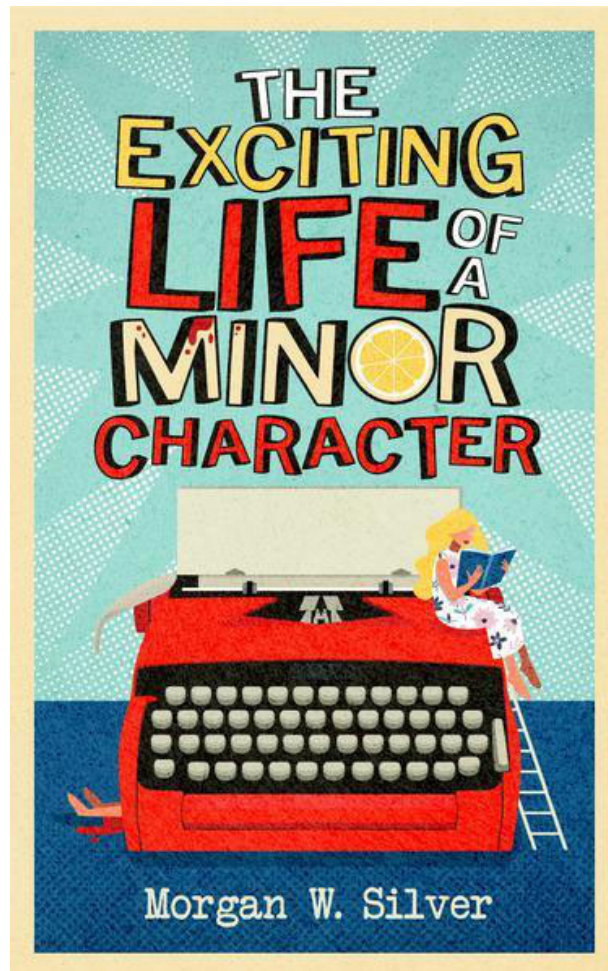
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About the Author

I considered writing this bio in the third person, but my other voices wouldn't let me. My name is Morgan W. Silver. I have a BA in English Language and Culture and a Master's degree in Creative Writing. Which means I have a licence to write, and it will be extra awkward if I make spelling eroiers. Oops.

All my novels contain mysteries, but the subgenres may differ. There are, however, always shenanigans and quirky characters, as well as a dash of romance.

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