

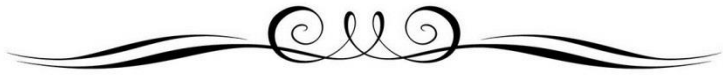
SERAPHYMPIRE

GUARDIANS

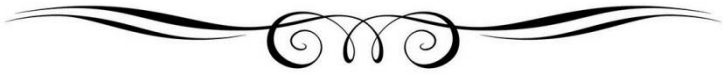
of the

GATEWAYS

RENEE SPYROU



BOOK 1.



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Seraphympire ~ Guardians of the Gateways.

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NOTE: This work contains coarse language, strong violence and graphic descriptions not appropriate for children under 18.

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MEMORIUM



*This book is dedicated to the memory of my beautiful son
Yanni Spyrou.*

*Who lost his battle to Adrenoleukodystrophy at the tender age of
13.*

*If not for you, Yanni, I never would have begun my writing
journey.*

*Thank you baby boy for bringing love, joy and much laughter into
our lives.*

*Your strength and unshakable courage continue to inspire us.
You will forever be missed.*

R.I.P

26/08/97 ~ 25/07/11

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PROLOGUE.



Aemma Pharmaceutical Laboratories

1.15 a.m. Wednesday 25th March 1987

The heady scent of chlorine infused the air as the man in black edged along the shadowed corridor. Moonlight glinted off the dagger in his white-knuckled grip. His eyes narrowed and focused on a lab door framed in fluorescence. The sound of tinkling glass, bubbling liquid and Luciano Pavarotti's 'Nessun Dorma' murmured in the background. These would be the last things his victim would ever hear.

He slid his print-less fingertips over the doorknob and eased into the room. His colleague was bent over a microscope, fine-

tuning the adjustment dial. A jagged-tooth grin formed on his face as he crept up behind and peered over his victim's shoulder. The formula was scrawled in red on a discoloured scrap of paper. He raised his arm and brought the dagger down with a quick flick of the wrist, slashing the honed steel across his colleague's neck and severing the main artery. Blood erupted in a wide arc, spraying the microscope, the coffee cup and lunch remnants cluttering the tabletop. With lightning speed, the man in black snatched and pocketed the scrap of paper and a test tube vial filled with a luminous red liquid.

The wounded man gasped as blood spurted from his mouth, and down his face and shirtfront. The assassin watched; unflinching, remorseless. The dying man kicked out his feet, upending his lab chair and landing in a heap on the bleached, tiled floor. Bewildered, he looked up at his executioner, his eyes widened when he saw who was standing over him. He lifted his hand to the wound at his throat; blood coated his fingertips as he felt the ragged, wet edges. *'Why?'* he mouthed as he died.

"Why indeed?" The man in black murmured, unhooking a giant keychain from his colleague's belt clip before departing.

PRESENT DAY.



“Did ya get the Red?”

“Yeah,” Thomas replied, barely noticing the squalor he and Scott were surrounded by. They’d snuck into the derelict building two hours ago.

“I can’t believe they’re giving this shit away,” Scotty intoned.

Thomas extracted a weathered crack pipe from his grimy denim jacket pocket. With shaking hands, he removed the red V5 crystals from a plastic sachet. He positioned them in the pipe chamber, struggling not to spill the rock crystals on the ground. A cold sweat coated his body, the shakes coming fast and strong.

“Come on man, I’m climbin’ tha fuckin’ walls ’ere – I wanna get blazed; light it up already.”

Thomas slid a banged-up lighter from a pocket in his jeans. He thumbed the flint wheel, beaming. He lowered the flame to the crystals. They hissed, igniting with a dazzling red flash. He sank deeper into the rotting couch, not feeling the broken springs stabbing him in the back, not smelling the mould, the garbage, or the decaying corpse in the corner of the room. He swung his arm out and whacked Scott in the chest with the pipe. Scott snatched it from his loose grasp.

Thomas’s head flopped back as if his neck were made of rubber and glanced about the room. It was a blur of spinning colour. The walls wavered back and forth as though someone had a hold of the ends wobbling them. A languid grin swayed across his face as he flung his arm at Scott for the pipe. A spluttering of hiccups sprang from his mouth like magic jumping beans. He began to laugh. Ten hands quivered like birds’ wings before his eyes. He wiggled his fingers and they stretched out like plasticine, his fingernails transforming into snake heads.

“*Cooooool,*” he murmured, turning his head towards Scott. Scott’s skull seemed to be swelling like a balloon.

“What the fuck’s up with your head, Scotty?” Scott didn’t reply, but his eyelids fluttered, curling backwards. Thomas giggled as he continued watching his mate. “Fuck, man, this shit’s

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A-O-kay,” he said, as red cocktail umbrellas exploded from his friend’s eyes; his tongue a river of yellow slime.

Thomas lurched forward, clutching his stomach, laughing hard, landing on the floor with an audible *oomph*. He lay on his back gaping at the orbiting ceiling, his eyes straining to adjust. He blinked, swiping his forehead with faltering hands as a celestial light seared his retinas. The shimmering glow took shape, and a golden-haired apparition manifested. It hovered in and out of focus above him. The angel-goddess smiled; he reached out for her, and she changed, rocketing towards him in a wall of fire; eyes blazing red, fangs dripping venom; and then blackness.

CHAPTER 1.



Kayla Uriel extended her six giant wings and held her face towards the sky, absorbing the last warm rays of sunshine with her skin and downy feathers. She sighed in pure, unadulterated pleasure.

The Greek island she'd lived on for centuries was a small piece of paradise; time hadn't diminished its beauty – the one constant in her world. The ocean, the sunrises and the sunsets gave her peace of mind and strength of heart. It was her sanctuary, the only place where she felt safe from the chaos of the world. It regenerated her, soothing her body, mind and soul, strengthening her against the evil in the world and in her heart.

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She came to her cove every day. The waves whispered as they broke along the shore's edge – beckoning. Kayla shrugged her shoulders and her wings vanished into her back. She lay on the luxurious white sand, dragging her fingertips through the soft granules, enjoying the powdery coolness. Greek beaches were usually covered in coarse, dark grey sand or smooth, round pebbles. The white sand was an oddity.

She dragged in the salty freshness of the rumbling ocean, if only she could bottle the smell and save it for when she was far from its lazuline depths. She looked up into the cloudless sky and smiled as a giant bird appeared; the largest wedge-tailed eagle she'd ever seen. He was a dark chocolate brown with burnt orange highlights that interchanged in the sunlight.

There was something more to him. His loud cry split the silence. The hairs on the nape of her neck prickled. She wolf-whistled, and slid a protective leather glove onto her hand. He dove like a skydiver, plummeting to earth, his wings opening like a parachute, and settled on her arm.

“I've missed you, boy,” she murmured.

He squawked his reply and she knew he'd been thinking it too. He was the only creature she had that kind of connection with. An image of food flashed in her mind. She removed a portion of fresh rabbit meat from a plastic container at her feet,

and held it out to him, the meat disappeared, and the same image flashed again.

“Hungry, huh?” she asked, feeding him more. “Come on then, let’s go inside.”

The eagle usually slept indoors at night, departing with the dawn. It'd been their ritual for decades. He was unusually old for an eagle – unique in his own way.

She made her way uphill towards her home. It was timeworn, seven hundred years old, a monastery in the past. It looked as though it had been constructed by a toddler, an incompatible compilation of Lego blocks. The cottage was a dirty brown-beige with watered-down rust-coloured roof tiles. Overgrown shrubs danced about the perimeter walls, seeking escape from the shadows.

It was a cylindrical building with a cone-shaped roof pinned by three cubed structures; held hostage with mortar and stone. A corroded steel cross thrust heavenward, begging God’s forgotten attention. Kayla thought about the artwork of saints and angels still on the interior walls; they’d survived the ravages of time undamaged. The images comforted her. She sensed it had to do with her Seraphim heritage.

She marvelled at the exquisite eagle perched on her glove. He was a majestic creature with eyes the colour of honeyed

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amber. Hard to believe he was a wild animal. She kissed the top of his head, smoothing her hand over his warm, glossy feathers.

“I knew I’d find us here!”

It was her Vampire alter ego, Makayla. Kayla had two souls trapped in one body. She wished she didn't have to share her body.

Kayla studied the entrance to her cottage. Two parallel lengths of beaten iron bordered the weathered wooden door. The iron was tarnished green, and pocked with small cavities. The door was simple, yet the artistry reflected the building's complexity. She unlatched it, and it creaked open with a loud screech.

“When are you going to oil that bloody thing?”

Kayla stepped over the threshold into her home, the warmth surrounding her immediately.

“Well? It's annoying!”

Kayla sighed. Her time, the daytime, was almost up. Makayla would take control of their body soon; she was vicious and sharp-edged, full of hate and anger – predatory.

Kayla walked to the centre of the room. The remains of a large, dead tree adorned the main living area, its gnarled branches stretched upwards towards the ceiling. It gave the lounge room an inherent earthy quality. She deposited the bird onto a sturdy branch. It flapped its wings and fluffed its feathers. Throwing

herself on a nearby couch, she folded her legs beneath her, tucked a plush cushion onto her lap, and gazed at the logs burning in the fireplace.

“I hate it when you ignore me.”

Kayla tried to remain calm, but Makayla’s incessant bullying was beginning to take its toll – a by-product of their shared existence. A log popped. She disregarded the buzzing in her ears and mind and found comfort in the flames as they rolled and kneaded the wood. The fire seemed alive, shifting and changing as it fed on the logs. She couldn’t help but admire its beauty as it caressed the wood.

“God you piss me off; you never change, Kayla.”

“I know.”

“Fuck, is that it? Is that all you can say?”

“What do you want me to say, Makayla? I’m tired, leave me alone.”

“You’re pathetic; I hate you!”

“I know. But I love you.”

“I want control of my body!”

“Our body; remember it was mine first.”

“Fuck you!”

“I wish you wouldn’t talk like that.”

“Yes, Mum!”

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Weakened by the setting sun, Kayla couldn't hold onto her body any longer. She continued gazing at the coals burning in the hearth, pretending she was her own. The heat radiated out in waves, wrapping around her and lulling her fuzzy mind to sleep.

“Thank fuck for that!” Makayla grimaced. She stood, and turned towards the eagle, he watched her with unusual intelligence. She wandered over to him and ran her hand down his back. The bird shivered at her slight touch, fluttered its feathers and greeted her with a piercing squawk.

Makayla tossed another log onto the dwindling fire. The room temperature was beginning to wane. She didn't like the cold; it reminded her of what she was: warm by day and ice-cold by night; one of the many traits of being half Vampire and half Seraphim.

She crossed the room and dragged out a well-worn leather desk chair and plonked down on it, the padded cushioning protesting loudly. She switched on her computer and waited for it to boot up. There was an email message from Vasili regarding a new assignment.

“Fucking Newbloods!” she said, hurling an empty wine glass that had previously been sitting on the desk next to her computer. The glass hit the wall across the room with a loud crash, splintering into tiny shards before vaporising into thin air.

“Fuck!” She switched off the computer and stomped towards the refrigerator, yanking open the door. Half-empty bottles clattered together.

“Wine, fucking wine; I hate this sour grape shit!” She scrummaged through the contents on each shelf.

“Don't tell me there's none left? Where is it, where is it, where is it?” Her skin twitched as she searched the refrigerator with a fiery thirst. Saliva pooled beneath her tongue, and streamed down her chin. Her gums were burning, her teeth fully extended and aching with hunger. She had only one thought – *blood*. She could smell its coppery scent, but couldn't locate it. She threw containers, food, plates and bottles onto the floor, searching anxiously, oblivious to the noise and mess she was making.

She honed in on the tall-necked, glass bottle with three-and-a-half inches of blood at the bottom and hissed, her eyes dilating. She pulled the cork and brought the bottle to her mouth with trembling hands. Two, three, four deep swallows and the frenzied need to feed abated slightly. But she needed more, wanted more, had to get more.

“When are you going to stop drinking pig slop and drink human blood again?” A dark, velvety voice echoed in her head – her nemesis.

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“Get out, get out, get out of my head, you fucking bitch!” Makayla said, banging the palms of her hands on her temples. “I’ve got Kayla in here, I don’t need you too!”

“*But Makayla, dear, I am you!*” the voice said, laughing seductively.

“I’ll never drink human blood, never again!”

“*Yoouuuu will if you want to get rid of me!*” The velvet voice purred. Makayla let out a roar, screaming at the top of her lungs. The cottage windows shattered, showering over her, and the eagle. She flung herself to the ground, jerking her limbs inwards trying to find warmth in her cold curling body; the debris haloing her.

“Need more blood!” She mumbled over and over. “Need more bloood!”



Kayla cracked open her eyes and shielded her face from the glaring sunlight puncturing the semi-shadowed room.

“Makayla what did you do? Ow!” She rubbed the grit from her eyes and removed a sharp piece of glass embedded in her side. Sitting up, she surveyed the chaos around her. Shards of coloured glass glittered in the morning sunshine. She raised her arm and brushed slivers from her skin.

The cottage was a disaster; food scraps, broken plates, glass bottles and containers littered the entire floor. She eased herself up, careful not to cut herself on the debris. Her clothes were slashed; saturated in blood. She noticed lettuce on her sleeve, picked it off and tossed it on the sludge pile. She looked across at the eagle; he rolled his eyes, blinking and flapping his wings as she crunched over to him.

“I’m glad to see you’re okay!” she said, removing a slice of tomato from his back.

“We need a bath!” Laughing, she gazed at the mess. It was a habit of Makayla’s. A habit she was getting sick of.

“Where do I begin?” She tiptoed to the closet and removed a bucket, a dustpan and a brush. Three hours later the place was spotless; she and the bird were clean, fed and sitting on the front porch on a couch that had seen better days. She snuggled deeper into the cushions stroking her feathered friend, knowing he would be leaving soon.

“So, my bronze boy, I’ll see you later,” she said, jerking her arm upwards. The eagle uncurled its talons from her leather clad hand and thrust into the air, flapping his massive wings as he sailed up into the clear, azure heavens, hovering along the wind currents as though he were a magnificent sailing ship unfurling its sails. His feathers reflected the light as he disappeared into the blue abyss. The lure of flight shadowed her thoughts; she wanted

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to join him, and fly as freely as he did. She loved stretching her wings; it was invigorating.

Kayla removed the leather gauntlet from her hand and leant back, relishing the warmth bathing her body. She smiled when she recognised Vasili's familiar voice in her mind.

"What are you thinking, child?"

"Invading my thoughts again, Vasili?" she said, feigning anger.

"I just wanted to see you were rested."

"Why?" She re-adjusted the cushion on her lap.

"We have another job . . ."

"So soon," she replied.

"The Shadow Seekers are assembling at the usual place in London. You have two days."

"Does Makayla know?"

"I sent her an email."

"I'm worried, Vasili, she's getting worse."

"I'll talk to her."

"Do you think it will help? It hasn't in the past."

"I can only try, I'll see you soon, child."

Kayla nodded, sensing his smile as his voice faded from her mind

CHAPTER 2.



The throbbing beat from the club across the street could be heard from the dark alley where Makayla stood. She liked the shadows. She could hide, become a part of them, and just vanish. She leant back, moulding herself against the rough rock wall, cigarette in hand, observing the people coming and going. The underlying odour of the river Thames enveloped her. Years of water filtration couldn't mask the centuries of human excrement that wafted off the muddied waterway, reminding her of The Great Stink of 1858. Lifting her cigarette to her mouth, she took a long, deep drag, savouring the nicotine as she exhaled. She watched the white plume of smoke curl up into the night. Her eyes caught on the Big Ben clock tower. Eleven fifty-five.

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She flicked her gaze back towards the club, tugging in another drag on her cigarette. There were a sundry of Off Worlders on the cobbled streets. Their human camouflage couldn't hide what they were. The air surrounding them seemed to waver as if their images were reflected in rippling water. If only mortals could see what she saw.

God, she was hungry. She looked up at the flashing neon sign above the establishment's doorway. "The Devil's Pit."

A scantily clad girl clothed in a devil's costume stood holding a red plastic pitchfork near the entrance, smiling at the pedestrians on the street as they passed. Makayla could see the goosebumps on the surface of the girl's skin. She regarded the girl's neck, watching the flow of blood pumping through her veins just below the surface of her skin.

Makayla tilted her head, angling her ear to the side. She could even hear it. The young woman's heart rate was elevated, fluttering with a swift hummingbird beat. Makayla's fangs punched out, piercing her bottom lip. Her mouth watered as she tasted blood. She licked her lip without thinking, sealing the holes with her saliva, and swallowed, the coppery liquid, accentuating the growling emptiness in her stomach.

"You could grab a bite to eat inside."

"Shut up, bitch! I don't do humans anymore!"

"Maybe you should! What could it hurt? You'd be stronger."

“I don't need to be stronger!”

“Keep lying to yourself . . .”

“Enough!” she said, retracting her fangs and tossing her cigarette butt to the kerb. Another night in the trenches; being around humans was getting harder. She stepped from the shadows and made her way across the street towards the club with feline grace. Traffic stopped in both directions; people were transfixed by her beauty. As she passed by them her long, wavy, gold, copper hair brushed her leather clad hips.

She gazed up at the beefy bouncer – bouncers all looked alike. Largish men, with military haircuts, tattoos covering the length of their arms and an arrogance that pegged them in charge of a doorframe. He stepped aside; she brushed past him, making her way to the bar, pushing through the crowded, dark, flashing room. The club was a regular haunt for people like her. She signalled the bartender and ordered herself a shot of Southern Comfort.

“Put it on my tab.” The bartender nodded and poured her drink. She rested her back against the stainless steel bar and downed her shot, licking the residue from her lips as the alcohol burnt a path down her throat like liquid fire. Makayla surveyed the spacious room and its occupants: Vampires, Demons, Werewolves, Witches, Warlocks, Fae, Off Worlders of every

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denomination, and a few human transients on the dance floor, as well.

“Fucking Vamp wannabes!” she mumbled.

She breathed in her surroundings and was smothered by stale tobacco, spilt beer, unwashed bodies and the unmistakable scent of dying human cells. She held her breath so as not to smell the one thing she couldn't resist – blood. The low hum of the smoke machine was a labouring undertone to the thumping techno music; it wasn't doing its job, she could still see the chipped, cracked flooring. People gyrated on the dance floor. They leant against walls that were draped in deep-red velvet curtains. They stood around stainless steel tables, drinking cocktails. They sat making out on red, lip-shaped couches in poorly lit corners. They laughed, flirted, danced. Some were having sex, the smell of copulation a musty, sour odour sticking to the dust particles in the air. Her nostrils flared. Makayla could hear the moaning and grunting in the background, even with the techno music at ear splitting levels.

“Hey there, pretty lady! Do you come here often?”

“Very funny, Reece,” she said, frowning.

“Can I buy you a drink, pretty lady?” Reece said, resting an elbow on the bar.

“Nope!” She punched his arm.

“Ouch,” he yelped rubbing it vigorously. “Don't be cruel, honey, I'm just trying to buy you a drink!”

“Well, get me a bloody drink and shut the fuck up!” She pulled a candy-red Zippo lighter from a pocket in her black leather biker jacket, lit another cigarette and took a lengthy drag.

She stared at Reece, giving him a swift once-over, and exhaled slowly. He was sexy, with a tall, athletic build and a pale complexion, striking oval face, dark eyes and shoulder-length, ash-blonde hair tied in a ponytail behind his head. They'd had a fling once, long ago, when he was a fledgling; before Anna. It was crazy sex and a big mistake. He was an annoying little shit, a try-hard comedian. It had been the longest fucking week of her life.

“So, do you know why Vasili has called this meeting?” he asked, in a more serious tone, handing her a drink as he spoke.

“What else is there?”

“Newbloods.”

“You got it. So, where's Anna?” Makayla asked, looking about the club.

“She's checking the perimeter.” He examined the crowded dance floor.

“Old habits die hard, huh.”

“Yeah,” he said, flashing perfect teeth. “Are the others coming too?”

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“That's a real dumb question, Reece!”

“Do you think its recruitment or dismemberment?”

“Who cares, as long as we get to kill something?”

“I've got a joke for you, Makayla!”

“Spare me the torture, Reece,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“What do you get when you cross a bulldog with a shiatsu? A Bullshit!” He laughed uproariously.

“Ah hah, ah hah, you're so funny . . . NOT . . . You need to find new material, Reece, because the Jim Carrey jokes are getting old!”

“Why do you always have to ruin the moment, Makayla?” he said, brushing his forefinger over his eyebrow.

“I get off on it!”

“Lighten up, you're too serious. Relax and be happy!”

“I am relaxed, see!” she said, rotating her shoulders and neck, taking another drag on her cigarette, and raising her finger for another shot. She upended the glass in one mouthful.

“You're seriously fucked up, Makayla.”

“You're just realising this, now? I'm four thousand years old, Reece, you don't live as long as I have and not get damaged. In time, you'll be just like me!” She ashed her cigarette on the floor.

“God, I hope not! I want to live, love and laugh!” He strolled off towards a woman wearing a sexy little red number. He leant in close, and whispered in her ear.

“Sure, handsome let’s dance!” the woman giggled.

Makayla turned back to the bar and ordered another four shots, flicking the Zippo lid back and forth as she waited; Reece’s happy-go-lucky attitude disgusted her; how could a Vampire be happy? He'd accepted his fate – the good and the bad aspects. He was content with what he was, but he was still young; she was ancient in comparison, with a lot more baggage. He hadn't fought in the wars she had. *“I'm fucked”* she murmured, and downed another shot.

She faced the crowded dance floor, scanning the room, searching for anything out of the ordinary. Her eyes lingered on faces here and there. The club was dark except for the strobe lights reflecting off the mirrored disco balls, creating a waterfall of twinkling, star-like-lights that showered the room and its occupants in dazzling coloured droplets. Her vision wasn't hindered by the darkness, but it could have been better. Blood would have fixed it.

“Mmmm . . . Have some human blood; you'll feel so much better.”

“Shut up, just shut the fuck up and leave me the fuck alone!” She mumbled as she noticed a shrouded individual sitting in the far corner of the club. She opened her senses and probed his mind; it was soulless. It felt as though her thoughts were being

sucked into a vacuum – a black void of nothingness. It wasn't new to her, she felt it a lot lately herself.

Her gaze progressed along a row of people leaning against a wall. She regarded a man; he looked elsewhere, but she could tell he was relaxed. He had a rare celestial quality, a casual gracefulness to his movements. Other patrons were dwarfed by his towering stature. As he moved, his shirt clung to his body, emphasising his muscular physique. His shoulder-length wavy hair was the colour of dark molasses, with threaded copper. Makayla had an irrepressible urge to walk over and drag her fingers slowly through it – he was gorgeous. She never entertained thoughts like this, Kayla did, not her.

“He's cute; can we go over and talk to him?” Kayla said, surprising her.

“What the fuck. You can't be awake, it's night-time.”

“Yes, I can; let's go over and say hi.”

“No, go back to sleep. It's my turn, not yours!”

“I want him, Makayla.”

“Well, you can't have him!”

He glanced up and noticed Makayla staring at him; he watched her with equal interest, casually making eye contact. The corners of his mouth hooked up in a seductive smile, almost teasing her to do the same.

His eyes were the colour of honeyed amber, his mouth too tempting to ignore with lips way too full to be on the face of a man. He was strong; his angular jaw all male ruggedness, his physique mouth-watering. He was a God; an Adonis.

She couldn't place where she'd seen eyes that colour before. His animal magnetism drew her to him; a beast luring in its prey. Makayla shook her head and turned back towards the bar, dropped her cigarette butt on the floor, stomped it out, and grabbed another of her shots, downing it quickly. She looked over her shoulder again, regarding him openly, imagining what it would be like to love a man like him.

“Kayla, would you stop.”

“I can't help it.”

Makayla saw him smile again; tenderness washed over her, soaking into her very marrow. It was riveting; she couldn't look away – his smile widened, displaying deep dimples on either side of his tempting mouth. She felt as though she was being physically caressed, as if he knew her innermost thoughts. Impossible, she was able to shield her thoughts. She sighed inwardly, yearning for something more.

“I'm a fucking freak!” she muttered, lighting another cigarette. She didn't feel things like this, never had, and never would. She didn't know if they were her feelings or Kayla's.

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“*Makayla, please . . .*” Kayla never whined, never asked her for anything, especially when she was in control of their body. What the hell. She looked away from him and continued examining the room, trying to distract her wayward thoughts. There seemed to be no imminent threat in the club, nothing out of the ordinary. She glanced back at the man, she couldn't stop herself. She knew he was still watching her – waiting for her to make a move, she wanted to, but didn't.

She hadn't wanted anything as much in her long life, except blood, there was always the blood. His allure beckoned her from across the room. She twisted back towards the bar and picked up her last shot.

“*Fuck me!*” she thought, wishing Vasili and the others would hurry up and make an appearance. If they didn't show soon she'd end up sinking her teeth into the stranger's smooth neck. Her thirst for blood had always been stronger than her sexual appetite, only just. What she wouldn't give for some mind-blowing sex, though, to relieve the tension. She slipped another quick glance over her shoulder. He was staring at her, hungry eyes; she recognised the predatory look. An image flashed in her mind of their bodies entwined. The cigarette she held fell to the ground as she threw back her head and grabbed the edge of the bar with her hands, the cool stainless steel bending in her tight grip. She gasped for breath, and glanced down at her reflection in

the glossy surface of the bar, and was surprised by her shimmering eyes as they fluctuated between a red-violet and a golden hue. The metal moulded in her hands like pliable plasticine. She wasn't there to pick up men, no matter how attractive they were.

The consuming nothingness, the emptiness, the resentment afterwards didn't take away what she wanted, needed. It always came back down to blood – not just any blood, the rarest of all human blood, the HH blood type; the Bombay phenotype – the kind of blood she refused to drink. She was addicted to rare bloods like HH. AB negative was the sweetest of all; O negative came close. When she smelt them it was hard to resist the urge to feed; a lesson she'd learnt a long time ago. She wasn't going to make the same mistake again.

She had no choice; if she did go back to her old ways the punishment would be far worse a second time around, and she couldn't go back to living in the dungeon for another two hundred years. It had almost killed Kayla, and the guilt Makayla had felt because of it had almost cost her her sanity. It was Kayla's body as well. As much as she hated to admit it, Makayla needed her, without Kayla there would be no balance, no good in her; she wanted to believe that.

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'Fool, you drink blood, you've killed thousands – good – you are no good, you're a killer, it's the only thing you're good at!'
Her nemesis droned.

She sensed the arrival of Vasili and the others. It was the distraction she needed. She scowled at her frowning reflection on the bar's glossy surface. The muscles in her jaw clenching and unclenching as she ground her teeth together; her elongated fangs piercing her bottom lip for a second time that night. She couldn't help but feel animosity for her colleagues. Bitter after everything they'd done to her. All eyes were on them; their group tended to draw an uncommon amount of attention. She lit another cigarette and took a long drag, waiting.

CHAPTER 3.



“Hello, Makayla,”

Makayla turned and looked up into Vasili’s smiling face. He reminded her of Sean Connery, but with hair. He always dressed impeccably, as if he were going to a grand ball. He even wore a cravat and cape, not to mention the Shillelagh walking stick he carried, which was more of a weapon than a necessity. He had an ancient elegance, an old world gentleman ethic; the man still opened doors, and pulled out chairs for women. People didn’t give a shit about etiquette anymore – least of all her.

“Vasili!” she said, sharp with malice. He was the closest thing she had to a father, and she hated that he loved her even with all her vile flaws. He and Zack were the only ones who knew

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about Kayla. She resented the fact Vasili knew. Kayla got on well with him, hell, she got along well with everyone; thank goodness they only worked nights.

He opened his arms for a welcoming embrace. Makayla angled her head to the side brought her cigarette to her lips and inhaled. She wasn't greeting him with affection; she wasn't giving him the satisfaction. She couldn't remember how long she'd held him at arm's length. She couldn't forgive him, it just wasn't in her nature; she wasn't that noble, or gullible.

"You look rested?" Vasili said, lowering his arms.

"Get your eyes checked!" she replied, ashing her cigarette on his polished, black shoes. He glanced at his feet and a sad expression crossed his face.

"Give me another," she said to the barman, ignoring the Shadow Seekers standing behind Vasili. The barman refilled her shot glass; the amber liquid reminding her of the handsome stranger's eyes.

"Kayla, enough of this crap!"

"I want him, Makayla. Can we—?"

"NO." Makayla murmured under her breath, lifting the shot glass to her mouth. Alcohol usually helped, great amounts of alcohol. Southern Comfort, what a crock, there was no comfort this night. She didn't want to feel a single fucking thing. Anger was all she had. They were old friends, she and anger.

Morgan and Ashley stood to Vasili's left discussing battle strategies; they'd obviously been practising. Makayla stared at them; they were identical twins and complete opposites, yet the same in a bizarre way. Ashley had dark features and Morgan fair, but both had dazzling emerald green eyes.

Morgan was outgoing, sexy, and oozed self-confidence, but she was hiding something. Makayla recognised it because she too had secrets. She could hear Morgan's thoughts; she could hear all their thoughts, being able to read minds pissed her off. She didn't want to know their twisted secrets. She wished she didn't have to associate with any of them. Being a Shadow Seeker was just a means to an end. She could kill as many Newbloods as she liked without any repercussions from the Vampire Senate.

Ashley, on the other hand, was compassionate, with a deep sense of right and wrong; always aware of others' feelings and quick to defend. Why a Vampire would be compassionate was beyond Makayla's comprehension, but that was Ashley. She didn't mind standing in Morgan's shadow. She was a shy, quiet woman; a wallflower compared to her precocious, loudmouth twin sister. She was far more beautiful than Morgan. Her green eyes shone with the glint of empathy, her tender smile curling softly at the corners, her thoughts pure and unpretentious, she had an inner beauty that could not be masked.

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“Don't you two talk about anything else? Like clothes or men?” Makayla said, exhaling smoke, disregarding a certain man she and Kayla had been arguing over earlier.

“Of course we do,” Morgan said, a seductive smile creasing her face.

“Yeah, right!”

“We've noticed the eye candy here tonight. Like the gorgeous hunk over by the wall, he's a nice piece of arse. He's been eating you up with his eyes ever since we arrived!”

Makayla looked her up and down. “I'm surprised you even noticed, Morgan.”

“Oh, I noticed. Go say hello.”

“Why don't you? You're the one into casual sex!” Makayla flicked ash before taking another drag on her cigarette.

“So touchy! He wants you, not me.” Morgan smirked, smoothing hair off her forehead.

“Jealous?” Makayla said in an icy tone.

Morgan feigned hurt, “You know I'm not.”

“Spare me the fake-arse hurt; it really doesn't suit you, Morgan!”

Morgan's eyes narrowed. “Why do you have to be such a bitch, Makayla?”

“I guess it takes one to know one!”

“Ease up, you're too serious; relax, be happy!”

“Definitely not on my to-do list right now.” Makayla frowned;

‘You wouldn’t be so uptight if you drank human blood; it would make you strong,’ the velvety voice purred.

“Stop it,” Makayla hissed at the voice in her head.

“Find a man, Makayla. Start with the hottie by the wall.”

“I don’t want or need that kind of complication in my life.”

“Have you ever had that kind of complication in your life?” Morgan said, looking over her shoulder at the man they were discussing.

“Fuck off, Morgan!”

“Morgan, lighten up,” Ashley said, defending her, as usual. “When she’s ready she’ll find him, won’t you, Makayla?”

“No, Ashley, I won’t!”

“I keep telling her, I’m available!” Zack wrapped his arms about Makayla’s narrow waist, hugging her from behind, and giving her a wet kiss on the cheek.

“Back off, Zack,” Makayla said, elbowing his ribs and pushing him away. “You know I see you as a brother.”

Zack was the only Shadow Seeker who didn’t piss her off. Well, not all the time anyway. She considered him a valued friend, if it were even possible. There were no pretences when it came to Zack; he was the least damaged of them all. He was what he was, take it or leave it. A telekinetic technopath, Zack was the

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computer geek of the group who designed and made all their weapons. An expert in martial arts and weaponry – swords, throwing knives, grenades, machine guns, crossbows, you name it, he could utilise it. If he had a spoon he'd find a way to use it as a weapon. He was a genius, a spectacular looking one.

She eyed him thoughtfully, he towered above the average person, but most Off Worlders did; they were far superior to humans, without a doubt. His short, messy brown hair was the most endearing quality about him. He was always dragging his fingers through it, especially when he was irritated, bored or nervous. There was no taming hair like that; it was always uneven, it gave him a sexy I-just-got-out-of-bed look. She liked him. She could smile around him; she didn't do it often, though. He hadn't betrayed her like the others. Even so, she'd still lay her life down to protect every single one of them as they would do for her. They were her surrogate family, and as far as families went, just as fucked up as any regular blood related family.

Zack didn't realise how much sex appeal he had, with his beautiful smile, olive skin, and the bluest eyes Makayla had ever seen. They reminded her of the rich, blue waters off the coast of Jamaica. You could lose yourself in their depths; it was almost like being in the shadows. Sometimes she wished she and Zack could be more. If she was to choose anyone, maybe she'd choose

him. Then again the guy by the wall was great looking too. Fuck, what the hell was the matter with her.

She was fubarred. The secrets had nearly destroyed her. There was a distinct possibility they still would. Her heart was warped, cracked; she couldn't risk anyone getting too close, not even Kayla.

"I could be more," Zack said, running his fingers through his dishevelled hair.

"Nope, I'd just fuck up your life, Zack, and you know it!"

"Where's Reece?" Anna asked, changing the subject as she stepped from behind Vasili.

"Right here." He waved his hands above his head.

Anna nudged his arm, laughing. "Were you on the prowl again?"

"Always!" he declared, a cheeky grin lighting his features.

Makayla knew Anna and Reece were at the club, but hadn't noticed them amongst the group, "*You're distracted, Makayla dear, drink some blooooood. You know you want to! You need toooooo!*" Makayla felt like screaming. Was this it? Was she losing her mind again? All the voices in her head indicated she was.

"Blooooood, blood will solve everything."

"Would you fucking shut up?" she howled above the thumping beat pounding throughout the club. People turned and

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stared. She looked at the Shadow Seekers without an ounce of embarrassment; they were used to her strange behaviour.

She caught Anna staring at her with a mournful look. Anna was untainted; a petite, pixie-like woman with brown copper-toned hair, dark eyes and a bubbly personality. She and Reece joked around with one another and laughed all the time. Sickening. How they could be so happy? It seemed unnatural. There was nothing funny about the job they did; killing, maiming and murdering rogue Off Worlders, and the recent addition, Newbloods – fucking mutant freaks of nature. Who was she kidding? They were all freaks.

“So, where are Ava and Gabriel?” Jackson asked.

Makayla glanced at Jackson; he was a beefy, well-muscled Weretiger with a terrible habit of appearing out of nowhere. Shorter than the rest, he hated being the odd one out, considering they were all so abnormally tall. His sun-bleached blond hair was almost white from the surfing he did in his spare time. His hazel eyes and kissable lips were his best features, or so he said. He deemed himself a bit of a playboy, and often came onto Makayla, but not so much lately. Why he thought he had a chance, she couldn't fathom. It wasn't as if she put out the vibes.

Jackson was an easy-going, laid-back kind of person, but most Australians were. She'd met a lot of Australians in London over the years. Nothing fazed him; he was calm in tight situations,

dependable, someone who'd never let you down in a fierce battle. He had a fondness for chocolate chip cookies and always had some item of food in his hand or mouth, generally displaying it as he spoke, a disgusting habit. His muscled physique was an oddity considering the amount of food he ate; he was a teenage bottomless pit, only, he was two hundred years past being a teenager.

“They'll be arriving shortly,” Vasili continued. “They were holidaying in the Caribbean when I contacted them.”

“Gabriel's going to be pissed! They've been planning their getaway for months now,” Jackson said, smirking as he crunched on an apple, the masticated fruit swirling around in his mouth as if set on spin-dry.

“Ah, well, yes, he was irritated. Ava was more understanding, but you know how Gabe is. I'm glad they're together, actually, she's had a calming effect.”

“I was more than bloody irritated,” Gabe said, stepping into their circle.

“Poor baby, was your dirty little weekend interrupted?” Morgan said, with a teasing smile.

Gabe was of Celtic origin and Vasili's second in command. He had no patience for Morgan, and it was obvious. Thousands of years ago, he and others of his kind, the Parthalons, fought off a race of invading monsters called Formorians. He was a giant man,

nearly seven foot, with groomed auburn-brown hair and dark russet eyes; he loomed over them, intimidating those who didn't know him – and those who did. He was a deadly battle-worn warrior, a shrewd but fair man, with a formidable temper that he often displayed. His face had a terrible habit of turning a bright beet colour before an angry outburst; he considered it an irritating tell.

Makayla generally kept out of Gabe's way, she knew not to push her luck and when to keep her mouth zipped. So did the other Shadow Seekers. Well, most of them. Morgan got off on seeing Gabe's face go red; she had a real knack for annoying people. As for Reece, he had no tact whatsoever. He shot his mouth off with considerable regularity and tended to put his foot in it. She could tell he was going to fuck up, just by the thought patterns he was transmitting.

“Hey, Gabriel, my man, how's it hanging? Did you get it wet?”

Bingo, Makayla thought, almost smiling. Gabriel's face deepened to mulberry red. It looked as though he were about to have an aneurism.

“What's up, Gabe? You look as if you're about to pop an eyeball.” Morgan threw in.

“Pop an eyeball, nicccccceee one,” Reece said, high-fiving her.

Makayla took a long drag on her cigarette and flicked the butt at Reece's head; it hit him hard on the cheek.

“What the hell did you do that for, Makayla?” he said, rubbing his face,

“Take a wild guess, asshole.”

Morgan smirked at Makayla; Makayla bared her fangs and the smirk disappeared from Morgan's face immediately. Ava, Gabriel's wife, stood quietly beside him; she placed a calming hand on his arm, and he immediately relaxed. She was Native American and an Elemental with the ability to influence people's emotions; a gifted healer, in touch with nature and Mother Earth, able to manipulate the elements and communicate with animals and the dead. She was a slender woman, with a delicate bone structure for one of such notable height, and had dark, hip-length hair she wore plaited in a braid down the middle of her back. Her doe-like brown eyes held striking flecks of gold.

If Makayla had a thing for chicks she'd have been all over Ava. Her skin appeared as supple as silk, all golden and brown. She embodied serenity and had a peaceful inner beauty that was projected through her eyes. The others could feel her calming influence as she gazed around the room. Makayla couldn't though, but she could read the thoughts of the people in the crowded room, and knew they'd succumbed to Ava's soothing powers. Ava preferred to communicate telepathically.

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“*Good evening, everyone,*” she said into their collective minds.

“Hi Ava, Gabriel,” Anna said, grinning at them both.

“Will Freya and Bryce be joining us?” Reece asked.

“Not tonight. They’re in New York, gathering Intel,” Vasili replied. “Now we’re all here, let’s get started, shall we? You all know the drill.”

The group nodded and separated. They made their way towards the hidden doorway by the restrooms. Makayla glanced over her shoulder for one last look at the handsome stranger, but he was nowhere to be seen. An involuntary sigh escaped her lips.



The shrouded individual lounging in an obscure corner at the rear of the club sat contemplating the Shadow Seekers. The Golden One had regarded him for a brief moment. He'd projected an illusion, a whirlpool vacuuming all emotion into its vortex. He'd sensed her considerable strength, his focus slipping slightly with her perusal. He'd been watching her for some time; hiding in the darkness, waiting for his master's instruction. She'd eluded him for centuries. It was as if she'd left Earth; which was improbable. She'd never fled the planet through the gateways into the Multiverses.

"Has it begun?" A sharp voice screeched in his mind like fingernails scratching down a chalkboard. His skin crawled.

"I'm unsure, Master," he answered, *"but something's afoot."*

"Inform me when there are any new developments."

"Yes, Exalted One."

"Don't engage or provoke them, this is of the highest priority. She'll be extremely displeased if you fail."

The hairs on the nape of his neck prickled, he shuddered. SHE terrified him, She was ruthless and unforgiving; failure would mean certain death.

"I will not fail you, Master."

"It's vital you're not identified. Stay concealed. If they suspect you, your punishment will be a lesson to all. She'll make an example of you."

"Yes, my lord," he said, sensing his master's withdrawal. The penetration left him weak with a migraine the size of the Grand Canyon. He observed the Shadow Seekers with a vigilant eye until they disappeared. One minute they were there and the next they weren't. They would not show up again this night. He faded, dissipating like mist, merging with the smoke vapours and the shadows in the room; floating along as though he were a feather caught on a soft breeze.

CHAPTER 4.



Makayla and the Shadow Seekers regrouped in a corridor concealed behind the nightclub restrooms. They followed Vasili down a narrow passageway until they came to a dead end, a magical ward he'd placed there decades ago to mask a hidden entranceway. The original building had been reduced to rubble from the continuous air raids during the World War II London blitz; all but the foundations had survived.

Makayla swept her hand through the wavering wall, thinking of what lay hidden on the other side. The endless maze of passageways leading into the bowels of the Earth made her nervous and claustrophobic; it wasn't natural to be underground. She liked open spaces. Beneath were bunker dwellings, and a

network of tunnels that honeycombed their way out into different parts of the city. Few knew the exits, but she'd made it her business to know.

Vasili and the Shadow Seekers walked through the rippling illusion. Makayla stood watching the wall momentarily, before taking a deep breath and following them through. She found herself at the edge of a steep, twisting stairwell that led miles into the Earth's belly; a deep, dark, man-made rocky abyss where they lived and worked. She watched Vasili and the Shadow Seekers disappear into the darkness as they walked down the stairs. An icy sweat glazed her body, the stairwell shimmered and in its place a cold, dank room appeared, with moss-covered rock walls. The musty smell assaulted her senses. *"No, I can't go back there!"* She felt someone grab her arm, the dungeon disappeared, and the stairwell reappeared again. Zack was standing beside her. She looked through him, not seeing.

"Makayla, are you okay?"

She stood trembling on the murky precipice. Too frightened to move forward, too frightened to move at all. She needed to feed. She'd be all right if she —

'Drink some blood, drink Zack's blood,' her nemesis purred.

"Nooooooooo, I won't, I can't!" she screamed into the black void, her voice catching on a sob. Zack pulled her into his arms brushing the sweat-soaked hair from her face.

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“It’s okay, I’m here now, it’s okay; I won’t let them put you back there again.”

Makayla peered into Zack’s eyes. She raised her hands and placed them on his shoulders. He was the only one who knew her vulnerabilities, what she struggled with every day. He’d saved her from the dungeon four centuries ago; he’d seen her at her worst. She lent her forehead against his chest and his heartbeat sped up. The blood racing through his veins brought on the hunger pangs. She licked her lips feeling the sharp points of her fangs as they extended, her mouth pooled with saliva and venom, a natural reflex.

‘Take a bite, he wants you to, he’d let you drain him, and you know it!’

Makayla stepped out of his embrace and looked up into the depths of his eyes; his pupils eclipsed his irises. Her fangs glinted in the low light as she opened her mouth, letting down the wall between their minds. She groaned as his thoughts flowed into her, his need, and the knowledge he’d welcome her bite made her crave his blood even more. She watched him pull his shirt collar open and move his head to the side inviting her with his eyes. She glanced down at his neck; saw the main artery pumping through his skin, and tried to suppress the lump in her throat. Makayla shuffled closer; she’d never been this close to him, his spicy scent flared in her nostrils. O negative, one of THE right blood types.

“Please, I want you to, Makayla, you need it; I know you do, you’ve gone without human blood for far too long. Better someone willing like me than someone unwilling. No one will ever find out, it’ll be between us.”

Makayla lowered her mouth to his throat, he smelt so good, she licked the length of his neck and heard his groan of pleasure, his corded muscles tightened and then relaxed. She scraped her teeth against his tender flesh and growled. He wrapped his arms around her and drew her closer. She felt the hardness of his body, was that an erection? What the fuck was she doing? He was her best friend, the only one she could depend upon; she moved backwards, pushing him away from her body, gasping for oxygen.

“I’m so sorry, Zack, I can’t. I just can’t!” She sped down the stairs away from the temptation of his blood.

Twenty minutes later the Shadow Seekers were seated randomly around a large steel table in the centre of the debriefing room. Makayla sat flicking her Zippo lighter open and closed, staring aimlessly at the high ceiling. Chiselled markings covered every surface throughout the underground bunker. She lowered her gaze to the slate floor and followed the brown lines marbling the stone with her eyes. She looked everywhere but at Vasili, seated at the head of the table.

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“Would you stop that infernal noise?” Morgan said, with a sneer.

Makayla flashed her fangs at Morgan in a vicious smile. “You’re ugly when you sneer,” she said, removing a cigarette from its packet and lighting up.

“And you’re a bitch!”

“Yes, I am, but we’ve already established that.”

“I love a good cat fight,” Jackson said, chewing on a blueberry muffin he’d procured from the food tray in the middle of the table, and spraying a hail storm of crumbs from his mouth as he spoke in his Aussie twang.

“Me too,” Reece exclaimed, “Girls in bikinis or less; less preferably, in mud, slipping all over the place. Mmmm, all we need is for you two to get naked and a pool of mud.”

“I’m game; what about you, Morgan? Are you game? Or are you scared you’ll crack a fingernail?” Makayla said, exhaling a smoke ring. She glanced across the table at Zack; he stared back at her, his face clenching in discomfort.

“Can we get on with it, Vasili, I’ve got somewhere else I’d rather be,” she said, breaking eye contact with Zack.

Vasili nodded, noticing the shared look between them. “Yes, yes, you’re right Makayla; we should begin as we have a lot to go over. I’m sorry to call you back so soon, but there have been some new developments,” he said, glancing about the table. “An

ancient artefact has been stolen from Chancellor Lagorias' estate. His vaults are virtually impenetrable.

“Yeah, right,” Makayla said, snapping her Zippo closed.

“If you recall during the theft at Aemma Pharmaceutical Laboratories twenty-seven years ago, Chancellor Lagorias's son was murdered. At the time, we thought they just wanted the blood substitute formula which they ultimately used as a platform for the designer drug V5. As it turns out, the formula theft was a necessary component in the implementation of their drug distribution agenda, but also a diversion. The key to the vault was the target.”

“If the key was what they initially wanted, then why has it taken them so long to use? Twenty-seven years is a long time to hold onto something, even for a Vampire,” Anna said.

Vasili templed his fingers. “Because no one knew the location to the Chancellor's vaults. They're hidden beneath his residence; not even his own son knew they were there.”

“Well, that sucks; dying and not knowing why.” Reece blew a minty chewing gum bubble out of his mouth.

“If he didn't know about it, how come he had the key?” Anna queried.

“His father placed it on his keychain for safe keeping. The Chancellor suspected something was about to happen.”

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“So, what was stolen from the vault?” Reece asked, folding a silver gum wrapper.

“The Trinian Globe.”

“What’s a Trinian Globe?” Ashley asked.

“It’s a spherical device that has the capacity to open multiple gateways within the Earth’s realm, or any realm for that matter. Legend has it that it’s the key of the Gods, divine justice. In the wrong hands, it’s the bringer of death, the apocalypse – end of days,” Vasili said, swiping a finger under the edge of his cravat.

“Well, it’s in the wrong hands now, so we’re fucked!”

“Not necessarily,” Vasili said. He picked a hair from his coat sleeve, and met Makayla’s stare. “They can’t activate it, not without the gems and the Multiverse key.”

“What a relief,” Makayla said, focussing on the Zippo in her fist. She brushed the pad of her thumb over the embossed image of a heart bound in barbed wire, a dagger protruding from it.

“There are six gems in total, each representing the ruling royal families of Evron; three Vampire and three Seraphim. Each precious stone activates the next gem’s location. Ultimately, whoever possesses the device has access to the power of the family the gem represents.

“Who do you think’s behind the theft?” Morgan asked, examining her fingernails.

“We have our suspicions.”

“The High Priestess Zobiana is the only one with the resources. We wouldn’t have a Newblood infestation if it weren’t for her. She’s power hungry! With the Trinian Globe, she’ll be unstoppable,” Makayla said, blowing a smoke ring into the air.

Vasili clenched his hands, his knuckles losing their colour. “We have evidence it’s her. We needed confirmation. We couldn’t go on gut instinct, Makayla. An operative died getting us the information.”

The room fell silent, so many had perished fighting the High Priestess and her armies. The pursuit in protecting the Earth, its gateways and humanity had come at a high cost.

“There has to be something more.”

“There is. Your blood triggers the multiple gateway key that controls the globe, Makayla.”

“What!” Makayla sat up straighter.

“You are the firstborn descendant of both royal houses,” Vasili said, meeting her eyes.

“Whadda ya mean she’s a descendant of both royal houses?” Jackson looked at Vasili and then turned to Makayla staring at her as if she were an interloper.

Makayla regarded Jackson and the others seated at the table. She could hear the questions racing around in their minds.

“Fuck you, Vasili. You can’t tell them!” The blood was burning up her throat, suffusing her cheeks with prickly red heat.

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“It’s time they learnt the truth, you can trust them.”

“Can I? By the thoughts circling in their heads, I don’t think so.”

“What . . . you read minds too?” There was anger in Morgan’s eyes. “Vasili, we have a right to know!”

“And that’s why I’m telling you. Makayla, they need to know. You’re in danger; they’ll be coming after you now.”

“They’ve been chasing me for longer than I can remember. I’ve managed to stay out of their clutches.”

“I had a vision; they’re coming for you as we speak.” Worry creased Vasili’s brow.

“And my privacy doesn’t count?”

“What’s the matter; don’t you want them to know why you’re such a fucked-up headcase?” Makayla clenched her teeth, ignoring the voice in her head.

“Vasili, is this necessary?” Gabriel said quietly. “She fights her demons, yet it doesn’t stop her doing what needs to be done. She has proven herself capable time and time again.”

“I know, but it’s the only way we can protect her from the High Priestess and her diabolical plans to control the world. I can’t have the Shadow Seekers going in blind.”

Makayla felt faint, her fingertips went to the glistening amethyst gem at her throat, what would they think when they found out about her mixed blood and her split-personality? Gabe

knew about her crossbred parentage because he was Vasili's second in command, but he didn't know about Kayla. If he did, would he be so quick to defend her? Vasili had a legitimate right to inform the others, but she rebelled at the thought of her fellow Shadow Seekers knowing the whole truth.

"Don't you fucking dare tell them about Kayla!" she said telepathically. She knew Vasili wasn't going to change his mind, but she had a right to keep Kayla a secret.

"Makayla, they already suspect something, I will respect your wishes in that regard, but I won't sit idly by and put them in danger!"

She lowered her head, hiding her face beneath a veil of hair, and waited.

"Yes Jackson, she's a Vampire, but she is also half Seraphim."

Makayla heard shocked gasps from the group, but refused to look.

"Impossible," Morgan whispered.

"Very possible!" Vasili replied.

"Well, that explains a lot." Reece said, looking at Makayla's bowed head. She slowly looked up into his eyes, into all their eyes, and was surprised by the awe smearing their faces. Ava smiled at her as if she already knew. It only stood to reason Gabriel would have told her.

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“So, do you have wings?” Anna asked softly.

Makayla nodded. “Yes, six of them.”

“That’s so cool.” Reece couldn’t help himself.

A slight smile creased Zack’s face. “See, I told you they’d be okay with it.”

“What! Did you know too, Zack?”

“Yeah, Reece, I knew, because the weapons I make for her are tailored to her DNA.”

“Amongst other things,” Makayla said, looking at Vasili cryptically. He fiddled with his cravat, adjusting it and avoiding her eyes. “I still think there’s more to this than my blood activating the key; there’s something else, I know it!”

“Well, on that note, Zack, would you set up the holographic projector, so we can take a look at the Trinian Globe?” Vasili poured himself a glass of water.

Zack strode towards a steel shelf covering the entire right wall of the room. It contained a multitude of equipment – objects he’d invented over the decades. He retrieved a medium sized box and deposited it on the table. A mechanical whirring similar to a microwave could be heard as the machine booted up. The noise grew louder in pitch and volume until finally the box unfolded, transforming as if an Autobot. A phosphorescent blue light leapt from the device and a gold, orb-like image manifested in the centre of the shimmering wall. It spun in a clockwise direction

like a planet spinning on its axis. Strange code-like script scored the surface, flashing intermittently – all the while moving in the opposite direction. The Shadow Seekers sat, mesmerised by the replica Trinian Globe’s beauty.

“Wow, it’s exquisite. But how do you have a copy?” Ashley asked.

“We have an archive of images and extensive data for this particular artefact, call it a precautionary measure. Chancellor Lagorias’ is the curator for all mystical antiquities relating to our history here on Earth and on Evron.”

“How do you know he hasn’t been compromised?”

“I will vouch for him if it makes you feel better.”

“It’s not about feeling better, Vasili, it’s about what Vampires are capable of; we’re not all alike!”

“Evidently!” Morgan said, targeting Makayla.

“Let’s progress with the meeting. I can’t begin to tell you how important it is that we retrieve the first gem before Zobiana. If we possess the primary gem that activates the globe, she won’t be able to use the device; it will render the Trinian Globe useless. We need to decipher the riddle to the first gem’s location. Makayla, this I entrust to you.” Vasili focused on her. “In two days you’ll meet with a contact of mine, he’s an expert in ancient languages and specialises in cracking codes. The details and digital images are in your electronic tablets in front of you. When

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you discover the gem's whereabouts, we'll retrieve it. You'll all receive miniature holography projectors to aid in your missions. Zack, would you hand out the devices? Now, we have other pressing issues to give our attention to."

Vasili looked about the table, drumming his fingertips. "We've acquired a sample of the designer drug, and have finally discovered why it's so lethal to humans. It's contaminated with a mutated strain of the Porphyria Vampire virus known as V5, hence the drug name. According to our Intel a large shipment of the drug is to be conveyed out of the country. It must be stopped. Violence is escalating on London's streets. The burgeoning rise in Newbloods has gotten out of hand. They show a complete disregard of our Vampire laws." He smacked his fist into the palm of his hand. "They must be dealt with, and without remorse. The drug circulation, if not stopped, will be catastrophic to the human population. We need to continue protecting humanity for our benefit and for theirs.

"We'll be stepping up our recruitment program. We need Shadow Seekers; we need to recruit as many Off Worlders as possible. Zobia has her army; she'll make a play for power, and we must be ready. The Vampire Council has offered the assistance of their Vampire Guard."

Reece saluted Makayla, "I was in the mood for dismemberment," he said, laughing in her direction.

“Ava, talk to the shape-shifting communities. Maybe they can help locate the nests producing these drugs.”

“I’ll leave immediately.” She stood. There was a magnetic vibration in the surrounding air and a mini tornado buzzed around her like a swarm of angry bees. She disappeared into a thin wisp of smoke.

“If there are no further questions, I suggest you go over your assignments.” Vasili stood, “I’ll see you all tomorrow night before you head out.”

Vasili halted Reece on his way out, and whispered in his ear. Reece nodded twice and jerked a look across at Makayla. Makayla’s brow furrowed. His shoulders relaxed, and his frozen façade reverted to the cocky grin he sported like a well-worn jacket. He saluted her again, and turned towards Anna. She said something, and they chuckled as they proceeded to the door. Makayla stared at them suspiciously. Reece glanced over his shoulder once more, smirking at her as he exited the room. Makayla lowered her shield to read his mind, but he’d barricaded his thoughts. She guessed she wouldn’t be reading their minds any time soon, not since Vasili had dropped the bomb.

“Makayla, a word in private if you would,” Vasili requested, his body tense

CHAPTER 5.



Zobiana transferred the Trinian Globe from Tyrone’s hands into her own; she gasped as the energy vibrated and dispersed into her fingertips, blistering her skin. Her head flopped back, a climaxing smile washed over her face as she soaked up the power. An electric pulse shot through her body, making her hair stand on end. The expected Hieroglyphics flared in a wave of phosphorescent light, scratching across the rippling surface of the globe in a flashing Morse-code-like sequence.

“Have you found him yet? We need to translate the script immediately!”

“We’re still trying to locate him, my lady; it’s just a matter of time.”

“A matter of time? That’s what they said when they located the key to the vault. I will not wait another twenty-seven years to have my revenge. Find him; find him now, or I’ll be using your skull as an ashtray. Go, get out, and send me Beltizare.”



“I have something more to ask of you,” Vasili said tensely.

“And what would that be, your lordship?” Makayla said, scrutinizing the play of emotion on his face.

“The contact you’re to meet with, well, ah . . . Hmmm. He’s not just a contact.” Vasili straightened his vest before looking at her.

“Spit it out, I have somewhere else I’d rather be.”

“He’ll be your new partner, from now on – permanently.”

Makayla’s head jerked up. “WHAT! You can’t!”

Vasili’s face was hard, his mouth a thin white line. “I’m sorry, but I can. It’s time you learnt to trust someone other than me.”

“I work alone, and I trust no one, not even you!”

“ENOUGH!” he shouted. “This is how it’s going to be. There are bigger things happening here besides the size of your ego, Makayla.”

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Makayla stared at him, open-mouthed. Vasili never raised his voice, not to her. She swallowed the retort on the tip of her tongue. He was serious, she looked down at her feet, her face burning, maybe what he said was true, but it was her right to challenge him.

“Makayla,” he said, cupping her face in his giant hands, prompting her to look into his eyes, “it's for your own good. We need assistance. It's a dangerous situation, please understand. He'll protect and help you.”

“I don't need protection!”

“Don't you?” He sighed, releasing her face, dragging a hand over his manicured beard. “You need protection from yourself. I see how you struggle; you're at constant odds with yourself. Return to the living. Stop fighting your demons.”

“Return to the living! Huh. Is that what you tell yourself when you feel guilt for letting them lock me up? Is it what you told yourself when you left me to rot? Is that how you protect someone you supposedly consider one of your children?”

“You were never his child, no one wants youuuuuu!”

Makayla clenched her fists at her sides, her back stiff, “How can you say that after what you let them do to me, without helping me? Fuck you, Vasili, fuck you! No one can save me, not you or your fucking friend, I'm ruined. Do you think I enjoy the voices in my head? Being stuck in this body knowing it will never really

be mine? Do you think I like living this pathetic split life existence? I have no control. I'm a killer, a predator, and when I drink human blood I become something else altogether: a monster!"

"Yesssss you are, drink some blooooood drink it now!"

"I know you felt you had to let them lock me up, but it made it worse, Vasili. You should have killed me!"

"I can if you like," the velvet voice murmured.

Makayla grit her teeth and continued. "But you couldn't. Not because you cared about me, but because of the fucking prophecy. You don't give a shit about me, but you should have given a shit about Kayla, it nearly killed her. I'm strong, she's not. If it weren't for Zack, we'd still be rotting in that damn dungeon right now, WOULDN'T WE?" she shrieked.

"Poor baby, you could leave the Shadow Seekers?"

"Makayla, it wasn't your fault they died. Stop torturing yourself for something that was beyond your control."

"Then why was I punished? How can you stand there and say it wasn't my fault when you know damned well it was! Anyone who gets close to me ends up dead! My foster family were massacred because of me!"

"Stop it. I tried to get you out of prison; every day I petitioned for your release. The Vampire senate wouldn't allow it.

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Your partner is a good man, I trust him. Would it be so hard for you to trust him?"

"If he were killed, he'd be another victim on my long list of victims; another of the voices in my head, I don't need that kind of punishment."

"You have to have faith in me, and in him."

"The fuck I do!" she said, stomping her foot on the floor.

"I've given it great consideration. He's aware of the risks, and he's not taking this partnership lightly."

Makayla's shoulders slumped. She was too tired to continue arguing. She had enough battles in her head to contend with. She was sick of fighting Vasili, fighting Kayla, her nemesis, and the Shadow Seekers. She carried so much guilt; perhaps it was time for a change. She was getting one whether she wanted it or not. Accepting it was going to take a while. She had two days.

"If he gets killed, it's on you."

Vasili smiled and hugged her, "That's my girl," he said, touching her nose as if she were a small child. Makayla swiped his hand away.

She frowned at his back as he left. Brushing her hands over her face, she exhaled the breath she'd been clenching and dragged out her Zippo to light another cigarette. A new partner, just what she needed.

She ambled her morbid way back to her underground quarters, thinking about a hot shower and a stiff drink. The whining screech of hinges barely made an impact on her wandering thoughts as she opened the door. She slumped onto her bed and sat staring at the wall, in the dark.

What a nightmare, she thought, throwing herself down on the bed. She whipped an arm over her eyes. Would he be an arse to work with?

Her mind drifted to earlier years with her foster family, when she and Kayla had been of one mind. The moment they'd given themselves over to the blood cravings was the moment they'd become separate beings, separate minds, separate entities living within the one body.

Her foster parents were the only family she'd ever known, but even then, she'd never quite fitted in. She still felt responsible for their deaths. Vasili said it wasn't her fault, but it was. She rubbed her chest feeling the knot tighten. She'd learnt to suppress emotion long ago. She'd vowed never to get involved with anyone, or be accountable for the lives of others, but here she was, again, being saddled with a new partner, a new responsibility.

Makayla was a better Shadow Seeker, a better killer without the entanglements of emotions. She was what she had to be to protect humanity from others like her. It was a sacrifice she was

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willing to make; she considered it a small one. She pulled herself up and stubbed out her cigarette, flicked on a light, and padded across the room to pour a drink. She snatched up the electronic tablet and plonked down at the kitchen table, gulping tequila as she read the mission file. *Great*, it didn't say who her contact was. Just a date, time and lecture room number at the Cambridge University.

She changed into a black Alice Cooper T-shirt with the words *'I'll Bite your face off!'* in red writing; slung her gym bag over her shoulder and picked up her Mp3 player. She needed to work up a sweat with the punching bag. It was the only thing, other than blood, that could calm her. "Buried Alive" by Avenged Sevenfold blasted through her head. Loud. It drowned out all the voices.

She passed the massive entertainment room doorway and gazed in. It was filled with billiard tables, pinball and air hockey machines, video game consoles, stereo equipment, an old jukebox and a giant, flatscreen television that covered the entire back wall. The Shadow Seekers sat at the bar, drinking and listening to music.

Reece caught her eye and waved. "Where are you off to, Makayla?"

"The gym. I need to hit something. Interested?"

“Why don't you save it for your new partner?” he said, laughing, swiping a forefinger over his eyebrow.

Makayla sent him a telepathic jolt that knocked him off his seat and deposited him on the hard, rock floor. He shook his head in surprise.

A huge smile formed on his face. “Hell, Makayla, I was kidding, man, I feel sorry for your new part—”

“If you utter that word one more time, just once, I'll rip out your tongue and smack you with it.”

Reece smirked as he dusted off his pants. “Geez, I hope he lives! It should be an interesting show.”

“Go fuck yourself, Reece!” Makayla said, stomping off.

Makayla continued on down the hallway towards the gymnasium. She turned up the volume on her Mp3 to drown out the voices, but it was useless; she could still hear them.

Ashley swatted Reece's ear. Anna scowled.

“Hey, that hurt!”

“You're asking for a lot of pain. You've seen how powerful she is. Why do you keep goading her?”

“She needs to lighten up.”

“I suppose harassing her is going to do the trick, are you nuts?”

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Gabriel shook his head. “Ashley's right, Reece, you know her history; let her be.”

Reece looked at the empty doorway. “Come on, guys, she knows what I'm like.”

CHAPTER 6.



Kayla watched the last rays of sunlight bleed across the sandstone courtyard. Her time seemed to always be ending. Just once she wished she could have the evening and her body to herself. She missed going out at night, getting lost in the darkness and spending time with friends – the few friends she had – or, heaven forbid, a man who cared about her; not Makayla, but her. Makayla was the one who had relationships, if you could call her flings relationships. Kayla, on the other hand, hadn't found anyone who touched her heart in that way. Not until recently.

People gathered in the courtyard, slowly making their way towards the lecture hall where Makayla was to meet her new

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partner. Kayla had read the mission details. Makayla hated when she knew the assignment particulars – it was a constant irritant for her. Kayla understood what she sacrificed. Makayla wanted to shield her from the nasty facts, but they were there waiting for her to clean up in the mornings.

Kayla stood in the entrance hallway admiring the vaulted ceiling arches. She liked early Romanesque architecture, the angles, arch points and beams were magnificent. Goosebumps prickled the surface of her skin, a result of the beautiful architecture she was admiring; she rubbed her arms to settle the fine hairs. The workmanship and precision was amazing. She pictured carpenters, masons and builders of a bygone era working tirelessly to complete the monster arches. What dedication, pride and triumph these long forgotten builders with their long forgotten names must have felt at the completion of such exquisite works.

“Are you done salivating over the ceiling? I want this finished!”

Kayla sighed, her face falling, her shoulders slumping as she relinquished control of their body. *“You need to feed, Makayla!”*

“No kidding. You need to mind your own fucking business!”

“You are my business!”

Makayla headed towards the gigantic oak door and entered the vintage lecture hall, making her way to the front of the capacious red velveteen room. She found a seat in the first row, and sat. She was the only one. People milled around the entrance waiting for something, or someone. She opened her senses, and a jumble of thoughts hit her like a wrecking ball. She closed her mind quickly. The gathered audience seemed in awe of the intended speaker.

Most lectures she'd had the misfortune to attend were long winded and wearisome; the lecturers themselves lacking all manner of personality, with striking similarities to wind instruments. Yet she sat doodling on her notepad, waiting. Makayla sensed someone standing in front of her. She caught a glimpse of expensive men's designer shoes. She continued scribbling on the notepad.

"Is this seat taken?" an animated male voice asked.

"Does it look taken to you, Sherlock?" she replied, not looking up.

"No, mind if I sit down?"

"If I did, would it matter?" She was so sick of guys coming onto her. She wished they'd get a little creative, make it interesting. She'd put up with it a long time.

"My name's Alexander Drake, my friends call me, Xander."

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“Congratulations; do you have many of those? Friends I mean.” She didn’t respond to his outstretched hand.

“I’d like to think so,” he said, laughing.

She frowned. “Nobody sits next to me, in case you were wondering.”

“And your name is?” he invited, his hand still extended.

“Oh, come on! Just fuck off.”

“Funny, they said you were prickly! I thought they were kidding.”

“Well, the joke’s on you, isn’t it?”

“Maybe it is, maybe it isn’t. Time will tell.” He laughed again.

His Celtic brogue gave her goosebumps. His sexy laugh vibrated with a deep, masculine rumbling. She hadn’t laughed in a long while. Come to think of it, had she ever laughed? She couldn’t help but look up. He had an unusual blood scent. She’d never smelt anything quite so delicious in all her life. Her mouth began watering. “*Taste him, eat him; bleed him dry.*”

“YOU!” It was the man from the nightclub. He was far more handsome up close. It almost took her breath away. She was like a tongue-tied teenager trying to find something intelligent to say.

“Are you following me?” *Good one, Makayla, really smart!* She thought to herself.

Bewilderment stained his features. “I beg your pardon?”

“You heard me,” she said, tapping her foot. “Are you following me?”

“Ah . . . no . . . Why do you ask?”

“So you don't recognise me?” she said, slanting her head.

She watched him fold his arms over his chest. “Should I?” he replied, with a coy smile.

“You know exactly what I'm talking about,” she said, clenching her fists. “The other night I saw you at a club called *‘The Devil’s Pit’*.”

“I frequent *‘The Devil’s Pit’* on occasion; it's an interesting place. I enjoy watching the people there.”

“Yeah, I kinda noticed.”

His face dimpled. “What did you notice?”

She swallowed the firm lump lodged in her throat. “It doesn't matter.”

“You never answered my question earlier.”

Makayla considered his shuffling feet. “Refresh my memory.”

“Your name, what's your name?”

“Makayla Uriel.”

He smiled again, flashing white, even teeth, and thrust his hand towards her for a third time. “Nice to meet you, Makayla, a pretty name for a pretty lady.”

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Makayla looked up into his face, and then down at his extended hand. Should she touch him? Did she dare?

“Bite him!”

“Shut it!” she said inwardly. She didn’t need encouragement in biting him; his scent was driving her libido wild and sending her saliva glands into a frenzied tailspin.

She grasped his outstretched hand with a hesitant jerk and was shocked by the tingling sensation that bounded up her arm. She caught herself staring into his eyes, fascinated by their colour, and came to her senses, yanking her hand from his grasp. She pretended not to be affected by his touch. Fuck, it was as though he'd been looking into her life.

Alexander inspected his empty hand. He clenched and unclenched it as if it were plagued with pins and needles. Holding her hand had felt both hot and cold at the same time. There was a lifetime of anger, pain, lovelessness, loneliness, betrayal, fear and immense sadness. He tried to refocus.

He beheld her golden eyes; had what he’d felt whilst holding her hand been an illusion? He sat down next to her, folding his long legs beneath the chair, making himself comfortable. His mouth seemed to have a mind of its own and kept curving up – an involuntary action he couldn’t say he regretted, but he was getting the distinct feeling it made her uncomfortable.

“So, Makayla, why are you here?”

“Is that a trick question?”

“No.” His eyebrow arched, his smile widening further.

“God dammit, stop smiling?”

“I like his smile, it’s beautiful.” Kayla said, in a dreamy faraway voice.

“Would you stop, Kayla! How the hell are you invading my time?” Makayla suddenly lost power of her right arm, and watched it move of its own accord. *“Kayla stop, no don’t, please, don’t!”*

“I want to, I need to,” Kayla hummed.

Makayla’s hand rose towards Alexander’s face, she wrestled for control, but Kayla’s strength overrode hers. She noticed Alexander staring at her fingertips and was struck dumb.

Alexander sat mesmerised by the subtleness of Makayla’s slender fingers. His mouth watered in anticipation, he wanted her touch. It’d been so long since he’d felt it; she’d forgotten him, but he’d not forgotten her. He caught her trembling fingertips within his grasp when she began to draw them away.

“Don’t stop,” he whispered.

Did she want to touch him just as much as Kayla? Yes, she did, she had an overwhelming compulsion to. He was pure oxygen. The urge to feel his smooth shaven skin was overpowering. She dragged in a breath and let him guide her hand back to his face. She trailed her fingertip lightly over his dimples and across his lips.

Kayla sighed.

Makayla saw the tip of his tongue glide out; felt the dewy dampness of its path as she continued her exploration. She looked into his dilated pupils. Had her feathery strokes elicited that reaction in him? She watched his eyes illuminate, the amber flecks brightening as she caressed his eyebrows and moved her index finger down the bridge of his nose at a snail's pace. She wanted him. So did Kayla. For once in their combined existence, they were unified. She felt the magnetic pull to taste his lips as she gazed at his mouth again.

"Do you remember me from the other night?" She traced her fingers back over his lips.

"I remember," he replied, kissing them.

"Did you feel anything for me?"

"Yes," he rasped, clearly affected by her touch.

"So, I wasn't the only one who felt those strange feelings?"

"No," came his soft reply.

"I saw us together in a vision; did you see the same thing?"

“A-huh,” he said, a pained expression on his face, the strain echoing in his voice.

Makayla watched his gaze drift down towards her lips.

“Please, Makayla.”

His husky voice was all the invitation she needed. Framing his face with her hands, she drew his mouth towards hers. Their lips touched, every nerve ending on the surface of her mouth prickled with the contact. Kayla sighed in pleasure, or was it her? She gave up trying to figure out which of them felt what, and just accepted the integrated emotions. A tingling sensation darted up and down her body, making the hairs bristle. Her throat constricted with the thrill.

She deepened the kiss and Alexander could no longer hold back, drawing her into his arms, he kissed her thoroughly, shamelessly, the kiss overpowering them both. He ran his tongue along the seam of her lips, begging entrance into the recesses of her mouth, sighing she opened eagerly. It was as though they were starved for one another.

“I want you, I want you now!” he moaned.

Makayla couldn't verbally respond, she sat stunned by the intense, unexpected feelings. “I want you, too,” she said, running her hands through the hair at his neck.

“Is there somewhere we can go?”

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“I don't know,” she replied in frustration, preparing to rip the clothes from his body.

“EEHHHHHeemmmmm, do you really think that kind of behaviour is appropriate,” a voice said from behind them.”

Makayla looked up at the stranger, unhinged her fingers from the buttons on Alexander's shirt, and sank low into her chair; she'd utterly forgotten where they were. Alexander gazed up and saw a balding, portly gentleman.

Alexander cleared his throat, “Ah, excuse us, the auditorium was empty when we came in.”

“As you can see, it's quite full now.” The bald man said, indicating the crowded room.

Makayla glanced about, shocked to see so many people sitting and smiling in their direction. She slid further down in her seat. “Fuck me!” she groaned.

“I'm sorry, Mr Harris; you'll have to excuse our behaviour. We lost track of time.” Alexander apologised, grinning smugly at the gentleman.

“I'll say you did.”

Makayla was mortified by the attention they were receiving, it made her feel like a teenager, and she was certainly no teenager. “I'm sorry, sir,” she said, not recognising her own voice. She was a confident, aggressive woman – a fucking predator for Christ's

sake. What the hell was the matter with her? She never apologised to anyone for anything.

“That’s okay, Miss; next time may I suggest a private room. I’ll talk to you later, Alexander,” he said, departing with a mischievous grin.

“Yes, you will.” Alexander winked at Makayla when he noticed the look on her face.

Makayla examined her right hand. She had a tight grip on the pen she’d been using earlier, her knuckles colourless. She remembered putting the pen down, but not picking it back up again; she was fucking losing it. She dropped the pen onto her notebook, and observed her fingernails, feigning disinterest. Kayla was always painting them bright colours. They were an attractive blood-red and she just knew her toenails would match.

Alexander glanced about the room, “It looks like we have a full house. Perhaps the lecturer’s really good?”

“Don’t go getting your hopes up, I never do!”

He uncurled from his seat, grabbing his briefcase.

Where’d the briefcase come from? Her lack of focus was way off kilter, and it seemed to have coincided with the first time she’d set eyes on Alexander at the club.

“Well, maybe we can talk after the lecture. . . Or we could do the other if you’d prefer?”

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Ah, hell no, she thought watching him climb the stage stairs to the podium in stunned silence, she cringed with realisation.

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen, my name is Alexander Drake. You'll have to excuse me and the lovely lady for our behaviour, I do apologise,” he said, winking at Makayla again.

Makayla felt her face infuse with heat, she'd never blushed in her entire life, but she was doing it. Embarrassment was a foreign feeling. Everyone looked in her direction clapping, and wolf whistling. She was going to kill him.

Alexander's smile broadened.

“Let's proceed with the evening's presentation. Tonight I'll be speaking to you about the origins of ancient civilisations recorded throughout the ages. Archaeology, my friends, is a way of thinking, a creative process. It's a series of questions we as archaeologists ask ourselves about the past. Some define it as the study of human nature and human experience – but I like to think of it as a record of how people lived and how they responded to their environments. We'll be studying the deities worshipped. We'll explore the rituals performed, and examine the chronologies through hieroglyphics and ancient texts of these complex societies.

“Over the course of the next few hours we'll discover the riddles of the past, what's fact and what's fiction, and how to tell

the difference between the two. So let's begin bridging the old world with the new.”

Makayla sat enthralled. Alexander's views and findings were refreshing. The chemical reaction they shared was intense. She could still feel her heart racing and her mouth tingling from the potent kiss earlier. His scent enticed her from across the room. His extraordinarily rare blood was an aphrodisiac to her raw nerves, luring her to feed – not quite the double H variety she was addicted to, but something altogether unique. There were similarities, she just couldn't identify them.

His gaze caught hers often during the lecture. She hated feeling so out of control. She grasped the amethyst medallion at her throat, trying to find comfort in its dazzling warmth. It wasn't working like it usually did.

“Control, when have you ever been in control? Drink his blood; drink it now!”

Makayla ignored the velvety voice, gritting her teeth. Still aroused from their brief exchange; she thirsted for more. The predator, the Vampire hungered for him. She wanted to feed, ravage and devour him, but she couldn't do that, not ever.

“What are you waiting for? You're hungry – feed.”

“Shut up, shut up, shut the fuck up . . . NOW!”

The auditorium grew dark as a slide show began. Alexander's hypnotic voice filled the void. She closed her eyes,

reliving the kiss. She tried to regain some composure, but Kayla was making it difficult. She shook off the daze, and refocused.

Idiot, why hadn't she realised it sooner – he was her new partner.

"Stop it, Makayla," another voice said. It sounded like Alexander's. Makayla looked up at him through the dim light in surprise. He was staring at her.

"Yes, I'm your new partner. Vasili paired us together, but you and I both know there's something more between us, don't deny it, don't fight it! Because I can't, I won't. I want you!"

"How the fuck did you get in my head?"

"Did you think you could keep me out? At the club I felt what you were thinking. You were practically screaming it out, and it has been driving me wild ever since."

"You projected those images into my head, didn't you?"

"You know I did, why bother asking?"

"Don't do it again!" Makayla ordered, searching the darkness for an escape.

"Why? It could be better than that between us," he said, projecting an image of them stretched out naked on a beach, his fingertips feathering soft circles over her ribcage. They glided over her breasts, lightly caressing her nipples. The waves lapped their feet, the ocean's momentum pushing their bodies against one another.

“What the fuck!” Makayla said, grabbing the arm rests.

“Oh yes,” gasped Kayla.

“Oh no you don’t!”

“And why not?” Kayla replied. *“Why do you get to have all the fun?”*

Makayla moaned as she felt his light touch on her breast, it was as though it were actually happening.

“Fuck no; this is so not happe—!” Her body started to thrum. She wanted him; she wanted to feel his body moving within her, she writhed against the velvet seating forgetting where she was. The dark auditorium and students were a distant memory. She was on a beach, she could smell the ocean, and taste the salt on her lips. She tried to focus, and was glad the students weren’t privy to what was playing out in her head.

“My God,” she screamed in her head, *“What the fuck are you doing to me?”*

“Showing you what it’d be like with us.”

Makayla’s body was as taut as a bow string, rigid with anticipation. The image in her mind changed, he was suckling her breasts, drawing one nipple and then the other into his mouth, teasing them with the tip of his tongue. They hardened from the punishing onslaught. His hands worshipped her, touching her everywhere. They slid down her hips towards the junction of her thighs.

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“Don't . . . you . . . dare!”

“Please, yes,” Kayla said, panting when his fingers found what they were searching for.

Could it get any worse? Could she be in any less control of an uncontrollable situation? She struggled to hold things together. Kayla and Alexander weren't helping.

“Do you want more?” he asked.

“NO, I don't,” was her reply.

“Yes, please,” whimpered Kayla.

“Are you sure? Tell me, Makayla, do you want me to stop? Do you want me?”

“Yes, I'm sure, and yes, I want you, I mean NO, I don't want you, to stop. Stop fucking with me!” she shrieked.

“Nooooo, please, don't stop,” Kayla pleaded. *“Please don't stop.”*

“Are you sure?” he asked one last time.

Makayla finally gained control of her senses and expelled him from her mind, which was no easy task considering she was fighting Kayla's, Alexander's and her own wants. She gulped in oxygen and licked her lips, scratching her tongue on her fangs. They jutted from her mouth extending far past her lower lip. She should rip his throat out, but it would be over too soon, and the satisfaction of making him suffer would end too quickly. She wanted to make him pay for toying with her.

Her vision began to clear, the beach disappeared into obscurity, and plush brown carpeting came into focus. The intoxicating scent of sandalwood, the ocean, male pheromones, and spicy blood enveloped her. She tightened her grip on the armrests of the chair she was sprawled in, and straightened in her seat. She continued gazing down at the carpet and noticed two sets of shoes – her black high heels, and Alexander’s. She wished she were wearing her combat boots. She could do some damage with those steel-tipped shit-kickers. She’d have to settle with just skewering him with her stilettos instead.

CHAPTER 7.



She angled her head to the side, sparks spitting from the purple gem at her throat, and slanted her red gaze at him; a feral grin crossed her face when she noticed the damp patch on the front of his trousers. She whipped her hand out and grabbed a handful of wet fabric and genitals, not caring if she had an audience. They were alone. She hadn't heard the students departing, but she'd been distracted, so it wasn't surprising.

She tightened her grip. A loud, anguished groan accompanied with a whoosh of exhaled air was music to her ears. Alexander crumpled to his knees, the momentum pulling her forward.

“Next time you feel like playing fucking mind games, be careful who you play them with,” she gripped harder, “because you mightn’t like the outcome.” She released his crotch and shoved him backwards, he bounced off the stage and face-planted the floor.

“I’m out of here!”

“What? Wait, we have to go over our assignment,” he said, gasping for breath and pushing up from the carpet.

“Really, is that what we were doing?”

“We’re partners.”

“Maybe, but it doesn’t give you the right to fuck with me!”

“You’re not alone any more, Makayla.”

“I’ve always been alone! And I always will be. A word of warning, NEVER, I repeat never do that again; not without my permission. Keep out of my head, and don’t touch me unless I’m in physical danger. Is that clear?”

Alexander didn’t respond.

“I said, is that CLEAR?” She prodded him with her finger, shooting electric shockwaves into his chest, and emphasising each word with an electrifying jolt.

“I asked if you wanted me to stop, and you said not to!”

“It wasn’t . . . it was Kayl . . . I don’t like being manipulated. You knew exactly who I was!”

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“I feel no remorse for what we shared,” he murmured. “It wasn't real. It was an illusion of what could be. It's just a matter of time.”

“If it wasn't real; how come you have a giant wet patch on the front of your pants? You know what? I've had about enough of your bullshit, and an adequate amount of education for one evening. You're my work partner, and that's as far as it goes, Mr Drake.”

“Call me, Xander, like I said. All my friends do.”

“I will tolerate you, Alexander. I don't have to like you, we'll be working together; we're colleagues that's it!”

“I know you like me,” he said, smiling, and flashing his sexy dimples.

“Your arrogance is so . . . fucking . . . amazing!”

Before she could stop herself, energy shot from her body surrounding her in phosphorescent blue-green light. Her hands lifted of their own accord as if someone else were operating them. She glanced down at them as though they were a foreign appendage. A smile tarnished her features as she let loose a burst of energy, it connected with his body, propelling him through the air. He landed in a heap on the opposite side of the room.

She smiled slyly, flashing her fangs as she strode past him, “I'll be waiting outside.” She said, leaving the auditorium.

Alexander shook off the power-driven charge. She was sexy when she was angry. Her hair was a violent, gleaming entity, moving as if it were an ocean of vibrant swirling waves about her face. Her eyes intense phosphorous violet, dotted with brilliant ruby-red and sunshine gold colours. He enjoyed sparring with her. He retrieved his briefcase and limped towards the exit. He found her outside by the kerb, scowling down at the gutter. He shuffled past her towards his car.

Makayla knew she was in big trouble.

“I like everything about him.”

“How am I going to do my job if you’re harassing me about him every two seconds?”

“I can help!”

“NO, Kayla, you can’t help! Do you remember the dungeon? You suffered.”

“You did too, Makayla!”

“Have you forgotten what I am, what I do?”

“I haven’t forgotten what ‘WE’ are, I can handle it; I have handled it.”

Makayla stood, staring blankly at Alexander’s black Ferrari, tongue-tied. Kayla had never offered to help before. Something had changed, and it had come wrapped in the form of a very tall man; her new partner. She was royally fucked

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“Nice car,” she said, trying to appear normal whilst processing Kayla’s change in attitude. She wanted to hit something, someone in particular.

“Thanks.”

“It’s a classic, aren’t you worried it’ll be stolen?” she said, attempting to calm her roiling emotions.

“Not really,” he grinned mysteriously, glancing down the street and back.

“Should I be scared?”

A seductive smile split his face “You should be very scared.”

She rolled her eyes. “You have a one-track mind.”

“My most endearing quality.”

“It’s annoying! I have a weakness for Ferraris.” She was revealing more than she’d intended. She glided her hand along the glossy, window edge.

“I thought I was your weakness!” he said, winking at her as he jumped into the driver’s seat, tossing his briefcase onto the back seat.

“You wish!”

“Your chariot awaits, my lady.”

“That’ll be the day,” she said, taking note of the leather interior.

“That day will come, eventually.”

She climbed into the passenger seat. “Not likely!” She sighed as she sank into the comfy cushioning. She watched his long, thick fingers, with their neatly groomed fingernails, turn the key in the ignition; the engine roared.

“If I were you, I'd put my seatbelt on, I like to drive fast.”

She glanced sideways at him, and crossed her arms over her chest and waited.

“Your funeral!” he said, revving the engine and pulling out into the flow of traffic.

Minutes later they pulled up in front of a towering, glass building. The streets were relatively empty. He twisted in his seat and smiled at her again running his hands down the length of his thighs. “So, are you going to wait here, or come up?”

“Is that an invitation or are you baiting me?”

“Why don't you just wait here?” he said, exiting the car, “It won't take a moment.”

“You certainly know how to manipulate a person.” She shoved her hands in her pockets and removed a fresh packet of cigarettes and her Zippo.

“I'm a master,” he winked.

“I bet!” she said, getting out of the car and slamming the door.



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“We have acquired the address, my lady.”

“Good, send Mikael and the beast, when you have the cryptologist bring him directly to me, he may need a little persuasion.”

“Yes, my lady. We have the other archaeologist, Mr Hammond, in our custody. Shall I transport him to the lab?”

“Yes, begin deciphering the hieroglyphs on the globe immediately. Go now.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Don't forget to tell Mikael to drain the Golden One's blood when he has captured her and the cryptologist. We'll need it. What we already have may not be enough.”

“As you wish, my lady.”

Zobiana watched her manservant back out of the room. She turned to the window, ignoring the vivid coloured flowers, and the hedges lining the gravel drive. The faces of those who'd exiled her to Earth were the only things she saw. She would return to Evron. The Seraphim and Vampire Elders wouldn't be controlling the gateways for long. She smiled, her lips stretching over her razor-sharp teeth. He and the elders would pay. She was only doing what she'd been born to do: kill Seraphim. Just because they believed they had the Christian God on their side didn't mean they were the chosen ones. She had the Dark One on

her side, and she would free him from his fiery prison, and then they would see who was all powerful.

CHAPTER 8.



Alexander stared at the elevator doors with a self-satisfied smile on his face. He wanted to get Makayla alone. Even her foul mouth didn't put him off. He glanced sideways at her; she was studying the carpet, feigning disinterest. Why was she fighting it? He pressed the button for the penthouse suite.

"So, do you like being up high?" Makayla asked, brushing a coil of hair from her eyes.

"I love it, it's like being on top of the world; no one can touch me, metaphorically speaking. It's almost as if you're as free as a bird."

"I know what you mean," she said, glancing down at the carpeting again.

“How do you know?” Alexander said, relaxing against the wall, hands in his pockets feet crossed.

“Come on, you've read my file. I'm guessing, no, I'm *betting* you know more about me than you're willing to admit. You know what I am.”

“Actually—”

“Yeah, you do!” Makayla said, rubbing the toe of her black, high heels back and forth over the short, woollen carpet pile.

“Okay, I know a little.” Alexander shrugged his shoulders raising his hands.

“I doubt that. Vasili is very thorough.”

“Do you fly much?” he asked, changing the topic and folding his arms across his chest.

“It's the only time I can truly be myself, go anywhere – be anonymous. It's a freedom that can't be explained, only felt.”

He nodded his head in agreement, his eyes roaming over her body, his throat tightening painfully. Her aura was molten lava, like angry, sharp, red diamonds surrounding her in a heat he couldn't seem to penetrate. No matter how hard he tried to break the surface of her heated exterior, she pushed back. Why?

She doesn't recognise you, Alexander. She may never recognise you.

He brushed the thought away, swiping at his forehead in a useless physical attempt to dislodge the memories of their past.

Why was the past haunting him? Now, when she was finally so close, so close he could draw her into his arms where she'd always meant to be.

Stop it, Alexander, just stop torturing yourself.

Makayla looked up into his eyes, curious, yet anxious at how much she'd revealed about herself again, she hated how exposed he was making her feel.

“Maybe you could fly with me sometime,” he whispered.

Not likely. “Maybe,” she said, her brow furrowing, the muscles in her back cramping.

The elevator doors slid open, and they strolled into his apartment. Makayla found herself standing in the main living area. A giant mural of an eagle encompassed the entire left side wall. She walked up to it, startled to see something she recognised, and stood captivated by the amazing bird. She reached up to trace her forefinger down the line of its beak thinking about her eagle – they were identical in every way except one. The bird's eye colour was different. She turned and caught Alexander watching her.

“It reminds me of a bird that visits me.”

“I know this bird. Is it the same as yours?” he asked, moving closer to her.

Makayla looked up at Alexander, and watched as he lifted his hand and gathered a lock of her silky hair between his fingertips. He raised it to his nose, and drew in a deep breath, smelling the sweet fragrance of her hair. He blinked, released her hair and lowered his arm when he noticed her staring at him.

“No, its eyes are different.” Makayla replied. There was something oddly familiar about Alexander’s eyes. Her willpower seemed to have evaporated, his blood intoxicating. The memory of their kiss still lingered on her lips; she wanted to taste him again, she wanted him. She wanted more.

“Bleed him dry, bite him. What are you waiting for? Now’s the perfect time!”

“You need to feed, Makayla!” he said, running his fingertip over her lips and touching the tip of her right fang with his forefinger. She jerked her head to the side; his touch burnt a path across her mouth. She hadn’t even realised her fangs were showing.

“Are you offering?” she asked in a voice she didn’t recognise.

“If you’re asking, I’m offering,” he replied, his gaze focused on her mouth again.

Makayla drew in a sonorous breath. She knew this man; she recognised his aroma, but how? His blood scent was doing terrible things to her, and now she had a lungful inside her body.

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It wasn't the only thing of his she wanted inside her body, bloody hell. Before he'd touched her mouth, it had been as dry as an ashtray filled with cigarette butts, but now it was pooling with saliva. She could feel the trembling in her fingertips. It always started there and got progressively worse, until she lost all sensation in her hands and outer extremities. In the end, all that remained was the inexplicable desire and desperate need to feed. White fuzz was beginning to collect at the edges of her peripheral vision, it was never a good sign, it usually preceded a blood binge anxiety attack.

"Kill him, feed from him," the velvet voice crooned.

"NO, kiss him, hold him, and make love to him," Kayla whimpered.

Makayla gritted her teeth against the ever-present and on-going inner monologue.

"I don't do humans any more."

"I'm not human!"

"What are you, Alexander?" She shoved her right hand in her jacket pocket, her fingers twining about her Zippo lighter, her thumb flipping the lid back and forth quietly.

"I'm many things!"

"Evasive being one of them!"

"Makayla, you deserve to be loved too!" Kayla's voice whispered in her mind.

“Love? What’s that?”

“Well,” Alexander said abruptly, “I’ll just go change my pants, and get my clothing and things together. Then we can leave for the underground compound, and I can get settled into my new accommodations. I won’t be long.”

Makayla went out onto the veranda and leant her arms on the railing, immediately feeling the strength of the wind blowing into her face and whipping her hair about her body. *What if she just let go? Manifested her wings and let the wind carry her off?* The flickering city lights danced, flashing like fireflies. She loved the night time, just as much as Kayla loved her sunsets. The darkness swallowed everything, concealing the grime and ugliness the daylight couldn’t hide. She dragged in the aroma of the city. It had been raining again and the smell of wet concrete, car fumes, plant foliage and the underlying scent of decay enveloped her. Most predominant was the sweet, coppery smell of blood over-ridden by the odour of degenerating human beings.

“What’s your poison?” Alexander called out. “I’ve got vodka, whiskey, Southern Comfort, Baileys, or white wine if that’s what you’re in the mood for.”

It wasn’t exactly what she was in the mood for; not anymore. “Baileys straight up with ice,” she said, lighting a cigarette with trembling hands.

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“Great view, isn't it?” he handed her the drink as he stepped out onto the veranda, “I sit out here in the dark all the time. I like gazing at the stars and watching the flashing lights of planes as they go by.”

“I bet you're never lacking for female company, either,” she said, looking up at the big dipper and exhaling a smoke ring.

“Actually, you're the first person I've ever brought up here.”

“Bullshit! Why?” She turned to face him, ashing her cigarette over the railing.

“I don't know, maybe because they're not you! I've missed you.” His gaze connected with hers before lowering to her mouth.

She licked her lips, her fangs scratching her tongue. “You're kidding, right! You don't even know me.”

“You'd be surprised at how well I know you. I've been watching over you for centuries.” He stepped closer, sipping his drink, his amber eyes unwavering.

Makayla raised her cigarette to her lips. “How many centuries have you watched over me?”

“Three, four it could be five centuries, could be more, I've lost count!”

“Unbelievable,” she whispered, looking down at her feet. She slowly sank into a chair. “Do you have Everclear? I need something stronger.”

“You could do some serious damage with that stuff.”

“It takes a lot of alcohol to affect me,” she said, waving him away.

“It’s your funeral.”

“You keep saying that. Vampires and Seraphim don’t get hangovers; maybe tipsy, but never hung over,” she flung over her shoulder as he disappeared into the kitchen; reappearing a few moments later.

“Here you go,” he said, handing her a glass and pulling up a seat.

She eyed the darkness, trying to ignore the burning in her gut, it was unthinkable.

“Why have you been watching over me?”

“I don’t think you’re ready to know why. Ask me again when you are,” he said, understanding lining his features.

Makayla felt so old; she was so tired of running; running from evil, running from herself. She was afraid – not of monsters, or wickedness – no, she was afraid of love, to love, yet afraid she’d never experience it as well. She shouldn’t feel so vulnerable, she was a predator. The night sky beckoned her. Her back itched in protest, her wings needed release, and so did she.

“I’ll get my things, and we can make a move.”

“Sure,” she said, gulping down the remainder of her drink, and stubbing out her cigarette. She made her way back through the lounge room. It was a man’s room in tones of brown. The legs

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of a barely visible coffee table protruded from a jumbled mess of reading material. She leant over and straightened the books and magazines. Shit, she was turning into Kayla; she never tidied. He was a Robert Ludlum fan. She picked up a tattered copy of *The Bourne Identity*. The pages were dog-eared and well read. She opened it, there were notes in the margins; paragraphs underlined. She'd read the series. She returned the book to the pile, feeling blindsided by the overwhelming similarities they shared. She crossed the room towards the mural; it was the most impressive part of the room. She raised her hand to caress the beautiful bird again, only to stop, the realisation smacking her hard in the face. She missed her eagle – she hated to admit it, but she did, he was her anchor. She could hear Alexander's movement in the bedroom, and sighed to herself; she liked him. She so didn't want to like him.

CHAPTER 9.



“Hurry up! Something’s not right! Do you feel it?” She thought into his mind.

“Yeah, I do,” he replied, as he put his suitcase in the trunk of his car.

Makayla's skin prickled with awareness, her shield instantly appeared, filling the space around her with a blue, water-like ball of light – encasing her within its nucleus.

“Do you always glow when danger's near?”

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“Yeah, it was a birthday gift from my father, but if you've been watching me all these years you should already know about it.” She looked him in the eyes.

“It looks different from a distance.” He jerked his eyes left and right.

Midnight and the streets were empty. The air was heavy and vibrating with electricity. A chilly fog crept in, circling their feet.

“We have company. Do you have weapons?” she asked.

“Always.” There was a metallic clack as he loaded large, iridescent bullets into an unusual looking plasgun he'd retrieved from the trunk of his car whilst stowing his suitcase.

“Good!” she said, kicking off her stilettos and sliding the silver chain she wore as a belt from the top of her skirt. *Thank God Kayla had had the sense to wear it.* The chain started to glow a striking blue colour, similar to her shield.

“They're close.”

“How many?” He noticed her teeth elongate, and her eyes shimmer.

Cold sweat beaded the surface of Makayla's skin as she dropped her mental shields and opened up her senses. Alexander's thoughts crashed into her and she was momentarily taken aback by his determination to keep her safe.

“There are two of them; one’s a Newblood, the other, I don’t quite know what it is, but it’s not human – they’re here for you.” She didn’t tell him what their exact plans were for her.

A menacing growl fragmented the air as the mist began to dissipate. A mountainous shape manifested before them. It was larger than any bear or elephant with reptilian, armour-like skin, and a body similar to that of a giant panther. A tail extended metres behind it; a bulbous, cactus-like ball topping its end with thick, spikey barbs. A gelatinous substance dripped from the barbs as its tail whipped from side to side. The creature drew closer with a hissing screech that sounded like a cross between a giant bird and a snake. They watched its mouth stretch wide, revealing transparent rows of vicious teeth.

“Check out its tongue, there are four of the bloody things”

“I see it.” Alexander said, lifting the rifle to his shoulder, squinting down the barrel as he targeted the creature through the scope.

“What’s on the end of them?” Makayla said, looping the electrified chain behind her; sparks shot out as it swept along the wet asphalt.

“Looks like serrated blades; don’t get too close.”

“I’m not going to kiss it, Alexander,” Makayla said, smirking. Her stomach flipped as a lopsided grin formed on his face.

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“Save the kisses for me, sweetheart!” He winked at her. *“Do you see the Newblood?”* He darted his eyes about, keeping his rifle positioned on the advancing animal.

“He’s shielding, he could be anywhere,” Makayla replied, noticing the creature’s eyes as it approached. There were six in varying positions on the top of its head; each moving separately from the other. A rotting meat odour assailed them as it skulked closer. She choked, gagging on the pooling saliva in her mouth. Bile coated her tongue, singeing the insides of her mouth and throat as she swallowed it down on reflex.

“It looks like a Formorian, more evolved; maybe a descendant or a hybrid.”

Makayla began coiling the silver chain; it spiralled above her head with a buzzing zing as it gathered momentum. She flicked her wrist and the blade-encrusted tip whipped towards the beast, connecting with its body, and sending up a shower of blue sparks as it tore off a portion of flesh. One of its tongues darted out and caught the chain, pulling it free from her hands.

A loud boom vibrated in her ears as a flash of light burnt her retinas. Part of the tongue holding her whip dropped to the tarmac in a ball of melted flesh. A pained screech pierced the silence. She blinked away the flashing light searing the backs of her eyelids. Black blood sprayed out of the brute’s mouth, liquefying pockmarks on the ground as a barrage of spikes shot from its tail.

Alexander discarded the plasgun and held up his hands, creating an invisible barrier that deflected and shattered the barbs mid-air, showering the beast in acid.

Hand size holes sizzled on the surface of the creature's body, dissolving from the venom. Makayla looked at the road and noticed the bitumen melting. Gaseous vapours curled up into the frigid night. She removed the silver bangles from her wrists. She spoke an incantation and the bands unfolded, morphing into Seraph blades. She grasped the handles and began spinning the swords, moving with a blurring speed. The creature pivoted, pitching its tail back and forth attempting to spear her.

"Keep flinging your tail, big fella," she said, dodging and slicing the blades together in an upward motion. She lopped off the bulbous oddity and watched it spiral into the sky. A foul brown substance orbited through the air, raining putrid flesh and blood. The monster howled, trying to focus its eyes on her. It swiped its front talon and collected her in the side, throwing her backwards. She landed on the asphalt with a meaty thwamp.

Alexander let fly a legion of small daggers that embedded deep in the creature's eyes. The animal's deafening shriek cut through the darkness; its tongues whipping in all directions. One connected with Makayla's left arm, slicing it like soft butter. She grabbed at it in surprise, wondering how the animal had penetrated her shield.

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“You were right; it has serrated blades on its tongues,” she yelled, looking across at Alexander.

She saw the Newblood edging down the street by a shadowed building on the opposite side of the road. Her arm lost sensation; she tried to move it, but it was a dead weight. A vicious smile swept across the Newblood’s face; Makayla watched in dread as he worked his way towards Alexander. She raised her uninjured arm and tried to manifest an energy ball.

“Help me, Kayla, please.” It was the first time she’d ever asked her other half for anything. Makayla felt something warm ebbing from the centre of her body. It was the feeling of unadulterated love, an all-consuming love. Makayla gathered the energy within her and forced it into the palm of her hand; the energy burst into flames; a shocking ice-cold heat encompassed her entire arm. Orange fire and blue ice plasma currents orbited her hand, a cold Vampire and hot-blooded Seraphim. She let out a euphoric sigh of relief. So that’s what it felt like to be one being. Twisting her body, she drew all the energy she could muster from the deepest, purist part of her: Kayla. She hurled the energy ball towards the Newblood bastard, intent on taking the first man she’d ever met who made her feel anything but an abomination.

The Newbloods eyes widened in incredulity before he disintegrated; Alexander whipped his head around, and saw a fine

covering of ash particles settle to the pavement not two metres from his foot.

“Xander, I can't move my arm,” she said faintly, shock weaving into her voice. “One of its tongues cut me.”

“It's the venom,” he said, taking a quick look over his shoulder at her.

“It shouldn't have penetrated my shield.”

“Gabriel will know what to do!”

“One problem, Gabe's not here.”

“He's like me,” he said, dodging what was left of the creature's oozing tail as it swung past him. He vaulted into the air with feline agility and landed on the creature's back.

“Throw me your blades,” Alexander said, thrusting his hands out towards her.

“Only Seraphim can wield them.”

“Give them to me NOW!”

Makayla threw them up; he caught, and wielded them with ease and familiarity.

“The head; cut it off.” Makayla tried to focus her eyes.

The creature bucked, twisting its body in an attempt to dislodge Alexander from its back. Orange sparks showered off the blades as he hacked through the beast's flesh, decapitating its head from its body.

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He surfed the creatures back as it crashed to the ground with a reverberating wet slapping sound. The asphalt shook as the great animal landed on its stomach near Makayla's feet. Its severed head lay a few metres from its body.

"Are you okay?" he asked, chest heaving as he dragged in gulps of air.

She felt strange; an all consuming disembodied terror engulfed her for the very first time in her long life.

Alexander caught her in his arms as she pitched forward – her body limp and boneless.

"Makayla, wake up," he said, shaking her. She was deteriorating fast. He lifted and carried her quickly to his car, and lowered her gently into the passenger seat before buckling the seatbelt around her body. Jumping into the driver's seat, he turned the key in the ignition. "*Fuck . . .*" Alexander checked under the hood of his car, the distributor cap was shredded. He dialled Gabriel's number.

"Hello Gabriel spea—"

"Thank God you're there, it's Alexander," he said, expelling the breath he'd been holding.

"Hey Xander, what's up?"

"Makayla and I were attacked by a Newblood and what seems to be a Formorian."

“It can't be, we killed them all!”

“Apparently not! It's some sort of genetically modified hybrid. It got a shot at Makayla with one of its tongues. She's got a sizeable gash down the length of her left arm.”

“Xander, listen carefully, do you have a belt or something to bind the wound with? Use it as a tourniquet to prevent blood loss and the venom from spreading.”

“Okay,” he said, pulling his belt free from the top of his jeans.

“Is she conscious?”

“No, she's been out a few minutes now.” Alexander glanced down at Makayla.

“Shit. Get her to the club.”

“I can't, the distributor cap has been shredded on my car, the Newblood must have tampered with it.”

“We'll come to you then, it will be quicker. One more thing: cut the creature's tongue out, we need to extract the venom in order to make the antidote. Hurry, we don't have much time.”

“Can you let Vasili know?”

“Yes, move it!” Gabriel said, in a worried tone.

Alexander rushed towards the creature's decapitated head, and cut its giant tongue from its gaping jaws. Cringing in disgust, he sent a thought to Makayla.

“Hold on Makayla, fight for me baby.”

SERAPHYMPIRE ~ Guardians of the Gateways

“Have you removed the creature’s entire tongue, all four of them?”

“Yeah.”

”Good, now concentrate on your location, so we can pinpoint your position.”

Minutes later the street began to glow, illuminated by a throbbing light. The wind picked up, spiralling the dead leaves. A spectre shone from within the dust storm of vibrating dirt particles, condensing with the magnetically charged atmosphere, forming two solid entities. Ava and Gabriel appeared as the wind died down.

“Where is she?”

“In the car.”

They moved briskly to the vehicle, Ava lent over Makayla feeling her forehead and then her throat for a pulse.

“She still has time, but I can't save her here. We must get her back to the facility. Do you have the tongue?” Ava opened a large plastic bag for Alexander to drop the tongue in.

“I’m Ava,” she said, introducing herself to Alexander. Gabriel smiled down at his wife.

“Alexander, meet my wife.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you, Ava.”

“I’ll stay here and wait for the cleaners to arrive,” Gabriel said. “We can’t leave the creature here for the mortals to find.

Good luck,” he said, unbuttoning his coat and digging his cell phone from a pocket.

Alexander cradled Makayla helplessly in his arms; he gazed at Ava his heart constricting with fear.

“Don't let her die; she's my universe.”

“She'll be okay, Alexander. Now, this will feel a little strange,” Ava said, grasping his elbow lightly.



The shrouded man stood in the shadows, watching the events unfold; years of experimentation had finally paid off. They'd been waiting centuries for something to penetrate the Golden One's defences.

Opening his mind, he summoned his master.

“What is it?” A harsh voice resonated through his head, he cringed in pain.

“We've succeeded in wounding the Golden One.”

“Is she dead?”

“The outcome is undetermined, sire; she's not invincible!”

“Where is she?”

“They've taken her away.”

“What about the beast? And our agent, did he succeed in capturing the cryptologist?”

“No, both the creature and our agent are dead!”

SERAPHYMPIRE ~ Guardians of the Gateways

“Destroy the creature’s remains.”

“Too late, they’re removing it as we speak,” he said, moving the foliage aside to peer at the roadway.

“Unacceptable! They’ll learn its origins.”

“Does it matter, sire? She was wounded, we were successful.”

“There was no success in this mission. The Golden One’s outcome is unknown and the cryptologist is still at large. If they cure the Seraphympire she’ll be immune.”

“We have other creatures, master; there’ll be one she’s not immune to.”

“Never underestimate her power. Keep me informed; they mustn’t sense your presence” The voice faded from his mind.

Vasili was waiting for them at the compound.

“Bring her in here.”

It was a sterile white room smelling of hospital grade disinfectant and equipped with a single hospital bed, a small refrigerator, a defibrillator, other medical equipment and supplies.

“We need to hook her up to an IV drip immediately. Xander, put her on the bed, and then get me a bag of blood from the refrigerator; it will have her name written on it, just look for one with an iridescent, gold-red liquid in it. There should be five of them.”

Alexander laid Makayla gently down on the bed, retrieved the bag of blood and handed it to Vasili. “There were only four bags of blood,” he said, watching Vasili insert an IV needle into Makayla’s hand and attach a heart and oxygen monitor peg to her index finger.

“You must be mistaken,” Vasili replied.

“*We need to clean and stitch the wound,*” Ava said, preparing alcohol swabs and suturing paraphernalia.

“Shouldn't the wound be healing?” Alexander asked, staring at the gaping laceration.

“*No, the venom prevents the healing process. Her body's working against itself doing more harm than good. That's why we're giving her a blood transfusion; it dilutes the contaminated blood and gives us more time to come up with an anti-venom.*” Ava picked up the plastic bag containing the creature’s tongue and headed for the lab. “*It should take me about half an hour to ready the anti-venom.*”

“She's declining fast.”

Alexander watched Vasili stitch up the gash on Makayla's arm with a practised hand.

“I take it you've done this before?” Alexander commented, looking him in the eye.

“Let’s just say it's a lesson I learnt out of necessity.”

SERAPHYMPIRE ~ Guardians of the Gateways

Alexander smoothed Makayla's hair back from her pale face; it was starting to lose its orange-golden glow and appeared more ashen, almost chalky, matching the unhealthy pallor of her skin.

"I'm worried Vasili, I can't lose her now, she's changed."

"She's a fighter. She'll make it, she's strong. Judging by what I saw at the club the other night she seems very interested in you."

"You saw that, huh?"

"Yes," he said, smiling and checking his wristwatch for the time. Fifteen minutes had passed. Without warning, Makayla began convulsing, her heart rate dropping – barely registering on the heart monitor. Alexander held her down so she wouldn't pull out the IV.

"Ava, I hope you've finished that anti-venom," Vasili yelled.

"*Yes, it's ready,*" she replied, rushing into the room, holding the largest syringe Alexander had ever seen. "*We have to inject it into her heart; it's the only way to get the anti-venom into her system fast enough.*"

Ava looked them both in the eye. "*Okay, let's do this.*"

Holding the needle high above her head, she plunged it deep into Makayla's chest. A scream cut the silence as Makayla struggled to get free. Her heart rate faltered, then stopped.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Renee Spyrou was born in Australia in a small town thirty minutes south of the Queensland border, to Australian and Greek parents. She studied Fashion in college and has worked in the rag trade since she was 20 years old. She loves creative arts and was sewing, knitting and crocheting from the early age of five. She grew up reading Greek mythology and always had a book or a paintbrush in her hand. She met her husband of 22 years in Greece when she was 22 years old on the small Island of

Kalymnos where she'd been living for a year and a half with family. It was love at first sight; they were engaged after a month and married after two months.

Renee lived in Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly known as Zaire, for three years. She was there when two point five million refugees crossed the borders of Rwanda into Zaire, during the Ebola outbreak, and when Mobutu's rule fell and the rebel leader Kabila overthrew the government. She's been held up at gunpoint, seen people shot; and seen the adverse effects of war, famine and disease.

Renee started writing when her son was diagnosed with a rare neurological disease called Adrenoleukodystrophy. Writing helps her escape the sad reality of losing her firstborn child. Sadly, her son died four years after he was diagnosed.

She lives in Ocean Shores with her husband and daughter and their two Rhodesian Ridgeback dogs. She loves Sci Fi, horror, paranormal and action movies and enjoys painting, reading, writing, drawing and sitting outside on a Friday night with her family near a small burn barrel watching the fire. If you would like to know more about Renee's up and coming novels, check out Renee's Facebook page, Twitter, or her website, www.reneespyrou.com. Happy reading.