

## 1. Haunted

\*\*\*Guinevere\*\*\*

"Quickly darling, we have to move quickly," my mother hisses as we make our way through the market, throwing looks over her shoulder every once in a while.

Several people throw dirty looks at us as we push past them in a hurry.

"Mummy slow down!" I cry out, my legs getting tired as she breaks into a gallop.

"No time, my love. We have to..."

"Stop that woman!" Someone cries out.

I turn to see a mob of villagers heading straight for us.

"She's a witch!" One of the villagers screams.

Mum lifts up her skirts and turns to me. "Run!"

We bolt through the crowded market, knocking over fruit stands and carts as we speed through the busy streets of London. My mother grabs onto my wrist, steering me to the edge of the city where market stands and cobbled roads give way to dirt paths and merchant farms. Soon enough, I realize we have slipped into the King's woods. Mother mumbles a chant under her breath, some bushes receding back to reveal a hidden path amongst the trees. We rush through it and Mum icks her wrist behind her, the path once again disappearing with the brush.

We run down the path until we come upon a small cottage I have never seen before.

Mum shes a key out of her dress and unlocks the door, shoving me inside.

"Mummy, what's going on? Why were those men chasing us? Where are we?" I ask.

"It's alright. It's going to be alright," she coos, cupping my cheeks and crouching down to my eye level. A tired smile stretches across her lips and a few tears well up in her eyes but she quickly wipes them away. "I need you to be a big girl. A strong girl. Can you do that for me, love?"

I nod, still very confused by the events of the morning.

"Good," she sighs, getting up and rummaging through the house.

She lifts up a piece of oor board, revealing a hidden compartment. Inside sits a small wooden trunk wrapped neatly in a black cloth.

Pulling it out, she places it on the table and blows away the dust that had collected on its lid. A silver lock with a small hole and a series of spirals carved into it keeps the lid sealed tightly. My mum rushes over to the kitchen and takes a small knife to her hand, pricking her nger. A few drops of blood gush from the small wound and she lets her blood drip into the hole in the lock.

"Gwen, come here darling," she waves me over.

I remain frozen in place, suddenly frightened by my mother's strange behavior.

"Gwen, Now!" She snaps and I obediently stand beside her.

She takes my hand in hers and presses the blade of the knife against my nger. I try to pull it away but she only tightens her grip.

"It will only hurt a little," she soothes before making a tiny incision on the tip of my index nger.

I yelp as the blood spills onto my hand and into the small hole. When the lock is full, my mother grabs a small cloth and wipes my hand.

"I'm sorry, my little sprite," she whispers. "But now this box will unlock for you."

I give her a confused look. "What's in it?"

"Everything you'll ever need for your witch training," she smiles at me. "Now, I'm going to go get your brother before your father takes him."

I give her a bewildered look. "But all those angry villagers..."

"I know, darling," she says, kissing my forehead and caressing the back of my head. "But I need to get your brother."

"Then I'll come with you..."

"No," my mother shakes her head. "No, you stay right here until I return." She crouches down on her knees and cups my face. "You wait for us here until nightfall," she instructs, her face growing grim. "And if I don't return, you go on your own."

My eyes trail down to the emerald ring on her nger. It was the nal gift my father ever gave my mother before he left us for another woman.

"No mummy, I won't leave you..."

"You will do exactly as I tell you Gwen," my mother says sternly. "If I don't return come nightfall, you will take this box and these," she says, pulling out a small pouch that rattles with coins against her hand. "And go down to the river. A man named Master Thomas will be waiting there for you. He will take you to the countryside to meet Missus Cromwell."

Fat tears roll down my cheek at the thought of having to leave London behind all by myself. "Mum..."

"You will be alright, my dear," mum smiles as she wipes away my tears. "And always remember you are a witch, Guinevere. Be proud... for we are the warriors of the Earth."

She gives me one last kiss on the forehead before grabbing her cloak and rushing out of the cottage. I curl up on the oor, clutching the little pouch of coins and the wooden box to my chest for dear life.

Hours slowly crawl by and I nibble on some cheese and bread until the sun settles between the hills. When the sky begins to sparkle with stars, I wait a little longer, hoping perhaps she is just running a little late, but as I see the moon peak through the window, I know she isn't coming.

Realizing I am completely on my own now, I collect my things and rush off to the river as my mother had instructed me to do. Along the bank, I see a man grumbling to himself as he nishes loading the last of his cargo onto his cart.

We are completely alone and as I approach, he looks up at me, clearly annoyed with my presence.

"You're late," he growls. "I almost left without you." He extends his dirty hand out to me. "Pay up."

Stunned and a bit frightened, I do not question him and hand over the pouch my mother had given me.

"A-are you Master Thomas?" I ask, my voice shy and meek.

He takes the pouch and nods in the direction of his wagon. "Get in."

I stare at the hay lled wagon. He wants me to get into that?

"I don't have all bloody day," he snaps. "Get in or stay here!"

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"Would you like a coffee, miss?"

The present comes racing towards me as I realize I am spacing out again, no longer in London but in a small diner ordering breakfast with my friend, Natalia, after dropping off her son at daycare.

I blink a few times to reorient myself and smile back up at the waiter.

"No, thank you. But... could I have a tea instead?" I ask.

"I'm afraid we only have iced tea," the waiter shrugs apologetically. "Would you like that, miss?"

Of course you only have iced tea...

I heave a heavy sigh, Natalia chuckling to herself as I collect the menus for him. "I'll just take a glass of water then."

I give him the rest of my order and stare out the window from my booth. Natalia and I never get window seats for fear of being spotted, but it is such a beautiful day outside. We simply couldn't resist.

Poulsbo is a small town nestled on the shores of Washington state. It is just small enough to not attract a lot of tourists and large enough that family secrets aren't affairs of the public. It is the perfect place to hide out while things settle down in the supernatural world. The Ivory Queen's rise to power was anything but quiet and word had spread that a witch had helped her. It is only a matter of time before Roman comes looking for me.

Natalia, my runaway companion, has her own reasons for hiding out as well. She is a human, running from her ex-Alpha mate.

She is a lovely girl, quite the feisty little thing, I might add. I love that about her. It's how we met, actually. She had been minding her business at the local shopping center when a guy tried to make a pass at her. I was about to step in but she needn't any help. She had him on the ground in a split second. A total badass.

I do fear for the lass, though. She is all alone, raising her son, Dakota. A furious Alpha mate is no joke and there is no telling what that man would do should he ever nd her and the boy.

The waiter returns with our meals and after we nish our breakfast, we head out for a quick walk on the beach to stretch our legs before work. The beach is the feature that attracted me to this sleepy town. The waves crashing against the cliffs are soothing, keeping my mind distracted, if only brie, from the turmoil I am feeling.

I have always known mates were a big deal to werewolves, but I am a witch for Earth Goddess' sake! It's been nearly two months since I left River Moon, and yet a certain green eyed wolf has somehow managed to invade my every thought, my every dream, my every desire.

It's infuriating! I don't need another man in my life! I had made that mistake one too many times. Men were trouble. Always. Besides, Salvador hated witches. I'm sure his goddess would nd him someone better. Someone with less baggage.

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"We'll be cutting across the main square before we reach the bridge to cross it. There will be soldiers everywhere. You are not to make a sound or we're both dead. Do you understand?" Master Thomas asks, his voice deadly serious.

I nod vigorously as he instructs me to lie at on my back and covers me in hay and alfalfa. The cart begins to move and I manage to get a peak of the road as we travel back into town. The hooves of the horse almost lull me to sleep when a horric smell lls my nostrils and my curiosity gets the best of me.

I should have never looked.

My eyes narrow to slits as I focus on the surroundings and after a few seconds of adjustment, I realize we've reached the town square. In the center, a witch's pyre burns into the night. It's almost out, though, the poor victim long dead. Two men clean up the ashes, one of them lifting the charred remains of a woman. Bits of her clothes cling to what is left of her body, her last scream forever engraved on her lifeless, indistinguishable face. As we turn the corner, I catch a glimpse of an emerald ring in the rubble.

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"Are you alright, Gwen?" Natalia asks, giving me a concerned look.

I take a few deep breaths to calm my racing heart. My memories have been escalating recently.

Get a grip, Gwen! I mutter to myself as I force a smile on my face.

"I'm alright, darling. Just a silly memory is all," I smile.

She doesn't seem convinced but she knows what it's like to not want to speak of the past. She doesn't press me for details, instead wrapping me up in her arms and giving me a tight squeeze.

"We're alright, Gwennie," She coos, staring off into the cold west coast ocean. "We're going to be alright. Don't you worry."

I walk Natalia to her rst job of the day at a local clinic where she is a medical assistant. She would work as a waitress/bartender at the biggest club in Poulsbo in the evening, leaving me to care for Dakota until she returned. She is an incredible single mother.

I have a job at a small bookstore in the town center. It is a quiet little store and with the rise of e-books, not very busy. It's the perfect place to not draw attention to myself. I clock in and busy myself with restocking the shelves.

Several hours later, the sun begins to dip in the horizon and I hurry to nish up the last of my tasks to pick up Dakota from daycare.

"Hey Sarah!" A voice chirps from the entrance of the shop.

I take that back. I had drawn someone's attention.

A man by the name of Keagan with a smile that haunts my nightmares steps by everyday to ask me out. I could turn him down 100 times and he would still ask, just in case I changed my mind.

Sarah is my alias in town; it made it harder for anyone to track me down. I hardly ever give away my real name.

"Go away, Keagan," I mutter as I put away the last set of the books on the shelves.

"Oh come on Sarah, just one drink. That's all I'm asking," he insists, ashing his creepy smile.

"I said no. Now, if you're not here to buy a book, I suggest you leave," I sigh, not in the mood to deal with this i\*\*\*t.

I feel a sharp pain as he grabs my wrists and yanks me towards him.

"Stop playing hard to get," he chuckles. "I know you want me."

"I believe the lady said no," a husky voice interrupts us.

We turn to see a man dressed in all black standing at the door. His deeply set eyes are cold and lifeless, his porcelain skin white as death. He has an air of danger to him and I instantly know what he was.

He smirks at me, my heart nearly dropping to my feet. It has been years since I've seen another of his kind.

Vampire.

Our eyes meet, his brown irises shifting to a blood red.

Those eyes... I recognize those eyes anywhere.

Cillian.