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Blood of the Monster: Book 1 in the Covenant Trilogy

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Blood of the Monster
Book 1 in the Covenant Trilogy

Emily Hayes

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in English

Bridgewater State University

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Prof. Bruce Machart, Thesis Director
Prof. Nicole Williams, Committee Member
Dr. Elizabeth Veisz, Committee Member

Emily Hayes—Thesis

Chapter 1

Chrysanthie Zabat stood at the end of a street in Mexico and examined an old warehouse down the road. Chrys was a Gorgon, and a member of the Covenant. The Covenant was a group of monsters created several thousand years ago. There was a sizable amount of monsters in the world, but they were still far outnumbered by humans. Getting through daily life could be difficult, so the Covenant became a safe haven where monsters could work together to live safely in a human centered world. Chrys and the team she was with had been sent to examine this warehouse where a wanted Dark monster was supposedly hiding out. The team leader, Casey, a young cockatrice, had told Chrys to wait at the end of the street and send an image, which showed the people in the warehouse and their locations. He basically just wanted her out of the way. Regardless, Chrys did as she was told. She sent an image taken with a camera the Covenant had given her, one that could see heat patterns through walls, and sent it to Casey. She was now standing back, waiting for Casey and his team to screw everything up, and dreaming of the end of this assignment. Chrys was a rotating immortal, meaning she was an active Covenant agent who could live forever. Instead of creating a team for eternity, the Elders, the Covenant leaders, rotated immortals. Each immortal would take a 35-year term with one team, and then move onto another team, and so on. Tonight was Chrys's last with the idiotic Casey and his idiotic friends before she was free to return to the base and get a new team. One more assignment, and she was free of this boy forever.

Chrys continued to watch the warehouse through the camera even after sending the images. She may have been told to stay back, but there was no way Casey could tell her not to watch them screw everything up. Might be good for a laugh or two. And she could use a laugh real bad. Her husband was deployed elsewhere, and so she was stuck facing Casey alone five

days a week, and he certainly did not make her laugh. He helped her work on her homicidal tendencies, and her brainstorming of new and painful ways to kill someone, but laughing, not so much his specialty. The team breached the warehouse and within moments a gunshot sounded through the air.

Chrys sighed. “Morons,” she said. They couldn’t even execute a simple breach properly. If she was in charge of this team, things would go a whole lot differently. But of course, Casey was in charge, not her.

“You seem mighty upset,” A boy said behind her.

“They can’t even operate a simple breach,” Chrys said.

“Harsh. Who can’t even operate a breach anymore?” the boy asked.

“I know, right! Even a simpleton can operate a breach under proper leadership. It’s not hard to open a damn door,” Chrys said.

“Too true,” the boy said.

“I appreciate you agreeing with me Jonah, but it doesn’t change facts. You’re under arrest by order of the Covenant for committing treason, four counts of murder, six counts of kidnapping for ransom, and a whole lot of other charges which I am not going to bother relating. You’ve been a busy boy, Jonah Billings, but you’re under arrest. And I’m afraid to tell you that gun won’t help much against me.”

Jonah looked at the gun in his hand and then the back of Chrys’s head. “Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m a Covenant member,” Chrys said.

“Great, but who are you?” Jonah asked.

“I thought that was all Dark monsters cared about,” Chrys said.

“Not if they’re trying to figure out what they’re up against. You have eyes in the back of your head, or radar, or...” Jonah started.

“Or someone down the street telling me through an ear wig you have a gun?” Chrys asked.

Jonah immediately turned around to look behind him.

“Oh, no, sorry. I don’t have someone down the street. Just offering a suggestion for your theories,” Chrys said.

Another gunshot went off. Chrys sighed. “Idiots,” she said.

“Yeah, well, suggestions aside. Who are you?” Jonah asked.

“Chrysanthie Zabat Metaxas, but most people call me Chrys,” Chrys said.

“Chrysanthie Zabat Mextaxas?” Jonah repeated.

“Well, close, you mispronounced it, but an easy mistake to make. Most people do mispronounce my name, thus I go by Chrys.” A third gunshot went off. “Honestly?” Chrys asked, turning back to the building. “What is *with* them?”

Jonah was still repeating Chrys’s name. “You’re getting closer,” she said.

“No, no, I know that name. Why do I know that name?” Jonah asked.

“Don’t know. I’m known for a lot of stuff honey. You’ll have to be more specific,” she said.

“What’s your type?” Jonah asked.

“You’re not gonna come in quietly, are you?” Chrys asked.

“No, what’s your type?” Jonah asked.

Chrys sighed. “Very well. We’ll do this by force,” she said.

Chrys transformed into her natural form. The long straight light brown hairs rose up one by one so that they were standing on edge. The hairs moved together and formed thirty different groups. One by one each group of hair turned into a slithering, hissing acid green snake with bright red glowing eyes. Her skin turned from a dark tan into a clear pale. She grew taller, her nails sharpened, her teeth grew out into pointed yellow spikes, and her eyes changed from a gentle brown into a bright acid green to match the snakes, the black pupils disappeared leaving nothing but green. The smell of perfume was replaced by musty wood and salt from sea water.

“Jonah Billings,” she said. “You’re under arrest by order of the Covenant through their agent, Chrysanthie Zabat Metaxas, otherwise known as the Gorgon,” she said.

Jonah turned and tried to run, but not before his eyes met Chrys’s bright acid stare and he started to turn to stone. “I’ll release you for your hearing,” she promised.

Jonah disappeared and a statue clattered to the ground in his place. Chrys transformed back into her human appearance and returned her focus to the warehouse. It seemed quiet now. Not a lot of people were moving inside. Three figures were still on the ground, wounded from gunshots, and there was a group handcuffed in the center of the floor. But it seemed calmer now.

“Well, if it isn’t the young Casey,” Chrys said. Casey was walking over to her, he was covered in blood, his face was blotchy red, and his hands were clenched into fists. Casey wasn’t so much young. He was actually 57. As a cockatrice, a mortal, he was in the second half of his life, but to Chrys, who was over 3,000 years old, he was an infant.

“There you are.” Casey said.

“I didn’t do nothing. I stayed here, like I was supposed to,” Chrys said.

“You turned someone into stone,” Casey said.

“Jonah Billings idiot. He’s the one we were sent here for. I’ll untransform him for his hearing, but he said he didn’t want to come quietly. What else was I supposed to do? Besides, he’s not a mortal. It won’t kill him. It’s uncomfortable, sure, but it won’t kill him,” Chrys said.

“You’re transferring him to holding,” Casey said.

“Thanks. I’d rather be with the statue than the bleeding people,” Chrys said.

“It was an accident,” Casey said.

“There’s no such thing as an accident. Try improper planning and a dumb leader,” Chrys said.

“Shut up. Just take the statue back. And don’t talk to me, ever again,” Casey said.

“Oh, believe me darling, I had no intentions of ever seeing you again,” Chrys said.

“Good.”

“Good yourself.”

Chrys went into her bedroom about an hour later. She brought the statue to the base, handed him off to the jailers, unstatuized him, and went upstairs. All the living Covenant members had a small room at the main headquarters if they ever needed it. The main base, a 100,000,000 square foot mansion hidden underground to avoid prying human eyes, was mostly empty since a large percentage of the 6,000,000 Covenant members were deployed. Only about a million resided at the Covenant at any given time. However they all had bedrooms in case there was an emergency which would require them to quickly leave the human world. Chrys and her husband Abydos Metaxas lived in the upper level wing. The upper level wing was comprised of nicer bedrooms than the common members got and was full of rotating immortals who were high value agents.

After reaching her room, Chrys put down her bags, and she took a long shower where she plotted how best to kill the Elders. She liked to lighten the rage she felt after a 35-year assignment by plotting to kill the people who stuck her there. Tonight she was liking the idea of fire, and poison. It just sounded good tonight. The hot water of the shower had given her the idea of fire, something she was not ultimately partial to. But, it would admittedly work well against the Elders. As for poison, well, it was hard to avoid with her. The snakes on her head were moving around in the shower, trying to avoid getting too much hot water on them. They didn't like it as much as she did. She left the shower, got changed, and fed the Boys dinner. The Boys was her collective name for the snakes. All thirty were male snakes, and Chrys had named each of them, but mostly, she called them the Boys for simplicity. Chrys was in the midst of feeding the Boys when there was a knock at her bedroom door. A man opened the door before Chrys had time to answer. It was Abydos. He liked to knock before entering so she didn't freak out and attack him thinking someone was trying to break in. She may have done that once, thousands of years ago, and yet somehow, he had still not forgiven her. It wasn't like she killed him. Sure, he was in the infirmary a while, but he was fine in the end.

"I didn't think you were coming till this weekend," Chrys said.

"I asked if I could come home today," Abydos said.

"Why?" Chrys asked. She finished feeding the Boys and cleaned the mouse blood off her hands with an old stained, once white, torn dish towel.

"I wanted to see how your assignment ended," Abydos said.

"You mean you wanted to make sure I wasn't plotting to kill anyone before you got home."

"Can you blame me?" Abydos asked.

“No, I can’t. And yes, I was. But I wouldn’t have,” Chrys said.

Abydos moved the bag of mice remnants off the bed and sat down next to Chrys.

“I was gonna clean up before you got home,” Chrys said quietly.

Abydos didn’t like her feeding the Boys while sitting on their bed. Blood tended to get on the sheets. Which he probably wouldn’t have minded, one of things Chrys loved about him was how easy going he was, but he was a Dhampyr, a mutated vampire breed. He had vampire abilities but also human traits. He still lived off blood, though, and if the sheets smelled like blood, he got really hungry at night.

“It’s okay. How was your day?” Abydos asked.

“Lovely,” Chrys said.

“That bad, huh?” Abydos asked.

“That bad.”

“You wanna talk about it?”

“Not really,”

“Okay,” Abydos said. He laid down and motioned her over. Chrys went and curled up in a small ball on his chest. “It’ll be okay,” he said.

“I hope so,” Chrys said.

She buried her head in his cold chest, which she could clearly feel even through the cotton shirt he was wearing, and tried to forget about everything but him, the cold pale skin, the smell of dried blood mixed with whatever he had been around that day, today it was wood, a bit of metal, and oddly some kind of citrus fruit, and the sound of his heart beating under her, but still thoughts pushed their way into her mind. Revenge, misery, sadness, revenge, justice, anger, revenge, irritation, annoyance, and more revenge. Abydos always used to be able to cheer her up,

and she knew he tried, but for whatever reason, she had not been so good at forgetting lately. The anger was piling up, the need for revenge was growing stronger each day, and the more she thought about it, the more she wanted the Elders' heads.

Chapter 2

Abydos had to go back to work in the morning. It was his last week with his current team, but he was still technically deployed, and still had to technically go to work. He and Chrys tried to keep the same 35 year schedules, or close to the same schedules, so they could be at home together at least sometimes. He promised to return that weekend, but until then Chrys was on her own.

Chrys had a limited number of friends, and so for her it was hard to find anyone to spend time with. Her family consisted of four people, and all of them were away on assignment. Unless she could find someone in the base that she was at least somewhat friendly with, and who would not attack her if they saw her, she would be on her own today. Chrys went down to the dining hall for breakfast, instead of making a quiet meal in her own room, which she would prefer, in hopes of finding a friendly face to spend the day with.

Chrys was disappointed upon entering the dining hall. She didn't see anyone who would want her company. She knew she wasn't popular, but she had been hoping for at least one person. Chrys found some food on the line, octopus eyes and fly wings in an omelet with toast and salt water, and took a table alone. The faster she ate, the faster she could look elsewhere for a friend, maybe the library or the courtyard. She was almost done with her food when a boy walked over to her. He was in his human form, but it was similar enough to his monster form that Chrys recognized him immediately.

"Jakie Wallace?" Chrys asked.

"Hey Chrys," he said.

"What're you doing here? I thought you were on assignment," Chrys said as the boy sat across from her.

Jacob Wallace was of medium build, with short, straight, black hair, and pale skin. As a monster, his skin was even paler than it was now, and he had bright red eyes, but he normally kept brown eyes as a human. Still, Chrys could see some remnants of red underneath the false brown color.

“I was,” he said.

“Where’s Verona? Or Fang? Annabelle?” Chrys asked.

“I don’t know,” Jacob said.

“What’d you mean you don’t know?” Chrys asked.

“I mean I don’t know. They’re where I left ‘em I guess,” Jacob said.

“Jakie,” she said.

Jacob sighed. “I don’t want to make a big deal outta this Chrys.” He said.

“Well, it is a big deal. You don’t know where your brother is and you’re not worried? You don’t know where your wife is, and you’re not worried? You don’t even know where your brother’s wife is, and she can’t be on her own. You’re not worried? What happened?” Chrys asked.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Jacob said.

“I don’t care. Jacob Wallace, as your godmother and temporary guardian, I believe I have a right to know what happened here. I did help raise you since you were 3 years old you know,” Chrys said.

“Yeah, I know,” Jacob said. She’d never let him forget it. Even at 1,368 years old, Chrys Zabat was still his godmother who helped raise him since he was three, and she still expected him to treat her as such.

“Alright, but I’m only gonna say this once, and I don’t want you to freak out on me,” Jacob said.

“When do I ever freak out on you, Jakie?” Chrys asked.

Jacob pushed the food around his plate. “V and I broke up.” He said.

“I’m sorry. What?” Chrys asked.

“Well, more like trial separation, you might say,” Jacob said. Chrys was not one to advocate divorce. It didn’t exist when she grew up, and as far as she was concerned, it still didn’t. She had been with the same man since she was 19, and she had no intentions of changing.

“I see,” Chrys said.

“Yeah. I left her with Fang. I figured he’d keep an eye on her for me, and they changed positions, but I don’t know where they are,” Jacob said.

“And what’re you doing?” Chrys asked.

“Looking for a new assignment. I’ve been put on the rotating immortal list,” Jacob said.

“It’s a long list,” Chrys said.

“Yes, it is,” Jacob said.

“But I’m sure you’ve gotten lots of offers already,” Chrys said.

“Yes, I have,” Jacob said.

Jacob was not primarily a part of the rotating immortal list. He, his brother Fang, and their wives, Verona and Annabelle, typically worked as a unit called the Vampire Covenant. They wandered around Earth together, walking wherever their hearts desired, and the Covenant sent them jobs to do depending on their location. Jacob and Fang were well-known throughout the Covenant as some of the best agents in operation.

“I just want them to leave me alone for a bit. I figured it’d be quieter over here,” Jacob said.

“Well, most people would disagree. But most people are not one of my godsons. You are more than welcome to hang with me for a bit,” Chrys said.

“Thanks, Chrysie,” Jacob said.

“Thank you. I would’ve been on my own without your company,” Chrys said.

“Where’s Abydos?” Jacob asked.

“His assignment doesn’t end till next week,” Chrys said.

“Olympia and Cleon?” Jacob asked.

“Some jungle, I think,” Chrys said.

“Khu and Gaios?” Jacob asked.

“Japan,” Chrys said.

“Odd, those two are normally here,” Jacob said.

“Normally, yes, but I am under the impression this particular job worked well with their skill sets,” Chrys said. She looked around to see that of the four dozen or so agents in the dining hall, half were staring at her and Jacob. “Should we go to the private sector?”

“Sounds fine to me,” Jacob said.

Three days later, Chrys and Jacob were sitting in the courtyard. Jacob was reviewing the 52 offers for teams he had. Chrys was pushing him to pick today, arguing the more he put it off the harder it would be. He was hesitating, but he had agreed to review all the choices with her. They had narrowed the list down to 20 when a boy walked over to them.

“Are you Chrys Zabat?” he asked.

“I am. And you are?” Chrys asked.

“I’m Derek Manchion. You were assigned as my second in command,” Derek said.

Chrys examined Derek. He was in his human form currently, tall, brown hair, brown eyes, tan skin, in other words, typical. But she could see remnants of his monster form. His brown hair contained a few strands of short, thin, pale white/blonde. His brown eyes were brightened by a light green undertone, his tan skin was lightened by what appeared to be a pale complexion, and she could tell his height was false from the stretching of his clothes. He was likely a lot shorter than this form. “Okay, sit down a minute,” she said.

Derek sat across from Jacob and Chrys. Chrys went back to helping Jacob with the offers they were reviewing. They narrowed it down to ten and then Chrys sent Jacob to his room to rest on the decision a bit. Once he was out of earshot, Chrys rounded on Derek.

“Alright. Who are you? What are you? How old are you? Where are we going? How long do I have to pack? Who are the other members of this team? How much money do you want? How long is this assignment? When do we deploy? What else should I care about?” Chrys asked.

“Um, well, I’m Derek Manchion. I’m a Romindroe Light Elf, 19. We’re headed to Washington State, and we’re supposed to leave in about a month for 35 years. I don’t have a team yet, I haven’t examined funding yet, and I don’t know what you should care about.” Derek said.

“Let me see the file,” Chrys said. Derek handed it over to her and Chrys started reading.

One of Chrys’s official positions was “second in command”. When a new team was formed, if the leader was mortal, they were assigned an immortal from the rotating list as a second in command. The second in command was responsible for advice and money, as immortals were generally rich having the unfair advantages of eternity and free housing to gather

large sums. Chrys was one of the richest of the Covenant, a quadrillionaire, so any money the team needed she would supply. Plus, she had been a team leader before, therefore she could offer Derek advice when he needed it. The file Derek had brought contained information on him and on the assignment so that Chrys could see what she was supposed to work with.

Chrys finished reading and turned to Derek again.

“A Romindroe?” she asked.

Derek nodded. “Impressive,” Chrys said.

Generally elves lived in large groups they called families. The Romindroe was located up in the Norway, Sweden, Finland area. They lived in the mountains, a cold, harsh terrain, and bred their warriors tough. The Romindroe were widely considered the best of the mortal elf families because they trained so vigorously.

“Where’s your wife located?” Chrys asked.

“North Carolina. Well, not yet. She’s going to North Carolina. She’s currently here.”

Derek said.

“You gonna be okay?” Chrys asked. Derek gave her a surprised look. “I’m not heartless you know. I do know what it feels like to miss someone.” She said.

There was a brief silence while the two stared at each other. Chrys’s bright green eyes piercing Derek, looking for his weaknesses, and his light brown eyes trying to read her mind, to see if she seriously cared or was trying to give him a hard time. “Yeah, I think I’ll be okay,” Derek said.

Chrys went back to the file.

“You and your husband work opposite groups, right?” Derek asked.

“Most times. Rarely we’re on the same team, but it does happen. I didn’t do well at all the first time we were separated,” Chrys said.

“I think we’ll be okay,” Derek repeated.

“I hope so.” Chrys said. She finished reading the file a second time. “Well, you finish getting the members you need for your team, and I will get together some funding for us,” she said.

“Okay, sounds good,” Derek said.

“Do you want to meet sometime next week to discuss things?” Chrys asked.

“Sure, is Monday okay?” Derek asked.

“Can we do Tuesday? Abydos is coming for the weekend,” Chrys said.

“Yeah, that’s fine. I will see you Tuesday and we’ll discuss,” Derek said.

“Okay, well, I should go find Jacob. So, until then,” Chrys said.

“Until then,” Derek agreed.

Chrys went inside the castle to find Jacob and continue working on minimizing the number of teams he was examining. Derek hadn’t seemed so bad, of course most of them don’t seem so bad on the first meeting. Hopefully they could continue talking to each other calmly, but there was something about Chrys which most group leaders tended to hate. She still wasn’t even sure what it was, but there must be something, because eventually they all learned to hate her. Shame too because Derek really hadn’t seemed so bad.

Chapter 3

Chrys met Derek at breakfast in the Covenant dining hall on Tuesday as discussed. They waited until a little later in the morning in hopes of the dining hall being quieter than normal. There were only ten other people in the room when Chrys came in. Derek had taken a table at the edge of the room, so that no one would bother them. Chrys got her usual breakfast order from the line, and sat down on the wooden bench across from Derek at his table. He was reviewing files. He glanced up briefly to say hi, but then returned to what he was reading.

“Is that the team?” Chrys asked.

“Part of it. At least I’m hoping,” Derek said.

“Who’d you get?” Chrys asked.

“Regan Bettencourt and Daniel Colt agreed to come in yesterday,” Derek said.

“And they are?” Chrys asked.

“She is a 18 year old nymph and he is a 19 year old werewolf,” Derek said.

“Decent start. What else do you have?” Chrys asked.

“I have a request in with Flora Henderson,” Derek said. Chrys gave him a confused look.

“16 year old garden fairy.” He explained.

“Ah, alright. Any immortals?” Chrys asked.

“I haven’t talked to immortals yet. I wanted to run the names by you, see if there were any outstanding issues,” Derek said.

“Admittedly a wise decision. Fire away,” Chrys said.

“Alright. PJ Jenkins?” Derek asked.

“No,” Chrys said.

“Why?” Derek asked.

“I’ve tried to kill him six times. He doesn’t like to see me for some strange reason,”

Chrys said.

“Why have you tried to kill him six times?” Derek asked.

“Well, that is a long story, Derek. Continue?” Chrys asked.

Derek looked back at the files. “Fine,” he said. He crossed off PJ and turned to the next name. “Oliver Anton?” he asked.

“No,” Chrys said.

“Because?” Derek asked.

“Because I killed his brother and he swore revenge on me,” Chrys said.

“Why did you...?” Derek started, but he stopped before he finished the question when Chrys’s pupils disappeared. “Whatever, um, Namer Kochek?” he asked.

“Hell no,” Chrys said. “I murdered his eight wives. Don’t ask why. Who’s next?” she asked.

“Turner Valesquez?” Derek asked.

Chrys snorted. “Valesquez? Are you joking?”

“Yes,” Derek lied. He crossed Valesquez off and moved on. “Jules Bennet?” he asked.

“No, she’s a whore, and I put her pimp in jail,” Chrys said.

“Wonderful,” Derek said. He crossed another name off and went through the rest of his list. There were only four names left. “Alexa Crutch?” he asked.

“Seriously?” Chrys asked.

“Joking,” Derek said hastily. He crossed another name off before the conversation could continue. “Corey Sanders?” he asked.

“No, I put both his father and his brother in prison,” Chrys said.

Derek looked at the second to last name on his list. “Marfa Danshov?” he asked.

“Marfa?” Chrys asked. She smiled.

“Yeah, Marfa,” Derek said.

“Well, sure,” Chrys said.

“You know Marfa well?” Derek asked.

“You could say that. She was a Court Lady,” Chrys said.

A few hundred years ago, Chrys had quit the Covenant after a particularly nasty insult from the Elders. She gathered up 700 friends and they waged a brutal war against the Covenant for control, nearly won it too. The Court Ladies were the leaders of the group Chrys had. There were eleven of them, ten plus Chrys, and they were some of the most powerful beings ever made.

“Really?” Derek asked.

“Yeah, we’re still pretty close,” Chrys said.

“Okay,” Derek said. He sent a request to Marfa Danshov and looked back at his depleted list. Only one name left. “Finnegan Wells?” he asked.

“Wells is a tricky case,” Chrys said.

“How so?” Derek asked, crossing the name off the list and putting down his tablet.

“Hey, I’m good with Wells,” said Chrys noticing Derek’s let down look. “I think he’s a moron. I think he’s a talentless hack. I think he’s a racist SOB. I think he’s a perv who sucks dick, but that’s no different from most of the people I know. It’s Marfa who wants Wells’s head.”

“Then it doesn’t matter anyway. I’d rather have Marfa than Wells,” Derek said.

“As would I, and I heard she was pretty desperate for a team,” Chrys said.

There was a ding as Derek’s tablet notified him to new mail. “She accepted,” he said.

“Like I said, pretty desperate. She’s had a hard run, with the knee and all.” Chrys said.

Marfa Danshov had been in the Russian Olympic Qualifying Trials as a gymnast a couple centuries ago. She fell off the Uneven Bars and shattered her knee. Marfa was a banshee, though. As a human, she assumed a fake form with fake bones, and since Marfa did not have bones in her natural form, the human ones were unrepairable. All she could do was wait for muscle to grow in around the injury, and hope for the best. It had been a long time, but she was finally back on her feet. No one wanted to take her, though. Too many people were worried she’d relapse.

“You have anyone else?” Chrys asked.

“That was my whole list,” Derek said.

“Sorry, but a few dozen years in the assassin’s unit will really do a number on your relationships. You kill someone’s family member, or try to kill them, and for some odd reason, it’s like they never want to see you again,” Chrys said.

“Good to know,” Derek said.

Jacob entered the dining hall and sat down next to Chrys.

“Somethin’ wrong?” Chrys asked.

“They’re still following me.” Jacob said.

Chrys glanced behind them. Derek looked in the general direction and saw a group of ten people staring right at them.

“You gotta pick, Jakie. You gotta pick before this gets out of hand.” Chrys said.

“Are those the short list?” Derek asked.

Jacob and Chrys both turned to him and gave him looks of confusion.

Derek shrugged. “Word gets around here, you should know that. Rumors have been flying that you left your wife and are looking a team. There have also been lots of rumors that you’ve turned down the majority of the offers and have a short list. Is that them?” he asked.

“Yeah, it’s them,” Jacob said. He stabbed into his food, a blood soaked steak, rather violently and started eating.

“You have to pick before this gets worse.” Chrys said.

“I don’t know how. I want to go...” Jacob started.

“Either with someone you know or somewhere you like. I know.” Chrys said. She’d only heard it a few dozen times before.

“Did you call about...?” Jacob started.

“Ky is in Africa with the Hell Brigade and Jace is in Bolivia with a team. I can’t get you in either. I told you Bagura...” Chrys started.

“No, I told you, no rainforest, no camping. It’s nothin’ against Bagura, I just don’t like where he is,” Jacob said.

“I can call about the Mudernos boys but I doubt that...” Chrys started.

“Mudernos?” Derek asked.

Jacob and Chrys both turned to him again. They had temporarily forgotten he was there.

“Why does that sound familiar?” Derek asked.

“Jacqueline Mudernos was head of the Bulanchia Elf Family in...” Chrys started.

“Germany! Right. I forgot. But she left to be a Court Lady.” Derek said.

“Yes, she did. Jacob has me running down some old friends of his from the Court. His mother was a Court Lady, and he was with her, but he held a lower ranking position. He used to

hang out with sons of the other Court Ladies. And now that he needs to pick a team, he wanted me to track down his old friends.” Chrys said.

“So Ky, Jace, Bagura?” Derek asked.

“All friends of his, and sons of my friends. Ky and Jace are Brooklyn Seantos’s sons, two particularly good friends of Jacob’s, and Bagura is Gretta Druvindi’s son,” Chrys said.

“Brooklyn Seantos is a black dog, right? And Gretta’s a witch?” Derek asked.

“I see you know the stories,” Chrys said.

“Some of them, you are famous for your time with the Court,” Derek said.

“Can’t you check... Chandler. Where’s Chandler?” Jacob asked.

“With his parents, and you have already ruled them out, so...” Chrys started.

“Can I come with you?” Jacob asked.

“Me?” Chrys asked confused.

“Sure, why not? You are my godmother.” Jacob said.

Chrys turned uncertainly to Derek. Derek looked at Jacob. “Sure,” he said. A legend like Jacob Wallace? He was way better than anyone whose family member Chrys killed, or imprisoned.

“Great,” Jacob said.

“You better deny their applications then, before they come over,” Chrys said.

Jacob glanced at the crowd of people behind him and nodded. He took out his tablet and started denying requests. Derek sent Jacob a new request, and Jacob accepted. The crowd started to move away from them, and Jacob was left with nothing more than a lot of people staring angrily from a distance, whispering, and pointing at him.

“Fantastic, thank you,” Jacob said. He went back to his breakfast without another word.

“So, that leaves how many more?” Chrys asked.

Derek checked the team he had. “One spot left,” he said.

Abydos walked over to the table to join them for breakfast. “Hey,” he said.

“Hey,” Chrys said. He sat down next to her. Chrys looked at Derek. “My husband, Abydos,” she said. Derek and Abydos exchanged greetings, and Chrys turned her focus back to Abydos. “I didn’t think you were coming back until Friday.”

“I wasn’t supposed to, but luckily my team leader got a horrible case of pneumonia and is deathly ill in the infirmary. The second in command broke his leg trying to get him help and will be down for a little while. The third in command then got assaulted in the field, and he’s pretty roughed up. Their wives all went with them to the hospital, concern you understand, about their wimpy little bodies and how much damage they can take, so the Elders cut me and Sebastian loose early.” Abydos said.

“I can’t believe you got such a run of good luck,” Jacob said.

“I know. I might go play the lottery later,” Abydos said.

“Oh, I don’t think we need any more money,” Chrys said.

“I suppose that’s true.” Abydos said. “The Elders might expect a cut.” He said.

Jacob laughed. “They already take like half of your funds to run the place,” he said.

“They have a tenth dear. I lied to them and told them I had less than we do, and since they consider me nothing more than a stupid woman, they believed me,” Chrys said.

“I didn’t know you got it down that low. That’s impressive, Chrysie,” Abydos said.

“I do have my moments,” Chrys said.

Abydos’s tablet started vibrating. He pulled it out of his bag and checked the message. He looked at Derek. “You want me on your team?” he asked.

“What?” Chrys asked surprised.

“Assassination team, kind of limited my options,” Derek said.

“Yeah, it’ll do that,” Jacob said.

“Unfortunately,” Abydos said.

“Have you all been on the assassination squad?” Derek asked.

“Long time ago, but yeah, we’ve all pulled turns there, and so has Marfa,” Chrys said.

Abydos accepted the form and put his tablet away. By the end of breakfast, Flora Henderson had also accepted her request. Within days, the team was cleared to leave at the end of the month for Washington.

Chapter 4

The team entered their new house in Washington on the first of September. The transport had let them off outside the small shack at the edge of a deserted street in the quietest part of town the Elders could find. The nearest neighbors were five acres away, and the road to reach the house was nothing more than a dirt path off the main drag. Marfa, Chrys, Abydos, and Jacob changed their appearances to better blend in with the new team, and Marfa, Chrys and Abydos made slight name changes. Marfa opted for Martha, to fit in a little bit better in the United States. Chrysanthie went to Christina, but Chrys was still the preferred nickname, and Abydos changed his name to Alex, at least while they were on Earth. As immortals could change human appearance much more easily than mortal creatures could, a tradition had always been to change the human appearance each team an immortal changed assignments. It added a bit of anonymity to their true appearance, which was sometimes enough to throw a hunter or an old enemy from a different assignment off their trail.

The Covenant transported the eight to their new home. Chrys looked around and shook her head. They had entered into a foyer which was about a two feet wide, and the living room next to the foyer was all of six by eight with scratched, stained, yellow wood floors, and stained yellow-white paint on the walls. Chrys went around the house quickly. The kitchen was about the size of a closet with old, dingy, beat up yellow plastic cabinets on the walls, cracked red patterned tile laminate flooring, peeling pink floral wallpaper, orange refrigerator, purple microwave, and a cracked green sink basin, no stove, no dishwasher. Besides the kitchen, living room, and foyer, there was one bedroom, about 5 by 6, with one twin bed inside, and hardly any room to walk around the bed, and a bathroom with a moldy, stained shower, and a cracked old toilet. There was nothing more to the whole house.

Chrys took the four steps back to the foyer, in hopes of finding something she missed. There was nothing though. “They’re not serious,” she said.

“I think they are,” Derek said.

“No, she’s right. They’re doing it to annoy her,” Alex said.

“Doing what to annoy her?” Regan asked.

Martha looked at Regan. She was a little bit of an airhead for 18, but she had some good qualifications regarding anything to do with the water, lying, and seduction. “It’s a one bedroom place, honey,” she said.

“They’re attempting to squeeze eight of us in a house that has one bedroom and one bathroom to create tension within the dynamic. That’s not even to mention that it’s disgusting,” Jacob said.

Regan immediately turned to Daniel. Daniel, or Dax as he was commonly known, was very quiet normally, but Regan always looked to him to complain for her when she wanted something, and she usually wanted something.

“I’m not havin’ it,” Chrys said.

“Well, I admit it’s not ideal...” Derek started.

“Not ideal?” Chrys asked, laughing.

“Not ideal, but what’re you gonna do about it?” Derek asked.

Chrys looked at Alex and raised her eyebrows. “We are quadrillionaires.” She said.

“Right,” Derek said.

“We’ll have a new place by tonight.” Alex said, and he and Chrys left.

“Wait, you can’t go,” Derek said, but the door had already closed.

“They’ll be back,” Martha said.

“Besides, you want a new place,” Jacob said.

“Alright, it’s a bit tight, but we could work with it,” Derek said.

“Have you ever slept in the same room as a vampire?” Martha asked.

“Hey! Watch it over there,” Jacob said.

“I’m just saying, Jacob. You do stay up two weeks straight before sleeping,” Martha said.

“Yeah, I do, and you glow like a street lamp when you sleep,” Jacob said.

“Don’t you take that tone with me, boy. I will have your mother down here faster than you would think possible.” Martha said.

Jacob busied himself with looking for something in his bag, and did not offer an answer.

“Your mother?” Regan asked amused.

“My mother is a hunter,” Jacob said.

“And you’re how old?” Regan asked.

“Have you ever met my mother?” Jacob asked.

“Well, no, but…” Regan started.

“She will rip the skin off your bones in a matter of minutes. I’ve seen decapitate people with nothing but her teeth. She can slit a throat and bleed someone dry faster than I’ve ever seen. She used to drink blood at the dinner table with her meal, sometimes from the victim’s neck directly. You don’t mess with my mother, no matter your age,” Jacob said.

“Who is your mother exactly?” Regan asked, but she looked slightly uneasy now.

“It doesn’t matter, but he is right. You don’t mess with his mother. And he knows that. So, don’t you take a tone with me over there. And you, shut up please,” Martha said.

“Whatever,” Jacob said. He went back to rummaging through his bag. Regan turned to Dax to complain on her behalf, but he shook his head. He was not getting involved with this.

“Great, okay, regardless, I think we could work with what we have.” Derek said.

“Okay, continuing. Besides the fact that Jacob does not sleep for two weeks straight, and skipping over the fact that I glow when I asleep, Chrys feeds her snakes dead mice parts in the bedroom,” Martha said.

Both Regan and Flora nearly threw up behind her, but Martha continued.

“And Abydos also does not sleep for generally a week straight. Also, if neither of those things bother you, they both wake up before 4 a.m. In addition to this, Dax over there will be transforming once a month, and to have him share a room with a vampire at that time could be fatal to him,” Martha said.

“She’s not wrong. It’s real bad to be near a vampire during a transformation, for both of us. It makes me unnecessarily sick, and in past cases werewolves have died from sickness during transformation. And I might attack him,” Dax said.

“Yeah, I’m not worried,” Jacob said.

“And I’m not suggesting you would be, but I’d prefer not to have your godmother turn me stone to stop me from biting you,” Dax said.

“I’m not so good at sharing rooms either,” Flora said. “I have a rather unusual connection to sunlight. It’ll be just as bright as Martha I’m sure.”

“That’s definitely not good. Extensive brightness won’t kill me, but it’ll sure burn,” Jacob said.

“Chrys is also horrible in real bright sunlight. Her natural eyes aren’t meant for it,” Martha said.

“Fine, point made,” Derek said.

“Good, I can explain why one bathroom is a serious concern too, but...” Martha started.

“Point *made*,” Derek repeated.

“They’ll be back, and I have some calls I need to make,” Jacob said. He went to the backyard.

“I should move my stuff downstairs,” Martha said. She went into the backyard after Jacob.

“We shouldn’t be leaving,” Derek called after them, but neither turned back. Derek looked at Flora, Dax, and Regan.

“I also have calls to make,” Flora said.

“Fine, go,” Derek said. Flora headed off. Derek turned to Dax and Regan. “Just go,” he said. They left the house.

Chrys was sitting in the living room of the new house they were renting that evening. This one she and Abydos had found at the other end of town was a six bedroom, four bathroom home, which they were temporarily renting fully furnished while looking for a more permanent house. Whereas the shack the Elders had found was full of broken, old, stained items, the rental house was well-kept, clean, top of the line with new finishes, and a good size. The only downside was that it was a bit closer to human life, but until Abydos and Chrys could find someplace new, it would do. Chrys was curled up on the black leather couch that came with the rental, sitting in front of a fire she had started in the marbled surrounded gas fireplace, reviewing old paperwork from her days leading her Covenant, and drinking a glass of salt water, seaweed, and gingham, a kind of alcoholic supplement which worked on gorgons. Chrys was naturally immune to human alcohol, it was far too weak to get by her poisonous nature. But she had married a bartender. Abydos owned and operated an entire chain of bars strictly for monsters, because, like Chrys,

several other kinds of monsters were unaffected by human alcohol. Abydos created specialty drinks which worked for different monster types. The wrought iron wooden staircase behind Chrys creaked. She turned around to see Derek entering the room.

“Can we talk for a minute?” he asked.

“Sure, what’s up?” Chrys asked.

“I got a call from the Elders,” Derek said.

“Always exciting,” Chrys said.

“They’re saying you used unnecessary force bringing in Jonah Billings.”

“Great.”

“They want me to suspend you.”

“Phenomenal,” Chrys said, putting down the file she was holding. “I’ll pack up and go to a vacation house near here in California for a bit. I can come back after the suspension’s lifted.”

“I said no,” Derek said.

“I’m sorry. You did what?” Chrys asked.

“I said no.” Derek repeated. Chrys gaped at him. “I told them I had reviewed that file, and that you handled the take down by the book. Which, to be quite frank, Jonah Billings is also testifying you handled it by the book. They offered him a reduced sentence to change the record, and he told them to fuck themselves.”

“Huh, kind of makes me feel bad about arresting him.”

“Don’t. He escaped this afternoon.”

“From who’s watch?”

“Meloy or something?”

“Carthy Meloy?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

Chrys laughed. Carthy Meloy had tried to arrest her years ago, they hadn’t gotten along so well since then. To hear misery come to him was a wonderful, freeing feeling for her. Not to mention just plain funny. Meloy had always been a moron, but somehow she was the only one who had ever escaped him. “I will be sure to send Jonah Billings a token of my regard,” she said.

“Well, after I told them no, they threatened to suspend me,” Derek said.

“And you said you changed your mind,” Chrys said.

“No, I said I’d like to see them try actually.”

“Why?”

“That’s what they asked. I told them I wanted to make you female team leader.”

“Are you crazy?”

“That’s what they asked. I told them I was fairly sure I was not, as they had me tested prior to making me a team leader, and that if I was, unfortunately they could not recount their decision.”

“Derek, you should’ve just sent me on suspension.”

“I couldn’t. You didn’t do anything,” Derek said.

“It doesn’t matter. When the Elders tell someone to punish me, they do it for laughs. They expect you to go along with it, or they will attack you, too. Believe me when I say I’ve heard it all before. I’ve been through it all before. It would’ve been fine,” Chrys said.

“Do you want to be my female team leader or not?” Derek asked.

“Well... I mean, sure. I haven’t had a leadership position since the Court, but there’s a reason for that,” Chrys said, stopping Derek from taking out his tablet and confirming her as his new female team leader.

“The reason being?”

“I embarrassed the Elders. That’s the reason. They want revenge.”

“And this affects me because?”

“Because you’re a mortal. You’re only 19, and you don’t want your life ruined before it starts.”

“Too late. When I refused the second time, Dynasty and I made a bet,” Derek said.

“You should’ve started with that!” Chrys said. She actually stood up out of her chair.

“What on Earth did they make you bet? You don’t have anything.”

“Well, if we lose, they’re taking my team leadership away, demoting me to follower, and breaking up the team we have in place to reassign us. You will be sent back to a follower, as will Alex, Jacob, and Martha who all have the ability currently to lead a team. If we win, they will publically apologize to you for all the injustices you have experienced, our team will remain intact, you, myself, Alex, Jacob, and Martha will be promoted to permanent leaders, and Dax, Regan, and Flora will be given high level standings.”

“Who suggested those terms?” Chrys asked.

“Me,” Derek said.

“Huh,” Chrys said.

“Huh?”

“Look, that doesn’t matter. What’d we have to do to win?”

“Average a 90% or higher on all missions for one year, year starts tomorrow.”

“And if we don’t get missions this year?”

Teams could go years without any real action in their neighborhood. Since the houses were spread out, each team controlled and took care of a small area. Any missions which their

team would be assigned would have to occur in their area, Washington, Iowa, or Oregon. It was possible there might not be anything this year.

“They’ll put us on call so we do a minimum of ten,” Derek said.

Chrys sat down again. She examined Derek. He seemed really pale, and a little sweaty, and looked a bit sick, but... “Okay.” She said.

“Okay?” Derek asked.

“I think you’re a moron for not suspending me, but okay. It’s done. I know how betting works with the Elders and mortals,” Chrys said.

“What’d you mean?” Derek asked.

“Immortals make their livings off bets. We’re trained to do it, because we have time to clean it up if we lose. Mortals aren’t. So the Elders strong arm them into bets by suggesting terms in a rather aggressive manner. Not knowing what to say, kids often talk kind of hypothetically to buy time to find someone to consult, but the Elders force it as a yes. That’s how it happened, isn’t it?” Chrys asked.

“I didn’t know what was happening, I mean the way we were talking, it didn’t seem really formal, and I wanted to talk to you, but I couldn’t. That’s how it happened.” Derek said.

“They’ve done it before, and they’ll likely do it again. Seriously though, who made those conditions on our behalf?” Chrys asked.

“I made most of them,” Derek said.

“The public apology thing?”

“Oh, that, that was Empire.”

“I see.”

“He said you’d put it in if you could.”

“Doesn’t matter. Look, first thing in the morning, we’ll talk to Martha, Alex, and Jacob. They will fully understand, much better than the others, and we will make sure we are on the top of our game.” Chrys said.

“And Dax? Regan? Flora?” Derek asked.

“They won’t understand, Derek. They’re not taught to bet. Let’s just start by telling the other three first. We’ll go from there.” Chrys caught sight of his worried face. “We’ll figure it out kid. You’re not taking the fall for me, no way.”

Chapter 5

A couple weeks passed, and the team settled into their new home. Chrys and Alex had managed to get a more permanent residence, a towering mansion at the edge of town with eight bedrooms and six bathrooms. The house was a brand new build, recently finished, with top of the line features, a private lake in the backyard, and its own private street. The group had also begun school. Since they were on Earth, and Earth kids went to school, most of the team—all but Alex—were attending school now. School was not just used as a cover, but it also had benefits involving meeting people from town, libraries for research, gyms to work out in, and learning new information. Thus far they had had no assignments, but two weeks wasn't a long time in the world of monsters. Alex stayed home to watch the house while the others were out, and although Martha, Chrys, and Jacob had already graduated from school a bunch of times, they went to protect the kids.

Derek was working on some math homework at the kitchen table one afternoon. Chrys was sitting next to him, typing away on a laptop. The rest of the team was spread out, as was custom. Martha often went to train at the gym, or to the Underground, a place underground where banshees, phantoms, and ghosts of all kind met to socialize. Alex and Jacob were making one of their rather constant trips to the mountains near their home to hunt. Meat and blood were consumed quickly in the house. Alex and Jacob drank blood three meals a day plus snacks, and Dax destroyed meat like a wolf, whether transformed or not. Chrys was also a rather impressive meat eater, her fangs and her Boys cutting through it like it was nothing. When they weren't hunting, Alex and Jacob also had extensive contact and friends' lists, so they were often out taking phone calls or handling emergencies. Dax and Regan were often in the house, except for standing date nights, but they were normally off on their own so Derek and Chrys didn't see

much of them either. Currently, Dax was about two days away from transforming, so he was upstairs on bed rest, horribly ill, and Regan was taking care of him. Flora hardly ever stayed at home. She was off most days flying around town, saying she felt better in the sky than in the home. Every now and again she'd stop at a garden to take care of it, and that could take hours depending on what state she found it in.

Derek was bound to the house, though. As the team leader, he was responsible for either being here or leaving his second in command, Chrys, or third in command, Alex, in charge in his absence. If someone trustworthy was not here, the house would be shut down. It was a safety condition in their contracts because there were times when a house would be visited by a wandering monster looking for shelter, or an injured Covenant member who needed help, or something similar. If there was no one trustworthy at the home, those people would be walking into danger. Chrys usually stayed with him, except when she went out with Alex every now and again, but she too had to take her fair share of calls from contacts and run out now and again to help a friend with an emergency.

Derek stared at his math homework, trying to remember what it was, and how he was supposed to solve the problems. The Covenant did teach math, but nothing like this. Whatever this was called, he had learned it last week, and the homework was not going well. He looked up from his math and turned to Chrys. "What're you working on?" he asked.

"A code I'm writing," Chrys said.

"You mean computer codes? You write those?" Derek asked.

"Sure," Chrys said. She saw Derek's shocked, but awed look. "When you're as old as I am Derek, you have a lot of free time on your hands. I didn't want to hang out at my houses too

much, since most people hated me, so I just kept going back school. Every time I'd get bored, I went to college, got another degree. Computer science was a rather recent acquisition for me."

"How many degrees do you have?" Derek asked.

"About 200 give or take," she said.

"200?" Derek repeated.

"Give or take," Chrys said.

"In what?" Derek asked.

"Well, in a bit of everything. Like I said, I get bored. I go back, do whatever takes my fancy at that moment, and move on a little later."

"Can you give me at least some examples?" Derek asked.

"I guess. I have a few degrees in medicine, pharmaceuticals, nursing, psychology, medical doctorate, neurology, ophthalmology, and otolaryngology. Two law degrees. I got an art history degree a few hundred years ago, it was interesting actually, not very practical for what I do though. History. More than I can remember in history. There was some English along the way. Science. Chemistry, physics, biology, two in biology actually, ecology, and a pair in zoology. Math, too, I've got five in math maybe. Sounds right. Three in computer science. I did philosophy once. Oh, and anthropology, about six in anthropology, I think. There were more, too. It's hard to remember really."

"And you remember everything you learned?" Derek asked.

"Kinda," Chrys said. She saw Derek's look. "Oh, come on, if you were in those houses, you wouldn't want to stay there either. College got me out of the house. Then I'd get jobs, to stay out of the house, then I'd invest my salary, and I made crazy amounts of money. So I went back to college for a new degree," she said.

“I see,” Derek said.

Chrys went back to the code she was working on to fix a virus which had recently infected one of her friends’ computers, and Derek returned his focus to the math. He still had no idea what kind of math this was. Might be an important thing to figure out. The phone went off then, saving him from having to figure out what it was right now. Derek answered the phone before Chrys could even look up from the line of code she was working on.

“Hello?” Derek asked.

“ID number?” A woman on the other end asked.

“605892,” Derek said.

“Safe word?” the woman asked.

“Ash,” Derek said.

“Okay, Derek Manchion, I have your team’s next assignment.”

“Hey,” Derek said. Chrys looked up from her codes. “We’re being assigned.” He said.

The woman sent everything through to Derek’s tablet and then the phone call ended.

Derek picked up his tablet and entered his ID number and safe word and password.

“I must tell you, I find all that ridiculous,” Chrys said.

“All what?” Derek asked. He was going into his email to pull up the assignment.

“ID Numbers. Safe words. Passwords. All easily hackable, and all easily memorized. I can officially sign in as you, just from hearing it once, and if I was a Dark Member, I could breach the Covenant just as easily.”

“Well, the numbers aren’t easy to memorize.”

“Yes, they actually are, but for sake of argument, if I couldn’t remember it, I would write it down.” Chrys said.

“Yeah, well, what’d you do at the Masks?” Derek asked. The Masks had been the shorthand term for Chrys’s Covenant years ago.

Chrys pulled a necklace up by the chain around her neck. A large emerald was at the bottom of the silver chain. “We had encoded gems called insignias, mine, as you can see, is an emerald. The gems were lined with small microscopic code which activates within our computer system. Additionally, the codes were enhanced by a group of witches who worked for me. If the member holding the insignia was who they claimed, and if they were still working for the light sight, it glowed green through our devices. If the member was not who they said, or if they had turned sides, it glowed red. We always knew who were talking to, without a little code you can write down on a piece of paper.”

“So, they want us in California.” Derek said, changing the subject.

“For?” Chrys asked. She dropped the emerald back under her shirt.

“There’s a monster artifact on display in a museum. It’s harmless, and the humans don’t know what it is, so it’s stayed there some time. But they have word that some Dark Members are going to attempt to steal it. They want us to steal it first.”

“Ten bucks says it’s not a real monster artifact, no Dark Members are coming, and they want to see if the cops can catch us, but fine. How do you want to handle this?”

“What’d you suggest?” Derek asked.

“Why’d you wanna know?” Chrys asked. “*You* are the team leader.”

“I’ve never stolen anything before.”

“And you’re assuming I have?”

Derek busied himself with his tablet instead of attempting a response.

“Well, you’re not incorrect. However, this is your team. I will help, but right now, I want to know. What do you suggest?” Chrys asked.

“Well,” Derek said. He put down the tablet and racked his brains for anything he could remember on the subject from his classes. “First and foremost, I want to see blueprints, security layout, a schedule showing rotations in the security, who will be where and at what times, I’d want to see the alarm system, the artifact itself in its natural setting, um...” he stopped. What else would he want to see?

“I agree,” Chrys said. “Where should you start?”

“Um...” Derek started. Chrys watched him move some paperwork around on the table, and attempt to come up with an answer. “A trip to the museum,” he said.

“Agree. If we go during the day, when everything is open, we can see the layout first hand, surveille, and get answers to our questions while having a reason to be there.” Chrys said.

“We’ll go tomorrow then?” Derek asked.

“No, I think that’s a bad idea,” Chrys said.

“Why?” Derek asked.

“You tell me.”

Derek stared at her in confusion.

“You are the leader, you have to handle stuff like this. With, or without, my input.” Chrys said.

Derek looked around the kitchen until his eyes landed on the math he was hopelessly attempting.

“We have school tomorrow,” he said.

“Yes, we do, and one more thing,” Chrys said.

There was a loud howl from upstairs. “Dax,” Derek said.

“Yes, he is very ill, and I’d want him to go with us, as well as Regan who will be very useful in her natural form for a robbery,” Chrys said.

“This weekend?” Derek asked.

“I think Saturday sounds lovely,” Chrys said.

“Saturday it is.”

“If all goes well, we can pull it off Sunday night. Before any Dark Member even knows we’re around the area.”

“Sounds good,” Derek said.

“Well, this is all assuming the Elders don’t steal it first to fail us for the mission, but I don’t think they’d do that tonight. I think they’d wait a bit.” Chrys said.

Derek looked at her over the top of her computer screen. She was completely engaged in her code writing again. Derek turned his attention back to his math homework.

“By the way, you’re doing trigonometry,” Chrys said.

Derek looked back at the paper and nodded. Right, trigonometry. That’s what it was called. Still didn’t help him understand it, but at least he knew what it was called.

“You need your calculator hon,” Chrys said.

Derek sighed. Right. He remembered that now. He got up to find his bag and fished out his calculator so he could work on math.

Chapter 6

Sunday evening the team was standing across the street from the museum. The afternoon before they had entered and taken a look around, to get a feel for the layout and to formulate a plan. “So, we’re all good, right?” Derek asked.

“Fine,” Chrys said.

“I’m good,” Jacob said.

Martha nodded. Derek looked at Regan, Dax, and Flora. He had admittedly been more worried about them, but good to know the others were doing good. They all said they were good to go, so Derek turned to the building.

“Let’s go,” he said quietly.

Regan and Flora transformed into their natural forms, which were too small for humans to see, and headed into the museum to find the security guards. They were to relate their locations to Martha, who would be the one doing the actual stealing.

Derek was waiting a little ways away from the front door with the car. He would be using Elvan magic to freeze the alarms inside the museum for ten minutes, as much as he could manage, but Martha assured him she’d only need eight.

Dax and Jacob took off to watch the perimeter, for any sign of the fabled Dark Monster who was after the artifact, and also to watch for cops.

Chrys was Martha’s only backup, she was entering the museum with Martha to watch her back. At first, Derek had been unsure about leaving Martha alone with Chrys, as he was hoping for additional people inside the museum if there was trouble. But Chrys insisted they would be fine, no trouble, a routine job that they’d done before a hundred times. Martha agreed, and that was that. Chrys followed Martha through the halls of the museum. No motion sensors sounded,

which meant Derek had done his job efficiently. Regan and Flora had told Chrys and Martha where the guards were: two in the office, one doing rounds on the other side of the museum, and one in the vault. Martha and Chrys had specifically taken a back hallway towards the artifact's room, a hallway with just one easily avoidable camera, but there was a point where they could avoid them no more. Thus why Martha had to enter alone.

"Here," Martha said. She pulled Chrys into a side alley and looked down the hall. "You wait here, I'll head in. If I need you, I'll call," she said.

"Cameras are where?" Chrys asked.

"About ten feet away, no blind spots, I can't get you through, just wait here." Martha said.

"Fine, call if you need me," Chrys said.

Martha transformed and sank into the ground. Though as a ghost it was hard to see her on cameras, it wasn't technically impossible. They figured it best not to take chances, so she was approaching the artifact underground. Chrys released one of her snakes to help her watch her back, and watch Martha, and she waited.

Martha headed through the underground and pushed her way through the museum and under the artifact case. She had to time this exactly right. The glass was bullet proof and shatter proof, with a reader to detect thermals, excessive sound, shattering, and movement. If any of these things were detected, it triggered a loud alarm, which would call the guards. Martha did not set off thermals, since she was dead. Sound wasn't a problem with her, and she wasn't intending to shatter the case. However, movement could still be detected, even in her natural form. One false move and the whole thing was blown. She had to go up, through the case, dead center, grab the artifact, and go back down dead center without moving anywhere else. Martha took a breath,

tried to visualize where the artifact was above her, closed her eyes, and pushed herself up as hard as she could. She felt the concrete pass under her, then the wood of the case, then the glass layer which held the artifact. Her eyes opened to see that was off, not much, but slightly. Martha quietly let out her breath and tried to steady herself. It was fixable.

Chrys watched Martha enter the case. They had hoped she'd come out right on top of the artifact, so that it could fall into her natural form without any additional effort. She missed slightly, but she had not yet set off the alarm. Chrys tried to steady her nerves, it was fixable, and Martha was an expert who'd done this many times before. Still though, Chrys felt her hands shaking just a bit as she watched Martha work.

Martha looked at the artifact which was about two inches from her nose. How to reach it without moving too much? She took another deep breath, steadying her nerves, and moved her nose forward about a centimeter. No alarm. Martha held her arms as straight as possible, but they were trying their best to shake. She moved her nose forward another centimeter, then another, then another, pushing herself forward little by little. Finally, her nose was directly over the artifact. No alarm. Martha took one final deep breath, and pushed her face straight down. She pushed through the artifact, which stuck itself inside her, and she sunk down from the case. Chrys took a breath when Martha was through. The artifact was theirs, and no alarms sounded. She was waiting for Martha to come back when she heard footsteps. "Martha, where are you?" Chrys asked through the earwigs.

"Underground. I've got it Chrys, I'm comin' back to you," Martha said.

"No, don't. Someone's coming. Go right outside. I'll meet you."

"Okay," Martha said.

"Who's coming?" Derek asked.

“Well, Derek, if I knew, I would tell you,” Chrys said. She moved down the corridor she was standing in to try and get out of the main path. The footsteps were coming closer. Chrys looked up at one of her snakes, Nicomedes, he was the eldest of the thirty which lived on Chrys’s head, and he was also the leader of the others. He nodded and slithered across the wall, attempting to see who was coming down the hall.

“No one came in,” Jacob said.

“Not that we saw at least,” Dax said.

“None of the guards are near you, we have them all under surveillance,” Flora said.

Chrys’s snake came back to her. He started hissing quietly. It was the Dark Members. Chrys held her breath, and stepped further down the hall. She pulled her snake back, as his eyes were bright glowing red and his skin a rather acidic green. Then she turned her hair into an ink black, made her skin as dark as it would go, and changed her eyes into a solid black. Her heart was pounding, so she took some quiet deep breaths to calm herself. Certain monsters could hear heartbeats, especially loud ones. She pulled the earwig from her ear, through which the others were still talking loudly enough to be overheard. She turned it off, and stuck it in her pocket. There were three Dark Members. They were approaching the hall where Chrys was hidden. She felt her heart banging against her rib cage, the Boys were moving, slithering, trying to get a good position to defend, or attack, depending on their set job, she felt a cold chill coming over her, as her blood drained, and she tried her hardest not to breathe even though her lungs wanted to burst. The three men headed down the hall. Chrys used Nicomedes, disguised as black hair, to see down the hall, so she would not have the risk turning around. One man, largely muscled, was walking in front of the other two, likely the leader. Of the other two, one was short and scrawny, likely it would be he who would grab the artifact as he had the build of a phantom, and the other

was average build, some kind of animal judging by the sharp teeth and pointed ears. He was likely the lookout for the group. The three walked towards the hall, Chrys tried her very hardest to hold still, but trying to hold still only made her want to move more. She felt herself squirming with more desire than before to move. The men approached her hallway, they were walking. *Maybe they'll pass.* Chrys thought hopefully. She still didn't dare to breathe though. The men walked closer. Chrys felt the Boys continue squirming, and had the extreme desire to join them, her hands were shaking again, but she stayed quiet. The men were walking and then... the lookout stopped, right in front of where Chrys was.

"What is it?" the leader asked.

"I heard something."

The other two exchanged looks and turned to the hallway. "I don't see anything," the thief said.

"Neither do I," the leader said.

"I didn't say I saw something. I said I heard something." The lookout argued.

The other two looked at each other again. "Alright, well, if you want to check it out, we'll go on. Call if you need us." The leader said.

The lookout nodded, and the other two headed off. He looked back down the hall. Chrys didn't dare to breathe, she closed her eyes tight, and tried to keep herself from shaking. It took a moment, but then the man started down the hallway. Chrys turned her head so she was facing the opposite direction, transformed her eyes only, and waited until the Boys told her the man was close enough. Chrys whipped her head around, and the bright green eyes glowed straight through the dark and into the scared, young, brown eyes of the boy. Bit by bit he turned to stone. The feet went first, then the legs, the torso, the arms, and finally the head. As he went, a silent scream

etched on his face, his eyes widened in horror. He was mortal, and he was dying. Chrys watched his terror, but she did nothing to prevent it. Once it was done, Chrys retransformed her eyes and crept to the end of the hall. His friends seemed busy, getting past the cameras to the artifact no doubt, which they would soon enough realize was missing. Best to leave before that happened. Chrys walked off, and she didn't look back.

As soon as Chrys got in the car took off.

"You okay?" Martha asked.

"I'm fine," Chrys said. She transformed back into the human appearance she had adapted for her time in Washington.

"What happened?" Jacob asked.

"There were three of them. One of them said he heard something down the hall, where I was, but his leader was apparently in a rush cause he took the other and they left him to check it out alone. I killed him and I ran."

"Where's your comm?" Derek asked.

"In my pocket," Chrys said. "I had to turn it off, they would've been able to hear it."

"Which is what we told him," Martha said.

"He didn't like that answer," Jacob said.

"It's not that I didn't like it," Derek said.

"No, you didn't like it," Regan said.

"I'm sorry, okay? But I'm fine. Can we please just go home?" Chrys asked. She was tired. It had been a long day, and her hands were still slightly shaking from being stuck in the hallway. She just wanted to find Abydos. She wanted to forget the look on that boy's face, the pure terror, as his body disappeared, and he died.

Derek turned in the artifact to the Elders once they got back. He and Chrys then both filled out action reports, and the Elders had to rather grudgingly, give them full marks for the mission. To their great disappointment, no one was injured, no humans were notified to their presence, and they completed all the parameters of the job. Those three things made up the scoring for the teams, and since they had none of the above, they got a 100%. The Elders told them they'd call when there was a new job, but until then, they were free to continue their everyday lives.