fated

book #11 in
the Vampire Journals

morgan rice

The Vampire Journals

Морган Райс

Fated

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In FATED, 16 year old Scarlet Paine struggles to understand what's happening to her, as she wakes and realizes she's becoming a vampire. Alienated from her parents and her friends, the only person she has left to turn to is Sage, the mysterious boy who has quickly become the love of her life. Yet Sage, whose house she finds boarded up, is nowhere to be found.Scarlet, alone in the world, with nowhere left to turn, seeks out her friends and tries to reconcile with them. All seems to be patched up when they invite her to join them on a trip to an abandoned island in the Hudson – but as things get out of hand and Scarlet's true powers are revealed, who her friends and enemies are becomes more confusing than ever.Blake, still interested in her, tries to make amends. He seems sincere, and Scarlet is confused as she has to grapple with whether to be with Blake or to wait for Sage, who is nowhere to be found.When Scarlet finally finds Sage, they have the most romantic time of her life; yet it is tinged with tragedy, as Sage is dying, with but a few days left to live.Kyle, meanwhile, turned into the only other vampire left in the world, is on a murderous rampage, seeking Scarlet; Caitlin and Caleb consult with Aiden, and they each embark on different missions – Caleb to stop and kill Kyle, and Caitlin, to the famed Yale University library, to research the ancient relic rumored to both cure and kill vampires for all time.It is a race against time, and it may be too late. Scarlet is changing rapidly, barely able to control what she's becoming, and Sage is dying with each passing moment. As the book culminates in an action-packed, shocking twist, Scarlet will be left with a monumental choice – one that will change the world forever. Will Scarlet make the ultimate sacrifice to save Sage's life? Will she risk everything she has for love?

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Morgan Rice
Fated
(Book #11 in the Vampire Journals)

"Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own."

– William Shakespeare, Hamlet

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About Morgan Rice

Morgan Rice is the #1 bestselling author of THE VAMPIRE JOURNALS, a young adult series comprising eleven books (and counting); the #1 bestselling series THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY, a post-apocalyptic thriller comprising two books (and counting); and the #1 bestselling epic fantasy series THE SORCERER'S RING, comprising thirteen books (and counting).

Morgan's books are available in audio and print editions, and translations of the books are available in German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portugese, Japanese, Chinese, Swedish, Dutch, Turkish, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak (with more languages forthcoming).

TURNED (Book #1 in the Vampire Journals) and A QUEST OF HEROES (Book #1 in the Sorcerer's Ring) are each available as a free download!

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"Rice does a great job of pulling you into the story from the beginning, utilizing a great descriptive quality that transcends the mere painting of the setting… Nicely written and an extremely fast read."
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– Paranormal Romance Guild (regarding Turned)

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– vampirebooksite.com (regarding Turned)

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– The Dallas Examiner (regarding Loved)

"Morgan Rice proves herself again to be an extremely talented storyteller… This would appeal to a wide range of audiences, including younger fans of the vampire/fantasy genre. It ended with an unexpected cliffhanger that leaves you shocked."
– The Romance Reviews (regarding Loved)

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Chapter One

Caitlin Paine stood in the back room of Pete's Bar, joined by Caleb, Sam, Polly, and a dozen police officers, and stared out through the smashed open window, into a night filled with flashing police lights. She wondered what on earth could have happened to her daughter. Scarlet, the love of her life, was out there somewhere, running into the night, alone, likely afraid, and the thought of it was tearing her apart. What pained Caitlin even more than the thought of Scarlet missing was the thought of what Scarlet had become, her memory of her, her last look at her before she'd leapt out through that window. That wasn't her daughter.

That was something else.

Caitlin shuddered to think of it, and yet, try as she did to shake it, she knew it was true. She had been fighting with the idea all this time, fighting not to believe that Scarlet was no longer human, that Scarlet was really a vampire. Caitlin had been fighting with Aiden, with the priest, with Caleb, and most of all, with herself, hoping, wishing, it were anything else. But she had no fight left in her. She had no more explanations.

Caitlin's heart pounded as she looked out into the night. She had seen it for herself this time, had witnessed it with her own eyes. Her girl had transformed, had fed on that man, had gained a super-human strength. She had smashed that huge man into a wall as if he had been a toothpick – and she had bounded off into the night so fast, within the blink of an eye, that there was no way she could be human. There was also no way, Caitlin knew, that they could catch her. She knew the police were wasting their time.

It was different this time, too, because she had not been the only one who had witnessed it. Caitlin had seen the expression on Caleb's face, on Sam's and Polly's, and she could see it in their eyes: a look of shock, a fear of the supernatural. Scarlet, the person they had all loved most in the world, was no longer Scarlet.

It was the stuff of nightmares and fairy tales and legends, something Caitlin had never ever imagined to see in her lifetime. It shook not only her view of Scarlet, but her entire view of the world. How could such a thing actually exist? How could this planet have more than just humans on it?

"Mrs. Paine?"

Caitlin turned to see a police officer standing beside her, pen and paper in hand, staring back at her patiently.

"Did you hear my question?"

Caitlin, trembling, in a daze, shook her head slowly.

"I'm sorry," she answered, her voice hoarse. "I did not."

"I said: where do you think your daughter might have gone?"

Caitlin sighed as she thought of it. If it were the old Scarlet, she could tell them easily. A friend's house; the gym; on a date; the soccer field…

But with the new Scarlet, she had no idea.

"I wish I knew," she finally replied.

Another officer stepped forward.

"Are there any friends she might have gone to?" he prodded. "A boyfriend?"

At the word *boyfriend*, Caitlin turned and searched the room, examining it for any sign of that mysterious boy who had appeared in this bar. *Sage*, he had said. So simple, just one word, as if she should know who he was. Caitlin had to admit that she'd never met anyone like him. He exuded a power more compelling than anyone she had ever met, and he was more a grown man than a teenager. He had been dressed in all black, and his shining eyes and chiseled cheekbones made him look as if he had dropped down from another century.

Strangest of all, Caitlin recalled what he had done to those locals in this bar. She had known Caleb and Sam to be more than capable of taking care of themselves – yet this boy had achieved a quick victory where they could not, beating up all those men in a whirlwind. Who was he? Why had he been here?

And why had he been looking for Scarlet?

Yet as she looked all around, Caitlin saw no sign of him. Sage, too, had somehow disappeared. What was his connection to Scarlet? she wondered. Her mother's instinct told her that somehow those two were together. But who was he? The mystery only deepened.

Caitlin didn't feel ready to mention it to the police; it was all too weird.

"No," Caitlin lied, her voice shaky. "Not that I know of."

"You had said there was a boy, a boy who was here with you, involved in the altercation?" another police officer asked. "Do you know his name?"

Caitlin shook her head.

"Sage," Polly chimed in, stepping forward. "He'd said his name was Sage."

For some reason, Caitlin had not wanted to tell them; she felt protective of him. And she also felt, she could not explain how, that Sage was not human, ether – and she was not ready to say that to the police, to have everyone once again thinking she was crazy.

The police stood there, scribbling his name, and she wondered what they would do.

"What about all these creeps in here?" Polly pressed, looking around in dismay. "All these jerks who started the fight? Aren't you going to arrest them?"

The police looked at each other uncomfortably.

One of them cleared his throat.

"We have already arrested Kyle, the man who attacked your daughter," the officer said. "As for the others, well, to be frank, it is their word against yours – and they say you started the altercation."

"We did not!" Caleb said, stepping forward angrily, nursing a lump on his head. "We came in here looking for my daughter – and they tried to stop us."

"Like I said," the officer said, "it's your word against theirs. They said you threw the first punch – and frankly they're in worse shape than you. If we arrest them, we'd have to arrest you, too."

Caitlin stared at them, smoldering with anger.

"What about my daughter?" she asked. "How do you plan on finding her?"

"Ma'am, I can assure you, we have our entire force out there right now looking for her," the officer said. "But it's awfully hard to search for someone when we don't know where she went – or why. We need a motive."

"You said she ran," said another officer, stepping forward. "We don't understand. Why would she run? You had arrived. She was with you. She was safe. So why would she run?"

Caitlin looked at Caleb and the others, and they all looked back uncertainly.

"I don't know," she said honestly.

"Then why didn't you try to stop her?" another officer asked. "Or run after her?"

"You don't understand," Caitlin said, trying to make sense of it. "She didn't just run; she bounded. It was like… watching a deer. We couldn't have caught her if we tried."

The officer looked skeptically to the others.

"Are you telling me that with all these grown people here, not one of you could even try to catch her? What is she, some kind of Olympic athlete?" he scoffed, skeptical.

"Were you drinking tonight, ma'am?" another officer asked.

"Listen," Caleb snapped, stepping forward, "my wife is not making it up. I saw it, too. We all did: her brother, too, and his wife. The four of us. You think we were all seeing things?"

The officer held up a hand.

"No need to get defensive. We're all on the same team. But look at our side here: you tell me your kid runs faster than a deer. Obviously that doesn't make any sense. Maybe you're all scuffed

up from the fight. Sometimes things don't always look as they appear. All I'm saying is that it's not all adding up."

The officer traded a skeptical look with his partner, who stepped forward.

"Like I said, our force is out looking for your daughter. Nine times out of ten, runaway kids show up back at the house. Or at a friend's house. So my best advice to you is to just go back home and stay put. I bet that all that happened here was that she wanted to bend the rules a bit and go out for a night at a grown-up bar and have a drink, and things got a little out of hand. Maybe she met a guy at the bar. When you guys came, she probably took off, because she felt embarrassed. Go back home, I bet she'll be waiting for you," the officer concluded, as if wrapping everything up neatly.

Caitlin shook her head, overwhelmed with frustration.

"You don't understand," she said. "You don't know my daughter. Scarlet does not go to bars. And she does not pick up strange men. She came here because she was suffering. She came here because she had nowhere else to go. Because she needed something. She came here because she's transforming. Don't you understand? Transforming."

The officers looked at her as if she were crazy; Caitlin hated that look.

"Transforming?" they repeated, as if she had lost her mind.

Caitlin sighed, desperate.

"If you don't find her, people out there are going to get hurt."

The officer frowned.

"Hurt? What are you saying? Has your daughter been hurting people? Is she armed?"

Caitlin shook her head, beyond frustrated. These local cops would never get it; she was just wasting her breath.

"She is unarmed. She has never hurt a soul. But if your men do find her, they will never be able to contain her."

The police officers gave each other a look, as if concluding that Caitlin was crazy, and then they turned their backs and continued into the next room.

As Caitlin watched them go, she turned and looked back out, through the broken glass into the night.

Scarlet, she thought. *Where are you? Come home to me, baby. I love you. I'm sorry. Whatever I did to upset you, I'm sorry. Please come home.*

The strangest thing of all of this, Caitlin realized, was that, as she thought of Scarlet out there, alone in the night, she did not feel any fear for Scarlet.

Instead, she felt fear for everybody else.

Chapter Two

Kyle sat in the back of the police car, hands cuffed behind his back, staring at the cage in the cramped cruiser, and feeling unlike he ever had before. Something was changing inside him, he did not know what, but he could feel it bubbling up inside. It reminded him of the time he used heroin, that first rush when the needle touched his skin. This new feeling was like a searing heat, coursing through his veins – and accompanied by a feeling of invincible power. He felt overwhelmed with power, felt like his veins were going to pop from his skin, like his blood was swelling inside him. He felt more powerful than he ever had in his life, the skin prickling on his face and forehead and the back of his neck. The surge of power within him was something he did not understand.

But Kyle did not care; as long as the power was there, he welcomed it. He looked through blurry eyes as the world tinted red, slowly coming back into focus. Behind the cage, he could see two officers.

As the ringing in his ears began to subside, he started to hear their conversation, muted at first.

"This perp's going away for a long time," one said to the other.

"Heard he just got out, too. Sucks for him."

The police started laughing, and the grating sound cut right through Kyle's head. The cruiser sped down the highway, its lights on, and Kyle became more aware of his surroundings, started to realize where he was. He was on the same Route Nine, heading back toward prison, the place he'd spent the last fifteen years of his life. He was piecing together the night: that bar… that girl… he was about to have his way with her when… something had happened. The little bitch had bit him.

Realization rushed through him like a wave. She had bit him.

Kyle tried to reach up and feel his neck – the two marks there were throbbing – but he was stopped; he realized his hands were cuffed behind his back.

Kyle moved his arms, and to his amazement, he broke the cuffs with no effort. He held up his wrists in wonder, looking at them, shocked by his own strength. Had the cuffs malfunctioned? He looked at them dangling before him, and wondered: How could he have done that?

Kyle reached up and felt the two lumps on his neck, and they burned, as if the bite had entered his veins. He sat there, looking at the dangling cuffs, and he wondered: Did vampires exist? Was it possible?

Kyle grinned wide. It was time to find out.

Kyle took the dangling cuffs and tapped them against the cage before him.

The two cops turned and looked back, and this time they weren't laughing; now, their faces bore looks of shock. Kyle's hands were free, his cuffs broken, and he dangled them there, grinning, as he continued to tap on the cage.

"Holy shit," one officer said to the other. "Didn't you cuff him, Bill?"

"I did. I'm sure of it. I cuffed him tighter than hell."

"Not tight enough," Kyle growled.

One cop reached for his gun, and the other went to slam on the brakes.

But not fast enough. With incredible speed, Kyle reached out, tore the metal grate off as if it were a toothpick, and dove into the front seat.

Kyle lunged onto the cop in the passenger seat, smacked the gun from his hands, and reached back and elbowed him so hard, he snapped the cop's neck.

The other cop swerved, and the car reeled across the highway as Kyle reached over, grabbed him by the back of the head, and head-butted him. A crack filled the air as the cop's blood gushed all over Kyle. With the car careening, Kyle reached out to grab the wheel – but it was too late.

The police cruiser swerved onto the other side of the highway, and horns filled the air as it smashed into an oncoming car.

Kyle went flying through the windshield, head-first, and he landed on the highway, rolling and rolling, as the car flipped and rolled onto its side, too. A car coming toward Kyle screeched its brakes, but not in time – and Kyle felt his chest being crushed as the car ran him over.

The car screeched to a halt as Kyle lay there, breathing hard, and a woman in her thirties got out, screaming, crying, as she ran to Kyle, who lay on his back.

"Oh my God, are you okay?" she said in a rush. "I tried to stop in time. Oh my God. I've killed a man! Oh my God!"

The woman was hysterical, kneeling over him, weeping.

Suddenly, Kyle opened his eyes, sat up, and looked at the woman.

Her crying stopped as she stared back at him in shock, eyes wide in the headlights.

Kyle grinned, leaned in, and sank his beautiful ecstatic fangs, growing and growing, into her throat.

It was the greatest feeling of his life.

The woman screamed as he drank her blood, gorging himself until she fell limp in his arms.

Kyle rose to his feet, satisfied, and turned and surveyed the empty highway.

He straightened his collar, smoothed his shirt, and took the first step. There was a lot of payback coming this town's way – and it would all start with Scarlet.

Chapter Three

Sage flew through the air, into the breaking dawn, the first rays of sun lighting up a tear on his cheek that he quickly brushed away. He was exhausted, bleary-eyed from flying all night, searching for Scarlet. He was sure he'd spotted her many times during the night, only to swoop down on some strange girl, shocked to see him land, and take off again. He was beginning to wonder if he would ever find her.

Scarlet was nowhere to be found, and Sage could not understand it. Their connection was so strong, he was sure that he would be able to sense her, that she would lead him to her. He couldn't understand what had happened. Had she died?

Sage's only guess was that perhaps she was in such an emotional state, all her senses were blocked, and he was unable to pick up on her location; or maybe she had fallen into a deep sleep, as vampires were known to do after the first time they fed on a human. That could be deadly for some, he knew, and his heart pained at the thought of her out there, who knew where, all alone. Would she ever wake up?

Sage flew low, flying so fast he was undetected, passing by all the familiar places he had gone with her – their school, her house, everywhere he could think of – using his laser-like vision to comb the trees and the streets for her.

As the sun rose higher and hour after hour passed, Sage finally knew there was no use searching anymore. He would have to wait until she surfaced, or until he could detect her again.

Sage was exhausted in a way he had never been before. He could feel his life force beginning to ebb away. He knew he only had days to go now until he himself died, and as he felt another pain in his chest and arms and shoulders, he felt that he was dying inside. He knew he would soon leave this earth – and he had made peace with that. He only wanted to spend his final days with Scarlet.

With nowhere left to search, Sage circled and flew over to his family's sweeping estate on the Hudson, looking at it down below. He circled again and again, like an eagle, wondering: should he see them one last time? He didn't know what would be the point. They all hated him now for not bringing Scarlet to them; and he had to admit, he hated them, too. The last time he left, his sister had been dying in his arms, and Lore had been on his way to try to kill Scarlet. He did not want to face them again.

And yet he had nowhere else to go.

As he flew, Sage heard a banging, and he looked down and saw several of his cousins holding up boards to the windows and hammering. One by one, they were boarding up their ancestral mansion, and Sage spotted several dozen of his cousins taking off in flight. He was intrigued. Clearly, something was happening.

Sage had to find out. A part of him wanted to know where they were going, what would become of his family – and a bigger part of him wanted to know if they had any idea where Scarlet was. Maybe one of them had seen or heard something. Maybe Lore had captured her. He had to know; it was the only lead he had.

Sage dove down for his family's estate, landing in the back marble courtyard, before the grand steps leading up to the rear entranceway comprised of tall, antique French doors.

As he approached them, they suddenly opened, and he saw his mother and father step forward, facing him with a stern, disapproving look.

"What are you doing back here?" his mother asked, as if he were an unwelcome intruder.

"You've killed us once," his father said. "Our people could have survived if it weren't for you. Have you come to kill us again?"

Sage frowned; he was so sick of his parents' disapproval.

"Where are you all going?" Sage demanded.

"Where do you think?" his father retorted. "They've convened the Grand Council for the first time in one thousand years."

Sage looked back, shocked.

"Boldt Castle?" he asked. "You are going to the Thousand Islands?"

His parents scowled back.

"What do you care?" his mother said.

Sage couldn't believe what he was hearing. The Grand Council hadn't convened since what felt like the beginning of time, and for all of their kind to gather together in one place, it could not be good.

"But why?" he asked. "Why convene, if we're all going to die anyway?"

His father stepped forward and smiled as he raised a finger and jabbed it in Sage's chest.

"We're not like you," he growled. "We're not going down without a fight. Ours will be the greatest army ever known, the first time we've all assembled in one place. Mankind will pay. We will take our vengeance."

"Vengeance for what?" Sage asked. "Mankind has done nothing to you. Why would you hurt innocent people?"

His father smiled back.

"Stupid to the end," he said. "Why wouldn't we? What have we left to lose? What are they going to do, kill us?"

His father laughed, and his mother joined him, as the two of them linked arms and walked past him, bumping his shoulders roughly, preparing to take off in flight.

Sage yelled after them: "I remember a time when you were noble," he said. "But now, you are nothing. You are less than nothing. Is this what desperation does to you?"

They turned and grimaced.

"Your problem, Sage, is that while you are one of us, you have never understood our kind. Destruction is all we've ever wanted. It is only you, only *you* who has been different."

"You are the child we never understood," his mother said. "And you've never failed to disappoint us."

Sage felt a pain course through him, felt too weak to respond.

As they turned to leave, Sage, gasping, mustered the strength to yell: "Scarlet! Where is she? Tell me!"

His mother turned and smiled wide.

"Oh, don't you worry about her," his mother said. "Lore will find her, and rescue us all. Or he will die trying. And when we live on, don't you dare think there will be a place for you."

Sage reddened.

"I hate you!" he yelled. "I hate you both!"

His parents merely turned, smiling, stepped up onto the marble railing, and took off into the sky.

Sage stood there and watched them go, disappearing into the sky, as the remainder of his cousins joined them. He stood there, all alone, before his boarded-up ancestral home, with nothing here left for him. His family hated him – and he hated them back.

Lore. Sage felt a fresh burst of determination as he thought of him. He could not let him find Scarlet. Despite all the pain inside him, he knew he had to muster the strength one last time. He had to find Scarlet.

Or die trying.

Chapter Four

Caitlin sat in the passenger seat of their pickup, exhausted, heartbroken, as Caleb drove relentlessly on Route 9, driving up and down as he had been for hours, scouring the streets. Dawn was breaking, and Caitlin looked up through the windshield at the unusual sky. She marveled that it was daybreak already. They had been driving all night, the two of them in front and Sam and Polly in the back seat, keeping their eyes peeled to the side of the road, looking everywhere for Scarlet. Once, they had screeched to a stop, Caitlin thinking she'd seen her – only to realize it was a scarecrow.

Caitlin closed her eyes for a moment, her eyelids feeling so heavy, swollen, and she saw the flashing of cars as she did, headlights passing, an endless flow of traffic as she had seen all night long. She felt like crying.

Caitlin felt so hollow inside, like such a bad mother for not having been there enough for Scarlet – for not having believed in her, for not understanding her, for not being there in her time of need. Somehow, Caitlin felt responsible for all this. And she felt like dying at the thought that she might not ever see her daughter again.

Caitlin started to cry, and she opened her eyes and quickly wiped her tears away. Caleb reached over and grabbed her hand, but she shook it away. Caitlin turned to look out the window, wanting privacy, wanting to be alone – wanting to die. Without her little girl in her life, she realized she had nothing left.

Caitlin felt a reassuring hand on her shoulder. She turned to see Sam leaning forward.

"We've been driving all night," he said. "There's no sign of her anywhere. We've covered every inch of Route 9. The cops are out there, too, with far more cars than us. We're all exhausted, and we've no idea where she could be. She might even be home, waiting for us."

"I agree," Polly said. "I say we head home. We need some rest."

Suddenly there came a loud honking, and Caitlin looked up to see a truck coming right at them, as they were on the wrong side of the road.

"CALEB!" Caitlin screamed.

Caleb suddenly swerved out of the way at the last second, back onto his side of the road, missing the honking truck by a foot.

Caitlin stared at him, her heart pounding, and an exhausted Caleb stared back, his eyes bloodshot.

"What was that?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I must've dozed off."

"This isn't doing anyone any good," Polly said. "We need rest. We need to go home. We're all exhausted."

Caitlin considered, and finally, after a long moment, she nodded.

"All right. Take us home."

* * *

Caitlin sat on her couch as the sun rose, leafing through a photo book with pictures of Scarlet. She was flooded with all the memories rushing back to her, of Scarlet at all different ages. Caitlin rubbed her thumb along them, wishing more than anything in the world that she could have Scarlet here with her now. She would give anything, even her own heart and soul.

Caitlin held up the torn page from the book which she'd taken from the library, the ancient ritual, the one that would save Scarlet if only Caitlin had returned in time, the one that would have

cured her from becoming a vampire. Caitlin tore the ancient page into small pieces and threw them to the floor. They landed near Ruth, her large husky, who whined and curled up at Caitlin's side.

That page, that ritual, which had once meant so much to Caitlin, was useless now. Scarlet had already fed, and no ritual could save her now.

Caleb and Sam and Polly, also in the room, were each lost in their own world, each slumped in a couch or chair, either sleeping or half asleep. They lay there in the heavy silence, all of them waiting for Scarlet to walk in the door – and all suspecting she never would.

Suddenly, the phone rang. Caitlin jumped up and snatched it, her hand shaking. She dropped the receiver several times, finally picking it up and holding it to her ear.

"Hello, hello, hello?" she said. "Scarlet, is that you? Scarlet!?"

"Ma'am, it's Officer Stinton," came a male voice.

Caitlin's heart dropped to realize it wasn't Scarlet.

"I'm just calling to let you know we have no sign of your daughter yet."

Caitlin's hopes were dashed. She gripped the phone, squeezing it, desperate.

"You're not trying hard enough," she seethed.

"Ma'am, we're doing all we can – "

Caitlin didn't wait for the rest of his response. She slammed the receiver down, then grabbed the phone, a large landline from the '80s, ripped the cord out of the wall, picked it up over her head, and smashed it down to the ground.

Caleb, Sam, and Polly all jumped up, startled from sleep, and looked at her as though she were mad.

Caitlin looked down at the phone and she realized, maybe she was.

Caitlin stormed from the room, opened the door to their large front porch, and went out alone and sat on a rocking chair. It was cold in the dawn, and she didn't care. She felt numb to the world.

She folded her arms across her chest tight, and she rocked and rocked in the cool November air. She looked out at the empty street that was spreading with the light of a new day, not a soul in sight, not a car moving, all the houses still dark. Everything still. A perfectly quiet suburban street, not a leaf out of place, everything clean and how it was supposed to be. Perfectly normal.

But nothing, Caitlin knew, was normal. She suddenly hated this place which she had loved for years. She hated the quiet; she hated the stillness; she hated the order. What she wouldn't give for chaos, for the stillness to be shattered, for sound, for motion, for her daughter to appear.

Scarlet, she prayed, as she closed her eyes, crying, *come back to me, baby. Please come back to me.*

Chapter Five

Scarlet Paine felt herself floating through the air, the fluttering of a million small wings in her ear as she felt herself being raised up, higher and higher. She looked out to see she was being hoisted by a flock of bats, a million bats, surrounding her, clinging to the back of her shirt, carrying her through the air.

Scarlet was carried up through the clouds, through the most beautiful breaking dawn she'd ever seen, the clouds scattering and breaking up, the whole burnt-orange sky on fire. She did not understand what was happening, but somehow, she was unafraid. She sensed they were taking her somewhere, and as they screeched and fluttered all around her, as they hoisted her into the sky, she felt as if she were one of them.

Before Scarlet could process what was happening, the bats set her down, gently, before the biggest castle she'd ever seen. It had ancient stone walls, and she stood before an immense arched door. The bats flew off, disappearing, their fluttering fading.

Scarlet stood facing the door, and slowly, it opened. An amber light spilled out, and Scarlet felt drawn to enter.

Scarlet crossed the threshold of the door, passed through the light, and entered the largest chamber she had ever seen. Inside, lined up at perfect attention, facing her, stood an army of vampires, dressed in all black. She hovered above them, looking down upon them as if she were their leader.

As one, they all raised their palms and slapped them against their chests.

"You have given birth to a nation," they boomed, their voice as one, echoing off the walls. "You have given birth to a nation!"

The vampires let out a great shout, and as they did, Scarlet took it all in, feeling as if, finally, she had found her people.

Scarlet's eyes flew open as she woke to the sound of breaking glass. She found herself lying face-down on the cement, her cheeks pushed up against it, cold and wet and damp. She saw ants crawling toward her, and placed her palms on the rough cement, sat up, and brushed them away.

Scarlet was cold, achy, her neck and back twisted from having slept in this uncomfortable position. Most of all, she was disoriented, freaked out at not recognizing her surroundings. She was underneath a small local bridge, lying on the cement slope beneath it, as dawn broke above her. It stank of urine and stale beer down here, and Scarlet saw the cement was all marked up with graffiti, and as she studied the ground, she saw empty beer cans, refuse, used needles. She realized she was in a bad place. She looked around, blinking, and had no idea where she was, or how she got here.

There came again the sound of breaking glass, accompanied by shuffling feet, and Scarlet turned quickly, her senses on alert.

About ten feet away stood four bums dressed in rags, looking either drunk or on drugs – or just out for violence. Unshaven older men, they stared at her as if she were their play-thing, lecherous smiles on their faces, revealing rotting yellow teeth. But they were strong, she could tell, broad and tall, and by the way they approached, one of them throwing a beer bottle and smashing it under the bridge, she knew their intentions were not kind.

Scarlet tried to remember how she had gotten herself to this place. It was a place she never would have willingly gone. Had she been brought here? Her first thought was that maybe she had been raped; but she looked down and saw herself fully clothed, and knew that wasn't it. She thought back, trying to remember the night before.

But it was all a painful blur. Scarlet remembered in flashes: a bar at the side of Route 9… an altercation… But it was all so hazy. She couldn't quite recall the details.

"You know you're under our bridge, right?" one of the bums said as they all approached, getting ever closer. Scarlet scurried back on her hands and knees, then rose to her feet, facing them, shaking inside but not wanting to appear scared.

"No one comes here without paying the toll," another said.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't know how I got here."

"That was your mistake," another said, in a deep guttural voice, smiling back at her.

"Please," Scarlet said, trying to sound tough, but her voice shaky, as she stepped back, "I don't want any trouble. I'm going to leave now. I'm sorry."

Scarlet turned to leave, her heart pounding in her chest, when suddenly, she heard footsteps running, and then felt an arm wrap around her throat, holding a knife to her throat, his awful beer breath in her face.

"No you're not, honey," he said. "We haven't even begun to get acquainted."

Scarlet struggled, but the man was too strong for her, his stubble scraping her cheek as he rubbed his face against hers.

Soon the other three appeared before her, and Scarlet cried out as she struggled to no avail, and then felt their awful hands running down her stomach. One of them reached her belt line.

Scarlet bucked and twisted, trying to get away – but they were too strong. One of them reached down, yanked off her belt, and threw it, and she heard the clang of metal on the cement.

"Please, let me go!" Scarlet screamed, as she squirmed.

The fourth bum reached down and grabbed her jeans by the waist and started to pull on them, trying to yank them off of her. Scarlet knew that, in moments, if she didn't do something, she would be hurt.

Something inside her snapped. She didn't understand what it was, but it completely overwhelmed her, an energy flooding through her, rising up through her feet, up through her legs, her torso. She felt it like a searing heat, shooting through her shoulders, her arms, all the way to her fingertips. Her face flushed, the hair stood on end all over her body, and she felt a fire burning inside. She felt a strength she didn't understand, felt herself to be stronger than all these men, stronger than the universe.

She then felt something else: a primordial rage. It was a new feeling. No longer did she have a desire to get away – but now she wanted to stay right here and make these men pay. To tear them apart, limb by limb.

And finally, she felt one more thing: hunger. A deep gnawing hunger that made her need to feed.

Scarlet leaned back and snarled, a sound that was scary even to her; her fangs extended from her teeth as she leaned back and kicked the man reaching for her jeans. The kick was so vicious, it sent the man flying through the air a good twenty feet, until he smacked his head against the concrete wall. He slumped down, unconscious.

The others stepped back, releasing their grip, mouths open in shock and fear as they stared back at Scarlet. They looked as if they realized they'd just made a very big mistake.

Before they could react, Scarlet wheeled around and elbowed the man holding her, cracking him across the jaw so hard, he spun around twice and collapsed, unconscious.

Scarlet turned, snarling, and faced the other two, like a beast looking down at its prey. The two bums stood there, eyes wide with fear, and Scarlet heard a noise and looked down to see one of them pee in his pants.

Scarlet reached down, picked her belt up off the floor, and walked forward casually.

The man stumbled backwards, petrified.

"No!" he whimpered. "Please! I didn't mean it!"

Scarlet lunged forward and wrapped the belt around the man's throat. She then lifted him with one hand, his feet dangling off the ground, the man gasping, clutching at the belt. She held him there, high overhead, until finally he stopped moving and slumped down, dead.

Scarlet turned and faced the final bum, who was crying, too scared to run. Fangs extended, she stepped forward and sank them into the man's throat. He shook in her arms, then in moments, he lay there in a pool of blood, limp.

Scarlet heard a distant scurrying, and she looked over to see the first bum rising, moaning, slowly getting to his feet. He looked at her, eyes wide in fear, and scurried to his hands and knees, trying to get away.

She bore down on him.

"Please don't hurt me," he whimpered, crying. "I didn't mean it. I don't know what you are, but I didn't mean it."

"I'm sure you didn't," she answered, her voice dark, inhuman. "Just like I don't mean what I'm about to do to you."

Scarlet picked him up by the back of the shirt, spun around, and threw him with all her might – straight up.

The bum went flying like a missile, up underneath the bridge, his head and shoulders smashing through the cement and popping out the other side, the sound of rubble falling everywhere as she sent him halfway through the bridge. He hung there, lodged in it, his legs dangling underneath.

Scarlet ran up to the top of the bridge in a single bound, and she saw him, his upper torso stuck in the concrete, as he shrieked, his head and shoulders exposed, unable to move. He wiggled, trying to break free.

But he could not. He was a sitting target for whatever car happened to come along.

"Get me out of here!" he demanded.

Scarlet smiled.

"Maybe next time," she said. "Enjoy the traffic."

Scarlet turned and leapt and flew off into the sky, the sound of the man's cries growing dimmer and dimmer as she flew higher and higher, away from this place, having no idea where she was and no longer caring. Only one person loomed in her mind: Sage. His face hovered before her in her mind's eye, his perfectly chiseled chin and lips, his soulful eyes. She could sense his love for her. And she felt it back.

She did not know where her home was in this world anymore, but she didn't care, as long as she was with him.

Sage, she thought. *Wait for me. I'm coming for you.*

Chapter Six

Maria sat with her friends in the pumpkin patch, hating life, so jealous of all of them. Everyone seemed to have a boyfriend but her. And the ones that didn't seemed to have a really strong clique of friends that all huddled together.

Maria sat on a pile of pumpkins, Becca and Jasmine by her side, and she didn't really know where she fit in anymore. Maria used to have such a strong clique, an unbreakable clique forever, the four of them, she and Becca and Jasmine and, of course, her best friend, Scarlet. They had been inseparable. If one of them didn't have a boyfriend, the others were always there for them. She and Scarlet had vowed to never fight, to go to the same college, to be maid of honor at each other's weddings, and to always live within ten blocks of each other.

Maria had been so sure of her friends, of Scarlet, of everything.

Then, in the last few weeks, everything had suddenly fallen apart, without warning. Scarlet had stolen away Sage right from under her eyes, the only guy Maria had been totally obsessed with for a very long time. Maria's face flushed as she remembered the indignity; Scarlet had made her look so stupid. She was still so mad at her for that, and she didn't think she'd ever forgive her.

Maria recalled their final argument, Scarlet defending herself, saying that Sage liked her, and she didn't steal him. Deep down, a part of Maria knew that probably she was right. Still, she had to blame someone, and it was a lot easier than blaming herself.

Someone bumped her, and Maria slid off the pile of pumpkins, landing on the ground, and her jeans got muddy.

"Watch it!" she yelled, pissed.

She looked over and saw it was one of the drunken boys. Several hundred of her class had gathered here, as they always did by tradition, the day after the big fall bash, for this stupid school "pumpkin picking" event. Everyone knew that nobody really picked pumpkins, they all just sat around the pumpkin field, filling up on hot apple cider and donuts, while the riffraff of the class spiked their cider with gin. It was one of these boys who had bumped her. He hadn't even realized he had done it, adding insult to injury, as he stumbled by. Maria knew him, and she knew that all those boys who drank at this age would end up doing nothing with their lives anyway, so at least she took solace in that.

Maria had to clear her head. She couldn't stand it anymore, being around all this. She just wanted to get away. She was still so upset, and now she didn't even know why. Losing her best friend, even with Jasmine and Becca there, made her feel at loose ends. Making things worse, she still felt a lust for Sage. Thoughts of him were driving her crazy.

Maria got to her feet and began to walk.

"Where you going?" Jasmine asked.

Maria shrugged.

"Just to get some air."

Maria pushed her way through the crowd, going farther and farther out into the farm field on the outskirts of town, looking at all the kids holding mugs, sitting around laughing, everyone seeming to be so happy. Everyone but her. At this moment, she hated them all.

Maria made it to the edge of the crowd and kept walking, finding a lone haystack at the base of the corn maze.

She put her head in her hands and held back tears. She was feeling depressed, and she did not know why. Mostly, she thought, it was because Scarlet was out of her life. She used to text her a hundred times a day. She didn't understand why it had all happened, either. And she couldn't stop thinking of Sage, even though she knew he didn't like her. She closed her eyes and willed and willed and willed for him to appear.

Sage, I'd give anything, she thought. *Come here. I want you. I need you.*

"What's a pretty thing like you doing sitting here all by herself?" came a dark, seductive voice.

Maria flinched, as she opened her eyes and was in utter shock at the sight before her. It was not Sage. But it was a guy, if possible even more gorgeous than Sage. He wore black leather boots, black leather jeans, a black T-shirt, a small, black shark-tooth necklace, and a fitted black leather jacket. He had gray eyes and wavy brown hair, and a small, perfect smile. He had more sex appeal than any guy she'd ever seen: he looked like a rock star who had stepped off the stage just for her.

Maria blinked several times and looked all around, wondering if this was a joke. But he was the only one there, and he was actually talking to her, and nobody else. She tried to respond, but her words stuck in her throat.

"Pretty?" was all she managed to say back, her heart thumping in her chest.

He laughed, and it was most the beautiful sound she'd ever heard.

"Come on, they're having all the fun. Why aren't you?"

Without waiting, he approached her gracefully, held out a hand, and without even realizing it, she took his hand, jumping down off the stack of hay, and followed him, the two walking hand-in-hand into the corn maze alone. She was so swept up by him, she didn't even stop to think or realize that this wasn't exactly normal. A fantasy of hers had materialized, and had swept her way. But she wasn't exactly about to start asking questions.

"Um… who are you?" she asked, tentative, her voice trembling, overcome by the feel of his hand in hers.

"I was looking for a date for the corn maze," he said with a smile as they stepped inside. "This is my lucky day. Maria, right?"

She looked at him in wonder.

"How did you know my name?"

He smiled and laughed.

"You'll soon find out about me," he said, "that I know just about everything. And as for my name: you can call me Lore."

* * *

Lore walked hand-in-hand with Scarlet's friend, delighted with himself at how easy it had been to seduce her. These humans were too frail, too naïve – it wasn't even fair. He had barely even needed to use his powers, and in just moments, he had her in the palm of his hand. A part of him wanted to feed on her, drain the energy from her body, and dispose of her as he had other humans.

But another part told him to be patient. After all, he had flown across the countryside and set down just for her. Lore had been searching for a way to get to Scarlet, and as he was flying, he had sensed Maria's strong feelings cutting through the universe; he had felt her desire for Sage, her desperation. It attracted him like a magnet.

Lore had spotted Maria with his eagle eye from the skies, and as he'd dove down, he realized she would be the perfect trap after all, someone so alone, so vulnerable – and so close to Scarlet. If anyone knew of a way to find Scarlet, it must be her. Lore decided he would befriend her, use her to find Scarlet, and when he was through, kill her. In the meantime, he might as well have fun with her. This pathetic human would believe whatever fantasy she wanted.

"Um… I don't understand…" Maria said, as they walked, her voice shaky, nervous. "Explain it to me again. You said you're like… like new here?"

Lore laughed.

"In a way," he said.

"So like are you going to be in our school?" she asked.

"I don't think I have time for school," he replied.

"What do you mean? Aren't you my age?" she asked.

"I am. But I finished school long ago."

Lore almost said *centuries* ago, but he stopped himself at the last second, luckily.

"Long ago? What do you mean? Are you like advanced or something?" She looked at him with wide, admiring eyes, and he smiled back at her.

"Something like that," he said. "So your friends are back there, at the party?" he added.

Maria nodded.

"Yeah, all of them except… Well, I'm not friends with her anymore, so yeah, all of them."

"Except who?" Lore asked, intrigued.

Maria blushed.

"Well, my former best friend. She's not there. But like I said, we're not friends anymore."

"Scarlet?" he asked, then immediately regretted giving too much away.

Maria looked at him, suspicious.

"Like, how do you know all this? Are you, like, stalking me?"

Lore began to feel her retreat from him, and he didn't want to lose her. He looked at her, held her cheeks, made her stare at him, and flashed his eyes at her. She blinked, and as she did, he wiped out the last thirty seconds of their conversation from her memory.

Maria blinked several times, and he took her hand, and they continued walking.

Close call, he thought. *Let's start again.*

"So your friends are back there, at the party?" he added.

Maria nodded.

"Yeah, all of them except… Well, I'm not friends with her anymore, so yeah, all of them."

"Except who?" Lore asked, intrigued.

Maria blushed.

"Well, my former best friend. She's not there. But like I said, we're not friends anymore."

Lore paused this time, thinking through his words.

"What happened between the two of you?" he asked carefully.

Maria shrugged, and they continued to walk in silence, their boots crunching in the hay.

"You don't have to tell me," Lore said, finally. "Anyway, I know what it's like to be estranged from a friend. My cousin Lore. We were once as close as brothers. Now we don't even speak."

Maria looked up at him with compassion.

"That's awful," she said. "What happened?"

Lore shrugged.

"Long story." *Centuries long*, he wanted to add, but he restrained himself.

Maria nodded, clearly feeling sympathy for him.

"Well, since you seem to understand," she said, "then I'll tell you. I don't know why, like I don't even know you, but I feel you'd understand everything."

Lore smiled reassuringly at her.

"I seem to have that effect on people," he said.

"Anyway," Maria continued, "my friend, Scarlet, she, like, stole a guy that I liked. Not that I care about the guy anymore."

Maria stopped talking and Lore sensed she wanted to say something more, and he read her mind:

Well, not since I met you, that is.

Lore smiled.

"Stealing someone's mate," Lore said, shaking his head. "There's nothing worse than that."

He squeezed her hand tighter, and Maria gave him a half smile.

"So you're not friends anymore?" Lore said, fishing.

Maria shook her head.

“No. I like totally cut her off. I kinda feel bad about it. I mean, she’s like still stored in my favorites and we’re still friends on Facebook and everything. I haven’t quite gotten that far. But I haven’t called or texted her. We used to text a hundred times a day.”

“Have you tried to text her at all?”

Maria shook her head.

“I don’t really want talk about it,” she said.

Lore sensed that he was pushing too hard. There would be plenty of time for him to seduce her, to find out all he needed to know about Scarlet. In the meantime, he had to make her trust him – to trust him completely.

They reached the center of the corn maze, and they stopped and stood there. Maria looked away, and Lore could sense how nervous she was.

“So, like, now what?” she asked, her hands trembling. “Maybe we should get back?” she added.

He read her mind:

I hope he doesn’t want to go back. I hope he kisses me. Please, kiss me.

Lore reached down, held her cheeks, leaned in, and kissed her.

At first, Maria resisted, pulling back.

But then, she melted into his kiss. He could feel her melting into him completely, and he knew that now, she was totally his.

Chapter Seven

Scarlet flew through the morning sky, wiping her tears, still shaken from the incident under the bridge, and trying to understand all that was happening to her. She was flying. She could hardly believe it. She did not know how, but wings had sprouted, and she had just taken off, lifted into the air as if it were the most natural thing in the world. She couldn't understand why the light was hurting her eyes, why her skin was starting to itch beneath the sun. Luckily, it had become a cloudy day, and she had some relief; yet still, she did not feel like herself.

Scarlet felt so lost, so alone, and she did not know where to go. She felt she could not go back home, not after all that had happened, not after discovering that her mother wanted her dead, that they all hated her. She couldn't go to her friends, either; after all, Maria hated her now, too, and it seemed she had turned the others against her as well. She couldn't go back to school, couldn't just step back into her normal life, especially after her big fight with Vivian at the party.

A part of Scarlet felt like curling up in a ball and dying. She felt she had no home left in the world.

Scarlet flew over her hometown and as she passed her house, it was such a strange feeling to look down on it from above. Scarlet flew high enough to not be seen by anyone, and she saw her town from a bird's-eye view, like she'd never had. She saw the perfectly formed blocks, the rectangular grid, the clean streets, the tall steeple of the church; she saw the wires everywhere, the telephone poles, all the slanted roofs, some shingled, some slate, most hundreds of years old. She saw birds perched on roofs, and saw a lone purple balloon lifting up toward her.

The November wind was cold up here, whipping her face, and Scarlet felt the chill. She wanted to get down, to warm up somewhere.

As Scarlet flew and flew, trying to think, the only person that she could see, the only face that continued to flash in her mind, was Sage. He hadn't shown up as promised at the homecoming; he had stood her up, and she was still mad about that. Scarlet assumed he didn't want to see her again.

Then again, she wasn't really sure what happened. Maybe, just maybe, there had been some reason he didn't show up. Maybe he loved her after all.

The more Scarlet thought about it, the more she felt she needed to see him. She needed to see a familiar face, someone left in the world who cared about her, who loved her. Or, at least, who had loved her once.

Scarlet made a decision. She turned and headed west, toward the river, toward where she knew Sage lived. She continued flying outside the town limits, looking down at the main roads below, and using them as a beacon as she flew. Her heart pounded quickly, as she realized she would reach him in a few moments.

As she flew outside of town, the landscape changed: instead of perfectly laid out blocks and houses, there were fewer houses, larger lots, more trees… The lots morphed from two acres, to four acres, to six, then ten, twenty… She was entering the estate section.

Scarlet reached the river's edge, and as she turned and flew alongside it, below her she could see all the mansions, replete with their long, sprawling driveways, framed by ancient oaks and formidable gates. It all reeked of wealth and history and money and power.

Scarlet passed over the biggest and most elegant of them all, beautifully set back from the road by several acres, perched right near the edge of the river, an old home of ancient stone, with the most beautiful spirals and towers, looking more like a castle than a house. Its fifteen chimneys protruded into the sky like a beacon to the heavens. Scarlet had never realized how beautiful Sage's home was until she saw it from above.

Scarlet flew lower, diving down, her heart pounding, so nervous. Would Sage even want to see her again? What if he didn't? If not, she did not know where she could possibly turn.

Scarlet landed before the front door, coming down gently, her wings retracting, and she looked up at the stone edifice – and as she did, she felt her heart go cold inside. She could not comprehend what she was seeing: the entire house, all of it, was boarded up. In place of the beautiful ornate glass, there was plywood, hastily nailed; in place of all the activity that had been here last time she visited, there was nothing.

It was deserted.

Scarlet heard a squeaking noise. She looked off to the side and saw a rusty gate swinging lightly, squeaking in the wind. It felt as if no one had lived here for a thousand years.

Scarlet flew around to the back of the house, setting down in the wide marble plaza, and looked up at the façade; it was more of the same. The house was completely empty, boarded up. As if all that had been, had never been.

Scarlet turned and looked at the sprawling grounds leading down to the river, peering into the cloud-filled horizon, the blackening sky threatening a storm, looking everywhere for Sage.

She did not sense him here. Not in the house. Not anywhere.

He was gone.

Scarlet could not believe it. He was really gone.

Scarlet sat down, putting her hands on her knees, and wept. Did he truly hate her that much? Did he never really love her?

Scarlet sat there, crying, until she fell hollowed out, numb. She stared at nothing, wondering what to do. A part of her wanted to break into the house, if for no other reason than to get warmth and shelter. But she knew she could not do that. She was not a criminal.

Scarlet sat with her head in her hands for what felt like forever, feeling an intense pressure between her eyes, knowing she had to go somewhere, do something. But where?

For some reason, Scarlet thought of her friends once again. Maria hated her; but there was no reason for any of the others to hate her. They'd all been so close at one point. Even if she couldn't talk with Maria, maybe she could talk with Becca or Jasmine. After all, Scarlet hadn't done anything to them. And what were friends for, if not for a time like this?

Scarlet stood, wiped her tears, took three steps, and leapt into the air. She would find her friends, ask for them to take her in, just for the night, and then figure out what to do with her life.

Chapter Eight

Father McMullen knelt before the altar, his hands trembling as he clasped the rosary, praying for clarity. And also, he had to admit, praying for protection. His mind still flashed images of that girl, Scarlet, brought here by her mother so many days before, of that moment when even here, in this holy place, every window shattered. The father glanced up and looked all around, as if wondering if it had really happened – and he felt a sinking pit in his stomach as he was given the stark reminder, the former windows now boarded up with plywood.

Please, Father. Send us protection. Send her protection. Save us from her. And save her from herself. I ask for a sign.

Father McMullen didn't know what to do. He was a small-town priest, with a small-town parish, and he did not have the skills to deal with a spiritual force of this magnitude. He had read legends of it, but he had never known it to be true, and certainly had never witnessed it with his own eyes.

Now, after spending his entire life praying to God, after spending his life talking to others of forces of good and evil, he had witnessed it for himself. True spiritual forces were doing battle, here on earth, on display for all to see. Now he had experienced it – everything he had ever read and talked about to others – for himself.

And it scared him to death.

Can such evil really walk the earth? he wondered. Where did it come from? What did it want? And why had it all come his way, fallen into his lap?

Father McMullen had contacted the Vatican right away, reporting what had happened, asking for their help, for guidance. Most of all, he wanted to know how to best help this poor girl. Were there any ancient prayers, ancient ceremonies, he did not know of?

But, to his dismay, he had never heard back.

The father knelt there, praying, as he did every afternoon, now praying longer and harder.

The father suddenly flinched as the huge, arched wooden doors to the church banged open, light flooding in behind him, a cold breeze rushing on his back. He felt an immediate chill – and it was not just from the weather.

He sensed that something dark had entered the place.

The father, his heart pounding, quickly gained his feet and turned around, facing the entrance, wondering what it could be. He squinted into the light.

In walked the silhouettes of three men in their sixties, with white hair, dressed in all black, with black turtlenecks and cassocks. He examined them in wonder; there was something different about them, something sinister. They did not look like any priests he had ever seen.

"Father McMullen?" one of them asked.

The father stood his ground as they approached, and nodded back shakily.

"Who are you?" he asked. "How may I help you?"

"You sent for us," one said.

The father looked at him, puzzled.

"I did?"

They reached him and as they did, one of them held a piece of paper out.

The father took it. It was from the Vatican.

"They've sent us to investigate," one of them said.

The father felt some relief, yet still, he examined them with apprehension, taking in their stark appearance.

"I am honored that you've come all the way from Italy," he said. "Thank you for coming. Can you help?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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