desired

book #5 in
the vampire journals

morgan rice

The Vampire Journals

Морган Райс

Desired

«Lukeman Literary Management Ltd»

2011

Райс М.

Desired / М. Райс — «Lukeman Literary Management Ltd», 2011 — (The Vampire Journals)

In DESIRED (Book #5 in the Vampire Journals), Caitlin Paine wakes to discover that she has once again traveled back in time. This time, she has landed in eighteenth century Paris, an age of great opulence, of kings and queens – but also of revolution.Reunited with her true love, Caleb, the two of them finally have the quiet, romantic time together that they never had. They spend idyllic time together in the city of Paris, visiting its most romantic sites, as their love grows ever deeper. Caitlin decides to give up the search for her father, so that she can savor this time and place, and spend her life with Caleb. Caleb takes her to his medieval castle, near the ocean, and Caitlin is happier than she ever dreamed.But their idyllic time together is not destined to last forever, and events intercede that force the two of them apart. Caitlin once again finds herself united with Aiden and his coven, with Polly and with new friends, as she focuses again on her training, and on her mission. She is introduced to the lavish world of Versailles, and encounters outfits and opulence beyond what she ever dreamed. With never ending feasts and parties and concerts, Versailles is a world of its own. She is happily reunited with her bother Sam, who is also back in time, and having dreams of their father, too.But all is not as well as it seems. Kyle has traveled back in time, too – this time, with his evil sidekick, Sergei – and he is more determined than ever to kill Caitlin. And Sam and Polly each fall ever deeper into toxic relationships, which just might threaten to destroy everything around them.As Caitlin becomes a true and hardened warrior, she comes closer than ever to finding her father, and the mythical Shield. The climactic, action-packed ending, takes Caitlin through a whirlwind of Paris' most important medieval locations, on a hunt for clues. But surviving this time will demand skills she never dreamed she had. And reuniting with Caleb will require her to make the hardest choices – and sacrifices – of her life.

© Райс М., 2011
© Lukeman Literary Management Ltd, 2011

Содержание

Chapter One 10
Chapter Two 16
Chapter Three 19
Chapter Four 22
Chapter Five 26
Chapter Six 29
Chapter Seven 31
Chapter Eight 37
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 39

Morgan Rice
Desired
(Book #5 in the Vampire Journals)

"Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again…"

– William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet

Copyright © 2012 by Morgan Rice

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior permission of the author.

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return it and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictionally. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover model: Jennifer Onvie. Cover photography: Adam Luke Studios, New York. Cover makeup artist: Ruthie Weems. If you would like to contact any of these artists, please contact Morgan Rice.

Acclaim for the Vampire Journals

"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."
– Black Lagoon Reviews (regarding Turned)

"An ideal story for young readers. Morgan Rice did a good job spinning an interesting twist… Refreshing and unique. The series focuses around one girl… one extraordinary girl!…Easy to read but extremely fast-paced… Rated PG."
– The Romance Reviews (regarding Turned)

"Grabbed my attention from the beginning and did not let go… This story is an amazing adventure that is fast paced and action packed from the very beginning. There is not a dull moment to be found."
– Paranormal Romance Guild (regarding Turned)

"Jam packed with action, romance, adventure, and suspense. Get your hands on this one and fall in love all over again."
– vampirebooksite.com (regarding Turned)

"A great plot, and this especially was the kind of book you will have trouble putting down at night. The ending was a cliffhanger that was so spectacular that you will immediately want to buy the next book, just to see what happens."
– The Dallas Examiner (regarding Loved)

"A book to rival TWILIGHT and VAMPIRE DIARIES, and one that will have you wanting to keep reading until the very last page! If you are into adventure, love and vampires this book is the one for you!"
– Vampirebooksite.com (regarding Turned)

"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)

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).

Morgan loves to hear from you, so please feel free to visit www.morganricebooks.com to join the email list, receive a free book, receive free giveaways, download the free app, get the latest exclusive news, connect on Facebook and Twitter, and stay in touch!

Books by Morgan Rice

THE SORCERER'S RING
A QUEST OF HEROES (Book #1)
A MARCH OF KINGS (Book #2)
A FATE OF DRAGONS (Book #3)
A CRY OF HONOR (Book #4)
A VOW OF GLORY (Book #5)
A CHARGE OF VALOR (Book #6)
A RITE OF SWORDS (Book #7)
A GRANT OF ARMS (Book #8)
A SKY OF SPELLS (Book #9)
A SEA OF SHIELDS (Book #10)
A REIGN OF STEEL (Book #11)
A LAND OF FIRE (Book #12)
A RULE OF QUEENS (Book #13)

THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY
ARENA ONE: SLAVERSUNNERS (Book #1)
ARENA TWO (Book #2)

THE VAMPIRE JOURNALS
TURNED (Book #1)
LOVED (Book #2)
BETRAYED (Book #3)
DESTINED (Book #4)
DESIRED (Book #5)
BETROTHED (Book #6)
VOWED (Book #7)
FOUND (Book #8)
RESURRECTED (Book #9)
CRAVED (Book #10)
FATED (Book #11)

Listen to THE VAMPIRE JOURNALS series in audio book format!
Now available on:
Amazon
Audible
iTunes

FACT:

Montmartre, Paris, is famous for its huge church, the Sacré-Cœur Basilica, built in the 19th century. But sitting beside it, high atop the hill, stands the little known Church of Saint Peter. This small, obscure church is much older than its neighbor, dating back to the 3rd century, and has an even greater importance: it was in this location that the vows were taken that led to the founding of the Society of Jesus.

FACT:

Sainte Chapelle, located a small island in the center of Paris (not far from the famous Notre Dame), was built in the 13th century, and for hundreds of years housed the most precious relics of Christendom, including the Crown of Thorns, the Holy Lance, and pieces of the cross upon which Jesus was crucified. The relics were stored in a large, ornate silver chest…

Chapter One

Paris, France
(July, 1789)

Caitlin Paine awoke to blackness.

The air was heavy, and she struggled to breathe as she tried to move. She was lying on her back, on a hard surface. It was cool and damp, and a tiny sliver of light came in at her as she looked up.

Her shoulders were squeezed together, but with an effort she just managed to reach up. She stretched out her palms and felt the surface above. Stone. She ran her hands along it, felt the dimensions, and realized she was boxed in. In a coffin.

Caitlin's heart started to pound. She hated tight spaces, and she started breathing harder. She wondered if she were dreaming, stuck in some sort of horrible limbo, or if she had truly awakened in some other time, and some other place.

She reached up again, with both hands, and with all her might, pushed. It moved a fraction of an inch, just enough for her to slide a finger into the crack. She pushed again, with all her might, and the heavy stone lid moved further, with the sound of stone scraping against stone.

She squeezed more fingers into the widening crack, and with all her might, shoved. This time, the lid came off.

Caitlin sat up, breathing hard, looking all around. Her lungs gasped in the fresh air, and she braced herself at the light, raising her hands to her eyes. How long had she been in such darkness? she wondered.

As she sat there, Shielding her eyes, she listened, bracing herself for any noise, for any movement. She remembered how rough her graveyard awakening had been in Italy, and this time, she didn't want to leave anything to chance. She was prepared for anything, ready to defend herself against whatever villagers, or vampires – or whatever else – might be nearby.

But this time, all was silence. She slowly pried open her eyes, and saw that she was, indeed, alone. As her eyes adjusted, she realized it wasn't, actually, that bright in here. She was in a cavernous, stone room, with low, arched ceilings. It looked like the vault of a church. The room was lit only by the occasional burning candle. It must be night, she realized.

Now that her eyes adjusted, she looked around carefully. She had been right: she'd been lying in a stone sarcophagus, in the corner of a stone room, in what appeared to be the crypt of a church. The room was empty, except for a few stone statues, and several other sarcophagi.

Caitlin stepped out the sarcophagus. She stretched, testing all of her muscles. It felt good to stand again. She was grateful that she hadn't awakened this time to a battle. At least she had a few quiet moments to collect herself.

But she was still so disoriented. Her mind felt heavy, like she had awoken from a thousand year sleep. She also, immediately, felt a hunger pang.

Where was she? she wondered again. *What year was it*?

And more importantly, where was Caleb?

She was crestfallen that he was not at her side.

Caitlin surveyed the room, looking for a sign of him anywhere. But there was nothing. The other sarcophagi were all open and empty, and there was nowhere else he could be hiding.

"Hello?" she called out. "Caleb?"

She took a few tentative steps into the room, and saw a low, arched doorway, the only way in or out. She went to it and tried the knob. Unlocked, the door swung open easily.

Before she left the room, she turned and surveyed her surroundings, making sure she hadn't left anything she needed. She reached down and felt her necklace, still around her neck; she reached

into her pockets, and was reassured to feel her journal, and the one, large key. It was all that she had left in the world, and it was all that she needed.

As Caitlin exited, she proceeded down a long, arched stone hallway. She could think only of finding Caleb. Surely, he had gone back with her this time. Hadn't he?

And if he had, would he remember her this time? She could not possibly imagine having to go through all that again, having to search for him, and then having him not remember. No. She prayed that this time would be different. He was alive, she assured herself, and they had gone back together. They *must* have.

But as she hurried down the corridor, and up a small flight of stone steps, she felt her pace increasing, and felt that familiar sinking feeling in her chest that he had not come back with her. After all, he had not awakened at her side, holding her hand, he was not there to reassure her. Did that mean he had not made the trip back? The pit in her stomach grew bigger.

And what about Sam? He had been there, too. Why wasn't there any sign of him?

Caitlin finally reached the top of the staircase, opened another door, and stood there, amazed at the sight. She was standing in the main chapel of an extraordinary church. She had never seen such high ceilings, so much stained-glass, such an enormous, elaborate altar. The rows of pews stretched forever, and it looked like this place could hold thousands of people.

Luckily, it was empty. Candles burned everywhere, but clearly, it was late. She was grateful for that: the last thing she wanted was to walk out into a crowd of thousands of people staring right at her.

Caitlin walked slowly, right down the center of the isle, heading towards the exit. She was on the lookout for Caleb, for Sam, or maybe even for a priest. Someone like that priest in Assisi, who might welcome her, explain things to her. Who might tell her where she was, and when, and why.

But there was no one. Caitlin seemed to be completely, utterly alone.

Caitlin reached the huge, double doors, and braced herself to face whatever might be outside.

As she opened them, she gasped. The night was lit up by street torches everywhere, and before her was a large crowd of people. They weren't waiting to enter the church, but rather were milling around, in a large, open plaza. It was a busy, festive night scene, and as Caitlin felt the heat, she knew that it was summer. She was shocked by the sight of all these people, by their antiquated wardrobe, by their formality. Luckily, no one seemed to notice her. But she couldn't take her eyes off of them.

There were hundreds of people, most dressed formally, all clearly from another century. Among them were horses, carriages, street peddlers, artists, singers. It was a crowded, summer night scene, and it was overwhelming. She wondered what year it could be, and what place she could have possibly landed in. More importantly, as she scanned all the strange and foreign faces, she wondered if Caleb could be waiting among them.

She scanned the crowd desperately, hoping, trying to convince herself that Caleb, or maybe Sam, could be among them. She looked every which way, but after several minutes, she realized they simply were not here.

Caitlin took several steps out, into the square, and then turned and faced the church, hoping that perhaps she would recognize its façade, and that it would give her a hint as to where she was.

It did. She was hardly an expert on architecture, or history, or churches, but some things she knew. Some places were so obvious, so etched into the public consciousness, that she was sure she could recognize them. And this was one of those.

She was standing before the Notre Dame.

She was in Paris.

It was a place she could not mistake for any other. Its three huge front doors, ornately carved; the dozens of small statues above them; its elaborate façade reaching hundreds of feet into the sky. It was one of the most recognizable places on earth. She had seen it online before, many times. She couldn't believe it: she was really in Paris.

Caitlin had always wanted to go to Paris, had always begged her mother to take her. When she had a boyfriend once, in high school, she had always hoped he'd take her there. It was a place she had always dreamed of going, and it took her breath away that she was actually here. And in another century.

Caitlin felt herself get jostled in the thickening crowd, and she suddenly looked down and took stock of her clothes. She was mortified to see that she was still dressed in the simple prison garb that Kyle had given her in the Colosseum in Rome. She wore a canvas tunic, rough against her skin, crudely cut, way too big for her, tied over her torso and legs with a piece of rope. Her hair was matted, unwashed, in her face. She looked like an escaped prisoner, or a vagabond.

Feeling more anxious, Caitlin again looked for Caleb, for Sam, for anyone she recognized, anyone that could help her. She had never felt more alone, and she wanted nothing more than to lay her eyes on them, to know that she did not come back to this place by herself, to know that everything would be all right.

But she recognized no one.

Maybe I am the only one, she thought. *Maybe I am really on my own again*.

The thought of it pierced her stomach like a knife. She wanted to curl up, to crawl back and hide in the church, to be sent to some other time, to some other place – any place where she could wake up and see someone she knew.

But she toughened herself. She knew there was no retreat, no option but to move forward. She'd just have to be brave, to find her way in this time and place. There was simply no other choice.

* * *

Caitlin had to get away from the crowd. She needed to be alone, to rest, to feed, to think. She had to figure out where to go, where to look for Caleb, and if he was even here. Just as important, she had to figure out why she was in the city, and in this time. She didn't even know what year it was.

A person brushed passed her, and Caitlin reached out and grabbed his arm, overwhelmed with a sudden desire to know.

He turned and looked at her, startled at being stopped so abruptly.

"I'm sorry," she said, realizing how dry her throat was, and how ragged she must have appeared, as she uttered her first words, "but what year is it?"

She was embarrassed even as she asked it, realizing that she must have seemed crazy.

"Year?" the confused man asked back.

"Um… I'm sorry, but I can't seem to… remember."

The man looked her up and down, then slowly shook his head, as if deciding there was something wrong with her.

"It's 1789, of course. And we're not even close to New Year's, so you really have no excuse," he said, shaking his head derisively, and marching off.

1789. The reality of those numbers raced through Caitlin's mind. She recalled that she had last been in the year 1791. Two years. Not that far off.

Yet, she was in Paris now, an entirely different world than Venice. Why here? Why now?

She racked her brain, trying desperately to remember her history classes, to remember what had happened in France in 1789. She was embarrassed to realize that she couldn't. She kicked herself once again for not paying closer attention in class. If she had known back in high school that she'd one day be traveling back in time, she'd have studied her history through the night, and would have made an effort to memorize everything.

It didn't matter now, she realized. Now, she was a *part* of history. Now, she had a chance to change it, and to change herself. The past, she realized, could be changed. Just because certain events had happened in the history books, it didn't mean that she, traveling back, couldn't change them now.

In a sense, she already had: her appearance here, in this time, would affect everything. That, in turn, could, in its own small way, change the course of history.

It made her feel the importance of her actions all the more. The past was hers to create again.

Taking in her elegant surroundings, Caitlin began to relax a bit, and even to feel a bit encouraged. At least she had landed in a beautiful place, in a beautiful city, and in a beautiful time. This was hardly the stone age, after all, and it was not like she had appeared in the middle of nowhere. Everything around her looked immaculate, and the people were all dressed so nicely, and the cobblestone streets shined in the torchlight. And the one thing she did remember about Paris in the 18th century was that it was a luxurious time for France, a time of great wealth, one in which kings and queens still ruled.

Caitlin realized that the Notre Dame was on a small island, and she felt the need to get off it. It was just too crowded here, and she needed some peace. She spotted several small foot bridges leading off it, and headed towards one. She allowed herself to hope that maybe Caleb's presence was leading her in a particular direction.

As she walked over the river, she saw how beautiful the night was in Paris, lit by the torchlight all along the river, and by the full moon. She thought of Caleb, and wished he was by her side to enjoy the sight with her.

As she walked across the bridge, looking down at the water, memories overcame her. She thought of Pollepel, of the Hudson River at night, of the way the moon lit up the river. She had a sudden urge to leap off the bridge, to test her wings, to see if she could fly again, and to soar high above it.

But she felt weak, and hungry, and as she leaned back, she couldn't even feel the presence of her wings at all. She worried if the trip back in time had affected her abilities, her powers. She didn't feel nearly as strong as she once had. In fact, she felt nearly human. Frail. Vulnerable. She didn't like the feeling.

After Caitlin crossed the river, she walked down side streets, wandering for hours, hopelessly lost. She walked through twisting, turning streets, further and further from the river, heading north. She was amazed by the city. In some respects, it felt similar to Venice and Florence in 1791. Like those cities, Paris was still the same, even to the way it appeared in the 21st century. She had never been here, but she had seen photos, and she was shocked to recognize so many buildings and monuments.

The streets here, too, were mostly cobblestone, filled with horse and carriages, or the occasional horse with a lone rider. People walked in elaborate costumes, strolling leisurely, with all the time in the world. Like those cities, there was no plumbing here either, and Caitlin couldn't help noticing the waste in the streets, and recoiling at the awful stench in the summer heat. She wished she still had one of those small potpourri bags that Polly had given her in Venice.

But unlike those other cities, Paris was a world unto itself. The streets were wider here, the buildings were lower, and they were more beautifully designed. The city felt older, more precious, more beautiful. It was also less crowded: the further she went from the Notre Dame, the fewer people she saw. Maybe it was just because it was late at night, but the streets felt nearly empty.

She walked and walked, her legs and feet growing weary, searching around every corner for any sign of Caleb, any clue that might lead her in a special direction. There was nothing.

Every twenty blocks or so the neighborhood changed, and the feeling changed, too. As she headed further and further north, she found herself ascending a hill, in a new district, this one with narrow alleyways, and several bars. As she passed by a corner bar, she saw a man sprawled out, drunk, unconscious against the wall. The street was completely empty, and for a moment, Caitlin was overcome by the worst hunger pang. She felt like it was tearing her stomach in half.

She saw the man lying there, zoomed in on his neck, and saw the blood pulsing within it. At that moment, she wanted more than anything to descend on him, to feed. The feeling was beyond an urge – it was more like a command. Her body screamed at her to do it.

It took every last ounce of Caitlin's will to look away. She would rather die of starvation than hurt another human.

She looked around and wondered if there were a forest near here, a place she could hunt. While she had seen some occasional dirt roads and parks in the city, she hadn't seen anything like a forest.

At just that moment, the door to the bar burst open, and a man stumbled out of it – thrown out, actually – by one of the wait staff. He cursed and screamed at them, clearly drunk.

Then he turned and set his sights on Caitlin.

He was well built, and he looked at Caitlin with ill intent.

She felt herself tense up. She wondered again, desperately, whether any of her powers remained.

She turned and walked away, walking faster, but she sensed the man following her.

Before she could turn, a second later, he grabbed her from behind, in a bear hug. He was faster and stronger than she had imagined, and she could smell his awful breath over her shoulder.

But the man was also drunk. He stumbled, even as he held her, and Caitlin focused, remembered her training, and sidestepped and swept him, using one of the fighting techniques that Aiden had taught her on Pollepel. The man went flying, landing on his back.

Caitlin suddenly had a flashback to Rome, of the Colosseum, of fighting on the stadium floor while being charged by multiple fighters. It was so vivid, for a moment, she forgot where she was.

She snapped out of it just in time. The drunk man got up, stumbled, and charged her again. Caitlin waited to the last second, then sidestepped, and he went flying, falling flat on his own face.

He was dazed, and before he could get up again, Caitlin hurried to get away. She was glad she had got the best of him, but the incident shook her. It worried her that she was still having flashbacks of Rome. She also hadn't felt her supernatural strength. She still felt as frail as a human. The thought of that, more than anything else, scared her. She was truly on her own now.

Caitlin looked all around, starting to feel frantic with worry about where to go, about what to do next. Her legs burned from the walking, and she began to feel a sense of despair.

That was when she saw it. She looked up, and saw before her a huge hill. On top of that, sat a large, medieval abbey. For some reason she couldn't explain, she felt drawn to it. The hill was daunting, but she didn't see what other choice she had.

Caitlin hiked up the entire hill, more tired than she'd just about ever been, and wishing she could fly.

She finally reached the front doors of the abbey, and looked up at the massive, oak doors. This place looked ancient. She marveled at the fact that, though it was 1789, this church had already been around for what looked like thousands of years.

She didn't know why, but she felt drawn here. Seeing nowhere else to go, she got her courage up, and knocked softly.

There was no response.

Caitlin tried the knob and was surprised to find it open. She let herself in.

The ancient door creaked open slowly, and it took a moment for Caitlin's eyes to adjust to the cavernous, dark church. As she surveyed it, she was impressed by the scope and solemnity of the place. It was still late at night, and this simple, austere, church, made entirely of stone, adorned in stained-glass windows, was lit by large candles, everywhere, burning low. At its far end sat a simple altar, around which were placed dozens more candles.

Otherwise, it seemed empty.

Caitlin wondered for a moment what she was doing here. Was there a special reason? Or had her mind just been playing tricks on her?

A side door suddenly opened, and Caitlin spun.

Walking towards her, Caitlin was surprised to see, was a nun – short, frail, dressed in flowing white robes, with a white hood. She walked slowly, and walked right up to Caitlin.

She pulled back her hood, looked up at her and smiled. She had large, shining blue eyes, and seemed too young to be a nun. As she smiled wide, Caitlin could feel the warmth coming off of her. She also sensed that she was one of hers: a vampire.

“Sister Paine,” the nun said softly. “It is an honor to have you.”

Chapter Two

Her world felt surreal as the nun led Caitlin through the abbey, down a long corridor. It was a beautiful place, and it was clear that it was actively lived in, with nuns in white robes walking about, getting ready, it seemed, for the morning services. One of them swung a decanter as she went, spreading delicate incense, while others were chanting soft morning prayers.

After several minutes of walking in silence, Caitlin began to wonder where the nun was leading her. Finally, they stopped before a single door. The nun opened it, revealing a small, humble room, with a view overlooking Paris. It reminded Caitlin of the room she'd stayed in in that cloister in Siena.

"On the bed, you'll find a change of clothing," the nun said. "There is a well in which to bathe, in our courtyard," she said. She pointed, "and that is for you."

Caitlin followed her finger and saw a small, stone pedestal in the corner of the room, on which sat a silver goblet, filled with a white liquid. The nun smiled back.

"You have everything you need here for a fresh night's sleep. After that, the choice is yours to make."

"Choice?" Caitlin asked.

"I am told that you have one key already. You will need to find the other three. The choice, though, of whether to fulfill your mission and continue on your journey is always yours."

"This is for you."

She reached out and handed Caitlin a cylindrical, silver case, covered in jewels.

"It is a letter from your father. Just for you. We have been guarding it for centuries. It has never been opened."

Caitlin took it in awe, feeling its weight in her hand.

"I do hope that you will continue with your mission," she said softly. "We need you, Caitlin."

The nun suddenly turned to go.

"Wait!" Caitlin yelled out.

She stopped.

"I'm in Paris, correct? In 1789?"

The woman smiled back. "That is correct."

"But why? Why am I here? Why now? Why this place?"

"I'm afraid that is for you to find out. I am but a simple servant."

"But why was I drawn to this church?"

"You are in the Abbey of Saint Peter. In Montmartre," the woman said. "It has been here for thousands of years. It is a very sacred place."

"Why?" Caitlin pressed.

"This was the place in which everyone met to take their vows for the founding of the Society of Jesus. It is in this place that Christianity was born."

Caitlin stared back, speechless, and the nun finally smiled and said, "Welcome."

And with that, she bowed slightly, and walked away, closing the door gently behind her.

Caitlin turned and surveyed the room. She was grateful for the hospitality, for the change of clothes, for the chance to bathe, for the comfortable bed that she saw lying in the corner. She didn't think she could take one more step. In fact, she was so tired, she felt like she could sleep forever.

Holding the bejeweled case, she walked to the corner of the room, and set it down. The scroll could wait. But her hunger couldn't.

She lifted the overflowing goblet and examined it. She could already sense what it contained: white blood.

She put it to her lips and drank. It was sweeter than red blood and went down more easily – and it ran through her veins faster. Within moments, she felt reborn, and stronger than she'd ever had. She could have drank forever.

Caitlin finally set down the empty goblet, and took the silver case with her to bed. She lay down, and realized how sore her legs were. It felt so good to just lay there.

She leaned back and rested her head against the small, simple pillow, and closed her eyes, just for a second. She was resolved to open them in just a moment, and read her father's letter.

But the moment her eyes closed, an incredible exhaustion overcame her. She couldn't open them again if she tried. Within seconds, she was fast asleep.

* * *

Caitlin stood on the floor of the Roman Colosseum, dressed in full battle gear, holding a sword. She was ready to challenge whoever attacked her – indeed, felt the urge to fight. But as she spun around, in every direction, she saw that the stadium was empty. She looked up at the rows of seats, and saw that the entire place was vacant.

Caitlin blinked, and when she opened her eyes, she was no longer in the Colosseum, but rather in the Vatican, in the Sistine Chapel. She still held her sword, but now was dressed in robes.

She looked about the room and saw hundreds of vampires, lined up neatly, dressed in white robes, with glowing blue eyes. They stood patiently along the wall, silent, at perfect attention.

Caitlin dropped her sword in the empty chamber, and it landed with a clink. She walked slowly towards the head priest, reached out, and took from him a huge silver goblet, filled with white blood. She drank, and the liquid overflowed and poured down her cheeks.

Suddenly, Caitlin found herself alone in the desert. She was walking barefoot on the baked dirt, the sun beating down her, and she held a gigantic key in her hand. But the key was so big – unnaturally big – and the weight of it was pulling her down.

She walked and walked, gasping for air in the heat, until finally, she came to a huge mountain. At the top of that mountain, she saw a man standing there, looking down, smiling.

She knew it was her father.

Caitlin broke into a sprint, running for all she was worth, trying to make it up the mountain, getting closer and closer to him. As she did, the sun grew higher, hotter in the sky, bearing down on her, seeming to come from right behind her father himself. It was as if he were the sun, and she were heading right into it.

Her ascent grew hotter, higher, and she gasped for breath as she got close. He stood with his arms are outstretched, waiting to embrace her.

But the hill became steeper and she was just too tired. She couldn't go any further. She collapsed where she was.

Caitlin blinked, and when she opened her eyes, she saw her father standing over her, leaning down, a warm smile on his face.

"Caitlin," he said. "My daughter. I'm so proud of you."

She tried to reach out, to hold him, but the key was now on top of her, and it was too heavy, pinning her down.

She looked up at him, trying to talk, but her lips were cracked and her throat was too parched.

"Caitlin?"

"Caitlin?"

Caitlin opened her eyes with a start, disoriented.

She looked up, and saw a man sitting on her bedside, looking down at her, smiling.

He reached over, and gently brushed the hair out of her eyes.

Was this still a dream? She felt the cool sweat on her forehead, felt his touch on her wrist, and she prayed that it was not.

Because there before her, smiling down, was the love of her life.

Caleb.

Chapter Three

Sam opened his eyes with a start. He was staring up at the sky, looking up the trunk of an enormous oak tree. He blinked several times, wondering where he was.

He felt something soft on his back, and it felt very comfortable, and he looked over and realized he was lying on a patch of moss on the forest floor. He looked back up, and saw dozens of trees high above him, swaying in the wind. He heard a gurgling sound, and looked over, and saw a stream trickling by, just a few feet from his head.

Sam sat up and looked around, glancing in every direction, taking it all in. He was deep in the woods, alone, the only light coming in through the tree branches. He checked himself and saw that he was fully dressed, in the same battle gear he had been wearing in the Colosseum. It was quiet here, the only sound being that of the stream, of the birds, and of some distant animals.

Sam realized, with relief, that the time travel had worked. He was clearly in some other place and time – although where and when that was, he had no idea.

Sam slowly checked his body, and realized he'd sustained no major injuries, and that he was all in one piece. He felt a terrible hunger gnawing at his stomach, but he could live with that. First, he had to figure out where he was.

He reached down, feeling to see if he had any weaponry on him.

Unfortunately, none of it had made the trip. He was on his own again, left to the devices of just his own bare hands.

He wondered if he still carried a vampire's power. He could feel an unnatural strength still coursing through his veins, and it felt like he had. But then again, he couldn't be sure until the time came.

And that time came sooner than he thought.

Sam heard the snap of a branch, and turned to see a large bear hulking towards him, slowly, aggressively. He froze. It glowered at him, raised its fangs, and snarled.

A second later, it broke into a sprint, charging right for him.

There was no time for Sam to run, and nowhere for him to run to. He had no choice, he realized, but to confront this animal.

But strangely enough, instead of being overcome by fear, Sam felt rage course through him. He was furious at the animal. He resented being attacked, especially before he even had a chance to get his bearings. So, without thinking, Sam charged, too, preparing to meet the bear in battle, the same way he would a human.

Sam and the bear met in the middle. The bear lunged for him, and Sam lunged right back. Sam felt the power coursing through his veins, felt it telling him that he was invincible.

As he met the bear in mid-air, he realized that he was right. He caught the bear by its shoulders, grabbed on, spun and threw it. The bear went flying backwards through the woods, dozens of feet, smashing hard into a tree.

Sam stood there and roared back at the bear, a fierce roar, even louder than the animal's. He felt the muscles and veins bulging in him as he did.

The bear got to its feet slowly, wobbly, and looked at Sam with something like shock. It now hobbled as it walked, and after taking a few tentative steps, it suddenly lowered its head, turned, and ran away.

But Sam wasn't going to let it get away so easy. He was mad now, and he felt like nothing in the world could abate his anger. And he was hungry. The bear would have to pay.

Sam broke into a sprint, and was pleased to find that he was faster than this animal. Within moments, he caught up to it and in a single leap, landed on its back. He leaned back, and sunk his fangs deep into its neck.

The bear howled in agony, bucking wildly, but Sam held on. He sunk his fangs deeper, and within moments, he felt the bear slumped to its knees beneath him. Finally, it stopped moving.

Sam lay on top of it, drinking, feeling its life force course through his veins.

Finally, Sam leaned back and licked his lips, dripping with blood. He'd never felt so refreshed. It was exactly the meal he'd needed.

Sam was just rising back to his feet, when he heard another twig snap.

He looked over, and standing there, in a clearing of the forest, was a young girl, maybe 17, dressed in a thin, all-white material. She stood there, holding a basket, and stared back at him, in shock. Her skin was translucent white, and her long, light brown hair framed large, blue eyes. She was beautiful.

She stared back at Sam, equally transfixed.

He realized that she must be afraid of him, afraid that maybe he would attack her; he realized that he must have looked like an awful sight, on top of a bear, blood in his mouth. He didn't want to scare her.

So he jumped down from the animal, and took several steps towards her.

To his surprise, she didn't flinch, or try to move away. Rather, she just continued to stare at him, unafraid.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you."

She smiled. That surprised him. Not only was she beautiful, but she was truly unafraid. How could that be?

"Of course you're not," she said. "You're one of mine."

It was Sam's turn to be shocked. The second she said it, he knew it to be true. He had sensed something when he'd first seen her, and now he knew. She was one of his. A vampire. That's why she was unafraid.

"Nice takedown," she said, gesturing at the bear. "A little messy, wouldn't you say? Why not go for a deer?"

Sam smiled. Not only was she pretty – she was funny.

"Maybe next time I will," he said back.

She smiled.

"Would you mind telling me what year it is?" he asked. "Or century, at least?"

She just smiled, and shook her head.

"I think I'll leave that for you to find out for yourself. If I told you, it would ruin all the fun, wouldn't it?"

Sam liked her. She was spunky. And he felt at ease around her, as if he'd known her forever.

She took a step forward, and reached out her hand. Sam took it, and loved the feel of her smooth, translucent skin.

"I'm Sam," he said, shaking her hand, holding it for too long.

She smiled wider.

"I know," she said.

Sam was baffled. How could she possibly know? Had he met her before? He couldn't remember.

"I was sent for you," she added.

She suddenly turned and began heading down a forest trail.

Sam hurried to catch up to her, presuming she meant for him to follow. Not looking carefully were he was going, he was embarrassed to find himself trip over a branch; he heard her giggling as he did.

"So?" he prodded. "Aren't you going to tell me your name?"

She giggled again.

"Well, I have a formal name, but I rarely go by it," she said.

Then she turned and faced him, waiting for him to catch up.
“If you must know, everyone calls me Polly.”

Chapter Four

Caleb held open the huge, medieval door, and as he did, Caitlin stepped out of the abbey and took her first steps out into the early morning light. Caleb at her side, she looked out at the breaking dawn. Here, high atop the hill of Montmartre, she was able to look out and see all of Paris stretched before her. It was a beautiful, sprawling city, a mixture of classical architecture and simple houses, of cobblestone streets and dirt roads, of trees and urbanity. The sky blended in a million soft colors, making the city look alive. It was magical.

Even more magical was the hand that she felt slip into hers. She looked over and saw Caleb standing by her side, enjoying the view with her, and she could hardly believe it was real. She could hardly believe it was really him, that they were really here. Together. That he knew who she was. That he remembered her. That he'd found her.

She wondered again if she had truly awakened from a dream, if she were not still sleeping.

But as she stood there, and squeezed his hand tighter, she knew that she was truly awake. She had never felt so overjoyed. She had been running for so long, had come back in time, all these centuries, all this way, just to be with him. Just to make sure he was alive again. When he hadn't remembered her, in Italy, it had crushed her to the depths.

But now that he was here, and alive, and remembered her – and now that he was all hers, single, without Sera around – her heart swelled with new emotion, and with new hope. She had never in her wildest dreams imagined that it could all work out so perfectly, that it could all actually *really* work. She was so overwhelmed, she didn't even know where to begin, or what to say.

Before she could speak, he began.

"Paris," he said, turning to her with a smile. "There are certainly worse places we could be together."

She smiled back.

"My whole life long, I'd always wanted to see it," she answered.

With someone I love, she wanted to add, but stopped herself. It felt like it had been so long since she'd been by Caleb's side, she actually found herself feeling nervous again. In some ways, it felt like she had been with him forever – longer than forever – but in other ways, it felt like she was meeting him again for the first time.

He reached out his hand, palm up.

"Would you see it with me?" he asked.

She reached out and placed her hand into his.

"It's a long walk back down," she said, looking down at the steep hill, leading all the way down, for miles, and sloping into Paris.

"I was thinking of something a bit more scenic," he answered. "Flying."

She rolled back her shoulder blades, trying to feel if her wings were working. She felt so rejuvenated, so restored from that drink, from the white blood – but she still wasn't sure she was able to fly. And she didn't feel ready to leap off a mountain in the hope that her wings would take.

"I don't think I'm ready yet," she said.

He looked at her, and understood.

"Fly with me," he said, then added, with a smile, "just like the old days."

She smiled, came up behind him, and held onto his back and shoulders. His muscular body felt so good in her arms.

He suddenly leapt into the air, so fast, that she barely had time to hang on tight.

Before she knew it, they were flying, she holding onto his back, looking down, resting her head on his shoulder blade. She felt that familiar thrill in her stomach, as they plummeted, coming down low, close to the city, in the sunrise. It was breathtaking.

But none of it was as breathtaking as her being in his arms again, holding him, just being together. She had barely been with him an hour, and already she was praying that they would never be apart again.

* * *

The Paris that they flew over, the Paris of 1789, was in so many ways similar to the pictures of Paris she'd seen in the 21st century. She recognized so many of the buildings, the churches, the steeples, the monuments. Despite its being hundreds of years old, it looked almost exactly like the same city of the 21st century. Like Venice and Florence, so little had changed in just a few hundred years.

But in other ways, it was very different. It was not nearly as built up. Although some roads were paved with cobblestone, still others were dirt. It was not nearly as condensed, and in between buildings there were still clumps of trees, almost like a city built into an encroaching forest. Instead of cars, there were horses, carriages, people walking in the dirt, or pushing carts. Everything was slower, more relaxed.

Caleb dove lower, until they were flying feet above the tops of the buildings. As they cleared the last of them, suddenly, the sky opened, and spread out before them was the Seine River, cutting right through the middle of the city. It glowed yellow in the early morning light, and it took her breath away.

Caleb dove low, flying above it, and she marveled at the beauty of the city, at how romantic it was. They flew over the small island, the Ile de la Cite, and she recognized the Notre Dame beneath her, its huge steeple soaring above everything else.

Caleb dove even lower, just above the water, and the moist river air cooled them on this hot July morning. Caitlin looked out and saw Paris on both sides of the river, as they flew above and below the numerous, small arched foot bridges connecting one side of the river to the other. Then Caleb lifted them up, and over to one side of the river bank, setting them down softly, behind a large tree, out of sight of any passersby.

She looked around and saw that he had brought them to an enormous, formal park and garden, which seemed to stretch for miles, right alongside the river.

"The Tuileries," Caleb said. "The very same garden of the 21st century. Nothing has changed. It's still the most romantic place in Paris."

With a smile, he reached out and took her hand. They began strolling together, down a path which wound its way through the garden. She had never felt so happy.

There were so many questions she was burning to ask him, so many things that she was dying to say to him, she hardly knew where to begin. But she had to start somewhere, so she figured she'd just start with what was most recently on her mind.

"Thank you," she said, "for Rome. For the Colosseum. For saving me," she said. "If you hadn't had arrived when you did, I don't know what would have happened."

She turned and looked at him, suddenly unsure. "Do you remember?" she asked worriedly.

He turned and looked at her, and nodded, and she saw that he did. She was relieved. At least, finally, they were on the same page. Their memories were back. That alone meant the world to her.

"But I didn't save you," he said. "You handled yourself quite well without me. On the contrary, you saved me. Just being with you – I don't know what I would do without you," he said.

As he squeezed her hand, she felt her entire world slowly become restored within her.

As they ambled through the gardens, she gazed in wonder at all the varieties of flowers, the fountains, the statues… It was one of the most romantic places she'd ever been.

"And I'm sorry," she added.

He looked at her, and she was afraid to say it.

"For your son."

His face darkened, and as he looked away, she saw genuine grief flash across it.

Stupid, she thought. *Why do you always have to go and ruin the moment? Why couldn't you have waited for some other time?*

Caleb swallowed and nodded, too overcome with grief to even speak.

"And I'm sorry about Sera," Caitlin added. "I never meant to get between the two of you."

"Don't be sorry," he said. "It had nothing to do with you. It was between her and I. We were never meant to be together. It was wrong from the start."

"Well, finally, I've been wanting to tell you that I'm sorry for what happened in New York," she added, feeling relieved to get it off her chest. "I would have never stabbed if I knew that it was you. I swear, I thought you were someone else, shapeshifting. I never in a million years thought it was really you."

She felt herself tear up at the thought of it.

He stopped and looked at her, and held her shoulders.

"None of that matters now," he said, earnestly. "You came back to save me. And I know that you did so at great expense. It might not have even worked. And you risked your life for me. And gave up our child for me," he said, looking down again in momentary grief. "I love you more than I can say," he said, still looking at the ground.

He looked at her with wet eyes.

At that moment, they kissed. She felt herself melting into his arms, felt her entire world relax, as they kissed for what felt like forever. It was the greatest moment she had ever had with him, and in some ways, she felt like she was getting to know him for the first time.

Finally, slowly, they pulled out of it, looking deeply into each other's eyes.

Then they both looked away, demurely, took each other's hands, and continued their walk through the gardens, alongside the river. She looked at how beautiful, how romantic Paris was, and realized that at that moment, all of her dreams were coming true. This was all she'd ever wanted out of life. To be with someone who loved her – who *really* loved her. To be in such a beautiful city, such a romantic place. To feel like she could have a life ahead of her.

Caitlin felt the bejeweled case in her pocket, and resented it. She didn't want to open it. She loved her father very much, but she didn't want to read a letter from him. She knew right then that she didn't want to continue on this mission any longer. She didn't want to risk having to go back in time again, or to have to find any other keys. She just wanted to be here, in this time, in this place, with Caleb. In peace. She didn't want anything to change. She was determined to do whatever she had to to guard their precious time together, to truly keep them together. And a part of her felt that that meant giving up the mission.

She turned and faced him. She was nervous to tell him, but she felt that she had to.

"Caleb," she said, "I don't want to search anymore. I realize I have a special mission, that I need to help others, that I need to find the Shield. And it may sound selfish, and I'm sorry if it does. But I just want to be with you. That's what's most important to me now. To stay in this time, and in this place. I have a feeling that if we continue to search, we'll end up in another time, in another place. And that we might not be together next time…" Caitlin broke off, and realized she was crying.

She took a deep breath in the silence. She wondered what he thought of her, and hoped that he didn't disapprove.

"Can you understand?" she asked, tentatively.

He stared off into the horizon, looking concerned, then finally turned and looked at her. Her own concern mounted.

"I don't want to read my dad's letter, or find any more clues. I just want us to be together. I want things to stay exactly as they are now. I don't want them to change. I hope you don't hate me for that."

"I would never hate you," he said, softly.

"But you don't approve?" she prodded. "You think I should continue with the mission?"

He looked away, but didn't say anything.

"What is it?" she asked. "Are you worried about the others?"

"I guess I should be," he said. "And I am. But I, too, have selfish reasons. I guess… in the back of my mind I was hoping that if we found the Shield, it might somehow help bring my son back to me. Jade."

Caitlin felt a terrible feeling of guilt, as she realized that he equated her giving up the mission with letting his son go forever.

"But it's not that way," she said. "We don't know that if we find the Shield, if it even exists, that it will bring him back. But we do know that if we don't search, we can be together. This is about us. That's what matters most to me." She paused. "Is that what matters most to you?"

He looked off at the horizon, and nodded. But he didn't look at her.

"Or do you only love me because I can help you find the Shield?" she asked.

She was shocked at herself, that she actually had the courage to voice the question. It was a question that had been burning in her mind ever since she'd first met him. Had he only loved her for where she could lead him? Or had he loved her for *her*? Now, she had finally asked it.

Her heart pounded as she waited for the answer.

Finally, he turned and looked deeply into her eyes. He reached up, and slowly stroked her cheek with the back of his hand.

"I love you for *you*," he said. "And I always have. And if being with you means giving up the search for the Shield, then that is what I will do. I want to be with you, too. I want to search, yes. But you are much more important to me now."

Caitlin smiled, feeling in her heart something she hadn't felt in forever. A sense of peace, of stability. Nothing could stand in their way now.

He brushed the hair from her face, and broke into a smile.

"It's funny," he said, "I lived here once before. Centuries ago. Not in Paris, but in the country. It was a small castle. I don't know if it still exists. But we can search."

She smiled, and he suddenly hoisted her onto his back, and leapt into the air. Within moments, they were flying, high up above Paris, and heading into the country, to search for his home.

Their home.

Caitlin had never been so happy.

Chapter Five

Sam was having a hard time keeping up with Polly as she walked. She talked so fast, and never seemed to stop, racing from one thought to the next. He was still discombobulated from the time travel, from this new place – he needed to process it all.

But they had been walking for nearly half an hour, he tripping over twigs as he followed her through the forest at her brisk pace, and she hadn't stopped talking. He'd barely been able to get a word in. She went on and on about "the palace" and "the court" and about her coven members and an upcoming concert, and a man named Aiden. He had no idea what she was talking about, or why she'd been looking for him – or even where she was taking him. He was determined to get some answers.

"… of course, it's not exactly a dance," Polly was saying, "but still, it's going to be an amazing event – but I'm not quite sure what I'll wear. There are so many options, not enough for a formal event like this – "

"*Please*!" Sam said finally, as she bounced along merrily through the forest, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but I have questions for you. Please. I need answers."

She finally stopped talking, and he breathed a sigh of relief. She looked at him with something like wonder, as if she were totally oblivious to the fact that she'd been talking all the while.

"All you need to do is ask!" she said happily. And then, before he could respond, she added, impatiently, "Well? What is it?"

"You said you were sent to get me," Sam said. "By who?"

"That's an easy one," she said, "Aiden."

"Who's that?" Sam asked.

She snickered, "My, you have a lot to learn, don't you? He's only been the mentor of our coven for thousands of years. I'm not sure why he's taken an interest in you, or why he'd send me on such a beautiful day tramping all the way through the forest to get you. The way I see it, you could have found your own way, eventually. Not to mention, I had a *thousand* things to do today, including looking at this new dress and – "

"*Please*," Sam said, trying to hold onto his thought before he lost again. "I really appreciate your coming to get me and all, and I don't want to be disrespectful," he said, "but wherever it is that we're going, I really don't have time. You see, I came back here, in this place and time, for a reason. I need to help my sister. I need to find her – and I don't have time for any side trips."

"Well, I would hardly call this a *side* trip," Polly said. "Aiden is only the most sought after man in all the court. If he's taken an interest in you, it's nothing to throw away," she said. "And whoever it is that you're looking to find, if anyone can point the way, it will be him."

"Then where is it that we're going, exactly? And how much further is it?"

She took several more steps through the forest, and he hurried to catch up, wondering if she'd ever respond, ever give him a straight answer – when, at that moment, the forest suddenly opened up.

She stopped, and he stopped beside her, awestruck.

Before them lay an immense open field, leading, in the distance, to immaculate, formal gardens, the grass cut into elaborate shapes of every size. It was beautiful, like a living work of art.

Even more breathtaking was what lay just beyond the gardens. It was a palace, grander than any structure Sam had seen in his life. The entire building was made of marble, and it stretched as far as he could see in every direction. It was a classical, formal design, with dozens of oversized windows, and a wide, marble staircase leading up to its entrance. He knew that he had seen pictures of this structure somewhere, but he couldn't remember what it was.

"Versailles," Polly said, providing the answer, as if reading his mind.

He looked at her, and she smiled back.

"It's where we live. You are in France. In 1789. And I'm sure that Aiden will let you join us, assuming that Marie allows it."

Sam looked at her, puzzled.

"Marie?" he asked.

She smiled wider, shaking her head. She turned and skipped across the field, towards the palace. As she did, she called out over her shoulder.

"Why, Marie Antoinette, of course!"

* * *

Sam walked at Polly's side, up the endless marble staircase, heading towards the front doors of the palace. As he went, he took in all the sights around him. The magnitude and proportions of this place were astounding. All around him, strolling the grounds, were people he presumed to be royalty, dressed in some of the finest clothing he'd ever seen. He couldn't get over this place. If someone had told him he were dreaming, he would believe them. He had never been in the presence of royalty before.

Polly hadn't stopped talking, and he forced himself to focus on her words. He liked being around her, and enjoyed her company, even if paying attention to her was really hard. He thought she was pretty, too. But there was something about her that made him unsure whether he was really attracted to her, or whether he just liked her as a friend. With his past girlfriends, it had been lust at first sight. With Polly, it was more like a camaraderie.

"You see, the royal family lives here," Polly said, "but we live here, too. They want us here. After all, we're the best protection they have. We live together in what you might call a friendly harmony. It serves us both. With this huge forest, we have unlimited hunting, a great place to live, and great company. And in turn, we help protect the royal family. Not to mention that a few of them are our kind, anyway."

Sam looked at her, surprised.

"Marie Antoinette?" he asked.

Polly nodded slightly, as if trying to keep it a secret, but unable to.

"But don't tell anybody," she said. "There are a few others, too. But most of the Royals are human. They want to be among us. But there are strict rules here, and it's not allowed. It's us and them, and we're not allowed to cross that line. There are certain members of the royal family we don't want to have too much power. And Marie insists on it, too.

"Anyway, this is just the most fabulous place. I can't imagine it ever coming to an end. There's party after party, endless dances, balls, concerts… There's going to be the most fabulous one this week. An opera, actually. I already have my outfit picked out."

As they approached the doors, several servants scurried to open them. The golden doors were massive, and Sam looked at them, awestruck, as he walked through.

Polly marched right down a huge, marble corridor, as if she owned the place, and Sam hurried to keep up. As they walked, Sam looked all around, amazed by the opulence. They walked down endless corridors made of marble, with enormous crystal chandeliers hanging low, reflecting the light off of dozens of gilded mirrors. The sun poured in and reflected the light in every direction.

They went through door after door, and finally entered a huge parlor, made of marble, with columns all around it. Several guards stood at attention as Polly entered.

Polly just giggled, apparently immune to them. "We also get to train here," she said. "Their facilities are the best. Aiden has us on a hard schedule. I'm surprised that he let me break to come get you. You must be pretty important."

"So where is he?" Sam asked. "When will I get to meet him?"

"My, you are impatient, aren't you? He's a very busy man. He might not choose to meet you for some time. Or he might summon you right away. Don't worry, you'll know when he wants to see you. Give it time. In the meantime, I've been asked to show you to your room."

"My room?" Sam asked, surprised. "Wait a second. I didn't say I could stay here. Like I said, I really need to find my sister," Sam began to protest – but at that moment, a huge set of double doors opened before them.

An entourage of royals suddenly entered, surrounding a woman in the middle, who they carried on a royal throne.

They set her down, and as they did, Polly bent low, gesturing for Sam to do the same. He did.

A woman who could have only been Marie Antoinette, slowly got down, took several steps towards them, and stopped right before Sam, gesturing for him to rise. He did.

She looked Sam up and down, as if he were an object of interest.

"So, you're the new boy," she said, expressionless. Her green eyes burned with an intensity he'd never seen, and he could, indeed, sense that she was one of theirs.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, she nodded. "Interesting."

With that, she walked right past them, and her entourage quickly followed.

But one person lingered behind, clearly one of the royals. She looked to be about 17, and was dressed in a royal blue, velvet gown, from head to toe. She had the fairest skin that Sam had ever seen, set against long, curly blonde hair, and piercing aqua eyes. She fixed them right on Sam, locking them onto his.

He felt helpless in her gaze, unable to look anywhere else.

She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

After several seconds, she took a step forward, and stared even closer into his eyes. She reached out her hand, palm down, clearly expecting him to kiss it. She moved slowly, proudly.

Sam took her hand, and was electrified at the touch of her skin. He pulled her fingertips close, and kissed them.

"Polly?" the girl said. "Aren't you going to introduce us?"

It wasn't a question. It was a command.

Polly cleared her throat, reluctantly.

"Kendra, Sam," she said. "Sam, Kendra."

Kendra, Sam thought, staring into her eyes, taken aback by how aggressively she stared back at him, as if he were already her property.

"Sam," she echoed, smiling. "A bit simple. But I like it."

Chapter Six

Kyle smashed through the stone sarcophagus with a single punch. It smashed into a million bits, and he walked right out of the standing coffin, on his feet, and ready for action.

He wheeled and looked about, ready to fight anyone who approached. In fact, he was hoping that someone approached him for a fight. This time travel had been particularly annoying, and he was ready to let his rage out on someone.

But as he looked around, to his disappointment, he saw that the chamber was empty. It was just him.

Slowly, his rage began to cool. At least he'd landed in the right place, and he could already sense, the right time. He knew that he was more of a veteran of time travel than Caitlin, and he could place himself more specifically. He looked around, and to his satisfaction, saw that he landed exactly where he'd wanted to be: Les Invalides.

Les Invalides was a place he'd always loved, one that had been important to the more evil of his kind. A mausoleum, deep underground, it was made of marble, beautifully adorned, sarcophagi lining its walls. The building had a cylindrical shape, with a soaring, hundred foot ceiling, culminating in a dome. It was a somber place, the perfect resting place for all of France's elite soldiers. It was also the place, Kyle knew, that Napoleon would one day be buried.

But not yet. It was only 1789, and Napoleon, that little bastard, was still alive. One of Kyle's favorites of his own kind. He would be about 20 years old now, Kyle realized, still starting his career. He wouldn't be buried in this place for some time to come. Of course, being of his race, Napoleon's burial was just a ruse, just a way to let the human masses think he was one of theirs.

Kyle smiled at the thought of it. Here he was, in Napoleon's final resting place, before Napoleon had even "died." He would look forward to seeing him again, to reminiscing about old times. He was, after all, one of few people of his kind that Kyle semi-respected. But he was also an arrogant little bastard. Kyle would have to slap him into shape.

Kyle walked slowly across the marble floor, footsteps echoing, and checked himself. He had seen better days. He had lost one eye from that horrible little child, Caleb's son, and his face was still disfigured from what Rexius had done to him back in New York. If that weren't enough, he now had a large wound in his cheek from the spear that Sam had hurled at him in the Colosseum. He was a wreck, he knew.

But he also kind of liked it. He was a survivor. He was alive, and no one had been able to stop him. And he was madder than ever. Not only was he determined to stop Caitlin and Caleb from finding the Shield, but now he was determined to make them both pay. To make them suffer, just as he had suffered. Sam was on his list now, too. All three of them – he would stop at nothing until he tortured each of them slowly.

With a few leaps, Kyle bounded up the marble staircase, and into the upper level of the tomb. He circled around, walking down to the end of the chapel, beneath the huge dome, and reached behind the altar. He felt its limestone wall, searching.

Finally, he found what he was looking for. He pushed a hidden latch, and a secret compartment opened. He reached in, and pulled out a long, silver sword, its hilt encrusted with jewels. He held it up to the light, and studied it with satisfaction. Just as he remembered it.

He slung it over his back, turned, and headed down the corridor, reaching the front door. He leaned back, and with one huge kick, the large oak door when flying off its hinges, the crash of it echoing throughout the empty building. Kyle felt satisfied that he had his full strength back already.

Kyle saw that it was still night, and he relaxed. If he wanted to, he could fly through the night, head right for his target – but he wanted to savor his time. Paris in 1789 was a special place. It was still, he remembered, rife with prostitutes, alcoholics, gamblers, criminals. Despite the nice veneer

and architecture, there lived an underbelly that was long and wide. He loved it. The town was his for the taking.

Kyle lifted his chin, listening, sensing, closing his eyes. He could sense Caitlin's presence strongly in this city. And Caleb's. Sam, he wasn't so sure about, but he knew that at least the two of them were here. That was good. Now all he had to do was find them. He would come upon them by surprise, and, he imagined, kill them both quite easily. Paris was a much simpler place. There was no grand vampire Council, like in Rome, that he had to answer to. Even better, there was a strong evil coven here, led by Napoleon. And Napoleon owed him.

Kyle decided that his first order of business would be to track down the little runt and make him reciprocate. He would enlist all of Napoleon's men to do whatever they could to track down Caitlin and Caleb. He knew Napoleon's men could be useful if he should run into resistance. He would leave nothing to chance this time.

But he still had time. He could feed first, and get both his feet planted firmly on the ground. Plus, his plan here was already set in motion. Before he'd left Rome, he'd tracked down his old sidekick, Sergei, and had sent him back here ahead of him. If all had gone as planned, Sergei was here already, and hard at work executing their mission, infiltrating Aiden's coven. Kyle smiled wide. There was nothing he loved more than a traitor, than a little weasel like Sergei. He had become a most useful plaything.

Kyle bounded down the steps like a schoolboy, filled with joy, ready to plunge right into the city, to take whatever he wanted.

As Kyle headed down the street, a street artist approached him, holding out a canvas and brush, gesturing for Kyle to allow him to paint his picture. If there was anything Kyle hated, it was someone wanting to draw his picture. He was in such a good mood, though, he decided to let the man live.

But when the man pressed his case, following Kyle aggressively, thrusting his canvas towards him, he pushed it too far. Kyle reached over, grabbed his brush, and jabbed it right between the man's eyes. A second later, the man dropped dead.

Kyle took the canvas and tore it up over his corpse.

Kyle continued on, quite happy with himself. This was already turning out to be a great night.

As he turned down a cobblestone alley, heading into the district he remembered, everything began to feel familiar again. Several prostitutes lined the streets, beckoning him. At the same time, two large men stumbled out of a bar, clearly drunk, and bumped hard into Kyle, not looking where they were going.

"Hey, you jerk!" one of them yelled at him.

The other turned to Kyle. "Hey, one-eye!" he yelled. "Watch where you're going!"

The big man reached out to give Kyle a hard shove to the chest.

But his eyes opened wide in surprise when his shove didn't work. Kyle hadn't been budged at all; it had been like pushing a stone wall.

Kyle shook his head slowly, amazed at the stupidity of these men. Before they could react, he reached back over his shoulder, extracted his sword with a cling, and in one motion, swung it, chopping off both their heads in a fraction of a second.

He watched with satisfaction as their heads rolled, and both of their bodies began to slump to the ground. He put back his sword, and reached out and pulled a headless corpse to him. He sunk his long fangs right into the open neck, and drank hardily as the blood squirted.

Kyle could hear the screaming of the prostitutes erupt all around him, as they saw what had happened. This was followed by the sound of doors slamming, window shutters closing.

The whole town was already scared of him, he realized.

Good, he thought. This was the sort of welcome he loved.

Chapter Seven

Caitlin and Caleb flew away from Paris, over the French countryside in the early morning, she holding tightly onto his back as he cut through the air. She felt stronger now, and felt that if she wanted to fly, she could. But she didn't want to let go of him. She loved the feel of his body. She just wanted to hold him, to feel what it was like to be together again. She knew it was crazy, but after being apart for so long, she had a fear that if she let him go, he might fly away forever.

Beneath them, the landscape was ever-changing. Pretty quickly the city fell away and the landscape shifted to dense woods and rolling hills. Closer to the city, there were occasional houses, farms. But the further they got, the more the land opened. They passed field after field, rolling meadows, an occasional farm, sheep grazing. Smoke rose from chimneys, and she guessed that people were cooking. Clotheslines spread out over lawns, and sheets hung from them. It was an idyllic scene, and the July temperature had dropped just enough so that the cooler air, especially up this high, was refreshing.

After hours of flying, they rounded a bend, and the new view took Caitlin's breath away: there, on the horizon, sat a shimmering sea, vibrant blue, its waves smashing into an endless, pristine shoreline. As they got closer, the elevation rose, and rolling hills went right up to the shoreline.

Nestled in the rolling hills, amidst the tall grass, she saw a single building set against the horizon. It was a glorious, medieval castle, designed of an antique limestone, covered in ornate sculptures and gargoyles. It was nestled high on a hill, overlooking the sea, and surrounded by fields of wildflowers as far as the eye could see. It was breathtakingly beautiful, and Caitlin felt as if she were in a postcard.

Caitlin's heart beat with excitement, as she wondered, as she hoped to dream, that this could be Caleb's place. Somehow, she felt that it was.

"Yes," he called out, over the wind, reading her mind, as always. "This is it."

Caitlin's heart pounded with delight. She was so excited, and felt so strong, she was ready to fly by herself.

She suddenly jumped off of Caleb's back, and went flying through the air. For a moment, she was terrified, wondering if her wings would sprout. A moment later, they did, supporting her in the air.

As the air ran through them, she loved the feeling. It felt great to have them again, to be independent. She rose and dove, swooping up, close to Caleb, who smiled back. They dove down together, then up, swerving in and out of each other's flight paths, the tips of their wings sometimes touching.

As one, they dove down, closer to the castle. It looked ancient; it felt worn in, but not in a bad way. For Caitlin, it already felt like home.

As she took it all in, looked at the landscape, the rolling hills, the distant ocean, for the first time in as long as she could remember, she felt a sense of peace. She felt, finally, like she was home. She saw her life together with Caleb here, living together, even starting a family together again, if that was possible. She would be happy to live out her days here with him – and finally, at long last, she didn't see anything that stood in their way.

* * *

Caitlin and Caleb landed together in front of his castle, and he took her hand and led her to the front door. The oak door was covered in a thick layer of dust and sea salt, and clearly hadn't been opened in years. He tried the knob. It was locked.

"It's been hundreds of years," he said. "I'm pleasantly surprised to find that it's still here, that it hasn't been vandalized – that it's even still locked. There used to be a key…"

He reached up, way above the door frame, and felt the crevice behind the stone arch. He ran his fingers up and down it, and finally stopped, extracting a long, silver skeleton key.

He slipped into the lock, and it fit perfectly. He turned it with a click.

He turned and smiled at her, stepping aside. “You do the honors,” he said.

Caitlin pushed the heavy, medieval door, and it opened slowly, creaking, encrusted salt falling off in clumps as it did.

They walked in together. The entry room was dim, and covered in cobwebs. The air was still and dank, and it felt like it hadn’t been entered in centuries. She looked up at the high, arched stone walls, the stone floors. There were layers of dust on everything, including the glass windows, which blocked a lot of the light, making it seem darker than it was.

“This way,” Caleb said.

He took her hand and led her down a narrow corridor, and it opened up into a grand hall, with high, arched windows on both sides. It was much lighter in here, even with the dust. There was some furniture left over in here, too: a long, medieval oak table, surrounded by ornate, wooded chairs. At its center sat a huge, marble mantel, one of the largest fireplaces Caitlin had ever seen. It was incredible. Caitlin felt as if she had walked right back into the Cloisters.

“I had it built in the 12th century,” he said, looking around himself. “Back then, this was the style.”

“You lived here?” Caitlin asked.

He nodded.

“For how long?”

He thought. “Not more than a century,” he said. “Maybe two.”

Caitlin marveled, once again, at the huge increments of time in the vampire world.

Suddenly, though, she got worried, as she thought of something else: had he lived here with another woman?

She was afraid to ask.

He suddenly turned and looked at her.

“No, I did not,” he said. “I lived here alone. I assure you. You’re the first woman I’ve ever taken here.”

Caitlin felt relieved, though embarrassed at his reading her mind.

“Come on,” he said. “This way.”

He led her up a spiral stone staircase, and it twisted and turned, and let them out on the second floor. This floor was much brighter, with large, arched windows facing every direction, sunlight pouring in, reflecting the distant sea. The rooms were smaller here, more intimate. There were more marble fireplaces, and as Caitlin wandered from room to room, she saw a huge four-poster bed dominating one of them. Chaise lounges and overstuffed velvet chairs, were spread throughout the other rooms. There were no rugs, just a bare stone floor. It was very stark. But beautiful.

He led her across the room, to a set of huge, glass doors. They’d been covered in so much dust, she hadn’t even known they were there. He stepped up and tugged hard at the locks and knobs, and finally, with a bang and a cloud of dust, they opened.

He stepped outside, and Caitlin followed.

They stepped out onto a huge, stone terrace, framed by an ornate limestone, column railing. They walked together up to the edge, and looked out.

From here, they had a commanding view of the entire countryside, of the ocean. Caitlin could hear the crashing of the waves, and smell the sea heavy in the air on the rolling breezes. She felt like she were in heaven.

If Caitlin had ever imagined a dream house, this would definitely be it. It was dusty, and it needed a woman’s touch, but Caitlin knew that they could fix it up, could get it to the state that it once was. She felt that this was truly a place they could call home together.

"I was thinking about what you said," he said, "the entire flight here. About our building a life together. I would like that very much."

He put an arm around her.

"I would like for you to live here with me. For us to start our life over again. Right here. It's quiet here, and safe, and protected. No one knows about this place. No one will ever find us here. I see no reason why we can't live out our lives safely, as regular people," he said. "Of course, it will need a lot of work to fix it up. But I'm game, if you are."

He turned and smiled at her.

She smiled back. She had never been more game in her life.

More than that, she felt deeply touched that he'd invited her to live with him. Nothing had ever meant more to her. The truth was, she would have lived with them anywhere, even if it was just a hut in the woods.

"I'd love to," she answered. "I just want to be with you."

Her heart pounded as they came together in a kiss, the sound of the waves in the background, the ocean breezes rolling over them.

Finally, everything was perfect in her world again.

* * *

Caitlin had never been so happy as she ambled through the house, going room to room, carrying a washcloth. Caleb had left, had gone out hunting, excited to bring them both home dinner. She was thrilled, because it gave her some time alone to walk through the house, to take it all in, by herself, and to look at it, with a woman's eye, for how she could fix it up and make it a home for them both.

She walked through the rooms, opening windows, letting in the ocean air. She'd found a pail and rag and had gone down to the stream she'd seen running through the backyard, and had returned with an overflowing pail full of water. She'd run the rag through the stream until it was as clean as could be. She'd found a large crate to stand on, and as she opened each of the huge, medieval windows, she stood up on the crate, and wiped each pane. There were a few windows which were simply too high for her to reach, and for these, she activated her wings, fluttering high in the air, and hovering before the windows as she cleaned them.

She was shocked at the immediate difference it made. The room transformed from being dark to being completely flooded with light. There must've been hundreds of years of caked dirt and salt on both sides of the pane. Indeed, just opening each window was a feat in itself, taking all her might to yank them free of rust and debris.

Caitlin looked carefully and was in awe at the craftsmanship of each window. Each window pane was several inches thick, and had the most beautiful design. Some of the glass was stained, some was clear, and some had the slightest tint of color. As she wiped each one down, she could almost feel the house's gratitude, as it slowly, inch by inch, came back to life.

Caitlin finally finished and surveyed it again. She was shocked. What had before been a dark, uninviting room, was now an incredible, sun-filled room, with a view of the ocean.

Caitlin turned to the floors next, getting down on her hands and knees and scrubbing them foot by foot. She watched with satisfaction as inches of dirt came off, and the beautiful, huge stones began to shine through.

After that, she turned to the enormous marble mantelpiece, wiping off years of dust. Then she turned to the huge, ornate mirror above it, wiping it down until it shone. She was bummed that she could still not see her reflection – but she knew there was little she could do about that.

She turned to the chandelier next, wiping each and every one of its crystal laden candle holders. After that, she set her sights on the four-poster bed. She wiped down each of its posts, and then its

frame, slowly bringing back to life the ancient wood. She grabbed the aging blankets and went to the terrace and shook them hard, clouds of dust flying everywhere.

Caitlin returned to the room, her would-be bedroom, and surveyed it: it was now magnificent. It shone as brightly as any room in any castle. It was still medieval, but at least now it was fresh and inviting. Her heart soared at the idea of living here.

She looked down and realized that the water in the bucket had turned completely black, and bounded down the steps and out the door, eager to refill it in the stream.

Caitlin smiled as she thought of what Caleb's reaction would be when he came back. He would be so surprised, she thought. She would clean out the dining room next. She'd try to create an intimate environment in which they could have their first meal together in a new home – the first, she hoped, of many.

As Caitlin arrived at the waterbank, sinking to her knees in the soft grass, emptying and filling the bucket, she suddenly felt her senses on high alert. She heard a rustling noise, close by, and sensed an animal approaching her.

She quickly spun, and was surprised at what she saw.

Approaching her slowly, just feet away, was a wolf pup. Its fur was all white, except for a single streak of gray running down its forehead and back. What struck Caitlin most was its eyes: they stared back at Caitlin as if it knew her. What's more: they were the same eyes as Rose.

Caleb felt her heart pounding. She felt as if Rose had come back from the dead, had been reincarnated in some other animal. That expression, that face. The fur color was different, but otherwise, this could have been Rose reborn.

The wolf pup, too, seemed startled to see Caitlin. It stopped, staring at her, then slowly, cautiously, took a few tentative steps towards her. Caitlin scanned the woods, looking to see if other pups were around, or its mother. She didn't want to end up in a fight.

But there was no other animal anywhere in sight.

As Caitlin examined the pup more closely, she saw why. It was limping badly, blood coming from its paw. It look injured. It had probably been abandoned by its mom, Caitlin realized, left to die.

The wolf pup lowered its head, and walked slowly, right up to Caitlin. Then, to Caitlin's surprise, it lowered its head and rested it in her lap, whining softly as it closed its eyes.

Caitlin's heart leapt. She had missed Rose so badly, and now she felt as if she'd come back to her.

Caitlin set the bucket down, reached out, and took the pup in her arms. She held it close to her chest, crying as she did, remembering all the time she'd spent with Rose. Despite herself, the tears rolled down her cheeks. The pup, as if sensing it, suddenly looked up at her, leaned back, and licked the tears from her face.

Caitlin leaned down and kissed it on its forehead. She held it tight, cuddling it to her chest. There was no way she could let it go. She would do whatever she had to to help it heal and bring it back to life. And, if the wolf wanted, to keep her as a pet.

"What shall I call you?" Caitlin asked. "We can't do Rose again… How about… Ruth?"

The pup suddenly licked Caitlin's cheek, as if responding to the name. That was as definitive an answer as Caitlin could have asked for.

Ruth it was.

* * *

Caitlin, Ruth at her side, had just finished cleaning the dining room, when she spotted something interesting along the wall. There, beside the fireplace, were two long, silver swords. She picked up one of them, dusted it off, and admired the hilt, encrusted with jewels. It was a beautiful

weapon. She set down the rag and pail, and couldn't resist giving it a go. She swung the sword wildly, left and right in circles, switching hands, all throughout the cavernous room. It felt great.

She wondered how many other weapons Caleb had here. She could have a field day training with them.

"I see you found the weapons," Caleb said, suddenly walking in the door. Caitlin immediately set down the sword, self-conscious.

"Sorry, didn't mean to pry into your stuff."

Caleb laughed. "My house is yours," he said, as he walked into the room carrying two huge deer slung over his shoulder. "Whatever I have, you're welcome to. Besides, you're a girl after my own heart. I would have went right for the swords, too," he said with a wink.

He strutted through the room, carrying the deer, then suddenly stopped and turned, doing a double take.

"Wow," he said, in shock. "It looks like a new place!"

He stood there, staring, wide-eyed. Caitlin could see how impressed he was, and she felt happy. She looked at the room herself, and saw that it was indeed transformed. They now had a gorgeous, dining room, replete with table and chairs for their first meal.

Ruth suddenly whined, and Caleb looked down, and saw her for the first time. He looked even more surprised.

Caitlin suddenly worried if he'd mind having the pup here.

But she was relieved to see that his eyes opened wide in delight.

"I can't believe it," Caleb said, staring, "those eyes… she looks just like Rose."

"Can we keep her?" Caitlin asked, hesitantly.

"I'd love to," he answered. "I'd give her a hug, but my hands are full."

Caleb continued with the deer, through the room, and down the corridor. Caitlin and Ruth followed him, and watched him set down the deer in a small room, atop a huge slab of stone.

"Since we don't really cook," he said, "I thought I'd drain the blood for us. Then we could drink together, for dinner. I thought I'd take care of the messy work in here, so we could just sit before the fireplace and drink in style."

"I'd like that," Caitlin said.

Ruth sat at Caleb's heels, looking up and whining as he carved. He laughed, cut a small piece for her, and reached down and fed it to her. She snapped it up and whined for more.

Caitlin headed back to the dining area, and began wiping down the goblets she'd seen. Before the mantle sat a pile of furs, and she gathered them up and took them out to the terrace, shaking them out in preparation.

While Caitlin waited for Caleb to finish, she looked out at the sunset, breaking over the horizon. She could hear the sound of the waves, breathed in the salt air, and had never felt more relaxed. She stood there and closed her eyes, and she wasn't even aware of how much time had passed.

When Caitlin opened her eyes again, it was nearly dark.

"Caitlin?" came the voice, calling out for her.

She turned and hurried back inside. Caleb was already in there, carrying two huge silver goblets of the venison blood. He was in the process of lighting candles, all throughout the dim room. She came over and joined him, setting the furs back down.

Within moments, the room was completely lit, glowing with candlelight in every direction. The two of them sat together on the furs, before the fireplace, and Ruth ran up and set beside them. The windows were open and a breeze wafted through, and it was actually getting cool in here.

The two of them sat beside each other, and looked into each other's eyes as they toasted.

The liquid felt so good. She drank and drank, as he did, and she had never felt so alive. It was an incredible rush.

Caleb looked rejuvenated, too, his eyes and skin shining. They turned and faced each other.

He reached up, and slowly touched her cheek with the back of his hand.

Caitlin's heart started to pound, and she realized she was nervous. It felt like it had been forever since she had last been with him. She had imagined a moment like this for so long, but now that it was here, she felt like it was her first time with him, all over again. She could see that his hand was trembling, and she realized he was nervous, too.

There remained so many things she wanted to say, so many questions she had for him, and she could see that he was brimming with questions, too. But at this moment, she didn't trust herself to speak. And apparently, he didn't either.

The two of them kissed passionately. As his lips met hers, she felt overwhelmed with emotion for him.

She closed her eyes as he came in closer, as they met in a passionate embrace. They rolled onto the furs, and she felt her heart surge with emotion.

Finally, he was hers.

Chapter Eight

Polly strode quickly down the corridors of Versailles, heels echoing on the marble floor, rushing down an endless corridor with soaring ceilings, moldings, marble fireplaces, enormous mirrors, and chandeliers hanging low. Everything shone.

But she barely noticed it; it was second-nature to her. Living here for years, she could hardly imagine any other form of existence.

What she did notice, though – very much – was Sam. A visitor like him was not at all a part of daily life – and, in fact, was most unusual. They hardly ever had vampire visitors, especially from another time, and when they did, Aiden never seemed to care. Sam must be very important, she realized. He intrigued her. He seemed a bit young, and he seemed to be bumble around a bit.

But there was something about him, something she couldn't quite place. She felt like, somehow, she had some connection to him, that she'd met him before, or that he was connected to someone who was important to her.

Which was so strange, because just the night before, she'd had the most vivid dream. About a vampire girl named Caitlin. She could see her face, her eyes, her hair, even now. In the dream, she was told that this girl had been her best friend for life, and throughout the dream, it seemed like they were friends forever. She woke up feeling it was so real, that it was more a meeting than a dream. She couldn't understand it, but she woke up remembering everything about this girl, remembering all the times they'd spent together.

It didn't make any sense, because Polly knew she'd never been to any of those places. She wondered if maybe, somehow, she had been looking into the future? She knew that vampires visited each other in dreams, and that they occasionally had the power to see into the future and the past. But these powers were also unpredictable. It could be a world of illusions. One never knew: was one seeing the future, seeing the past, and was one merely dreaming?

After the dream, Polly had awakened looking for Caitlin, as if she really knew her. She found herself missing her as she walked down the hall. It was crazy. Missing a girl she'd never even met.

And then this boy showed up, Sam. And for some crazy reason, Polly felt his energy to be connected to hers. How, she couldn't possibly know. Was she just imagining that, too?

Aside from all of this, she found herself feeling something for Sam. She wouldn't say that she was head over heels for him. But she was not unattracted to him either. There was something about him. It wasn't the feeling of being in love. It was more a feeling of being… intrigued. Wanting to know more.

Which made her all the more agitated that Kendra had already laid her eyes upon him. Not necessarily that she wanted him for himself. It was way too early for her to know that. But more because he seemed so innocent, naïve, impressionable. And Kendra was a vulture. She was a member of the royal family, one who had never been told No in her life, and she had a magical way of getting whatever she wanted, from whomever she wanted.

Polly had always sensed that Kendra had some sort of sinister agenda. For years, she'd been trying to get every vampire in her coven to turn her. Of course, it was forbidden, and no one would oblige her. But now, she could tell, she'd set her sights on Sam. Fresh blood had arrived, and she was determined to try again. Polly shivered, not liking the idea of what could happen to Sam if Kendra was determined.

Yes, this was certainly an unusual day for her. Her mind swarmed with emotions as she marched down the hall, and she realized she was already late. The new singer everyone had been talking about was giving a private concert for Marie and her entourage. The singer had been here for weeks, and all the other girls were going on about not only his voice, but his looks. She was eager to get a glimpse of

him for herself. Polly had been looking forward to this, and now she was doubly annoyed that she'd come in at the tail end of it.

That was the problem with this place, she thought, as she marched down yet another corridor. It was just too big. It was impossible to get anywhere on time.

Polly stepped up her pace, and finally reached the end of another corridor, and two guards opened the immense double doors for her. She walked right through, and as they closed behind her, she was immediately embarrassed.

The entire room turned and looked at her; as the singer continued his performance, she realized she'd interrupted the concert. Her face reddened, as she sank to the back of the room, taking a seat among her friends.

Everyone turned back slowly, and as they did, she settled in, and realized the concert was almost over.

She looked up, and watched, and as she caught the first glimpse of the singer's face, she was shocked. He was even more gorgeous than everyone had said. He had dark features, with dark eyes and dark, wavy hair. His face was perfectly chiseled. He was so regally dressed, from head to toe, in a black velvet coat, with white stockings, and shiny black shoes. He stood in the center of the small stage, and looked so confident, so in control. He looked like he might be… Russian.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.