

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's face, focusing on the mouth. The person has pale skin and is wearing bright red lipstick. Their mouth is open, revealing two sharp, white fangs. A thick, dark red liquid, presumably blood, is dripping from the lower lip. The background is a solid, deep red color.

book #3 in
the vampire journals

betrayed

morgan rice

Morgan Rice

Betrayed

Серия «Vampire Journals», книга 3

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Аннотация

In BETRAYED (Book #3 in the Vampire Journals), Caitlin Paine awakes from a deep coma to discover she has been turned. Now a true, full-bred vampire, she marvels at her new powers, including her ability to fly, and her superhuman strength. She finds that her true love, Caleb, is still by her side, waiting patiently for her to recover. She has everything she could dream of.

Until it all, suddenly, goes terribly wrong.

Caitlin is horrified to discover Caleb with his ex-wife, Sera, and before Caleb has a chance to explain, Caitlin tells him to leave. Heartbroken, confused, Caitlin wants to curl up and die, her only consolation being in her wolf-pup Rose.

Caitlin also finds consolation in her new surroundings. She finds she has been placed on a hidden island in the Hudson River – Pollepel – amidst an elite coven of teenage vampires, boys and girls alike, 24 in all, including her. She learns that this is a place for outcasts, just like her, and as she meets her new best friend, Polly, and begins her training in elite vampire combat, she realizes that she might finally have a place to call home.

But a major vampire war is looming, and her brother Sam is still out there, kidnapped by Samantha. The evil Kyle, too, now wielding the mythical Sword, is still on the warpath, and he will stop at nothing to wipe out New York. Caitlin, despite her new home, and despite her finding a new love interest in the elusive vampire Blake, knows that she can only stay on this island for so long before her destiny calls. After all, she is still the One, and all eyes still look to her to find her father and the other weapon that might save them all.

Torn between her new friends and her lingering feelings for Caleb, she must come to decide where her true loyalties lie, and whether she is willing to risk it all to try to find Caleb and have him in her life once again...

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Morgan Rice

Betrayed

(Book #3 in the Vampire Journals)

*“Threescore and ten I can remember well,
Within the volume of which time I have seen
Hours dreadful and things strange; but this sore night
Hath trifled former knowings.”*

– William Shakespeare, Macbeth

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Acclaim for the Vampire Journals

"BETRAYED is a great installment for this series. Morgan Rice has really come up with a winner in this series. It is fast paced, filled with action, love, suspense, and intrigue. If you haven't read her first two novels, read them and then get your hands on BETRAYED. I read these books in order, but each of these books are also designed to read individually, so even if you haven't read the first two, pick up BETRAYED. I'm sure you will end up getting the first two – they are all definitely worth a read... or two!"

– *VampireBookSite*

"TURNED is 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*

"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, TURNED is a good start to a new vampire series sure to be a hit with readers who are looking for a light, yet entertaining story.”

– *Black Lagoon Reviews*

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!

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- 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)
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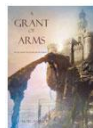
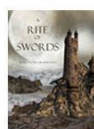
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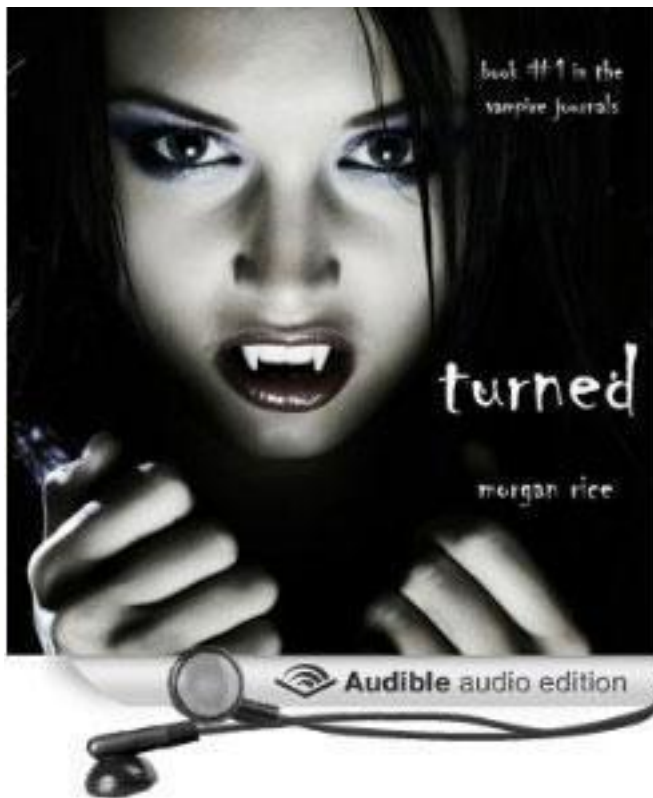


THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY



the vampire journals





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FACT:

60 miles north of Manhattan, there exists a small, obscure island in the Hudson River on which sits a crumbling Scottish castle. This island is known as Pollepel, and was named after a young girl, Polly, who hundreds of years ago, was stranded on the ice of the Hudson and ended up on its shores. Legend has it she was romantically rescued by her sweetheart, who married her on the island.

One

Pollepel Island, Hudson River, New York
(Present Day)

“Caitlin?” came the soft voice. “Caitlin?”

Caitlin Paine heard the voice, and struggled to open her eyes. They were so heavy, though; no matter how much she tried, she could barely lift them. Finally, she managed to pry them open, just for a brief second, to see where the voice was coming from.

Caleb.

He was kneeling by her side, holding her hand in both of his, concern etched across his face.

“Caitlin?” he asked again.

She tried to get her bearings, to lift the immense cobwebs from her head. Where was she? She could see enough to see that this room was bare, made of stone. It was nighttime, and a large window let in the light of a full moon. Stone floors, stone walls, an arched, stone ceiling. The stone looked smooth and ancient. Was she in a medieval cloister?

Aside from the moonlight, the room was lit only by a small torch, fixed to the far wall, and not giving off much light. It was too dark to see more.

She tried to focus on Caleb’s face, so close, only a foot away, staring at her hopefully. His eyes seemed to light up, as he

squeezed her hand tighter. His hands felt warm. Hers were so cold. She couldn't feel the life in them.

Despite her efforts, Caitlin couldn't hold her eyes open a second longer. They were just too heavy. She felt... *sick* was not the word. She felt... *heavy*. She felt free-floating, as if she were in limbo, stuck between two worlds. She didn't feel connected to her body, didn't feel like a part of the earth anymore. But she didn't feel dead, either. She felt as if she were trying to awaken from a very, very deep sleep.

She struggled to remember. Boston... the King's Chapel... the sword. And then... getting stabbed. Lying there, dying. And Caleb at her side. And then... his fangs. Approaching her.

Caitlin felt a dull, throbbing pain on the side of her throat. It must have been from where she'd been bit. She had asked for it – had *pleaded* for it.

But the way she felt now, she was not sure she should have. She didn't feel right. She felt an icy, cold blood racing through her veins. She felt as if she had died, but had not taken the next step. As if she were stuck.

More than anything, she felt pain. A dull, throbbing pain in her lower right side, and in her stomach. It must be from where she'd been stabbed.

"What you are going through is normal," Caleb said softly. "Don't be afraid. We all go through it when we are first turned. It will get better. I promise you. The pain will go away."

She wanted to smile, to reach up and caress his face. The

sound of his voice made everything perfect in the world. It made all of this worth it. She would be with him forever, now, and that gave her hope.

But she was too tired. Her body was not responding to what her brain wanted. She couldn't get her lips to smile, and she couldn't summon the strength to lift her hand. She felt herself drifting back into sleep...

Suddenly, her thoughts shifted again, jolting her awake. The Sword... it was lying there, and then... stolen. Who had it now?

And then she remembered her brother, Sam. Unconscious. Then, taken away by that vampire. What had happened to him? Was he safe?

And Caleb. Why was he here? He should be pursuing the Sword. Stopping them. Was he here only for her sake? Was he sacrificing it all to stay at her side?

Question after question raced through her mind.

She summoned every ounce of strength she had, and opened her lips just the slightest bit.

"The Sword," she managed to say, her throat so dry it hurt to speak. "You must go..." she added. "You must save..."

"Shhh," Caleb said. "Just rest."

She wanted to say more. So much more. She wanted to tell him how much she loved him. How grateful she was. How she hoped that he would never leave her side.

But it would have to wait. A new wave of fuzziness washed over her, and her lips simply would not open again. Despite

herself, she found herself sinking, sinking, reeling back into the blackness, back into her state of immortal sleep.

Two

As Kyle flew over northern Manhattan, he had never felt so elated. Behind him flew Sergei, his obedient soldier, and behind him, hundreds of vampires that had joined them along the way. Kyle now held the fabled Sword in his belt, and nothing more need be said. Malevolent vampires all along the East Coast had already heard the news, and as Kyle flew over, many covens were eager to join him. They knew war was coming, and Kyle's reputation preceded him. These mercenary vampires knew that, wherever he was going, he would be up to no good. And they wanted to be a part of it.

Kyle felt the thrill of the growing army behind him, and felt another surge of confidence as he flew over the city. Sergei had done well in grabbing the Sword and stabbing that girl, Caitlin. In fact, Kyle had been surprised. He'd never imagined Sergei had it in him. He had underestimated him, and as a reward, he'd decided to keep him alive, realizing that he'd make a good sidekick. He was especially impressed that Sergei had dutifully handed him the Sword immediately after leaving the King's Chapel. Yes, Sergei knew his place. If he kept this up, Kyle might even promote him, might even give him a small legion of his own. Kyle hated most things about most people, but the one thing he appreciated was loyalty.

Especially after what his people, the Blacktide Coven, had

done to him. After thousands of years of loyalty, Rexius, their supreme leader, had cast Kyle out as if he were nothing, as if his thousands of years of service had meant nothing. All for one little mistake. It was unthinkable.

Kyle's plan had worked perfectly. Now he wielded the Sword, and nothing – absolutely nothing – would get in his way. War with the human race, and with the other vampire races, would soon be his to wage.

As Kyle continued downtown, now over Harlem, he dipped closer to the ground, using his vampire vision to zoom in on the details below. He grinned wider.

His spreading of the Bubonic Plague has really worked. Pandemonium and chaos ruled. Those pathetic little humans were scrambling every which way, racing their cars the wrong way down one-way streets, arguing with each other, looting stores. He could see that most humans were covered in the horrible sores indicative of the plague. He could also see the corpses, already piled high on nearly every street corner. It was Armageddon down there. And nothing made him happier.

It would only be a matter of days until every human in the city fell. At that point, Kyle and his men could easily wipe out the rest of them. They would feed as they had never fed before. And then would enslave the rest of the human race.

The only small obstacle that remained in his way was the White Coven, those pathetic vampires who fed only on animals, who thought they were better than everyone else. Yes, they would

try. But they would be no match for the Sword. When he finished with the humans, he would wipe them out next.

First, and most importantly, he would take back his place in his own coven. And he would do it brutally. Rexius had made a grave mistake in punishing him, Kyle thought, as he reached up and felt the hardening scars all along the side of his face, his horrible fate, his punishment for letting Caitlin slip away. Rexius would pay for each and every one of Kyle's scars. Rexius was powerful, but now, with the Sword, Kyle's power was even greater. Kyle would not rest until Rexius lay dead, at his own hand, and until he himself was declared the new supreme leader.

Kyle smiled wide at the thought. Supreme leader. After all these thousands of years. It was what he deserved. It was his destiny.

Kyle and his men flew and flew, over Central Park, over Midtown, over Union Square, over Greenwich Village... and finally, they reached City Hall Park.

Kyle descended gracefully, landing on his feet, and the flock of now hundreds of vampires landed behind him. Kyle's army had grown beyond belief. What a way to return, he thought.

Kyle was about to head to the gates of City Hall, to crash down its door and begin his war, when he noticed something out of the corner of his eye. Something that bothered him.

Kyle used his vision to zoom in over several blocks, and to look closely at the pandemonium in front of the Brooklyn Bridge. Hundreds of cars were stuck in traffic, jammed up against each

other, backlogged in front of the bridge. All wanting to get out.

But the bridge was cordoned off. Blocking the way were several military tanks and trucks, on top of which sat dozens of soldiers, machine guns aimed at the crowd. Clearly, no humans were being allowed off the island of Manhattan. The military must not have wanted the plague to spread. They had probably locked down all the bridges and tunnels.

On the one hand, that was exactly what Kyle had wanted: it made life easier, since all the humans would be trapped in Manhattan, and he could kill them all more easily.

But on the other hand, now that he actually saw it with his own eyes, it made his stomach turn. He hated authority – of any kind. And that included the military. He almost sympathized with the masses of humans, clamoring to get off the island. They were being stopped by authority figures. Kyle's veins burned at the thought.

At the same time, a new idea came to him. Why not let some humans off the island? In fact, that would only serve his purpose. They would spread the plague further. To Brooklyn, to start. Yes, that could be very convenient indeed.

Kyle suddenly lifted back into the air, flying towards the base of the Brooklyn Bridge. Immediately, the hundreds of vampires followed him, on his heels.

Good, he thought. They were loyal and obedient, and they didn't ask questions. This would be a very convenient army indeed.

Kyle landed at the base of the Brooklyn Bridge, setting down on the hood of a car, and the hundreds of vampires landed on cars behind him, the sound of their boots click-clacking as they touched down.

Car horns suddenly flared up. It seemed the humans didn't like people walking on their cars.

A new rage washed over Kyle, as he thought of the ingratitude of these pathetic humans, blaring their horns as he had come to help them.

Standing on the hood of a Saab SUV, blaring its horn at him, he stopped. He had been about to jump down, to deal with the military, but instead, he slowly turned and looked down through the windshield, at the family glaring up at him.

It was a typical preppy family. In the front seat sat the husband and wife, 40s, and behind them, their two kids. The husband rolled down his window, and reached out and shook his fist at Kyle.

"Get the fuck off of my hood!" the man screamed.

Kyle, standing on the hood, got down on one knee, reached back, and thrust his fist through the windshield. He grabbed the man by his Polo collar, and in one motion, yanked him towards him, right through the windshield. Glass shattered everywhere, as the screams of the man's wife and children lit up the night.

Kyle stood on the hood, grinning, lifting the man, holding him up high over his head.

The man was whimpering and crying, head covered in blood

from the shattered glass.

Kyle reached back, and with a wide grin, tossed the man through the air like a paper airplane. The man went flying, hundreds of feet, and landed somewhere back there in the traffic, on the hood of some other car. Dead, Kyle hoped.

Kyle got back to business. He jumped off the car, and trotted towards the huge tanks blocking the bridge. Behind him, he could feel his hundreds of soldiers following suit.

As Kyle approached, all of the soldiers tensed up. Several of them raised their machine guns and pointed them at him.

There was a perimeter of no cars or people a good hundred feet away from the tanks, one which no one seemed willing to cross.

But Kyle happily crossed the line, walking right into the open space, right towards the tank.

“Freeze!” a soldier yelled through a megaphone. “Do NOT come any further! We WILL shoot on sight!”

Kyle smiled wider as he kept marching, right towards the tank.

“I said FREEZE!” the soldier screamed again. “This is your LAST warning! There is a curfew in effect. We have orders to fire on anyone at night!”

Kyle grinned even wider.

“I own the night,” he answered.

Kyle continued towards them, and suddenly, they opened fire. Dozens and dozens of soldiers fired their machine guns right at Kyle and his men.

Kyle felt the pain of all the bullets ricocheting off him. One after the other, they all bounced off his chest and arms and head and legs. They felt like raindrops, but stronger. He smiled at the thought of these pathetic human weapons.

Kyle saw the horrified expressions on the soldiers' faces, as they began to realize that he was unfazed. They clearly couldn't fathom how he was still walking. Or how any of his followers were, too.

But they didn't have time to react. Kyle walked right up to the closest tank, got under it, placed both hands under the treads, and with superhuman strength, lifted it way above his head. He walked several feet, carrying the tank above his head, and came to the railing of the bridge. Several soldiers, off balance, fell off the tank as he walked. But dozens of others clung to it, grabbing hold of the metal, trying to hold on at any cost.

Big mistake.

Kyle took three running steps, hoisted the tank back, and threw it for all he was worth.

The tank went flying through the air, dozens of feet, clearing the railing's edge.

It was airborne over the Brooklyn Bridge, plummeting down hundreds of feet towards the river. The tank turned and turned, and soldiers screamed as they fell off of it, plummeting. It finally hit the water with a massive splash.

Suddenly, the traffic jam came to life. Without any hesitation, the anxious New Yorkers stepped on the gas, and their cars

sped through the now-open lane onto the bridge. Within seconds, hundreds of cars were racing out of Manhattan. Kyle looked at their faces as they went, and could see that many were already infected with the plague.

Kyle grinned wide. This was going to be a beautiful night.

Three

Samantha watched the massive double doors open up before her, creaking as they went, and felt a pit in her stomach. She walked into her leader's chambers, accompanied by several vampire guards. They were not restraining her – they would never dare – but they did accompany her closely, and the message was clear. She was still one of them, but she was under house arrest, at least until she'd had this meeting with Rexius. He summoned her as a soldier, but he was also summoning her as a prisoner.

The doors closed with a crash behind her, and she saw that the huge chamber was filled. She had not seen a turnout like this in years. There were hundreds of her fellow vampires in the room. Clearly, they all wanted to watch, to know the news, what had happened with the Sword. How she had let it slip away.

Most of all, they likely wanted to see her punished. They knew that Rexius was an unforgiving leader, and that even the smallest mistake demanded punishment. A transgression of this magnitude would demand an extravagant punishment.

Samantha knew that. She was not trying to escape her fate. She had accepted a mission, and she had failed. She had found the Sword, yes, but she had also lost it. She had allowed Kyle and Sergei to steal it out from under her.

It all would have been perfect. She clearly remembered the Sword, sitting there, on the floor of the King's Chapel, in the

aisle, just feet from her grasp. She was only seconds away from having it, from fulfilling her mission, from being the hero of their coven.

And then Kyle, and that awful sidekick of his, Sergei, had to come marching in, knocking her out, stealing it from her grasp. It was unfair. How could she have expected that?

And now, what was she? The villain. The one who let the Sword go. The one who failed the mission. Oh yes, there would be hell to pay. She was sure of that.

All she wanted now was for Sam to be safe. He had been knocked out, unconscious, and she had carried him away, had taken him all the way back here. She'd wanted him close. She wasn't ready to let him go, and she didn't know where else to bring him. She had snuck in, and had stored him safely, way underground, in an empty chamber in their coven. No one had seen her, at least as far as she knew. He would be safe in there, away from the prying eyes of these vampires. She would report to Rexius, suffer her punishment, and afterwards, she would wait until daybreak, when everyone was asleep, and she would escape with Sam.

Of course, she couldn't just escape outright. She'd have to report back first, to suffer her punishment, or else her coven would hunt her down, and she would be on the run for the rest of her life. Once she was punished, no one would pursue them. Then she could take Sam, and they could flee far from here, and settle down somewhere. Just the two of them.

She hadn't expected the boy, Sam, to grab hold of her feelings the way he had. When she thought of her priorities now, she thought of him first. She wanted to be with him. She *needed* to be with him. In fact, as crazy as it sounded, even to herself, she could no longer picture life without him. She was furious at herself. She did not know how she had let it reach this point. An infatuation with a teenage boy. Much less, a human. She hated herself for it. But it was what it was. There was no use trying to change the way she felt.

The thought of this gave her strength, as she slowly approached Rexius' throne, preparing for her sentence. She would undergo indescribable pain, she knew that, but the thought of Sam would keep her strong throughout it. She would have something to go back to. And Sam would be protected, spared from all of this. That was what made it all bearable.

But would he love her after she had undergone the punishment? If she knew Rexius, he would reserve the Ioric acid treatment for her, would scar her face as best as he possibly could. She may lose the best part of her looks afterwards. Would Sam still love her? She hoped that he would.

A hush descended over the chamber, as the hundreds of vampires edged in closer, eager to see the exchange. Samantha took several steps closer to Rexius, and got down on one knee, bowing her head.

Rexius, just feet away, stared down from his throne, his harsh, icy blue eyes piercing right through her. He stared at her for

what felt like several minutes, although Samantha knew it was probably only seconds. She kept her head down. She knew better than to ever meet his gaze.

“So,” Rexius began, his gravelly voice cutting through the air, “the chicken comes home to roost.”

Several more minutes of silence followed, as he studied Samantha. She knew better than to try to explain herself in any way. She just kept her head bowed low.

“I sent you on a very simple mission,” he continued. “After the failures of Kyle, I needed someone I could trust. My most valuable soldier. You had never let me down before, not in thousands of years,” he said, staring. “But in this, this one simple mission, you have somehow managed to fail. And to fail miserably.”

Samantha lowered her head again.

“So. Tell me exactly what happened to the Sword. Where is it?”

“My master,” she began slowly, “I tracked down the girl. Caitlin. And Caleb. I found them both. And I found the Sword. I even got Caitlin to release it. It was on the floor, just feet from my grasp. In but a few seconds, it surely would have been in my grasp, for me to bring back to you.”

Samantha swallowed.

“I could not have foreseen what happened next. I was surprised, attacked by Kyle—”

A loud murmur erupted throughout the room of vampires.

“Before I could grab the Sword,” she continued, “Kyle had already taken it. He fled from the church, and there was nothing I could do. I tried to find him, but he was long gone. The Sword is now in his possession.”

An even louder murmur spread throughout the room. The anxiety in the room was palpable.

“SILENCE!” screamed a voice.

Slowly, the murmur died down.

“So,” Rexius began, “after all that, you let Kyle take the Sword. You practically handed it to him.”

Samantha knew better, but she couldn’t contain herself. She *had* to say something in her defense. “My master, there was nothing I could do – ”

Rex interrupted her by simply shaking his head. She dreaded that gesture. It meant bad things were to follow.

“Thanks to you, I must now prepare for two wars. This pathetic war with the humans, and now a war with Kyle.”

A heavy silence blanketed the room, and Samantha felt her punishment was imminent. She was ready to accept it. She held fast in her mind the image of Sam, and the fact that they could not absolutely kill her. They would never do that. There would be a life after this, some kind of a life, and Sam would be in it.

“I have a very special punishment reserved for you I,” Rexius said slowly, breaking into a slow grin.

Samantha heard the wide double doors open behind her, and she turned to see.

Her heart dropped.

There, being dragged in by two vampires, chained by feet and hands, was Sam.

They had found him.

He was gagged, and as much as he squirmed and tried to make a noise, he couldn't. His eyes opened wide in shock and fear. They dragged him to the side of the room, chains rattling, and held him firmly, forcing him to watch.

"It seems you have not only lost the Sword, but have also developed an affection for a human, despite every rule of our race," Rexius said. "Your punishment, Samantha, will be to watch suffer that which you hold dearest to you. I can sense that that which is dearest to you is not yourself. It is this boy. This pathetic, little, human boy. Very well," he said, leaning closer, grinning. "Then that is how you will be punished. We will put this boy through horrific pain."

Samantha's heart pounded in her chest. This was something she had not foreseen, and something she could not let happen. At any cost.

She sprang into action, leaping in the direction of Sam's attendants. She managed to reach one, kicking him hard in the chest. He went flying backwards.

But before she could attack the other, several vampires were on her, grabbing her, pinning her down. She struggled with all she had, but there were just too many of them, and she could not match the strength of all those vampires at once.

She watched helplessly as several vampires dragged Sam forward, towards the center of the room. They positioned him on the spot – the exact spot reserved for those undergoing the high Ioric acid treatment. On a vampire, the punishment was indescribably painful. It scarred for life.

On a human, though, the pain would be incalculable, and the punishment meant a certain, horrific death. They were leading Sam to his execution. And they were forcing her to watch.

Rexius grinned even wider, as Sam was chained down on the spot. As Rexius nodded, one of the attendants tore the tape from his mouth.

Sam immediately looked for Samantha, fear in his eyes.

“Samantha!” he yelled. “Please! Save me!”

Samantha, despite herself, burst into tears. There was nothing, absolutely nothing she could do.

Six vampires rolled forward a huge, iron cauldron, bubbling and hissing, mounted at the top of a ladder. They put it in position, right over Sam’s head.

Sam looked up at it.

And the last thing he saw was the liquid leaving the cauldron, bubbling and hissing, and heading right for his face.

Four

Caitlin was running. The field of flowers climbed as high as her waist, and as she ran, she cut a path right through it. The sun, blood-red, sat as a huge ball on the horizon.

Standing with his back to the sun, on the horizon, was her father. Or at least, his silhouette. His features were unrecognizable, but she knew that it was him.

As Caitlin ran and ran, desperate to finally see him, to embrace him, the sun sank quickly, too quickly. Everything happened too fast, and within seconds, the sun had disappeared completely.

She found herself running through the field in the middle of the night. Her father was still there, waiting. She felt that he wanted her to run faster, that he wanted to embrace her. But her legs would only run so fast, and no matter how hard she tried, he seemed to just get further away.

As she ran, the moon suddenly rose over the horizon – a huge, blood-red moon, filling the entire sky. Caitlin could see all the details on it, the indents, the craters. It was crystal clear. Her father stood, a silhouette against it, and as she tried to run even faster, it seemed as if she were running towards the very moon itself.

But it wasn't working. Suddenly, her legs and feet were not moving at all. She looked down, and saw that the flowers had twisted themselves around her ankles and legs, and were morphing into vines. They were so thick, and strong, soon she could not move

at all.

As she watched, a huge snake slithered towards her, through the field. She tried to struggle, to get away, but she was helpless. All she could do was watch as it approached. As it got closer, it leapt into the air, lunging right for her throat. She turned and screamed, and felt its long fangs pierce her throat. The pain was horrific.

Caitlin woke with a start, sitting upright in bed and breathing hard. She reached for her throat, and felt the two hardening scars. For a moment, she confused her dream with reality, and looked about the room for a snake. There was none.

She rubbed her throat. The wound still hurt, but not as much as it had in the dream. She breathed deeply.

Caitlin was covered in a cold sweat, her heart still pounding. She wiped her face and the sides of her temples, and could feel her cold, wet hair sticking to her. How long had it been since she'd bathed? Washed her hair? She couldn't remember. How long had she been lying there? And where, exactly, was she?

Caitlin looked all about the room. It was the same place she remembered from some time ago – was it from a dream, or was she awake here at some point before? The room was entirely made of stone, and had one tall, arched window, through which she could see the night sky, and the enormous full moon, its light pouring in.

She sat on the edge of her bed and rubbed her forehead, trying to remember. As she did, she was struck by a horrible pain in her side. She reached down, and felt the scab of a wound. She tried

to remember what it was from. Had someone attacked her?

Caitlin thought hard, and slowly, but surely, the details flooded back. Boston. The Freedom Trail. The King's Chapel. The sword. Then... being attacked. Then...

Caleb. He had been there, looking down at her. She had felt her world slipping away, and she had asked him. *Turn me*, she had pleaded....

Caitlin raised her hands and felt the two marks on the side of her throat, and she knew that he had listened.

That explained everything. Caitlin stood with a start, with the realization. She had been turned. She had been taken somewhere, probably for recovery, probably under Caleb's watchful gaze. She tested her arms and legs, twisted her neck, tested her body....

She felt different, that was for sure. She was not herself anymore. She felt unlimited strength coursing through her. A desire to run, to sprint, to break through walls, to leap into the air. She also felt something else: two slight bulges on her back, behind her shoulder blades. Very subtle, but she knew they were there. Wings. She knew, she felt, that if she wanted to fly, they would open up for her.

Caitlin fell intoxicated by her newfound strength. She wanted desperately to test it. She felt so cooped up – she had no idea how long she had been here – and she wanted to see what this new life could be like. She also felt something else that was new: a sense of recklessness. A sense that she could not die. That she could make stupid mistakes, that she had infinite lives to play with. She

wanted to push things to the edge.

Caitlin turned and looked out the window, at the night sky. The window was shaped in a wide arch, with no glass, and was open to the elements. The sort of thing one might see in an old, medieval cloister.

In the past, the old, human Caitlin would have hesitated, would have thought about what she was about to do, would have second-guessed herself. But the re-born Caitlin felt no hesitation. Practically the second after she thought it, she took off at a sprint, right for it.

With just a few short strides, Caitlin jumped up onto the window sill and dove out into the open air.

Some part of her, some instinct, told her that once she was airborne, her wings would sprout. If she were wrong, it would mean a serious plummet, hundreds of feet down to the earth. But the re-born Caitlin didn't feel as if she could ever be wrong.

And she wasn't. As Caitlin leapt out into the night, her wings sprouted out from behind her shoulder blades, and she felt the exhilarating thrill of flying, of gliding through the air. She was delighted to feel how wide and long her wings were, thrilled to feel the fresh, night air washing over her face, hair, and body. It was nighttime, but the moon was so full and so big, it lit up the night almost as if it were day.

Caitlin looked down and was afforded a bird's-eye view. She had sensed water, and she had been right. She was on an island. All around her, in every direction, there stretched a huge,

beautiful river, its waters very still and lit up by the moonlight. It was the widest river she had ever seen. And there, in the middle of it, was the tiny island on which she'd slept. A small island, hardly more than a few dozen acres, one end of it was dominated by a crumbling, Scottish castle, half in ruin. The rest of the island was completely consumed by a thick forest.

As Caitlin flew in the air, up and down on the wind currents, turning and swooping and diving, she circled the island again. The castle was huge, magnificent. Parts of it were crumbling, but other parts, those hidden from outside view, in the interior, were perfectly intact. There were inner courtyards and outer courtyards, ramparts, turrets, winding staircases, and acres and acres of gardens. It was large enough to hold a small army.

As she dove, she saw that the interior of the castle was lit with torches. And there were people milling about. Vampires? Her senses told her that they were. Her own kind. They were walking about, interacting with each other. Some them were training, sword fighting, playing games. The island was abuzz with activity. Who were these people? Why was she here? Had they taken her in?

As Caitlin finished her circle, she saw the room she had leapt from. She had been staying at the top of the highest tower, opening up onto a huge rampart, a wide, open terrace. On it, there stood a single, lone vampire. Caitlin did not have to fly any closer to know who that vampire was. She knew it already, in her very heart and soul. His blood now ran through her, and

she loved him with all her heart. And now that he'd turned her, she loved him with something even more than love. She knew, even from this far distance, that the loan figure pacing outside her room was Caleb.

Her heart soared at the sight of him. He was here. He was really here. Standing there, waiting, right outside her room. He must have been waiting for her to recover. All this time.

Who knew how much time had passed? He had never left her side. Even with all that had happened, all that was going on now. She loved him more than she could say. And now, they would be together for eternity.

He stood there, leaning over the ramparts, looking down at the river, looking both concerned and sad.

Caitlin dove right towards him, hoping to surprise him, to impress him with her newfound skill.

Caleb looked up, shocked, and his face lit with joy.

But as Caitlin came in for a landing, something suddenly went wrong. She felt herself losing her balance, losing coordination. She felt as if she were coming in too fast, and she couldn't correct it in time. As she came in over the ramparts, she scraped her knee on the stone and landed too hard, taking a hard role on the stone.

"Caitlin!" Caleb exclaimed, running over to her.

Caitlin lay on the hard stone, feeling a new aching pain running up her leg. She was fine. If she had been the old Caitlin, merely a human, she would have broken several bones. But as this new Caitlin, she knew she would bounce back, recover from

it quickly, within minutes probably.

But she was embarrassed. She had wanted to surprise and impress Caleb. Now she looked like an idiot.

“Caitlin?” he asked again, kneeling by her side, laying a hand of her shoulder. “Are you okay?”

She looked at him, grinning sheepishly.

“Some way to impress you,” she said, feeling like a fool.

He ran a hand along the side of her leg, checking her injury.

“I’m not human anymore,” she snapped. “You don’t have to worry about me.”

She immediately regretted her words, and her tone. It had come out like an accusation, almost as if she regretted being turned. And she hadn’t meant to take a harsh tone. On the contrary, she loved his touch, loved the fact that he was still so protective. She had wanted to thank him, to say all this and more, but as usual, she screwed it up, and said exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time.

What a terrible first impression as the new Caitlin. She still just couldn’t keep her mouth shut. Clearly, some things never changed, even with immortality.

She sat up, and was about to lay her hand on his shoulder and apologize, when suddenly, she heard a whining noise, and felt a furry cloud in her face. She leaned back, and realized what it was.

Rose. Her wolf pup, Rose leapt into Caitlin’s arms. Rose was whining with excitement, and licking Caitlin all over her face. Caitlin couldn’t help but break out laughing. She gave Rose a

hug, and pulled her back and looked at her.

Still a pup, Rose had already grown, and was bigger than Caitlin remembered. Caitlin thought, and recalled when she last saw Rose, in the King's Chapel, lying on the floor, bleeding, shot by Samantha. She had been sure Rose was dead.

"She pulled through," Caleb said, reading her mind, as always. "She's tough. Like her mother," he added with a smile.

Caleb must have been watching over them both all this time.

"How long have I been out?" Caitlin asked.

"One week," Caleb said.

One week, Caitlin thought. Incredible.

She felt like she'd been out for years. She felt like she'd died and returned to life, but in a new form. She felt washed clean, as if she were starting life again with a blank slate.

But as she remembered all the events that were transpiring, she realized that the passing of one week was also an eternity. They had stolen the Sword. And her brother, Sam, kidnapped. An entire week had gone by. Why hadn't Caleb gone after them? Every minute counted.

Caleb got to his feet, and so did Caitlin. She stood opposite him, looking up into his eyes. Her heart started beating. She didn't know what to do. What was the protocol, the etiquette, now that they were both true vampires? Now that he was the one who had turned her? Were they together? Did he love her just as much now that she was of his race? Now that they'd be together forever?

She felt more nervous, like there was more at stake, than ever before.

She reached up and gently lay a hand on his cheek.

He looked down into her eyes, and his eyes shone in the moonlight.

“Thank you,” she said, softly.

She had wanted to say, *I love you*, but it hadn't come out right. She had wanted to ask: *will you be with me forever? Do you still love me?*

But despite everything, despite all of her newfound powers, she didn't have the courage to say that. She could have at least said, *Thank you for saving me*, or, *Thank you for watching over me*, or *Thank you for being here*. She knew how much he had given up to be here, how much he had sacrificed. But all she could manage was, *Thank you*.

He slowly smiled, reached up with one hand, and gently pulled the hair from her face, tucking it behind her ear. He then ran the back of his hand, so smooth, over her face, studying her.

She wondered what he was thinking. Was he about to express his love for her forever? Would he kiss her?

She felt that he was about to, and suddenly she got nervous. Nervous for what their new life would be like. Nervous for what would happen if it didn't work out. So instead of savoring the moment, she had to go ahead and ruin it, open her big fat mouth when all she wanted to do was keep it shut.

“What happened to the Sword?” she asked.

His facial expression changed completely. It transformed from a look of love, of passion, to troubling concern. She saw it happening instantly, like a dark cloud passing over a summer sky.

He turned and took several steps towards the edge of the stone ramparts, his back to her, and looked out at the river.

You're such an idiot, she thought to herself. Why did you have to say anything? Why couldn't you just let him kiss you?

She cared about the Sword, that was true, but not nearly as much as she cared about him. About *them*, as a couple. But she had ruined the moment.

"I'm afraid the Sword is gone," Caleb said softly, his back to her, looking out. "It was stolen from us. By Samantha, then Kyle. They caught us by surprise. I did not anticipate their being there. I should have."

Caitlin walked to him, standing by his side and gently reaching up and placing a hand on his shoulder. She hoped that maybe she could change the mood again.

"Are your people all right?" she asked.

He turned and looked at her, even more troubled than before.

"No," he said flatly. "My coven is in grave danger. And every minute I'm away, the danger grows."

Caitlin thought.

"Then why haven't you gone to them?" she asked.

But she already knew the answer, even before he said it.

"I could not leave you," he said. "I had to see that you were all right."

Was that all? Caitlin thought. Did he only care about seeing that she was all right? And as soon as she was, was he going to just leave?

On the one hand, Caitlin felt a surge of love for him, knowing what he'd sacrificed. But on the other hand, she wondered if he only cared about her physical well-being? Not about them as a couple?

"So..." Caitlin began, "now that you see that I'm all right... are you going to just leave?"

It had come out too harsh. What was wrong with her? Why couldn't she be more kind, more gentle, as he had been? She certainly didn't mean it. It just came out all wrong. What she had wanted to say was, *Please, don't ever leave me.*

"Caitlin," he began softly, "I want you to understand. My family, my people, my coven – they are in grave danger. The Sword is out there, and it is in the wrong hands. I need to get back to them. I need to save them. In truth, I should have left a week ago... and now that I see that you are recovered, well... it is not that I *want* to leave you. It is that I must save my family," he said softly.

"I could come with you," Caitlin responded, hopeful. "I could help."

"You are not fully recovered," he said. "That crash landing was not an accident. It takes any vampire some time to fully come into her own powers. And in your case, you also suffered a terrible injury from the Sword. That may take days, or weeks, to heal. If

you came, you could injure yourself. The battlefield is no place for you right now. They will train you here. That is why I brought you.”

Caleb turned and crossed the terrace, leading her, and they looked down at the courtyard.

There, far below, were dozens of vampires, lit up under the torchlight, sparring, jousting and wrestling with each other.

“This small island holds one of the finest covens there is,” Caleb said. “They have agreed to take you in. They will teach you. They will train you. They will make you stronger. And then, when your powers are fully developed, when you are fully healed, I would be honored to have you fight beside me. Until then, I’m afraid I cannot let you. The war I am heading into will be very dangerous. Even for a vampire.”

Caitlin’s brow furrowed. She’d been afraid he’d say something like that.

“But what if you don’t come back?” she asked.

“If I am alive, I will return for you. I promise.”

“But what if you don’t live?” Caitlin asked, almost too afraid to utter the words.

Caleb turned and looked out at the horizon, and breathed deeply. He stared out at the clouds, and did not say a word.

Now was Caitlin’s chance. She desperately wanted to change the subject. He was determined to leave, she could see that, and nothing was going to stop him. And it was clear that he could not bring her. She felt a wave of exhaustion, and she knew that he

was right: she was not ready to fight. She needed to heal.

She didn't want to waste any more time trying to stop him. And she didn't want to talk anymore about vampires, wars, or swords. She wanted to use their precious remaining time to talk about them. Caitlin and Caleb. Them as a couple. Their future. Their love for each other. Their commitment to each other. Where, exactly, did they stand?

More importantly, she realized, throughout all their time together, since she'd first met him, she's always just taken him for granted. She had never stopped to take a moment, to look into his eyes and tell him exactly how deeply she felt for him. She was a woman now, and she felt it was time for her to step up and act mature, act like a woman. To tell him what she really felt for him. She needed him to know. Maybe he sensed it, sensed how much she loved him, but she had never uttered the words. *Caleb, I love you. I've loved you from the second I met you. I will always love you.*

Caitlin's heart was pounding, more terrified for this than she had been for anything thus far. Trembling, she reached up a hand, and gently placed it on his cheek.

He slowly turned towards her.

She was ready, finally, to tell him what she thought.

But as she tried, the words got stuck in her throat.

At the same time, he suddenly looked at her with a flash of concern, and opened his mouth to speak.

"Caitlin, there is something I need to tell you – " he began.

But he never had a chance to finish his sentence.

There was suddenly the sound of a door opening, and Caitlin sensed immediately that the two of them were no longer alone.

They both spun towards the noise, and looked to see who it was.

It was a person. A vampire. A beautiful, incredible creature, taller, thinner, better built than Caitlin. With long, flowing red hair and bright green eyes.

As Caitlin realized who it was, her heart plummeted.

No. It couldn't be.

It was her. Sera. Caleb's ex-wife.

Caitlin had met her only once, briefly, at the Cloisters. But she had never forgotten her.

Sera walked towards them with the elegance of a creature who had been on this planet for thousands of years. Confident. Without slowing, her eyes on Caitlin all the while, she walked up beside Caleb.

She reached up a single, pale, beautiful hand, and slowly draped it around Caleb shoulder. She looked down at Caitlin with utter contempt.

"Caleb?" she said softly, a sinister smile across her face. "Didn't you tell her about us?"

And with those few words, Caitlin felt as if a knife had been plunged into her heart.

Five

Samantha watched in horror as the cauldron tilted toward Sam's face. She struggled for all she was worth, but there was nothing she could do to break free of her captors. She was helpless. She'd just have to stand there and watch it destroy the person she had come to love.

As the liquid doused Sam, Samantha braced herself, expecting to hear the horrible shrieks so often accompanied by a dousing of Ioric acid.

But as Sam became completely lost in the waterfall of acid, there was, strangely, not a single sound.

Had it killed him so quickly, so completely, that he didn't even have a chance to scream? As the liquid stopped, Sam came into view.

And Samantha was truly shocked. As was every other vampire in the room.

He was fine. He blinked and looked around, clearly not in pain. He even looked a bit defiant.

It was incredible. Samantha had never seen anything like it – never seen anyone, human or vampire, immune to the liquid. That is, anyone except for one person. Now she remembered. Caitlin. His sister. She had been immune, too. What could that mean? Was it because they were genetically linked? She thought back to his watch, to the inscription. *The Rose and the Thorn.*

Was the dynasty split between them? Could it be that she wasn't The One?

But that *he* was?

Caitlin was a few years older than Sam, and perhaps she'd showed signs of coming-of-age sooner than he. Perhaps, if they had waited a few years, Sam would also have shown signs of morphing into a half-breed.

Whatever the reason, he was clearly immune. Which made him very, very powerful. And very dangerous to her coven.

Samantha looked around, and in the room of several hundred vampires, there was not a sound. They all just stared, in shock.

Sam looked pissed. He reached up, dragging his chains, and wiped the water from his face. He tugged at the chains, but could not get free.

"Can someone get me out of this fucking thing!?" he screamed.

And then, it happened.

Suddenly, there was a crash at the door.

Samantha spun around, and watched as the huge set of double doors came crashing down.

She couldn't believe it. There stood Kyle, half his face disfigured, Sergei at his side, and hundreds of mercenary vampires behind him.

And that wasn't all. Kyle had it. Was holding it high. The Sword.

Kyle let out a horrific scream and charged madly, headlong,

into the room. His supporters followed close behind, shrieking, on a rampage. And the room broke into mayhem.

It was vampire against vampire, as Kyle and his men viciously attacked every being in sight. But the Blacktide Coven had been at war for thousands of years, and it was not about to give in easily. Rexius' vampires fought back with equal determination.

It was an outright battle, hand to hand, vampire to vampire. Neither was giving an inch.

But Kyle himself made incredible headway. He held the Sword high, with both hands, and swung it widely in both directions. Wherever he went, vampires fell. Arms, legs, heads.... Kyle was a one-man army. He cut a path right through the crowd of thousands of vampires, murdering each one.

Samantha was shocked. In her thousands of years, she had never seen a vampire murdered, actually, ultimately, killed. She had never pictured a vampire as frail. This Sword was awe-inspiring. And very, very deadly.

Samantha didn't wait any longer. As a vampire charged her, screaming, his bloody, sharpened teeth aimed right for her face, she quickly ducked, let him fly over her, and then took off at a sprint.

She charged across the room, heading right for Sam.

Just in time. A rogue vampire had the same idea, and was going right for the chained, petrified boy. The vampire leapt right for Sam, teeth extended, aiming for his throat. He was like a lamb chained in a room full of lions.

Samantha reached him just in time. She leapt, colliding with the vampire in midair and knocking him down to the ground. Before he could get up, Samantha backhanded him hard, knocking him out cold.

She jumped to her feet and tore at Sam's chains. As she set him free, he looked all around in utter disbelief, as if he were watching a fantastical nightmare come to life.

"Samantha," he said, "what the hell is going on – "

"Not now," Samantha said, as she tore the last of his chains, grabbed his arm, and jerked him, leading him through the mayhem. She was heading for the exit.

As they ran, another rogue vampire leapt right for them, teeth extended.

Samantha grabbed Sam and threw him to the ground, ducked herself, and the vampire leapt right over their heads.

She quickly regained her feet, dragging him up, and they sprinted through the room. They managed to duck and weave, she all the while leading them. She knew that if she could just make that door, there was a back corridor, a rear staircase that could take them to the street. Once outside, she could take them far, far from here.

In all the mayhem, no one noticed them sprinting. She was almost out the door, only feet away.

And then, just as she was about to make it, she felt the pressure on her back, felt herself tumbling, hitting the floor. She had been jumped from behind.

She spun around and looked up to see who it was. Sergei. That despicable little Russian sidekick to Kyle. The one who had stolen the Sword from her hand.

He grinned down at her, an evil, cruel grin, and she hated him more than she'd ever had.

Sam, to his credit, showed no fear. Still shackled, he jumped onto Sergei's back, using his chains, wrapping them around Sergei's throat. The boy was strong. He actually squeezed hard enough to get Sergei to loosen his grip on Samantha, and she used the opportunity to roll out from under him.

But Sam was no match for a vampire, nonetheless. Sergei stood, snarling, and threw Sam off of him like a ragdoll. Sam landed ten feet away, crashing into the wall.

As Samantha tried to scramble to her feet, she was pounced on by a dozen more vampires. She saw that Sam was surrounded, too. They were trapped.

The last thing she saw was Sergei's cruel smile, as he wound up and punched her in the face.

* * *

As Kyle ripped through the huge chamber of the Blacktide Coven, wielding the Sword wildly, destroying vampire after vampire, he had never felt more alive. Blood splattered in every direction, covering him, and his hands felt wet with blood as he swung with more and more intensity. It was vengeance.

Vengeance for his thousands of years of loyal service, for the way they'd treated him. How dare they. Now they would know the meaning of the word revenge. They would all apologize, every last one of them, bow down to him, down to the ground, and admit that they had been profoundly wrong.

It was all going perfectly. After his little detour at the Brooklyn Bridge, he had led his loyal throng right through the doors of City Hall, killing the few vampires who dared stand in the way. They had then filed through the secret passageway, lower and lower, into the bowels of City Hall, right into his coven's nest. No vampires dared stand in his way as his army stormed the chamber. Many other vampires, upon seeing Kyle, and especially the Sword, immediately fell in with him. He was happy to see that so many of his old coven were still loyal. He knew that the day had arrived for him to claim rightful leadership.

Rexius was a weak leader. If he had been stronger, he would have found the Sword himself, years ago. He never would have sent others to do it. He liked to punish others for his own faults, when he was the one that needed to be punished. He had grown drunk with power. Banishing Kyle had been a last, desperate attempt to remove all those close to him. But it had backfired.

As Kyle tore through the room, he headed right for Rexius' throne. Rexius spotted him coming, and his eyes opened wide with panic.

Rexius jumped down from his throne and tried to slink away, away from the fighting. Their so-called leader, showing his true

colors in a time of war.

But Kyle had other plans.

Kyle ran to the other side, to meet Rexius face-to-face. It would have been much easier to just plunge the Sword into his back, but he refused to allow Rexius to go down so easily. He wanted Rexius to see, up close, who killed them.

Rexius stopped, his path blocked by Kyle's massive shoulders, by the shining, gleaming Sword.

Rexius jaw trembled. He raised a shaking finger, pointing it at Kyle's face. At that moment, he just looked like an old man. A weak, old, terrified man. *How pathetic.*

"You are banished!" he yelled, lamely. "I ordered you banished!"

Now it was Kyle's turn to grin, a wide, malicious grin.

"You cannot win!" Rexius added. "You *will* not win!"

Kyle stepped up casually, reached back, and with one, smooth stroke, plunged the Sword right through Rexius' heart.

"I already have," Kyle said.

The entire room, even while busy in battle, turned and stared at the sound. It was a horrific screech, consuming the entire stone chamber. It seemed to go on forever, as Rexius screeched and screeched. As they all watched, his body dissolved before their eyes, disintegrating into a cloud of smoke, and then a wisp, rising up, into the air and towards the ceiling.

The whole room stopped and stared at Kyle.

Kyle raised the Sword high, and roared. It was a roar of

victory.

Whatever vampire survived, on both sides of the battle, turned and faced Kyle. They all dropped to their knees, then lowered their heads, bowing all the way to the ground. The fighting was over.

Kyle breathed deeply, taking it all in. He was their leader now.

Six

Caitlin, unable to speak, stormed away from Caleb and Sera.

It was too much for her to process at once. Had she just seen what she thought she had? How was it possible?

She had thought that she'd known Caleb so well, that they were closer now than ever. She was sure that they were *together*, a couple, and would be that way forever. She had seen their new life together clearly, and had been so sure that nothing would tear them apart.

And then this. It never occurred to her that there could be another woman in Caleb's life. How could he have not told her?

Of course, Caitlin remembered Sera from her brief visit to the Cloisters – but Caleb insisted he no longer had feelings for her, that whatever they had, it was years ago – *hundreds* of years ago.

So then what was she doing here? Especially now, of all times? During Caleb and Caitlin's most private moment together, when Caitlin had just arisen, fully turned, a true vampire, by his own blood? How did she even know where they were? Had Caleb invited her? He must have. But why?

Layers and layers of hurt washed over Caitlin. There was just no explaining this. She had always been afraid to make herself vulnerable, especially to guys, for this exact reason. But with Caleb, she had let go, had trusted him completely. She had made herself more vulnerable than she had with any guy she had ever

been with. And he had managed to hurt her deeper, deeper than she could have ever imagined.

She still couldn't fathom how she could have misjudged him so thoroughly, how she could be so dense, so wrong. She felt like her insides were breaking apart. What would immortality be like now, without him? It would be a sentence. An eternal sentence. She felt like she wanted to die. And worse than anything, she felt like such an idiot.

"Caitlin!" Caleb yelled behind her, as she heard his footsteps chasing after her. "Please, allow me to explain."

What could there possibly be to explain? Clearly, he had invited her here. Clearly, he still loved her. And clearly, his feelings for Caitlin weren't as strong as her feelings for him.

Caleb's hand gripped her arm, tugging at her, pleading for her to turn and face him.

But she jerked away. She couldn't stand the feel of his touch. She wanted nothing to do with him. Not ever again.

"Caitlin!" he exclaimed. "Won't you just let me explain?"

But Caitlin didn't slow. She was a different person, a different being now, and she felt it in more ways than one. Along with her newfound vampire strength, there also came a newfound vampire array of emotions. She could already feel that her emotions were stronger than they had been when human – much, much stronger. She felt everything much more deeply. She didn't just feel depressed – she felt as if she were literally dying. She didn't just feel betrayed – she felt as if she were literally being stabbed

through the heart. She wanted to tear herself apart, to do anything to stop the hurt that tore her up inside.

She marched across the terrace and right into her room, slamming the oak door behind her.

“Caitlin, Caitlin please!” came the muffled voice outside her door.

Caitlin turned and slammed the door.

“Go away!” she yelled. “Go back to your wife!”

After several seconds, she finally sensed him leave.

Now it was just her. Just the silence. Caitlin sat on the edge of her bed in her small room, put her head in her hands, and cried. She sobbed and sobbed, heart-wrenching cries. She felt that all she had to live for was suddenly taken away.

She heard a whining, and felt a soft brush against her face, and looked down to see Rose, rubbing her face against Caitlin’s. Rose licked Caitlin’s cheeks, trying to lick away her tears.

It helped snap Caitlin out of it. She reached down and caressed Rose’s face, stroking her hair. Rose jumped up onto Caitlin’s lap, still small enough to do so, and Caitlin hugged her.

“I still have *you*, Rose,” Caitlin said. “You won’t leave me, will you?”

Rose leaned back and licked her face.

But the pain was too much. Caitlin couldn’t allow herself to sit in that room one second longer. She felt as if she were about to burst through the walls.

She looked to the huge window, saw the inviting night sky,

and without hesitating, put Rose down, jumped from the bed, took two long strides, and leapt out.

She knew that her wings would sprout, and carry her away. But a part of her wished they wouldn't – wished that they would fail her, and let her plummet right to earth.

Seven

Samantha stood in chains. She was held tight by several vampires who grabbed her arms roughly as they dragged her through the huge chamber. The room had become a slaughterhouse. Everywhere she looked, she saw thousands of vampire corpses, her former coven-members, their blood now pooling all over the floor, chopped into pieces by Kyle and his cursed Sword. That Sword held power beyond what she'd imagined.

Yet amidst all the carnage, several hundred vampires remained alive. Kyle's people now. And with each passing moment, dozens more poured in through the open doors. In fact, there seemed to be no end to the stream of vampires eager to plead allegiance to Kyle. It was clearly *his* coven now. With Rexius dead, there was no one else to plead allegiance to. And Kyle had earned it. He had managed to wipe out every vampire that had ever betrayed him.

There were hundreds of vampires who had assisted him in the battle against Rexius. Some were truly loyal to Kyle, while some were just opportunistic. Others just didn't like Rexius, and had been waiting for their chance. Vampires poured in from covens all over the city. News spread fast in the vampire world – and they all wanted to be a part of the upcoming war. Whatever their reasons, this was Kyle's army now.

Now that Kyle was leader, now that he had the Sword, it was clear that there would soon be a major war, a war unlike any the vampire race had ever waged. Kyle was ruthless, and lusted for blood, and even this carnage had not satisfied him. He had a chip on his shoulder he just could not remove. All of the vampires out there who had not already rushed to pledge allegiance to him would pay for that. Along with all of the innocent humans. His vendettas stretched endlessly, Samantha knew, and New York City would soon be his playing thing.

They dragged Samantha roughly through all the chaos, right to the center of the room.

Kyle now sat on Rexius throne, savoring his power, an evil grin spread across his face, as vampires bowed low to him in every direction.

Sergei, standing at Kyle side, banged his metal staff on the floor, three times.

The entire room, thousands of vampires, lined up in perfect order. They all raised their fists, and yelled: "Hail Kyle!"

Samantha was amazed. It was an incredible show of force and loyalty. She had never seen any obedience like this in her life. Kyle was magnetic. Already, he was a tyrant.

But Kyle didn't seem interested in his soldiers. Instead, his eyes fixed on Samantha. The entire room seemed to notice his interest in her, and the murmur quieted as they prepared to watch the exchange.

"So," Kyle said to her. "You beat me to the Sword. But as you

can see, I am the one to wield it.”

“For now,” Samantha spat back.

Let him think about that, she thought. For truly, she believed, one day it would no longer belong to him. Whoever was meant to wield the Sword would, and she knew, deep down, that it wasn't him.

Kyle raised his eyebrows.

“Do you know why I've kept you alive this long?” he asked.

Samantha stared back, defiant. She had no interest in engaging in a dialogue with him. She didn't want any part of this new coven. She wanted to leave, to get as far away from this place as possible. She wanted to just take Sam and go. If he'd let them.

But Sam was nowhere in sight. They had been captured by Kyle's soldiers, and she hadn't see him since. Samantha needed to keep her cool until she could find out where he was. She needed to buy her time, to plead allegiance to him if need be, until the moment when she and Sam could escape.

“I still don't know why Rexius sent you to retrieve the Sword instead of me. As we all know, I'm a better warrior. But I will admit, you have some skills,” he said.

“But that is not entirely why I've kept you alive. Rexius had planned on punishing you. From this, I assume you have no reason to still be loyal to him. There is a war coming, and I can use strong warriors like yourself. If you are ready to pledge allegiance to me, I will consider keeping you alive.”

Samantha thought. She had no issue with pledging allegiance,

because she knew that very soon, she would leave all of this. But first she had to know about Sam.

“What of the boy?” she asked. “Where is he?”

Kyle smiled.

“Ah yes, the boy. Getting right to the heart of what I want to discuss. I’m not sure why you’ve taken such a fondness for this human, and you’ve already violated our rules in doing so. I could have you killed just for that, you know. But I do find this very interesting, and this, indeed, is one of the reasons I’ve let you live.

“You see, Samantha, you need to be punished. Any vampire who was at any time loyal to Rexius and not myself, needs to be punished. It is part of the initiation process of my new Army. You will learn to obey me, and to obey me only.

“In your case, I have found the perfect solution: an act that will both prove your loyalty to me and serve to punish you. My men will take you to the boy, you will bring him back here, and in front of everyone, you will kill him.”

Samantha’s heart dropped at the thought. That was something she could never, *ever* do. She would take her own life before taking his. Kyle, as usual, was delusional. And cruel. Yes, he was a fitting successor to Rexius.

“I will quite enjoy seeing you personally put him to death,” Kyle said, smiling at the thought of it. “You see, I consider this boy a liability. He comes from the same strand as his sister, and for all I know, they bear an immunity that could hurt us all. I don’t trust any of them. Not to mention, he is a human.”

Kyle studied Samantha's face closely.

"If you do this thing, I will reward you with rank, honor and prestige. There will be a special place for you in my new coven. This will be a magnificent war, one of the most magnificent our race has ever seen. And you can be one of its chief architects.

"But if you refuse... you will be tortured, slowly, cast into eternal pain, and your name will be wiped out from our coven's history altogether."

The room was dead silent as Samantha thought. Her mind raced, trying desperately to think of a way out.

"Why don't you just kill him yourself?" she finally asked.

Kyle leaned back and grinned, slowly.

"Half the fun will be watching you do it," he said. "One of my favorite hobbies is watching people kill that which they hold dearly."

Eight

Caitlin flew and flew. She had no idea where she was going, but wherever the wind took her would be fine with her. She felt as if she had nowhere to go, anyway, and nothing left to live for. Her beloved Caleb had betrayed her, and the only other person she cared for in the world, her brother, Sam, had probably betrayed her, too. After all, Sam had led Samantha, had led all of those evil vampires, right to her, right to the King's Chapel. Was there anyone left in the world she could trust? Was it her destiny that everyone who came into her life ended up betraying her?

Caitlin flew far over the Hudson River, and looked down as it gleamed in the moonlight. The night air felt good as it brushed her face and hair, wiping away her tears. She was far from the island now, just a dot on the horizon. She flew further and further away, desperate to clear her head.

She dove low, within feet of the water, and flew just over its surface, nearly touching it. It felt good to be so close to the water. A part of her wanted to just keep diving, to submerge herself. But another part of her, the new vampire part, knew that would be pointless. A vampire could not die. Not even by drowning.

As she flew, groups of fish leapt out of the water all around her. They must have sensed her presence. Was it the vampire blood they sensed?

Caitlin climbed up high, high in the air, and as she ascended,

her head started to clear again. She thought about everything that had happened. Already, the details felt fuzzy. Was it possible that she had blown things out of proportion? Now that she thought about it, what had Caleb actually done? Yes, Sera was there, and on the one hand, her presence was inexcusable. But the more she thought about it, the more Caitlin realized that she didn't really know exactly why she was there, or how she got there. She didn't really know for certain that Caleb had invited her. She didn't really know for certain that the two of them were back together again. Was it possible, even remotely possible, that there was some other explanation?

Maybe she had reacted too quickly. She had always done that, could never control herself.

As Caitlin flew even higher, she made a wide turn, heading back in the direction of her island. She found herself drawn to go back in that direction, and a part of her wondered if she might even return. After all, where else could she really go?

As she headed in that direction, she felt a newfound sense of purpose. Maybe she should at least give Caleb one chance to explain. He had saved her life so many times. He had watched over her all these days, had nursed her back to life. Maybe he did still love her. Maybe...

Caitlin wasn't so sure anymore. But the more she flew, the more she realized that she did owe Caleb at least one chance, one chance to explain himself.

Yes, she would give him that. And then she would decide.

Caleb was furious. Once again, Sera had landed into his life, causing destruction everywhere she went. He couldn't recall, over the thousands of years, how many times he had asked her to keep away from him, how many times he had made it clear that he had no feelings for her, that he didn't want her in his life. But countless times, at all the wrong moments, she managed to show up again. It was as if she knew, as if she sensed whenever he was with someone new, whenever he was with someone he really cared about. And she always showed up at exactly the wrong moment. She was the most territorial and possessive creature he had ever met. And he had been plagued with her in his life for thousands of years.

This time, he could not accept it. He would not allow it. She had ruined his relationships too many times, and this was one time too many. He cared more for Caitlin than anyone – vampire or human – he had ever been with. And Sera, like a moth to a flame, must have sensed that. This must have been what brought her out of hiding, what prodded her to track him down.

She had an excuse – she always had an excuse. That was the problem with her: you could never really one hundred percent blame her, because she always showed up with some urgent message, and it always had some legitimacy. In this case, of course, their coven was on the verge of attack. Kyle, she'd said,

was back in New York City, with the Sword, and it would only be days until there was an all-out vampire war. She came bearing a message from his coven: they wanted him back. They would forgive his earlier transgressions. They needed every soldier they had in this time of war, and Caleb was one of their best.

So on the one hand, he could not be as upset with her as he would have liked – which made the situation even more maddening. On the other, he suspected that she had been waiting for exactly a situation like this to have an excuse to worm her way back into his life. But regardless of the news, she'd had no right to give Caitlin the impression that they were still together.

He stormed over to her now, still on the castle's terrace, red-faced.

“Sera!” he snapped. “Why did you have to say that? Why did you have to use those words? There is no *us*! And, as you very well know, there is *nothing* that I have not told her. You came here to deliver a message from our coven. That is all. You gave the impression that there was some secret I was hiding, that you and I were still together.”

She was not deterred by his anger. If anything, she seemed to enjoy it. She had managed to ruffle his feathers, and it appeared that that was exactly what she'd wanted.

She smiled slowly, taking a step towards him, and raised a hand and laid it on his shoulder.

“But aren't we?” she asked seductively. “You know, deep down, that we still are. That is precisely why this upset you so

much. If you had no feelings for me, you would not care either way.”

Caleb threw her hand off his shoulder.

“You know that is complete nonsense. We have not been together for hundreds of years. And we will *never* be together again. I don’t know how many times I can say this,” Caleb said, exasperated. “I need you to stay out of my life. I need you to stay away from me. And most of all, from Caitlin. I am warning you to stay away from her.”

Sera’s face transformed with anger in the flash of an eye.

“That pathetic little girl,” she snapped. “Just because she is one of us now, doesn’t give her any more standing over me. She has *nothing* against me. I don’t see how you can even *look* her way. Not to mention that our coven never sanctioned your turning her,” Sera said, giving Caleb a dark look.

Caleb knew what that meant. It was a threat. She was warning him, his violation of the law. He could be punished severely for it – and she was threatening to let the others know.

“I’m not deterred by your threats,” Caleb said darkly. “You can tell anyone anything you want. I will face whatever they want to throw at me myself.”

“You disgust me,” Sera snapped. “Here we are, at war, our entire coven, our family at risk. And what are you doing? You are hiding out here, on some island, waiting for some pathetic little girl to get well. You should be home, defending your people, like the real man you used to be – ”

“My coven cast me out,” Caleb snapped back, “after hundreds of years of loyal service. I owe them nothing. They are receiving now exactly what they deserve.”

Caleb exhaled.

“Nonetheless, I do care for them, and given that the situation is what it is, I will not let them down. I told you that I will return, when the time is right.”

“You said that you would return when she had recovered. Clearly, she has recovered. You’re out of excuses. You must return now!”

“I will honor my word, as I always do. But I want to be very clear on this point: I return only to help save our coven, the humans who might be slaughtered, and to help retrieve the Sword. Do not harbor any delusions that it is for any other reason. As soon as my mission is accomplished, I will depart again, for good this time, and it will be the last time you ever see my face. Do not harbor any fantasies that we are together again. Because we are not.”

“Oh, Caleb,” she said, with a dark little laugh, “you can believe whatever you like, but you know deep down that you and I have been together forever, and that we will always be together. The more you fight it, the closer you become to me. I know how much you love me. I can feel it, every day.”

“You are delusional,” Caleb said. “You are getting worse with time.”

Sera smiled wider. “That’s right,” she said, “tell yourself that.

Fight your feelings. Fight what both of us already know.”

Sera suddenly took two bold steps to him, draped her hands around his throat, and with one quick motion, yanked him hard towards her.

Before he could react, she planted her lips firmly on his, kissing him with tremendous force.

Caleb recoiled, disgusted. He reached up and shoved her away. And as he did, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed someone landing on the parapet beside them.

Caitlin.

* * *

As Caitlin approached the island, she felt hope rising within her again. Her head was clear now. Caleb, she realized, had done nothing wrong after all. She had been stupid. She should have given him a chance to explain. For all she knew, Sera had come uninvited, and there was absolutely nothing between them. Why had she been so rash?

As she swooped lower and the island came into view, she saw the huge stone castle sprawled out below her, the scores of vampires down there on the ground, training in the torchlight. It was a beautiful place, and she was grateful that Caleb had taken her here. She started to feel that everything would be OK after all, as she took one final turn and rounded the bend, landing on the upper rampart.

But as she came in close, as she landed, her heart stopped within her.

There were Caleb and Sera. And this time, they were kissing. Kissing. The thought of it pierced Caitlin's insides worse than the Sword. She couldn't move. She couldn't think. She couldn't breathe. They were kissing. *Kissing*.

So, they *were* together. There was no misunderstanding this time. He was still in love with her.

He had tossed Caitlin out as if she were nothing. And he had done it all right in front of her eyes.

Caleb rushed over to her, and this time, Caitlin didn't run. She stood where she was, frozen in shock, as she felt the rage well up within her. She felt herself becoming fierce, fiercer than she had ever been as a human.

"Caitlin," Caleb began, "this is not what it seems. Please, let me explain –"

But as Caleb approached her, as he began speaking, Caitlin simply reached out a finger and pointed at the horizon.

"LEAVE!" she screamed, scowling.

It was an order. It was not a question, and it didn't leave open any room for discussion.

Caleb stood there, frozen himself, apparently shocked at her ferocity. He must have seen how resigned she was.

"I SAID LEAVE!" Caitlin screamed again. "I never want to see you again. As long as I live!"

Caleb stood there, looking shocked and hurt himself, like a

little boy who had just been scolded. It looked like there was so much he wanted to say to her, but that he could also tell she would never hear a word of it.

He slowly lowered his head, despondent.

He turned and walked to the edge of the rampart, took two long strides, jumped onto the edge of the railing, and leapt off. He was soon flying, his giant wings flapping, and heading off into the night.

Caitlin could see Sera turn her head and look after him, watching him fly away, looking worried, like she wanted to fly after him. But she also looked torn, like there was something she wanted to say to Caitlin before she did.

Sera suddenly took several steps towards Caitlin, coming within feet of her.

“I hate you,” Sera said, slowly, her voice dripping with venom. “I will *always* hate you. You tried to take my man away from me. And it will *never* work. Caleb doesn’t want you. He wants me. Only me. And that’s the way it’s always been.”

Caitlin was in too much of a fury to bother responding, and she had nothing to say to her anyway.

Sera’s wings expanded behind her, as she got ready to depart. Before she turned, she leaned in close to Caitlin, and whispered one last thing: “I have something with Caleb that you will never have. Not as long as you live. I’m sure he never told you, and I’m sure he never will.”

Caitlin stared back at her with equal rage, wondering what else

this vile creature could possibly tell her that could cause her any more upset than she already had. She didn't think it was possible.

But as she heard her next words, she realized that there was, indeed, something that could make her feel even worse.

“Caleb and I have a child.”

Nine

Samantha found herself escorted by two hulking vampire guards down the stone corridor. They stood close, but neither dared grab her arm. She was too senior of a warrior to them – they would never cross such a line of disrespect. Despite their size, despite the fact that they were male, she was a much more powerful warrior than both of them – and they knew it.

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