



MONSTER'S KISS

BLACKTHORN ACADEMY
FOR SUPERNATURALS

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
C.D. GORRI

MONSTER'S KISS

BLACKTHORN ACADEMY FOR SUPERNATURALS

BOOK ONE



C.D. GORRI

CONTENTS

[Monster's Kiss](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Follow C.D. Gorri](#)

[Also by C.D. Gorri](#)

[About C.D. Gorri](#)

MONSTER'S KISS

BLACKTHORN ACADEMY FOR SUPERNATURALS

BOOK ONE

COPYRIGHT © 2023

C.D. GORRI

ISBN: 978-1-77357-567-4

978-1-77357-566-7

PUBLISHED BY NAUGHTY NIGHTS PRESS LLC

COVER ART BY SILVANA G. SÁNCHEZ

@ SELFPUB DESIGNS

NAMES, CHARACTERS AND INCIDENTS DEPICTED IN THIS BOOK ARE PRODUCTS OF THE AUTHOR'S IMAGINATION OR ARE USED FICTITIOUSLY. ANY RESEMBLANCE TO ACTUAL EVENTS, LOCALES, ORGANIZATIONS, OR PERSONS, LIVING OR DEAD, IS ENTIRELY COINCIDENTAL AND BEYOND THE INTENT OF THE AUTHOR.

SALE OF THIS BOOK WITHOUT A FRONT COVER MAY BE UNAUTHORIZED. IF THIS BOOK IS COVERLESS, IT MAY HAVE BEEN REPORTED TO THE PUBLISHER AS "UNSOLD OR DESTROYED" AND NEITHER THE AUTHOR NOR THE PUBLISHER MAY HAVE RECEIVED PAYMENT FOR IT.

NO PART OF THIS BOOK MAY BE ADAPTED, STORED, COPIED, REPRODUCED OR TRANSMITTED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS, ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL, INCLUDING PHOTOCOPYING, RECORDING, OR BY ANY INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL SYSTEM, WITHOUT PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM THE PUBLISHER.

THANK YOU FOR RESPECTING THE HARD WORK OF THIS AUTHOR.

MONSTER'S KISS

Will a curvy necromancer succumb to a monster's kiss?

Serena

I spent my childhood avoiding things that went bump in the night. Not an easy feat, considering I saw ghosts. Ignoring the dead was part of my daily routine.

After dozens of visits with doctors, hypnotists, and priests forced on me by my aunt and uncle, I'd learned to keep quiet. It wasn't until I received my invitation to Blackthorn Academy that I finally felt hope.

Ever since I arrived, I've felt someone watching me. Glowing eyes pierced the darkness, always trailing after me, but whenever I turned to confront the owner of those eyes—poof—he was gone. Like magic.

I didn't know my mystery stalker, but at least I wasn't alone anymore.

Draugr

Cursed with an insatiable thirst, I've spent decades searching for the one who can sate my desire for blood. I thought all hope was lost until she arrived at Blackthorn Academy.

The second I scented her, I knew she was mine. Now, I just have to convince her. There is only one question. Can this beauty learn to love a beast?

Monster's Kiss is book one in the Blackthorn Academy for Supernaturals shared world, featuring a curvy necromancer new to the supernatural world, and a Viking revenant suffering from an unimaginable curse!

PROLOGUE



DRAUGR

“HELLO, DRAUGR,” Headmistress Blackthorn said as I walked into her study. “It’s time to renew our agreement for the upcoming term. I need your signature here, ink and blood.”

I snarled as I called on my DeathFace, using my preternatural fangs to pierce my tough, dark hide and dipping the quill into the warm, red blood that flowed from my bite. I understood this was the only way I could remain at Blackthorn, and though I had not been a fan of the Academy at first, it had changed my life.

“Good evening, Headmistress, I am ready,” I replied, ever polite as I signed my name in scrawling script in my blood, using a different quill before following that signature in black ink.

“Good. Now, for our review. What can you recall about your arrival here last year and how have things changed for you?”

I sat down on the velvet-covered loveseat opposite the headmistress, taking in the subdued opulence with an

approving nod. She was from an old, powerful line, and I had nothing but respect for the female.

“The thing I remember most vividly was the pain. Well, that and the darkness,” I began as the memories flooded into my brain.



ONE YEAR AGO...

THE DAYS WERE BLURRING one into the next as my thirst for that life-giving substance grew and grew. My regular feeders were scared of me. Frightened of their inability to appease my appetite.

It was happening.

I stared at my reflection in the small silver mirror in my bedroom and hated what I saw.

Son of the Draugr, destined to replace the sufferer. The time was upon me, and I hated it. I stared at the glaringly obvious changes in my person. The differences between me and everyone else so abhorrently apparent it was ridiculous. Never again could I cross worlds, passing as a human or something close.

Forever would I be other. Always would I be monster.

My skin had turned the color of pitch, great horns spiraled out from my head, enormous wings appeared and disappeared at my beck and call, but along with all these changes, there was one I could have lived my entire life without.

Hunger.

Like no ordinary hunger. This was a bone-deep yearning. A thirst greater than the sea. A craving so wide, it could never be filled. It clawed and plagued me like a bad dream that would not go away. Tears pricked my eyes as the pain made me blind to everything around me. Everyone I came into contact with was reduced to a heartbeat and the sound of blood rushing through their veins was like someone ringing the dinner bell.

Fuck me. I am starving.

No. You mustn't.

Why me? All Father, have mercy.

But my prayers went unanswered, and as I came into my own, I felt that burn inside me grow and grow until it became like an oubliette in my very flesh. An abyss of nothing but need. And what did I need?

Blood.

Of course, it was always blood. I loathed myself, the thing I had become. To pay for sins I had not committed, I was asked to bear the unbearable. It was not my fault, though. How I hated my father for making me do this! For not finding a way to stop the curse.

“You will embrace this, my son. Your task, like the task of the many before you, is one of honor and privilege. Carry the thirst. Do not fall prey to the Bloodlust. Be strong, my son.”

“Really?” I replied. “Honor? Privilege? I die every time my hunger strikes, fearing who I will kill next!”

It was not just hysteria. Blood was on my hands. It was part of the curse, of course, this living with one foot over the veil and one within. I was a monster. My need for blood was part of my penance.

“It is your duty to live with it, not sate it, son,” my father growled.

Didn't that suck? No pun intended.

“Why, Father? Why must I suffer so?”

“Because it is your duty—”

“You speak to me of duty? Look at me! I am a Demon now. Is that not enough? Runes carved into my ruined flesh. Horns. Wings. No female will ever have me. Why must I pay for a debt owed because of sins committed by my forefathers, *sire?*”

“It is a debt, but what of this talk? Your mother bore me you—” my father said, his voice void of all emotion.

“Out of duty, sire. Why else did she not stay to raise her only son?” I asked, having heard the tale of her abandonment long ago by those males who tended our keep.

My line was a warrior line. To keep the Clan safe, it must be continued. Females had serviced my family for centuries for that reason alone.

“Love does not live here, Raven. You know this.”

I snapped my head to the side, unable to look at him. He was to blame for all of this. As a youngling, my skin had been as pink and pretty as any other member of my people.

True, the Draugen had been cursed long ago, but why could he not make my mother happy? Now, it was my turn to fail. Soon, I would be too far gone to care, wouldn't I?

As my body changed, so did my appetite. I'd been battling the Bloodlust for decades now, but just lately, it had gotten worse.

Like ten times worse.

“You almost drained your last donor dry, Raven,” my father said.

“No. You don’t call me that! I am not *Raven* anymore, am I? I am Draugr,” I sneered.

“Raven, you must—”

“Call me by my true name,” I demanded, the growl in my chest rumbling loudly in the small chamber where my father held court.

He had been the Draugr before I ascended. And his father before him. The males of my line had been cursed for centuries.

“Stop acting like a child,” my father grunted. “The Draugr is a servant. So, serve,” he demanded.

Just like that, all my angry rebuttals died on my lips. He was right. The Draugr was a servant and not just to the Bloodlust, but to all the members of the Clan. The Draugen and their mates and young were all protected from the curse by the chosen one who bore the weight for all.

I did not ask to be born. I was no one’s idea of a hero. Even when my skin started to turn black as a raven’s wing, I fought against it. But the Norns refused to be outwitted. Those sister Fates held my destiny in their skeletal hands, and it was time I accepted there was no hope.

With that in mind, I stalked outside under the cloak of night, and walked through our land. I stayed in the shadows, more comfortable there, ever since I had come into my position. The Draugr was feared, reviled, and even hated by some.

I heard the whispers. Felt their eyes piercing the darkness, searching for me. I was the stuff of nightmares. The monster waiting under the bed, in the closet, behind the stairwell. My hunger burned inside my throat, the agony too great.

I walked and walked, stumbling to where a group of young males and females had gathered around a bonfire. They laughed and drank ale, sharing stories. I watched with greedy eyes as hands were held, couples choosing their mates for the night.

All Draugen fed on blood, but none were as insatiable as I. Everything turned black as my pulse pounded in my ears. The agony of it was a never-ending scream that sent me to my knees. Louder and louder, the wail grew until it was all I could hear. My eardrums pounded in pain at the sheer volume of that cry.

It was not until I felt hands on my shoulders, holding me down, that I realized I was the one making that horrible sound. I thrashed atop the mound of snow while a dozen Draugen warriors struggled to keep me still.

“Raven!” my father screamed, the sadness in his eyes telling me the truth for once.

I was doomed to suffer the torment of our people. For the first time, I saw my father’s strength. He was not just some cold and calculated revenant of a man. He was the Draugr before me, and his strength was immense. I was an ungrateful whelp. A weakling. And it was time to change.

“I will get you help, son,” he grunted, and I felt shackles clamp down on my wrists and ankles.

When I woke up, I was no longer in the North with my Clan, but on Northumberland Island, newly enrolled in

Blackthorn Academy. I admit the castle was frightening at first. Dark and ominous, it loomed over the rest of the island.



PRESENT DAY...

“YES, I recall the day you arrived, Draugr. You were not happy,” the headmistress offered politely.

“I was not. But I have learned many things here. I have learned that through my suffering, I am saving my own people. It is, as my father said, noble, but that is not how I bear it,” I confessed.

Headmistress Blackthorn leaned forward, her tight bun never moving as she craned her neck and looked me over.

“Pray tell, have you discovered the reason or found the fortitude to bear your burden, then? And what are they?”

“Being the Draugr is a nightmare, Headmistress. But not being the Draugr means someone else would have to be. I have learned one thing my father and all the long line of our ancestors have not. It is that one thing that will end this curse.”

“Really? And what is that?”

I turned my head, taking a sip of the mint tea she offered from an antique set. It was good stuff, satisfying one thirst only to enhance my other. I had resolved myself to a very important decision. An understanding that would hopefully end this horror from happening to anyone else.

“Blackthorn Academy has the honor of hosting the very last Draugr of the Clan Draugen.”

“What do you mean?”

“I will not procreate. I will not ever breed with a female.”

“But how can you say that?” she asked, her face revealing no emotion.

“Because I refuse to pass this curse on to a son. My father before me was a servant to the curse, but I will be stronger. This ends with me.”

We sat in silence for some time. There I was, stoically resigned to my fate alone, with Headmistress Blackthorn sipping her tea, quietly watching me.

“I wonder if you realize the arrogance of such a statement, young Draugr.”

“It is not arrogance. It is my will. Besides, what worthy female would seek to be bedded by a monster like me?”

“Oh, I believe you would be surprised, Draugr,” she said as I stood to take my leave.

Surprised? Ha! Not likely.

The other students gave me a wide berth and with good reason. The few times I accepted feedings, I had to be restrained to keep from killing my donors. That kind of thing got around, and it did not do my reputation any favors.

It did not matter. I was not some Romeo looking for his Juliet. I was the Draugr, a revenant, a Vampiric Viking whose Bloodlust would be the death of all if I did not learn to control it. That was why I remained at the academy. To work on my control so that I could hold the seat longer than those who came before me.

With every new generation, the Draugr was younger and younger. As the elders lost control, they gave up the curse to

their sons. It was a long and bloody lineage. And it would stop with me.

“Damn fucking straight,” I snarled from my perch on top of the castle.

I chose a long since abandoned watchtower as the perfect spot to build my sanctuary, though technically I was assigned a dorm room. That did not matter to me. Sleep never came easy, anyway.

I was the Draugr. I was death. A monster made flesh by a vengeful deity, destined for ruination.

I tipped my head back and opened my mouth, howling as my hunger grew. My stomach burned as the pain had me doubling over. But still I screamed, and screamed, though the sound was whisked away by the wind coming off the raging seas.

I had to let go of my childish dreams. There was no end coming for me. No happy ever after with a mate or family.

No.

I was the Draugr. And that would be my end.

Roooooaaaaaarrrrrrrr!

CHAPTER 1



SERENA

THE SKY WAS overcast when I stepped out of the airport. It was gloomy and depressing, but I was told that was common for the United Kingdom. I'd been dreaming of visiting England, Ireland, Scotland, all of it, since reading my very first Shakespeare sonnet.

I had imagined rolling green hills and bright blue skies, a warm, orange ball of light in the center of it all. But the reality was the total opposite. Stupid of me, really. London was a city. Crowded and congested.

The skies outside of Heathrow Airport were gray and dark, and I thought back on what I'd read in the travel book I'd downloaded. Rain was common in the Fall. Still, as I turned my head to the cloudy skies, I had to admit disappointment. I thought I had heard a sound. Like a lion's roar, only deeper, darker.

Whatever.

I must have been imagining things.

Anyway, this was not at all how I pictured this place. It was only the first day, and I supposed I was angry and

nervous. I'd spent so much of my life in denial about my preternatural abilities.

Truly, it had been something of an epiphany to realize I was not crazy. Sure, I'd terrified my aunt and uncle ever since I was six years old and told them my maternal grandmother was not happy about them selling her wedding crystal.

At the time, I did not understand how upsetting such a statement was coming from their recently orphaned niece. Aunt Gabby was my mother's only sister. She and Uncle Patrick had taken me in when my parents died in a car accident coming home from the movie theater.

Drunk driver. Yeah, it sucked.

Aunt Gabby had been very angry at me for telling *lies*. I wasn't lying, but how was six year old me supposed to know I was the only one who could see and hear them?

Who are they?

Well, to put it simply, they are the others. The dead, the buried, poltergeists, shadows, spectres, spirits—whatever you wanted to call them. Speaking plainly, *they* were *ghosts*. And they were all around us.

“Where you headed, miss?”

“The railway station. I have to catch the 2:25 to Hexhamshire. Um, which way do I go?” I asked the man wearing the airport security jacket.

His gaze roamed over me, and I bit back the snarky comment that was on the tip of my tongue. I was a little oversensitive about men ogling my curvy frame, having been the butt of more than my fair share of rude comments.

My favorite was *you have such a pretty face if you could just lose some weight*. I was totally fine with my body. At five foot two inches short, I should have been born all tiny and petite. Instead, I inherited my paternal grandmother's ample bosoms and hella jiggly booty.

I waited for his eyes to flick back to mine, surprised to see actual appreciation in them, as opposed to ridicule. Maybe London was the place for me, after all.

As if. I shook my head and listened to his simple directions. Romance was not on the agenda this time around. I was here for one reason only—to *learn to control my powers*.

“Safe travels, miss,” the guard replied with a warm smile that I returned.

“Oh, and best get your rain jacket out once you get there. It's going to storm all over for the rest of the week,” he advised.

“Thank you,” I said, waving as I walked away, dragging my wheeled suitcase behind me.

Checking my phone, I saw he'd been telling the truth. Seemed the entire UK was going to be hit by a damned monsoon. I counted the months until May and wondered if I could survive without sunshine for so many months. I loved the outdoors, and the idea of being cooped up in a strange place was grating on my nerves.

“You'll deal, Serena,” I mumbled to myself, boarding the train, and finding my seat more easily than I expected.

Maybe the fleeting fair weather was why poets and authors immortalized summer in ink and paper. I supposed there was something about the constant rain that made you appreciate the sun.

Grabbing my eReader, I sat back in my seat and got comfortable. It would take about three and a half hours by train to travel to my destination. There I would catch a special ferry to the island where Blackthorn Academy was located. Nervous energy pulsed through me, and I turned my head, letting my guard down for a moment.

Shit.

The ghost of an elderly woman caught my eye and was now desperately trying to get me to engage. Her pleas turned to angry shrieks, but I was used to this. I turned back to my eReader, using my backpack as a lap pillow.

I swiped the screen to open to where I left off in the latest book I was reading. It was a fun and feisty paranormal romance series about demons and speed dating, full of page-turners and impossibly romantic situations. I always had a passion for books, and once I found a series I liked, I simply devoured them.

After thirty-six minutes the ghost moved on to the next car, her shrieks still audible from where I sat. Dead people were often confused and always frightening. Learning how to control my heart rate so as not to tip them off of my fear had taken years. I wanted nothing to do with ghosts, and pretending they did not exist had made my life slightly easier.

The dead could spot heightened emotions caused by their proximity. Masking my feelings had been vital to my survival and sanity. It sure as shit beat the long hours I'd spent making false confessions to priests, being prayed over by nuns, and talking to psychiatrists who'd blamed my parent's death for my behavior.

As I got lost in the story, I allowed myself to relax. Few travelers were on the train with me and were easily ignored. It

was my first time traveling outside of my small hometown—I was raised in West Caldwell, in New Jersey—and I was nervous as hell.

My aunt and uncle had been thrilled when my letter came. They thought Blackthorn was some fancy European college and couldn't wait to get rid of me. Especially when the letter they'd received mentioned a scholarship. Of course, the welcome packet I'd gotten was a bit different.

Mine explained exactly what Blackthorn was and what they had to offer—the truth.

And for me, that was everything.

CHAPTER 2



DRAUGR

“IT ALWAYS RAINS when new students arrive,” I complained.

I was surly and out of sorts, but excuse fucking me. My thirst had reached new heights, and it was all I could do not to go on a bloody rampage. I flexed my wings against the breeze, giving myself a good, long stretch.

“Oy, Draugr! Wanna head down to Buckie’s with us for a pint?” Bench McCree asked.

I looked over the tentacle-faced monster and shook my head. He was a decent friend, I supposed, but I had no time for an ale this evening. Bench shrugged his shoulders noncommittally and walked off, joining some of the other lads waiting on the far side of the path.

Whatever.

I had far more worrisome shit on my mind these days. My hunger was growing, gnawing, and clawing at me from the inside out. I knew I’d been acting terrible to my friends and peers, even the professors at Blackthorn. The headmistress was getting pretty fucking tired of looking at my face, but what could I say?

Hangry took on an entirely new meaning for me. I was unique among the other monsters attending Blackthorn. True, it was one of the most diverse and accredited supernatural academies in the known universes, but I was the Draugr—the next in line to take the throne of my people.

My father had filled me with tales of our ancestors. We were a peaceful people living in the far North. A landslide overtook the village, leaving them buried in a cavern below ground, sealed over in ice and snow. Death was imminent, but the villagers found a way to survive.

A grisly, gory, horrible way.

My stomach turned as I tried to imagine the poor demented soul who took the first bite of his friend and neighbor to sustain his life. Six months they stayed buried until the frost thawed enough to claw their way out. Six months of living in fear, not knowing who would be served next in their sick feast.

Still, they ate. They survived. And they were cursed by the All Father for the sins of cannibalism. It was so cold below ground and the bodies froze so quickly they could not be eaten. It was blood that sustained them. Blood that they extracted and consumed.

Somehow, everything always came down to blood.

“How could they do that, father?”

“How could they not?”

The words of my father repeated in my brain, and I frowned as I looked at the stormy seas below the cliff where I stood. Less than twenty out of a hundred and fifty emerged from the mound where those early Skaals had been buried.

Was it worth it for them? Killing their friends so they might live? I had no way of knowing. My father told me they

were captured and imprisoned by servants of the All Father, trapped in the underworld for their crimes.

At least, they were, until the first Draugr made his pact with the god.

“Free us, All Father, let us serve you in all realms of man and god. Let one bear the weight of our crimes, so all may survive. I will carry this weight. Let my hunger run evermore till the Norns, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, weavers and seers of destiny, see fit to sate my lust. I will be known as the Draugr. I will do this for my people. My life for all until the next of my line comes forth to bear the burden until such time as penance has been made.”

As a child, I did not understand why one would do such a thing, but my father explained love did crazy things to all creatures. That first Draugr had offered himself in the memory of his mate who had been killed in one of the underground battles.

Eons later, all Draugen still depended on one to take the punishment our ancestors brought down on us.

My line is ancient and though we are small in numbers, it is my destiny to shoulder the burden of hunger in penance for the sins of my forebears. Three thousand years of sorrow and pain, and still we are cursed.

The time for me to bear the bony crown of the Draugr is upon me. My hunger so great, it is close to ruling me. How can I lead if I am too weak to manage the curse?

Self-doubts and fear of failure have plagued me for decades. I was sent to Blackthorn by my Clan to learn control. Unease and anxiety have kept me awake for countless nights. I

left like a great storm was about to come crashing down on my head.

And still the curse hounded me. Even the many chefs at Blackthorn can't do a thing to satisfy my relentless appetite.

Does it suck?

Yes.

No pun intended.

Would I see it through to the end? I did not know. Determination could only get me so far, but I had that going for me. Loneliness ate at my soul as I stood on that rocky edge. The other students were milling about discussing their studies, working on projects, preparing for the next wave of first years, or going off together for a pint.

But not me. I was not there to make friends. I was there to become the next leader of my kind. To ensure the Draugen had a place in the supernatural world. Was it fair that I must sacrifice my life for theirs? Maybe not, but what choice did I have?

My father's reign was ending. As had developed over time, each Draugr carried the burden for five hundred years before passing it to his next of kin. He was weary, old, ready for the end, and it was my duty to see him get his rest.

No, it was not fair. I would miss the old man, and I hated the thought of what came next. As the oldest of my four siblings, this was my destiny. That did not mean I had to like it.

Tossing my head back, I roared into the wind, its fury whipping wildly around me. My wings outstretched, arms open wide, I relished the sting of rain as it fell in sharp drops onto my skin.

The storm had finally arrived.

CHAPTER 3



SERENA

“WHAT THE HELL is with this weather?”

I shivered as I looked out the window of my dorm room. I’d finally stopped dry heaving after throwing up all the contents of my stomach the second I stepped onto the boat to Blackthorn Academy.

Traveling to a parallel dimension via ferry was, in a word, trippy. The academy existed on Northumberland Island, a place I’d been told would be somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean between England and Ireland. Only humans could neither see, hear, or find the place.

“It’s strictly paranormals.”

That was what Ursula, my roommate, had told me. We met up on the boat, and she was kind enough to hold my hair back while I puked my guts out. Poor thing. I was afraid I’d made a rather poor first impression.

“I guess the weather is still similar to back home,” Ursula said, walking toward me. “I brought you some peppermint tea,” she added, handing me a plain mug.

Steam wafted from the top, and I breathed in the fragrant brew, offering Ursula a grateful smile. She was super nice, and a lot more open about her gifts than I'd been. Not that I would blame her.

She was a Kitchen Witch with some serious potion making skills. She also had a huge advantage over me in that Ursula knew exactly what she was—had always known it.

“They shouldn't have made you take the boat if you get seasick,” she said for the tenth time since we'd boarded, and I'd turned green.

I held my mug of tea and looked out the window, wondering if the sound I'd heard when I was busy being sick on the ferry was real. The bellowing roar had been so full of pain it broke my heart. I could hardly imagine who or what could have created such an emotionally wrought sound.

“I don't think they would change how they do things just for me,” I replied, turning my head as the door opened.

Two more women walked in with big cases rolling behind them. It was a four person suite, and I found myself wishing for a single almost immediately. Not that I did not like the other students. They weren't mean or anything. I was just a really private person. I didn't like to talk about my *gifts* as I was encouraged by Ursula to think of them.

“Hey, I'm Sapphire. I'm an empath,” the first one said.

Like me, she was a young woman, but that was where our similarities ended. She had impossibly fair skin and light strawberry-blonde hair where I had a year-round tan with dark hair and eyes. My parents were a mix of Italian and Spanish and I resembled them with my coloring and short and curvy stature.

“I’m Emery. Soothsayer,” the other young woman added.

Sapphire was tall and lithe. Her eyes sparkled like the gemstones she was named after, and her Irish accent was intriguing. Emery had dark red hair that curled around her head in a short halo that was fun and attractive. She had doe shaped eyes that glowed amber, and her tawny skin was smooth and clear. She spoke with the same lilt as the rest of my roommates.

I was starting to wonder if I was the only American there, even though I knew it was unlikely. Almost everyone I’d spoken to so far had wonderful accents, unlike my own garishly American one. I sounded like Louie DePalma from *Taxi*.

Not cool. Like at all.

How did a twenty-two year old know anything about an old TV show from the late seventies?

Well, let’s just say if you grew up seeing and hearing ghosts, you would have spent as much time as possible trying to tune them out, too. For some reason, spirits were super active at night, especially around three AM.

Some call that time the witching hour. For me, it was prime rerun hour. Late night television was my best friend when I was growing up. I had begged for my own television set when I was ten, and miraculously, Aunt Gabby and Uncle Patrick actually allowed it.

Maybe it was because they were tired of finding me in the living room huddled on the couch with the TV on. More likely, it was because of the Christmas Uncle Patrick’s parents had visited. Grandpa and Grandma Miller, as they told me to call them, were kind people.

They had asked why I wouldn't stay in my room at night, and I told them. I was very young and didn't know at the time I shouldn't tell others about my nightly visitors. I figured grandparents, even if they weren't my real ones, were people I could trust.

I was wrong.

The Millers never came over for Christmas after that. But after that, Uncle Patrick bought me a twenty-seven inch TV for my bedroom and hooked it up to the cable. I guess they figured if I had my own TV, I would stay in my room.

They were right.

“Wanna go with us to look around the grounds? We have an hour before assembly,” Ursula asked me.

I was already feeling better, so I nodded and grabbed my raincoat. I was dying to explore the Academy grounds. From what I'd gathered on the trip over, the island was protected, but there was hardly anything visible from the ferry. Just fog and the crashing waves and churning waters.

“You nervous?” Sapphire asked, her head canted to the side as she watched me curiously.

Right. Empath, I thought and nodded, not bothering to hide my feelings.

“I guess I am nervous. It's my first time at any place like this, acknowledging all this, I mean,” I stammered.

Smooth, Serena. Real smooth.

“What is it you can do again? What are your talents?” Emery asked, eyeing me suspiciously.

I tugged my raincoat on as we walked down the stairwell to the main floor. First years were on the sixth floor. Must be a

cruel twist of fate. Chub rub was already starting on my thighs, and I bit my lip hoping my discomfort didn't show.

“No worries, roomie. You'll get used to the stairs in no time,” Sapphire whispered with a wink.

“Yeah, right. I doubt it.”

I chuckled and ducked my head, feeling a blush burn over my cheeks. Sapphire, Emery, and Ursula were all thin and pretty, and they talked as if they had the same point of reference. Since they all came from pretty much the same place, I suppose they did.

“Oy, where you lot going then?” a guy with curly blond hair and dark moss colored skin asked, joining us in the stairwell.

I almost tripped down the stairs as he looked me over with intense yellow eyes. The girls had said this place was full of interesting creatures and paranormal beings, but I had never seen anything like him. Another guy joined him, this one with gray skin and a stony expression on his face that reminded me of the gargoyles that sat atop the churches the train had passed on my way through England.

Holy. Fuck.

“Just exploring. You after joining us, then?” Ursula asked, inviting them on our impromptu expedition.

Introductions were made, their names were Dietrich and Olaf, and as was becoming a habit, I went last.

“Serena? What is it you are, then?” Dietrich asked.

“She doesn't know, does she? Besides, that was rude,” Ursula scolded him on my behalf.

“Och, I wasn't after being rude.”

“Well, you were.”

“It’s fine,” I said quickly, watching Sapphire’s take on the exchange.

Seemed a lot like sexual tension to me, and since no one else seemed worried, it probably was. I realized I would have to come up with an answer for that question and preferably soon.

“Alright, Serena, by way of apology, how about we all walk to get a pint? I’ve heard of a place called Buckie’s. The students agree it is a good place to go to unwind. What do you say?”

“Sure, if everyone wants to,” I agreed, not wanting to go alone.

The last thing I wanted was to be the center of anyone’s attention. Dietrich and Olaf exchanged glances, and I wondered what that was about, but pushed it out of my mind. The rain had stopped, but it was windy and dank.

As we walked, the ribbing got worse. The two newcomers tried to get me to spill, as did my new roomies, though they were more tactful about it.

“I mean, you guys all grew up knowing you had these gifts. This is all new to me,” I tried to explain.

“So, new girl here don’t trust us. Isn’t that what you mean, then?” Dietrich snarked.

“New girl doesn’t know you. And like Ursula said earlier. I don’t know what I am,” I answered back.

“Ease up, lads. She really had it rough on the ferry over. Seasick and all,” Ursula said, and I closed my eyes on the

wave of embarrassment that hit me. Like I needed them to think I was an even bigger freak.

“It’s alright,” Sapphire added quickly. “Lots of people get seasick.”

I slowed my footsteps as Emery changed the subject, drawing attention away from me. I mouthed a *thank you* when her amber gaze flicked toward me once and noted her happy nod of acknowledgement. They were already close to each other, and as usual, I was the odd man out.

Buckie’s was up ahead in the small village located close to Blackthorn. I’d read in the brochure that had been sitting on the bed I chose, the academy was actually a castle. A real life fairytale castle. Imagine that?

I slowed my footsteps as their chatter grew farther away, just taking in the cobble walkways and old buildings. Some were brick and tar, others looked like mud and thatch. I supposed it was a combination of really old and just regular old architecture.

“Lucky we have plumbing,” I muttered to myself and could have sworn I heard a snort of laughter somewhere close by.

Chills rippled up my spine as awareness flickered to life. Was I being followed? I heard nothing out of the ordinary. No creepy footsteps or heavy breathing.

The village was moderately busy, with about a dozen or so students on the street. Yet nothing and no one seemed out of place. Well, any more out of place than the lot I’d walked to town with. Witches. Monsters. I guess I was going to have to get used to all this now. Crazy how easily I seemed to accept the fact that the supernatural world was real.

But so far, it was the first time anything in my life had made sense. I squinted my eyes, counting the shades around me without giving away the fact I could see them. Ghosts were everywhere in the world, and Northumberland Island was no different.

There were seven right then who appeared the clearest and strongest. A few dozen others in varying stages of forgetfulness. I'd started my own system of categorizing ghosts when I was a kid.

The blurry ones were on their way out. Whether they just winked out of existence or moved on, I did not know. I guessed it was different for everyone. Maybe with some lessons, I'd find out.

I stopped outside the pub, rubbing the back of my neck with my hand. The feeling of being watched had not gone away.

"Hey, new girl, you coming?" Dietrich asked, holding the door open.

Green skin and all, he was handsome, but I noticed his smile didn't quite reach his eyes. He was probably just a flirt, and that was fine. I sure as hell was not looking for a boyfriend in this place. Just some answers.

The noise inside Buckie's was pleasant and not at all grating like I'd expected of a pub. Tables with students and villagers filled the small place and everyone seemed to be having an evening drink and snack.

"Um, just water for me," I said, not trusting my stomach just yet with anything stronger.

"Aye, me too," Sapphire added as the boys went to get our drinks.

“Well, isn’t this exciting?” squealed Ursula. “My family has been coming to Blackthorn for twelve generations now. Almost going back to when the school began in 1666.”

“1666?” I asked, wondering at the number.

“Yep. Multiples of three are sacred in the craft, you know. Lots of threes, sixes, and such,” Emery explained.

“Oh, well, I am not a Witch,” I confessed, drawing three pairs of eyes to my face.

Ursula, Sapphire, and Emory frowned hard. And I amended my statement.

“At least, I don’t think I am. I mean, I don’t have magic powers or anything—”

“I can tell you are being truthful, but most supernaturals passing as normals are typically either Witches or Shifters, or maybe Fae, but I do not sense another creature in you and your magic seems muted,” she mumbled.

“Muted? Wait, Shifters? You mean like Werewolves?” I asked, stunned.

“Something like that, yes,” Sapphire whispered.

“Wow, I had no idea. But still, no, I am not that either.”

“A mystery then! But surely you know what talents you have? Like sensing feelings, making things move, reading minds. Anything like that ever happen?” Ursula asked.

“Um, no—” I replied, but was interrupted by the unceremonious prodding of an elbow digging into my side.

“Has she confessed yet?”

Dietrich intruded on our chat, placing a large tray with drinks on the table after he nudged me out of the way.

“Hush now, eejit. You’re gonna have the girl thinking we’re all mad,” Ursula admonished.

She wasn’t wrong. I mean, I certainly was not the pot calling the kettle black, but this was like being in the *Twilight Zone*—another late night TV favorite of mine, even with the creepy episodes.

“Seems to me you are being very secretive for no reason at all. Like you want to act all cool for us, is that it, little American?” Dietrich asked, taking a huge swallow of ale.

The feeling that I was being watched started up again. Between that and my growing discomfort at being the center of attention in a room full of creatures the likes of which I didn’t even know existed up until a few days ago, I was jumpy as fuck. Ursula touched my elbow, and I jolted, nearly upending my glass of water.

“Sorry,” I said, immediately feeling bad about my reaction to her simple touch.

“It’s okay,” she mumbled, but some droplets had splashed her, and I felt bad. I grabbed some napkins and handed them over, this time bumping into the table with my hip and causing everyone’s drinks to slosh over.

“Oh fuck, I am so sorry!” I whisper-screamed.

I was horrified and completely embarrassed. Leave it to the big girl to be clumsy and bumping things. Shit.

“Watch it,” Dietrich grumbled. “No need to soak me just cause you wanna be the new mystery girl—”

“Look, I don’t know why you are being so aggressive with me. I’m really not trying to be cool or mysterious. I just don’t like talking about it.”

“About what, exactly? What are you hiding?” he asked again, his eyes glowing eerily in the dimly lit pub.

The walls started to close in on me and I noticed spectres gathering in the doorways and windows. They came in through the shadows—that much I knew from years of watching and praying to a god that didn’t listen.

“Where’s your gray friend?” Emery asked, running interference, but it was too late. Everyone was watching me.

“Olaf is just there, but I am still needing an answer from this one,” Dietrich said.

He nodded his head in the direction of his friend who was stopped at the next table, clapping hands with a darker green man with a beard that resembled dreadlocks, only they were wiggling and—*oh fuck*, were those tentacles?

My eyes widened, and I swallowed a sip of water. Yep. Those were tentacles protruding from the handsome man’s face.

Was every monster here hot? Geez—what an observation!

“Fine,” I growled, angry at Dietrich’s persistent line of questioning and feeling all out of sorts in the strange and mystical place. “It’s probably old hat here, anyway, considering everything and everyone. I mean, you guys are way more talented than me. My thing is just weird, but it scares me, and I don’t know how to turn it off. That’s why I’m here,” I mumbled.

I knew I was revealing far too much about myself. I couldn’t stop it, though. It was like I’d gone into full panic mode. The strange feeling I was being watched grew, unsurprising since all eyes were then zeroed in on me.

“You are all supernaturals here, right? So. I suppose I can just come out with it.”

“That’s what we’ve been saying, after all!” the green monster said, slapping his hand on the table.

His face looked gleeful, as if he could not wait to hear my secret, which was baffling since he did not know it. I mean, how unique could I really be among all these Witches and creatures and things? I was being dumb. So, taking Dietrich’s cup from his hand, I took a long pull of ale, then I faced my roommates and the two guys we’d gone there with.

Calling up the infamous quote from that flick by the uber-talented and somewhat creepy M. Night Shyamalan, I gathered my nerve and opened my mouth.

“I see dead people.”

CHAPTER 4



DRAUGR

THE SECOND I caught her scent, I was a goner. Standing on the cliffs overlooking the dock, I roared my agony against the incoming storm. The rain and wind my only respite from the hunger burning my veins.

With my vision turned red from the bloodlust, I scoured the new arrivals, wondering which among them would be a willing donor to quench my thirst. It was the same with every new batch of students that arrived—a clause in my contract with the Academy.

Mine was an ancient curse that could only be lifted if the Norns, those Nordic weavers of fate—*Clotho*, *Lachesis*, and *Atropos*—saw fit to bless just one of us with a mate. Fated mates were rarer than Unicorns in our world, and I'd already given up hope. After all, father, grandfather, great-grandfather before him, and so on, had not been blessed. Surely, I had done nothing to garner their favor.

Thousands of years and hundreds of Draugrs later, my people eked out their living in the northernmost part of this realm. Time seemed to stand still for the Draugen, who continued to explore the seas, fish, and hunt. Of course, we

could never return to the mortal world. The All Father had not just given us a taste for blood, like our Vampiric brethren, but our appearance was such that we could never pass. Skin black as crow feathers, eyes that burned with inhuman color, wings, and horns.

We looked more demon than man. Fitting, I supposed, since all Draugen were male. Contracts were made with females for breeding purposes, continuing the line ever important. Just that morning, I had a missive from my father reminding me of my duties.

Headmistress Ophelia Blackthorn had agreed to my father's ridiculous demands, and here was yet another arrival day. I snarled angrily, my hunger growing to impossible heights. Each semester was the same, new female students unwittingly agreed to submit to an exam designed to determine compatibility so she may be considered for future breeding.

The idea was revolting, and yet, there it was. My father had not only sent me here to control my hunger, so I may rule our people better—he'd sent me out to stud.

Motherfucker.

My lip peeled back over fangs that had elongated in my anger and thirst. Damn the man. I was not fit to oversee the new arrivals. Yet, I was bound by my word.

Angrily, I lifted my wings, taking flight in the raging storm. The elements were strong, but so was I. My cloaking magic worked in this realm, but not in the castle. I took advantage when and where I was able.

I hovered near the gangplank where passengers were disembarking. There were almost three dozen of them, ranging from Witch to Gargoyle, Shifter, and more.

I was used to the variety of supernatural creatures, but it was still quite something. Typically secretive or prone to warring with one another, this island, the Academy really, was a neutral ground for unlikely allies to learn and grow in a safe place.

Yeah, right.

I felt like a pussy when I repeated such things, even if only to myself. I watched the throng of giggling girls, posturing males, and the few older passengers on board with little interest. The wind turned and with it, a new fragrance lifted to greet me, penetrating through the scents of ozone and sea. Lightning crashed and thunder boomed, I sniffed deeply, trying to drag more of it into my lungs.

What was it?

The scent was earthy and musky. Memories flooded my brain. Damp mornings walking through the woods of my old village. Sunlight breaking through the thick fir canopy, landing on patches of wild thyme, mint, and in the summer, rare Nordic rosebushes.

I needed to find the owner of that scent. Flying lower, I saw her. A rounded beauty with full, womanly curves, pulling a suitcase and holding a napkin to her lips. Her long, dark hair was pulled back, and her companion, a female, was holding her elbow and whispering to her.

She'd been ill on the boat. I frowned, wondering what kind of supernatural got seasick on their way to Blackthorn. But no matter. If she were not well, I would happily fetch a nurse to her or help her to the infirmary. As soon as I could find my nerve, of course.

How could it be that a woman had rendered me, the Draugr, speechless?

The very idea was astonishing, and even more, I realized, in her presence my hunger had abated. Wait—that was not right. It was there, beneath the wonder and the curiosity. My thirst burned with the heat of a thousand suns, but instead of a raging bloodlust that would destroy all, I had one focus now.

Her.

I don't know why, but the idea of harming her in any way made my blood run cold. Forcing myself to move, I flapped my wings higher, moving away from the beautiful creature before I could cause her any lasting damage. This was disastrous. She felt human to me. Well, human with a little extra, but what?

Pain riddled me with every inch of space I placed between us. Grunting with effort, I collapsed onto the roof of the castle, struggling against the magnetic pull, all but forcing me to go back.

“You have found her,” a familiar voice broke through the growl of battle raging inside of me.

I spun around in a low crouch, fangs bared and claws out, only to be met by the amused chuckle of Professor Fotheringham. The man stood in the storm, collecting rain in glass jars likely to be used in his spells or potions.

Professor Fotheringham taught students how to magically defend themselves against Dark Creatures and Magic and had worked many hours with me, acting as both monster and rescuer. Admittedly, I enjoyed his class very much and appreciated every opportunity to study with him.

Between Mr. Brecken, the librarian, and Professor Fotheringham, I'd learned more about myself at Blackthorn than I ever had back home. It was a humbling experience, testing one's limitations, but the men of the Draugen lived very long, somewhat undead lives, as it were.

"For a man with one foot inside the veil, and one here, I'd say you look like shite, Raven," Professor Fotheringham casually observed.

"Bloody hell, Professor, I told you, I'm not Raven anymore. I'm the Draugr now."

"Aye, but I think maybe no. At least, I dinnae think your destiny is that of your father, young Raven. Now, up off the floor with you, lad," he growled, offering me his hand, and helping me to stand.

I was a wee bit wobbly on my feet, and I hated the show of weakness, but I was not so much a fool as to refuse his help. The male was good, solid. And he still called me Raven. That was the name of my youth, from the time before I came into my title.

"You have found *her* then, haven't you?"

"How can you tell all that? I barely caught a glimpse of a female who just happened to smell good, is all."

"Sure, you are right, then. So, where is she now?" he asked, and without error, I knew.

"She is walking down the corridor, off to the pub," I said, surprising myself into stopping. "Wait. How the hell did I know that?"

"You imprinted, Raven. That means she is the one. I believe your destiny had just arrived on the island."

“No way! I am the Draugr, I’ve no destiny or fate. The Norns would not likely have blessed me. Who am I to get such attention?” I barked, mad beyond reason by then.

What did all this mean? If the beautiful female was my destiny, she was in danger. My bloodlust was unparalleled. If it were to focus on one person, I’d wind up destroying her before I could stop myself.

“I can see you panicking,” the professor said, capping one of the bottles.

The rain had tapered off into a fine Northumberland drizzle, but my chest was heaving with the effort it took to breathe in and out. Yeah, I was panicking, but I did not like him pointing it out, for fuck’s sake.

“Raven, go easy on yourself, lad. And go easy on her, too,” he said, ignoring my rolling growl. “She’s likely new to all this. A first year, nervous with no real friends. You know how some of the folk here can be with newbies. Might be she could use a friend.”

“Are you insane? You think I could be friends with the first woman to elicit a bloodlust inside me?” I snarled, running a hand through my soaked hair.

“So, she did get your blood pumping? That is another sign, Raven. She might be exactly what you’ve been waiting for.”

“Stop calling me Raven. I am not him anymore. I am the Draugr. *Faaz! Paak! Dinok!*” I snarled the ancient motto of my Clan, thumping my chest with my fist after each word.

Its meaning was simple. *Pain! Shame! Death!* Not exactly chipper.

“If she is truly yours, as I suspect she is, then Raven is not gone,” the professor spoke softly.

But in his eyes, I saw my reflection and knew Raven was gone. Even as I tried desperately to control myself, I had failed. My DeathFace snarled back at me, the mask of my inner monster.

Corpse-like, a monster's skeletal skull with sunken flesh in the hollows of my cheek, my bones sharp and defined, my fangs elongated. The horrors beyond the veil shone in my eyes for any who dared glance too long. It was said gazing in the eyes of my DeathFace would drive a person mad.

I roared as pain the likes of which I had never felt squeezed around the thudding muscle in my chest. Shit. Was that my heart?

The pull toward town, toward her, was undeniable. Even as I tried to hold on to myself, my DeathFace roared, and I reared up, wings flapping into the sky.

“Off you go, Raven. Claim what is yours by right,” Professor Fotheringham whispered, but I could hear his words clear as a bell—and they burned into my soul.

Claim. Mine. Mate.

Fuck. What was I doing?

Apparently, I was stalking my mate. I crept down the alleys, keeping to the shadows, wings and cloaking magic wrapped around me to shield my form.

Fuck, she was beautiful. I drank in every inch of her I could glean of her from a safe distance. My hunger burned in my veins, but I wouldn't allow myself any closer.

Purple swirls of magic seemed to surround her, and I wondered if anyone else noticed them. She was a beacon of violet in the gray atmosphere of the island. The flame to my moth-like existence.

I coveted her from afar, snarling when the males in her group got too close, they could not see me, but even first year monsters could feel when they were being hunted. Scraps of their conversation filtered to my ears, and I followed along silently, willing myself into stillness.

Once inside the pub, I used twice the amount of magic to hide myself in the periphery of the crowd, making sure she was safe while learning all I could from thirty paces. Some supernaturals were harder to disguise myself from than others, to them I uttered a warning growl and flashed my DeathFace in their direction.

One plus about being a legendary monster, few wanted to fuck with me when I was in rare form. Those who did not know better. The ones sizing me up in the dim bar room were stopped by those who did.

Lucky them.

I had been in my fair share of fights, but the monster in me was in no mood. My only focus was on the female. Serena, I had heard her give her name to the students she was with. The females were Witches, but I could not tell what sort of supe my fair mate was.

Her majestic purple aura pulsed lightly around her, working to push away any unwanted brushes of magic from the others. I wondered if she knew she was guarding herself so diligently or if it was merely a force of habit.

Typically, magical beings allowed their powers to touch and test each other on the island. It was a part of the treaty that allowed us all to study there. We learned from each other, helped keep ourselves and this place safe by playing nicely.

Either she had not read the agreement, or she was unaware. Either way, if it was privacy she wanted, privacy she would get. Curiosity got the better of me and I moved in closer, sliding into an empty table just two down from hers.

That was when I felt her anxiety rising. Before I could react, I noticed something else. The undead in the room were creeping closer to her. Ghosts and poltergeists moved out of the shadows, drawn in by her calming purple light. Then she spoke, and the entire room froze.

“I see dead people.”

Her confession hit me like a ton of bricks. The entire bar turned to stare at her, their eyes wide in either fear or disgust.

“Dark magic,” someone whispered.

“Necromancy,” mumbled another.

A few hurried to leave, dropping bills on their tables hastily while those at her table stood and jumped back.

“Fuck, you must be joking!” the moss-skinned male, the one named Dietrich said, anger flashing in his yellow eyes.

“What? You wanted the truth, there it is. I see dead people,” Serena uttered, her voice wavering.

“That’s not funny, Serena! We don’t joke about that here,” one of the female’s said, her eyes pleading with Serena to take it back.

But Draugr saw it then. The sadness in her eyes. She was telling the truth, and from the look on her face, this was not the first time she’d been met with skepticism, anger, and disappointment.

“I shouldn’t have said anything,” she mumbled, running out of the pub.

“Fuck. We should go after her. No telling what she might do,” Dietrich said, standing, but I had already moved, blocking his path.

“Sit down,” I growled, noting with pleasure his sudden pallor.

“Where did you—who are you?”

“Draugr?” Bench said, moving over to stand by the table of first years who had just upset my mate. “What are you doing?”

“You know these pups, Bench?” I asked my peer.

He nodded his head in the direction of the Gargoyle, shook it at Dietrich, and shrugged at the girls. Everyone in Buckie’s was staring at me, all on guard, as they should be. I was no one to be trifled with.

“Who are you?” Dietrich repeated.

“Holy feck, mate. Shut up. It’s the Draugr,” the Gargoyle whispered, his voice filled with awe and no small amount of fear. “Name’s Olaf. We meant no ill will toward Serena, Lord Draugr,” he said, proving he was smarter than his pal.

“Good. Keep it that way,” I growled my reply, claiming Serena before all and sundry.

“Draugr, is she yours?” Bench asked.

“Mine,” I snarled and cracked my neck, meeting the eye of every male in the room. A couple held my gaze for more than a few seconds, but in the end, all looked away.

That did it. The second the word slipped past my lips, my inner monster went apeshit. I needed to find Serena. Introduce myself.

Claim. Bite. Drink.

No!

“She didn’t even know what she was before she got her letter,” one small female uttered, looking miserable. “Now she is wandering around the island alone. Who knows what might happen?”

“Shite. I did not think of that,” Dietrich muttered, and it was all I could do not to snap the fucker’s neck.

The growl rolling through my chest grew louder, and I flexed my wings angrily. Fuck. That magnetic pull was back, but fear stopped me from moving. I supposed I could keep it together for at least a few minutes. Just to make sure she was alright.

The fact I was the one who could potentially harm her was not lost on me. There were other dangers on Northumberland Island. Creatures and perils in the forests and the moat surrounding the castle, never mind the sea that held the island itself. Things a first year who’d been raised in the human world would know nothing about.

That settled it. I might be bad for Serena, but there were things here that were definitely bad for her. Besides, I was about ninety percent sure I would do terrible things to keep her safe, including kick my own ass if necessary.

“Draugr? You going or what?” Bench asked, his head cocked to the side in question as he watched me.

“Aye,” I growled, blurring to the door and beyond. I didn’t need to track her by scent. Something inside was leading me right to her and not a moment too soon.

I zoomed overhead, flying quickly through the darkening skies till I felt Serena below me. She was standing on the

overlook behind the castle, and I could hear her sobbing as she stared at the waves.

Tears were dangerous in Northumberland. They were like candy to some of the creatures dwelling here, one that was currently stalking her.

“Serena!” I bellowed, using all my strength to reach her.

I turned my body, angling downward in a nosedive I’d heard likened to a falcon’s stoop. Only I was not the predator and Serena was not my prey. Not in this case, anyway.

She turned around when she heard me call her, and that was when she saw the Daemon encroaching on her personal space. It was an Algea—a god of pain and suffering.

Fuck, this was not good. Where there was one, you could bet on the other two being close by. Greek by nature, these beings were known for feasting on misery and nothing signaled misery like tears. Anger raged through me at the thought of Serena being there alone, unprotected. What was the headmistress thinking? She was practically a human, for fuck’s sake!

With no knowledge of the dangers abounding the territory, she was practically bait. Minor Deities like these flooded the wilds of Northumberland. Attracted to the power of the students and staff at Blackthorn, these forgotten ones often attacked the stray student. Many powerful wards were placed protecting the castle itself, but out here, their effect lessened.

I snarled and grabbed the creature by the scruff, ignoring the way my claws sank deep into the slimy flesh at its nape. The creature screeched an ear-piercing wail, and I watched Serena crumble to the floor, clutching her ears. Rage filled me

at seeing her hurt, and I hefted the daemon up and tossed it over the cliff in time to be tackled by its sister.

“Watch out!” Serena screamed, and my heart filled with joy.

She was worried about me. That meant something, right?

“Ooof!” I grunted as the next Algea raked me with her claws.

Bloody Daemons!

CHAPTER 5



SERENA

“WATCH OUT!” I screamed, my eyes widening at the sight unfolding before my eyes.

A big, freaky ass monster resembling a sort of half-woman, half-slug gnashed its lamprey like teeth as it squirmed toward me. Paralyzed with fear, I barely registered the stranger yelling at me to watch out as he swooped down like some dark, avenging angel there to save my life.

As if.

Terrified, I fell to the floor, dodging the slimy tail of the slug thing, and whimpered as the beautiful stranger fought to save me. Rippling muscles covered his body, and I damn near swooned. His skin was black as a raven’s wing, his chest covered in strange markings that looked like runes I’d once seen in a show about Vikings during one of my many all-nighters.

They were like tattoos, only they seemed to glow like fire was flowing within each mark. Heat pooled in my belly as I watched him brave the hideous creature. The thing seemed

really pissed that he'd tossed the other one off the cliff, but that was just too damn bad as far as I was concerned.

“Ooof!” my hero grunted as the creature head butted him in the stomach.

I cringed, hoping he was as strong as he looked. Another of the monsters was slithering toward us, and I did not think I could face it alone. The stranger growled, anger sparking his gaze, turning his gaze a deep, mesmerizing purple. How did I know it was anger? It was bizarre, but it was like I could feel his emotions.

Two parts enraged, one part worried. The enraged part, I understood. The guy was fighting for his life. It was the why that befuddled me.

I mean, I was nothing to him. He did not know me or owe me a single thing. So, what was he doing, coming to the rescue of some chubby weirdo who saw ghosts?

Fuck. Everyone knew now. My roommates. The two guys we'd met. And everyone at Buckie's Pub.

For once, I'd taken the chance and come right out with my strange talents, and like always, I'd been judged and found wanting. No, that was wrong. The people here feared me. Feeling lost and hurt, I'd come to this overlook and spent a few minutes alone, wallowing in misery.

The tears came freely, and that was new for me. I did not cry easily. At least, not since I was a kid. Ghosts seemed to latch onto sadness, and I did my best to present an ever cheerful, or at the very least serene, exterior. I even had the name for it.

“Grrrr,” the handsome hero was gaining the upper hand, and I searched for something, anything, I could use to help

him.

“What are you doing?” he demanded. “Get down and stay down!”

“I can help,” I answered, hefting a stone off the floor and launching it at the closest monster.

“Fuck,” he growled as the thing switched its plan of attack, slithering rapidly toward me instead.

“Shit,” I whimpered.

Hurrying backward, I lost my footing, landing hard on the rocky ground. Thank goodness for my big butt. Still, it hurt, but I had no time to think. The stranger had the thing by the tail and was pulling it back, but the third beast was on him, its hideous, circular mouth closing over his shoulder. He roared in pain, still refusing to let go.

“Fuck,” I moaned, looking around frantically for something I could use. My gaze landed on a shadow standing near the forest. It was blurry and dark, but sentient enough to be watching what transpired.

My heart hammered inside my chest, and I could hardly breathe for the fear building within me. For some reason, this stranger’s well-being was very important. In fact, it was everything. Something sizzled along my skin, pulsating with power as I pointed at the shadow.

“Help him!” I ordered and felt a wave of energy burst forth from me in sharp, glittering, purple waves.

The fact I could see it was terrifying enough, but then the energy wave hit the shadow, and the ghost sprang into action. I could hear the sounds of the departed screeching like a banshee as it floated over the rocky earth, attaching itself to one slug and pushing it off the cliff. I collapsed to my knees,

suddenly exhausted, barely able to keep my eyes open as I watched my hero dispense with the last creature.

“Serena! What have you done to yourself? You should have stayed hidden, out of the line of fire,” the stranger growled.

I would have taken offense at his bossy, heavy handedness, but I saw worry in his gaze. Felt it, too. Somewhere around my rapidly beating heart. This was so weird. It was like I was bound to him, instantly connected to this strange, dark, beautiful creature.

“Serena? Open your eyes, stay with me,” he said, sounding urgent.

“Had to help,” I whispered, surprised I did not have the energy to talk. “I’m no one’s damsel in distress.”

“Foolish girl. Brave, but foolish,” he said, lifting me princess-style.

“What are you doing?”

“Saving you, whether or not you like it.”

“You know my name.”

“Yes,” he said, eyes widening.

“What’s yours?”

“I am the Draugr,” he said after an intense pause.

“But what’s your name?” I asked, knowing somehow that the Draugr was not his preferred moniker.

Another pregnant pause, but I was stubborn. He would not win me over with that gnarly glare of his. I swore his eyes darkened to a deep purple before returning to their lighter violet color. This close, I noted his chiseled features, spiraling

horns, and the massive, black-feathered wings protruding from his back. He was incredibly potent, and devastatingly handsome. In other words, boyfriend here was hot as fuck.

Holy hotness.

“My given name is Raven,” he grunted, holding me tight to his chest. “May I take you to the infirmary now?” he said, sounding completely annoyed.

What the hell did he have the right to be annoyed about? I wondered, but then again, the dude did just save my chubby ass from getting eaten by whatever that was. He did not have to, but he did. I was being ungrateful, and that made me feel like shit.

“Sorry,” I murmured. “You don’t have to carry me. I know it’s not easy—”

“First, those things were called the Algea. Three sister Daemons—minor Greek Deities who feed on misery. Your tears brought them out of the forest.”

“So, this is my fault?” I asked, trying unsuccessfully to fight the need to pass out.

“Of course not, *unnasta*. Second, you are wrong,” he murmured.

“About what?”

“Carrying you is my pleasure.”

I was seconds from losing consciousness anyway, so I nodded my head in assent. I did not think I could walk anywhere right then. It was like all my energy had been zapped up by whatever I had done to that shadow.

“Okay, Raven, and thank you,” I whispered before I slipped into darkness.

For the first time, I was not afraid of it. Rather, it seemed to welcome me like an old friend. Maybe it was because I was in Raven's arms. Or maybe it was whatever magic had flowed through me to move that shadow. It was too early to tell.

At least, I was positive I was asking the right questions. Even better, I knew I would find the answers there, at Blackthorn Academy.

CHAPTER 6



DRAUGR

I PACED the tiny room where Serena was being looked over by Nurse Campbell in the infirmary. The woman's fear was grating on my nerves, but I suppose it could not be helped.

Ever since I'd arrived with Serena, so small and fragile, in my arms, unconscious at that, I'd been flickering between my DeathFace and my normal mien, which admittedly, was not all that less frightening ever since I'd arrived.

I was agitated, nervous, angry, plus a million other complicated feelings I had no desire to sift through. Fuck. If she woke up now, I would likely send her running from me screaming.

Then again, maybe not.

There was a moment where I was certain she was attracted to me. Strange, really, it was like I could feel what she was feeling at certain times. She moaned lightly, and I turned, practically pushing the nurse out of the way.

"Is she alright?" I asked.

"Far as we can tell, she simply needs rest. There is nothing physically wrong, but the headmistress has been notified as to

what occurred.”

“Fine,” I growled, hovering near as the tiny female on the bed stirred.

“Raven?” Serena murmured, and helpless to do otherwise, I went to her.

“Miss Notte, I’m a nurse here at Blackthorn. How are you feeling?”

“Okay. Tired. Raven?”

“I am here, *unnasta*,” I murmured, taking her hand as she slowly looked up at me, her luminous eyes warming as they met my gaze. Relief poured over me and I exhaled a breath I had not even realized I’d been holding.

“Good,” the nurse said, writing something down in the chart. “I will be back later. Press the button if you need anything beforehand, and please, get some rest,” she said, glaring pointedly at me.

I pulled my lip over my teeth in a snarl and the small female swallowed and left the room. Normally, I was better behaved, but being around Serena had me confused and bristling with protective instincts I’d never felt.

“Are you okay?” Serena asked, attempting to push herself upright.

She closed her eyes and held a hand to her forehead like she was dizzy, and I moved forward, aiding her into a sitting position. Grabbing a pillow from the side chair, I placed it behind her back, my only goal was to make sure she was comfortable.

Fuck. When had that happened?

I was the Draugr. What the fuck did I care for the comfort of another? Typically, when I met someone, I was sizing them up as a blood donor to my insatiable hunger. When I thought about it, I realized no one had stirred my appetite since I'd laid eyes on her.

Then it hit me. So hard and fast, I nearly doubled over from the pain. Hunger burned in my veins, the likes of which I had never felt. I was on fire. Literally. Closing my eyes, I took a step back, but realized she was still holding my hand.

"I'm starving," she murmured, and I opened my eyes to find her hungry gaze locked on my face.

"I don't think so. I think that's me," I confessed, embarrassed that I could not control my own feelings.

"How did you find me? I mean, we haven't met. You weren't at the pub, but I swear I felt you there."

I swallowed hard. Unsure of her reaction when I told her what I'd really been doing. It was not like she would appreciate me stalking her—not that I'd ever blame her for that. But she had been born and raised in the human world and had all sorts of expectations of behavior I had no way of knowing.

Fuck it. I was not a coward. I was the Draugr. Leader of my people. Destined to suffer for them all—*maybe*. After all, it was very possible Serena Notte, *I'd learned her last name from the nurse*, could change all that. Taking a fortifying breath, I straightened my back and answered her questions.

"I've been following you," I said.

"Following me? When?"

"Ever since the ferry docked. I felt a pull, Serena, a sort of, I don't know, magnetic force and it led me to you."

“Why didn’t you speak to me? Introduce yourself?” she asked, her brows furrowed adorably in concentration.

When did I start using words like adorable?

I shook my head, tucked my wings tightly against my back as I focused on my breathing and not the delicious, oh so tempting fragrance that wafted from the delectable little female.

Earthy, sweet, delicious.

I was practically salivating with my need for her. The steady thumping of her heart beneath her breastbone was a siren’s call. I wanted to claim her then and there. Take of her blood. Seal our bond. Make her mine.

“I do not fully understand this compulsion to be near you —” I started, but she shook her head.

“You’re lying. I don’t know how I know that, but I do. You understand more about this than you are telling me, Raven.”

“Draugr,” I muttered. “I am the Draugr.”

“I don’t know what that is. But you gave me your name, and to me, you are Raven.”

“Fuck, Serena, this complicates things. It will not be easy.”

“What won’t be easy?” she asked, and I noticed her dark eyes glowing softly with her magic, all violets, and lavenders.

Damn. She was so beautiful. Temptation personified. I gritted my teeth, trying to choose how much of myself to give away. How much would be too much for this fine creature?

“Raven?” she said my name, but it sounded like a question.

I felt her small hand wrap around my forearm, and I had to look down to make sure I was not imagining it. I wasn't. She really was touching me. Voluntarily—and wasn't that fucking amazing? The contact made me shiver and a low rumble built inside of me.

“What won't be easy? Tell me,” she asked, but I could see in her softly glowing eyes she knew. Fuck yes, she knew.

Sultry, sweet siren. My unnasta.

My heart squeezed inside my chest as thoughts of tasting her lips all but consumed me. Hunger rode me harder and harder with every breath I took. I feared what giving in to my need to touch her would do. Would my bloodlust destroy her?

No.

I knew the answer before it echoed in my brain. I could never hurt her. Serena was precious to me. Incredible how quickly this female took over every single thought in my brain. Only that morning had I suffered the agony of knowing mine was a fate I would not wish on the soul of my worst enemy.

“Staying away from you,” I replied after a long pause.

Shit. I could have kicked myself at the hurt that flashed across her face. But I needed her to understand. She was a temptation I could not resist. Passion burned my throat, an insatiable desire to capture her lips in an all out consuming kiss filled me.

Dangerous beauty.

I leaned down, brushing her hair off her shoulders as I caressed her face. Her skin was like silk, and her warm breath tickled my nerve endings as she leaned into my touch. Serena was more powerful than any other creature in the world, far as I was concerned.

She gave me the one thing I had never dared dream of having. She gave me hope. That made her the single most important thing in my life. It did not matter that we barely knew each other. Or that I was a monster and she a dream.

All that mattered was that Serena was mine. I would do anything to keep her safe, protected and by my side. Oh, she did not realize the monster she was courting was already hers. Body, heart and soul, as I drew near her lips, I made a silent vow, a sacred oath, I would do terrible things to keep her whole.

Serena Notte was more than just a first year novice Necromancer at Blackthorn Academy. She was my one, my only. She was that which I had never dreamed of having.

Serena Notte was my fated mate.

CHAPTER 7



SERENA

I WOKE with a hunger so ravenous it was driving me mad. Opening my eyes slowly against the harsh fluorescent lights, I squinted as a strange woman took my pulse and temperature.

“Miss Notte, I’m a nurse here at Blackthorn. How are you feeling?” she said.

“Okay. Tired. Raven?” I replied, needing to know what happened to the man who had fought so bravely for me.

“I am here, *unnasta*,” a deep, familiar growl answered, and relief welled within me.

I met his gaze and felt my body respond instantly. Heat and need throbbed inside my veins. My hunger returned, causing me to wince, but I held my tongue. I wanted to be alone with him, and that would never happen if the nurse thought I was sick.

“Good,” the nurse said and wrote in my chart. “I will be back later. Press the button if you need anything beforehand, and please, get some rest.”

She glared at Raven, and I frowned at her. Far as I was concerned, he was the one I wanted here, not her. I was

relieved when she left the room.

Exhaustion kept trying to creep into my brain, but I was too intent on the strange back and forth between Raven and me. He was dancing around something, I could feel it. Sure as I felt the gnawing, grating hunger down to my bones.

What was happening to me? I couldn't be sure, but one thing was clear. I wanted him. This strange, beautiful, dark, avenging angel. I wanted him to kiss me. I was desperate for it.

I reached out and grabbed his muscular forearm, loving the sizzle that burned where we touched. Damn. I had never felt anything like this. His eyes glowed with purple fire, and I was helpless to look away. He insisted he was the Draugr, using whatever that meant to keep his distance, but I was having none of that.

“Fuck, Serena, this complicates things. It will not be easy.”

“What won't be easy?” I asked.

I was trying to follow what he was saying, but desire, hunger, and thirst rolled together until I was running on one giant, primordial instinct. My goal was simple. I wanted him to kiss me. Now.

Like right now.

“Raven?” I murmured his name, more question than statement. “What won't be easy? Tell me.”

Okay, fine. So I was begging now. But who could blame me? In all my life, I never had a man look at me the way Raven was staring at me right then. Like I mattered.

No. It was more than that. He looked at me like I was *all* that mattered.

My pulse raced and my heart beat like a thousand horses thundering across the plains. He brushed my hair back off my shoulders and cradled my face in his big, warm hands. I leaned into his touch, needing more like I needed air to breathe.

“Raven,” I moaned as his lips brushed softly across mine.

“*Unnasta*,” he growled the strange word, eyes blazing as he finally gave in and claimed my mouth in a kiss that put all others to shame.

I’d had boyfriends back in New Jersey, for sure. I wasn’t even a virgin. But the things Raven was doing to my mouth sure as hell made me feel like one.

He growled, angling my head where he wanted it, driving his tongue in long, deep sweeps that made me ache with wanting him. That hunger I’d been feeling since I woke up burned bright, then slowly began to fill, as if our kiss was nourishment enough.

I did not understand it, but I knew I wanted more. Threading my fingers through his long hair, I held him close, encouraging him to go deeper, harder. Longer. Fuck, my clothes were uncomfortable. I wanted them gone. Longed to feel his heated flesh against mine.

His rumbling growl reverberated against my chest. It was the sexiest damn sound I had ever heard, my wet panties were a testament to that fact.

More. More. MORE.

The words repeated in my brain, and I could not tell if they were mine or his. Raven moaned, pressing down on me, and I half pulled him onto the mattress. His big, muscular thigh slid between my legs. It was as if he knew I ached, and, fuck yes, I did ache for him.

Raven. My Raven.

“Shit. We have to stop,” he growled, pulling back from the kiss.

I saw a brilliant flash of white peeking out when he spoke. Fangs. He had fangs—long, sharp, lethal looking fangs protruding from his gums.

They should have terrified me, but instead, I rather liked them. He was enormous and heavy, but not uncomfortably so. He felt good, stone hard, and hot, pressed against me on the small bed. I trembled, loving the way he fit in the cradle of my hips.

Sexy, deadly monster. Mine.

“I need,” I moaned, trying to coax him back to my mouth.

Hungry. So hungry for him, I could not speak beyond fragmented sentences. It was like I was running on instinct.

“What do you need, *unnasta?*” he asked, his voice gravelly.

“Want you. Need you.”

“You have me, sweet Serena,” he growled, eyes flashing purple fire as he captured my lips once more.

This time, when he kissed me, he moved. Raven flexed his hips and rocked his hard length against my core, sending tendrils of pleasure skyrocketing through me.

I was seconds away from coming and we both still had our clothes on. He tasted so good. Like dark chocolate and red wine, the expensive kind I snuck out of the cellar from Uncle Patrick’s special collection the day I graduated high school. My friends and I drank the whole bottle, and I wasn’t even

sorry, considering my so-called family could not be bothered to even get me a cupcake.

Raven's kiss reminded me of that delicious wine, and that night. I'd done something bad, but it felt good. I'd never done anything really wild or spur of the moment. But kissing Raven made me feel untamed and savage.

When I kissed him, I didn't feel scared or weird. I felt powerful, fierce, like I belonged. His tongue wrapped around mine and he sucked on it, long and hard, moving faster now. His leather pants made swooshing noises against my leggings, and I moaned—*so close*.

I needed something, but I was not sure what. Just a little something extra, I was burning for him, my blood on fire. He just had to do something to push me over the edge. As if he knew, Raven switched angles, licking a path from my chin to my neck, nipping the skin with biting kisses designed to drive me insane.

“Please, Raven, please,” I moaned, arching my back.

Raven's eyes met mine, his irises glowed a deep purple I found simply intoxicating. He flashed his fangs, and I felt his hunger match my own.

“Serena,” he growled, holding back, but I was already a goner.

“Do it,” I whispered fervently, craving his fangs on my skin.

It was like I needed him to bite me. Understanding passed between us, and his eyes darkened. Whatever this was that was about to happen, it felt big. Huge. And I wanted it more than I wanted my next breath. Lips pulled back, Raven bared his

teeth. Excitement pulsed through my veins, and I angled my head, baring my neck for him.

“Mine,” he growled, a split second before the door slammed open.

“STOP THIS!” a commanding voice shouted and power pulsed through the room.

It all happened so quickly I could hardly follow. I saw Raven leap, spreading his wings to block whatever weaponized magic had been hurled at us. I felt confused and hazy, still revved up and frustrated from my almost orgasm, but also angry and scared.

“What is going on here? Draugr, we have a contract!” the female intruder asked, her heels clacking on the floor as she walked into the room.

“I honor the contract, headmistress, but it has no bearing here,” he snarled in reply.

I gasped at the barely contained rage I heard in his voice, though, to be truthful, I totally got where he was coming from. This whole interruption was not exactly conducive to sexy fun times. In fact, I was just as pissed off as he was at being cock blocked.

“You will remove yourself, Draugr,” the woman, *er*, headmistress, said calmly.

I bristled at her use of the name Draugr. He’d called himself “the Draugr” once or twice, but the headmistress used the word in place of his name, and for some reason, that annoyed me. As if I knew it had a dark meaning for my—*my what exactly?*

Confusion growing, I tapped on Raven’s lower back, but he did not budge. With his black, densely feathered wings

spread wide, he effectively blocked and protected me from view. I took a moment to run my fingers through my hair and straighten my shirt, hoping all my bits were properly covered.

They were. Unfortunately, we hadn't gotten to the revealing bit.

"I said leave us, Draugr. I must converse with Miss Notte alone."

Raven hissed a slow, menacing sound, and it brought chills to my spine. It wasn't fear of him that made me shiver. Nope. Strange as I was, his possessive tendencies were a serious turn on.

"It's alright, Raven," I said, pressing my hand firmly to his back, in the space just below his left wing.

He relaxed a moment, tucking the massive things away, and I was shocked to see them wink out of existence. I was dazzled and confused, never having seen anything quite like him before.

"Your wings? Where did they go?" I asked, ignoring the headmistress.

"Yes, well, Draugr will tell you all about his abilities later, Miss Notte. I must have a word and my time is precious."

I darted a sharp glance at the woman, but turned my gaze back to Raven's dark one. He looked amused, and I saw him visibly relax when I smiled up at him.

"Will you come back after she's gone?" I asked, feeling equal parts hopeful and foolish.

Raven leaned into me, dropping a quick kiss to my forehead. He whispered in my ear before blurring out of the

room, leaving me alone with the woman who was the headmistress of Blackthorn Academy.

“Nothing can keep me away from you now, *unnasta*.”

Gulp.

My heart thudded in my chest as he kissed me one more time, just a slight brush of his lips against mine before he was gone.

Nothing could keep him from me?

I repeated his words in my head, and licked my lips, tasting chocolate and wine. Whatever happened now, I only hoped Raven meant what he had said because one thing I knew for certain, I did not want him to stay away from me.

CHAPTER 8



SERENA

THE HEADMISTRESS WALKED into the room, her hair wrapped in a tight bun displaying one thick silver streak among the black strands. She was unsmiling. Her face was as severe as the long black robes she wore over thick-heeled shoes.

I sat up, nervous in her presence. This whole *magic is real* thing was still very new to me. But, if ever I doubted, all I had to do was look at her to know she held real power.

“Miss Notte, I am Ophelia Blackthorn, headmistress of Blackthorn Academy,” she began in a voice that brooked no interruption. “I must say, I am glad you decided to join us.”

“It’s not like I had a choice. My aunt and uncle were getting tired of having me around.”

“I see. Well, you are not the first student whose home life left much to be desired. Tell me, did your mother ever get around to discussing your heritage?”

“My heritage? I mean, I was pretty young when my parents passed away. I know my grandmother was from Sicily,” I said, shrugging noncommittally.

I did not know what that had to do with anything. But maybe now would be a good time to address the huge pink elephant in the room.

“Headmistress Blackthorn, I knew nothing about magic before I received my invitation here. But something happened when I met Raven. What is with me and him?”

“Raven, is it? Well, if Draugr has not told you, I do not know that I should, Miss Notte. However, allow me to enlighten you on our mission here,” she said, gesturing around her. “Blackthorn Academy was founded in 1666 by my ancestor. Our mission is simple. To prepare supernaturals coming into their power for the responsibilities they hold in order to create a better multiverse for us all. Now, a bit of mixed geography and history lesson for you, Miss Notte,” she said, waiting until I nodded before continuing.

“When you replied to Blackthorn Academy’s invitation with your intent to attend, you accepted our terms and agreements. One of those was to board the ferry for Northumberland Island from Hexhamshire, where, about two miles out, you crossed from the realm of your birth into this one. You see, Northumberland Island is located in a magical place, an alternate reality, if you will. In fact, this very castle was built atop ley lines where powers beyond your imagination pulse with energy and life.”

“Another realm?”

“That’s right. You should really read the fine print before signing anything, my dear. Where was I?”

“Ley lines,” I muttered, wondering how she knew I usually skimmed over those ridiculously long term and agreements whenever I had to fill something out.

“Yes, well, magic is common in this place. You will find creatures of legend and lore ranging from friendly to deadly abounding on the island. But where they are commonplace, your abilities are not.”

“Yeah, I sort of got that when my roommates and a couple of guys we met freaked out when I told them. Honestly, Headmistress, am I like the only person here who can see dead people?”

“Not at all,” the headmistress replied, one eyebrow raised.

I noticed her lip twitch as if she were biting back a smile. Thunder boomed from outside, and I turned my head to look at the window. It was impossibly dark, but lightning flashed and I saw something huge and silver streak by.

“What was that?” I murmured.

“Dragon. We have several among the student body. Now, yes, magic is real. But more important, you have magic, Miss Notte. Necromancy is the proper term for the magic you have, but I believe there might be something else there as well. Something you will have to uncover for yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am not sure. It is simply a feeling I have, and I learned long ago, never ignore a feeling.”

I frowned as my thoughts went immediately to Raven. I did not know what it was about him that pulled me so, I only knew I wanted to know more about the dark, beautiful angel of a man.

“You know, your thoughts are like a neon sign flashing overhead. One more thing about your admission papers, well, I suppose it is about all of our students’ admission papers, that I should mention is all the students here have agreed to be tested

as possible matches for the current Draugr when they come to Blackthorn, including you.”

“Including me? Wait. What? The current Draugr? Are there more than one? And what do you mean, *all* students? Is he just flapping around, shoving his tongue down everyone’s throat?” I snarled the last bit, and I could have sworn purple flames sparked from my fingertips as rage flashed over me.

When I looked, I saw nothing out of the ordinary. Just my usual pink nail polish, but it was chipped now. Probably from fighting the Algea—or from running my hands through Raven’s hair and tugging on those thick horns of his.

Warning bells went off in my head. Was the headmistress messing with me? Or was Raven?

All students agreed to be tested as possible matches.

What the actual fuck did that mean? Jealousy was an ugly emotion, and I did not enjoy feeling it in the least. I pushed my thoughts of Raven aside for now. After all, I didn’t go to Blackthorn for a man.

Nope. I was there to find out why I could do what I did. Even thinking about the fact I saw the dead as a power was strange to me.

For so long, it was a curse and nothing more. But maybe if I accepted it was magic, I could make it better.

“Miss Notte, that is all I will tell you about that. I am afraid the rest is up to him. Now, I suggest you rest up. You expelled a ton of magic, ridding us of the Algea, but I warn you, the forests here are enchanted. The waters, too. You are not safe off campus, and until you can control your abilities, I suggest you stay close to home.”

“When will I learn to control them?”

“That is up to you and your professors. You may check your student email for a recap of tonight’s assembly, as you missed it.”

“Thank you, Headmistress.”

“My pleasure, Miss Notte.”

“Do I have to stay here? Or can I go back to my room?”

“That is up to you. Ah, I believe your roommates have come to check on you. Goodnight,” she said, stepping back as Ursula, Emery, and Sapphire came running in.

“Serena!”

“You’re okay? Thank goodness!”

“What happened to you?”

They spoke over one another in rapid succession, and it was difficult to understand them. I held up my hand to slow the influx of questions. Sapphire’s quizzical gaze was glued to me, while Ursula rambled on about how worried she was, and Emery sat down and exhaled a great big sigh, as if relieved of an unbearable weight. I had to admit it was kind of nice having people worried about me. That was not a usual occurrence in my life.

“Slow down, sheesh. Okay, first, I apologize for scaring you guys about my powers, but that’s why I am here, right? To learn to control it.”

“No, we should apologize for reacting like ninnies,” Ursula countered. “It’s just, well, necromancy is a rare talent, even in the magical world. People are prejudiced, I guess.”

“Well, I don’t guess,” Emery added. “I know they are! Look at how we treated Serena here! And she’s, our friend!”

“I am?”

“Of course you are,” Ursula snapped, offended, and again I felt warmth flow through me.

I might be mixed up about Raven or Draugr or whoever he was, but I had people here worried about me. My roommates chattered away about the assembly, and I listened eagerly.

They were a good group, and I was lucky to have the chance to make friends with them. The nurse returned a little while later, and after checking me over, announced I could return to my room.

“You sure she shouldn’t stay overnight?”

“I am sure,” the nurse said sweetly, and I could see she was getting annoyed.

“I’m good, girls. No worries,” I said, standing up.

I really wanted a hot shower and some clean clothes. Not to mention some food. I was starving again.

The further I walked to my dorm room, away from the infirmary, the stranger I felt. The old stone floors gave way to the stairwell. It was dim and dark, and I did not know what time it was, but my roommates’ chatter made me paste a smile on my face and follow them up to where our room sat on the sixth floor.

My stomach growled, and I put my hand on it, embarrassed by the loud sound. My face burned, and I hated the cliché I made, but what could I say? Chubby girls ate, too.

“Didn’t they give you dinner in the infirmary?” Emery asked as she opened the door to our suite.

“No, actually,” I mumbled, avoiding eye contact.

“No worries! I’ve got some shortbread.”

“That’s okay,” I mumbled, closing my eyes against another pang.

I sat heavily on my bed while Ursula walked to her side of the room. A moment later, and she was back with a tin full of fragrant shortbread and a bottle of water.

I took one, gratefully, and though delicious, I felt even worse after. With each bite, my hunger grew. An image of Raven flashed in my brain. He was alone, outside standing on what looked like a rooftop. Wind and rain beat against him, but he stood tall, immovable.

His eyes glowed purple, and his fangs were descended. Inside my mind’s eye, I could feel his thirst—a raw, aching, bone deep hunger that filled me as it did him.

“That’s where this is coming from,” I murmured, shocked at the revelation.

“What did you say?” Sapphire asked, her gaze trained on me, but I shook my head.

“Nothing,” I replied, and forced a smile. “I’m just tired. Goodnight.”

I did not know why I should feel so connected to Raven or why he was tortured with such a powerful hunger. I admitted to myself my heart hurt for him. I was not above feeling sympathy or compassion, but it was more than that.

Those tempestuous moments I’d spent in the infirmary wrapped in his arms were burned inside my brain. I’d never felt such a powerful compulsion to be with someone before. It was like my soul had recognized his.

I wanted him. Really, I did. But I didn't want to be a notch on his bedpost. After what the headmistress told me, I couldn't be sure I wasn't just a number to him.

This world of monsters and magic was new to me, and I didn't know where I fit. I decided it was probably best I distance myself from Raven and all his dark beauty.

Even if it hurt.

CHAPTER 9



SERENA

THE FIRST WEEK of classes was a blur of activity. I could not believe I was learning things like *Defense Against the Dark Arts*—something I had only heard about in fictional movies about Wizards and Witches.

Only, this wasn't fiction, and Witches and Wizards were real, along with a whole slew of other supernaturals. I was still getting used to sitting next to people with scales and fur, horns, wings, tails, multiple legs, and arms, and even tentacles.

There was a Merman in my *History of Magic* class who needed to be submerged in saltwater every forty-five minutes or his skin erupted in hives, some sort of allergic reaction to air. Lucky for him, Professor Bannerman, a mysterious man if ever I saw one with a mane of dreadlocks, layers of dark robes, and a small red dragon perched on his shoulder, had agreed to allow the Merman, Nathan, to bring a portable pool into his weekly three and a half hour-long lecture.

It was dinnertime, and I was famished. In fact, I had been all week. No matter how much I tried to eat, the hunger was still there, and I knew it was because I'd been avoiding *him*. Raven. The Draugr.

All week long, I'd heard whispers of the fierce Nordic monster. Many of the students at Blackthorn thought him something of a devil, a revenant, whatever the fuck that meant.

Raven had tried several times to reach me, calling my dorm room, and tracking me down in the halls. I pushed him away each time. Maybe I was a coward, but the idea of being one of his women made my skin crawl and my heart feel like breaking.

It was ridiculous. I hardly knew him. So, what if I felt inexplicably drawn to the man, *er*, monster?

My thoughts strayed to the latest gossip I'd heard about the Draugr, and the tale had made my blood run cold. His ancestors were Northmen, Vikings, cursed by the All Father for an unthinkable offense. Cannibalism was vile in just about every culture I could think of, and yet, that act had birthed the legend of the man I knew as Raven.

"Hey," someone said beside me, bumping my shoulder as I waited in line for a smoothie.

Turning my head, I saw Dietrich and Olaf standing beside me. I should have guessed. The two of them were joined at the hip, and where there was one, I was sure to find the other. After their initial reaction to my talents, they'd both apologized and seemed accepting of my apparently rare gifts.

Today, I learned a little more about necromancy from Professor Bannerman. Apparently, communicating with the dead had long been categorized as a Dark Art. But times were changing, and the Academy was working on changing that point of view.

"How were your classes today?" Dietrich asked conversationally.

“Fine.”

I was not feeling very talkative, but that didn't stop the green-skinned guy from chatting away about his own day. By the time we got our drinks and placed our orders for today's special—*it was Friday and that meant “Catch of the Day” according to the weekly meals schedule*—Dietrich was already done recalling what happened in all his classes that day.

“Do you ever pause for breath?” Olaf asked, and I laughed at the Gargoyle's surprisingly funny remark.

“Shut it, Olaf. Someone has to keep the conversational ball rolling. This one's quiet as a mouse,” he said, nodding at me.

“Sorry. I'm just, I don't know—”

“Hungry,” Olaf supplied, and my eyes widened. “Can hear your stomach growling from here, girl. Better sit down and get to it,” he said, pointing at the tray holding my order.

“Thanks,” I mumbled, taking my dinner with me.

I looked for an empty table and found none. Not in the mood for any more forced conversations, I decided it was nice enough to eat outside. I walked to the courtyard with my plate of perfectly seared Cajun mahi mahi, complete with loaded potato, slaw, and corn on the cob, and one large mango smoothie in hand. Thankfully, no one else was there.

I craved solitude. It was necessary as I tried to process everything that had occurred the past few days. There were a few scattered picnic tables, and a firepit glowing in the center of them all. I sat down at the one furthest from the cafeteria.

Lifting my fork over the plate of fish, I took a sip of the smoothie, closing my eyes tightly against a sharp hunger pang that hit me suddenly. The sweet drink failed to make a dent in my ever-growing thirst.

It clawed at my throat. Like it was some sort of living sentient thing, and I was desperate to satisfy it. A growl sounded from my left, and I spun on the bench to see the culprit behind the sound. My stomach tensed, anticipation making me shiver as I squinted at the darkness.

“You’ll find no reprieve from your hunger there, *unnasta*,” he growled.

Raven.

My mind immediately supplied the identity of the speaker. Ripples of awareness coursed through my body, and I licked my lips, swallowing back my saliva. I was literally drooling for the man.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, equal parts excited and annoyed.

How dare he intrude on my solitude! I mean, really. First, he storms into my world, rescuing me like I was the princess in some fairytale. Then, he makes my head spin with his sinfully decadent chocolate and wine flavored kisses.

Next, I discover I am one of thousands of potential hopefuls for the Draugr, whatever the fuck that meant. And to top it all off, I knew this never-ending hunger I was feeling came from him. What the hell?

“Why are you avoiding me?” he countered.

“Who said I was avoiding you?”

“You, *unnasta*,” he said, and there was that word again. I had no idea what *unnasta* meant, but my heart skipped a beat every time he uttered it.

Crap.

I really had it bad, and the sad truth of it was, I did not know why I was so angry with him. I never even bothered to ask Raven what any of this meant. Call me jaded, but my go to setting was to assume the worst, and I did. Frequently.

“I’ve been watching you all week, Serena. Leaving messages, trying to talk to you, but you keep pushing me away. That day in the infirmary, I thought we understood each other. What happened?” he asked, frowning so hard, I could feel his confusion.

Damn. He was right. I didn’t give him a single reason for my behavior. Just went from hot to cold, with no rhyme or reason.

“Shit. I’m sorry,” I said, turning my whole body to face him. “You are right. I owe you an explanation.”

“You owe me nothing, *unnasta*. But I would ask you to come with me if you will?”

My dinner forgotten, I stood up and walked over to him, helpless to refuse. Every fiber of my being was pushing me to get closer to where he waited near the stone wall patiently, terrifyingly powerful, and ever watchful, like the larger-than-life monster he was.

Relief shuddered through me the closer I got. Instantly, my hunger lessened, and I sighed at the peaceful feeling that rose inside me. Raven stood frozen, not moving a muscle until I was so close I could feel his breath on my cheek.

Then, faster than I would have given him credit for, he wrapped me up in a powerful embrace and rocked me close to him. Immediately, I was encased in warmth, his delicious scent closing in on me, and I allowed myself to do nothing but feel.

It was wonderful being hugged by him. The feeling of utter belonging filled me, and I shivered involuntarily as peace was replaced by longing. More than that, it was desperation so poignant I wanted nothing more than to give into it.

“What manner of magic dwells inside you, that I would give all I am for just a taste, *unnasta*?” Raven whispered, the wonder in his voice plain as day.

His hands reached up to cradle my face as his wings wrapped around us, like black shadows, shielding us from view.

“Raven.” I breathed his name, tugging him by the neck so I could reach his hard mouth.

Kissing Raven was like nothing I had ever experienced. Each kiss was better than the last. They just kept building and building, appetizers to my ever-growing desire to have him.

“Fuck, Serena, we can’t do this here,” he growled.

“Where?” I asked, knowing I needed him more than my next breath.

“Fly with me?”

It was one part question, one part demand, and I had no desire at all to refuse him. Nodding my head, I squeaked as his hands gripped my waist, and Raven pushed off the ground with his wings. He lifted me as if I weighed nothing at all, holding me tight to his impossibly muscular body as he soared straight up at record-breaking speeds.

Finally, our ascent stopped, and Raven dropped down atop a tower or other. We were on top of the castle, I realized with a start. I opened my eyes wide and turned around, still in the safety of his embrace as I looked out at the vast, harsh beauty that was Northumberland Island.

“This place is my sanctuary. I’ve never brought anyone here before,” he said as I took a step away from the delicious warmth of his body so I might face him.

“Oh, no? What about the other hopefuls?” I asked, hating the jealousy I could not contain.

“What?”

“You know, the others. The incoming students who, by signing their admission papers, agree to be tested as a suitable match for *the Draugr*,” I said, using air quotes at the end.

Anger and confusion were horrible emotions. They made me feel uncomfortable in my own skin, unsure of myself, and downright petty. I knew all of that and would acknowledge those and any other shortcomings if called out. I was only human, after all.

Well. Mostly.

But I still deserved an explanation. I mean, what was he doing? Toying with me for funsies? Raven was this big, gorgeous beast of a man and I was just me. A too curvy, ghost-seeing freak who no one wanted.

“Your thoughts are battering against me like rams, *unnasta*,” he growled, and I watched his eyes dilate as he tried to contain his reaction to me.

That was unsettling, and yet, also very empowering. Imagine, little old me riling up the big sexy baddie? That sort of thing could give a girl a complex—and not necessarily a bad one.

“Sit, Serena, and allow me to explain, if I can.”

“Fine. Start talking because I have homework and I need to get back,” I mumbled, following Raven inside the shed-like

structure that sat atop the castle tower.

He motioned to a large mattress piled high with pillows and blankets, and I sat down, trying not to swoon at the heady scent of Raven that clung to the bed.

I watched the play of muscles dance across his back as he tucked his wings away, into whatever realm they vanished to when he willed it. Raven was preparing the kindling in the small fireplace that sat against the wall. Soon, he had a flame going, and the room grew cozy and unexpectedly comfortable.

“Well?” I asked, impatient for him to begin his explanation.

I was trying to snap myself out of whatever spell he was weaving around me, but it was impossible. My desire for him increased with every second that passed. It was uncanny, unheard of, and downright unbelievable. I mean, why should I of all people be destined to have this insatiable need for a monster like him?

“I can answer that question, *unnasta*, if you let me.”

“Are you reading my thoughts?” I asked, troubled by the bald statement of what I already knew to be true.

“You know the answer already, Serena.”

He was right. I did. But that did not make it any easier to hear.

CHAPTER 10



DRAUGR

A WEEK HAD PASSED since the infirmary, and I was slowly losing my damned mind. Damn that interfering Witch, Headmistress Blackthorn, had ordered me away from Serena for the time being, to allow her to get acclimated to the Academy.

I tried. Fuck knows, I tried. But my need for her was greater than my will to obey the rules by which I'd been allowed to attend Blackthorn. For a moment or two, I thought for sure Bloodlust would overtake reason, but in a fateful twist of irony, my hunger was centered on only one.

Serena Notte.

Her name blazed across my brain with the intensity of a supernova. I sat through my classes, a stone statue of a monster, refusing any and all attempts to get me to take part. I did not care about my grades.

Fucking hell. I was only at Blackthorn to learn how not to be a fucking nightmare. But I had always been that! What the fuck was all this for if the one person I knew could change my fate refused to speak with me?

Curiosity and confusion fueled my rage until I felt near to bursting. The need to have her, to possess, dominate, make her mine filled me to the brink. I was an inch away from shattering like a dam, and when that happened, who knew what the devil would be unleashed?

Now, I had her in front of me and it was all I could do to force myself to pay attention to her words. She was stunning in her beauty. A complicated woman full of as many intricacies of the heart and mind as her body was ripe with hills and valleys, designed to make a man, or monster, lose his mind with wanting her.

And, fuck yes, I wanted her.

Her words filled me with anger and rage, not directed at her, of course, but once more at our meddling headmistress. Ophelia Blackthorn had disclosed the conditions of my admissions contract, but she had not explained the history behind it. Oh no, the clever Witch had left that to me.

This was it, I mused. The real test of the Fates, or the Norns, as my people called them. Were they as wise as they were presumed to be? Or was their fault in their visions?

Only one way to find out, Draugr. Stop being such a pussy.

I really sucked at pep talks. Sitting across from Serena, I allowed myself one moment to indulge in my need to study her. She wore a short, flowy, black dress that revealed her shapely legs, stopping at mid-thigh. The front dipped low in a scoop neck, and I noticed tiny purple flowers dancing across the fabric.

She was so damned pretty it hurt to look at her, but I could not look away. Not even if my life depended on it. Her dark hair was loose in curling waves that fell about her shoulders.

Tanned skin, so smooth and unblemished, glowed with faint embarrassment, or was that arousal?

Fuck, I hoped for the latter. I did not think I could get through the night without kissing her at least once.

“Well?” she asked, her words impatient.

But with them, the scent of her arousal drifted to my nostrils, and I felt her need stir the same thing inside of me. I closed my eyes and was struck by thoughts and images of us entwined, and fuck me, but I knew they were coming from her. With those images were a barrage of questions, the loudest of which pained me greatly.

My sweet, beautiful Serena desired to know why she of all creatures would be the recipient of my attentions. As if she were somehow not worthy of them. If only she knew, I mused, with not a little self-loathing.

“I can answer that question, *unnasta*, if you let me.”

“Are you reading my thoughts?”

“You know the answer already, Serena,” I said, and felt her acceptance of my statement.

“Where to begin,” I said, trying to decide how much to tell her.

It was early in our courtship, after all, but I was in this for the long haul. Whatever happened now was of little consequence, I was a monster possessed. The one glaring truth in all this, I would give my last breath for Serena Notte.

“Why don’t you tell me who you are?”

“I am Draugr—or rather, I was just *the Draugr*. Now, I am more,” I started, uncertain of her reception to her part in my life.

“But your name is Raven.”

“Yes. Technically, I am Raven Draugsson. But I am more than that. I am the next leader of my Clan. I am the *Draugr*.”

“I’ve heard people call you Draugr or the Draugr, and I hate it. You are not that to me. You are Raven.”

“And I can’t tell you what that means to me, sweet Serena,” I replied, drinking in her beauty with complete and total adoration for her.

“But you are wrong,” I said, hating myself for causing her to frown. “I am the Draugr, too. As my father was before me. You see, many centuries ago, my Clan committed an unforgiveable sin. In desperation to save themselves from death after being imprisoned beneath a frozen avalanche, they turned to cannibalism.”

My confession was hard. It stuck in my throat as I told her of the horror, the fear, the desperation that led my people to conceive of such a heinous act.

“Cannibalism? They ate each other?” she gasped.

“Aye, they killed and ate their own to survive. Since that time, my Clan, the Draugen, has been cursed by the All Father to wander this realm with one foot beyond the veil and one firmly entrenched here. Blood is a necessary staple to our diet, making us more Vampire than Man.”

“So, Vampires are real. I have like eighty-two of them in my classes. Why are you different?”

“Vampires can pass as human, *unnasta*, I never can. My monstrous countenance is a reflection of my soul, my fair *unnasta*. My pitch-colored skin, the runes carved on my body, the crux I bear, are all part of the punishment handed down from generation to generation from the All Father. I must

suffer the great hunger of all my people. It is part of the vow my forefather made with the All Father.”

“A vow? I don’t understand. What vow?”

“I have it here, but I know it by heart,” I said, pulling a sheet of vellum from the drawer of the small table by the bed. I handed it to Serena, noting her increased breathing and the acrid scent of her pain.

“Can I read it aloud?”

I nodded, waiting for her to begin the hated verse. Though now, maybe not so much.

“Free us, All Father, let us serve you in all realms of man and god. Let one bear the weight of our crimes, so all may survive. I will carry this weight. Let my hunger run evermore till the Norns, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, weavers, and seers of destiny, see fit to sate my lust. I will be known as the Draugr. I will do this for my people. My life for all until the next of my line comes forth to bear the burden until such time as penance has been made,” Serena ended on a heavy sigh, rolling the vellum, and handing it back to me.

“So, what does this mean?”

“Well, you see the part where my ancestor speaks to the Norns?”

“Yes.”

“That’s another name for the Fates. Supernatural beings believe in destiny, Serena. I was never one to put much faith in it, to be honest, but ever since I laid eyes on you, I feel an irresistible urge to be by your side.”

“You mean like those other girls, you need to test for potential matches?” she asked, and I snarled, cutting off the

sound when she jumped.

“I am sorry. But no. There have been no other girls. I swear to you. I came to Blackthorn to learn to control my Bloodlust. The fate of my people is in my hands, Serena. But I think there is another way now.”

“You’re telling the truth,” she whispered, surprise on her face. “I mean, I know you are telling the truth. I feel it, in here,” she said, pointing to her chest.

“Good. Because I am, I swear it. I believe the Norns have granted us a reprieve. I think you might be the one to sate my Bloodlust.”

“How?” she asked breathlessly.

I moved to sit next to her, thankful I’d already tucked my wings away. The bed sagged a little beneath our combined weight, and I heard her heartbeat speed up. She smelled so good, like a fresh morning breeze through a Nordic forest.

“I believe you are my destiny, *unnasta*.”

“You think so,” she whispered, leaning toward me, big, dark eyes on my lips.

I felt my body harden in response to her nearness, a side effect I’d been experiencing for days. Trembling like a boy, I reached up, allowing my fingers to hover over her neck, but never quite touching.

“I know so, Serena. You are my fate. I realize you have things to learn here, and so do I. I am older than your human years, yet there is much I must learn as well. But maybe there are some things we might learn together?” I whispered my most ardent desire.

My pulse raced, and I prayed she was not discouraged by my carnal innocence. I had never touched a female the way I wanted to touch her, and I would hate for my untried status to dissuade my beautiful Serena from granting me what I craved, permission to claim her with my body, heart, mind, and soul.

“Whenever I am near you, I feel like I am on fire,” she whispered, her warm breath fanning my skin.

“I can cool your flame, *unnasta*,” I promised, knowing beyond a doubt I was the only one who could quench the delectable female’s desire.

“I can’t stop thinking about you, Raven.”

“Serena, sweet, sweet Serena,” I moaned her name, whispering it reverently like a prayer.

I could not take anymore, and I closed the distance between us. The moment her lips met mine with the same greedy need, I was lost. Desire pulled me in like a drug, and all I could think about were my hands on her body, my tongue in her mouth, my fangs in her flesh.

She pressed her body to mine, and our lips crashed together in a kiss I was unprepared for. The siren in my arms writhed and moved closer. Somehow, she ended up straddling me on the bed, pushing me backward, and I allowed it. Hell, I craved it.

Serena moaned, her hands undoing the leather vest I wore, pushing it from my overheated body. Fuck, I loved her hands on me. She traced the runes that marked my skin and rolled her hips so her core caressed the hard evidence of my ardent desire.

With a tiny shove, Serena pressed me back into the cushions, stretching out on top of me and I slid my hands up

her dress, growling as my fingers traced the elastic of her panties. Lifting the material, I tore it over her head, a hiss of breath escaping my lips as my eyes fastened to her magnificent breasts.

She wore a white bra with tiny purple hearts splashed across the fabric and a tiny pair of cotton panties that matched. Fuck, she was like a wet dream come to life, not that I'd had many of those. But if I did, they would be of her. Only her.

"Serena," I growled her name, lifting my massive hands to caress her bountiful beauties.

"More," she moaned, reaching behind her to unfasten the bra.

As it fell away, my hunger for her rose to immeasurable heights. I sat up with her pressing down on my cock, practically purring at the sensation of her silky skin sliding against mine. Licking a trail from her sweet lips to her throat, I gripped her vein with my teeth, biting but not piercing the skin, not yet.

Then I kissed my way to her naked breasts, suckling one, then the other, into my mouth. Fuck, she tasted so good. Like silver firs and snowy nights. Fresh, clean, and bright. Serena was everything I wanted but did not have in the shadows where I dwelled.

"Need more," she whispered, arching her back and thrusting her chest more fully into my face.

Her curves were so soft and plentiful, I could die a happy monster knowing she was mine even for just the night. But no, that would never do. Serena was an addiction I could never give up.

My body shook with the need to be inside of her, and as we touched and kissed and writhed against each other, I became desperate to make it so. Passion was new and heady and fuck, I wanted more of it. Possibly more than I wanted to sip of her blood, but fuck yes, I wanted that, too.

Running on instinct, I put my hand between her thick thighs, growling with barely contained restraint as I took the edge of the material in my hands and ripped the cotton from her body.

“Oh!” she gasped, but her purple-glowing gaze was heated and lustful.

My sexy little siren liked it when I let her know how much I wanted her. Good. I would let her know often. My body shook with need and I growled my approval as her hands slid between us, unbuckling my pants.

Using instinct to guide me, I delved between her legs, my searching fingers sliding between her slick, hot folds. Containing my hunger was no longer an option, I needed to taste her. Now.

“*Unnasta*,” I murmured the old term of endearment as I flipped our positions, lying her down on the cushioned mattress.

It meant something between lover and mate, but for me, it simply meant Serena. She was my *unnasta*, my heart’s own desire, and the only female I would ever want. I slid down her overheated flesh, dropping kisses as I went, learning every soft curve and tempting inch of her delicious body.

“Mine,” I snarled, unable to stop the possessive words from spilling out as I laid claim to her with my kisses.

Her heart hammered in her chest, the din loud in the small room I had made for myself atop the castle. Serena moaned, the scent of her arousal increasing as I gripped her hips and positioned myself between her splayed legs. Fuck, she was beautiful. Her body a work of art, a masterpiece in the silence of the universe, finally opening up for me in a symphonic crescendo of carnal delights. I wanted her more than I wanted blood, more than I wanted air, more than I wanted anything. And I had to show her.

Mine.

CHAPTER 11



SERENA

IS THIS HAPPENING? Fuck. Yes. This is really happening. Fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck. Yes!

Raven's tongue pierced my core, and I released a low, guttural moan I did not even know I was capable of. Purple sparks danced behind my eyes and everything inside of me seemed to call to and caress the monster between my legs, who was making me feel things I had never experienced before.

I reached down, threading my fingers through his pitch-black hair as he laved at my heated sex, licking me into oblivion. My first orgasm crested, and I howled with my release. I didn't know it was possible to feel like that, and I was scared I was going to pass out from such intense pleasure.

But Raven knew my body better than I did, apparently, and he took me back down, only to send me spiraling again and again. His lust for me was insatiable, and I craved him even more with every swipe of his talented tongue.

But I needed more than his mouth and I pulled his hair, urging him to slide up my body. When his heated purple gaze

landed on mine, I grinned widely pulling him down so I might taste myself on his lips. That was the single most erotic kiss of my adult life, and I moaned as I leaned down, pushing his pants down his hips.

Like every other bit of him, Raven's cock was colossal. Way bigger than any human male I had ever seen. Long and girthy, I stared at the thing, and that was when I noticed the runes. Heat filled me, anticipation dripping down my thighs as his thick member throbbed and glowed. Those magical markings branded his skin, visibly transforming from flat images to a raised, scar-like pattern of symbol I would undoubtedly feel when he entered me.

Need filled me, hunger unlike any I had ever felt before. Just like the ones on his face, the runes appeared as I held his pulsating staff in my hand. Hot, heavy, hard, he seemed to grow even longer, and those runes became more pronounced, like ridges I could not wait to feel inside of me.

I placed him at my entrance, breathless anticipation filling me. My body burned for him and I wrapped my legs around his waist, halting any thoughts he might have of retreating. I needed him inside me so badly.

“Are you sure, Serena? If you allow me to have you, I will never let you go,” he growled, and I saw the promise in his eyes.

Did I want this? Was I sure I wanted to belong to this monster? Did I want to be with the leader of an ancient Nordic Clan cursed for eating their own by a deity I knew nothing about?

It was scary and new to me, but the fact was I did not know enough about myself or my own powers to judge Raven

or his people. The supernatural world was vast and unknown. But there was one thing I did know.

I did not want to walk the world alone anymore. I did not want to go back to being a scared little freak. Blackthorn was going to teach me to own my power, and with Raven, I saw a chance for a future I never thought I would have. A future that included love.

“Yes,” I replied, solidifying my feelings in that one word. I saw his eyes brighten with impossible need and I felt it echo inside of me. “I want you, Raven. I want to be yours. Need you.”

“Our bond gets sealed with blood,” he grunted. “Do you understand? I will claim you with my bite. Need to drink your blood, *unnasta*. You have no idea how strongly I thirst for you.”

“I feel it, too,” I whispered, caressing his face, and kissing his lips.

Finally, he pressed down with his hips, invading my body inch by glorious inch—and holy fuck, there were a lot of inches. He filled me to the max, stretching my channel as he seemed to grow longer and thicker inside me. The runes I’d seen on his cock thickened, the ridges of those markings stroked that secret inner spot inside of me, sending tendrils of ecstasy rolling through me.

“Serena,” he grunted my name, flexing his hips as he pressed his body into mine, becoming one with me.

This was not just sex, or even fucking, this was something more. Something infinitely bigger. Raven’s eyes glowed purple as he cupped my cheeks, kissing me with so much passion it seared my very soul.

“You feel so good inside me,” I whispered reverently, completely consumed by the way he was making me feel.

Wonder, pleasure, rightness filled me. And with those, need, hunger, and possession. I had one good look at his face before Raven dropped his head to my neck. The runes marking his skin glowed and moved as if lava flowed beneath them.

His movements increased in pace and force, the size of his sex swelling even more. It was like those Nordic markings across his wondrously large cock were branding me, leaving a mark inside of my body, making me his from the inside out. My pleasure increased tenfold. I moaned, helplessly clinging to him as he moved within me.

It was intense, incredible, and unlike anything I ever felt. Sweat glistened on his body, making him shine in the dimness of the room. His pleasure and mine became tangled. I was uncertain if what I was feeling was my own erotic bliss or what he projected onto me. Either way, it was beyond comprehension.

Need, desire, hunger ruled us as we moved together toward that inexplicable height. I needed something more. Something only he could deliver. Then I felt his fangs scrape my neck, and my pleasure shot higher.

“Do it, please,” I moaned, every cell screaming at me to allow his possession.

I needed it. Wanted it. Had to have it.

Raven snarled, sheathing himself inside of me, pressing all the way in and stroking that secret place no one had ever touched before. My entire body was buzzing with ecstasy as we became one in a communion of bodies and souls.

He bit down, piercing my skin, and pleasure the likes of which I never knew possible washed over me in an endless wave of bliss. I felt as if my body was not my own. My thighs squeezed his hips, riding the endless, almost punishing pace he set as he fucked me to within an inch of consciousness.

I don't know what was sexier, the way his impossibly enormous, rune-covered cock felt shooting off warm jets of cum deep inside my needy sex or the pull of his mouth around my neck as he sucked my blood and swallowed it down.

His body was a wonder. It was as if he was forged by the gods themselves, and that massive dick between his legs was like a magic fucking wand. I wanted to ask him what the markings meant, but I was still flying high on carnal bliss.

Holy hell.

I was honest enough to admit he was a dream of a lover. No human could compare, and I doubted any other monster could either. With Raven's pitch-colored skin, glowing purple eyes, horns, wings, and that chiseled, marked up face and body like so much body art, I was totally addicted. Everything about him was beautiful to me.

The Draugr was feared by so many, but to me, his was a form I loved. Fuck, yes, I loved him.

It was an exchange of life giving fluid. A carnal bartering that I was so on board with. I wanted to give him all I had and, in return, I wanted everything from him. Raven was not just a sexy beast I lusted after. He was bigger than that. More important. Fuck, he felt like everything.

"*Unnasta,*" he snarled as he rode out his orgasm, head thrown back, Raven released a guttural roar, pinning me to the mattress with one final thrust.

I'd lost track of how many times he'd made me come, and I felt like a fucking goddess knowing I'd given him that bone-deep satisfied smile spread across his bloodstained lips. Unable to help myself, I lifted my face and kissed the corner of his mouth.

He was so beautiful it almost hurt to look at him. The glowing runes etched into his skin glowed brightly in the darkness of the room, and that wasn't all. I thought I was dreaming for a second as I watched them shift and move, changing form as they burned into his skin. I tracked the movements from his face down his chest, rock hard abs, all the way to his semi-hard cock.

Raven hissed, an angry sound, but when I flicked my gaze to his own purple glowing stare, I did not see anger. I saw shock, then something else. Pride maybe.

I tried to slow my breathing, but my heart was beating me to death. I had so many questions, but did not know where to begin. My body buzzed with pleasure and I reveled in the fact Raven had not pulled away from me yet. His weight was reassuring, and I loved the feel of his smooth, muscular form pressing down on my own soft, sated body.

"You can ask me anything, *unnasta*," Raven whispered, his gaze seeming to penetrate my very soul.

"What do these mean?" I whispered, tracing alongside the glowing Nordic symbols.

"These mean I am claimed, *unnasta*. I belong to you now."

I smiled at that, loving the idea that this incredible creature was mine. I was his, too. The rightness of that zoomed through me as we held each other in the dark.

“Have you more questions?” he asked, running his hands along my shoulders and arms.

It was like he couldn't stop touching me, but I was on a roll now and would not be distracted.

“How old are you?” I asked.

“Old? Ah, yes, I forget you lived a human life before coming to Blackthorn. I am one hundred and twenty-seven years old in human years.”

“A hundred and twenty-seven? Holy fuck!”

“What? Is that old?” he asked, head canted to the side, reminding me of a curious puppy I'd once seen.

“Well, I mean, you said you never did this, *um*, you know, *had sex* before.”

“That is right.”

“But you are so good at it,” I blurted, blushing wildly at the bark of laughter that escaped his sexy-as-sin lips.

“No, no. Do not shy away from me now, bold Serena. I like that you say what you mean. In fact, I have never met anyone so open and honest in my entire life.”

“Okay,” I said, relieved and nervous, which was ridiculous since the man already had his mouth and fingers and cock buried in my most secret places.

There was no mystery anymore. Why should I feel shy now? But that didn't stop the feeling. Nope. I felt heat spread across my cheeks, down to my breasts, and all the while Raven waited patiently for me to ask what I really wanted to know.

I bit my lip, loving the way he moved immediately. Raven tugged my flesh from between my teeth, replacing them with

his hard, delectable mouth. His kiss had the power to render me stupid, and I was not sure I was happy about that.

But damn, he was addictive. He controlled the speed, the length, the design. I was a puppet in his hands, and for the first time ever, I gave up control willingly. With Raven leading the way, I knew I would be okay.

“You want to know why I waited to have sex?” Raven asked, brushing his lips across mine one more time.

Slowly, I opened my eyes, lifting my face to meet his steady stare. Purple was my favorite color, and the fact his eyes glowed brilliantly for me made me preen with pleasure.

“I want to know why you waited and why you chose me as your first,” I whispered, bringing my insecurities to light.

Raven was this dark, mysterious, powerful, beautiful creature. As for me, I was a short, chubby, decidedly average woman who saw ghosts and had no idea what I was doing, never mind how I ended up at an academy for the supernatural.

“I have lived my entire life knowing I was destined to bear the weight of the crimes of my ancestors. It was not an easy upbringing. Bloodlust has claimed many of my kin, sweet Serena, and I came here as a last hope to learn some magic to help control my hunger,” Raven began.

He moved, lying on his side, facing me. I listened, waiting for him to get to the part where he explained his previous virginal status. His hands never left my skin as he talked. It was like he could not get enough of my body, and I thanked every God I had ever heard of for that.

I did not want him to stop touching me either.

“Sex leaves you vulnerable, open. There is a moment when the pleasure is so great you are almost outside of yourself. I never wanted to leave myself open to anyone. Never trusted that I was safe enough to simply let go.”

“Then, why me?” I asked, my face crumpled in confusion.

“Because, Serena, you are my fated mate. I trust you with my body,” he said, dropping a kiss on my mouth.

“My soul.” Another kiss, this one on my neck.

“My blood.” Kiss.

“My heart.” Kiss, kiss.

“My life. *Unnasta minn.*” Deep, earth shaking kiss. By the time he came up for air, I had to gulp some down myself just to stop from passing out.

“It is too soon to tell you how I feel about you. You will not believe me,” he whispered. Our faces were so close, I could make out every one of his velvety dark lashes, see every line in the runes marking his cheek. Raven’s chocolate and wine scent permeated the air, making me downright drunk with need.

“Too soon to say aloud, but know that I feel it, *unnasta*. Right, here,” he said, taking my hand and placing it over his heart.

That muscle beat so rapidly, I gasped at the speed and strength of it. Yes, it was too soon for declarations, but I knew I was in love with him. Raven might be a monster. True, he was the Draugr.

But he was mine, and I was not letting go.

CHAPTER 12



DRAUGR

I DRAGGED a hand through my bed-tousled hair. How many times had I made love to Serena during the night? How many times had I kissed my way around her soft, tanned skin, mesmerizing every inch as I lavished tender attention on her?

At around five, I took her back to her dorm room, determined to see her get some real rest before the day started. We had no classes, as it was Saturday, but I had plans.

Big plans.

I was taking Serena out.

On a date. With me.

What the fuck was I thinking? I was the Draugr, not some fucking Romeo. For the first time in who knew how long, the Draugr's hunger had been sated! And I meant *really sated*.

Losing my virginity was a big enough deal, reason to celebrate for sure, but I had done a helluva lot more than that last night. I'd bitten and drunk from the vein of my *unnasta*.

Her blood was like no other. Sweet, spicy, hot, thick perfection. It was everything I had ever wanted and needed,

and so much more than even I could have imagined. I'd drunk from countless faces over the year, but never had a feeding been so intimate. Hell, I was ready to be a damned slave to the woman.

Fuucckk.

I was shaking like a fucking human by the time I returned to her room at three o'clock in the afternoon to pick her up. Nerves assailed me and all I wanted was to have her back in my arms, safe, happy, secure.

I looked down at my outfit, the same leather pants, paired with a white t-shirt that looked even brighter against my pitch-colored skin. My wings were tucked away, but my horns and rune-etched skin were visible as always.

There was only so much I could do to hide what I was, but there was no real disguise for me. The other students gave me a wide berth, and I appreciated their distance, knowing they feared me was kind of a boon when I thought about it.

If everyone in the whole damn school pissed themselves when they saw me, I would relish the fact. The more afraid they were of the Draugr, the safer my mate would be.

Mate.

Holy fucking shit. Serena Notte, what have I done to deserve you? Beautiful, precious, powerful creature.

She was my mate. I had a mate. Wrapping my head around that fact was definitely fucking with me, but in a totally good way. A smile broke across my face, but it felt easier this time around than it had been the first time she'd made me grin. I arrived at her door and wiped my sweaty palms on my t-shirt before reaching up with my fist to knock.

“Raven!” Serena opened the door, happiness and excitement pouring off of her in waves.

“*Unnasta*,” I replied, immediately opening my arms to catch her as she tackle-hugged me.

Her lips were soft and warm, affectionate as she kissed me hello. My body responded immediately, but since I was certain she did not want to give her roommates a show, and I sure as fuck did not, I slowed the kiss down.

“I missed you,” she whispered, nuzzling my face with hers.

“And I you, *unnasta minn*,” I growled and kissed her hard and quick.

“Oh, um, hi,” one of her roommates said from behind her.

“Hey girl, um, Raven, this is Sapphire. That over there is Ursula. And way over there with her ear pods on, is Emery.”

“Pleasure to meet you all,” I replied, tucking Serena into my side.

“Um, we’re going out,” she said, blushing, and her roommates waved us off with catcalls and whistles.

“OHMYGOD! They are so embarrassing!” she hissed, covering her face, but I could tell she was pleased.

Serena seemed to glow from within with pleasure, and being near her was like having my own, personal sun. I wanted to circle her like a planet, be near her always. She pulled me into orbit around her, and for the first time, it felt like I was exactly where I belonged.

“They care about you, *unnasta*. That is good. You deserve friends and this place can make you feel isolated and gloomy,” I said conversationally.

“Is that how you feel?” she asked, worry creasing her brow.

I stopped and thought before I replied. Did I feel that way? It was difficult to gauge, but maybe she was onto something.

“You are truly insightful, Serena. I think maybe once upon a time I did feel quite alone here, but not anymore,” I told her in a whisper.

“Good, because you aren’t alone anymore,” she replied, and kissed me sweetly.

My body burned for her, and I wanted to be close to her again. Like we’d been in my rooftop room. But any lasting relationship needed something more than physical attraction. And where I knew my hunger for her would never go away, I wanted her to know me better than that.

“So, where are we going?” she asked, holding my hand as we walked down the stairwell to the lobby.

“I thought we could maybe walk around the campus grounds together,” I began.

“Oh cool. Maybe grab a bite?”

Serena paused as if she realized what she had said. Her cheeks burned pink, and fuck, she was beautiful. Hunger burned my throat as I stopped and pulled her in front of me.

“I will bite you anytime you like, *unnasta*. But perhaps we limit that to when we are alone?” I asked, loving the way her blush increased and grinning at her as she smiled sheepishly in return.

“Tease,” she whispered, kissing me quickly before we entered one of the common rooms where several dozen students were hanging out.

I felt eyes on us as we made our way through the room. Typical for me, but I looked at Serena, noting her response to the unflattering attention.

“Why are they staring at us?” she asked, and I frowned.

I wanted her happy with me. Hell, I would do terrible things to ensure her happiness.

“It is not you, *unnasta*. It is me. Being the Draugr, I have a reputation. They are not used to seeing me like this.”

“What reputation?” she asked as I held the door to the courtyard open for her.

Serena walked past me, her forest fresh scent tickling my senses, and my mouth watered. Fuck, she was beautiful, so full and round, soft and lovely. I felt the need to have her under me, burning like fire through my loins. Still, she deserved to know all of it.

“For being cold, aloof, and dangerous, Serena. Blood is a necessary part of my diet, as you know.”

“Oh, wait, you mean you drank from them?” she whispered, her eyes wide.

“Fuck,” I mumbled, hissing a breath as I tried to explain. “Before I met you, my needs had to be met. But I swear, I never took from the vein,” I growled.

“What does that mean?” she asked, and the hurt rolling off her was like a blow to my chest. I hated hurting her in any way.

“It means, Headmistress Blackthorn has seen to everything. Some students, staff, and even the inhabitants of the island regularly donate blood to feed those of us who require it. The blood is collected, refined, and served.”

“But you drank from me,” she whispered, eyes wide.

“Yes. And some do take the vein of those willing. But I have not indulged in quite some time, Serena. You see, I feared the Bloodlust would take me then, and I did not wish to ravage this place,” I confessed, allowing her a look into the monster I had tried so desperately to hide.

We walked in silence across the rocky ground to the overlook. It was a place filled with bad memories, and I wanted to replace those for her. I had a confession to make, something I needed to do, and I needed to know she was happy and safe at Blackthorn.

“You know, my roommates have been telling me stories of the creatures who attend Blackthorn, but everyone has been so close-lipped over you,” Serena said.

She stepped close to the rock wall and stared out at the vast water surrounding the island. Her hands flat on the stone, the wind whipping around her, Serena looked perfect standing there. Her soft, tanned skin, long, dark hair, and delicious lavender aura made her a beacon in the late afternoon sun. I took a moment to allow her words to sink in before replying to her statement.

“Few know my real story as I have shared it with you, but I will answer any questions you have, *unnasta*,” I said, putting my arms on either side of her.

Her entire body seemed to relax as I surrounded her with mine. She shivered delicately against my front, her backside pressing into the most masculine part of my anatomy. Fuck, if she kept that up, my cock was going to go off like a rocket. I confess, I had no idea sex was so addictive.

My body craved hers and it wasn't just that I thirsted for her blood. I wanted to know everything about her. To keep her safe. To make sure she knew how wonderful she was. All that and more. I supposed it was because, for the first time in history, I was truly and completely in love.

"Thank you," she murmured, dropping her head back against my chest and allowing me to absorb her weight.

Serena closed her eyes and exhaled. A delightful, humming sound of contentment slipped past her lips, and I growled in response, tightening my hold on her. She smiled, her eyes still closed, and I kissed her head and thanked the All Father for the gift of her. That she trusted me was beyond humbling.

Everything about me, from my horns and claws to my fangs, and the pitch-black skin that covered my body, pointed to the indisputable fact that I was a monster. But not to Serena. To her, I was simply Raven, and that was a gift I had not been prepared for.

"Are you hungry?" I asked, knowing I would do anything to ensure her comfort.

"No. I just want to be with you."

"You are with me, *unnasta*," I replied, and grinned with my lips pressed against her head.

"I know, but I feel like this is too good. Like something is going to happen and I don't want to waste a single moment."

I frowned hard, wondering if maybe my mate had a touch of foresight in her. She was still researching her powers, and there was more unknown than known at this point. Whatever she found, I was not going anywhere.

"Nothing could ever keep me away from you, *unnasta*."

“Do you promise?” she asked, turning her neck so she was looking at me with her eyes glowing purple.

“Yes. I promise,” I hissed, cupping her cheek, kissing her lips.

It was not enough. Not nearly. I took her shoulders and turned her around, holding her captive in my arms. Then I licked her lips, begging entry, pushing my tongue into her throat when she granted it.

Serena moaned, pressing her body against mine, her hands clutching at my shoulders. That right there was another reason I was devoted to her. As much as I hungered for her, she desired me right back.

Serena saw me, the real me, and she didn't run screaming. Not my brave little mate. Rather, she ran to me. And wasn't that something?

CHAPTER 13



SERENA

THE DAYS SEEMED to pass one after the other in rapid succession. The time I spent on my studies was mostly counting down the seconds until I could be with him again.

Raven was a second year, so I did not have any classes with him. We saw each other at mealtimes, and afterward, sneaking to his rooftop sanctuary when almost everyone was asleep.

My roommates liked to tease me about it, but I did not mind their joshing. They were a great group of girls, and I was lucky to have synced with them. Thank goodness for Ursula and her proficiency with Herbology or Professor Calderwood would have kicked me out already.

I kinda sorta was not paying attention when we were cultivating some precious night-blooming herbs and I clipped the thing to the root.

Oopsies.

Luckily, my roomie was able to salvage the plant. But that was what I got for daydreaming about tall, sexy, monstrous

hunks during school. Raven felt big to me. Like he was this super important part of my life.

He called me *unnasta*, and I looked it up finally, learning it was the old Norse word for lover or darling. When I told him, he smiled but canted his head, explaining it meant more to the Draugen.

It meant mate. My heart had soared at that. I'd been learning about fated mates among supernatural species, and the second I had heard the term, it clicked for me. Whatever else I learned at Blackthorn, one thing I knew beyond a fraction of a doubt was that Raven was mine.

With him, I felt better than I ever had before. The sex was fantastic. That he was a virgin before me was completely unbelievable. Raven knew my body better than I did myself. He unerringly touched me in all the right places. Like he knew instinctively when, where, and what I needed.

Yes, he fed from me, blood being vital to his health, and I relished the fact I could nurture him in that way. He was so incredibly sexy. Gorgeous, muscular, powerful, and menacing. Fuck, I loved everything about him.

I was sleeping better, feeling better, and even more, I had not seen a ghost in days. I felt free, light, and airy. Like everything was finally falling into place for me.

As I walked into my favorite class, Professor Bannerman's *History of Magic*, I felt a chill creep up my spine. The classroom was exquisite, all mahogany molding, polished marble floors, and framed masterpieces on the wall. There were enormous bookshelves lined with ancient, leather-bound tomes. Some were scrolls, kept safe inside metal and glass cases.

We were due to start a brand new lesson today about regression spells and their place in the supernatural world. Some of the students whispered about this part of our lessons excitedly, as the professor typically took a volunteer from the class to perform the regression spell on.

I was curious who he would choose, though I assumed it would not be me. After all, I hardly knew anything at all about my supernatural side, and figured he would want someone with a more predictable background.

I was wrong.

“Good morning,” Professor Bannerman grumbled as he walked into the classroom, the door closing behind him seemingly on its own. “Well, you all know what today is and after looking over the roster, I have chosen Serena Notte for today’s regression spell lesson.”

I started in my seat, completely taken aback at being chosen. I stood up slowly, moving to the chair he gestured as he snapped open his briefcase and ran through what was going to happen. My gaze landed on Ursula and my roommate nodded encouragingly.

“Sit, Serena. Get comfortable. It is always a good idea to make certain your subject is at ease before performing any type of regression spell. This technique was used mostly to categorize and classify supes as recently as a hundred years ago, back when we lived in a society where social class was based on what kind of powers you had,” he explained. “Serena, are you ready?”

“I suppose, but Professor, my powers have been a little muted lately,” I told him.

“Ah, no worries. The castle sometimes does that to some first years to help you learn control. The lock on your powers will lesson as time goes on, and for the purposes of this lesson, I will expunge said lock.”

“A lock?” I asked, but he was already reciting his spell.

The red dragon perched on his shoulder did not move, even when a sudden breeze whipped through the professor’s dreads, lifting them up and causing his robes to swirl like inky waves around him.

My thoughts churned wildly. I had been so involved with Raven, I had not bothered to question the sudden lack of spectres in my life. If the castle had locked down my powers, maybe unlocking them would be bad—*but it was too late*.

Before I could protest, I felt pushed back into the chair, as if I was being held there by invisible arms. The room was thrown into darkness, and a few students gasped aloud. The professor had stopped his chanting, and I saw the whites of his eyes flash with uncertainty as the scene changed.

I was no longer at Blackthorn in the safety of my classroom, though the students and professor still existed there, they appeared as ghosts to me. Semi-transparent figures watching in horror as the chair I was in became a wooden table where I was bound by my hands and feet. Thick ropes cut into my flesh, and I felt as if I had been used and tortured for ages.

Pain and agony flowed through me as I opened my mouth and screamed. Robed figures hovered over me, brandishing whips, and other torturous weapons. The air smelled heavy of blood, pain, and misery. I screamed as my skin tore apart under the hands of a foul-looking woman in ancient nun’s garb.

She yelled something in what I thought was Spanish, slicing my skin with a metal-pronged leather whip. Pain like I'd never felt before had my back arching and my body convulsing as I fought against the restraints. The nun yelled harshly, I could not understand the words, but I knew it was something vile and hate-filled.

The pain though, fuck, I had no experience with this sort of thing. I howled as it tore at me like claws, ripping me to shreds. The faces of my professor and classmates blurred as some wailed and hid their eyes, others like Dietrich and Olaf, stared in horror. Professor Bannerman was chanting frantically, I could see his semi-transparent body working to undo whatever magic he'd done to cause this mess.

Not that I blamed him. No one really knew my history or the extent of my powers, never mind their origin. It wasn't until my own mouth opened and I spewed a line of something in a language I could not have possibly known that I truly felt fear.

I was speaking some archaic form of Spanish or Italian, or a mix of both, I could not tell. Shouting loudly, tears ran down my face as pain and loathing filled my voice. I felt rather than heard the nun's hiss of fear as she tried to push me back down onto the table.

It was then I realized I was levitating, and not just my body, but the whole heavy wooden table I was bound to. Anger and rage coursed through me. I longed for my home, a small cottage on the hills of Palermo where my mother and I had lived until the priests came with their soldiers to take us both.

Fuck, whose life was this? I tried to remember my present, Blackthorn Academy, Raven, my friends—my thoughts were a

mix of this past life and the one I was just discovering. Propelled back and forth between the present and the past revealed to me by Bannerman's regression spell, I felt dizzy and nauseated.

The nun whipped me again, and I howled in pain as warm blood flowed freely from the wound on my belly. She screamed again, cursing me as Satan's whore, and I spat back at her. What could this small-minded female know of me? Know of love?

I understood then what I was trying to do as I opened my mouth and called *them* to me. Using my powers in earnest, I cast deep purple nets of magic into the ether, weaving them around the *wanderers*, the spectres, those who had died and refused to leave.

"Serena! Stop!" the professor yelled, but I was too far gone.

The classroom blinked in and out of existence, and the images of the torture chamber grew more prominent. I began to forget Serena of the present and fell into Serena of the past.

Misguided fanatics, hateful people who wanted to make everyone the same. They were responsible for bringing the Inquisition to the shores of Sicily. I called the dead to me, casting my net wider, then pulling it in. Maybe I did not fully understand what I was doing until it was too late. Or maybe I just did not care.

My body felt like it had been cut up and dropped inside a blender, one of those ninja blade fuckers that could turn a coconut into paste in seconds. Yes, it hurt that much.

My mind was being torn apart. It was like I could not wrap around the fact I was experiencing a past life. All I really

understood was that I was being tortured, and I wanted it to stop. So, I did what any female with necromancer powers would do.

I raised an army to come to my aid.

CHAPTER 14



SERENA

POWER SURGED THROUGH ME, and I arched off the table. I felt them come to me in waves of hundreds, if not thousands. The nun screamed, trampled by my ghostly battalion.

The dead took corporeal form, able to do so in short bursts as they pulled on my own magic, freeing me of my bonds. I levitated off the table as my magic skyrocketed, purple flames erupted over my skin. The long-robed nuns and priests were on their knees, praying to a God who was not listening as I used my army to destroy them.

The ghosts acted on my command, pulling the old steeple down on top of the chamber after lifting the half dozen of my sisters that remained. The wind whipped wildly around us as I lifted us to the rocky cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean.

My feet were bloodied and bruised, but nothing ever felt so good as standing of my own accord. Multicolored flames took over the old church, brought on by my sisters of my heart. I looked at the women, all dark-haired like me, with eyes glowing green, red, pink, purple, and gold. We combined our powers, purifying the evil the Inquisitors had wrought on us.

“Grazie, sorella.”

They thanked and embraced me before turning away. I did not want to go, happy to have found a place I belonged, with the sweet-scented women on the island of Sicily somewhere in time. But as I faltered, I could hear someone calling my name. The voice sounded anguished, and the owner was screaming for me to return to him.

I shook my head, trying to erase the heart-wrenching echo of that sound. But it was pointless. Solid hands held me, shook me hard as I fought to follow the dark-haired women. I wanted to be with them. To learn more about my powers and who I was.

“Come back to me, *unnasta*. Please, mate. I did not get to tell you. *Ek elska pik, unnasta*. I love you,” growled the voice.

I could no longer feel my limbs, they were cold and heavy. I blinked as the scenery changed yet again. From the rocky cliffs of the past, to the ornate classroom where the faces of dozens stared down at me.

“She feels confused,” a girl’s voice said, and I recognized it.

I thought maybe I knew her. She was my friend. Her name was Ursula, but why was she crying?

“Fuck. The ghosts are trying to get in,” another hysterical voice added.

Ghosts?

I wondered. I felt something tugging on me, draining my life force as I tried to remain conscious. Where the heck was I? Why could I not remember?

“What were you doing in here?” a clear voice full of authority spoke.

“What I have done for decades, Headmistress, but this was not the intended result!”

I knew the man who spoke. He was my teacher, Professor Bannerman. I was on Northumberland Island at Blackthorn Academy.

“Professor, we have an army of the dead trying to tear down our barriers. Tell us something,” a voice I connected with Headmistress Blackthorn spoke.

“Something went wrong with the regression. I had no idea this could happen,” Professor Bannerman explained.

“She is cold,” the angry masculine voice from before said.

“You know what to do, Draugr,” Headmistress Blackthorn replied softly.

“I must warm her,” the male, Draugr, I thought, but that felt wrong, said.

I felt strong hands on my neck as someone lifted my head. My eyes refused to stay open, and I felt as though a thousand hands were grabbing at my body and soul, trying to tear me to bits.

Then I felt it. Something warm, spicy, and delicious slid down my throat. Chocolate and wine, I remembered that flavor. Greedy for more, I lifted my head, latched onto the wrist at my mouth, and suckled at him.

Strength came pouring back to me and when I opened my eyes, it was to meet the purple stare of the one I loved more than my own life.

“Raven,” I whispered.

“*Unnasta*, you have come back to me,” he growled, and I saw fierce pride and relief wash over his beloved face.

“That’s all fine and good, Miss Notte, but do you mind? Your revenants are creating quite the disturbance,” Headmistress Blackthorn quipped.

I sat up with Raven’s aid and noted the chaos that had erupted all around me. The classroom was in shambles as ghosts and poltergeists ran rampant. There were three dozen of the things surrounding me, pulling on my power, and I realized I was somehow feeding them.

The entire classroom was struggling against more ghosts than I had ever seen in one place in my life. Typically, I would have ignored them, pretending that they did not exist. But I had caused this mess. I had called them to me.

Anxiety rose as I looked at what I had done. There was no way I could control this number of ghosts! Not me. I did not have the power or the skill, and I was seconds away from completely falling apart.

“Hey, it’s alright. Look at me, *unnasta*, You can do this. Sever the tie and cast them out.”

I looked at Raven, saw his utter belief in me, and something wonderful happened. Taking direction from him, I drew on his own confidence in me, and I looked around at the ghosts wreaking all manner of havoc.

“Just let go. Trust in yourself, *unnasta*.”

I heard someone scream and saw Ursula being hauled across the room by her feet. Dietrich ran behind her, as if the green-skinned male had no other choice than to try to protect the slight female. That was interesting.

My power pulsed and throbbed inside of me. The ghosts had been pulling on my magic, feeding off it and growing in strength. But with Raven's blood flowing through me, I felt more strength than ever before. My magic was a deep, dark purple that glowed and flexed. Like a sentient thing. It did not like being used in this way. It demanded I act.

So, I did. I took it back.

Calling on the strength of my sisters from the past, I used that to harness the spirits who I'd bound to me unwittingly. The ghosts cried and hissed, scratching at my very soul with their clawed hands, but I would not yield.

I sent them back to where they belonged, urging those who could move on to do that while sending the ones not ready yet back to whence they came. All with a very strict command to stay there lest I call again.

After a moment more of concentrating, I released the spell, taking one look at the damage they had done to the classroom before collapsing. Lucky me, my man was fast and strong. Raven caught me, swinging me up in his arms before I could hit the floor.

"Sorry," I murmured before darkness took me.

CHAPTER 15



SERENA

I WOKE with the sunlight streaming in through a small window to my right. Bone-tired and with the worst dry mouth ever, I frowned, coughing as I tried to sit up.

“Easy, *unnasta*. Here. Drink this.”

A straw touched my lips, and I blinked my eyes, opening them fully to look upon the face of the only person who was ever truly concerned for my well-being.

Raven. The Draugr. My fated mate.

Love swelled inside me, and I took a long pull of the thick, lukewarm liquid.

“What is that?” I asked, gasping at the sharp flavor.

“Plasma. You seem to have acquired some extra dietary needs, *unnasta*,” Raven murmured, his gaze apologetic.

“I drink blood now?”

“Um, sort of. You see, when you were kind of out of it, I felt you fading. I had to do something, *unnasta*. I simply cannot face this world without you in it.”

Raven's body tensed as if he fully expected me to lash out at him for the change in me, but all I felt was pure joy.

"I understand if you are angry with me, my sweet Serena. I have forced you to live like me, with one foot beyond the veil and one on the other side. I robbed you of your choice, but I cannot apologize," he growled, sorrow and repentance rolling off him.

"Are you done?" I asked, watching his eyes glow as he cocked his head to the side and waited for me to continue.

"I am not angry with you, Raven."

"You're not?"

"No. How could I be angry when you love me so much? You broke all the rules to save me."

Raven seemed to preen at my praise. His eyes glowed brighter, and his spicy chocolate and wine scent thickened in the air. Prowling like the beast he was, he stalked over to my bed and cupped my cheeks, leaning down to capture my mouth in a kiss so full of devotion and promise, tears rolled down my face.

How much luckier could a girl like me possibly get? I had a beautiful, powerful, loyal, sexy as fuck monster as a mate. Not only was he all of that and more, but there was nothing he was not willing to do for me.

"Are you sure you are not angry with me?" he asked, dropping kisses on my eyelids, nose, and cheek.

"Raven, you saved my life. I am the opposite of angry. I am so completely in love with you," I whispered, loving the tremble that racked his enormous body.

He made me feel cherished, loved, cared for, and those were things I had not had a lot of in my life. I sighed and kissed him back, encouraging him to lie down next to me as I was too weak for the types of shenanigans I was almost desperate to get into with him.

“We have time for that, *unnasta*. All the time in the world,” he grinned, holding me close.

“Well, it is nice to see you are awake,” Headmistress Blackthorn said, suddenly appearing inside my room in the infirmary.

“Headmistress,” Raven murmured, moving to stand.

“Do not get up, Draugr. I will only intrude a moment. Miss Notte, how are you feeling?”

“Fine,” I said, bristling at her use of his title and not his name.

“That is good. Well, after the incident, let us call it, we did a deep dive on your background and found a pretty good account of what we think happened to your ancestors.”

“What?” I asked, sitting up suddenly. Raven moved with me, an arm around my back for support, listening in earnest as the headmistress explained what they had discovered.

“While Necromancy is your prevalent talent, you, my dear, are so much more.”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you recall of the place the regression spell took you?”

“Um, it was a torture chamber. There were others like me. We were held by nuns and priests. Uh, I don’t—oh, I think we

were in Sicily,” I said, squinting as I recalled the scented air and the rocky path that had been below my battered feet.

“Yes. Precisely. We believe we have traced your earliest ancestor to the Witch Trials of Sicily brought forth by the Spanish Inquisition in the 16th century.”

“So, I am a Witch after all,” I asked, still confused.

“Actually, no. The people targeted were not Witches. You are the last in a line of ancient Fae called the *Donas de Fuera*.”

“Fae? Like fairies?” I gasped, shocked at the revelation.

“Indeed, Miss Notte. Your talents for necromancy notwithstanding, I believe we have only touched upon the true depth of your abilities.”

“So, her lifeline, then?” Raven asked.

I knew it had caused some concern, and he’d been trying to find ways to prolong my life or shorten his. Now, we would not have to worry about either. Relief and excitement rushed through me.

“If it is anything like her ancestors, Miss Notte will likely stop aging around twenty-five and will live a very long time indeed,” Headmistress Blackthorn said.

“*Unnasta minn*,” Raven whispered, kissing my temple, and wrapping his arms around me.

“By the way, whatever magic you wielded in class yesterday, you managed to clear all ghosts and spectres from the campus for the time being. Now, there are many and I expect them to come back, but that alone is quite an accomplishment. We are looking forward to seeing what else you can do, Miss Notte.”

“You mean, I am not kicked out?” I asked, eyebrows raised.

“That is precisely what I mean. Draugr, Miss Notte, have a fine evening, then.”

A second later, she was gone, and I was left with my heart damn near pounding me to death. It took at least fifteen minutes for me to stop freaking out.

Holy crap.

Finally, I had some answers about who I was and where I came from, and where I was going. Necromancy was rare, but if I was Fae, that explained the power.

It also explained why the Witches on campus did not feel my power. Fae simply did not adhere to the same rules as Witches. I had learned that in my classes.

“Do you know anything about the *Donas de Fuera*?” I asked Raven, who seemed to be digesting the news as well.

“No, but I will write to my father and have the scribes of my people search the archives for any information,” he said.

“I can’t believe it,” I mumbled, covering my mouth with my hand.

“Oh, I can, sweet Serena. You have been like a beacon for me the second I caught your scent on the breeze. I knew you were special, and now everyone else does, too,” he growled, pride shining from his lavender gaze.

“Your eyes are so beautiful. Purple has always been my favorite color,” she murmured, touching his face.

“My eyes were black until you arrived, *unnasta*. The purple you see is your own light reflected back from my darkness.”

“What?”

“It’s true. You brought me light when there was none, hope, when I had none. And I vow to remain true by your side until the end of all things,” he whispered.

I found what I was looking for at Blackthorn Academy, and this was only the beginning. Everything I had ever hoped for and more was now mine. I did not have to hide who I was or wonder where I belonged. Not anymore.

“You belong with me, *unnasta*,” Raven said, reading my mind as we lay back on the small bed and held each other.

“And you belong with me. I never expected to feel this way about anyone, and even saying the words doesn’t feel like enough, but I love you, Raven. With every fiber of my being, I love you,” I whispered, meaning every word.

“*Ek elska pik*, sweet Serena. I love you, too,” he murmured, catching my lips in a sweet kiss that sent my soul to soaring.

Over the next few years, I expected I would learn many spells and potions, tons of magic that could bring about the ruin of worlds. But of all those things, none would ever be as earth-shattering to me as my monster’s kiss.

That was the thing that changed my life. And I would spend all the rest of my days making sure he knew it, too.

“Can we get out of here?” I asked, after a few more hours of resting.

“Sure. Would you like me to take you to your dorm?” Raven asked, rising to his feet, and bending to lift me in his strong embrace.

“No. Will you take me to our place?” I asked.

Raven's eyes glowed deep with hunger as I held on to his neck. He revealed his enormous, black-feathered wings and walked to the window. I loved the feel of him beneath my hands and anticipation had me quaking in my skin. The need for him was constant, my desire ever growing. I licked my lips, loving the way he followed the movement as he readied us both for flight.

“Anything you want, *unnasta*.”

And I believed him when he said that. My monster was as devoted to me as I was to him. I could not wait to see what our future would bring.

Thank you for reading this installment of the Blackthorn Academy for Supernaturals shared world!

Read [Monster's Delight](#), the next book in the series!

Watch for the other books in the
Blackthorn Academy for Supernaturals shared world series.

[Monster's Kiss](#)

[Monster's Delight](#)

[Monster's Spell](#)

[Monster's Enemy](#)

[Monster's Past](#)

[Monster's Secret](#)

Monster's Savior

Monster's Reward

Monster's Obsession

Monster's Mayhem

Monster's Charm

Monster's Bride

and More!

If you would like to find more of C.D. Gorri's books, please visit her website here: <https://www.cdgorri.com>.



Signup to get C.D. Gorri's Newsletter Here:

<https://www.cdgorri.com/newsletter>

FOLLOW C.D. GORRI

<https://www.cdgorri.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/Cdgorribooks>

<https://www.bookbub.com/authors/c-d-gorri>

<https://twitter.com/cgor22>

<https://instagram.com/cdgorri/>

<https://www.goodreads.com/cdgorri>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@cdgorriauthor>

ALSO BY C.D. GORRI

If you enjoyed this book, you may also enjoy...

[YA Urban Fantasy Books](#)

[Macconwood Pack Novel Series](#)

[Macconwood Pack Tales](#)

[The Falk Clan Tales](#)

[The Bear Claw Tales](#)

[The Barvale Clan Tales](#)

[Barvale Holiday Tales](#)

[Purely Paranormal Romance Books](#)

[The Wardens of Terra](#)

[The Maverick Pride Tales](#)

[Dire Wolf Mates](#)

[Wyvern Protection Unit](#)

[EveL Worlds](#)

[The Guardians of Chaos](#)

[Hearts of Stone](#)

[Accidentally Undead](#)

[Moongate Island Mates](#)

[Mated in Hope Falls](#)

[Twice Mated Tales](#)

[Island Stripe Pride](#)

[Hungry Fur Love](#)

[NYC Shifter Tales](#)

[Standalones](#)

[Shifter Unleashed Anthologies](#)

[Anthologies](#)

[Witches of Westwood Academy](#)

[Shelly Maypo Witch PI Cozy Mysteries](#)

[Reader Journals](#)

ABOUT C.D. GORRI

C.D. Gorri is a USA Today Bestselling author of steamy paranormal romance and urban fantasy. She is the creator of the Grazi Kelly Universe.

An avid reader with a profound love for books and literature, when she is not writing or taking care of her family, she can usually be found with a book or tablet in hand. C.D. lives in her home state of New Jersey where many of her characters or stories are based. Her tales are fast paced yet detailed with satisfying conclusions.

If you enjoy powerful heroines and loyal heroes who face relatable problems in supernatural settings, journey into the Grazi Kelly Universe today. You will find sassy, curvy heroines and sexy, love-driven heroes who find their HEAs between the pages. Werewolves, Bears, Dragons, Tigers, Witches, Romani, Lynxes, Foxes, Thunderbirds, Vampires, and many more Shifters and supernatural creatures dwell within her worlds. The most important thing is every mate in this universe is fated, loyal, and true lovers always get their happily ever afters.

Want to know how it all began? Enter the Grazi Kelly Universe with *Wolf Moon: A Grazi Kelly Novel* or pick up

Charley's Christmas Wolf and dive into the Macconwood Pack
Novel Series today.

Thank you and happy reading!

del mare alla stella,

C.D. Gorri