

# ~ Flight of Shadows ~

## by Windstar

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### Chapter 1

*There are two worlds. The first is an orderly place, filled with people who work nine to five jobs, worried about taxes and paying for their kid's braces. The second one lies just beneath the first. It's a dark place, full of sharp edges and sudden pain. If you look close enough you can see it, lurking out of the corner of your vision. Down that old alley way, where the wind that isn't quite human. Beware though, if you look, and perchance, see, you may never be able to go back to your nice little orderly world.*

~ Unknown Magister

### Night One.

In the old days, a Magister could look forward to an average lifespan of barely twenty-five years. In those dark times, the duty of those chosen was clear: defend the helpless against the Dark, and procreate to ensure that there would be another generation of Magister's to take your place when you fell. These days, things were different. A good Magister, one who didn't take risks, could expect to live nearly as long as a regular human.

A lot depended on the Magister, though.

For some reason, as she hung from the rafters, Sarah was pretty sure this little stunt she was about to pull would be classified as taking too big of a risk. She was also equally certain that Gwen would have had a royal fit if she knew what the Magister was doing.

A good thing for her that the city's resident Angel was busy, now, wasn't it?

*Of course, if Gwen was here, taking this guy out would be a lot easier, wouldn't it?*

Her arms were starting to ache, and her fingers hurt from gripping the rust covered steel girder for so long. Winter had descended on the city with a vengeance, and her slow even controlled breaths were white in the air.

Not that anyone could see her at the moment.

She'd been careful about that at least. Cautiously inscribed marks had been carved into the rusty girder all around her. Marks of deception and stealth, along with a good handful of glyphs for

hiding, as well, to ensure that even if someone did glance upwards, all they would see is what they expected to see.

Nothing.

At least that was the plan.

The one little drawback of her plan that was now making itself painfully obvious was because she expected her prey here a half hour ago. Hanging from the rafters, careful to move as little as possible least she draw attention, was giving her a good workout. Usually she wouldn't have minded, but she might just need all her strength for this prey.

The two men below her laughed and made jokes by the light of the small portable lantern they'd set up. They were playing cards, and both were cheating badly. It was tempting, very tempting, to just drop down and take them out.

*No, I want Garz. I'll wait for him, the others are just small fry.*

Finally, just when she'd started to consider getting down and finding another hunting spot, the loading dock doors rattled open. The old truck doors rolled up in a symphony of clanking, clattering and groaning metal. Headlights pierced the darkness of the mostly empty warehouse below her. The Magister's smile was bright white in the darkness. Gone was the feeling of fatigue.

Three cars pulled inside, a limo and two SUV's like hers'. Silently she waited, watching intently as the occupants of those vehicles emerged. The SUV's had pulled up so that their headlights illuminated the table and chairs that had been set up in the middle of the warehouse.

She counted eight bodyguards, paying close attention to the way they walked and the obvious hardware they carried. Three large men stepped out of each of the SUVs, and two more bodyguards emerged from the Limo itself. Eyes that had been the color of warm chocolate darkened to pale blue ice as she watched one last figure step out from the limo.

He wasn't much to look at. A hunched over little man hobbling towards the two men with the help of a cane. Certainly the two body guards who stood at his elbow's looked more impressive, fierce and tall, each one a good six and a half foot tall, and carrying sub machine guns at that. But it wasn't them that terrified the two men who had been playing cards. She could see the sweat even from where she was hanging, a good twenty feet up.

No, they were terrified of the little man, of Garz.

"Where is it?"

The warehouse was suddenly silent at Graz's raspy voice. Neither man answered, both looking from one to the other, until Garz raised a hand. The two bodyguards on either side of him cocked their sub machine guns.

The solid metallic chink seemed to rouse both men and one of them reached down, holding up a black briefcase.

"Good, give it to me."

His arm shaking, the man slid the case across the table towards the hunched over old man.

"Excellent, you and your brother have done well."

She'd hoped that Garz would have said why he wanted so badly what was inside that briefcase that he'd risk coming into Her city to get it.

*Guess I can't count on the stupidity of my enemies. Damn. Going to have to do this the hard way.*

Sarah let go of the girder. A twenty-foot fall wasn't something to sneer at. People had died falling from far shorter distances. She knew that, of course, and the adrenalin singing in her veins certainly was a result of that knowledge.

*God, I love my job.*

Her dark clothes hid her for the first half of the fall, twisting in mid air to land on her feet. Nothing more than a whisper of passing air on cloth heralded her approach as she dropped from above. Only Garz heard her, and his head whipped upwards. The bodyguards on either side hadn't obviously. Simulacrum, all of them, were barely smart enough to drive. Nothing more than lumps of flesh made by Garz's master to do his bidding.

Which meant they weren't alive.

Which meant she was about to have fun.

Sarah Mordicai, Magister of her city, slammed down in back of the two humans. Both of them were little better than thieves and street punks, involved in something that was far over their head. Fortunately for them, a Magister's domain was the dead, not the living and she slammed the two stun batons she'd drawn while dropping from the girder into the middle of both their backs.

They dropped like puppets with their strings cut.

Garz was staring at her, his wrinkled face livid.

"Hey, Garz, I'm hurt. You didn't tell me you were in town."

"What are you waiting for, you idiots? Shoot her!"

*Oops!*

The two bodyguards on either side of the old man finally gathered their wits about them and opened fire. But not before she managed to dive to the side and roll away, bullets tearing up concrete behind her.

"Get her!"

The simulacrum reacted to their master's order and all eight lunged after her, straight into the shadows.

Her domain.

Simulacrum didn't rank too high on the list of servants. They were just smart enough to drive a car without getting into an accident, and fire a gun. That was about it. Trying to hold a conversation with one was about as frustrating as trying to get a brick wall to express an opinion.

They were great muscle though, and quite a few hedge wizards and minor necromancers used them as bodyguards. Eight was a bit much, and Sarah was surprised someone as minor as Garz had managed to make so many.

*Or his employer made them for him. I think I need to ask Garz a few questions.*

All of them charged for where she had been, barreling past, and over, the two prone bodies she'd left behind. They were as subtle as bulls in a china shop and the Magister exchanged the stun batons in favor of the blade she carried on her back. Glyphs glowed faintly and crawled along the length of that blade. She smiled wickedly.

One of the bodyguards sprinted towards where he thought he had seen a glint of light in the dark shadows. Her blade took his head clean off, and the body hit the floor like a two hundred and fifty pound bag of potatoes. She moved before the body even landed, sprinting towards a nearby hiding spot, while leaving behind a satchel she'd brought with her.

*One.*

She danced to the side, watching the others charge past her towards their dead companion. The Magister waited silent and still, letting all the group pass by her hiding place before stepping out behind them. The four foot long curved blade flicked out, carving a trail of fire through the dark air.

*Two.*

The sound of a body falling to the floor behind them slowed the remaining six, and as one, they turned and opened fire. Of course, she'd anticipated that, and had tossed herself to the side and down. Sarah had cut it a bit fine though, and she gritted her teeth against the pain as a bullet came just a hair too close and grazed her upper left arm. Behind her she could hear Garz cursing as bullets came perilously close to him as well.

*Damn, hope they don't kill him. I need to talk to him first.*

She'd gotten them right where she wanted them though.

Still laying on her side, she slid the small silver rod out of one of her pockets, grinning in the darkness as she pressed down on what she knew was a red button. The magister knew what was coming, and closed her eyes against the sudden burst of light. Her uncle had made the satchel charge and had been careful to warn her to be at least ten feet away from it when she detonated it. She was just a bit inside that safety distance, and she could feel the heat on her face from the flames.

She waited until the room had more or less gone black before once more opening her eyes.

*Not bad. Three, four, five, six and seven!*

Number eight was still standing, erratically swinging his gun back and forth. Obviously, the explosion had blinded him and Sarah languidly rose from her crouch. Garz was also scrubbing at his eyes, and the old man looked up just in time to see her step up behind his last surviving bodyguard.

"Behind you!"

It was far too late though, and the sword went in and up, angled perfectly upwards through the heart. The red tip emerged through the front of the simulacrum's shirt, and Sarah smiled to Garz as she let the last one drop to the floor.

*Eight. Time to find some answers.*

"Now, Magister, let's not get too hasty!"

Sarah smiled and wiped the blood off her blade before returning it to its sheath.

"Garz, you really should have stopped by and told me you were in town. I'm hurt, really."

The little man clutched the briefcase and tried to scuttle backwards towards the limo. Four quick steps around the table brought her right up to him though, and she easily deflected his attempt to hit her with his cane, stripping the briefcase from him in the same easy movement.

"Now, what do we have here, Garz?"

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She did not pass through the doors.

She didn't have to. Not here. Not to enter this place.

The girl was right where she'd known she would be. Crouched in the front pew, shoulders shaking as she sobbed. The pale woman perched herself on the top of the choir balcony. Blue eyes, the only color in an otherwise pale face, watched with compassion as the teen cried.

For two hours, she watched over the girl, waiting while the wracking sobs became simple crying, and finally the tears dried. No one entered the church; none would while she kept watch down over the troubled teen. Even the priest would find distractions keeping him from entering until she was ready for him to.

When the tears ended, she lightly jumped from the balcony. The cream colored jacket fluttered softly about her as she descended downward. White shoes hit the tiled floor silently and she strode forwards down the central passageway. Only the red votive candles marked her passage, bursting into life in waves as she passed them.

Gently, just as she would approach a wounded and cornered animal, Gwyn sat down next to the teen. A head covered in wavy brown hair hid what Gwyn knew would be hazel eyes. She was about to open her mouth when the teen beat her to it.

"Go away."

Gwyn blinked in surprise, she hadn't thought the girl had known she was there.

"My name is Gwyn."

"I said, go the FUCK AWAY!"

Gwyn stiffened in surprise, that wasn't the way she expected this to go. Granted she was still new at this particular mission, but certainly being the guardian Angel for a city couldn't be harder than battling the hosts of hell, could it?

"Victoria..."

At that the teen erupted up from her seat, whirling around to glare at Gwyn, hissing.

"How the fuck do you know my name?"

*Oh boy, how did the Professor do this?*

"I know you're confused..."

Once more the teen interrupted her, wildly laughing then standing, twirling about and shouting up at the ceiling above her.

"Do you hear this? Do you? She thinks I'm confused!"

The laughter dissolved into tears once more and the lanky teen, collapsed back down onto the pew.

"Just leave me alone, just let me be."

Gwyn sighed and reached towards one shaking shoulder. Instinctively pulling up short before she actually touched her.

"Look, I know this is confusing Victoria, but you have to listen to me."

"Don't call me that."

The teen muttered, and if she hadn't had such good hearing, Gwyn wouldn't have heard it the low tones. Once more, the speech she'd tried to prepare went out the window as she got distracted.

"What?" She asked in surprise.

"Don't call me Victoria. No one calls me that. My name's Vicki."

"No, it isn't. Your mother named you Victoria Anne Grange."

A red, tear streaked face poked out from under dark auburn hair, and red rimmed hazel eyes stared at Gwyn.

"Who the fuck are you?"

*Well, at least that's a question I can answer. So much for sticking with the script.*

"My name's Gwyn. Walk with me and I'll fill you in on the rest?"

Vicki gave a short, bitter laugh and shrugged, wiping at errant tears with the sleeve of a red sweater that had seen better days. This time, Gwyn used the church doors, and hoped that Vicki didn't notice the statue of Saint John that smiled at her as they left. Outside it was cold, with a bitter north wind bullying it's way about and tossing snow around. Gwyn didn't particularly feel the chill, other than a vaguely uncomfortable feeling. The under-dressed youngster at her side shivered all the while trying to act tough for the older woman.

Gwyn didn't say a word on the short walk from the church to the small bar. The long-limbed teen next to her didn't say anything either, but Gwyn could feel the questioning glances that darted her way.

The bar wasn't much; it didn't even have a sign hanging outside, just a simple weather beaten wooden door painted black.

"... I see a red door and I want to paint it black..."

Gwyn wasn't sure why Vicki was quoting song lyrics as she pushed the door open, but the trembling teen seemed relieved enough when they stepped into the heat.

"W-w-where are we?"

Gwyn waved towards the mountain of a man behind the bartop, pointed towards a back bench, smiled in response to the small thumbs up, and started herding the shivering teen towards the back bench, all in the space of time it took Vicki to chatter out her question.

"A bar."

"Funny."

"Sarah thinks so."

Vicki rubbed her arms, trying to warm herself as they slid into the booth.

"Who's Sarah?"

Gwyn blinked in surprise.

*I really need to get focused. I can't believe I just mentioned Sarah. Come on Gwyn, what's going on?*

Thankfully, the soup had arrived by then, and Gwyn gratefully took the small respite the diversion offered. With only one wary look at her, Vicki had quickly set on the bowl of soup, nearly inhaling it. Sadly, Gwyn made note of the prominent finger bones, the sharp cheeks, and the pallor. The teen had been on her own for weeks now before finding her way into the church, and Gwyn could only trust she hadn't been allowed to find the teen before now for a good reason.

When Vicki was done with her own bowl, Gwyn silently pushed hers towards the girl, waiting patiently while the underfed teen made her way through that one as well.

"Thanks."

It was reluctantly said and the teen was looking anywhere but at her when she spoke, but right now, Gwyn would take it as a minor victory. The teen kept on glancing at the clock above the wall, and then back down to the rapidly disappearing soup. Gwyn let her, waiting again for her to finish the bowl. When that had gone the way of the first, followed by the soda that Touk the bartender had brought, Gwyn spoke up.

"Are you in a hurry?"

Startled, hazel eyes met knowing blue eyes, and Gwyn smiled to reassure the suddenly even edgy woman across from her.



"You have time."

Vicki was openly gaping at that, and Gwyn watched as the teen sought shelter behind anger.

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

There were only a few other patrons at the bar, and none of them even glanced in their direction as Vicki raised her voice.

"Quiet, child. I'm here to help you."

"What the fuck do you mean by that?!"

This time she got a few glances, not many people casually swore inside of this bar. Gwyn smiled and shook her head to them as a few started to rise to come and offer their help.

"You were asking for help in the church, weren't you?"

Gold flecked brown eyes widened and Vicki's face paled as she nodded jerkily.

"Well, here I am."

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Sarah parked her black SUV in the manor's four-car garage. With a yawn she stretched and stepped out, happy to be home. It had been an interesting evening, and she carried the case she'd taken from Garz, into the house.

"Eric!"

Her uncle, still showing signs of the illness that had nearly cost him his life mere months before, slowly made his way down the hallway towards the entryway.

*He looks better every day. More color in his cheeks, as grandmother would say. I owe Gwyn for that.*

"Here, tell me what you make of this?"

He took the briefcase from her and she hung up her long coat.

"What's wrong? You don't look happy to see me. Usually, you're even more excited than I am when I bring you a puzzle to solve."

She frowned as her Uncle uncharacteristically looked everywhere but at her.

"Well, you see... Actually you should talk to Gwyn about it."

A raven eyebrow rose.

"About what?"

Eric slowly started backing away, taking the briefcase with him. Something was seriously wrong if he hadn't even bothered to look inside or ask what was in it. Sarah frowned at her uncle.

"Just talk to your girlfriend!"

With that he backed out into the hallway and took off towards his little bomb shelter of a room. Shaking her head at his odd behavior, the Magister hefted the rest of her equipment on her shoulder and set out to find her girlfriend.

*Two months, we've been together two months!*

That fact never failed to bring a grin to her face, and Sarah shook her head in amazement. It had been two months since the final battle with Gabriel for the key, and her death. Gwyn had managed to bring her back from death and had even become the guardian angel for the entire city.

"Gwyn?"

The bedroom the two shared was empty. Shrugging, Sarah deposited her duffle bag full of equipment on the bed, and continued down the hallway. The sword she would have left behind, except for the uneasy feeling in the pit of her stomach. Something was going on, and the sword was a comfort.

A peek into the living room yielded no sign of her pale lover.

The blonde wasn't in the kitchen or the basement either.

With a glance out into the snow-covered gardens, Gwyn headed into the guest wing of the Manor. Since the manor never hosted guests, other than occasional visiting family members, the rooms she searched through were seldom used. Many were filled with relics of past Magisters, old furniture under white tarps, and large steamer trunks.

She'd seen enough similar looking rooms portrayed in horror movies to scare people. But this was her home, though. For someone who routinely hunted down the rotting corpses of the undead, the furnishings held about as much chance of scaring her as a walk through the park on a bright summer day did.

The noise in the last room on the third floor did cause her to pause, however. No one should have been up here, and she eased her blade from its scabbard. The polished wood floors gleamed in

the pale moonlight from outside. Sarah eased her way down the darkened hallway with the long practice of one intimately familiar with her surroundings. This was her family's manor after all, and it had served as her training center throughout her adolescence.

Silently, she moved up next to the doorway, and stilled her breath to listen carefully. There was definitely movement inside the room. If it was Gwyn, she'd apologize for what she was about to do. If not, that meant she wasn't paranoid.

The Magister shoved open the door, leading the way with her sword point, and moved quickly into the room beyond. A woman, a teenager actually, yelped in surprise and dropped the mirror she'd been holding. The hand-held mirror, an antique, Sarah noted, shattered as it hit the ground. Cold, gray eyes watched the intruder as she backed up until she was against the wall.

"Who are you?"

The girl, who Sarah noticed was only an inch or so shorter than she was, just stared at her in shock.

*If she's done something to Gwyn, I'll kill her.*

The thought must have showed her on her face, because the girl rapidly slid down the wall until she was as far away from the Magister as she could be and still be in the same room, her back in a corner now.

*She must be nineteen, maybe even eighteen. Where the hell is Gwyn?*

As if her thoughts had summoned her, the shorter woman slipped in through the doorway and placed a soothing hand on Sarah's shoulder.

"Love, it's all right. I brought her here to stay for a while."

Sarah eyed the stranger in the corner warily, but slowly lowered her sword at Gwyn's words.

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Victoria Grange"

The taller woman kept a wary eye on Victoria, matching the girl's glare.

*I've been glaring at people since you were in diapers, so don't even try it.*

Suddenly something that Gwyn had said finally caught her attention.

"Wait, what do you mean she's staying here?"

## Chapter 2

### Light of Day.

Sarah sleepily yawned and stretched. The silk sheets felt good against her body as she swung her legs over the edge of the bed and stood up. She spared a glance for her bedmate, grudgingly smiling at the sight that greeted her. Gwyn was still sprawled out, and the red silk only accentuated the paleness of her lover.

*You and I are going to have a talk about bringing strays to the Manor, but I think I'll let you sleep a bit more.*

Quietly, the Magister slipped on a worn pair of jeans, loose white blouse, and slipped out of the master bedroom after replacing the bandage on her arm.

Rolling her shoulders, she headed down to the kitchen, happy when she found the kitchen empty of any unwanted guests. Taking down a cup, she started to heat a pot of water.

The sound of a floorboard creaking behind her made her whirl around in haste.

"Morning."

Letting out a breath, she relaxed, while shaking her head.

"Morning, Eric. Actually, it's nearly afternoon."

Her uncle shrugged, moving to the fridge and snagging a beer from the shelf.

"Close enough. You going to attack me with that, or are you just happy to see me?"

Smirking, Sarah returned the cleaver she'd snatched up from the countertop and fetched herself some cereal.

"Have you been up long?"

"I'm old, Sarah, I don't sleep much these days. How's Gwyn?"

She shrugged, taking a seat across from him at the table.

"Sleeping."

"I've been meaning to ask you about that."

Sarah took a healthy sip of coffee, raising an eyebrow in question. Eric took a swig of his beer before continuing.

"She eats food."

The dark haired magister finished swallowing before she realized that was as much as her uncle was going to say.

"Annnd?"

"Just saying, don't know many Angels that do that."

Sarah shrugged, not entirely sure on the finer points involved in Gwyn's return to the city.

"She's not a hundred percent Angel anymore, so to speak."

She'd asked Gwyn about it, but the smaller woman had just smiled and kissed her until she'd pleurably forgotten all about the question. Frowning, she remembered how Gwyn had avoided talking about it every single time she'd brought it up since the other woman had returned to become the guardian Angel of the entire city.

Her uncle fidgeted a bit with the bottle of beer, tearing at the label.

"Ask your Angel if she wouldn't mind taking a look at that dagger you brought back last night."

Sarah paused with the spoon halfway to her mouth.

"The what?"

It was Eric's turn to roll his eyes at his niece.

"Dagger, remember? The briefcase you brought me back from Garz?"

"Oh, right, that."

She continued eating, waiting for him to finish grumbling about short attention spans.

"I'm running it through the Legacy's database right now, but nothings come up yet. Just figured Gwyn might know something about it."

The dark haired woman tried to mumble an agreement around a mouthful of cereal and milk. She succeeded in managing to dribble some milk down her chin.

"Thank god, we don't have to send you to fund raisers." To which Sarah grinned unrepentantly.

"You just don't want to try to get me to wear a dress again."

Eric sputtered beer, remembering the one and only time he'd tried to get her to dress up for a family event. It hadn't been what he'd call a big success.

"On that lovely note, I'll see you. Going to go get some clothes from downtown."

She blinked at that, glancing up sharply at his words as she swallowed.

"Clothes for who?"

"Vicki, of course."

With a grin, fully aware of what he was doing, Eric downed the last of the beer and left the table. He'd be walking downtown; it wasn't that far a trip, and he always enjoyed taking in the sunshine whenever he could, even if it was going to be cold outside.

Dark eyes narrowed, and Sarah thoughtfully chewed the rest of her breakfast as she watched her uncle leave.

*She's not telling me everything, as usual! I'm the Magister of this city, damn it! She should tell me what's going on.*

By the time Gwyn came down the stairs, Sarah had worked herself into a good righteous anger.

"Hey you, how are you doing?"

Sarah glared in answer, and Gwyn smiled slowly as she crossed the room towards the fuming Magister.

"Grumpy, huh?"

Sarah could feel a pout forming.

"Poor baby, let me see if I can make it up to you."

*I am not going to let her get away with this!*

Her thoughts were sidetracked as Gwyn claimed her lips, and she groaned as the small blonde climbed onto her lap and thoroughly kissed her. Gwyn felt soft and warm, and she was pressing her body up against Sarah's in the most delightful ways. Sparkling blue eyes regarded Sarah as Gwyn leaned back, just far enough so she could see the Magister's eyes.

"Better?"

*Damn. She got me again.*

"I guess."

Sarah couldn't help but grin at the teasing look in her lover's eyes, and hugged the smaller

woman to her.

"Just try not to make this a habit, ok?"

Gwyn sighed and hugged her back, tucking her head in underneath the taller woman's chin.

"I can't promise, but I'll try."

The Magister smiled into fair pale hair, pressing a kiss to the top of that head.

"Best I can hope for, I suppose."

They sat like that, each holding the other and just enjoying the stillness of the late morning. Neither of them were morning people. A Magister's work was almost all done at night, when the things that they hunted came out of their hiding places. As far as Gwyn knew she was the only angel to sleep, so she wasn't sure if her like for the late evenings came from her time with Sarah or something else. Sarah sighed in pleasure and hugged the slender woman close before speaking again.

"Oh, before I forget, Eric asked me to ask you to take a look at something."

Something that sounded vaguely like a question made it's way up from where the pale head was snuggled up against her chest.

"A dagger that I recovered last night. This old acquaintance of mine, a guy who used to specialize in stealing ancient relics until I had a few words with him, had it when I caught up with him. Eric can't figure out what it is, there's no mention of it in the Legacy's so he was wondering..."

For a split second it seemed to Sarah that Gwyn had tensed, but the blond was smiling as she pulled back out of the hug and finished her sentence for her.

"...if I might not know something about it?"

"Exactly."

To Sarah's surprise Gwyn climbed off her lap and started towards the door.

"Wait, I didn't mean now."

The angel glanced over her shoulder, shaking her head.

"No time like the present, Magister. I thought you knew that?"

If she hadn't ducked down to hurriedly eat a bit more of her cereal she wouldn't have missed the sad, resigned look that crossed Gwyn's face. Instead, when she put the still half full bowl in the

sink and crossed over to the waiting blonde all she got was a broad smile.

"It's not much to look at, you know. I'm not sure what Eric thinks you're going to tell us about it."

Lacing her fingers with the smaller woman, Sarah led the way towards Eric's room. Her uncle's room had been built as a bunker inside of the manor, complete with a heavy steel door. Banks of computers lined an entire wall, and as they entered a digital image of the dagger filled the central screen. A search program was trying to match any of the symbols carved into the pitch-black foot long dagger, without any luck so far.

The dagger itself lay on a nearby table under the glare of several lights and the watchful eye of several cameras.

"Gwyn, are you all right?"

The small woman's hand was trembling in Sarah's grasp, and she looked even more pale than usual. Swallowing, Gwyn nodded shakily.

"W-where did you find this?"

"In a warehouse downtown. Garz was meeting with some local lowlifes that handed it over to him. Why? What is it?"

Sarah watched in growing apprehension as the other woman paced around the table, staring at the long thin dagger that lay on it. The blade itself was a simple black length of steel. The functional hilt was covered with tiny intricate carvings that were inlaid with gold.

"Gwyn, what is it?"

"It's a sign."

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Vicki woke up slowly.

The warm bed and clean sheets had conspired to keep her asleep. During the last month she'd barely slept, snatching a few cherished hours of sleep here and there when she could. Her body had obviously decided she needed to catch up on her sleep. For long minutes she stared up at the ceiling above her.

*Look Mama, look where your daughter is now.*

Angrily, she scrubbed at the tears that suddenly stung her eyes and got out of bed. A quick check made sure that her journal was right where she had left it last night, tucked underneath the mattress of her bed. It was one of the few things she'd managed to keep with her ever since the...



*No, I promised myself I wasn't going to think about it anymore.*

Firmly shoving aside the errant thoughts, she walked towards the windows. The view outside, she had to admit, was nice. The early afternoon sun showed the snow covered winter garden, with only the bordering evergreens adding any color to the scene. The back of the large property was wooded, with several paths that she could see winding their way through the trees. In the garden itself were several fountains, a snow covered arboretum, and even what looked to be a small hedge maze. Her hand was trembling as she pressed it against the cold windowpane, but she scarcely noticed.

She wanted to be out there, feeling the wind against her skin. Only the rumbling of her stomach made her turn her away from the view.

If it had been weeks since she'd slept well, it had been longer since she'd had anything like the food that Gwyn had bought her last night at the pub.

*Gwyn, what sort of name is that? She said she was here to help me, does that mean she knows?*

Memories kept struggling to push to the surface, and she had to force herself to shut out everything but the here and now.

*I have one more day. I'll figure out what to do later.*

She hadn't had much time to look around last night, Gwyn had only just showed her into the room and had gone to go fetch some blankets for her when the other one barged in. The look in the taller woman's eyes caused Vicki to shudder, even now, a day later. There had been something deadly in those eyes, dangerous and vicious.

A look that Vicki knew well.

She'd been very relieved when Gwyn had come back inside and taken the taller woman, Sarah, away.

The polished wooden floors were warm under her bare feet and the teen padded down the hallway past to the bathroom she'd taken a needed shower in last night. Being clean and alone had made putting up with the few moments of fear last night worth it. Now that she was reasonably rested, she took time to look about her as she wandered down the hallway.

Rich tapestries hung here and there from the arched ceiling above her, and she pursed her lips in a silent whistle as she considered how much some of those could bring her.

*If I brought one of these to Frank maybe he'd...*

No, things were too far-gone for that, and she shook away the thought with a snarl. There was only one thing that Frankie wanted. Curious she stopped and peeked into some of the other rooms that lined the hallway. None of them had recently been occupied, as attested by the thick

layers of dust and white sheets thrown over furniture and luggage. It was all vaguely unsettling.

She noticed a curved staircase leading up to another couple of floors above her, and she was sorely tempted to go exploring except her stomach chose that exact moment to remind her how hungry she was.

The ground floor of the manor was much more lived in than the rest. Gwyn had shown her a comfortable and well-appointed living room last night on the way through. Complete with leather chairs, matching couch, a nicely hidden surround sound system, and even a large plasma screen hanging from the wall.

*The boys would love to get in here. We'd clean it out in less than a night, and party for days on the money.*

That thought brought a wave of loneliness and she hurried towards the kitchen that the pale woman had shown her last night. It wasn't until she'd pushed open the doors that she realized she'd walked into the middle of an argument.

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"What the hell do you mean you can't tell me!?"

Gwyn had known this was coming. That didn't mean she was ready for it, though. Sarah had badgered her about the dagger ever since they'd gone to see it in Eric's room. As much as she loved her, right now Gwyn just wished her love would leave her alone.

"I told you, I can't."

She'd wanted to get something to eat, but as she stared at the plate of toast she'd been prepared to spread jam and peanut butter over, she sighed.

"If it's something important, I should know about it!"

Closing her eyes and praying for strength, Gwyn shook her head. Despite her best efforts, she was starting to get irritated with the constant badgering.

"Sarah, I told you. I can't tell you what it is!"

The Magister, her eyes gone dark with anger of her own, strode across the kitchen.

"I'm the Magister of this city! If it's supernatural and in this city, I should know about it!"

The door to the kitchen swung open just then, and both women turned slightly towards Vicki as the eighteen-year-old girl stepped inside. Judging by the look on her face, Vickie regretted that action almost immediately. In way of silent apology for the girl having wandered into the small

war zone, the blonde offered her the plate of toast.

"Here, breakfast."

"We aren't done talking about this, Gwyn."

The irate smaller woman spun about to glare at the already fuming Magister. Obviously more was going on here than a simple argument over one dagger.

"Yes, we are. I can't tell you anything!"

"It's my job to know!"

"And it's my job to do as I'm told!"

They were nearly shouting at each other now, and from the corner of her eye, Gwyn could see the teen slowly starting to back away from them towards the open door.

"Then I'll just find out myself!"

With that, Sarah angrily strode from the room, nearly shoving the still startled- looking teen on her way out. Even then, as upset, as she was with Sarah for her stubbornness, Gwyn couldn't help but admire how beautiful her lover was. Anger fairly radiated from the tall woman as she stalked outside, her dark hair trailing behind her. Letting out a breath, Gwyn did her best to try to let go of some of her own pent-up anger. She was well aware of how dangerous that emotion could be.

*I'm not supposed to be capable of anger.*

Along with new experiences had come some disturbing revelations of what hidden traps this new body of hers came with. Emotions like love and joy she had no trouble with. The darker emotions, like hate and anger she had no experience with, no way to deal with them. A soft sound from the door reminded her she wasn't alone and she wearily opened her eyes.

*And it started out as such a good day.*

"Sorry about that."

The teen shrugged, mumbling something that even Gwyn's hearing couldn't catch, and moved over to take a seat at the table. The angel poured herself a cup of hot water and added some tea to seep. She'd discovered she rather hated coffee, much to Sarah's dismay since the Magister loved the stuff. They were both silent as she took another seat at the table.

"You sleep well?"

Guarded hazel eyes watched Gwyn from under low cut, wavy brown hair as Vicki answered.

"Yeah, thanks. Sooo... that's Sarah, huh?"

Gwyn took a small sip of tea before nodding.

"Yes, that's Sarah."

"So, are you two, ya know?"

Gwyn felt her eyebrow climbing as she stared at the teen across from her.

"Are we what?"

"Doing the nasty?"

She quite nearly sprayed the table with the sip of tea she'd just taken, as it was it took her a few seconds to stop coughing.

"Are we WHAT?"

Vicki shrugged.

"Hey, no biggie. Just wondering."

Definitely not how Gwyn had hoped the conversation would go.

Sighing, she set aside her still mostly full cup of tea and stood up.

"On that note, come on, we've got some things to do."

Once more the teen watched her warily as she finished off the last of the toast that Gwyn had given her.

"What sort of things?"

"We're going to go see if we can find that Pack of yours."

The wariness suddenly turned to fear.

-----

Sarah leapt into her SUV, slamming the door shut and gunning the engine.

"Damn it!"

The argument had been about more than just the dagger, although she was plenty pissed off that Gwyn was refusing to tell her anything about it. This had been coming for almost as long as

she'd known the smaller woman.

*I'm the Magister, damn it!*

Angrily she backed out of the large garage, and then gunned it as she headed out of the driveway. The main gates of the estate barely had time to open before she went barreling past the black wrought iron fence and into the outskirts of the city.

*A nice long drive, that's what I need. Time to cool off a bit before I kill someone.*

That decided, she spun the wheel, tires screeching as she pulled a rather illegal U turn in the middle of the mostly deserted street. Gunning the powerful engine once more, she headed away from the city and out into the surrounding countryside. Not knowing that events in the city would soon change everything she held dear.

### Chapter 3

*A great war raged in the heavens. In the end, Lucifer and his legions were cast down from the heavens into flame and shadows. The war did not end though.*

#### The Gathering of Shadows

"Why are we on the bus?"

Gwyn sighed, it was the fifth time that Vicki had asked her that since they had left the manor. Deciding she didn't want to put up with the apparently relentless, younger woman, she turned to regard the brown haired teen and answered truthfully.

"I can't drive."

Hazel eyes blinked in surprise.

"You can't drive?"

Vicki's tone was incredulous and she squirmed around in her seat until she was sitting facing Gwyn.

"How come you can't drive? You're what, thirty?"

With a mental groan, Gwyn turned away from the other woman and stared out the bus window at the passing streets. She could see the smirk on Vicki's face reflected in the glass while she waited for Gwyn to answer her questions.

*Am I thirty? I don't know how old I am. Can I even measure my existence in years? How long*

*has it been since Eden fell?*

Vicki's continual prodding called her back from those unanswered thoughts. In her own way, the young woman was proving to be just as annoying as Sarah when she wanted to know the answer to a question.

"I just can't. Can we leave it at that?"

"Nope. Why can't you? Are you color blind?"

*Lord, give me patience.*

"No, I am not color blind. I just... I don't handle machines well."

Vicki waggled her eyebrows, well aware that Gwyn could see her in the window.

"What, no mechanical toys for you?" she grinned.

*Patience, I need patience.*

Thankfully, their stop was only a few more minutes away and Gwyn managed to survive Vicki's nonstop snickering. Pale blue eyes flashed in annoyance as she stood up and tugged on the cord to get the bus to stop.

"Come on, we're getting off."

Sighing at the renewed laughter, Gwyn managed to herd Vicki towards the doors of the bus. She was reminded again how young her charge was as she guided the still giggling teen down the steps. It was the eyes, she decided. Vicki's eyes usually looked closed and shuttered lending her a much older look than her tender nineteen years.

The bitter cold wind tugged at their clothing as they stepped out from the warm haven onto the sidewalk. With a hiss, the pneumatic doors closed behind them and the city bus pulled away leaving them both standing there alone.

It was not a nice part of the city.

There had been plans to revive this area, to encourage shops and a pedestrian walkway. None had been carried through. Now, few of the old buildings were full, many were crumbling, and all held signs of decay. Vicki's laughter had trailed off as they exited the bus, and once more the teen's eyes were guarded and dark as she looked about. Her voice was almost as cold as the air around them.

"What are we doing here?"

Gwyn didn't answer; instead, she tucked her hands into the pockets of her full-length cream-

colored jacket and started walking down the sidewalk. She wasn't looking forward to this either, but there was no sense drawing out the event.

"Gwyn, we shouldn't be here."

The pale woman still didn't answer, leading the way down the nearest alleyway. The few people wandering the streets in this part of the city didn't glance twice at them as they hurried towards their destinations. Old newspapers fluttered past the two women as they walked between the buildings. Gwyn glanced sideways at the nervous teen beside her.

"You know what we are doing here."

Vicki swallowed, drawing the jacket that Sarah's Uncle Eric had gotten for her closer around her body.

"How about we just go back to Sarah and let her yell a bit more?"

Gwyn, still slightly annoyed at her lover for the outburst this morning, shook her head.

"Come on. It's this way, isn't it?"

They passed a row of battered dumpsters and boxes that would undoubtedly become someone's home during the night. Despite the sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach, Vicki wordlessly pointed to her right. The three-story building had been condemned months ago and yellow warning tape still fluttered around the rear door. Plywood covered in graffiti obscured the ground floor windows, but the boards had been ripped away from the back door.

Gwyn gently touched the younger woman's arm and nodded towards the building in front of them.

"Come on."

Mutely, Vicki shook her head, refusing to step through the gaping doorway into the darkness beyond. Gwyn looked at her compassionately and then glanced up at the building, studying the empty windows and crumbling bricks.

"Victoria. We have to do this."

Terrified hazel eyes met reassuring blue ones. Vicki shook her head again. The wind swallowed her whispered words, but Gwyn heard them nonetheless.

"What if he's there?"

Gwyn knew who Vicki was talking about, the person the youngster was terrified of finding.

"He isn't. None of them are here. They've left this place."

Defiantly wrapping her arms around herself, the taller woman took a step backwards.

"Then why do we have to go up? Let's just get out of here."

Gwyn met the other woman's eyes squarely, sadly knowing what she feared.

"If you don't, you won't be able to save Jessica."

Hazel eyes narrowed and the teen surged forwards gripping Gwyn's shoulders painfully and shoving her against the wall.

"How do you know about Jessica?" Vicki snarled, the fear from the moment before banished by her anger.

The hands that gripped her shoulders would have left bruises on a human. Vicki was stronger than she looked, but of course, Gwyn had expected that so she didn't resist as she was shoved backwards.

Perhaps it was time to have this out, here and now, she mused. "I told you, I'm here to help you."

"What? You think you're some kind of guardian angel?"

Vicki's tone had turned mocking as she sneered at the pale woman she had grabbed.

Despite herself, Gwyn could feel the smile forming on her lips as she studied the angry face so near to her own. She knew what was causing some of the anger directed her way. But to her own surprise, she didn't feel herself reacting to that anger.

"Yes."

The teen hadn't been expecting that revelation and she quickly let go of Gwyn's shoulders, backing away apprehensively.

"You can't be."

Despite her words, Gwyn could see the uncertainty lurking in those hazel eyes. Amused, the pale woman leaned against the wall behind her grinning.

"Oh, and why is that?"

"You're, I mean, you... you're you!"

"Last I checked, yes I was." Gwyn answered wryly, waiting for Vicki to come up with a coherent sentence.



"I don't believe in God."

Gwyn smiled and shrugged slightly. She was prepared for that objection.

"It doesn't really matter what you believe in."

"It doesn't?"

Gwyn's smile grew larger at the incredulous look on brown haired woman's face.

"No, it doesn't. All that matters is what's in here." She touched her chest.

Vicki rolled her eyes.

"Sure, whatever."

Chuckling, the pale woman started into the building, hearing Vicki swear softly and then follow behind her. The entrance smelled vaguely like old, stale vomit and Gwyn distastefully made her way through the bottles, syringes and trash that littered the way. The boards on the stairs groaned beneath even their slight weight as they made their way up. The only light was coming from the open door below and windows above. The dim glow was still more than enough to illuminate the words that had been scrawled on the walls.

Vicki stayed close behind the smaller woman, tensing at even the slightest sound made as they climbed. She had thought she would never come back here, had sworn she wouldn't. Now here she was, heading back up to the den. Swallowing, she tried to find something else to think about, trying anything to delay their arrival to the top floor. Even to her own ears, her voice sounded strained.

"So, if you really are an Angel, how come you and Sarah are lovers?"

Halfway up the second flight, Gwyn paused and looked back, puzzled.

"What do you mean?"

Vicki shrugged, not meeting those pale blue eyes.

"I mean, doesn't the church kinda frown on that sort of thing?"

She'd been expecting some sort of angry reaction, but once more, Gwyn merely smiled and started climbing cautiously again.

"Do you know what God is?"

Vicki stopped at the strange query, and then hurried to catch up. Gwyn kept going upwards and answered her own question.

"God is love. It's a gift, and you should treasure it wherever you find it."

The teen shrugged, her concerns were a bit more immediate than that. She'd never cared what others thought of her anyway.

Glass crunched beneath their feet as they came up the last steps into the top floor. The building had once been a hotel, and a few of the rooms still had room numbers dangling from the wooden doors. Others didn't even have doors. What light there was, on this gray, overcast day, made its feeble way in through broken windows. The structure was nearly as cold inside as it was out on the street. At least, it provided some protection from the wind.

Vicki could feel her chest tighten as she stared at the far end of the hallway.

Room Eleven.

The door was shut, and the slender brunette closed her eyes against the sudden onslaught of memories.

A noise downstairs caused her to spin around with a small yelp. Her heart thudded in her chest as she listened to the noise of someone moving slowly up the stairs they'd just come up. She jumped as a hand touched her shoulder and Gwyn slid past her.

"Go on without me. I have to handle this."

Vicki opened her mouth to argue when blue eyes flashed up at her.

"Go. I need to do this alone."

The blue eyes gentled and she could see the white of teeth as Gwyn smiled.

"Don't worry, I just have to have a talk with someone."

Vicki hesitated a second then nodded and headed down the hallway. She was sure there was going to be the sounds of a fight in seconds. But when she heard neither screams nor bodies hitting the ground, she went to the old wooden door at the end of the hallway and pushed it open. The doorknob had always been missing, ever since they'd started staying here. Derek had used stuffed some old rags into the hole in the door, to keep out as much of the cold air as possible during the long bitter nights.

The inside of the room was almost exactly as she remembered it. Three old mattresses took up most of the space on the floor, with heaps of old army surplus blankets piled on top of them.

Over in the corner was the old sink that you had to let run for five minutes before the water got clean. She'd taken cold sponge baths next to that sink for the entire six months they'd stayed here. So had the others. Ignoring the tightness in her throat, she moved across the room, brushing her

hands along the rim of the sink as she did. Glancing at her reflection in the cracked mirror, she tried a smile that looked even worse than it felt.

As usual, the bed the twins used was completely messed up, although all of their meager belongings were gone. The other mattresses were in similar condition; even Frank's who had always made certain his bed was made every single morning. Which had made no sense to Vicki, but who was she to argue with the head of the pack?

She looked towards the closet.

One of the two sliding doors had been knocked off its track and Vicki hesitated as she saw the thin smear of blood on its edge. Fearing the worst she lifted the cheap particleboard door out of the way.

*Please, don't let me find a body.*

However, since she didn't believe in God, she wasn't sure whom she was praying to. Thankfully, there was no body inside the closet and Vicki let out a breath she hadn't known she'd been holding. She'd feared she would find Jessica's body.

It wasn't empty though.

Propped up in the corner, half covered with a torn sweatshirt, was the violin case.

Her hands were shaking as she reached out and gently, tenderly, lifted up the battered case. The sweatshirt she recognized as one that Derek had scavenged from a dumpster behind Wal-Mart.

There was dried blood on it as well, and she picked it up to sniff at the stain. The blood was at least a day old, probably a little more by the smell of it. She set that bit of knowledge aside and forced herself to stop delaying and just open the case. Carefully, she started to undo the clasps. Inside was Jessica's violin, its surface lovingly polished. When Vicki closed her eyes and concentrated, she imagined she could hear the music those strings could produce.

She gently closed the cover, taking care to make sure that both of the old latches were closed and then around them, wrapped the twist ties that Jessica used to make sure the lid wouldn't open.

The violin case she took with her. The rest she left behind in the old room. This time she knew she wouldn't be coming back. It felt different than the last time she'd left though. Probably, she admitted, because Frank wasn't chasing her.

*Of course, I thought that was going to be the last time I ever came here, too.*

Gwyn had been gone for quite a while now and she hadn't heard anything from downstairs. A part of her was screaming for her to take the old fire escape and keep on going. Take this chance and just leave. She probably would have a few weeks ago, except she had nowhere left to go, no one to turn to now.

The stairs groaned under her slender weight as she made her way down them. The second floor looked empty enough and with a quick glance behind her, she started down to the ground floor.

The sight that greeted her at the doorway was one she could never have imagined.

Big Mac was well known in the neighborhood as hired muscle for one of the local gangs. He was at least six and a half feet tall and the big, bald black man was nearly as wide, or at least that's how it had always seemed to Vicki. He was a generally unpleasant man, and even the pack tended to avoid him as much as they could. He was just one of those people on this earth that seemed to revel in the pain and misery of others. He was in and out of jail, often on charges of assault. Frank could have taken him down in a fight, but no one else in the pack could have.

Which was why she was so shocked to find him crouched on the ground, weeping like a child, while Gwyn slowly rocked as much of his body as she could wrap her arms around, back and forth. Sniffing, the big man lumbered to his feet as Vicki hesitantly approached. Her eyes widened in surprise when Big Mac helped Gwyn to her feet. He literally filled the entire doorway.

"Don't worry, Frederick, things will get better. You'll see."

*Frederick? His name is Frederick?*

Since Vicki had a healthy survival instinct, she didn't smirk and judging by the warning look that Big Mac sent her way, it was a wise decision on her part.

"I'd be goin' now. You be careful, Miss Gwyn, there be bad people out here these days."

Vicki's eyes felt like they were going to fall out of her head with that, and it wasn't until the moving mountain lumbered back out into the alleyway that she dared look at Gwyn. Who was staring at her with a look on her face that Vicki didn't understand.

"What was that all about?"

Gwyn shrugged, dusting off her pant legs and beamed brilliantly as she replied,

"Me doing my job."

Vicki just stared at her.

"You do know who that was, right?"

Gwyn nodded and stepped outside.

"Yes, a little boy who needed a hug. Everyone deserves that."

*She's either insane or really is some sort of Angel. I don't know which answer I like better.*

"You found the violin?"

Vicki blinked, and then nodded, protectively holding the violin case to her chest.

"It was in the closet." She didn't want to know how Gwyn knew there would be something waiting for her in the room. The pale woman determinedly started back down the alleyway and Vicki had to hurry to keep up.

"Where are we going now?"

"You want to save Jessica, right?"

That was an easy one, and Vicki nodded solemnly in answer.

"Then we have to go back to the Manor, pick up something, and go find your pack. Right?"

Vicki swallowed, the first part didn't sound so bad, but the rest was going to be messy.

"You know that's not going to be easy. Frank said..."

Gwyn stopped at that, turning towards her with a ghost of a smile.

"What did your pack leader say?"

"He said he'd kill Jessica if I didn't have the spear to him by the full moon."

Vicki pictured the look on the large muscular man's face as he had said that. The bloodlust in his dark eyes, the hardness in his voice and she shuddered, knowing that he would indeed kill her if she didn't get it for him. The Claws had gotten to the first piece before she could, though. She'd been unable to find the trail after that. She wandered the city in despair until she'd ended up in the church, exhausted and cold. Now, she was certain that the only person that had ever been nice to her because of who she was, would die, because of her.

Cool fingers touched her hand and the teen blinked, looking down into blue eyes that radiated understanding.

"Don't worry. We will get her back. We just need to get the spear for this pack leader of yours."

To her shame, she could feel her eyes start to water and she angrily brushed a sleeve across her face.

"I tried! The Claws got the tip, though! They probably sold it already."

Gwyn smiled and nodded.

"They tried. Come on, let's go back to the Manor."

"Why?"

"Because Sarah found the first piece and we're going to borrow it."

-----

Wincing, Eric Mordicai, uncle of the current Magister Sarah Mordicai, appointed archivist of the Legacies, sat down in front of the row of computer screens and yawned. He hadn't been sleeping well for a long time now, and even before Gwyn's arrival, he was beginning to feel his age catching up with him. He was nearly seventy now, and his body was a roadmap of scars and wounds from a lifetime of fighting every evil imaginable. And some that should have remained unimaginable.

Typing in his password and logging onto the main Legacy database, he smiled as he thought of the newest addition to their little family. Gwyn, keeping the name that Sarah had given her the first time they'd met, was unique. At least, as far as he knew, she was. A mix between angel and human whose abilities no mortal truly understood. Oh, he'd taken pains to do some research. There were old legends about angels that sired children with mortals, but this was different.

Gwyn had started out as an angel, but she'd become something unusual since her arrival here on earth.

He, truthfully, had never seen Sarah this happy, and he was glad that when, not if, he passed away, his niece would have someone to help her. Most Legacies had entire families that operated in their cities. Here, however, Sarah was the last of her line, the last Mordicai.

Lately, though, things had started to change. He'd begun to notice a new tension between his niece and the blonde angel, one that wasn't there before. Something was going on between them that had him worried. Eric just hoped his niece was smart enough to talk about it, but he feared her usual impulsive behavior might get the better of her again.

Judging by what Gwyn had said when he'd returned with clothes for Vicki, they'd fought this morning after he'd left.

There was nothing he could do right now, and he tiredly brought up the day's news from the other legacy houses. He'd done a detailed study of the object that his niece had brought back, and now, he wasn't so sure it was a dagger anymore. It certainly looked like one. But even though the blade was solid enough, the hilt was actually hollow.

*Let's see here. Ah, another vampire clan nest in Boston. They're going to have their hands full down there. Paris, crap, more trouble with gargoyles. London's quiet for once. Tokyo's got another spirit problem; I hope they don't have as much trouble as last time.*

That was another thing that had been bothering him. He had wanted to report Gwyn's existence to the other Legacy houses, but Sarah had flat out refused. A week or so after Gwyn had returned, they had one of the worst fights he could ever remember over it.

*I think I better talk with her about it again.*

The Legacies existed to aid one another. The central database, located in London, had been established as soon as the Internet had become available so that every House could utilize the information gathered from all the other Houses. They were pledged to detail any information that might help another House in its constant battles. Sarah's refusal to reveal the existence of Gwyn sat poorly with him.

*I'll talk to Gwyn when she gets back. Maybe she can talk some sense into this stubborn niece of mine.*

For now, he opened the search program he'd set up to hunt through the huge Legacy data base for references to anything resembling the runes carved on what he was still considering a dagger.

There was a match, a partial one, anyway, he noted.

Leaning forward in his old comfortable chair, he studied the screen. The match had turned up in a set of ancient Celtic drawings with a reference to something called the Spear of Destiny.

Eric cast a frown over his shoulder at the ring of cameras monitoring the object in question.

*It could be a spear tip, I guess.*

Nodding, he turned back to the terminal and sent in a direct request to the head Legacy house, asking for all information regarding the Spear of Destiny. Yawning, he logged off and stood up. It would take time before the material he'd requested was processed and returned. For now, he was going to go take a nap. Making his way into the next room where his bed was, he never noticed the two figures lurking quietly in the hallway outside the room.

-----  
Sarah drove aimlessly for two hours, letting her thoughts wander as she navigated, with ease, the country roads outside of the city. It had snowed the night before, but it wasn't anything her SUV couldn't handle.

She enjoyed it out here, in the countryside with nothing for miles around. It was much quieter than in the city. Even at the Manor, if you listened, you could hear the traffic going by outside the front gate. You never quite forgot that the Manor was surrounded by the city.

Out here, though, she could ignore all that and just think peacefully.

By the second hour, her anger had slowly dissipated, leaving her feeling unsettled and vaguely

uneasy. They'd argued before during the past few months they had been together, but nothing like this.

*It's been coming for a while though. She should tell me what's going on, damn it!*

Taking a deep breath, she managed to calm down before she got herself all worked up again.

*I shouldn't have run out. I should have just stayed right there and had it out with her, getting everything out into the open. Fuck the dagger, this is about us! We just have to figure this out. I'm the Magister. My duty is to the people of this city, to protect them from what they cannot fight, what they can't even understand. That is my duty with them and the Legacy houses. Gwyn's duty...*

Sarah paused, tilting her head to the side as she pulled the black SUV over to the side of the road. She'd actually never truly contemplated what Gwyn's duty was. The pale blonde hadn't told her exactly what being the guardian angel of a city entailed.

*I should have asked.*

Gloved hands tightened around the steering wheel as she turned the truck around and headed back towards the city.

*I will not lose her again. Not over something like this.*

Dark brows drew together as she studied the city outline. Clouds had begun to build in the horizon, and the late afternoon sun turned them a forbidding dark red.

The uneasy feeling tightened in her gut.

In that instant, peering up out of the windshield of her truck with the city silhouetted against the blood red clouds, she could feel it. A storm was coming. Evil forces gathering and building, as surely as those clouds were.

It would come soon.

*Damn it! I knew it!*

Something was going on, and Gwyn hadn't told her about it. Now, she had no idea what was going to happen to the City or how she could stop it. Once more anger flared, and this time, she didn't stop it. Her foot pressed down on the accelerator and she sped towards the city, hoping she was in time, but unsure what it was she was racing towards.

The Magister was three blocks from the Manor when her cell phone rang. The shrill tone nearly made her ram a nearby taxi. Instead, she traded gestures with the irate cab driver and then toggled the hands free device.



"Yeah?"

"Sarah! Where are you?"

She frowned at the anxious tone in her Uncle's voice. The last time he'd been worried, they'd been facing down an archangel bent on opening a doorway to Hell.

"Three blocks from the Manor, why?"

"You need to meet me in my room."

The line went dead before Sarah could ask her Uncle why. With a soft curse, she cut through two lanes of traffic, went through a yellow light, and barreled through the Manor gates before they'd even finished opening. With a screech, the SUV came to a sudden stop at the front of the house. Sarah snagged her sword from the passenger side seat and bounded towards the suspiciously open, front door.

Nothing was out of place in the living room she noted as she ran down the hallway towards Eric's little bunker.

The inside of Eric's room looked just as cluttered as always, and her Uncle was already there, typing commands into his computer system. As she entered, he glanced up from whatever he'd been doing and stood, shaking his head.

"What is it? What happened?"

Wordlessly, he pointed towards the dagger she'd gotten from Gustav.

Pointed towards where the dagger was supposed to be.

The cameras were pointed downwards at an empty tabletop.

"Shit. What happened?"

Eric shrugged, returning to his task.

"I don't know. I came back from shopping, gave Gwyn the jacket and clothing that I'd gotten for Vicki and went to bed. When I woke up, it was gone."

Their eyes met, and Sarah grimaced. Her uncle's bed was just next door and he was a notoriously light sleeper.

"The security system?"

"No sign of tampering. Someone waltzed right inside without setting off anything or waking me and took it out from under my nose."

She paced around the room, trying to see if anything was out of place. Nothing seemed to be.

"What about the cameras?"

He shrugged and hit a key. The large screen displayed a recording of the dagger with a time index at the lower right hand corner. It continued for two minutes until the picture suddenly went dead.

"I don't know what happened yet, but the cameras were still recording. They were just recording... that."

He pointed at the black screen, the time index still visible. It lasted for twelve seconds, and then suddenly the screen lit up once more showing the empty tabletop.

The uneasy feeling twisted inside her as the Magister stared down at the empty tabletop.

#### Chapter 4

*Did you really believe that you could call up the Devil and ask him to behave?*

~ Special Agent Fox Mulder

#### Twilight

It was dark by the time they made their way to the outskirts of the city. It had begun to snow soon after they left the Manor, small flakes that whirled in the gusting wind. The temperature had dropped again, and Vicki wouldn't have lasted at all without the new coat Eric had gotten her. By the time they walked past the sign marking the edge of the city limits, and wrapped tightly in the thick, down-filled coat, she was still shivering.

At this point, on the western side of the city, where the forest and park met, the trees crowded the edge of the city limits. Out here, the forest ruled. Even the highway bent around it, heading north and then west to make a loop around the parkland.

"Couldn't we have taken a taxi or something?"

Gwyn smiled at the question, keeping her own hands bundled in the pockets of her white duster as they walked. She didn't really feel the cold, but the wind was singing to her as it blew past them. Whispering dark things at odds with the clean white image of the snow-laden forest around them. They followed the road for almost a half hour past the bus stop that had brought them to the city border. Then Gwyn stepped off the single lane road on to a barely discernable path.

"Gwyn?"

The smaller woman looked over at Vicki, pausing when she realized the teen had stopped at the

edge of the roadway.

"What is it?"

Vicki was peering uncertainly towards the dark snow-laden trees that Gwyn had been heading for. Normally she loved the forest. There, she found the peace she craved as she walked or ran between the trees. If she'd had her say, the pack would have moved into the countryside a long time ago. It was Frank who had decided they'd stay in the city, where they could disappear in the sea of humanity and remain anonymous.

Here, though, the trees offered her no peace, and she felt them whispering to her of doom and death, of bloodshed and unending pain.

"The forest... it's... it's strange."

Gwyn simply nodded and turned around, once more heading deeper into the trees, forging her own path through the snow.

"There was a battle here, a very long time ago. It's all right now, though. Plus, the trees will protect us from the snow."

She didn't look behind her. She knew the teen would follow her. Vicki moved through the snow nearly as silently as Gwyn herself, with only the considerably louder sound of the youth's breathing. The younger woman wasn't so sure of Gwyn's assurance that the forest was all right. The trees seemed to bend in towards her as if they were trying to stop her.

"What kind of battle?"

The Angel said nothing, simply continued on her path through the trees. It was warmer in there, too, with the dense tree growth blocking out most of the wind. The nearly full moon bathed the area in a silver light. Vicki gave up on the battle question, but she had another one to replace it with.

"Won't your girlfriend be sort of upset with us for borrowing this?"

Vicki patted the black knapsack she wore, in which she'd placed the carefully wrapped spear point from the Manor. Gwyn's voice was quiet when she answered, and it sounded sad even to her.

"She's going to be beyond upset, I'm afraid."

They walked in silence for a few more minutes, Gwyn pausing once or twice before changing their course slightly.

"Thank you."

Vicki lifted her eyebrows in amusement at Gwyn's startled look.

" 'Thank you' for what?"

The tall girl shrugged as they stopped again.

"For being here now, I guess, for helping me with this." She tugged her jacket even closer around her as the cold air searched to get inside. "But, why did you insist I leave my journal behind? You know what it means to me."

Gwyn relaxed a bit, the tension in her chest easing at that completely unexpected gratitude from the girl. Things were not going to go well the next time she met Sarah, she thought unhappily, but at least, some good had come from all this.

*Lord, I wish I could ask you to take this bitter cup from me.*

"Oh, that. You're welcome." She deliberately ignored the question about the journal. "I told you I would help you get her back, didn't I?"

"Yeah, I guess you did. I still don't believe you're an Angel, though."

With a laugh, Gwyn shook her head. "I guess that was too much to hope for." Smiling, she turned back to the trail, again changing their course slightly.

The tension returned, gripping her, as they emerged into a small natural clearing. During the rest of the year, a small stream ran through this part of the forest, now it was little more than a frozen ribbon running through the trees. There was a boundary line here, a powerful one that even Vicki could feel. Gwyn felt the small hairs on the back of her neck stand up, and behind her she could hear Vicki making a noise that sounded surprisingly like a growl. She didn't hesitate though as she hopped over the boundary, they didn't have the time. Vicki simply stepped over the ice, and Gwyn had a surge of envy for the younger woman's taller frame.

*I'm leading her into one of the dark places, and I'm envious of how tall she is?*

Gwyn gave herself a mental slap, unsettled at the easy way her all too human body allowed her to lose focus.

*What if I start second guessing myself during a battle? I could get someone killed. I could get Sarah hurt!*

Shaking her head, she realized she'd been doing exactly what she'd been worrying about. She'd come to a stop just on the other side of the stream. Vicki was watching her, a little confused, and Gwyn forced a smile to reassure her. Judging by the expression that crossed the brunette's face, she didn't succeed.

"This place feels even weirder than the woods near the road, Gwyn."

"I know. We're on the site of the battle now."

They both talked in hushed whispers, even though the woods appeared to be barren all around them. The crunch of snow under their boots sounded loud, and every movement seemed to echo through the barren trees.

Gwyn slowed to a stop, her attention focused on something to the south of them. There was a presence there, something she could just barely feel, tugging at her senses. That it was old was beyond a doubt. What its intentions were, or what it was, she wasn't sure.

"Gwyn?"

Making a decision, Gwyn changed her course, starting towards the south.

"Keep going until you see the rocks, Victoria. You'll find the next piece there."

The teen looked around her in disbelief and then yelped, "What? Are you out of your mind? I'm coming with you!"

Gwyn whirled and for a moment Vicki looked into eyes that were not quite human.

Gone was the woman she'd eaten soup across from or ridden in the bus with. Those eyes that regarded her now were ancient, and if she looked long enough, she could see the beginning of time in them. Trembling, she took a step backwards.

"Go find the next piece of the Spear. Just follow the murder until you see the rocks." Gwyn turned away and quickly moved southward.

Vicki nodded, not realizing she'd been holding her breath until the trees swallowed up the other woman.

Only when her lungs began to burn did she gasp for a breath and realize that her body was shaking. With one last glance towards where Gwyn had disappeared, Vicki started walking again, wondering about the pale woman's parting words.

*'The murder'?*

Still shaken by what she had seen in Gwyn's eyes, Vicki nearly screamed when the trees she'd been heading towards erupted. Hundreds of crows leapt into the air, their calls filling the quiet forest as the rose up into the air. They seemed to hover there, above the tree line, like a black shadow. Shivering, even though she wasn't all that cold now, the teen hurried forward, following the murder of crows as they flew deeper into the forest.

Only one thought kept her going.

*The full moon was tomorrow night.*

-----

If the forest had been silent around her before, it was now completely mute. Not even the wind dared to make a sound as she crept through the trees. She heard nothing ahead of her, and it seemed as though even the light from the nearly full moon was enclosed in shadows. Behind her she could hear, muffled, as from a great distance, the faint calls of crows as they rose into the air behind her. Then, even that ceased and she was left with only the sound of her crunching boots on snow and her own heavy breathing.

It was as if the forest was holding its breath for some reason, and she felt the part of her that was now human, begging her to leave. Pleading for her to flee from this silent place drenched in darkness and never look back.

Once, her eyesight had allowed her to see in the dark as if it were day, and even now she could see like a cat in the darkness. Still, she was nearly upon it when she noticed the chair.

It sat between two old and gnarled oak trees. The high-backed chair was made of bones, and from what she could see, and suddenly smell, were fresh ones. Blood covered many of them, and she imagined there were pieces of rotten flesh still clinging to others. What she'd taken initially to be a leather seat cushion was actually human skin stretched between two large femurs. Swallowing, she started to turn away when a shape detached itself from the shadows next to the trees.

"What is it, little sister?" A voice hissed softly. "You don't like my throne? I made it special... just for you."

Her body shook with sudden fear and adrenaline as she slowly pivoted back to face the figure that had stepped forward. Dark clothes covered him, and even though his face was handsome, none would ever call him anything other than terrifying. The scent of decay and death hung about him, and to her eyes, flames danced across his skin. The brand of who and what he was, given to him on that fateful day when he was tossed down away from them.

"Lucifer."

-----

Sarah found the note in their bedroom, lying on the king-sized bed. The thick paper was carefully folded and her name lovingly penned across the top in Gwyn's distinctive calligraphy.

Lightly tracing the black ink, Sarah sat down on the edge of the bed before picking up the note.

*She takes cursive writing to a whole new level.*

Opening the note she read the beautiful, flowing handwriting inside.

*My love,*

*I know you will be angry with me when you find this note. Please, my beloved, trust me. I can't tell you why yet, but I had to take the spear tip. Give my love to Eric and tell him I'm sorry. I'll be back tomorrow night, promise.*

*Gwyn*

Just as carefully, Sarah refolded the note and set it aside, frowning. She hated this feeling of being out of the loop. But what she hated even more was this sense of helplessness. Somewhere out there, Gwyn was putting herself in harm's way and she wasn't there to protect her. Sarah didn't even know who Gwyn was fighting or why. It made her feel very vulnerable. And she didn't like it... at all.

*Time to find some answers.*

"Sarah!"

Tucking the note into the pocket of her black jeans, she headed towards the room Vicki had been spent the night in, not glancing behind her as she went down the hall.

"What is it, Eric?"

"The Legacy Council is coming here."

That stopped her at the top of the stairs.

"When?"

"They'll be here by dawn."

The Magister tried to recall when the last time the senior council of the Legacy Houses had ever come to North America. She couldn't remember hearing of such a thing ever happening before.

"Sarah, they hired the frigging Concorde to fly them over here."

She tried to imagine what sort of political and financial pull that had taken, and failed. Nodding, she hurried down the hallway, calling instructions over her shoulder as she went.

"They tell you why they're heading here?"

Eric jerked his head in the general direction of his room.

"When I started a search through the Legacies, it triggered some sort of warning over there. They

told us, and I quote: "Don't let the spear point out of your sight, we'll tell you more when we get there." Before you ask, they didn't say how many were coming, or what the spear point was."

At that, the uneasy feeling that had taken up residence in her gut swelled.

*It's a wonder that more Magisters don't have ulcers.*

She started up the stairs once more.

"Get Stephanie to send over some of her girls and get as many of the guest bedrooms ready as you can. I'll give Tyler a call in an hour and see about getting some cars to meet them at the airport when they arrive."

"Okay, but where are you going?"

Her mirthless laugh drifted down the stairs to him.

"I'm going to find some answers, I hope."

Sarah made her way down the hallway, glancing out of the windows, towards the gardens in the back of the manor. It wasn't often that she came into this wing of the Manor anymore. She used to play hide and seek in these rooms when she was young, delighting in discovering the hidden treasures left behind in the chests that were piled in many of the rooms. Most were filled with clothes from long dead Magisters, but some held trinkets and picture albums of people she would never meet in this life.

The room that the girl had slept in was one of the few that were relatively clean and free of clutter. The bed was only forty years old, which was new for this wing of the Manor. The curtains were still pulled back from the window, and for a moment, Sarah enjoyed the view below. Trillium Manor had always had a formal garden that rivaled anything from the other Legacy Houses. Come spring, the flowers for which the manor was named, would soon carpet the floor of the forest behind the gardens.

*I hope we have enough sleeping space for all these people who are coming.*

The Magister was more than a little annoyed by the short notice of arriving guests.

*Would have been nice if they could have actually told me something about the spear.*

She'd save her questions for when the plane landed, though. Until then, she had another objective in mind. A quick search of the room turned up only one object. It had been hidden under the bed mattress and Sarah's eyebrows drew together as she frowned down at the pad of paper. It was one of those little memo books that you could buy for a dollar at any corner store, and she wondered why the girl had been carrying it around. Switching on the small lamp next to the bed and taking a seat, the Magister idly flipped through the pages.



*...time we have to change is during the full moon ...*

"What?"

Blinking, she rapidly flipped back to the phrase that had caught her eye. Arching an eyebrow, she read the page and blinked in surprise. Settling down on the bed to get more comfortable, she flipped to the very beginning and started reading. The words had been written in pencil with sharp angles, as far from Gwyn's graceful handwriting as you could get.

*Mother always told me I should keep a diary. Said I would treasure it when I grew up and I could go back and visit my childhood. I told her I'd rather not remember a lot of it, and she slapped me. So, I'm kinda confused about why I finally picked this book up. If I were smart, I'd be out there finding a way to rescue Jessica. I just don't know what to do, though.*

*Okay, how about I start at the beginning. All the best stories start at the beginning right?*

*Right.*

*So, once upon a time, there was this little girl who left home to come to the big city and find her future.*

*Shit, that just sounded crazy.*

*Let's just skip my childhood.*

*I think I just want to write about Jessica, and what happened after I met her.*

*The boys and I had broken into a place down near the highway. We'd managed to score two TVs, a VCR, a DVD player and even a small collection of DVDs. We got a good price after hawking them at Tony's. After giving Frank his share, we partied all night long down at this bar on Crescent Street. You give the bouncer a "tip" and he forgets how old you have to be to buy a drink.*

*It wasn't that late, but we'd decided to call it a night. I wanted to go up to River Street and see if any of the booksellers had dumped unsold books out in the dumpsters. The boys would rather be caught dead than go through dumpsters with me for books, so they were going to find some dinner and we'd meet back at the hotel. Frank was probably going to be out partying anyway.*

*Besides, we'd blown our share of the loot by then.*

*I heard her before I saw her.*

*It was still early autumn and the cold weather hadn't arrived yet. It was getting dark earlier then, but I remember she was under one of those fancy streetlights that they have down there. I would normally have avoided the fancy cobble stone streets, with their snobby tourists, and yuppie elite like the plague but the music drew me out of the alleyway.*

*You think I should have stayed in the alley, don't you? Yeah, you're probably right. That way none of the shit that happened afterwards would have ever taken place.*

*Where was I?*

*Music, that's right.*

*I don't know what it was she was playing, but it sounded like one of those old ballads. The sounds she was coaxing from that violin! She'd gathered a crowd by the time I got there, and no wonder. The music just seemed to wind its way into your soul and tug you towards it.*

*Still it wasn't too hard to find a vantage point, I just climbed up onto the nearest bench, ignoring the mock outraged glares from the jerks around me, and voila! I could see the source of that music.*

*She was dressed in all black, from the strange hat tucked over her head, the heavy wool jacket, and fingerless gloves, right down to black combat boots. Curly auburn hair escaped the hat here and there, and I had to give her points for style. After another two songs she wrapped things up to some enthusiastic applause. A small shower of coins and even a few bills were tossed into the empty violin case at her feet and she smiled and thanked everyone.*

*It was the smile that got me.*

*If the music had gently tugged me towards her, the smile that lit up her face, at odds with the black artist's uniform she wore, seized me by force.*

*I was standing in front of her before I'd even realized I'd moved. She was taller than I'd expected, nearly my height. Her skin was the color of milk chocolate, and a pair of light hazel eyes watched me curiously.*

*Shifting awkwardly from foot to foot, I offered her some stupid compliment on how talented she was. I couldn't believe how dorky I was acting, but she just smiled and thanked me as she had everyone else in the crowd who spoke to her.*

*"I wish I had some money I could give you."*

*She'd shrugged, scooping up the change that had been tossed into her case and tucking it away with the bills before gently putting the violin away.*

*"It's ok, I'm glad you liked it, though."*

*She gave me another one of those shy little smiles and I knew I couldn't leave things like this.*

*"Wait! I'll be right back."*

*I think back now and wonder why she didn't just leave. It must have been obvious that I was insane by then. But, by the time I got back she was still standing where I left her, violin case in hand.*

*"Here."*

*I think she looked surprised, but it was hard to tell as I thrust the book towards her. Seeing her hesitation I hurried to explain.*

*"It's a music book."*

*Like I said, I was obviously insane.*

*With a slow smile she took the book from me, and flipped through it. I'd seen it in one of the dumpsters as I searched for a good thriller to read. The cover had been ripped off of course; the bookstores do that and send the covers back on books that they haven't sold.*

*"I hope, you... um, like it."*

*It was amazing she didn't just take off right then.*

*Instead, she gravely took the gift, tucked it into a rather beat up looking backpack and held out her hand.*

*"My name's Jessica."*

*Even the backpack was black.*

*"Hi, I'm Vicki."*

*We went for coffee. I didn't have any money, but I was more than happy to just hang around her. She ended up buying me a cup of coffee and one of those apple fritters I really like. We stayed there until they threw us out at midnight, then we walked the city until neither of us could stay awake anymore.*

*I think she surprised herself when she quickly kissed me on my lips as we stood at the stairs that led up to her third floor apartment. I know she surprised the hell out of me.*

*The smile on my face was still there when I got back to the motel and even Frank noticed it. For once, I managed to ignore his little jibes and got some of the best sleep I'd had since coming to the city.*

*Throughout November and December I'd see Jessica as often as I could. She was taking classes at one of the local colleges in music theory, so I didn't see her too often during the day. At night, though, we'd wander the city, and I delighted in showing her some of the seldom seen treasures in the parks. I learned more about her than I have any person in my entire life.*

*I knew her name was Jessica Conner, and she'd moved her from Massachusetts to study music. I knew she thought her mother was trying to control her future, and that she adored her father. I knew the cute little dimples she got when she smiled, and that she wanted to play for a symphony orchestra.*

*It was scary. She knew as much about me as I knew about her. We spent entire nights just talking sometimes. She even tried to get me to share her apartment. I couldn't though; I couldn't just leave the pack, not like that. We hadn't done more than kiss, neither of us wanted to push things. Which was still a big leap for me, considering it was my first time actually being with a woman.*

*My imagination and years of lusting didn't even hold a candle to actually being with Jessica, and we hadn't done more than make out.*

*There was one thing I never could bring myself to tell her though.*

*What I was.*

*A lupine.*

*I wanted to, again and again. But I'd seen what the truth could do, even in my own family, and I couldn't lose her. It got tricky sometimes trying to dodge around the answers to her questions, and I know she knew there was something I wasn't telling her. I think she thought it was that I was involved in some sort of gang.*

*I wish it had been that simple.*

*You know something's wrong when you wished all you had to worry about was being in a local street gang.*

*Jessica almost caught me in December, during the full moon. I'd fallen asleep at her place on the couch after we got back from the end of semester concert that she'd put on as part of her program.*

*I want to explain what it's like. The sudden change, shedding your human body and becoming a wolf. I wish I could write down and say what the world is like, how close to nature you feel.*

*I can't though. I can't find the words, I don't even think that there are words for it in English, or maybe even in any human language.*

*Everything started to go to hell in January.*

*Frank started hanging out with a new group of people at the bars he went to. He started beating up the twins, Derek and Andrew, even more than usual. He roughed me up a few times also, but I always managed to outrun him when he was that mood, so I didn't get too hurt. I should have known things were really going bad when I noticed he'd started taking drugs.*

*I was too busy trying to spend more time with Jessica, though.*

*The last time we spent together as a true pack was in mid January. It was a full moon, and even though it was bitter cold out, we went running. We always went out running in the parks or even outside the City when we could.*

*The full moon forced us to change, to become wolves.*

*We had to be careful to avoid being caught changing form by those who would have thought we were something else. All four of us were true werewolves, not some poor soul who had some curse placed on them. The change was something we could control during the rest of the month, and it had served us well in our robberies. What cop in his right mind is going to chase after a dog that just happened to be near a crime scene?*

*The only time we have to change is during the full moon, but even then, it's not a horrible thing like what they show in those stupid movies. Frank says there are people who are cursed with being werewolves and who can't control themselves when they change. Then they hunt down people and cause a blood bath. He says they're the source of all the old myths.*

*All I know is that when it's the full moon, I love to run through forest. The trees streaking past me on either side, the world turned white and black by the moonlight. Those were the best times. When we ran together, all four of us. The forest was our playground, and we were the masters of our domain.*

*It was the last time we'd run together.*

*I always wished that I could have told Jessica about everything; show her what it meant to be what I am. I should have taken the chance, then maybe she would have run away screaming and she wouldn't be in trouble now.*

*Two weeks after that came the big fight.*

*Frank had shown up at the hotel on one of the few occasions that I was there, with two friends of his I'd never seen before. The twins and I knew that they were our kind the instant they came in; it was in their scent.*

*Frank was drunk and probably high. It takes a lot to get us drunk, but some drugs can really screw us up. We were always a little afraid of Frank, but the two men who were with him terrified us. Frank was making promises that we'd find some sort of spear, that I'd find it for them actually since I was the best at breaking and entering. All the while the two men, each of which were very nearly as muscle-bound as Frank, watched us with their empty eyes and smiled.*

*Smiles full of teeth.*

*I didn't know who they were, or what Frank had gotten us into this time, but I told him to go*

*screw himself once the two men had left. He was too high to be a serious threat when he lunged at me, and I easily kept my distance from him. He was screaming something about I had to do it, for him, for the pack. That it would make us all rich, and we'd have power like we'd never even dreamed.*

*I decided it was time to cut my losses and get the hell out of there.*

*I mean, enough was enough, right?*

*The twins refused to come with me, they were scared of leaving a life that for all it's faults was still a lot better than what they'd come from. So I got out of there, told Frank to let me know when he was done doing deals for things we couldn't deliver on, and went to find Jessica.*

*I spent the night on her couch after a really nice make-out session. She practiced her violin all night long, and I even listened to her suggestions about taking night classes at the college.*

*How stupid was I?*

*How fucking naïve of me to believe I could try to be normal.*

*I obviously didn't know how deep in Frank had gotten himself. Or how desperate he was.*

*I'd gone out to hunt down part of Jessica's Valentine's Day present. I was going to officially see if I could make her my girlfriend. Yeah, I know, we've been sort of together for months, but I just wanted to make things official.*

*I knew something was wrong the second I found the door to her apartment forced open. If it had been a regular burglar, he would have been in for some serious trouble. Unfortunately for me, it turned out to be Frank. He took me down the second I stepped inside, and things went pretty much like you'd think after that.*

*He beat the shit out of me.*

*I probably would have died from internal bleeding or something if all of us didn't have phenomenal powers of regeneration.*

*I think it was somewhere around the time when I spit out my second tooth that he forced my head up, and made me see where he'd tied down Jessica. Frank was alone so I couldn't even try to get the twins to help me out.*

*"You get me the Spear, you get it to me in the park at the Soldier's Memorial by the next full moon, or your girlfriend's dead."*

*He kicked me in the head and the next thing I knew it was late afternoon and the cops were coming up the stairs to check out a report of a busted in door. Now I'm huddled in a doorway across from St. Joseph's. I can't find the stupid dagger, and I don't know what to do now.*

*My plan, such as it is, is to show up at the Memorial and try to get Jessica out of there by fighting Frank.*

*I'll lose, of course. He's faster, stronger, and far more vicious than I am.*

*I don't know what to do.*

*God, help me.*

The diary ended there, and Sarah thoughtfully closed the lid of the small journal. For several long minutes she stared at the window, out at the darkness beyond. It was a cold night outside; she could hear the wind whistling as it whipped around the Manor.

Magisters dealt with the dead so much that she sometimes thought they forgot why they did what they did. Even if she was a werewolf, Sarah was pretty sure that Vicki wasn't a threat to Gwyn. That didn't mean that the dark haired woman was going to trust the teen the next time they met.

And meet they would, now that she knew the gathering place for the exchange.

*Gwyn, you better stay safe so I get the chance to throttle you when I see you!*

Taking the journal with her, she flipped open her cell phone and started back down towards her bedroom.

"Hi, Tyler?"

She nodded as she listened to the enthusiastic greeting on the other side.

"I'm doing fine, any sign of those zombies?"

The Magister was happy to hear a negative response to that question.

"Good. Look, Tyler, I need a favor. I've got some relatives arriving at the airport tomorrow morning and I need some cars with drivers to pick them up."

Entering her bedroom she made her way towards one of the two walk-in closets. Unlike the other one, this one was built like a vault, and she had to type in a ten digit PIN number to open it. Inside were the tools of her trade.

"I know it's short notice, but they didn't give me any warning either. There shouldn't be more than two dozen of them."

At least she was pretty sure there wouldn't be more than that. Even two dozen would mean they were sending representatives from every major Magister family in Europe.

"Ok, six limo's should do it. Thanks a lot, Tyler."

Tossing the phone aside she headed into the vault. Tomorrow was going to be a very long day, and if she were lucky, she'd manage to snatch a few hours sleep tonight. One way or the other, she was going to find Gwyn tomorrow night.

## Chapter 5

*I remember the First War. The way the sky burned, the faces of the angels destroyed. I saw a third of Heaven's legion banished and the creation of Hell. I stood with my brothers and watched Lucifer's Fall. I have always obeyed, but I never thought that War would happen again.*

~The Archangel Michael\*

### Prophecy

"Why don't you take a seat?"

The dark-haired man smiled, an expression completely devoid of any humor, as he waved towards the throne he'd made. Gwyn's body was frozen in place; she could hardly draw in a breath.

*So this is what terror is like.*

She never truly understood her new human emotions until she experienced them. And, up until that moment, she'd never felt terror before. Her human half took one look at the man who stood next to her and retreated into a corner of her mind, babbling in utter, complete terror.

Lucifer tended to have that effect on mortals.

"You don't like my throne? I'm hurt, Ariel."

Her arms were shaking and she was certain that she would have collapsed onto the ground if she'd been able to unlock her legs. Gwyn desperately tried to keep her eyes away from the throne, the thing built of bone, wet and still dripping with blood and flesh. As horrific as it was, the souls that cried out to her from it were even worse. Souls bound in pain and anguish for all of time, screaming out her name in an unholy chant.

"That's not my name anymore."

She didn't realize she'd managed to say it out loud until the dark-haired man laughed and walked around her. She could feel his gaze raking over her body, her shivering intensified. Gwyn could barely think and her body wanted to run away... run far, far away.



*God, please help me.*

"You wouldn't make it ten paces. Don't bother asking for help. He doesn't see you here. You're all alone with me."

His voice was harsh in her ear and she whimpered, closing her eyes against the sight of him.

"Fear is one of my domains, little Gwyn."

Lucifer's voice had dropped to a low growl, perversely intimate, as he cupped her cheek and squeezed, forcing her to look at him.

"You'll be my Queen, Gwyn. We'll rule Hell together and wage War like the good old days. You remember those, don't you? Raining fire from the heavens down onto the mortals back when we were His best loved?" He dropped his hand and looked carefully at her. "Half angel... best of both worlds, aren't you, Gwyn? You have the power of an Angel and the ability to be as deceitful as one of these talking monkeys."

Despite her fright, she managed to shake her head. With her teeth chattering, she forced her voice to work.

"I won't be yours."

He growled and stalked around in front of her.

"Would this shape suite you better?"

Within a flicker of a shadow, he suddenly changed. Where a dark-haired man with a light brown beard had stood before, was instead, a woman dressed in an impossibly low cut dress, made of some type of clingy, shimmering material. She was taller than Sarah, and her features were so perfect, they were inhuman.

*Lust, this is lust.*

Where, just a moment before, her human side had been cowering in terror, it now was reacting with desire to the beauty in front of her.

Gwyn did the only thing she could think of... she closed her eyes and pictured her Sarah.

The voice was low and smoky as she slid her body against Gwyn's. "I know you like this body. Lust is one of mine, too. Didn't you know that, little Gwyn?"

Clenching her jaw, Gwyn forced herself to ignore the sensations. She remembered what the Magister had looked like the last time they'd made love. With her dark hair wreathing her face, their bodies moving in rhythm, Sarah delighted Gwyn with the rapturous look she gave her as Gwyn slid her fingers into her.

*Love.*

Perhaps for the first time, she felt the heft of the word and the feelings gathered behind it. She knew she'd loved Sarah, but now she really understood exactly what that meant and how powerful it could be. If her human half diminished her powers, then this was a source of strength she never knew existed before.

The pale woman's lips curled into a small smile and she opened her eyes to look at the confused woman trying to seduce her. Even now, a part of her had to admit that she was beautiful and wanted her, but it no longer held power over her. No matter what shape the devil took, he was still Lucifer, and she had been there when they had cast the Morningstar down from the heavens.

"You will never have me."

*He doesn't understand.*

The brief confusion in the woman's eyes disappeared as quickly as it had come, but she knew what had caused it. If he had ever known what love was before, the concept was now alien to him.

With a snarl, he moved far quicker than Gwyn's almost mortal body could. The woman shape he had draped around himself disappeared like a cloak tossed aside and he grabbed her by her throat, lifting her off the ground. To her utter revulsion, he licked her cheek, baring his teeth after he had tasted her skin.

"So much power. You will be mine, Gwyn!"

Blue eyes widened as he started to squeeze, and she desperately tried to pry his hand free of her neck. Her feet kicked in the air as he held her a good foot up off the ground.

Slowly, the world around her began to go dark.

-----

She loved the forest, the quiet still places where you could forget about all the messed up things in the world and just be yourself. Vicki had always treasured the wilderness. She'd argued with Frank often trying to get him to move the pack out of the city.

He had never agreed, obviously. In a way, she was glad that he hadn't. If they had moved, she probably would never have met Jessica.

Of course, if she hadn't known Jessica, she wouldn't have gotten her into so much trouble.

However, the forest surrounding her now did not instill a sense of peace. The trees were warped and twisted, and if she listened carefully, she thought she could hear moans as the wind whipped

through the branches.

Then, of course, there was the minor detail that she was following a murder of crows.

The birds, little more than a dark shadow in the night sky, would take off in a huge squawking mass when she got close to them. Then, they would fly to the next tree and wait for her there, only to repeat the process when she approached them again.

Deeper into the woods she went, leaving Gwyn somewhere behind her.

She hoped the pale woman was going to be all right.

*I do not want to go back and tell tall, dark and angry that her girlfriend got hurt.*

All thoughts of Sarah and Gwyn fled when she reached them and the crows didn't take flight. This time, except for some ruffling of feathers, they were silent as she approached. Under their watchful eyes, she passed under the bare branches and looked beyond the trees into the clearing.

The cairn of stones looked even more ghostly as the bright moonlight turned them a bone white color. The mostly flat rocks were stacked in piles over twenty feet tall. The ground was full of tracks ringing the stones in almost concentric circles. They were like no prints she'd ever seen before. From her place by the trees, they appeared like someone had walked around the rocks in a slow shuffling gait.

Vicki sniffed the air.

There was a scent of decay and death.

*Gwyn said to keep going until I see the rocks. So now what?*

As if in answer, she felt a tug at her back. With a startled yelp, she spun around, fully expecting to see some abomination behind her.

There was nothing.

Again, there was a tug at her pack. This time, she realized where it was coming from. Shrugging off the black knapsack, the lanky young woman reached inside and pulled out the spear point that they'd wrapped in black silk. The point twisted in her hands and tugged towards the base of the middle pile of stones.

"Okay." The sound of her voice startled her and she quickly lowered her voice to a bare whisper. "I get it."

She put the spear point back into the knapsack.

With one last glance around, she stepped forward.

She knew something was wrong the second her foot touched the snow. Almost immediately, the thing came around the cairn. The smell of decay and rotting flesh was now suddenly overpowering. It was nearly ten feet tall, a shambling mass of bone and flesh roughly formed into a humanoid shape. The moonlight made everything look monochrome, but no matter, she could smell the blood dripping from it. It had an eyeless, over-sized head fashioned from scraps of flesh, bone and spikes of hair.

*Oh, my god...*

There was no doubt that it knew she was there, though. Its lumbering pace quickened as it headed straight for her. She didn't hesitate even to think about what do, she simply acted. With one hand, she tossed the pack behind her, up into crow-filled branches of the closest tree. She didn't have time to get out of her clothes, so she simply started the change. It was easy with the full moon only one night away; her body barely needed the nudge to begin the transformation. She was lucky. If it had been a new moon, she would have had to force it and that would have taken much longer.

As it was, it nearly took too long.

She could never describe the sensation of changing. It was painful, but it was also a joyful experience. Between one breath and the next, her fingers shortened, her head lengthened and hair covered her body.

Where a young woman had stood merely moments earlier, there was now a mottled black and white wolf. With a snarl, she tore free from the clothes that now limited her movement. With agility she never could have managed in her human form, she ducked beneath the first clumsy swipe of a huge claw shaped hand and with a quick bound, she was through the space beneath the creature's legs and raced for the pile of stones.

Everything was so much sharper to Vicki in this form. The wind was alive with scents that her human form would never even have noticed. Her vision was heightened and her ears could hear another wolf's call from miles away.

Another bound and she was at the cairn. Behind her, she could hear the thing stumbling in the snow, then shamble towards her. Frantically, she searched the rock piles trying to find a way in. The snow was deeper here and almost obscured the small depression that hid a small tunnel in the rocks.

With a small yelp of annoyance, she began digging, casting a glance over her body at the thing. It began heading towards her again. If it had looked tall before, it now towered over her smaller body. Desperation lent her body strength and she flung snow behind her with her paws. The creature leaned down into the snow, its arm reaching for her as she finally cleared enough snow from the entrance of the tunnel to squirm inside. The thing's fingers grabbed the tip of her tail,

but with an extra squirm and at the cost of a clump of hair, she was free.

It was dark under the stones and the rock walls were so close, she could barely inch her way forward. Her nose twitched at the smell of the old stagnant air surrounding her. She wondered how that was possible considering the open mouth of the tunnel was only several feet behind her.

*What the hell?*

The tunnel was widening around her, and suddenly, she was cautiously walking down steps carved from stone. She could see nothing, but constantly sniffed the air, ears alert, as she silently crept forward.

The stairs ended abruptly, nearly causing her to lose her balance as her nails slid on the smooth floor.

*I must be twenty feet below the surface now.*

From the foot of the stairs, she saw a faint glow of light a few yards in front of her. As she carefully moved towards it, she found herself entering a small chamber. Propped up in middle of it, was a simple wooden shaft at least seven feet tall. Surrounding it was a blue nimbus, giving just enough light to see by.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the only thing in the chamber.

The ground moved and squirmed by her feet and the wolf pawed at it as she tried to recognize what it was.

*Ewww! Maggots.*

The floor crawled with them. Growling, she stepped forward, lifting each foot high and then shaking it as she tried to dislodge as many of the disgusting, wriggling white things as possible. She had a moment of hesitation once she got close to the actual staff.

*Now, how am I supposed to carry this? No way am I changing to human form in here!*

In the end, she simply tilted her head sideways and grabbed it with her teeth. Although, she'd found herself waiting for the faint glowing to disappear, it didn't. Vicki finally couldn't stand the feeling of the maggots crawling across her paws anymore and bolted for the stairs, dragging the spear shaft with her.

It was a tight fit back through the tunnel and she kept feeling things moving across her paws. She hoped it was just her imagination. The walls that had seemed so stable on her way down were shifting around her and pebbles bounced off her fur as she crawled. It took her a while, but she finally managed to reach the snow bank that she'd entered through.

With a lunge, she was finally free from the constricting walls.

A meaty fist caught her in the side and sent her tumbling end over end towards the edge of the clearing.

She'd forgotten about the thing. Obviously, it hadn't forgotten her. The creature was deadly strong, and Vicki whimpered as she was hit.

That blow would have killed a normal wolf.

It only slowed down a werewolf.

Even as she slid through the snow, stopping only when she hit the base of a tree, she felt the internal organs heal and the broken bones shift and mend. Although her side still hurt, the pain was beginning to fade even as she noticed it.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the thing move towards her, ignoring the spear shaft she'd dropped when struck.

She stayed where she was though, watching and panting, as the thing lumbered closer. Only when it stopped and raised both fists upwards for a killing blow did she stir. A sudden jump and she was up on her legs. Then with a lunge, she leaped upwards, suddenly a ball of fur, claws and snapping teeth. Blood and flesh flew from the creature as she attacked it. Although, it didn't seem to even register the wounds she inflicted. Then she was past it and, once more, grabbed the spear shaft in her mouth.

The wolf looked across the clearing and bounded towards the tree line. With a quick duck of her head, she hooked the straps of the knapsack that somehow had been lying next to the first tree, around her neck. Then she was gone, darting back into the forest, dragging the spear shaft along. Behind her, the creature stopped at the edge of the clearing, blood dripping onto the white snow from the wounds it had been dealt.

If it had possessed a mouth, it would have howled in rage.

Vicki wasn't sure where to go now, but the crows quickly took care of that. With a sudden outcry of caws and flapping wings, the entire murder took to the sky as she passed the trees they'd been watching from. Once more, the flight of shadows led her through the woods on a different path than she'd originally trod.

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The world was slowly darkening.

Clawing at the hands that held her throat, she struggled to try to draw in a breath, but she began to lose consciousness from the lack of air.

"I'll rip your soul from your dead body."

Just as she started to black out, he loosen his grip and dropped her ungraciously onto the snow at his feet. Sprawled on the ground coughing, Gwyn desperately sucked in a lung full of air with her eyes tearing up from the effort.

*Why didn't he kill me?*

Afraid that he still might, she forced herself to half crawl, half stumble away from him until she stood upright next to the nearest tree. Turning, she watched Lucifer, trying to understand what had just happened. The brown haired man was looking into the forest, a cold thin smile on his face.

"Why Gwyn, your little pup made it. She has the entire Spear of Destiny now."

Once more, he moved faster than she could follow, his hands grabbing her shoulders and forcing her to stand motionless as he invaded her personal space. His breath was hot and foul on her face as he whispered.

"I almost forgot myself around you. Next time we meet, you may not be so lucky."

Cupping her cheeks with one hand he roughly kissed her, forcing his tongue into her mouth and making her gag.

"Oohhhh, you and I are going to meet again."

With that, he disappeared, the shadows silently swallowing his departure.

A glance to her side showed that the throne vanished as well.

His taste lingered in her mouth and suddenly, she went to her knees, vomiting into the snow as her body tried to cleanse itself. Gwyn desperately wanted to scrub her skin raw to try to remove the taint he'd left on her.

That's where Vicki found her. The large wolf whimpered as she came out of the trees, her tail hung low and her soulful eyes worried.

Scooping up a handful of snow and both rubbing and eating it, Gwyn did the best she could to rid herself of the aftertaste before getting to her feet. Her legs were wobbly but kept her standing. Warm fur was by her side in an instant and she absently patted the thick fur.

"You got it, Vicki."

It wasn't a question, but the wolf's tail wagged in answer.

Wrapping her hand in a length of cloth from her coat she took the spear shaft from the wolf careful not to touch it with her bare skin. She didn't know what would happen if she touched the

Spear, and she didn't want to find out. The hand she was holding the spear shaft in tingled, even through the layers of cloth.

Still unsteady on her feet, the small blonde headed towards the trees. She wanted to get away from this place, from this cursed ground. Gwyn trudged tiredly forward, following the faint trail between the trees. Silently, Vicki padded through the snow alongside her.

"I miss Sarah," she sniffed dejectedly, a tear working its way down her cheek.

Once more the wolf's tail wagged.

"Bet you miss your Jessica, too."

This time the wolf bumped her head into Gwyn's thigh, bringing a forlorn smile to the pale blonde as she rubbed her face.

Werewolf and half angel headed purposefully towards the dawn to face the horrors the new day would bring.

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Dawn found her standing on the tarmac just off the runway. Sarah had managed to catch perhaps two hours of sleep. The little sleep she had gotten was plagued by dreams of fire and suffering. She woke up drenched in sweat and clutching at the empty space where Gwyn would have been.

She only had enough time to get her gear stowed away in the SUV before the first unexpected guest showed up.

She knew she probably should have expected it, but she never thought about what the Magisters from all the major cities in this side of the pond might do.

*Apparently, they're coming also.*

Four Magisters had arrived by the time she'd had to leave for the airport.

It was a cold overcast day, the edges of her favorite leather trench coat whipping about in the wind. Eric was sitting in the black SUV behind her. Strung out behind the SUV, was a line of six black limousines with a uniformed driver waiting patiently behind the wheel of each of them.

The Concorde had never landed in the city before.

The delta-winged airplane looked out of place as it taxied down the runway coming to a stop a few dozen feet away. Sarah had never actually ridden on a Concorde before, but it certainly seemed out of the ordinary for it to stop so far away from the terminals. One of the waiting airport vehicles, a pickup truck with stairs mounted up off the rear, pulled over towards the opening doorway while the others headed for the cargo hold.



Excluding the trucks, the area was quiet and conspicuously absent of any other people. Once more, the Magister wondered how the local media had missed this.

She started forward as the first of the passengers began to make their way down the stairs. Behind her, she could hear car doors opening, as the limo drivers got ready to receive them.

Sarah watched with conflicting emotions as the stream of Magisters, family members, partners and husbands made their way down the ramp. Some of the most famous families among the Legacy's were represented.

Mary van Helsing, the Magister in charge of London, and her brother in arms, Simon, whose family had faced down one of the most feared of all vampire masters, Dracula.

Florance Lecroix from Paris, representing a family that had long dealt with werebeasts of every type.

The Magdalena from the Vatican itself, responsible for taking care of assaults on one of the holiest cities in the world. Unlike the others, she walked alone without a group of family members with her.

The list went on, each representing some of the oldest families in the old world. They had come to her city, uninvited. And even though she knew they would be of use, in helping her track down Gwyn, a part of her resented them being here.

*This is my city.*

However, they didn't look entirely happy to be here, either. Sarah smiled faintly as she noticed the distance between the groups, each family staying separate from the others. This was the first sizeable gathering of Magisters in centuries, and the first ever, in what many of them still considered, the new world.

The last person disembarking from the plane was a surprise, though. An old lady escorted by two beefy men, stepped from the plane and began to slowly hobble down the steps.

"Well, well, well. Look who's coming to breakfast," a deep voice intoned.

Sarah didn't dare turn to grin at her uncle. He had stepped out of the SUV and came to stand slightly to the back and right of her, making his official position clear.

*Grandmother.*

The old lady had no other name among the Legacy Houses. They all knew her simply as the Grandmother, and she'd been alive for well over a century now. Under her rule, the Legacy Houses had become stronger than ever before in history and had multiplied across the world.

Keeping her voice low, Sarah whispered to Eric, never taking her eyes off the group of Magisters that waited at the base of the stairs for Grandmother.

"I didn't think she ever left Ireland."

Eric's answer was just as quiet.

"She never has."

Only when the elderly woman had reached the bottom of the stairs did the entire group begin to make their way towards the cars. Despite the two men in black suits who flanked her, the woman walked under her own power even though she used a cane.

Bright green eyes met Sarah's as Grandmother approached and Sarah's jaw tightened in surprise at the amount of power she saw. The old, lined face that surrounded them spoke of extreme old age, but those eyes were young and reflected a sharp intelligence.

"We have come in a time of need."

The words were heavy with an Irish brogue. From the amused look in those green eyes, Sarah was certain that Grandmother knew her own internal conflict. But she wasn't about to show signs of that in front of the group of nearly two-dozen Magisters that stood watching.

"Welcome to my city," she said firmly.

She'd put a lot of thought into what she would say when she first greeted them. The not so subtle reminder about whose territory they were in was not lost on the many faces watching her.

"If you would please choose a limo, we will get you to the Manor where we can discuss things over breakfast." She glanced back at the huge plane.

Dozens of cases had been unloaded from the Concorde. Sarah tried to stifle a snort of amusement as she spotted the words spray-painted across them.

*Diplomatic papers? Cute.*

That explained how they were getting all of the unique equipment past customs. And speaking of customs and immigration, Sarah had yet to see any sign of the usually quite efficient, government agencies.

The Grandmother simply smiled and headed for her SUV, ignoring the line of limos entirely. Sarah shared a glance with Eric before moving to open the door for the old woman, just beating out one of the two suits. The other Magisters broke up into groups and more or less, managing to sort themselves out into the waiting stretch limos. Closing the door behind the Grandmother, Sarah got into the driver's seat. The two bodyguards managed to fold themselves into the SUV as well.

Leaving the airport at the head of a convoy was an interesting position to be in, but Sarah had other things on her mind. Sarah figured she might as well get straight to the point.

"As much as I am grateful for your help, I don't understand why so many of the Magisters are gathering here."

The old woman laughed, peering out of the window with interest at the city they were approaching.

"Blunt, just like your mother."

The SUV swerved slightly as Sarah jerked and glanced over her shoulder at the old woman.

"You knew my mother?"

"Not personally, mind you, but we talked once or twice over the phone."

Sarah glanced at her uncle, who shrugged slightly. He had no idea about it either.

"Are you going to answer my question?"

It came out more aggressively than she'd planned. The two bodyguards stiffened at her tone, but the Grandmother never batted an eyelash.

"Over breakfast. As much fun as flying was, I'd rather have some real food before we start the day."

Which was how Sarah found herself presiding over a scene she'd never imagined possible. Eric had somehow managed to find caterers who were willing to set up a buffet style breakfast, leave and then, come back to clean up afterwards without asking any questions.

A good thing too, considering the amount of weapons, both archaic and new, that were being displayed at the meal.

The formal dining room had been opened, as well as the informal one, and the regular dining area where she usually ate. The other two dining rooms hadn't been used since her parents wedding, according to Eric, and she believed him. Trillium Manor hadn't seen this much activity during her lifetime of living here.

The distance between the different family groups eased with the start of the breakfast and now had almost dissipated. There was enough weaponry openly displayed to arm a small army. Impromptu displays of modifications and new spells were going on throughout the Manor.

*I already told them, 'if they break it, they bought it'.*

A group of Magisters had even gone out into the back gardens to show off some of their new offensive spells.

Eric was worn out from trying to keep people from snooping around his little bunker. Spontaneous reenactments of past battles were taking place throughout the crowd. Dodging to the side, Sarah scowled at the group who were so deep in conversation they weren't looking where they were walking. She'd already had to kick a few family members out of the garage when they wanted to see what Eric had done to the SUV.

*If this goes on for much longer, I'm going to scream.*

"Do not be too angry at them, many have never left the area they are responsible for."

*For an old woman, she sure knows how to sneak up on people.*

Snatching a glass of orange juice, Sarah frowned at the people all around her. Even more had arrived after she'd left for the airport; it seemed to her that every Magister in the world was here.

"Easy for you to say, it's not your family manor that they're tearing apart."

The old woman clucked her tongue as she slowly took a seat, amusement once more evident in her eyes.

"This is the first gathering of Magisters in centuries. Think of it as a big family party."

Sarah turned to fully face the old woman, sighing, as she heard something shatter in the background.

"About that, why are you all here?"

Silently, the Grandmother produced an old leather bound tome. Her old hands gently caressed the cover as she set it down on the white linen covering the table. Carefully, she opened the book to a red-velvet page holder and spun the book around so that Sarah could see the page.

The once white page had been turned yellow by the passing of the years. An old water stain marked one side of the parchment. None of that registered to Sarah as she looked upon the familiar face smiling back up at her. The ink used to draw it had begun to fade but the picture was still visible.

"Gwyn," she whispered.

The old woman leaned back in her chair, eyes thoughtful, as she studied the Magister across from her.

"So you do know her."

Sarah nodded and looked defiantly at her. "She lives here."

*Or did, until we had that argument. Why didn't you just tell me what was going on, Gwyn?*

"You never told us about her."

The old woman didn't seem really surprised by that, though. Sarah had no answer and so, just shrugged slightly.

"She's not quite human, is she, Sarah Mordicai?"

The green eyes across from her suddenly seemed ancient, but Sarah read no judgment in them.

"No, she isn't." She glared at Grandmother defensively. "I love her."

*I want to kill her sometimes, but I love her.*

The old woman peered at her intently, and then, gently flipped the page, again turning the book so Sarah could see.

Sarah didn't understand the writing, but the picture she knew well by now.

"The spear tip."

Grandmother nodded, touching the picture with one gnarled finger.

"The Spear of Destiny. The prophecy speaks of it and of your love... this Gwyn of yours."

Sarah could feel the tension turning her stomach into knots. Somehow, she managed to find her voice, not that she wanted an answer, but certain she had to ask anyway.

"What does it do?"

"It will bring about the end of our world, child."

## Chapter 6

*"In my beginning is my end. In succession, Houses rise and fall, crumble and are extended. Are removed, destroyed, restored..."*

~T.S. Eliot

Apocalypse

The wolf convulsed.

Its fur and tail rippled and shrank as fingers and toes were sprouting from the pads of its paws.

Gwyn stood off to the side of the road, watching Vicki's transformation with interest. She'd never actually seen a werewolf change its form before. It didn't take as long as she'd thought it would and soon a naked, shivering, slim girl was crouching on the side of the road. She'd wrapped her coat around the spear shaft and was holding the entire bundle well away from her body.

"Here, put these on."

Gwyn tossed her a set of clothes and a warm coat. The teen put them on, and for a few minutes until she warmed up a bit, her teeth chattered so hard she couldn't even talk.

"T-t-thanks."

The pale blonde forced a smile and nodded, glancing down the road towards the city limits. It would take them the better part of the day to get back to the city on foot. She hadn't thought to make arrangements for the taxi to wait for them.

*Just goes to show you that even Angels aren't infallible.*

Sighing, Gwyn tossed Vicki her backpack, put her coat back on and started walking along the roadside. It only took the teen a few paces to catch up to her. Vicki used the spear shaft as a walking staff.

"How come you can't touch this?"

Pale blue eyes flicked sideways to glance at the spear that the brown-haired teen held up, and then back to the road in front of her.

"I just can't."

"Why not?"

Gwyn glanced up towards the sky above.

*Give me patience.*

"I just can't," she said brusquely. "Come on, we have to get back to the city."

The teen blinked in surprise at the bitterness in Gwyn's voice, but nodded.

"Yeah, about that, I was wondering. Can't you just summon up a taxi or something?"

The angel shrugged, walking back along the mostly snow-covered dirt road that had led them to the forest.

"Nope."

The teen sighed, settling the book bag on her shoulders.

"Well, that sucks. You can't touch the spear shaft and I can't be in my wolf form to stay warm because I have to carry this stupid thing for you."

The encounter with Lucifer had left Gwyn with a pounding headache. It didn't help her current mood as she listened to Vicki complain about having to walk all the way back to the city in her human form because of her inability to carry the spear. Pale blue eyes narrowed in irritation, but by biting the inside of her cheek, Gwyn managed to avoid saying anything nasty.

Walking beside her, Vicki grumbled on for the next hundred yards until she glance down at her clothes and then blink in confusion.

"Hey, I left all my clothes back in the forest when I changed into my wolf shape. Where did these come from?"

Gwyn snapped at her. "Guess I'm not completely useless, huh? Come on, we have to get back before tonight."

They made it another five hundred feet before Vicki spoke up again.

"Is your Sarah going to be there tonight?"

The question brought a dangerous ache to Gwyn's chest and her eyes teared.

The pale skinned woman whispered, "I hope so" as she watched the snow swirl around her feet while the wind gusted around them.

She had a bad feeling about the meeting tonight. The spear was a powerful relic that could be used for either good or evil and she had a good idea to which one Frank and his companions wanted to use it for.

"We could go see her, you know. We should have enough time before we meet Frank to get Jess back."

Gwyn knew they had enough time, but still didn't answer.

She was afraid.

Afraid that Sarah wouldn't forgive her for stealing the spear point, afraid that she'd caused too much damage to the trust between them. Afraid that she had lost a gift that she was just now realizing the preciousness of it.

Instead, she continued moving, focusing on making her way away from the source of evil behind

her. She could still feel the malice of the twisted woods they had fled, a diseased sore within the pristine wilderness.

She hoped no one would ever decided to try building something in it. The results would probably be very ugly.

"How are you feeling?" Gwyn asked.

She tried to break up the silence that had reigned during the past half mile of walking since she hadn't answered Vicki's last question. The teen shrugged, her hands stuffed into the pockets of her coat.

"Cold. Wishing I could run in my wolf form. Scared. You know, the usual."

Gwyn smiled.

"Yeah, the usual."

"I sometimes think summer's never going to come. You know? It's been so cold this winter. Do you even feel the cold, Gwyn?"

The Angel opened her mouth to answer when a flash of movement along the side of the road distracted her. She stopped, scanning the trees for whatever she had just caught out of the corner of her eye.

There.

"Stay here, Vicki."

"What?"

"Stay here."

Gwyn gave the startled teen what she hoped was a reassuring smile and headed off the roadside into the woods. She moved silently along the snow-covered ground, leaving no tracks behind her as she went. The cream colored duster she wore blended in with the snow providing her with some camouflage. As she went, she reached up over her shoulder, her fingertips disappearing for a brief second as she grasped something that had been hidden behind her.

A flick of her hand and the angel drew a sword seemingly from thin air. Blue fire gleamed along its edge as the dim winter sunlight was reflected from the length of its polished blade. Swiftly, she dodged between the trees, running full out towards the movement she'd spotted from the roadside.

The figure wearing the brown trench coat was still standing where she'd last spotted it, watching the road as it stood next to an ancient oak tree. It sensed her at the last moment, spinning around



and drawing its own sword from the air as she had.

Metal clanged on metal as the two swords hit, showering the area with sparks.

Grinning, Gwyn circled the man, twirling her blade before striking again. The man smiled, ducking the swipe. He'd forgotten about the fedora that had been on his head though, and her blade cleanly sliced the hat in half.

"Gwyn! That's my favorite hat!"

She laughed unrepentantly, twirling her sword.

"You're as slow as ever, Michael. It's a wonder you survived the war."

Michael shook his head, bending down to pick up the two halves of his ruined hat.

"I heard you'd been slowed down by your human half."

She shrugged, sliding the sword she held back into the air and leaving it there.

"Guess you heard wrong."

Pale blue eyes challengingly met his deep brown ones. The Archangel said nothing, simply touching the two halves of his hat together and mending them into one with a brief flash of light.

"Why are you here, Michael?"

The joy at having spotted her old friend started to fade when she noticed the odd look he'd just given her.

"Michael?"

Her old friend shook his head, watching her sadly.

"How much of you is now human, Gwyn?"

It wasn't a question she'd been expecting. Frowning, she shook her head.

"What do you mean? What's going on, Michael?"

"Do you love this human of yours?"

"Yes. I love Sarah."

It was possibly the only thing she was certain about these days. The new emotions from her human side were bewildering, but love, she understood. That was the one emotion she could

handle.

"Do you love her more than the Boss?"

Gwyn's mouth opened then closed at the question. She had no answer for her old friend. It must have shown in her eyes because he sighed and shook his head.

"I wish I knew how much I could trust you, Gwyn."

She took a step towards him at that, eyes narrowing irately.

"Michael, it's still me. I'm still the same. I fought at your side when we threw the Morning Star from the heavens and forced his followers to follow. Remember?"

The pale, brown haired man nodded, gazing down at her with an undecipherable expression.

"I remember those days, Gwyn. You aren't the same, though. You would have never questioned me so quickly before, nor would you have gotten upset at me for even asking you the question."

Pale blue eyes flashed.

"Why, exactly, are you here, Michael?"

"I'm here to make sure you let things happen as they must."

A wolf's howl echoed nearby, cutting through the crisp winter air.

Blue eyes widened in sudden understanding. She sprang forward, trying to lunge around the other angel to head back toward the roadside. He knew she'd try it, though, and blocked her move easily.

"Get out of my way, Michael!"

The Archangel shook his head sadly. "I can't, Gwyn. You know that, or at least, you used to."

Vicki's panicked voice pierced the cold air.

"Get out of my way!" she demanded.

The taller man shifted sideways, blocking her route once more.

"I can't."

More loud voices came from the road.

Gwyn tried to force her way past the Archangel.

"I'm warning you, Michael, let me past!"

"GWYNNNN!"

Vicki's plea was even shriller. Michael watched her, shaking his head slightly in answer to Gwyn's demand. All joy in seeing her old friend was gone now. Reaching into the air above her, she drew her sword once more.

"I'll make you move if I have to."

The Archangel smiled sadly and drew his own.

The clash of metal on metal once more rang out through the trees.

-----

Vicki let out a sigh, as Gwyn became a ghost flitting through the trees. The young werewolf had always enjoyed winter. It always seemed to her as if the world was once again unspoiled under the cover of newly fallen snow. She loved running through the snow banks, diving and bounding as she and her little makeshift pack played. Those had been good times. Frank had been a different person back then. He wasn't filled with the bitter resentment at the mortals who he blamed for all their current problems. They had been a family, a strange one of course, but a family nonetheless. His betrayal hurt her more than she would have thought it would.

*Please don't let him hurt Jessica. I don't know what I'll do to him if he's hurt her, but it won't be pretty. Please, if there is a God, please let Jessica be all right.*

Another sigh and she looked towards the woods, shifting her backpack, conscious of the weight of the spear shaft in her hands.

*I wonder what she saw?*

The teen rolled her eyes. She still wasn't sure if she believed that Gwyn was what she claimed to be. To do so, she'd have to accept there was a God, and to do that, well, that was a pretty big step for her. True, she had ended up in that church when things seemed hopeless, but that had been just as much to get out of the cold as anything else.

At least that's what she told herself.

She impatiently shifted her weight, eager to be back in the city. They had some extra time before the meeting with Frank and the others, but she didn't want to risk being late. The sooner she could give Frank his stupid spear, the sooner she could get Jessica back. Ignoring the small voice inside, whispering that it wouldn't be that easy, she scanned the trees, searching for any signs of the pale blonde. She thought she heard the sounds of metal clashing together for a moment, breaking the silence of the woods, but as she cocked her head to listen, it became quiet again.

A gust of wind whipped through the trees, sending snow flying around her. In that instant, she smelled them upon the wind, her eyes widening as she turned toward the threat. A moment later, they would have been upon her. As it was, the three large men that exited the woods were almost halfway across the road when she backpedaled out of reach. She held up the spear shaft in front of her as a makeshift weapon. Vicki didn't know how to use a weapon that wasn't her teeth and claws, so she was under no illusion of what would happen to her if the three attacked.

"Frank, who are your friends?" she called out.

The muscular gray-haired man in the center smirked, nodding towards the two deadly silent men behind him.

"Oh, new associates... you know how it goes."

Licking her lips, Vicki started as a wolf's howl echoed nearby. The pack was nearby then. She had no doubt that the other two men were werewolves as well. The teen could almost smell the feral energy rolling off them. They had a presence as powerful as Frank's, and ones even more menacing than his. She glanced hopefully towards the trees in back of her, but there was no sign of Gwyn.

The man standing behind Frank spoke up. "Give us the spear."

All three of them were grizzled, even Frank was more unwashed looking than usual. The coats they wore did little to hide their powerful bodies and Vicki wondered how quickly she could get away from them. As if in answer, another wolf call went up nearby. This one she recognized as one of the twins.

*Crap. The twins always were faster than me.*

"This wasn't the deal, Frank," she loudly protested.

The Alpha male of her former pack shrugged. "Give us the spear and you might get out of this alive, Vicki."

She didn't think so. The ways the other two were looking at her made her skin crawl. Their eyes were dark and full of hatred. Again she glanced behind her, hoping to see Gwyn emerge from the forest. The sound of metal meeting metal rang out again and her heart sank.

"Sounds like your friend has her hands full," Frank smirked, shaking his head in mock sympathy. "You just can't trust these humans to do anything right, can you?"

Another step backwards and she was at the edge of the forest. She didn't have to look to know that the woods behind her were full of wolves.

"Stop dicking around, Vicki. Give me the spear."

Her heart sank at the smile the two men behind Frank shared. Trying to stall what seemed inevitable, she asked, "Where's Jessica?"

Frank opened his mouth to open when the man to his right shoved him out of the way.

"Enough, we'll just take the spear from her."

Vicki didn't have time to be shocked at the way the man casually shoved aside Frank. She'd never met anyone who was stronger than her former pack leader. He was a big man, but the stranger had shoved him aside as if he weighed nothing. Quickly, the man moved towards her.

"GWYNNNN!" she shrieked.

Her body saw the threat coming and instinctively reacted as she screamed the Angel's name. Flight was impossible, so she tried to fight back. The spear shaft was in her hands, and she swung.

The stranger raised his arm, surprise flashing across his unwashed face as he tried to block the blow. The simple wooden spear shaft slammed into his upraised arm with as much strength as she could put behind the blow.

The world exploded in light.

-----

The Magisters were gathered in the grand hall of Trillium Manor. Sarah watched them all as the Grandmother told them about the prophecy, about the Spear of Destiny and what little they knew about it. There wasn't all that much information about what it was capable of, but every legend seemed to agree that it had the power to change or end the world.

She felt her Uncle join her at the back of the Hall where she was watching the briefing.

"Trust our Gwyn to get into this kind of trouble, huh?"

Sarah nodded, a scowl on her face. When she made no move to make any other sort of answer, Eric touched her elbow.

"Hey, I was joking. She's going to be fine."

She couldn't meet his eyes, couldn't let him know how truly terrified she was that Gwyn was going to get into even more trouble before this was all over.

"She was acting strange ever since I brought in the spear point. I should have made her tell me what was going on."

Her mentor was silent for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was as serious she'd ever known it to be.

"Your father used to say that whenever your mother got involved in her duties." He moved around in front of her until she had no choice but to meet his eyes. His body might have been old, and he had long since lost his hair, but his brown eyes were kind and compassionate as he met her dark gaze.

"You can't *make* her do anything. You know that. Trying will only frustrate you and get her angry. She isn't a Magister. She isn't bound by our rules. You have to accept that."

He was right, and she knew it, she just wasn't sure if she could accept it.

"What if I can't?"

Her uncle shrugged, moving aside so that they could listen as the other Magisters began asking questions.

"You have to decide how important she is to you, Sarah. I can't answer that for you."

"How did my parents do it?"

But she knew the answer even before he answered.

"They loved each other."

*Can it be that simple?*

She didn't have time to think about his words as the Grandmother called out her name.

"Since this is her city, and she knows this Gwyn, Sarah Mordicai will lead you to retrieve the Spear of Destiny." The old lady paused as she stood in front of the gathered Magisters. She looked every year of her long lifetime. "We cannot risk the Spear being used to fulfill the prophecy."

The Magdalena, the Magister for Rome, spoke up in the silence that followed those words.

"Why do we believe that the Spear will be used for evil?"

Sarah met the Grandmother's eyes, and then, despite herself, she answered the question.

"We don't. But we can't risk the fate of the world."

She saw the understanding in the eyes of the Magisters around her. Personal sacrifice was no stranger to the people around her. They all knew what she was saying, and what it might cost her.

There were no more questions about the prophecy after that.

Determined not to focus on what could go wrong, Sarah made herself continue to lay out the plan that she and the Grandmother had come up with.

"Thanks to the diary that Vicki left behind, we know when and where the werewolf is supposed to hand over the spear. I know some of you doubt that Vicki and Gwyn could have found the other part of the Spear since the Magisters have been searching for both parts of it for centuries now. And, you've all heard the rumors about what Gwyn is. Those rumors are true. She is, at least partly, an Angel."

Sarah waited for the sudden burst of conversation that greeted that announcement to die down.

"You can see why, I then think, it's very likely that she and Vicki have found and maybe even assembled the Spear."

*I wish you weren't so clever, Gwyn. Forgive me, love, but I can't let the Spear be used.*

"We will surround the park and wait for them to show up. Then we move in, take the Spear and stop whoever it is behind all this."

They'd have to flesh out the specifics once they reached the park, but that was the basic plan.

"You all know that we will probably face some werewolves. Other than that, I can't tell you what else we may be facing, but we should assume the worst. Questions?"

The room was filled with a sudden tension. Gone was the joy and laughter from breakfast. The camaraderie was still there, but it had been hardened by resolve and duty.

"Let's do it."

They were all eager to be off, Magisters, husbands, partners, family members and friends who had come in response to the Grandmother's summons. Sarah wasn't thrilled they were in her city, she still wasn't too happy about it, but she had to admit that having this much power to back her up did make the outcome seem a brighter.

*Now if we can stop this prophecy without hurting Gwyn, this might actually come out all right.*

The uneasiness that had plagued her since she'd taken the Spear tip from Garz in the warehouse was back with a vengeance, but her years as a Magister enabled her ignore it somewhat as she led the way out of the Manor. Eric and the other support personnel would be staying behind in the Manor to help coordinate. Her Uncle's bunker had turned into an impressive communications center during the last few hours.

They piled into cars, buses and limousines, bringing weapons and armor with them. There was

everything from Kevlar vests to pieces of medieval armor worn openly, and just as varied, a selection of weaponry. Sarah took the wheel of her black SUV and let a few others pile into the car before pulling out of the driveway. The convoy would follow her to the park, where they would set up to take the Spear.

Sarah's thoughts were chaotic as she waited for the others to prepare themselves.

*My duty is to my city, as was my mother's before me and her mother's before her. How can I put myself before the lives of all these innocents? This is my city; I am responsible for everything that happens within its borders, no matter what the Grandmother says.*

The dark haired woman leaned her head against the cool glass of her passenger window, wondering when it had all gone so wrong.

*Gwyn, I do love you. I admit, I don't understand you most of the time, but I love you with all my being. I feel off balance without you next to me.*

She jerked upright with the next thought.

*That's why my mother wasn't willing to live without my father. It would be like living with only half of your soul.*

Her eyes watered and she hastily brushed a hand across her cheek.

*Please don't make me try to live through the rest of my life without you, Gwyn. Stay safe, my love.*

Then everyone who was going along on this little expedition was set. With one last glance at the Manor, Sarah threw the truck into gear.

They'd only just left the Manor when the sky to the west of them lit up. For a frozen second, Sarah thought she'd just witnessed a nuclear weapon detonating. Then she realized the glowing column of blue fire that towered in the distance was magical. All along the column, Magisters winced, cursed, and flinched along with any of their entourage that could see it as well. Those who weren't blessed... or cursed, with mage sight couldn't see anything, and had to be told what was happening.

"Shit."

Sarah smiled humorlessly at the woman sitting in her passenger seat. The Magdalena shifted; gripping the sheathed katana she was carrying a bit tighter.

"That about sums it up, yes."

Making a quick decision, she changed direction, pulling a U turn in the middle of the street. Ignoring the honks of the enraged taxi drivers she'd just cut off, Sarah called up her Uncle.



Behind her the entire convoy followed her lead, cutting off traffic as they doubled back the way they had come.

"Eric, I think the plan's toast. Someone just used magic, with all the subtlety of a nuclear bomb, west of the city. Something tells me the Spear and Gwyn are probably involved."

"I'm calling up maps right now, Sarah."

She could hear the rattle as he typed quickly.

"Okay, here's a route you can take. You sure about this?"

"Trust me, something big just happened. I think our timetable just got moved up."

"Watch yourself, Sarah."

"You know me. Uncle."

"Yeah, that's why I'm telling you to watch yourself."

Her smile at her Uncle's last comment faded away as she considered the magical pillar of energy she was leading her fellow Magisters towards.

*God help the person that hurts my Gwyn.*

Leaving a snarled traffic jam behind them, the convoy raced towards the outskirts of the city.

## Chapter 7

### End of an Age

The pillar of energy erupted towards the sky without warning. The golden white light towered over the surrounding landscape, dwarfing the largest of the city's skyscrapers. Everywhere, people turned and stared at it in confusion.

The towering inferno of magical energy seemed to eclipse even the sun. Throughout the city, those with magical abilities screamed in anguish at the sudden onslaught. A shockwave of supernatural energy expanded from the pillar, washing across the city and countryside around it. Even the strongest of personal shields were no match for it, and more than one person harboring dormant powers suddenly had them awakened by the rush of energy.

Streetlights died and car engines stopped, grinding the morning commute into complete gridlock. Cell phones and pagers went dark and across the city, electrical power failed. People who depended on pacemakers dropped where they stood. Hospital power shut down, and emergency back up generators could not be started. Nothing that depended upon technology worked within a

forty-mile radius.

It got worse for those closer to the pillar.

Sarah had one brief moment for thought before the shockwave washed over the convoy she was leading.

*Holy Shit!*

Then she screamed along with every other Magister in the convoy as her shields were torn aside. Personal shields that had helped to keep her safe from nearly every magical attack she'd ever faced were brushed aside as if they were little more than tissue paper.

Through either sheer luck, skill of the drivers, or perhaps a combination of both, none of the cars or trucks in the convoy suffered worse than minor fender benders. The pain faded the moment the shockwave passed.

"Fuck, that hurt."

The Magdalena smiled wanly from the passenger seat and nodded in agreement. The engine of her SUV was dead and despite her best efforts of reviving it by beating the steering wheel, it stayed dead. So were the cell phones.

*So much for calling AAA for a tow.*

Absurdly, that thought made her smirk as she got out of the truck. Up and down the now crumpled convoy line, the others were doing the same. Anything with electronics in it was fried.

"Listen up!"

The majority of her comrades in arms had already grabbed everything they needed. Being a Magister made people resourceful. Or they died.

"I don't know what that was, but it can't be good. Take what you can carry, leave the rest. We'll go the rest of the way on foot."

Snatching her backpack and sword from the useless SUV, the black-haired Magister of the City set out for the pillar.

Sarah led the way down the country road, the bitter cold, winter wind sending her black trench coat flapping. Behind her came the others, Magisters from all over the world. As one, they started to run down the road, all of them hoping they would be in time, yet fearing that they would not.

In front of them, the column of light continued to blaze furiously.

-----  
It had happened before she understood what was going on.

Suddenly, Michael had disappeared, allowing Gwyn to scramble towards the roadside. She'd just cleared the tree line when the Angel had only a glimpse of what was occurring before the terrible brightness had swept over her. Vicki was holding the shaft of the Spear of Destiny like a baseball bat. A large snarling man, with eyes that screamed 'werewolf', was lunging at her. Around her, the woods were filled with wolves, all watching the drama unfolding on the road.

Past them, she spotted another figure, half hidden in shadows where there should have been no shadows at all. He stood in the middle of the road, watching the scene with an eager delight. Gwyn recognized him of course; it was hard to forget the face of the devil.

*Lucifer...*

"Vicki! NOOOOO!"

Gwyn hadn't even realized she'd screamed until she heard the echo of her own voice.

Then Vicki's clumsy swing hit the large man catching him in the shoulder. Just before the world exploded in vicious light, Gwyn could have sworn that Lucifer winked at her. Then, there was nothing but the seemingly, endless pain.

*So this is what purgatory feels like.*

The thought flicked momentarily through a small analytical part of her brain. Then, there was nothing but the unending waves of agony as the radiance tried to tear her apart. This was not the pure white Light she knew. No. This was an awful thing. A malevolent, burning anger that devoured everything it could.

The wrenching pain slowly receded, but the awful, all consuming Light did not.

The earth around her was gone, replaced by that terrible, stark illumination. For a panicky, split second, she worried that the world itself had been consumed. Even as the thought formed, it was followed by sheer panic as she realized that would mean Sarah was dead. But then, her senses expanded.

She wasn't alone.

There were others nearby, some in even more anguish than she'd just experienced. Not understanding how she was able to do it, she brushed her thoughts across the minds of those nearest to her.

Instantly, she recoiled. Gwyn had no physical body in this place, but her mind flinched with pain.

The mind she had just probed was locked in its own personal ordeal. Forced to replay endless mental scenes of torture. With a sudden finality, she understood what was going on. The Spear had been used in anger, even if it was self-defense. Unwillingly, Vicki had opened a portal between Earth and Hell. That doorway was still closed, but now, it was unlocked. However, it wouldn't remain that way for long. The Door was feeding off the fear, anger and pain of those trapped inside of this place. When it had consumed enough of them, it would swing open, and the legions of Hell would be set loose on an unsuspecting planet.

*NO!*

She tried to deny the future her mind showed her. A planet devoid of the humanity she had come to love, a place filled with only hatred, fear, pain and suffering. The knowledge was overwhelming, tears streamed down her face.

Suddenly, her eyes widened and she refocused her thoughts. She'd almost slipped into the trap, had almost let herself become another source of power for the Door.

*No. I won't let this happen.*

A memory of Sarah's arms around her, holding her tight through the night, a tender caress, and a loving kiss gave her renewed strength. Once more, she sent her thoughts outwards, casting to see what lay near her. She found scores of minds trapped in their own hell.

*The werewolves, they've all been taken. What about Vicki?*

Even as she wondered, she found the teen's mind. The Angel paused in surprise as she felt not one, but two minds. She didn't know how, but by some means, Vicki had finally found her friend. The werewolf was trying to shield Jessica from the Light, and failing. The two teens were being dragged apart, slowly torn away from each other.

It was playing with them. Making them clutch for each other's mind in order to remain together, and then feeding off their frustration and fear when they couldn't sustain it.

*It knows what it's doing. This thing is alive!*

Maybe *alive* wasn't the right word, but the Light was aware enough to understand what it needed to open the door to Hell and how to gather the energy it would use.

Vicki and Jessica's struggle gave her something to focus on. Without a body, distance meant little to her. Between one thought and the next, she swept forward, folding mental arms around the two frightened teens and gathering them to her. Belatedly, the Light sensed what she was doing and quickly tried to tear the two apart.

They held onto each other with surprising strength.

In the sudden respite that her protection offered, Gwyn could feel their thoughts.

Gwyn?

*Yes, Victoria, I'm here.*

*Thank God! ... and I told you, my name is Vicki.*

If she'd had lips in this place, the Angel would have smiled.

*Who... Who are you?*

Feeling the other girl's terror, Gwyn soothed Jessica.

*I'm a friend of Vicki's. I've come to help you.*

A sudden burst of anger at Michael for delaying her return to Vicki cost her. The Light exploited the small weakness, flooding her with feelings of anger and rage. She struggled to regain control of her fury without losing her concentration in protecting Vicki and Jessica. Shaking with the effort, it took her a moment to hear the whistling.

It wasn't actual sound, but more like the *thought* of music.

The Light recoiled from it as if it had been burned.

*Jessica! Was that you?*

Instantly the music stopped, and the Light returned, pressing up against Gwyn's mind. Fortunately, the small reprieve had given her time to cleanse her thoughts, and the Light found no purchase to exploit this time.

*I'm sorry... it's just that it helped before.*

If she'd had a mouth, Gwyn would have laughed out loud.

*Don't apologize! Keep whistling!*

Despite the shy awkwardness that Gwyn sensed in her, the girl obeyed without question. Once more, her soundless tune forced the Light to recoil. In that small second, as she marveled at the two whom she held close, Gwyn swore she caught sight of destiny itself.

Humans called it "having an epiphany".

*Vicki, we have to stop the Door from opening.*

*What door?*

*This Light, everything around you, it's a doorway created by the Spear of Destiny. If we don't stop it from drawing power from all of these werewolves, it's going to open and Hell will be unleashed on Earth.*

Confusion was still evident in the teenager's thoughts, but she went along with Gwyn's explanation as she mentally shrugged.

*Okay. How can we stop it?*

*Vicki, can you make your music stronger? Louder?*

The other teen hesitated, and then softly answered.

*I think so.*

*Good. When I tell you, make it as loud as you can. After she does that, Vicki, you have to find as many of the werewolves as you can. They're trapped in their darkest fears and thoughts. You have to pull them out of it. Do you understand?*

*I guess. What are you going to do?*

This time her lips would have formed a cold predatory smile that Vicki would have had no trouble understanding.

*I'm going to go after the Key.*

Gwyn didn't give either of them time to question her.

*Jessica, now!*

And then she disappeared from their minds.

The startled teen managed only a nearly silent whistle of sound at first. Within moments, though, she concentrated to make it louder. Jessica realized she didn't have to actually produce any sound, not in this bizarre place. Instead, she had to will the music into being. It was difficult at first, as if she'd forgotten everything.

*What's wrong?*

*I don't remember the music, Vicki! I can't remember anything other than how to whistle.*

Even that memory seemed to be fading in this place where there was nothing physical. The silence ate at her mind, as if it were trying to draw the music out of her soul.

Vicki could feel the fright welling in the other teen. She didn't know what to do either and she began to panic, too. Frantically, she tried to find some way to help Jess. And then she

remembered Gwyn's words when they had gone back to the old hotel room.

Forcing herself to ignore the Light that slid against them in sickening waves since Gwyn had left, she pictured the violin. Remembered the feel of the case as she'd picked it up in the hotel room. It seemed like an eternity ago, almost a different lifetime. Vicki didn't know how she did it, but she just took the memory of the violin and gave it to her girlfriend like a gift

*Here, Jess, your violin.*

Taking the memory, Jess sighed with relief. Violin music swelled suddenly in the silence, casually tossing the angry Light aside. The violin coaxed other memories from Vicki, and Jessica drew upon them greedily. Drums, Bass, Cellos, Harp, Piano, Trumpet, they all joined the music, swelling around them and filling the silence.

The Light fled before the notes, leaving them alone.

Which was good, since soon after Gwyn hurdled herself out of their minds in search of her Key and the music grew louder, Vicki followed her. She looked around for other presences, ignoring Frank and the other two violent men with him. They felt too diseased and she had no desire to get close to them. Instead, she found the twins, curled together, and set about trying to call the boys back from whatever nightmares gripped them.

But if the doorway to Hell wasn't fully open, it wasn't completely shut, either. Things began to leak through cracks and from under the door. Small ones at first, then larger demons as the doorway collected more and more energy from the sacrifices that had been maneuvered towards it.

Dark shadows began to trickle outside the boundary of the Pillar of Light. Werewolves' lay where they had fallen bathed in that sickly Light. In the very center hung a gleaming spear, suspended over the bodies beneath it.

-----

They'd been running for what felt like forever, but what was probably less than an hour. The day had started out bitterly cold, and it was getting even more so as they ran down the road. The wind had picked up as well, blowing snow horizontally into the faces of the Magisters.

Sarah knew that she was losing some of the others. Many of the family members and even one or two Magisters weren't fit enough to keep up with her punishing pace. But the dark-haired woman was certain they needed to get to that column of light as soon as possible, or things were going to get very ugly. She had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach, the one that told her things were about to hit the fan at a high velocity.

*At least our guns still work.*

As far as the Magister could figure out, anything with electronics in it was dead.

"Hey."

Keeping up her pace, Sarah spared a glance to her side. The Magister matching her strides couldn't have been more than eighteen, and it took a second before Sarah could place her.

*Carol Ryan, her family is from Boston. Her mother just died a few months ago in that nasty zombie episode they had down there. I haven't seen her since she was just a kid. God, I feel old.*

"What is it?"

The younger Magister gestured towards their destination.

"I was just kinda wondering what are we going to do when we get there?"

Ignoring the light laughter from the nearby Magdalena, Sarah glanced at the kid again. Being a Magister made you grow up fast, or you didn't last long.

*That's a real good question. Wish I had an answer for you, kid.*

Sarah couldn't very well say that out loud though.

"We'll find out when we get there."

"Just in case you didn't know, the translation of that means: I don't know."

Sarah sighed, knowing very well who was attached to that cultured, British voice. She risked a glance to her right, then grimly kept on running, doing her best to ignore Mary Van Helsing. Just because she was the daughter of a famous Hunter shouldn't mean she was better than them.

"Then shouldn't we stop and make some sort of plan?"

On any other day, Carol's suggestion would have been a valid one. The gnawing worry that had been with Sarah since this had all started argued against it, though.

"No."

She didn't have to see it to know that Mary, the Magdalena, and Carol all shared an incredulous look towards her. It wasn't much of a surprise that Mary van Helsing was the one that broke the small silence after that.

"I think we should know what we are going to do when we get..."

Sarah's voice cut across the cultured British accent like a whiplash.

"Do you know what I think? I think you're in my city, and you are going to follow my lead."



Otherwise, I'm going to drop kick your asses back to wherever the hell you call home. Got it?"

Labored breathing was her only answer.

"Good. Now, save your breath for running."

Sarah picked up the pace. She wasn't going to stop until she'd reached that light... whatever it was. She didn't know why, but she was certain that would be where she would find Gwyn.

*I'm coming, babe, and I'm bringing the cavalry.*

It felt like they had been running all day. Looking at the watch that her mother had given her...thank God it was a mechanical one... told her it had only been an hour since they'd set out.

At first, Sarah had been concerned that the Military would try to get involved. Then, she'd realized, since the lighted pillar continued to keep anything that depended on any sort of electricity from working, the Magisters wouldn't have to worry about any interference for a while.

*They'll have to hike in like we're doing or use horses. But, by the time they get their act together, we'll either have won or be dead. So it won't matter, anyway.*

Once she'd realized that, she stopped worrying about how to keep any outsiders from getting killed and she could focus on what to do when they actually got there.

Regrettably, the Protector of the City wasn't any closer to coming up with a plan by the time the column of Magisters and family members arrived at the outside edge of the pillar of energy. It had formed in the middle of the woods. Sarah didn't see any immediate reason why it had happened here. Breathing hard, she slowed to a walk, her hands close to her weapons. Her breath formed small clouds in the air in front of her.

She reached for her cell phone to call her uncle before she remembered the cell phone was only useful as a paperweight now.

*Okay, now what, genius?*

All around her, the other Magisters were spreading out, forming a loose ring across the road and into the forest on both sides. The snow crunched under their feet and the air was freezing.

*At least here, the wind isn't trying to tear us apart.*

If anything, the air was unnaturally still.

*No sign of Gwyn.*

She refused to think about what that could mean.

*She isn't dead. She can't be.*

Now that they were close to it, Sarah could feel the Light pulling at her. As if it were trying to draw her into its malevolent grasp. It sucked against her personal wards and shields that she had hastily rebuilt on the run here, and was slowly draining them. The entire area was bathed in an unwholesome, reddish light. The strangest thing about the place was the music. It sounded like an entire orchestra was playing inside of the Light. The music was muted like it was coming from far away, but they still could hear it.

"Great, we're here. Now what?"

Shooting a sideways glare at Mary van Helsing, she missed the first flicker of shadow that darted between the tree trunks. Thankfully, the Magdalena didn't.

"Demon!"

Her shout was the equivalent of yelling "Incoming!" to a group of battle-hardened soldiers. Rapidly, Magisters found defensible positions while weapons were unsheathed. Denied the element of surprise, the demons rushed at them. Then suddenly, the area was also filled by lesser demons that only appeared as dark shadows during the day. Those could be taken care of easily enough; it was the others that were really dangerous. The ones who were strong enough to take on a physical form even during the daylight. Those were full demons and they could use magic and physical weapons.

"Hold them! We can't let them get into the city!"

Of course, they all knew that, but Sarah had to make sure the peril was understood. If the demons did indeed manage to make it to the powerless city, the imminent slaughter would be indescribable.

The dark-haired Magister's blade whistled as it slid through the air, slicing an impossibly tall and lean man-shaped demon in half. Dancing away from a burst of demon fire that engulfed the tree she'd been next to, Sarah drew a pistol from her side, aimed, and shot in one clean move. The demon that had cast the fire, a young woman whose mouth held long, bony, bright white teeth, crumpled as the enspelled bullet punched through her face.

Up and down the length of their line, the Magisters fought. They fought as individuals as most were accustomed to doing. At most, two or three would fight back to back, but the majority simply fought as best they could by themselves. If the demons had fought as a group, the Magisters would have been in serious trouble, but since they didn't, the Magisters managed to cut down most of the demons they faced.

But, for every one they killed, two more emerged from the Light. Slipping through into the mortal realm with malicious glee.

*We can't keep this up forever.*

As if to punctuate her thought, somewhere to her left, a woman's scream ended in a gurgle. Ducking a thrown dagger as she plunged her sword into the guts of a beetle-like creature, Sarah desperately tried to think of something, anything, which they could do to stop the impending carnage.

Drowned out by the sounds of battle, the resonance of the music began to fade.

-----

*It has to be here.*

It seemed as if she had been afloat in this light forever. There was no way to measure time here; she couldn't even tell how far she had traveled from the two teenagers. Gwyn was pretty sure that distance didn't mean the same thing here as it did on the mortal plane of existence. For all she knew, she could have traveled miles, or barely moved at all from where her body lay.

*There must be a way to stop this. Michael said this was supposed to happen, or at least, that's what I think he meant.*

She forged sluggishly through the Light, mentally gritting her teeth as it continued to try to drain her.

*What if I'm wrong? What if I left the girls behind to die a slow, horrible, tortured death?*

It almost got her that time. The urge to turn around and go back to find out if Vicki and Jessica were safe was extremely intense.

*NO! I have to stop this or no one will be safe.*

She simply had to believe there was a way to sealing the Door again. She struggled onward, forcing her mind to search into the Light for the Key. But even with Jessica's singing and Vicki waking up as many of the werewolves as she could, Gwyn still felt the doorway gaining power.

*It's probably taking in energy from outside. Maybe it even managed to get a few demons out to start gathering life forces, too.*

That wasn't a mental image she wanted, and instead, she focused on trying to find her way. Unfortunately, there were no landmarks, visual clues, or physical sensations of any kind to go by. Gwyn wasn't even certain she was really moving.

There was no transition.

Between one moment and the next, she found herself back in her body. The pale-haired woman

gasped in shock, then blinked as she realized she could feel the air and hear her gasp. Then she realized what she was seeing.

She stood in a gothic-styled throne room. The walls were hung with tapestries depicting battles with loving detail. The amount of blood and gore shown on the one closest to her made the Angel queasy. In front of her, half hidden in the shadows that seemed to be draped over everything was a Throne. The throne she'd seen this morning inside of the park. But instead of being done of bone, the chair here was finished with bones covered with rotting flesh.

Hastily, she started backing away, bile burning a path up her throat.

"God, please..."

A hand wrapped around her mouth from behind just as she realized someone had stepped up behind her. Lucifer's breath was hot on her cheek as he pulled her tight against him.

"God has nothing to do with this place. I told you I would be seeing you again soon. I'm going to make you my Queen."

-----

As was common in many Legacy households, Sarah had traveled some during her teenage years. Visiting other Legacy Houses across North America and learning from the Magisters she met there. In Boston, she remembered staying with a kind gentle man, his wife the Magister, and playing with their young girl.

She hadn't seen Carol after she'd left, not until today. Sarah doubted that the younger woman even realized that it was Sarah that she'd known when she was a child.

Sarah dodged between two trees, hacking her way through the demons in front of her as she went towards the terrified scream. The blade of her sword carved blue arcs through the air as she swung it, slicing through the two crablike creatures that had taken down Carol. The young Magister from Boston was splayed out over the snow.

*No one should have to die like that.*

The demons managed to drive the young woman apart from her fellow Magisters and then, had simply overwhelmed her with sheer numbers. By the time Sarah reacted to the piercing cry and had fought her way towards them, the demons had eviscerated Carol, spreading her organs across the snow as if they were on display.

Sarah's blade came loose from where she had buried it in the side of the first demon with a soft wet whoosh. Using her momentum, she launched herself upward, flipping up onto the back of the second demon. Even as it started to raise its claws to grab her, she flipped her sword, aimed the point downwards and drove it into the soft spot just behind the head of the creature.

Green ichors splattered her as she leapt aside; avoiding the death roll those particular demons were known for. Panting, and ignoring the pain in her side from a gash the last demon had made, Sarah headed back towards the battle.

Mary van Helsing finished off a smaller demon of her own with a flourish and angled towards the taller, dark-haired Magister.

"We have to pull back."

Sarah barely glanced at the British woman as she continued to stalk back towards the front lines.

"No."

"Damn it, Mordicia! We're getting ripped apart out here! We can't hold them."

Another Magister hurtled past them, running after a fleeing fiend, shotgun at the ready. Sarah watched her pass, the woman's long blonde hair billowing out behind her as she sprinted after the dark shadow that fled before her.

"We can hold."

"This Gywn of yours, you think she's in there, don't you?"

Sarah didn't answer.

Mary grabbed her arm and spun the taller woman around.

"Stop thinking with your libido! Your girlfriend is dead. We can't hold this position, we have to fall back to the city!"

It was only because Sarah had already sheathed her sword that Mary continued to breath after she said those words. With a low growl, the tall Magister roughly grabbed both of the other woman's shoulders and shoved her back against a tree trunk.

"Listen to me, you little shit. First, we leave when I say so, got it?"

When Mary didn't answer, Sarah slammed her against the tree trunk again.

"Got it?"

Mary sneered at her.

"Yeah, I got it."

"Second, she isn't dead. Third, if we fall back to the city, there is no way in Hell that we can keep the civilians safe. At least we have the demons contained here. We are going to do our job and

keep these demons away from any innocents. Or have you forgotten the oath you took when you became a Magister?"

The sheer fury in Sarah's voice caused Mary to shrink away from the overpowering woman. Grudgingly, she nodded to the taller woman's question, sighing in relief when Sarah let her go.

"You're right, though."

Those suddenly quiet words caused Mary to blink in confusion.

"Right about what?"

"We can't hold them if we keep doing things like this."

Sarah waved a hand at the Magisters in front of her.

"We're fighting like individuals. We can't be and still hope to defeat all these demons."

Rubbing her shoulder, Mary nodded at the insight. Pulling out her sword, Sarah moved forward again.

There seemed to be a small lull in the fighting. The demons that had emerged from the Pillar of Light had either fled back into it or had been destroyed. From all directions, Magisters were being helped further back into the woods where the support family members had set up a triage station.

Earlier in the fighting, a few Magisters had attempted to storm the Light. They'd slammed into a solid wall of force and had been flung backwards to land in the snow a dozen feet away.

Leaving four Magisters to keep an eye on the Pillar, Sarah rounded up everyone else into a tight circle. She quickly assessed the situation. Most of the fighters were wounded and because of the rate they were using it, having enough ammo for the guns was starting to be a problem.

"Listen up, we can't keep doing things like we have been. We need to work as a team because they are simply going to keep coming and tear us apart."

The gathered women shifted, glanced at one another, and wearily waited to hear what Sarah was going to say next.

Making certain that she had their attention, she leaned forward and started to draw a diagram in the snow.

"Okay, here is what we are going to do..."

-----

It was difficult to wake someone up when you didn't have a physical body. No arm to shake somebody, not vocal chords to shout. Finally Vicki just took to grabbing a hold of their thoughts and yanking.

Hard.

That usually got their attention, and if their mental yells were any indication, it also gave them a wonderful headache. Vicki didn't really mind.

She didn't know how long it had taken, but the teen had managed to wake up almost two-dozen werewolves. She'd led them back to where Jessica was still making music for all she was worth. It was easier to ignore the Light near her talented girlfriend. It didn't press up against their minds as much.

*Vicki, any sign of Gwyn?*

Jessica's thoughts were tired as Vicki could feel the fatigue coming from her girlfriend.

*No, babe. No sign of her.*

*I don't know how much longer I can keep this up, Vicki. I think the Light keeps trying to steal the songs from me.*

The teen had no illusions about what would happen to them if Jessica's music failed them. The Light would take all of them again, and something even more horrible would happen.

Reaching over to the nearest of the werewolves, she mentally backhanded the older male.

*Give her your strength!*

The male snarled at her, trying to thrust back at her. They were all drained though, and for once, Vicki was the strongest among them. She shoved harder, nearly sending the male spiraling back into the Light. Losing face, he desperately scrambled to stay in place.

*Don't make me force you. All of you!*

Vicki snarled, forcing her strength of mind upon the werewolf pack. She'd never been Alpha before, and it was a thrilling experience to feel them bow to her. First one, then all of them, moved closer to Jessica. Vicki joined them, willing her power into her girlfriend.

A soaring symphony erupted around them, spiraling through the Light.

-----

"Go screw yourself."

Gwyn had always loved that human saying and she spat it out the second that Lucifer loosened his hold on her mouth. With a snarl, the Dark Angel flung her to the ground, sending the pale haired woman sprawling across the stone floor.

"Don't make me torture you, Gwyn."

She looked up at him from where she lay, trembling, but still defiant.

"I will never be yours."

He kicked her in the side, with enough strength to send her flying across the stone floor and crashing into the nearby wall. Her vision was filled with pain and she could taste blood in her mouth as she curled into a ball.

*Sarah. I love you.*

Then he came over to her. With a startled whimper of pain, his hands grabbed her and wrenched her upright without care.

"Is it that human? She's going to die you know. My demons are going to feast on her blood. I admit your little friends are keeping the portal from opening as fast as I had hoped, but they can't stop it. It is inevitable."

This time, the Morningstar wasn't lying to her. It did seem inevitable. Nothing that Jessica, Vicki or even Sarah, could do would completely stop the portal between Hell and Earth from opening. She realized that now.

Lucifer's mouth covered hers; his tongue forced its way past her lips, making her gag again.

"You are going to be mine. One way or another."

-----

Sarah could have sworn she heard a symphony playing nearby as they waited for the next wave of demons to come out of the Pillar of Light.

*Put up or shut up time. I hope my plan works and no one gets killed because of it. And I really, really, want Gwyn to be all right.*

That had become a mantra of sorts for the dark-haired Magister as she waited with the others. On her left side, she could feel the resentment radiating from Mary van Helsing. The British Magister had done her best to take the lead role in the upcoming attack.

Sarah smiled slowly. It had felt surprisingly good to simply overrule the other Magister.

"Here they come!"



The call went up from one of the four Magisters on lookout. Sarah leaned forward, her grip tightening on the sword she carried. The runes blazed to life along the length of the silver blade as the demons swept out of the Pillar.

They were doing the same thing they had before, trying to run the Magisters into the ground with sheer force of numbers. Not much in the way of tactics, but it would probably work, if not in this wave, then with the next group following them.

Just as Sarah had hoped they would come.

There were more of them this time. Almost double the number that the Magisters had faced in the first encounter. From where she was crouched, she watched the four lookouts race back towards their hiding spots.

The first of the demons began moving into the woods. To her right, she watched as one of them brushed up against one of the protection wards that had been erected. The magical wall burst into golden flames as the demon hit it, incinerating it before it had time to do more than scream in anguish.

Sarah couldn't see it from where she was hidden, but she knew that another ward wall had been erected on the other side of the forest. It forced the demons inwards, funneling them towards one particular patch of woods.

*Come on, just a little farther. Just a little further...*

The first of the demons slithered past her, a snake-like creature she hadn't seen before. The forest in front of her seemed to be teeming with demons, and even though she knew that was because they were being concentrated here, it didn't make it any easier. The entire place held an aura of dread and fear. Her self-preservation instinct was screaming for her to start running and never look back.

Long years as a Magister let her ignore that voice.

*Just a little further...*

"NOW!"

Throughout the forest Magisters and their family members opened fire with shotguns, rifles, pistols, crossbows and bows. Arrows and bullets filled the air with sudden death. The forest trembled as the demons screamed in agony and rage at the sudden attack. Demon blood fell, steaming on the no longer pristine white snow-covered ground. Spell-fire lanced through the trees adding to the confusion.

Then, the Magisters surged forward, sprinting into the woods, screaming like banshees as they charged the remaining demons survivors. Even demons are not immune to shock, and many were

still trying to understand what had happened when the final onslaught reached them.

Which wasn't saying that they went down easily. The demons were now fighting for their lives.

Sarah nearly got her head taken off by a vicious swipe from another of those crab-like creatures. Eventually, the demons managed to go on the offensive, fighting back physically or with magic. Fortunately, they were too few of them left, but even so, a few more Magisters were wounded or killed.

Skidding on the snow and ice covered ground, Sarah slid under the crab demon, stabbing upwards with her sword as she went. Its entrails tumbled out of the wound, convulsing into death.

Sarah rolled to her feet. Just a little ways ahead of her, Mary was busy trying to keep two wraiths-like creatures at bay. They had managed to back the British Magister up against a tree trunk. Bullets were useless against the incorporeal demons and only a magical sword could hurt them. As Sarah was getting to her feet, one of the wraiths feint forwards, causing Mary to slash at the hovering ghost-like creature with her blade. The creature hissed and pulled back.

The swing left Mary's side open though, and the second wraith swooped in. Its fingers sprouted long claws from their tips, which it then plunged into her shoulder.

Mary screamed as the wraith began feeding off her life force, sucking her essence out of her. The other one drifted in front of her, its decomposing face alive with excitement as it prepared to join in the feast.

Sarah's blade cleaved the air and the first wraith's arm with equal ease.

The banshee-like howl of pain was quickly cut off as she reversed her stroke and sliced it clean in two. The second one tried to flee, but Mary wasn't completely helpless from the attack. The British Magister struck with her sword, slicing its head apart.

Both wraiths dissolved into mist.

"You okay?"

"Bugger."

"I'm going to take that as a yes. Come on, let's get you out of here."

Slipping Mary's arm over her shoulder she helped the other woman walk. She'd been hit by a wraith once; a long time ago, so she understood how drained the British Magister felt right now.

"Thanks. You're not so bad for a pushy bitch, you know that?" She grimaced as they stumbled through the trees to rejoin the others.

Sarah snorted, stepping over a still bleeding tentacle that lay in the snow.

"You aren't so bad for a snotty, obnoxious know-it-all either."

They were laughing when the last of the demons was cut down into shreds.

-----

Lucifer had pressed up her against the wall, her hands above her head. His constant physical attacks had left Gwyn battered and bleeding. Everything was becoming fuzzy. She just didn't have enough strength to keep fighting him.

*Sarah...*

She clung to the memory of her lover's face. The way she smiled, her smell, her laughter.

"You're mine now, Gwyn."

*Sarah...*

She remembered Michael's question, almost a lifetime ago, back in the forest.

How much of you is human now, Gwyn?

She didn't know the answer to that.

She did know that part of her was bruised and bleeding, terrified beyond belief of the creature that held her prisoner. The pale blonde also knew she would die before submitting to him.

Her thoughts spun about her as she felt Lucifer press his body against hers. There was another choice, but her thoughts shied away from it like a spooked horse. It would mean giving up all that she knew. Giving up a part of her very being.

*There is a Key! I just didn't understand what it was.*

As she felt his fingers tug on her clothing, she realized she had no more time.

*Better to die then surrender to him!*

"Do you really want me?"

Her whispered words drew him to a stop, and for the first time, Gwyn allowed herself to meet his eyes. She forced herself to peer into their soulless depths.

"What?"

She licked her lips.

"Do you really want me?"

He was grinning now, suddenly secure in his victory.

"Yes."

She forced herself to kiss him. He eagerly accepted her; he had no reason not to. He had won. Gwyn ignored the bile that rose in her throat at his touch and focused her attention inward. She gathered herself, pulled together her heavenly strength and focused it. She was ruthless, collecting everything, any part of herself that was angelic in nature. When she got all that she could, she melded it into a ball of pure light.

Before he realized what she was up to, she forced the untainted goodness into the devil.

His eyes widened as he broke off the kiss and flung her away from him.

"You bitch! What have you done?"

Her body hit the wall with a sickening wet sound, and she could feel bones snap. Blood bubbled from her lips as she gave him a ghastly red smile and murmured.

"Gave you a piece of me. Isn't that what you wanted?"

Lucifer's eyes were no longer soulless as they met hers. Trembling in rage, he stalked towards her, clearly intent on rending her in half. She watched him come, knowing she could do nothing to stop him now. His hands reached towards her broken and twisted body.

They stopped, bare inches away from her flesh.

"What have you done to me?"

His horrified whisper was the last thing she remembered as her body dragged her downwards into darkness.

-----

It was gone as suddenly as it had appeared.

The column of Light disappeared without any warning, leaving behind a world that had abruptly changed forever from what it had been.

But none of that mattered to the battered and weary Magisters who made their way towards where the Pillar of Light had stood. Sarah ignored the werewolves that were sprawled on the ground throughout the area. A few of the wolves started to stir, whining as they unsteadily got to

their feet and there were many who would never get up again.

She disregarded all of them, heading for the three women on the side of the road. Two of them were moving. Next to them lay a broken spear.

Sarah's sword fell from fingers suddenly gone numb.

"No. Please, No."

Tear-streaked faces looked up at her from where the two teenagers crouched by the third.

The dark-haired Magister sank to her knees, fingers gently brushing pale blonde hair back from the body's face, the skin cold to the touch.

"Gwyn. Don't you dare leave me alone."

The woman didn't move. Sarah was dimly aware of the Magisters forming a circle around them. Tears blurred her vision as she picked up the slim body of her lover and held her close.

"No! Damn it! It isn't right!"

"You are right, it is not."

The male voice was that of a stranger. A dozen guns and at least that many swords were pointed at him as the man made his way through the circle of Magisters. Despite themselves, they parted to let him through. He was dressed in simple clothing, with a brown leather overcoat and brown fedora. There was something about him, though; he almost seemed to glow from within.

Sarah was the first to recognize him for what he was.

"What's your name?"

She hardly recognized her own voice. It was too steady and composed.

"I'm known as Michael."

This time her voice did crack as she spoke.

"She can't be dead."

He was quiet as he knelt down next to Sarah, dark eyes intent as they studied the body she held.

"She made her choice."

"What does that mean?"

Her voice was deadly cold and he could feel her wrath building.

Michael smiled though, ignoring the dark anger in her eyes as he reached over to gently touch Gwyn's brow.

"It means that she chose you over everything else. She chose to become human to remain with you and save this world."

Slowly color leached back into Gwyn's face and Sarah could feel the blonde draw in a shaky breath. Before she had a chance to react, Michael reached over and took her hand in his.

"You have to take care of her. This one is going to change a lot of people's lives.

"What?"

Michael simply smiled and was gone, vanishing into thin air.

In a shadowy place that knew only pain and hatred, a darkly handsome man was curled up, weeping. He wept because of the pain he had caused, wept for the wars he had encouraged and the horrible acts he had tricked humanity into throughout history. Most of all, he cried because he had been reminded, for one brief instant, what it felt like to be loved.

Despite himself, he remembered how it was before. Before he had risen up in his arrogance and challenged God. Before he had been tossed down from the Heavens with his followers and forced to endure an eternity without God's love.

He remembered all of it. Hated it... and craved it.

## Epilogue

### The Future

The tall, dark-haired woman leaned against the balcony, watching the scene below her with a feeling of contentment she'd never thought she'd have. It was a beautiful, cloudless summer day. The gardens behind Trillium Manor were filled with flowers of every color. The gardens had never been so well tended, in either Sarah's or her uncle's memory.

The Manor was different these days as well.

*I like the changes, even if I did grumble a lot about it at first.*

Vicki and Jessica had ended up moving into the Manor, Sarah still wasn't exactly certain how Gwyn had pulled that off. One day, about a week after the incident with the Spear of Destiny, Sarah had gotten back from patrol to find the two had been moved into one of the wings of the mansion.

She'd yelled about it for two days before simply giving up.

It felt right for them to be here, though. The Manor felt full of life again, with the five of them in it.

They were even getting regular visitors these days.

Smiling, Sarah watched as her uncle presided over the BBQ. He was doing his best to keep Vicki away from the steaks until they were done, but judging on the girl's propensity for eating them still raw, Sarah didn't have much hope that he'd succeed.

"Hey you, I was wondering where you'd gone off to."

Sarah's smile widened as she turned around. Gwyn stepped out of the Manor and came up to join Sarah on the balcony and lightly kissed her.

"I was enjoying the view."

Gwyn smiled at her lover's words and happily leaned into the warm hug.

As she had ever since she'd come so close to losing her again, Sarah thanked God. Gwyn had been changed by whatever she had gone through inside the Pillar of Light. The memories of all those who had been inside of it were hazy and uncertain at best, taking on a dream-like quality. Sarah gently ran her fingers through hair that was no longer pale white, but dark amber. Gwyn's skin had changed as well, she was no longer so ghostly white, but had developed a healthy tan during the past few months.

"I like your new hair."

With a grin, the shorter woman pulled her down for another kiss.

"You say that all the time."

Sarah shrugged.

"Well, it's true, I like it."

"Then I guess I'm happy it didn't turn some interesting color like green."

"Grandmother sends her regards."

That caught Gwyn's attention and the former Angel looked up at Sarah curiously. Only days after the incident, the head of the Legacy Houses had announced her intention to retire. She had also announced that the Trillium Manor and her Magister, would become the Head Legacy House.

After the fight in the woods, not even Mary van Helsing grumbled too much about that.

"What did she say?"

Sarah shifted them so that they were both looking out over the balcony and wrapped her arms around Gwyn from behind.

"She says she'll be happy when everything is set and she can go on a cruise to the Bahamas."

Gwyn laughed, the sound as musical as it had ever been.

"We're going to have a lot of visitors, I guess. Good thing we have all those empty guest rooms."

Sarah sighed at the teasing, a gentle reminder of the fight she'd put up when the girls moved in. Below them, Jessica began playing her violin, the soft mellow sounds the bard produced a perfect counterpoint for the lazy late afternoon. In the forest, behind the gardens, wolves ghosted through the woods.

They wouldn't go far without their Alpha, a position Vicki had somehow kept after the incident.

Gwyn's hair was not the only thing that had changed. The city was different these days.

Sarah chuckled, earning her another curious glance from the woman she held close.

"What is it?"

The Head Magister smiled and shook her head.

"Just thinking about how the government's been trying to explain the Incident."

The authorities had done their level best to clarify what happened. They'd brought out all sorts of scientists and specialists to explain it as a meteorite hitting the earth or some sort of electrical storm. It had all sounded very technical and exceedingly convoluted.

No one who had actually seen the Pillar of Light believed a word of it.

It had changed people. The city now boasted the highest concentration of people capable of Seeing the Truth of what was going on with other parts of the world. People were starting to really notice and accept what was around them.

Sarah didn't know what that would mean for the future, but for better or worse, the column of Light had awakened an awareness in the population for the non-human element of the city. They no longer took it for granted that a wolf was simply a wolf.

"I'm glad that Vicki is going to be helping you."



Gwyn's words called Sarah back from her amused thoughts.

The moment she had realized she was still Alpha, Vicki had promptly offered herself and her pack to help the Magister patrol the city and the countryside.

Normally, Sarah would have laughed at an offer like that.

She worked alone, and she wasn't going to depend on a pack of werewolves for help.

"They aren't a bad bunch."

Which, for now, was the highest praise that Sarah was willing to give them.

But normal was no longer a word that really applied, though.

There were other considerations now.

"We better go down there."

The tall woman nodded in agreement. Her hands slid downwards along her lover's belly, taking in the slight swelling that was only now beginning to become apparent.

Normal really wasn't a word that had ever applied to her life, anyway.

Together they went downstairs to join the others.

The End.

As always any feedback, negative and positive, are welcome at: [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com).

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