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Queen of Air and Darkness

CASSANDRA CLARE

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Lady Midnight

CASSANDRA CLARE

THE DARK ARTIFICES

BOOK ONE

A SHADOWHUNTERS NOVEL

From the #1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author

Lady Midnight

CASSANDRA CLARE

THE DARK ARTIFICES

BOOK ONE

Margaret K. McElderry Books

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For Holly
Elven, he was

PROLOGUE

Los Angeles, 2012

Shadow Market nights were Kit's favorite.

They were the nights he was allowed to leave the house and help his father at the booth. He'd been coming to the Shadow Market since he was seven years old. Eight years later he still felt the same sense of shock and wonder when he walked down Kendall Alley through Old Town Pasadena toward a blank brick wall—and stepped through it into an explosive world of color and light.

Only a few blocks away were Apple Stores selling gadgets and laptops, Cheesecake Factories and organic food markets, American Apparel shops and trendy boutiques. But here the alley opened out into a massive square, warded on each side to prevent the careless from wandering into the Shadow Market.

The Los Angeles Shadow Market came out when the night was warm, and it both existed and didn't exist. Kit knew that when he stepped in among the lines of brightly decorated stalls, he was walking in a space that would vanish when the sun rose in the morning.

But for the time he was there, he enjoyed it. It was one thing to have the Gift when no one else around you had it. The Gift was what his father called it, although Kit didn't think it was much of one. Hyacinth, the lavender-haired fortune-teller in the booth at the market's edge, called it the Sight.

That name made more sense to Kit. After all, the only thing that separated him from ordinary kids was that he could *see* things they

couldn't. Harmless things sometimes, pixies rising from dry grass along the cracked sidewalks, the pale faces of vampires in gas stations late at night, a man clicking his fingers against a diner counter; when Kit looked again, he saw the fingers were werewolf claws. It had been happening to him since he was a little kid, and his dad had it too. The Sight ran in families.

Resisting the urge to react was the hardest. Walking home from school one afternoon he'd seen a pack of werewolves tearing each other apart in a deserted playground. He'd stood on the pavement and screamed until the police came, but there was nothing for them to see. After that his father kept him at home, mostly, letting him teach himself out of old books. He played video games in the basement and went out rarely, during the day, or when the Shadow Market was on.

At the Market he didn't have to worry about reacting to anything. The Market was colorful and bizarre even to its inhabitants. There were ifrits holding performing djinn on leashes, and beautiful peri girls dancing in front of booths that sold glittering, dangerous powders. A banshee manned a stall that promised to tell you when you'd die, though Kit couldn't imagine why anyone would want to know that. A cluricaun offered to find lost things, and a young witch with short, bright-green hair sold enchanted bracelets and pendants to catch romantic attention. When Kit looked over at her, she smiled.

"Hey, Romeo." Kit's father elbowed him in the ribs. "I didn't bring you here to flirt. Help put the sign up."

He kicked their bent metal footstool over to Kit and handed him a slab of wood onto which he had burned his stall's name: JOHNNY ROOK'S.

Not the most creative title, but Kit's father had never been overburdened with imagination. Which was strange, Kit thought as he clambered up to hang the sign, for someone whose clientele list included warlocks, werewolves, vampires, sprites, wights, ghouls, and once, a mermaid. (They'd met in secret at SeaWorld.)

Still, maybe a simple sign was the best. Kit's dad sold some potions and powders—even, under the table, some questionably legal weaponry—but none of that was what brought people to his booth. The fact was that Johnny Rook was a guy who knew things. There was nothing that happened in L.A.'s Downworld that he wasn't aware of, no one so powerful that he didn't know a secret about them or a way to get in touch with them. He was a guy who had information, and if you had the money, he'd tell it to you.

Kit jumped down off the footstool and his dad handed him two fifty-dollar bills. "Get change off someone," he said, not looking at Kit. He'd pulled his red ledger out from under the counter and was looking through it, probably trying to figure out who owed him money. "That's the smallest I've got."

Kit nodded and ducked out of the booth, glad to get away. Any errand was an excuse to wander. He passed a stand laden with white flowers that gave off a dark, sweet, poisonous aroma, and another where a group of people in expensive suits were passing out pamphlets in front of a sign that said PART SUPERNATURAL? YOU'RE NOT ALONE. THE FOLLOWERS OF THE GUARDIAN WANT YOU TO SIGN UP FOR THE LOTTERY OF FAVOR! LET LUCK INTO YOUR LIFE!

A red-lipped, dark-haired woman tried to thrust a pamphlet into his hands. When Kit didn't take it, she cast a sultry glance past him, toward Johnny, who grinned. Kit rolled his eyes—there were a million little cults that sprang up around worshipping some minor demon or angel. Nothing ever seemed to come of them.

Tracking down one of his favorite stands, Kit bought a cup of red-dyed shaved ice that tasted like passion fruit and raspberries and cream all mashed up together. He tried to be careful who he bought from—there were candies and drinks at the Market that could wreck your whole life—but no one was going to take any risks with Johnny Rook's son. Johnny Rook

knew something about everyone. Cross him and you were liable to find your secrets weren't secret anymore.

Kit circled back around to the witch with the charmed jewelry. She didn't have a stall; she was, as usual, sitting on a printed sarong, the kind of cheap, bright cloth you could buy on Venice Beach. She looked up as he drew closer.

"Hey, Wren," he said. He doubted it was her real name, but it was what everyone at the Market called her.

"Hey, pretty boy." She moved aside to make room for him, her bracelets and anklets jingling. "What brings you to my humble abode?"

He slid down beside her on the ground. His jeans were worn, holes in the knees. He wished he could keep the cash his father had given him to buy himself a few new clothes. "Dad needed me to break two fifties."

"Shh." She waved a hand at him. "There are people here who'd cut your throat for two fifties and sell your blood as dragon fire."

"Not me," Kit said confidently. "No one here would touch me." He leaned back. "Unless I wanted them to."

"And here I thought I was all out of shameless flirting charms."

"I *am* your shameless flirting charm." He smiled at two people walking by: a tall, good-looking boy with a streak of white in his dark hair and a brunette girl whose eyes were shaded by sunglasses. They ignored him. But Wren perked up at the sight of the two Market-goers behind them: a burly man and a woman with brown hair hanging in a rope down her back.

"Protection charms?" Wren said winningly. "Guaranteed to keep you safe. I've got gold and brass too, not just silver."

The woman bought a ring with a moonstone in it and moved on, chattering to her partner. "How'd you know they were werewolves?" Kit asked.

"The look in her eye," said Wren. "Werewolves are impulse buyers. And their glances skip right over anything silver." She sighed. "I'm doing a

bang-up business in protection charms since those murders started up.”

“What murders?”

Wren made a face. “Some kind of crazy magic thing. Dead bodies turning up all covered in demon languages. Burned, drowned, hands chopped off—all sorts of rumors. How have you *not* heard about it? Don’t you pay attention to gossip?”

“No,” Kit said. “Not really.” He was watching the werewolf couple as they made their way toward the north end of the Market, where the lycanthropes tended to gather to buy whatever it was they needed—tableware made out of wood and iron, wolfsbane, tear-away pants (he hoped).

Even though the Market was meant to be a place where Downworlders mingled, they tended to group together by type. There was the area where vampires gathered to buy flavored blood or seek out new subjugates from among those who’d lost their masters. There were the vine-and-flower pavilions where faeries drifted, trading charms and whispering fortunes. They kept back from the rest of the Market, forbidden to do business like the others. Warlocks, rare and feared, occupied stalls at the very end of the Market. Every warlock bore a mark proclaiming their demonic heritage: some had tails, some wings or curling horns. Kit had once glimpsed a warlock woman who had been entirely blue-skinned, like a fish.

Then there were those with the Sight, like Kit and his father, ordinary folk gifted with the ability to see the Shadow World, to pierce through glamours. Wren was one of them: a self-taught witch who’d paid a warlock for a course of training in basic spells, but she kept a low profile. Humans weren’t supposed to practice magic, but there was a thriving underground trade in teaching it. You could make good money, provided you weren’t caught by the—

“Shadowhunters,” Wren said.

“How did you know I was thinking about them?”

“Because they’re right over there. Two of them.” She jerked her chin to the right, her eyes bright with alarm.

In fact the whole Market was tensing up, people moving to casually slide their bottles and boxes of poisons and potions and death’s-head charms out of sight. Leashed djinn crept behind their masters. The peris had stopped dancing and were watching the Shadowhunters, their pretty faces gone cold and hard.

There were two of them, a boy and a girl, probably seventeen or eighteen. The boy was red-haired, tall, and athletic-looking; Kit couldn’t see the girl’s face, just masses of blond hair, cascading to her waist. She wore a golden sword strapped across her back and walked with the kind of confidence you couldn’t fake.

They both wore gear, the tough black protective clothing that marked them out as Nephilim: part-human, part-angel, the uncontested rulers over every supernatural creature on earth. They had Institutes—like massive police stations—in nearly every big city on the planet, from Rio to Baghdad to Lahore to Los Angeles. Most Shadowhunters were born what they were, but they could make humans into Shadowhunters too if they felt like it. They’d been desperate to fill out their ranks since they’d lost so many lives in the Dark War. The word was they’d kidnap anyone under nineteen who showed any sign of being decent potential Shadowhunter material.

Anyone, in other words, who had the Sight.

“They’re heading to your dad’s booth,” Wren whispered. She was right. Kit tensed as he saw them turn down the row of stalls and head unerringly toward the sign that read JOHNNY ROOK’S.

“Get up.” Wren was on her feet, shooing Kit into a standing position. She leaned down to fold up her merch inside the cloth they’d been sitting on. Kit noticed an odd drawing on the back of her hand, a symbol like lines of water running underneath a flame. Maybe she’d been doodling on herself. “I’ve got to go.”

“Because of the Shadowhunters?” he said in surprise, standing back to allow her to pack up.

“Shh.” She hurried away, her colorful hair bouncing.

“Weird,” Kit muttered, and headed back toward his dad’s booth. He approached from the side, head down, hands in his pockets. He was pretty sure his dad would yell at him if he presented himself in front of the Shadowhunters—especially considering the rumors that they were press-ganging every mundane with the Sight under nineteen—but he couldn’t help but want to eavesdrop.

The blond girl was leaning forward, elbows on the wooden counter. “Good to see you, Rook,” she said with a winning smile.

She was pretty, Kit thought. Older than he was, and the boy she was with towered over him. And she was a Shadowhunter. So she was undateably pretty, but pretty nonetheless. Her arms were bare, and a long, pale scar ran from one elbow to her wrist. Black tattoos in the shapes of strange symbols twined up and down them, patterning her skin. One peeked from the V of her shirt. They were runes, the sorcerous Marks that gave the Shadowhunters their power. Only Shadowhunters could wear them. If you drew them on a normal person’s skin, or a Downworlder’s, they would go insane.

“And who’s this?” Johnny Rook asked, jerking his chin toward the Shadowhunter boy. “The famous *parabatai*?”

Kit looked at the pair with renewed interest. Everyone who knew about Nephilim knew what *parabatai* were. Two Shadowhunters who swore to be platonically loyal to each other forever, always to fight by each other’s sides. To live and die for each other. Jace Herondale and Clary Fairchild, the most famous Shadowhunters in the world, each had a *parabatai*. Even Kit knew that much.

“No,” the girl drawled, picking up a jar of greenish liquid from a stack by the cash register. It was meant to be a love potion, though Kit knew that

several of the jars held water that had been dyed with food coloring. “This isn’t really Julian’s kind of place.” Her gaze flicked around the Market.

“I’m Cameron Ashdown.” The redheaded Shadowhunter stuck out a hand and Johnny, looking bemused, shook it. Kit took the opportunity to edge behind the counter. “I’m Emma’s *boyfriend*.”

The blond girl—Emma—wincing, barely perceptibly. Cameron Ashdown might be her boyfriend now, Kit thought, but he wouldn’t lay bets on him staying that way.

“Huh,” said Johnny, taking the jar out of Emma’s hand. “So I assume you’re here to pick up what you left.” He fished what looked like a scrap of red cloth out of his pocket. Kit stared. What could possibly be interesting about a square of cotton?

Emma straightened up. She looked eager now. “Did you find out anything?”

“If you dropped it in a washing machine with a load of whites, it would definitely turn your socks pink.”

Emma took the cloth back with a frown. “I’m serious. You don’t know how many people I had to bribe to get this. It was in the Spiral Labyrinth. It’s a piece of the shirt my mom was wearing when she was killed.”

Johnny held up a hand. “I know. I was just—”

“Don’t be sarcastic. *My* job is being sarcastic and quippy. Your job is getting shaken down for information.”

“Or paid,” said Cameron Ashdown. “Being paid for information is also fine.”

“Look, I can’t help you,” said Kit’s father. “There’s no magic here. It’s just some cotton. Shredded up and full of seawater, but—cotton.”

The look of disappointment that passed over the girl’s face was vivid and unmistakable. She made no attempt to hide it, just tucked the cloth into her pocket. Kit couldn’t help feeling a jolt of sympathy, which surprised him—he never thought he’d be sympathetic to a Shadowhunter.

Emma looked over at him, almost as if he'd spoken. "So," she said, and suddenly there was a glint in her eyes. "You've got the Sight, huh, like your dad? How old are you?"

Kit froze. His dad moved in front of him quickly, blocking him from Emma's view. "Now here I thought you were going to ask me about the murders that have been happening. Behind on your information, Carstairs?"

Apparently Wren had been right, Kit thought—everyone *did* know about these murders. He could tell by the warning note in his father's voice that he should make himself scarce, but he was trapped behind the counter with no escape route.

"I heard some rumors about dead mundanes," Emma said. Most Shadowhunters used the term for normal human beings with intense contempt. Emma just sounded tired. "We don't investigate mundanes killing each other. That's for the police."

"There were dead faeries," said Johnny. "Several of the bodies were fey."

"We *can't* investigate those," said Cameron. "You know that. The Cold Peace forbids it."

Kit heard a faint murmur from nearby booths: a noise that let him know he wasn't the only one eavesdropping.

The Cold Peace was Shadowhunter Law. It had come into being almost five years ago. He barely remembered a time before it. They called it a Law, at least. What it really was, was a punishment.

When Kit was ten years old, a war had rocked the universe of Downworlders and Shadowhunters. A Shadowhunter, Sebastian Morgenstern, had turned against his own kind: He had gone from Institute to Institute, destroying their occupants, controlling their bodies, and forcing them to fight for him as an unspeakable army of mind-controlled slaves. Most of the Shadowhunters in the Los Angeles Institute had been taken or killed.

Kit had had nightmares about it sometimes, of blood running through hallways he'd never seen, hallways painted with the runes of the Nephilim.

Sebastian had been helped by the Fair Folk in his attempt to destroy the Shadowhunters. Kit had learned about faeries in school: cute little creatures that lived in trees and wore flower hats. The Fair Folk were nothing like that. They ranged from mermaids and goblins and shark-toothed kelpies to gentry faeries, those who held high rank in the faerie courts. Gentry faeries were tall and beautiful and terrifying. They were split into two Courts: the Seelie Court, a dangerous place ruled by a Queen no one had seen in years, and the Unseelie Court, a dark place of treachery and black magic whose King was like a monster out of legend.

Since the faeries were Downworlders, and had sworn allegiance and loyalty to the Shadowhunters, their betrayal was an unforgivable crime. The Shadowhunters had punished them viciously in a sweeping gesture that had come to be known as the Cold Peace: forcing them to pay huge sums to rebuild the Shadowhunter buildings that had been destroyed, stripping them of their armies, and instructing other Downworlders never to give them aid. The punishment for helping a faerie was severe.

Faeries were a proud, ancient, magical people, or so it was said. Kit had never known them as anything but broken. Most Downworlders and other denizens of the shadowy space between the mundane world and the Shadowhunter one didn't dislike faeries or hold much of a grudge against them. But none of them were willing to go against the Shadowhunters, either. Vampires, werewolves, and warlocks stayed away from faeries except in places like the Shadow Market, where money was more important than Laws.

“Really?” said Johnny. “What if I told you that the bodies have been found covered in writing?”

Emma's head jerked up. Her eyes were dark brown, almost black, surprising against her pale hair. “What did you say?”

“You heard me.”

“What kind of writing? Is it the same language that was on my parents’ bodies?”

“Don’t know,” said Johnny. “Just what I heard. Still, seems suspicious, doesn’t it?”

“Emma,” said Cameron warningly. “The Clave won’t like it.”

The Clave was the Shadowhunter government. In Kit’s experience, they didn’t like anything.

“I don’t care,” Emma said. She’d clearly forgotten about Kit completely; she was staring at his dad, her eyes burning. “Tell me what there is to know. I’ll give you two hundred.”

“Fine, but I don’t know that much,” said Johnny. “Someone gets grabbed, a few nights later they turn up dead.”

“And the last time someone ‘got grabbed’?” said Cameron.

“Two nights ago,” said Johnny, clearly feeling he was earning his payoff. “Body’ll probably be dumped tomorrow night. All you have to do is show up and catch the dumper.”

“So why don’t you tell us how to do that?” Emma said.

“Word on the street is that the next body dump will be in West Hollywood. The Sepulchre Bar.”

Emma clapped her hands in excitement. Her boyfriend said her name again, warningly, but Kit could have told him he was wasting his time. He’d never seen a teenage girl this excited about anything—not famous actors, not boy bands, not jewelry. This girl was practically vibrating to pieces over the idea of a dead body.

“Why don’t *you* do it, if you’re so worked up about these murders?” Cameron demanded of Johnny. He had nice eyes, Kit thought. They were a ridiculously attractive couple. It was almost annoying. He wondered what the fabled Julian looked like. If he was sworn to be this girl’s platonic best friend for eternity, he probably looked like the back of a bus.

“Because I don’t want to,” said Johnny. “Seems dangerous. But you guys love danger. Don’t you, Emma?”

Emma grinned. It occurred to Kit that Johnny seemed to know Emma pretty well. Clearly she’d come around before asking questions—it was weird that this was the first time he’d seen her, but he didn’t come to every Market. As she dug into her pocket now, took out a roll of bills, and handed it over to his father, he wondered if she’d ever been in his house. Whenever clients came to their home, Kit’s dad made him head down to the basement and stay there, not making a sound.

“The kind of people I deal with aren’t the kind of people you should meet” was all he said.

Once Kit had wandered upstairs by accident while his father was meeting with a group of robed and hooded monsters. At least Kit thought they looked like monsters: their eyes and lips were sewn shut, their heads bald and gleaming. His father had told him they were Gregori, Silent Brothers—Shadowhunters who had been scarred and magically tortured until they became something more than human; they spoke with their minds, and could read other people’s. Kit had never come upstairs again while his father was having a “meeting.”

Kit knew his dad was a criminal. He knew he sold secrets for a living, though not lies: Johnny prided himself on having good information. Kit knew his own life would probably follow the same pattern. It was hard to live normally when you were constantly pretending you didn’t see what was going on in front of your face.

“Well, thanks for the info,” Emma said, starting to turn away from the booth. The gold hilt of her sword gleamed in the light from the Market’s illuminated stalls. Kit wondered what it would be like to be Nephilim. To live among people who saw the same things you did. To not ever be afraid of what lurked in the shadows. “See you around, Johnny.”

She dropped a wink—at Kit. Johnny whirled around to look at him as she disappeared back into the crowd with her boyfriend.

“Did you say something to her?” Johnny demanded. “Why’d she zero in on you like that?”

Kit held his hands up defensively. “I didn’t say anything,” he protested. “I think she noticed me listening.”

Johnny sighed. “Try to get noticed less.”

The Market was starting up again now that the Shadowhunters had left. Kit could hear music and a rising bubble of chattering voices. “How well do you know that Shadowhunter girl?”

“Emma Carstairs? She’s been coming to me for stuff for years. Doesn’t seem to care that she’s breaking Nephilim rules. I like her, as much as you can like any of them.”

“She wanted you to find out who killed her parents.”

Johnny yanked a drawer open. “I don’t know who killed her parents, Kit. Probably faeries. It was during the Dark War.” He looked self-righteous. “So I wanted to help her out. So what? Shadowhunter money spends.”

“And you want the Shadowhunters paying attention to something that isn’t you,” said Kit. It was a guess, but, he suspected, a good one. “Have you got something going on?”

Johnny slammed the drawer shut. “Maybe.”

“For someone who sells secrets, you sure keep a lot of them,” said Kit, jamming his hands into his pockets.

His father put an arm around him, a rare affectionate gesture. “My biggest secret,” he said, “is you.”

1

A SEPULCHRE IN THIS KINGDOM

“It’s just not working out,” Emma said. “This relationship, I mean.”

Disconsolate noises came from the other end of the phone. Emma was barely able to decipher them—the reception wasn’t particularly good on the roof of the Sepulchre Bar. She paced along the edge of the roofline, peering down into the central courtyard. Jacaranda trees were strung with electric lights, and sleek ultramodern tables and chairs were scattered around the garden space. Equally sleek and ultramodern young men and women thronged the place, glasses of wine glimmering in their hands like clear bubbles of red and white and pink. Someone had rented out the place for a private party: A sequined birthday banner hung between two trees, and waiters made their way through the crowd carrying pewter chargers of snacks.

There was something about the glamorous scene that made Emma want to break it up by kicking down some of the roof tiles or doing a front flip into the crowd. The Clave would lock you up for a good long time for that kind of behavior, though. Mundanes weren’t supposed to *ever* glimpse Shadowhunters. Even if Emma *did* jump down into the courtyard, none of the partygoers would see her. She was covered in glamour runes, applied by Cristina, that rendered her invisible to anyone without the Sight.

Emma sighed and put the phone back to her ear. “All right, *our* relationship,” she said. “*Our* relationship isn’t working out.”

“*Emma*,” Cristina hissed loudly behind her. Emma turned, her boots balanced at the edge of the roof. Cristina was sitting on the shingled slope behind her, polishing a throwing knife with a pale blue cloth. The cloth matched the bands that held her dark hair back from her face. Everything about Cristina was neat and put together—she managed to look as professional in her black fighting gear as most people would look in a power suit. Her golden good-luck medallion glimmered at the hollow of her throat and her family ring, twined with a pattern of roses for Rosales, shone on her hand as she placed the knife, wrapped in its cloth, beside her. “Emma, remember. Use your *I* statements.”

Cameron was still wittering away on the other end of the phone, something about getting together to talk, which Emma knew would be pointless. She focused on the scene below her—was that a shadow slipping through the crowd below, or was she imagining it? Maybe it was wishful thinking. Johnny Rook was usually reliable, and he’d seemed *very* sure about tonight, but Emma hated getting all geared up and full of anticipation only to discover there was going to be no fight to work off her energy.

“This is about *me*, not *you*,” she said into the phone. Cristina gave her an encouraging thumbs-up. “*I* am sick of *you*.” She smiled brightly as Cristina dropped her face into her hands. “So maybe we could go back to being friends?”

There was a click as Cameron hung up. Emma tucked the phone into her belt and scanned the crowd again. Nothing. Annoyed, she scrambled up the slope of the roof to flop down beside Cristina. “Well, that could have gone better,” she said.

“Do you think so?” Cristina took her hands away from her face. “What happened?”

“I don’t know.” Emma sighed and reached for her stele, the delicate *adamas* writing instrument Shadowhunters used to ink protection runes onto their skin. It had a carved handle made of demon bone and had been a

gift from Jace Herondale, Emma's first crush. Most Shadowhunters went through steles like mundanes went through pencils, but this one was special to Emma and she kept it as carefully intact as she kept her sword. "It always happens. Everything was fine, and then I woke up one morning and just the sound of his voice made me feel sick to my stomach." She looked at Cristina guiltily. "I *tried*," she added. "I waited weeks! I kept hoping it would get better. But it didn't."

Cristina patted her arm. "I know, *cuata*," she said. "You just aren't very good at having . . ."

"Tact?" Emma suggested. Cristina's English was nearly accentless, and Emma often forgot it wasn't her first language. On the other hand Cristina spoke seven languages on top of her native Spanish. Emma spoke English and some scraps of Spanish, Greek, and Latin, could read three demon languages, and swear in five.

"I was going to say relationships," Cristina said. Her dark brown eyes twinkled. "I've only been here for two months and you've forgotten three dates with Cameron, skipped his birthday, and now you've dumped him because it was a slow patrol night."

"He always wanted to play video games," said Emma. "I hate video games."

"No one is perfect, Emma."

"But some people are perfect for each other. Don't you think that has to be true?"

A strange look flashed over Cristina's face, gone so quickly Emma was sure she'd imagined it. Sometimes Emma was reminded that however much she felt close to Cristina, she didn't know her—didn't *know* her the way she did Jules, the way you knew someone whose every moment you had shared since you were children. What had happened to Cristina in Mexico—whatever had sent her running to Los Angeles and away from her family and friends—was something she'd never spoken of to Emma.

“Well,” said Cristina, “at least you were wise enough to bring me along for moral support to help you through this difficult time.”

Emma poked Cristina with her stele. “I wasn’t *planning* on dumping Cameron. We were here, and he called, and his face came up on my phone—well, actually a llama came up on my phone because I didn’t have a picture of him so I just used a llama—and the llama made me so angry I just couldn’t help myself.”

“Bad time to be a llama.”

“Is it ever a good time, really?” Emma flipped the stele around and started to ink a Sure-Footedness rune onto her arm. She prided herself on having excellent balance without runes, but up on a roof it was probably a good idea to be safe.

She thought of Julian, far away in England, with a sting at her heart. He would have been pleased she was being careful. He would have said something funny and loving and self-deprecating about it. She missed him horribly, but she supposed that was how it was when you were *parabatai*, bound together by magic as well as friendship.

She missed all the Blackthorns. She had grown up playing among Julian and his sisters and brothers, lived with them since she was twelve—when she had lost her parents, and Julian, whose mother had already died, had lost his father. From being an only child she had been thrust into a big, loud, noisy, loving family. Not every part of it had been easy, but she adored them, from shy Drusilla to Tiberius, who loved detective stories. They had left at the beginning of the summer to visit their great-aunt in Sussex—the Blackthorn family was originally British. Marjorie, Julian had explained, was nearly a hundred years old and might die at any moment; they *had* to visit her. It was a moral requirement.

Off they’d gone for two months, all of them except their uncle, the head of the Institute. The shock to Emma’s system had been severe. The Institute

had gone from noisy to quiet. Worst of all, when Julian was gone, she *felt* it, like a constant unease, a low-level pain in her chest.

Dating Cameron had *not* helped, but Cristina's arrival had helped immeasurably. It was common for Shadowhunters who reached the age of eighteen to visit foreign Institutes and learn their different customs. Cristina had come to Los Angeles from Mexico City—there was nothing unusual about it, but she'd always had the air of someone running from something. Emma, meanwhile, had been running from loneliness. She and Emma had run directly into each other, and become best friends faster than Emma could have believed possible.

“Diana will be pleased about you dumping Cameron, at least,” said Cristina. “I don't think she liked him.”

Diana Wrayburn was the Blackthorn family's tutor. She was extremely smart, extremely stern, and extremely tired of Emma falling asleep in the middle of class because she'd been out the night before.

“Diana just thinks all relationships are a distraction from studying,” Emma said. “Why date when you can learn an extra demonic language? I mean, who wouldn't want to know how to say ‘Come here often?’ in Purgatic?”

Cristina laughed. “You sound like Jaime. He hated studying.” Emma perked her ears: Cristina rarely spoke of the friends or family in Mexico City she'd left behind. She knew Cristina's uncle had run the Mexico City Institute until he'd been killed in the Dark War and her mother had taken it over. She knew Cristina's father had died when she was a child. But not much else. “But not Diego. He loved it. He did extra work for fun.”

“Diego? The perfect guy? The one your mom loves?” Emma began to trace the stele over her skin, the Farsighted rune taking shape on her forearm. The sleeves of her gear were elbow length, the skin below it marked all over with the pale white scars of runes long ago used up.

Cristina reached over and took the stele from Emma. “Here. Let me do that.” She continued the Farsighted rune. Cristina had a gorgeous hand with runes, careful and precise. “I don’t want to talk about Perfect Diego,” Cristina said. “My mother talks about him enough. Can I ask you about something else?”

Emma nodded. The pressure of the stele against her skin was familiar, almost pleasant.

“I know you wanted to come here because Johnny Rook told you that there have been bodies found with writing on them, and he thinks one will turn up here tonight.”

“Correct.”

“And you are hoping the writing will be the same as it was on your parents’ bodies.”

Emma tensed. She couldn’t help it. Any mention of her parents’ murders hurt as if it had happened yesterday. Even when the person asking her about it was as gentle as Cristina. “Yes.”

“The Clave says Sebastian Morgenstern murdered your parents,” said Cristina. “That is what Diana told me. That’s what they believe. But you don’t believe it.”

The Clave. Emma looked out into the Los Angeles night, at the brilliant explosion of electricity that was the skyline, at the rows and rows of billboards that lined Sunset Boulevard. It had been a harmless word, “Clave,” when she had first learned it. The Clave was simply the government of the Nephilim, made up of all active Shadowhunters over the age of eighteen.

In theory every Shadowhunter had a vote and an equal voice. In point of fact, some Shadowhunters were more influential than others: Like any political party, the Clave had its corruption and prejudices. For Nephilim this meant a strict code of honor and rules that every Shadowhunter had to adhere to or face dire consequences.

The Clave had a motto: *The Law is hard, but it is the Law*. Every Shadowhunter knew what it meant. The rules of the Law of the Clave had to be obeyed, no matter how hard or painful. The Law overrode everything else—personal need, grief, loss, unfairness, treachery. When the Clave had told Emma that she was to accept the fact that her parents had been murdered as part of the Dark War, she had been required to do so.

She hadn't.

“No,” Emma said slowly. “I don't think so.”

Cristina sat with the stele motionless in her hand, the rune unfinished. The *adamans* gleamed in the moonlight. “Could you tell me why?”

“Sebastian Morgenstern was building an army,” Emma said, still looking out at the sea of lights. “He took Shadowhunters and turned them into monsters that served him. He didn't mark them up with demon languages written on their bodies and then dump them in the ocean. When the Nephilim tried to move my parents' bodies, they dissolved. That didn't happen to any of Sebastian's victims.” She moved her finger along a roof tile. “And—it's a feeling. Not a passing feeling. Something I've always believed. I believe it more every day. I believe my parents' deaths were different. And that laying them at Sebastian's door means—” She broke off with a sigh. “I'm sorry. I'm just rambling. Look, this is probably going to be nothing. You shouldn't worry about it.”

“I worry about you,” Cristina said, but she laid the stele back against Emma's skin and finished the rune without another word. It was something that Emma had liked about Cristina since the moment she'd met her—she never pressed or pressured.

Emma glanced down in appreciation as Cristina sat back, done with her work. The Farsighted rune gleamed clear and clean on Emma's arm. “The only person I know who draws better runes than you do is Julian,” she said. “But he's an artist—”

“Julian, Julian, Julian,” echoed Cristina in a teasing voice. “Julian is a painter, Julian is a genius, Julian would know how to fix this, Julian could build that. You know, for the past seven weeks I’ve heard so many wonderful things about Julian I’m starting to worry that when I meet him I will fall in love with him instantly.”

Emma brushed her gritty hands carefully down her legs. She felt tight and itchy and tense. All wound up for a battle and no fighting, she told herself. No wonder she wanted to jump out of her skin. “I don’t think he’s your type,” she said. “But he’s my *parabatai*, so I’m not objective.”

Cristina handed Emma’s stele back to her. “I always wanted a *parabatai*,” she said a little wistfully. “Someone who is sworn to protect you and to watch your back. A best friend forever, for your whole life.”

A best friend forever, for your whole life. When Emma’s parents had died, she’d fought to stay with the Blackthorns. Partly because she’d lost everything familiar to her and she couldn’t bear the thought of starting over, and partly because she’d wanted to stay in Los Angeles so that she could investigate her parents’ deaths.

It might have been awkward; she might have felt, the only Carstairs in a house of Blackthorns, out of place in the family. But she never had, because of Jules. *Parabatai* was more than friendship, more than family; it was a bond that tied you together, fiercely, in a way that every Shadowhunter respected and acknowledged the way that they respected the bond between husband and wife.

No one would separate *parabatai*. No one would dare try: *Parabatai* were stronger together. They fought together as if they could read each other’s minds. A single rune given to you by your *parabatai* was more powerful than ten runes given to you by someone else. Often *parabatai* had their ashes buried in the same tomb so that they wouldn’t be parted, even in death.

Not everyone had a *parabatai*; in fact, they were rare. It was a lifelong, binding commitment. You were swearing to stay by the other person's side, swearing to always protect them, to go where they went, to consider their family your family. The words of the oath were from the Bible, and ancient: *Whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.*

If there was a term for it in mundane English, Emma thought, it would have been "soul mate." Platonic soul mate. You weren't allowed to be romantically involved with your *parabatai*. Like so many things, it was against the Law. Emma had never known why—it didn't make any sense—but then, much of the Law didn't. It hadn't made sense for the Clave to exile and abandon Julian's half siblings, Helen and Mark, simply because their mother had been a faerie, but they'd done that too when they'd created the Cold Peace.

Emma stood up, sliding her stele into her weapons belt. "Well, the Blackthorns are coming back the day after tomorrow. You'll meet Jules then." She moved back toward the edge of the roof, and this time she heard the scrape of boots on tile that told her Cristina was behind her. "Do you see anything?"

"Maybe there's nothing going on." Cristina shrugged. "Maybe it's just a party."

"Johnny Rook was so sure," muttered Emma.

"Didn't Diana specifically forbid you to go see him?"

"She may have told me to stop seeing him," Emma acknowledged. "She may even have called him 'a criminal who commits crime,' which I have to say struck me as harsh, but she didn't say I couldn't go to the Shadow Market."

"Because everyone already knows Shadowhunters aren't meant to go to the Shadow Market."

Emma ignored this. “And if I ran into Rook, say, at the Market, and he dropped some information while we were chatting and I accidentally let drop some money, who’s to call that ‘paying for information’? Just two friends, one careless with his gossip and the other one careless with her finances . . .”

“That’s not the spirit of the Law, Emma. Remember? *The Law is hard, but it is the Law.*”

“I thought it was ‘the Law is annoying, but it is also flexible.’”

“That is not the motto. And Diana is going to kill you.”

“Not if we solve the murders, she won’t. The ends will justify the means. And if nothing happens, she never has to know about it. Right?”

Cristina didn’t say anything.

“Right . . . ?” Emma said.

Cristina gave an intake of breath. “Do you see?” she asked, pointing.

Emma saw. She saw a tall man, handsome and smooth-haired, with pale skin and carefully tailored clothes, moving among the crowd. As he went, men and women turned to look after him, their faces slack and fascinated.

“There is a glamour on him,” Cristina said. Emma quirked an eyebrow. Glamour was illusion magic, commonly used by Downworlders to hide themselves from mundane eyes. Shadowhunters also had access to Marks that had much the same effect, though Nephilim didn’t consider that magic. Magic was warlock business; runes were a gift from the Angel. “The question is, vampire or fey?”

Emma hesitated. The man was approaching a young woman in towering heels, a glass of champagne in her hand. Her face went smooth and blank as he spoke to her. She nodded agreeably, reached up, and undid the chunky gold necklace she was wearing. She dropped it into his outstretched hand, a smile on her face as he slid it into his pocket.

“Fey,” Emma said, reaching for her weapons belt. Faeries complicated everything. According to the Law of the Cold Peace, an underage

Shadowhunter shouldn't have anything to do with faeries at all. Faeries were off-limits, the cursed and forbidden branch of Downworlders, ever since the Cold Peace, which had ripped away their rights, their armies, and their possessions. Their ancient lands were no longer considered theirs, and other Downworlders fought over who could claim them. Trying to calm such battles was a great part of the business of the Los Angeles Institute, but it was adult business. Shadowhunters Emma's age weren't meant to engage directly with faeries.

In theory.

The Law is annoying, but it is flexible. Emma drew a small cloth bag, tied at the top, out of a pouch attached to her belt. She began to flick it open as the fey moved from the smiling woman to a slender man in a black jacket, who willingly handed over his sparkling cuff links. The fey was now standing almost directly beneath Emma and Cristina. "Vampires don't care about gold, but the Fair Folk pay tribute to their King and Queen in gold and gems and other treasure."

"I have heard the Court of the Unseelie pays it in blood," said Cristina grimly.

"Not tonight," Emma said, flicking the bag she was holding open and upending the contents onto the faerie's head.

Cristina gasped in horror as the fey below them gave a hoarse cry, his glamour falling away from him like a snake shedding its skin.

A chorus of shrieks went up from the crowd as the fey's true appearance was revealed. Branches grew like twisted horns from his head, and his skin was the dark green of moss or mildew, cracked all over like bark. His hands were spatulate claws, three-fingered.

"Emma," Cristina warned. "We should stop this now—call the Silent Brothers—"

But Emma had already jumped.

For a moment she was weightless, falling through the air. Then she struck the ground, knees bent as she'd been taught. How she remembered those first jumps from great heights, the snapping, awkward falls, the days she'd have to wait to heal before trying again.

No longer. Emma rose to her feet, facing the faerie across the fleeing crowd. Gleaming from his weathered, barklike face, his eyes were yellow as a cat's. "*Shadowhunter*," he hissed.

The partygoers continued to flee from the courtyard through the gates that led into the parking lot. None of them saw Emma, though their instincts kicked in anyway, making them pass around her like water around the pilings of a bridge.

Emma reached back over her shoulder and closed her hand around the hilt of her sword, Cortana. The blade made a golden blur in the air as she drew it and pointed the tip at the fey. "No," she said. "I'm a candygram. This is my costume."

The faerie looked puzzled.

Emma sighed. "It's so hard to be sassy to the Fair Folk. You people never get jokes."

"We are well known for our jests, japes, and ballads," the faerie said, clearly offended. "Some of our ballads last for weeks."

"I don't have that kind of time," Emma said. "I'm a Shadowhunter. Quip fast, die young." She wiggled Cortana's tip impatiently. "Now turn out your pockets."

"I have done nothing to break the Cold Peace," said the fey.

"*Technically* true, but we do frown on stealing from mundanes," Emma said. "Turn out your pockets or I'll rip off one of your horns and shove it where the sun doesn't shine."

The fey looked puzzled. "Where does the sun not shine? Is this a riddle?"

Emma gave a martyred sigh and raised Cortana. “Turn them out, or I’ll start peeling your bark off. My boyfriend and I just broke up, and I’m not in the best mood.”

The faerie began slowly to empty his pockets onto the ground, glaring at her all the while. “So you’re single,” he said. “I never would have guessed.”

A gasp sounded from above. “Now that is simply rude,” said Cristina, leaning over the edge of the roof.

“Thank you, Cristina,” Emma said. “That was a low blow. And for your information, faerie guy, I broke up with him.”

The faerie shrugged. It was a remarkably expressive shrug, managing to convey several different kinds of not caring at once.

“Although I don’t know why,” Cristina said. “He was very nice.”

Emma rolled her eyes. The faerie was still dumping his loot—earrings, expensive leather wallets, diamond rings tumbled to the ground in a sparkling cacophony. Emma braced herself. She didn’t really care about the jewelry or the stealing. She was looking for weapons, spell books, any sign of the kind of dark magic she associated with the markings on her parents. “The Ashdowns and the Carstairs don’t get along,” she said. “It’s a well-known fact.”

At that the faerie seemed to freeze in place. “Carstairs,” he spat, his yellow eyes fixed on Emma. “You are Emma Carstairs?”

Emma blinked, thrown. She glanced up; Cristina had disappeared from the edge of the roof. “I really don’t think we’ve met. I’d remember a talking tree.”

“Would you?” Spatulate hands twitched at the faerie’s side. “I would have expected more courteous treatment. Or have you and your Institute friends forgotten Mark Blackthorn so quickly?”

“*Mark?*” Emma froze, unable to control her reaction. In that moment, something glittering hurtled toward her face. The fey had whipped a

diamond necklace at her. She ducked, but the edge of the chain caught her cheek. She felt a stinging pain and the warmth of blood.

She bolted upright, but the fey was gone. She swore, wiping at the blood on her face. “Emma!” It was Cristina, who had made it down from the roof and was standing by a barred door in the wall. An emergency exit. “He went through here!”

Emma dashed toward her and together they kicked open the door and burst out into the alley behind the bar. It was surprisingly dark; someone had smashed the nearby streetlights. Dumpsters shoved against the wall reeked of spoiled food and alcohol. Emma felt her Farsighted rune burn; at the very end of the alley, she saw the slight form of the fey spring toward the left.

She set off after him, Cristina by her side. She had spent so much of her life running with Julian that she had some difficulty adjusting her stride to someone else’s; she pushed ahead, running flat out. Faeries were fast, notoriously so. She and Cristina rounded the next corner, where the alley narrowed. The fleeing fey had shoved two Dumpsters together to block their path. Emma flung herself up and over, using the Dumpsters to vault forward, her boots clanging against the metal.

She fell forward and landed on something soft. Fabric scratched under her fingernails. Clothes. Clothes on a human body. Wet clothes. The stench of seawater and rot was everywhere. She looked down into a dead and bloated face.

Emma bit down on a yell. A moment later there was another *clang* and Cristina dropped down beside her. Emma heard her friend breathe an astonished exclamation in Spanish. Then Cristina’s arms were around her, pulling her away from the body. She landed on the asphalt, awkwardly, unable to stop staring.

The body was undeniably human. A middle-aged man, round-shouldered, his silvery hair worn like the mane of a lion. Patches of his skin

were burned, black and red, bubbles rising where the burns were worst, like lather on a bar of soap.

His gray shirt was torn open, and across his chest and arms marched lines of black runes, not the runes of Shadowhunters, but a twisted demon script. They were runes Emma knew as well as she knew the scars on her own hands. She had stared obsessively at photographs of those marks for five years. They were the marks the Clave had found on the bodies of her own murdered parents.

* * *

“Are you all right?” Cristina asked. Emma was leaning back against the brick wall of the alley—which smelled very questionable and was covered in spray paint—and glaring laser beams at the dead body of the mundane and the Silent Brothers surrounding it.

The first thing Emma had done as soon as she’d been able to think clearly was summon the Brothers and Diana. Now she was second-guessing that decision. The Silent Brothers had arrived instantly and were all over the body, sometimes turning to speak to each other in their soundless voices as they searched and examined and took notes. They had put up warding runes to give themselves time to work before the mundane police arrived, but—politely, firmly, requiring only a slight use of telepathic force—they prevented Emma from coming anywhere near the body.

“I’m *furios*,” Emma said. “I have to see those markings. I have to take photos of them. It’s *my* parents that were killed. Not that the Silent Brothers care. I only ever knew one decent Silent Brother and he quit being one.”

Cristina’s eyes widened. Somehow she had managed to keep her gear clean through all of this, and she looked fresh and pink-cheeked. Emma imagined she herself, with her hair sticking out in every direction and alley dirt smeared on her clothes, looked like an eldritch horror. “I didn’t think it was something you could just stop doing.”

The Silent Brothers were Shadowhunters who had chosen to retreat from the world, like monks, and devote themselves to study and healing. They occupied the Silent City, the vast underground caverns where most Shadowhunters were buried when they died. Their terrible scars were the result of runes too strong for most human flesh, even that of Shadowhunters, but it was also the runes that made them nearly immortal. They served as advisers, archivists, and healers—and they could also wield the power of the Mortal Sword.

They were the ones who had performed Emma and Julian's *parabatai* ceremony. They were there for weddings, there when Nephilim children were born, and there when they died. Every important event of a Shadowhunter's life was marked with the appearance of a Silent Brother.

Emma thought of the one Silent Brother she'd ever liked. She missed him still, sometimes.

The alley suddenly lit up like daylight. Blinking, Emma turned to see that a familiar pickup truck had pulled into the alley's entrance. It came to a stop, headlights still on, and Diana Wrayburn jumped down from the driver's seat.

When Diana had come to work as the tutor to the children of the Los Angeles Institute five years ago, Emma had thought she was the most beautiful woman she'd ever seen. She was tall and spare and elegant, with the silvery tattoo of a koi fish standing out across the dark skin of one arched cheekbone. Her eyes were brown with flecks of green in them, and right now they were flashing with angry fire. She was wearing an ankle-length black dress that fell around her long body in elegant folds. She looked like the dangerous Roman goddess of the hunt she was named for.

"Emma! Cristina!" She hurried toward them. "What happened? Are you all right?"

For a moment Emma paused the glaring and let herself enjoy being hugged fiercely. Diana had always been too young for Emma to think of her

as a mother, but an older sister, maybe. Someone protective. Diana let go of her and hugged Cristina too, who looked startled. Emma had long had the suspicion that there hadn't been much hugging in Cristina's home. "What happened? Why are you trying to burn a hole through Brother Enoch with your eyeballs?"

"We were patrolling—" Emma began.

"We saw a fey stealing from humans," Cristina added quickly.

"Yes, and I stopped him and told him to turn out his pockets—"

"A faerie?" A look of disquiet came over Diana's face. "Emma, you know you shouldn't confront one of the Fair Folk, even when Cristina's with you—"

"I've fought Fair Folk before," Emma said. It was true. Both she and Diana had fought in the Shadowhunter city of Alicante when Sebastian's forces had attacked. The streets had been full of faerie warriors. The adults had taken the children and walled them up in the fortresslike Hall of Accords, where they were meant to be safe. But the faeries had broken the locks. . . .

Diana had been there, laying to the right and left of her with her deadly sword, saving dozens of children. Emma had been one of those saved. She had loved Diana since then.

"I had a feeling," Emma went on, "that something bigger and worse was happening. I followed the faerie when he ran. I know I shouldn't have, but—I found that body. And it's covered in the same marks my parents' bodies were. The *same markings*, Diana."

Diana turned to Cristina. "Could you give us a moment alone, please, Tina?"

Cristina hesitated. But as a guest of the Los Angeles Institute, a young Shadowhunter on Leave, she was required to do as the senior staff of the Institute requested. With a glance at Emma, she moved away, toward the spot where the body still lay. It was surrounded by a ring of Silent Brothers,

like a flock of pale birds in their parchment robes. They were sprinkling a sort of shimmering powder over the markings, or at least that's how it looked. Emma wished she were closer and could see properly.

Diana exhaled. "Emma, are you *sure*?"

Emma bit back an angry retort. She understood why Diana was asking. Over the years there had been so many false leads—so many times Emma had thought she had found a clue or a translation for the markings or a story in a mundane newspaper—and every time she had been wrong.

"I just don't want you to get your hopes up," Diana said.

"I know," Emma said. "But I shouldn't ignore it. I can't ignore it. You believe me. You've always *believed* me, right?"

"That Sebastian Morgenstern didn't kill your parents? Oh, honey, you know I do." Diana patted Emma's shoulder lightly. "I just don't want you to get hurt, and with Julian not here . . ."

Emma waited for her to go on.

"Well, with Julian not here, you get hurt more easily. *Parabatai* buffer each other. I know you're strong, you are, but this is something that cut you so deeply when you were just a child. It's twelve-year-old Emma that reacts to anything to do with your parents, not almost-adult Emma." Diana winced and touched the side of her head. "Brother Enoch is calling me over," she said. Silent Brothers were able to communicate with Shadowhunters using telepathy only they could hear, though they were also able to project to groups if the need arose. "Can you make it back to the Institute?"

"I can, but if I could just see the body again—"

"The Silent Brothers say no," Diana said firmly. "I'll find out what I can, and I'll share it with you? Deal?"

Emma nodded reluctantly. "Deal."

Diana headed off toward the Silent Brothers, stopping to talk briefly to Cristina. By the time Emma reached the car she had parked, Cristina had joined her, and they both climbed in silently.

Emma sat where she was for a moment, drained, the car keys dangling from her hand. In the rearview mirror she could see the alleyway behind them, lit up like a baseball stadium by the truck's powerful headlights. Diana was moving among the parchment-robed Silent Brothers. The powder on the ground was white in the glare.

"Are you all right?" Cristina said.

Emma turned to her. "You have to tell me what you saw," she begged. "You were close to the body. Did you hear Diana say anything to the Brothers? Are they definitely the same markings?"

"I don't need to tell you," Cristina said.

"I—" Emma broke off. She felt wretched. She'd messed up the whole plan for the night, lost their faerie criminal, lost her chance of examining the body, probably hurt Cristina's feelings. "I know you don't. I'm really sorry, Cristina. I didn't mean to get you in trouble. It's just that—"

"I didn't say that." Cristina fumbled in the pocket of her gear. "I said I didn't need to tell you, because I meant I could *show* you. Here. Look at these." She held out her phone, and Emma's heart leaped—Cristina was scrolling through picture after picture she'd taken of the body and the Brothers, the alley, the blood. Everything.

"Cristina, I love you," Emma said. "I will marry you. *Marry you.*"

Cristina giggled. "My mother's already picked out who I'm going to marry, remember? Imagine what she'd say if I brought *you* home."

"You don't think she'd like me more than Perfect Diego?"

"I think you would be able to hear her screaming in Idris."

Idris was the home country of the Shadowhunters, where they had first been created, where the Clave held its seat. It was tucked away at the intersection of France, Germany, and Switzerland, hidden by spells from mundane eyes.

Emma laughed. Relief was coursing through her. They had something after all. A clue, as Tiberius would say, head stuck in a detective novel.

Missing Ty suddenly, she reached to start up the car.

“Did you really tell that faerie that you broke up with Cameron and not the other way around?” Cristina said.

“Please don’t bring that up,” Emma said. “I’m not proud of it.”

Cristina snorted. It was remarkably unladylike.

“Can you come to my room after we get back?” Emma asked, flicking on the headlights. “I want to show you something.”

Cristina frowned. “It isn’t a strange birthmark or a wart, is it? My *abuela* said she wanted to show me something once, and it turned out to be a wart on her—”

“It’s not a wart!” As Emma pulled the car out and merged with the rest of the traffic, she sensed anxiety fizzing through her veins. Usually she felt exhausted after a fight as the adrenaline drained out of her.

Now, though, she was about to show Cristina something that no one but Julian had ever seen. Something she herself wasn’t exactly proud of. She couldn’t help wondering how Cristina would take it.