





# ONE

*Sunday, November 21, 1999*

Bastion's corpse was found in the thin woods at the edge of Stepwood Cemetery, covered in bite marks, by the biggest dickbag at Regional No. 9 High School. Cameron Winship, a junior and our school's only notable track-and-field star, was taking his bleach-blond bowl cut out for a morning run when he literally stumbled across my boyfriend's dead body.

Or so we thought at the time. Actually, at the time I wasn't thinking at all, because North Coven had planned a ritual for eleven o'clock sharp, and fate decided to amuse itself by having the four of us walk up to the crime scene about ten minutes after the cops and first responders.

Cameron never went for a run without his \$900 Nokia, which further illustrated what a total dickbag he was, but it came in handy when he discovered the cadaver of his murdered classmate. I think he was in a shock blanket when we walked out of the woods and tried to understand what we were seeing. I'm actually sure he was, sitting there like a wounded deer and tearfully talking to a cop, but I only noticed Cameron for a second before I started screaming.

They hadn't covered Bastion up yet, and so I got a last

look at him before he was loaded into a body bag, only to see that the fingers had been chewed off on both of his hands. His handsome face, with the white patch of vitiligo over the left eye, looked like it had been pushed through a lawnmower. Blood congealed over holes in his black jeans where something had *eaten* at him, chunk of flesh by chunk of flesh. So yeah, I screamed—I started screaming his name and then Dove started yelling and pushing her way through the people working, which made sense, because he was her *baby brother*, even if he was like a foot taller than her.

It was so obviously a murder that they didn't want us contaminating the scene, if you follow me. I ran after her, trying to shove through the cops and EMTs and whomever to get to Bastion, and when someone grabbed Dove in a way I felt (in my shock-induced freak out) was too rough, I will admit that I started throwing my fists around, which is how it happened that three grown men had to pin me to the freezing November graveyard ground on the day I saw Bastion for the last time.

I mean, for the second-to-last time.

Later, when I'd been given 'something to calm me down', and Drea and Brandy had gone home with their respective moms and Dove and Bastion's parents had gotten the worst news of their lives, my older brother picked me up from the emergency clinic that was the closest thing North Dana had to a real hospital.

“Dad’s coming back from Boston right now,” Nic told me.

Like I cared at that moment. As far as my dad knew, Bastion was just my friend from my weird little witch group, not my first boyfriend and my true love and the most fascinating person to ever walk the earth.

“From the . . . Is he at the car show?” I asked. I felt like I was talking through a wad of cotton.

I don’t remember if Nic answered me, though, because the sedatives finally kicked in around then, and I faded into nightmares. I dreamed I was at the auto show my dad had traveled to . . . but in that long gray room every dim spotlight lit a shining antique hearse, and from behind each silver grille of each black car I could hear Bastion calling for me.

“*Nesbit,*” he called, faint and pleading. “*Nesbit, you have the power now. Not just you—it’s for all five of you, of course—but **you** have the dreams—*”

“Bastion!” I screamed, terrified for him even in my sleep. “Bastion! Where are you?!”

“*No—please stop him, why won’t you stop him? Nesbit, I revoked the token, you have the power now . . . no, no, oh help oh god oh please he’s killing me—*”

And in my dream, I clawed fruitlessly at the front of each car in turn until the skin on my hands tore, as Bastion’s terrified entreaties turned into agonized, wordless shrieks. As something I couldn’t see ate him alive. When I woke up it was Monday afternoon, and I had pressed my nails so

hard into my hands that I had eight bloody half-moon marks on the flesh of my palms.

After a minute of staring at my hands, I flipped my left hand over to look at the little tattoos that ornamented each of my fingers.

A heart for Dove.

A sword for Bastion.

An eye for Brandy.

A mouth for Drea.

And finally, on my thumb, a little miniature hand, the index finger pointing skyward, like you sometimes see on the top of old gravestones.

My most meaningful tattoos. North Coven, united.

Never to be united again.

“Bastion.”

I said his name out loud. Once. Just one time, like I was talking to him.

Then I went out to the kitchen and started my life without him. If you can imagine it, things only got worse from there.