

*In truth,
I was tired of waiting,
Tired of waiting for my life to start,
Tired of waiting for Archos and tired of waiting for him.
I needed to do something—anything—but sit and wait for my hunters to strike.*

Now, I fear that which I have roused.

CHAPTER 1

Lina



“Oh, God!” I clamped both hands over my gaping mouth as white scorched the back of my eyelids. “You hit him. You hit him!” I couldn’t shake the ghastly feel of the truck bouncing over someone’s body, and there wasn’t enough noise in the world to drown the sound of it reverberating in my head. “I,” I gripped the seat, panting in shock, “I’m gonna be sick.” I needed him to tell me that what I thought happened was somehow a fluke, that it was a nasty pothole and not a person we hit, but Archos remained silent. *Say something!*

“Lina ...” Archos let my name linger in the charged air as time weighed heavy on every passing second.

“Didn’t you see him?” I shrieked with a mouth devoid of moisture.

My fingertips ached from clutching the seat, but I couldn't move. I refused to believe it. Archos would never do something so horrifying, not intentionally, not Archos. The guy running at us must've distracted him from seeing the man on the road; that had to be it. As steady as ever, he replied, "You are hyperventilating; slow your breathing with deep breaths and calm down." His concern was not for the one he had bulldozed but for me.

I shot a withering look his way and managed a thin breath of air tainted by an unearthly scent. "I can't see," I gasped, "is he moving?" Archos didn't respond. And I had no way of knowing if he bothered to check. I squeezed my eyes shut, then let them flutter open. Nothing. So, this was what it was like when your immortal hunk of a neighbor used his power to blind you. But did it belong to Archos or the man on the road?

I recalled the night I was attacked at the theater. An intense light temporarily stole my sight then, too ... was that the same thing? Needles pricked my spine at the thought of "Sever," or rather, Severino—another immortal. He could control your emotions with a single word and had a twisted way of entertaining himself with his mean right hook.

"He will survive," Archos stated flatly, "now breathe."

My held breath slipped free as the initial shock lifted, and stars of lightheadedness danced at the edges of my white-washed sight. Maybe I did need to focus on breathing. I placed a hand on my constricted chest, confident that the guy we hit was the one who stubbornly refused to emerge from my visions. He was the one man who caught my eye and my heart ... until Archos came along and flubbed that up.

I've had visions my whole life. Something I'd learned to keep to myself rather than lose another friend or get tagged as the class freak. Usually, they were glimpses of future events, minor warnings, or pre-introductions to people I would one day meet. Nearly all of them materialized, but not *him*, until now. And Archos struck him with the truck. "No, no, no ... please, no." I tugged the shoulder strap as if it were the seatbelt suffocating me. "That was him! *Him!*" The belt locked in protest, and I gave up on the one-sided tug of war. "That's the guy from my visions. And you—you hit him!"

"You are mistaken," his even tone held its usual sureness, and the engine roared to proclaim the truck's accelerated pace.

It made no sense; Archos hit someone but wasn't freaking out. Nor was he stopping. I wanted to shake sense or feeling or something back into him. "I know what I saw—what I felt. It

was an accident, right? You didn't mean to do it?" Unable to see it in his eyes and too upset to read him intuitively, I desperately needed him to confirm that, but he didn't or wouldn't. I knew it. Heaven help me; I knew it all along. I should never have trusted someone I met just a few short months ago—let alone start falling for him—especially when my intuition screamed *danger* whenever he was near. "Please answer me."

The warmth of his hand cupped my shoulder. "It will be all right."

He didn't confirm it was an accident; he didn't say no. Chills wracked my body, and everything swayed. "Don't touch me!" I recoiled to the passenger door to get as far away from him as possible. "Don't *you* touch me! Oh, God, you need to pull over."

Archos released a contemptuous humph, "Aah, no." His tone made clear he thought it should be obvious.

"No?" *What does he mean by "No?"* I thought.

Archos showed no shame in using his ability to listen to my thoughts. "I mean, no; there is no need." I heard him fiddle with the wipers and fluid. *What's he cleaning off of the windshield?* I had a distinct feeling I didn't want to know. Then he added, "He is immortal."

Something revolting laced his words, and I cringed. "You did it on purpose; you meant to hit *him*."

The edge in his voice was palpable, "I assure you, *that* was not *him*."

"Then who is he, 'cause he sure looked like him?" When Archos didn't respond, I held up a hand. "You know what? Either way, you need to stop the truck."

"I told you—"

The familiar opalescent flash of silver pressed in, announcing the vision to come ...

~ * ~

*** A gruff, disembodied voice coiled around me, *'He waits for you.'* My stomach went fluttery with anticipation. But I had no idea whom I was looking forward to bumping into.

Their enveloping presence went through me, leaving a chill that worked from skin to bone, and I shivered uncontrollably. *'There was a time when you liked it,'* they mused. ***

Liked what? As quickly as it arrived, the revelation ended. It was a travesty that visual images didn't accompany all of them. The voice sounded so near I feared Archos might've

heard, but when he made no comment, I sighed in relief. Maybe he struggled to tap into my visions like he so easily tapped into my thoughts.

I folded my arms and tucked my fingertips under until my fingernails bit into my palms, but I couldn't get warm. "W-what did you say?" I asked, trying to shake the disruption.

"I said no," he reinforced.

I let my head drop back onto the seat, "Shocker."

"What is that supposed to mean?" he asked, preoccupied.

I shrugged, "'No.' It's your favorite word."

"Can you blame me when it is so often merited?" I could only imagine the self-satisfaction gracing his perfect features as I straightened with indignation.

"Merited?" I fumed. *What twenty-three-year-old talks like that?* "You ... I," he had me so flustered I couldn't think straight. "You know what, whatever, just—enough already—stop the truck, Archos," I spat his name, listening for any indication he was slowing. He wasn't. *Fine, if he's not gonna stop, I'll make him,* I thought as I searched for the door handle and released my belt.

"What the hell are you doing?" The truck swayed when he grabbed my arm, and the onset of a possible bruise forming ached under his digging fingers, "Have you completely lost your mind?"

"Ow, let go!" I gripped the lever, contemplating how jumping from a moving vehicle might feel. *Drop and roll, right?*

"As soon as you release the handle."

I scrunched closer to the door, but with his height, he had a long reach. "I said let go!"

"You first," there was no trace of yielding in his voice.

He wasn't going to let go, which meant I wasn't going anywhere, and he knew it. *How do I get out of here and back to him?* My head pounded in a ferocious beat, and while the shivers weren't helping, the blindness only aided in my focusing on the thumping pain. With reluctance, I released the handle. The instant I did, Archos let go of me. If nothing else, he was a man of his word. Well, except maybe when it came to *him*? I don't care what Archos claimed; I knew what I saw. It had to be *him*. "I-I need to see him—to make sure he's okay ... I have to," *to touch him and prove once and for all that he's real.* "That was *him*."

“Him? *Him*? Why is it *he* has no name, Lina?” Archos said sharply while helping me refasten my seatbelt. Low blow. Why the fates hadn’t revealed that tidbit after having countless visions of *him* had always bothered me—a fact Archos was well aware of. “Perhaps it is because *he* does not exist.” For Archos to go there, I must’ve ticked him off something fierce with my attempted escape. Even so, I felt him trying to spread a blanket over me one-handed. I grabbed an edge and pulled it up to my chin, immediately thankful but unable to say so.

Incidentally, a name had come to me. But it arose like a whisper to the subconscious after a recent vision with *him*. Lucius. From what I knew, its meaning had something to do with light. Was there a more perfect name? I like to think it belonged to my midnight-eyed phantom, but I wasn’t sure, nor was I about to share that with lead-foot. I let the blanket fall to my lap and tested my arm where Archos had grabbed it. *No bruise; I guess he wasn’t gripping me that hard.*

“Of course not,” he blurted, sounding offended.

“Stay out of my head,” I countered while rubbing my arm, though it wasn’t necessary. “What’s in a name, anyway? I know your name, and a fat lot of good that does me; I don’t know squat about you.”

His voice quieted to a velvety low, “You know me, Lina.”

“Uh-huh,” I snubbed, even though the intimacy of his words darn near touched my soul, and it irked me that my voice softened. “Name or not, *he*’s been there for me. *Him*, I know.” Though Archos kept himself well-guarded, it didn’t take sight to know I delivered a low blow myself. I felt it, much like I’d felt the man’s astonishment on the road when our eyes met—just before the blinding light stole my sight and Archos hit him.

‘As have I.’

Whatever was said got lost somewhere behind my pressing thoughts. “What?”

“What?” Archos sounded thrown.

I shook my head, not wanting to play his game. “I missed what you said,” *under your breath*, I added in thought.

He hesitated before replying, “I did not say anything.”

“Of course not,” I conceded, too exasperated. “And for your information, I do have a name for *him*,” I said, picking at a snagged nail—thankful the frigid chill from my vision was waning and sad to admit the blanket helped. Why was I telling him this?

“Oh?”

I swallowed to ease the tightening of my throat, “Yes, Keraunos.”

“Keraunos?” his curiosity outweighed his incredulity.

“It’s just a nickname I have for him—until I find out his real name,” my voice feathered off as I braced for what was sure to be a snarky response.

“Do you know what that means?” His voice was surprisingly mild.

“Yeah, uhh, thunderbolt. Because he struck me—” I froze. *Sweet daisies, stop talking!*

“Like a thunderbolt,” he completed, and all I could do was nod. “Not just any thunderbolt; that is what they call Zeus’s power.”

“Really?” I angled toward him with carefully contained interest.

“Mm-hmm.”

When Archos added nothing further, I had the distinct feeling it wasn’t sitting well with him, so I moved on to something else. “Speaking of power, why can’t I see? Obviously, you can; you’re still driving.”

“Give it time. It will wear off.”

That much I knew. “Is that your power?”

“No.” Archos’s abrupt reply made it clear he didn’t want to talk about it, which suited me; I didn’t want to talk to him right now anyway. I needed to find a way to get Archos to let me out.

Though the day was approaching its waning hours, the sun had yet to set; I knew because I could feel its warmth on my skin. I pulled the blanket off, and Archos took it from me. *Thank you*, I thought, unable to bring myself to say it aloud. I took a deep breath, grateful for the pause in our conversation. Day or night, I could hear the star’s melodious murmurs—indecipherable as they were—so I wished upon a star. *Please, please let him be okay*, “please.” The last word squeezed from me, heading skyward in a desperate plea. *Give me a way to get to him*.

Oh, how I needed the comforting presence of my Nonna right now, her embrace, wisdom, and quiet strength; my grandmother made everything right in our small corner of the world. She raised me after I lost my parents in a car accident. When Nonna passed and left me her house, the house I grew up in, it was then that I actually met my neighbor, Archos. He said he grew up next door, but I don’t remember seeing him until we were both older, and even that was rare. *His parents probably sent him off to boarding school*, I inwardly joked. With Archos came the chaos.

And those that were once lurking in the shadows, with eyes set on me, began to emerge ... to hunt.

The last of the pungent burnt wire smell dissipated, leaving the air smelling clean, like a fresh sea breeze—*like Archos*. My eyebrows crumpled, and the throbbing headache answered in response. We must've been miles away by now. I rubbed my temples until Archos rested his warm hand on my neck and massaged the tension.

“For the record, I am my father’s legacy; I *chose* to follow in his footsteps and attend the very boarding school he went to.”

“Oh.” I let my head droop to give him a better angle. “Mmm,” I sighed involuntarily to his skillful hand, kneading the tight muscles. *What am I doing?* I jerked my shoulder and tilted away from him, “Please stop.”

For once, he listened, and we sat in silence. Without his distractions, I struggled to subdue the nagging thought that had begged my attention since the accident: *Keraunos might be dead*. And with every passing second, we grew farther and farther away. A suffocating weight pressed in on me, and I had to get away from Archos, “I-I need air.”

“Here.” There was a mechanical hum followed by an unending gust of wind.

“Are you kidding? I want out!”

He rolled the window up and took a rather large, unneeded breath. I imagine it took the entire count of ten to calm down. “I think I made it clear; we are not stopping.”

Ignoring the calculated cool in his voice, I pressed, “Okay, I get it. You hit him because you think he’s immortal—not that that’s okay—but shouldn’t we check on him? I mean, either way, he’s hurt, right? You could at least move him to the side of the road.”

“This is not a debate, Lina,” Archos maintained.

Unbelievable. “Where’s your humanity?” When he didn’t answer, I prodded, “Oh, right; you’re not human.” He sighed his irritation but said nothing. *Another sigh*. “Fine. Let me out. I’ll help him myself.”

“Lar bless it; this is not about one’s obligation to render aid; we are not stopping for him!” Archos seethed.

And there it was, an admission of guilt. I slammed my hands down on the seat and turned toward Archos. I couldn’t see him, but I wanted to make darn sure he saw me. “I knew it; you’re sick,” I blurted.

“It is too dangerous,” he added.

“Dangerous for who? You ran the man over!” I turned until my back met the door and started to kick. My heel hit his leg and then maybe his hip. “I said, stop. Stop. The. Truck!”

“Good night,” he yelled his usual well-wish instead of cussing, “are you trying to make us wreck?”

He tried to block my kicks, sometimes successfully swatting my legs away; other times, I landed one and was glad. Of course, I was too far away to do much of anything other than be an annoyance. It didn’t take him long to knock my sandals off to soften the blows, but I kept kicking at his leg, hoping I could push it off the gas pedal.

“You ran the guy over with your big honkin’ truck. What are you afraid of? You think he’s gonna get up and beat you with one of his broken bones?” I could swear he laughed, which only “merited” more pummeling.

The truck swerved as his concentration split between our pace on the back country road and my assaults. “Will you desist?” He swatted my leg harder, and my ankle hit the dashboard.

“Ow!” I yelled louder than necessary, knowing it caught me more by surprise than anything.

“I may be immortal, but I feel pain just as well as you do; now stop,” he scolded, with barely a hint of remorse.

“Then so does *he*. How could you?” I attempted to kick him again, but he caught my leg and yanked. The back of my head thumped onto the leather seat, and he pulled me to him. Once my backside pressed against him, he pinned my legs to his chest. *How does he do that?* I struggled as if somehow, this time, I could break free from his grip.

“I said ‘enough’.”

“Monster.”

“Resorting to name-calling?” I was sure he was shaking his head. “Nice.”

“Whatever, nematode. I don’t care what you think.”

He huffed, “Somehow, I doubt that.”

“Ugh!” He was infuriating. “Presumptive much?”

“Presumptive much?” he gave a chuckle. “I think Angie is rubbing off on you.”

“I can’t believe you’re laughing—and leave my friend out of this.”

“You are right,” he admitted. “What did you call me, a nemo-what? Dare I ask what that is?”

“Archos!”

He squeezed my leg gently to get my attention. “Look,” there was empathy in his voice, “I understand. What you saw was troubling. However—”

“You think?” I snapped.

“*However*, what you perceive to be a fatal blow, I know to be insignificant.”

“Insignificant! Are you crazy?”

He ignored my outburst and continued, “No more than giving someone a shiner.”

“You’re equating that to a black eye? You are crazy.” I tried to sit up but found it difficult with him holding my legs. “So, all that,” I mimicked his deep chocolatey voice, “‘I may be immortal, but I still feel pain,’ is a load of compost?”

“No, but we have a high pain threshold—and I do not talk like that.”

Oops. I bit my lip while contemplating, “So, my kicks?”

“Butterfly kisses, albeit I prefer those from your stunning lashes.” He gently squeezed my legs. “It would have to be severe to be a bother.”

“Like getting plowed down by a mad truck?”

Aggravation sharpened his words, “All I did was buy us some time.”

“All you did—?” I exclaimed, then interrupted myself, “Do you hear yourself?” I wanted to believe Archos that Keraunos would be okay, but I found it hard, even if he was immortal. “It sounds like you don’t want him to be okay.”

“He is immortal,” Archos droned on in frustration at having to repeat himself. “Do you honestly think I would do such a thing if he was human?”

“I don’t know,” I retorted, “That shouldn’t matter, but as I said, I don’t know you.”

“You know me well enough to call me a worm.”

My cheeks heated. *I guess Archos does know what a nematode is. Of course, he does; he’s probably a parasitic Martian worm.* When he remained quiet, I figured he was waiting for a response, whether leach, vampire, or otherwise. “Maybe, but not what you’re capable of.”

The heat of his breath on my leg teased as his lips grazed my skin, “You know me better than that, Daisy-girl.” He finished with a kiss that replaced the tickle with an altogether new sensation.

“Stop it.”

“Stop what?” his sultry voice strummed as he stroked his thumb over my leg.

“That,” I swatted at his hand, “and don’t call me Daisy-girl. I’m mad.” It was unsettling how he could manipulate my emotions with such ease.

“As I previously stated, not all immortals are vampires, nor am I Vampiro-Immortalis. However, if you keep it up, I may be inclined to nibble your neck.”

I tried to ignore what he said, hating that he was systematically melting away my wall of anger. “I would’ve thought calling you a parasite was far worse.” One benefit of being blind was that I couldn’t see his beautiful smile; it was easier to stay mad that way.

“Perhaps. Then again, you could see me as Marvin the Martian, waiting for an earth-shattering kaboom.” He used my being visual to his advantage.

I tried to stifle any amusement at the image he provoked. *Why’s he acting all cute?* Then it hit me. “You’re stalling.” He was manipulating me all right—just not the way I thought.

The following words resonated crisp and somehow dense, crackling through the air as I reached up and grabbed for his chest to free my legs. “I have to save him!” An electric burst surged down my arm and out of my hand. With every pulse, I screamed in pain. Archos yelled out almost in unison; he grabbed my arm and chucked it away, throwing me off balance. As I reached to steady myself, I yelled, “I said, STOP!” The instant my hand touched the dashboard, the engine died, and the truck slowed to a halt.

Everything went silent.