

PROLOGUE

The tales of Devils Oak:

In the quiet town of River Valley, there lived a witch. She was friendly with most of the townspeople, so one one suspected a thing. She even had two demon helpers, but they seemed so human, that no one even looked twice at them. They lived slightly outside of the town, but no one had any reason to be suspicious.

One day, a girl who had been in love with one of the demons for a very long time without knowing what he was, felt jealous of the witch. She desperately wanted the attention of the man, completely unaware of his true nature. She decided to follow the witch back to her home. She hoped that she'd be able to catch him at a moment when he wasn't with the witch. After waiting a few minutes besides the door, she decided to knock. She waited for a few minutes, heart pounding, but nothing happened. She decided to knock again, still receiving no response. She then decided to peeking in through the window, desperate to even catch a glimpse of him.

Her heart thudded in her throat, as she saw him and the girl talking, for some reason he was holding an apple, but didn't take a bite. The other man, whom she was not interested, was sitting in a chair, simply observing. The man, the one she was in love with, then tossed the apple into the air, but it did not hit the ground. It stayed there floating, with no body touching it.

The girl screamed, backing away from the window. She turned, terrified, and ran back to the center of the village.

At first no one believed her story. The girl did however, manage to convince a few people to at least check out the witch's house.

Upon arriving at the house, they witnessed the witch doing something that seemed to be a demonic ritual. The girl was standing in a circle drawn in chalk, and several objects surrounding her were afloat.

The girl screamed, and splashed the witch with holy water. The witch screamed, and steam erupted from her skin. The girl then shoved the witch backwards, and jumped on top of her, she then picked

up a dagger, and stabbed the witch in her heart. A look of betrayal crossed the witch's face, as the girl stabbed her to death.

The townspeople, in fear, ran out of the house, and the girl, calmly, stood up. After a few minutes, she, followed by the two demons left too.

Upon realizing they had no hope of saving their master, the demons were angered. They decided to flee, into the woods, but not before getting their revenge. One of the demons, turned to the girl, and said "Tell your silly little friends, that the Birman twins have left their mark. Let these woods bear the mark of madness, no human who enters, will ever leave again."

And with those words, the curse of Devils Oak began.

1

I wake up, panting heavily, in a cold sweat. I had the same nightmare, every night, you think that I'd be used to it by now, but no. My eyes dart around my room, looking for anything to reassure me that I was back in reality. I look at the clock on the nightstand next to me. It says that it was eight am. I sigh, and slide onto the cold stone floor. My entire room is stone, stone walls, stone floor, stone ceiling. I had to make it less boring, with posters, and paintings, most of the paintings I made, and the posters were of various things that I liked. My room itself was pretty bare, it had a bed, a nightstand, a desk that was covered in art supplies, a bookshelf, and a dresser, since my room didn't have a closet.

The air is so cold, which was normal, seeing how my room was a fixed up cell in the dungeon. I grab some clothes, a t-shirt and jeans, and walk to the bathroom across the hall.

I look awful, well worse than usual. My long, light brown hair is knotted, there's dark circles underneath my electric blue eyes. The bathroom is freezing, but at least it has plumbing. You wouldn't expect that of a castle that's been around for who knows how long, but you'd be surprised. I look at the box of makeup, I don't really like wearing it, in fact, I barely even know why I have it to begin with. I don't even consider covering the dark circles, I'm way too lazy for that, plus no one's even gonna see me. Well, no one except for Jasper and Milo.

I wear a very plain blue oversized T-shirt, jeans, and my hair tied back into a ponytail. A lot of my other clothes is skirts and dresses, stuff that I would never wear. I guess Jasper and Milo really like to buy me clothing, or else they would just stick with one fashion sense. Makes sense that they would like to go into the village with any excuse they got, after all they needed some form of entertainment.

I walk up the narrow winding staircase. A delicious smell wafts from the kitchen. I walk in, to see that everyone was already seated, everyone being only two people, but still.

Milo was seated at the table, wearing a green T-shirt, shorts, and only one single sock. How he managed to lose one sock is beyond me. His shaggy black hair was a mess. He looked as if he'd just woken up, which was surprising, since he didn't actually need any sleep. Jasper on the other hand, was wearing a

hoodie, despite the sunshine, and jeans, I guess the temperature didn't bother him. He also wore glasses, I wasn't entirely sure if they were even real or not. It wasn't like someone like him needed them, but then again it was just like him to fake an eye exam just to get glasses. He also wore a weird frilly pink apron that read "Kiss the cook" over his clothes, which made sense since he was cooking, I guess. His auburn hair was combed more neatly than Milo's, as if he actually put time into his appearance. I guess that makes one out of three.

I sit down at the table next to Milo. He points to the dark circles on my face "Maybe we should give you an earlier bedtime. Or really any bedtime."

"You already did," I say as Jasper plops down a plate of chocolate chip pancakes. "You're just really bad at enforcing rules and you know it."

"I can be strict!" Jasper says untying his apron, and hanging it on the hook where we normally keep our jackets. "I'm just too busy with... Other things."

"Like stalking villagers?"

"Well... Yes."

"Knew it," I say shoving a forkful of pancake into my mouth. As always, it's cooked to absolute perfection, but there's no need to tell Jasper that. He already knows this, plus I don't need to increase his ego even more. Jasper usually was cooking, or annoying the villagers, or reading a book or something. Milo usually just watches TV (Because somehow castles get electricity and cable) or plays video games, or sometimes I can persuade him to go on walks with me. Jasper likes going on walks a lot more than Milo does, but he's horrible to walk with. He always stops to provoke random animals into fighting each other or chasing us. He also talks the entire time, normally it's just ranting about books, TV or anime, or whatever he's interested in that day, but when he starts talking he never stops. While Milo does stop to try and pet every animal we see, at least he's quieter than Jasper.

I look over at Milo's plate. He had a huge stack, of what must be about ten pancakes. He sure eats a lot for someone who doesn't need food. Or at least I don't think he does. I decide that it's too quiet, I need to hear the sound of my own voice.

"So... Jasper, seen anything interesting lately?" I ask in a real casual tone, attempting to hide my smile.

Milo's eyes widen with a look of betrayal as Jasper ponders the question. "No... You seriously had to? WHAT IF HE ACTUALLY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY???"

“He always has something to say,” I say, with a satisfied giggle. One of the unspoken rules is to never ask Jasper questions, because when he answers, he’ll answer for about an hour. Or two. Or ten.

“Well,” Jasper says “I read this one murder mystery, and they’re locked in a hotel with the killer, and then they killed off the ONLY LIKABLE CHARACTER!”

“I’ve probably read it,” I say, “Do you know what the name is?”

“Something with killer in the title probably,” Jasper says. So obviously he doesn’t know what the name is. Of course he wouldn’t. I shake my head and let out a sigh.

I stood up to get myself seconds, walking from the dining room to the kitchen, and let Milo deal with the rest of Jasper’s ranting. Milo shoots me a “to kill” look. As I’m loading another pancake onto my plate, I hear something bang against the back door.

That confuses me, considering the fact that no one is supposed to be able to find this place. I hear it again, something scratching against the door. Curiously, I walk to the door, and pull it open. Before I even have time to scream, or jump out of the way, something leaps out at me, and pins me to the ground.

2

Milo's already dark red eyes suddenly grow brighter. Instead of somewhat human like, they get cat like, his teeth also get longer, and sharper, and his fingernails grow longer. I know that this was only a piece of his true form, but it was still intimidating. I keep avoiding the teeth, as the animal snaps at me, and barks loudly into my ear. In a flash of motion, Milo lunges at the thing ontop of me, tackling it, to the side. Now that I can see it clearly, I see that it's a dog.

Milo hugs it in such away, that it can barely move. It keeps squirming and barking, but Milo holds it still. I can see that the dog is fluffy, with long black fur, and glowing red eyes. It had white foam dripping from its mouth that flew every where every time it barked. Milo clamped its mouth shut, it continued to growl.

I could have saved myself from the dog, but it's better that I didn't. It's better that I let Milo save me, That way, I wouldn't expose my secret. I also notice that Jasper didn't move from his chair, he instead studied me intently, almost as if he wanted to see what I'd do. *He knows*. I wanted to scream, He knows something, but I'm still not saying anything about it. I know he's onto me, I've known it from the beginning, but this just proves it.

Suddenly, the dog in Milos hands went limp. Milo let go in surprise. The dog then Jumped up, and bound towards me. Before it could get to me, milo lunged for it, he misses the dog itself, but managed to grab onto its collar. He holds the dog's collar, trying his best to pull is away from me, but the dog is relentless. The dog pulls so hard that the collar snaps, Milo flies back, and the dog falls sideways, goes limp, and its eyes go a pearly white color. I awkwardly crawl away from the dog, "I-is it dead?"

Jasper slides off of his chair "Well there's only one way to find out I guess" He licks the syrup off of the fork he was eating with, and jabs it into the dog's leg. The dog doesn't even so much as twitch. The fork lodges itself into the dog's leg, and bent slightly.

"Did I kill it?" Milo asks blinking and poking the dead dog with his foot.

Jasper points to the scrap of ripped cloth in Milo's hand "I bet it was the collar. The dog was already dead, you can tell from the lack of blood, and this collar enchanted it to bring it back as a... zombie thing"

"Why?" I ask "I mean I get people love their pets and all, but why?"

"To kill." Jasper says "And judging from its behavior, you were its target"

"That doesn't make any sense" I say. No one knows I'm here, how's it possible that they sent the dog after me? Everyone I know thinks I'm dead, no one's heard from me in six years, since I was eight. Unless someone has found

me out... ? That's not possible, it's impossible for anyone to find this place... Unless they're not human. Could somebody have really found out about me? Jasper meets my eyes. His face is stone cold, but I can tell he knows how scared I am, and his eyes are silently grinning. *Did he send it after me?*

"It was probably meant for any humans, not just Sapphire specifically right? It as probably sent from just past this castle and the dog got attracted to the nearest human or something right?" Milo says, "After all, why would anyone want to go after Sapphire?"

"It's entirely possible" Jasper says, pushing up his glasses to make him seem smarter, or perhaps his glasses were actually sliding down. "But if it was set after humans, wouldn't it be drawn to a crowd rather than one measly human?"

Milo falls silent. I can tell that he's still not entirely convinced. I guess from what I've told him, there's no reason or possibility for someone to send a wild undead warrior after me. After all, everyone I know, which wasn't many people in the first place, hasn't seen or heard from me in six years, since I left in the middle of the night. Seeing that no one who goes into the woods ever come out, they probably just assume I'm dead. Is this some kind of sick way of trying to track me down? You'd think that they would have... safer ways of tracking me right? But of course, it wasn't my family or friends tracking me down, it was someone else. Someone who tracked me down because they figured me out somehow.

Jasper stares at me. His golden eyes cut into me. I can already tell he's trying to figure this out. With a chill, I wonder if he's reading my mind. *You promised you wouldn't!* My mind shouts, but of course there's no reply. When I first came here, that's one of the things they'd promise, they wouldn't read or manipulate my mind, even though they had the power. I promised something else, to never leave, or attempt to escape. It's not like even if I did escape, I'd get very far anyway, they'd probably sense it and drag me right back. *Maybe he knows... Maybe he's figured it out. Maybe he realizes I'm not entirely human.*

But if he knows then why not say something about it? Is it because he knows I'll deny it? *No I think It's because this is entertaining to him. He wouldn't want to interfere, because that's not what demons like him do. That's the job of Milo. He just has to manipulate one thing, then sit back and watch.*

I look at Jasper's face. I got it right. So he *has* been in my mind! I suddenly feel extremely violated. But it did make sense then, even if Jasper has figured

out what I am, he still doesn't know how strong I am. That's why he didn't stop the dog, he wanted to see me defend myself. That, and he's extremely lazy.

I AM NOT! A voice shouts in my head. Its Jasper's voice.

AHA! So you have been in my mind! I shout back satisfied.

Um... this is your subconscious? The voice says, now shifting to sound a little more like me. I wouldn't be fooled by it though, that little liar was in my mind! I guess I shouldn't have expected too much from a demon.

"So uh... You guys done having an awkward staring contest?" Milo interjects waving his hand between us. We both turn and look at him. "So what exactly should we do with the dog's corpse?" He says, pointing his thumb back at the poor puppy lying on the ground. I couldn't help but feel kind of bad.

"I guess I could try and bring it back" Jasper says with a shrug.

"Wait you can bring stuff back from the dead???" I ask, I knew he was powerful, after all, he's part of the reason I'm stuck in this whole mess, but... Bringing stuff back from the dead? That was straight up unnatural.

"Kind of" Jasper said "We have limits. Something brought back immediately after it died, would be in better shape. Usually it's within twenty four hours or so. After something's been dead for about twenty four hours, It'll come back as nothing more than a bloodthirsty puppet. The more decomposed it is, the less lively and more puppet like it is"

"That's... messed up" I say.

"What part of us *isn't*" Milo retorts.

"Yeah, yeah" Jasper says with a wave of his hand. He pulls the fork out of the dog's thigh, then placing his hands on the dogs chest. The dogs white eyes are suddenly filled with an orange glow, and the dog bolts up. The dog sits still, with its head cocked to one side.

"Well now we have a living dog. Cool. Can we keep it?" Milo says. He's already wrapped his arms around the dog. He was strangling it a second ago, and now they're practically in love.

"Ok fine. What should we name it? How about sebastian?" Jasper says crossing his arms.

Milo wrinkles his nose "No. That's an awful name for a dog. It sounds like the name of some kind of old fashioned narcissistic butler."

"How about Pazzo? That's a cute name for a dog!" I suggest, silently agreeing that Sebastian would be a terrible dogs name.

“Pazzo” Milo echos “I like that! It's fun! Paaaaaaaaaazzzzzzoooooo! Here Pazzo! Come here boy!”

Pazzo's ears perked up, and stared at Milo confused, I guess since he was already right next to Milo, he didn't need to run over to see him.

“But!” Jasper says, unwilling to lose the argument “You can kinda see this dog as a butler right?”

“Pazzo.” I say finally “This dog is a Pazzo.”

Jasper sighs, and pats the dog's head. “I guess he can be Pazzo”.

I smiled proudly, and nervously joined in petting the dog on the head. The dog happily stuck its tongue out, panting gleefully. I was already falling in love with this dog, even though it was technically a zombie dog. I've been wanting a pet for so long, the fact that it was dead didn't matter, as long as I actually had one.

I then notice a crunched up piece of paper on the floor next to Pazzo's paw. I pick it up, and uncurl it, to see what it is. It's a note, When I look at the words it sends a chill up my spine.

IF YOU'RE READING THIS, THEN I'VE FOUND YOU.

3

“Strange” Jasper muttered thoughtfully “And just as I was thinking of ruling this out as a mere coincidence.”

“Where did the note even come from?” Milo asks, snatching the note out of my grasp to read it over again.

“My guess is that it was tucked into the dog, sorry *pazzo*’s collar, and when Milos snapped it it flew out.” Jasper says, pointing to the shred of the collar, which Milo abandon on the floor.

“So Pazzo really was sent after me then?” I ask, my throat feeling tight. I’d been so sure that no one knew about me, or at least not anyone who still thinks I’m alive. As much as I sometimes hated how strict the twin’s rules on leaving were, they were keeping me safe. Or at least I thought they were. But, if someone was to track me down here, and I wasn’t able to leave, what would I do?

Then I remembered I wasn’t supposed to be thinking about that, since Jasper could read my mind. *Think about other things, like the dog we just got, or chocolate, or... more chocolate* I repeat to myself. It almost works.

Beside me, Pazzo suddenly jumps up and bounds toward the door. He whines, then claws at it, still whining, before turning around, cocking his head to the side, and using his puppy dog eyes to their full advantage.

“He says he wants to go outside” Milo says.

“So you can speak dog as well?” I ask. I seem to find out more and more about how unbelievably powerful these guys are each day.

“Well obviously” Jasper says “We don’t natively speak the language that any of you humans do, but we can still speak to you, if we can speak to you, why would you think we can’t speak to animals as well?”

“Because animals don’t have speech, they do have sounds, but it’s not exactly speech” I say, crossing my arms and swishing my hair over my shoulder, holding my nose up as if to say *look I’m smart*, when in reality I have no idea what I’m talking about.

“It doesn’t matter if they have full on speech patterns or not” Jasper says “They still have thoughts, though not as complex as yours or mine they still have thoughts”

“You don’t have to be a mind reader to know that a dog scratching at a door wants to go outside” Milo points out.

“Well... true...” Jasper says, I swear if demons could blush Jasper would be the color of a tomato right now.

“So... Can you or can you not speak to dogs then?” I ask “Because, maybe you can ask Pazzo why he was sent after me or something”

“No, Pazzo was little more than a bloodthirsty beast. When something is brought back, it's normally more savage, the closer to the twenty four hour mark it is. I’m guessing Pazzo was only dead for two or three days, but he still probably has no memories of being dead.” Milo says, petting the dog, then adding “Poor Pazzo. Jasper probably only let us keep you because he was too lazy to bury you.”

Pazzo cocks his head to the side again, and started whimpering. I sighed, walking to the door. “I guess I can take him for a walk” I say.

Pazzo was good, he didn’t run off. He stayed right by me, unless he saw a squirrel, then he would bound after it, scaring the poor helpless animal half to death. Pazzo didn’t kill the poor animal though, he just barked at it excitedly. I watch him attempt to make friends with the squirrels, but instead the squirrels would scurry away, usually up a tree where he would sit and bark at them, seeing that his new toys were just out of reach.

Aside from the squirrels though, Pazzo didn’t run after any other animals. While I found that kind of strange, there was a lot more strange about the undead dog. Halfway along the trail, I picked up a large stick, and Pazzo instantly got excited. His already bright orange eyes glowed brighter, and he started hopping around on his back two paws.

“You want me to throw it?” I ask looking at the excited dog. “FETCH!” I yell, tossing the stick in the dogs direction. Pazzo jumps up, and catches the stick mid-air. He places it at my feet, looking up at me hopefully, with his tongue hanging out, his head slightly tilted to the side.

“You want me to throw it again?” I ask, in my best high pitched excited dog voice. It might have just been me, and the fact that I’m becoming a crazy dog lady, but I swear that Pazzo nodded.

“Ok” I say, tossing the stick. I throw it harder this time, and Pazzo doesn’t catch it instantly, he instead watches it land. It falls to the ground with a soft thud, and as soon as it falls, Pazzo runs after it, with lightning speed.

He then runs back to me, with the stick in his mouth. I pick it up a third time, when Pazzo turns his head, and starts sprinting away. I set the stick down, and run after Pazzo. “Where is that dumb dog *going?*” I ask no one. I wonder exactly why Pazzo just suddenly sprinted off, since he was being so good just a minute ago. *He probably saw a squirrel.*

I don’t even realize exactly where I’m running too, until I trip over Pazzo’s tail, and do my best to manoeuvre myself so that I don’t end up crushing him when I fall. I end up landing on my butt on the ground, right next to Pazzo, who is looking longingly at something. It takes me a few minutes to realize what exactly I’m looking at. The fence. The one that’s keeping me here. As much as I can almost pretend that Jasper and Milo are just keeping me safe, I’m still basically their prisoner. They’ll never let me leave, at least not alive. *If I’d known crossing that fence I would never cross it again, would I still have crossed it?* Part of me still says yes. The other part, was busy obsessing over how cute Pazzo was.

“Pazzo” I say brushing him lightly “You miss it don’t You?” He whines, jumping against the gate, pressing himself to it, as if he was attempting to jump over it. But it was too tall, and the top was laced with barbed wire. Whether we like it or not, we were trapped here. I wonder, what was Pazzo’s life like before he died? Would his owners miss him? How did he die, old age or something else? But as curious as I was, I would probably never find out the answer.

I grab Pazzo by the neck, and guide him away from the gate. He struggles, and whines in protest. “I’m sorry” I mumble to the dog, leading him back to our prison.

“I saw that” A voice says from behind me. I whirl around to see Milo standing behind me with a disappointed look on his face. His arms are crossed over his chest, and his dark red eyes pierce into me. “You know you’re supposed to stay away from the fence”

“But Pazzo ran off!” I begin hastily, avoiding eye contact at all costs. Normally, if you maintain eye contact it makes you look more truthful, but you’ve never seen Milo’s eyes. There was something unnatural about the split pupils, his eyes were like blood colored cat eyes.

“I saw” He says, eyes still burning into me “You should have just told me to go the Pazzo”

“Well I didn’t know you were *stalking* me. Next time just tell me, we can even walk together” I say crossing my arms, looking just past Milo’s shoulder. I’m not sure if it's very intimidating, since I can barely look him in the eye.

“I’m only here because Jasper told me to be out here. Jasper’s the one who likes stalking you, He’s just too lazy to do it himself” Milo mutters, uncrossing his arms to put one on his hip, like a sassy teenage girl.

“You like walking with me and you know it” I tease.

“I’d like it a lot more if you were a dog” Milo sighed “But I guess not everyone can be as perfect as Pazzo and I”

“You’re comparing yourself to Pazzo” I point out “Pazzo tried to eat a stick”

“Yes, yes true genius” Milo says.

“Right.” I mutter, rolling my eyes.

“Can we go back already?” Milo groans “You’ve already walked farther than you SHOULD have. I’m bored of this”

It's already a million degrees out, so as much as I like being outside, I decide it's best to go back inside. At least at the castle, we have AC. “Ok fine” I sigh “But you have to be the one who drags Pazzo home.”

I start walking forward, marching ahead of Milo, who starts throwing sticks to get Pazzo to move. There's some, kind of an odd high pitched ringing in my ear, but what exactly it is, I can’t tell. I decide it’s not important, and keep on walking. I guess the heat was starting to get to me. Not only does waterfalls worth of sweat drip down my neck, but my stomach aches a little, and I feel light headed. I keep walking forward, when suddenly the world starts to dim, and everything starts to slant. Not only does it slant, but it starts to spin.

I fall onto the ground, and shut my eyes tight to stop the world from spinning.

4

I'm sitting in the back of a car again. In the front, I see my mom, and my older sister. I'm slightly surprised, though I'm not entirely sure why. My mom looks like me, her hair is light brown like mine, But I can barely see her face, I'm not entirely sure why, perhaps it's just the way the light hits it. My sister's face, however, is much more clear. I can hear my sister and my mom and sister chatting about something, though what exactly it is, I'm not sure.

"You're awake" My sister says turning to me, as my mom continues to talk about nothing.

"Where are we going?" I ask. My sister doesn't answer, she just turns back to my mom, and starts nodding, as if she cared about whatever mom was ranting about.

We continue to drive along the road, I can't make out exactly what my mom and sister seem to be saying. They talk so quietly I can't hear them from the back seat. I wonder if it's not to wake me, though my sister already acknowledged that I was awake. Suddenly, the car jerks to a halt, and my mom slowly turns to face me.

"Out of the car. Now." Mom demands, pointing one of her long boney fingers at me. When I don't move, she crawls across the car, opening the door, and forcefully shoves me out onto the sidewalk. I realize, that there is no sidewalk, it's all just dirt. The ground is covered in a dusty sand, I realize we're in the middle of a desert.

My mom shut the car door, climbing back into her seat, and drove away, as quickly as she could, leaving me alone in the dirt. I can barely make out the utterly shocked face of my sister, as the car drives off.

When I wake up, I'm lying on the couch in the living room. Despite the fact that I'm covered in sweat, I'm still shivering. I spot Jasper in the corner, sitting on a chair reading a book. I slowly sit up, shaking the thin blanket draped over me off.

“Oh, you’re awake” Jasper says, setting down his book.

“You don’t have to sound so disappointed” I say.

“Can you blame me?” Jasper sighs “I was just at the climax. Now I have to set my book down and talk to you, and make sure you’re not dying”

“What if I am dying” I say, throwing myself back on the couch dramatically.

“That would be such a tragedy,” Jasper mutters sarcastically. “I’ll make sure to blast anime theme songs at your funeral”

“Thanks,” I say sitting up. “You’re a true friend.”

At that moment, Milo barged through the door holding a glass of water and five popsicles. “Oh you’re awake” He says, spotting me staring at him from the couch. “Popsicle?” He asks, leaning over me so I can reach one of the many popsicles cradled in his arms.

I pick a red one out of his arms and start to unwrap it. The cold popsicle and the AC felt good. “Do you think it was the heat that made me pass out?” I ask in between licks of my popsicle.

“That would be a logical assumption,” Jasper said pushing up his glasses as they slid down his face. “Only your skin was ice cold according to Milo.”

“It was,” Milo said. “Even though it’s like a million degrees out.”

“It’s like 75 degrees” I say.

“Fahrenheit,” Jasper says sighing in disgust. “You need to learn to use the right measurement”

“Sorry,” I apologize sarcastically. “It’s America. I have no right to question the lord of hamburgers”

“What ever” Jasper grumbled stuffing his face into the book again.

“I could go for a hamburger” Milo said in between licks of his popsicle.

I roll my eyes, and slide off the couch. I attempted to stand, but immediately felt light headed and sat back down.

Jasper gives me a concerned look, “You want a glass of water or something?”

“No thanks.” I mutter, “I just stood up too fast.”

“How about another popsicle?” Milo said, leaning forward so the mass of popsicles in his arms were practically in my face.

“No thanks” I say, not because I didn’t want one, but because they were all orange, the color which I despise.

“I’ll take one while you’re being generous.” Jasper said, reaching for a popsicle from Milo’s arms. Milo angrily elbow-butts the popsicle out of Jasper's hand, landing the orange popsicle on the white carpet.

“MY CARPET” Jasper screeches as he dives forward hoping to pick up the popsicle before it can stain. I almost feel bad for him, I know how much of a neat freak he can be.

Milo just smirked “My bad, looks like I fuzzed up.”

Jasper sighs and rolls his eyes. He gets up and sprints towards the kitchen, making sure to bump into Milo on the way. I think about how much they remind me of my own sister and I. Being the younger sibling I was often the subject of teasing, but it was mutual. I often found ways to get her back, usually involving embarrassing her in front of her boyfriend.

Thinking about my sister makes me sad, and I think Milo notices the tears in my eyes.

“Are you ok?” He asks, “Are you sure you don’t want a popsicle?”

“No.” I say flatly “I’m fine.”

Milo stares at me. I know he doesn’t believe me, but even if I told him what upset me, it wouldn’t solve anything. Milo opens his mouth to say something, but is interrupted when Jasper sprints back into the room, paper towels in hand and taking extra care to bump into Milo on his way back in. He then knelt down next to the now half melted orange popsicle on the white carpet, and began frantically whipping it up while muttering to himself.

“Can’t you just use demon magic or something?” I ask.

Jasper glares at me, and with obvious sarcasm says “Well gee. Why didn’t I think of that. Maybe because it’s cheating and I’m not that lazy? Or maybe because demon magic is specific and used for more than ‘cleaning stuff?’”

“If I had magic I’d use it to be lazy all the time.” I say “I’d never get up to find the remote or walk to the fridge again.”

“Then why don’t you?” Jasper mutters under his breath. This catches me off guard, since he’s usually not this direct. I’m not sure exactly how to react, but before I could even say anything, Jasper smirked slightly, but conceals that smirk by saying “I mean, why don’t you just convince Milo to do it? He’s such a huge pushover I’m sure you can get him to do anything for you.”

“Hey!” Milo says “I’m not a pushover, I just want our guest to be comfortable!”

“I’ve lived with you guys for six years. You think I haven’t already figured That out?” I smirk. Milo lets out an exaggerated offended gasp.

“Fine then. I’ll remember that next time I offer you popsicles” Milo lectures.

“I didn’t want your gross popsicles anyway” I retort. This causes Milo to look even more deeply offended.

“I should’ve just left you out there to die of heatstroke or something” Milo growles.

“Then you would’ve put a whole six years and a bagillion dollars worth of chocolate to waste” I tease.

Milo rolls his eyes and huffs angrily. Jasper chuckles and says “You’re overly confident. I could just kill you right now.”

“You could’ve killed me anytime” I point out “I guess you’ve grown to like me.”

“Don’t flatter yourself, I was merely curious.” Jasper mutters

“You say was, but you haven’t killed me yet” I retaliate.

Jaspers expression reveals the faintest hint of a smile. “I guess it's because I haven’t gotten the answer I’m looking for just yet.”

5

I stare at the alarm clock that casts glowing blue lights across my room. Yet another night I spend sleepless, for fear of having *that* dream again. I start to recount what happens in the dream, it was similar to the one I had earlier, except something happens after my mom shoves me out of the car. Something happens, but I could never remember all of it...

Just as I started attempting to think back to exactly how the dream ended, the creek of the stairs interrupted my thoughts. I got up and walked to my door, not opening it, but pressing my ear to it. I heard a soft thud of footsteps attempting to be quiet. My first thought was Pazzo, but he slept curled up in the corner of my bed. I figured it would've been Jasper; Milo was never that careful. But when I opened the door the red eyes piercing me revealed I was wrong.

"Milo?" I ask, He jumps nervously, revealing that it really was him. I wonder why exactly he was trying so hard to be sneaky since stealth isn't really his thing.

"Oh, uh Sapphire! Fancy meeting you here." Milo stammeres.

"What the heck are you doing" I hiss.

"I'm uh... sleep walking? While awake? You know what it's my house ! I can do whatever the heck I want!" Milo rambles. That's enough to let me know that he's definitely up to something.

"Milo. What are you up to? I thought the suspicious one was Jasper." I grumble, all former sense of sleepiness beginning to fade.

Milo sighs, finally aware that his acting skills are quite lacking. He leans in close to my ear and whispers "Ok, fine. There's something I want to tell you, but I can't right now. I'm almost positive that he's listening."

"Jasper?" I wondered. Milo's expression tells me that I'm write. I guess demons wouldn't sleep, and with the control freak Jasper was, it didn't surprise me much that he would listen.

"Meet me outside by the back door tomorrow after breakfast" Milo whispered, then raising his voice a little added "And for satan's sake child, go to sleep."

"I've been trying. But I got interrupted thanks to *somebody*." I snapped. I felt wide awake now, it would take me another hour or so to grow tired again.

“I get it” Milo chuckled lightly before placing the palm of his hand on my forehead.

“Good night” he muttered, and immediately my eyelids begin to grow heavy. The last thing I notice before I sink into sleep is Milo’s bright red eyes gleaming in the darkness. My knees give out beneath me and I sink into unconsciousness.

When I open my eyes I notice that I’m in my bed, only I wasn’t under the covers. I then recall the events that took place last night, and it became apparent that Milo had used some kind of sleep magic on me. Surprisingly, the only other time he’s used it was when I first showed up at the castle, and woke up screaming from nightmares. It was the first time I’d ever had that dream.

I sit up, my hair tumbles in waves down my shoulders. I’m sure that when I look in the mirror my hair will look like some sort of living being. I slid off the bed and wander into the bathroom, and I’m surprised to find an outfit laid out for me.

I guess that they must’ve been put out there by Milo. The first thing that caught my eyes were the boots. They were hiking boots, not my usual sneakers. Confused, I pick them up and look at the size. They’re size eight, a half size too big, and I wonder why would Milo want me to wear random boots I’ve never seen before. I gasp when I realize what else is in the pile of clothing. Aside from the shirt and pants that I’ve never even seen before, there was a platinum blond wig sat on top of the shirt I was supposed to wear.

Then I realized; I wasn’t supposed to wear it. At least not yet. Whatever Milo wanted to meet me for, I wasn’t supposed to be recognized. It surprised me a bit, Milo usually wasn’t one to sneak around hiding things behind Jasper's back.

“I get it. I’ll play along” I giggle mischievously as I walk back to my room and find some clothing to change into. I pick something that I would usually wear, a t-shirt, a pair of shorts, and my dirty old sneakers.

As I take my usual place at the kitchen table, I notice Milo was absent from his seat. Jasper stands by the stove, and once again he’s wearing his pink apron. Although I already have the vague idea of where he might be, I still decide to question Milo’s absence.

“I have absolutely no idea” Jasper shrugged “But hey, that means we might have left overs for once” He seemed surprisingly unconcerned at his brother's disappearance. Usually Jasper was the one to leave with no mention of where he'd be. Milo almost never left the house unless told to do so by Jasper.

Jasper sets a plate of eggs, bacon, and toast in front of me. That's when he notices the cloth bag that I have besides my chair. He raised an eyebrow but didn't question it, which surprised me. He usually asked a lot of questions, whether it be ones I could answer or not. I figure that he must know what Milo wants with me, why else wouldn't he ask any questions? But if Jasper already knew, then why did Milo try so hard to keep it hidden?

After I finish breakfast, I pick up the bag and start to head towards the side door. Jasper puts his hand on my shoulder and suddenly I feel a bit unnerved, although with no reason to. I turn around calmly, and face Jasper who's wearing an annoyed expression.

“If you're going to leave without saying a word the least you could do is put your plate in the sink” Jasper states as he glares over his shoulder at the plate I left out on the table. I begrudgingly walk back to the table and move the plate into the sink.

“I'm going outside now” I tell Jasper flatly.

He nods “At least you finally found the decency to clean up after yourself before you left. You're doing better than Milo who decided to take that stupid dog out and not clean up it's muddy footprints.”

I gasp, realizing that Jasper is right. I didn't even think about it, but when I woke up this morning Pazzo wasn't in my room. I wonder just what Milo had planned. “Well, whatever. I'm going outside.” I reply hoping Jasper won't notice just how confused I was by all of this.

“Bye then” Jasper said with his usual unreadable expression as I walked out the door.

I barely take five steps out when some blurry mess swoops down from mid air and lifts me by the waist before speeding through the woods. I barely have time to process what was going on before it drops me again. I took a second to look around, I feel disoriented and can't tell exactly where I am or which direction the castle is. In front of me is a large black mist like substance that cloaks everything so heavily in darkness that the sun looks completely eclipsed. The mist begins to shift, folding into itself until it starts to take the more solid

shape of a human. I gape as Milo appears out of the shadows before my eyes along with the sun which shines brightly over the dissipating cloud of darkness.

“Milo?” I screech angrily at the demon who appeared out of nowhere “You couldn’t just tell me to follow you rather than giving me motion sickness?”

“Sorry” Milo apologized halfheartedly “I didn’t want Jasper to see us.”

“Right.” I huff “Any way, is there a point to dragging me out into the middle of the woods?”

“We’re not in the middle of the woods, we’re at the *edge* of the woods.” Milo points out “The fence separating the woods and the village is just over there.”

“So, you took me over to the edge of the woods because...?” I question.

“I’m going to let you visit your old home.” Milo says.

6

After being kept in the woods without contact to anyone I knew previously for six years, it was hard to believe I'd be let out just like that. I feel like there has to be some sort of catch, or this is just another one of Jasper's pranks. I decide that because of Jasper's odd behavior, he it must've been the ladder.

"Ok, get it this is all a prank" I grumble "Well, very funny. Can we go back to the house now?"

"It's not" Milo insists "I've been debating taking you back for a while. The only reason I didn't was Jasper seemed to have an odd fixation with you, normally he would've just killed you."

"I'm still confused" I confess. That explanation made no sense to me. Milo just sighed as if he was expecting that.

"Basically I'm not aloud to set you free, but I'll take you to visit the village once." Milo says "Because I'm not the type of demon who enjoys human suffering like Jasper. I'm a demon who feeds on souls."

"That still doesn't explain anything" I say.

"Fine then. Don't bother with the why, just know that I'm doing something nice." Milo says.

"Ok. But if this turns out to be a prank I'm going to sick pazzo on you!" I say.

"Speaking of which" Milo chirps

"PAAAAAAAAAAAAZZZZZZZZZZZOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO" Milo calls out, and not even a second later the dog bounds out of the bushes and parks himself in front of the demon, tongue sticking out and tail wagging. He kneels down and starts petting the dog, It's about a full thirty seconds before Milo remembers me looming awkwardly over his shoulder. He stands up turning to me and smiles "Shall we go then?"

"We're bringing the dog?" I caution. "You can change your shape and I can wear a wig but if we run into Jasper he's sure to recognize the glowing orange eyes."

Milo gives me a sort of funny look “The wig isn’t so Jasper doesn’t recognize you, he’d recognize you either way. It’s so people you knew don’t recognize you.”

“Oh.” I say, nervousness suddenly fluttering around in my stomach “SO if we run into Jasper we’re basically screwed”

“Yep” Milo confirms sounding rather unconcerned.

“Great” I grumble “Well then, let’s go since I’m inevitably going to be caught might as well get it out of the way.”

“That’s the spirit!” Milo cheers, as he grabs my hand and once again I’m surrounded by mist and shot forward at speeds so intense I begin to feel motion sick.

I feel to the ground landing on my hands and knees, and immediately turn to glare at Milo “You couldn’t have set me down on my feet?”

“Sorry” Milo says without a hint of apology in his voice.

I roll my eyes at him and stand up, brushing the dirt off of my knees, which are now brush burned thanks to that fall. “I guess I should put on that wig now huh?”

“That’s probably a good Idea” Milo says “You should also change into the clothes I gave you.”

“Right here? In the open?” I object.

Milo blinks before realizing what he just said. “You humans and your embarrassment.” He mumbles “That’s not what I meant. You can just put the jeans and hoodie on what you’re already wearing.”

“A hoodie and jeans in 90 degree weather” I retort, not that it bothers me too much but because now I just want to be right.

“It’s only for an hour” Milo says.

“I nearly had a heatstroke yesterday.” I remind him.

“I’m not too sure about that...” Milo mutters under his breath.

“Right, well I’ll put the clothes on but you’re going to have to help me with the wig.” I say.

“Fine” Milo says “I happen to be an expert at putting wigs on people”

“Why...Never mind, I’m sure I don’t want to know.” I decide.

Walking the streets of my old town felt strangely alien. The town was much bigger in my memory. As I walked through the center of the town I noticed missing posters with my face on it, along side several missing dog and

cat posters. It felt weird seeing my own face as a missing poster, but I tried to act like I didn't even notice and kept walking. I kept wanting to scratch my head, but whenever I tried I was met with the wig. The village looked different from how it used to look, yet it looked the same. Many of the stores were still the same ones I used to shop at and many of the restaurants were the same too. When we walk by the school I used to go to it looked practically the same, though it seems it was expanded a bit. I wonder if My old teachers still worked there. I felt sort of sad walking past this building knowing everyone I once knew now probably thinks I'm dead.

I decide to take Pazzo to the nearby park, figuring his owner probably took him there too. It seems as if I was right because almost instinctively Pazzo's ears perk up as soon as the park is in sight. Milo let's him go and the dog eagerly runs around chasing butterflies, birds, and an awfully terrified squirrel.

Next to me, Milo chuckles, obviously extremely entertained by watching the dog's failure to catch anything. He takes a break from laughing at the dog and asks me if there's anywhere specific I would want to visit.

I think about it for a minute. This town was pretty boring aside from the myths about the cursed woods. In fact it was pretty ironic that I had always been curious about the woods, and now I was the only human who knew the truth about them. But the more I thought, the more there was once place that I really wanted to go.

"There is a bookstore near where we walked in. The owner there was usually pretty nice to me and she sometimes even lent me books." I say "Plus there's chocolate"

"You could've mentioned it, we were just over there." Milo says "Alright, let's go."

"Here pazzo!" I call, and the dogs comes bounding towards me. Milo and I start to walk away from the park and Pazzo looks back giving a sad whimper.

As I walk down the street, I can still barely believe that I'm back after six years. It was hot just like I thought it would be, and now sweat starts to roll down my neck. I have to keep my head down as I walk because now there are people walking about. One of them, a girl much younger than me dressed in ragged clothing and jogging rather than walking ends up bumping into me.

"Oh, I'm so sorry" She squeaks out quickly before scampering away.

"It's ok" I start, but the girl has already dashed off.

“That was odd” Milo said.

“Yeah” I agreed, then kept walking.

I could already tell that the shop had been renovated when I walked by it the first time, but now that I looked at it even closer, I could barely recognize it. The shop is much bigger, and rather than being mostly empty there were several people there.

I stepped into the shop and there is a loud dinging noise. The teenager in the red t shirt sitting by the cashier boredly looks up at me.

I walk straight to the fantasy section, reading a few plot synopsis. None of them stuck out to me as all that interesting so I decided to pick the one with the prettiest cover. I hand it to the bored cashier lady, who boredly scans it then tells me it will be thirteen dollars.

I reach into the pocket of my jeans for my wallet, before I remember that these aren't my jeans, so I must've left my wallet at home.

“I'm sorry, I'll be right back” I say giving the cashier a shy smile.

“Mmm” The cashier grunts not even looking up from her phone.

I run back out of the store, bumping into several people in the process, then step out to see Milo getting smothered by Pazzo. When he see's me he stands up and forces the dog off of him.

“That was fast” Milo said.

“I don't have any money.” I say “Can I borrow some?”

“Did I not put a wallet with your things?” Milo asks “I'm pretty sure I did.”

Then my eyes widen. What if he *did* leave it there? What if that child I bumped into stole it? “Milo, what if that kid I bumped into stole my wallet?” I say shakily.

“I mean it's more likely that I left your wallet at home” Milo said.

“Can we at least find the girl?”

Milo sighs “Ok I guess. But we should make it quick. This is around the time when Jasper might wonder why we aren't there.”

“Ok” I say before turning and sprinting off in the direction that I think she went. I don't get very far however, because I trip on nothing and end up firmly planting my face on the ground. Sitting up, I see Milo strolling towards me.

“She's right over there.” He says pointing at a cafe. I look inside the cafe but can't see her anywhere. Then I notice her sitting in the shadows besides the cafe. Instantly I stand up and walk over to her.

The girl sees me walking towards her, and suddenly a look of worry fills her face.

“YOU STOLE MY WALLET!” I shout, pointing a finger at the surprised looking girl.

“N-no” the girl replies “I don’t even know you” Her voice quivers and she sounds like she’s about to cry.

“I don’t think she’s lying” Milo says “I probably just left it at the house.”

“You could’ve said that sooner” I say spinning around to glare at Milo.

“I did” He says “Several times actually.”

The wide eyes fearful girl’s eyes move between me and Milo before finally falling upon Pazzo. “Hey, that looks like my dog!” The girl says excitedly before her expression changed and she looked a little sad “But my dog just ran away recently.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your dog” Milo says with genuine apology

“It’s ok. I know that wherever he is, he survs his purpose. The girl said.

“What?” I say, being confused by her statement. What did she mean by its *purpose?*

The girl doesn’t say anything, taking this confusion as a chance to get away she sprints into the cafe. I’m about to follow her, but then I realize that running around chasing a girl I don’t know in a crowded public area.

“Let’s go now, before Jasper starts getting suspicious.” Milo said pulling at My arm. I sighed defeatedly, and let Milo drag me away.