

Chapter 1 (partial)

“Angela?” Tony’s voice came up, taking Angela out of her own thoughts. She turned and glared at him. Tony opened his mouth to say something, but there was nothing he could say. What could he say when Angela looked like she just had her heart ripped out from her chest? He knew Angela held him responsible for what happened to Brent, and he didn’t blame her.

Knowing he couldn’t say anything to help the situation, Tony got up from his spot on the floor, and wordlessly went to his room. He closed the door behind him and flopped onto his bed. He shut his eyes.

This all feels like a bad dream. Maybe if I close my eyes, I’ll wake up and everything will be back to normal, he thought. Tony kept his eyes closed, and waited a few seconds. When he opened them, he frowned, because everything still felt the same.

This is all my fault, he miserably thought as it all set in. He felt as if everything that was bad was the sole product of his own actions. After all, he was the one who had torn off the charm from around Brent’s neck in a fit of anger, which left him unprotected. Even worse, when Boo was attacked, he pushed Brent down while his back was turned, which prevented him from joining them in Chrissie’s room. Brent’s separation from them by one room’s distance was all Irate needed once the charms were gone.

Why didn’t I get a stupid charm replacement like everyone said I should’ve? Tony angrily thought as guilt washed over him. *For weeks, Brent told me to, but I ignored him. And I really didn’t think there was any reason for me to get one, but now...now I wish I had gone with Isabel to her shop and get a replacement when she offered me the chance. I mean, how weird is it that I ran into Isabel the same day Brent got taken? It couldn’t have been a coincidence.*

A few hours earlier, Tony had bumped into Isabel at a local café. He had invited her to sit with him, and as they made small talk, he had noticed some strange things about her.

When Isabel unbuttoned her gloves she wore from her hand in order to eat her food, he saw pronounced scars along her knuckles and wrists. When he reached out to touch them, Isabel bolted back in her chair so to keep out of his reach. Her strong reaction was bizarre, but that was not the only odd thing that had happened.

Isabel became increasingly evasive when Tony asked about the necklace she always wore. Her necklace was very unusual. The amulet part of it looked like a bundle of leather wrapped around an eye—an eye that could move independently. While looking into the eye, Tony felt as if he was looking at something with intelligence. Wanting to know more about it, Tony made the bold move of gently taking hold of the necklace before she could pull away again. The moment he did, however, he could hear Isabel’s thoughts—even though he could hear that she was guarding them. He even heard her think how Brent couldn’t listen in on her mind. So, if a Pure couldn’t invade her thoughts, how was it that Tony could? It was something that still confused him.

Before leaving the café, Isabel repeatedly tried to convince Tony to get a replacement charm, but he refused. He insisted that it was only Brent who actually needed one. Isabel then took the liberty of giving him her number. She said she felt something bad was going to happen and that he would need it.

Man, was she ever right, Tony thought with a groan as he raised himself up to a seated position and pulled out the receipt Isabel had given him. Turning it over, he looked at the number written on the back. With a heavy sigh, he reached into his other pocket and pulled out his phone. *She deserves to know what happened. I really don’t want to tell her, but the last thing I want is for her to find out on her own. That would be really messed up.* He dialed the numbers and nervously waited as the phone rang.

I hope I don’t get her voice mail, Tony thought when it seemed she wasn’t going to pick up. He fidgeted a little as the phone continued to ring loudly in his ear. *I’ll give her five more seconds, and then I’ll try calling again later. One. Two. Three. Four...ah, forget it.* Tony took the phone away from his ear.

“Hello?”

Tony immediately brought the phone back up to his ear.

“Hello? Isabel?”

“There’s no one here by that name. Who is this?” she asked. Tony raised an eyebrow. He knew it was Isabel. Why was she pretending to be someone else?

“Uh, Isabel? It’s me. Tony.”

“Oh! Hey, how are you?” Isabel asked, her tone suddenly turning from guarded to cheerful. *I can’t believe he called so soon. Good thing I picked up. I wasn’t even going to answer when I didn’t recognize the number. Hopefully he doesn’t think I’m weird for pretending I was someone else. Still, I’d rather be safe than sorry.*

Tony blinked in surprise. He did not expect to telepathically hear Isabel over the phone, too. He brushed his confusion aside, now not being the time to wonder about it.

“I’m, uh, not too good right now,” he answered.

“Why? What’s wrong?”

The genuine concern in her voice sent a new wave of guilt through Tony. He opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

“Tony? Are you still there?”

“He’s gone,” Tony forced out. The words were harder to say than he thought they would.

“Who’s gone?”

“Brent.”

“What?”

“He’s...Irate got Brent. He’s gone. It happened right in our living room. I...” Tony sighed. “I just thought you should know.”

There was a long silence on Isabel’s end. If it weren’t for the fact Tony could hear her breathing, he would’ve thought the call had dropped. He patiently waited for her to digest the news.

“Give me your address.”

“What?” Tony had not expected her to sound so bold and commanding. He thought she would break down like the rest of them did, or at least cry a little.

“Where do you live? Give me your address,” she repeated. Tony gave it to her. “Got it. Thanks.”

“Why do you want to know where I live?” he asked before Isabel could hang up.

“I’m coming over. Don’t touch anything until I get there. Don’t clean up or move *anything*, okay?”

“But—”

“I mean it!” she yelled. “Not a thing!”

“Okay, okay. We won’t touch anything.”

“Good. I’ll be over as soon as I can.”

Chapter 2 (partial)

“So much blood,” Isabel murmured as her eyes took in the horror before her. Eight headless snakes littered the floor, with a ninth in Chrissie’s room. Their black blood was smeared over the walls and carpet, alongside the red blood Isabel assumed was Brent’s. She took in a deep breath while looking at the crimson liquid. Patches of it was already dry, while some areas still dripped down the once white walls.

He put up a strong fight, but he was outnumbered. Something else got him besides the poison from the snake bites, she thought while protecting her mind from being heard by everyone, but not knowing Tony could hear her. She closed her eyes, took in another breath as she bent down to her knees, and picked up one of the dead snakes. Her leather gloves gripped the scaled body as she held it in her hands and craned her head back. *I want to see what happened.*

“What is she doing?” Nathan asked Tony. He didn’t understand what the witch was doing at their place. She had just arrived at their loft a few seconds ago, and wordlessly walked past them into the living room. She didn’t even give anyone a chance to tell her what had happened.

Tony shrugged in response as he and everyone else watched Isabel rock back and forth on her knees.

“Whoa. Look at her necklace,” Chrissie whispered to Angela. Its black eyelid was open, and a golden eye stared out. “It looks like it’s staring at the snake. How can it do that? I thought that

necklace was just a sculpture of a closed eyelid, painted black. Did she switch it out for one of an opened eye?"

"No, it's the same necklace. That eye is actually from part of Isabel's soul," Tony said, hearing Chrissie's comment. "I bumped into her earlier today and she told me that part of her soul is locked inside of it. She didn't want to tell me why or how it got trapped in there, but either way, it's a real eye."

"She told me that Brent was the one who made it," Angela said.

"Shh!" Isabel tried to tune the friends out as she focused her senses. She rocking back and forth on her knees, and took in a deep breath of air. *Show me what happened. I want to see for myself. Show me.* Blurred images invaded her mind, appearing too erratically for her to make any sense of them. *Clear. Become clear. Become clear for me.*

Brent came into view, but he was in his Pure Werewolf form. Isabel shuddered at the sight of him as a large, black werewolf with piercing yellow eyes. It always unsettled her. Isabel had only seen Brent like that a handful of times, but even after eight years, she could never erase the sense of shock she felt when she first time saw him turn years ago.

Show me, show me, show me, show me, Isabel mentally chanted as she allowed her soul to open up to her visions. She gasped when one vision after another bombarded her mind. She saw Brent as the Pure being grabbed at by a horde of shadows. They all had poured out from the balcony entrance, which had transformed into a portal to hell. The vision changed, and she saw him being bitten by snakes of all varieties, with only a few successfully breaking his skin. He was then slashed at by an unseen force, and thrown against the wall. Isabel doubled over, feeling as if her ribs had ruptured.

I can't breathe! Isabel's lungs ached for air, but she couldn't command them to breathe then felt like there were chains around her throat. She couldn't breathe. They seared her skin, and made her want to tear them off, but none were there. She could even feel blood seep out from open wounds, as if her skin was being sliced open by things she could no longer see. Laughter then filled her ears as a vision of rotten teeth appeared in front of her. The smiling mouth opened up, ready to swallow her whole.

Isabel screamed as she dropped the snake to the floor. She sprung up to her feet and violently shook her head, unable take the residual effects of Brent's pain anymore.

"Are you okay?" Angela asked as she and Chrissie took a step forward, ready to catch Isabel in case she needed support. Isabel signaled them away from her.

"I can stand on my own, but I'm *not* okay," she said as she brushed her long, black hair out of her face. "I saw what happened. I *felt* what they did to him when you and Tony were locked behind that door," she said, pointing at Chrissie's room. "They ambushed him. They mutilated him. They..." she tried to continue, but her words were unable to come out. Isabel's face went hot with fury as she looked back at the evidence of destruction before her. She grit her teeth, and clenched her hands into fists.

I want to kill them, a raspy voice suddenly came from Isabel's mind. It sounded toxic—like a starving predator about to kill its prey. *I want to kill them for stealing him.*

Tony took in a breath. He recognized that voice. It was the same one he heard when he held Isabel's necklace in the palm of his hand at the coffee shop. He remembered how, when he held the necklace, he got flashes of unsettling images. The things he saw all had the background feeling of pain and fear, but it was the image of an open door, leading downstairs to a dark basement that stuck to him the most. It was then he heard that raspy voice. It said it wanted him to know something. Tony had no idea what that was since the connection had been broken before it could tell him, but Tony did notice that it was immediately after then he could hear all of Isabel's thoughts. Regardless, Tony didn't like the way it sounded, nor the fact that it seemed to be from Isabel's mind. He somehow knew it was not *her* voice, so he couldn't help but wonder whose it was.

There won't be any killing, Isabel's normal, temperate voice responded over the raspy one.

I want to kill them, the voice said again.

No, Isabel thought, though her mental voice wavered as she continued looking at the blood on the walls.

They deserve it.

That doesn't—

They deserve to be slaughtered! the voice shouted as a look of unadulterated hate washed over Isabel's face. Tony's gaze dropped to Isabel's necklace and was shocked to see the eye of it physically react to the voice's words. It was wide open, and its intensity matched the emotion in Isabel's face. *They deserve death! They must die! Kill them! Kill them! Kill them!* **Kill them!**

Everyone shielded their eyes when the dead snakes suddenly burst into flames, and the heat of it hit their faces. Seeing the fire, Nathan instinctively ran into the kitchen, and grabbed the small extinguisher next to the stove. He ran back into the living room, and was greeted by the smell of cooking meat. The aroma made his werewolf instincts hungry, but he pushed that hunger aside. Nathan took aim at one of the fires and pressed down on the handle, but nothing came out. He impatiently cursed as he pulled out the handle's safety pin. He took aim again, but just before he could do anything, the fires extinguished themselves.

"Huh?" Nathan lowered the fire extinguisher.

"How did ...?" Chrissie started, stunned by the lack of scorch marks on the carpet, though the snakes had all been reduced to charcoaled remains.

Angela walked up to one of them and tapped it with her shoe. It crumbled at her touch, and disintegrated into ash.

"Isabel? Isabel, are you okay?" Tony asked as she took in a breath to calm herself. She looked over at him.

"Can you please get me a small, plastic bag?"

Tony blinked in confusion. He had not expected her to make such a casual request. "Uh, sure." He went into the kitchen and came back with a small sandwich bag.

"Thank you." She took it from him, bent down, and scooped up generous handfuls of the snakes' ashes. Once it was full, she sealed the bag, stood back up and put it into her purse. With a determined sigh, she walked to the front door.

"Hey, wait. Where're you going?" Tony asked as he followed after her.

"To get Brent."

"What?" Angela asked as hope filled her. "How?"

"I'm going to get him back, myself."

"You can do that? That's possible?" Chrissie asked.

"For me, it is."

"Well, if you're going, then I'm going, too," Angela said as she and everyone else joined Isabel at the front door. Isabel turned around and motioned them to stop.

"No. You don't know what hell is like. You wouldn't survive the journey."

"We're stronger than you think," Chrissie insisted.

"We're going with you," Angela repeated.

"No, you're not."

"Brent is our Pure," Tony said.

"He's also our friend," Angela added in.

"You can't tell us to stay behind and think we'd be okay with that," Nathan said, stepping up to Isabel.

"None of you are going. Your minds won't be able to handle it. Trust me on this."

"Oh, we can't handle it, but you can?" Tony asked.

"Yes. I can."

"How are you able to handle hell but not us?" Nathan demanded. Isabel narrowed her eyes.

"None of your business how," she said as she turned around and put her hand on the doorknob. Before she could turn it, Nathan grabbed her wrist and pulled her away from it.

"You're not leaving here without us," he stated as he tightened his hold, causing the leather of her glove to twist uncomfortably.

Isabel's eyes flashed at Nathan's. Anger was hard in her face. Without a word, she brought her other gloved hand over his, took hold of the thumb area and twisted it away from him so his whole arm was manipulated into an unnatural position. Nathan let go of her and yelled out in surprised pain as she put him into a tight wristlock. He tried turning so he wouldn't be put into a further contorted position, but Isabel merely twisted his thumb a little more, giving him no choice but to submit to her.

“Don’t ever grab me like that again,” she warned him.

“Let him go,” Chrissie warned with a snarl.

Isabel dropped her hold and Chrissie roughly pulled Nathan away from her.

“I’m fine,” Nathan said, looking at Isabel with a new perspective. He had not pegged her as someone who could turn the tables like that on him, but he now knew she wasn’t someone to make assumptions about. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have grabbed you like that, but you have to bring us with you.”

“No, I don’t. I know you all want to help, but the best way you can do that is by staying here. Now, if you don’t mind—” She turned from them, her hand going for the front door again.

“We’ll follow you, then,” Chrissie interrupted and defiantly crossed her arms. “We’ll just follow you to hell. You can’t stop all of us.”

Isabel coyly smiled, and looked over her shoulder at Chrissie. “You’re going to go follow me to hell, huh? Okay. Tell me something: *How* do you get to hell?”

Everyone stayed silent.

“That’s what I thought.” She turned the doorknob. “Good luck with that.”