# RAVENOUS

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# KRESLEY COLE




*An Aria Book*

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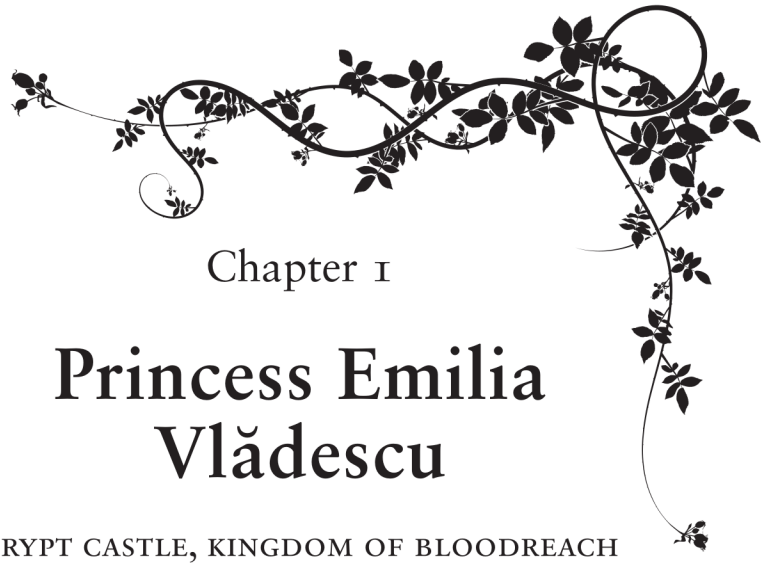
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*Dedicated to Swede and Team Belemmo*
*with all my love.*

Every choice I make ignites a new timeline—endless, infinite.

In this one, fate hungered deep, filling the dark with teeth and blood, but forging legends. These are the immortals whose tales went untold."

—The Coffin Valkyrie,
oldest shield-maiden, ever-knowing soothsayer



Chapter 1

# Princess Emilia Vlădescu

CRYPT CASTLE, KINGDOM OF BLOODREACH

*You shall bear one hundred babes in one hundred years…* The king's decree rang through the nearly empty court, tolling in Lia's ears.

"*Why?*" she choked out. "Why would you curse me like this?" She'd been perfect, dutiful and compliant for all her twenty-two years.

"Curse?" King Neculain leaned back in his throne. "You will ensure the future of our species. Vampires shall revere your name for eons."

She usually avoided her father's gaze, but now Lia forced herself to look up through the haze of bloodroot incense that clung to every stone of this castle. It burned her lungs. Or maybe that was fear. "I don't understand."

"The Berserkers will war with us this Accession." He flashed his fangs, red eyes widening. "They must. Many remain just on the cusp of immortality."

Those bear-spirit warriors earned immortality through slaughter. Killing was prayer to them.

And vampires were their favorite offering—payback long owed, a debt written in arterial spray.

"I can't fathom why they haven't already stormed this rich castle." Neculain cast a disgusted look at his oldest son

and heir, Prince Coștin, who stood beside his throne. "Under your watch, the army has faded in number and strength. You think I don't know what outsiders call you? The General of Nothing! We are the great Horde no longer."

Coștin rested his hand on the golden sword at his side, his own eyes reddened like banked embers. Though he was a decent swordsman—a rarity—he ruled nothing, not even his own appetites.

And Father wasn't wrong. Training halls stood empty while the vampires drowned in blood orgies and intoxispells. Even their teleportation had withered, lost to decadence.

But in fairness to her monstrous brother, the rot had festered long before his birth five centuries ago.

Coștin's attention locked on her again. As he stared, he sliced his tongue on a fang. Eyes promising horror, he hollowed his cheeks and nursed his own blood.

She shuddered. *Will I never be free of his threat?*

He believed she was his destined Bride. Lia hadn't awakened his dead heart, but he'd decided she was too young to "blood" him.

Unlike all their fair-haired siblings, she and Coștin resembled each other as closely as fraternal twins—the same pale skin, black hair, and amber eyes, though bloodlust tainted his. Perhaps he'd fixated on her due to her likeness: because his truest obsession had always been himself.

She'd been fourteen when he'd first tried to kiss her. Against her neck, he'd grunted, *You are everything to me, sprung from the same womb and seed.* As she thrashed, he'd commanded her, *Wake my body,* soră mea, *so I can use it on you.*

"When the Berserker attack comes," Father continued, oblivious, "you'll be safe in the blood crypt."

This snapped Lia's focus from Coștin. "You're going to… to seal me in?" Deep beneath the castle lay a cave no force could breach, its stone walls weeping endless blood. "For how long?"

"Until the birth of your hundredth. Until our elite army is complete."

Lia rocked on her feet. Would she be maddened by the twentieth babe? The fiftieth? She'd be only halfway done! "This is insane. Insects have fewer offspring!"

"This is my will. And you shall heed it."

No courtiers witnessed his decree—only Coştin, Queen Sereth, and the blank-eyed donors that slumped against the wall.

Sereth sat in her throne beside Neculain's like a soulless doll, smoothing her blonde hair.

"Mother," Lia said, voice breaking, "please, you can't let him."

Sereth gave a testy sigh. "He's *the king*."

Blood tears pricked Lia's eyes. Her mother had been a broodmare too—fourteen children in five hundred years—and had never resisted her fate. Hadn't even pretended to want more. "Who will accompany me?" Lia demanded of her father, swiping away tears. "Do I get to pick which stud violates me?" She had never dreamed of speaking to him this way, but what did she have to lose?

Irritation crossed Neculain's sharp features, his black brows knitting. "I will choose noble males. You'll test the first babe. If it lacks your gift, you'll mate with another."

Her cursed "gift" was exactly the reason she shouldn't be locked in the crypt!

Coştin frowned. So he hadn't known. Or worse—thought *he* should be the sire.

Lia told her father, "I'm not yet fixed into my immortal form, can't even regenerate. Childbirth could kill me."

"With my lineage, you will be hardy." He planned to cage and breed his youngest child like an animal, like the blood donors.

Her gaze flicked to them. *They donate nothing*. Covered in bite marks, the Berserker mortals sagged against the far

wall of the court, made docile with intoxicants.

Everyone in her family drank from them except her. Spittoons lined the walls to receive flesh if a bite landed too deep. Which often killed the Berserkers.

Her mother was infamous for those deaths, had reddened her eyes without ever hunting. Some whispered that she dreamed her victims' bloodborne memories like stolen prayers.

Her father prolonged his meals. Tonight a collared female knelt at his feet, his "favorite snack." Lia had long hated her parents, but never more than right now.

She forced herself to stay focused on her own fate, reasoning that she couldn't help anyone from the crypt. "What you've described is hell, Father." Every small dream she'd once hoarded began to shrivel. "I'm begging you—as your youngest child—not to do this."

Neculain was unmoved by her words. "You have two weeks. Guards will see you don't squander them."

"And if I say *no* down in that crypt?"

"Then you'll never leave it. One hundred babes is the price you'll pay for freedom."

Her voice barely held. "What if none of them inherit my gift?"

He smirked. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try another's seed…"

Was this just a joke to him? Other species speculated that the vampires were all mad, but especially the royals.

Not for the first time, Lia thought: *We vampires are the creepy, wrong ones*.

Coştin's voice cut through the tension. "You did not consult your heir, one deeply invested in her fate."

"She is not your Bride," Neculain snapped. "Her time in the crypt will rid you of this insane obsession as nothing else will."

"So that's your reason?"

"Partly. But mostly I want an army to claw its way up from the ground with murder in its veins like the first bloodthief.

When the Berserkers come, they'll find retribution buried right beneath them." His eyes gleamed. "Nothing could be more vampiric than sowing a blood harvest."

In Neculain's mind, the end was nigh. *Best to go out in carnage and death.*

He told Lia, "You are vengeance incarnate, the sinister future of our species. Act the part." He rose and vanished with his captive.

Lia turned to her mother, tears burning. "Please stop him, Mother." *Help me, though you never have before.*

Sereth swept from the court. "The king has spoken. Be bold in your fate, child."

No one had taught Lia boldness. But she had begun to learn cunning.

A plan took shape, dangerous and unforgivable. Glancing over the blood slaves, she thought, *I owe this kingdom no allegiance.*

Before she could flee, Coştin's lips curled, revealing his bloodied fangs. "The crypt has weaknesses. Father might prevent me from having you. But I'll be damned to the hells before anyone else does."

Lia fled, heart pounding, half expecting his hand on her throat. But he stood like a statue with that rictus smile frozen on his face…

Outside the court, Nadje, her royal companion, hurried to meet her in the hallway. "You are pale, my princess."

"Walk with me." Lia swept forward, her skirts whispering against stone. Ancient family portraits glared from their gilded frames. Tapestries depicting veins, thorns, and spiders spinning hung on the opposite wall. Bloodreach's weavers dyed their threads with blood and gore; Lia glanced down at her own gown, the crimson silk suddenly feeling like a death shroud.

A trio of intoxicated nobles stumbled past—flushed, drunk on spells, laughing as they headed for another endless

revel. Their bows were lazy, mocking.

She inclined her head with equal disdain. Would they be down in the crypt with her? She grew even queasier.

When they veered down a side hall, Lia asked softly, "Did you hear anything from inside the court just now?"

Nadje's auburn brows furrowed. "Only bits. Nothing that made sense." Her accent, rough and musical, still carried the cadence of the Badlands, a postapocalyptic wasteland on the outskirts of Bloodreach.

Lia knew little of her past beyond rumor: a survivor, risen from filth and famine to serve a princess. Her hazel eyes showed no signs of bloodlust, though she'd admitted to obeying her prey drive on occasion, feeding lightly and never to the death.

Lia exhaled. "Whenever my family is given a choice between good and evil, they always choose evil."

Nadje hesitated, then whispered, "Yes." Even that small admission felt dangerous in these halls. The torches hissed, as though they'd heard.

"We're the wrong ones," Lia murmured. Then, searching Nadje's clear gaze: "Can I trust you?"

"With your life," she answered, tone low and earnest.

"I'm going to trust you with far more than that. But you mustn't tell another soul."

"I will never repeat anything you tell me."

Lia eyed her rough-around-the-edges servant. Had her father or another faction installed Nadje as one of their agents? Why else would someone lacking in decorum be assigned to a royal?

What a gamble trusting her would be!

Nadje laid her hand on Lia's arm, an impertinence. "*Never*, my princess."



## Chapter 2

# Inkletter Scribe XII

CRYPT CASTLE, SERVANTS' LEVEL

"I'll tell you anything. Anything! JUST—DON'T—STOP."

Ink stared down in detachment at the mindless vampire he was fucking. Nadje. His latest mark.

He moved with mechanical precision, his mind far from her flushed, vacant face and heaving breasts. This dolt was a mouth breather. And nothing was so unattractive as a befanged, mouth-breathing vampire.

Wet gasps through fangs. He stifled a shudder.

But his job as a spy often forced him to do things—and beings—he'd rather not do. Ink had danced rings around her before he'd even unsheathed his most persuasive instrument: his gorgeous cock, which was nearly a foot of madness-making flesh.

"More, incubus!" she cried, pale limbs twisting against his ebony skin. When he'd first begun his seduction, she'd twirled her dark red hair and asked, "Do they call you Ink because your skin's so black?"

Vapid dullard. She had no idea the name Inkletter carried twelve generations of scholars—historians who'd chronicled the Ubus Peoples and all the Lore before the Exile from Gaia.

She moaned, mind fogged, body moving on instinct alone

as she struggled to steal the relief he cruelly withheld. To wrap her nether lips around the base and root him fully within.

Her copious arousal drenched his shaft, glistening along the veins. He frowned inwardly. *Harder than usual. And we have hours yet to go.*

The servants' level around them was a bruise of damp stone and stale heat, the air clogged with bloodroot incense. He would have liked her own scent to season his incubus meal, but that smoke smothered everything, even down here. Thick enough to blind the gods.

One level below them, the weavers' looms made a ceaseless hum—warp and weft, warp and weft. Every vibration traveled through the floorboards and into Nadje's bed frame, making the whole wretched room shiver as if the castle itself had a pulse.

*Despise this place.*

"Please," Nadje whimpered. "Incubus, *please*!"

"Not quite, little flame," he murmured, and she shuddered at the endearment, as predictable as gravity. "Not quite."

A new royal attendant, the fool hadn't even connected the timing of her appointment with his sudden "interest." Nights of patient seduction—slow smiles, casual proximity, the careful drip of charm—and now, in her moans, she'd already spilled secrets worth her weight in Berserker gold.

The bears would pay handsomely for this intelligence. Something was brewing in Bloodreach, a plot centered on Emilia, Neculain's youngest. Ink meant to uncover it, one thrust at a time.

A bell clanged faintly as weavers changed shifts. Somewhere in the corridor, boots passed, then faded. No voices. No laughter.

Servants knew better than to laugh.

In the throes, Nadje's dazed eyes drifted to his throat. Her tongue brushed a fang. The insult flared like heat in his gut.

Though he too fed on others, he reaped pleasure, not death. And this vampire was plump, probably drank her fill of blood every night. But her eyes were clear, so she'd never drained a being to the quick. Not yet.

Bloodreach was a place where "yet" was a countdown.

*What am I doing with my life?* The thought came uninvited, bitter as ash. His true calling—chronicling the past, decoding the patterns of history—burned brighter than this sordid work. He was Inkletter XII, master scribe of the Skein, and whoever wrote history directed the future.

"Aren't you hungry, Ink?" she begged. "Feed from me! Please!"

*Greedy, foolish female.* He plucked her pouting coral nipples and shafted her core, but not too deep. "I'll take care of you, sweet. *Soon…*" he crooned with a voice that made females spasm from the resonance alone.

He hardly needed to try. Incubi fluid called stav did much of the work. A tinge of it in his pre-semen caused euphoria, but doses of it over three penetrations would make a partner dependent on it for life.

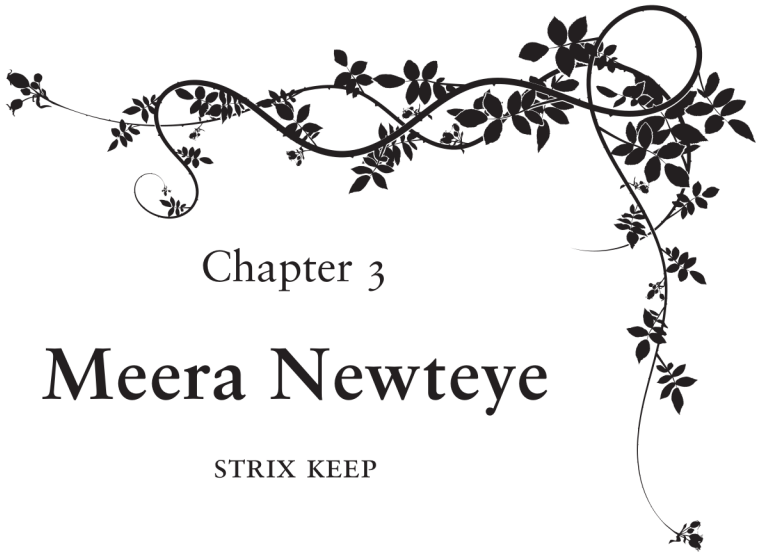
A quiet chain. Invisible. Unbreakable once clasped. *Everything about me sexually slays her.*

He should take a vacation after this job, a palate cleanser to wash away his debasement. Umber's vineyards ran purple this time of year. Demons like him—magnificent, moneyed, powerful—were always welcome. Even demonkin paused there, letting sunlight and sweetness convince them the world wasn't always a battlefield.

"Gods, I'm going to come so hard!" Nadje clenched the rough woolen sheets of her squeaking bed, and her head thrashed as she neared her peak. "It'll feed you well, incubus. I'll feed you so good!" Her voice pitched into delirium. "So hard. So hot. Wet, *wet*."

Bloodroot. Loom hum. Stone sweat. Nadje's breath in broken little sobs.

"Not yet, my beauty." He shallowed his thrusts with ruthless precision, making an immortal like her dance on the knife's edge between release and carnal insanity. "I want to hear your voice in my ear. You said you'd tell me anything…"



# Chapter 3

# Meera Newteye

STRIX KEEP

*These walls whisper of murder.*

As Meera ascended the murky stairs, cold spots crept over her. Not from wind—no breeze dared stir the interior of the keep—but from memory.

Death left its own kind of draft.

Even someone as inept as Meera could sense them. She didn't mind; witches collected hauntings the way other immortals collected talismans and flesh trophies.

Cobwebs clung like lace to gargoyles, and bats squeaked in the high spires. A skeleton or two inhabited most closets; sometimes those bones caught a stray hit of magic and reanimated for a midnight waltz. All good fun.

But tonight the keep's humor had curdled.

As she neared the high priestess's tower, Meera wondered if her boss's office still held warmth. Or had it grown chilly like the surface of a gravestone?

Each step echoed her dread. How many times had she climbed these stairs feeling safe, proud to serve under Lazara the Worthy? Now she climbed toward a stranger—maybe even a murderous one.

Accessions always meant blood. Every five hundred years, war rippled through the Skein like fever.

Her first Accession. She'd expected to be far away from the fray, buried in paperwork and potion budgets, not espionage and death. Yet earlier today, Red Riders—the elite warrioress caste of witches—had stormed her cottage with accusations. "Your new boss killed your old one," they'd said. "And you're going to help us prove it."

How could Meera possibly help them? Her! Clumsy, almost powerless Meera Newteye. *Absurd*.

Now she was here, trembling outside a new high priestess's door, timidly knocking.

"Come in," a cool voice commanded.

Meera smoothed her blouse, tugged her skirt, and entered. Her flats squeaked like frightened mice across the stones.

She turned the corner of the foyer to face Lazara's replacement, and a new chill hit her like a hexshot. Her heart sank. The room felt freshly fed. *Someone must have died here since I entered last*.

Behind Lazara's desk sat Ditch, a halfling newcomer—part demon/part witch. Her emotionless eyes were light green, the color of sun-starved grass, and they followed Meera's entry as if tracking prey.

"Sit," Ditch commanded, and Meera all but collapsed into the seat across from Lazara's desk. "You're Molly, correct? Or some equally insipid name?"

*Don't sweat. Don't bite your nails*. "Uh, I'm Meera." Meek Meera. Lily-livered Meera.

"Of course you are," Ditch murmured, her voice the recipe for slow poison: one part boredom and two parts contempt.

Meera noticed the dark glint of sharpened claws as Ditch ran her fingers over the desk. The halfling's horns shone black as obsidian against her sleek, blonde ponytail.

"What do you know of me?" Ditch asked.

Meera dug for courage. "Akelarre confirmed your arrival and appointment as high priestess. You're to guide our coven through this Accession." Though Akelarre was the origin

realm of the House of Witches, Gaia had been their second home until they'd been exiled millennia ago. Now this coven in the Skein was the witches' most promising new territory.

Ditch's lips curled, not a smile, something sharper. "Correct."

Meera's gaze flicked over Lazara's framed photos, half-burned candles, and the black cat glaring from the sill. If Lazara still lived, she wouldn't have abandoned Nettle.

"How odd," Meera said carefully, "that Lazara hasn't come for her belongings. Has she sent word?"

"No." The single syllable hit like a warding spell.

Meera's mouth went dry. "I'll, uh, compile a welcome binder for you with information about the Skein. It should come in handy."

"Very well. What's on my schedule, Molly?"

"Meera," she corrected under her breath. "You're giving an Accession awareness talk for some of the younger witches."

Ditch rolled her eyes.

"And then the mystical armory tour."

A touch more interest.

"And later, a meeting with the werewolf king, Thane the Hungry."

Ditch's brows arched. "A wolf? Why meet with those moonatics when we can war with them?"

Most witches felt this way. The Skein had only so much room for inhabitants who could theoretically live forever. Tensions escalated each Accession, hurtling them toward another All-Battle. "It's been on the books for some time. Lazara had asked for a meeting, perhaps in a bid to broker an alliance. Lowell—Thane's right hand—arranged it." Meera's heart fluttered at his name.

Handsome, intelligent Lowell Nightclaw. With his mop of black hair and devilish green eyes.

He had the kind of rakish grin that promised laughter before bed play, and that really did it for Meera. She'd bet

he called underwear "knickers" and that he took them down with his teeth. He'd make puns just before he used his wolf's tongue for other treats.

Inner sigh. A secret crush that could never be more.

"Where is the meeting?" Ditch asked, cutting through Meera's thoughts.

*Not now, fool. Read the room. Survive.* "Uh, Mount Nothrior. It's neutral ground, warded against magic and weapons." Also known as the Mount of No Swords. "Our powers won't work there, and neither of the Lykae will be able to call upon his wolven inner beast."

Ditch rose and crossed to the window, the movement serpentine. Her leather catsuit gleamed like black paint poured over her voluptuous body and had a slit for her tail. That length swayed lazily, thick as a broomstick and ending in a barbed triangle.

"How long were you Lazara's assistant?"

"Eighty years or so." Meera's voice softened. "She was good to me." Lazara had been a mentor who'd never pushed her beyond comfort. Was she really gone? Had Ditch truly murdered her?

"What experience do you have?"

"I was hired right after I completed my advanced degree. So I know the office."

"Not war?" Ditch gazed out at the darkening sky over the Witchwood, home to all manner of beasts. Giant spiders, prides of black cats, and a multitude of bats all made their home amid the twisted tree trunks and thorns. Heavenly.

A spider, standing a story tall, plodded by the window then. The coven called him Webmaster because he inundated homes with sticky threads. While Ditch sighed as if charmed by the creature, Meera had a less rosy view of his visits. *Such a nuisance of yardwork to wake up to.*

"No, not war," Meera said. "I mean, I'm not a Red

Rider or anything." She gave an awkward laugh that went unanswered. Yet her mother had been one of the fiercest Riders in history.

Meera had sometimes dreamed of their adventurous existence—sleeping under the stars, camaraderie, battle chants chorused around a fire.

But she was a confirmed homebody. Paperwork. Cottage maintenance. Predictability. Now she wanted *nothing* to do with Riders at all.

Unfortunately, they wanted everything to do with her. The memory of earlier arose unbidden, the way dread always did…

Rosewyn the Banehand had paced Meera's toadstool cottage as if measuring it for a coffin, her red cloak snapping with each sharp turn. The hearth fire had thrown light on Rose's black braids and the purposeful flush across her petal-like cheeks.

"You're going to help us nail this halfling witch," Rose had said, not asking. Her voice had been calm, far more frightening than shouting.

Meera's hands had trembled around her teacup. "A-and if I don't?"

Rose had stopped pacing then. Slowly, she'd smiled—wide and delighted. "Then you'll get nailed too."

Not metaphorically. Riders didn't bother with metaphor.

"You already have access," Rose had gone on, circling closer. "You'll see schedules. Correspondence. You'll tell us what she plans, who she meets, and when she's alone."

"That's subversion," Meera had whispered. "A betrayal of the office." Depending on the new witch's powers, it might also be suicide.

Rose had leaned down, braids brushing Meera's shoulder. "Don't make this complicated. You're not choosing between right and wrong. You're choosing who kills you and when."

Now Ditch turned back to face Meera, pale green eyes

fixing on her like a pinned specimen. "You wouldn't be a Rider, would you? They're in peak condition."

Meera's shirt strained when she sat straighter. "Yes. They are." But Meera ate when nervous. After Rose and the Riders had left, Meera had polished off a whole pie without tasting a bite.

How could she not? Rose intimidated her nearly as much as Ditch did. Though young, Rose carried herself with all the confidence of a long-lived immortal. She and this demon-witch were on a collision course, and Meera feared she would be trapped in the middle when the carnage hit.

One thought kept repeating: *Will I survive either of these women?*

Ditch asked her, "You're in the enchantress caste?"

"That's correct." Witches were separated into five castes: warrior, seeress, conjurer, enchantress, and healer. Most had one or two powers, a rare few even up to three. For millennia, the Wiccae had awaited a witch prophesied to possess all five, called, originally enough, the *Awaited One*. "You're likely in the warrior caste?" Meera ventured.

Ditch's brows arched, her tail going rigid as if tensing for a strike. "You don't think I could be a healer?"

Healers were the gentlest caste—selfless witches who worked to support the rest of the coven. Meera hesitated. "No. I…don't." At Ditch's narrowed eyes, Meera scrambled, words tripping: "I mean, maybe? Yes! You could be. You just don't…strike me as selfless? I don't know?"

"And you assume I'm only of one caste. Interesting." Sparing Meera, Ditch said, "Tell me about this werewolf king. What do you know of Thane the Hungry?"

*Everything*. No one in the 'Wood knew more about him. "Um, I did my thesis on Thane MacGray. In the years since, I met him a few times when he convened with Lazara, and I've kept up on the subject."

"Give me an overview."

"He's roughly fifteen hundred years old, a hands-off ruler who leaves kingdom details to his seneschals. But he's a fearless tactician. His byname, *the Hungry*, came about because he's never satisfied on a battlefield, just hungers to fight and fight. And because rumor says he descends from the wolf who devoured Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. Hecate rest their souls." Meera lowered her gaze briefly, as was polite.

Ditch's tail flicked. "Colorful. What does he look like?"

"Attractive. Probably too much so." Objectively, he was even handsomer than Lowell, but Thane's weariness and permanent scowl were a turn off. "Hungry" was exactly how she'd describe him—a ravenous, unsatisfied male. The kind whose smile never reached his forever searching eyes.

"No mate?"

"None," Meera said. "Only conquests."

"Sexual predilections?"

Where was Ditch going with this? "He beds only the most beautiful nymphs and Lykae females in his kingdom. Usually several a night. Word has reached us that Thane's been drinking more of late as well."

Ditch sat behind the desk in a chair that should never have been hers and changed the subject: "I wanted a Red Rider as my aide."

Meera wilted. "Oh. Well, I'd never make the cut." As she had told them *repeatedly* when they'd been spell-bent on recruiting her to spy.

"What's your power, Molly?"

*Meera!* "It's of little use and no matter." Not to mention it was rude to ask. Did Meera want to know Ditch's abilities? Absolutely. No one knew. But Meera would wait for a power declaration.

Ditch stared at her with raised brows.

"I'd rather not talk about it."

Raised brows and a flick of a demonic tail.

If Ditch had slayed Lazara, a warrior witch of no mean power, she could murder Meera without blinking those pale eyes. "I can make people angry." At Ditch's spark of interest, she quickly added, "It's very inconsistent. I can't control it at all."

"When has it arisen, Meera?"

*Now you remember my name?* "Whenever *I* am angry. Which means I just get myself into huge, unproductive rows. The madder I get, the madder another gets, and we just feed into this awful cycle." Singlehood forever! Good thing few witches cohabited with others.

"You think this is a curse?" Dramatically biting her knuckle, Ditch cried, "Because fighting is *wrong*." Her drama evaporated. "Are you a placater? A *yes woman*? Do you always say *yes* when you want to say *no*?"

Meera's lips thinned because only one answer fit. She miserably answered, "Yes."

"Imagine using your gift on the battlefield," Ditch said. "If you developed your ability, you could madden opponents and make them attack themselves."

*What if I madden the wrong ones?* Meera swallowed thickly at a memory, and the demon-witch noted the motion of her throat. Meera longed for Lazara's no-pressure, *you'll come into your powers when you're ready* approach.

Ditch continued, "I look at you, and all I see is potential wasted in this job. I'm inclined to fire you, starting fresh."

*Let her!* Meera didn't want to work for this lethal female and get embroiled in some Rider plot. "If that's your wish, I understand—"

"But I'm equally inclined to use you for my own ends." Ditch rapped her black claws together and said, "There. I've decided that you won't escape my clutches so easily. I have another plan for your destiny." Her grin was pure devil. "How wicked can we make you, witch?"