

One

When the door to my cell clicked open, the first thought that flitted through my doped-up brain was that Liz had changed her mind and come back. But ghosts don't open doors. They will, on occasion, ask me to open one, so I can raise and interrogate the zombies of supernaturals killed by a mad scientist, but they never need one opened for themselves.

I sat up in bed and rubbed my bleary eyes, blinking away the lingering fog of the sedative. For a moment, the door stayed only cracked open. I slid from the bed, tiptoeing across the thick carpet of my fake hotel room, praying the person on the other side had been called away and I could escape before they started whatever experiments they'd brought me here to—

“Hello, Chloe.” Dr. Davidoff beamed his best kindly-old-man smile as he pushed the door wide. He wasn't that old—maybe fifty—but in a movie, I'd cast him as the doddering absent-minded scientist. It was an act I'm sure he'd worked on until he got it just right.

The woman behind him had chic blond hair and a New York suit. I'd cast her as the mother of the nastiest girl in class. Which was cheating, because that's exactly who she was. Mother of Victoria—Tori—Enright, the one housemate we'd left out of our plans when we'd escaped from Lyle House, and for good cause, considering she was one of the reasons I'd needed to escape.

Tori's mom carried a Macy's bag, like she'd just been out shopping and popped in to conduct a few horrific experiments before heading on to lunch.

“I know you have a lot of questions, Chloe,” Dr. Davidoff said as I sat on the edge of the bed. “We're here to answer them for you. We just need a little help from you first.”

“Simon and Derek,” Mrs. Enright said. “Where are they?”

I looked from her to Dr. Davidoff, who smiled and nodded encouragingly, like he fully expected to turn in my friends.

I'd never been an angry kid. I'd never run away from home. Never stomped my feet and screamed that life was unfair and I wished I'd never been born. When my dad would tell me we were moving again and I needed to transfer schools, I'd swallow a whiny "but I just made new friends," nod, and tell him I understood.

Accept your lot. Count your blessings. Be a big girl.

But now I looked back at a life of doing what I was told, and realized I'd bought into a game adults played. When they patted me on the head and told me I was so grown up, what they really meant was that they were glad I wasn't grown up enough yet to question, to fight back.

I looked at Dr. Davidoff and Mrs. Enright, and I thought of what they'd done to me, lying to me, locking me up, and I *wanted* to stomp my feet. Wanted to scream. But I wasn't going to give them that satisfaction.

I widened my eyes as I met Mrs. Enright's gaze. "You mean you haven't found them yet?"

I think she would have slapped me if Dr. Davidoff hadn't lifted his hand.

"No, Chloe, we haven't found the boys," he said. "We're very concerned for Simon's safety."

"Because you think Derek might hurt him?"

"Not intentionally, of course. I know Derek's fond of Simon."

Fond? What a strange word to use. Derek and Simon were foster brothers, tighter than any blood brothers I knew. Sure, Derek was a werewolf, but that wolf part of him was what would *stop* him from every hurting Simon. He'd protect him at all costs—I'd already seen that.

My skepticism must have shown in my face, because Dr. Davidoff shook his head, as if disappointed in me. “All right, Chloe. If you can’t spare any concern for Simon’s safety, maybe you can for his health.”

“W-what ab-bou--” I stopped and tried to slow down, and plan what I was going to say. My stutter cropped up most when I was nervous, and I couldn’t let them know they’d struck a nerve. I tried again. “What about his health?”

“His condition.”

Apparently I wasn’t the only one who watched too many movies. Now they would tell me that Simon had some rare medical condition and if he didn’t get his medicine within twelve hours, he’d spontaneously combust.

“What condition?”

“He has diabetes,” Dr. Davidoff said. “To stay healthy, his meal times and food choices need to be monitored and regulated, as do his blood sugar levels.”

“With one of those blood testing things?” I said slowly, thinking back. Simon had always disappeared into the bathroom before meals. I’d thought he just liked to wash up. I’d bumped into him once coming out as he’d been shoving a small black case into his back pocket.

“That’s right,” Dr. Davidoff said. “With proper care, diabetes is easily managed. You weren’t aware of it because there was no reason you needed to be. Simon leads a normal life.”

“Except for one thing,” Tori’s mom said.

She reached into the Macy’s bag and took out a backpack. It looked like Simon’s, but I wasn’t falling for that—they’d probably bought a matching one. Then she pulled out a hoodie I recognized as Simon’s. But he’d left behind a whole closet of clothing. Easy enough to grab some stuff from his room.

Next came a pad of paper and pouch of colored pencils. Simon's room was filled with his comic book sketches. Again, easy enough to—

Mrs. Enright flipped through the sketch pad, holding up pages. Simon's work-in-progress. He'd never have left that behind.

Then she laid a flashlight on the table. The flashlight from Lyle House—the one I'd watched him put into his bag.

“Simon slipped going over the fence,” she said. “He had his backpack over one shoulder. It fell. Our people were right behind him, and he had to leave it. There's something in here that Simon needs much more than clothing and art supplies.”

She opened a navy nylon pouch. Inside were two pen-like vials, one filled with cloudy liquid, the other clear. “The insulin to replace what Simon's body can't produce. He injects himself with these twice a day.”

“What happens if he doesn't?”

Dr. Davidoff took over. “We aren't going to scare you and say that if Simon skips a single shot, he'll die. He's already missed his morning one, and I'm sure he just feels a bit out of sorts. But by tomorrow, he'll be vomiting. In about three days, he'll lapse into a diabetic coma.” He took the pouch from Tori's mom and set it in front of me. “We need to get this to Simon. To do that you need to tell us where he is.”

I agreed to try.

Two

In a good drama, the protagonist never takes the straight line to the prize. She must set out, hit an obstacle, detour around it, hit another, take a longer detour, another obstacle, another detour . . . Only when she has built up the strength of character to *deserve* the prize does she finally succeed.

My story was already fitting the time-honored pattern. Fitting, I guess, for a film student. Or, I should say, former film student. Chloe Saunders, fifteen-year-old Steven Spielberg wannabe, her dreams of writing and directing Hollywood blockbusters shattered on the day she got her first period and started living the kind of life she'd once imagined putting on the screen.

That's when I started seeing ghosts. After freaking out at school, I was taken away by the men in the white jackets and shipped off to a group home for mentally disturbed teens. Problem is, I really *did* see ghosts. And I wasn't the only kid at Lyle House with supernatural powers.

Simon could cast spells. Rae could burn people with her bare fingers. Derek had superhuman strength and senses and, apparently, soon would be able to change into a wolf. Tori . . . well, I didn't know what Tori was, or if she even was one of us and not just a screwed-up kid put in Lyle House because her mom helped run it.

Simon, Derek, Rae and I realized it was no coincidence we were in the same place, and we escaped. Rae and I got separated from the guys and, after running to my Aunt Lauren—the person I trusted most in the world—I ended up here, some kind of laboratory run by the same people who owned Lyle House.

Now they expected me to help them bring in Simon and Derek?

Well, it was time to introduce a few obstacles of my own. So it was in the spirit of proper storytelling that I told Dr. Davidoff where to find Simon and Derek.

Step one: establish the goal.

“Rae and I were supposed to hide while the guys stayed behind to distract you with Simon’s magic,” I told Dr. Davidoff. “Rae ran on ahead so she didn’t hear, but at the last second, Simon pulled me back and said, if we got separated, we’d meet at the rendezvous point.”

Step two: introduce the obstacle.

“Where is the rendezvous point? That’s the problem. I don’t *know* where it is. We talked about needing one, but everything was so crazy that day. We’d only just decided to escape, and then Derek was saying it had to be that night. The guys must have picked a rendezvous point, and forgot they never told me where it was.”

Step three: map out the detour.

“But I do have some ideas—places we talked about. One of them must be the rendezvous point. I could go back to the factory yard and help you find it. They’ll be looking for me, so they might hide until they see me.”

Rather than escape this place, I’d let them take me out by using me as bait. I’d list places I’d never discussed with Simon or Derek, and there would be no chance they’d get captured. A brilliant plan.

The response?

“We’ll keep that in mind, Chloe. But for now, just tell us the places. We have ways to find the boys once we get there.”

Obstacles. An essential part of the storytelling process. But in real life? They suck.

After Dr. Davidoff and Tori’s mom had gotten my list of fake rendezvous points, they left, giving me nothing in return—no answers, no clues as to why I was here or what would happen to me.

I sat cross-legged on my bed, staring down at the necklace in my hands as if it was a crystal ball that could provide all those answers. My mom had given it to me back when I was seeing “bogeymen”—ghosts as I now knew. She said the necklace would stop them from coming, and it did. I’d always figured, like my dad said, that it was psychological. I believed in it, so it worked. Now, I wasn’t so sure.

Had my mom known I was a necromancer? She must have, if the blood ran in her family. Was the necklace supposed to ward off ghosts? If so, its power must have faded. It even looked faded—I swore the bright red jewel had gone a fainter, purplish color. One thing it didn’t do, though, was answer my questions. That I had to do for myself.

I put the necklace back on. Whatever Dr. Davidoff and the others wanted from me, it wasn’t good. You don’t lock up kids you want to help.

As for Simon, I certainly wasn’t going to tell them how to find him. If Simon needed insulin, Derek would break into a drug store if he had to.

I had to concentrate on getting Rae and me out. But this wasn't Lyle House, where the only thing standing between us and freedom was an alarm system. This room might look like it belonged in a nice hotel—with a double bed, a carpeted floor, an armchair, desk and private bathroom—but there were no windows and no knob on the inside of door.

I'd hoped to get Liz's help escaping. Liz had been my roommate at Lyle House. She hadn't made it out alive. So when Aunt Lauren brought me here, I'd summoned Liz, hoping she could help me escape. Only problem? She didn't realize she was dead. As gently as I could, I'd broken the news. She'd flipped out, accusing me of lying, and disappeared.

Maybe she'd had enough time to cool off. I doubted it, but I couldn't wait. I had to try summoning her again.

Three

I prepared for a séance. As set pieces went, this one was so lame I'd never put it in a movie. No sputtering candles to cast eerie shapes on the walls, no moldy skulls forming a ritual circle, no chalices filled with what the audience would suppose was red wine but secretly hope was blood.

Did experienced necromancers use stuff like candles and incense? From the little I'd learned about the supernatural world, I knew some of what we see in movies is true. Maybe, way back in history, people had known about necromancers and witches and werewolves, and the stories we get today are based, if very loosely, on old truths.

My method—if I can call it a method since I've only used it twice—came from trial and error, and a few grudging tips from Derek. As a guy who was taking college-level courses at sixteen, being confident in his facts is important to Derek. If he isn't sure, he'd rather keep his mouth shut. But when I'd pushed him, he'd told me that he'd heard that necromancers summoned ghosts either by being at a graveside or by using a personal effect, like Liz's hoodie, so I was sitting cross-legged on the carpet, clutching it.

I pictured Liz, and imagined myself pulling her out of limbo. At first, I didn't try very hard. The last time I'd focused all my power into summoning a ghost, I'd summoned two right back into their buried corpses. I wasn't near a grave this time, but that didn't mean there weren't

bodies around somewhere. So I kept the voltage low at first, gradually ramping it up, focusing harder and harder until . . .

“What the—? Hey, who are you?”

My eyes flew open. There stood a dark-haired boy about my age with the build, looks and arrogant chin-tilt of a star quarterback. Finding the ghost of another teenager in this place wasn't a coincidence. A name popped into my head—that of another Lyle House resident who'd been taken away before I arrived, supposedly transferred to a mental hospital, like Liz.

“Brady?” I said tentatively.

“Yeah, but I don't know you. Or this place.”

He pivoted, scanning the room, then rubbed the back of his neck. I stopped myself before asking if he was okay. Of course he wasn't okay. He was dead. Like Liz. I swallowed.

“What happened to you?” I asked softly.

He jumped, as if startled by my voice.

“Is someone else here?” I asked, hoping he sensed Liz, beyond the pale where I couldn't see her.

“I thought I heard . . .” He studied me, frowning. “You brought me here?”

“I-I didn't mean to. But . . . since you *are* here, can you tell me—?”

“Nothing. I can't tell you anything.” He squared his shoulders. “Whatever you want to talk about, I'm not interested.”

He looked away, *determined* not to be interested. When he started to fade, I was ready to let him go. Rest in peace. Then I thought about Rae and Simon and Derek. If I didn't get some answers, we might all join Brady in the afterlife.

“My name’s Chloe,” I said quickly. “I’m a friend of Rae’s. From Lyle House. I was there with her, after you—”

He kept fading.

“Wait!” I said. “I c-can prove it. Back at Lyle House. You were trying to get into a fight with Derek, and Simon shoved you away. Only he didn’t touch you. He used magic.”

“Magic?”

“It was a spell that knocks people back. Simon’s a sorcerer. All the kids in Lyle House—”

“I knew it. I *knew* it.” He swore under his breath as he rematerialized. “All that time, they kept trying to shove their diagnosis down my throat, and I told them where else they could shove it, but I couldn’t prove anything.”

“You told the nurses what happened with Simon, and that Rae saw it.”

“Nurses?” He snorted. “More like security guards. I wanted to speak to the real boss: Davidoff. They took me to see him at some building, like a warehouse.”

I described what I’d seen of this building when we’d arrived.

“Yeah, that’s it. They took me inside and . . .” His face screwed up in thought. “A woman came to talk to me. A blonde. Said she was a doctor. Bellows? Fellows?”

Aunt Lauren. My heart battered my ribcage. “So this woman, Dr. Fellows . . .”

“She kept trying to get me to say Derek started the fight. That he threatened me, punched me, shoved me, whatever. I considered it. A little payback for all the attitude I had to put up with from that jerk. I’d just been goofing around with him when Simon got all up in my face and smacked me with that spell.”

In the version I’d heard, Brady had been the one getting in Derek’s face. Simon had a good reason for interfering, too—the last time Derek took a swing, he’d broken a kid’s back.

“So Dr. Fellows wanted you to say Derek started the fight . . .”

“I didn’t. I’d have to deal with the fallout when I went back to Lyle House and I didn’t need that grief. That’s when Davidoff came in. He hauled her out of the room, but I could still hear him chewing her out. She kept saying Derek was a menace and the only reason Davidoff kept him was because he couldn’t admit he made a mistake by including Derek’s type.”

“Type?”

“In the experiment.”

A chill settled in my gut. “E-experiment?”

Brady shrugged. “That’s all she said. Davidoff told her to shove off. He said he made a mistake with the others, but Derek was different.”

Others? Did he mean others of Derek’s “type”—other werewolves? Or other subjects in this experiment? Was *I* a subject in this experiment?

“Did they say any—?” I began.

His head whipped to the side, as if seeing something out of the corner of his eye.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Don’t you hear that?”

I listened. “What is it?”

“Whispering.”

“It could be Liz. She—”

Brady went rigid. His eyes rolled. Then his head flew back, the tendons in his neck popping out, bones crackling. His throat convulsed and he gurgled. Instinctively I tried to help. My hands passed through, but I could feel the heat of his body, a scorching heat that made me fall back in surprise.

As I recovered, Brady went still again. His chin lowered and he rolled his shoulders, as if working out the kinks. Then he looked down at me. His dark brown eyes were now a glowing yellowish-orange. The chill in my gut slunk up my spine.

“Frightened, child?” The voice coming out of Brady’s mouth was a woman’s, so high and light it was almost girlish. “Your instincts are excellent, but you have nothing to fear from me.”

“W-where’s Brady?”

She looked down at Brady’s body. “Do you like him? He *is* pretty, isn’t he? All of dear Dr. Lyle’s creations are so very pretty. Perfect balls of perfect energy, waiting to explode.”

In a blink, “Brady” was in front of me, his face coming down to mine, bathing me in scorching hot breath that smelled strangely sweet. Those orange eyes met mine, the pupils slitted like a cat’s.

“The boy can’t help you, child. But I can. You just need to—”

Those eyes rolled back, darkening to Brady’s brown, then back to orange as she snarled.

“They’re pulling him back to the other side. Call me, child. Quickly.”

“C-call—”

“Call me forth. I can—”

The eyes rolled again, the snarl deepening into something inhuman, a sound that made the chill in my veins harden to ice. I stepped back and smacked into the wall.

“Call me forth,” she said, voice going ragged, deepening into Brady’s. “I can answer all your questions. Call me—”

Brady’s image wavered, then popped, like a TV screen after the power cord is pulled. One flash of white light and he was gone. I thought I heard a knock at the door, but couldn’t move, just stared at the spot where Brady had been.

The door opened, and Dr. Davidoff stepped in to find me plastered to the wall.

“Chloe?”

I staggered forward, rubbing my arms.

“Chloe?”

“S-spider,” I said, pointing to the bed. “It r-ran under there.”

Dr. Davidoff struggled against a smile. “Don’t worry. I’ll get someone in to take care of it, while we’re gone. We’re going to go for a walk. It’s time you got a proper tour and a proper explanation.”

Four

As I followed Dr. Davidoff down the hall, I tried to shake off thoughts of whatever had been in that room. I was a necromancer; ghosts were my one and only specialty. So it had to be a ghost, no matter how strongly every instinct in me insisted it wasn't. All I knew for sure was that I was in no hurry to go back to that room.

“Now, Chloe—” Dr. Davidoff stopped, noticing me rubbing the lingering goose bumps on my arms. “Cold? I'll have them turn up the heat in your room. Your comfort is important to us.”

We started walking again.

“But comfort isn't just physical, is it?” he continued. “Equally important, perhaps even more, is mental comfort. A sense of security. I know you're upset and confused, and it didn't help when we refused to answer your questions. We were eager to start checking those places you listed.”

He hadn't been gone long enough to check spots miles away. I knew what he'd really been checking: whether Rae corroborated my story. She would. She didn't know the real rendezvous point, only that I'd said the guys would meet up with us.

Dr. Davidoff opened a door at the end of the hall. It was a security station, the wall lined with flat screen monitors. Inside, a young man spun in his chair, like he'd been caught surfing porn sites.

“Why don't you go grab a coffee, Rob,” Dr. Davidoff said. “We'll take over.”

He turned to me as the guard left. “You'll be seeing more of the building later. For now—” he waved at the screens “Consider this the one-stop tour.”

Did he think I was stupid? I knew what he was really doing: showing me how well-guarded this place was, in case I was planning another escape. But he was also giving me a chance to study what I was up against.

“As you can see, there's no camera in your room,” he said. “Nor in any of the bedrooms. Just in the hallway.”

Two hall cameras, one at each end. I scanned the other screens. Some flipped between cameras, giving multiple angles of halls and entryways. Two showed laboratories, both empty, the lights dim, probably because it was Sunday.

Another screen did show someone, though. It was an older model, propped on the desk, cords every which way, like it had been quickly set up. The tiny picture was black-and-white and fuzzy, showing what looked like a former storage room, all the boxes shoved along the walls. I could see the back of a girl in a beanbag chair.

She was slumped back, sneakers stretched onto a game console, long curls spilling over the beanbag, the white controller held between dark hands. It looked like Rae. Or maybe it was an impostor set up to convince me that she was okay, playing games, not locked up, screaming for—

The girl in the chair reached for her Diet 7 UP and I saw her face. Rae.

“Yes, as Rae has informed us, that Playstation 2 is terribly outdated. But once she we promised to promptly replace it with the latest model, she resigned herself to playing it.”

As he spoke, his eyes never left the screen. The expression on his face was . . . fond. Weirdly, the very word he’d used earlier for Derek seemed to fit here.

When he turned to me, his features rearranged themselves, as if to say, “I like you well enough, Chloe, but you’re no Rachele.” And I felt . . . bewildered. Maybe even a little hurt, like there was still part of me that wanted to please.

He waved at the screen. “As you can see, we weren’t prepared to have you kids with us here at the facility, but we’re adjusting. While it will never be as cozy as Lyle House, the five of you will be comfortable here, perhaps more so, with all those unfortunate misrepresentations corrected.”

Five of us? That must mean he didn’t plan to put Derek “down like a rabid dog,” as Aunt Lauren wanted. I breathed a soft sigh of relief.

“I won’t apologize, Chloe,” Dr. Davidoff continued. “Perhaps I should, but we thought setting up Lyle House was the best way to handle the situation.”

He waved me to a chair. There were two, the one the security guard had vacated and a second, pushed against the wall. As I stepped toward the second one, it rolled from the shadows and stopped right in front of me.

“No, that’s not a ghost,” Dr. Davidoff said. “They can’t move objects in our world—unless they happen to be a very specific kind, namely the ghost of an Agito.”

“A what?”

“Agito. It’s Latin roughly translating to ‘put into motion.’ Half-demons come in many types, as you’ll discover. An Agito’s power, as the name might suggest, is telekinesis.”

“Moving things with the mind.”

“Very good. And it is an Agito who moved that chair, though one who is still very much alive.”

“You?”

He smiled and, for a second, the mask of the doddering old fool cracked, and I caught a glimpse of the real man beneath. What I saw was pride and arrogance, like a classmate flashing his A+ paper as if to say “top that.”

“Yes, I’m a supernatural, as is almost everyone who works here. I know what you must have been thinking—that we’re humans who’ve discovered your powers and wish to destroy what we don’t understand, like in those comic books.”

“The X-Men.”

I don’t know what was more shocking, that Dr. Davidoff and his colleagues were supernaturals or the image of this stooped, awkward man reading *X-Men*. Had he pored over them as a boy, imagining himself in Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters?

Did that mean Aunt Lauren was a necromancer? That she saw ghosts too?

He continued before I could ask anything. “The Edison Group was founded by supernaturals eighty years ago. And as much as it has grown since those early days, it’s still an institution run by supernaturals and for supernaturals, dedicated to bettering the lives of our kind.”

“Edison Group?”

“Named after Thomas Edison.”

“The guy who invented the light bulb?”

“That’s what he’s best known for. He also invented the movie projector, which I’m sure *you’re* grateful for. But you, Chloe, have accomplished something he dreamed of but never succeeded in doing.” A dramatic pause. “Contacting the dead.”

“Thomas Edison wanted to talk to the dead?”

“He believed in an afterlife, and wanted to communicate with it not through séances and spiritualism, but through science. When he died, it’s thought he was working on just such a device—a telephone to the afterlife. No plans for it were ever found.” Dr. Davidoff smiled conspiratorially. “Or, at least, not officially. We adopted the name because, like Edison, we take a scientific approach to matters of the paranormal.”

Improving supernatural lives through science. Where had I heard something like that? It took me a moment to remember, and when I did, I shivered.

The ghosts I’d raised in the Lyle House basement had been subjects of experiments by a sorcerer named Samuel Lyle. Willingly, at first, they’d said because they’d been promised a better life. Instead, they’d ended up lab rats sacrificed to the vision of a madman, as she’d put it. And that thing in my room had called Brady—and me, I think—Samuel Lyle’s “creations.”

“Chloe?”

“S-sorry. I’m just—”

“Tired, I imagine, after being up all night. Would you like a rest?”

“No, I-I’m fine. It’s just— So how do we fit in? And Lyle House? It’s part of an experiment, isn’t it?”

His chin lifted, not much, just enough of a reaction to tell me I’d caught him off-guard and that he didn’t like it. A pleasant smile erased the look and he eased back in his chair.

“It *is* an experiment, Chloe. I know how that must sound, but I assure you, it’s a non-invasive study only, using only benign psychological therapy.”

Benign? There was nothing benign about what had happened to Liz and Brady.

“Okay, so we’re part of this experiment . . .” I said.

“The powers of a supernatural are both blessing and curse. Adolescence is the most difficult time for us, as our powers begin to manifest. One of our theories is that it might be easier if our children don’t know of their future.”

“Don’t know they’re supernatural?”

“Yes, if we instead allow them to grow up as human, assimilating into human society without anxiety over the upcoming transition—and possible exposure. You and the others are part of that study. For most, it has worked. But for others, such as yourself, your powers came too quickly. We needed to ease you into the truth, and ensure you didn’t harm yourselves or anyone else in the meantime.”

So they put us into a group home and told us we were crazy? Drugged us? That made no sense. What about Simon and Derek, who’d already known what they were? How could they be part of this study? But Derek clearly was, if what Brady said was right.

What about that thing calling us Dr. Lyle’s creations? What about Brady and Liz, permanently removed from this study? Murdered. You didn’t kill a subject when he didn’t respond well to your “benign psychological therapy.”

They’d lied all along—did I really think they’d fess up now? If I wanted the truth, I needed to do what I’d been doing all along. Search for my own answers.

So I let Dr. Davidoff blather on, telling me about their study, about the other kids, about how we'd be "fixed" and out of here in no time. And I smiled and nodded and started making my own plans.