

One

After four nights on the run, I was finally safe, tucked into bed and enjoying the deep, dreamless sleep of the dead . . . until the dead decided they'd really rather have me awake. It started with a laugh that slid into my sleep and pulled me out of it. As I rose on my elbows, blinking and struggling to remember where I was, a whisper snaked around me, words indistinguishable.

I rubbed my eyes and yawned. Dull gray light shone through the curtains. The room was silent and still. No ghosts, thank God. I'd had enough in the last few weeks to last me a lifetime.

A scrape at the window made me jump. These days every branch scraping the glass sounded like a zombie I'd raised from the dead, clawing at my window.

I went to the window and pulled back the curtains. It'd been nearly dawn by the time we got to the house, so I knew it had to be at least mid-morning, but the fog outside was so thick I couldn't see anything. I leaned closer, nose pressed against the cold glass.

A bug splattered against the window and I jumped a foot in the air. A laugh sounded behind me.

I whirled, but Tori was still in bed, whimpering in her sleep. She'd thrown off the covers and was curled up on her side, her dark hair spiked across the pillow.

Another chuckle erupted behind me. Definitely a guy's laugh. But no one was there. No, strike that. I just couldn't *see* anyone. For a necromancer, that doesn't mean no one *is* there.

I squinted, trying to catch the flicker of a ghost and saw, off to the left, the flash of a hand that was gone before I could see more.

"Looking for someone, little necro?"

I spun. "Who's there?"

A snicker answered me—the kind of snicker every fifteen-year-old girl has heard a million times from jerk boys.

“If you want to talk to me, you have to show yourself,” I said.

“Talk to you?” he said in an arrogant high-school quarterback voice. “I think you’re the one who wants to talk to me.”

I snorted and headed back to bed.

“No?” His voice slid around me. “Huh. I figured you’d want to know more about the Edison Group, the Genesis experiments, Dr. Davidoff . . .”

I stopped.

He laughed. “Thought so.”

The four of us—Tori, Derek, Simon, and me—were on the run from the Edison Group, after discovering we were subjects in the Genesis project, an experiment for genetically modifying supernaturals. My aunt Lauren had been one of the doctors involved, but she’d betrayed her colleges by helping us get away. Now she was being held captive. Or so I hoped. Last night, when the Edison Group tracked us down, a ghost had tried to help me . . . a ghost that had looked like Aunt Lauren.

We were supposedly in a safe house owned by an group opposing the experiments. Now a teenaged ghost showed up, knowing about the project? I wasn’t about to banish him, however tempting it might be.

“Show yourself,” I said.

“Bossy little necro, aren’t you?” His voice slid behind me. “You just want to see if I’m as hot as I sound.”

I closed my eyes, pictured a vague male form, and gave a mental tug. He began to materialize—a dark-haired guy maybe sixteen, seventeen, nothing special, but with a smarmy smile that said he thought he was. I could still see through him, like he was a hologram, so I closed my eyes to give him another pull.

“Uh-uh,” he said. “You want more, we gotta get to know each other a little better.” He disappeared again.

“What do you want?” I asked.

He whispered in my ear. “Like I said, to get to know you better. Not here, though. You’ll wake your friend. She’s cute, but not really my type.” His voice moved to the door. “I know a place we can chat in private.”

Yeah, right. Did he think I’d just started talking to ghosts yesterday? Well, close—two weeks ago, actually. But I’d already seen enough to know that while there were some ghosts who wanted to help and some who just wanted to talk, there were more who wanted to cause a little trouble, spice up their afterlife. This guy definitely fell in the last category.

Still if he was another Edison Group subject, one who’d presumably died in this house, I needed to find out what had happened to him. But I wanted backup. Tori had no experience helping me with ghosts and, while we were getting along better, she still wasn’t anyone I wanted watching my back.

So I followed the ghost into the hall, but stopped at Simon and Derek’s door.

“Uh-uh,” the ghost said. “You don’t need to bring a guy along.”

“They’d like to talk to you, too.” I raised my voice, praying Derek would hear me. He usually woke at the slightest noise—werewolves have super-hearing. All I could hear though, was Simon’s snores. And the guy who’d brought us here, Andrew—a friend of Simon and

Derek's dad—had taken the downstairs bedroom, the one his members of his group usually used when they visited.

“Come on, necro-girl. This is a limited time offer.”

You know he's up to no good, Chloe.

Yes, but I also needed to know if we were in danger here. I decided to proceed with extreme caution. My subconscious voice didn't argue, which I took as a positive sign.

I started walking.

We'd gone straight to bed after we got here, so I hadn't gotten a good look at our new place. I only knew that it was huge—a rambling Victorian straight out of a Gothic horror movie.

As I followed the voice down the hall, I had the weird sense I was in one of those movies, caught in an endless narrow corridor, passing closed door after closed door until I finally reached the staircase . . . heading up.

From what I'd seen of the house as we'd driven in, it was three stories. The bedrooms were on the second floor, and Andrew had said the third was actually an attic.

So the ghost was leading me up to the dark, spooky attic? I wasn't the only one who'd seen too many horror films.

I followed him up the stairs. They ended at a landing with two doors. I paused. A hand appeared through the door in front of me, beckoning. I took a second to prepare myself. No matter how dark it was in there, I couldn't let him see my fear.

When I was ready, I grabbed the handle and—

It was locked. I turned the deadbolt and it clicked free. Another deep breath, another second of mental preparation, then I swung the door open and stepped in—

A blast of cold air knocked me back. I blinked. Ahead, fog swirled.

A deadbolt on an attic door, Chloe?

No, I was standing on the roof.

Two

I wheeled as the door swung closed behind me. I caught the edge, but something hit it, hard, and it slammed home. I grabbed the handle as the deadbolt clanked shut. I twisted the knob, sure I was mistaken.

“Leaving so soon?” he said. “How rude.”

I stared down at the handle. Only one very rare type of ghost could move stuff in the living world.

“An Agito half-demon,” I whispered.

“Agito?” He twisted the word with contempt. “I’m top-of-the-line, baby. I’m a Volo.”

Which meant nothing to me. I could only guess it was a more powerful type. In life, a telekinetic half-demon could move objects mentally. In death, they could move them physically. A poltergeist.

I took a careful step back. Wood creaked underfoot, reminding me of where I was. I stopped short and looked around. I was on a kind of walkway that circled the third floor—the attic, I presumed.

To my right was a nearly flat section littered with rusty bottle caps and beer cans, like someone had used it as a makeshift patio. That calmed me down. I wasn’t stranded on a roof, just a balcony. Annoying, but safe enough.

I rapped on the door, lightly, not really wanting to wake anyone, but hoping Derek might notice.

“No one’s going to hear you,” the ghost said. “We’re all alone. Just the way I like it.”

I lifted my hand to bang on the door, then stopped. Dad always said the best way to deal with a bully was not to let him know you were frightened. At the thought of my father, my throat tightened. Was he still looking for me? Of course, he was, and there was nothing I could do—

Dad’s advice for bullies had worked with kids who mocked my stutter—they gave up when they couldn’t get a reaction from me. So I took a deep breath and went on the offensive.

“You said you know about the Edison Group and their experiments,” I said. “Were you a subject?”

“Boring. Let’s talk about you. Got a boyfriend? I bet you do. Cute girl like you, hanging out with two guys. You’ve gotta have hooked up with one of them by now. So which one—?” He laughed. “Dumb question. The cute girl would get the cute guy. The chink.”

He meant Simon, who was half-Korean. He was baiting me, seeing if I’d leap to Simon’s defense and prove he was my boyfriend. He wasn’t. Well, not yet, though we seemed to be heading that way.

“If you want me to stay and talk, I need some answers first,” I said.

He laughed. “Yeah? Doesn’t look to me like you’re going anywhere.”

I grabbed the doorknob again. A bottle cap pinged off my cheek, just below my eye. I glowered in his direction.

“That was only a warning shot, little necro.” A nasty tone edged his voice. “Around here, we play my game by my rules. Now, tell me about your boyfriend.”

“I don’t have one. If you know anything about the Genesis experiment, then you know we aren’t here for a vacation. Being on the run doesn’t leave much time for romance.”

“Don’t get snarky with me.”

I banged on the door. The next bottle cap hit my eye, stinging.

“You’re in danger, little girl. Don’t you care?” His voice lowered to my ear. “Right now, I’m your best friend, so you’d better treat me good. You’ve just been led into a trap and I’m the only one who can get you out.”

“Led? By who? The guy who brought us here—” I thought up a fake name fast.

“Charles?”

“No, some total stranger, and Charles just happened to bring you here. What a coincidence.”

“But he said he doesn’t work for the Edison Group anymore. He used to be their doctor—”

“He still is.”

“H-He’s Dr. Fellows? The one they were talking about at the lab?”

“None other.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’d never forget that face.”

“Huh, well, that’s weird. First, his name isn’t Charles. Second, he’s not a doctor. Third, I know Dr. Fellows. She’s my aunt, and that guy downstairs looks nothing like her.”

The blow hit me from behind, striking hard against the back of my knees. My legs buckled and I fell on all fours.

“Don’t toy with me, little necro.”

When I tried to rise, he hit me with an old plank swung like a baseball bat. I tried to twist out of the way, but he got my shoulder and knocked me into the railing. A crack, and the railing gave way. I toppled, and for a second, all I could see was the concrete patio two stories down.

I caught another section of railing. It held and I was steadying myself when the plank swung straight for my hand. I let go and scrambled onto the walkway as the board hit the railing where my hand had been, so hard the top rail snapped and the plank snapped, too, splinters of rotting wood flying.

I ran toward the flat section of roof. He whipped the broken board at me. I stumbled back, bumping into the railing again.

I caught my balance and looked around. No sign of him. No sign of anything moving. But I knew he was there, watching to see what I'd do next.

I ran for the door, then fainted toward the flat part of the roof. A crash. Shards of glass exploded on the ground in front of me and the ghost appeared, lifting a broken bottle. I backpedaled.

Sure, that's a great idea. Just keep backing into the railing, see how long it'll hold.

I stopped. There was nowhere to run. I considered screaming. I've always hated that in movies--heroines who scream for help when cornered--but right now, caught between a broken-bottle wielding poltergeist and a two-story fall, I could survive the humiliation of being rescued. Problem was, no one would get here in time.

So . . . what are you going to do? The super-powerful necromancer against the bullying poltergeist?

That was right. I did have a defense, at least against ghosts.

I touched my amulet. It'd been given to me by my mother. She'd said it would ward off the bogeymen I'd seen when I was little—ghosts, as I knew now. It didn't seem to work that well, but clutching it helped me concentrate, focus on what I was.

I pictured giving the ghost a shove.

“Don't you dare, little girl. You'll only piss me off and—”

I squeezed my eyes shut and gave him a huge mental push.

Silence.

I waited, listening, sure when I opened my eyes, he'd be right there. After a moment, I peeked and saw only the gray sky. Still, I gripped the railing tight, ready for another bottle to fly at my head.

“Chloe!”

My knees shook at the shout. Footsteps thudded across the roof. Ghosts don't make footsteps.

“Don't move.”

I looked over my shoulder to see Derek, in jeans, a T-shirt, and bare feet.

Three

Derek made his way across the flat section of the roof, keeping well back from the rotted walkway.

“Watch out,” I called. “There’s broken glass.”

“I see it. Stay where you are.”

“It’s okay. I’ll just back up and—” The wood crackled under me. “Or maybe not.”

“Just stay there. It’s holding your weight as long as you stand still.”

“But I walked out here, so it must be—”

“We’re not testing that theory, okay?”

There was none of the usual impatient snap in his voice, meaning he was really worried, and if Derek was worried, I’d better stay right where I was. I gripped the railing.

“No!” he said. “I mean, yes, hold on, but don’t put any weight on it. It’s rotted through at the base.”

Great.

Derek looked around, like he was searching for something to use. Then he stripped off his shirt. I tried not to look away. Not that he looked bad without his shirt. The opposite actually, which is why . . . Let’s just say friends are really better when they’re fully dressed.

Derek got as close as he dared, then knotted a corner of the T-shirt and tossed it to me. I caught it on the second throw.

“I’m not going to pull you in,” he warned.

A good thing, because with his werewolf strength, he’d probably wrench it from my hands and I’d tumble off the roof backward.

“Pull yourself along—”

He stopped, seeing I was already doing that. I made it onto the flat part, wobbled a step, then felt my knees start to give way. Derek grabbed my arm—the one without stitches, bandages, and a bullet graze—and I lowered myself slowly.

“I-I’m just going to sit for a minute,” I said, my voice shakier than I liked.

Derek sat beside me, his shirt back on. I could feel him watching me, uncertain.

“I-I’ll be okay. Just give me a second. It’s safe to sit here, right?”

“Yeah, the slope’s only about twenty-five degrees, so—” Seeing my expression, he said, “It’s safe.”

The fog was lifting, and I could see trees stretching into the distance on all sides, a dirt road winding through them to the house.

“There was a ghost,” I said finally.

“Yeah, I figured that.”

“I-I knew I shouldn’t follow but—” I stopped, not ready for the full explanation, still shaky.

“I paused outside your door, hoping you’d hear me. I guess you did?”

“Kind of. I was dozing. Woke up confused, so it took me a while to get out here. Got a touch of fever.”

I saw it now, the flushed skin and glittering eyes.

“Are you—?” I began.

“I’m not Changing. Not for a while. I know what that feels like now, and I’ve got a ways to go. Another day, at least. Hopefully longer.”

“I bet you’ll change completely this time,” I said.

“Yeah, maybe.” His tone said he doubted it.

As we sat there, I snuck a look at him. At sixteen, Derek was more than a foot taller than me. Solidly built, too, with broad shoulders and muscles he usually kept hidden under baggy clothes, so he wouldn’t look as intimidating.

Since he’d started Changing, Mother Nature seemed to have cut him some slack. His skin was clearing up. His dark hair didn’t look greasy anymore. It still hung in his face—nothing emo, just like he hadn’t bothered to get it cut in awhile. Lately, that would have been the last thing on his mind.

I tried to relax and enjoy the fog-laced view, but Derek fidgeted and squirmed, which was more distracting than if he’d just been his usual self and demanded to know what had happened.

“So there was this ghost,” I said finally. “He said he was a Volo half-demon. Telekinetic, but a stronger type than Dr. Davidoff. Probably the same type Liz is. He lured me out here, locked the door, then started pelting me with stuff.”

Derek looked over sharply.

“I banished him.”

“Good, but you shouldn’t have followed him out here at all, Chloe.”

His tone was calm, reasonable, so un-Derek-like that I stared at him, the weird idea that this wasn’t Derek creeping through my head. Before I’d escaped the Edison Group laboratory, I’d

met a demi-demon, chained there as a power source. She'd possessed someone, but only a ghost. Could Derek be possessed?

"What?" Derek said as I stared.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, just . . ." He rubbed the back of his neck, wincing and rolling his shoulders. "Tired. Feeling off. Really off. Too much . . ." He struggled for the word. "Being here. Being safe. I'm still adjusting."

That made sense. Derek's werewolf protective streak had been in hyper-drive for days, keeping him awake and on guard. Having someone else to watch out for us now would be weird. Still, not blasting me for blithely following a random ghost onto a roof was so totally not Derek that I knew there was more to it.

When I asked what was bothering him, though, he muttered that it was nothing. I backed off and was about to explain more about the ghost when he blurted, "It's Tori. I don't like her story about how she got away."

When the Edison Group had almost captured us last night, they'd nabbed Tori. Yet when they'd refocused their efforts on the biggest threat—Derek—they'd left the young witch with only a single guard. She'd locked him in a binding spell and escaped.

"You think they let her escape?"

"I'm not saying . . . It's just . . . I don't have any proof."

And that's what was making him uncomfortable, that his misgivings were based on nothing but a gut feeling. The math and science whiz really preferred dealing in facts.

"If you're thinking she's been a plant from the start, she hasn't." I lowered my voice.

"Don't tell her I told you this, okay? When she helped me escape, she only wanted to get away

from the Edison Group, and run back to her dad. So she called him. Instead he sent her mom—the woman we’d just escaped. Tori was hurt, really hurt. In shock even. She couldn’t have faked that.”

“I didn’t figure she was in on it from before you guys escaped.”

“Just that she cut a deal last night?”

“Yeah.”

“Would Tori turn us in for the promise of getting her old life back? It’s possible, and we should be careful, but I *do* buy her story. Unless her mom told them she was figuring out how to cast spells—which I doubt—then, as far as they know, she just has random outbursts of power. Her binding spell could have taken out a single guard. I’ve seen her use it. She doesn’t even need to say an incantation. It’s like, if she thinks it, she can do it.”

“No casting? No practicing?” He shook his head. “Don’t tell Simon that.”

“Don’t tell Simon what?” said a voice behind us.

We turned to see Simon step out of the doorway.

“That Tori doesn’t need to use incantations to cast,” Derek said.

“Seriously?” He swore. “You’re right. Don’t tell me.” He picked his way across the roof.

“Better yet, don’t tell her that I need incantations and weeks of practice, and I still suck.”

“You were good with that knock-back spell last night,” I said.

He grinned. “Thanks. Now, do I dare ask what you guys are doing hiding out up here? Or is it going to make me jealous?”

Simon was smiling as he said it, but Derek glanced away with a gruff, “Course not.”

“So you weren’t having another adventure?” Simon lowered himself on my other side, so close he brushed against me, hand resting on mine. “It sure looks like a good spot for one.

Rooftop hideaway, rotting widow’s walk. That is what that is, huh? A widow’s walk?”

“Yeah. And it *is* rotting, so stay off it,” Derek said.

“I did. So, adventure?”

“A small one,” I said.

“Oh, man. I always miss them. Okay, break it to me gently. What happened?”

I explained. As Simon listened, intent and concerned, he cast glances at his brother. Foster brother, I guess you’d say—one look at them and you knew they weren’t related by blood. Simon is fifteen, a half-year older than me, slender and athletic, with dark almond-shaped eyes and spiked blond hair. When Derek was about five, he’d come to live with Simon and his dad. They were best friends and brothers, blood tie or not.

I told him as much as I’d told Derek so far. Then he looked from me to Derek.

“I must have been sound asleep if I missed all that shouting,” Simon said.

“What shouting?” Derek said.

“You mean that Chloe just told you that she followed a ghost onto a roof, and you didn’t blast her all the way to Canada?”

“He’s a little off this morning,” I said.

“More than a little, I’d say. Aren’t you going to ask her for the rest of the story? The part where she explains *why* she followed the ghost? Because I’m sure there was a reason.”

I smiled. “Thank you. There was. It was a teenage guy who knew about the Edison Group and the experiments.”

“What?” Derek’s head whipped around, the sound more growl than question.

“That’s why I followed him. There’s a dead kid here who might have been another subject, and if he died here . . .”

“Then that’s a problem,” Simon said.

I nodded. “My first thought, naturally, was ‘Oh my God, we’ve been led into a trap.’ ”

Simon shook his head. “Not Andrew. He’s one of the good guys. I’ve known him all my life.”

“But I haven’t, which is why I prodded the ghost, and it was clear he hadn’t recognized him. Andrew said this place was owned by the guy who started his group and was involved in the experiments. If there’s a link to this kid, I think we’ll find it there.”

“We can ask Andrew—”

Derek cut him off. “We’ll find our own answers.”

Simon and Derek locked gazes. After a second, Simon grumbled something about making things difficult, but he didn’t argue. If Derek wanted to amuse himself playing detective, then fine. We’d be gone soon anyway, back to rescue those we’d left behind and take out the Edison Group . . . or so we hoped.

Four

We went downstairs shortly after that. Derek headed straight for the kitchen to scrounge up breakfast. We might have gotten only a few hours sleep, but it was already almost noon and his stomach was, predictably, growling.

While he searched for food, Simon and I poked around our temporary new home. I read a book once about a girl in a huge English mansion with a secret room no one had found in years, because a wardrobe had been pulled in front of the door. I remember thinking that was ridiculous. My dad had friends with really big houses, and there was still no way you could “misplace” a room. But with this place and a little stretch of the imagination, I could see it.

It wasn't just big. It was set up weird. Like the architect just slapped rooms onto a blueprint, with no thought to how they connected. The front was simple enough. There was a main hall connecting the doors, the stairs, the kitchen, a living room, and dining room. Then it got confusing, branching into a couple of back halls, with rooms that only joined other rooms. Most were really tiny, not even ten feet square. It reminded me of a rabbit's warren, all these little rooms going off in all directions. We even found a separate set of stairs back there, ones that looked like they hadn't been cleaned in years.

As Simon went to see if Andrew was up, I wandered into the kitchen, where Derek was eyeing a rusty can of beans.

“That hungry?” I asked.

“I will be soon.”

He prowled the kitchen, flipping open cupboards.

“So you don’t want me asking Andrew about that kid,” I said. “You trust him, though, right?”

“Sure.”

He took down a box of crackers and turned it over, looking for a “best before” date.

“That didn’t sound convincing,” I said. “If we’re here with someone you don’t trust . . .”

“Right now, the only people I really trust are you and Simon. I don’t think Andrew is up to anything. If I did, we wouldn’t be here. But I’m not taking a chance, not if we can find our own answers.”

I nodded. “That’s fine. Just . . . I know you don’t want to spook Simon, but . . . If you’re worried . . .” My cheeks heated. “I don’t mean you need to confide in me, just don’t . . .”

“Blow you off when you know something’s wrong.” He turned and met my gaze. “I won’t.”

“Is he drinking the ketchup yet?” Simon swung into the kitchen. “Ten minutes, bro. Andrew’s on his way down and—”

“And he’s apologizing profusely for the lack of food.” Andrew walked in. He was about my Dad’s age, with really short gray hair, square shoulders, a stocky build and a crooked nose. He clapped a hand on Derek’s shoulder. “It’s coming. One of the group is bringing breakfast, and they’ll be here any minute.”

He kept his hand on Derek’s shoulder, giving it a squeeze. It was an awkward gesture, maybe because he was a half-foot shorter than Derek, but it seemed more than that. Last night,

when he'd first seen Derek after a few years, a pulse of surprise and wariness crossed his face. Derek had seen it, and I knew he'd felt it, the jab of having a guy he'd known most of his life reacting like he was some teenage thug you'd cross the road to avoid passing.

Andrew was a sorcerer, like Simon, an old friend of their dad's and a former employee of the Edison Group. He was also their emergency contact. Andrew and their dad had some kind of falling out a few years ago, but they'd stayed in contact, so when we'd been stuck, we'd come to him.

He gave Derek's shoulder one last squeeze, then he bustled about the kitchen, getting out plates and rinsing them off, wiping dust from the counters and the table, asking how we'd slept, apologizing yet again for the lack of preparation.

"Hard to prepare when you don't know anyone's coming," Simon said. "Is this going to be okay? You staying here with us? I know you've got work . . ."

"Which I've been doing from home for two years now. Finally built up the seniority to start telecommuting, thank God. The daily trips into New York were killing me. I go once a week now, for meetings."

Simon turned to me. "Andrew's an editor. Books." He glanced at Andrew. "Chloe's a screenwriter."

I blushed and stammered that, obviously, I wasn't a real screenwriter, just a wannabe, but Andrew said he'd love to hear about what I was working on, answer any questions about writing. He even sounded like he meant it, unlike most adults, who just say things like that to humor you.

"Right now, she's working on a comic with me," Simon said. "A graphic journal of our adventures. Just for fun."

"Very cool. I take it you're doing the art? Your dad told me you're—"

The doorbell rang.

“And that would be breakfast,” Andrew said. “Chloe? I know Tori’s probably exhausted, but she should be here for the meeting.”

“I’ll go wake her up.”

So the mysterious resistance group was here. It didn’t look like much: just three people and Andrew.

There was Margaret, who looked like a lot of the women my dad worked with—a corporate business type, tall with graying brown hair cut short. She was a necromancer.

Gwen wasn’t much taller than me and barely looked out of college. As for supernatural type, with her short blonde hair, turned-up nose and sharp chin, I started wondering if there was such a thing as a pixie, but she said she was a witch, like Tori.

Andrew said there were another half-dozen members in the New York City area, and twenty or so more across the country. Under the circumstances, though, it didn’t seem safe to have them all trooping up here to meet us. So they’d sent the ones who could help us the most—a necromancer and a witch. Derek was out of luck. There weren’t any werewolves in the group, not surprising given that there were maybe a couple dozen in the country, compared to hundreds of necromancers and spell-casters.

The third newcomer was Russell, a bald grandfatherly guy who was a shaman paramedic, in case we needed medical attention after our ordeal. With Andrew and Margaret, he was one of the group’s founding members and had also once worked for the Edison Group.

The supernaturals who joined the Edison Group weren't evil. Most were like my aunt, who offered her services as a doctor because she wanted to help people like her brother, a necromancer who'd either committed suicide or been driven off a roof by ghosts when he was still in college.

The Edison Group believed that the answer was genetic manipulation—tweak our DNA to minimize side effects and improve control. Things started going wrong back when we were little, and three of the werewolf subjects attacked a nurse. They were “eliminated.” Killed, by the same people who swore they were trying to help supernaturals. That's when Simon's dad and others, like Andrew, left.

But leaving wasn't enough for some. Concerned about what they'd seen, they'd monitored the Edison Group, making sure they didn't pose a threat to other supernaturals. Now we were bringing news of exactly what they'd feared most. For many of us, the genetic modification had backfired, instead producing kids with uncontrollable powers—witches who could cast without incantations and necromancers who could raise the dead by accident.

When those failures hadn't proved as easy to control as the Edison Group hoped, they'd done the same thing they'd done to the werewolf boys. Killed them.

Now, we'd come to Andrew's group for help. We were in mortal danger and we'd left behind another subject, Rachele, and my aunt Lauren, who were in even greater danger. We were asking this group to rescue them and end the threat against us. Were they up to it? We had no idea.

Gwen had brought the breakfast: donuts, coffee, and chocolate milk, which I'm sure she thought would be the perfect treat for teenagers. It would have been . . . if we hadn't been living on junk food for three days and if one of us wasn't diabetic.

Simon picked out a donut and a half-carton of chocolate milk, joking about having the excuse to eat stuff that was normally off his diet. It was Derek who complained. Andrew apologized for forgetting to warn the others about Simon, and promised more nutritious food for our next meal.

Everyone was really nice and sympathetic, and maybe I was just being paranoid—Derek rubbing off on me—but behind those smiles and kind eyes, there seemed to be a touch of unease, like they couldn't stop thinking about our messed-up powers. Like they couldn't help but think that we were all ticking time-bombs.

I wasn't the only one who felt uncomfortable. When we moved to the living room, Derek staked out a corner and retreated there. Simon barely said a word. Tori, who normally wanted nothing to do with us, stuck so close to me that I thought she was trying to swipe my donut.

Us versus them. The genetically modified freaks versus the normal supernaturals.

Simon and I did most of the talking. That was weird for me, the kid who always sat in the back of a group, hoping she wasn't called on to speak because she might start stuttering. But the burden of proof lay with me and what I'd seen: the ghosts of the other kids and the files on Dr. Davidoff's computer.

As we explained, I saw sympathy in their eyes, but doubt, too. They believed that the experiment had gone wrong for some subjects—that was exactly the kind of thing they'd feared when they quit. They also believed us about Lyle House, the "group home" where the Edison

Group had kept us. When the experiment screwed up, naturally the Edison Group would try to cover their tracks.

But the rest of it? Hunting us down when we escaped? Shooting at us, first with tranquilizer darts, then real bullets? Locking us up in the laboratory? Killing three kids who'd failed rehabilitation?

That sounded like something from a movie. No, strike that. As an aspiring blockbuster screenwriter/director, if I'd heard this pitch, I'd have dismissed it as too outrageous.

I could tell that Andrew believed us. Gwen did, too. I could see it from the horror in her face. But Gwen was the youngest, and her opinion didn't seem to count for much. Russell and Margaret couldn't hide their skepticism and I knew convincing them to help us wasn't going to be as easy as we'd hoped.

Finally, I blurted, "Rachelle and my aunt are in *danger*. They could be killed any day now, if they haven't already been."

"Your aunt is a valuable member of the team," Margaret said, her severe face unreadable. "They won't kill her. Nor does your friend seem in imminent danger. She's happy and compliant. That's all they'll ask for now."

"But if she finds out the truth, she won't be nearly so compliant—"

Russell cut in. "Your aunt and your friend made their choices, Chloe. As harsh as that seems. They both betrayed you. I didn't think you'd be so eager to rescue them."

"My aunt—"

"Helped you escape, I know. But you wouldn't have been there if it wasn't for your friend's betrayal."

Rae had told Dr. Davidoff about our escape plans, so they'd been ready when we tried to make a run for it. She'd believed their lies about wanting to help us and thought I'd been brainwashed by the boys.

"She made a mistake. Are you saying we should let her die for it?" My voice was rising. I swallowed, trying to stay calm, reasonable. "She's in danger. Whatever she did, she thought it was the right thing at the time, and I won't abandon her now."

I glanced at the others. Simon agreed quickly and vehemently. Derek mumbled a gruff "Yeah, she screwed up, but stupidity isn't a capital crime."

We all looked at Tori. I held my breath, feeling the weight of the adults' gazes on us, knowing we needed consensus on this.

"Since we're already going back for Chloe's aunt, then Rae should be rescued," Tori said. "And they both need to be rescued ASAP. The Edison Group might not be a bunch of vindictive homicidal maniacs, but my mother is the exception, and when we left, she really wasn't happy with Dr. Fellows."

"I don't think—" Russell began.

"Now it's time to move onto the boring discussion part." Andrew interjected. "Why don't you kids go upstairs and check out the other rooms. I'm sure you'd each like one of your own."

"We're good," Simon said.

Andrew looked at the others. They wanted us out of the room so they could discuss whether they were going to help us or not.

I wanted to scream, *What is there to discuss? The people you used to work for are killing kids. Isn't this your mission? To make sure their work doesn't hurt anyone? Stop chowing down on donuts and do something!*

“Why don’t you—?” Andrew began.

“We’re good.” It came out as a growl. That was just Derek’s “I’m serious” tone, but the room suddenly went very still. All eyes turned toward him, every gaze wary.

Derek glanced away and mumbled, “You want us to leave?”

“Please,” Andrew said. “It would be easier—”

“Whatever.”

Derek led us out.