Cora Hamilton has spent most of her life being invisible; and considering her demure nature and deeply rooted shyness, she has no qualms with keeping it that way. But when she is marked and comes to the Tulsa House of Night, she will be forced out of the shadows and into the light to become the person she was meant to be.
Chapter 1

As I reached up to the highest shelf of a library bookcase, I cursed my genetic shortness and wondered why there seemed to be a lack of stools in my vicinity.

Exhausted from reaching, I grabbed a nearby chair and hoped that no librarians were nearby to see my violation of the library’s rules. Finally, the leatherbound edition of *The Mystery of Vampyre Genetics: Volume I* was within my grasp and I hopped down from the chair, wiping off any dust my slacks accumulated.

The rest of my bounty, a mass of vampyre history archives and anatomy books, lied in an immaculate stack on the table nearest me. Sitting down, I opened the book I had retrieved and began to lose myself in the world of vampyres.

Vampyres, specifically their biology, was a bit of an obsession of mine, and my reading materials reflected said obsession. I had always been interested in biology, so when I learned all I could about human anatomy and genetics, vampyres were the obvious next choice.

However, vampyres tended to be very closed off when it came to humans learning about their own biology, so any information I could learn was obtainable only through mankind's limited knowledge about vampyres as a species.

Skimming through the index of the thick volume, I pulled away for a moment to wetly cough into a silk handkerchief, taking care not to soil the fabric of my blouse. Recently, I had begun to display signs of changing into a vampyre fledgling; that is, except for actually being marked.

I knew that it was only a matter of time before the vampyre tracker found and marked me, so I intended to soak up as much information about vampyre culture before that happened. And if I wasn't marked, then at least I got some extra studying done.

Clearing my throat and pushing my glasses farther up onto my nose, I continued to read, nerves coalescing into a knot in my stomach about the well known statistics of how many vampyre fledglings reject the change. While I wasn't particularly athletic, I could only hope that my already optimal health before the change would better ensure that I would survive it.

An hour or so later, I finished the rest of the volume and got up from the table to retrieve volume two. Before I could do so, however, the air around me filled with tension, hairs on my arms and neck stood up, and a cough wracked over my body.

After catching my breath, I noticed a man that appeared to be in his late to mid twenties standing in corner of the library, onyx eyes seeming to drill holes into me, and dark blue mark stark against his tanned skin.

Before I could visibly react to his presence, he lifted a finger towards me and spoke words that sent goosebumps running up my back and shook me to my very core.

"Cora Hamilton! Night has chosen thee; thy death will be thy birth. Night calls to thee; hearken to Her sweet voice. Your destiny awaits you at the House of Night!"
Pain bloomed across my face, centering around the middle of my forehead, and before I collapsed to the floor, I wished that I thought far enough ahead to bring a pillow with me to the library.

A pounding headache roused me out of my slumber, caused both by the recently obtained mark and hitting the floor hard. The fluorescent lights of the library were especially irritating once I opened my eyes, caused by my newly intensified senses. I knew that once someone noticed me and the crescent moon outline on my forehead, there would most likely be a panic.

So, ignoring the throbbing the pain that began to spread into my scrawny limbs, I got up from the thin carpeting and lumbered over to the table full of books that I would no longer need.

Figuring that not putting the books away would be an excusable offense considering my current situation, I simply pushed in my chair and grabbed the cloth totebag I had brought with me, folding it up instead of using it to carry books I had intended to rent out. I tangled my fingers into my curly dark brown bangs, taking care to arrange it so it covered where my mark most likely was.

The librarians said goodbye me happily when I left, not seeming to notice the sickly hue my light brown skin seemed to have taken on. I gave them a polite reply, and walked out to the lazy, late afternoon atmosphere of Mustang, Oklahoma, walking the several blocks from the library back to my house.

While I wasn’t approached by anyone, I could clearly see the strange looks that I received from my neighbors. Considering that I lived in a town populated mainly by bored housewives and their barely present husbands, anything out of the ordinary was immediately noticed and gossiped about.

The georgian architecture of my house exuded the wealth and status that my parents have, and this was further shown by the fact that neither of said parents were currently home. This didn’t faze me, as each were attending some luncheon or removing a tumor from a brain as per usual. A beautiful, large, and empty home greeted me, the soles of my flats squeaking on the pristine shine of the hardwood floors.

Walking up the grand staircase, I was forced to stop halfway up to catch my breath, lungs protesting any physical activity. When I made it to my bedroom, I bypassed the gauzy pink canopy over my bed and logged into the computer at my desk, finding the directions I had looked up the previous day to the Tulsa House of Night.

After printing them out and having a sneezing fit, I grabbed the suitcase I had prepared a few days ago and carried it haphazardly down the stairs, regretting the decision to pack so heavily. When I got to the bottom, I grabbed my phone and a few granola bars and tissues for the trip, and then took a moment to say goodbye to the home that had never truly felt like such.

My parents wouldn't notice I was gone until I much later, considering how busy my mother was with her social life and my father's devotion to his career as a surgeon. As a black man at the top of his field, most people assumed that he was exceptional in every way, including his home life, but most people didn't know that he was rarely if ever home and barely interacted on a deep level with his wife and daughter.

As for my mother, well, she was an extrovert in every way, and having a daughter who was neither bubbly nor interested in fashion or parties definitely dampened her plans. However, my mother trying to force me to be a fashionista did pay off, considering the tube of concealer in my skin shade
that she had bought at for me covered up my mark exceptionally well.

I finished applying the makeup and, after putting my extra items into my suitcase, I walked out the front door of my house for the very last time.

The 7:00 bus to Tulsa thankfully arrived promptly, though the bus driver giving me a strange look when I first got on certainly dampened my spirits. To be fair, I did look a bit like a druggie with my curly highlighted hair in haphazard bun, square frame glasses askew on my face, and the Harvard Medical School hooded sweatshirt I had stolen from my dad seeming to swallow my small frame and face.

For the first half hour, the bus ride was peaceful, save for the occasional poorly stifled coughing fit. The occupants of the bus trickled down to only me and a snoring man in the very back of the bus. By the time we finally reached Tulsa, I struggled not to succumb to sleep myself, my body heavy from exhaustion and sickness raging through my veins.

I half carried-half dragged the suitcase off of the bus, ignoring the look of concern from the bus driver. The rest of the walk to the House of Night was a blur, my legs were barely able to carry myself, let alone a jumbo sized suitcase and tote bag. Finally however, my journey came to an end, and as I approached the gates of the Tulsa House of Night, my strength finally gave out, and I collapsed into a coma like sleep.

Chapter End Notes

The story takes place a bit before Betrayed, and I adjusted the order of events in the actual book to suit the plot of this fanfic. Also, for anyone wondering, Cora is mixed: her mother is white and her father is black.
Chapter 2

When I became conscious again, the congestion in my throat and the throbbing in my head were gone. In their place was a feeling of lightness and buoyancy. Above me, countless stars and an impossibly large moon shined across the pitch black night sky. This confused me, because I had always assumed that the pollution in Tulsa would make stars invisible to the naked eye on most nights.

The soft, melodic sound of humming brought me out my musings. I sat up in what I now identified as soft grass, and turned towards the source of the beautiful music.

A woman sat a few paces away from me, hands weaving what appeared to be a flower crown. Her long, jet black hair covered most of her face, the moonlight exposing her subtle dark blue and purple highlights. Before I made my way over to her, I was dumbfounded by the circle of trees that surrounded us in this large clearing.

My last memory was of getting off the bus in Tulsa, stumbling my way to the House of Night front gates and then...nothing.

"Well child?" The woman called, her light yet powerful voice effortlessly capturing my attention. "Are you going to come speak to me?" Her voice held no malice, though when I came and sat beside her, a pervasive feeling of nervousness came over me.

She had just finished the wreath of flowers when I came to her, the dark purple coloring of the fauna matching her form fitting dress. After a moment, she lifted her head up towards mine, and the ageless beauty this woman possessed took my breath away.

I had seen vampyres in movies and on t.v., and I thought I had seen the epitome of beauty. But this woman put all of those other vampyres to shame. Her stunning features were highlighted by the unadulterated power and confidence she exuded, and from the intricate dark blue design that framed her heart shaped face, I finally realized who she was.

"You’re the goddess Nyx, ” I gasped, awed by the fact that I was meeting the Vampyre deity in person.

The scientific aspect of vampyre culture had always appealed to me more so than the spiritual, because of the logic and reliability that came with science. But now, faced with a territory I had never encountered, I was at a loss on how to proceed.

As though she sensed my nervousness, Nyx smiled in a breathtaking fashion. “Do not worry, my child. There are no wrong questions you can ask me.”

My mind immediately filled with inquiries about the universe, the Christian God, our relevance in the grander scheme of existence, and other world shattering concepts. But as I couldn’t decide on the most pressing question, I decided to begin simple.

“Why am I here?” I asked, looking around at the place we resided in. Nyx chuckled, and while she was already breathtakingly beautiful her laugh effectively turned my thoughts to mush as I stared at her in awe.
“Do you know why I mark fledglings, Cora?” This question threw me off guard, but I quickly realized she was going to answer in a roundabout fashion and I nodded.

“Every person that is born on this earth has the potential to be marked as a vampyre, which lessens or grows depending on the character they exhibit throughout their life.” As Nyx explained, I could feel every nerve ending in my body focus minutely on the words she spoke, the velvety soprano of her voice stimulating my senses.

“By the time they reach the beginning of puberty, I have already decided whether or not to mark these individuals. From there I simply wait for an opportune time in their lives to notify a tracker. I care deeply for all of my children, Cora; but a select few I mark for a very particular reason, and they become my true children of this age.” Suddenly, her mosaic colored eyes stared into mine, effectively punctuating her next set of words.

“You are one of them Cora.”

All at once, shock and confusion rushed through me, but before I could voice my concerns Nyx began to speak once again.

“I know that you have many questions, and I am sorry that I can’t answer them all right now. All I can do is tell you that no matter what happens, no matter the trials and tribulations you may go through, I will always be there by your side.”

Nyx grasped my hands between her own, her skin softer than silk. Although I had countless questions to ask, something about the care that Nyx showed to me made me more inclined to trust her and what she was telling me.

Then, as though giving me a parting gift, Nyx looked at me and stated, “The one thing I can do, however, is tell you that I have never marked any fledgling with the intent for them to reject the change.”

Before I could ask why she would give me that seemingly random tidbit of information, Nyx pressed her full lips to the center of my mark, and I am once again lost in the world of sleep.

A soft pillow beneath my head and the gentle weight of a blanket over my torso was the first thing I felt when I woke up. The pounding in my head had diminished, as well as the stuffiness in my nose. Before I could investigate my body further, however, I was distracted by the feeling of a hand brushing over my forehead and against my bangs.

“It’s alright, child.” A calm voice assured, the tone distinctly feminine. Although the voice had a soothing quality to it, my body immediately tensed up, a churning feeling in my gut highlighting my distress. For some reason, I wanted to be as far away from whoever was causing this reaction.

Opening my eyes, the warning bells going off in my head intensified exponentially when I gazed upon the object of my distress. She had vibrant, auburn hair, and moss green eyes that stared down at me with concern. Framing her heart shaped face was a dark blue mark in the shape of ocean waves. Her curvy and tall figure was accentuated with the dark blue off the shoulder dress that clung to her body like a second skin.

Although there was no open hostility in either her voice or her body language, there was something
deeply disturbed lurking beneath the surface of her green eyes. I flinched away from her touch and barely caught myself from falling off of the bed. It was then that I realized that the bed I was laying in was similar to that of a hospital cot, which I had seen before when involuntarily touring my father’s work place.

The large, rectangular room I resided in was designed in shades of cream and beige. Although the colors and set up were similar to that of an E.R., the overall atmosphere was much more aesthetically pleasing. Beside me and the troubling woman was a dark oak bedside table with a glass of water and a stack of neatly folded rags. Each cot had a similar oak table, and the room’s lighting, while bright, was much more appealing than the washed out lights of most hospitals. Beside the cot I laid in was my suitcase, grass stains from when I had fainted streaked across the tough brown fabric.

“Child, what’s wrong?” The woman’s concerned voice brought me back to the dilemma at hand. Nyx calling me ‘child’ had felt comforting and right, while this vampyre calling me child was off-putting and wrong. When she reached for me again, I was about to flinch away when a feeling in my gut told me, ‘Stay still...’. I froze, and inadvertently followed the advice when the woman brushed her hand along my forehead, her touch leaving goosebumps in it’s wake.

“N-nothing, I, uh...” I struggled to come up with an excuse, and decided to use my confusion to my advantage. “I’m sorry, it’s just...I-I was thrown off by someone touching me after I had just woken up and I...I guess I was afraid...” The woman peered at me intensely for a few heart pounding seconds before giving me a "warm" smile.

"Do not fret, child. You are safe now, and amongst your own kind." The woman's reassurance confirmed that I was in the Tulsa House of Night, although judging by my visceral reaction to one of it's teachers I was beginning to wonder if that was such a good thing...

While I mused, the vampyre turned towards the oak side table and handed me the glass of water. It wasn't until that moment did I realize how thirsty I was, the dryness in my throat and mouth immediately soothed by the cool liquid. I quickly drank the glass dry and handed it back to the woman, ignoring the shivers that ran up my spine when our fingers touched.

"My name is Neferet. I am the High Priestess of the Tulsa House of Night." That explained the power she seemed to exude, but why would a priestess of Nyx be giving me such a negative feeling? Neferet placed the glass back on the bedside table and turned back towards me.

"One of our professors found you near the front gates of the school passed out. Thank the goddess that we found before any human could," Neferet stated, her subtle disregard of humans, while understandable, rubbing me the wrong way.

"When you are ready, I can bring you to meet your roommate and get settled." While I wasn’t entirely ready to be plunged into my new life just yet, if the only alternative was to spend more time with Neferet I was more than willing to leave the safety of the infirmary.

I carefully swung my legs over the side of the cot and stood up, Neferet standing close by in case I stumbled. Thankfully, I was strong enough to stand on my own and wasn’t forced to endure her touch again. After ensuring I was well enough to walk, I grabbed my rolling suitcase and walked with Neferet towards the doors of the infirmary.

"What time is it?" I asked as we walked down the long corridor, the occasional gaslamp providing low visibility and many shadows.
"It is approximately-" Neferet paused and cocked her head to the side. "Five o'clock a.m. Classes have been out for about two hours, and dinner is almost over." I nodded my head in understanding. Although I didn't already know about House of Night's schedule, it only made sense that the nocturnal nature of vampyres would be reflected in their school schedule.

At first, I was surprised that I was able to see the hallway in front of us without much difficulty. But, then I recalled that vampyres and fledglings possessed exceptional sight, including in the dark. As we walked, I wondered to myself when I would be forced to tell my thick framed glasses goodbye...

After taking several confusing turns that would have thrown me off if I was alone, Neferet and I came to a set of tall oak doors. The gold handles were engraved with elegant floral designs, showing the wealth and age of the building.

It was pitch black out when we finally went outside, the moon's glow casting silver rays over the surrounding buildings. Neferet didn't speak for the rest of our journey allowing me to take in the idyllic campus and beautiful scenery.

While researching the Tulsa House of Night, I had discovered that the campus was originally a monastery for the People of Faith church. It was then converted into a private school called Cascia Hall, until about five years ago when it was bought and converted into a House of Night.

The neo-French-Norman design of the campus betrayed its Catholic influences, from the aged dark brick of the buildings to the spire and sloping roofs. The only visible change from its original design seemed to be a large statue of the Goddess Nyx, which we passed by in the courtyard.

I was so preoccupied with the stunning architecture of the buildings that I almost didn't notice the few people that we passed on our way. Most of them were fledglings, the dark blue crescent moon outline apparent on their foreheads. They all wore some variation of a school uniform, the dark color scheme fitting in naturally with their surroundings.

A few of the fledglings that we passed close by paused for a moment to pay deference to Neferet, allowing me to see a few up close. Most were moderately attractive but didn't possess the awe inspiring good looks and confidence that other adult vampyres who approached us seemed to.

We began to approach a building which, judging by the sound of laughter and a TV announcer speaking, appeared to be the dorm.

The front room of the girl's dorm completely contrasted the gothic design of the campus. Soft pastels and bright colors dominated, from the plush beanbags that were occupied by several fledglings to soft rugs that decorated the hardwood floor. The TV that I had heard earlier was playing some game show that I didn't recognize.

Neferet's entrance prompted all of the girls to focus their attention on her, and by extension me. "Merry meet, Neferet," they chirped in unison, those who were standing crossing their clenched fist over their heart and bowing.

"Merry meet, fledglings." Apparently being dismissed, the fledglings returned to their previous activities. A few of them looked at me with curiosity. I struggled not to squirm under their scrutiny, but was spared the effort when Neferet lead me past the main room to the rest of the dorm.

"Here is the kitchen, where you'll have breakfast and any snacks. You can make yourself something to eat after the tour, since you missed dinner." Neferet gestured to the kitchen with state of the art
appliances and gleaming marble countertops. After walking back towards the front room she made a sharp turn towards a wide set of stairs up to the second floor. Most of the doors on that level were closed, music or conversations audible even through the thick wooden doors.

At the second to last door on the left Neferet abruptly stopped. I was so busy gazing at the beautiful oil paintings that decorated the walls that I narrowly missed bumping into her.

"Here's your room, Cora. This was only available double room, but if you have any issues with your roommate let me know and I'll have you moved."

I nodded my head in understanding, though I was confused by her insistence to notify her of any complaints. Almost as though she assumed my roommate would give me issues...

While I mused over this, Neferet knocked on the door to the room. After waiting a beat there was no answer. Neferet knocked again with more force.

"Aphrodite, are you there?" Neferet called. Again, there was no answer.

Finally, Neferet opened the door to the room. From my position behind her, I couldn't see much of the dorm room's contents. But as she rushed into the room, I could clearly see the girl lying on the bed set against the right wall.

She had long blonde hair that was strewn across the pillow as she writhed, eyes rolled so that only the whites were visible.

"Blood...so much of it..." Aphrodite groaned, whatever neurological attack she was experiencing causing her to hallucinate.

"Aphrodite," Neferet said, smoothing her hair away from her forehead. "Tell me your vision, child."

Aphrodite groaned again before she closed her eyes and opened them, her gaze seeming to focus. She looked at Neferet with a start before looking around wildly to find me standing in the doorway.

"You!" Although she was looking in my direction, I was still startled by her addressing of me.

"Harbinger of darkness, raiser of the dead! The House of Night will crumble at your feet!"

And with that, my new roommate promptly passed out after declaring that I was going to destroy my new home within 24 hours of me arriving.
While the High Priestess tended to my comatose roommate, I began to unpack my suitcase and examine my new surroundings. The dorm room was a bit smaller than my bedroom back home, with each side being an exact mirror of each other.

Across from each other were two double beds, desks with computers, bookshelves, and bedside tables. On either side of another door, which I suppose lead to our bathroom, were two closets. One of them was filled to the brim with uniform shirts, skirts, pants, and other trendy looking items of clothing. The other closet had similar uniform clothing, but it was much more sparse and lacked any personal items.

As I fitted my bed with a set of sky blue linens and a fluffy white comforter, I thought back to my queen sized bed at home with its garish hot pink and purple linens and gauzy pink canopy.

I wondered if my parents even noticed if I was missing yet. My mother should be getting home from whatever social event she was at, and so should my father if he didn't have to work overtime at the hospital.

'I should have left a note,' I thought, internally chiding myself for making an error in my planning.

Done with my sheets, I started unrolling my shirts, pants, skirts, dresses and undergarments. The contrast between the personal style of me and Aphrodite was obvious, with her bright colors and revealing clothing and my darker colors and more conservative style.

I wondered, since we appeared to be complete opposites, if would we become friends or even get along?

The sound of coughing cut through my musings. I turned around to see Aphrodite bent over the side of the bed as she coughed, long blonde hair falling into her face. From her standing position, Neferet gently patted her on the back until she stopped coughing and sat up.

Now that she wasn't comatose or prophesying my inevitable doom I could see how incredibly beautiful Aphrodite was. Her blue eyes, while glassy, were a bright sapphire that complemented the blue crescent mark on her forehead. Her golden blonde hair flowed in waves down to her waist. Judging by the fact that she wore a rumpled black blouse (with some kind of symbol embroidered in silver over the breast), black skirt and tights, she probably had the attack right after she got back to her room.

"It's alright, Aphrodite. Just breathe," Neferet soothed. Aphrodite cleared her throat and rested her head against the wall next to her bed, closing her eyes with exhaustion.

"Do you remember what precisely your vision was about?" Neferet asked, her voice still soothing but with an urgency to it. Aphrodite sighed loudly and effortlessly flipped her hair over her shoulder.

"I have no idea," Aphrodite answered breezily, her voice scratchy from her coughing fit.

All of a sudden, the room was filled with an unbreakable tension as Neferet narrowed her eyes dangerously.
"Aphrodite, if you have any desire to get back into the goddess's good graces, I suggest you do not withhold important information from her High Priestess."

Although I already felt uneasy around Neferet, this was the first time I had witnessed the vampyre display such strong anger. Aphrodite's casual arrogance faltered at Neferet's cool anger, causing her to swallow hard at Neferet's hard gaze.

"I honestly don't remember, Neferet. This particular vision was very murky, and it didn't make much sense." Appeased with this answer, Neferet gracefully stood up and came over to my side of the room.

"Like I said before Cora, if you have any issues at all, don't hesitate to let me know. I'll be back tomorrow evening to give you your class schedule." Eager to be rid of her company, I awkwardly smiled and nodded in confirmation.

Neferet walked towards the door. Before she left, she turned slightly back towards Aphrodite. "Feel better, Aphrodite," she said as though an afterthought.

Finally, the door closed shut and I was left alone with my roommate. As I came to the realisation that I was alone with someone that had claimed that I was going to destroy the House of Night, I wondered if Neferet leaving was such a good thing after all...

While I silently panicked, Aphrodite had begun to mill around the room. I was so busy reveling in my own social ineptitude that I didn't realise she was speaking to me until halfway through her sentence.

"-know your place," she finished, rummaging through the many clothes in her closet as she spoke. "Huh?"

Aphrodite set her blue eyes on me in a disapproving fashion while I internally kicked myself. Those same blue eyes rolled in disgust as she turned back towards her stuffed closet.

"I was saying, airhead, that if we are going to be living together for an indefinite period of time, you need to know your place."

Know my place? Having been privately tutored since kindergarten, I had never been confronted with drama usually associated with high school girls. Even so, Aphrodite's arrogant demeanor and antagonistic behavior proved that she wasn't someone to be messed with.

Hoping to close whatever chasm had suddenly formed between us, I mustered up the meager social skills I had in an effort to make peace.

"Don't worry Aphrodite. I'll be sure to keep my side of the room clean and to study at hours that are agreeable to the both us."

My kind words clearly didn't cool Aphrodite's resentment towards me, as she rolled her eyes once again and humphed in dissatisfaction.

"Whatever, loser." Aphrodite pulled out an identical wrinkle free black blouse. I caught a glimpse of her lacy pink bra when she pulled off the creased shirt and swiftly replaced it. She smoothed out her skirt and examined her appearance in a mirror on the wall beside the closet.
Deeming herself presentable, Aphrodite grabbed a small leather satchel bag that rested on her bed and opened the door. Just before she left, Aphrodite looked back in an almost ironic imitation of Neferet's earlier actions.

"Just stay out of my way. And don't you dare tell anyone about the vision I had." The door slammed shut, leaving me feeling and dejected and even more of an outsider than before.

I took me less than 20 minutes to unpack all of my clothing and personal items. The school uniform already in my closet consisted of several black blouses (similar to the one my antagonistic roommate was wearing), black slacks, skirts, and multiple sweaters with a silver spiral embroidered onto the breast pocket.

After adding my own items to the closet I still only filled up half of the available space. When I got the nerve to contact my parents I would ask them to bring the rest of my clothes, but until then I was left with uniform clothes and the meager items I had brought with me.

Assuming that Aphrodite had left for good, I didn’t hesitate to take off my sweatshirt and sweatpants. I decided on a pair of lounging pants and, since I didn’t know the uniform policy, a black school sweater with silver buttons over a plain black tee.

Now that I wasn’t overwhelmed by my new environment, I could properly take in all of the decor as I passed paintings of objects and prominent women on my way down the hall.

Considering the cold welcome I had received my roommate, I had no desire to seek out my other housemates company. This is why after I made myself a sandwich in the kitchen downstairs, I carefully but quickly retreated to the relative safety of my dorm room.

Thankfully my roommate was still gone by the time I got back. After eating my meal, I brushed my teeth in the small en-suite bathroom and put my hair into a low ponytail. Now that I was no longer in danger of rejecting the change, my brown skin had regained its natural hue and the dark shadows under my green eyes were gone.

The only noticeable difference in my appearance was the dark blue crescent shaped mark above my forehead, which was partially hidden by my curly bangs. After a moment of gazing at the new permanent feature, I turned off the lights in the bathroom and crossed the short distance to my bed, pausing for a moment to take off my sweater and hang it on the back of the desk chair.

I crawled under the soft comforter and arranged my pillow against the headboard, allowing me to lean back in a comfortable upright position. Reaching to the side table next to me, I grabbed my laptop and opened up it up, the device immediately switching on. I opened up a document and began typing the title of the new file, “Vampyre Biology Study: Test Subject Cora Hamilton.”
Chapter 4

My eyes opened with a start at the sound of knocking the next morning. I rubbed the blurriness away from eyes and blindly felt around my bedside table until I identified my glasses. Once I had them on, I could clearly see that according to the clock on my table it was 7:10 p.m. Across the room I could see Aphrodite’s sleeping figure underneath the covers of her bed.

Before whoever was knocking could awaken my roommate, I got out of the bed and hurried over to the door leading out into the hallway. The girl who was knocking, a fledgling with short brunette hair and nondescript features, smiled brightly at me when the door opened.

“Hi, you must be Cora,” she gushed, her bubbly attitude throwing me off guard. “I’m Tara.”

“Oh, um, hi," I said, caught of guard by the sudden enthusiasm. We were both silent for a few awkward beats before the girl spoke.

“So...can I come in?” I blanched for a moment and looked over my shoulder at my still sleeping roommate.

“Uh...” I turned back towards the waiting fledgling. “I...I don’t think that would be such a great idea.” Suddenly, a look of realisation crossed Tara’s face.

“Wait, is Aphrodite LaFont your roommate?”

“Yes?” I answered hesitantly. Tara immediately beckoned me outside, her sudden urgency prompting me to close the door softly yet quickly. In the hallway a few girls were starting to mill around. Some remained in their sleep clothes and conversed from their doorways while others were fully dressed and headed downstairs.

“I am so sorry, I had no idea you were rooming with her.” Tara’s apology struck me as a bit odd, but then I realized that the other students were most likely familiar with Aphrodite’s abrasive personality.

“It’s alright,” I insisted. “I’d just rather not disturb her.” Tara nodded in agreement, and then reaches into her black satchel bag and pulls out a sheet of paper.

“There was an incident in Nyx’s temple involving some candles, so Neferet asked me to give you your class schedule and show you around school,” Tara explained, handing me the sheet. “I guess she assumed that your roomie wouldn’t really be up to giving you the grand tour.”

On the sheet of paper was a class schedule with my name printed in bold letters along with my class year:

1st Hour- Lit 101. Rm. 214. Prof. Penthesilea

2nd Hour- Drama 101. Performing Arts Center. Prof. Nolan

Or

Sketching 101. Rm. 312. Prof. Doner

Or

Intro to Music. Rm. 314. Prof. Vento
“You can choose from one of the three electives,” Tara explained as I perused the paper. I was immensely excited for the history and sociology classes, and a bit put off by the athletic ones. I was already fluent in Spanish (along with French, Italian, Polish, and Modern Latin), so I was unsure what more I could learn from this class.

I wasn’t a especially artistic person, but I supposed there were some technical elements to drawing that I could find interest in. To my dismay there didn’t seem to be any biology or anatomy classes on the schedule. Before I could make an inquiry to Tara, however, she began talking about the class times.

“Classes start at eight at night and end at three in the morning. The profs are around until three-thirty to offer help, and dinner starts at four and ends at five. Nyx’s temple is open all day, but trust me pretty soon you won’t want to be hanging around outside after dawn.”

“I see...and are there any classes involving physical science?” I asked. Tara just gave me an incredulous look.

“Wait, do you mean like geology and stuff?”

“Um, no, more like biology.”

“Ugh, no and thank god for that,” Tara declared, rolling her heavily mascaraed eyes at the mere idea. “We’ll take a class like that when we’re sixth formers, but luckily we get to escape that for now.” I tried not to let my disappointment show as she continued to explain the inner workings of the House of Night.

“You should go get dressed now. I’ll meet you down in the kitchen and we can head over to your first class.” With that Tara spun on her high heeled foot and walked down the hallway towards the stairs, short black skirt flouncing as she went.

It was then that I realised, surrounded by girls who were interested in clothing, gossip, boys, and essentially nothing that I was interested in, that perhaps being an outsider was better than becoming something I wasn’t.

On the walk to my first class Tara talked about something regarding the new shoes she had got at the Gap during one of the weekend trips. Her proclivity to ramble on about herself allowed me to tune her out as we walked. There were more people milling around the campus than before, mostly fledglings but the occasional vampyre as well.

We began to approach one of the larger buildings, which multiple other fledglings were walking into. Tara led me through the first floor, which acted as a sort of seating area, and up the stairs to the second floor. There were only a few students seated in the classroom when we arrived, and the teacher was noticeably absent.
“...and even after I explained my manicure, Professor Lenobia still said I had to brush that smelly horse.” Tara flounced down in her seat with exasperation. “I am so glad that I’m in taekwondo this semester, my cuticles were crying for mercy after that class.”

I was unsure of how to respond in the one sided conversation we were having. However, I was spared the effort when Tara’s attention was drawn to a group of girls across the room from us.

“I’ll catch up with you later Cora,” Tara said, barely paying me any mind as she walked over to them. The other girls squealed with exaggerated joy when she came over. I watched with mild amusement as she was enveloped within a crowd of manicured nails and gaudy jewelry.

I noticed a few students putting their items in a cubby against the wall before sitting down in their seats. After a moment of hesitation, I cautiously walked over to the cubby and found mine after a minute of inspection. I placed my small backpack in the cubby and went back to my seat along with a notebook and pencil case.

While I waited, I gazed around at the beautiful paintings and interesting posters that filled up any available wall space. Above me were sculptures made out of crystals and wind chimes that made soft, delicate notes every time a draft went through the room. After waiting a few minutes more, the majority of students had come in and sat down in their seats. Most of them continued to converse with their neighbors until Professor Penthesilea walked into the room.

The vampyre had curly, russet colored hair with large brown eyes. Her dark blue crescent mark was the focal point of the elegant Celtic knots that framed her high cheekbones. She wore a red v-neck sweater and a pair of black slacks that accentuated her curvy figure. On the breast of the sweater was a silver embroidered symbol of a woman, most likely the goddess Nyx.

“Merry meet, fledglings,” Penthesilea greeted, her voice calm yet amplified within the room. Everyone, even the flighty Tara, immediately gave their attention to her.

“We began reading A Night to Remember a few weeks ago, and recently began talking about literature of the early 20th century in general. Today, I want to focus in on the juxtaposition between the culture of the ‘Roaring Twenties’ and that of the Great Depression the following decade.”

My interest was immediately peaked considering that my some of my favorite authors were from that time period including Langston Hughes, Virginia Woolf, and Zora Neale Hurst.

“The first book we will be reading is a famous work by the author Virginia Woolf titled Mrs. Dalloway.” As the last person in each of the rows received a book, I tried and failed to hide my excitement at studying one of my favorite books of all time.

“Now before we read,” Penthesilea said, sitting down at her desk. “Does anyone have any knowledge about the author or the text itself?”

My hand shot up in the air reflexively. Penthesilea saw my enthusiasm and smiled, immediately calling on me.

“Yes Ms. Hamilton?”

“Virginia Woolf was born on the 25th of January, 1882 in Kensington, Middlesex, England. She was marked at the age of 14 at her boarding school and then transferred to the London House of Night. Leonard Woolf became her consort in 1911 and subsequently her husband in 1912. She died in 1941 via drowning herself. Mrs. Dalloway is the most notable of her works due to the theory that the titular character is an alternate version of Woolf had she not been marked by Nyx, as well as the
themes of mental illness and suicide that relate directly to her fate later in life.”

I sat back in my chair, slightly out of breath after the rush of words that had left my lips. For a long while no one said anything. I glanced around in confusion at the looks of shock that everyone was shooting me. The desire to sink down in my chair increased exponentially. Finally, the teacher spoke.

“Well...um...thank you for that detailed answer Cora.” Penthesilea answered slowly, trying to hide her shock. She shook her head a bit and opened up the book to the first page.

“We will read along together for the first part of class, and then you can read on your own or quietly with a small group.”

Everyone opened their book and followed along as she read the first chapter out loud to us. Although I had read Mrs. Dalloway more times than I could count, I still enjoyed Penthesilea’s reading voice that managed to be soothing yet engaging at the same time.

Once she had finished, I eagerly began to read at my usual fast pace while my other classmates actually read or pretended to read in groups while actually conversing about other topics. Before I had even realized, class was over and everyone was packing up for their next period. Tara stopped over at a desk after saying goodbye to her friends.

“You can leave your stuff in your cubby. First period acts as homeroom and you can come back between classes to get or put things in,” Tara explained. I elected to take my small backpack with me and drop it off before my first athletic class. Before I could walk out with Tara, however, Penthesilea called me back into the room.

“I see that you are a fan of Virginia Woolf, Cora,” the vampyre commented.

I nodded eagerly at the observation. “Absolutely, Professor. Most of my favorite authors are from that era, especially the Harlem Renaissance.”

“Have you studied vampyre literature prior to being marked?” she asked.

“On my own time, yes. I've always been fascinated by the biology of vampyres, so I began to study and research it a few years ago. After that I got into reading about vampyre culture and subsequently the literature that resulted from it.”

“Are you interested in taking classes pertaining to vampyre biology?” Her intelligent brown eyes watched me closely as I answered.

“Yes, but from what I understand fledglings don't take those classes until they're upperclassmen. I'm okay with that,” I hurriedly assured. “But I will admit, I am disappointed that I'll have to wait two years.”

Penthesilea nodded with understanding. “I see. Well, I’ve held you up long enough. It was a pleasure meeting you Cora.”

“You as well, Professor Penthesilea,” I said, and walked towards the door.

Tara was waiting anxiously for me outside the classroom and began to talk at me as soon as we started walking. “So how did you know all that stuff about Virginia Woolf?”

“Well, she’s one of my favorite authors,” I answered as we walked up the stairs to the third floor. Tara stopped in front of what I assumed was my next class.
“I have the drama elective this period, so I’ll see you during archery. The class you have after this is on the second floor, the room to the right of Lit class.”

“Alright, goodbye Tara.”

I opened the door to the art room to reveal two rows of easels facing the front of the room. Most of the students were already sitting on their stools, either talking to the person near them or sketching on the large blank paper. Unsure where to sit, I made my way to the stool closest to front of the room and hoped that there weren’t any assigned seats.

After a few minutes of running through my mind the best way to phrase my phone call to my parents, I nearly jumped out of my seat when I felt someone tap my shoulder.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn't mean to startle you,” the boy who tapped me apologized. He had dark brown hair and eyes and a round face that was blemish free, save from the crescent mark on his forehead.

“It’s alright,” I said, moving to get out of the stool. “I’m sorry, is this seat yours?”

“Oh, no no! I just wanted to come say hi since you’re a new fledgling. I’m Damien.” I shook Damien’s outstretched hand, his open and friendly demeanour immediately easing any tension.

“So, where are you from?” Damien asked. As he spoke, he sat down in front of the easel next to mine.

“I’m from Mustang, Oklahoma.”

“That isn’t too far from here. It’ll be easy for your parents to come and visit you.”

I wasn’t sure how to respond, considering that my parents may not want to visit me, but was spared the trouble when Professor Doner finally came into the room. “Sorry I’m late, everyone,” she apologized, twisting her thick dreadlocks up into an elegant bun.

Professor Doner picked up the artist smock lying across her desk and tied it around her waist over a trendy pair of black jeans and school issued navy blue sweater. The outfit was accented with a pair of silver hoops, nude lipstick and subtle eye makeup, a silver nose ring. Her mark, a familiar crescent moon with swirls that framed her high cheekbones, stood out against her dark skin.

“So, last time we talked about landscape sketches. This week, we’re going to start on individual projects. I want you all to spend a few minutes thinking of a design, and then come consult with me about your idea.”

Everyone started to converse with their neighbor about ideas, or jump straight into drawing. I took the latter route and started sketching a few ideas that were running through my head. Finally, I decided on a large moon overlooking a peaceful meadow. My idea was approved, and I spent the rest of class sketching and making small talk when prompted by Damien. The class was over before we knew it, and Damien and I decided to walk to our classes on the second floor.

“I just wish that they would expand their vocabulary,” Damien sighed, in the midst of talking about his group of friends. “I love Shaune and Erin, but they tend to be irreverent when it comes to their academics. Irreverent means-”

“-having or showing a lack of respect for something that is usually treated with respect,” I interrupted. Damien looked at me with slight shock, and then with warmth. Our conversation was halted by our arrival to Damien’s classroom.

“I’ll talk to you later, Cora,” Damien said, walking into Professor Penthesilea’s class. I went into the
classroom right next to it and elected to sit down at the desk closest to the door. As I took a notebook out of my backpack, I began open it to a clean sheet of paper when a troublingly familiar voice rang out in the classroom.

“Merry meet, fledglings,” Neferet greeted, gracefully walking into the classroom. Her green eyes scanned the room before falling on me, lips curving into an unnerving smile.

‘How had I not realised she would be my teacher?’ I thought to myself, not used to missing important details.

“We have a new student here with us today. It’s good to see you again, Cora. I look forward to having you in my class,” she said, her statement somehow both a promise and threat.
Chapter 5

Neferet’s lecture was both gripping in its delivery and interesting in its subject matter (that being the effect the Amazons had on modern culture), but I was unable to enjoy a minute of it. While my classmates were enraptured with the connection between the three waves of feminism and the gender politics of Ancient Greece, I attempted and failed to maintain my composure.

‘Focus, Cora,’ I thought to myself, forcing myself out of my stupor enough to take notes. Before long, Neferet started to open up a discussion in the class.

“What are some examples of the Amazon’s influence on modern society and culture?” Neferet asked the class. Immediately, several hands went up. After a moment of examination, Neferet picked on a girl with sandy blonde hair in a messy bun.

“Well, the current wave of feminism is kinda similar to how the Amazons were all about independence and didn’t really like men,” the fledgling responded.

“Interesting point, Rebecca. Does anyone have any thoughts on that?” Even more hands went up then before, which is why I was completely caught off guard when Neferet set her unnerving gaze on me.

“Any thoughts, Cora?”

Since I had been homeschooled for most of my life, I had no experience in dealing with teachers I disliked. I hesitantly glanced around to confirm that everyone was looking at me expecting an answer.

“Um...the stereotypes surrounding the current wave of feminism are similar to how the Amazons were depicted by the patriarchal Greek government,” I finally answered.

“How so?” Neferet urged.

“The Amazons were characterized as man-hating witches, when in reality they just wanted to live their lives separate from men. They didn’t look down upon female vampyres who chose to coexist with their male counterparts, just as they didn’t want to be judged for creating a single gender society. Rebecca’s example is closer to the definition of modern misandry, as opposed to modern feminism which wants equality of the sexes and acknowledges the historical disadvantages of women, as well as people in who have traditionally feminine traits and characteristics.”

I kept my eyes facing Neferet, since I knew that everyone would be giving me an odd look like in Literature class. The vampyre gave me an unsettling smile and continued on with her lecture. As time went on, Neferet would occasionally fix her eyes on me for a few tense seconds while she spoke to the class, and then continue to roam over everyone else.

After what seemed like an eternity, the class was finally over. I was the first person out of the classroom and, after heading into Professor Penthesilea’s classroom to drop off my backpack, I walked down the stairs and out of the main academic building.
Fortunately, the archery field was easily identified after I walked across the courtyard. At one end of the field were a dozen archery targets set equally apart from each other, and at the other end multiple fledglings were conversing with each other and/or setting up their archery bows. I saw Tara holding a bow in one hand and twirling her hair with the other as she talked to a buff boy with tan skin.

At the very end of the row demonstrating an archery stance to a student was a tall, lean man dressed in a pair of black slacks, a form-fitting gray shirt with a leather strap over his shoulder, and black boots. His light brown hair was cut short and slicked back, leaving his mark that consisted of two intricately detailed arrows that pointed up towards his crescent mark and down towards his strong jawline bare. After expertly shooting an arrow into the dead center of his target, he finally noticed me and walked over.

“Hello Cora. I’m Professor Jennings, but all of my students call me Marco,” he greeted, his british accent lilting each of his words. He led me over to a pile of bows and handed one to me.

“Your guide can tell you what clothes you should change into later, but for now I’ll run you through the basics of archery while supervising the rest of the class.”

Marco gave a brief explanation on the mechanics of archery, and demonstrated proper stances with the bow. Finally, he handed me the bow and I hesitantly copied his earlier movements.

Unsurprisingly, my arrow completely cleared the target, and by the end of class the closest I had managed was the very edge of the target block.

“Don’t feel bad, I was the worst when I first started this class,” Tara reassured as we walked to the showers. My arms ached from the exertion I had put on them, and the sweat pouring down my face fogged up my glasses, forcing me to rub them on my shirt ever so often.

I gave her a weak smile as a sort of response, but by that point she was already rambling on about something unrelated. Since I didn’t have anything clean to change into once I had washed the sweat away, Tara lent me her black school sweater. The shirt came down to my lower thighs, but it was clean and although I wasn’t sure of school etiquette I was pretty sure this was a gesture of friendship.

The dining hall was fairly easy to locate. Similar to the archery field, I probably could have found it without Tara’s guidance. The room itself was very aesthetically pleasing, with rustic stone walls and antique style gas lamps.

Each wooden table sat about six students except for the table in the center that appeared to be where the food was served. Tara gave me a moment to take everything in, and then lead me over to a table on the outskirts of the hall.

There sat four girls, each with varying hair shades and skin tones, but all with the same high pitched screech that emerged as soon as Tara was in their line of sight.

“Hey guys!” Tara squealed in response, wrapping them all up in an overzealous group hug while I stood there feeling awkward (as usual). One of the squealers, a curvy girl with long red hair, finally noticed me.

“Tara, you are so bad.” The redhead playfully nudged her. “I didn’t know the new girl was here already, we’re being so rude.” The other girls expressed their agreement and all focused on me.

“Hi, I’m Daphne. This is Megan, Hillary, and Veronica.” She points to each girl to assign the names,
“Um, hi. I’m Cora.” The four of them resumed their conversation while Tara put her stuff down and leads me over to buffet line.

“So now that you’ve had an extensive tour of the House of Night, it’s time for you to learn the ropes.” When I didn’t respond, Tara looked back to see my confused look and giggled.

“The social scene, sweetie. Who’s hot, who’s not, and who to just plain avoid.” Tara examined a shiny red apple for spots before placing it on her plate.

“You probably already know who to avoid since you’re rooming with her. Aphrodite LaFont used to be the queen of this place. She was the leader of the Dark Daughters, training to be the next High Priestess, dating the hottest guy on campus, and the fact that she’s super hot and rich certainly didn’t hurt.”

“Wow.” I had no idea that my grouchy, rebellious roommate had been a social butterfly. “Why isn’t she popular anymore?”

“She actually fell from grace just a few weeks before you got here. Aphrodite pretty much acted like a psycho witch to anyone who didn’t kiss her ass, and a new girl named Zoey Redbird was one of those people.”

“Zoey Redbird?” I asked, scooping garlic mashed potatoes onto my plate.

“Now that is someone who’s hot around here. She’s basically the new Aphrodite, except ten times less psycho and ten times more powerful. Her and Aphrodite had a showdown on the night of the Dark Daughters full moon ritual. I guess Aphrodite summoned these demons and got possessed by one of them.”

Tara told the story nonchalantly, piling on her plate with food as I stood there in shock and awe. I had known about the mystical aspect of vampyre lore through my research, but that aspect of vampyre culture had never gripped me the way that the biology did, so I had never investigated further.

“She got possessed by a demon?”

“I know right? Super freaky. Anyways, she was totally about to eat this drunk human boy who had wandered onto the ritual, until Zoey went magical badass on her and banished the demons away. Neferet took the Dark Daughters and the High Priestess training away from her and gave it to Zoey. Partly because she ended that psycho’s reign, but mostly because she’s, like, the most powerful fledgling in the history of ever.”

“Really?” I asked, picking up a pair of utensils wrapped in a red cloth napkin. Tara started leading me back to her table, when she stopped and pointed someone out to me.

“See her? That’s Zoey.” I followed her pointed finger to a table near the doors of the courtyard.

There sat five students, three of them on one side of the table and two of them on the other. The two sitting next to each other was a girl with platinum blonde hair and sky blue eyes, and a girl with light brown skin and glossy dark hair. They seemed like polar opposites, if not for the matching silver
hoops and identical red and black cardigans with

Sitting across from the dark skinned fledgling was a girl with short, curly blonde hair that complemented her round face and sweet smile. She spoke animatedly to a boy with dark hair who seemed familiar...

Almost like a light bulb, I remembered him. It was Damien from art class. He was laughing at whatever the short haired girl said and turned to talk the girl sitting on his other side.

Even without Tara’s clarification, I knew the girl to the far right was Zoey Redbird. Her hair was jet black and fell in thick waves around her shoulders and, judging by her high cheekbones and olive complexion, I could tell that Zoey was of Native American descent. To put it simply, Zoey was stunning. It was easy to see why she was Aphrodite’s logical replacement in the social hierarchy.

But what caught my breath more than her good looks was the filled in dark blue crescent mark and matching lace like tattoo that framed her dark eyes.

“Zoey’s mark is extended,” I said almost robotically in shock and awe. It was common for fledglings to be gifted by Nyx, but never in all my research had I ever encountered a fledgling with extended marks before.

“Like I said, the most powerful fledgling in the history of ever. Aphrodite is pretty powerful with her visions of the future and all, but Zoey makes Aphrodite’s powers seem like party tricks.”

Just as I realised I was blatantly staring at Zoey, her long lashed eyes moved away from Damien’s to mine. I flushed and looked away immediately, walking back to our table while Tara continued to drone on obliviously.

All throughout the meal she and her friends gossiped incessantly in between meager bites, while I quietly ate my meal. By the time I was almost done, the rest of them had barely made a dent in their plates.

“...and Zoey has an affinity for all the elements. Like, all of them.” Tara paused for a moment and turned to me. “The elements are-”

“Earth, air, water, fire, and spirit,” I recited. Tara rolled her eyes with exasperation.

“Of course you already know, Miss Smarty Pants. Did I tell you guys about how she knew all the answers in history and in lit?”

“No, but we heard people talking about the new girl who’s a total brainiac.” I flushed as everyone at the table focused their attention on me.

“So, Cora? How are you so smart?” They all waited for my answer as my stomach tightened with unease.

“Um...I was home-schooled, I guess...” My heart palpitated in my chest, anxiety slowly growing under their scrutiny. I looked down at the plate, hoping that my body language would end their interrogation.

“Yeah, but how do you know so much about vampyres and stuff when you just got here yesterday?” I considered explaining that I’d had an interest in the biology and culture of vampyres long before I
was marked, but then I recalled Tara’s disdain for scientific classes and thought against it.

“...I have change for my next class, excuse me,” I muttered, quickly pushing my chair out and picking up my empty plate. As I walked away from the table, I overheard a comment from one of the girls.

“I told you guys she was a loser,” the fledgling sneered. Tears burned in my eyes, but I managed to hold them back while I stacked my plate on top of other dirty dishes.

Once I had walked out of the dining hall and into the crisp autumn night, the floodgates opened immediately. I instinctively tried to make myself as small as possible, my arms grasping each side of my abdomen and my head ducked down as sobs wracked through my body ever so often.

My vision was obscured by my long bangs and by the tears now spilling down my face, which caused even more of a shock when I walked into a solid figure and fell backwards onto the hard pavement.

“Crap, are you ok?” A voice said with concern. Standing above me was a tall boy with dark hair and piercing blue eyes. Silver rays of moonlight shone down on his face, casting shadows over his strong brow and chiseled jaw line. His dark blue crescent mark was slightly covered by a single black curl that broke away from an otherwise neat hairstyle.

“Hello? Are you alright?” I realised that I had been staring silently at him for the past few seconds, and blushed with embarrassment.

“Um, yes. Thank you,” I said, accepting his offered hand. As he helped me up from the ground, I couldn’t help but notice how the warmth of his hand seemed to seep into mine. My cheeks grew hotter at the thought. Although enhanced sight and the brightness of the moon granted us some visibility, I hoped it wouldn’t be enough to see how red my face was.

“Sorry for bumping into you,” he apologized.

“No need to apologize. I was equally responsible for our collision,” I said, adjusting my glasses and dusting off the back of my slacks.

“Um, yeah thanks,” he chuckled, blue eyes crinkling with mirth. Butterflies began to form in the pit of my stomach at the sound of his laugh.

“Well, either way I’m glad you’re alright. My name’s Erik.”

“I’m Cora. It’s nice to meet you,” I said, hesitantly reaching my hand out to shake. Thankfully, Erik met me halfway and I wasn’t left in an awkward situation.

“It’s nice to meet you too. Are you a new fledgling? I don’t think I’ve seen you around campus before.”

“Yes, I arrived two days ago,” I said.

“That explains why I haven’t seen you then. I’ve been at a Shakespeare Monologue competition for the past week.”

“Oh, so you’re an actor then?”
“Yeah, pretty much. Are you taking the Drama elective this semester?”

“Um, no. I’m not really...confident about my acting abilities.”

“That’s too bad,” Erik said, looking a bit disappointed. “I was hoping to see you in Professor Nolan’s class. Maybe I’ll see you around campus though. See you later Cora”

“Bye...” I absently waved to Erik as he headed down the path in the direction I came from. After a few moments of watching his muscular figure walk towards the dining hall, I remembered why I had left to begin with.

As I hurried back to my dorm, the thought of Erik’s kind smile warmed my cheeks once again.

Fortunately, I was able to make it back to my dorm room, change, and get to my fifth class of the day in time. Professor Garmy greeted the class in fluent Spanish just as I came through the door and took the only available seat at the very front of the class.

The rest of the period was essentially a repeat of the first half of my day, seeing as I spoke entirely in Spanish before realising that the professor expected me to answer her questions in English like the rest of the class.

By the end of the class period, I was actually looking forward to taekwondo since I would be free from the gawking stares that came with being an apparent overachiever. The class ended, and as students emptied from the classroom I gathered my writing utensils and notebook into my backpack. As I zipped up the bag and swung its straps over my shoulders, I didn’t notice someone entering the room and coming to stand in front of me until a voice alerted me to their presence.

“Hello Cora.” My heart nearly stopped and I barely contained a full-bodied flinch at the sound of Neferet’s voice. I cautiously tilted my head up towards the tall High Priestess who was giving me a small but disturbing smile. To my dismay, I noticed that Professor Garmy had exited the room as well, leaving me at the mercy of the adult vampyre.

“Hello Neferet,” I responded, consciously keeping my eyes locked with hers at the behest of the feeling in my gut, despite my mounting fear.

“After your exemplary performance in my class today, I decided to speak with the professors in your other academic courses. They all had a similar experience as mine, and agreed that keeping you in 3rd former classes would be wasting your potential.”

Seemingly out of nowhere, Neferet manifested a sheet of immaculate paper and handed it to me. On the paper read:

**Cora Hamilton, Entering Third Former**

**1st Hour- Spells & Rituals. Rm 316. Prof. A. Lankford**

**2nd Hour- Sketching 101. Rm. 312. Prof. Doner**

**3rd Hour- Economics 101. Rm 315. Prof. Lord**
4th Hour- Archery. Field. Prof. Jennings

Lunch Break

5th Hour- Vampyre Sociology 301. Rm 219. Prof. Neferet

6th Hour- Taekwondo. Gymnasium. Prof. Clark

“You’ve been placed in fifth former academic classes. After completing those as well as sixth former classes next year, you’ll remain at the Tulsa House of Night as a teacher’s assistant or study further at a House of Night abroad.

“But I’m only a third former,” I stuttered, my eyes gaping at the list of advanced classes. “Why wouldn’t you place me in fourth former classes?

“That was also considered, but we felt that the fifth former level would be an appropriate challenge to your academic prowess.” I opened my mouth to protest once again, about how being placed at a level above my peers would isolate myself from them even further.

Before I could, however, a jerk in my gut told me to curb this desire and accept. Having been advised well by this feeling in the past, there was only one thing I could say in response.

“Of course Neferet.”

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