



Living With The Dead

Author: *BL Maxwell*

Category: LGBT+

Description: Jordan Amid's family has always been connected to the other side of the veil, but they follow a long tradition of secrecy, not telling outsiders all they can do. When an insistent spirit keeps showing up in the middle of the night, he knows he can't keep it all from Bran any longer. Throwing his spirit from his body is only one of the skills he has, but he's not sure its time to admit everything yet.

Bran Tanda is finally starting to accept and understand more of his necromancer abilities, but he's still hesitant to embrace all the powers he knows he possesses, and even though he's avoided the witches in his mother's coven his ability is not only one they're interested in.

Jordan's family has kept their abilities secret for generations. Mostly to protect themselves from being used in ways that could bring more power to some at the expense of others. Especially when one of those secrets involves the ancient enemy that's been behind most of the strange happenings around town. Jordan and Bran's abilities will be tested, along with their relationship. More than their relationship will suffer if they fail.

Total Pages (Source): 29

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I was startled awake once again, and I knew Edith was there with me. She'd been showing up nightly for more than a month. Bran thought she'd moved on, but unfortunately for me, she'd just changed her tactics. She knew he could see her so instead of getting in his face while he ignored her, she had now chosen to try to reach me.

Her icy hand gripped my arm, and a flash of emotions and images hit me. I fought the need to pull away and forced myself not to move or react in any way.

"I know you can feel me," she whispered. Her voice was like ice water dripping down my spine. "You need to see. You have the ability even if you choose to ignore it."

She'd said this same thing to me every time she was here, and every time I ignored her the best I could. This time something snapped in me, and my eyes flew open. There was nothing there, but I could still feel her hand gripping my arm.

"You can't ignore me forever. You'll either help me or I'll continue to haunt you."

"What do you want?" I asked through gritted teeth. I hoped I was dreaming and there would be no answer but of course I couldn't get that lucky. Bran pulled me closer to him but didn't stir.

"There's something I need you to do," she said, but still hadn't released my arm. Then I realized I could hear her. And I had before, but it hadn't really registered with me. Normally I could feel all the emotions of the dead, but unless I threw my spirit from my body, I wasn't able to hear or see them. Something I was more and more

thankful for.

“I can’t help you, Edith. You either choose to cross over or you don’t. It makes no difference to me, but you can’t continue to harass me.”

“Jordan, I can do whatever the fuck I want. You have no control over the workings of the dead.”

Once again, I was shocked that I could hear her, but she wasn’t the mild-mannered old lady I thought she was. Not even close. “I have to be dreaming,” I mumbled.

“Believe whatever you want, but I need your help. I’ve tried to talk to your boyfriend for months and he refuses to listen.”

“Edith, you’ve screamed in his face for months. Maybe if you actually talked to him, he’d listen, but what you’ve been doing won’t work.” At this point I questioned my own sanity. I was aware of every word I said, and every word she said in return, but I also knew this couldn’t be real. “Why can I hear you?” As the words left my mouth a mist swirled around where I knew she still held my arm. A woman with white hair and weathered skin, was just visible. She was obviously old, but she didn’t seem frail or weak, no, just the contrary.

“Because you’re dreaming, and if you won’t get your boyfriend to listen to me, I’m going to continue to come to you nightly until you finally do as I ask.” She grinned as she leaned in closer to me with her hands on her knees. I pulled away from her until I backed into Bran. His grip around my waist tightened and he buried his face in my hair, but he didn’t wake. I glanced back at her fully expecting to see her grinning face, but she was gone.

“Hey, is everything okay?” Bran asked, his voice heavy with sleep.

I took a deep breath and blew it out slowly while repeating the words I'd been taught to take away the splitting pain usually associated with encountering a spirit. But there was no pain. "Yeah, just a bad dream." Bran had enough to worry about without me adding more to it. If Edith wanted to reach out to him, she'd need to do it on her own.

He rolled me over, so we were face to face and brushed my hair back from my forehead. Bran was so different to how I imagined him to be. He was sweet and gentle and had a good heart. The idea that a coven of witches wanted to use his powers was unimaginable to me. We'd been together a few months now, and not once had I been concerned that Bran could be lost in his power, but I also knew things could change. Then there was the fact that I was keeping my own secrets from him. Not that I wanted to deceive him, but because this is what my family had always done.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked again before brushing his lips as gentle as a feather against mine, making me smile. Without answering I leaned in close enough to kiss him. It would never be enough. It felt like we'd waited so long to touch each other that now I craved him every minute of every day.

"I'm okay," I whispered. His fingers traced the Celtic symbol that was tattooed over my heart.

"I love this," he said for what had to be the hundredth time. Not that I was counting and not that I minded in the least. "You're always full of surprises."

"Look who's talking. By the way, Justice isn't here is he?" I leaned back to look around the room making Bran laugh.

"No, he's in the basement. He's been watching The Walking Dead."

"Are you serious?" I asked, and he laughed again.

“I know, it’s the definition of irony, but apparently he was a huge fan and wanted to see how it all ended.”

So much had changed since Bran had bonded with Justice. He wanted to help as much as he could from the other side of the veil, and even though he could cross over if he chose to, he seemed content to stay here for now. “Let’s get some sleep, it’s a workday tomorrow,” I said and kissed him once again. There was so much I needed to tell him but wasn’t sure where to start. I hoped it didn’t hurt our relationship, but I knew Bran didn’t like secrets, and I was definitely keeping more than a few.

“Good night, again,” he said and closed his eyes.

“Good night, I love you,” I whispered the last part, but I knew he heard me as he fell back asleep with a soft smile on his lips. That was one thing that wasn’t a lie, I did love him, but there were some things that it wasn’t time yet for him to know.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“Today is going to be busy, they delivered two bodies overnight, and I still need to finish the report on the accident victim from Friday,” I said as I read the email I’d been sent in the middle of the night. “Apparently, they’ve moved the morgue up to a more active position. They used to send more bodies to the other hospital across town, but they’ve lost their medical examiner and need us to take up some of the slack.” I knew that meant more work for both of us, and a need to step up the pace to keep ahead of the demand. It also meant Jordan would probably be spending more time in the backroom than he wanted to.

Jordan took a bite of his toast before kissing my cheek. “It’s okay. I can help in any way you need me to.”

He was so sweet, and the time we’d been together had been some of the best of my life, but there were times I felt like he was holding back, and I wasn’t sure if it had to do with his feelings for me, or his abilities that I still wasn’t completely sure about. “Thanks, I know you don’t like to be around the dead more than you need to be.”

His eyes met mine and he grinned. “But I do like spending more time with you. Don’t worry about me. It’s about time I start getting used to the dead if I’m going to keep working at the morgue.”

“Did you not want to work there anymore?” The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them. I loved working with Jordan, but I didn’t want him to be miserable all day.

“No, I love working there. The hospital staff is great, and I love the fact I don’t have to deal with many people throughout the day. I’d miss Buddy keeping me company,

plus, we get to go to lunch together.”

I relaxed with his words. Our relationship was something completely new to me. Most people got a weird vibe from me and weren't willing to have more than a one-night stand, so the fact that Jordan also shared some strange quirks was something I'd come to appreciate. “I'd miss you too much.” Admitting that should have been hard, but it wasn't.

“Aww don't worry, you're stuck with me now,” he said and after finishing his coffee, walked over to the sink to rinse his cup before tucking his plate and cup into the dishwasher.

I walked up behind him and looped my arms around his waist. “I think it's more like you who's stuck with me.” I ignored Justice who was just at the edge of my vision making a gagging motion. The longer I spent around him the more I saw his sarcastic sense of humor emerge. But I didn't care, nothing was going to make me hold back my feelings for Jordan.

“Okay, lover boy, let's get going.” Jordan walked to where Buddy waited by the door and slipped his jacket on before opening it. “I can't wait until the rain is done. Remember when April used to be warm and sunny?”

“Yes, but I also remember when it was warm, and everything was brown from the drought. The rain is annoying, but I love seeing everything green.” We both hurried out to the car, and Buddy and Justice appeared in the back seat as soon as the doors closed.

“Looks like there's yard work in our future,” Jordan said.

“Yes, one of the glamorous sides of homeownership.” I started the car and we chatted about anything and everything on the short drive. But as soon as we walked

up to the hospital doors, Jordan's mood changed, and he went from friendly and talkative to quiet and guarded.

"Morning, guys," one of the nurses said as she hurried past us on her way to who knew where. I ignored the three ghosts wandering around lost as we continued down the hall. Hopefully they'd figure out where they were on their own. Taking Jordan's hand in mine I led him back to our office where he collapsed into his chair. Buddy was immediately at his side trying to offer support where he could.

"Jordan?" I knelt next to him with my hand on his knee. Some days were okay for him, but others were painfilled, and I was at a loss for how to help him through those.

"It'll pass," he said, and covered my hand with his.

"Do you need your crystals?" When his pain was overwhelming Jordan would siphon off some of the pain with crystals or the words that had been passed down to him from his ancestors. Sometimes neither worked, and he was left in blinding pain for hours.

"I think I'm okay. I'll wait and see how I feel in a little while. Go ahead and get to work. Don't worry about me, I'll be fine." He met my eyes then, and even though his were pinched with pain I knew there was nothing I could do to change his mind. I'd met my match in Jordan. As stubborn and hardheaded as I was, he was equally so.

After a kiss to his forehead, I walked into the morgue. "I'm worried about him," Justice said as I settled in to work.

"He'll tell me if there's something wrong," I reassured him, and possibly myself.

"I'm not so sure about that," Justice mumbled before fading through the wall.

Flipping through the notes I'd started on the body I needed to autopsy, I was relieved there was nothing out of the ordinary and hoped, just for today, that we could get through this shift without anything paranormal happening, but of course as soon as that thought crossed my mind, I worried something was about to happen.

"Justice, are there any other spirits nearby?" I asked. Being a necromancer, I could feel them, but the spirits were good at hiding and making it hard for me to find them. Especially if they had something in mind, they didn't want me to know about.

Justice reappeared in front of me before he disappeared again for a moment, before popping back into the room exactly where he'd been before. "That old lady is at the edge of your control. She's trying to reach in and contact you, but she can't get through your protections. Not for her lack of trying. She's pretty pissed off."

"She's always pissed off. Which is why I blocked her. She does nothing but yell in my face without telling me what she wants, and now I think she's trying to reach Jordan while he's asleep." I walked over to the symbol I'd drawn that kept her out and changed it slightly. Allowing me to drop my defenses enough to let her speak, but nothing more. She wouldn't be able to enter here but she could tell me what she wanted. "I have locked you out of here, Edith. You need to move on." Justice and I both waited to see if she'd answer now I'd permitted it. At first there was only silence, then a voice as soft as a breeze came to me. Which was a big improvement over the yelling.

"Necromancer, I know you've tried to stop me from reaching out to you and the empath, but there is much I need to tell you."

"What do you want, Edith? I tried to show you the light, but you've obviously ignored it."

"There is much to be done before I can move on." Her voice was even softer now,

and I knew she couldn't counter my defenses if I didn't let her.

"What do you mean?" I asked, just as Justice walked over to stand next to me.

"You and your boyfriend are not the only ones with abilities. If you're willing to listen, call me. I know you have the power to compel me to answer, but that won't be necessary." Her words faded away, leaving us in silence.

"Where has she been hiding?" I asked Justice.

He shrugged his shoulder and once again faded into the wall without answering, proving to me once again just how unpredictable the dead were. They spoke when they wanted, and ignored you as they pleased, and more times than not they were not completely honest. "Time to spend some time with the dead," I said to myself as I slipped on my lab coat and got ready to finish the first of a few autopsies.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

My phone pinged with a message as I struggled to get the pain under control, and I barely needed to look to know who it was. Janis had been in constant contact with me the past few weeks. She was so connected to the paranormal realm it didn't surprise me she would know something was wrong. Before I could read the message my phone rang.

"Jordan, are you okay?"

"Yes, just a lot of pain today."

"Has something changed?" she asked, her voice full of concern.

"I don't think so. My father thinks we have time before the wraith tries to make a move to slip into this reality, but I'm not so sure." There was so much I wanted to say to her, and to Bran. But I knew it was better to hold back.

"Your pain has increased, and it doesn't seem like anything is helping now. Is there a spirit that's connected somehow?" Janis asked.

She always knew. There was no point in trying to hide anything from Janis because eventually she would find out. "I keep dreaming about Edith," I blurted out, and looked in the direction of the morgue door hoping Bran was still busy.

"The old woman that has something she needs to tell Bran?"

"Yes. She was always screaming at him, and because she'd never tried to talk to him, he thought she was senile. In my dreams, she says she has something she needs to tell

him, but he won't let her."

"Do you know if he's blocked her?"

"He said he's blocked her out of the morgue because he can't work with her constantly yelling. He tried to lead her to the light, but she wouldn't go. I guess if someone was screaming in my face all day, I wouldn't really want to help them either. I'm not sure why but I feel like there's more going on and if he does help her then we might find out some information that could help us."

"What do you know about her when she was alive?" Janis asked.

"I don't know anything. Bran said she died at the hospital after being here for a long time. She had no family or anyone to claim her body so all we know is what was on her medical record, which wasn't much."

"Jordan, I think you should do some research on her. There may be more to her than just a screaming ghost."

"I'll see what I can find out," I promised.

"Have you spoken to Bran yet?" she asked, and I knew exactly what she was talking about.

"Not yet. I know I need to, but I don't know how to bring it up. He's been very busy, and with trying to learn more about his abilities I—well I just don't want to add more stress."

"I know your family has always lived by the rule of secrecy, but you can trust him. He won't judge you, and he'll support you any way he can."

“You’re right. I know you’re right. But it’s hard to go against what I’ve been taught my whole life.” When I’d drowned it changed so much for me, but it also gave me a lot of insight into the secrets my family kept. Not only were we almost guaranteed to inherit empathic abilities if we nearly died, but we were predisposed to being the reincarnated spirit of one of my long dead relatives. Which it turns out was quite possibly my situation.

Bran was in touch with the other side of the veil, but he had no idea he shared his bed with the spirit of an ancient Celtic pagan. There were so many times I’d experience déjà vu or had dreams which felt like memories, but I knew for a fact were not. Memories of ancient rituals in the wilds of Ireland, and of a man who was not Bran, but had his same abilities.

“Jordan?” Janis said, bringing me back to the present.

“Yes, sorry, Janis. I’ll talk to him soon, I swear.”

“If he finds out you’re keeping things from him—well, Jordan, I don’t think Bran needs more reasons not to trust those he loves. His mother showed him he can’t trust everyone.” She hung up then, leaving me with my thoughts.

Buddy pressed against my leg. He’d heard our entire conversation, but so far, he wasn’t the type of spirit who would betray secrets he was entrusted with. He was faithful to Bran and a good friend to me, and even if he couldn’t talk and I couldn’t see him, I always knew he was there.

“Let’s see what we can find out about Edith,” I mumbled more to myself than to Buddy. I tapped her information into the computer, and it opened her medical files. She’d been admitted many times through the years, mostly for exhaustion or for a mental hold based on her behavior. But she hadn’t been diagnosed with any mental illness. “Strange.”

“What’s strange?” Bran asked as he walked out the door from the morgue and over to my desk.

“Nothing, just seeing what I can find in Edith’s medical history. There has to be a reason she’s still bothering us.”

“I haven’t been yelled at in weeks, she’s not bothering me at all. Has she been disturbing you?” he asked, not knowing she had in fact been letting her presence be known, one way or another.

This was as good a time as any to admit what I’d been keeping from him. “I keep dreaming about her. I think she’s trying to tell me something, but I have no clue what it is. I didn’t know her at all while she was alive, so I’m not sure why she’s trying to contact me now,” I said, and hoped Janis was right and he wanted to know.

“She shouldn’t be able to do that. I put a binding spell on her spirit to keep her away from both of us, and Buddy too. You say she talked to you?” he asked, and sat on my desk.

“Yes, she keeps saying the same thing, but it doesn’t make sense. When I tell her I don’t understand, she gets more annoyed.”

“What exactly does she say?” Bran asked.

“That I can see if I choose, that I have the ability.” I waited for his reaction, but Bran had a very good poker face and his expression didn’t change as he mulled over my words.

“What do you think she means?” he asked again.

“I think she wants me to see her, but I can’t, I don’t have that ability. No one in my

family has had that ability except—” I stopped then as a memory washed over me. I was transported back to the past and was part of a ceremony. All of us wore masks, and we were thanking nature for the bounty of food we’d harvested that year. The whole village celebrated as we danced around a huge bonfire, but then something unexpected happened. A spirit walked out of the flames, right up to me, and tapped their finger on my forehead. My eyes opened and, at that moment, we were not alone in our celebration. The spirits of our lost loved ones and our ancestors danced with us, and for the first time, I could see them all.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

Jordan was there and then he wasn't. His head was thrown back and his eyes moved under his eyelids as he watched whatever vision played out only for him. He'd mentioned his dreams earlier, but this wasn't a dream, and I'd never seen him have a vision or heard him mention them. There was so much I didn't know about him, and so much he was unwilling to talk about, but I was the same. My past with my mother and her coven was not something I wanted to share with anyone, not even Jordan.

"Jordan?" I whispered, but I knew there was no reaching him until the vision was done.

His eyes opened then, and he looked around the room before his eyes met mine. "Bran?"

"Yes, you're okay. What did you see?" I couldn't stop myself from asking. If there was any chance we could end all the craziness of the past few months, I was interested in that information.

"It's all very strange. I think I had a vision. I was at a celebration. But it was long ago, and while I could see everything happening around me, I wasn't me," Jordan tried to explain while narrowing his eyes and trying to hold onto the memory before it faded like a dream on waking.

"What celebration?" I asked and hoped it helped him remember. He shook his head slightly and met my eyes.

"You won't believe me," he whispered.

“Try me,” I said. He took a deep breath and started to tell his story.

“Lately I’ve had a lot of dreams and visions from another lifetime.” He met my eyes and waited for my reaction. “At first, I thought they were dreams, but there are deep emotions attached to them. When it happens, I’m able to feel and sense everything around me. It’s not a dream.”

“Do you think they’re really memories of another lifetime?” I asked, using the words he had. I was hesitant to ask about reincarnation. I knew for a fact it was possible, but I hadn’t met anyone who could prove they were a reincarnated spirit. Something about crossing over the veil wiped all memories and gave the spirit a new beginning no matter if that’s what they wanted or not. But I also knew some witches had managed to pass on their knowledge after death to a blood relative who was willing to carry on where their ancestor had left off. Ensuring their line of magic and power continued.

“I think so. I have memories of a small village that I think might be in Ireland, and pagan ceremonies.” He looked at me then, gauging my reaction. “I know it sounds crazy.”

I knelt between his knees and cradled his face in my hands. “After all we’ve been through, you think I would doubt you? Jordan, I know you wouldn’t tell me this if you didn’t think it was important, and if it matters to you it matters to me. I’m here for you through all the weirdness.” I smiled then, but I could tell he was still holding back, and I wasn’t sure why. His past didn’t have any effect on me or our future, but something stopped him from telling me all he knew.

He covered my hand with his and met my eyes. They were full of determination and maybe a little bit of relief. “You were there with me, and you were a necromancer. I don’t know how I knew that, but I did. We were a couple.” Again, he waited for my reaction. “We’ve been together before, and I don’t think it was the only time. Our

fates are entwined. We were meant to meet through the centuries, but I don't know why."

"You mean like a fated couple? How can you know this?" I was still a man of science and wanted proof even though I was connected to the spirit world. So many things could be proven wrong, but not everything in the supernatural had an explanation.

"I see you in my memories and I recognize you, but it's not you. I don't recognize you, yet somehow, I know—it's you. We're bound together no matter what we do, our fates will always be woven together. Sorry, I know that sounds strange, but that's what keeps repeating in my mind. We're fated."

Fated. I tried the word out and wondered if it could be true. I was familiar with this belief, but my upbringing didn't allow for it. While my mother believed power never died, and was passed down from witch to witch, the science part of me didn't believe that. My mother wanted my power because she hadn't been born with it, and like all genetics we were never guaranteed to inherit certain traits or talents that were passed to future generations.

"Bran?" Jordan asked, his voice full of regret at his admission.

"I'm familiar with this, but I have a hard time believing it's true." I didn't want to hurt him, but I wouldn't lie to him either. "I love you, but I'm not sure I believe it's because of a spirit that was in love with someone who may or may not have been from my bloodline."

"That's what I thought too. At first, I really thought they were just dreams, really vivid dreams, but then I couldn't shake the feeling it went beyond that. Then the past few weeks I've had visions while I'm awake. Not every day, and not all of them are as intense. I just don't know what it means."

“Do you think it’s a message?” Spirits were strange and would do some fucked up things to get the attention of the living, but I wasn’t sure what the endgame could be from a vision that showed the two of us together in the past.

“I’m not sure. Then there’s Edith—” he said, before meeting my eyes.

“What about her?” I asked.

“I think I need to contact her.”

“Why? Do you think she has something to do with your visions?”

“I’m not sure, but I want to know what’s going on, and not in the middle of the night when I’m half asleep. She comes to me but tells me nothing.” He huffed out a laugh and made half an effort to sound convincing then looked away when he knew it hadn’t worked.

“I spoke to her earlier,” I blurted out.

“What? How could she get through your protections?” Jordan asked.

“I opened it enough for her to speak to me but not enter.” I reached for him then and pulled him into my arms. “Jordan, I didn’t know this was weighing so heavy on you.” It made me mad at myself for ignoring what was now his obvious distress. “She didn’t tell me anything, just that we weren’t the only ones with abilities and that she needed to speak to us. I’m still hesitant to let her into our space but I don’t want you to be in pain or have her keep contacting you.”

“Thank you,” he whispered into my chest and relaxed into my arms. “Hopefully after she’ll leave me alone.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

The relief I felt was immense as I relaxed into Bran's arms and let him take some of the stress I'd been holding in for weeks. I still hadn't told him everything, but I told him what was important for now.

"Let me go check I've put everything away and that I have what I'll need, then we can go to lunch. It'll do us both some good to get out of here," Bran said, before a quick kiss. I watched as he hurried back to the morgue and thought how lucky I was that he was willing to help me with such an unusual problem. I still didn't understand most of what his power was, and I didn't know how to do any of the multiple spells and rituals he was well-versed in. But he'd spent most of his life with his mother and she'd exposed him to magic at a young age, both white and dark. I was more than thankful for his knowledge, and the fact he hated the dark side of it.

I stared at Edith's medical records for a moment before putting the computer to sleep. "Edith, if you really want help, we're going to give you a chance to speak. I suggest you use that time communicating rather than yelling." I glanced around the room but didn't see or hear anything, like usual.

"Ready to go? I have everything we'll need so no need to stop by the house," Bran said as he walked out with a smile.

I forced myself to return that smile and we walked away from the chaos of the hospital into the warm sunshine. Taking a deep breath, I forced myself to calm down while the two of us walked to Bran's car.

"Jordan, how long has this been bothering you?" Bran asked as soon as we buckled in.

“If you mean Edith, it’s been more than a month. At first, I thought it was just a dream. I haven’t seen a picture of her, and you know how much I dislike looking at the bodies. So, I really had no idea what she looked like.”

“Do you think she’s trying to tell you there’s more power out there for you?”

“I’m not sure. I don’t feel afraid of her when I see her in my dreams, but she speaks in riddles and expects me to just know what she’s talking about.” I’d racked my brain for weeks now and I was not any closer to figuring out what Edith wanted, even with the help of Janis. “Janis told me to talk to you. She said you’d know what needed to be done.”

“Did she?” Bran asked, and reached for my hand. “When we get back to the office, we’ll set up a summoning circle and see if we can get her to speak, but I won’t allow her the freedom to drop in anytime she wants. It’s odd that all the time she’s been at the morgue she’s never tried to tell either of us anything. The first time I saw her she was asking where she was, and why she was there. After that it was just lots of yelling.”

“Maybe something stopped her,” I said, and he glanced at me but neither of us spoke. We drove to a little pizza place nearby and both chose two slices of pizza and ate outside in silence—besides the street noises. I forced myself not to focus on what we’d be doing later, but what we were doing now. Bran and I were at lunch together and I needed to enjoy all those little moments for what they were, a little bit of happiness in a chaotic world.

An hour later we were in the morgue. We’d moved everything aside to give Bran room to do what he needed to allow Edith to speak to us.

“I’m using ash infused with negative energy. You don’t want to know where I got it,” Bran explained as he poured it to make a circle in the center of the autopsy room.

We'd found we could do anything in here and no one would disturb us since no one really wanted to see what was going on here. Which worked for us, but I agreed with them. It was creepy here and I didn't want to see it either.

He finished the circle and added a few crystals around the outer edge before standing and checking notes he'd made in a notebook.

"Is it ready?" I asked.

"Yes, sit here." He directed me to sit across the circle from him and took both my hands in his while murmuring a few words I didn't understand. "This way you'll be able to see whatever I see."

I nodded and he started chanting. I didn't recognize the words and thought maybe they were in a different language, but as I watched a fog began to coil around the inner edge of the ash. At first it swirled lightly like a puff of smoke from a cigarette, but as Bran chanted it grew thicker. Then I recognized a shape forming.

"What do you want with me, necromancer?" the same voice from my dreams asked. It floated in and out just loud enough and clear enough for me to make out what it was saying.

I looked up and was shocked to see the barely-there image of the old woman I knew as Edith.

"We have a few questions for you," Bran started.

"I've tried to contact you for months and you ignored me." Her lips curled in obvious discontent and annoyance while she stared down at Bran.

"If you had tried to speak to me, I would have listened, but all you've done is scream

in my face. That's why I banned you from this area."

The spirit shimmered for a moment as though her connection to this place was fading before she looked at me. "You are a seer. There is so much more to your abilities than you know. You have inherited all the powers of your ancestors from the spirit you are reincarnated in the image of."

I forced myself not to react to her words as Bran calmly watched her but didn't talk. "It's true I'm an empath. But I can't see spirits or speak to them. I can only hear and see you now because Bran has made it so," I said to her, and once again her spirit shimmered and faded.

She leaned as close to the edge of the circle as she could and met my eyes. "You are far more than an empath. You are reincarnated from one of the most powerful pagan leaders from the past. The power you have at your disposal would challenge that of the necromancer. You only need to see," she said, and her words were frantic, and I met Bran's eyes to find him already looking at me.

"What is he supposed to see?" Bran asked while never taking his eyes off mine.

"Everything." She stood then and for a moment didn't move at all.

"I'm willing to allow you to enter here again, as long as you agree to speak to me and not scream. If you start to do that again I'll send you away for good." Bran was serious and while I wanted to stop him, I also understood how thin his nerves were stretched. "And no more bothering Jordan in his dreams. If you need to speak to him then do it during the day. I won't have you harassing him while he's sleeping."

Edith's spirit shimmered but remained silent as she turned her head to meet my eyes once again. "I will do as you ask. But the seer must come to power, or you won't be able to defeat the wraith."

“What do you—” Before Bran could finish his sentence she’d faded away. “Do you think she means the wraith we’ve been warned about?”

“How many wraiths can be out there?” I asked. “Never mind, I don’t want to know. Come on, let’s finish so we can leave early.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

Edith had agreed to do as I'd commanded her, but I wondered how her spirit had the energy to find another way to get to Jordan around the protections I'd used. But spirits were good at only doing what they wanted no matter what powers we had over them. I may have been new to using my necromancer abilities, but every time I'd used them so far, the spirits immediately complied. How was Edith different?

"Did it work?" Jordan asked.

"I think so, I mean I don't see her anywhere." I gave the room a onceover just to be sure but didn't see any spirits which was always a little shocking. It was, after all, a morgue.

"Do you think she really knows more about the wraith?" Jordan whispered as he leaned closer to me. I realized we still held each other's hands over the circle of ash, but I liked it and didn't let go.

"I'm not sure, but I doubt she would have mentioned it if she didn't know something more about it. What do you really think about the past-life thing?" I waited for his reaction. Jordan was very quiet about his abilities, and I wasn't sure exactly what they were. He'd surprised me with the fact he could release his spirit from his body and still stay in control of it. Something I'd never heard of before and it made me wonder if there were more talents he kept secret.

"It's the same thing I told you earlier. She told me that in a dream, and after the last vision—well, I'm not sure. What's a seer?" Jordan asked, but there was an edge to his voice that was new. Was he nervous?

“The spirits I’ve dealt with can barely remember what this life was like, not their past ones.” I hesitated a moment and collected my thoughts before answering his question. “A seer is someone who, with supernatural help, can see the future.” I waited for his reply because being an empath wasn’t easy, but being a seer was far worse. He swallowed hard, and I knew he was worried about my answer.

“Is that really possible?” he asked.

“Yes. There was a witch in my mother’s coven that was a seer. She was very accurate. They used her anytime they needed to plan one of their many terrible deeds.”

“Is it something evil?” he asked, and I was surprised to see he was serious.

“I suppose it could go either way depending how you use that ability. The seer in the coven didn’t use evil means to gain her knowledge, and even though they used that knowledge for less than legal or moral actions, I don’t believe the person who is getting the information is evil.”

“I think I need to ask my parents about this. If there was ever a seer in my family, they would know.”

“I know you and your family have lots of secrets, but I agree you need to ask. It’s important for you to find out if there has ever been a seer in your family line.”

He looked down at where our hands were still clasped before he spoke. “She said that I had more power if I was willing to take it.”

“It could be true, but she also said we were together in a past life. I’m not sure what to think of that.” I was drawn to Jordan for so many reasons, and I didn’t want to accept that fate had made the decision for us. But maybe that was how I knew I could

trust him from the start, and maybe it would explain how he had powers he didn't understand or even know about. Even if his family wanted to keep their empathic abilities secret, there had to be a reason he knew he could release his spirit without dying.

“Me either. I'm not trying to keep anything from you, I swear. It's just hard to break the habits that have been pounded into me my whole life. My family never wanted any attention to come to us from our connection to the other side, and if it got out that we could feel what spirits feel then everyone who had a recent death would search us out to check that their relative was finally at peace. Even if we couldn't tell them with absolute certainty,” he rambled. It was obvious to me he'd been carrying this worry around for a while and I hadn't noticed, too busy trying to figure out my own abilities.

“Have you talked to Janis about your dreams?”

He bit his lip and once again looked anywhere but at me. “Yes, she's been telling me for a while I needed to talk to you about everything. I just wasn't sure if it was Edith contacting me or if I was just dreaming.”

“You can talk to me about anything. I'm sorry I've been so distracted. If I can learn how to use my abilities, then I can keep us both safe. I don't ever want you to get hurt by a spirit and I don't want to ever see your body without your soul in it.” Since the day he'd done just that I worried constantly about something happening to him. At the time it was the only choice we had, and it had proven to be just what we needed, but it came at the price of Jordan's safety. I wanted to be ready to protect him if I ever needed to.

He met my eyes then. “Bran, there are some things I can't talk about. It's not that I don't want to, it's that they're secrets my family has kept for generations. I need to speak with my parents. I don't want to betray their trust but you're my family now

too and I need to be able to tell you everything.”

I wasn't sure what he meant, but it was obvious it was weighing heavy on his mind. Relationships were not easy for me. My family had avoided contact with my mother, and my mother only did what benefited her, so I'd been alone for most of my life. Other than my grandparents. They tried to give me a normal life, but my mother always showed up to remind me I wasn't a normal person. Jordan loved his family, and they loved him back. “Whatever you need. I don't want you to do anything that puts you in a bad place with your family.”

“I meant what I said, you're my family too. I just need to speak with them. I want to ask about past lives and let them know I'll be telling you everything. You've been honest and open with me even when that wasn't easy, and now it's time for me to do the same,” Jordan said, before leaning forward and kissing me. “I love you, and I want you to know you can trust me.”

“I trust you. You're everything to me, and I'll understand if they don't want to share their secrets. I know better than anyone some secrets are better kept hidden.”

“I don't want to keep anything from you,” Jordan said. “Let's clean this up. Do you have much more to do today?”

“I need to finish the autopsy I started earlier and the report then I'm done for the day,” I said as we both stood. I got out the broom and swept up the ash while Jordan picked up the crystals. Just then Justice stepped into the room.

“Something has changed,” he said, but I ignored him. “Bran, you may not want to deal with it, but there's definitely something on the other side of the veil that wants to make it to this side.” Justice walked over closer to me and stood between Jordan and I. Jordan flinched and looked in his direction.

“Is Justice here?” he asked.

“Yes, he just walked in.” I glanced in his direction and tried to give him a stern look. Not that he cared. Spirits never cared how annoyed you were with them.

“Hi, Justice, I’ll leave you two alone. Bran, let me know when you’re ready to leave for the day,” Jordan said, and walked back out to his desk.

“What’s the big emergency?” I asked Justice who knelt to pet Buddy.

“One of two things is happening, either the being on the other side of the veil is getting stronger—or the veil is getting weaker.” He didn’t need to tell me he was serious, it was obvious, and I forced myself not to think of what could happen if what he said was true.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I slumped against the door and took a deep breath. I loved Bran so much, but years of being told not to share family secrets tore at me. Suddenly Buddy leaned against my leg, surprising me. When Justice was around, he usually stayed close to him, but maybe he knew I needed him. Drawing in a deep breath I forced myself not to reach for him knowing I'd only feel air and walked over to my desk.

My phone vibrating got my attention. My dad was calling. "Dad? Is everything okay?" My parents never called me at work unless it was an emergency. We didn't see each other weekly, but we did keep in touch and had a good relationship.

"Yes, son, sorry to scare you. Your mother wanted me to ask you and Bran to come over for dinner tonight." Dad tried to act like this was just an innocent call, but it was a pretty big coincidence that Bran and I had just talked about speaking to them. I was willing to bet there was more to them wanting us both to spend the evening with them than just a simple dinner.

"What's this about?" I finally asked.

"Bran has a connection that we don't to the spirits on the other side of the veil. There's an old enemy that has it in for us all. We need to strike before it strikes us," Dad said, not really telling me much more than he had already.

"Dad, I want to tell him more about our family. I love him, and I won't continue to lie to him." My voice quivered saying it out loud. I had been telling myself for weeks that not telling Bran everything was keeping him safe, but the longer I stuck with that story the worse I felt.

“I understand, son. Are you sure you can trust him?”

“Yes. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for him, and he feels the same way. We’ve been through so much already, and every time he’s protected me or taken my side. If he only wanted power he could have kept his mother’s book, but he didn’t. It’s still in Janis’s care. He goes there once a week to study it but only under her supervision.” I hadn’t told my parents everything that had happened when we’d faced off against Bridgette and Sophia. But I had told them that Bran had made sure I was safe when I let my spirit wander.

“I suppose you’re right. There’s been so many times he could have chosen not to intervene, but he did, and he kept you safe. It’s just hard to trust the son of a black witch. Especially one as power hungry as his mother.”

“I understand, but Bran is good. There’s something else I wanted to tell you.” I swallowed and hoped this wasn’t a mistake. “I’ve started having visions.”

He was quiet for so long I thought we’d been disconnected, but then my mom spoke. “What happened?”

I told her everything. How I’d had dreams about another life but today it wasn’t a dream, and it happened while I was awake. “When we stop by after work, I want us to all fill him in. He’s been honest with me, now it’s time I do the same.” It was a huge relief to say the words, and I knew when I finally told Bran it would be the same only ten-fold.

“Do you remember any names?” Dad asked.

“No, it was only images and faces I don’t recognize. Dad, there’s more. There’s been a spirit who keeps coming to me in my dreams. She died here and I thought she was just clinging to me to make me do something that she wasn’t able to before she died.”

“But that’s not the case.” he said, not even questioning the fact I was telling him a ghost had contacted me.

“No. It’s become clearer that she herself was a part of the veil. She keeps telling me Bran and I are connected and—well there’s more, but I want to tell you in person.”

“We’ll be ready, son,” he whispered.

“Okay, I just . . . I’m not sure what’s happening.” My mind raced with all the recent events and all the information I didn’t understand.

“There’s a lot we need to talk about. I’ll cook some gnocchi. Don’t be late.” He hung up, leaving me looking at my phone and wondering if we’d been cut off. But he hadn’t rebuked my request to talk to Bran. I hoped after tonight we’d both have an even better understanding of each other.

I opened up my computer and for the next hour entered the last report Bran had given me. I was nearly done with it when the clunk of a gurney hitting the outer door startled me. One of the ambulance drivers pushed the gurney over to where I still sat and looked at me without saying a word.

“Can I help you?” I asked.

“Yes. Sorry, I’m new to this. I’m supposed to deliver this body to the morgue?” He glanced around like he just realized where he was.

“You’re in the right place, just back this way,” I said as I shoved open the doors and led him to the refrigerator the body would stay in until it was claimed or identified.

“Thank you, today’s my first day driving and they gave me no directions other than to bring him here.” He didn’t wait for me to answer before he rushed out the door.

Bran's eyes met mine as he worked away on another body and even under his mask I could see his smile.

"My parents want us to come over for dinner," I blurted out.

"Really? Weren't we going to go there anyway?" he asked.

"Yes, but that was before I talked to my dad, and he asked us over for dinner."

"Do they know something about what's coming?" he asked and didn't need to explain. Something was coming that we both knew was going to be bad, but we had no real idea of what that was.

"I think so, but my dad was his usual vague self, so I really have no clue. They could be offering you the family china as a welcome to the family gift for all I know." He laughed, knowing exactly what I meant.

"Don't worry, baby. It's hard to start sharing things you've been taught to ignore or hide your whole life."

"So, I should tell them yes? Great, because I already did. Good talk, get back to work so you're ready to go at closing time," I rambled as I backed out the door and away from where he was about to do something I didn't want to see to the body he was examining.

"Love you," he yelled just as the door swung shut. I took a deep breath and smiled. We had a weird relationship, but we were weird, and somehow it all worked for the two of us. He accepted there were things I wasn't able to share with him, and I accepted that his powers went way beyond anything I'd ever seen before. Somehow, we'd make it all work because nothing in this world or the next mattered more to me than Bran.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

We drove over to Jordan's parents' right after work. His leg bounced the whole way there as he clenched my hand. I never questioned it because I understood. By sharing their secrets with me they put their family at risk, and I'd rather they feel safe than feel the need to share anything. But Jordan insisted.

"I want you to know everything. I can't keep hiding things from you," he said again as we pulled up to his house.

"Should Buddy stay here?" I asked, unsure even though Buddy had been here before.

"No, I want him there. My dad knows about him."

"I knew it, he was petting him the last time we came over."

I got out of the car and waited for Jordan to join me so we could walk in together. Buddy ran ahead and walked through the door before we were even in the yard, making me roll my eyes. "He just went inside."

"Aw, he can't wait to see them," Jordan said, and pulled me up to the door. It was cute, and it didn't matter if Buddy was a spirit, he was still our special boy.

"I swear he knows so much more than I do. It would be really helpful if he could talk," I said, and reached for Jordan's hand.

"What would be the fun in that? I love that he's still such a sweet dog." Jordan started to knock on the door before pausing. It was the same house he'd lived in until a few months ago, and he seemed to remember that before turning the knob and walking in.

“Dad? Mom?”

“Back here,” Emilia, his mom, called from the kitchen.

With a squeeze to my hand, he led me through the living room to the small but cozy kitchen. Emilia sat at the counter watching Roger cook. “There’s my boy,” she said, before patting the stool next to her. “How are you two doing?” She pulled Jordan in for a hug as he sat down next to her and tugged me down to the stool next to him.

“Great, we finally got the basement organized and most of the flammable items removed,” Jordan said, and I tried not to cringe. My mother had quite a collection of weird shit that she kept just in case she needed it for a spell or possibly to poison someone, but that all ended when she sacrificed herself for more power. It was actually a huge relief to get the things that reminded me of her out of the house.

“Don’t worry, Bran, we’ve got some crazy ones in our family too,” Jordan’s mom said, and reached across Jordan to pat my hand.

“Dinner’s nearly ready,” Roger said from the stove where he was putting gnocchi onto a serving tray along with some roasted garlic and bread. “We’ll eat first then we’ll talk.” Emilia helped him set everything on the counter and the four of us loaded our plates.

“This is great, thanks,” I said around a mouthful of gnocchi. Jordan and I both tried to cook, but neither of us were all that successful. Now I wondered if maybe this could be something we could handle.

“You’re welcome. I’ve never made gnocchi before and thought I’d give it a try,” Roger said. Since he’d retired last year, Jordan said he cooked most nights, and his mom was more than happy to let him. Apparently, he’d always loved cooking but never had time.

“How’s work been?” he asked me, and held my gaze until I answered.

“As good as working at the morgue can be. It’s been busy but nothing too weird.” It was true, and I hoped he accepted my answer and didn’t ask for more details.

“No clingers?” Roger asked, and once again didn’t look away from me.

“Clingers?” I asked, and looked at Jordan who was blushing so hard I worried for his blood pressure.

“He means spirits that won’t leave, like Justice or Edith,” Jordan explained.

“Oh, no not lately. Justice has decided to stay, and I’m not sure what’s going on with Edith. I haven’t seen her around work lately,” I lied since we’d just summoned her earlier, and they didn’t need to know Justice was now bound to me. Jordan stopped chewing and glanced at each of us.

“Come on, guys, let’s finish eating first.”

“You have chosen a necromancer to be your partner, son, we need to know a few things. Sorry, Bran, nothing personal,” Roger said while Emilia once again patted my hand.

“It’s okay, I don’t mind. On the contrary, I’d rather it all be out in the open. I’m tired of trying to decide what should be a secret and what shouldn’t. Keeping secrets is what destroyed my mother and I don’t want to go down that same path.”

Jordan settled his hand over mine and smiled. “I trust you, Bran, I know you didn’t have a choice in most of the things she involved you in. Go ahead and tell him,” Jordan said to his parents.

Roger wiped his mouth with a paper towel before folding his hands in front of him, his elbows resting on the table. I noticed how strong his arms were and how callused his hands, proof of a lifetime of hard work. "I know you know about Jordan's abilities as an empath, but there's a lot that you don't know, actually, he doesn't know either. This ability goes back many generations to when our first ancestor discovered he could feel the emotions of those near him but especially those that had passed on. We're with the living but part of us lives with the dead."

"Neither of us have the ability, but Roger's father did. He tried to fight it rather than embrace it and it nearly cost him his sanity. Only when a spirit from someone he'd known as a child came to him did he finally believe he could feel the emotions and pain of their death. You see, he thought he was insane, and the pain and confusion were his own," Emilia said.

"It's all very confusing. The thoughts and feelings come through so strongly. Even though I know they're not my own, it's easy to forget," Jordan said.

I knew his ability took a toll on him. He was always on edge and seemed to be in fight or flight mode regularly, but I thought things had calmed down since we confronted my mother's spirit.

"Are things a little better now?" I asked him.

"At work it is, and I hope since we spoke to Edith, she'll stop contacting me in my dreams."

"If she approaches you again, we'll try something else," I said. He tried to make it seem like he wasn't worried about it when he obviously was, and his tight smile proved it even more.

"There's more you need to know," Roger said. He glanced at Jordan who nodded for

him to continue. “Our family has deep connections to our lineages. Long ago, one of our first ancestors was a very powerful psychic empath. Our history tells us he had a partner, that partner was a necromancer. It’s also been told that those same ancestors live again through us.”

“What are you saying?” I asked, needing to hear it from them.

“We think the two of you were together in a different lifetime. If that’s true, then the power you both share is even stronger than what we imagined. You two could very well control everything on the other side of the veil from this side. Controlling a spirit would be as easy as whispering your demand. They cannot go against the combined power of the two of you.” Roger looked between us before crossing his arms, and grinning.

Jordan met my eyes and I saw reflected back at me the same shock I knew was on my face. “It’s similar to what Edith said,” Jordan said.

“Edith? The spirit you said was bothering you in your dreams?” Emilia asked.

“She said we’re fated. That we’re meant to be together,” Jordan said. Once again Jordan and I stared at each other. He started to smile and before I thought about it, I pulled him close and kissed him. “There’s nothing we can’t do together,” I said, and wondered if those were my thoughts or a memory of the past.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“Are you sure about this?” Bran asked while still holding me close and staring into my eyes. “I don’t mean to doubt it, but—well you know even if I have one foot in the paranormal world, I’m also a man of science.”

“I really believe it could be true. There are so many times I’ve had dreams about two other people I don’t recognize, but the emotions around them are the same I feel with you,” I said, and hoped he understood.

“I’m still not convinced that reincarnation or souls being reborn anew is even possible. Like I said earlier, something about crossing the veil wipes out all memories of that life. But I trust you, and I can’t deny how deep my feelings are for you. If you think it could be true and this could help us with the wraith, then I think we should see what we can find out.”

“I haven’t wanted to mention it, because I didn’t want to tell you something that wasn’t true. Then Edith said it, so I knew we needed to talk about it. Dad, I know you said it will give us more power, but I don’t really know what that means. Bran is still figuring out his power, and I’m empathic but it can leave me in so much pain I’m not sure that’s really useful.”

“Baby, you threw your spirit out of your body to help knock my mother’s spirit back into the nether. There’s literally nothing you could tell me that I wouldn’t believe. I love you,” Bran said, and I realized how stupid it was for me to doubt him. He knew exactly what harm secrets could do.

“No more of that, young man. Let me remind you what happened to your great-uncle Cyrus,” Mom said.

“I promise, no more throwing my spirit. I only did it because we had to get to Janis and warn her. Plus, I had Buddy with me, he’ll always protect us if he can.” I smiled and like I did about ten times per day, I reached to pet him.

“He’s a good one to have around. You know there’s more he can do too, don’t you?” Dad said to Bran.

“Buddy? He hasn’t shown any other talents other than being there when someone needs a little extra reassurance and love. Plus, I wouldn’t want to ever risk him, he’s important to me.” He turned then to face me, forcing my attention on him. “What exactly happened to your uncle?” Bran asked, and sat stock-still while he waited for me to answer.

“Buddy’s important to me too. I love having him around and I won’t ever do anything to risk his spirit,” I reassured him. There was no way I’d ever want to see Buddy leave us unless he was ready to go.

“Uncle Cyrus threw his spirit when there was a great spiritual confrontation. He had no other choice and didn’t have anyone to watch over his body. He’d nearly done what he set out to do when he felt the connection to his body being severed. He died the worst death. His spirit was left to fade away, never crossing over and unable to stay on this side of the veil.” Dad repeated the story he’d told me a few times in warning about what could happen if I threw my spirit and wasn’t careful.

“Jordan? I don’t want you to ever risk that,” Bran said as the color drained from his face. “If that happened there wouldn’t be anything I could do. Without a body to hold you here you’d fade away.” He swallowed hard and I really wished my dad hadn’t shared that bit of information.

Thinking back on everything that happened because of Sophia and his mother was still hard. It terrified me because I still didn’t understand it all. Bran had been forced

to embrace an ability he'd tried to deny and knew how dangerous it could be.

"Son, there are things we've kept from you. Abilities you possess that you inherited from our ancestors, but there are a lot of things you'll need to find out for yourself when you're ready. Family tradition," Dad said. "But we can help guide you. There's a notebook my great-grandfather left for us. He used all the information he'd been able to find and tried to separate stories passed down through the years from what was real and what was tall tale."

"Another notebook?" Bran said, and stood. "I don't want to bring something dangerous into our home. The book my mother left is protected and shielded so no one of power can find it, and so no one else can use it. Even then I have to use every precaution to study it."

"This is different. While your mother didn't seem to care enough to hide the book or make it safe, our ancestor did. It can't be seen or touched by anyone who isn't of our blood," Mom said, and took a bite of her gnocchi. "This really is good."

"Wait a minute, you're saying you have a book that can explain everything I've been experiencing?" I asked. "Why am I just now finding out about this?"

"It's the rules. No one shall be given access until there is no doubt they are the one who inherited the family talents. Feeling the pain of the dead and knowing they're near is one thing, but being able to throw your spirit and communicate with them in a dreamscape is another matter. Your powers are growing, and you'll need to know what to expect and how to handle the spirits," Dad said. "We'll be here for you, don't worry."

"Why do I feel like you knew everything that was going to happen?" Bran asked.

"It was all predicted the last time our family encountered the wraith," Dad said, and

watched as Bran and I tried to control our shock. “A seer shall be born who will be a direct match in power and an opposite of the evil of the wraith.”

“You know about that?” I choked out.

“Yes. Our family defeated it the last time it came into contact with one of our ancestors, but it took centuries to build its power and now it’s back. The ancestors knew we needed to prepare, that’s why they left a written history. Bran, we believe your ancestors are in there too. Our family couldn’t defeat it then without your ancestors’ help and we won’t be able to do it this time either.” He looked between the two of us waiting for us to speak, but when I finally managed to look over at Bran, he had the same shocked look on his face I knew I was wearing.

“Are you serious?” he whispered.

“Yes. Do you think we’d invite you over and tell you this just for shits and giggles?” Mom asked.

“Show me,” I managed to say before clearing my throat. “Show us the journal.”

Mom shared a look with Dad who walked over to where he’d prepared dinner and came back with a knife. “Hold your hand out.”

“What?” I asked, but he grabbed my hand and cut my thumb. “Ow, what are you—” A drop of blood landed on the table in front of me and spread on the surface, but it wasn’t the surface of the table. Now, a book appeared. An old leather-bound journal.

“Whoa,” Bran said, and folded his arms. “Glad to see I’m not the only one with weird family secrets.” He reached out a tentative finger toward the book, but it passed right through, proving what my parents said was true, no one without our blood could touch it.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“That’s fantastic,” I breathed out, fascinated by what I’d just seen. “So, let me get this straight, no one except a blood relative can even touch the notebook. I thought you said they couldn’t see it either.”

“It is, isn’t it? It keeps out anyone who would try to use the information in it against our family,” Roger explained. “You are connected to our family, so even though we don’t share the same blood, the journal must recognize that you helped to maintain the balance of good and evil in the past which explains why you can see it.”

Magic was strange, and the more I learned about it, the more I realized there was no rhyme or reason to it, and no rules. It was as it was supposed to be, and if I could see the book then I was meant to see it, but apparently, I wasn’t meant to touch it. “My mother did something similar, but she didn’t care if anyone else touched it. Most who do end up cursed in some horrible way, so she was more than happy for some poor unfortunate but curious person to experience that fate.” It was true, which was probably the reason she didn’t take much care in hiding it. She didn’t want another witch to find it, but if they dared to touch it—it would not end well for them.

“There’s a lot about our family you don’t know. Jordan has kept our secrets, but it haunts him. He wants to be honest with you,” Emilia said, and gave Jordan a fond smile. “I know how hard it is to keep things from those you love.”

Then a thought hit me, the wraith wasn’t a thing of the past, it had been here not long ago. “You said your ancestor defeated the wraith in the past, did Jordan tell you that the group of ghost hunters we’ve worked with had an experience with it only last year?”

“How can this be? It was banished to the dark for eternity, the only way it could have found its way back out is if someone guided it,” Roger said.

“My mother had been plotting this power grab for a while. It wouldn’t surprise me if she had something to do with releasing it, but the team also banned it. They’re not magical though so the protections they used may not have been strong enough to hold it.” I tried to remember exactly what Wade and Jason had said about their experience with the wraith, but at the time we didn’t think it was part of all the strange happenings.

“If she used the wraith then it came at a price. It’s a very dark spirit that likes nothing more than to collect and enslave the spirits that encounter it,” Roger said.

“She was willing to put her soul into another body that she thought could give her more power, there is literally nothing she wouldn’t do to get more,” I said. “James said they released the spirits it had held captive, and they think it’s power is linked to how many spirits it’s able to collect.” I needed them to understand how far my mother would go. It didn’t matter that her body was dead, her spirit was still out there, and until we knew it had been destroyed, there was always a chance of her coming back and wreaking more havoc in our lives.

“A seer could tell us what your mother’s spirit and the wraith have planned. Do you understand what it means if you’re the seer?” Emilia asked Jordan, and she looked worried.

“Bran said it’s someone who can see the future with supernatural help. I know our ancestors had the gift of sight, but I don’t know more than that. And before you ask, no I haven’t had any visions of what’s going to happen.”

Roger froze for a moment with his mouth open, making it obvious he was about to ask if Jordan had any visions of what would be. “You should read the journal. Not all

of our ancestors were gifted with sight, if you are truly the chosen one then there's a lot you'll need to know," he said. "This isn't something to be entered into lightly. Once you've accepted the power, it cannot be undone, and like every other power it comes at a price."

"Are you saying I can choose to take the power or refuse it?"

"Yes, but once it's offered there will be a cost no matter what your decision. And, son, it is your decision. This is an ability that will be with you for the rest of your days, and it won't always be easy." His father's eyes were filled with sorrow and worry, and a few months later I'd look back on this conversation and wish I'd said more but ultimately it was Jordan's path that he would need to choose. I'd gladly walk it with him, but I couldn't choose for him.

"Will Jordan be in danger?" I asked. My mind raced with all the risks we'd already been exposed to, and all the horrible things I could imagine us going through. I loved him, and I wanted to spend my life with him, but I didn't want him to be constantly in harm's way.

Jordan thumbed at the pages of the journal, lost in thought.

"I won't lie to you. He could be in danger. You know as well as we do, when you're dealing with the other side you never know what to expect. You have to be ready for anything and everything." Roger covered Jordan's hand and met his eyes. "I won't risk my son. If you read the journal and you do not want to be the chosen one, then when that time comes there are actions we can take that will make it so you don't even need to decide. You'll be passed over."

"What do you mean?" Jordan asked.

A look passed between Roger and Emilia, before she nodded. "I was meant to be the

next seer. But by the time I was called your mother was pregnant with you. I never wanted to risk you or your mother, and accepting the power also meant putting us in the crosshairs of not only the wraith, but every supernatural being who would want to use the ability to see the future.”

“You turned it down—for me?” Jordan asked.

“It wasn’t a hard decision. I’ve never been one to be that involved with matters of the spirit world, so turning it down was easy. Especially when I knew that by accepting, it would put my baby boy in danger.”

“We have a friend who is still connected to ancient magic. They’re pagan and were more than able to bind the powers away from your father,” Emilia said. “Taking and using the power isn’t the only risk.”

“Some who had the power were driven mad before they were able to control the visions,” Roger said.

“With every power there’s a price,” I said. My abilities put me at risk of having the powers either taken from me, or being forced to use them to help evil people get what they wanted. If Jordan would be able to predict the future and others found out about it, he wouldn’t be safe. “How did you know you were chosen?”

“That’s a whole other matter,” Roger said. “When Emilia was three months pregnant, I was in a terrible car accident.”

“Oh no,” Jordan whispered.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“Are you okay?” I asked. Because I knew what he was about to say. Our abilities came at a price, and my empathic abilities weren’t just inherited. They were activated after I’d nearly drowned.

“Yes, son, it was a long time ago. But my experience was very similar to yours. I fell into a coma and was unconscious for weeks.”

“How could you avoid taking the power?” Bran asked.

“It was a strange experience. Even though I was unconscious I can still recall every moment. One minute I was driving to work, and the next moment I was wandering through a forest. At first, I didn’t realize what had happened and thought I was losing my mind. But then I realized this was all a test, and the fates that be were making sure I was worthy of so much power.” My dad’s eyes glassed over as he remembered that time. Mom slid off her stool and draped her arms over his shoulders.

“We knew he would be tested, and we also knew our friend could help. So, before that happened, we created a safe place for his spirit to go while it was tested. This way he could decide what he wanted to do without the chance of his spirit going to the other side. You see, no one in our lineage has gotten their power without nearly dying. By touching death, we are blessed,” Mom said.

“How long were you out?” Bran asked.

“For me it felt like months, but it was actually a few days more than three weeks. That whole time I was stuck in the forest, but I wasn’t alone. It was supposed to be a safe place and in a way it was. It was cut off from the veil preventing my spirit from

crossing over, but wandering spirits were allowed to enter and torment me. They tried everything they could to get me to relent and become the seer. But I didn't want to do that. I missed Emilia, and I wanted to see our son grow up. So, I fought. I fought with every part of me until finally I woke up. I wasn't the seer, but I'd survived." His hand reached up and covered Mom's over his chest. She kissed his neck and whispered something too low for me to hear.

"I don't want Jordan to risk dying to inherit this power," Bran blurted out. A look passed between Mom and Dad that I couldn't interpret.

"You understand now why I made sure I couldn't inherit? My family was too important."

"Dad, surely the ancestors would have understood," I said.

"Once you're chosen there is no changing your mind. All that saved me was the spell that closed off the veil."

"Jordan—" Bran was stunned. His voice shook with emotion as he stared at me wide-eyed. It was one thing to claim an ability, but it was another thing entirely to have to nearly die to inherit it. I wasn't sure my heart could handle any part of knowing everyone I loved was witnessing me going through that battle while they were helpless to do anything other than wait.

"I'm not going to do it. If it means I need to nearly die again, I won't do it." I fell into his arms and clung to him while I tried to stop the quiver that ran through my body. "I can't go through that again, and I can't put you through it."

"You won't have to," Bran said.

"You can't promise that. I've been trying to tell you. He's in danger. He is to be the

seer,” Edith said, startling me. But it wasn’t only her voice this time. She stood in the center of the living room glowing so bright I forced myself not to flinch away from the light. I wasn’t sure why I was able to see her without Bran’s help, but before I was able to question it, my blood ran cold. Something more was happening.

“Oh no,” I managed to say before I lost consciousness. I sensed movement nearby, but I couldn’t tell what it was or who. Bran was close, I could feel his warmth, but then I found myself face down. My eyes were clenched shut but as my hands opened and I made to push myself up, I realized I was no longer inside.

“You may not be chosen as the seer, but you do not get to choose if you will be chosen,” a voice not much louder than a whisper said close to my ear.

My eyes shot open. I definitely wasn’t in the kitchen where I’d been just a moment ago. I was outside, and I was alone. Scrambling to my feet, I looked around. Everything was strange but somehow familiar. There was a dense forest made up of trees I didn’t recognize, that were so close together it would be nearly impossible to walk between them. I was in a small clearing that had barely enough room for me. At the edge of the clearing was a path.

Cupping my hands around my mouth, I yelled as loud as I could. “Bran!” And waited, hoping he would hear me. It was then I realized how quiet it was. There were no bird calls or the sounds of insects buzzing around. Everywhere around me was completely silent.

“He can’t help you,” the voice said again but I couldn’t locate where it came from. It floated over to me like a breeze and disappeared just as fast.

“Who are you?” I yelled, my frustration building by the second.

“That doesn’t matter. All that matters is what you choose to be.”

I was frantic as I looked everywhere expecting to see someone hiding behind a tree or at the edge of the clearing where the brush was so thick I couldn't see past it to where the path led. "Please help me, where am I?"

"You'll know soon enough," it said, and once again faded away.

"Bran, where are you?" I said to myself before pushing through the thick brush and following the path.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“Jordan!” I shook him hoping he’d wake up but there was no reaction. I looked up to meet Emilia’s eyes that were wide with shock as her hand covered her mouth. “What happened?”

“I tried to tell you,” Edith said. She was still where she had been and as I glanced at Roger, I knew he could see her too.

“What the fuck, Edith! What happened to Jordan?” I screamed at her from where I still sat clutching Jordan to me. “You know I can destroy you. If you don’t start talking, I swear I’ll tear your spirit apart.” The calm that came over me should have scared me, but it didn’t, it put me in touch with the power I tried to deny, and that power cried out for me to take action against her.

“He lives. They could not wait for him to choose to be the seer. Without him the wraith will destroy this world.”

“Take me,” Roger pleaded. “I never wanted this for him. He’s a good man, why would they take him?”

“It was as predicted. A seer will rise to defend against the wraith with a necromancer. The two of you are entwined in many ways, one of them is by the powers you are both capable of. But neither of you are fully willing to embrace it, so the fates have decided for you.” Edith hadn’t taken her eyes off Jordan, and I wondered if she expected him to wake up. But still he hadn’t moved.

“We need to take him to the hospital,” I said to Roger and Emilia, ignoring Edith and what she’d just said.

“It won’t matter,” Roger said, his voice low as he stepped closer to Jordan. “There’s nothing that can help him now. He’ll need to survive the forest and return to us.”

Buddy lay his head on Jordan’s leg, and I realized we were all circled around him. He was surrounded by love, and I hoped he could feel it. “What do we do?” I whispered.

“We wait. He’s smart and he won’t allow anything to happen to him there,” Emilia said, and she smoothed back the hair from his forehead. “Oh, my boy. Be strong,” she whispered.

I looked up to Edith who still stood watching us. “You will go and protect him,” I said. “If you won’t do it on your own, I can force you. I won’t allow him to be taken from me this way.” The rage in me built and I could feel a darkness start to seep into my words that I knew could overtake me the moment I was out of control. I fought the urge to destroy this spirit and waited for her to reply.

“Necromancer, I will do as you ask, but there is more I need to tell you.”

“What could possibly be more important than protecting the man I love while his spirit is outside his body?” I ground out and waited again for her to answer.

“Be prepared for what’s about to come. There is far more happening than you know. The empath must come to his power or all will be lost, and you need to embrace all parts of your necromancer side or there will be no saving you.”

“Who the fuck are you? How do you know anything about either of us?” I pulled Jordan closer to me and hoped for my rage to be tempered by my control.

“You do not know me, but you know my powers. You see, necromancer, I was once a seer, so I know exactly what can happen to the empath if he’s unwilling to take the power that’s offered.” She glanced at Roger who looked away. “My family is the

same as yours. We are connected to the veil in ways not many understand or even know about. I will go and help the empath, but I cannot give him any information. He needs to decide for himself.” With that she faded and disappeared.

Emilia stood but still held Jordan’s hand. “Let’s move him to the couch. At least he can be comfortable there,” she said, and I wondered if it mattered if his body was comfortable when his spirit was absent. But I didn’t ask, I just carried him with help from Roger, over to the couch.

He looked so at peace, and I hoped he was safe wherever he was. I also made a promise to myself that whoever or whatever had caused Jordan to slip into the space between our world and the veil would pay dearly.

“Who was that spirit?” Roger finally asked once we had Jordan settled. I refused to move away from him and held his hand.

“So you could see her,” I confirmed, needing to know what I thought happened, really had.

“Yes, but I don’t know her or why I’d be able to see her,” Roger said.

“I could see her too. I think she might be one of the old ones,” Emilia said, and threw a blanket over Jordan. “I’m tired of keeping secrets that do nothing but harm those closest to us. Do you know how the wraith came into being?”

“No. Jordan and I tried to find out more about it but had no luck. We know it’s an evil spirit, and its main purpose is to collect souls and use them. We couldn’t find anything about destroying it permanently or how it came to be here.”

“I know Jordan has wanted to tell you more about our family and the abilities we all have or those we could have. But I think it’s important to know why we have them to

begin with. It's not random, and while you are chosen by fate, in our family, genetics are more to blame. This is both a curse and a blessing to those that share our blood. Whether by marriage or direct line. The journal we showed you earlier is much older than we led you to believe, it has been added to for centuries. Each generation has one who updates it and one who will be either an empath or a seer. Roger is not the first to deny the role of seer but because he denied it, he is the scribe of this generation." Roger didn't look at me, just stayed as close as he could to Jordan who had yet to move other than to breathe.

"Who are the old ones?" I asked, knowing I needed the information but hating that I didn't already know.

"The old ones were our original ancestors, and some of the first people to experience magic. They were a small group that experimented with elemental magic, and the powers they found in nature. But they were inexperienced and in learning more about their magic, the wraith was pulled through from the other side of the veil. At first, they did not understand what had happened, but as you said, the wraith collects souls and forces them to do its bidding until it's strong enough to fully form in this world. It's a horrible entity who enjoys nothing more than trapping spirits and using them. It will stop at nothing to exist in this world."

Her words were a warning, and even though we'd been warned several times about the wraith, it was still a shock. For a moment hopelessness flooded my senses and I struggled to find anything good, but then I remembered something. "There is one man in the ghost hunters' group that can call spirits to him. He calls it a beacon. Apparently, the spirits can see this beacon and are drawn to it no matter where they are. The wraith tried to use his ability to draw more spirits for it to use, but instead they were able to turn them against the wraith. The spirits were set free, and the wraith was shoved back through the veil."

"That's impossible. No one has been able to force it out of this world since it was first

brought here. They found ways to contain it but every time it has found a way to escape,” Roger said.

“The guys knew it would try to return eventually, but we were all hoping we’d have longer before that happened.” Janis had warned us that we needed to be ready, and we’d tried. But now it looked like the time had come and we were no more ready than we had been before. “Do you think the wraith would be able to get to Jordan while he’s in the space between?”

“I—I don’t know. There’s so much we don’t know about that part. We only know all seers will go there.”

There was so much that could happen to Jordan there, and there was nothing I could do from here. But maybe there was something . . .

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I wandered along the narrow path for hours, surrounded by dense forest, vines and tall grass. The only direction I could go was straight ahead. When I was tired, I sat and rested, but I didn't feel thirst or hunger even though I'd done nothing but walk. One of the perks of being outside your body. "Then why am I tired?" I said out loud.

Bran's words came to me then. "The body suffers without a soul. It will deteriorate while the spirit is outside it and if you stay out too long the body will no longer accept you."

"Only throw your spirit outside your body when there is no other choice," I repeated the last part myself. A noise in the distance got my attention, drawing me out of my thoughts. I listened again but wasn't sure I was really hearing what I thought I was. Then I was up and running in the direction of the noise, crashing through vines and overgrown bushes that tried to hold me back but were no match for how motivated I was to get to where the noise was.

I stopped a few times and listened, making sure I was still going the right way before moving as fast as possible through the dense growth. It felt like I ran for miles, but it was probably only a short distance because of how hard it was to travel at any speed. Bursting through a vine that tried to hold me back, I crashed into an open area, and there in the center was the next best thing to Bran. "Buddy!" I yelled before running to him.

He froze, his feet spread wide and ready to react, before his tail started wagging and he ran in my direction. "Oh my god, how are you here?" He licked my face as he whimpered and jumped around trying to contain his own excitement. "Bran. Did Bran send you?"

Buddy stopped then and his eyes locked with mine. He huffed out a bark that I took as an answer to my question. I hugged him close once again and kissed the top of his head. "Thank you, Buddy," I whispered. Then he was up and bolted down the path. "Buddy, wait." I ran until I finally caught up with him and he stayed with me while the two of us walked.

After a while he stopped in front of me, forcing me to stop too. "What is it, boy?" A low growl registered from him, and he lowered his head and planted his feet. I looked around but didn't see anything. A flash of color moved through the trees, but it was too fast, and the foliage was too thick for me to see exactly what it was. Buddy growled and backed up to where he was touching my feet, protecting me as best he could.

"Are you the empath?" a voice asked from behind a large tree.

"Who are you?" I yelled back and tried to sound stronger than I felt. The bushes moved and I was terrified of what was back there, but then a woman appeared from around the tree.

"You know me as Edith," she said as she slowly walked toward me. Buddy didn't growl but he didn't let down his guard either.

"How can that be?"

"I'm sorry, the body I have inhabited the past five decades has declined. Since I had attached to that body, I was unable to leave until Edith died, and then I was confused. I knew only you and the necromancer could help but I was unable to communicate. That changed recently, and when I crossed over the boundary to come here everything became clear again," she said as she slowly approached us. She had a slight build, and I could recognize parts of Edith, but the spirit in front of me was not an old woman.

“You’re not Edith. I know her and I know what her spirit looks like.” I was never more thankful that Bran had used the ceremony to make her visible to me, even though the spirit was transparent and barely visible, it was enough to know what she looked like.

“You know what her body looked like. Edith was challenged with accepting my spirit into her body when she was quite young. I am one of a few old ones. We share the same blood from many generations ago, long before you or your line of the family came into reality.”

“I don’t understand. My father was destined to be the seer, but he chose not to accept the power.”

“Your bloodline is different than mine, but we’re the same. Edith was the last so our power will fade away. With my help she kept the wraith locked away, but as her memory faded so did her ability to contain it. The wraith will be free to collect all the souls and all the fear it can feed on if you decide not to take up the power your family has been handed.”

“But I don’t know how to do any of that. I’ve tried to learn. But anytime I’m exposed to a spirit it feels like my head is going to split apart. It’s a blinding pain that I’ve tried everything to alleviate but nothing works for long.” She walked closer to me then and reached her hand out. I could see now that she definitely wasn’t Edith, but there were definitely similarities. Buddy moved closer to my side and watched every move she made. When she was just in front of me, she extended her index finger and tapped my forehead.

As soon as her finger made contact, a blinding light ripped through my vision, and I was thrown back against a tree. Buddy yelped in shock as I crumpled to the ground. The rushing sound of the wind blew all around me and when I was finally able to open my eyes, Edith stood close looking down at me. “What happened?” I asked and

tried to get up but was overcome with vertigo.

“Don’t try to stand. I’ve enabled you to see as you’re meant to with no pain. You’ll be able to decide now if you want to inherit the power that is meant for you.”

I blinked my eyes and tried to make sense of her words, then I was conscious of the weight of Buddy laying across my stomach. “I’m okay, boy,” I said to him, and stroked my hand down his back. I sat up and Edith stepped back, and as I looked around, I was shocked at all I saw. Balls of light floated around the forest. Some of them zipped around like they knew exactly where they needed to be while others floated around like bright specks of dust slowly being pushed by a gentle breeze. “What is this?”

“This is what you’re meant to see. The seer is not only able to see spirits that choose to stay tethered to Earth, but the spirits who move on. These are all the spirits that are passing through this plane on their way to their final destination. Some will choose to return to Earth and be reborn anew, while others will go on to find whatever it is they desire in their afterlife. But all must pass through here,” Edith said, and I didn’t miss how happy she looked as she watched the magical show that played out around us. “While you are living, you will always be among the dead, and they will look to you to guide them to the veil and beyond.”

“Is there only one seer?” I asked, and couldn’t stop watching all the sparkling specks of light we were surrounded by.

“No, child, there are many. This is just a small number of spirits who need to be guided, all spirits will look to a seer to find their way. But you need to understand, once you decide you cannot change your decision, and you cannot abandon your duties.”

“What happens to them if I choose not to be seer?” I knew why Dad had turned it

down, but I didn't have a child, and Bran understood better than anyone how the world outside our own demanded that the living acknowledged the dead.

"These spirits will wander until they finally reach their destination, but some will be lost along the way, and if the wraith is set free, it will be able to use them as it chooses without fear of a seer."

"Why would it worry about a seer?" I asked, and wished I'd paid more attention.

"That's what I'm here to show you," she said with a grin. "Now come on, are you ready to learn?"

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“I can’t just sit here. Is there anything else we can do?” I asked for what felt like the hundredth time, and each time a look passed between Roger and Emilia that I didn’t understand. Full of concern, but also a little pride which really made no sense.

“No, he’ll come back when he’s decided on his fate.” Emilia checked his forehead like she would for a fever, but a virus wasn’t to blame for what afflicted him.

“What if he doesn’t decide? What then?” I asked, but I knew the answer.

“If he won’t decide then he’ll stay there until he does,” Roger said. He looked so haunted, and I wondered what horrible things he’d seen. “If the wraith is gaining power, then it’s more important than ever that our seer take up his power.”

“What do you mean our seer?”

“Each of the old ones became a seer as a counter to the evil they’d inadvertently released on us all. When they died, their power was passed to their descendants, but not all their lines survived, and after a while some of them died off. Jordan is the last of our lines.”

“Lines?”

“We are both descended from different lines of seers,” Emilia said. “Jordan is . . . special. Not many of the old ones survive, not even in spirit form. When they called the wraith to them, they also realized they could protect spirits from it, and eventually they learned how to send it back to the other side of the veil. But no seer has ever been strong enough to destroy it or prevent it from coming back as a bigger threat the

next time.”

“You think Jordan could be the seer that destroys the wraith?” I asked, finally understanding why they tried to stay away from the supernatural and what their family was destined to inherit. “How can that be? Surely there have been other seers who were able.”

“There were a few that were possibly strong enough, but the wraith did not try to gain power under them. It knew if it tried it would be destroyed, but this time is different,” Emilia said.

“I don’t understand. If they could have destroyed it and the old ones were the ones that originally conjured the wraith, why didn’t they conjure it again and destroy it?” Fucking magic and power, it was always the same. Those that have it always brag about how powerful they are, but when it comes down to it, they’re never there when it counts. My anger grew as I thought of how much I’d tried to deny my abilities but was forced to use them, and I still had no clue exactly what I was capable of or what my boundaries were.

“The wraith stayed away. It didn’t take any souls, so for a few generations, they forgot about it. But it used that time to learn, and to see how strong it could get and how weak they could be. It started preying on the spirits of seers.” Both of them were quiet and I wished Buddy was nearby, but mostly I wanted Jordan.

“You didn’t say it destroyed their spirits, what did it do?” I braced myself for their answer.

“It stole their memories and their experience, leaving them vulnerable and unable to defend against it,” Roger said.

“Like Edith.” They didn’t need to answer for me to know. She may have been the last

of her line, but she was also a victim of her destiny. “She didn’t have dementia.”

“No, this is a common outcome for seers who no longer have family or another seer to go to. We have to protect each other,” Emilia said and took my hand in hers. “We are not safe when we’re alone.”

“Emilia—” Roger cautioned.

“He’s not alone,” I reminded her, and hoped she realized I meant far more than just his family.

“The seer needs their family. They cannot deal with the emotional strain of the spirit world without feeling love on this side,” she said. Roger squeezed her arm and nodded his head.

“Tell him everything.” Roger took a deep breath as he waited for Emilia to speak.

“Jordan feels pain being near a spirit because he’s very connected to the other side, and no matter how much he denies it he can’t turn it off. He’s also very sensitive to emotions, but he shuts that part of himself away. The pain he feels is his own doing from denying his ability. It’s imperative he choose to become the seer,” Emilia said.

“What do we do?” I asked, and hoped they had some fucking idea because I was fresh out.

“We wait, but the wraith knows the longer he’s there the weaker he grows. But what’s worse is that now it knows not all seers are defeated, and it won’t stop until it destroys him too.”

“I can put a glamour spell on him. It’ll hide him from—”

“That won’t work on the wraith. He was made from original magic. We’ve tried every spell to protect our seers but none of them were successful,” Emilia said. “I wish we didn’t pass this on to Jordan. He’s already been through so much, it’s not fair that he has to live his life this way.”

“Jordan would choose to help. If he knew how much was on the line and how important the seer is, he’d agree to do it in a minute. Does he know all this?”

“He knows some. He doesn’t know what will happen if he isn’t our next seer and I won’t have him decide on his own life based on everyone else,” Emilia said.

“He needs to know everything so he can decide for himself. We came here because he wanted me to know everything, but I feel like he’s the one who’s been kept in the dark. He needs to know. He’s so afraid to use his ability or to try to read the emotions of a spirit because of pain. He’s in pain nearly every day at work. It’s not fair to Jordan, and I won’t help hide information from him that might help him. I love him, and I won’t lose him to either the wraith or any other spirit. I will fight for him.”

Roger met my eyes and smiled. “I was hoping you’d say that. Now, come on, we’ve got to help our boy.”

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“I know there is much about your abilities you have ignored, and I understand why. But the time has come for you to know everything and decide for yourself,” Edith said.

I glanced around at all the shining spheres that danced and shot all around us. There were far too many to count, and way more than I would have imagined would gather here. “Why are they all here?”

“They use this area as a crossing-over point. For many years the seers guided the spirits, but now most of them are gone. Not all spirits are capable of finding their own way to the other side of the veil, and an eternity of wandering is unending torture. They cross the veil to find their peace, and to be reborn if that is their destiny. But the wraith has changed so many things. Since it came into being the spirits no longer pass from our world to theirs without threat of the wraith taking their spirit and draining it before it withers and fades away.”

“Why do the spirits look this way here? When Bran gave me the ability to see spirits, and when I was outside my body and able to see, the spirits were all still in human form.”

“Because on this plane of existence they’re no longer human or nonhuman, they’re all life and are treated the same.”

“Wow,” I breathed out as I watched the show of lights that surrounded and floated all around us.

“The reason you were called here is because you are meant to be a seer. I know you

equate spirits with pain, but your fear is what holds you back from all you could see. The spirits in your world are the very same as the spirits here, but in your world, you see them through the lens of what is familiar to you. Here you have no preconceived notions, so your mind is willing to accept that what you're seeing here is the truth," Edith explained.

"I won't leave Bran," I said, and meant it. There was nothing that would make me leave him.

She smiled and patted my hand, reminding me of my mother. "You do not have to give up anything. To be a seer means to protect the spirits that cross to the veil, and also to accept you will be gifted with visions of the future."

"When I'm near a spirit I have so much pain. It's blinding, and I can't concentrate on anything but the pain. How can I help if I'm blinded by pain? My parents think it's because I won't accept my abilities, but I'm not sure that's it." I didn't know if Edith had all the answers, but I was willing to ask.

"Your sight is muted by the fact that you're afraid. That fear stops you from seeing everything you could. Don't you see, Jordan? Spirits aren't just drawn to Bran. They are drawn to you just as much. Your warmth and empathy give them a clear path to follow, and they know you can guide them to their eternal peace. Do not fear them, they seek you out only for guidance."

"I'll try not to be so afraid. When I sense they're near, pain is my first indication, and it makes me flinch away from them. But I'll try. You mentioned visions of the future, but I've never experienced that."

"Haven't you?" she asked.

"No, I—" Memories flooded my mind. Times where I saw something happen just

before it did. Times where I knew how something would end up far before it was even planned, or times I knew I'd meet someone. The time I knew if I took a job at the morgue, I'd meet the man I was meant to be with. My eyes met hers, and I didn't have to say a word for her to know that yes, I had experienced it.

"You need only to open your mind to the many possibilities you have at your disposal and all will be clear to you," Edith said.

"I'm afraid," I finally admitted. "I don't want to see what can happen if all of it is horrible. I couldn't take knowing that Bran would be hurt, or my parents. I don't want to see that sort of thing." I took a deep breath and slumped over, finally free from what had haunted me for years. I didn't want to know when the people I love would die.

"You have so much to learn. Not all visions will be about impending death, but your visions can warn you when you or someone close to you is threatened, or even when something good will happen. While not all visions are good, not all are bad, and most will help you in one way or another. I know it's hard to put your trust in something you have no choice in, but there's something else you need to know before you decide."

She glanced out at the deep woods, and at the many sparkles of light that looked like fireflies, but I knew weren't. "What is it?" I finally asked when she had yet to speak.

"The seers are dying. There are not nearly enough to keep all the spirits safe as they cross over, and if the wraith is allowed to gain more power there will be far less of us still."

"Us?" I tried to remember if she'd mentioned this before but couldn't.

"I too was a seer, and also the last survivor of my family."

“What happened?”

“There are more things you need to fear besides visions of the future. A seer needs to be surrounded by love. We are so close to death that love is what tethers us to this world. If no one is left behind to watch over us as we wander near the veil or as we walk with spirits, then there’s really nothing to make us go back to our body, is there?” She had a faraway look that told of love lost and time might have dulled the pain but didn’t take it fully away.

“You lost someone close,” I said, and a part of me knew it was true.

“Yes. I was on a spirit journey and while I was out of my body—well, she had a heart attack, or at least that’s what they said it was.”

“But you don’t believe it.”

“No, I was out of my body because the wraith had started gathering spirits and we thought if we stopped it before it got too strong then we wouldn’t need to search out other seers. But it tricked me. By the time I realized it, Lenore was being rushed to the hospital.”

“I’m so sorry. How long ago was this?”

“Early last year,” she said, and I wondered if the spirits being set free had anything to do with it, but I was afraid to ask.

“Wait, you’d been at the hospital for weeks before you passed.”

“Yes, I was unable to fully enter my body when I returned. That is what I wanted to warn you about. The wraith will not only feed on the fear and energy of the spirits it traps and holds, but it will also steal your memories and experiences so that when

you're outside your body you won't remember how to return."

"I know there's a risk to throwing my spirit, but sometimes there's no other choice." I remembered how desperate we'd all been to warn Janis and the others about what was coming. Even if we'd sent Buddy, it wouldn't have been enough, and it ended up being worth the risk. But then I thought about how worried Bran had been. The look of relief and wonder on his face when he'd seen my spirit at Janis's and the way he held me once I was back in my body. "Bran would never forgive himself if I was stuck outside my body," I said as much to myself as to her.

"Therein lies the risk of being a seer," Edith said.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I hated this. Every last fucking second of the three hours Jordan had been gone had stressed me out more than any other single minute in my whole damn life. And for me that was saying something, but never in my life had I loved someone so much that a part of me would die if he was hurt—or worse.

“I thought Buddy would be back by now,” I mumbled, and squeezed Jordan’s hand, and he squeezed back. My eyes widened as I looked from his face to his hand. “Jordan? Did you hear me?”

“What is it? What happened?” Roger said, and the three of us stood over Jordan. Then Buddy was there, laying over the top of Jordan before he hopped up and barked at me, but not in warning. No, his bark was sheer happiness.

“Buddy? Is Jordan okay?” His tail wagged, and I wished once again that he could speak. But then Jordan’s eyes fluttered and I dove to my knees to be closer to him. “Jordan?” I whispered and clutched his hand to my chest.

“Bran?” he choked out and licked his lips before his eyes opened.

“I’m here, baby, oh my god I’m here,” I said, and tried not to burst into tears because right then every nerve and emotion was about as raw as it could get.

“It’s okay. Everything is okay,” he said before he pulled me to him, and I rested my head on his chest.

“I thought you were gone. I wasn’t sure what was going on, but when Buddy didn’t return, I thought something really bad had happened,” I rambled with my mouth

pressed against him.

“I wasn’t sure either and when I first got there, I was scared. But then Buddy was there, and he let me know I wasn’t alone. Then Edith appeared, and she helped me so much. I wish she had just talked to us when she was at the hospital, but I know now that was impossible.”

“She was confused,” I said.

“Yes, you know about the wraith?” He pulled back and tried to meet my eyes.

“Roger and Emilia have been filling me in. I had no idea about any of it. I thought it was a malicious spirit, but it’s far more than that.”

“Yes, it is. But it’s also afraid of what it knows we can be if we work together. With your necromancer powers and my seer abilities, we can defeat and destroy it.” Jordan’s voice took on a determination I hadn’t heard from him before. Gone was the doubt and confusion, now he was confident and more than ready to destroy what was becoming our greatest threat.

“Seer? So, you decided—” I left the thought hanging knowing full well he’d chosen to take up the power his family had passed down for generations.

“Yes, it’s meant to be, and the fates won’t be denied,” he said, and cupped my jaw. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too. You are my fate; no matter what else happens we do it together.” I meant it to my bones, there was no one else for me. No one who could understand the craziness of my life, and no one who was an equal the way Jordan was.

“Edith taught me a lot. We need to talk, all of us. The wraith has been busy planning

how to destroy us all for decades, possibly centuries. It's had lots of time to figure out our weaknesses and exploit them. It destroyed Edith, and if it could do that it can destroy us just as easy." Jordan sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the couch. "None of the seers are safe, and their lineage is in danger. The wraith is trying to destroy us all for good."

"We explained about us needing another when the spirit is thrown out of the body," Roger said.

"Edith had her partner watching over her body when the wraith was finally strong enough to cross into this world. First it made sure her partner couldn't help her return then it stole Edith's memories and knowledge, making it hard for her to find her way back from the other side. When she finally did, she was left in a coma with no way of breaking free. It stole her life. Her partner died of a heart attack, but she thinks it was the wraith."

A look passed between Roger, Emilia, and Jordan. "If you are truly the seer then all of us will be responsible for you to pass safely and to guide any spirits that need your help," Roger said.

"Which makes you three the biggest targets of the wraith. We'll need to find a way to protect you, or I won't cross over no matter how much I'm compelled." Jordan looked between us all.

"It's not going to destroy anyone I care about," I said, and looked at each of them. "I don't understand everything about the seer or what exactly it means for you to throw your spirit, but I know it's important, and I'll do whatever it takes to make sure you're safe. All of you."

"The wraith must be destroyed. It was brought into being by a mistake, and since then it's been pushed away and temporarily stopped, but it comes back each time. And

each time it takes more spirits and uses them before finally using them up and forcing them to live out eternity in limbo,” Jordan said.

“Do you know what magic they used?” I asked.

“No, only that it’s very old, and nature based. They were not trying to bring it here. They were trying to ensure that their relatives would cross over to the other side or be reborn. It uses our love against us, and tortures those of us that are ready to cross the veil,” Jordan said.

“I’ll help any way I can.” Just as I spoke Justice walked into the room.

“This is what I was trying to tell you about. The veil is not safe. Many spirits who try to cross aren’t able to, or they’re absorbed by the wraith. It’s building its powers. If you wait too long, it’ll be too strong. It’s not like it was the last time. It’s worse,” he said.

“Justice, I want you to know you don’t have to avoid me anymore. I won’t be in pain when you or any other spirit is nearby,” Jordan said, and met my eyes again. “I’m not going to fight it anymore.” Justice looked at me as he floated just above the ground. Roger and Emilia fussed over Jordan, and he looked between Justice and me. “It’s going to be okay.”

“I think we need to talk to Janis and see if she’s aware of how the wraith works, and how your family is tied to the veil,” I said, and kissed his forehead. “I’m so damn glad you’re back and you’re okay.”

“Janis will be thrilled to know I finally understand what was causing me pain. She’s tried everything and nothing was working. Now we can get to work on what needs to be done. Because if we leave things how they are now, none of us are safe. Including her brother. The first thing the wraith will want to do once it’s powerful enough, is to

influence him. It's tried before and all that stopped it was Jimbo's friends and his husband. Love is the answer but also the weakness," Jordan said. "I think I need to go home and rest." His eyes fluttered, and I realized even though he'd been unconscious he wasn't sleeping, and he needed to rest now more than anything.

"Come on, let's get you home," I said. Justice walked through the wall to wherever he went when he wasn't with us, and Buddy stayed close by. Roger and Emilia both hugged Jordan and shared whispered words of love and support before pulling me into the hug too.

"You're a part of us now," Roger said, and I was shocked at how emotional those words made me. Jordan's eyes met mine and were filled with so much joy and love my heart clenched. I was a part of them, but they were just as much a part of me. And together we could do anything. "You too, Buddy."

"I knew you knew he was there," I said, making all of us laugh. It felt so fucking good. So normal and so totally not what I was used to. I wanted more of this feeling, and more time spent with Jordan's family. "Jordan, make me a promise."

"Anything," he said with a grin.

"No more throwing your spirit without a little warning." I knew what had happened wasn't his fault, but I had to say something to make myself feel better. He curled into my side and kissed my neck. Once again, we were together and both of us had survived.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I lunged to Bran for the short drive home with Buddy draped across my lap. I still couldn't see him, but I felt him now and I knew if he wanted me to, I could see him. Bran parked in front of the house and turned off the engine, but neither of us moved.

"I thought I lost you today," he whispered.

"I'm sorry. I never meant to worry you." I unclipped the seat belt and moved closer to him. "Maybe we should work on some protections." He smiled but it didn't reach his eyes. "Hey, I promise that won't happen again." Bran looked down and his eyes slid shut before he drew in a deep breath and turned to face me.

"That's the problem. Neither of us can promise it won't happen again. Both of us are touched by forces we can't control, and don't know how to combat. I want to keep you safe so bad it killed me knowing there was nothing I could do." His eyes welled with tears, and seeing how upset he was, tore at my heart. Pulling him to me I kissed the top of his head.

"I promise I won't ever allow myself to be put in a situation where you aren't there when I'm vulnerable. Would you mind if we started using our abilities a little more so I can get more confident? I really don't want to do something wrong."

He smiled then and turned to face me. "You and I both know you can't promise that. But I do love you for saying it. Let's both work on familiarizing ourselves with our abilities, and make sure we each know how the other's works. Then I think we really need to explore more protections and maybe some escape plans just in case you get trapped somewhere or the wraith tries to do to us what it did to Edith. I'm not willing to lose you."

“I love you. There’s literally not one other person in the whole world that would put up with my weirdness and still love me back,” I said before kissing him. He kissed me back and wrapped me in his arms. His warmth and the feel of his stubble and soft lips against mine grounded me and reminded me I was safe, and he loved me too.

“The more love we surround ourselves with the weaker it makes the evil that wants to consume us. I love you, and I need you so badly. I want to show you how much I love you and feel your body close to mine,” he whispered next to my ear, making me shiver and start to harden.

“Let’s go inside, I need you.” Buddy was off and out of the car before I could slide across the seat and open the door. Bran held his hand out for me as he met me next to the car. The heat between us started to build until everything about him was all I could focus on. His scent and touch were like fire burning me up in the flames of passion I had no way of denying or resisting. We walked to the house and as soon as we were inside, he shoved me against the door and ran his tongue along my neck, making my breath speed up.

“I was so worried I’d lost you,” Bran said as his lips trailed along my jaw. “Don’t ever put yourself at risk, please. You’re everything to me, Jordan. There won’t ever be anyone else for me that holds my heart the way you do.” His words did things to me like no one had before. We were similar in so many ways, but so different too. He cradled my face in his hands before meeting my eyes.

“I feel the same. I never expected to meet someone like you.” My words were whispered against his lips as he deepened the kiss enough to let me know exactly how much I meant to him. His tongue glided against mine, and I slid my hands under his shirt needing to feel his warm skin. We kissed without thought of time or the fact he still had me pressed against the door and neither of us cared. Then I felt a change.

My body felt heavy for a moment before I realized my spirit was seeking out his.

While he held me and I held him, my spirit was seeking out the same warmth that I enjoyed and craved from him. He pulled back enough for me to see his eyes open wide with wonder. “What’s happening?” he whispered.

“We love on more planes than just the one we live in. My spirit is entwined with yours and it seeks you out.” His eyes jumped between mine before he pulled me in for another kiss.

“Let me show you how much I love you,” he said, taking my hand and leading me to our bedroom. He sat me on the bed and slipped off my shoes and socks before standing. Both of his hands settled on either side of me as he leaned in for a kiss. I could have kissed him forever and it wouldn’t have been enough, it would never be enough with him. He slipped my shirt off and after trailing his hands over my chest and stomach he unbuttoned my jeans and slid those off too. “You’re the most beautiful man I’ve ever seen.”

His words made me blush. Never had anyone made me feel so celebrated or so under the microscope. He didn’t try to hide the fact he liked what he saw but he also didn’t hold back from looking at every part of me. Finally, he leaned in and licked my nipple. I was so amped up by then I flinched at that simple touch which made my back arch off the bed, and I cried out. Embarrassed at not being able to control my reactions to him I once again blushed. He trailed his knuckles down my cheek, and when I met his eyes all I saw was love and a look of awe. “Beautiful,” he whispered again.

He hurried to take his own clothes off as I watched. “I love your body.” It seemed such a strange thing to say, but it was true. He hid his toned abs and strong legs under the scrubs and jacket he wore at work and sometimes didn’t change out of until he walked into the house. But I knew what was under them, and that body was all mine.

Once he was naked, he knelt between my legs where they were still draped over the

edge of the bed. Leaning forward he kissed my abs while sliding my briefs down my legs. "I love this body too. It's my favorite," he said, before looking up with a grin.

I smiled back before I flipped our positions. "My turn." His eyes widened but when I swallowed him down his shock changed to passion. His moans and groans drove me on as I did my best to take him to the edge without letting him fall over while I fought my own body's need to do the same. I couldn't stop myself from grinding against the bed as I enjoyed every part of his body. His hips moved as I pressed down on him, forcing him to stay in place until finally neither of us could wait a moment longer.

Lifting one of his legs over my shoulder, I spread lube over him from the bottle we kept handy next to the bed. He watched me through heavy lidded eyes filled with so many emotions as his breath sped up. "I love you," I whispered as I slowly pressed into him. Sometimes we'd fuck, without a care about being a little rough. Both of us chasing our release and thrilled to have each other to work out that energy. But not today. Today I wanted him to know without a doubt I loved him, as I slowly made love to him.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

My eyes rolled back in my head as Jordan pressed into me. My skin craved his every touch as his fingers trailed down my chest and stomach. Then just as he was fully in me, the strange sensation from earlier returned. It started as a tingling, but it wasn't on my skin, it was everywhere. Then there was warmth, but it wasn't the warmth of a cozy blanket or a roaring fire, it was the emotional warmth that Jordan gave me every time we were together.

He leaned in and held me close as he moved at a slow pace without touching my aching dick. My eyes were barely open, but I couldn't look away from him. Then I saw it. His spirit wavered on his skin as it too reached for me, and tried to touch me the same way he was. Then without me wishing it, and without any effort at all, my spirit reached out to his.

He glowed as he leaned over me and tried to go slow and easy, but it wasn't what either of us wanted or needed. "You make me want you so fucking bad," he said through gritted teeth, and wrapped his hand around my straining dick. He glowed. The power he now had was on display, driven by all the emotions and raw energy that flowed between us. I didn't have to concentrate on my abilities to see it, it was just there. He had become the seer his genetics told him he could be.

My release hit me so fast and intensely, nothing could have held it back. "Oh god," I stuttered out as he followed right behind and the two of us jolted with every shockwave of sensation. He continued to press into me as best he could as we both finished, before finally sliding out of me and falling on the bed next to me.

"Something's changed," he said.

“I think you almost broke me,” I said, making us both laugh. “But, baby, I could feel your love for me. I knew exactly what you were feeling while we were connected.”

He leaned up on his elbow and met my eyes. “I felt it too. At first, I thought it was just all the relief at finding my way back to you. But it was more.” His eyes had a faraway look while he tried to put some order to his thoughts. “We should get cleaned up,” he finally said, and hopped off the bed. “Come shower with me.”

He didn’t wait for me to follow, and when I walked into the bathroom, he had the shower on and was just getting ready to step in. “I could see our spirits reaching for each other,” I said as I stepped in behind him. “That’s never happened before to me. I could see your spirit reaching for mine and my spirit fighting the constraints of my body to touch yours.”

“I could feel you,” he murmured against my shoulder. “I’ve never felt so close to anyone ever in my whole life.”

“It was like I was a part of you—but more.” I wrapped my arms around him needing him close. “I could see your spirit,” I said again. It wasn’t normal to see a living person’s spirit unless something was wrong and it was fighting to stay where it was, or someone or something was trying to pull it out. “It was amazing.”

He met my eyes with a smile and after squirting soap into his hand, he got busy soaping himself before spreading soap on me too. We were silent for the rest of the shower, and for once my mind was quiet. I tried to remember the last time I felt so at peace and couldn’t remember ever feeling close to how I felt now. The feeling of being enveloped in love overwhelmed me and I swallowed hard, trying to get a handle on the emotions that suddenly flooded me.

“Hey, what is it?” Jordan asked while drawing his hands through my wet hair.

“You make me feel more love than I have ever experienced my whole life,” I finally managed to choke out. He smiled softly before meeting my eyes.

“Come on, let’s get to bed.” He kissed me sweetly, toning down the fire that had ignited between us earlier, and turned off the shower. After towel drying each other, we slipped into bed and it was him pulling me close tonight, and me settling into his warm, safe arms.

“Good morning, guys.” One of the nurses greeted us as we walked into work the following morning. This day was so normal and for once that seemed strange compared to all the weird we seemed to find ourselves wrapped in daily.

“Good morning, Joe. How’s the grandkids?” Jordan asked as he walked over to where Joe was trying to get the front desk in order before they were slammed.

“They’re good. Everyone is busy playing some kind of sport or other activity. Keeps me running on my days off that’s for sure.” He looked between the two of us with a grin before going back to what he was doing.

“It’s very calm here today,” I said to Jordan as we walked down the hall toward the morgue. There were a few spirits wandering around, but there wasn’t the frenzied activity like some mornings—from the living or the dead.

“It is,” Jordan said. It was like a weight had been lifted from him, and he was illuminated from within. Everything about him was more relaxed and happier. Instead of grimacing all the way back to the morgue as he tried to avoid any spirits, now he walked through the doors and to his desk with no effort at all.

“Everything okay?” I asked as he got busy turning on the computer and settling into work.

“Of course. I’m going to finish that report from yesterday first then you can tell me what you need me to do after that,” he said while totally focused on his screen. Before I walked away, he was working with a smile on his face and not gripping the crystals in his pocket like he normally did. Maybe things will be better now.

“Is he okay?” Justice asked as soon as the door shut behind me in the morgue.

“Good morning, Justice,” I said, and walked over to my own computer to see if anything had changed since we left yesterday.

“Well?” he asked, and walked through a gurney to stand closer to me.

“Do you know what happened yesterday?” I asked, not sure if he could know or if he was still waiting for whatever he thought was going to happen, to actually happen.

“No. I just know something from the other side reached out to someone on this side.”

“How do you know that?” I asked. “No wait, never mind.”

“I know he’s the seer. Every spirit nearby knows.” Justice knelt and once again petted Buddy who’d walked into the morgue and plopped down where he normally did. “Even Buddy knows. Jordan doesn’t have the pain and confusion he had before. It’s better for all of us that he agreed to do it.”

“I’m not sure about that yet. I know he’s calmer than he was, and he hasn’t had any pain since he got back. He left his body, and I had no clue how to get him back or where he’d gone.” My breath started to speed up and I fought down the panic I’d needed to control yesterday. “What would I have done if he didn’t make it back?”

“Bran? Everything is okay,” Jordan said as he stepped into the room and walked over to me. “There’s nothing that would ever make me not choose you.” He pulled me into

his arms and kissed my head as the emotions I'd been holding in since yesterday bubbled to the surface, and I cried in his arms.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

Bran and I had been living together a while now, but in that time, he was always very stoic and in control of his emotions. Never letting on when he was upset or scared, but today I could feel his fear and confusion like a wall of emotions hit me as soon as he was in the morgue. I hurried to get to him knowing he needed me but not understanding why.

It was then I noticed Justice. I'd known he was here, but until yesterday, I had never seen his spirit. He was younger than I expected, and worried. He was so worried about Bran. His eyes were on him but then slowly he turned to meet my eyes, and his immediately widened in shock when he realized I really could see him. "Yes, I can see you now."

"What happened?" he asked, and walked closer to us.

Bran pulled in a deep breath but didn't move away from me. "Jordan can do more than he could before. He can't just feel you, if he chooses, he can also see you," Bran explained before kissing my cheek.

"I have to admit it's nice seeing everyone and not guessing who's here and who isn't." Just then a spirit walked through the wall and right up to us.

"Seer, there's a spirit who needs help crossing the veil," it said to me. It was an old man who I didn't recognize and who didn't spare Justice or Bran a second glance. Bran's head popped up and he stared at the spirit who didn't seem to even notice him.

"Why are you here?" Bran asked. But still it was silent. He slipped out of my arms and walked closer to the spirit. "Do you want me to force you to answer?"

The spirit slowly turned to look at Bran, but its expression remained neutral. “Necromancer, I’m here as a messenger. The seer is bound to help wayward spirits cross the veil. Lately more and more spirits wander between the world of the living and the veil.”

“Edith told me the same thing. What do I do?” I stepped closer to the spirit before Bran caught me around the waist and pulled me back.

“Not too close,” he whispered against my ear, and the spirit smiled. But it wasn’t a cute friendly kind of smile.

“My master knows you have taken up the task of seer and sent me to give you a message.”

“So, there’s no spirit who needs assistance?” I asked, and Bran pulled me a little closer.

“You’re strong, but naïve. The wraith will take more spirits and you won’t be able to do a thing to stop it. Soon. Very soon, we will inherit all of what you hold dear and destroy it,” the spirit said while staring straight at me. Buddy stood in front of us and growled low and threatening at the transparent image before us.

“Your familiar will not save you either. You’ll both be destroyed in the end.”

Bran had just stepped toward it, and I knew he was prepared to shred this spirit, but before he could, it disappeared. “Is it gone?” I asked.

Justice walked around the room before nodding. “If that thing could get in here then other spirits can too. You’re going to need stronger protections,” he said to Bran.

“Do you really think the wraith sent him?” I asked, still staring at where it had

disappeared.

“Yes. It’s showing you just how strong it is, and that it can get to you anywhere and anytime it wants to. Justice is right, we need stronger protections,” Bran said, and took out his phone. “Janis?”

I listened while he briefly explained to her all that had happened the last few days. Then he turned to meet my eyes.

“We’ll be there right after work. I wish we could go sooner but we really can’t.” He didn’t have to tell me how serious this was. I could tell by the way he looked at me and the fact Buddy hadn’t moved away from us even after the spirit had left. “We need help,” he said.

“What did she say?”

“She knew you’d become a seer, and she was hoping the wraith would recognize that you and I together are very strong. But she thinks it’s hoping to gather enough spirits that it won’t matter how strong we are,” Bran said. Justice also listened, and I wondered if he was always here so much.

“Edith said I’d know when there were spirits who needed help crossing but she did warn me the wraith would try to use them.” I tried to remember everything she’d said, but some of it was no longer a clear memory. “The wraith took her memory so when she was alive, she was confused. When she died her spirit was also confused until she crossed to the other side. She waited there to help guide me since she was the last seer in her line.”

“It’s grown stronger than I had anticipated,” Janis said, now on speaker so I could hear her too. “We cannot allow it to gain more energy, or it won’t be possible to completely destroy it. It will continue the same as it always has, being destroyed and

lying in wait until it gains enough strength to enter this world again.”

“Do you think there really are spirits trapped at the edge of the veil?” I asked. This was all new to me, and until I learned more I was as blind as I had been before I was told I had more abilities.

“There’s no way to tell. You are the only one among us that has the ability to travel to the barrier. If Justice were to go there, he would be compelled to cross over, and Bran cannot use his own spirit in the way you can. He could compel a spirit to go there, but again they would not be able to resist the pull of the veil.”

“I think I need to go.”

“No!” they all shouted at the same time.

“There is no way to guarantee your safety from the wraith. Jordan, know this—while Bran would be very useful to the wraith, you would be the prize. It could use your influence to guide spirits to go to it where they would be trapped and used. There is no protection that will keep you safe when you are on the spiritual plane. The wraith knows this, and it will do all it can to tempt you to go there.”

“Did Edith cross over?” Bran asked.

“I don’t know. One minute we were there, and she was explaining how when a spirit ends up at the veil some may need help crossing over, when I was pulled back into my body. As far as I know she’s still there and she hasn’t moved on.”

“Bran, you may need to call her to you to get some answers. If she’s still there she can tell you exactly what’s happening,” Janis said.

Bran was quiet for a moment as he considered her words. I knew exactly how much

he hated this part of his abilities. Calling the dead was never easy and never straightforward. Spirits lied or forgot information that was lost when they died, but mostly there were some who were more than happy to try to drag your spirit back to the veil with them. Bran knew this, and even though he never said it, I knew the whole process terrified him.

“You don’t have to,” I said, and took his hand. He looked down at our joined hands before looking up to meet my eyes.

“I’ll do it, but I want you with me.”

“Of course, where else would I be?” I asked, and hated that once again we were thrown into this strange world of the supernatural neither of us really understood.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I wished once again that I had not inherited these abilities, but then I thought about the fact I probably would have never met Jordan. And I loved Jordan, and wanted to do anything I could to make sure he was safe. If that meant summoning a ghost that had been driving me nuts for months, then so be it.

“I’ll need to gather a few things,” I said, and walked into the backroom, leaving Jordan to speak to Janis. As spells and incantations went this was one of the simpler ones, but it also invited a spirit into our world, and sometimes that wasn’t good. They were not only unpredictable, but they lied and were not all that helpful, too intent on keeping their secrets no matter how trivial.

When I walked back out Jordan was just hanging up the phone and walked over to take some of the items I’d gathered from me.

“Are we doing the same thing we did last time?” he asked.

“Yes, but this time I’ll allow her spirit to enter, not just her voice, so I’m putting a stronger barrier around the circle. She won’t be able to cross through into this room if she’s still on the other side.” He nodded and the two of us set about making a circle of salt before I added some ash mixed with some cemetery dirt. Even though my abilities were strong, I was learning from the notebook my mother had left that there were many ways to amplify and hone my abilities. To summon the dead, I needed to add a symbol of death to the circle, and cemetery dirt and ash were both perfect.

I handed Jordan five red candles. “Put these evenly around the circle. It should help to stop her from crossing back here if she tries.” Jordan nodded and did as I asked. When we’d both finished, we sat next to each other facing the circle. I wanted him

close, not across from me like we'd done last time. This circle was bigger, but so much stronger.

"Spirit, hear me and know it is me that calls you forth. You will obey and appear to me without resistance, I call to you, Edith Byrne, to appear to me now." I said the words I'd memorized and hoped I'd done everything right and it worked like it was supposed to.

A shimmering mist appeared in the circle and slowly started to rotate. Jordan reached for my hand and squeezed it. Justice was not visible, and Buddy stayed behind us. Nearby, but not close enough to be affected by the magic of the circle.

"Why do you summon me, necromancer? I have taught the seer all he needs to know." Edith's voice floated through the barriers, but she did not appear.

"We need more information," I said.

"There is nothing more I can tell you," she said, and her voice began to fade away.

"You cannot leave yet. We need to know if the wraith is once again at the entrance of the veil feeding off spirits." I put as much power into my voice as I could. I wanted her to know in every way how serious I was.

"You hold no sway over me from here, necromancer. My spirit is not yours to control. I choose to help you because I was once a seer, and I will continue to help the new seer, but he will need to learn to deal with the wraith the same as we all have who went before him."

"What does that mean?" I yelled.

"Edith, Bran is here to help. The two of us working together can control the wraith,

but we need to know what it's doing. Is it gaining power?"

"It is as it was when you were here. It tests the boundaries daily, and while it hasn't been able to collect more spirits, it does not allow them to cross the veil." Edith's voice wavered and I wasn't sure if her spirit grew weaker or if another power was trying to prevent her from speaking.

"They cannot cross?" I asked.

"No, they wait at the boundary."

"How long since any have crossed?"

"When the seer left, the boundary was closed."

"I have to return," Jordan said.

"No, I won't allow it," I said, not thinking or caring about how that sounded. "I won't lose you."

"It's necessary. Only the seer can guide them across. If they continue to wait between the two barriers, it will create an imbalance and weaken the walls of the veil. If the veil is weakened the wraith will be able to cross into the world of the living and there will be nothing either of you can do to stop him." Edith's voice was no longer calm, now it was full of concern.

Jordan threw his head back and his eyes rolled back but stayed open. He sat unmoving and locked in the throes of a vision.

"The seer will know the consequence if he chooses not to intervene," Edith said, before the circle cleared and her spirit returned to where it had been.

“Jordan!” I turned to him and cupped his jaw in my hand. His eyes were white, and I realized it wasn’t that they were rolled back, but glowed with a power I hadn’t seen before. He still hadn’t moved but he reacted slightly as emotions played across his face. Finally, after what seemed far too long, he closed his eyes, and when he opened them, they were back to normal. “Baby?”

His hand came up and covered mine. “I have to go to the veil,” he said, like he was saying he needed to go buy milk.

“It’s too dangerous,” I said, and hoped he listened.

“If I don’t go, the world as we know it will cease to exist. I’ve seen it, Bran. Everything Edith has been telling us is true. If I don’t stop the wraith at the veil and help the spirits that have gathered there to cross, the imbalance will lead to the destruction of the veil, and without that barrier the wraith will be able to exist here without anything to stop it. Once it’s here we won’t be strong enough to send it back.”

“But Wade and Jason sent it back before,” I said.

“It has never fully existed in the real world. It’s always been tethered to the other side, but if it can cross through the veil, it will be here in every way, and we won’t be strong enough to stop it. We cannot allow that tether to be broken.”

“We are going to meet with Janis. She’ll know what to do. Let’s wait until we are with her,” I said, and hoped he listened.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I knew what I needed to do, I'd seen it in the vision I'd been hit with, but I also knew Bran wouldn't like it and would fight me on it. "There's only one solution, I need to go to the veil. The spirits have to be able to cross over, and there is a way for me to help them, but I won't lie to you. It's not without risk."

"What risk?" Bran asked.

"The wraith could trap me there the same as it did with Edith. It won't be like when I was sent there before, this would be me sending my spirit to the veil and doing that will leave me vulnerable to the wraith. It needs the veil to be open as much as we do."

"I don't want you to risk it. No, I'm not okay with that," Bran said.

"There's no other way. I saw it. If we do nothing the veil will break, and all the spirits there and those that are not able to cross over will be used by the wraith. It will devour some for power while using the rest to destroy the living. The Earth will become a land of the dead where the wraith is free to consume all the spirits it chooses."

"We'll go to Janis's, it's the safest place. From there you can throw your spirit and we'll make a tether that will lead you back. That's the only way I'll agree to let you go. It's just too dangerous, and I just can't lose you." Bran was more stressed than I'd ever seen him. Both resolved that I needed to go but unwilling to give up all control in the hope of keeping me safe.

"You're right, her house is the brightest light. I'll need you to be there, I can't do this without you." It wasn't that I didn't expect him to go with me, it was that I didn't

trust myself to send my spirit to the veil without knowing he was on the other side guiding me. We were stronger together, and if I was going to be able to cross over and help those spirits, I would need him.

“I’ll be there. There’s nothing that would stop me. Tell me exactly what you saw.”

I knew Bran hated this. He hated that we’d been thrown into the very world he’d fought to avoid, and I knew without a doubt he didn’t want to risk me going to the spirit realm. But there was nothing else we could do. “I saw us at her house, and we were performing a ritual. You and Janis knew what was necessary. You made a silver rope of light that you tied around me. When I jumped out of my body to the spirit realm that tether stayed attached.”

“Did you see what would happen when you got there?”

“I know what I need to do,” I said, and hoped the vision I’d had was correct. Because it had shown me two outcomes. And I wasn’t willing to let the second one come into reality. “Is that clock right?” I looked at the large analog clock on the wall to see lots of time had passed when we were in the circle.

“Yes, we were involved much longer than I thought.” Two hours had passed in the blink of an eye and our workday was done. “We should get going,” Bran said, and started to clean up the circle. I helped and in just a few minutes it was done.

“Do you think this place is still safe?” I whispered, and noticed Justice had come into the room.

“I’m not sure, but I think we should redo what Janis did. It kept them out for a while, but the spell could be weakening.”

I watched as he took a stick of charcoal and drew a symbol on the wall. “This one

will only allow the spirits I allow to enter. I'll need to mark Buddy and Justice, or they'll be prevented from entering too." Bran walked over to Buddy and Justice and drew a symbol on Buddy, and then on Justice. I wasn't sure how that worked or how the glowing mark appeared on both of them before disappearing, but I was glad he knew, and he was trying to keep them both safe.

"Let's finish up anything we need to and go. I don't want to wait any longer than we absolutely have to," Bran said. I nodded and walked out to the front office and stood there frozen for a moment.

Was I really going to try to throw my spirit into the space between the living world and the spirit world? And what if I couldn't find my way back like Edith, or if the wraith was able to get to me there? I knew there was no way to know, but I was also glad Janis would be there, not that she could help me once I was there, but because I knew with her and Bran watching over me, I'd be as safe as was possible. I shook my head before forcing myself to walk over to my desk and spent the next forty-five minutes doing two hours' worth of work so we could leave as soon as our shift was over.

"Are you ready?" Bran asked when he walked out of the morgue. "I still have one more autopsy report, but it can keep for tomorrow."

"I'm ready," I said but I was so not ready. Bran gave me a tight smile that told me he knew exactly what I was thinking.

"Janis and I will make sure you're safe. If you need Buddy to go with you, I can make it so."

"I don't want to risk him. It's not a place for any of us to go to if we don't need to," I said, and patted Buddy. "I'm ready."

The two of us walked out to Bran's car and within twenty minutes we were parked in front of Janis's. There were no other cars there, which surprised me. But it also made me relax because I knew if she thought we were in danger she'd have the guys from the ghost hunting team there to help. Bran turned off the engine and looked at me before speaking.

"Baby, please don't take any unnecessary chances. We don't know what the wraith is capable of, and you're still learning how your abilities work. If you were lost there, I don't know how I'd get you back." His voice was serious but also nervous. I knew after speaking to Edith how real the possibility was, and I wasn't willing to take that chance. I wanted us both to live a long and happy life together and in order for that to happen, the wraith would have to be taken care of.

"I won't do anything that's not necessary, I promise. I'll just go there and see what I can see. Maybe it's not as bad as it sounds and all this is for nothing," I said, knowing it wasn't true. I'd seen the many spirits wandering lost between worlds in my vision.

"Just make sure you come back to me," Bran said again, before leaning in to kiss me.

"Always." We got out of the car and as soon as we were at the door it swung open.

"I want you both to know I think this is a horrible idea. But I also know there is no other way for us to know what's happening there. I have reached out to spirits who want to help, but they're unable to cross the veil. The spirits I have contact with on the other side of the veil are silent. I fear the wraith has begun to gather them on that side and is using them to gain power. I know you have the ability to go there, but are you sure you want to?"

"Yes, we can't let the wraith gain any more power."

"I knew you'd say that, and I also knew Bran wouldn't want you to go without extra

protection. So, Bran, you're going to help me, this will take a while." She led us out to the backyard where so many strange things had happened to us. On the small table were two containers and some paintbrushes. "We're going to need to mark his body. The marks will both allow him to go there with protection and will also ensure that he can return once he's done. It will create a tether to this world, so he won't be lost there no matter what happens."

Bran didn't question it, just picked up the sheet of paper where Janis had drawn the symbols and looked at it. "This is pretty straightforward. Could you take off your shirt?" he asked, and smiled at me when I pulled it over my head. "The symbols won't save you, but they will keep you safe." He guided me to a chair, and they wasted no time grabbing a brush each and duplicating the symbols on my chest, arms, back, and face. My eyes met Bran's and I could see his fear, but mostly I could see his love, and I told myself that was what would make me come back. Not the markings or the possibility of being trapped there would be enough, but his love would be the shining light I'd always look for.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

I helped Janis paint the symbols all over Jordan's upper body. She knew how worried I was, and if this made his journey a little safer, I would be more than willing to do all I could. "Do you think this really will help?" he asked.

"It will give you a little more protection and it'll help Bran not be quite so stressed out because it will give us a direct connection to you," Janis said with a wink.

His eyes met mine and even though I forced a smile, I knew I wasn't fooling him. "Can we have a moment before we start?"

"Of course, just let me know when you're ready. Come on, Buddy," Janis said, as easy as though she were talking to any other dog and not a spirit brought by a friend.

Jordan and I stared at each other a moment before we both laughed. "Are you ready?" I asked.

"Yeah, as ready as I can be. Don't worry, Bran. I swear I won't do anything stupid."

Ignoring all the markings on his face I memorized every detail, and hoped he'd return soon. "Baby, just come back to me. I know you can't control it all but when you're there, remember how much I love you. My love will always be with you even when I'm not." We kissed then, and I poured every emotion he made me feel into that kiss and hoped he felt it all. Janis walked back out of her house just as we'd finished, like she knew the exact moment it would all be easier.

"Jordan, I know you've been practicing, so where do you want to wait while your spirit is on its quest?" Janis asked.

“Maybe over there?” He pointed at a lounge she had on the patio. He moved over to it and after making sure he was comfortable, he started to slip into the deep relaxation that it would take for him to allow his spirit to slip away from his body. I held his hand and watched his face as his breathing slowed down the same as it was when he’d been pulled out of his body at his parents’ house. But this was different, this time it was his choice.

“Should I send Buddy?” I asked Janis without looking away from Jordan.

“He’ll call him if he needs him. He’s your familiar but he also is very connected to Jordan. It’s a very emotional connection.”

“They’re together a lot. Jordan loves having Buddy next to him at work, and Buddy likes his warmth.” I didn’t need to explain it to her because she already knew, but it felt good to say it. “Janis, what do you think of Jordan being a seer?” I took my eyes off him just long enough to glance at her. She was lighting some incense and purifying the area even more than she already had.

“I think he’s the perfect person. He’s very sympathetic to everyone’s feelings, but he’s cautious. He’s not blinded by his empathy. That alone will serve him well. You know as well as I do how the spirits like to use our emotions to get what they want.”

“I was worried when he was with Edith that she’d somehow convince him to stay there.” Putting my fear into words didn’t make me feel one iota better, but I knew if anyone understood it would be Janis.

“She gave you no reason to trust her. If what she told Jordan is true, then it does explain her not being able to communicate. Did you look into her history?”

“Jordan did, he found where her partner had died, and she was left alone. She had no other family. You and I both know a seer with no one on this side to anchor them

here isn't a good thing," I said, and stroked Jordan's hand. Buddy stood on the other side of him, and Jordan was his complete focus. Suddenly a faint glow shown on Jordan's waist.

"He's entering the other side. The tether we've created is there for him, and he's safe. If anything happens to him, we can bring him back here with it. Where's Justice?" Janis asked, and glanced around the area.

"He stayed at the morgue. I didn't want to chance that his spirit could be caught up in anything and either drawn into a space he couldn't escape, or worse." Justice may have been bonded to me, but he was also a friend, and I didn't want to risk anything happening to him.

"Jordan is strong. The fact he was able to find his way back without any help says a lot. Not many seers could have done that. The love you two share is very powerful." It wasn't said as a question, it was said very matter of fact, and I realized it was very strong and it gave us both the strength to overcome many things we couldn't have done alone.

"What if we're wrong and the wraith is waiting for him?" I'd thought about this possibility about a million times in the past few hours, but I hadn't wanted to say anything to worry Jordan more than I knew he already was. He was trying so hard to be brave and do what he knew he was made to do, and I didn't want him to worry about things that may not happen.

"Trust him. The other seer will be there, she won't let him face any of this alone," Janis said, and started to lay a circle of salt around the two of us. Once it was sealed, she placed a few crystals and other stones on his forehead and chest. Janis knew so many ways to protect us. Some were familiar but others were not. At this point I didn't care what it was as long as it kept him safe. "The marks we painted on him will connect him to you while he's there. If you try, your mark will enable you to hear

each other's thoughts, and of course you'll have the tether which will enable you to pull him from the barrier back to this side."

"Are you sure?" I asked because so far, the mark on my back had done nothing.

"Oh, I'm quite sure. Your connection is very emotionally strong. You should have no trouble with a mental connection. Have you studied what your mark means?"

"Not really. I know you said it's Metatron's cube, and I did look online to find out a little bit of information on it." I regretted all the times I pushed aside learning more about my abilities, and the mark I'd been left with the last time we'd met the wraith and promised myself right then that I'd start learning more.

"After all, part of the meaning of your mark is it helps you form a bridge between this world and the other. Try it," she encouraged, and watched as I tried to embrace the part of myself I knew was there, but I refused to use.

I sat right next to Jordan and held his hand in mine as my eyes slid shut. I focused on him, and everything I'd want to say to him, but mostly I focused on how much I loved him.

"Bran? How can I hear you?" Jordan asked, but when I opened my eyes his were still closed. Janis smiled that knowing smile and continued wafting more sage around the area.

"Just in case something else is listening," she said.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

When I came here last time it wasn't through my own power, and I woke up alone in a strange forest. I realized now that was probably Edith's doing because one moment, I closed my eyes and the next I was in a wasteland. There was nothing as far as I could see beyond the dunes of sand that stretched out for miles and miles.

I stood and looked around. It was then I noticed the glowing silver rope tied around my waist. "Whoa," I said, before giving it a tug. The rope seemed endless as I looked to where it disappeared into the distance, but it weighed nothing. The only way I knew it was there was the physical feel of it. I stood a moment longer hoping for a pull in one direction or another. I was about to start walking when I heard a voice. It started as a whisper of words I couldn't quite understand, but then I knew it was Bran.

"Janis said because we have a strong connection and part of my mark helps to form a bridge between this world and where you're at. Where are you?" he asked, and I knew he was trying to be calm, but I could feel the worry and concern that laced through his words.

"I don't know. When I was here before I landed in a forest, but now there's nothing. It's all desert and sand for as far as I can see." Using my hand, I shielded my eyes from the sun and turned in a circle. "I think I see something. I'm going to walk toward it." A flash of metal caught my eye, and I hurried in that direction, but everything was strange here. The faster I moved the slower I got there but the rope around my waist stayed as it was. Never getting tighter, or having more slack.

"Can you see anything?" Bran asked, and I tried to focus on letting him see exactly what I saw.

“Not yet.”

“Sometimes it’s not what you see, it’s what you don’t see. Close your eyes and clear your mind. That’s it, take some deep breaths,” Bran said, and the sound of his voice soothed me and helped me focus. There was a whoosh of wind, and I felt my hair blow back. When I opened my eyes, I was back in the forest I’d been in with Edith. I hurried along in the direction we’d gone last time on what I would have sworn was the same path. The plants and everything were the same, but there was a dark heaviness that wasn’t here before.

When I broke through the clearing at the end, I knew it was definitely the same path. The veil was in front of me. A shimmering wall that had no beginning and no end yet divided the world of the living from the beyond. Spirits were everywhere, some were only light and had no discernable features or shape. They floated right through the barrier as easy as they had floated around the forest.

But other spirits were not as lucky. They were in human form and stood at the base of the veil. Some of them put their hands up to it and were met with resistance. “They can’t pass through,” I said, and hoped Bran heard me.

“Do you see the wraith?” Bran asked, making me glance around and pay closer attention.

“Not yet. I’m going to get a little closer.” I made my way through the spirits that were wandering aimlessly as though they couldn’t see the veil but had been drawn to it.

Then I noticed some of them were frozen in place at the barrier. Other spirits avoided them, but the longer I watched them the more obvious it was they had not moved at all. “No, but there’s something strange at the boundary.” I walked nearer to one of them and was surprised to realize it was Edith. “Bran, something’s wrong,” I said to myself in a low voice.

“Please be careful,” he whispered.

“Edith?” I slowly moved past some spirits that were near where she stood. They were wandering around in a circle, and looked like they weren’t sure where they were supposed to go or where they even were. I slid past one and got closer to Edith. Except she wasn’t anything like she had been. Instead of glowing with the internal light that seemed to emanate from most spirits, she looked grey and dull. When I was close enough to touch her, I reached out.

“Jordan, don’t,” I heard Bran say just before my finger made contact with her. She crumbled like ash so fine that it blew away leaving not a trace behind.

“Bran, something is definitely wrong.” I walked closer to where she’d stood and noticed that her arm had been extended through the barrier. The opening was still there as I bent over to look inside. There, just on the other side, was a figure. It was dark and I couldn’t see much through the small hole, but I’d seen that figure before and I knew exactly what it was. “The wraith.”

I turned and bolted back the way I’d come and didn’t stop running until I was so deep in the trees and underbrush, I wasn’t sure where I was anymore. But that didn’t matter right now. I tugged on the silver rope at my waist and was relieved it was still there before I turned to look back in the direction I’d run. I was too far into the forest to see the barrier anymore, and I tried not to think about what I’d seen, not wanting Bran to see, but he knew. He’d seen through my eyes everything I’d seen.

“Jordan, you need to come back, it’s too risky there.” I could feel his worry. The connection between us tugged at me to return to him. But I wasn’t done yet.

“I need to make sure. If what I think I saw was true, then what’s going on here is much worse than we imagined.” The last thing I wanted to do was go back again. But I knew if I didn’t do it now, I never would, and we needed to know what was

happening.

I turned then and ran, only stopping when I was close enough to see the barrier. Staying under the cover of the thick trees and brush, I noticed Edith wasn't the only one that had been turned to ash. There were several other spirits, all of them in the same condition she was in, and when another spirit got a little too close, they crumbled without a trace. "Something's not right," I mumbled to myself.

Sudden pain shot through me, and my back felt like it had been touched by a white-hot branding iron. I was pulled backwards fast enough to blur everything within my vision. The air was squeezed from my lungs as the pain in my back grew even hotter.

"Jordan!"

My eyes shot open at the same time I sucked in a big breath of air. "Where am I?" I said as my eyes bounced around from Bran to Janis before I finally realized I was back.

"Are you okay?" Janis asked.

"I think so. Something strange is happening at the veil. I went to get a closer look and was pulled back here."

"Your connection is even stronger than I realized," Janis said.

"My back is burning. One minute I was standing in the woods near the boundary and the next my back was on fire, and I was being pulled back here." I squirmed around and tried to itch the area but couldn't reach it.

Bran turned me around and held my arms to steady me. His intake of breath startled me. "What is it?" I asked, and tried again to reach it. "What is it?"

“The Merkaba,” Janis whispered.

“What? I don’t know what that is,” I said as Bran continued to stare at my back.

“A very strong mark of protection. If I had to guess, Bran’s worry caused his mark to send you some protection of your own.” She patted my back, and after gathering the stones and crystals that I’d flung off me when I sat up, she turned to face us both. “Now we learn to fight.”

Bran pulled me into his arms and held me so tight it was nearly painful, and I clung to him. Because no matter how tight he held me it would never be tight enough, and I never wanted to feel the pain of being pulled away from him again.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

After drinking a large glass of water, Jordan explained to us all he'd seen. Because even though I'd experienced it through his thoughts, it wasn't the same as hearing him explain it. Especially the part about Edith and what had been on the other side of the veil when he'd investigated the hole her arm had left. "Do you really think it was the wraith?" I asked.

"Well from how Wade and Jason described it, and from drawings I've seen online, I'd say so. But it was strange. It wasn't there gathering spirits or attacking them. If I had to guess, it's blocking them from the other side. They all had their arms extended into the veil, but they were no longer spirits. They were ash."

"It's feeding on their energy. It's found a way to reach from the other side where it's banished to. It has no power there and cannot absorb the spirits as they pass through. But if it could drain them before they could fully pass the veil then it could gain unlimited power in a short amount of time," Janis said.

Both of us looked at her with the same confused expression. "The barrier is supposed to be one way. Spirits are only allowed to return by reincarnation. Why would it be able to drain their energy as they're passing through it?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, but I'm willing to bet it's lying in wait for those with energy it senses and then draining them before they can pass. It's had lots of time to plan a way to escape the other side of the veil." Janis slowly paced the patio area before turning to look at Jordan again. "The mark you returned with is very unique, it's directly related to a relationship and balance between soul and body. If Bran did indeed give you protections, it may prove to be at least as strong as his own."

I hoped it was true but there was only one way to test it and I wasn't willing to even think about that. "After all the trouble with markings it was the last thing on my mind. I'd completely forgotten about mine," I said, and shrugged my shoulder.

"It's strange and amazing what the mind and spirit will do when someone you hold dear is threatened. The symbols we drew on Jordan would have kept him safe and tethered to this world, but they had no power to return him, and while he is capable of walking between the two worlds, the Merkaba pulled him back here."

"I don't want Jordan to try that again. If he's right and the wraith is waiting on the other side of the veil, then it will be looking for him. There's not a chance it doesn't know who he is now, and it will know how powerful he is," I said, and brushed my thumb over one of the symbols we'd painted on him. The Merkaba had disappeared, all that remained were the symbols of protection.

"Bran, I know you're worried, but I'm the only one who can cross over to the veil. I don't know what I saw, and I don't understand it, but I know how I felt. We're all in danger if we don't stop it. The wraith will keep coming for us until it finally gets what it wants, and what it wants is to exist in this world and feed on as many spirits as it can—forever."

I brushed the hair back from his forehead and I looked deep into his beautiful eyes. "You're everything to me, and I won't ever stop fighting whatever it is that wants to try to keep us apart. Janis, when you said we need to fight, what did you mean?" I wanted this over but I knew there was no way it would be simple.

"We aren't strong enough to destroy it from here, but we can hurt it," Janis said.

"Is there a way to do that from this side of the barrier?" I asked. The wraith was an unknown to me. When we'd dealt with it working with the spirit of my mother it had taken me by surprise, and I was more than willing to let the wraith exist if it faded

into the background, but it didn't give up. Its hunger for more power by destroying more spirits was insatiable.

"There may be. What exactly did it do to the spirits you saw, Jordan?" Janis asked.

"I think it consumed them until all that was left was a husk of ash. It was horrible. Edith wasn't the nicest person, but she didn't deserve that," Jordan said. "Now she'll never get to be with her loved ones ever again. She was the last of her line, it all ends with her."

"The last of her line?" Janis repeated.

"Yes. Her family was one of the original families that brought the wraith into existence. The old ones. Same as my family." Jordan looked at me and I knew he hated not only admitting it, but also that it had happened at all.

"Your family was one of the old ones?" Janis asked.

"Yes. Bran and I went to my parents to get more information and they finally admitted we are one of the original families, and also one of the last lines of seers. I'm sure the wraith has been waiting for all of them to die off. Now there's not many left so it won't have to fight nearly so hard to come into this world."

"I had no idea you were one of the original families. There's something you need to know. My family is also descended from one of them. That's where the origins of my abilities and my brother's come from. We knew there was a family connection, but we didn't know what that connection was. Only recently was James able to trace it all back to our heritage. In many ways, you and I are bound together in the ways of magic. Our families are some of the last surviving that can destroy the wraith."

"But how? I don't have any idea about magic. I have no clue how to help that way,"

Jordan said, and looked at both of us.

Janis patted his hand and smiled her serene smile. “We might just have a chance if we work together. My family has an old journal that speaks of their journey from Ireland but there’s not much written about them being one of the original families. I think they were trying to hide in plain sight. All the families left Ireland and were scattered all around the world. Part of this was so they could spread their magic around, but part of it was so they would be prepared for the return of the wraith.”

“There’s more,” Jordan said. “I’m not just related to them, I’m reincarnated from one of the more powerful members of their society, and my mate at that time was also a necromancer. I don’t know if it was one of Bran’s ancestors, but I’m willing to guess it probably was. My father was destined to be the seer, but he chose not to accept the power.”

“So that left you,” Janis said.

“I was pulled to the edge of the veil by Edith’s spirit. It’s so confusing where her abilities came from. She said she was the seer for her family line, but the wraith trapped her outside her body.” I remembered all the times we’d tried to communicate and lost patience with her, but we’d had no way of knowing what had actually happened. “She died while in a coma and unable to get back into her body. They thought she had dementia, but she didn’t. If we don’t stop the wraith now, it’s going to keep going after every seer until they’re all eliminated. We’re all that stands between it taking everything it wants.”

Janis took a deep breath before slowly releasing it and speaking. “Jordan, I know you feel the pressure to protect us all, but that’s not how being a seer works. We all gain power from each other, and you are stronger with Bran and other people around you who share the same connection to the other side that you do. All of us together can destroy the wraith eventually. But for now, we’ll need to stop it from feeding off the

spirits trying to pass through the veil.”

“Tell me what we need to do,” Jordan said, and I hoped Janis was right and we were stronger, but I also worried what would happen if one more of us was lost.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“The key is in the marks. It’s the one advantage we have over the wraith,” Janis said. “That and the fact that Jordan can move between both worlds. It won’t be expecting that.”

“What are you saying?” Bran asked, and I knew no matter what plan Janis had, he wouldn’t agree with it.

“I have to go back.” I knew it as soon as she started talking. There was no other way for us to reach the wraith without returning.

“No, you can’t,” Bran said.

“It’s the only way,” Justice said as he appeared close to Bran. “There’s no other way. The only chance we have of crippling the wraith is going at him on the other side.”

Bran stared at him for a full minute before he turned to me. “You can’t. It’s just too risky.”

I stepped closer to him as I slipped my shirt back on. “There’s no other way. I’ll need you here to guide me back, but the only way we have a chance of hurting the wraith is if we can reach it through the veil.”

“I know you’re right, but I don’t think I can sit here while you’re there risking your life again. What if you end up like Edith? I’d have no way of getting there to help you.” Bran’s eyes were frantic as he searched for another way to persuade me not to go.

“I’ll go with you,” Justice said.

“No!” Bran shouted. “I can’t lose both of you.” Bran was mostly a loner, and at first, he’d hated that Justice was there all the time, but once he got used to it, they’d become close, and he looked forward to spending time together while he worked. Plus, Justice didn’t mind watching while he performed autopsies, something I still couldn’t get used to.

“Justice, there’s a chance you could be drawn to cross over the veil. But I could come up with a protection that wouldn’t allow that to happen. Much the same way the wraith is trapped on the other side,” Janis said.

“You’re okay with this?” Bran yelled. “Why would you want to risk them both?”

Janis smiled the way she always did. Like a mother comforting one of her children with kindness and love. And lots of patience. Because if I was being honest, we would always need her help and I didn’t think she’d ever turn us down. “I would never put any of you in a situation if I didn’t think you could handle it. But Jordan is stronger than you realize. His ability to cross the veil will help us to bring the wraith to its knees before it has time to destroy more spirits. You must trust him, Bran. He’s ready.”

“I know you’re scared. I’m scared too. But I don’t want to lose everything we could have in the future to a creature that only wants to destroy the world. If there’s something we can do I want to do it,” I said to him, and took both his hands in mine. “I can’t do it without you.”

He squeezed his eyes tight before finally looking at me. “Promise me you won’t take any chances. We’ll put another tether on you and under no circumstance will you take it off or try to cross the veil. Promise me,” Bran said. His hands on my arms shook me, and I was shocked at how worried he was.

I reached up and cupped his face. “I’ll do whatever I need to do to stay safe. I will always fight to come back to you,” I said, and hoped he knew how much I believed it. “You know we’ll be connected the whole time. You’re the only one who can be linked to me mentally, without you I can’t do it.” We were all silent for a moment as I waited to hear Bran’s next words.

“There may be more I can do,” Bran said. “I know you’re right, and you have to be the one to go. But I think there might be a way to destroy the wraith without you having to get too close to it.”

“What are you thinking?” Janis asked.

“There is a way to mark a spirit that makes it unstable and dangerous to any other spirits or even humans around it. If you were able to mark a few spirits before they went through the veil, then maybe they could wound the wraith without us having to wait to be in contact with it.” Bran tapped his lip while he ran through all the different scenarios in his mind. His beautiful mind was part of what attracted me to him.

“What if we mark a spirit that it would choose to feed on?” Janis said. “A mark that would make it toxic to the wraith when it consumes that spirit’s energy.”

“Like a poison?” Bran asked. “I like how you think. But how would we know which spirits it would feed on?”

“I can tell you. Not all spirits appear the same, some have a brighter light that shows how strong their energy is,” Justice said.

“I noticed that when I was there. Not all spirits look alike on the other side.” I remembered how some were orbs, and others appeared in human form, but some of them definitely glowed brighter, including Edith.

“Are you sure it’s safe for you to go? I don’t want you to be pulled across,” Bran said to Justice.

“I trust Jordan and I trust Janis. If they say I’ll be safe then I won’t question that,” Justice said.

“There is a way I can temporarily bind your spirit to Jordan’s. It’ll only last while you’re in the spirit world but it should keep you bound to him enough to resist the pull of the veil. Unless you want to cross. I won’t stop you if you’re ready,” Bran said, and waited for Justice to reply.

“Not yet. Maybe someday, but for now I want to stay.” Justice looked at both of us before reaching for Buddy who leaned against his leg.

“Then that’s what we’ll do. I’ll need to look at my mother’s journal for a binding spell. I know there’s one there,” Bran said to Janis, and the two of them put their heads together getting the right marks and spells for us.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Justice asked. It was still strange for me to be able to see and speak to him.

“No. But we don’t have another choice. I know I can travel there and return, and I know I can keep you safe there. I don’t know how I know but I do.”

“You really are the seer,” Justice said, and smiled at me.

“Yeah, I guess I am.” I surprised myself with that response, but after going to the other side twice it was harder for me to deny, and time for me to accept it.

“I think this mark will work,” Bran said from where he looked at the journal. We’d learned the hard way how dangerous it was so now he only opened it once he’d

placed a barrier spell around it. He could reach in and turn the pages, but he never touched it, preferring to either wear rubber gloves or use something to turn the pages.

“I think you’re right, and I found an incantation to give it a little extra punch,” Janis said, and showed Bran what she’d found. Edith was right, we were both strong, but together—especially with our friends—we were even stronger.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

When we had everything ready and had decided what Jordan would do once his spirit was at the barrier of the world of the living and that of the dead, I found myself doing everything as slowly as I could. Because if Jordan and Justice were still here, then they weren't in danger of being consumed by the wraith.

"I know what you're doing, and I love you, but we need to get going," Jordan said.

"Jordan, I know you're meant to do this, but I don't want to lose either one of you. Just please be careful." There was no other solution other than to stop the wraith before he could cross the veil. Once that happened, he'd continue to get stronger until eventually we wouldn't be able to stop him. We couldn't let that happen.

"Jordan, this is the symbol I want you to use. When you come upon a spirit that the wraith seems to target then you'll want to mark them," Janis said.

"How will we know which spirit the wraith will target?" Justice asked, because now apparently, he was part of the gang and was included in everything. Not that I minded, but it was strange considering he was a ghost. "Is it as simple as it being those that glow brighter?"

"Jordan will know. You mentioned they look different to you, the brighter the more spiritual energy," Janis said.

"Yes, but some were only light—they have no human form," Jordan said.

"Those are spirits that have ascended. They're no longer the spirit of a human, they've moved on and are pure energy. They are power but not the power the wraith

is interested in. It wants the spirits who are new to crossing and still have all their human abilities intact because they don't know what's happened to them. They're led to the veil, and they cross over usually without incident, but some aren't ready yet. Those are the ones it's targeting. The ones who still feel the pull to go back to their body and aren't ready to cross the veil."

"I noticed Edith glowed from inside when she first appeared to me there. Her light was very bright compared to some of the other spirits. There were a few others that glowed as brightly as her but not many," Jordan said.

Janis smiled and I knew once again Jordan had figured it out. "You're really good at this," I said, and he blushed.

"I'm not sure about that but I know I can handle it, and I will always come back to you," Jordan said, and brushed his thumb against my cheek.

"And I'll make sure of it," Justice said.

"There are some protections I have for the two of you." I'd used the time we had to read the journal and find what I thought would help them the most. I had chosen the same symbol that Jordan had been marked with when he was at the boundary. "This way I know without a doubt the mark is there, and the link between us is strong." Using the same charcoal paint from before I drew the Merkaba, two interconnected pyramids that would protect him and combine our powers.

"Justice, stay close to Jordan. If you wander too far away from him, you may be tempted to cross over. But if you choose to go then I'll understand," I said. His eyes met mine and I wondered when this wayward spirit had become my friend. I closed my eyes and drew on the part of me that was not completely human.

"Necromancer," Justice whispered, before I reached out my hand and gripped his

shoulder.

“I mark you so you will feel the tether that connects your spirit to mine. You will pass through to the land of the dead, but you will also return to the land of the living with Jordan.”

“Yes, Necromancer,” Justice said. His spirit was under my influence now, and no matter what he may have wanted to say or do, all he was able to do was what I allowed. I hated using this influence over him, but I didn’t want to risk him while he was in the spirit realm. “I bind your spirit to Jordan. Your fates are tied together while you’re at the boundary, and you will protect each other as you would yourself.” Justice nodded. Jordan wasn’t under my influence. I would never do that to him. I loved him, and I trusted him to make the best choices he could while he was out of his body.

“We’re ready,” Jordan said, and Janis helped him get settled where he had before. This time he had different markings and held a vial clenched in one hand. It was strange to imagine he’d be able to carry whatever it was with him, but none of what we could do made any logical sense. He lay down and after Janis had settled the crystals and other items around and on him, he slipped into the deep sleep I now knew was when his spirit was separating from his body.

“Bran.” I turned at the sound of my name and was surprised to see both Jordan and Justice standing there. “Don’t worry, we’ll be back.” Justice nodded but didn’t speak. Buddy took a step toward them, but with a look from Jordan he walked back over to Jordan’s body and settled down next to him.

“Hurry back to me,” I said, just as the two of them faded away.

Janis was busy fanning the sage and other herbs that would keep them safe while I sat next to Jordan and took his hand. I’d secured the rope that bound me to him onto my

wrist and felt a slight tug but didn't think anything of it other than a sign we were still attached. From this side nothing was visible, but Jordan had said it was a silver thread he could clearly see and feel while he was there. All I cared about was that we were tied together. No matter how far apart, we were still together.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“Jordan,” a voice echoed around me. It sounded so far away and came in waves like water touching the shore. With a whoosh of wind, I was on my back. “Jordan!”

“Bran?”

“No, it’s me.” I opened my eyes to see Justice standing over me with a worried look. He looked so different here, not solid and real, but he glowed with the power that came from his spirit the same as Edith had. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“Yeah, I think so.” I stood and looked around. Once again, I was in the thick forest where Edith had brought me. “It’s not far from here,” I said, and started to walk in the direction of the barrier. It was then I noticed the cord that extended from me to Justice and the other end that I knew led directly to Bran.

“Don’t worry, Bran made sure you can get back,” Justice said. His voice was also different here or maybe it was the fact I’d only been able to hear and see him for a short amount of time. I wasn’t sure, but I was incredibly thankful to have him with me now.

“Let’s go where we can see the veil.” We walked through the thick forest for a while. Neither of us spoke, both too focused on the spirits streaming over our heads toward the barrier. When we were close enough to see, we found a rocky outcropping to stay out of sight. I didn’t expect any of the spirits here to harm us, but I wasn’t sure what could happen if the wraith knew we were here to try to stop it. Or at least wound it enough to slow it down.

“Look there,” Justice whispered, and pointed near where the glowing barrier met the

ground. Many spirits were gathered there, and most were moving through at a steady pace. One spirit stood out. It glowed bright, and I wondered if the spirit knew they had power when they were alive, or if they were only aware of it once they'd died. My thoughts were interrupted when the spirit stopped just before it would pass through. It raised its arms and took a few steps forward so they were as close to the barrier as they could get before pushing through.

I knew what would happen before it began, but seeing it was even more shocking than seeing the aftermath. The glow that had stood out among all the other spirits started to flicker and fade, as the wraith fed on this spirit from the other side. As its light was drained, it started to change. What had once been a spirit of light was slowly transforming into a human shaped pillar of ash.

“What’s happened?” Justice whispered, just as another spirit brushed up against it and it crumbled to nothing but dust.

“The wraith drained its energy. See the hole in the barrier? That’s going to be our opening to get to the wraith if marking the spirit doesn’t work.” I hadn’t talked to Bran about this, but one way or another we would hurt the wraith today. “We need to get a little closer so when we find another spirit that glows the way that one did, we can mark it.”

Justice nodded and we made our way under cover of the underbrush and rocks closer to the glowing boundary. More glowing orbs floated around nearby before disappearing into the wall while a steady number of spirits walked straight toward it. Most of them passed through without hesitating, but a few stopped just before they would have entered, and wandered off on their own or in small groups. Then I saw it. One of the spirits that had just emerged from the forest glowed bright. I pointed it out to Justice and the two of us started to make our way toward it.

The other spirits that were waiting to pass through didn’t pay any attention to us, but

also didn't move out of the way to let us past them. I noticed then how different we looked from them. Both of us were transparent while they were solid. They didn't give us any notice as we ducked around one after another trying to reach the one that glowed so bright.

Finally, we were close enough to reach it. I stood in front of it but instead of stopping, it passed right through me and was within a few more steps of crossing through the veil. "Wait," Justice shouted. The spirit stopped and turned to face us.

"What is it you want?" it asked.

"Only to offer you some protection as you cross over," I said, and hoped it worked. The spirit didn't spare us another glance as its eyes were straight ahead, but not focused on anything other than the barrier. I stepped closer and was surprised to find a silver rod in my hand where on the other side I held the vial Janis had given me. The skin of the spirit was not skin, it was made of the same glowing material the veil was made of and I hoped once more that this would work. I touched the silver stylus to its arm and tried to control my shock as liquid energy swirled around but maintained the shape of an arm. Making the mark in the liquid, I hoped it maintained its shape and didn't melt off and disappear. As soon as I finished the last stroke the mark ignited and glowed even brighter than the spirit.

"It's working," Justice whispered. The spirit continued on in the direction of the wall without any hesitation and crossed through. "Did it work?"

"I'm not sure." I stepped a little closer hoping to hear or see something. "Do you—" My words were cut off as Justice's expression changed and all emotion was wiped from his face. With unseeing eyes, he turned and joined the other spirits in their walk toward the wall. "Justice!" I shouted and ran over to him.

Gripping his arm, I tugged as hard as I could, but it was like pulling on a statue even

though his skin was now the glowing, swirling liquid like the spirit we'd marked. He was rigid and unmoving as he continued his silent walk to the other side. Then I remembered I could still contact Bran. "Bran, Justice is caught in the pull of the veil. I'm trying to stop him but he's not responding. I need your help."

"Jordan, I'm here," he immediately answered. I tried not to sag with relief, but Justice still had not slowed down his constant march to his very real demise. Bran's voice took on the strange tone it had when he'd talked to me across the expanse of the two realms. "Justice, stop!"

His voice boomed with power and command and as soon as Bran said the words, Justice froze. He still was under the spell of the veil, and I was worried he'd try again to walk through. If he did, there would be nothing I could do to help him. Slowly I approached, and noticed again how similar he looked to the others that were walking around us to the veil. They all wore the same expression, but it wasn't sad or without feeling. They looked happy, and at peace. For a moment I considered letting him go. But it had to be his choice, and the influence of the veil was so strong here it was hard to deny it.

"Jordan, give me the vial Janis gave you," Justice said through gritted teeth. Then I realized he wasn't at peace at all. He was fighting to stay here and not cross over.

I glanced down at my hand and what had just been a silver rod, was once again the vial. "We'll give it to another spirit to carry over," I said, knowing exactly what he was thinking.

With a considerable amount of effort, he forced his hand out. "Jordan. It's okay, having you two as friends has meant more to me than I could ever say. Give me the vial." He reached out his hand while his feet stayed immobile, and I wondered if Bran was still holding him in place. "He cannot force me to do his will. His influence isn't as strong here, I obey because he's my friend."

“Justice, no,” I begged, and I knew then he meant as much to me as he did to Bran. He was a friend, and I didn’t want to lose him. Just then one of the bright glowing spirits walked past us and slowly raised their hand toward the wall of the veil. I bolted and before they could put their hand through, I shoved the vial into their hand.

Justice’s eyes widened as we both watched, and he continued to fight the pull of the veil. For a moment nothing happened. The spirit still glowed but its arm was hidden in the wall. A deep rumbling sounded, and the spirits closest to the wall were thrown back away. The spirit we’d used was also thrown free of the wall, but as soon as its arm was free the hole remained open. I rushed over and looked inside.

Howls of pain and screeches of anger filled the air as a creature even more horrible than what had been summoned by Sophia writhed in pain. Its face was covered by a black veil and its hands were only bones, but they were not human hands. Long talons curled and flexed as it tried to shake off the effects of the vial. It threw its head back as it roared, and I noticed one of its hands was black and mangled just as I was tugged away from the wall by the cord that was attached to Justice.

Suddenly he was pulled backwards too. His eyes were wide, and his arms reached out to me as he was dragged back to Bran by the silver rope we’d both been secured with. But a hand caught my arm stopping me.

“Let go, I need to leave,” I pleaded as I watched Justice disappear.

The rope around my waist tugged until it was pulled tight, but I was held in place by the spirit who had carried the vial. It had a human shape but there were no defined details, just the swirling energy that most of them were made of. “Seer, you must know, this is only the beginning. You’ve only wounded the beast. It will return again. I suggest you prepare for that day.” It transformed then into the shape of a woman. I didn’t recognize her, but her energy was familiar.

“Who are you?” I managed to sputter out.

“It is from me your family was born. Never forget the greatest threat to us on both sides of the veil is the wraith. It will stop at nothing to inherit more power. Build your protections and make a plan, because it will return, and you will need to destroy it.” She smiled then before fading into a glowing mist as I was ripped back into the world of the living.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

“Bran!” Justice’s voice was filled with panic as he yelled at me in my mind. Something was going wrong, and I knew it had to be way worse than Justice trying to cross over. But Justice and I had prepared for this, and after compelling him he was finally free of the veil.

I listened as Justice yelled to Jordan and could feel him jerking on the rope. “Pull us out!” Justice shouted and instantly I pulled as hard as my powers allowed. Justice landed in a heap on the grass awake while Jordan was unconscious.

“What happened?” I asked Justice, as I hurried to Jordan and patted his cheek.

“Give him a moment,” Janis encouraged.

Seconds felt like hours as I waited for him to wake up. “Jordan?” I whispered, and finally his eyes fluttered open.

“Justice! Where is he?” Jordan sat up and scrambled to the edge of the lounge. His eyes were frantic before he looked to the yard. Justice sat in the grass laughing while Buddy— his tail going a million miles a minute, he was so excited and happy—licked him.

“He’s there,” I said to Jordan, who breathed a sigh of relief.

“Take me home,” he murmured, before nuzzling into my neck.

“He’s okay,” Janis reassured me as she helped me get him into the car. “Take him home.” She patted me on the back before I leaned over and buckled him in.

“Thanks, Janis,” I said, before walking around the car and climbing in.

“Thank you,” Jordan murmured, before he fell back to sleep.

I drove home and all the way there I thought of all the things that could have happened to him but as far as I knew none of it had. He made it back and as far as I could tell he was tired but safe.

“I wish you could have seen him there. He was so brave,” Justice said from the back seat where he sat with Buddy. But he didn’t need to tell me that. Just the fact Jordan went at all told me exactly how brave he was. “Normally when I’m near Jordan I can’t feel his emotions. Some of the living are so full of feelings it’s hard not to sense them. But not him. Maybe it’s because he’s an empath and it makes him not as readable.”

“You can feel our emotions?” I asked and glanced at him in the rearview mirror.

“Yes. All spirits can. Some of us are actually drawn to emotions, but I think you’ve figured that out already.” Justice rarely spoke about what spirits did or didn’t do. He kept most of our conversations to what was happening in that moment, and he mostly tried to pretend he wasn’t part of the spirit world. “Yours are easy to read. They’re visible and very much a part of who you are, but you hide them from humans. It’s not easy to hide from spirits.”

“What happened when you were there?” I asked, and hoped to take the focus off me and my emotions.

“We found a spirit who we thought the wraith would target, and we were right. It passed through the barrier with the mark, but it wasn’t enough to destroy it or even wound it. When that didn’t work, we tried the vial Janis gave us. At least it looked like a vial after Jordan used it to mark the first spirit.”

“The mark didn’t do anything?” That shocked me. I’d gotten that mark from that evil journal, and so far, nothing I’d used from it had failed.

“The spirit was past the realm so we couldn’t see exactly what happened, but it did not stop the wraith from trying to feed on another. Jordan put the vial in that spirit’s hand before it moved to the wall.”

“That spirit’s hand passed the vial through to the other side before being blown back away from it. It was one of my ancestors,” Jordan whispered.

I turned to look at him, surprised to find him awake, and happy we were nearly home. “How could that be?”

“I’m not sure, but there’s more.” He grimaced as he shifted in the seat.

“Are you okay?” I asked, and pulled up to the house.

“Yeah, just really happy to be out of there. The spirit said the wraith would be fighting to come into this world and we need to prepare.”

“But wouldn’t an ancestor have crossed over already?”

“She said she was where my family came from, and I think she was waiting to warn me.”

“Warn you?”

“The wraith isn’t gone, and we need to be ready when it manages to make it into our world. It will cross the veil.” Neither of us made a move to get out of the car, and when Jordan’s eyes met mine, his fear was clear. “I think this might be the only chance we have to completely destroy it.”

I cupped his cheek and met his eyes. “Then we’ll destroy it. There’s nothing we can’t do together.”

His hand came up and covered mine. “No, there’s not.” I kissed him the way I’d wanted to since he’d returned to his body. “I love you.”

“I love you too, and no witch, or wraith, or spirit is going to keep us apart. We’re strong enough to destroy it.” His words were so full of conviction I believed every word he said, and any bit of doubt I may have had melted away.

“We fight,” I whispered.

“We fight.”

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:01 am

Neither of us wanted to admit it, but a lot had changed since I'd returned from the veil. My senses had been activated and now I practiced working with wayward spirits that came through the morgue and worked to find more ways to be a strong seer. Bran did the same; he studied the notebook his mother had left daily and learned so many things he didn't know, and many things he wanted to forget.

"Justice, any news from the veil?" I asked. Once he'd gone there with me, he was now able to slip into the space between both worlds as easily as he could walk through a wall. The mark Bran had drawn on him remained, just in case he got into any trouble there.

"Nothing has changed. The wraith has started feeding on spirits again but there aren't as many of them that glow with power. I'm not sure if there are less of them or if he's consumed the few that were left," Justice said. He was at our house today, which was something else that had changed. He used to stay at the morgue, or somewhere else more than he was here. But now he preferred to be with us as often as he could.

"You didn't feel the pull to cross over?" Bran asked from where he sat at the kitchen table practicing an incantation he'd been studying.

"Not this time, but I stayed as far away as I could." He knelt and patted Buddy. "There was one strange thing though." He looked at me and for a moment I had to remind myself I was seeing his spirit and not who Justice was before he was killed.

"What was it?" I asked.

"Your ancestor was there."

“But she walked through the veil. I’d seen it just before I’d been pulled back to my body.”

“I think she has the ability to walk between the two realities when she desires and without harm,” Justice said.

“Is that possible?” I asked Bran.

“Jordan, I’m pretty sure there is nothing that’s impossible,” Bran said with a grin.

“That must be how she was able to deliver the vial to the wraith without it consuming her spirit. She’ll be handy to have on that side of the barrier,” I said. “Have you learned anything else about your mark?”

“There’s a lot written about it, but in the journal it’s more specific. Metatron’s cube is tied to all the other symbols and uses them all so it’s very powerful. I told you how it helps form a bridge from one reality to the next, but there’s so much more.” Bran’s mark had gone back to being invisible. It seemed it would only appear when he needed to use its power, or maybe the marks had a sense for when it was time to activate. Either way we were all thankful for it. “I can make the mark you used more permanent if you’d like.”

I thought about it a moment before responding. The marks had not always helped us and had been used against us in horrible ways. Plus, the fact Sophia had been used to collect more of them in order to gain more power made me leery of them. They seemed to corrupt anyone who used them—except Bran. “Not yet. If we need it to destroy the wraith then I’ll consider it. But I like the idea of being able to use it when we need it.” The mark had bound me to Bran in different ways than we already were, but it also helped me share his strength and some of his powers, something that could come in handy on the other side of the veil.

“I could go for a break, what do you think?” he said, and when our eyes met my

breath sped up.

“You know I’m always ready for a break,” I said, and ignored Justice rolling his eyes and faking a gag.

“I’ll be back later. Come on, Buddy,” Justice said as he led Buddy through the wall and to who knew where.

As soon as Justice was through the wall, I was straddling Bran where he still sat in one of the kitchen chairs. “Listening to you talk about the supernatural does strange things to me,” I whispered, before licking his neck and grinding down on him. This was something else that had changed. Since I’d returned, I couldn’t get enough of Bran physically. His touch alone made me want him constantly. The slight brush of a hand at work or the heat of him standing close to me were enough to make me shove him into the storage room at work more times than I could count.

“Oh yeah,” Bran breathed out as he closed his eyes and enjoyed all the sensations. Our lips met and my tongue found his as we kissed until both of us needed to breathe, but I still couldn’t completely back away from him and trailed my lips along to his ear.

“I’m going to suck you,” I whispered, and as soon as the words left my mouth Bran was unbuttoning his pants and trying to slip them down. “Anxious?”

“Always,” he said, and when he opened his eyes, the familiar fire was there. Love, lust, and want all rolled into one singular need. My mouth watered as I moved to my knees in front of him and slid his pants down just far enough to give me access.

“Keep your hands here,” I said, and placed them around the back of the chair which forced his back to bow just enough to shove him closer to my mouth. A drop of moisture gathered at the tip as I slowly leaned down while holding his hips still. His taste on my tongue made it harder for me to control myself and instead of going

slowly and teasing him like I wanted, I swallowed him down as much as I could and groaned.

He flinched back and shoved himself even deeper into my throat, but I didn't have it in me to care, and forced myself not to gag as I was lost in his taste and the scent I craved. "Oh god," he groaned, and I knew it wouldn't take long before he was ready to climax, so I hurried to pull my pants down enough to stroke my own straining hardness.

I tried to go slow and make it last but hard and fast felt too fucking good, and when he started to come it put me over the edge and I followed. Bran threw his head back as he panted with the last few bursts of his orgasm while I lay my head down on his thigh and wiped my mouth. "Every time I want to go slow and make it last, and every time I can't resist you."

He used his hand to tip up my chin enough to meet his eyes. "You make me want you more every fucking day, and there is no way I could have held off either. Why deny ourselves, we can just do it more often." He grinned at me before pulling me in for a kiss, and a taste.

Maybe we both realized every moment was precious, or maybe we knew we may not have more of these moments. But either way we were both on the same page and wanted to be together as much as we possibly could. Once we'd both cleaned up, we got right back to studying the journals that we hoped held more answers.

"It would be really helpful if you could just look at this journal," I said as I flipped through my family's. "You're a lot better at figuring out what's helpful than I am."

"Your family put that concealment spell there for a reason, and I'm willing to live with that. You're doing fine, and I trust you to share anything you find that could be helpful," Bran said as he flipped through his mother's journal which was now enclosed in a bubble of magic that only let him touch it but didn't allow any magic to

penetrate and touch the book or allow the book to instigate any magic from within.
“Want me to allow you to read this one?”

I held my hands out to him. “Nope, I’m good. I barely want to touch this one,” I said, making him laugh.

“If there’s something in here we can use to destroy the wraith, we’ll find it. I just hope it’s not too much stronger when that fight happens.” He’d said this many times, and since he knew way more about how his abilities worked, I hoped for the same.

“We’ll figure it out, and we’ll be ready.”

Justice walked through the wall then with Buddy. “Oh, thank god it was a quick one,” he said, making us all laugh.

Things had changed so much for us all but with the four of us and Janis to help, we’d figure it out or die trying.

THE END