

Chapter One

SOPHIE LAWRENCE FOLLOWED her best friend, Lilli, into their sociology class at Lotus Academy. A few minutes early, they slid into a row in the large auditorium.

“Sophie, are you okay? You look really tired.”

“I didn’t sleep well last night. I had another vision,” Sophie whispered as students filed in.

“About the kidnappings?” Lilli whispered back. “We have to do something.”

“I know. I can’t believe we’re even having a fall semester. Three students were kidnapped over the summer, and none have been found.”

“We could tell them about your visions.”

“I doubt that would work any better than the letters I’ve shown the police. They’d institutionalize me.”

Sometimes her dreams, or visions, as Lilli deemed them, drove her almost to insanity. The other night she’d dreamt of a girl held prisoner in a stone chamber and had awoken to the smell of charred flesh.

What person dreamed these types of things and remained normal? How long was she going to have to deal with it? Several months was beginning to feel like eternity already, and with no end in sight, she wasn’t sure she was going to make it. If these dreams didn’t end soon, Sophie was going to *volunteer* to be institutionalized.

More students entered the classroom. Sophie glanced up, and her breath caught in her chest as the rest of the room faded away.

All except for him.

His gray-eyed gaze met her violet ones, and it hit her like a bolt of lightning. She gasped as his eyes widened. Like he recognized her, even though they’d never met before now.

Absolute trust and affection swelled inside her as she continued staring. Even from where she sat, she could tell he was taller than most boys, and some type of athlete from the muscles in his arms and chest. His brown hair was mussed, as if he'd just woken up, and his eyes were the color of ashes, pale and stormy.

Since he'd jerked to a stop the moment their gazes met, he was blocking the doorway to the classroom. Someone shoved him, and he blinked.

The spell was broken. He averted his face from her and climbed the rows.

Sophie's face flamed as she thought about how hard she'd been staring. It had almost been like one of her visions. She couldn't have stopped if she'd wanted to. Beside her, Lilli was breathing in through her nose and out through her mouth rapidly. "Are you okay?" Sophie asked.

Lilli glanced at Sophie with eyes full of wonder. "What just happened?"

"You saw him, too?"

"The curly-haired god with the muscles of Adonis and puppy-dog eyes?" Lilli sighed and bit her lip.

"What? No. I saw someone else." Sophie desperately wanted to risk a look back to see if he was still there. That he hadn't been one of her visions.

"I think something magical happened when I saw him, Sophie. It felt like lightning and sparks all at the same time!" Lilli turned in her seat to look back. Sophie watched her eyes glaze over before she turned back around. "It's like I recognize him from somewhere. I know I've never seen him. It's not like I would forget that face."

Sophie decided the risk was enough and turned. There he was, a few rows behind them. Her heart started hammering in her chest. Next to him was the curly-haired god, who was indeed cute, with auburn hair and deep chocolate eyes. His facial features were almost delicate when he saw her watching, and she felt a smaller moment of familiarity.

She shot around and faced the front. "I had the same thing happen with the guy next to him."

"What do you think it means?"

Sophie's heartbeat was slowly resuming its normal rate. "I don't know. Maybe nothing."

"Nothing?" Lilli hissed. "That was hardly nothing. The room melted away when I saw him. Isn't that what happens when you see your soul mate?"

"That doesn't exist. That's just a myth."

"So are healers and psychics, right?" Lilli tucked a piece of hair behind her ear and tapped the pencil on her notebook. "He was hot!"

"Yeah, I guess." Sophie tried to push the strange feeling out of her mind.

"Come on, Sophie. They were both hot."

"They're normal. We're not. Did you forget that I have visions and you heal people?"

"Are we supposed to be alone for the rest of our lives because of these gifts? I don't think so. And besides, there is nothing wrong with looking."

"Who's looking at what?"

Lilli and Sophie glanced at each other. Did someone overhear the first part of that conversation? They glanced up at the guy standing next to their seats. He was different from the others, dressed in black pants and a tight black t-shirt. His blond hair was short and spiky, and tattoos danced out from under his sleeves. When he raised an eyebrow, the hoop there rose, too.

"Uh, nothing." Sophie's cheeks heated.

"She's so cute when she blushes," he said to Lilli. When he reached his hand to shake Lilli's, the leather cuffs on his wrists almost scraped Sophie's face. His amber eyes twinkled with warmth. "I'm Aidan."

"I'm Lilli, and this is Sophie."

Sophie murmured a hello to him.

"Is she always like this?" He flashed a smile, a dimple showing to the left of his lips.

"I think you bring it out of her."

"Hey, I can switch seats so you lovebirds can be closer," Sophie interrupted.

Lilli and Aidan laughed. They quickly silenced it as the professor entered the room.

"Hello, class. I'm Ms. Whittaker, and this is Sociology."

The teacher's blonde ponytail swayed as she walked to the first of the rows and stopped. Sophie couldn't help but feel something was off.

The way Ms. Whittaker moved didn't bring teacher to mind. Sophie instead thought of dancers.

Whittaker began passing out the syllabus to the class.

She stopped by Sophie's row and handed some papers to Aidan. Her gaze traveled over all three of them before moving on. Sophie could feel the excitement brimming off of the teacher and wondered where it was coming from. Was she that happy to be teaching?

"Your grade will be based on one semester-long project. I want you to study the communication measures of students and people near the school. I've already picked the groups."

Everyone groaned.

"This is an advanced school, not to mention Sociology—the scientific study of society. You need to be pushed out of your comfort zones. That means you will be grouped with people you may have never met. As I call out your names, form your groups. We'll resume regular class on Wednesday."

"Do you think we'll get a group together?"

"I doubt it, Lilli. She probably looked at our files and knows we're from the same town."

"I'm not from your town. Maybe we'll get a group together."

Sophie narrowed her eyes at Aidan. "Shut up."

"Group number two consists of Lilli Washington, Jackson Donovan, Aidan O'Brien, Tristan Adams, Sophie Lawrence, and Morgan Tate."

Lilli gave a small squeal as she, Sophie, and Aidan raised their hands. "We're in the same group."

Sophie's smile slipped as the two guys from earlier and a girl joined them. She felt that familiarity toward the girl even as the girl looked down her nose at them.

"Great. We're stuck with two geeks and emo boy." Morgan's loosely curled hair bounced across her shoulders as she studied her painted nails.

Sophie's smile died. Yeah, they may not be popular, but there was no reason to be snotty about it.

Morgan sighed. "At least I'm here with you, Tristan." She latched on to the gray-eyed guy's arm, and Sophie fought back a possessive urge to slap Morgan's perfect face.

Tristan met Sophie's gaze, and heat sparked again as he shrugged Morgan's arm off. He ran a hand through his hair, mussing it even more.

Morgan pouted and leaned forward to show off her curves. "You're no fun anymore."

"Where should we meet? We have practice this afternoon, but should be okay after that." Jackson, the curly-haired god, gestured between him and Tristan as he spoke. He definitely reminded Sophie of a woodland deity. He was toned and muscled, but his features were practically angelic. She thought football would almost be too violent for him.

"I have cheer practice today. I'm not missing it for this," Morgan said.

"No one said you had to, princess." Aidan leaned back in his chair.

Morgan narrowed her cerulean eyes. They were startling against the backdrop of her cocoa-colored skin. Sophie had to blink against the brilliance.

"Let's meet at seven," Lilli said, attempting to smooth things over.

"Seven is fine." Jackson smiled down at Lilli.

* * *

Sophie approached the library doors, the vision at the forefront of her mind. Panic threatened to choke her, but she fought the sensation down with a few deep breaths. Meeting the others earlier had sparked her psychic gift, and she didn't want it to come true. Lilli shot her a glance and then looked pointedly at the door.

Guilt panged in Sophie's heart. It was her fault Lilli was in Boston, hours from home. That Lilli volunteered to follow her there didn't matter. Now Lilli was willing to follow her inside this library, knowing Sophie's visions, because that's who she was. Loyal, kind, determined. Not one to turn from something she felt she had to do.

Again she could see and hear the vision. The battle, the screams. She smelled brimstone. All she remembered clearly was Lilli using her healing gift to the point of exhaustion. Sophie wanted to protect her from that, but couldn't. They'd made a pact years ago to always share what went on with their gifts.

Sophie took another deep breath and entered the library. It was after dark because Morgan wouldn't miss cheerleading practice for their Sociology project.

Morgan was somehow a part of this. Whatever this was. As were the other study group members. The connection had slammed into Sophie the moment she'd met them in class. So she'd try to be nice.