

## Chapter One

Magic was a thing that the world feared during that time. It was misunderstood, or not understood at all, which is why even the most civilized, advanced societies waged a war to silence it. But it was misunderstood because it was forbidden, an art forbidden, considered sinful, by religious standards of the day. Those who practiced magic were thought to contain demons, evil spirits, or to have made bargains with evil creatures.

This didn't deter the Beauchamp family; it encouraged them to explore magic and to inevitably fall in love with it.

What the church condemned, starting with Larue Beauchamp in the eleventh century, the Beauchamp family explored. Larue found that magic offered sensual benefits he couldn't ignore. It empowered him to heal wounds, live longer, create structures and food from nothing, and provide monetary riches to himself and his family.

He saw that the benefits were so great that he required that his children learn at least one category of magic to enhance the quality of their life.

Larue reasoned that just because magic was outlawed by the church, that no one could truly understand its roots of creation, didn't make it an evil force. He sought to understand the scientific qualities of it, discovering that even magic contained limits to what it could accomplish.

Soon he found others who considered themselves scholars of the magic arts and joined their quest to understand it. Long hours, within a set of carefully insulated rooms, he and his colleagues practiced various forms of magic: healing, elemental, alchemical, and creating objects from what they thought, at the time, out of nothing.

For several years, Larue studied unharrassed. His wife supported him and his children were studying a selected category of magic.

Inevitably, an unsuspecting neighbor found their way into the room after hearing strange sounds in that direction. They quickly

reported what they'd seen to the local authorities, who sought out those who practiced magic.

Larue took his family with great haste, fleeing to the outer regions of France to seek peace. But he found none. The word of his practices had reached the church, who had decreed that they'd scavenge the country till the "witches and devil's handymen", as Larue and his colleagues were termed, had been extinguished.

For a few years, Larue hid his family safely. Then his oldest son had learned enough magic to destroy his father's cloak that had kept them hidden, and ventured out. He was sheltered, didn't believe his father's warnings that the Christians would kill him for using magic, and quickly found himself in trouble.

He tried to flee but was caught and promptly run through with a sword, dying a few minutes after.

Larue became more afraid for his family, but not willing to cease practicing magic, he instead taught them the arts of how to keep themselves and their residences hidden from all people.

This worked for the two hundred years that the family lived in fear of their practices. They created all they needed, conversed little with people who didn't practice magic, and lived a generally low-key, contented life.

In the early Renaissance, approximately 1400, the public literacy rate steadily increased; ancient Greek and Roman texts were more thoroughly studied, read, and even applied by the populace.

Tolerance for other lifestyles started rising out of this enlightenment, and though the church still condemned magic, it was accepted in certain more eccentric circles. These circles encouraged the practice of it for human benefit.

Certain nobles of broad influence even patronized a few magic scholars and received direct benefits for their patronage. The Beauchamp family fell into this fortunate circumstance.

The patrons agreed to keep the details of their service to those they supplied as long as the beneficiaries followed their terms.

Up till the 1600s, the Beauchamp family enjoyed this layer of protection, increasing their magical skills steadily through the generations. They were one of the most skilled families in the magic arts in all of France, honored and feared by those who knew of their history pursuing magic.

But the time came in 1610, that the Beauchamp's most supporting patron died, his wife despising magic, threatening to inform the church of what her husband supported. The Beauchamp family fled to Paris and there they settled, concealing their magic, but encouraging their sons Jacques and François to visit their aunt out in the country to safely practice magic.

The boys visited France once a year at first. Then less and less as they grew.

François chose to study the magic arts of controlling water. In the process, he learned to control ice with little difficulty, it simply being frozen water.

Jacques, his younger brother by a few years, had the disposition to oppose everything his brother did in order to appear different. He considered it a necessity to separate himself from everything his brother symbolized as the elder, more responsible model, and live a contrary lifestyle.

They never got along well. The brief time that François and Jacques allied together was to aid their family or others of the magical understanding against those who didn't understand magic.

But those were brief, their relationship otherwise rocky, some would even term nonexistent. François wished his brother would love him but no matter how hard he beseeched Jacques to make peace with him, he wouldn't.

Eventually, the day came that François kissed his aunt good bye and moved to France where he joined His Majesty's Musketeers, fell in love, married, and nearly forgot the troubling hatred of his brother.

Jacques seemed to conform to François's lifestyle however, when he came of age not long after and also moved to Paris, but his



two leather dress coats, one beanie and one new era hat, ear buds, a computer speaker set, and lastly but not least, six packs of bubble gum crammed at the back, all into his locker.

Anger rising, patience depleting, Erik accidentally banged his head and yelled, “This is unacceptable!”

“Something wrong?” clipped in a chipper, mediocre voice of his fellow friend Luke Kellon. “Oh,” Luke glanced around Erik into the stuffed locker, “Nate been around lately?”

“I swear if I could I would rip his arm off so he c-” Erik stopped short, eyes narrowing intently. The hallway was saturated with bodies, but Erik still saw in-between the opened cracks as people walked around, a head of dark hair, jelled back around the ears, those jubilant eyes, that smiling face.

Luke chuckled, “Take it easy.”

Erik gritted his teeth, slammed his hands on the sides of his locker and exhaled, “Take it easy?”

Nate was approaching with Carson glued to his side. Nate Dimitrious, a senior, complete opposite to his unfashionable, dirty self, slinging his scarf around his shoulders, laughing as if there wasn’t a care in the world, had a ritual of circling the school building before classes began to talk to all the people that adored him. Ironically, and Erik knew purposefully planned, Nate’s journey ended right at his locker.

On cue, Nate slammed Erik’s locker closed, almost severing Erik’s fingers, “Hey Erik! How goes it?”

Erik, without facing him, slowly balled his fingers together, released them, and wrenched his locker open, “You were in my locker,” he stated with an even voice, a great feat as he desperately desired to belch the taller teenager in the mouth.

“Yeh. Last Saturday. There was that big dance and I needed a place to stash my extra stuff.”

“Why,” Erik turned towards him, “was it necessary to bring several sets of clothes for one dance?”

Here Nate acted as though he were thinking very hard for a response. This took about ten seconds, he smiling, “I needed options you see. I had to ask Carson which set and accessories I looked best in, isn’t that right?”

“Of course,” she smiled at him with what Erik considered blind, disgusting adoration.

“Whatever,” their further exchange of shameless infatuation further disgusted Erik. He attempted to jump to the point, “You’re not supposed to be getting in my locker. I don’t care to hear how you did it, Nate. If you do it again, I will rat to the principal. Now clean out your mess!”

“I can do that after school.”

“No; you’ll do it now!”

“I don’t think so,” Nate sighed, as if wearied by Erik’s difficult behavior, “I can’t do it right now, you see, because Luke and I need to talk to you about something really important.”

A sense of impending loathing snaked down Erik’s back. He leaned against his locker, arms folded, and glared at both his friends. “Ok, what?”

“Not in front of Carson,” Luke interjected, pulling out a thin chocolate bar.

The three of them looked at Carson, and she, getting the drift, kissed Nate on the cheek and strode off, “Don’t forget about 4 o’clock.”

Nate smiled after her and then joined Erik in leaning against the locker, Luke stepping up in front of them to form a tight circle. Erik actually felt a sense of exciting mystery till Nate murmured, “Luke and I want you to go check out the Haunted Mansion.”

“The Haunted Mansion,” Erik stated, looked at Luke and Nate with a quirked brow, and chuckled, “that fabled mansion in the Haunted Woods? What put you both up to this?”

They were both serious, so serious, that it wasn't possible for Erik to find their proposition funny anymore.

"Nate and I've been doing some intense research at the library for about two weeks now. We want to prove it exists so we can get back at Bray."

"Wait—this is because Bray laughed at you four months ago when you both dared to debate him over the possible existence of certain city fables and failed? I'm going to class."

Erik pushed gently away from the locker.

"No! No wait!" Luke pushed Erik back against the locker, "I want you to go with me 'cuzz two people are better than one."

The sense of urgency in Luke's voice caught Erik by surprise for a couple seconds. They were both looking so deeply at him with their eyes open wide, hands pressed to the locker around him, leaning forward to keep their conversation super secret.

But Erik knew that Luke and Nate, as stupid and annoying as they usually were, never pursued something for such trivial reasons as removing embarrassment or proving someone wrong.

"Stop breathing in my face. Gross," Erik pushed Luke away so he could stand straight. Glaring hard back and forth between them, he stated, "The Haunted Mansion is a fairy tale and I'm ashamed that either of you believe such a kiddy thing. Now let me get to cla—"

"No," Nate cut him off and grabbed his shirt, "It does exist! And you're going to go with Luke tonight to find it. Can't you imagine the historic implications such a finding could make on the world?"

"I can imagine the implications of a fight in the hall if you don't get your hands off me."

Nate released him, smiling and shrugging.

"So will you go with me?" Luke hopefully asked.

And Erik blandly responded, "No," snatching Nate's math book since he couldn't find his own, "It's just a stupid fairy tale. If such a place existed, believe me, the people who are in charge of

finding old stuff like that would have found it long ago. A huge mansion can't just hide away in the forest as it wishes."

Erik sensed this argument wasn't going to close. He started walking down the hallway to his first class and, to his growing agitation, Nate and Luke slipped in beside him.

"If that was so," Nate tried a little history and geography on Erik, "how would you explain all the French stuff around here? Why, everything's named after François! Or his wife, or kid—or other French stuff. Like François Forest and stuff."

Erik huffed, "Great string of details Nate. Now, if I don't recall, you failed history and you almost failed geography. François Beauchamp was a mythical character created as a French fairy tale, the same way Beauty and the Beast and other fairy tales of the time were, to instruct children with proper morals. And to try to claim the authenticity of a myth based on designations is faulty. Many names are used in more than one place."

"But every name has a story behind it."

Passing Luke a withering frown for that pathetic attempt at a counterstrike, Erik turned to Nate, "Well," he said, with a rare malicious smile forming, "The simple answer is that this part of the United States in the 1600s experienced an influx of French influence. I can't say how, seeing that there was no history of any significant French people in this part of the world at that time, but things are often overlooked in history."

Nate for once appeared dumbfounded, "Alright, fine. You can think that." He turned away, but spun back with his index finger up, "but let's make a bet: let's bet that if you don't find the Haunted Mansion tonight, that I'll give you five hundred bucks."

Erik stopped walking. Nate and Luke spun around and stepped back beside him. It took a minute of contemplation before Erik carefully inquired, "Are you being serious?"

"Take advantage of this, Erik," Luke coughed, having swallowed his chocolate bar too quickly, "it's a juicy and really easy five



neatly, labeled with their owner's name. Some showed signs of faithful wear: yellowing edges, loose threads, gloves becoming threadbare and dented masks.

Bray pulled out his set and slipped the jacket on from the front. He preferred the jackets that zipped up at the back. Then, as he turned away from the huddled mass of fencers, he heard the door open and looked back to see who it was.

Erik, his half cousin, dumping his backpack and foil next to Bray's, and without hesitation, approaching the armory to slip on his own fencing set.

It never ceased to humor Bray how his geeky, uncoordinated, often pathetically unaware half cousin never feared approaching him as the others jealously whispered amongst themselves.

"Afternoon," Bray tugged on his gloves and flexed his fingers.

"Afternoon," Erik repeated, hastily pulling on his fencing gear to catch up to Bray, "guess you just got here?"

"I did."

"Good. I hate to keep you waiting."

"It's OK. I would have just read some sonnets."

Erik rolled his eyes. Most would have taken Bray's response as sarcasm, but he knew Bray indeed would have read some sort of Renaissance poetry, most likely rambling a line or two in French and, in that almost seductive deep voice of his, explaining the brilliance of the lines.

"School went smoothly?"

"No," Erik stated, walking out to the fencing strip.

To that, Bray cocked his head, put his mask on, and grabbed both their foils, "What happened?"

"The same."

"Here," he tossed the foil to Erik. "So, was it Elaine or Nate?"

“Nate.”

They stood several feet apart, their left feet straight, heels touching, right foot facing out at a ninety degree angle. In unison, both brought their foils before their faces, swiped them down to the left, and bent their knees with their empty hands placed above the back of their heads.

“So,” Bray continued to probe as they fenced, “He caused trouble?”

“Not exactly.”

Bray understood Erik wasn't in the mood to talk, but he intended to find out what the problem was. For years, they'd fenced in this very sale, at first learning together till their fencing master told them the best way to progress was to fence against the other.

From that time, it had become a ritual to meet on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to fence for two hours. Erik's friendships with Nate and Luke continually evolved and as that happened, Erik always had one petty burden or another to vent in their fencing.

It often caused him to lose concentration and Bray would make a touch, just as he did now.

“Touché!” Erik hopped back, then stepped a good few feet away and aligned himself once more in the en guard position.

“So if Nate didn't exactly cause a problem, what did he do? Your fencing is sloppy. I know you're upset about something.”

“You're right!” Erik attempted a lunge; Bray parried, attempted to make a touch, to which Erik parried back, retreating a few steps at the same time. “That jerk dumped his garbage in my locker and just about forced me to go with Luke tonight to find the Haunted Mansion.”

“Oh, really?” Bray sounded almost monotonous, but Erik knew that tone.

“Stop patronizing me, Bray.”

Bray made another touch and took his mask off, “Really, this isn’t a challenge. I guess it’s upsetting you more than you’ll let on that you have to look for the Haunted Mansion, isn’t it?”

“I guess,” Erik’s voice dropped off and he sighed. “I don’t understand why I let Nate push me around.”

“It’s because you don’t stand up for yourself. It’s easier for you be abused since it doesn’t require any responsibility. If you stood up for yourself, people’s perceptions of you, including Nate’s, would change and there would be a new, harder standard you’d have to maintain.”

That was very annoying, to be read so easily. It was embarrassing because it was true, and therefore, as Erik processed his emotional response, a great discomfort. Not that it was surprising. Nate was a great observer, analyzer, and predictor of people’s personalities and feelings. He was talented in studying the subconscious psychological reasoning of people’s actions.

“Let’s just fence,” Erik positioned himself in the en guard position and impatiently waited for Bray to give the salute and fall into position after him.

“If you say so.”

They resumed fencing for about ten more minutes before Erik made a touch, saluted his half-cousin, and dropped down onto one of the benches aligned against the far wall.

“Bray, how's things with your dad?”

“The same.”

That response meant that Bray and his father still weren't getting along. Bray, being the silent, contemplative type, hadn't found common ground with his father; and his father being a social, busy scientist, didn't understand his son's like of monotony and silence. They spoke little, few times initiating awkward conversation in which both their understanding of the other's interests lacked. Lately, it had become painful for them to be in the same room together so Bray

spent more time engaged in seclusion and his father spent more time with his work.

Bray pressed a towel to his face and yawned, seeming uncaring of his family's dysfunction, "He still thinks he can keep me out of the basement. I thought last time would have proved otherwise."

"You broke into it again?" Erik almost gasped out, eyes wide.

"Don't be so surprised," responded Bray, passing Erik a cool smile, "the last time, I burned the door away with a simple acidic compound. Not sure how I'll get into it this time since he removed all acidic substances, but I know I will."

Erik advised against it, "I wouldn't if I were you. Playing with chemicals isn't worth the adrenaline."

His cousin thought otherwise. His deep intake and slow exhale of air, leaning back against the wall and closing his eyes for a couple seconds, he shook his head, "You just don't know what that rush feels like. It's way more than fencing or bungee jumping or even drugs."

Erik slouched forward, running both his hands through his hair, "Don't be a stupid fool!"

"I'll do what I please."

"OK, fine. We're through here," he rose, grabbed his foil while glaring at Bray's collected grin, and walked over to the armory to remove his fencing gear.

Bray secretly liked it when Erik fussed over him. It was nice to know someone cared about him.

## Chapter Two

Billet-doux Street was located in the northern residential section of Zoe Dominique, a collection of mini-mansions commonly placed within carefully manicured, Victorian-style lawns, some boasting iron gates and a set of Corinthian-style columns before the front entrances.

This neighborhood also happened to be the closest clustering of buildings to the Haunted Woods, the thickest set of forestry that no lumber company, including Seeton Lumber Mills, could harvest because of its cultural and historical roll.

Though no exploration parties or archaeologists had ever located The Haunted Mansion, the mysticism surrounding François Beauchamp and the mansion's existence lingered so prevalently that the forest had been deemed a national heritage. All of these factors contributed to the extreme denseness of the foliage and excessive darkness even worse than any of the other, regularly preened and planted forests around the city.

Erik was standing outside Edouard Public Library, which was a convenient seven blocks from his house, hugging his arms to his chest to try to keep warm. He'd been waiting for Luke for 20 minutes now and was becoming very irritated.

"If he doesn't arrive in 10 seconds," Erik muttered and of course, on cue, Luke's skinny frame appeared out of the snowy fog. He was running as fast as he could, arms up and hands balled before him, taking long strides. That, plus his skinny jeans, orange scarf, and oversized jacket, truly completed his portrait as a pure geek.

"Good evening," Erik cocked his head forward with a sarcastic smile, "how are you?"

"Ho! Sorry Erik! I lost track of the time. You see there was this ultra jerk on the game and-" He paused, darted his eyes to Erik's face, and slowly closed his mouth. This wasn't a good time, based on Erik's frozen face of anger, he wisely concluded. "Well, I'm here, so let's go."

"Ladies first."

“Oh ha, ha, ha, ha, so funny, ha, ha, he, he, ha ha uh-huh.” It wasn't funny.

Luke handed Erik hot cocoa in an insulated bottle. That was a trick he'd learned: when Erik was upset, giving him something tasty usually sedated him. It seemed to work since Erik started walking in the direction of the woods.

The Haunted Woods was past the library about half a mile, to short of a distance to make a taxi trip worth the effort. Since there was no other useful alternative, they both walked quickly to preserve some warmth.

Approaching the forest's edge, Luke moaned, “I drank all my cocoa.”

Erik pushed him into the trees, “Like that's my fault.”

“Hey, hey not so harsh! My bones—I'm a delicate creature, and all that.”

“Yes, Dear.”

After they both explored the forest for a good few minutes of pure darkness, Erik pulled out a flashlight.

“Man alive, if I have to freeze to death in a forest, I intend to freeze with light.”

Luke snorted, “Right, because that would help so much.”

Erik handed the flashlight to Luke, “For that, you get the honor of leading.”

They became quiet, listening to the rustling of the branches, the occasional owl hooting and sound of a cracking branch. Every so often, one of them stepped on a twig and gasped, but never admitting to have been startled.

Something flapped by Luke very close, “What the heck was that?” and he lost his balance, dropping the flashlight and falling against Erik.

“You douche!” Erik pushed him off, fetched the flashlight, “it was just a bird.

Luke fake-pouted, “You’re as mean as Nate!”

“No one’s as mean as Nate.”

They continued on, Luke being more annoying, “you’ve got no sense of humor.”

“And you have no sense of courage.”

“Hey, you’re the one that didn’t want to come to the Haunted Woods. Nate and I had to make you.”

“No one made me go,” he pushed some low-hanging branches aside, “but you obviously won’t believe anything otherwise.”

The further they wondered around in the forest with Luke attempting to read some map he and Nate either made or found from who knows where, of the geographical layout of the forest, the more regretful Erik grew. He was cursing himself now for taking up their bet.

This whole venture was vain because the Haunted Mansion was just a myth stimulated by city-wide gossip. From the pioneers settling up till now, dozens of books had been written about The Haunted Woods, François Beauchamp, magical seals and curses, and maps of the forest had even been sketched down in, sadly, wide-read books on the subject.

These books produced city-wide gossip about what the Haunted Mansion must look like. A Victorian-style mansion was the most common agreement. But others insisted that since magic was involved, that it would look more “magical”—whatever that meant.

And of course there was François himself, a tragic figure. He had been a musketeer, his family had been murdered, and he’d embarked on a vengeful quest to kill his family’s murderer, which ended up being his own brother.

Not that Erik cared. He was totally bored with reading about François, studying François, debating over whether the man had actually lived or not.

In addition to all that, almost half of the stories, histories, and myths surrounding François claimed that he was a member of a family that had practiced magic for many generations. That was where Erik won in the debate: slamming others on the ludicrousness of magic.

Erik was so agitated that he couldn't help but speak his thoughts aloud, "I wish I wasn't living in this city. I can't stand that it's founded on French myths. I mean, if it was real French history—if something real had happened here like an American-French war—that would be OK. A place like this can't continue founded on fables."

"This is real to me, but there's no point debating it."

"Of course not. You won't see the logic of it."

Luke pushed a branch aside and purposefully let it slap Erik in the face. While Erik fussed, he said, "It's what you consider myth that's often the strongest foundation for cities, culture, and revolution. Don't diss it like a fool, Erik."

Erik wiped his face, scowled but didn't refute this. He did, however, continue to vent in his mind.

Erik didn't hate François for any personal reason. Rather, it was his art teacher hanging up a portrait of a gorgeous man with flowing blue robes; it was the fleur-di-lis-branded basketball uniform Nate wore, plus similar fleur-di-lis jewelry Elaine bought. The musketeer souvenirs that lined the streets from spinning racks were the worst. Tourists perusing Zoe Dominique clustered around anything musketeer they could buy.

"Hey," Luke nudged him, "I think we're almost there."

"I hope so. I feel like we've been out here forever. My toes feel like they're not there."

"Gah, you're worse than a little kid."

They emerged from their escapade of tripping over roots, rubbing against moss and vines, and stepping in very muddy puddles to a huge semi-circle of tall trees guarding a big, wide black object.

“Oh,” Luke breathed, “check this out!”

As their eyes adjusted to the glowing light of the snowflakes falling from the completely open circle in the forest, the black shape took form. It was, to Erik's personal embarrassment at being proved wrong, and his outward horror, a huge mansion. It stood three stories high, wider than it was tall, mahogany brick red, with at least eighteen rectangular windows streamed out from left to right.

It sat before a lot of freshly manicured grass, an oddity Luke verbally noted as they carefully walked up to the front iron gate. The structure was circular at the left and right sides, seeming to sink in at the middle, with a tall, oak door that was ajar, just as the gate had been.

“It's like the trees are waiting on the house,” Luke noted absently.

Erik didn't feel so in awe of this place as Luke did. He felt chilled like something was watching him, apprehensive about the whole situation.

Luke pushed the door open slowly, “Let's go in and check it out.”

“No, I don't think so. You go in; I'll stay out here and wait.”

“What? Don't be stupid,” Luke grabbed his arm and in they both went, right after the door closed by itself.

“OK!” Erik tried to open it and failed, “what's up with this?”

“Maybe this place really is haunted!”

“You sound so excited.”

“I am!” He produced a camera from his bag, most enthusiastically wondering further down the foyer to find worthwhile oddities for photo journalism.

“Elaine's in on this too, isn't she?” Erik followed.

He snapped a picture of what looked like a sitting room, smiling at Erik, “Of course. You know how she is. Always biting into every story she can.”

“I can't stand reporters,” Erik muttered.

Every hall and room they explored reflected a refined, noble sense of style, contemporary fashion of the time, and excessive wealth. The floors were wooden, covered entirely in some of the rooms by thick, navy carpeting and strips of gold cloth. Chairs sat in the corners, dark oak with firm satin-textured, shimmering cloth. There were tea tables in some of the rooms, marble fireplaces with elaborate crystalline figures ornamenting the mantle. Walls were dominantly dark oak, completely barren of any imagery or portraits.

Luke fingered the heavy silk curtains and ran his hands over some of the tables, “Notice how there's no dust on any of this stuff?”

Erik ran his finger over a chair near the fireplace, “You're right. And everything's seems new.” He looked up at the mantle and tapped on a small, glass figurine of a girl, cocking his head.

“Creepy,” Luke whispered, but not in a tone that reflected he really felt so. He shuffled down the hall to the next room. “Should we go explore upstairs?”

“I wouldn't,” Erik responded, “who knows if the stairs are stable or not. I mean, not that I'd really be sad if you fell through and broke your leg.”

Erik suddenly felt something cold clutching his feet, rising up around his waist, arms, and neck: a coldness, not like cold air or wind, but of something else.

“Uhm, is there something on my leg?” He felt shivers dissipate down his spine.

Luke stepped back and flashed a picture of Erik, “No. I seen nothing. What?”

A sense of disturbance emanated from both teenagers. As Erik continued to stand with a half scared to death expression, this

unsettled Luke and he repeated several times, “What? What’s going on Erik? Is this a joke?”

Erik gasped. The cold sensation had risen around his waist and from there, rapidly over his arms. It started rising above his head.

Panicking, he slammed himself against the wood. Heart pounding, he slid his arm down the wall and found an icy-cold metal handle. There was no way to turn it, so he tried pushing it. The top creaked inward and the wall opened up to reveal a hidden room that smelled of old cardboard.

He was too stunned to get up off the floor for a good minute, and Luke was too stunned to make a sly remark.

It was Erik who came to his senses first, muttering, “disgusting,” as he fanned the stale air away, getting up to enter the room. He couldn’t see much in the dark room, but he could feel that same cold presence lingering in the small space.

“Bring the flashlight in here,” he called back for Luke.

Once the light beamed into the room, Erik saw that it was completely closed off, with one bookshelf to the right, a desk at the back, and a small table to the right with empty glass jars and some closed books sitting atop it.

Their presence in the room caused wind flow, which ignited several loose papers on the desk to flutter and twirl about them to the ground.

“Now,” Luke stepped to the side, “that was creepy.”

“Everything in this place is. I say we leave.”

“Not just yet!”

Erik had already turned and was about to leave the room but Luke grabbed him and spun him back. That was when Erik looked noticed a glittering object lying beneath the desk. Since it was completely dark, minus the flashlight, he knew he shouldn't be seeing anything at all.

Luke followed his gaze but saw nothing, “What is it Erik?”