

VELICIOUS PART ONE: SAMPLE

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PART ONE

5 CHAPTER PREVIEW

SHELIQUE LIZE

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VELICIOUS PART ONE

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1

DANTE THE YEAR 1818

I AWOKE HOT, sweaty, and trembling. I sat up erect, utterly distracted by my surroundings, and feeling antsy for no particular reason. A giddiness was building inside of me, but darkness loitered. I trailed my fingers over the dewy cement beneath me and gaped in confusion as I stared off into the rouge-lit darkness at a dozen thick, rusting iron bars in front of me, condemning me to this small confinement.

Behind me were iron shackles built into the stone wall to hold prisoners. To my left and right was another set of stone barriers, on which grew muck that I could not clearly see. I sneezed, realizing that I

could not only smell the musty, tangy odor, but *taste* the fungus. That was new to me. There was another scent, this one so heavenly that I wanted to bathe myself in the fragrance.

I peered into the opening beyond the iron doors, where the rouge lighting came from an opening high above in the ceiling. I knew the purpose was to allow only a trickle of light in for the captives.

The dingy cells had no windows, but the red glow reminded me of blood, mostly because the essence that enraptured me, and for a short while I entertained myself with the thought that the red glow was a pool of blood. How delightful that would be.

Nevertheless, rouge lighting? *Isn't that quaint?* I wondered, feeling the hair rising on my nape, arms, and legs, pulsing intense and pure as my fingers curled into fists.

My vision began to darken. I stood up hastily, falling into the hands of wooziness and stumbling into the iron bars with a curse.

I laughed bitterly as I mulled over my own situation, grasping the irony of where I was and knowing that I was most likely being punished because of her. My thoughts lingered on her brown face and defiant pale brown eyes.

My uncle will kill her for my slip, my only weakness. I gripped the bars tightly, and laughed aloud with lucidity... and that's when I heard her.

Amelia.

"Who's there?" Her voice was shaken and quiet, and I felt the need to go to her and figure out why she sounded so distressed. Why was Amelia even down here?

The implacable force of zeal pulsed through every vein, muscle, and artery—the essence of what works in-sync to keep a being like me going—became elevated, and the ethereal smell still lingered. My fangs extended automatically, as if her voice was a fang charmer, and I followed impulsively, thinking about blood.

Blood, blood, and more blood. I thought of biting Amelia, tearing through her flesh and veins, reaping her blood. All I could think of was the red substance. It was taking over, and for the first time in a long time, I was scared.

Amelia repeated her question as I walked past the iron bars. My sudden burst of hunger focused on her as I looked upon her gaunt face, under the red light from above. Amelia's curly hair swallowed her petite features as she took a step back into the shadows, her dress wrapped around her legs.

"Dante," Amelia said, studying me. Her brown eyes were filled with fear and confusion. Many questions populated her mind, and as I read her thoughts, I knew she was trying to make sense of the monster before her.

Amelia's heartbeat increased, her breaths shortened, and her eyes widened with fear, but still she shook her head.

"So, the rumors are true," she whispered.

Her scent engulfed me like a tornado. I didn't want the darkness to take over, so I fought it. Another flash of dizziness came over me, blurring my vision. I knew the darkness wanted Amelia.

I tensed my jaw, fighting the monster inside me. “Get out of here!”

What was happening to me? My body was going into hunting mode without spilled blood. I could usually control my desires when faced with the dark red beauty. Why was Amelia’s blood so powerful, so potent, that I could already feel the warmth of it sliding down my throat? Why does her blood drive me crazy with desire—an unyielding, agonizing craving?

Amelia took another fearful step back.

“Leave,” I growled as I planted my feet into the cement, feeling it crack with the force. I was drowning in the dark depths of myself. I could feel every inch of me slipping.

Amelia said my name, her tone still shaken, and all I wanted to do was take her in my arms. But I wouldn’t dare be that close to her— not now. Not with the darkness lingering.

Growling, I appeared in front of Amelia, standing in the scarlet moonlight too quick for human eyes to comprehend. “Get out!” I yelled as I pushed her. She stumbled backward onto the wet, mucky cement. She swallowed the panic, her urge to scream in fear.

I felt the rush of blood, and my breathing and heart rate increased. I bellowed for Amelia to escape. With each step I advanced toward her, she crawled backward in fright, tears streaming down her face. Finally, she got to her feet and sprinted into the darkness. She stumbled a few times, but managed to stay on her feet as I followed, spewing callous words.

I heard Amelia gasp when she encountered the back wall, frantically seeking out her escape. She winced when I reached around her to open the chamber doors, but then felt a burning sensation against my palms. I instantly pulled away when they began to sear and burn.

A nasty snarl escaped me as I realized this was indeed my punishment. Amelia scrambled from beside me, terrified to be so close.

Hurrying back into the rouge lighting in sheer terror, Amelia ran without another word, escaping into the shadows of the dungeon. She shrieked for salvation that never came.

2

JUSTICE PRESENT DAY, TORONTO. ONTARIO

I KNEW I wasn't crazy, despite what everyone else may have believed. I was also fully aware that I couldn't change their minds. The definition of crazy means "mentally deranged, demented, and insane." I believe I am in no way close to any of those descriptions.

My family doesn't suffer from any type of mental illness. My older sister has a goddess complex, and my little sister is babied too much, but there is no mental illness to bring about what happened that night. That's my story and it's the truth, no matter how horrible it sounds to my family or anyone else.

Sighing dolefully, I fixed my attention on Dr. Fields, who sat across the room from me on his stereotypical brown leather sofa, a book in his lap, a pen in his grasp. I was tired of being in his office and I wanted to leave. I was fed up with talking about my emotions and how I felt about that horrible night from a year ago.

Finally ready to answer his question, I lied. "No, I don't believe that I was in the presence of death." Dr. Fields cast his brown eyes on me.

Truthfully, it wasn't an expression one would normally notice. To someone who hasn't spent two days a week for nearly a year talking to this man, Dr. Fields would seem nonchalant, like he hasn't a care in the world. His receding hairline, out-of-date floral dress shirts, and glasses added to his look.

Dr. Fields' glare had become more frequent since I stopped insisting that I was in the presence of death. How many people could honestly say that they've been in the presence of death anyway?

Granted, there *is* probably a handful of them, like the ones who survived cancer or a fatal accident. What I felt, though was the kind of fear that flowed through my entire body, preventing me from moving

my limbs as if I was paralyzed, frozen on the outside. On the inside I was screaming and banging on the pellucid glass, hoping someone would come to my rescue.

I recalled a faint voice in the back of my head that wasn't mine, commanding my physical form to move. I remembered envying my tears for their freedom to escape the qualm that commanded my fingers one by one, gripping the knife. The churning in my stomach was unforgettable.

I glanced away from Dr. Fields, maddened by his analyzing leer. I looked up at his bookshelf to the left of me, scanning his multitudes of medical books and certificates, always in the same place. My eyes drifted along his royal blue wall, finding more certificates, awards, and diplomas. I swear the one to the far left was new.

Settling my gaze on the family therapist, I tried to find the right words to explain, in detail, what was going on in my head. Now that I thought about it, for a family to have a therapist, that does make me—us, my family—look a little crazy. Unlike my siblings though, I never had a reason to see our therapist. Mya, my older sister by three years, overdosed on drugs at a party and the paramedics revived her. I would have thought that being brought back from the dead would make my sister re-evaluate her life, but that wasn't the case. Mya took that to mean her life was meant for greatness, so a few years later she ran off to Hollywood.

My little sister had no issues yet, but our mother forced her to talk to Dr. Fields once a week about her emotions and life. According to our mother, she already had two screwed up daughters, and she didn't want a third kid flying over the cuckoo's nest into a dark abyss—my mother's exact words. My mother could be just a tad dramatic. She also dragged Daddy to see Dr. Roberts for couples' counseling.

"So, you don't hear the voices anymore?" Dr. Fields asked.

"No," I said, and *that* wasn't a lie.

He scribbled something on his pad of paper. "What about you trying to kill yourself?"

I repeated the same line I've been telling him for the past three weeks now. "I missed my ex-boyfriend, my sister had cancer, and everything was really stressful for me. I was at a weak point in my life, and at the time I thought taking my own life would make everything easy. I wasn't thinking about how that would affect my family and friends. It was stupid and selfish of me."

In other words, I, of my own free will, did not walk downstairs and head straight to the drawer, pulling out a stainless steel knife. *I did not try to kill myself!*

Without speaking, Dr. Fields wrote on his notepad. He then looked at his wristwatch. "Justice, it's a quarter to three. We'll continue this session next Wednesday."

Thank goodness! I stood up, grabbing my jacket and belongings.

"Oh, and before I forget," Dr. Fields began and I held my breath. "Happy twenty-first birthday."

Exhaling, I thanked him and hustled out of the room, then out of the building as if my feet were on fire. Pushing the glass doors open, a bitter wind hurried by, decorating my winter jacket and hair with snowflakes. I *hated* winter. Shoving my hands in my jacket pockets, I followed the salted pathway to the parking lot where Mya was waiting by the new Nissan Daddy bought for me today.

"Birthday girl! We're gonna have a fun night," she said as I approached. Her glossy lips parted into a smirk. I translated that to mean we would be getting stupid drunk.

Walking around to the passenger side, I said, "I just want to take a bottle of rum to my head and erase everything Dr. Fields and I spoke about. Plus, you and Audrina have been talking about this for a week now, building up the anticipation. I hate to say it, but you guys have gotten me excited."

My original plan was to stay home and celebrate with my family and close friends. Nothing too crazy, because I simply was not in the mood to do anything extravagant this year.

However, I should have known both Mya and my best girlfriend were going to make this birthday the best one ever. I didn't do much last year since it was only days after my so-called suicide attempt.

We climbed into the vehicle. "So, how is good old Dr. Fields?" Mya asked as she turned down the radio.

"His eyes burn," I murmured, buckling myself in.

"Learn anything new about yourself today?" Mya asked, mocking our mother's tone while backing out of the parking space.

The edge of my lips tugged outward. "That I'm a good actress and liar."

"Make sure you keep up with the 'I'm innocent, but I'm still crazy' speech."

Mya and I decided on the "innocent" speech a few days after she came down to Toronto. Everything I said was true though. I didn't lie to Dr. Fields. Calvin, my ex, had dumped me two years ago. Well, *disappeared* is a better word. Last year, however, Calvin's cousin Jordan, who is also one of my very good friends, finally heard from him. So, I finally knew that my ex was alive. It hurt like a bitch knowing that Calvin was alive after I had spent a good amount of my life worrying about the missing asshole.

Also last year Mya was diagnosed with breast cancer, but now she's healthy as a horse. She claimed it was eating healthy and non-GMO foods. Then add in school, midterms, and it was very stressful for me. I was at a very stressful point in my life, but never once did I think about taking my own life. I thought about vacationing for a few months away from home and school, but that was as far as it went.

I rolled my eyes. "Did you talk to Mom and Dad?"

I tried talking to my parents about reducing the sessions to one every two weeks, but they didn't agree. This morning I even told Dad that he could return the car if they talked to my therapist. Dad didn't agree to my plan, and if he had agreed I would have regretted my bargaining skills.

"Mom said it would depend on what Doctor Fields says today, and Dad still worries about you."

"He's going to be a tough one to convince." I can't blame him. What he walked in on would scare any parent.

"So, you still haven't really answered my question," Mya pointed out as she switched the radio station.

"I don't want to talk about it," I replied quickly.

"When will you ever wanna talk about it?"

"When I do, you will know," I responded with an attitude.

"You're being difficult," Mya retorted.

“Really, you’re the queen of ignorance.”

She huffed. “I know you better than anyone else, so don’t bullshit me.” She stopped at a red light and I felt her glowering at me as I gazed out of the window, watching Toronto’s lively streets. It was early Friday afternoon and everyone was hustling about. Toronto buses were everywhere, and everyone was trying to get things done for the weekend. Not to mention that Christmas was just a couple of days away.

Finally, I spoke. “To tell you the truth, I wish I knew what to tell you, but I don’t even understand it myself. So can we please drop it?”

The light turned green. Mya inhaled deeply, flicking her bounding brown hair over her shoulders, and released the brake pedal. “I know what you can do to get Dad on your side.”

“Do I really want to hear this?” I asked.

“Just give him the puppy dog eyes and wear your hair in pigtails like you used to when you were like—”

“Five,” I interrupted, already seeing the mischievous wheels turning in Mya’s head. It was the same technique she used on Dad when she was ten, fourteen, sixteen, and even when Mya was my age. It actually worked, or at least it had when our father still believed that she was his innocent firstborn daughter. That image of innocence shattered two years ago when my father bought a *Playboy* magazine and discovered his firstborn daughter showing off certain body parts a father should never see on his full grown daughter. Needless to say, Daddy never bought another *Playboy* again, which made Mom very happy.

“I’m not going to play mind tricks with Dad. I’m going to sit him down, once again, and we’re going to discuss this like adults.” I was never one for mind games like Mya always was, but if push came to shove I didn’t shy away from them.

Turning up the radio, I sat back in the passenger seat as Audrina, my best girlfriend, sent me a text wanting to know how my birthday was going so far. We exchanged texts until I noticed Mya turning on a green light.

“Where are we going?” I asked, peering down the road. This better be a shortcut.

“It’s a surprise,” Mya said with a grin.

Fifteen minutes later I was peering up at an old apartment building with a sign hanging from the third floor window. The large capital letters read, “*Selena Sanchez*” with smaller writing below that read, “*Embrace the unknown.*”

“You have got to be kidding me. I’m not going in there,” I said, stifling a laugh.

Mya swung her arms around my shoulders. “We’re here.” Her golden eyes were gleaming.

“And what’s your point?” I snapped. “You know I don’t believe in this crap.”

“Even more reason for you to be more open.”

“I’m open enough,” I huffed in denial. I winced when memories reminded me that being the good little girl, Daddy’s angel, and the perfect overachiever, had seriously hampered my ability to be more open-minded. A minor plight, I planned on fixing in the near future.

“Please,” Mya begged. “It will only take five minutes.”

I crossed my arms as I shook my head. “Nope.” But my sister was relentless on this woman. The more I said no, the harder she fought. We were both stubborn.

Mirroring my pose, Mya crossed her arms. She watched me as an unpleasant winter breeze came up front behind me, burning my ears, and disarrayed Mya's straight, coffee locks into her face. The coldness left her cheeks flushed, and the tip of her nose pink. After the breeze had subdued, Mya lifted her right hand and tucked the loose strands behind her ears. She glared at me with her hazel eyes, and I recognized it as Mom's prissy expression.

Mya was Mom's exact Brazilian replica, with a long body, legs, and a curvy waistline. I wasn't as curvaceous as my sister, in fact, my breasts weren't as big either—it was the curse of my father's family. All the women on his side have a small chest. Mom, Mya, and our little sister wore a size six shoes, while I wore size nines. Again, the curse of the Labelle family. Mya inherited Mom's perfect teeth, while I had braces until I was eighteen. Mya had flawless skin, while I had acne until I started using Proactiv when I was in grade eleven.

The only thing Mya and I have in common is the same big, almond eyes, which came from my father's side. Mya and I inevitably inherited both my father's and mother's golden eyes. The only thing that I had that made Mya envious was my naturally curly hair. *Again*, my major traits had been stolen from the Labelle family, or I'm adopted, which Mya had argued throughout our entire childhood.

I was surprised that Mya had the nerve to cast those big eyes on me, on my birthday of all days.

“All I'm asking for,” Mya said, “is a half hour with her.”

I filled my lungs with the frosty air as I contemplated. “You said it would be five minutes, five minutes ago.”

“Okay,” she said with a sigh. “I over exaggerated maybe, a little. It'll be a half hour max.”

Studying Mya, I didn't believe her as she clasped her hands together in a plea, and pouted her lips. I caved.

“Fine. I'll go.” I sighed. “I don't believe in this nonsense anyway, so what harm will it do?”

Mya smiled a roguish grin, showing perfect white teeth. “You won't regret it.” That moneymaking smile was deadly. It was a smile I hated to see because witnessing that crafty look—even when we were little—meant that she was going to get us in trouble. I hated that expression because it meant a lot more headaches were coming my way.

Mya and I walked into the building. A sign near the elevators indicated that they weren't working. Glaring at my sister, I didn't say a word as I marched toward the staircase and started up the four flights of stairs. Reaching the fourth level, Mya led me down the hallway and stopped in front of an open apartment door with beads hanging from the frame. I smelled incense burning.

Mya and I walked through the beaded curtains and my heart nearly jumped out of my chest as a parrot started flying around the room squawking, “Visitors. Visitors.” It then flew through a doorway inside the apartment.

Mya mouthed, “Relax” as I made sure my heart was still where it belonged.

A woman came through the same entrance that the bird flew through. She wore an apron and oven mitts, but she was pretty, which was not what I was expecting. I was expecting old, white hair tied back, a long, ugly dress, and maybe a mole on her right upper lip. At least she could have had heavy bags under her eyes, but this woman was pretty and voluptuous.

“I’ll be right with you,” she said sweetly, turning back into the kitchen. I heard an oven open. Seconds later, a delicious smell wafted into my nostrils. My stomach yearned silently, just as Selena Sanchez came through the kitchen entrance, no oven mitt and no apron this time. The parrot flew in behind her and perched on a bird stand.

Selena smiled brightly, extending her hand that was overdue for a manicure as she introduced herself. “Hi. I’m Selena Sanchez.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said as I smiled back equally brightly. Her beautiful brown eyes made me mimic her smile—I couldn’t help it. “My name is Justice.” I hoped my smile seemed just as sincere.

“It’s a pleasure, Justice.” She glanced at my sister thoughtfully. “Mya, long time. How have you been?”

Mya hugged her. “Living life, chilling like a villain.” Of course they knew each other. I was wasting precious time.

“Well, at least you’re safe and healthy.” Selena turned her attention back to me. “Now, let’s get to the reason for this little visit. I assume your sister told you about me and what exactly I do?”

I nodded, and then I scolded myself for lying. All Mya did was try to convince me to see a psychic. I came up with my own assumptions from the sign itself. I know nothing and yet still goose bumps prickled over the surface of my forearms.

Selena continued. “I’m also sure that you can see there are no round tables, magic balls, lucky potions, love potions, or karma potions. As a matter of fact, no potions at all. No charm bracelets, necklaces, rings, or remedies of any kind.”

I gave a quick glance around just to confirm what she was saying and it was true. I wanted to find something, anything, but there was absolutely *nothing*. This place was a regular apartment. There was a bookshelf filled with novels and such, but nothing truly out of the ordinary. Not even books on magic. There were a few pictures of her and a little girl, but that was it. She was an ordinary Jane, who claimed to be a psychic.

“There’s no crows hanging around my place, and I’m not an old hag. I’m still young, and if you say anything against it, we will have problems,” Selena threatened playfully.

A small smile parted my lips. “You look no more than twenty-five.”

“Aw, you’re a sweetheart.” Then she spoke to Mya. “I love your sister.”

“Really, you can take her.” Mya grinned. “Before you bring her back to me— because that will happen—locate her real parents with your psychic abilities and drop her off there.” And there it was, the tale of my adoption.

Grinning back, I accepted her teasing. “You’re just jealous because I got all the good genes.”

"Says the girl who couldn't get a guy to kiss her until she was fifteen."

Ouch.

"And I got all the smarts, apparently," I snapped back at her. Mya had barely graduated high school, and didn't even attempt University.

"Yet still I'm walking runways."

"So, that's why you've been looking so sickly. I didn't want to say anything, but you gotta eat."

Mya was about to chew me out when Selena scowled after her. "Go away."

Mya rolled her eyes, but held her composure. She stood up and disappeared into the kitchen. *Oh, sisterly love. Gotta love it.*

Selena's attention was back on me. "Okay, now, let me explain to you exactly how this works. Hold out your hands." I did as she asked. "Relax, don't think about how weird this is, or that you probably don't believe in what I do. Simply relax. I need your mind completely blank. Close your eyes."

I took a deep breath and tried to clear my thoughts. I didn't think about how pretty she was. I cleared my mind about how crazy I thought this whole thing seemed. *A psychic? Really, Justice, what are you getting yourself into?* I pushed out tonight's plans that I was excited for and, with the silence and darkness, memories of my ex crept into my mind. With great effort, I managed to push those thoughts away, for now.

Inhaling and lost in my mind, the sounds of the Toronto streets beyond the window were now faint whispers. I could hear my heart pounding so clearly. *Thump, thump, thump.* It echoed in my subconscious, like thunder crashing in the distance.

Selena's voice pierced through the drumming and her words reverberated, as if she was in a hollow tunnel. "I'm going to touch you, and once I do this you will feel a surge of energy through your thumbs and pinkies."

"A surge of energy?" I asked, my voice sounding distant to my own ears.

"Yes, something like when your leg or arm falls asleep."

"Like a bunch of needles?" I asked, noting the familiar sensation. My body felt like it was floating.

"Exactly. You will feel the needles first through your thumbs and pinkies. Then, you will feel them spreading through the rest of your fingers and eventually your whole hand will have that same feeling. Understand?"

I nodded. At least, I think I did. I felt Selena place her fingers opposite mine. Her pinkies were touching my thumbs, and her thumbs were lightly touching my pinkies. She placed her other fingers together in the middle of my palm. I slowly felt the pricking she had described on my thumbs and pinkies.

The pricking separated into my hands, and soon both of them were prickly and felt strangely heated. It felt as if the force of two magnets was pulling our hands together and keeping us connected.

I wanted to pull away. I didn't like this, but I kept my hands still, simply because I didn't want Mya to have something to hold over me if I backed out. I was not going to let that happen, not with something so easily accomplished.

Through the dense darkness, I heard breathing. I clearly heard someone panting and gasping for air. I tried to find the person in the dark. I wanted to help, but the murkiness confined me, held me down, constricting my body. I felt my hands tremble.

Then, suddenly, I was engulfed in flames.

3

I GLANCED DOWN at my red, pulsing hands, feeling the tears streaming down my cheeks. I looked at Selena, who was holding her chest and gasping for air. Her nose bled, and sweat poured down her face.

She looked up at me. "Water," she said hoarsely.

Staggering to my feet, I went to the kitchen. My hands still felt like they were on fire.

Mya looked up from what she was eating. "Is everything okay?" Then, registering my expression, she rushed toward me. "What happened?"

"Selena needs water, and—" I breathed heavily, my hands burning, "fire." I shook my hands, trying to shake off the warmth.

Mya's brows pulled together. "Fire?"

"Selena... water," I whispered, still waving my hands around.

Mya watched me before she turned to pick up a cup from the dish tray. She filled it with water from the tap and brought it out to Selena.

Water! Of course! I turned on the cold tap, then placed my hands under the cooling liquid, immediately feeling relief. Mya returned to the kitchen with the empty cup, curiosity burning in her golden eyes.

"What happened?" Mya asked. "Selena's out there panting. She's sweating like someone took a bucket of water and dumped it on her. Not to mention the bleeding. What did she see?"

I removed my hands from under the faucet. *What the hell just happened?*

Mya filled the cup with more water. "One of you two needs to start talking," she said as she left with the water and some paper towels.

What did just happen? Did she actually see something? What did she see?

I realized that if I was asking myself these questions, then I believed that she was a psychic and had powers. But stuff like this wasn't real. It's *impossible* for this to be real. Wasn't it? Was I really one to talk about unimaginable events considering what I went through?

Mya came back into the kitchen. "I regret it," I told her, faintly holding out my hands in front of me.

"Regret what?" she asked.

"You said I wouldn't regret it, but I do."

Mya watched me worriedly. "Are you okay? Let me see," she said as she took my hands in hers.

"I don't know if I'm okay," I said, shrugging. "When she did whatever to you, did your hands hurt?"

"Nope." Mya shook her head. "Why would they?"

I glanced down at my hands. "You felt the needles?"

"Yeah." Mya ran her fingers down my palms.

"Did you feel the heat or energy force that she calls a 'surge of energy'?"

"Something like that," Mya said with a shrug. "I'll get you some ice." Turning, she went to the fridge and pulled out an ice tray. She placed three cubes of ice in a dishcloth, folded it neatly, and handed it over to me. She sat back at the table. "Can you explain some more?"

"I can't say. I don't know what she saw," I said as I sat down opposite Mya, holding the cold cloth to my palms.

"That must have been something," she mumbled.

"You have no idea," Selena said, entering the kitchen. Uneasiness turned my stomach inside out. She leaned against the kitchen door-frame, clutching her sides. Her hair was damp with sweat. "I apologize about your hands."

"It's okay."

"It happens when I disconnect from a person so suddenly. It's like shutting down a computer. You're supposed to click the start menu and then go through the options to shut the computer off safely."

"But for me, you just hit the power button and forced it to shut off," I guessed.

She nodded. "I really like you," she said with a faint smile.

"So, why did you disconnect so suddenly?"

"Each of your fingers represent a year of your life, so I can see ten years into your life by touching you the way I did."

Mya looked at me as if to say, "*Isn't she awesome?*" If my hands didn't feel like I had held them over a burning flame, and if the person connected to me wasn't so out of breath, I may have been able to smile. If the session had gone as smoothly as Mya's apparently had, maybe I would have been able to tell her, "Hey Mya, you were right."

Selena continued after a moment. "When I connect to anyone, I see their future through their eyes. I feel what they feel, see what they see, and hear what thoughts that person would be thinking at that time."

She paused for a moment, and I could tell she was reading my facial expressions to determine if I understood her explanation. She was trying to decide if I would call her crazy and run out of the building screaming. Truthfully, that's exactly what I wanted to do.

“First, let me say, it’s nothing bad. Depends on how you want to look at it, and depends on how open you are to new things...things of the unknown,” she continued. Her gaze was intense.

My mind went back to the words under her name on the sign outside. *Embrace the unknown*. What unknown things could she possibly be talking about? New types of food, entertainment, culture, religion, clothes?

Puzzled, I asked. “What new things?”

“Things unknown to you.”

“That’s a lot of things.”

“In life, you can never experience everything.”

It irritated me that she was ignoring the main question. “I want to know what, *exactly*, is unknown to me, that I should, or will, embrace. What did you see? What caused you to pull away so fast? I can understand if ten years of my life is way too much for you.”

“No.” She shook her head. “It wasn’t seeing ten years of your life at a speed you could not imagine. It was more what was happening within the years of your life, and *that* was the problem. Justice, sweetie, I didn’t see ten years of your life, not eight, not five. I only saw *one*.”

“One?” I echoed, confused. I glanced at Mya, who gave me the same confused look. “I thought you said you see ten?”

“I do in most cases, but, then again, in most cases others have more simplified lives and it goes quite smoothly. However, yours didn’t—or, should I say, *doesn’t*—go smoothly.”

An eerie coldness swept over me, and I had to recompose myself while trying to understand the situation. “Do I die within the next year?” *What a strange question to ask someone*.

Selena didn’t answer. She looked away. “Selena,” Mya urged, her voice full of genuine concern.

The psychic responded after moments of crushing silence. “I don’t know,” she replied helplessly. “I couldn’t see that far, and it happened too fast. I couldn’t stay connected to you long enough to find out. If I stayed connected any longer I would be in the hospital right now.” She seemed broken and exhausted.

Trying to understand what in the hell happened, I asked, “You can die from doing this?”

“In your case, yes,” Selena stated.

Back to my original question. “The unknown?”

“That I can’t say,” she said meekly.

“What do you mean you *can’t* say?”

Walking to the sink, Selena filled another cup with water and avoided making eye contact. “It’s not up to me to tell you about them.”

“*Them*! So, it’s a cult? A gang?”

“When that time comes in your life, you will have all your answers. Until then, I’m sorry. It’s not my place.”

I held back the urge to shake Selena until she talked. Who in their right mind tells someone to embrace the unknown—whatever that means—and then turns around and says, “*I can’t tell you about the unknown?*”

Glaring at Selena and Mya, I crossed my arms. “When does everything start? Can you at least tell me that? The first event that starts the chain reaction?”

I couldn’t keep the attitude out of my tone. I was beyond frustrated. I didn’t even want to do this in the first place.

Selena took a few sips from her glass, then set the cup on the countertop. “Tonight,” she said in a soft, hesitant voice.

“Tonight?” I echoed, my voice sounding just as hushed. Tonight I may or may not die.

Finally meeting my gaze, Selena spoke. “Tonight you will encounter a guise of a man. He will be sleek, sexy, and risqué—the ultimate perfection of the male species.” Almost every word that escaped her lips sounded imperious as she described my stranger. “His eyes are blue like the ocean, serene, vast, and mysterious. I must warn you, for if you gaze into them for too long, you may be swallowed by the ocean, drowning in his sapphire lakes, forever to be lost.”

Mya mouthed, “Sounds sexy.”

Ignoring my sister, Selena continued, “You two are tied together. You cannot escape the connection that has been established.”

Call me rude, but I wanted to explode with laughter. “And *he’s* the unknown?”

“He’s the beginning of the end of the way your life used to be.” Selena sounded almost sad for me, and I had to repeat that sentence multiple times in my head before it made sense.

“What if I choose not to talk to the sleek, sexy, handsome dude?” I asked.

“You two will come together, whether you may be doomed or blessed by the stars. It’s your fate.”

“I don’t believe in soul mates.”

“Who said anything about soul mates, sweetie? Something wasn’t settled in the past. Something happened to change the course of destiny, and now she wants to play out what she had previously planned. Destiny writes the stories. We just play them out.”

This has to be a joke. A smile pulled at the corner of my lips. I looked at Selena and then at Mya, who seemed as confused as I was. A nervous laugh escaped.

“You set me up, didn’t you?” I asked Mya.

She shook her head. “Nope. This is all real shit. I told you she’s legit.”

“I won’t be angry. Just tell me the *truth*.”

“*Truthfully*, I think your reading was a lot more interesting than mine,” said my sister as she and Selena exchanged looks.

I was too distracted to question what that was about. Glancing at my watch, I read a quarter after four. “I think it’s time we made our exit.” I reminded my sister that we had to pick up my friends and do some last minute shopping.

Before leaving, I turned to Selena. "What if I choose not to go out tonight?"

"Don't fight it. The one who returns cannot be easily ignored and dismissed. He'll fancy you, as you will him. It's inevitable."

"Can I not change my own destiny?" I wondered aloud.

"Sweetie, who's to say what you consider a changed destiny wasn't actually your true destiny to begin with?"

"But, you *did* say that the course of destiny was changed?"

"Ah, and who's to say that those obstacles in that past weren't supposed to happen? To bring you and your stranger to this point in time?"

I had no words. *Ugh*. My head was hurting. Selena extended the mental torture.

"You and this stranger will cross each other's path once again. It is inevitable."

Inevitable, my ass, I wanted to say. Instead, I stood up. "Well, thank you for your very inspirational insight into my life, but we have to cut this visit short. It's my birthday and I have plans."

Selena stood up as well, still rattled. "Don't let me hold you any longer."

Gathering my things, Mya and I said our farewells to Selena and left the building. Heading back down the staircase, Mya tried to reassure me. "You know, I wouldn't take it seriously. It's a hit and miss with Selena."

"Yet you told me upstairs that Selena was legit." I was trying my best to sound composed. When my sister didn't respond, I began to worry. I stopped walking down the flight of stairs. "Do you believe that I may or may not die?"

"I believe that Selena's predictions are like a box of chocolates."

"That's not helping," I said as I continued down the stairs.

Mya followed. "But it's true. She may see events in your life, but Selena can't tell you exactly step by step how to get there."

"What was your prediction then? Wait. Let me guess. You'll be a star!"

"Not exactly," she responded. I didn't have to see my sister to know that she was frowning. Her tone gave her away. "Selena actually told me that I was going to die. She wasn't unsure about it, like with you. She knew and she told me that I would be given a second chance. And this second chance, or second life, would bring me everything my heart desired."

Two flights of stairs left. "When the paramedics brought you back to life," I said.

"I didn't know when I was going to die. Would it be while I was driving, from the cancer, the drinking, while taking a walk? Maybe while I was cooking, swimming, or maybe it would have happened at the bar I worked. Maybe a robbery gone wrong at an ATM. Justice, those are the little things that Selena doesn't always know."

One flight of stairs to go. "So, what, they brought you back to life and you had an epiphany?"

"Something like that."

"Oh, you're full of it."

“Sometimes, but what she said came true.”

Reaching the bottom, I opened the side door and held my hand out for my car keys. That was what I get for listening to Mya, to be what she called open minded. I get a prediction of my death.

Bang, bang. Life shot me down.

4

CALVIN

"CALVIN," KYLE SAID, dipping his fingers in the black slime. "It's close." He wiped the slime onto his pants.

"And dying," I noted, hoping that it was still here as Jessica guessed. If that thing took off again, I was going back to the hotel.

Jessica pushed past me. "Let's get this over and done with, boys." Her red hair flowed down her slender back, contrasting against the glossy black, tight body suit. I licked my lips as I watched her firm ass sway in front of me.

"Head and chest shots," he reminded us as he broke through the thick line of bushes, with Jessica and I following closely.

The bright moon shone down on us, revealing the creature as it drank from the lake. The scene could have been described as beautiful, a picture perfect moment seen on a postcard with the moon hanging artistically above, shining on the surface of the lake. However, the creature greedily gulping the water eliminated the artistic beauty of such a scene.

Kyle motioned for me and Jessica to each take a side. Jessica ambled to the right as she unsheathed her katana from her back. I, on the other hand, drew in the cold air, mentally prepared myself, and cautiously tread in the opposite direction.

Head and chest shots. Quick and easy, I told myself. Make the first shot count for something.

The creature, called K-17, and currently invading the body of a man, was bare-chested on his hands and knees. Thick, black veins pulsed on his face, neck, down his arms, and across his back. The man was already dead, which meant there was little time before the creature inside the human carcass died as well.

Kyle mouthed, *No*, as Jessica was about to close in on K-17. She glared at him furiously as the creature inside the man lifted his head. His eyes were bloodshot, another sign that the human body was, in fact, dead.

Acknowledging our presence, K-17 stood. He spoke slowly with a raspy voice. "I...need...a-another...b-body."

I aimed my gun. "Sorry. The expiration date just ran out."

He shook his head and took short pulls of air. "M-m-mission...not...d-done."

"There was never a mission assigned for you."

"You have violated four regulations through the laws of Cerberus," Kyle informed him.

K-17 screamed with anger, or maybe pain. It vomited, holding its sides tightly.

Kyle continued speaking calmly over the creature's retching. "One, taking over an unauthorized human body. Two, leaving the laboratory premises without proper authorization. Three, attempting to attack your enemy without direct permission to do so. And, four, killing a human."

K-17 winced once again. "Mission...n-not...c-complete."

"Your judgment," Kyle continued, "is execution." He then turned to Jessica, giving her the go-ahead.

Jessica stepped to the creature, who was still doubled over, and raised her katana over her head. When it spoke, she stopped mid-strike. Kyle and I exchanged a look.

"P-p-p-please," it pleaded in a voice that belonged to the human, not the K-17. There was still hope for the body. "I have a family," he said as his bloodshot eyes disappeared. The human's normal eye color returned.

Jessica lowered her katana and looked at Kyle. "There's hope."

Kyle, Jessica, and I were confused by this turn of events. I know that he couldn't—by our sworn laws—order us to kill K-17 if there was a small chance that we may be able to save the human.

I turned my attention to Kyle, my supervisor, wondering if it would be worth it to save the body, or kill both. After all, Cerberus thinks that the human body is dead, so would it make much of a difference? The human wouldn't be alive much longer anyway. It was cruel to prolong his agony.

Abruptly, the small glimpse of hope shattered as the man charged Jessica. Taken aback, she dropped her weapon as she stumbled into his iron grip.

"Need...n-new...b-body," he said, panting. K-17's monstrous voice returned. It squeezed, and I heard a horrible cracking sound. Jessica screamed in agony. The K-17's bloodshot eyes returned, confirming that he had tricked us. Kyle and I sprinted toward K-17 and Jessica.

I stopped and aimed my gun as it backed into the cold lake, dragging Jessica with it. Kyle had stopped as well, aiming his weapon.

"If you know what's good for you, you will release my partner!" I called out as I aimed my gun, trying to find a clear shot. Jessica's body blocked him from view. Kyle was in the same predicament since he hadn't taken a shot either.

Jessica wiggled against his hold. “Kill it!” she screamed, but gasped when his fingers squeezed her throat. Kyle inched closer. K-17 backed a few more steps into the cold water. I examined my chances of a head shot, but it would be too risky. Then I saw an opening, a dicey one that would graze Jessica, but not kill her, for the sake of mankind—the oath I swore by.

I, Calvin, do swear that I will protect mankind from any creature that threatens human lives at all cost, bear true allegiance to the government, and before harming a human, I must weigh all options.

Kill one, save many. That last oath has a lot of holes, in my opinion. I will avoid killing Jessica at all cost.

Glancing at Kyle, I tried to read his body language. Was he going to take the shot? I figured he wouldn’t, since seconds had gone by and he hadn’t shot. *Before harming a human I must weigh all options.* In our line of work humans don’t mean us, the Cerberus agents. We don’t get the luxury of human status when we’re on duty—which is always. We’re disposable agents.

I decided what I was going to do.

“She will do,” K-17 said and opened its mouth wide, baring its sharp, jagged teeth.

My finger itched, clenching the silent trigger. It was now or never.

I shot the K-17 in the shoulder, the bullet skimming the top of Jessie’s already broken shoulder. The creature staggered backward with the force of the bullet.

Jessica fell to her knees, gasping for air, and Kyle raced forward to get her. My finger quickly resumed its rightful place, hovering over the trigger. I was ready to fire the final shot when a screeching sound echoed in the night. I instinctively covered my ears to block out the piercing, high-pitched squeal, dropping my gun in the process.

I gritted my teeth as the excruciating malady surged through my head, and through my hazy mind, I was able to make out faint shattering of glass in the far distance. I was brought to my knees. The pain became unbearable as the pressure built in my head.

What on Earth was this sound?

Just as I was positive the sound was going to kill me, it stopped. A heavy silence fell on me and my body sagged forward into the wet snow. My head pounded, but I knew I was going to be okay. I couldn’t say the same for Jessie and Kyle.

Andrea was going to get an earful tomorrow. “*Don’t worry,*” she told me when giving us this assignment. “*This will be very simple. He should be easy to capture.*”

I couldn’t wait to get a hold of that condescending, power hungry, dick sucking, bitch.

I drew in deep breaths and managed to find the strength against my aching head to push myself up. I heard Jessica cough up water, seeing her stumble out of the lake, but there was no sign of K-17.

When Jessica reached the shore, she collapsed on her back, trembling. I saw crimson under Kyle’s nose as he forced himself up as well. He wiped the blood away as he glanced around slowly, looking for K-17. When he looked my way I nodded, letting him know that I was okay, and we both turned our attention to Jessica, who was soaking wet and shaking.

Kyle awkwardly fumbled with his jacket as I slowly strode toward her. I noticed a bone poking through her flesh.

"Is it bad?" she asked, wincing in pain.

"Not at all," I lied. I picked Jessica up as careful as my wobbly arms would allow. She whimpered as Kyle draped his jacket over her and I carried her back to our vehicle over a mile away.

We'd chased that damn creature quite a distance. At first, it didn't seem all that far, but carrying an extra one hundred fifteen pounds, without an adrenaline rush, can make the trip back seem a lot farther. Kyle noticed my staggering and took Jessica from my arms. We continued to walk in silence.

Twenty minutes later, our black SUV was spotted at the Scarborough Go station, where the creature had crashed his vehicle. The damn thing drove his car straight onto the train tracks. Of course, the train didn't have any time to stop, and collided with the car. We're lucky no one was hurt. Unfortunately, that included the K-17. When we got to the damaged vehicle, he was not inside it. We'd followed the trail of black blood until it ended.

"He's going to the bluffs," Jessica had said.

"Why would he go there?"

"The lake. Water," she responded. I remembered the imperative information they had provided us when giving us this assignment.

To make our night even more enjoyable, we had to deal with the city cops. Not fun, but Kyle dealt with them. If I had known what this assignment would have entailed—a chase across town, a car flying into an oncoming train, and the creature's ability to screech pins—I would have gracefully rejected the escaped government experiment. It's not like they're providing a bonus for catching their renegade monster, although they do provide a hell of a medical plan.

On a more positive note, I could feel the trial vaccine I've been taking since I was thirteen working now. The pain wasn't as bad anymore.

"I'm okay, guys," Jessica said half an hour later from the back of the car.

Kyle and I stripped Jessica, leaving her only in her bra and panties to bandage her wounds. She's lucky we had a first aid kit and an emergency thermal blanket to help keep her warm.

"Your scapula is fractured and you have a bullet wound. What part of that is *okay*?" Kyle had questioned.

"I didn't get shot. It grazed me," she corrected through her clenched teeth, breathing through the pain.

"The bone is sticking out of your flesh," he snapped. "Obviously that is not okay! We are going to the emergency room, whether you like it or not," he finished, sounding like a father scolding his child.

Jessica sighed, sounding like a teenager. She sounded annoyed, but I could hear the pain in her voice. Jessie wasn't a fan of hospitals.

She broke the uneasy silence. "Which one of you strong men is going to call Dexter and tell him that we lost the experiment?" she asked.

"This operation is all Andrea," I answered. We used to answer to Dexter with the Vampyres, but Andrea was handling the new mission. Never again will I take any mission that's dictated by that evil broad.

After another stretch of silence Jessica spoke again, breathing heavily. "Are we going to talk about what happened back there?"

"What is there to talk about?" Kyle asked.

"For starters..." She paused, momentarily grimacing. "How are we going to get it back?"

"I can contact the Cerberus teams out here and have them do a search on both land and water. The human was dead, so there is only so long it can continue to manage in the carcass. But, if the creature got out the water and found another human body in time, then we have a problem."

"Then we're screwed," Jessica said, stating the obvious.

Kyle stopped at a red light. The hospital was right around the corner. "What I'm confused about is in all the information they provided us, there was nothing indicating that this creature could trick us into believing that the human was still alive."

"All the signs were there," Jessica said softly.

"If we had known this information, we could have handled the situation better," I said. I knew Jessica's shoulder blade wouldn't have been shattered and there would not have been a need to shoot Jessie to get to K-17. All the signs were there that made us assume that the experiment was dead, the signs Andrea had drilled into our heads in a forty-five minute presentation before sending us blindly on a wild goose chase.

I glanced back at Jessica as the light turned green and Kyle made a left turn. "Hang in there." Extending my hand, I held hers, squeezing it gently. I noticed that she was breaking out in cold sweats.

Her bottom lip quivered as she tried to smile. "Care to pass me some of that magic vaccine Cerberus pumps into you every week?"

"I wish I could," I mumbled, half smiling. I squeezed her hand, letting her know that everything was going to be okay.

Kyle made a left turn into the hospital parking lot and drove straight to the emergency entrance. He parked, hopped out, and opened Jessica's door. He picked her up in a quick, fluid motion and carried her through the emergency entrance. Inside, he demanded to whomever was on duty that they get us help.

Kyle and I also saw a doctor to make sure that our hearing wasn't permanently damaged. The doctor was obviously aware of the kind of work we did, and did not ask questions. Cerberus had doctors throughout hospitals around the world, making our lives a little easier. The doctor gave us little bottles of Tylenol, promising us that the severe pounding would stop. Fifteen minutes later we were informed that Jessica needed surgery to reset the bone.

"Wish me luck, boys," Jessica murmured from the surgery table. Her eyes screamed, "*I don't want to be here.*"

Why is it so bright in here? I grimaced, feeling the heavy drumming on the right side of my head. The pain had gone away, but a headache lingered, something that the vaccine couldn't fix. The lights were making my head hurt worse.

"Are you okay?" Kyle asked when I placed my fingers on my temples. Tonight there was more concern in his tone than usual. This was something that none of us had expected, something none of us dealt with before.

"Yeah, it's the bright lights in here."

My phone rang, and for the first time since the incident, I pulled it out of my pocket, noticing a crack down the middle of the screen with little fractures splintering out in a web pattern. I mentally cursed.

I showed Kyle my phone as the doctors exchanged a few words with him, then he kicked us out of the room. Before leaving, I kissed Jessie on the cheek and promised her that she would be okay.

Kyle and I stood outside in the hall. "That is why I leave my phone in the car when we go on hunts. Try it sometime." He wasn't shocked by my ill-fated phone. I hated to admit that almost every phone that I owned ended up getting destroyed. Maybe I should start taking his advice and do the same.

I sighed miserably. "I just got the new Samsung last week!"

Kyle shrugged nonchalantly. "It's going to be a long night. I need lots of coffee."

"Don't remind me," I said with a groan. I peered through the cracks to see that Mya had called. She went to voicemail. "Shit, what time is it?" I asked Kyle. "I totally forgot. *Shit*, she's going to kill me."

He pulled out his cell phone. "Ten forty-five."

"Can I borrow that?" I asked, pulling the phone from his grasp. I walked briskly down the hall.

"Sure, why not," Kyle hollered sarcastically.

I dialed Mya's number. It rang for a few short seconds, and when she picked up I heard loud music blaring in the background.

"I'm sorry," I said immediately. "I know I'm an ass, but something came up and I'm still coming." I found a vacant bathroom and slipped inside, locking the door, glancing at myself in the bathroom mirror.

"You better be sorry," she retorted. "You were supposed to be here an hour ago. Where are you?"

"Coming."

"Like, *now* coming?"

"Yeah." I popped two more Tylenol pills. "I'll be there in thirty."

A club scene is going to finish me off.

"Before midnight, preferably, since her birthday will be over by that time."

I dampened a piece of tissue paper, cleaning the blood that had leaked from my ears. "You know you're throwing me into the fire."

"You need to stop worrying."

"She's going to kill me," I informed her. Although my lovely, hot-tempered, ex-girlfriend didn't exactly say she was going to kill me. No, she would never say those exact words. It was a combination of extremely colorful and descriptive words of the outcome once her violent actions had been completed.

“Look, lover boy, if I don’t see you here in half an hour, it’s me that you will need to fear. Not my little sister.”

Always with the threats. “You remembered to put me on the VIP list?”

“Of course,” she snapped. “Be here.”

“The new club downtown?”

“Before midnight!” She hung up.

I felt as if she was throwing me into the fiery pits of hell, and that's saying a lot, especially with my job description.

5

JUSTICE TWO AND A HALF HOURS PREVIOUSLY

A Top Forty song played loud and clear on the sound system in the VIP room. It was decorated in black, chrome, red, and white. The back wall was a one-way mirror, allowing us to look out on the dance floor, but preventing those on the other side from looking into our room. This place was wicked.

“Look what we have here, ladies and gentlemen.” That gleaming voice belonged to my petite best friend, Audrina. She’s only five-four, but she has an attitude that is hard to miss. Audrina’s long, straight, white-blonde hair flowed over her shoulders as she picked up a bottle of rum, singing the Black Eyed Peas song *I Gotta Feeling*. She turned to my sister. “I love it when you come down for visits.”

Audrina set down the Bacardi and picked up another bottle. “Tequila, baby, we meet once again.” She glanced over at the five liquor bottles in front of us, her eyes sparkling like they did when she was shoe shopping. My God, it was like we hadn’t been clubbing just last weekend.

My alcoholic friend continued her singing. “Ladies, tonight’s the night...Let’s live it up!” She danced around me and my little sister, who only got in because the bouncer at the door knows my older sister.

Audrina danced around my guests, then stopped in front of Mya. “She got the money, let’s spend it up.” Mya and Nicolle joined her in the dance and song.

Mya threw her arms around me, hugging me tightly, and I glanced at Jordan, who grinned my favorite half smile.

“Gotta love it when she comes down,” he spoke over the music and the singing.

“Do I really?”

“Yes, you do,” Mya retorted, and Jordan gave me a knowing head nod. His handsome hazel eyes, with a hint of gray on the outside, complemented his caramel complexion very well. Jordan is my God-brother. His father and my father went to medical school together, and I couldn’t imagine my life without him.

Mya continued, “You’re lucky I *lave* you.”

“Am I really?” I raised an eyebrow. “I think at times I can do without your *lave*.”

Kailah, my little sister, said, “I hope you *lave* me just as much when my birthday rolls around in June. I know you know Zac Efron.”

“Even better,” Mya said with a grin. “Channing Tatum and I have been buddies recently.”

“I hate you,” Kailah mumbled, glowering at Mya.

Mya blew her a kiss. “Love you too.”

Audrina grinned, ignoring our sibling bickering. “All the liquor we desire.” She picked up a bottle of Hypnotic, grinning at a couple of Jordan’s boys whom he brought along for the ride.

Nicolle mumbled, rolling her eyes. “Really and truly, drunkard, relax. This is why you get so messed up when you go out.” Nicolle, my down to Earth girl, unlike Audrina who does things spur of a moment. “I think I need to hide this bad boy,” she said, snatching the bottle from Audrina. Her pink, wavy hair fell away from her mocha face. Nicci is obsessed with Nicki Minaj.

Audrina stole back the bottle. “Nicolle, you know you can’t keep me and my baby from each other—it’s an addiction.”

“I believe they have a name for that.” Jordan glanced in our direction, disconnecting himself from a conversation he was having with a few random girls I brought from our campus city.

“Alcoholic,” Kailah said as she fake-coughed.

“I sense an AA meeting in the near future,” Nicolle said.

Smiling and ignoring everyone around her, Audrina handed out shot glasses. “Toast to the birthday girl!”

“You read my mind,” Mya said, striding over to the table, followed by the four boys and my other guests. On the count of three, we clinked our glasses together, then tipped our heads back.

Tonight was definitely going to be a good night. I was going to make sure of that, but I would be lying if I said what Selena told me earlier didn’t bug me. I don’t believe in psychics. I don’t believe in anything that can’t be explained through a logical answer. *Everything* has an explanation.

So, if I come to terms with the incident, it doesn’t mean that I believe Selena is a psychic, or that there are others like her. It goes against everything I have been taught. It goes against science. But it means that I’m now second guessing and pursuing other options that goes against science, against my belief system.

Oh, my God! What has gotten into me? This is crazy, and I’m crazy for overthinking something so small, so manageable.

What’s wrong with you, Justice? Tonight is your night. Go crazy and wild. Tonight’s your night!

Forty-five minutes later, I was in my happy place and feeling nice, but I was alone. Jordan found some trappy looking girl to give him a lap dance. Audrina and Nicolle were entertaining some guys with lighthearted girl on girl action. Kailah was off dancing with one of Jordan's boys. I had no idea where the extras we brought along disappeared to, and Mya had vanished on me too. Or, was I the one who ventured away from the group? Oh, well, potato, po-tah-to.

I showed the bartender the pink bracelet I'd received to get free drinks, ordering a tequila shot. I promised myself that this was going to be the last one for tonight and a bubble of laughter escaped. The cute bartender gave me a funny glance, as if contemplating whether he should serve me.

"It's my birthday," I said to the bartender with a giggle. "I'm turning twenty-one. Yay me!"

"Yay, you," he responded mechanically, turning his back to me.

Oh, and I'm going to die within the next year. Yay me. I may meet my soulmate tonight, who will drown me with his eyes. What does that even mean?

And as I pondered Selena's words, a guy came up beside me at the bar and said. "Happy birthday to you."

"Uh, thank you," I mumbled, licking the salt from my hand.

"I'll pay for birthday girl drinks," he informed the bartender, who looked annoyed.

"Pink bracelets equal free drinks," the bartender informed him.

The stranger was shorter than me, possibly because I was wearing heels, and he smiled up at me. "Well, there goes my attempt at trying to talk to you."

He wants to talk to me, and I want to laugh in his face. "Get him a shot," I told the bartender. "It's on me." The bartender looked at me and rubbed his thumb against his first two fingers.

Pulling a twenty from between my breasts, I handed it over.

"Listen," the stranger began. "I'm not usually so straightforward, but I think you're absolutely gorgeous." His eyes lingered on my excessive cleavage.

The bartender handed us the shots I ordered along with my change.

"Well," I said, lifting my shot glass, "are we going to finish these?"

He smiled, and we tipped our heads back to drink the shots. I said my goodbyes before ordering a rum and Coke. I made a quick decision to escape, turning at an opening to the left of the bar. It led me into a hallway that had more private lounging rooms to either side.

One of the many private lounging doors slid open to my left and a guy bumped into me, spilling my drink on my new dress. He didn't stop to apologize though. Hell, he didn't even acknowledge that he hit something. Following him were Angel and Chalice, sisters at the university I attend.

Angel smiled. Her long, white-blond hair fell beautifully over her shoulders. "Well, look what we found."

The guy stopped momentarily and looked.

"Nothing of importance. She's still alive," Chalice added.

Angel frowned at that comment, sucking on a red lollipop, and I couldn't take my gaze away from the tall stranger.

"Girl, you need to watch where you walk," he told me.

"Excuse me?" Is he serious? Did this man have the audacity to call me *girl*?

"You should get yourself cleaned up," he continued. "It's not very becoming."

I was at a loss for words. Who was this guy? "You're friends with this jerk?" I asked Angel.

"Old friends. We go way back. He's not all that bad," she said, looking up at the man in front of us. His tight, black T-shirt clung to his well-defined chest. His messy black strands fell away from his face, sculpting his perfect features.

My chest felt heavy. This stranger was definitely something to be in awe of. Something to look at, but not touch.

His uncanny, pearly blue eyes looked down at me. This man was beyond sexy.

"Well," I mumbled to the stranger, "I think I deserve an apology." Angel licked her lollipop, glancing from me to her friend as if something exciting was going to happen.

Her friend watched me with a certain jauntiness hidden behind his perfect pressed lips. "I apologize for you not being able to watch where you walk," he told me.

My body ignited with annoyance, and my heart raced. "*You* walked into *me*."

He shrugged. "That's not the way I see it."

"Oh, for fuck's sake!" Chalice retorted.

"Let's go find the girls," Angel replied. She linked arms with Chalice and skipped off gracefully, dragging Chalice along.

"That's not the way you see it? All right, enlighten me, *please*," I said with my hands on my hips.

A smirk loomed and my breath hitched. "Why should I have to apologize for something that I couldn't foresee?" he said. "I walked out not knowing that you were going to be passing by at that same moment. Technically, if I wanted to be a gentleman, I could have apologized to you, which would be considered polite."

"Yes, that would be." I glared hotly at the jerk before me, and I was not going to apologize, drunk or sober. "Obviously, no one taught you how to be a gentleman."

An overwhelming feeling of déjà vu came over me.

"Unfortunately, being a gentleman never took to me. Neither politeness nor manners. You get the point."

Fire blazed through my veins. "You're just an asshole."

"I've been called worse," he said, sending tingles exploding throughout my body. My mind wouldn't allow me to push the familiar feeling away. I know I don't know him. I could never forget a face like his.

The stranger turned to walk away. "Do I know you?" I asked after him.

"I don't associate with little children."

My skin crawled with irritation while my heart jolted, taking in his sensual presence. I took in a deep, riveting breath of him, my lungs filling with pure felicity. Saliva filled my mouth with desire—unexpected desire. I continued to inhale and exhale in an attempt to soothe my frazzled and flustered nerves.

“Do I look familiar to you?”

“Women,” he said with a sigh. His chest heaved as the air escaped from his lungs. “I don’t know you. Never met you. Can you stop harassing me?”

Just then it clicked as to why he seemed so familiar. His perfection had not gone unnoticed, with flawless skin and a beautifully structured face to enhance his features. He shared the same beauty as the Svensson sisters, Angel and Chalice, and they have two other siblings. They all shared straight, narrow features of the face, and lurid, yet enthralling eyes—not to mention he had their attitude down. He was definitely related to them.

Although, by calling the Svensson sisters “sisters”, I don’t really mean blood sisters. They call themselves sisters, though I think they’re all related to tell you the truth, cousins of some sort, somewhere down the line, because the four of them all have the same green eyes, but different color skin.

“I have a name you know.”

“And so do I, and six billion other human beings on the earth,” he replied, continuing to walk away. He disappeared through the dancing crowd just as Mya cleared through, giving the asshole a double-take.

“There you are!” Mya said. She was very intoxicated. “We need to go back to the room.”

Five minutes later, Mya shouted, “Surprise!”

It took five long seconds before the realization of who stood there sank in, before anger had a chance to consume my soul with pure, forgotten hatred. Right then I could have killed her.

Standing there was my ex. The first second was noticing who he was, and what he had meant to me a long time ago. The second, was how he changed, physically, of course. His once tawny, innocent gaze, now seemed like he’d seen way too much—not to mention the scar over his right eye. He looked good now. In the third second, I wanted to run to him, have him hold me just once more for old times’ sake and tell him how much I’ve truly missed him. But, in the fourth second, the hurtful memory of what he did surfaced, and in that fifth second anger ignited with his presence.

“Surprise,” Calvin said, sounding a lot smaller and not too enthused.

“What’s he doing here?” I asked Mya sharply, my eyes narrowing into slits.

“It’s my present to you.”

“Your present to me was a plane ticket to visit you in Las Vegas and the psychic.”

“Okay, Selena was simply for you to experience other things in life, and the plane ticket is nothing to what I have in store once you come down.”

Clenching my jaw, I glared at Mya. “I want him *gone*.”

“Well, he came down to see you,” she informed me calmly.

“I don’t care. I want him gone!”

“Technically, I didn’t come back to Canada for this reason,” he ventured.

"You're not helping," she snapped at him.

A bitter smile parted my lips. "Nice to know."

"I think I better go," Calvin said to Mya, but was still looking at me.

"No, you're staying," she protested.

"I think he's not. Why are we arguing about this? It's my birthday, and I want him gone." I brushed past my sister, leaving the room.

To be totally honest, it wasn't only the fact that Calvin was my ex-boyfriend who crashed my party, but I was still heated from the encounter with that guy, and just thinking about him made my mind go all fuzzy. I needed to clear my head and get some fresh air.

Mya grabbed my arm. "Hold on, why are you being so dramatic about this? You know he loves you."

I really needed some fresh air.

"Yeah, well, maybe he should have thought about that before he stuck his dick into another girl!" I fixed my glare on Calvin.

His dark brown eyes flickered with a hurtful emotion. His lip twitched as if wanting to say something and Mya released my arm. Silence held us captive in its own little world where time did not exist.

The spell was broken when the VIP room door opened and music blared in. Jordan was the first to step in. He stopped, aware of the tension in the room. He first looked at me, then at his cousin, and then his gaze twitched back to me and Mya.

Audrina kind of stumbled into the room, laughing with a guy, she must have picked up downstairs.

"Um, are we interrupting something?" Jordan finally asked.

I continued my escape, passing Audrina and Nicolle. "Did you know your cousin came down for a visit?" I asked Jordan.

"He's like a thief in the night," Jordan responded.

"Mya forced me into coming," Calvin confessed to him.

"And on that lovely note..." I left everyone behind and raced down the stairs and out of the club. I wanted to scream, hit something, anything to let out the frustration that was ready to explode.

How dare Mya invite him without my permission? How dare he come to my birthday celebration after I threatened to run him over with my car during our last conversation?

"Justice!" I heard Calvin holler as I walked along the streets of Toronto.

In a blinding rage, I turned around to face my ex but I put the anger on pause when I noticed his bloody nose. "What happened?"

"Jay punched me," he replied as he wiped under his nose.

"Well, you deserved it," I said bitterly.

"I know."

"Now leave me alone." I walked faster.

Calvin kept pace. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to call a taxi and go home."

"Don't be like that."

I stopped walking and turned to face him again. "Don't be like *what*? You left without so much as a good-bye, and two years later you appear like nothing happened. What were you expecting, Calvin? I don't understand."

"I would have said good-bye to you, but I remember you telling me you would run me over with your car, feed my rotting corpse to the sharks, and that you hoped I died a diseased death!"

"Maybe, but a phone call, letter, e-mail, hell, a post on my Facebook page would have been better than nothing."

My words were venom as Calvin and I glared at each other for the longest seconds of my life. How dare he say what he had? I didn't even know the jerk had applied to go overseas at the time.

"What do you want from me, Justice?" he asked, trying to keep his tone calm.

If only looks could kill. "I want nothing from you, Calvin."

"Seriously? Running me over would speak volumes of what you're not saying now."

"Well, everything was said two years ago."

Two years, six months, and twenty-one days to be exact.

I continued walking, ignoring the people around us who heard every single word. Calvin called out to me, but I ignored him, walking away briskly and feeling my heart pounding in my chest. My phone vibrated and I pulled it out from my cleavage. The text was from an unfamiliar number.

The text message read: *Two years, six months and twenty-one days to be exact.*

My heart folded, making every breath I took in throb woefully, and my legs beneath me wobbled. That was how long it's been, since Calvin left.

I turned into a small alley using the brick wall for support.

I hate men. I hate them all! I was doing fine. I was surviving, moving on and handling my own. Then he came out of nowhere and made all my progress disappear. He crushed my achievements like little ants beneath him.

Taking one last deep breath, I wiped away the few tears that had escaped and headed out of the alley. I heard a commotion and saw two police cruisers racing down the street. Nicolle and Audrina were coming up from the club. I didn't see Calvin anywhere.

"So, I saw Calvin tonight," Audrina mused.

"*Ha ha*, you're so funny," I replied sarcastically.

"Nothing shows a man that you're not over him like when you run away from him," Nicole added.

I glared at Nicolle. "I didn't *run* from him." I looked down the street as I heard more commotion. "What's going on down there?"

"I dunno," Audrina said with a shrug. "This homeless guy is getting a little too out of control."

"Is anyone hurt?"

"I don't think so."

Nicolle gazed down the street as well. "I think he kind of ruffed up this girl though."

“Where’s Kailah?”

“Flirting with Nathan.”

“Really, you left her with that pervert?”

“In our defense, they’re not alone. Jay, Mya, and the others are all up there with ’em,” Audrina said.

Just then we heard gunshots and screams. Down the street a man jumped on a police car, denting the roof and shattering the windows. He was holding a girl by her throat.

Audrina gasped. “That’s him.”

“What in the world is he doing?” Nicolle mumbled as the homeless guy jumped off the police cruiser, heading in our direction. He dragged the girl behind him by her throat.

I noticed who was in his grasp. “Oh, my God, is that—”

“That’s Erin!” Nicolle finished.

The policemen aimed their guns and ordered him to drop the girl and fall to his knees, but he ignored them and they fired their weapons.

The homeless guy lets out a screeching cry that made everyone on the streets of Toronto cover their ears.

Every window and lamp post imploded.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

If you enjoyed this preview, then you will enjoy the full book as well.

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PRAISES FOR VELICIOUS

This was an entertaining, quick paced, paranormal vampire read. I like that it had a different type of vampire, still dangerous, but integrated into society and known to exist by some.

+ + +

I loved it! I love paranormal and this was a good one. Aside from dealing with all the college stuff and real life decisions, Justice has vampires thrown in the mix... Once I got sucked in, I couldn't stop reading.

+ + +

I loved the characters in this book! The way the author describes each individual is terrific. The story itself is enthralling, hooks you, pulling you in wanting to know what happens next.

+ + +

The author kept me turning the pages anxiously awaiting what would happen next! Justice was a kick ass main character, and definitely one of my favorites! I can't wait to see what's up next for this author! She is certainly one to watch! I would recommend this book to all lovers of Paranormal Romance!

+ + +

Shelique Lize's debut novel is a page turner. Once you open the book, it's going to grab you and hold you down real tight and you'll watch those pages turn and turn and turn some more until you reach the last page. You'll find twists and turns as you read. Be sure that you have your seat belt on because you will be going on a wild adventure.