



C H A P T E R

2

WTF Triangle: These three young adults belong to the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday clans. Formerly best friends, two of them are now romantically involved while the third is a tentative ally. See also: Winnie Wednesday, witches, and werewolves.

When the WTF triangle met eight days ago, their first reunion in four years, it was awkward. And tense. And Winnie kept imagining spaghetti western music playing in the background, as if she were trapped in the graveyard climax scene of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. (She's pretty sure she was the Ugly in that scenario.)

But it was also undeniably productive.

If Winnie had brought a voice recorder to the cabin on that night, a transcript of the conversation would have read as follows:

[0:00]

Winnie: [standing below the window] Tell him, Erica. Tell Jay what you actually are.

Erica: [seated in the folding chair] No thanks. I'm good.

Winnie: Okay, then I'll tell him.

[Erica shrugs.]

Winnie: She's a Diana.

[Jay, leaning against a riding lawnmower, stiffens.]

Erica: I am. And Jay's a werewolf.

[Jay stiffens more.]

Winnie: This is a big deal, Erica. You do recall that you broke into my house to steal my dad's clues?

Erica: Because your dad took *my sister's* stuff. That dampener belonged to Jenna, thanks.

[Now Winnie is the one to stiffen. She pushes her glasses up her nose.]

[0:20]

Winnie: And you've known that for how long? Four years? You've *known* your sister was a Diana and my dad wasn't—

Erica: I don't know anything about what your dad was, okay? [lifts both hands] Maybe he was a Diana too. I have no clue. I just know that the dampener I found in your room belonged to Jenna, not him.

Winnie: But how did you even know the dampener was *in* my room?

[A pause while Erica crosses her legs at the ankles and smooths her jeans.]

[0:42]

Erica: I saw that map your dad left on the library shelf, and since I'm a Diana . . . I knew what I was looking at.

Jay: [snorts] So you aren't even gonna try to deny what you are?

Erica: Are you? It's not like you can call the Tuesdays on me, can you?

Winnie: Okay, but Jay didn't *ask* to be a nightmare, Erica—

Erica: [eyes narrowing at Jay] Yeah, how *does* that work?

Winnie: —while you voluntarily became a witch.

Erica: [shrugs] I only recently joined the Dianas, and only because I wanted to know why Jenna died. *How*, too. The official report from the Tuesdays says a

vampira horde killed her on her second hunter trial, but I don't buy that. For one, Grayson said . . .

Jay: What? What did Grayson say?

Erica: He said he saw will-o'-wisps near her body when he found her. Not vampira. And for two, it just . . . it's never felt right. Her being on that trial, her dying in the forest. So once I learned she used to be a Diana, well . . . [Erica trails off.]

[1:34]

Winnie: So what—are you saying she was killed because of what she was?

Erica: I have no idea.

Jay: And how did you figure out she was a Diana in the first place?

Erica: How did you figure out you were a nightmare?

Winnie: [speaking at the same time as Jay] Stop deflecting questions, Erica!

Jay: [speaking at the same time as Winnie] Because I woke up one night in the forest with no clue how I got there. Is that specific enough for you?

Erica: [sniffs] I found a spell in Jenna's room. It was hidden in her diary.

Winnie: A spell for what?

Erica: I don't know.

Winnie: Do you still have it?

Erica: Of course not. With how nosy my mom is?

Jay: That still doesn't get us from point A to point B. So Jenna was a Diana—why did you become one?

Erica: [glares] They started contacting me. With Jenna's locket. I ignored it at first until . . . I didn't anymore.

Winnie: Wait, how does that work? [She fishes out her locket from her sweater.]

[2:24]

Winnie: This thing sends messages?

Erica: Yeah, the lockets send messages. A small piece of paper shows up in mine with words, sometimes in Latin. Sometimes not.

Jay: [under his breath] Pretentious.

Winnie: Does it ever heat up? And burn?

Erica: No. And that's a weirdly specific question. Does yours do that?

[Winnie doesn't answer. Just pushes the locket back into her sweater.]

[2:45]

Jay: Wait, I thought Grayson had your sister's locket. How did you get it back?

Erica: [bites lip] He gave it to me. After Jenna's funeral.

Jay: Does that mean he knew what Jenna was?

Erica: I have no idea. We didn't talk about it, and I didn't know what the locket meant when he gave it to me. [lifts hands in frustration] Jenna spent *all* her time with him the year before she died. When he showed up to give me the locket and invite me to a party at the old museum . . . Well, the only reason I wanted to go was so I could tell him off for stealing all my sister's time. But then my mom wouldn't let me leave the house, and that was that.

Winnie: But only a few weeks ago, you told me you'd lost the locket. Where was it?

Erica: [flushing] I just misplaced it. The latch is shoddy, and it fell off.

Winnie: Okay, so when did you get your first message from a Diana?

[Erica's lips compress.]

[3:28]

Jay: Come on, Erica. Answer the question.

Erica: Well, when did *you* become a werewolf?

Jay: [unfazed] When I was thirteen.

Erica: [Her eyes narrow again.] Okay, fine. I was twelve. And they sent a message every year after that, but I never answered until last year.

Winnie: Why last year but not before?

Erica: Because I wanted information. As *mentioned*, Winnie, I want to know why Jenna died. And how. [She flips up her hands.]

Jay: And do the Dianas have an answer?

Erica: I . . . don't know. Or at least, I haven't learned anything. Yet.

Jay: So why remain a Diana?

Erica: And why remain a werewolf?

Winnie: Because he can't just change what he is.

Erica: Precisely, Winnie.

[4:02]

Jay: [inhales audibly, then exhales] Give us one good reason we should believe anything you're saying right now, Erica.

Erica: [bounces one shoulder] I don't know. Maybe because I saved your life in the forest, Jay? I knew those witches were after you, but I led them away. Winnie can vouch for that. She was hiding *right* there.

Winnie: [winces, then nods] It's true. She did do that, Jay.

Erica: Look, the only reason I agreed to meet you here tonight is because I think we want the same thing. You want to know what happened to your dad; I want to know what happened to Jenna.

Winnie: And those are connected somehow?

Erica: Obviously. Your dad's map led to Jenna's dampener. *Without* the source inside. Do you know anything about that, by the way?

Winnie: You stole all my stuff. Did it look like I knew anything?

[Erica studies Winnie for several seconds.]

[4:37]

Erica: Okay, so this is why we need to work together. Pool our resources. I know about Dianas, you've got the clues from your dad. And you . . . [She looks at Jay.] I don't know what you contribute, honestly.

Jay: For starters, I'm someone Winnie can *actually* trust.

Erica: What are you trying to say?

Jay: I'm not *trying* to say anything, Erica. I am actively saying you're not trustworthy.

Erica: Oh, because trusting the Big Bad Wolf is a great idea—

Winnie: Enough. Both of you. [Winnie chops her hand at each of them.] Witch, werewolf, Wednesday.

Erica: Huh?

Winnie: Nothing. [She looks at Erica.] Jay is the F in our WTF triangle, okay? I'm not keeping secrets from him, and he *will* help us find what we need.

Erica: So does that mean we have a deal? I help you follow your dad's clues, and you help me find Jenna's source?

Jay: Hold up. I thought you wanted to know what happened to Jenna. You didn't say anything about finding her source.

Erica: [rolls her eyes] The two go hand in hand, Jay. Can't do one without the other. An empty dampener is useless.

Jay: And a full dampener is dangerous.

Erica: Jenna has been dead for four years. There's no magic left inside her source.

Winnie: Stop it, you two. Enough squabbling. And yes. [She extends a hand.] We have a deal, Erica.

[Erica shakes Winnie's hand, firm and businesslike. Jay simply digs his hands into his pockets and turns away.]

[End 6:16]

After that, the spy games began. Although admittedly it has mostly been only Winnie and Erica participating. Partly because there really isn't much that Jay can contribute. But mostly because he still doesn't trust Erica, even after eight days of proving herself useful to them.

And it's fine.

Yep, it's *fine* being caught in the middle.

Winnie didn't expect the WTF gang to become besties again overnight. Sure, she'd hoped for it. (*Hope is the thing with feathers!*) And yeah, she still daydreams of easy camaraderie, but even her loyal bear heart knows she has to approach this Erica alliance with wide eyes and hunter senses turned to max.

So for now, Winnie will be the W in a WT angle . . . and in a WF angle too. And maybe one day—hopefully sooner rather than later—those two corners will slot back into the three-sided shape they're meant to be.



C H A P T E R

3

Nightmare Masquerade: An annual tradition introduced in the 1970s by Tessa Tuesday in which global Luminaries are invited to explore Hemlock Falls. Over the course of a week, each clan hosts an elaborate event showcasing their clan's hard work and virtues.

The high school rises before Winnie, with cars and jeeps and trucks and bicycles pulling into the parking lot. Students converge, ejected from parental vehicles or disgorged from their own. The morning is cold, but the sun peeks up from the high school's south side. The days are stretching longer now; a reminder that the forest can't steal everything; that even summer comes to Hemlock Falls eventually.

Casey Tuesday drives past in his red Wrangler and howls at Winnie. Because of course he does.

Four more howls reach Winnie as she coasts through the parking lot and toward the bike rack at the front door. She doesn't acknowledge the howlers, and they're almost static at this point. *Cosmic microwave background*. Now that the werewolf is presumed dead by the entire city—now that Winnie knows the truth of that wolf and what really happened to her under the crushing waterfall waves with the melusine and Jay . . .

Well, hope is the thing with feathers and she's feeling a lot of it these days.

She doesn't even get annoyed by the giant Nightmare Masquerade banner fluttering beside the school's front door. *Enjoy the celebrations*

and delight in the Floating Carnival! it declares in swirly golden script that Darian spent *hours* agonizing over. *Festivities begin Sunday April 21!*

That's only two days away now, and there's a dramatic illustration of a midnight-blue basilisk coiling around the Ferris wheel that floats on the Little Lake . . .

Okay, maybe Winnie does get a little bit annoyed. That basilisk has its poison glands in the wrong positions along its crown, and the tendrils coming off its cape are not accurate at all. Winnie would know, having seen one up close right before her glasses turned to stone.

Number of basilisks killed a month ago? Zero. Number of basilisks killed now? One.

She huffs a sigh and charges into the school. She is not going to let a poor anatomical representation of a nightmare ruin her day. She has new notes in her pocket from Erica to study later, and although her own just-delivered intel was nothing more than a rehash of things they already know, as far as secret alliances go, this one is working out quite well—and she really hopes Jay will recognize that soon.

When she passes Erica's locker on her way to homeroom and Erica happens to glance her way, Winnie offers only a nod. Which Erica returns in an identical interaction to what they would have shared a few weeks ago. Because they are not friends. They are barely acquaintances.

“WINNIE!”

The voice that screeches this is so loud and so close, Winnie is not prepared at all for the explosion in her eardrums. Or how very near Bretta Wednesday is when she flings her arms around Winnie and starts squeezing. Winnie is not a small person, and Bretta is not a large one, but Bretta easily lifts Winnie off her feet as she embraces her with all the ferocity of a Wednesday bear.

“WE DID IT!” This is a new voice and a second set of arms now squeezing.

“Did . . . what?” Winnie grunts out as Fatima's golden hijab presses against her left cheek.

“WE PASSED OUR THIRD TRIAL!” This comes from both Bretta and Fatima simultaneously, and it takes Winnie several seconds to take their jubilant screeching—which is *very loud*—translate it into words, and then process those words.

But eventually the neural pathways connect, and suddenly Winnie is

screaching too. And jumping. They're all jumping. "OH MY GOD, YOU PASSED YOUR THIRD TRIAL! YOU PASSED YOUR THIRD TRIAL!"

"LAST NIGHT!" Bretta shouts.

"AND IT WAS AMAZING!" This is from Fatima, who is now pulling back. Bretta, however, still holds tight—and is still jumping. Her corkscrew curls spring while she chants: "We're hunters now, we're hunters now!"

Winnie pries herself loose, though it doesn't slow Bretta. Nor her sister Emma, who has joined their square and is managing a pretty decent jump despite her cast. "We're hunters now, we're hunters now!" She is singing along with her sister.

Actually, there are other people singing too—*You're hunters now, you're hunters now!*—because everyone in the hallway is feeling the ripple of exuberant Luminary joy. Becoming a hunter is a Very Big Deal; they all know that; and their smiles and fist bumps and applause parade by like the happiest of processions.

"We're celebrating after Sunday training today," Bretta says, finally pausing her jumps long enough to speak. Her cheeks are so bunched from smiling, the dimples within look fathomless. "You *have* to come with us! We're gonna go to Falls' Finest to *buy things*."

"Mom's out of town on networker stuff," Emma explains. Her own cheeks are just as round as her sister's—and her eyes may be a bit misty too. "She feels so guilty she missed Bretta's big moment that she's basically told us we can buy whatever we want."

"And," Fatima now inserts with a sly grin, her braces wrapped in bright orange rubber bands, "am I right in guessing you still don't know what you want to be for the Nightmare Ball?"

Winnie cringes—a melodramatic face she knows will make her friends laugh. And they comply, their voices lifting up to the paneled ceiling. "How about an anatomically correct basilisk?" Winnie suggests. "Complete with poison glands on its crown and tendrils that don't curl?"

Her friends are not impressed by this suggestion.

"Okay, you're definitely coming with us." Fatima hooks her arm in Winnie's and hauls her toward their shared homeroom. "Especially because I haven't even told you the most exciting news of all."

Something about the way she utters this makes Winnie's head cock.

Then makes her eyes narrow as Bretta laughs mischievously. “Oh, you’re gonna love this part, Winnie!” she calls. “Just wait until you see.”

“Um,” Winnie asks as she follows Fatima into Ms. Morgan’s room—and the bell starts its croaking. “Gonna love what part, Fatima?”

Fatima ignores her. Possibly because the bell is so loud.

“Gonna love *what* part?” Winnie presses once they’re both seated in their desks. “Fatima, love *what* part?”

“That.” Fatima points at the front of the room, where a grouchy-looking Ms. Morgan stands with a stack of papers in her left hand.

“Time to vote for your Nightmare Court,” the teacher half moans, half snarls at the classroom. “These are the names that made it through to the final round of voting. Circle one person from each grade whom you think should . . . should . . . ugh, *represent* you on the Nightmare Court during the Masquerade next week. And please, for the love of god, my children, *do not* take it personally if your name isn’t on this list. Winning one of these four crowns will have absolutely no bearing on your future in Hemlock Falls or beyond. It’s an antiquated tradition that conflates popularity with success. Name a single Midnight Crown winner who has gone on to do great things?”

“Theresa Monday is a councilor.”

“Patrice Thursday manages Falls’ Finest.”

“Hugo Sábado is the liaison with Mexico.”

“Your own boyfriend, Mason, is the Lead Hunter—”

“Okay, okay.” Ms. Morgan’s head slumps. “I get it. Good lord.”

The students don’t stop, and more names ricochet around Winnie while Ms. Morgan plods like a pissed-off droll down each row and hands out papers.

Oh, Winnie thinks as one lands on her desk. *Now I see what’s going on*. Forty names peer up at her, ten from each of the high school grades. Jay Friday is of course on the senior list, next to his fellow Forgotten band-mates: L.A. Saturday and Trevor Tuesday.

And right there, in the column next to Jay’s, is Winnie’s own name for year eleven. *Winnie Wednesday, junior*, it reads.

“I’m voting for you,” Fatima whispers. “And then you’re letting me do your hair when you win.”

Winnie only glares at her friend. Then crumples up the paper and slouches back in her seat.

“Bravo, Winnie!” Ms. Morgan cries. “Let’s all be like her, please, and refuse to engage! Who’s with her?”

No one responds. Pencils and pens scratch furiously. Fatima snickers nearby.

As Winnie shambles out the homeroom door, Ms. Morgan pops up beside her. “Winnie, you dropped these.”

A whiff of honey lalts up Winnie’s nose—and her stomach slams so hard into the floor that she physically lurches forward two inches.

Because of course, Ms. Morgan is holding the two pages from the cabin. They might be blank, but all it takes is one person asking, *Hmmm, why does Winnie have paper that smells like honey?* and then conducting a Google search. They’ll see real fast that honey is an easy way to write secret messages.

Winnie gulps. Then tries to *not* frantically yank the two pages from Ms. Morgan. *HOW DID THESE FALL OUT OF MY POCKET?!* she screams inwardly. Outwardly, she muscled a smile onto her lips. “Oh, ha! Thanks for finding those. Don’t want to litter.”

“Oh, are they trash?” Ms. Morgan’s fingers tighten on the pages. “I can toss them for you.”

The harpy laugh this pulls from Winnie’s chest is so shrill, it actually hurts. Like, it *hurts* Winnie’s lungs and it visibly hurts Ms. Morgan’s ears. The teacher winces.

“Nope!” Winnie half shrieks. “I’ll toss them myself. Thanks so much.” *Tug.* Still no release.

“Actually, Winnie, now that I’ve got you here, there’s something I’ve been meaning to say.”

Oh god, there goes Winnie’s stomach again. And her brain too, filling the milliseconds of silence with a thousand worst-case scenarios. *Why are you sending secret messages in honey, Winnie? Why are you sneaking around Hemlock Falls and the Thursday estate? Is Jay a werewolf? Is Erica a witch?*

“I . . . feel I need to apologize.”

“Oh.” This is so far removed from what Winnie was bracing for, she has to replay the words twice in her head. “For what?”

Ms. Morgan releases the pages. Winnie snatches them to her chest. *Play it cool, play it cool.*

Fortunately, Ms. Morgan isn't paying attention to the papers anymore. Her attention has slid sideways, following a pensive pucker on her lips. “Because I pushed you to apply to that art program at Heritage University a month ago. I had no idea you were going to attempt the hunter trials, and I thought . . . well, I'm sorry. I hope it didn't feel like I was saying you didn't belong in the Luminaries.”

“Oh,” Winnie says again, breathier this time. “I totally forgot all about that application. There's been a lot going on.”

“Understatement of the year.” Ms. Morgan sniffs. “It's not like Hemlock Falls is ever uneventful, but things have been especially bananas in recent weeks.”

You have no idea. Winnie tries again to exit—she *does* have Algebra 2 to get to, after all. But Ms. Morgan lifts a hand.

“*But,*” she continues, dragging out that word, “I do have another application to give you before you go. This is one I think you're really going to like.” She pauses to dig through a large pocket in her skirt. “Where are you, where are you . . . Lip balm, pharmacy receipt, aha! Here we go.” She offers a wrinkled paper to Winnie.

Nightmare Compendium Illustrations Contest, it reads along the top, below which is a detailed drawing of a vampira heart (recognizable by the five chambers). *Submit your drawings to be included in the newest edition of the Nightmare Compendium.*

Winnie's heart skips a beat. Like, literally: it stops for the entire span of a usual heartbeat. “Holy crap,” she breathes, and for a few seconds, she forgets about the honey-laced pages or that she's supposed to hate the Masquerade.

“Holy crap indeed,” Ms. Morgan agrees. “This doesn't circulate until Monday at the Science Fair.”

“Um, thank you?” Winnie ogles the flyer. Then flings her gaze up. “Wait—how did you even get this if it's not public yet?”

Ms. Morgan preens. “There are some perks to dating the Lead Tuesday

Hunter. One being that I get first dibs on dessert at clan dinner. Another being that I get sneak peeks and early access to competitions like this one.”

“Wow.” Winnie shakes her head. Then starts grinning . . . and grinning. “Thank you for showing it to me, Ms. Morgan. I’m really honored.”

“Of course.” Ms. Morgan grins right back. “All I ask is that you win, okay? So pick something *really* complicated to illustrate.”

“I will.” Winnie’s mind is already leaping from one possibility to another. *Kelpie vascular systems are pretty incredible—oh, but spidrin spinnerets have microscopic spigots to create silk filaments.* Winnie slings her backpack around to stuff in the application. *And then there’s the banshee claw, which I’ve studied firsthand!* But as she starts unzipping her bag, a thought erupts in her frontal lobe. If Ms. Morgan hears things before other people, then maybe . . .

“Hey, Ms. Morgan, um . . .” Winnie pauses, fighting the urge to click her teeth. This is a perfectly normal question; she has no reason to be nervous at all. “Has Mason ever seen anything weird in the forest?”

“I’m pretty sure *everything* in the forest is considered weird.” Ms. Morgan snorts. “But you’re talking about that thing that chased you, right? The Rustler?”

“The Whisperer,” Winnie corrects, even though that isn’t what she was talking about at all. What *she* was talking about were Dianas—including the two very dead corpses she left melted in the forest and whom absolutely no one has mentioned since.

It defies the third law of motion: for every action in nature, there is an equal and opposite reaction. In the Luminaries, that means when witches show up, Tuesdays assemble. Yet an entire week has passed since the forest burned and Jay nearly got taken by witches. Since Aunt Rachel *should* have died, but got saved by Jay while Winnie faced off to a powerful Diana leader. Yet there have been no broadcasts on the nightly news about witches, no warnings around town to be on the lookout for magical activity, and no sudden wails from the siren that stands next to city hall.

It defies basic physics.

Every day, Winnie has waited for an announcement to come. For the town to erupt with a droll-sized panic that would make their werewolf fears look unicellular in comparison. But every day, there’s nothing.

And right now, Ms. Morgan doesn’t seem to know about it either.

“Oh yeah. Whisperer, not Rustler.” Ms. Morgan wags her head. “No, I’m afraid Mason’s never mentioned anything about that. But hey, have you ever considered . . .”

That I’m crazy? Winnie thinks. That it’s all in my head? Because yeah, I worried about that for a while.

“. . . that maybe it isn’t a nightmare?” Ms. Morgan shrugs. “I don’t know. Just something to think about. You’re the Luminary, not me!”

Winnie blinks at the petite, round-hipped lady who made her memorize poems two years ago. Ms. Morgan is shockingly close to the heart of the matter. *Pure Heart. Trust the Pure Heart.* Like, so close she has basically guessed what’s really going on.

But maybe that’s to be expected. Ms. Morgan is a non, after all. Her culture doesn’t run thicker than blood, so maybe it’s only natural she’d have an outsider’s view on things.

“Thanks, Ms. Morgan.” Winnie offers her a smile. It’s tight, but real. Then she finishes shoving the application *and* her secret pages into her backpack (she digs those all the way down to the bottom; no falling out this time). “I really appreciate the application.”

“Of course, Winnie.” The teacher beams. “I’m always on your side.”