



CHAPTER ONE

BREACH

THE DAY OF

Noa

The first bad omen is blood.

The murmur of magic surrounds me as I work in my apothecary. Once a centuries-old lighthouse, its walls, worn by hurricanes and smoke and salt, let the wind inside—my constant companion. I stand guard at my cauldron to protect its flame as I stir with meticulous precision. After everything that's happened in the past few days, there's no more room for mistakes—this good fortune potion must be perfect, for my sake.

Shelves of carefully labeled ingredients stare down at me begging to be used. Potions embossed with our emblem, a pendulous nightshade flower, sit alongside items plucked from friends and foes.

I push my glasses up my nose and glance at my ring as it catches the lantern light, its core burning like liquid fire beneath my family's crest. The magic oleum starter shimmers in a jar high above my head. It waits for me to summon it.

I'm one of the only alchemists in the city who can manipulate this magic to its full potential, a Saint renowned for her skills. The oleum's

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glowing heartbeat becomes my compass as I infuse the magic from the starter into the brew with a twist of my hand. The ring itself isn't magical, but feeling the metal against my skin grounds me, focuses me. A single shiver scales my spine, drenching me with its power. Sweat lifts from my skin and my veins swell as the volatility of it hums. The whisper of cool air filtering down from the stone staircase is welcome as the whole apothecary heats with magic.

There's one last ingredient before this potion, made to instill good fortune in its user, is ready, before it can be poured into dozens of little bottles to be sold.

I take my right hand and trail my fingertip over the uniform labels of my vials, squinting through the steam fogging my glasses. *Mugwort . . . squid ink . . .* Their kaleidoscopic colors are as striking as the glasswork of the Parliament of Saints Cathedral. *Ah! There, four-leaf clovers.*

I don't notice until the potion oozes from a molten gold to a frothing black sludge that something is wrong. Very wrong.

I drop the stirring wand and step back just in time for a cloud of noxious vapors to billow out, the smell of sulfur and death wafting toward me like a plague. As the magic in the potion sours, the colors in my heirloom ring turn a murky black; the connection is broken. I grimace as I command the grim cloud away.

"Shit," I say, waving my hand through the air.

All that remains is the tarry muck of my blunder and the irritation curdling my insides. I look around for my error.

Oleum isn't easy to come by these days. If Theo finds out I wasted even a small amount of our crew's starter ...

I cover my mouth, the thin silk of my blouse growing wet from sweat. I march toward the wall of glass vials lined up beside my cauldron. The pot gurgles like an ill stomach, settling into magical waste.

Useless.

I *can't* be useless. I'm Noa Toussaint. Baroness. Saint. Nightshade.

HER SHARP EMBRACE

Before this apothecary, before the world of the Nightshades, I lived a life of luxury, of ease. My ascension in the Toussaint family had been guaranteed, but I left all that behind, including my beloved little sister. Gave up the gold and glamour and sweet Juliette for a world of crime, cauldron smoke, and Lennon.

I turn my anger toward the vials, searching for a culprit. When I see the bottle, weeping over the edge of my sprawling oak cupboard, my stomach sinks. I hadn't heard the glass slip, its cork pop open, or the *drip-drip-drip* of blood. *Right* above my cauldron.

"How in the world could *that* have happened?" I whisper, glancing around. I lean my head toward the corner staircase, but I'm alone. A headache punches itself into my temple, nearly as vicious as the beating Theo gave me last night. I frown. The vial's label is dappled, but the letters still read clear.

Blood of an enemy.

I shiver. Not from the rush of magic or the thrill of potion-making.

The bottle is nearly empty. Its contents sizzle on the remnants of good luck turned bad. Behind me, the grandfather clock chimes, mocking me further.

I stare at the time, then bite my lip nearly hard enough to leave a mark. The Nightshades have no room in their crew for a failing alchemist, especially not after my spectacular screwup last night. The potions I swallowed healed the bruises from Theo's assault, but they've done nothing for the pinch in the back of my throat. A tiny hairline fracture in my glasses and the overwhelming feeling of guilt are the only reminders of the skirmish.

I think of the wild look of desperation in Lennon's eyes. She told me this job needed to be seen through to completion. If I can't fix it ... a setback like this could ruin us. Ruin Lennon. Ruin *me*.

I squeeze my eyes shut, forcing the wall of burning tears back until they recede.

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Worse, this setback means I may not see Lennon tonight. Time I've been craving, needing for weeks, and it's all thanks to the blood of our Saints-be-damned enemies.

Saints, I don't want to be useless to her.

But I don't have time to pout or feel sorry for myself, because my second omen arrives with a gasp.