

# Chapter One

-

## Resurrection

Stirring from her disquieted slumber, Amara's eyes flutter open to the soft light of the sunset glowing through a window reinforced by plexiglass. An alarm sounds, reverberating through her throbbing head. She turns to identify the source, and sees a woman sleeping, draped with the same thick blue fleece blankets as herself. Connected to the woman is a heart monitor—the source of the alarm which, in the moment, feels like the bane of Amara's existence.

She sits up slowly on the uncomfortable mattress, and stretches her arms and legs with a yawn. There's an IV attached to her arm, and connected to it, a half-empty bag of a yellowish fluid labeled "TPN." To her left is a column of shelves lined with medical tools, supplies, and clean, white clothes.

It's a makeshift hospital room.

As her awareness dawns, fragments of memory assemble—a car crash. The details unfold like the tendrils of an unsettling dream. Amara tries to take a breath, but the air is stifled, thick with unease and sickness. The barren walls compress, her chest tightening as the weight of the memories settle, entangling themselves through her fascia with an unrelenting grasp. Amara clenches her jaw in agony as she

unwillingly relives the crash with disturbing clarity. There was blood—so *much blood*.

She shifts her weight to the edge of the bed, cringing when the ball of her foot touches the icy tile floor. Someone's already dressed her in the same white clothes on the shelves. She heads towards the door, pulling along the IV. The handle is oddly-shaped, crafted to leave no gaps, leaving no chance to tie something dangerous around it.

The door creaks as Amara steps out. The halls are barren, besides nameplates displaying room numbers. There's sound coming from down the hall: casual dialogue between two people echo from low-quality speakers, combined with the satisfying sound of crunching popcorn.

Cautiously, she continues down the hall. As she gets closer, a paradoxical feeling of comfort and anxiety creeps over her. The familiar comforts draw her closer, letting her know that whatever she will face is probably safe. Still, the uncertainty tightens in her chest.

Amara peers around the wall and is met with a family of faces, adults and children alike, with expressions captivated by the outdated television screen. A few of them notice her, turning to glare like meerkats weary of a potential predator.

One of them, an orange-haired boy no older than seventeen, abruptly stands up.

“Hey! It's the girl!” He exclaims, his British accent rippling through the air, attracting the attention of the rest of the room's inhabitants. Suddenly, *everyone* is staring. Amara squirms under the unwanted attention as the boy dramatically steps over the others' legs, climbing his way out of the row. Amara tenses as he approaches.

“I'm Sid,” he says, sticking out his hand. “What's your name?”

She lifts a brow, eyeing him suspiciously before taking his hand. “Amara.”

He notices as they shake hands that the catheter is still in her vein. “Oh, you haven't met Mark and Libby yet?”

“No... I have no idea what’s going on. I just woke up, and my head really hurts.” She glances towards the rest of the people in the room. Clearly, her sudden appearance is more important than the movie. She shifts on her cold feet.

“Are you feeling alright?”

“Just a little uncomfortable,” she whispers.

“Libby’s got to check up on you. I’m not sure if you should even be up and about right now. Come on, follow me.”

Sid swiftly walks past her, back towards the way she came. Her bare feet and the now rattling IV pole wheels struggle to keep up with his pace against the unforgiving floor. A subtle scent emanates off of him, wafting past her; creamy, yet nutty, like freshly roasted chestnuts.

“Don’t be nervous,” he calls back joyfully, as if he can sense her unease. “Everyone’s nice here.”

Amara doesn’t respond. The broadcast, the accident, and now this boy taking her to their leader in this sterile and unfamiliar environment like she’s been thrust into a completely different universe. Her mind buffers.

The distant sound of a conversation in the library breaks her out of her thoughts.

“...then clear and secure the floor. Once everything is secure, we’ll—”

“Markus?” Sid interrupts, catching the doorframe with his hand. “Amara’s woken up.”

It’s odd to hear her name so casually spoken by a stranger, as if they’d known each other forever. She curls her lip in response.

There, she sees two people dressed in the same bright white clothing as herself. Yet, the air they exude is so distinctly different from the others in the movie room.

“Amara,” the attractive man speaks with an authoritative tone, yet wears a warm smile, contradictory to his aura. “I’m Captain Markus Daniels. Pleasure to meet you. This is my subordinate, Liberty Cruz.”

A sudden ease washes over her as she hears the man’s title.

“Nice to meet you,” Liberty says. “You can call me Libby.” She exudes a much softer presence than Markus. There’s a vibrant youthfulness about her, unlike somebody in the military. The contours of her deep brown complexion seem to glow golden under the soft library lights.

“Nice to meet you,” Amara shyly replies.

“If you’d leave us, Sid, we have to speak with Amara privately.”

“Can’t I stay? There’s nothing that you’d tell her that I don’t already know.”

“Give her space.” His tone is soft, yet demanding, offering no options.

“Oh... alright.” Sid seems dejected.

“Before you go, Amara’s going to need a place to sleep tonight. Would you mind moving into your parents’ room for the time being?”

Sid furrows his brows. “Can’t Amara and I just share my room? Other people did when we first got here.”

“She needs privacy.”

“You know what happens when my dad and I are stuck in a room together,” Sid pleads.

“Please do it for tonight. Tomorrow, we will ask if there’s anybody willing to share. If nobody wants to, you can stay with Libby and me.”

Sid sighs, and exits the room without another word. Amara furrows her brows, feeling ever-so-slightly guilty. Truth be told, she wouldn't mind sharing a room with him. It wasn't unlike sleeping in the same room as Eden.

"I'm sure you have lots of questions," Markus begins, "but first, I'll let Liberty explain your condition."

"Do you remember what happened to you?" Libby's voice is gentle and sweet, the polar opposite of Markus's.

Amara clenches her jaw as her throat and chest tighten with grief. It's not something she wants to remember. "Yes."

"I'm an EMT. I'm the one who brought you here. You suffered from whiplash and a concussion. You were asleep for two weeks."

Amara's heart drops. *Two weeks?* She holds her breath and swallows the lump forming in her throat. Tears threaten to form, but she locks the floodgates tight, unwilling to break down. The pressure rises in her head, threatening to burst.

Libby approaches and places a comforting hand on her shoulder. "I understand what you're going through. I also lost my mom in a car crash. So... if you need to talk, I'll be here."

Amara nods, but she won't. Talking won't help. Advice won't help. Nothing will.

"There's something else you need to see," Markus interrupts the tense moment.

"Not now, Markus," Libby argues, a tinge of disdain in her voice. Amara glances up at him, confused.

"Liberty, she needs to see it. Come," he beckons, walking over to the window behind them.

Amara stands up, grasping at the IV pole to stabilize her gelatin legs, and walks hesitantly towards the window. The blinds are closed, and instead of opening them, Markus peeks out in between them. Amara follows his example.

Outside, the sun is set, casting a red glow over the horizon. Scattered around the street are shifting silhouettes scurrying about like wild animals. Over to her right is a group of them huddling in a circle together. They seem to be eating something... or someone.

“Oh my god.” She steps away from the window, feeling like she’s going to be sick. “They’re...”

“They’re dead,” Markus finishes.

“They’re *infected*,” Libby corrects. “Technically, they’re not dead.”

“They might as well be,” Markus snaps back. “I don’t think there’s anything left to be saved. They’re just flesh-hungry shells of the people they once were.”

Amara falls into the cushioned library chair, her mind churning like a witches’ brew with the recent events. She’s frozen, numb with disbelief. Reality feels like a distant echo, a faded painting she observes from afar. Just yesterday, she was living a simple, happy life. But, yesterday was actually two weeks ago, and her family is gone.

“Do you think this is everywhere?” Amara chokes out, her throat clamping itself shut with anxiety and overwhelm. “I mean, you’re in the military, right? Is anyone coming to save us?”

Markus releases the blind and turns back to face her, eyebrows lowered in a solemn expression. “I don’t think so. I’m sorry.”

Amara looks into her lap, completely overwhelmed, and tries to focus on her breath. She can’t break down in front of these people. She won’t.

“I’m not *just* in the military,” he adds. “I’m the Captain of a sizable cell of Vampire Hunters, recruited by the Vampire Eradication Administration.”

Amara’s churning thoughts come to an abrupt halt, similar to how she felt when the broadcast first echoed throughout her living room. She looks up questioningly at him, but he seems completely serious. Without missing a beat, he continues as if he can hear her thoughts.

“Vampires are *very real*. They’re not the mythical creatures of folklore, though their name *was* inspired by that. They were created to be super soldiers, the product of genetic engineering; to be stronger, faster, and better... but they’re *not* better. They’re an abomination, and they need to be *exterminated*.”

Amara looks away from him, at anything else in the room. It feels like she’s living in a horror movie. It’s all too much to take in at once.

“I need to process,” Amara mutters.

“I told you, Markus,” Libby spits frustratedly, not like a subordinate talking to their boss, but more like a friend or an acquaintance.

“She needs to know,” Markus repeats. “I’m sorry to drop all of this on you, Amara. You should rest. Liberty, please tend to her medical and get her some supplies.”

Libby sighs, and then turns to Amara. “He’s right. You need to rest. Come with me.”

Amara stands from her spot and follows Libby out of the room, back into the now dark hallways. Her scent is subtle and sweet, like a floral perfume.

“We still have electricity and water, so you can take a shower. There should be shampoo and soap in the bathroom, unless Sid used it already. We’ll get you a towel. Speaking of Sid,” she cuts off, as Sid turns the corner with some new sheets in hand, “would you mind setting up Amara’s room for her? I need to show Amara around and take her vitals.”

“Already on it,” Sid shrugs, motioning to the sheets in his hands.

“Thank you,” Amara replies as he passes by. He’s so thoughtful.

Libby and Amara continue down the hallway. They finally rear the corner, once again appearing in front of the movie watchers.

“This is the common room. Everyone, this is Amara. Amara, this is everyone.”

Amara sheepishly waves at the people, and some wave back. Some of them completely ignore her, which she finds odd.

“We’ll do formal introductions later,” Libby says, and they continue down the hall. The wall ends and is replaced with huge glass windows leading to an outdoor area. There’s a large empty concrete area, as well as a fake grass patch. A broken-down bench is leaning against the wall, along with a pile of wood shavings, wooden planks, and a few wooden staffs.

“This is the Oasis. Markus has been training people every morning out here for about a week now. He’s working on making bo-staffs for everyone. Not everyone trains, but I hope you will, for your sake,” she ends her sentence on a grim note.

Amara uncomfortably brushes it off and they move on, making their way to the kitchen.

“Are you hungry? We have some leftovers from dinner in the fridge, but you can have anything you like.”

Amara contemplates eating. She *does* feel hungry, but the idea of it repulses her. “Maybe later.”

“Of course, that’s normal for people in your situation. Feel free to raid the pantry when you feel up to it. Eat something light so you don’t overwhelm yourself. Over here,” Libby motions, walking a bit more down the hall, “is the storage and laundry room. Everything you need will be in there: clothes, sheets, toiletries, feminine care, you know. Why don’t you grab some fresh clothes for now?”



Amara nods in understanding and does what she says. With the tour out of the way, they head back to the bedrooms. They approach one of the doors: room twenty one. Libby pushes the door handle, and it gives way. Sid's smell permeates the otherwise empty room, but in a good way. It's inviting and somewhat comforting.

"This'll be your room. You can put your clothes on the shelf over there. I need to take your vitals, just to make sure everything is okay with you, so I'm going to go get some supplies. Why don't you make the bed while I'm gone?"

With that, Libby walks out of the room. It takes no time for Amara to make the bed—the mattress is so light that it's almost nonexistent—and in just a minute, Libby is back with some supplies.

"Sit down and hold out your arm."

Amara does as she says, and Libby wraps a blood pressure cuff around her arm. She also clips a small device, a blood oxygen monitor, onto Amara's finger, before removing the IV catheter and placing a bandage over it.

"Now just look right at me. I'm gonna shine this into your eyes."

Amara does as she's told as Libby measures her pupils. "There doesn't seem to be any sign of a serious concussion." She removes the light from Amara's eyes and continues. "I don't have any supplies to give you a comprehensive checkup, but you should be fine."

As Libby packs the light back into its container, Amara says, "you know, I really don't mind sharing the room with Sid. I used to sleep in the same room with my little sister."

"You should take tonight for yourself and rest. Besides, you'll get enough of Sid eventually," Libby says with a small smirk on her face. "He's a good kid, but he's got a loud personality."

The words register, but seem to go in one ear and out the other as more questions cloud her mind. "So who is that girl? The one with the heart monitor?"

“That’s Catherine. She had an accident. I had to amputate her arm.”

“What happened?”

Libby’s chest rises tensely as she glares at the blood pressure measurement. “She was bitten.”

“Oh,” is all Amara manages to choke out. The thought of those people—those dead people—outside, makes her skin crawl.

“Alright, your blood pressure and oxygen levels are normal.” She removes the instruments and places them in their respective containers. Instead of getting up like Amara expected, she stays on the bed, taking a deep breath and sighing. “So, um, I need to tell you something... something important.”

Amara furrows her brow slightly in response to Libby’s concerning statement. “Okay.”

“Like I said, I’m an EMT. I’m the one who pulled you out of the car...” she pauses, reluctant to speak, suspending anxiety in the air like a foreboding guillotine. “You didn’t just have a concussion. Your car flipped. You had a serious head injury, a shattered collarbone, and a broken fibula.”

Amara’s expression stays rigid.

Libby sighs, trying to get the tension out of her chest. “As a Hunter, we’re required to have a supply of Vampire Blood on our person at all times, just in case we get hurt. It heals you. I used my supply to save your life.”

The pieces suddenly come together like a puzzle. Amara looks away, into her lap, staring at the skin on her arms. The crash killed her mom and Eden instantly. She feels dumb for not realizing it sooner. There’s no way she made it out of the accident without a scratch. The pounding headache, the dizziness, the disturbing amount of blood dripping from her mother’s mangled body...

“I’m really, *really* sorry Amara. I can’t even begin to understand how you must feel right now. I just figured, since Markus already told you everything, that it would be better to tell you now, so you can process it all at once. Now, I’m not sure if that was the best idea...”

Amara bites her lip, the whirlwind of thoughts intensifying her nagging headache. Leaning forward, she rests her heavy head in her palms. It’s an overwhelming flood of information, too much to process. There’s too many questions; yet, one question looms over it all like a threatening storm. She’s hesitant to ask, because she’s afraid the answer may shatter her reality beyond repair.

“Amara,” Libby calls gently, but pauses to contemplate, like she’s trying to form a coherent sentence. “You can’t tell Markus about this. We’re not allowed to give Vampire Blood to civilians. If he finds out...” she trails off, leaving an uncomfortable feeling to settle in Amara’s stomach. “Just don’t tell him.”

Amara clenches her jaw tighter. She wants to lash out, to tell Libby that she’s a fucking idiot for dropping this bomb on her and then ever-so-subtly hinting that Markus could kill her at any moment.

“Please say something,” Libby pleads, her voice tinged with concern.

“What are you saying?” Amara blurts, finally raising her head to face Libby. “Am I... you know?”

Libby sighs exasperatedly. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? What do you mean, you don’t know?! Aren’t you a Vampire Hunter?”

“I don’t know!” Libby admits. She avoids eye contact with Amara, like there’s uncertainty weighing on her mind. She opens her mouth to speak, but the only thing that emerges is a sigh.

The anger and confusion well up in Amara’s chest, and she sighs, huffing. “Get out.”

“I’m sorry, okay? I really am. I just... I couldn’t stand to watch another person die!”

“Get the fuck out,” Amara mutters.

Libby stands up and walks to the door. She stops and looks back at Amara. “I’m sure you’re going to be just fine.”

With that, she leaves Amara to process the events of the past hour; to reassess her reality as she knows it.

Amara grinds her teeth as she walks into the bathroom to take a shower and hopefully find some mental peace. She faces the sink, but there’s no mirror—of course not. She grabs her hair brush, but as she hastily detangles her hair, her mind won’t stop racing. Why would Libby do this to her? Even if she didn’t want to see her die, Amara has nothing left to live for. Then there’s the looming question, the one that she doesn’t want to know the answer to. If there’s anything Amara learned from this experience, it’s that Libby is incredibly negligent.

Fortunately, there’s an abundance of hot water at her disposal, and she shivers in delight as it envelops her aching body. She closes her eyes as her mind wanders to simpler times. She imagines she’s in her home, staring at the loose hair stuck to the shower wall at waist level. It was Eden’s doing, of course. Back then, Amara found it annoying and unhygienic. Now, she wished her sister was still here to stick her loose hair to the shower wall every morning.

Some noise breaks her out of her trance, and Amara listens to the conversation through the wall.

“—your thick fucking skull!”

“You watch your mouth, boy!”

“Or what, you’ll ground me?”

“You think I won’t?” His father retorts condescendingly. “Give me your phone.”

“You know what? Take it!” There’s a loud bang against the wall. “I’m already trapped in this *shithole* with *you*. There’s no worse punishment than that.”

“You ungrateful little shit! I’m through with this. No phone, no movies, and no training!”

“What, you think you can just trap me in this room so I can rot away? Good fuckin’ luck with that! Markus won’t have it.”

“Markus isn’t your father, I am. He doesn’t make the rules when it comes to me and *my* family. He’s off his head. You’re not to train with him, and that’s that.”

“Ugh!” Sid exasperates, “you’re such an ignorant *cunt*!”

“Hey! You get back ’ere this instant!” But before he can finish, Amara can feel the vibration of the slamming door reverberate through her feet.

Outside, the commotion fades into the static of the shower. Amara can hear Markus’s rumbling voice talking to Sid’s father, and the conversation ends with another slamming of the door.

Amara can’t help but feel guilty, wondering if it would have been better if she hadn’t woken up—maybe if she hadn’t been here at all. It doesn’t matter now. All that matters is getting some rest.

After finishing her shower, she turns the lights off and falls into the mattress. When her head hits the pillow, Sid’s scent wafts into her nose, the same pleasant, relaxing nutty smell as before. Her brain prepares to shut down, completely overwhelmed and exhausted from everything she’s been through for the past few hours. Her eyes close on their own, and she quickly drifts off to sleep.