

The pavement pounding underneath me was the only thought that kept me going as I ran towards the last safe haven I knew. The Rose's Thorn. *I hope that was enough to keep Snow down permanently, but even if she doesn't wake I'll still have to deal with her disciples.*

I dashed past rows of bright white and powder blue townhouses until I popped out onto a main road and skidded to a stop to avoid getting hit by a car. *Think Grimhelde. If you don't, what Hunter did will be for nothing. You need to figure out where you are before you can even think about the location of your base.*

As I took in my surroundings, I sucked in a breath and looked for any of the tell-tale marking the covens left on buildings to mark hideouts. They were in silver, so the vampires wouldn't see them. I squinted in the bright sunlight, staring at the chrome skyscrapers and crowded street until my eyes locked on an intricate silver thorn that pointed to a small alleyway between two office buildings.

*That must be it.* I glanced down at my blood-soaked red skirt and shirt. *But I need to ditch these first.*

I ducked into an alleyway and scanned for one of the nearby clothing shops. When I spotted one of those fake charities where people donate clothes, I walked into the store and pretended to skim the racks. I noted a shirt and pants that looked to be the right size and ran my fingers along them checking for security tags.

When the two store employees were occupied with customers, I snatched a plain shirt and pants that looked to be my size off the shelf and stuffed them into my crimson shirt, securing them in the waistband of my skirt.

I walked to the bathroom, keeping out of the gaze of employees and other customers as I approached the bathroom. Once I was locked in the stall, I slid off my shirt and skirt and dumped the old red clothes in the garbage can. My gaze swiveled from side to side as I headed towards the exit, checking to make sure no one was scrutinizing my moves.

As I shoved the door open to the main street, I glimpsed another thorn pointed straight ahead, but all that was this way was a long alleyway with no storefronts or other symbols.

My chest grew tight as the pathway narrowed. The backs of storefronts glared at me, and my breaths came sharply. *What if this is the wrong way? I don't know where this place is or where else to turn to.* Stars danced in my vision as my breaths came in too fast. I pressed a hand to the wall and leaned my forehead to the filthy brick before vomiting up the contents of my stomach. My throat burned, and my face flushed, but the feeling of the brick on my head and my hand against the wall steadied me a little.

My arms shook against the brick. I'm not going to find anything like this. *I need to look for a signal. What I saw was definitely a thorn, I just need to find the next one. If I don't see it in one more block, I'll back track.*

My gaze scanned over the stark white office buildings and chrome skyscrapers for the glint of silver, but everything came up smooth, so I continued along the pathway until I hit a dead end. The path was blocked by a squat, red brick building with a caved in roof. I scanned over the building's surface, and directly on the sewer drain, I caught a glint of a scratched up and dented silver thorn. I gave a long sigh. *Now, I know I'm going in the right direction at least.*

The vine pointed towards a small rusted ladder that led to the roof of the building. When I ran a hand along the side of the ladder, I felt bumps and glanced at it to see another vine pointed up. *I hate ladders. Did you have to pick the ladder, Thorn?*

I gritted my teeth and stepped up the ladder. Each step made a loud creak, and flakes of rust rained down from the rungs. When I reached the top of the ladder, I caught a glimpse of a building in the distance with massive silver letters that read. "The Rose's Thorn."

"I see what you did there, but I still hate you. It looks like it's just a few blocks west from here, so I just need to get there without any vamps nabbing me. It shouldn't be too difficult. I hope."

I slid down one rung on the ladder when it gave a loud groan and started separating from the wall. I leapt off the ladder and rolled onto the pavement, wincing as my arms and knees scraped the asphalt. "I knew going up that ladder was a bad idea. Damnit, Thorn. This will attract vampires to me like bees to flowers."

I dusted myself up and did my best to wipe the blood away, but there were still some stains that marred the sleeves of the grey button down I'd picked. I took the sleeve with the blood on it and gave it a sharp tug, ripping the fabric and then wrapped it around the scrape, covering the open wound. "I guess I'll have to move quickly to stay off the vampire's radar."

I glanced around for the eastern exit out of the alleyway and power walked my way through the busy streets, keeping my chin up, my gaze steely, and my gait quick to avoid any passerby who might ask questions or for directions.

Just as the vampire hideout came into view, the advertisements on all the screens in city central died. An announcement flashed in its place, and a vampire from the house she'd been in came on screen in its place. "This is a warning. There is an assassin on the loose. She is wanted for killing this city's mayor, Ms. White. If you see the person fitting this description, please notify the police immediately. Thank you."

A picture of my face grinning while dotted in blood appeared on the screen. My face paled as several people in the area turned to look directly at me. I did the only thing I could think of to get away from them. I ran out into the road despite all the cars racing down the street.