

*Darkness
and Light*

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Part One

Portrait of the Past

Prologue

Life in New York City in 1828 was one of opportunity and economic expansion. Settlers from abroad came to the city with a spirit of pioneering to make their mark on the unsettled land and shape what was becoming a melting pot of different cultures. This was just the type of environment that brought Jacob and Arianna Nayah, natives of Barbados, to the city having traveled from Cairo, Egypt. It represented a chance to start anew and to give their only daughter, Sage, a chance to see new things and meet new people. This, however, was not the only reason for Jacob and Arianna coming to the city. They were also on the run from the hunters that were hot on their trail. The Nayahs were not ordinary people. They were vampires.

Sage, whose exotic beauty would strike a living man dead, had sharp features, dark eyes, waist-length dark brown hair, and olive skin. She would soon turn twenty-eight, an age signifying that she would inherit the vampire throne—the same age her parents were when they became vampires right after her birth. She was to continue the family tradition of vampire royals that expands centuries. Because she was the last of her generation, it was up to her to continue the bloodline. However, trouble arose with the plan

after the family moved into a wooden house a block away from the furniture store when Sage met and fell in love with Cristian Thomas, the son of the owner of Thomas Furniture. This would soon set off a chain of events that no one could have anticipated.

The day began as a typical day when Jacob and Arianna, with Sage in tow, wanted to look at handcrafted furnishings and had heard from some of the townspeople that Thomas Furniture, run by Jonathan Thomas, was the best in the business, and that both father and son were carpenters by trade. The store was located downtown in a brownstone building that also had wood houses next door, one in which Jonathan and his wife Carolyn lived with their son. Because portions of the land were unsettled, some streets were made of cobblestone, others of dirt. They rode to the store on a horse-drawn carriage. Stepping out of the carriage, they looked at the people bustling about on the street. Sage noticed, to her surprise, that no one seemed to notice them as they walked on the street. The stench of horse manure permeated the air.

“There it is!” Sage exclaimed. “Thomas Furniture.”

They knocked on the glass door as a short woman with curly black hair and a day gown with a round, ruffled linen collar came to the door. She frowned upon seeing them. “Hello,” she said sharply. “Hello,” Jacob replied. “We were told that this is the best place for handcrafted furnishings,” he said. She semi-nodded her head as she stood, still looking at them scornfully.

“What is it!” said the voice of the unseen man on the other side. She widened the door so the man wearing full-length, light-colored trousers, a linen shirt, and curly hair with sideburns could see what had her attention. “How can I help you?” he asked. Arianna and Sage could see the disdain on his face. “I wanted to inquire about your handcrafted furnishings,” Jacob said with unease. “I don’t think we have anything that fits your...uh...your...,” the man stammered.

Jacob was all too aware of the bigotry that he and Arianna had received because of their caramel complexion, having fled from Barbados when the slave traders came. He knew that in parts of this young country, people of his skin color were enslaved and that coming to America would be a risk for that reason, but with the hunters closing in on them, he had no choice but to make this move and take the hostility he knew they would face. He tried to warn Sage that they would face scorn because of their ethnic background.

“Mother, I decided that...,” Cristian stopped dead in his tracks upon his first glance at Sage. He stood still, looking at her, not uttering a sound, completely besotted by her beauty. Sage caught her breath at her first glance of Cristian. He was handsome with pale skin and medium-length, dark brown hair tied back in a ponytail, penetrating dark brown eyes that could look deep into the soul, and a deep, raspy voice. They both stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity while both parents stared at each other uncomfortably.

“Well, uh, thank you for your time,” Jacob said, ushering Sage away who kept looking back at Cristian. The woman shut the door swiftly.

That night, Sage was in her room praying. She knew that her parents wanted her to continue the vampire tradition, but she didn’t want to be a vampire. She wanted to live a normal life, get married, and have a family. Her mind raced to thoughts of the handsome young man she saw earlier that day in the furniture store hoping that she would see him once again. Her parents warned her about getting involved with someone not of their kind. They told her it was best for her to stick with her own, because it would be nothing but trouble to think of getting involved with someone not of the same race. At the same time, Cristian’s parents were giving him the

same warning of not making trouble by wanting to see the Negro girl again by the way he stared at her. They didn't want him to bring embarrassment or scandal to the family. His mother even tried to tell him about the girl down the street named Susie who had a crush on him, whom he at one time considered dating. Nevertheless, Cristian couldn't forget the mysterious beauty and wanted to see her again. Being a skeptic, he never believed in love at first sight, but from the moment he saw her, he knew he loved her and he had to see her again.

The following morning, Sage dressed in a ruffled day gown, snuck out of the house determined to find a way to see Cristian who had also snuck out of his house to try to find her.

She stepped into the horse-drawn carriage just as Cristian boarded it. They looked at each other astonished.

"Hello," she said, smiling shyly.

"Good morning," he said with a grin. "I was coming to try to find you."

"You were?" she asked, batting her long eyelashes. "So was I."

They both laughed. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Sage," she replied. "And your name is...?" she asked.

"Cristian," he said. "Cristian Thomas."

"It's nice to meet you, Cristian," she said, extending her hand.

"Pleased to meet you," he said, taking her hand and kissing it.

Sage felt her face flush. They stepped out of the carriage and walked alongside the dirt road toward the Hudson River. "It's beautiful," she said. "You sure are," Cristian said, staring at her with twinkling eyes. "I was talking about the river," she said with a nervous laugh.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"I've lived in Egypt, but I was born in Barbados," she replied.

“So what brought you to New York City?” he asked. “My parents wanted to see something different,” she replied. “Well, I’m glad you came,” he said. “So am I,” she said, smiling.

They watched the sunrise, which was a magnificent sight of gold, yellow, and orange hues. Impulsively, he leaned in and gave her a kiss. She looked at him stunned. “What was that for?” she exclaimed, feeling like her heart was going to leap out of her chest. “I couldn’t help myself,” he said, looking into her eyes. “You had better get going,” she said, looking around, nervous that they brought attention to themselves. “I don’t want you to get in trouble for being with me.” “I’ll be fine,” he said, flashing a smile. “What about your parents?” “My parents are resting,” she said tongue-in-cheek. “So, I’ll see you tomorrow?” he asked. She nodded her head “yes.” He smiled. “So, tomorrow it is,” he said as he got in the carriage and waved good-bye.

Sage felt like she was on top of the moon, as if she were floating in the air. She had instantly fallen in love. As she walked through the door of the wooden house, the door slammed shut behind her. “What did I tell you about seeing that boy!” her father demanded, his eyes turning red. “I didn’t see the problem...” He silenced her with a swift slap in the face, the impact nearly knocking her to the floor. “He’s not our kind,” he said, his eyes glaring. “He doesn’t belong in our world.” “I forbid you to see him again,” he said, his lips pursed. “Soon, you will be one of us, and he has no place in your life.” Sage wiped the tears from her eyes. “There’s no way I’m becoming a vampire,” she thought as she rubbed her stinging face. “No way!”

The next morning, Sage once again snuck out of the house, this time packing her belongings along with a newspaper clipping that she tore out about Thomas Furniture that featured a hand-drawn picture of Cristian. Resolved that nothing and no one was going to keep her

apart from the man she loved, she got onto the carriage and waited for Cristian to appear. He ran up and got on the carriage with one suitcase in his hand. “What happened?” she asked. “My parents and I got in an argument over . . .,” he sighed heavily, “over you,” he said.

He noticed the bruise on her face. “What happened!” he exclaimed. “My parents and I got in an argument over you,” she replied. “That’s it!” Cristian said, “Let’s run away together.”

“We can run away to Europe,” he said, “anywhere but here.” He shook his head appalled by the narrow-mindedness of people. Remembering the strange visitors the night before, he mentioned, “Some people showed up at the store last night. They were looking for people that fit your parents’ description.” Sage became alarmed. “Did they say what their name is?” she asked, afraid of the answer. “Yes!” he replied. “They said their name was Pearson.”

She grimaced and covered her face with her hand. “What’s wrong, Sage?” Cristian asked. “I need to go back and warn my parents,” she said. “Why? Why are those people after your parents?” he asked, seeing the fear in her eyes. “It’s a long story and I don’t have time to explain it to you,” she said. “I’ll meet you at the river, okay?” she said. “But, Sage!” “Please just meet me there,” she said.

She got out of the carriage and ran back to her house. “Mother, Father!” she yelled, running inside the house. “We need to get out of here now,” her father said, grabbing her. “The hunters have found us.” “That’s what I was going to tell you,” she said. “We have to go now,” her father said. “There’s no time.” She pulled away from him. “I’m not going with you,” she said.

“What do you mean you’re not going with us? You’re really trying my patience, child,” he said raising his voice. “We’re leaving together as a family,” he said. Suddenly, they heard the sound of glass breaking at the door. “Where’s my son?” said Jonathan Thomas, holding a pistol in his hand and coming through the door.

“How’d you know where we live?” Jacob asked.

“Well, I hate to state the obvious,” Jonathan said. “But it wasn’t that hard to figure out. Now where’s my son?” he repeated. He looked at Sage with rage in his eyes. “What did you do to my son!” he demanded. “She didn’t do anything to me,” Cristian said, coming up behind him, holding his, along with Sage’s, suitcase. “I left on my own.” “Go home, boy,” the elder Thomas said. “I’ll deal with you later.

As for you,” he said, looking at Sage and cocking the trigger. “I’m ending this for good.” “No!” Cristian yelled as he ran in front of Sage just as his father pulled the trigger, and they both fell to the ground. Sage, unharmed, turned Cristian over. He was mortally wounded, bleeding from the chest. “No,” Sage cried. “Please don’t die,” she said tearfully. Cristian took his last breath, and he was gone, his motionless eyes staring into hers.

Jonathan stared at the pistol in his hand, in shock, trembling.

Jacob looked at Jonathan Thomas with incredulity that he would kill his own son. Filled with rage, he grabbed him by the neck, lifting him off the ground, and began to squeeze tightly.

“No, Father!” Sage cried. “Don’t kill him.” Jacob tightened his grip on Jonathan’s neck as his face turned beet red. “Please,” she pleaded. He loosened his grip and Jonathan dropped to the ground. Sage knelt down beside Cristian’s lifeless body. “We need to go now,” Jacob said, grabbing their suitcases and jerking her away. “You’re not human,” Jonathan Thomas said, coughing and wheezing. “You’re not human!” “We need to get to the steamboats,” Jacob said. Sage could hear the screams of Cristian’s mother as the carriage rode away. He looked at Sage who was crying as they were riding in the carriage. “I told you to stay away from that boy,” he said, shaking his head. “But you didn’t listen to me, and now you have to pay the price.” “This happened before,” he said, staring at

her. “It’s spoken of as the fate of Amerie and Lance.” “Tell me,” Sage asked. “I don’t have time to explain it now,” he said gruffly.

She looked away as the carriage arrived at the Hudson River. Jacob and Arianna looked around, suspicious of anyone who stared at them. Their powers greatly diminished because of the daylight; they knew they had to act quickly. Arianna looked at Sage, then whispered into Jacob’s ear. He looked at her. “You’re right,” he said. He looked at Sage. “We have to turn you now,” he said. “No, please!” she pleaded. “We have no choice now, Sage,” Jacob said. “This is for your own good.” “Not even your prayers can save you now.” He threw his head back as the fangs in his mouth grew. The veins protruding from his neck frightened Sage as she reached for the lever to run. He grabbed her as she protested and sank his fangs into her neck. She felt her body weakening as he nearly drained her of all her blood. Next, Jacob slit his wrist with his clawlike fingernails and forced her to drink, holding his wrist against her mouth. The last thing that Sage remembered was the excruciating pain she felt as her physical body died.

It was nightfall as Sage began to awaken. Her senses heightened, she could hear the sounds of the roaches scurrying thunderously across the floor of the steamboat. Focusing her eyes, she could see things well in the distance with her night vision, such as a man and woman kissing in a carriage in town. She sat up, looking around and trembling. “You’re a vampire now,” Arianna whispered. “You are the last of this generation.” Sage felt hungry, as if she hadn’t eaten in ages. “I’m famished,” she said. “That’s normal,” said Jacob, smiling proudly. He looked around at some of the passengers on the steamboat. “There’s plenty to feast on,” he said. The thought of drinking blood from a human made Sage feel ill. Jacob noticed men in the far corner who’d been watching them. He averted his eyes over to Arianna who had noticed the same thing. It was the

hunters. “Sage,” he said to her telepathically, startling her, “I want you to get off this steamboat.” “But,” she started. “Do as I say,” Jacob demanded. “Get off now! Don’t ask any questions.”

Sage got up and walked over to the door with her suitcase as Jacob closed it behind her, pretending to leave as she peered through the window. The hunters, taking out their silver stakes, got up and began to approach Jacob and Arianna as the terrified passengers took cover. Arianna began to fly toward them as one of hunters drove the stake into her heart with one hand and in one fell swoop with the other, decapitated her with the silver hunting knife, silencing her ear-piercing cry right before Sage’s horrified eyes. Jacob grabbed the other hunter and tried to snap his neck, but the hunter overpowered him, driving the stake into his heart, and decapitated him as he fell to his knees. Sage, overwhelmed with grief, opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came out. In a matter of hours, she had lost the man she loved and her parents. She peered into the window again as the hunters made their way to the door, to her horror. With only seconds to spare and not fully aware of the power she had inherited, Sage tucked the newspaper clipping into the bosom of her dress and changed her form into vapor, escaping just before the hunters came through the door. Fleeing back to Egypt with just the clothes on her back, she mourned her lost love and her parents, aligning herself with a faithful coven that affectionately referred to the reclusive vampire as “Queen V.”

Now one hundred and eighty years later, Sage felt a pull to return to New York City, for some unexplained reason. She felt as if Cristian’s soul were calling out to her—but how? Although well aware that there were still hunters searching for her, she was willing to take the risk of going back to the place where she met and lost her first love.

Chapter One

The rock music blared from the iPod as the unseen man, wearing earphones, worked energetically on the last touches of his masterpiece painting. Each stroke of his paintbrush brought to life the image that he'd seen in his mind so vividly of an exotically beautiful woman. "Cristian!" His manager said, tapping him on the shoulder. He took off the earphones. His manager was a man in his forties, tall, lean, with salt and pepper hair. "How long are you going to work on that oil painting?" he asked. Cristian turned the painting over. "Until I'm satisfied with it," he said. His manager looked at his watch. "Well, it's late and the gallery closed hours ago," he said. "You can finish it tomorrow," he replied. "Besides, the exhibit isn't until next week. That should give you time to finish it." He told Cristian that he would meet him at the entrance. Cristian turned the painting over and stared at it. He didn't want to leave it, for some unknown reason. He covered the painting and went to wash his hands, stopping to look at his reflection in the mirror and noticing that strands of his blonde hair had fallen out of his ponytail onto his face.

Putting on his leather jacket, he met his manager outside while the security guard locked the door. "I swear sometimes I think you live as a vampire," his manager joked, looking at Cristian's black

attire. “Vampire!” he remarked. “Yeah,” his manager replied. “You only work at night, you always dress in black,” he started to laugh. “But I don’t drink blood,” Cristian joked. “Isn’t that what vampires do?” he asked. “C’mon, let’s go,” his manager said, chuckling. “The night awaits.” “Anything can happen during the witching hour,” Cristian said with a laugh. They hailed a taxi to go over to SoHo. Having achieved early success as an artist afforded Cristian West the luxuries of a celebrity lifestyle. He had his adoring fans that mostly lusted after him because of his youthful good looks, and of course, his being wealthy made him a great catch. However, he felt emptiness in his life. There was something missing, but what was it? The last girlfriend he had—it wasn’t serious; it was more of a fling. Then, there is the image of a woman that he sees in his mind every minute of the day. He sees her in his sleep and in his dreams. “Why can’t I get this woman out of my mind?” he wondered. “Does she exist, or is she just a figment of my imagination?”

Sage sat on her private plane staring out the window. This was the first time that she was coming back to New York in centuries. She had been to California and New Orleans numerous times, but she couldn’t bring herself to return to the city where she had lost Cristian. Nonetheless, something that was beyond her control was pulling her there. It was something greater than she was. The coven sat behind her seat, excited about leaving the Middle East for awhile and ready for a new adventure.

The coven consisted of seven members. Anna, the first member, with jet-black, long hair with a bang and white skin like snow, and an English accent, was already a vampire when she and Sage met after she fled from New York when her parents died. The two women instantly bonded over Sage’s tragic story and became friends. More like sisters. Especially protective of Sage, Anna would not let anything happen to her even if it meant sacrificing her life. Another member brought

into the coven was Billy, an eyeliner- and lipstick-wearing glam-rock vampire. He was turned by Anna in the 1980s and has been stuck in the decade ever since. From his hair, clothes, and musical taste, Billy is completely obsessed with all things eighties. Lisa, baby-faced with shoulder-length, light brown curly hair, is another member of the coven. The only thing known about her, besides her being very timid, is that she was a runaway with nowhere to go when Samuel turned her and Sage took her in. Pedro, a Mexican of Egyptian descent, joined the coven after Lisa turned him. Exotically handsome with raven black curly hair, Pedro looked as though he'd stepped from the cover of a romance novel. Daniel, a native from Barbados, with brown skin and a chiseled physique, joined the coven when he came to Cairo. Samuel, pale faced with effeminate features and black hair that cascaded down his back, joined the coven in Egypt when Anna turned him. Cody, the last member of the coven, with boyish features and a Southern twang, was a farmer's son before Lisa turned him.

Sage only wanted to know the coven on a first name basis, since they had all left their former lives behind and joined her family. She didn't feel it was necessary to know what their lives were like before they became vampires. She herself didn't discuss her life before she became a vampire with the others, because it didn't matter anymore. The man she loved was dead, and there was no use rehashing the past; although there wasn't a day that went by that she didn't think of Cristian. She sometimes would try to imagine what their life would have been like had they been able to run away together, but quickly dismissed the thought because she knew it was nothing but a fantasy. "If I were a fly on the wall, I would love to see the look on Pearson's face," Anna grinned wickedly, snapping Sage out of her wandering thoughts. She began to smile, thinking of the wild goose chase they led him on. The Pearsons have been centuries-old archenemies of

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