

book #1 in the
vampire journals

turned

morgan rice

The Vampire Journals

Морган Райс

Turned

«Lukeman Literary Management Ltd»

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In TURNED (Book #1 of the Vampire Journals), 18 year old Caitlin Paine finds herself uprooted from her nice suburb and forced to attend a dangerous New York City high school when her Mom moves again. The one ray of light in her new surroundings is Jonah, a new classmate who takes an instant liking to her. But before their romance can blossom, Caitlin suddenly finds herself changing. She is overcome by a superhuman strength, a sensitivity to light, a desire to feed—by feelings she does not understand. She seeks answers to what's happening to her, and her cravings lead her to the wrong place at the wrong time. Her eyes are opened to a hidden world, right beneath her feet, thriving underground in New York City. She finds herself caught between two dangerous covens, right in the middle of a vampire war. It is at this moment that Caitlin meets Caleb, a mysterious and powerful vampire who rescues her from the dark forces. He needs her to help lead him to the legendary lost artifact. And she needs him for answers, and for protection. Together, they will need to answer one crucial question: who was her real father? But Caitlin finds herself caught between two men as something else arises between them: a forbidden love. A love between the races that will risk both of their lives, and will force them to decide whether to risk it all for each other...

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Morgan Rice

Turned

(Book #1 in the Vampire Journals)

*"Is it physical
To walk unbraced and suck up the humors
Of the dank morning? What, is Brutus sick,
And will he steal out of his wholesome bed
To dare the vile contagion of the night?"*

– William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

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"TURNED is an ideal story for young readers. Morgan Rice did a good job spinning an interesting twist on what could have been a typical vampire tale. Refreshing and unique, TURNED has the classic elements found in many Young Adult paranormal stories. Book #1 of the Vampire Journals Series focuses around one girl... one extraordinary girl!.. TURNED is easy to read but extremely fast-paced....Recommended for anyone who likes to read soft paranormal romances. Rated PG."

– The Romance Reviews

"TURNED grabbed my attention from the beginning and did not let go....This story is an amazing adventure that is fast paced and action packed from the very beginning. There is not a dull moment to be found. Morgan Rice did an awesome job bringing the reader into the story. She also made it easy to root for Caitlin and want desperately to her succeed in finding her truth....I will be looking forward to the second book in the series."

– Paranormal Romance Guild

“TURNED is a likable, easy, dark read that you can read in between other books, as it is short... You're sure to be entertained!”

– *books-forlife.blogspot.com*

"TURNED is a book to rival TWILIGHT and VAMPIRE DIARIES, and one that will have you wanting to keep reading until the very last page! If you are into adventure, love and vampires this book is the one for you!"

– *Vampirebooksite.com*

“Rice does a great job of pulling you into the story from the beginning, utilizing a great descriptive quality that transcends the mere painting of the setting....Nicely written and an extremely fast read, TURNED is a good start to a new vampire series sure to be a hit with readers who are looking for a light, yet entertaining story.”

– *Black Lagoon Reviews*

About Morgan Rice

Morgan Rice is the #1 bestselling author of THE VAMPIRE JOURNALS, a young adult series comprising eleven books (and counting); the #1 bestselling series THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY, a post-apocalyptic thriller comprising two books (and counting); and the #1 bestselling epic fantasy series THE SORCERER'S RING, comprising thirteen books (and counting).

Morgan's books are available in audio and print editions, and translations of the books are available in German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portugese, Japanese, Chinese, Swedish, Dutch, Turkish, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak (with more languages forthcoming).

Morgan loves to hear from you, so please feel free to visit www.morganricebooks.com to join the email list, receive a free book, receive free giveaways, download the free app, get the latest exclusive news, connect on Facebook and Twitter, and stay in touch!

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A FATE OF DRAGONS (Book #3)

A CRY OF HONOR (Book #4)

A VOW OF GLORY (Book #5)

A CHARGE OF VALOR (Book #6)

A RITE OF SWORDS (Book #7)

A GRANT OF ARMS (Book #8)

A SKY OF SPELLS (Book #9)

A SEA OF SHIELDS (Book #10)

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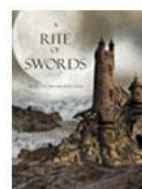
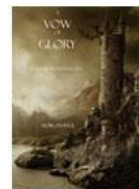
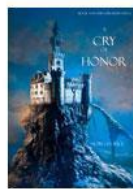
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THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY



the vampire journals





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Chapter One

Caitlin Paine always dreaded her first day at a new school. There were the big things, like meeting new friends, the new teachers, learning new hallways. And there were the small things, like getting a new locker, the smell of a new place, the sounds it made. More than anything, she dreaded the stares. She felt that everyone in a new place always stared at her. All she wanted was anonymity. But it never seemed meant to be.

Caitlin couldn't understand why she was so conspicuous. At five foot five she wasn't especially tall, and with her brown hair and brown eyes (and normal weight) she felt she was average. Certainly not beautiful, like some of the other girls. At 18, she was a bit older, but not enough to make her stand out.

There was something else. There was something about her that made people look twice. She knew, deep down, that she was different. But she wasn't exactly sure how.

If there was anything worse than a first day, it was starting in mid-term, after everyone else already had time to bond. Today, this first day, in mid-March, was going to be one of the worst. She could feel it already.

In her wildest imagination, though, she never thought it would be *this* bad. Nothing she had ever seen – and she had seen a lot – had prepared her for this.

Caitlin stood outside her new school, a vast New York City public school, in the freezing March morning, and wondered, *Why me?* She was way underdressed, in just a sweater and leggings, and not even remotely prepared for the noisy chaos that greeted her. Hundreds of kids stood there, clamoring, screaming, and shoving each other. It looked like a prison yard.

It was all too loud. These kids laughed too loud, cursed too much, shoved each other too hard. She would have thought it was a massive brawl if she didn't spot some smiles and mocking laughter. They just had too much energy, and she, exhausted, freezing, sleep-deprived, couldn't understand where it came from. She closed her eyes and wished it would all go away.

She reached into her pockets and felt something: her ipod. *Yes.* She put her headphones in her ears and turned it up. She needed to drown it all out.

But nothing came. She looked down and saw the battery was dead. *Perfect.*

She checked her phone, hoping for some distraction, anything. *No new messages.*

She looked up. Looking out at the sea of new faces, she felt alone. Not because she was the only white girl – she actually preferred that. Some of her closest friends at other schools had been black, Spanish, Asian, Indian – and some of her meanest frenemies had been white. No, that wasn't it. She felt alone because it was urban. She stood on concrete. A loud buzzer had rang to admit her into this "recreational area," and she had had to pass through large, metal gates. Now she was boxed in – caged in by massive metal gates, topped by barbed-wire. She felt like she'd gone to prison.

Looking up at the massive school, bars and cages on all the windows, didn't make her feel any better. She always adapted to new schools easily, large and small – but they had all been in suburbia. They had all had grass, trees, sky. Here, there was nothing but city. She felt like she couldn't breathe. It terrified her.

Another loud buzzer sounded and she shuffled her way, with hundreds of kids, towards the entrance. She was jostled roughly by a large girl, and dropped her journal. She picked it up (messing up her hair), and then looked up to see if the girl would apologize. But she was nowhere to be seen, having already moved on in the swarm. She did hear laughter, but couldn't tell if it was directed at her.

She clutched her journal, the one thing that grounded her. It had been with her everywhere. She kept notes and drawings in every place she went. It was a roadmap of her childhood.

She finally reached the entrance, and had to squeeze in just to walk through. It was like entering a train at rush hour. She had hoped it would be warm once she got inside, but the open doors behind her kept a stiff breeze blowing down her back, making the cold even worse.

Two large security guards stood at the entrance, flanked by two New York City policemen, in full uniform, guns conspicuously at their side.

“KEEP MOVING!” commanded one of them.

She couldn’t fathom why two armed policemen would have to guard a high school entrance. Her feeling of dread grew. It got much worse when she looked up and saw that she’d have to pass through a metal detector with airport-style security.

Four more armed policemen stood on either side of the detector, along with two more security guards.

“EMPTY YOUR POCKETS!” snapped a guard.

Caitlin noticed the other kids filling small plastic containers with items from their pockets. She quickly did the same, inserting her ipod, wallet, keys.

She shuffled through the detector, and the alarm shrieked.

“YOU!” snapped a guard. “Off to the side!”

Of course.

All the kids stared as she was made to raise her arms, and the guard ran the handheld scanner up and down her body.

“Are you wearing any jewelry?”

She felt her wrists, then her neckline, and suddenly remembered. Her cross.

“Take it off,” snapped the guard.

It was the necklace her grandmother gave her before she passed, a small, silver cross, engraved with a description in Latin which she never had translated. Her grandmother told her it was passed down by her grandmother. Caitlin wasn’t religious, and didn’t really understand what it all meant, but she knew it was hundreds of years old, and it was by far the most valuable thing she owned.

Caitlin lifted it from her shirt, holding it up, but not taking it off.

“I’d rather not,” she answered.

The guard stared at her, cold as ice.

Suddenly, a commotion broke out. There was shouting as a cop grabbed a tall, thin kid and shoved him against a wall, removing a small knife from his pocket.

The guard went to assist, and Caitlin took the opportunity to slip into the crowd moving its way down the hall.

Welcome to New York public school, Caitlin thought. Great.

She was already counting the days to graduation.

* * *

The hallways were the widest she’d ever seen. She couldn’t imagine that they could ever be filled, yet somehow they were completely packed, with all the kids crammed in shoulder to shoulder. There must have been thousands of kids in these halls, the sea of faces stretching endlessly. The noise in here was even worse, bouncing off the walls, condensed. She wanted to cover her ears. But she didn’t even have elbow space to raise her arms. She felt claustrophobic.

The bell rang, and the energy increased.

Already late.

She scanned her room card again and finally spotted the room in the distance. She tried to cut across the sea of bodies, but wasn’t getting anywhere. Finally, after several attempts, she realized she just had to get aggressive. She started elbowing and jostling back. One body at a time, she cut through all the kids, across the wide hall, and pushed the heavy door open to her classroom.

She braced herself for all the looks as she, the new girl, walked in late. She imagined the teacher scolding her for interrupting a silent room. But she was shocked to discover that was not the case at all. This room, designed for 30 kids but holding 50, was packed. Some kids sat in their seats, and others walked the aisles, shouting and yelling at each other. It was mayhem.

The bell had rang five full minutes ago, yet the teacher, disheveled, wearing a rumpled suit, hadn't even started the class. He actually sat with his feet up on the desk, reading the paper, ignoring everyone.

Caitlin walked over to him and placed her new I.D. card on the desk. She stood there and waited for him to look up, but he never did.

She finally cleared her throat.

"Excuse me."

He reluctantly lowered his newspaper.

"I'm Caitlin Paine. I'm new. I think I'm supposed to give you this."

"I'm just a sub," he replied, and raised his paper, blocking her.

She stood there, confused.

"So," she asked, "...you don't take attendance?"

"Your teacher's back on Monday," he snapped. "He'll deal with it."

Realizing the conversation was over, Caitlin took back her I.D. card.

She turned and faced the room. The mayhem hadn't stopped. If there was any saving grace, at least she wasn't conspicuous. No one here seemed to care about her, or to even notice her at all.

On the other hand, scanning the packed room was nerve-wracking: there didn't seem like any place left to sit.

She steeled herself and, clutching her journal, walked tentatively down one of the aisles, flinching a few times as she walked between unruly kids screaming at each other. As she reached the back, she could finally see the entire room.

Not one empty seat.

She stood there, feeling like an idiot, and felt other kids starting to notice her. She didn't know what to do. She certainly wasn't going to stand there the entire period, and the substitute teacher didn't seem to care either way. She turned and looked again, scanning helplessly.

She heard laughter from a few aisles away, and felt sure it was directed at her. She didn't dress like these kids did, and she didn't look like them. Her cheeks flushed as she started to feel really conspicuous.

Just as she was getting ready to walk out of the class, and maybe even out of this school, she heard a voice.

"Here."

She turned.

In the last row, beside the window, a tall boy stood from his desk.

"Sit," he said. "Please."

The room quieted a bit as the others waited to see how she'd react.

She walked up to him. She tried not to look up into his eyes – large, glowing green eyes – but she couldn't help it.

He was gorgeous. He had smooth, olive skin – she couldn't tell if he was Black, Spanish, White, or some combination – but she had never seen such smooth and soft skin, complimenting a chiseled jaw line. His hair was short and brown, and he was thin. There was something about him, something so out of place here. He seemed fragile. An artist, maybe.

It was unlike her to be smitten by a guy. She'd seen her friends have crushes, but she'd never really understood. Until now.

"Where will *you* sit?" she asked.

She tried to control her voice, but it didn't sound convincing. She hoped he couldn't hear how nervous she was.

He smiled wide, revealing perfect teeth.

"Right over here," he said, and moved to the large window sill, just a few feet away.

She looked at him, and he returned her stare, their eyes fully locking. She told herself to look away, but she couldn't.

"Thanks," she said, and was instantly mad at herself.

Thanks? That's all you could manage? Thanks!?

"That's right, Barack!" yelled a voice. "Give that nice white girl your seat!"

Laughter followed, and the noise in the room suddenly picked up again, as everyone ignored them once again.

Caitlin saw him lower his head, embarrassed.

"Barack?" she asked. "Is that your name?"

"No," he answered, reddening. "That's just what they call me. As in Obama. They think I look like him."

She looked closely and realized that he *did* look like him.

"It's because I'm half black, part white, and part Puerto Rican."

"Well, I think that's a compliment," she said.

"Not the way *they* say it," he answered.

She observed him as he sat on the window sill, his confidence deflated, and she could tell that he was sensitive. Vulnerable, even. He didn't belong in this group of kids. It was crazy, but she almost felt protective of him.

"I'm Caitlin," she said, reaching out her hand and looking him in the eye.

He looked up, surprised, and his smile returned.

"Jonah," he answered.

He shook her hand firmly. A tingling sensation ran up her arm as she felt his smooth skin envelop her hand. She felt like she melted into him. He held her grip a second too long, and she couldn't help smiling back.

* * *

The rest of the morning was a blur, and Caitlin was hungry by the time she reached the cafeteria. She opened the double doors and was taken aback by the enormous room, the incredible noise of what seemed like a thousand kids, all screaming. It was like entering a gymnasium. Except that every twenty feet there stood another security guard, in the aisles, watching carefully.

As usual, she had no idea where to go. She searched the huge room, and finally found a stack of trays. She took one, and entered what she thought was the food line.

"Don't you cut me, bitch!"

Caitlin turned and saw a large, overweight girl, half a foot taller than her, scowling down.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know – "

"Line's back there!" snapped another girl, pointing with her thumb.

Caitlin looked and saw that the line stretched back at least a hundred kids. It looked like a twenty minute wait.

As she started heading to the back of the line, a kid on the line shoved another one, and he went flying in front of her, hitting the ground hard.

The first kid jumped on top of the other and started punching him in the face.

The cafeteria erupted in a roar of excitement, as dozens of kids gathered around.

"FIGHT! FIGHT!"

Caitlin took several steps back, watching in horror at the violent scene at her feet.

Four security guards finally came over and broke it up, separating the two bloody kids and carting them off. They didn't seem to be in any hurry.

After Caitlin finally got her food, she scanned the room, hoping for a sign of Jonah. But he was nowhere in sight.

She walked down the aisles, passing table after table, all packed with kids. There were few free seats, and the ones that were free didn't seem that inviting, adjacent to large cliques of friends.

Finally, she took a seat at an empty table towards the back. There was just one kid at the far end of it, a short, frail Chinese boy with braces, poorly dressed, who kept his head lowered and focused on his food.

She felt alone. She looked down and checked her phone. There were a few Facebook messages from her friends from her last town. They wanted to know how she liked her new place. Somehow, she didn't feel like answering. They felt so far away.

Caitlin barely ate, a vague feeling of first-day nausea still with her. She tried to change her train of thought. She closed her eyes. She thought of her new apartment, a fifth floor walkup in a filthy building on 132nd street. Her nausea worsened. She breathed deeply, willing herself to focus on something, anything good in her life.

Her little brother. Sam. 14 going on 20. Sam never seemed to remember that he was the youngest: he always acted like her older brother. He'd grown tough and hardened from all the moving around, from their Dad's leaving, from the way their Mom treated them both. She could see it was getting to him and could see that he was starting to close himself off. His frequent school fights didn't surprise her. She feared it would only get worse.

But when it came to Caitlin, Sam absolutely loved her. And she him. He was the only constant in her life, the only one she could rely on. He seemed to retain his one soft spot left in the world for her. She was determined to do her best to protect him.

"Caitlin?"

She jumped.

Standing over her, tray in one hand and violin case in the other, was Jonah.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Yes – I mean no," she said, flustered.

Idiot, she thought. Stop acting so nervous.

Jonah flashed that smile of his, then sat across from her. He sat erect, with perfect posture, and put his violin down carefully beside him. He gently laid out his food. There was something about him, something she couldn't quite place. He was different than anyone she'd ever met. It was like he was from a different era. He definitely did not belong in this place.

"How's your first day?" he asked.

"Not what I expected."

"I know what you mean," he said.

"Is that a violin?"

She nodded to his instrument. He kept it close, and kept one hand resting on it, as if afraid someone might steal it.

"It's a viola, actually. It's just a little bigger, but it's a much different sound. More mellow."

She'd never seen a viola, and hoped that he'd put it on the table and show her. But he didn't make a move to, and she didn't want to pry. He was still resting his hand on it, and he seemed protective of it, like it was personal and private.

"Do you practice a lot?"

Jonah shrugged. "A few hours a day," he said casually.

"A few *hours*!? You must be great!"

He shrugged again. "I'm OK, I guess. There are a lot of players much better than me. But I am hoping it's my ticket out of this place."

"I always wanted to play the piano," Caitlin said.

"Why don't you?"

She was going to say, *I never had one*, but stopped herself. Instead, she shrugged and looked back down at her food.

"You don't need to own a piano," Jonah said.

She looked up, startled that he'd read her mind.

"There's a rehearsal room in this school. For all the bad here, at least there's some good. They'll give you lessons for free. All you have to do is sign up."

Caitlin's eyes widened.

"Really?"

"There's a signup sheet outside the music room. Ask for Mrs. Lennox. Tell her you're my friend."

Friend. Caitlin liked the sound of that word. She slowly felt a happiness welling up inside of her. She smiled wide. Their eyes locked for a moment.

Staring back into his glowing, green eyes, she burned with a desire to ask him a million questions: *Do you have a girlfriend? Why are you being so nice? Do you really like me?*

But, instead, she bit her tongue and said nothing.

Afraid that their time together would run out soon, she scanned her brain for something to ask him that would prolong their conversation. She tried to think of something that would assure her that she'd see him again. But she got nervous and froze up.

She finally opened her mouth, and just as she did, the bell rang.

The room erupted into noise and motion, and Jonah stood, grabbing his viola.

"I'm late," he said, gathering his tray.

He looked over at her tray. "Can I take yours?"

She looked down, realizing she'd forgotten it, and shook her head.

"OK," he said.

He stood there, suddenly shy, not knowing what to say.

"Well... see you."

"See you," she answered lamely, her voice barely above a whisper.

* * *

Her first school day over, Caitlin exited the building into the sunny, March afternoon. Although a strong breeze was blowing, she didn't feel cold anymore. Although all the kids around her were screaming as they streamed out, she was no longer bothered by the noise. She felt alive, and free. The rest of the day had gone by in a blur; she couldn't even remember the name of a single new teacher.

She could not stop thinking about Jonah.

She wondered if she had acted like an idiot in the cafeteria. She had stumbled over her words; she barely even asked him any questions. All she could think of to ask him was about that stupid viola. She should have asked where he lived, where he was from, where he was applying to college.

Most of all, if he had a girlfriend. Someone like him had to be dating someone.

Just at that moment, a pretty, well-dressed Hispanic girl brushed by Caitlin. Caitlin looked her up and down as she passed, and wondered for a second if it was her.

Caitlin turned down 134th street, and for a second, forgot where she was going. She'd never walked home from school before, and for a moment, she blanked on where her new apartment was. She stood there on the corner, disoriented. A cloud covered the sun and a strong wind picked up, and she suddenly felt cold again.

"Hey, *amiga!*"

Caitlin turned, and realized she was standing in front of a filthy, corner bodega. Four seedy men sat in plastic chairs before it, seemingly oblivious to the cold, grinning at her as if she were their next meal.

“Come over here, baby!” yelled another.

She remembered.

132nd street. That’s it.

She quickly turned and walked at a brisk pace down another side street. She checked over her shoulder a few times to see if those men were following her. Luckily, they weren’t.

The cold wind stung her cheeks and woke her up, as the harsh reality of her new neighborhood started to sink in. She looked around at the abandoned cars, the graffitied walls, the barbed-wire, the bars on all the windows, and she suddenly felt very alone. And very afraid.

It was only 3 more blocks to her apartment, but it felt like a lifetime away. She wished she had a friend at her side – even better, Jonah – and she wondered if she could manage this walk alone every day. Once again, she felt angry at her Mom. How could she keep moving her, keep putting her in new places that she hated? When would it ever end?

Broken glass.

Caitlin’s heart beat faster as she saw some activity up on the left, on the other side of the street. She walked quickly and tried to keep her head down, but as she got closer, she heard yells and grotesque laughter, and she couldn’t help but notice what was going on.

Four huge kids – 18 or 19, maybe – stood standing over another kid. Two of them held his arms, while the third stepped in and punched him in the gut, and the fourth stepped up and punched him in the face. The kid, maybe 17, tall, thin and defenseless, fell to the ground. Two of the boys stepped up and kicked him in the face.

Despite herself, Caitlin stopped and stared. She was horrified. She had never seen anything like it.

The other two kids took a few steps around their victim, then raised their boots high and brought them down.

Caitlin was afraid they were going to stomp the kid to death.

“NO!” she screamed.

There was a sick crunching sound as they brought their feet down.

But it wasn’t the sound of broken bone – rather, it was the sound of wood. Crunching wood. Caitlin saw that they were stomping a small, musical instrument. She looked closely, and saw bits and pieces of a viola all over the sidewalk.

She raised her hand to her mouth in horror.

“Jonah!?”

Without thinking, Caitlin crossed the street, right to the pack of guys, who had by now begun to notice her. They looked at her and their evil smiles broadened as they elbowed each other.

She walked right up to the victim and saw that it was indeed Jonah. His face was bleeding and bruised, and he was unconscious.

She looked up at the pack of kids, her anger overpowering her fear, and stood between Jonah and them.

“Leave him alone!” she shouted to the group.

The kid in the middle, at least six-four, muscular, laughed back.

“Or what?” he asked, his voice very deep.

Caitlin felt the world rush by her, and realized that she’d just been shoved hard from behind. She raised her elbows as she hit the concrete, but that barely cushioned her fall. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see her journal go flying, its loose papers spreading everywhere.

She heard laughter. And then footsteps, coming at her.

Heart pounding in her chest, her adrenaline kicked in. She managed to roll and scramble to her feet just before they reached her. She took off at a sprint down the alleyway, running for her life.

They followed close behind.

At one of her many schools, back when Caitlin thought she would have a long future somewhere, she took up Track, and realized she was good at it. The best on the team, actually. Not in long-distance, but in the 100 yard sprint. She could even outrun most of the guys. And now, it came flooding back to her.

She ran for her life, and the guys couldn't catch her.

Caitlin glanced back and saw how far behind they were, and felt optimistic that she could outrun them all. She just had to make the right turns.

The alleyway ended in a T, and she could either turn left or right. She wouldn't have time to change her decision if she wanted to maintain her lead, and she'd have to choose quick. She couldn't see what was around each corner, though. Blindly, she turned left.

She prayed it was the right choice. *Come on. Please!*

Her heart stopped as she made a sharp left and saw the dead end before her.

Wrong move.

A dead end. She ran right up to the wall, scanning for an exit, any exit. Realizing there was none, she turned to face her approaching attackers.

Out of breath, she watched them turn the corner and approach. She could see over their shoulders that if she had turned right, she would have been home free. Of course. Just her luck.

"All right, bitch," one of them said, "you're gonna suffer now."

Realizing she had no way out, they walked slowly towards her, breathing hard, grinning, and relishing the violence to come.

Caitlin closed her eyes and breathed deep. She tried to will Jonah to wake up, to appear around the corner, awake and all-powerful, ready to save her. But she opened her eyes and he wasn't there. Only her attackers. Getting closer.

She thought of her Mom, of how she hated her, of all the places she'd been forced to live. She thought of her brother Sam. She thought of what her life would be like after this day.

She thought of her whole life, of how she'd always been treated, of how no one understood her, of how nothing ever went her way. And something clicked. Somehow, she had had enough.

I don't deserve this. I DON'T deserve this!

And then, suddenly, she felt it.

It was a wave, something unlike anything she had ever experienced. It was a wave of rage, flooding through her, flushing her blood. It centered in her stomach, and spread from there. She could feel her feet rooted to the ground, as if she and the concrete were one, and could then feel a primal strength overcome her, course through her wrists, up her arms, into her shoulders.

Caitlin let out a primal roar that surprised and scared even her. As the first kid approached her and laid his beefy hand on her wrist, she watched as her hand reacted on its own, grabbing hold of her attacker's wrist and twisting it backwards at a right angle. The kid's face contorted in shock as his wrist, and then arm, were snapped in two.

He dropped to his knees, screaming.

The three other boys' eyes opened wide in surprise.

The largest of the three charged right at her.

"You fuc –"

Before he could finish, she had jumped up in the air and planted her two feet squarely in his chest, sending him flying back about ten feet and slamming into a stack of metal garbage cans.

He lay there, not moving.

The other two kids looked at each other, shocked. And truly scared.

Caitlin stepped up and, feeling an inhuman strength course through her, and heard herself snarl as she picked up the two kids (each twice her size), hoisting each several feet off the ground with a single hand.

As they hung dangling in the air, she swung them back, then swung them together, crushing each into the other with an incredible force. They both collapsed to the ground.

Caitlin stood there, breathing, foaming with rage.

All four boys were not moving.

She didn't feel relieved. On the contrary, she wanted more. More kids to fight. More bodies to throw.

And she wanted something else.

She suddenly had crystal clear vision, and was able to zoom in on their necks, exposed. She could see down to the tenth of an inch, and she could see, from where she stood, the veins pulsing in each. She wanted to bite. To feed.

Not understanding what was happening to her, she tossed her head back and let out an unearthly shriek, echoing off the buildings and down the block. It was a primal shriek of victory, and of unfulfilled rage.

It was the shriek of an animal that wanted more.

Chapter Two

Caitlin stood before the door to her new apartment, staring, and suddenly realized where she was. She had no idea how she got there. The last thing she remembered, she'd been in the alley. Somehow, she'd got herself back home.

She remembered, though, every second of what happened in that alleyway. She tried to erase it from her mind, but couldn't. She looked down at her arms and hands, expecting to see them look different – but they were normal. Just as they had always been. The rage had swept through her, transforming her, then had just as quickly left.

But the after-effects remained: she felt hollowed out, for one. Numb. And she felt something else. She couldn't quite figure it. Images kept flashing through her mind, images of those bullies' exposed necks. Of their heartbeat pulsing. And she felt a hunger. A craving.

Caitlin really didn't want to return home. She didn't want to deal with her Mom, especially today, didn't want to deal with a new place, with unpacking. If it weren't for Sam being in there, she may have just turned around and left. Where she'd go, she had no idea – but at least she'd be walking.

She took a deep breath and reached out and placed her hand on the knob. Either the knob was warm, or her hand was as cold as ice.

Caitlin entered the too-bright apartment. She could smell food on the stove – or probably, in the microwave. Sam. He always got home early and made himself dinner. Her Mom wouldn't be home for hours.

"That doesn't look like a good first day."

Caitlin turned, shocked at the sound of her Mom's voice. She sat there, on the couch, smoking a cigarette, already looking Caitlin up and down with scorn.

"What did ya, ruin that sweater already?"

Caitlin looked down and noticed for the first time the dirt stains; probably from hitting the cement.

"Why are you home so early?" Caitlin asked.

"First day for me, too, ya know," she snapped. "You're not the only one. Light workload. Boss sent me home early."

Caitlin couldn't take her Mom's nasty tone. Not tonight. She was always being snotty towards her, and tonight, Caitlin had enough. She decided to give her a taste of her own medicine.

"Great," Caitlin snapped back. "Does that mean we're moving again?"

Her Mom suddenly jumped to her feet. "You watch that fresh mouth of yours!" she screamed.

Caitlin knew her Mom had just been waiting for an excuse to yell at her. She figured it was best to just bait her and get it over with.

"You shouldn't smoke around Sam," Caitlin answered coldly, then entered her tiny bedroom and slammed the door behind her, locking it.

Immediately, her Mom banged at the door.

"You come out here, you little brat! What kind of way is that to talk to your mother!? Who puts bread on your table...."

On this night, Caitlin, so distracted, was able to drown out her Mom's voice. Instead, she replayed in her mind the day's events. The sound of those kids' laughter. The sound of her own heart pounding in her ears. The sound of her own roar.

What exactly had happened? How did she get such strength? Was it just an adrenaline rush? A part of her wished it was. But another part of her knew it wasn't. What was she?

The banging on her door continued, but Caitlin barely heard it. Her cell sat on her desk, vibrating like crazy, lighting up with IMs, texts, emails, Facebook chats – but she barely heard that, too.

She moved to her tiny window and looked down at the corner of Amsterdam Ave, and a new sound rose in her mind. It was the sound of Jonah's voice. The image of his smile. A low, deep, soothing voice. She recalled how delicate he was, how fragile he seemed. Then she saw him lying on the ground, bloody, his precious instrument in pieces. A fresh wave of anger arose.

Her anger morphed into worry – worry if he was all right, if he'd walked away, if he made it home. She imagined him calling to her. Caitlin. *Caitlin*.

"Caitlin?"

A new voice was outside her door. A boy's voice.

Confused, she snapped out of it.

"It's Sam. Let me in."

She went to her door and leaned her head against it.

"Mom's gone," said the voice on the other side. "Went down for cigarettes. Come on, let me in."

She opened the door.

Sam stood there, staring back, concern etched on his face. At 15, he looked older than his age. He'd grown early, to almost six feet, but he hadn't filled out yet, and he was awkward and gangly. With black hair and brown eyes, his coloring was similar to hers. They definitely looked related. She could see the concern on his face. He loved her more than anything.

She let him in, quickly closing the door behind him.

"Sorry," she said. "I just can't deal with her tonight."

"What happened with you two?"

"The usual. She was on me the second I walked in."

"I think she had a hard day," Sam said, trying to make peace between them, as always. "I hope they don't fire her again."

"Who cares? New York, Arizona, Texas... Who cares what's next? Our moving won't ever end."

Sam frowned as he sat on her desk chair, and she immediately felt bad. She sometimes had a harsh tongue, spoke without thinking, and she wished she could take it back.

"How was your first day?" she asked, trying to change the subject.

He shrugged. "OK, I guess." He toed the chair with his foot.

He looked up. "Yours?"

She shrugged. There must have been something in her expression, because he didn't look away. He kept looking at her.

"What happened?"

"Nothing," she said defensively, and turned and walked towards the window.

She could feel him watching her.

"You seem... different."

She paused, wondering if he knew, wondering if her outside appearance showed any changes. She swallowed.

"How?"

Silence.

"I don't know," he finally answered.

She stared out the window, watching aimlessly as a man outside the corner bodega slipped a buyer a dime bag.

"I hate this new place," he said.

She turned and faced him.

"So do I."

"I was even thinking about..." he lowered his head, "... taking off."

"What do you mean?"

He shrugged.

She looked at him. He seemed really depressed.

“Where?” she asked.

“Maybe... track down Dad.”

“How? We have no idea where he is.”

“I could try. I could find him.”

“How?”

“I don’t know.... But I could try.”

“Sam. He could be dead for all we know.”

“Don’t say that!” he yelled, and his face turned bright red.

“Sorry,” she said.

He calmed back down.

“But did you ever consider that, even if we found him, he may not even want to see us? After all, he left. And he’s never tried to get in touch.”

“Maybe cause Mom won’t let him.”

“Or maybe cause he just doesn’t like us.”

Sam’s frown deepened as he toed the floor again. “I looked him up on Facebook.”

Caitlin’s eyes opened wide in surprise.

“You *found* him?”

“I’m not sure. There were 4 people with his name. 2 of them were private and had no picture. I sent them both a message.”

“And?”

Sam shook his head.

“I haven’t heard anything back.”

“Dad would not be on Facebook.”

“You don’t know that,” he answered, once again defensive.

Caitlin sighed and walked over to her bed and lay down. She stared up at the yellowing ceiling, paint peeling, and wondered how they all had reached this point. There were towns they’d been happy in, even times when their Mom seemed almost happy. Like when she was dating that guy. Happy enough, at least, to leave Caitlin alone.

There were towns, like the last one, where she and Sam both made a few good friends, where it seemed like they might actually stay – at least long enough to graduate in one place. And then it all seemed to turn so fast. Packing again. Saying goodbyes. Was it too much to ask for a normal childhood?

“I could move back to Oakville,” Sam said suddenly, interrupting her thoughts. Their last town. It was uncanny how he always knew exactly what she was thinking. “I could stay with friends.”

The day was getting to her. It was just too much. She wasn’t thinking clearly, and in her frustration, what she was hearing was that Sam was getting ready to abandon her, too, that he didn’t really care about her anymore.

“Then go!” she suddenly snapped, without meaning to. It was as if someone else had said it. She heard the harshness in her own voice, and immediately regretted it.

Why did she just have to blurt things out like that? Why couldn’t she control herself?

If she’d been in a better mood, if she’d been calmer and hadn’t had so much thrown at her at once, she wouldn’t have said it. Or she would have been nicer. She would have said something like, *I know what you’re trying to say is that you’d never leave this place, no matter how bad it got, because you wouldn’t leave me alone to deal with all this. And I love you for it. And I’d never abandon you either. In this messed up childhood of ours, at least we have each other.* Instead, her mood had gotten the worst of her. Instead, she acted selfish, and snapped.

She sat up and could see the hurt etched on his face. She wanted to take it back, to say she was sorry, but she was just too overwhelmed. Somehow, she couldn’t get herself to open her mouth.

In the silence, Sam slowly stood up from her desk chair and exited the room, gently closing the door behind him.

Idiot, she thought. *You're such an idiot. Why do you have to treat him the same way Mom treats you?*

She lay back down, staring at the ceiling. She realized that there was another reason she snapped. He'd interrupted her thoughts, and he'd done so just at a moment when they were turning for the worse. A dark thought had crossed her mind, and he'd cut her off before she'd had a chance to resolve it.

Her Mom's ex-boyfriend. Three towns ago. It had been the one time her Mom had actually seemed happy. Frank. 50. Short, beefy, balding. Thick as a log. Smelled like cheap cologne. She had been 16.

She had been standing in the tiny laundry room, folding her clothes, when Frank appeared at the door. He was such a creep, always staring at her. He reached down and picked up a pair of her underwear, and she could feel her cheeks flush in embarrassment and anger. He held them up and grinned.

"Dropped these," he said, grinning. She'd snatched them out of his hands.

"What do you want?" she'd snapped back.

"Is that any way to talk to your new step-dad?"

He took a half step closer.

"You're not my step-dad."

"But I will be – soon."

She tried to go back to folding her clothes, but he took another step closer. Too close. Her heart pounded in her chest.

"I think it's time we got to know each other a little bit better," he'd said, removing his belt. "Don't you?"

Horried, she tried to squeeze past him and out the door in the small room, but as she did, he blocked her way, and roughly grabbed her and slammed her back against the wall.

That's when it happened.

A rage had flooded through her. A rage unlike anything she'd ever experienced. She felt her body heating up, on fire, from her toes to her scalp. As he approached her, she jumped straight up and kicked him, planting both feet squarely on his chest.

Despite being a third of his size, he flew backwards through the door, cracking the wood off its hinges, and kept going, ten feet into the next room. It was as if a cannon had blasted him through the house.

Caitlin had stood there, trembling. She had never been a violent person, had never so much as punched someone. Moreover, she was not that big, or strong. How had she known had to kick him like that? How had she even had the strength to do it? She had never seen anyone – much less a grown man – go flying through the air, or shatter a door. Where had her strength come from?

She had walked over to him, and stood over him.

He was knocked out cold, flat on his back. She wondered if she'd killed him. But at that moment, the rage still filling her, she didn't really care. She was more worried about herself, about who – or what – she really was.

She never saw Frank again. He broke up with her Mom the next day, and never came back. Her Mom had suspected something happened between the two of them, but she never said a word. She did, though, blame Caitlin for the breakup, for ruining the one happy time in her life. And she hadn't stopped blaming her since.

Caitlin looked back up at her peeling ceiling, heart pounding all over again. She thought of today's rage, and wondered if the two episodes were connected. She had always assumed that Frank

had just been a crazy, isolated incident, some weird burst of strength. But now she wondered if it was something more. Was there some kind of power inside of her? Was she some kind of freak?
Who was she?

Chapter Three

Caitlin ran. The bullies were back, and they were chasing her down the alleyway. A dead end lay before her, a massive wall, but she ran anyway, right towards it. As she ran, she picked up speed, impossible speed, and the buildings flew by in a blur. She could feel the wind rushing through her hair.

As she got closer, she leapt, and in a single bound she was at the top of the wall, thirty feet high. One more leap, and she flew through the air again, thirty feet, twenty, landing on the concrete without losing a stride, still running, running. She felt powerful, invincible. Her speed increased even more, and she felt like she could fly.

She looked down and before her eyes the concrete changed to grass – tall, swaying, green grass. She ran through a prairie, the sun shining, and she recognized it as the home of her early childhood.

In the distance, she could sense that her father stood on the horizon. As she ran, she felt she was getting closer to him. She saw him coming into focus. He stood with a large smile, and arms spread wide.

She ached to see him again. She ran for all she was worth. But as she got closer, he got further away.

Suddenly, she was falling.

A huge, medieval door opened, and she entered a church. She walked down a dimly-lit aisle, torches burning on either side of her. Before a pulpit, a man stood with his back to her, kneeling. As she got closer, he stood and turned.

It was a priest. He looked at her, and his face filled with fear. She felt the blood coursing through her veins, and she watched herself as she approached him, unable to stop herself. He raised a cross to her face, afraid.

She pounced on him. She felt her teeth grow long, too long, and watched as they plunged into the priest's neck.

He shrieked, but she didn't care. She felt his blood course through her teeth and into her veins, and it was the greatest feeling of her life.

Caitlin sat straight up in bed, breathing hard. She looked all around her, disoriented. Harsh morning sunlight streamed in.

Finally, she realized she had been dreaming. She wiped the cool sweat from her temples and sat on the edge of her bed.

Silence. Judging from the light, Sam and her Mom must have already left. She looked at the clock and saw that it was indeed late: 8:15. She'd be late for her second day of school.

Perfect.

She was surprised that Sam hadn't woken her up. In all their years, he'd never let her oversleep – he'd always wake her if he was leaving first.

He must still be mad about last night.

She glanced at her cell: dead. She had forgot to charge it. It was just as well. She didn't feel like talking to anyone.

She threw on some clothes from the floor and ran her hands through her hair. She normally would just leave without eating, but this morning she felt thirsty. Unusually thirsty. She went to the fridge and grabbed a half gallon of red grapefruit juice. In a sudden frenzy, she tore off the top and gulped it right from the container. She didn't stop gulping until she'd downed the entire half gallon.

She looked at the empty container. Had she just drank all of that? In her life, she'd never drank more than a half a glass. She watched herself reach up and crush the cardboard container in a single hand, down to a tiny ball. She couldn't understand what this newfound strength was that coursed through her veins. It was exciting. And scary.

She was still thirsty. And hungry. But not for food. Her veins screamed for something more, but she couldn't understand what.

* * *

It was strange to see the hallways of her school so empty, the complete opposite of the day before. With class in session, there wasn't a soul in site. She glanced at her watch: 8:40. There were 15 minutes left to her third class of the day. She wondered whether it was worth it to even go at all, but then again, she didn't know where else to go. So she followed the hallway numbers towards the room.

She stopped outside the classroom door, and could hear the teacher's voice. She hesitated. She hated to interrupt, to be so conspicuous. But she didn't see what other choice she had.

She took a deep breath and turned the metal knob.

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