



CHAPTER ONE

FOR THE FIRST time in Call's life, the house he had grown up in looked small.

Alastair brought the car to a stop and they piled out along with Havoc, who ran along the edge of the grass, barking. Alastair glanced at Call once before locking the car — there was no suitcase to carry out, no duffel bags or luggage to worry about. Call had come home from Master Joseph's with nothing.

Not exactly nothing, said Aaron's voice in his head. You've got me.

Call tried not to smile. It would be weird if his dad saw him grinning at nothing, especially since lately there hadn't been much to smile about — Master Joseph and his forces had been defeated by the Magisterium, but there had been a high death toll. Call's best friend, Aaron, had been raised from the dead only to die again.

As far as anyone knew.

"Are you all right?" Alastair squinted at Call. "You look dyspeptic."

Call abandoned the attempt not to smile. "Just glad to be home."

Alastair hugged him awkwardly. "I don't blame you."

The house looked smaller inside, too. Call went into his bedroom, Havoc panting at his heels. It was still weird to see Havoc with regular green wolf eyes instead of the coruscating eyes of the Chaos-ridden. Call reached down to scratch Havoc's ears and the wolf yawned, his tail thumping on the ground.

Call wandered around the room, picking things up almost aimlessly and putting them down. His old Iron Year uniform. Smooth, pebbled rocks from the caverns of the Magisterium. A picture of him and Aaron and Tamara, grinning ear to ear.

Tamara. His stomach clenched.

He hadn't spoken to Tamara since she had been kneeling over his body on the battlefield outside Master Joseph's stronghold. In that moment, it had seemed possible that she cared about him the way he wanted her to, but the silence that followed let him know where he stood. After all, it was one thing to not want someone to die; it was another thing entirely to want to talk to them once they were alive.

Tamara hadn't wanted Call to raise Aaron from the dead in the first place, and once he had, she hadn't thought that Aaron was himself. To be fair, Aaron *hadn't* been acting like himself. It turned out that bringing a soul back into a slightly rotted body did weird things to it. Ironically, Aaron was much more himself now while rattling around in Call's head. But Tamara didn't know Aaron was still around, and Call was sure, based on her previous reactions, that she would be highly suspicious if she found out. She already thought Call was an evil sorcerer, or at least evilly inclined.

Which Call didn't really want to think about, because of all the people in the world, Tamara had always believed in him the most.

We're still going to have to tell her, you know.

Call startled. Despite Aaron being there with him in the Magisterium infirmary all through his healing from the aftereffects of using too much chaos magic at the battle with Alex, another person hearing and responding to your thoughts never stopped being unsettling.

There was a knock on the door and then Alastair opened it. "You feel up to some dinner? I could make some grilled pimento cheese sandwiches. Or we could get a pizza."

"Sandwiches would be great," Call said.

Alastair made them carefully, buttering up the pan so the bread got nicely toasted and opening a can of tomato soup. Call's dad had never been much of a cook, but eating dinner at the table with him — and sneaking crusts to Havoc under the table — was way better than the most delicious feast Master Joseph could conjure.

"So," Alastair started, once he'd sat down and they'd both started eating. The tomato soup was salty-sweet, just right, and the pimento cheese perfectly spicy. "We need to talk about the future."

Call looked up from his soup, puzzled. "Future?"

"You're heading into your Gold Year at the Magisterium. Everyone agrees that you've, um, learned enough magic for your Silver Year to be considered complete. You'll be walking through the gate as soon as you get back to school in the fall."

"I can't go back to the Magisterium!" Call said. "Everyone hates me."

Alastair pushed back his dark hair absently. "Probably not so much anymore. You're a hero again." Call's dad was a great dad in many ways, but his bedside manner still needed a lot of work. "Anyway, you only have to make it through one more year of study. And with Master Joseph gone, it ought to be pretty quiet."

"The Collegium —"

"You don't have to go to the Collegium, Call," Alastair said. "And I think it would be better if you didn't. Now that Aaron's gone, you're the only Makar left. They'll try to use you, and they'll never trust you. You can't have a normal mage's life."

Call thought privately he wasn't sure any mage had a normal life. "Then what'll I do instead? Go to regular college?"

"I never went to any kind of college," said Alastair. "We could take some time off, travel a little. I could teach you what

I do — we could set up a business somewhere, father and son. Like California." He poked his soup with his spoon. "I mean, we'll have to change our names. Avoid the Magisterium and the Assembly. But it's worth it."

Call didn't know what to say. Right now the idea of never dealing with the Assembly and its views on Makars, or the hatred people held toward Constantine Madden, the Enemy of Death, whose soul lived in Call's body, sounded ideal. But . . .

"Look, there's something I've got to tell you," Call said. "Aaron's not really gone."

Alastair's brows furrowed in concern.

Uh-oh, Aaron thought. I hope he's not going to freak out.

"What do you mean?" Alastair said carefully.

"I mean, he's still in my head. Like, he's living on in me," Call blurted out.

There's really no need for you to tell him this, Aaron said. Which was pretty rich coming from him, since he'd just gotten through saying they had to tell Tamara.

Alastair nodded slowly, and relief made Call's shoulders dip. His dad was taking this well. Maybe he'd have some ideas for what to do.

"That's a good way of looking at it," Alastair said finally. "You're dealing with all of this really well. Grief is hard, I know. But the best thing to do is to remember the person you lost and —"

"You don't understand," Call interrupted. "Aaron talks to me. I *hear* him."

Alastair continued nodding. "I felt that way sometimes after we lost your mother. It was almost as though I could hear Sarah's voice scolding me. Especially one time when I let you crawl around outside and you ate dirt while I wasn't paying attention."

"I ate dirt?" Call asked.

"Helps you build immunities," said Alastair, slightly defensive. "You're fine."

"I might be," said Call. "But that's not the point. The point is that Aaron is really, really with me."

Alastair put a gentle hand on Call's shoulder. "I know he is," he said.

And Call didn't have the heart to say anything after that.

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The night before leaving home for his final year at the Magisterium, Call lay awake in bed as the moon made a white path over his bedclothes. He had packed a duffel for his trip to the Magisterium the next day, where he'd be putting on the deep red uniform of a Gold Year. He remembered looking at Alex Strike in his Gold Year uniform, seeming so cool and confident with his friends. Now Alex was dead. Call was glad, too. Alex had murdered Aaron and deserved everything he'd gotten.

Call. Aaron's voice was a whisper. Don't think about this stuff. You just have to get through tomorrow.

"But everyone will hate me," Call said. He knew his father disagreed, but he was pretty sure he was right about this. He might have come out on the right side in the last battle, he might have saved the Magisterium, but he was still the bearer of Constantine Madden's corrupted soul.

Havoc gave a whine and nosed at Call's hand, then began trying to crawl under the covers. It had been cute when he was a pup but was downright dangerous in a full-grown wolf, even if he wasn't Chaos-ridden.

Havoc, quit it, Aaron thought, and Havoc jerked his head up, blinking. He can hear me! Aaron sounded delighted.

"You're imagining things," Call said.

There was a knock on Call's door. "Call? Are you on the phone?" Alastair asked.

"No!" Call yelled. "Just — talking to Havoc."

"Okay." Alastair sounded dubious but his footsteps receded.

You've got Tamara, and Havoc, and me, said Aaron. As long as we all stick together, we'll be all right.

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