

In Shadowside



ELIZABETH ASHE

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BY ELIZABETH ASHE



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By: Elizabeth Ashe
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Dedication

To my mom, who isn't aware that I know she tells people to watch out when I say I'm going to do something because that means I'm going to do it.

And my dad, for making me strive to prove him wrong about me.

Also Aimee and Vicky... for being the best and most supportive of friends. And Nichole for answering 'you could do that' in serious belief the first time I ever said I could be a writer. You never doubted my ambitions, and I miss you more than you could know.

IN SHADOWSIDE

“What are you doing, Kitten?”

“Meeting Salice for our session.”

“No. With Joshua.”

“Making friends.”

“You are aware he’s not to be involved with a human.”

“Well, I guess it’s good we aren’t involved. That we’re just friends.”

“It’s dangerous.”

“I think vampires and humans being non-mixable is a sucky rule. Pardon my bad pun.”

Spider stared at her. “Why don’t I like that look in your eye?”

She stopped and faced him. “Because I think you know what it means. Also because no one, and I do mean no one, is going to tell me who I can and cannot make friends with. Now you have a good day.” She turned and stalked off.

Spider just watched. Madison was becoming this person that no one would recognize when she went home to visit. She was becoming herself. The girl had all this fire she had never been able to use. She was going to cause trouble. He could feel it in his bones. She was more like Ashling every time he talked to her, and that was a truly horrifying thought. He was proud, but at the same time, he was terrified.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW THE STORY BEGINS

Alias Rivern stared.

The new girl was pale. Vampire pale. Her file said nothing of vampirism anywhere though. It was witchcraft with this one, but he could see no signs of that either. Spider had said she was special, this girl, but Alias could see no signs of it. She looked like any other human to him. Alias supposed that was her charm, that semblance of normality. Normal she was not. He just didn't see how she was here. He saw not even a hint of dark or shadow. He supposed that would emerge in time - provided Spider was right about this girl. The shadow always swayed the humanity in the students, but Alias could not see even a hint of it in her. What he did note were the blue eyes and dark red hair, blood red, that held streaks of pink. Her fingernails held the remains of silver polish. It was chipped and faded, but he could tell it had been bright and glorious once. Her knees were tucked up to her chest, so he couldn't tell much about her clothing - other than it was all black and covered her almost completely. The only skin he could see were the tips of her fingers and her face. Her face with rosy cheeks. No one around here had rosy cheeks - unless they'd just fed.

He looked back at the file. Madison Ellsbeth Luna Leonine. Supposedly she had a couple of tattoos. Interesting. Supposedly she had undeveloped telekinesis. Now that actually WAS interesting. He raised an eyebrow. One grandmother recently deceased. The woman's name was classified. How odd. How did she and the granddaughter fit here?

"Just ask me."

Alias jumped. "What?"

"You were wondering how I got here. How the story begins. Ask. As opposed to staring. I do talk when spoken to."

Alias laughed. Now he was seeing a little of it. "I like you already."

Five days earlier...

"... And to my granddaughter, Madison E. L. Leonine, I leave my

moon charm and all that is kept in my jewelry box..."

Madison stared as the pewter crescent moon on a rickety chain was placed in her cupped hands. It felt cold to her. What had always been a symbol of her Nan's warmth and vitality now felt icy upon her skin. She stared at it and willed herself not to cry in front of them. Her family. That was a laugh. They redefined the word. Family usually implied a closeness. Not so here. Vipers, every last one of them. Her family of vultures that had descended upon her Nan's house before the body had even grown cold. There were people there she had never laid eyes on before today.

They'd all come for the house. A nice two stories of red brick with five bedrooms and a lush garden. It was a cozy place. Madison had spent most of her life there. The walls were lined with family portraits, even the members of the family her Nan had not liked so well. The hardwood floors were covered with old rugs of various colors and sizes. The sofa had old blankets thrown over it to hide its age. The study the family was currently gathered in was lined with bookshelves. It was different from other houses in the way that there was no particular color scheme. Nothing matched, yet it all fit together. Because it had all been her Nan's. She had definitely made that house HER home. She had also welcomed an unwanted child into her midst and made that child something of a person. Madison owed anything she had become to the way her Nan had raised her, and there was never more love between two people.

Madison fisted her hands over the item lying within them and pulled those hands tight against her heart. It was the favored piece of jewelry of her grandmother's. She had rarely taken it off. Certainly by no means the most expensive piece her Nan had owned, but its wealth lie in its meaning. Half the things Nan had cherished had no value outside the old woman's heart. Her Nan had told Madison once when she was a very tiny girl that the moon charm had been given to her by someone very special. That she cherished it above anything because of the giver. Yet she had never revealed the name of that person to Madison. She would just smile when asked, as if the answer was a great, delicious secret she would never share with anyone save herself. And she hadn't. Nan had never told a soul as far as Madison knew. That secret, along with so many others, was now buried.

"... My home and all the un-mentioned belongings within it will be sold and the profits donated to the Darcy Women's shelter, excluding, of course, the contents of Madison's room and anything else she deems her possession."

Madison blinked. Nan was liquidating the house? She'd always

spoken of doing so. It was not a very great shock, just a little surprising to hear it. "What?"

The lawyer looked at her. "The house is to be sold, Madi."

Madison nodded in resignation. She hated to have the house go, but it was just a thing - mortar, bricks, wood, and glass. Nan had known there would be a battle for the house. This solved that neatly.

"This is ridiculous!" Her cousin Kim jumped up.

Madison ignored the murmurs of protest from her family. "When, Simon?"

Simon ignored everyone but her as well. "Five days time, Madi." The lawyer looked at her sadly.

She was the one Simon worried for. Madison knew this. He'd known the girl her whole life, had known her father since they were both boys. He'd never had a friend like John Leonine. He'd been a pallbearer at the man's funeral fifteen years ago, and John's mysterious death was still a torment. You could see that in the man's eyes. Delia Leonine had been like a second mother to him. He would likely mourn her loss for years as well. Madison would have nowhere to go now. No one to look after her. That bothered Simon, and he was not exactly good at hiding that fact.

Madison smiled as she watched the emotions race over Simon's face. Yes, she knew her father's old friend worried for her. He and his wife Patricia had been like parents to her. She stared at him for a minute. He was perhaps a bit heavier than he ought to be. He opted for suspenders instead of a belt to keep his pants up. She'd rarely seen him out of a suit and tie. His salt and pepper hair always had a bit of a wildness to it that no brush could ever tame. Madison always said it made him look less intimidating to clients and like a dangerous man in the courtroom. She remembered as a girl his hair had been a rich, dark brown, but she had watched it change over the years. His face was kind and handsome. He had all the right creases in his skin around the eyes that made him look warm. She was glad to have him since she could barely remember her own father.

Madison nodded and slipped the chain of the moon charm over her head before walking out of the stuffy room. Her family's cries of protest followed her all the way onto the front porch. They were like a pack of wild dogs fighting for the last scrap of meat. Madison tightened her black wrap around her and sat in her Nan's rocking chair. She closed her eyes and began to move the rocker with the toe of one of her scuffed, black boots. Madison felt very alone. Her Nan was the only one who ever bothered to ask. Even the thought of Simon and Patricia was not comfort. They didn't know her spirit the way only Nan had seemed to.

Madison wondered if she would ever again know someone who could finish her sentences and know her moods without her having to utter a sound. They had so many unspoken secrets. Madison could just look at the older woman and know half her thoughts. The day her mother had abandoned her to her Nan's house was perhaps the happiest day ever. She was never treated like a child unless she wanted to be. Her Nan had a sixth sense for when Madison wanted to be coddled and when she wanted to be treated as an equal. Madison didn't know what she would do now. It was like this whole part of her had been buried with her Nan. The house was to be sold. She had nowhere to go. Nan had always told her she would always make sure that she was cared for, but Madison didn't see how at the present.

"Madison Ellsbeth Luna Leonine?"

Madison's eyes shot open. There was a very handsome man standing in front of her in a pressed black suit with the greenest eyes she had ever seen. His white shirt was starched and his black tie lay perfect down his torso. His blonde hair was spiked off his head at all angles. It was the only thing about him that seemed wild, yet there was a deliberate aura to the spikes that led Madison to believe the hair was not so wild and unplanned as it looked. He was young. Likely in his late twenties or early thirties. He was also very striking. Madison couldn't help her stare.

"Are you Madison Leonine?"

Madison shook herself. "Sorry. Yes. I'm Madi. I'm a little out of it."

He smiled, and her breath caught. "No need to apologize, Kitten. I thought you might be Madison. You have the look of her. And it's understandable for your concentration to be off on such a day. Let me take this time to offer my sincerest condolences for your grandmother. She will be missed."

"I'm sorry." Madison was confused. "You knew my Nan?"

"A little." He smiled in a way that led Madison to believe he'd known Nan quite a bit more than just a little.

"And your name?"

"I apologize. How rude of me." He held his hand out to her. "Spider Blue."

Madison arched an eyebrow. "Interesting name." She took his offered hand. The instant her skin touched his a sense of *deja vu* settled on her. She knew this man. She didn't know how, but he had been in her presence before.

"Not where I come from."

"Oh? And where's that?"

Spider just smiled and handed her an envelope. It was black with

silver writing on it - her initials. There was a seal of red wax keeping it closed. The mark on the seal was a dragon. She looked up at him. He was just grinning at her in a way that could only be described as wickedly mischievous. Madison smiled despite herself. He was staring at her intently with that grin. Normally people staring at her made her quite nervous. This was making a slow warmth spread over her entire body. He made her feel safe. She could not explain it.

When Madison broke the seal, she swore she heard a whisper on the air. She pulled out a black sheet of paper from the envelope and read the silver script.

Dear Miss Leonine,

Welcome to the University of Transylvania at Shadowside. We are pleased to accept you on full scholarship. The letter of recommendation sent to us by Ashling D. Darcy was most encouraging. We look forward to having you at the start of our next semester. Though your bloodline is in witchcraft, we would not restrict you to that. We offer many studies. The messenger sent with this letter will have instructions for your arrival should you decide to enroll. We sincerely hope that you will. Once again, welcome to U of Trans, Home of the Biting Vamps.

Until,

Bastian G. Bracken

Dean of Admissions, University of Transylvania

Madison blinked.

"Well?"

"Well what? What kind of a sick joke is this?"

"Joke?"

"Yes, a joke."

"I assure you, Madison, this is no joke."

"The University of Transylvania?" She threw the paper and the envelope back at him. "Give me a damn break."

"How delightfully narrow-minded of you, Madison."

"Stop saying my name as if I were a three year old."

"Well stop acting like a three year old." He muttered.

"Excuse me?"

Spider just smiled and pocketed the letter inside his jacket. "You really

are delightfully human.”

“What? Of course I’m human.”

“I’m not.” His eyes darkened in hue and seemed to glow. His head twisted to the side as the smile on his face became downright sinister. Though the sun was high, shadows seemed to find their way across his features to make him more menacing. It was as if that whole area of the porch dimmed a bit.

Madison was having trouble breathing. It was frightening and fascinating all at once. She gasped when Spider pulled her to her feet. His movements were so fast. She’d barely even seen them. He had just pulled her out of the rocker by her arms and was holding her just inches from his face. She was horribly afraid. He had pulled her so close to him. He really was a stranger despite her feeling of familiarity. She had known him all of five minutes, yet he was already holding her tighter to him than almost anyone in her life. She could actually feel the heat emanating from his body.

He pulled her closer, and she stiffened.

“Does this bother you, Mad?” His lips were right on her ear. His face hidden by her hair.

She was shivering. “Yes.”

“I would get used to it, Kiddo.”

“Wh-what?” Who was he calling a kid? He couldn’t be that much older than she was.

“They will all want to hold you close. Just to be near you. They will touch you unbidden just to say they have. To say they touched heaven so to speak.”

“They?”

“She never told you? None of them ever told you?”

“Told me what?” Madison was shaking. His nearness was wrecking havoc on her nerves, but not in an attraction way. Yes, he was good looking, but provoked all the spark of a wet towel for her. This was something else. It felt... fatherly. That was surely strange.

Spider moved his hands along her spine in a soothing motion. Madison felt much like a little girl who was being soothed after a skinned knee. It was bizarre, and she was certain she heard him sniffing her.

“Ah, lavender. A natural scent. Of course.”

He was smelling her! She had definitely heard him sniffing, but that comment confirmed it. Madison’s nervousness reached new heights, but at the same time she was comforted. She liked to smell people too. It was an odd habit, but she could often identify people by the perfume they wore or the soaps they used.

"Told me what?" She repeated again.

"There's witchery in these veins."

Madison blinked. Both his hands had just been moving up and down her spine, but somehow one of his thumbs had managed to caress the inside of her wrist over the pulse point. Said pulse had started racing even more violently shortly after. Not because of the touch. That touch had only held comfort, as innocent as a newborn lamb. None of this man's touching was anything but innocent and comforting. Odd, but it reminded her of her Nan's touches somehow. No, it was not the touching that got to her. It was the words he'd said with it that provoked her. "Witchery?"

"Your grandmother was a witch."

Madison shoved him away. Though she had pushed with all her might, he was still standing but a hair from her. She'd had no effect on him.

"You don't believe me."

"Witches don't exist. Well, they do, but not the kind I think you're referring to."

"Witches? I doubt you've even seen a real witch outside your grandmother, and if you did you sure didn't realize it. Witches. Are you talking about Wiccans? Humans playing at being the lady of the lake or some rot. Praying to the goddess. That is not what I'm talking about here. Having a few Celtic tats and a spice rack does not a witch make. Those aren't real witches. They're children playing dress up. None of them wield any power. Not like what flows inside your veins. Though true Wicca, ones that truly follow, will see things a mere human will not. Just because they are open to the suggestion."

"Get out of here."

"Not a chance, Kid."

Madison blinked. There was that kid again. As if he was her father or something.

"You blink a lot."

She blinked again. Spider smiled at her. He grabbed her chin gently and allowed his fingers to caress her face. She half expected him to pat her atop her head and tell her to be a good little girl. He put her off balance in a way she had only ever experienced with her grandmother.

His smile turned wicked again. "They are not going to know what to make of you. And that's good. It's high time we had some fresh blood. Figuratively speaking of course. It's been far too long since a real witch was in their midst."

She leaned her cheek into the palm of his hand a little, like a little girl

looking for more affection from her daddy. "What do I do?"

Spider stiffened. He pulled her into his arms. He hugged her tightly. She expected a head pat again. There was something so weird about the way the two of them interacted for her. She should very well be attracted to this man, being that he was such a dish, but she just was not. He did nothing for her. She liked him already, but that was because he seemed familiar.

"I am so glad you are willing to go, to trust me. I promised her I'd watch out for you. If that meant staying in this mortal place, I was willing. She is the only person who could ask that of me, but I do so hate this place."

Madison chuckled against his shoulder. Spider tightened his arms. Madison could not remember feeling this at ease or safe in her entire life. She was getting more of a sense of family from this hug than she had gotten in that whole room of relatives earlier.

"Madi, I was...." Simon stopped upon seeing the two young people in their tight embrace. "Oh, I'm sorry. I..."

Madison pulled away. "No, Simon, wait." She grabbed the lawyer's arm. "This is Spider Blue. He was a friend of Nan's."

"A friend of hers? Funny she never mentioned him."

"No, she didn't." Madison looked at Spider. "When was the last time you had seen her?"

Her wrap had fallen open revealing the chain and charm. Spider picked up the moon and looked at it. His fingers grazed over the pewter lovingly. "It had been a while."

"Yes." Madison blinked. She seemed to have gone in a trance for a few seconds. His touching the charm had confirmed it in her mind. He had been quite close to her Nan. "I'm sorry. Won't you come inside?"

"What have you decided?" He patted the breast side of his jacket that she knew the letter rested under.

"Might I think it over?"

"I would expect nothing less."

Madison smiled.

"Until, Kitten." Spider grabbed her hand and kissed the knuckles. He turned and walked down the stairs of the porch.

"Wait."

He stopped walking, but did not turn.

"Where are you going?"

"A hotel."

"Nonsense. You'll stay here."

"Madi-"

She cut Simon off with a look. Spider turned and walked back up the

stairs with that wicked smile on his face again. He knew now.

"Are you sure, Madison?"

"Yes."

"Can you trust me now?"

"Perhaps." She smiled in a way that said she most definitely did trust him.

Spider's smile widened. His look suggested he had just won something. Perhaps the heart was to return to his home.

"This is insane."

"Simon." She was packing. It had taken her less than twenty four hours in the house with her relatives before she had decided Spider could lead her straight into hell's fire, and she would follow so long as her family was not there.

"I know you dislike them, Madi. I dislike them myself, but to go off with some stranger to God knows where?"

"He doesn't feel like a stranger, Simon."

"He doesn't feel like.... Are you insane?"

"Quite clear, actually."

"You just think he's cute." Simon spat.

"As a matter of fact I do think he's good looking. I think he's strikingly handsome, but that has nothing to do with the other. I have no sort of attraction to him. He's just... comfortable. I just know I can trust him. He seems very familiar to me. Maybe he was my brother in a past life?"

Simon jumped to his feet throwing his hands in the air. "For Christ-sakes, Madi, you can not do this!"

"Oh?"

"Please. Please, think about what you're doing."

"Simon, in four days I will have no home. What then?"

"You're going to stay with Patricia and I until we get this figured out."

"No, Simon."

"Madi, I can't let you wander off with this Spider character! You're as good as being my daughter. I mean, what sort of a decent person has the name Spider?"

She almost blurted out that she didn't suspect he was a person at all. "It's likely a nickname." Even though she was quite certain it was not.

Simon snorted.

"And I'm not wandering off either. I'll be at the University of Transylvania."

"There's no such place!"

"So certain?"

"Madison, you're grieving. She was the only one who gave a damn, but Patricia and I love you too. I know we can never fill the void your Nan Delia left. I understand that, but you can't just latch on to the first person who comes along."

"I'm not latched, Simon."

"Aren't you? You allowed this stranger to stay in the house with you."

"He is not a stranger."

"Well, I should hope not with the way he was all over you yesterday afternoon."

"Simon! I've told you that it wasn't like that at all!"

"You don't know him!"

"But I feel like I do!"

"Oh, well that makes it all ok then!" Simon threw his arms in the air in desperation and began pacing.

"I don't want to fight with you, but you can't keep me from this, Simon. I'm an adult. I make my own decisions. Besides, it's school. You know I always wanted to finish college."

"You can finish college here."

"With what money?"

"I'll pay for it."

"Simon, no."

"Madi-"

"Simon, I have depended upon others all my life. I think it's time I made my own way for a bit. I truly believe in my heart that my path lies this way. It's a scholarship. And if I don't like it, I can always come back."

"I really can't talk you out of this?"

"I'm afraid not."

"I'll worry, you know. A lot."

"I'll call."

He raised an eyebrow.

"As often as I can."

"She said you'd fly like a bird when she was gone. She told me not to cage you. I suppose I should let you go."

"You know the saying... If you love something, set it free..."

"Ha ha. Whoever thought that up knew no one like you, Madi."

She just smiled.

Spider rolled his eyes as Simon the lawyer hugged Madison again.

He supposed he should be thankful. The elder human did drive them to the airport, and his wife had not come. Meeting her had been interesting. She was so very friendly, and she talked almost incessantly. She was very human, that one, but Spider had kind of liked Patricia Robison. Though she had no children, there was a mother quality to her.

Patricia had reminded him of the picture he always had in his head when people talked about Mother Earth. Her hair had been long and honey colored. Her eyes were warm and brown. She'd offered him hot chocolate or sunned ice tea. Her home reeked of spices. Spider supposed that was where a lot of the scents on Madison had come from. Patricia made things. She created with her hands. Her house had been full of homemade sculpture. She seemed to be the opposite of Simon, yet they worked well together. Yes, Spider had liked Patricia Robison, but he was glad she had not come with them to the airport. She would have talked to them forever.

Simon patted Madison's back as he hugged her. "Good-bye, sweetheart."

Spider mimicked gagging.

"Good-bye, Simon. Take care."

"You too. Here." Simon reached into his pocket. "I got you something." He handed her a small package wrapped in brown paper.

Madison smiled and opened it. It was a tiny, black sketchbook. She flipped the pages and looked back at him with a smile.

"I expect some doodling again, Little Miss."

Madison looked at him softly. "Perhaps." She hugged him again. "Bye, Simon. Thank you. For everything."

"You're most welcome, Madi. Always."

"Madison."

She looked at Spider then back at Simon. "I'm off then. My love to Patricia."

Spider held out his arm to her in a gentlemanly fashion. Madison hooked hers through it, and they walked off. She cast one last glance at Simon and waved before turning the corner to their terminal.

"Don't think I didn't see the gagging thing."

Spider looked at her out of the corner of his eye. She was trying not to smile and failing at it a bit.

They walked out onto the airstrip. Madison looked around nervously. Spider tightened his hold on her. He could feel her tension. He was charged with putting this girl at ease.

"Relax."

The were approaching a jet. Madison looked closer. It was black with

a red dragon silhouette painted on the tail of the plane. The same dragon that had been on the seal of her letter. She looked at Spider. He grinned at her. he could tell she expected some mischief with this. Well, she should expect a lot, but he wasn't about to tell her that. She needed to figure this out for herself, or she'd never be who she was destined to be.

"Welcome to the world you never knew was yours, Madison Leonine. From this moment on, everything changes."