

CHAPTER 1

Everyone said they were witches.

I desperately wanted to believe it. I'd only been at this school a couple of months, but I saw how it was. They moved through the corridors like sleek fish, ripples in their wake, stares following their backs and their hair. Their year groups had grown used to it by now, or at least pretended they had, and tried their hardest to look bored by it all. But the younger kids hadn't yet learned how to hide their silly dog eyes, their glamoured, naked expressions.

Summer Grace, the youngest, was fifteen and in my year. She backchatted the teachers no one else dared to, her voice drawling with just the right amount of rude to make it clear she was rebelling, but not enough to get her into serious trouble. Her light Grace hair was dyed jet black and her eyes were always ringed in black kohl and masses of eye shadow. She

wore skinny jeans and boots with buckles or Victorian laces. Her fingers were covered in thick silver rings and she always had on at least two necklaces. She thought pop music was ‘the devil’s work’ – always said with a sarcastic smile – and if she caught you talking about boy bands, she’d slay you for it. The worst thing was, everyone else joined in, even the people you’d been excitedly discussing the band with not three seconds before. Because she was a Grace.

Thalia and Fenrin Grace, at seventeen, were the eldest. Non-identical twins, though you could see the family resemblance. Thalia was slim and limber and willowed, her fine-boned wrists accentuated by fistfuls of tinkling bangles. She had a tight coil of coarse, caramel-colored strands permanently woven round a thick lock of her honey hair. She wore her hair loose, rippling across her shoulders, or pulled carelessly into a topknot from which tendrils always slid out to wisp around her neck. She wore long skirts with delicate beadwork and rows of tiny mirrors sewn onto the hem, thin open-necked tops that floated against her skin, fringed scarves with metallic threading slung around her hips. Some of the girls tried to copy her, but they always looked as if they were wearing a gypsy costume to school, which got them no end of grief, and then they never wore them again. Even I hadn’t been able

to resist trying something like it, just once, when I first came here. I'd looked like an idiot. Thalia just seemed like she was born in those clothes.

And then there was Fenrin.

Fenrin.

Fenrin Grace. Even his name sounded mythical, like he was more creature than boy. He was the school Pan. Blonder than his twin, Thalia, he let his hair grow loose and floppy over his forehead. He wore white muslin shirts a lot and leather cords wrapped round his wrists. A varnished turret shell dangled from a leather thong around his neck every day. He never seemed to take it off. The weight of it rested against his chest, a perfect V. He was lean, lean. His smile was arrogant and lazy.

And I was completely and utterly in love with him.

It was the stupidest, most obvious thing I could have done, and I hated myself for it. Every girl with eyes loved Fenrin. But I was not like those prattling, chattering things with their careful head tosses and thick, cloying lip gloss. Inside, buried down deep where no one could see it, was the core of me, burning endlessly, coal black and coal bright.

The Graces had friends, but then they didn't. Once in a while, they would descend on someone they'd never hung out with before, making them theirs

for a time, but a time was usually all it was. They changed friends like some people changed hairstyles, as if perpetually waiting for someone better to come along. They never went out drinking in the pubs at the weekends, never went to the Wednesday student night in the local club like everyone else. The rumour was that they were barely allowed to leave their house, except to come to school.

No one had real details of their personal lives – except for whoever Fenrin was sleeping with in any given week, as he never hid it. He'd tour the girl around school for however long it lasted, one arm slung over her shoulders in a lazy fashion, and she would drip off him, giggling madly and dying with happiness. I'd never seen one of these girls around him longer than a month or two. They were nothing, just distractions. He was waiting for someone special, someone different who would catch his attention so suddenly and so completely, he'd wonder how he had survived all this time without them. They all were, all three of them. I could see it.

All I had to do was find a way to show them it was me they'd been waiting for.