

Magic
at the
Gate



Devon Monk



A ROC BOOK

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Gate

Devon Monk



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Praise for the Allie Beckstrom Novels

Magic in the Shadows

“Ms. Monk sweeps readers up in the drama and dangers of the heroine’s life as it steadily changes and grows. *Magic in the Shadows* is an intriguing read with fascinating characters and new magical elements introduced to the mix.”

—Darque Reviews

“Delicious . . . action-packed, and full of magic, this series is really starting to hit the Kim Harrison and Kelley Armstrong level. Deep, dark, and addictive with a great leading lady. . . . Once you start reading, you won’t be able to stop. Give Devon Monk a chance and try the Allie Beckstrom series. You will not be disappointed.” — Amberkatze’s Book Blog

“Mystery, romance, and magic cobbled together in what amounts to a solid page-turner.”

—SFFWorld

“[This] series is one of my favorites . . . a well-written story with likable and realistic characters. *Magic in the Shadows* is a fun urban fantasy with strong world building and characters readers can enjoy following.”

—BSCreview

Magic in the Blood

“Tight, fast, and vividly drawn . . . features fresh interpretations of the paranormal, strong characters dealing with their share of faults and flaws, and ghoulish plot twists. Fans of Patricia Briggs or Jim Butcher will want to check out this inventive new voice.”

—Monsters and Critics

“Ms. Monk weaves a unique tale of dark magic that will keep readers at the edge of their seat[s]. *Magic in the Blood* is so thoroughly described that the creepy bits will have you thinking of magic and ghosts long after you’ve finished the story. Fast moving and gripping, it will leave you wanting more.”

—Darque Reviews

“One heck of a ride through a magical, dangerous Portland . . . imaginative, gritty, sometimes darkly humorous. . . .An unputdownable book, *Magic in the Blood* is one fantastic read.”

—Romance Reviews Today

“[A] highly creative series about magic users in a world much like our own, filled with greed and avarice. I love the character of Allie and she is just getting better and stronger as the series continues. . . . If you love action, magic, intrigue, good-versus-evil battles, and pure entertainment, you will not want to miss this series.”

—Manic Readers

Magic to the Bone

“Loved it. Fiendishly original and a stay-up-all-night read. We’re going to be hearing a lot more of Devon Monk.”

—Patricia Briggs, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Bone Crossed*

“Gritty setting, compelling, fully realized characters, and a frightening system of magic-with-a-price that left me awed.”

—Rachel Vincent, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Shift*

“Highly original and compulsively readable. Don’t pick this one up before going to bed unless you want to be up all night!”

—Jenna Black, author of *The Devil’s Playground*

“An exciting new addition to the urban fantasy genre. It’s got a truly fresh take on magic and Allie Beckstrom is one kick-ass protagonist!”

—Jeanne C. Stein, national bestselling author of *Retribution*

“The prose is gritty and urban, the characters mysterious and marvelous, and Monk creates a fantastic and original magic system that intrigues and excites. A promising beginning to a new series. I’m looking forward to more.”

—Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Bram Stoker Award-winning author of *Thresholds*

“Monk’s reimagined Portland is at once recognizable and exotic, suffused with her special take on magic, and her characters are vividly rendered. The plot pulled me in for a very enjoyable ride!”

—Lynn Flewelling, author of *The White Road*

“Clever and compulsively readable. . . . Allie’s internal and external struggles are brilliantly and tightly written, creating a multifaceted character who will surprise, amuse, amaze, and absorb readers.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Devon Monk has created a cool new heroine in Allie Beckstrom. . . . She has developed a system of magic that is intriguing and distinct from those filling urban fantasies by the score. . . . With a strong heroine, a great setting, and an interesting new system of magic, *Magic to the Bone* is likely to give urban fantasy readers more of what they want: a worthy read. Recommended.”

—SFRevu

“Devon Monk is casting a spell on the fantasy world. . . . Allie is a convincing, street-smart heroine. . . . Monk has done an outstanding job creating a gritty, authentic-feeling urban fantasy on par with Rob Thurman or John Levitt. It should be interesting to watch how this series develops.”

—Monsters and Critics

“With style and a magical world that is quite fresh, Monk explodes on the scene and makes a few waves. . . . For sheer guts, stubbornness, and determination, they don’t come much feistier than Allie.”

—*Romantic Times*

“Monk makes a grand entrance with her debut novel, captivating readers with a well-imagined tale of magic and suspense. *Magic to the Bone* delves into a dark-edged magic and adds a touch of romance that keeps the heroine more human than those around her. I’m looking forward to seeing where the next portion of Allie’s journey takes her.”

—Darque Reviews

“An intelligent, entertaining mystery. The kick-butt heroine is strong and independent. . . . Exciting fun, readers will look forward to more adventures of Allie.”

—Genre Go Round Reviews

“The characters are anything but stereotypical. They defy expectations and truly come alive on the page. The use of magic in here is new and fantastically riveting. The plot is complex and wonderful, with excellent twists and turns. The not-particularly-explicit sex scenes are searingly hot in an unusually ‘real’ kind of way, and the emotions are incredibly poignant. Simply put, I can’t do this book justice. You’ll have to read it for yourself.”

—Errant Dreams Reviews

“*Magic to the Bone* is a breath of fresh air in the urban fantasy genre, in much the same way that Ilona Andrews’s Kate Daniels series is a breath of fresh air. Instead of the same tired werewolf/ vampire soap opera that so many novels perpetuate, *Magic to the Bone* is more concerned with the ramifications of adding magic to modern society and exploring the realistic consequences . . . an exciting and often poignant story. . . . Devon Monk shows the potential to be a standout writer in the subgenre. Most importantly, I could not put this book down; I read it in two nights, with only work and sleep coming between me and the pages. Well done.”

—Fantasy Literature

“A unique character, her interior quips are humorous. . . . The humor blends with the drama to make it stronger. Devon Monk has created some fantastic characters to inhabit her suspenseful story. The ending indicates this might be the beginning of a series, which is wonderful, because the story is as addictive as the use of magic, earning *Magic to the Bone* a perfect ten.”

—Romance Reviews Today

Also by Devon Monk

Magic to the Bone
Magic in the Blood
Magic in the Shadows
Magic on the Storm

Magic
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Gate



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Published by New American Library, a division of
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street,
New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto,
Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2,
Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124,
Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.)

Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632,
New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd., 24 Sturdee Avenue,
Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices:
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published by Roc, an imprint of New American Library, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

First Printing, November 2010

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eISBN : 978-1-101-44507-5

<http://us.penguin.com>

For my family

Acknowledgments

Without the many people who have contributed time and energy along the way, this book would not have come to fruition. Thank you to my agent, Miriam Kriss, and my editor, Anne Sowards, two consummate professionals and awesome people who make my job easy.

All my love and gratitude to my fantastic first readers, Dean Woods, Dejsha Knight, and Dianna Rodgers, whose loving support and brilliant insights not only make the story stronger, but also make me a better writer. Thank you also to my family, one and all, who have been there for me every step of the way, offering unfailing encouragement and sharing in the joy. And to my husband, Russ, and sons, Kameron and Konner. You are the very best part of my life—I couldn't do this without you.

Lastly, thank you, dear readers, for letting me share this story and this world with you.

Chapter One

Sure, love can make a person do crazy things. But not me. No, never me. Still, there was nothing else to explain the fact that I had ended up in a battle between magic users over the disks my father invented while a wild-magic storm tried to kill us all. There was nothing else but love that would make me turn away from my injured, possibly dying friends, and step through a gate into death with no one beside me but my undead father and my gargoyle. Nothing but love would make me leave this world to bring Zayvion Jones' soul back from death.

I suppose if I had never met Zayvion Jones, none of this would have happened. Man had a knack for messing up my life. Truth was, I liked it. He'd probably say the same about me, if he weren't in a coma.

As I took that first step off of the grass of Cathedral Park, and through the gate into death, I braced for pain. I'd never stepped into death before, but I figured it was going to sting a little.

No. A pause of breath, then cool, soothing numbness settled over me, whisking my pain away. I had never felt better.

As soon as I put my foot down into death, that sense of well-being was gone, replaced with a sense of foreboding.

Death itself had seen better days. Vacant, crumbling buildings, and slick pools of black oil stretched out along the sidewalk of what I was pretty sure was supposed to be West Burnside Street. The city—and it was very clear we were in some twisted version of Portland—looked like a dump. If this was death, I wanted to meet the marketing team that had dreamed up both the fluffy-cloud, golden harp thing and the eternal fires of burning hell shtick.

This place was broken and empty. Achingly so.

"Allison?" my father, who had his hand on my arm, said.

He was fully solid, no longer ghostlike. A little taller than me, gray hair, wearing a business suit with a lavender handkerchief in the pocket. Death didn't seem to bother him one bit.

And it shouldn't. He belonged here.

He squeezed my arm, his eyes flicking back and forth, searching the details of my face. "Can you breathe?"

Of all the dumb questions. "Of course I can breathe. Let go of me."

His lips pressed together in a thin line and the familiar anger clouded his eyes. He pulled his hand away from my arm.

There was no air. No air in my lungs and none to breathe. I tried not to panic, but hey, this was death. I'd be lucky to get out of here alive. And I had to get out of here alive. Zayvion was here, pushed through a gate by his ex-girlfriend Chase, and her ex-Soul Complement, Greyson. Zay's body was in a coma, but his soul was here. Somewhere.

This was my one chance—my only chance—to save him. I didn't think anyone got to walk into and out of death twice. I was just praying that Zayvion and I got to do it once. The very real danger of never feeling his touch or hearing his voice while those

dark, beautiful eyes looked into me, suddenly sank in. The possibility of never being able to find Zay's soul set off a sharp panic in my chest.

Well, that and not being able to breathe.

Dad put his left hand in his pocket, tucking something away. Then he crossed his arms over his chest and watched me gasp. Stone cold, that man.

I shut my mouth and glared. I would not reach out for his help. Yes, I was that stubborn. My vision darkened at the edges.

Could you pass out in death? I was about to find out.

Stone growled and stepped toward Dad, fangs bared. That's a good gargoyle. Take a bite out of Daddy for me.

Stone's normally dark gray body was now black, shot through with lightning flecks of blues and greens and pink, like obsidian with opal running beneath the glassy surface. He practically shone, his eyes glowing deep amber. Death didn't seem to be bothering him, which wasn't all that strange, since he was made out of rock and magic, and wasn't actually "alive" in the traditional sense.

"Touch the Animate," Dad said. "You should be able to breathe again."

It was beginning to dawn on me that passing out and leaving my dad conscious might be a really stupid idea. I put my hand on Stone's head. Air, good—well, if not good, serviceable—air filled my lungs. I hacked like a smoker on a three-day bender. My lungs *hurt*.

"You are in death." Dad hit lecture mode from word one. "A living being crossing into death. There is so little chance you could have survived that, Allison. No one can step into death if they are fully alive. And yet, here you stand." His gaze searched my face. "What part of you is dead, my daughter?"

I didn't know—my sense of humor maybe? My tolerance for his possession of me? Or maybe I could walk into death because my Soul Complement was in a coma and his soul was already here. Right now, I was too busy coughing and trying to breathe to get all philosophical.

He shook his head, dismissing the question as easily as he had always dismissed me. "To survive this place, you will need to stay in contact with something that is neither fully alive nor completely dead. Something that exists in a between state, like the Animate."

"Stone." I finally managed to exhale. "He has a name."

"Yes, Stone. He will act as a filter between life and death, and if you stay in contact with him, he will bear the brunt of the effects of death. But not for very long."

"You're dead," I said. "All dead. Why could I breathe when you touched me?"

"That answer is complicated. It involves choices I made years ago." He looked up and down the street, then at the building next to us as if getting his bearings. He started down the street.

I followed him, Stone somehow sensing the need to stay under my hand. There was no one on the streets with us, no wind, no rain. When I glanced up, it was nothing but terracotta sky and hard, white light.

"Tell me you're dead," I said.

"Very much so. That doesn't mean I'm not without resources in life."

Which meant part of him, some of him somewhere, was alive. Great. I did not trust my dad. I never had. For good reason. And that very calm, trustworthy face he was

wearing made me twitchy.

“Where are you alive? Why?” I asked. “Who’s helping you?”

He glanced back over his shoulder. “If I tell you those things, you will be at risk.”

“I’m already at risk. I’ve been at risk from the moment I was accused of your murder. Probably before then. And now I’m in death. How can I be at more at risk than that?”

“If you walk away from this, out of death and into life again with information you should not have, you will end up back here. Permanently. My plans are not your concern.”

“Yes, they are. What is your angle in all this, Dad? I’ve lost track of whose side you’re on.”

“I am on magic’s side. To see that it falls into the right hands. Magic was once whole—light and dark used equally through the disciplines of Life, Death, Faith, and Blood. But when Leander and Isabelle became Soul Complements, everything changed. Magic was too dangerous to be used in its full form, and magic was broken.

“Guardians of the gates, such as Zayvion, are trained to endure the strain of wielding light and dark magic for short periods of time. No one else. But separating light magic from dark magic hasn’t made anything better. I’ve been trying to tell the Authority that for years. The separation has caused a rot in our world, and has given the Veiled and other creatures cause to seek out the living in search of the light magic they hunger for.”

That was more than I’d gotten out of him in months, maybe years. Death made him talkative. Good. I planned to use that to my advantage. “So why are you getting involved? You’re dead. Why worry about the living?”

He gave me a look that could melt rock. “My motives are not yours to question.”

“I’ll question your motives until the day I die. Again. For reals.”

“This is real,” he said quietly. “Very real. If you are to survive, you need to put your stubbornness aside and listen to me.”

“Oh, I just love that idea.”

“Love it or not, your options are limited. Living flesh does not travel well in the world of death. I believe if you stay in contact with the Animate, it will filter the . . . irritants of death long enough for you to accomplish your task.”

He made it sound like he was teaching me the ABC’s and knew there was no way I’d ever make it to Q.

He stopped, glanced back down the street the way we’d come. “Faster would be better.” He grabbed my arm and propelled me down an alley. I shook free, my other hand still on Stone’s head, and looked over my shoulder.

Watercolor people, about a dozen or so, mostly men, wearing clothing in the style of the recent century. The Veiled were the ghosts of powerful magic users—or at least pieces of powerful magic users—impressed on the flow of magic. Zay had once told me to think of them as a recording of a life caught on the film of magic.

I think he was wrong. These did not look like the nice kind of Veiled. Unlike the other Veiled I had seen in life, these ghostly beings barely resembled people. Twisted bodies, sagging faces—they looked like movie zombies more than ghosts. They also looked solid.

And hungry.

Stone growled.

The Veiled heard him and turned our way, sniffing, scenting, crooked hands tracing half-formed glyphs, as if they could use magic to find us.

“Veiled?” I asked, just in case the mutated watercolor people were something else.

“Quiet,” Dad said.

Stone’s ears flattened. He stopped making noise, but his lips were pulled back to expose a row of sharp teeth and fangs.

Dad traced a glyph in the air and magic followed in a solid gold line at his fingertips. I wasn’t using Sight, yet magic was clearly visible. That wasn’t how it worked in life. Magic was too fast to be visible. Here, it was slow and fluid and gorgeous.

I hadn’t seen him set a Disbursement, nor a Proxy. He was bearing the price of pain for using this magic.

He finished the glyph. Camouflage glittered in the air like a filigreed screen. He whispered a word and the glyph stretched and widened, creating a swirling shell around us. I swallowed, but couldn’t taste the butterscotch scent of the spell. That was different than in life too. Magic didn’t smell or taste here.

Or maybe I just wasn’t dead enough to sense it.

The Veiled were almost at the mouth of the alley.

“This way,” Dad whispered. He rolled his fingers, catching up the lines of the Camouflage glyph and balancing it on his open palm. He pushed his palm outward like a waiter carrying a tray, and the spell moved with us, keeping us hidden.

Impressive.

Dad’s mouth set in a hard line and his eyes narrowed. Clearly, casting magic in death and maintaining the spell cost pain. Well, at least something about magic was the same. Dad stormed down the alleyway—not once looking back—strong, confident.

And for a second, just a second, I saw my dad as a heroic figure. The epitome of what a magic user should be. The mythic wizard who knew the hidden strengths of magic, in life or death, and the power of his own soul. Even in death, my dad stood tall and kicked ass.

“Walk or be eaten,” he said.

Okay, so much for the hero bit.

I picked up the pace and Stone padded along beside me. I didn’t have a clue where we were going, but Dad seemed to know the place a lot better than I did.

The Veiled stepped into the alley behind us and shuffled over to where we’d been standing. They didn’t follow any farther. Four dropped to their knees, patting the sidewalk as if they’d just lost something, while the other eight ran hands along the brick walls, mouths open. They leaned against the building and sucked at the walls, as if they were starving for even the slightest drop of magic they might contain. The dead were hungry for light magic. I didn’t see how this could turn out well.

It creeped me out. I walked faster, holding tight to Stone’s ear.

“I did not want to enter this way,” Dad said, “but bringing you along has changed my approach. Why must you challenge me in every way, Allison?”

“I’d be happy to help,” I said as pleasantly as I could muster, “if you’d tell me where Zayvion’s soul is so I can take him, and me, the hell out of here.”

He stopped. We were at the far end of the alley. A crowd of mutant Veiled blocked our passage—I gave up counting at twenty. A mix of men and women, they stared at us as if they could see right through the Camouflage my dad still held.

That wasn't good.

I put my hand on the hilt of Zayvion's katana, sheathed on my back.

"Don't draw the blade."

There wasn't a lot of room in the alley. I was behind Dad. I didn't know how he'd seen me reach for the sword.

"I'm not going to wait until they jump us."

And just like that, the Veiled rushed.

"Do you trust me?" Dad asked without looking back.

"No."

"That's unfortunate."

My dad broke the Camouflage spell, and I mean it shattered like glass exploding, gold ribbons and sharp edges falling *through* me, but not hurting, not drawing blood, then spreading out across the broken concrete at our feet to be sucked down into the cracks as if the magic had never been there.

The Veiled were almost on us. They were fast, fast, fast.

Dad spun, his back to the Veiled. He stuck his hands into my chest.

Wrist deep. Into. My. Chest.

It hurt. I inhaled. Exhaled. Yelled. Couldn't move to draw the sword, draw a spell, draw a breath.

Stone launched at him out from under my hand. Then I couldn't breathe even more.

Dad was fast. He yanked his hands free, pulling magic, pink and silver and black, out of my chest and pointing at Stone, who halted in his tracks and stepped on my foot with his back paw, so I had at least some contact. Dad carved a glyph out of the magic, my magic—a metallic sparking fireball—and threw it at the Veiled.

The explosion lit the street and slapped hard shadows across the alley.

The Veiled screamed. An unholy sound that echoed out and out and seemed to reflect off of the sky as if it were a low ceiling. It was too big of a sound, too much of a sound, in too small of a place.

Their scream vibrated somewhere deep inside of me where I couldn't get away from it, making their pain a part of me, as my magic was now a part of them.

No, no, no.

I reached for Stone, for my dad, for anyone, anything to hold on to to make this stop. Then Dad was in front of me, his hand over the old bullet scar just below my collarbone.

"Breathe, Allison, breathe."

I gasped. Got some air down. Tasted something sweet against my tongue, and the cool, rough bricks of the building against my back.

"What. The. Hell," I said.

"Light and dark magic, through Death magic," he said evenly, not moving away from me. "Death magic always takes a transference of energy. I took from the Life magic within you, and now I give you back the magic of death."

So that was the bluish glow coming from his hand.

"Wait. What? You are not putting dead magic in me." I pushed at his hands, but it

didn't do much good. I was very, very tired and he didn't seem to have any problem keeping me pinned against the wall.

Why was I so tired?

Could it be because I was in death? And my father had just ripped magic out of my chest? And right before that, back in life, I'd Grounded a wild-magic storm and fought a bunch of crazy magic users, all the while killing nightmarish creatures while trying to save my friends' lives?

Yes. That was probably it. I'd had a hell of a day and the adrenaline of the battlefield was wearing off, leaving behind the very real horror of what had happened.

Zayvion was in a coma. Shame had almost died on the battlefield, trying to save his mother, Maeve. For all I knew, the crystal I gave to Terric to try to keep Shame from bleeding out had been only a temporary reprieve.

Jingo Jingo, who had been a trusted member of the Authority and a teacher of Death magic, had betrayed everyone, nearly killing Shame's mother. Jingo Jingo had kidnapped Sedra, the head of the Authority, and used my dad's disks to disappear with her.

Magic users had turned against magic users in a battle that had left several dead. The Authority wasn't cracking; it had broken. Sides had been taken. The war was on.

Whoever came out on top would rule how magic was used by the common citizen, and by the Authority. Whoever came out on top would control all the magic that the public knew about, and worse, all the ways magic could be used that they didn't know about.

The winners would have say over what technology was allowed to be developed to use with magic, how doctors could use magic, how politicians could use magic, how corporations could use magic. They would decide what every person could learn about magic. And they could kill anyone who stood in their way. There was a lot of power at stake here. Plenty enough to kill for.

And I was here, dead. With no one but my gargoyle and my Dad to help me find a soul for my lover, and the way home for me. Where were my ruby slippers when I needed them?

I had to find Zayvion soon. Yes, because I loved him. But also so we would have a fighting chance to stop the war. There was a city full of people who didn't deserve to die because a few secret magic users had suddenly become power hungry. I might not agree with everything the Authority did, but at least their tenet required that they keep magic safe and people unharmed from using it. That was worth fighting for.

"I'm not putting dead magic inside you." Dad's voice was gentle. He shifted so he wasn't pressing so hard on my collarbone. "I'm giving back the magic I used in a slightly different form. They won't be able to see you here now—or at least you won't stand out like a burning torch. It's the best protection I can give you."

"Don't," I said. But he ignored me like he always ignored me, and didn't move his hand. I was feeling better, stronger. Like I'd just taken a long crawl through the desert and he was tipping a cup of cool water to my lips.

That sort of kindness did not make sense coming from him. I couldn't look in his eyes, didn't want to see the concern there. He was a confusing man. I liked it better when I could just hate him and not have to think he was capable of compassion. So I gazed past him, toward the end of the alley.

The watercolor people walked past the mouth of the alley, smiling, and paying no attention to us.

Weird. They looked like normal men and women. No longer twisted and zombielike, they moved down the street as if they were out shopping, going to work, enjoying the first day of spring after a hard winter.

They looked like they had been healed.

“What did you do?” I whispered. “What did you do to them?”

Dad took a deep breath and finally pulled away. His hand, when he straightened his jacket, trembled a little.

Stone, who had been grumbling like a bag of rocks in a washing machine, stepped up to me and leaned against my leg. That was nice. Since my dad wasn’t touching me, I needed Stone to breathe.

“I took an educated risk with magic and saved your life. Again.”

Oh, he had not just used that tone of voice. I glared. “You took my magic and used it without my consent.”

“*Your* magic?” He shook his head. “I thought you’d be pleased. The magic you carry healed them, restored them to a balance of light magic and dark magic together. It is how magic is meant to be. One. Whole. Not separated into two forms.”

“You will never again take my magic. For anything or anyone,” I said. “Understand?”

I pushed off the wall and strode past him to the edge of the alley. Stone paced me, a solid, breathable buddy. Not for a minute would I believe my dad was doing me favors. There was a reason he had agreed to let me step into death with him. There was a reason he hadn’t let me get eaten by the Veiled. He wanted immortality. And I was pretty sure he wanted to be the one who came out on top of this war, with magic ending up in his hands and him having final say over how it was used.

Yeah, well, I wasn’t going to let him use me in the process.

Except I had a problem. I had no idea how to find Zayvion. Just because we were Soul Complements didn’t mean I could find him in death. Right now, even the idea of touching the magic inside of me that Dad had messed with made me want to throw up. So Hounding was out.

My dad told me he knew where to find Zay. Which meant I had to cooperate with him.

I stepped up to the mouth of the alley. Watercolor people walked by, stopped to talk to one another, though I could not hear their words. They didn’t seem to notice I was there. At all.

I waved my hand. Nothing. Not even a glance. I was a ghost to them just as they had been ghosts to me in life.

Dad stopped next to me. “You have always underestimated your natural ability,” he said, with a tone I could not place. “Do you see what we have accomplished together? The healing of souls with the magic you carry. We have healed souls in death. With light and dark magic.”

“We? No, you stuck your hands in my chest and stole my magic and threw it at them. If you try that again, you won’t have hands. Where’s Zayvion?”

Okay, maybe I was a little rusty on the whole cooperation thing.

“Where did I go wrong with you?”