

## Chapter One

*Two hundred years later...*

To think, life was supposed to be calm and mundane. But, once Isis hovered high above the village of New Salem, she knew today wouldn't work out as she hoped. Their soothsayer was right. An attack was coming. A horde of reanimated corpses, turned into mindless vampires, were heading toward New Salem, pushing through the swamp jungle's shrubs and bushes.

A few collided with trees that stopped them in their tracks. Many others, however, had enough instinct to shuffle their way through and resume their path. They smelled blood, and they were determined to get their hands on it.

Isis eyed the village below. Most were indoors, standard protocol before an impending threat. The few who were outside gazed at her as if she was a bright star in the sky. Isis' primary job as of late was to turn away attacks. Today would be no different. Well, maybe a little different. Despite her protests, she was about to have help in securing the borders and protecting lives.

Isis held out her arms and allowed her body to glide to the ground, into the middle of the quad where a crowd awaited her return. One person stood in front of the others. She landed before him.

"So, what's the deal?" Zack asked.

Isis focused, on Zack's green eyes and blond hair. After all this time they were still his best features. "They're coming," she said in a huff. "They're five minutes away." A collective gasp filled the small crowd.

"Then Domina's vision about the attack was accurate?"

"There's around two dozen of them." Isis eyed the short and rotund girl standing to Zack's right. Her hair was box-braided down her back. "But she was off about what direction they're coming from. The North is clear of any threats. This horde is coming from the East."

"Then what are we waiting for?" shouted Elian, the youngest of the group. "Let's go kick some mindless vampire ass!" At least one in the group was excited maybe too excited, to charge off into battle. The rest had widened eyes and were tense. A few kept taking deep breaths.

"Wait until we get the word," the taller and redheaded Cindi snarled at him. She returned her attention to Isis and Zack. "We have to be ready, right, Mister President?"

"You are ready," Zack replied. He looked upon the entire group of six. "Listen to me. This will be no different than what you've been practicing in our class. Yes, they are vampires, but they work on impulse, not thought. You will need to use your cunning and your ingenuity. But, most importantly, you will need to use the energy to fend them off. You're the best we have here in New Salem. I believe in you. Your families believe in you. We all believe in you!"

Elian jumped up with two fists clenched. If Zack was looking for excitement from the others, they

weren't giving it to him. At least they were taking their first task as New Salem's latest protectors seriously. It was finally Cameron, Cindi's twin brother, who stepped forward. "We will make our people proud, Sir." Two of the witches behind him nodded their agreement.

"Let's head east," Cindi shouted.

The twins and the other four grabbed the wooden spears lying at their feet. They ran for the east border. Isis watched them all with a skeptical eye. They had been both her and Zack's trainees for a few years, and now they were being put on the front lines. Were they truly ready to turn away the horde of savages heading to New Salem looking for thirst-quenching blood? Of course, they were anxious. It was just what Isis expected from them. These kids could barely handle being trained by a pair of vampires. Now they'd have to engage vampires in battle? This was the main reason Isis wore jeans and a pink T-shirt while Zack wore jeans with a blue T-shirt. They thought it made them look less like the undead.

Cameron and Cindi took the lead. They strode with confidence that may have been staged. Zack always spoke to them about looking poised in front of the others. It seemed both siblings, especially Cameron, were always looking to impress Zack. At seventeen, they were also the oldest members of the team. For the others, however—two boys and two girls—they were no older than fifteen. Elian was only thirteen and just started his training three months ago. When he wasn't running around the entire village, Elian moved with a strut and a dance in his step. He never looked nervous, especially around the older kids in the group. Isis did notice, however, that he always wore his white baseball

cap, passed down through a number of generations, like a security blanket.

"Nice speech," Isis whispered. Zack replied with a nod and a smile.

Domina's gasp had them both spinning around. "They come from the east, not the north. I beg forgiveness for my flaw." Her voice shook as she spoke. "I try, but a full understanding of what I see, it is hard for me."

"In that case." Isis raised a finger in the air. "Off with your head!"

Domina shrieked. "My head?" She grasped her neck, her face turned as white as Zack's. "What do you mean? What is off with my head?"

"I'm making a joke." Isis placed her palm against Domina's exposed forearm. "Relax. It's all good."

Domina jumped back. Isis' arm fell to her side. The girl was never relaxed, especially around Isis. It wasn't because Isis was a vampire, not when there were two others in the village. But, whatever the reason, the obvious fear began the moment her Wiccan abilities manifested three years ago at the age of thirteen. As was the case with her ancestors, Domina's connection manifested as psychic visions. Isis had been hoping her fear would subside, but it had only grown over time.

"Okay, then. I thank you for understanding."

Zack chimed in. "You did well, Domina. You let us know the threat is coming, and we appreciate that. Now, it's time for the rest of our team to do their part."

"I should get there, too." Isis stepped forward. Zack's ice-cold fingers wrapped-around her wrist. She stopped in her tracks. "What are you doing?" she asked. "They need to do this themselves, Isis," he said.

"By themselves?" Isis threw Zack a wide-eyed glance. "They're so young. Do you really want to risk their lives by having them fight those things without us?"

"We have to," Zack replied. "The village relies on your connection too much as it is. They need to know this team can keep them safe and turn away threats without you."

"Zack, there's a bunch of monsters heading here!"

"Twenty plus one," Domina said. "That's what I saw."

"They looked nervous. Real nervous," Isis said. "That could play havoc with the energy, maybe even sever them from it."

"I get that," Zack replied. "But with each generation of witches we trained, they hung back while you did all the heavy lifting. This group needs to see they can use their Wiccan abilities on their own. If not, they'll fall into the same pattern. It's time this village started relying more on each other and less on you all the time."

Isis opened her mouth to argue but then stopped herself. She hated it when they disagreed, especially when she knew he was right. People called on her for even the most menial of tasks about ninety percent of the time. After two hundred years together, she had learned to trust Zack's gut just as he trusted her Wiccan connection. But she still couldn't stand by and watch the six students they trained get slaughtered. There had to be something she could do, even if it was in a subtle manner.

The sound of dozens of the undead snorting and growling came closer. They were less than a minute

away. With her enhanced vision, Isis saw the six defenders standing in a straight line, each a few feet apart. They held their wooden staffs with the sharp ends aimed forward. Isis smelled the sweat on all of them, even Elian. An idea suddenly hit her. Isis knew exactly what she had to do.

"Okay!" She wrapped her arms around Zack's waist. "But let's at least stay close and keep an eye on them. Just in case."

"That's a good idea. You'll teleport us there?" Isis touched her nose against his cheek and smiled.

"Unless you became a witch since this morning, I'd better handle the travel."

Zack moved back, keeping hold of Isis' hand. Domina, you want a lift?" Isis had almost forgot the girl was still standing there.

"No, no, no." Domina waved her hands in protest. "Walking is best. Walking is what I shall do to transport."

Isis shut her eyes and focused on the New Salem's eastern border. Once she opened them, Isis and Zack stood in the middle of the cemetery, which lined the village's border. The mindless vampires' feet scampered their way. Each of the six stood ready, although a few swayed as if caught in a strong breeze. The undead horde came into view. Their eyes were pure black, and their mouths hung open, displaying corroded teeth. Some of the older ones even had the sharp ends of teeth, the beginnings of fangs, protruding. The noises they made sounded more like pigs snorting than anything human.

Three of the undead were steps ahead of the rest. They charged forward with hands stretched out,



reaching for the human beings in front of them. Kim, a fifteen-year-old girl they found and rescued in Taiwan, aimed her wood staff and attacked. She let out a loud scream. Cameron and Cindi did the same. The mindless vampires marched directly into the three staffs, becoming impaled through their chests. Each staggered, but they stayed on their feet.

Cindi stretched out her arms. "Rise!" she chanted. "Rise!" But nerves and stress interfered with her witchcraft. The vampires stayed in place.

Isis, realizing what Cindi was trying to do, focused on the energy around each of the three vampires. "Rise," she whispered, copying Cindi's chant. The vampires levitated up, over the trees, then shot off into the horizon and far from the village. Cindi faced her brother with a face filled with relief. That relief melted at the sight of several undead attackers charging at full speed from behind the trees.

"Heads up!" Zack shouted. "Do not let them enter New Salem!"

For a moment, the entire team stood frozen in place as more of the vampires approached. Elian finally lunged, pointing his palms outward. "Fire, light up!" he shouted at the top of his lungs.

Isis focused on the two creatures in front of him. Smoke rose from their backs and shoulders. The smoke burst into fire that spread across their bodies. The undead ran in circles while the flames grew. They scurried away from the village border squealing like pigs the entire way.

"Did you all see that?" Elian threw his arms in the air and cheered. His head darted back and forth.

"Who's next? I have more where that came from!"

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