

BLURRED HORIZONS

Chapter 1: Surge

The day felt, off, or maybe in my case, on. It should've been the perfect start to my senior year, but something in the air, on the current, flowed like radio waves. Little transmissions warbled around me; the buzzing caused havoc with my concentration. I didn't know what it meant. In the past, I never understood why cell phones died around me, why lights flickered when I approached, why computers surged as I touched them. Most of the time, I dismissed it as bad luck or maybe too much static electricity, but today everything beat out of tempo. Later I realized the electricity, the buzzing, it was a warning. They had arrived.

I walked into anatomy shortly before the bell rang unaware of any danger, except from my own personal bully. Robert, the school's golden boy, groaned when he saw me. "Hey Emme," he called as I scanned the seating chart projected on the wall for my name--Emmeline Sauventer, last table, back corner.

"I thought about you all summer," Robert said.

Caught off guard, I glanced up at him and nearly tripped over the landmine of bags. He never talked to me. That is, unless he was insulting me.

"Yeah, that's right," he smiled, "every time I went to the zoo, I couldn't help but to think of you. Hell, I've seen polar bears with more of a tan."

My face felt hot as the students around me laughed. I let my long hair work as a shield while I took my seat. Not that pale-blond worked well to hide the blush now burning my cheeks. Was it my fault my skin went from burnt to freckled in 2.5 seconds? I ducked under the table to grab my notebook.

When I resurfaced from my search, Robert continued his rant. "Can't you take a different class? Any other class?" He turned to a friend next to him. "My dad expects an Ivy League acceptance this year which isn't happening if someone," he flipped his middle finger at me, "keeps throwing the curve."

I'd like to say the weird signals warned me about Robert. They should have. If I had known, I would've taken his advice. I would've walked out of class that very second, but I didn't.

Instead, Mr. Keenan chose that moment to walk into the room, saving me from Robert's tantrum. As he turned off the lights, for what would surely be an hour of overhead notes, I felt it, the concentration of energy. A boy stood in the doorway, a boy with unnatural eyes, eyes the iridescent color of rain in the sunlight. A shiver ran down my arms as they flitted toward me. I dropped my gaze.

Chicken, I scolded myself.

When he didn't move, Mr. Keenan said, "Seating chart's projected on the wall. Find your spot."

"Aye, sorry, but I'm new. My name isn't on the seating chart because I arrived this morning." His voice, a cadence unlike anything I'd ever heard before, was hypnotic. I found myself leaning to listen.

"Schedule." Mr. Keenan held out his hand. He took the boy's schedule and began muttering to himself, "Thirty-five students in one room. Don't they understand this is a lab?" Then he spoke up a little, "Taby-es Almond is it?"

"Tobias Adalmend actually, but I prefer Tobi." His tone was strange--polite, but cavalier at the same time like he thought Mr. Keenan should feel privileged he was giving him the time of day.

Mr. Keenan muttered something.

I decided to take a chance and peek. Tobi had shoved his hands in his pockets while he watched the teacher ramble. I couldn't help but notice the contrast between him and Mr. Keenan. Where the middle-aged man looked similar to most California natives, as if he'd spent his entire life in the sun, Tobi looked like he'd spent his existence in the shadows. His hair alone was darker than my oldest childhood fears.

That thought, coupled with the way he watched everything around him, left a chill in the air. Something else about him,

something I couldn't quite figure out, didn't sit right either. Most high school boys were still, well, boyish. Their faces were rounded, soft. The boy at the front of the room had already hardened. I glanced away. My brain buzzed, making it hard to concentrate. Why did my head feel like a tuning fork? I looked around the room to focus on something other than the chatter in my mind and I noticed I wasn't the only person interested in our newcomer. Every female in the class had her eye on him, fresh meat. Poor guy, he didn't stand a chance. Hopefully, he had some sense and stayed away from the really pretty girls. They were usually trouble.

"Well, everything's full," Mr. Keenan said. "I guess you'll have to sit here." He pointed to a table piled with papers at the front of the room.

Tobi hung his backpack on the chair before sitting. Unnerved by this strange new kid, my attention pulled back to him. It was then that Tobi turned around to grab something out of his bag and his attention drifted back to me.

He paused. I could've sworn his eyes began to glow. They pulsed, drawing me closer until I felt my own retinas burn.

It was as though someone flashed a camera in my face. Only they turned up the intensity. I blinked, trying to clear my vision. I could hear Mr. Keenan in the background, but I couldn't see.

Popping sounds exploded around me. I cringed in my seat. Students began to let out little screeches of surprise.

Okay, don't panic. I squeezed my eyes shut and took a deep breath. Even behind closed lids, all I could see was the light. People jostled around me and I could smell burning plastic, an acrid taste in the back of my mouth. I opened my eyes again.

Nothing. I held out my hands in an attempt to make sense of the chaos. Dread rose in my throat. Was I blind? I squeezed my eyes closed. Relax. Breathe in. Out.

The fire alarm sounded.

Mr. Keenan yelled over the confusion, "People, stop panicking. It's probably a short. Head outside."

Chairs scraped against the floor. Slowly, I opened my eyes. My vision had cleared. I could see the students as they scurried out of the room now filled with smoke, leaving me alone in the back corner. The florescent bulbs over my head were burnt and fuming. Had one of the lights electrocuted me? I jumped out of my seat and ran to the door before it could happen again, but I kicked something on the way out: a wrist band. It looked handmade, probably valuable to someone. Without thinking, I picked it up and hurried outside.

Everyone loitered around the courtyard, chatting with an animation rarely seen at school, as Mr. Keenan sent for help.

"Did you see that?" someone asked.

"It looked like lightning..."

"Yeah, coming right out of the ceiling."

"The coolest thing I've ever seen."

"It was so pretty. Like blue ribbons."

"Freakin' sweet."

Mr. Keenan attempted to yell over the crowd, "Since we aren't having class today, you all need to complete exercise four on page twenty."

Good luck with that. Still high on the excitement from what had happened, no one listened to him. I barely registered his command over the questions buzzing around in my own head.

Okay, stop and think. What happened? I hadn't seen a thing. I had felt it though. My whole body trembled at the electrical current coursing through it and I still couldn't catch my breath. I looked down at my arms, my hands. They seemed fine. I seemed fine. Maybe.

I twisted the leather around in my fingers out of nervous habit.

It was broad, probably two inches wide. Intricate Celtic patterns covered it. I couldn't imagine trying to carve any of these knots into leather. I had seen designs like this before in tattoos or on paper, but these designs looked so much more elaborate. The odd thing about the band was the fact that it was clearly unfinished. I flipped the leather around in my hand.

Maybe there was a name or something on the inside. No name, but the inside was--gold?

"What have you done?" a voice asked. The hostility in his tone made me flinch like he burned me. I cringed as I looked up into Tobi's eyes. The blinding light stole my vision again. I could feel electricity arcing around me.

"Stop," he said.

His voice doused me like ice. I blinked, looking away from the light. "I...I..."

"Do not bother," he said. "I cannot believe it. After what you've done and now look at you. What were you going to do? Sell it?"

I couldn't respond. I froze, watching anger swirl around him.

My lack of response must have confirmed his question because he said, "My uncle warned me about people like you. I didn't believe him. I didn't believe that any of you still posed a threat. I mean look at you. Your race is pathetic."

My eye began to prickle. "I was just--" I tried to begin again.

"Save your breath," he said. "I know what you are. I know what you can do and it won't work on me, so save your lies."

I snapped my jaw shut. The water in my eyes began to pool, but I forced back the tears. I would not give him the satisfaction.

He reached his hands up toward my shoulders as though he wanted to shake me, but dropped them before he touched me. "Good. I'm glad to see you've taken my warning. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like my Keltar back."

I had no idea what a Keltar was, but it was implicitly clear he meant the band I was holding. I held out my hand, and he snatched it out of my grasp, careful not to touch me before he spun on his heel and disappeared.

Rooted in place, I watched him disappear into the crowd. What was that about? What was he talking about, my race? He looked liked we belonged to the same race. Did he mean my country?

Tears leaked down my face. I brushed the back of my hand over my cheek. I had been wrong. His eyes weren't the color of rain, more like that of a gathering storm, blue-black, full of power and ready to destroy me. I just didn't understand why.