

## **A LOST SCENE FROM HALLOWED:**

Christian's house is bigger than mine, a lot bigger, actually, but otherwise they look almost identical: both large log houses with tons of shining windows and a wraparound porch, even down to the snowy roof and dangling icicles. This surprises me. I guess I expected Christian's house to be dark and broody, a stone mansion with mysterious figures lingering in the windows. Instead it's charming, welcoming even.

"Hey," Christian says as a greeting, opening the door before I even make it up the front steps. "Come on in."

I follow him into a large entryway, complete with a grand staircase with smoothed log banisters in the middle of it, which opens onto a huge family room.

"I like your house," I say. "Wow."

"Thanks. We've had some good parties here," he says.

I can see why. The place almost begs to be filled with people lounging on the overstuffed leather furniture, playing pool at a table in the corner, playing chess at another table. There's a giant fireplace against one wall, and long, comfy-looking couches, all turned toward the enormous television. I can almost hear the echoes of laughter and music in this room.

Christian leads me into the kitchen where he gets me a soda out of the equally massive stainless steel refrigerator.

"Give me a tour?" I ask spontaneously.

"Uh—" he hesitates for a split second, then shrugs. "Sure."

I follow him upstairs, down a long hall that seems pretty standard, past a bathroom, a laundry room, a bedroom that's so plain and undecorated it reminds me of a hotel room—

Walter's room, Christian tells me. Then there's another bedroom that's like the opposite of Walter's, decorated in pale pink, light and airy with gauzy curtains on the windows and a floral pattern on the bed.

"My mom's," explains Christian, and that's all he says about it.

I expect the next room to be his, but instead it's a big room with two sets of bunk beds against each wall, enough to sleep eight people, by my count.

"You guys also running a hostel or something?" I ask.

"It's for when Walter's buddies visit," he says.

Walter must have a lot of buddies.

"He has friends from all over the world, and somewhere along the line they heard about what great skiing we have here, fishing and hiking, all that. So they come a lot. Sometimes this place does feel like a boarding house," he says.

He's nervous, I notice. I can feel his anxiety coming off him like a particularly edgy cologne. He's been nervous since I suggested the tour, but I don't get why. I know it's weird, showing people where you live. It shows a side of you that's private, invites judgment, maybe, that kind of thing. But here everything is so immaculate, so clean and tidy that it doesn't feel like anybody lives here. It's nice and all, but in a strange way it's also blank, impersonal. The size of the house, the way it's furnished, suggests that it's the kind of place that's supposed to be brimming with people. So here, with just Christian and me wandering the halls, it feels deserted. It feels empty.

"And this is my room," Christian says when we reach the last door on the left.

We stand out in the hallway and peer in. A little better, I think. A little more lived in. Ski posters on the wall, along with posters of some bands I've never heard of, an acoustic guitar on a stand in the corner, and an electric in another.

"That's right, you play guitar," I say, stepping inside.

"A bit. Aren't angel-bloods supposed to be musically inclined?" he says.

"Why, because angels play harps?"

He smirks. "Only little naked, chubby angels play harps. But there's the chorus of angels, the heavenly music, that sort of thing."

"What, you sing too?" I turn and look at him, and he meets my eyes even though what he wants to do is look away. I get this through my empathy. His vibes are very strong right now. And very conflicted.

"Not really," he says, squinting and looking at one of the band posters. "Mostly I just play."

"I must have been left off the list the day they were passing out musical talent to angel-bloods," I say. "I don't sing or play an instrument, really. Jeffrey played the trumpet for a year, back in middle school, before sports took over his brain. Mom plays piano. She knows all kinds of classical pieces and a bunch of jazz and blues stuff. Angela plays a mean violin. You should ask her to play for us one of these times. So it's just me, I guess. Musically uninspired."

"But you're a ballerina," he says. "You dance."

I stare at him. "How did you know that? Did you read my mind about that, too?"

He scoffs. "No. I listened. With my ears, and stuff. You told me, last year at prom. Which I thought was strange since you kept stepping on my feet."

Hello, embarrassing. "Well, I never said I was a *good* dancer."

“That’s true,” he says.

“You are, by the way. A good dancer, I mean.”

“My mom taught me when I was a little kid,” he says. “She loved all these old ballroom dances.”

Involuntarily, it seems, his eyes move to a framed photograph on his dresser, a black and white snapshot of a woman swinging a small dark-haired boy up in the air. The picture’s a little blurry, since they’re both in motion, but the boy is unmistakably Christian, Christian at four or five years old, I’m guessing. Christian and his mom. Together. Happy. They’re both laughing. I can almost hear it, looking at them. I can almost feel it. Joy. And it makes me sad to think about all that he’s lost.