

Frostbite prologue

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



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For Kat Richardson, who is very wise.

PROLOGUE

THINGS DIE. BUT THEY DON'T always stay dead. Believe me, I know.

There's a race of vampires on this earth who are literally the walking dead. They're called Strigoi, and if you're not already having nightmares about them, you should be. They're strong, they're fast, and they kill without mercy or hesitation. They're immortal, too?? which kind of makes them a bitch to destroy. There are only three ways to do it: a silver stake through the heart, decapitation, and setting them on fire. None of those is easy to pull off, but it's better than having no options at all.

There are also good vampires walking the world. They're called Moroi. They're alive, and they possess the incredibly cool power to wield magic in each of the four elements?? earth, air, water, and fire. (Well, most Moroi can do this?? but I'll explain more about the exceptions later). They don't really

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use the magic for much anymore, which is kind of sad. It'd be a great weapon, but the Moroi strongly believe magic should only be used peacefully. It's one of the biggest rules in their society. Moroi are also usually tall and slim, and they can't handle a lot of sunlight. But they do have superhuman senses that make up for it: sight, smell, and hearing.

Both kinds of vampires need blood. That's what makes them vampires, I guess. Moroi don't kill to take it, however. Instead, they keep humans around who willingly donate small amounts. They volunteer because vampire bites contain endorphins that feel really, really good and can become addictive. I know this from personal experience. These humans are called feeders and are essentially vampire-bite junkies.

Still, keeping feeders around is better than the way the Strigoi do things, because, as you might expect, they kill for their blood. I think they like it. If a Moroi kills a victim while drinking, he or she will turn into a Strigoi. Some Moroi do this by choice, giving up their magic and their morals for immortality. Strigoi can also be created by force. If a Strigoi drinks blood from a victim and then makes that person drink Strigoi blood in return, well... you get a new Strigoi. This can happen to anyone: Moroi, human, or ... dhampir.

Dhampir.

That's what I am. Dhampirs are half-human, half-Moroi. I like to think we got the best traits of both races. I'm strong and sturdy, like humans are. I can also go out in the sun as much as I want. But, like the Moroi, I have really

good senses and fast reflexes. The result is that dhampirs make the ultimate bodyguards?? which is what most of us are. We're called guardians.

I've spent my entire life training to protect Moroi from Strigoi. I have a whole set of special classes and practices I take at St. Vladimir's Academy, a private school for Moroi and dhampirs. I know how to use all sorts of weapons and can land some pretty mean kicks. I've beaten up guys twice my size?? both in and out of class. And really, guys are pretty much the only ones I beat up, since there are very few girls in any of my classes.

Because while dhampirs inherit all sorts of great traits, there's one thing we didn't get. Dhampirs can't have children with other dhampirs. Don't ask me why. It's not like I'm a geneticist or anything. Humans and Moroi getting together will always make more dhampirs; that's where we came from in the first place. But that doesn't happen so much anymore; Moroi tend to stay away from humans. Through another weird genetic fluke, however, Moroi and dhampirs mixing will create dhampir children. I know, I know: it's crazy. You'd think you'd get a baby that's three-quarters vampire, right? Nope. Half human, half Moroi.

Most of these dhampirs are born from Moroi men and dhampir women getting together. Moroi women stick to having Moroi babies. What this usually means is that Moroi men have flings with dhampir women and then take off. This leaves a lot of single dhampir mothers, and that's why not as many of them become guardians. They'd rather focus on raising their children.

As a result, only the guys and a handful of girls are left to become guardians. But those who choose to protect Moroi are serious about their jobs. Dhampirs need Moroi to keep having kids. We have to protect them. Plus, it's just... well, it's the honorable thing to do. Strigoi are evil and unnatural. It isn't right for them to prey on the innocent. Dhampirs who train to be guardians have this drilled into them from the time they can walk. Strigoi are evil. Moroi must be protected. Guardians believe this. I believethis.

And there's one Moroi I want to protect more than anyone in the world: my best friend, Lissa. She's a Moroi princess. The Moroi have twelve royal families, and she's the only one left in hers?? the Dragomirs. But there's something else that makes Lissa special, aside from her being my best friend.

Remember when I said every Moroi wields one of the four elements? Well, it turns out Lissa wields one no one even knew existed until recently: spirit. For years, we thought she just wasn't going to develop her magical abilities. Then strange things started happening around her. For example, all vampires have an ability called compulsion that lets them force their will on others. Strigoi have it really strongly. It's weaker in Moroi, and it's also forbidden. Lissa, however, has it almost as much as a Strigoi. She can bat her eyelashes, and people will do what she wants.

But that's not even the coolest thing she can do.

I said earlier that dead things don't always stay dead. Well, I'm one of them. Don't worry?? I'm not like the Strigoi. But I did die once. (I don't recommend

it.) It happened when the car I was riding in slid off the road. The accident killed me, Lissa's parents, and her brother. Yet, somewhere in the chaos?? without even realizing it?? Lissa used spirit to bring me back. We didn't know about this for a long time. In fact, we didn't even know spirit existed at all.

Unfortunately, it turned out that one person did know about spirit before we did. Victor Dashkov, a dying Moroi prince, found out about Lissa's powers and decided he wanted to lock her up and make her his own personal healer?? for the rest of her life. When I realized someone was stalking her, I decided to take matters into my own hands. I broke us out of school to run off and live among humans. It was fun?? but also kind of nerve-wracking?? to always be on the run. We got away with this for two years until the authorities at St. Vladimir's hunted us down and dragged us back a few months ago.

That was when Victor made his real move, kidnapping her and torturing her until she gave into his demands. In the process, he took some pretty extreme measures?? like zapping me and Dimitri, my mentor, with a lust spell. (I'll get to him later). Victor also exploited the way spirit was starting to make Lissa mentally unstable. But even that wasn't as bad as what he did to his own daughter Natalie. He went so far as to encourage her to turn into a Strigoi to help cover his escape. She ended up getting staked. Even when captured after the fact, Victor didn't seem to display too much guilt over what he'd asked her to do. Makes me think I wasn't missing out on growing up without a father.

Still, I now have to protect Lissa from Strigoi and Moroi. Only a few officials know about what she can do, but I'm sure there are other Victors out there who would want to use her. Fortunately, I have an extra weapon to help me guard her. Somewhere during my healing in the car accident, spirit forged a psychic bond between her and me. I can see and feel what she experiences. (It only works one way, though. She can't "feel" me.) The bond helps me keep an eye on her and know when she's in trouble, although sometimes, it's weird having another person inside your head. We're pretty sure there are lots of other things spirit can do, but we don't know what they are yet.

In the meantime, I'm trying to be the best guardian I can be. Running away put me behind in my training, so I have to take extra classes to make up for lost time. There's nothing in the world I want more than to keep Lissa safe. Unfortunately, I've got two things that complicate my training now and then. One is that I sometimes act before I think. I'm getting better at avoiding this, but when something sets me off, I tend to punch first and then find out who I actually hit later. When it comes to those I care about being in danger... well, rules seem optional.

The other problem in my life is Dimitri. He's the one who killed Natalie, and he's a total badass. He's also pretty good-looking. Okay?? more than good-looking. He's hot?? like, the kind of hot that makes you stop walking on the street and get hit by traffic. But, like I said, he's my instructor. And he's twenty-four. Both of those are reasons why I shouldn't have fallen for him. But, honestly, the most important reason is that he and I will be Lissa's

guardians when she graduates. If he and I are checking each other out, then that means we aren't looking out for her.

I haven't had much luck in getting over him, and I'm pretty sure he still feels the same about me. Part of what makes it so difficult is that he and I got pretty hot and heavy when we got hit with the lust spell. Victor had wanted to distract us while he kidnapped Lissa, and it had worked. I'd been ready to give up my virginity, and Dimitri had been ready to take it. At the last minute, we broke the spell, but those memories are always with me and make it kind of hard to focus on combat moves sometimes.

By the way, my name's Rose Hathaway. I'm seventeen years old, training to protect and kill vampires, in love with a completely unsuitable guy, and have a best friend whose weird magic could drive her crazy.

Hey, no one said high school was easy.