



Otherworld Nights: An Anthology (The Otherworld Series Book 3)

By Kelley Armstrong

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Rare and never-before-published short stories featuring fan favorites from the #1 *New York Times* bestselling Otherworld series

It's been more than ten years since Kelley Armstrong began the Otherworld series and drew legions of fans to a realm roamed by witches, werewolves, necromancers, vampires, and half-demons. Many of the novels have become bestselling favorites, but not all of the Otherworld adventures have been easy to find. At last, *Otherworld Nights* shares short stories that have previously been available only online or in obscure collections. Fans have long been clamoring for this anthology and they won't be disappointed—they'll find plenty of surprises are in store.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Delightful.... Lycanthrophiles will be very pleased." *Publishers Weekly*

"Just because a series has finished never means we're ready to say goodbye. Thankfully Kelley Armstrong has come up with these extra short stories filled with wonderful tales that keep you reading into the early hours of the morning. I loved this book. I adore these characters and to be perfectly honest I can't wait for the next anthology to delve further into the Otherworld.... Divine.... Here are the stories you found hard to find and always wanted to read." *April Hollingworth* (blog)

From the Trade Paperback edition.

About the Author

KELLEY ARMSTRONG is the #1 bestselling author of *Omens* and *Visions*, the first 2 books in her Cainsville series, as well as the international bestselling 13-volume Women of the Otherworld series, the Nadia Stafford crime series, and 3 YA trilogies. Her Otherworld characters have also inspired the TV series *Bitten*, which debuted in January 2014. She lives in rural Ontario.

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This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof

DEMONOLOGY

Talia stared at the painting. A tiny fishing boat caught in a raging storm, swirling in an eddy, the crew members barely managing to keep it afloat . . . while a giant wave swelled behind them. That's my life, she thought. I fight the storm and I keep fighting, but somehow, I never shake the feeling that a huge wave is gathering behind my back, waiting to make a mockery of my efforts.

Her eight-year-old son, Adam, was sprawled across the office floor doing his homework with his blond head bent over the math workbook, pencil in his mouth, scowling at the numbers as if that could make them surrender their secrets. He'd been quiet for fifteen minutes now, a sure sign that he was dreading this appointment.

In her support group for parents of hyperactive children, the other mothers always rejoiced over their children's "quiet times," those rare occasions when their kids stopped bouncing and chattering and sat for more than a few minutes at a stretch. Talia never joined in. When Adam went quiet, it was a sure sign that something was bothering him. These days, he sank into those spells several times a week, more often if that week included appointments.

In the last three months, they'd been to at least a dozen doctors. General practitioners, specialists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers . . . a never-ending parade of professionals all claiming they could figure out what was wrong with Adam. Talia hated that phrase: "what was wrong with Adam."

There was nothing wrong with her son, and she told him that every day. But the fact that she needed to give constant reassurances proved that even Adam knew something was wrong. How many blood samples could a little boy give, how many questions could he answer, how many X-rays and tests could he undergo, before he stopped trusting his mother's reassurances?

"Mom?"

Talia looked over and met his brown eyes, the mirror image of her own.

"I'm thirsty."

She lifted her purse. "I brought juice boxes and animal crackers—"

"I'm more thirsty than that." He wrinkled his nose, freckles forming new constellations. Then he slanted a sly look her way. "I saw a pop machine down the hall."

"Did you, now? And let me guess. That's how thirsty you are: full-can-of-pop thirsty."

"Please?"

With a dramatic sigh, she opened her change purse and counted out enough for a soda and a candy bar. Yes, she was apologizing for the appointment with junk food, but sometimes you'd do just about anything to make the medicine go down easier. His grin as she handed over the money said she'd done the right thing, whatever the parenting books might tell her.

"Thanks, Mom."

He bounded for the door and nearly knocked over a student walking in. A blurted apology and a sheepish glance at Talia. Then, as he turned backward to the door, he froze, his gaze snagged on a photo. An aerial view of a forest fire. Adam had noticed it the moment he'd walked in. Yet now he stared as if seeing it for the first time.

"That's a neat photo, isn't it?" Talia said. "I wonder how they took it. From an airplane, I bet."

"Cool," Adam said, then tore his gaze away and took off, back on target.

Talia moved to the doorway. He shot her a look that said he was too old to have his mother watching out for him, but she stuck out her tongue and stood her ground.

As he ran down the hall, weaving through groups of students, her gaze slid back to the forest-fire photograph. Should she have commented on it like that? Most of the doctors she'd talked to would have said no, that she should either ignore his fascination or distract him from it. Maybe Talia was naive, but that didn't seem right to her. Treat it as normal—that's what she thought she should do. Act as if Adam's fixation with fire was neither positive nor negative, just a fact of his life, like another child's obsession with cars or trains.

Budding pyromania. That's what the experts called it. Pyromania. Talia could barely even think the word, as if that gave it a validity it didn't deserve. Yes, her son was fascinated by fire, but there was a huge difference between staring at a candle flame and lighting your bed on fire. Adam didn't start fires; he just liked to watch them. And yes, maybe that was a warning sign, but pyromania seemed a simplistic explanation that ignored so many other things.

When Adam struck out in anger, which was luckily very rare, his hands were hot enough to give a physical jolt, like touching fire itself. The last time he'd done that—three months ago, with a bully at school—he'd left a mark on the kid's skin. That's when the parade of experts had started.

Now, after months of searching, she'd ended up here. At the office of a different kind of doctor. A college professor. She looked at the nameplate again. Robert Vasic, PhD. Nothing to indicate his area of expertise or even his department. She could have looked that up. She should have. No one could accuse Talia of being anything less than thorough, especially when it came to her son's care.

But this time . . . When the nurse at the last specialist's office had taken her aside and slipped her Vasic's number, she'd made an appointment without even looking him up. She was that desperate.

"Do you think he forgot about us?"

Talia jumped and looked at the student Adam had nearly bowled over.

The young woman smiled. "Sorry, I was just wondering whether Dr. Vasic was going to show up. He can be a bit absentminded."

"Oh?" Talia said, trying to sound interested as she leaned to look for Adam.

"Last month, we were supposed to have a quiz, and he completely forgot about it." The girl grinned. "Not that anyone complained."

Adam was still at the vending machine, trying to make a decision.

"He's a great prof, though, isn't he? Enthusiasm makes all the difference, I think. Of course, it'd probably be hard to make something like that boring. When I told my mom I was studying demonology, she almost had a fit. She thought I was taking an occult class."

Talia stared at the young woman. Her mouth opened, but before she could speak, the student continued, "Then I told her he used to be a priest, and that made her happier. I think she figures we're learning about exorcisms and stuff. My aunt called last week, asking if I could take a look at my little cousin, check for signs of possession. I think she was joking . . . but I'm not sure."

Demonology? Former priest? Possession? Oh God, what had she done?

Talia caught sight of Adam bouncing back from the machines, pop can in one hand, candy bar in the other, his face beaming. She held up a finger, telling him to wait. Then she grabbed her purse and his homework, murmured something to the student about remembering another appointment, and raced out.

"Mom?" Adam said as she hurried to him. "What's—?"

"The appointment was canceled."

"So we don't have to stay?" A momentary shadow, then another sly look. "It's getting late to go back to school."

She put a hand against his back to steer him along the hall. "Definitely too late. But I think there's still time for the arcade, and I bet it isn't too busy at this time of day. No lineup for Pac-Man."

Another grin. "Cool."

They'd caught the attention of a slender, bearded middle-aged man. With his towheaded good looks and infectious grin, Adam often won the attention of strangers, but it was usually indulgent smiles and the occasional pat on the head. This man, who'd been rushing down the hall, had stopped and was frowning slightly, as if he recognized them.

"Ms. Lyndsay?"

She almost stopped. Almost turned. Then she realized this man must be Robert Vasic.

"Ms. Lyndsay?" he called after them.

She took Adam's arm, ignoring his protests, and steered him into a throng of students exiting a classroom. By the time they were through the crowd, Vasic was gone. She gave a soft sigh of relief, and hurried Adam to the exit.

That night, Talia dreamed of Adam's father, as she found herself doing more often these days, especially when her quest would smack into another dead end. It made sense, she supposed—that a single mother struggling with a parenting problem would reflect on her son's absent father. But there was never any anger to her dreams, no "Why am I stuck handling this alone?" bitterness. Instead, she dreamed of their meeting and of their night together.

From the start, she'd accepted that Adam was her sole responsibility. Had she been able to contact his father, she would have—it was only right. But that hadn't been an option, and she'd never wished it was otherwise.

She'd met him a month into her first college term. There'd been a lot of changes in that month, not all of them good, not all of them welcome. The biggest had been the end of a relationship. When she'd gone away to college, the guy she'd been dating since ninth grade had dumped her.

Maybe "dumped" wasn't the right word, as it implied a sudden, unexpected end to the relationship. Josh had warned her, starting the day she sent in her college application. Leave for college, and we're through. Like most of the boys in town, he already had a job lined up at the tire factory, and had his life lined up right behind it. Find a good job with good benefits, get married, start a family, like his father and his older brothers before him.

When he'd learned that Talia's plans didn't coincide with his, he'd given her his ultimatum. Go to college and you lose me. She hadn't believed him. When she was accepted, he'd sulked but continued dating her right until Labor Day weekend. She thought he'd changed his mind. Later she realized he just hadn't expected her to go through with it. When she did, he dumped her.

A month later, she'd come home for the weekend, planning to talk to him and work it out . . . only to discover he was dating Brandi Waters, who'd been after him since they were twelve. That was the end of her weekend home. And the end of Josh.

She'd caught the bus back to school, though she was sure she could have saved the fare and just kicked herself all the way back. Had she really gone home to try to make up with him? After what he did? She should have booted his ass to the curb the moment he'd given her that ultimatum.

When she got back to college that evening, she'd dropped off her suitcase at the dorm, then headed to the

café to drown her sorrows in an herbal tea with scones and jam. They didn't have scones back in Springwater. They didn't have herbal tea, either. And they certainly didn't have any place like the Elysian Café, with its incense burners, abstract art, and Tuesday-night poetry readings. Most times, Talia found the place too So-Cal, but tonight anything that didn't remind her of home was exactly where she wanted to be.

She'd resisted the urge to bring schoolwork. This night was for wallowing, not studying. So she'd grabbed one of her roommate's novels. Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*. Vampires. If that wasn't wallowing, she didn't know what was.

She'd noticed him watching her as she sat down. He was a decent-looking guy. Not gorgeous, but Talia didn't go for gorgeous. He sat by the fireplace with his chair pulled up to the blaze as if he found the air-conditioning too much. She pegged him at a few years older than her, probably a grad student. Average height, average build, medium brown hair . . . average all around, really.

Only his eyes were noteworthy. A warm brown with coppery glints. When he smiled at her, she smiled back—polite, nothing more. Then she settled in with her book, tea, and scone.

After a few minutes of reading, a shadow passed over her table. She looked up to see the young man. He smiled. A cute, average sort of smile—friendly, nothing more.

"Vampires, hmmm?" he said, nodding at the book. "Do you like vampires?"

"I don't know. I've never met one."

He threw back his head and laughed as if this was the funniest thing he'd heard all day. His laugh was anything but average, as rich and vibrant as his copper-speckled eyes.

"That's not the most comfortable place for reading," he said, gesturing at her wooden chair. "The seats by the fire are much better."

"Sure, but they're always full—" She looked over. The chairs were empty, with only a jacket thrown over his to save his place. "Well, they were full when I came in."

"I scared everyone away for you."

She smiled. "Thanks. But I'm not sure—"

"You don't have to be sure," he said, his eyes dancing with amusement. "I'll just go back to my chair and move my coat over one for you, and if your chair here gets uncomfortable, you know where you can find something better."

With that, he tipped his head, the gesture oddly old-fashioned and courtly, then walked back to his chair by the fire.

Talia held out for ten more minutes. Then she looked at him, reading quietly, as anti-Josh as this café was anti-Springwater. She gathered her tea and her book, and went to join him.

They'd spent the evening talking. Just talking, about an endless array of topics. He seemed to know something about everything, but what he wanted to know most was more about her—her life, her interests, her goals. Of himself, he said very little, not even his name. It didn't matter. Talia was fascinated, and there was something fresh and exciting about being found fascinating in return. Nine years later, she could still see him, leaning forward, the fire making his eyes glitter.

They left only because the café closed at midnight. He offered to escort her back to her dorm. He actually said “escort,” and she’d tried not to laugh, charmed in spite of herself. When they reached the building, they stopped under a tree to talk some more, and he’d kissed her.

In his kiss, there’d been something she’d never found with Josh, and when she’d closed her eyes, she’d seen fire, and felt it blazing through her. Then she did something that she still couldn’t believe: she’d invited him to her room. Talia Lyndsay, the girl who’d made Josh wait almost three years before letting him go all the way, inviting a stranger into her bed. And, to this day, she didn’t regret it.

That night . . . well, she’d had lovers since, but none had come close. He’d been perfect—patient yet passionate. Some nights she could still see the glimmer of his face in the candlelight, feel the heat of his fingers.

That was what she always remembered in these dreams. Those candles and that heat. She’d come from the bathroom to find that he’d lit every candle her New Age–obsessed roommate owned. She’d jokingly asked where he’d found the matches, because Sunny kept them hidden, but he’d only smiled and rose to meet her. And his touch. Hot, his skin like someone with a fever, and his fingertips warmer still.

She’d asked him to wear a condom, and he’d produced one from his wallet. She’d seen him put it on—she was sure she had. As for what went wrong, she could only assume it had broken. She hadn’t noticed until the next morning, rising to find a still-damp spot under her.

The last thing she remembered of their night was him lowering her to the pillow, then staying there, watching her as her eyelids flagged. Once, she’d forced them back open and had one last glimpse of him, holding a candle to watch her face, his own shimmering against the flame. Then she’d drifted off, and when she awoke, he was gone. A month later she missed her period and knew he’d left something behind.

The day after she’d bolted from Dr. Vasic’s office, Talia started feeling foolish. That student had been laughing about her out-of-touch mother jumping to conclusions . . . and Talia had done the same thing. Put the words “ex-priest” and “demonology” together, and she’d envisioned a man booted out of the Church for radical views, a nut who’d see a child fascinated by fire and assume possession by hellfire imps. Just the kind of guy who’d make tenured professor at Stanford. Obviously, not.

So, Talia did what she should have done before making the appointment. She researched him. And she found a man with a solid academic record, lauded and admired by his peers.

After three nights of dreaming about Adam’s father, she knew her subconscious was telling her she’d run out of options. It was time to take another look at Robert Vasic.

Two days later, Talia sat at the back of Vasic’s lecture hall for his huge first-year class. Getting in hadn’t been difficult—she looked young enough. Taking time off work hadn’t been tough, either. She was a horticulturist—a glorified gardener, as she joked—and self-employed, so her schedule was flexible. Busy, but flexible.

Talia couldn’t believe not only that Stanford offered courses in demons but that they were so popular. By the end of the lecture, though, she understood why. Vasic was an outstanding teacher. He spoke with a quiet passion and a dry humor that had her suspecting he could have made even her plant physiology classes

interesting.

At the end, she tried to merge into the rushing river of students.

“Ms. Lyndsay?”

Vasic’s voice was soft yet strong enough to cut through the chatter. She could pretend she hadn’t heard, but .

..

She backed into the classroom as Vasic stepped off the lecture platform and walked toward her.

“Did you enjoy the class?” he asked.

His voice was mild, no hint of mocking, but Talia’s cheeks heated.

“It was very interesting, thank you.”

“It can be, though it’s never as interesting as some students hope. No satanic rituals. No demonic possession. No exorcisms.”

Her face burned now.

“So how is young Adam?” he asked. “He looked quite happy the other day. Glad to miss an appointment, I’ll bet. No doctors poking and prodding, asking questions, pestering him about his dreams, his thoughts, his feelings . . .”

“It’s been difficult for him.”

“I’m sure it has been.” His eyes met hers. “For both of you.” He paused. “May I buy you a coffee?”

Talia nodded, and let him lead the way.

They talked until their coffees went cold. Vasic asked questions, and Talia answered. It never felt like an interview, though. More like confession. Talia had never been to confession—she wasn’t Catholic—but she imagined this was what it would be like, talking to someone who seemed to have all the time in the world to listen and was genuinely interested in everything she had to say. With each scrap unloaded, the weight lifted.

She told him about Adam’s father. All of it, most of which she’d never breathed to another soul. No matter how “liberated” you thought you were, there was shame in admitting you’d become pregnant at seventeen, in a one-night stand, and didn’t even know the father’s name.

But with Vasic, the confession came easily. He’d wanted to know everything about Adam’s father, obviously looking for a genetic link, so she’d told him everything, right down to the silly fancies that ate at her brain—the images of fire, the heat of his touch. Vasic had seemed fascinated, pulling out every observation she’d made, until he seemed to cut himself short, dowsing his enthusiasm and forcing himself to move on.

One other topic had sparked that same excitement—her description of Adam’s “abilities.” That’s what he called them, abilities not problems. He’d asked again how old Adam was. And when had this started? Had he

burned anyone since the bully?

When they finished their coffees, Vasic leaned back in his chair as if digesting it all. His gaze flicked to the wall behind the counter. Talia followed it to a calendar that featured a photograph of a tornado. She'd seen Vasic notice it when they'd first walked in.

"First," he said as he tore his gaze back to Talia. "Let me reassure you. There is nothing wrong with Adam. He's not a 'budding pyromaniac' or any other label they've assigned. I've worked with cases like his before, children with behavioral anomalies that science can't explain. While his abilities may change as he grows, there is no cause for alarm. He will learn to manage them as we all learn to manage our special skills. That is where I can be of most assistance, Ms. Lyndsay. Helping you and Adam monitor and manage his skills."

Talia tensed. "How much is this—"

He cut her short with a small laugh. "My apologies if that sounded like a sales pitch. I'm an academic, Ms. Lyndsay, and I deal only in the currency of knowledge. Yes, I will keep notes on Adam for my research, but he will remain an anonymous subject, and I promise you that it will be strictly observational. I'll never subject him to any test or experiment for the sake of my work. My career is established. I'm not seeking to conduct groundbreaking studies, but simply to learn and to help others do the same."

"Learn about what? Does that mean you know what's—" She stopped, realizing she'd been about to say what's wrong with Adam. "You know what's happening with Adam? If you've seen this before—"

"If you're asking for a label, I can't provide one. I don't believe in them. What matters is that you have a very healthy, very special young boy and that none of that—his fascination with fire, his special abilities, those anomalies they found in his blood tests—is a cause for concern. We can continue to meet like this to monitor Adam's progress and make him comfortable with his skills."

She looked Vasic in the eye. "Do people buy that bullshit?"

He blinked and sat back.

"You said you've met other children like Adam. Do their parents fall for that? You pat them on the head, tell them everything is fine, and they go away happy?"

"A child's welfare is paramount—"

"I didn't need you to tell me that my son is fine. I know he is. What I want is an explanation. Not a label. An explanation."

"There's no need—"

"—to raise my voice? I've been searching for an answer for months, Doctor, and now you have it and you think you can just tell me everything is fine and I should be happy with that?" She paused, reining in her anger. "You said you wanted to meet Adam?"

Again, Vasic blinked, as if surprised by the change of tone and subject. Then he smiled and his eyes gleamed with barely contained enthusiasm. "Yes, certainly. I would very much like to meet him. He sounds . . . remarkable."

"He is." She took out her business card. "Here's my number. When you're willing to tell me what's going on, I'll bring him by your office."

She let the card flutter to the table, and strode from the coffee shop.

When a week passed with no word from Vasic, Talia began to second-guess herself. Maybe he hadn't been as interested in Adam as he'd seemed. Or maybe he really didn't know what was happening, only that he'd seen similar abilities before.

No, he was interested. There had been no mistaking the way his mild gaze had lit up when she'd asked whether he wanted to meet her son.

As for what was happening, he knew that, too. He wasn't just fishing with his questions, like the other doctors and specialists who'd randomly tossed out queries. He'd known exactly what to ask, including about Adam's father. Especially the questions about Adam's father. Nothing she'd said had shocked or surprised him . . . because he'd expected it.

After nine days with no call, Talia decided to light her own fire under Robert Vasic. First, she sent Adam to visit his great-great- aunt Peggy. Peg was like a second mother to Adam, and a fairy godmother to Talia. When Talia had been choosing colleges, her mother pushed her toward Berkeley, where her aunt Peg lived. Peg had offered to let Talia stay with her but had understood when Talia had wanted to try dorm life instead.

After Adam came, though, her aunt had been adamant that Talia would live with her. She would stay in school, while Peg—a retired schoolteacher—looked after Adam. When Talia had graduated, she hadn't left the area. After all Peg had done for them, Talia wasn't about to wrest her son away from the old woman.

Once Adam was at Aunt Peggy's, Talia made the call. Then she waited. Less than thirty minutes later, someone pounded at the front door. Didn't ring the bell or knock politely, but pounded. She opened it to see Vasic on her stoop, bareheaded in the rain, water streaming off his hair and beard, panting as if he'd run from the car and was unaccustomed to the exertion. Seeing him like that, she felt a little bad about what she'd done. But only a little, and only for a moment.

"Are you all right?" His eyes were dark with concern, and she felt another slight pang of remorse.

"I'm fine," she said.

As he searched her face, she knew she should try to seem more upset, even be crying, given what she'd told him on the phone. But making that call had drained her limited acting abilities.

"You should sit down," he said, taking her arm to guide her.

He thinks I'm in shock. She gently pulled from his grasp and led him to the kitchen.

"Where's Adam?" he asked.

"Staying at his aunt's."

A brief frown, as if surprised she wouldn't have him right there, at her side, after such a traumatic event.

“And the other boy?” he asked. “Is he all right? The burns . . . second-degree you said?”

She stared hard at Vasic. “Does that surprise you?”

He blinked.

“It doesn't, does it? You knew this could happen. These changes you mentioned, that's what you meant. That it would get worse. That he'd start inflicting real burns.”

His gaze went to the patio doors. The rain beat against them, the harsh patter backlit by lightning and the rumble of distant thunder. “May we . . .?” He gestured at the doors. “Another room, perhaps. Less . . . distraction.”

She took him into the living room. “You knew this could happen,” she repeated before he could change the subject.

“Someday, yes. But not at this age. He's so young. I've never . . .” He took a deep breath. “I'm sorry, Ms. Lyndsay. That sounds inadequate, but I made an error in judgment, and I feel terrible about it. I knew Adam was displaying his pow—abilities at an early age, much younger than I usually see, but I misjudged the speed at which he could progress. I did intend to contact you, in a few months, after you'd had time to . . .”

“Calm down?” she said, crossing her arms. “Stop being such a demanding bitch?”

He flinched at her language.

She moved to the couch, subconsciously getting distance before letting loose the bomb. “Adam didn't burn anyone, Dr. Vasic. I just wanted to hear you admit that he could.”

Vasic straightened sharply.

“You've just told me that my son could—will—someday be able to inflict serious damage with these ‘abilities’ of his. Now I think I have the right to know what's going on. If you refuse that, I can make things very unpleasant for you at Stanford—”

“There's no need to resort to threats, Ms. Lyndsay,” Vasic said, his voice taking on an unexpected edge.

“I don't want to, but this is my son, and I need to know what he's going through.”

He met her gaze. “What good will that do, Ms. Lyndsay? A label isn't going to give you a cure. There is none. It won't help you look after him and keep him safe, no better than you can do—and are doing—now. What will a label do for you? How will an explanation help?”

“It will help me understand my son.”

“Will it?” His gaze bored into hers. “And what if this ‘label’ changed the way you saw Adam, changed your feelings for him?”

She met his gaze. “Not possible.”

They argued for another hour. Three times Vasic said he was leaving. Once he got as far as the front stoop.

But when Talia showed no signs of backing down and letting him help Adam without an explanation, he led her into the kitchen to stand by the patio doors.

For a minute, he just stared out at the storm. The look in his eyes sent a shiver down her spine. It was the same look Adam got when he stared into a fire.

“Do you like storms, Ms. Lyndsay?” Vasic asked softly.

“I . . . guess so. I’m not afraid of them, if that’s what you mean.”

“But they can be things to fear. Incredible power for destruction. Like fire. Beautiful from a distance, but devastating if uncontrolled. That’s the key, to storms and fire. Control.” He glanced over at her. “I can teach Adam to control his powers. As for the source of that power . . .” He looked her square in the eye. “I think you already know what it is; you’re just too rational to believe it.”

“I don’t know what—”

“I’m talking about? Good. It’s better that way. Safer. For you. There is absolutely no need for you to know the source of Adam’s powers, Talia. You don’t need to know that to help him. Knowing will change . . .” He looked back out the window. “Everything.”

“I don’t care.”

He opened the patio doors and stepped outside. When he reached the far side of the plant-choked patio, he beckoned to her. She looked up at the rain.

“It’s all right,” he said. “Just step out.”

She did, bracing for that first splash of rain. But it didn’t come. She took another step. Still nothing. She made it to the middle of the porch and was still dry, while rain beat down all around her. She looked up. There was nothing over her head. Nothing to shelter her. She turned toward Vasic.

“Put your hand out,” he said softly.

She did, and felt the hard sting of the fast-falling rain against her palm. Then the rain softened, and turned cold. Ice-cold. Snow covered her hand. She stared at Vasic.

“Do you still want to know?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Then come inside and I’ll tell you.”

Users Review

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