

MY SOUL TO SAVE

by

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From Chapter One:

On stage, soft lights illuminated dancers strutting out to join Eden as the huge screen tracked her every movement. The dancers closed in on her, writhing in sync, hands gliding lightly over her arms, shoulders, and bare stomach. Then they paired off so she could strut down the catwalk stretching several rows into the crowd.

Suddenly I was glad we didn't have front rows seats. I'd have to scrape a puddle of Nash goo into a jar just to get him home.

Warm breath puffed against my neck an instant before the sound hit my ear. "Hey, Kaylee!"

I jumped, so badly startled I nearly fell into my chair. Tod stood on my right, and when the cowboy's swinging arm went *through* him, I knew the reaper was there for my viewing pleasure only.

"Don't do that!" I snapped beneath my breath. He probably couldn't hear me, but I wasn't going to raise my voice and risk the guy next to me thinking I was talking to myself. Or worse, to *him*.

“Grab Nash and come on!” From the front pocket of his baggy, faded jeans, Tod pulled two plastic-coated, official-looking cards attached to lanyards. His mischievous grin could do nothing to darken the cherubic features he’d inherited from his mother, and I had to remind myself that no matter how innocent he looked, Tod was trouble. Always.

“What’s that?” I asked, and the cowboy frowned at me in question. I ignored him—so much for not looking crazy—and elbowed Nash. “Tod,” I mouthed when he raised both brows at me.

Nash rolled his eyes and glanced past me, but I could tell from his roving stare that he couldn’t see his brother. And that, as always, he was pissed that Tod had appeared to me, but not to him.

“Backstage passes.” Tod reached through the cowboy to grab my hand, and if I hadn’t jerked back from the reaper’s grasp, I’d have gotten a very intimate feel of one of Eden’s rudest fans.

I stood on my toes to reach Nash’s ear. “He has backstage passes.”

Nash’s scowl made an irritated mask of his entire face, while on stage, Eden shed her jacket, now clad only in a bikini top and short skirt. “Where did he get them?”

“Do you really want to know?” Reapers weren’t paid in money—at least, not the human kind—so he certainly hadn’t bought the passes. Or the tickets.

“No,” Nash grumbled. But he followed me, anyway.

Keeping up with Tod was a lost cause. He didn’t have to edge past row after row of ecstatic fans, or stop and apologize when he stepped on one girl’s foot or spilled her date’s drink. He just walked right through seats and concertgoers alike, as if they didn’t exist in his world.

They probably didn’t.

Like all reapers, Tod's natural state of existence—if it could even be called natural—was somewhere between our world, where humans and the occasional *bean sidhe* reside in relative peace, and the Netherworld, where most things dark and dangerous dwell. He could exist completely in either one, if he chose, but he rarely did, because when he was corporeal, he typically forgot to avoid obstacles like chairs, tables, and doors. And people.

Of course, he could easily become visible to both me and Nash, but it was evidently much more fun to mess with with his brother. I'd never met a set of siblings with less in common than Nash and Tod. They weren't even the same species; at least, not anymore.

The Hudson brothers were both born *bean sidhes*—that was the correct spelling, though most people knew us as banshees—from normal *bean sidhe* parents. As was I. But Tod had died two years earlier, when he was seventeen, and that's when things got weird, even for *bean sidhes*. Tod was recruited by the grim reapers.

As a reaper, Tod would live on in his own un-aging body. In exchange, he worked a twelve-hour shift every day, collecting souls from humans whose time had come to die. He didn't have to eat or sleep, so he got pretty bored for those other twelve hours of each day. And since Nash and I were among the few who knew about him, he typically took that boredom out on us.

Which was how we'd gotten kicked out of a mall, a skating rink, and a bowling alley, all in the past month. And as I bumped my way through the crowd after Tod, I had a feeling the concert would be next on the list.

One glance at the irritation glowing in Nash's cheeks told me he still couldn't see his brother, so I pulled him along as I tracked the headful of blond curls now several rows ahead of us, heading toward a side door beneath a red exit sign.

Eden's first song ended in a huge flash of purple light, reflected on the thousands of faces around me, then the lights went out.

I stopped, unwilling to move in the dark for fear that I'd trip over someone and land in an unidentified puddle. Or a lap.

Seconds later, the stage exploded with swirling, pulsing light, and Eden now swayed to the new beat in a different but equally skimpy costume. I glanced at her, then back at Tod, but caught only a fleeting glimpse of his curls disappearing through the closed side door.

Nash and I rushed after him, stepping on a series of toes and vaulting over a half-empty bottle of Coke someone had smuggled in. We were out of breath when we reached the door, so I glanced one last time at the stage, then shoved the door, grateful when it actually opened. Doors Tod walks through usually turn out to be locked.

Tod stood in the hall beyond, grinning, both backstage passes looped over one arm. "What'd you do, crawl all the way here?"

The door closed behind us, and I was surprised to realize I could barely hear the music, though it had been loud enough to drown out my thoughts in the auditorium. But I could still feel the thump of the bass, pulsing up through my feet from the floor.

Nash let go of my hand and glared at his brother. "Some of us are bound by the laws of physics."

"Not my problem." Tod waved the passes, then tossed one to each of us. "Snoozin', loozin', and all that crap."

I slipped the nylon lanyard over my neck and pulled my long brown hair over it. Now that I wore the pass, it would be seen by anyone who saw me; everything Tod holds is only as visible as he is at the time.

The reaper went fully corporeal then, his sneakers squeaking on the floor as he led us down a series of wide white hallways and through several doors, until we hit one that was locked. Tod shot us a mischievous grin, then walked through the door and pushed it open from the other side.

“Thanks.” I brushed past him into the new hall, and the sudden upsurge of music warned that we were getting close to the stage. In spite of the questionable source of our backstage passes, my pulse jumped when we rounded the next corner and the building opened into a long, wide hall with a cavernous ceiling. Equipment was stacked against the walls—soundboards, speakers, instruments, and lights. People milled everywhere, carrying clothes, food, and clipboards. They spoke into two-way radios and headset microphones, and most wore badges similar to ours, though theirs read “crew” in bold black letters.

Security guards in black tees and matching hats loitered, thick arms crossed over their chests. Background dancers raced across the open space in all stages of the next costume change, while a woman with a clipboard pointed and rushed them along.

No one noticed me and Nash, and I could tell Tod had gone non-corporeal again by the silence of his steps. We headed slowly toward the stage, where light pulsed and music thumped, much too loud for any of the backstage racket to be heard out front. I touched nothing, irrationally afraid that sneaking a cookie from the snack table would finally expose us as backstage-pass thieves.

In the wings of the stage, a small crowd had gathered to watch the show. Everyone wore badges similar to ours, and several people held equipment or props, most notably a small monkey, wearing a collar and a funny, brightly colored hat.

I laughed out loud, wondering what on earth America's reigning pop queen would do on stage with a monkey.

From our vantage point, we saw Eden in profile, now grinding in skin-tight white leather pants and a matching half top. The new song was gritty, with a crunchy guitar riff, and her dancing had changed to suit it; she popped each pose hard, and her hair swung out behind her. Guys in jeans and tight, dark shirts danced around and behind her, each taking her hand in turn, and lifting her on occasion.

Eden gave it her all, even several songs into the performance. The magazines and news stories hyped her hard work and dedication to her career, and the hours and hours a day she trained, rehearsed, and planned. And it showed. No one put on a show like Eden. She was the entertainment industry's golden girl, rolling in money and fame. Rumor had it she'd signed on for the lead in her first film, to begin shooting after the conclusion of her sold-out tour.

Everything Eden touched turned to gold.

We watched her, enthralled by each pose she struck, mesmerized by each note. We were under such a spell that at first no one noticed when something went wrong. During the guitar solo, Eden's arms fell to her side and she stopped dancing.

I thought it was another dramatic transition to the next song, so when her head fell forward, I assumed she was counting silently, ready to look up with those hypnotic, piercing black eyes and captivate her fans all over again.

But then the other dancers noticed, and several stopped moving. Then several more. And when the guitar solo ended, Eden still stood there, silent, a virtual vacuum sucking life from the background music.

Her chest heaved. Her shoulders shook. The microphone fell from her hand and crashed to the stage.

Feedback squealed across the auditorium, and the drummer stopped drumming. The guitarists—both lead and bass—turned toward Eden and stopped playing when they saw her.

Eden collapsed, legs bent, long, dark hair spilling around her on the floor.

Someone screamed from behind me in the sudden hush, and I jumped, startled. A woman raced past me and onto the stage, followed by several large men. My hair blew back in the draft created by the sudden rush, but I barely noticed. My gaze was glued to Eden who lay unmoving on the floor.