



By M.p Temple

Copyright © 2025 Looking for cows Audio

All rights reserved.

1

: *Ragamuffin Outbreak*

"Move over, everyone! Out of my way! Give me my coffee before that guy, Idris." The monster, Grobopalopacus, pushed its way through the crowded magic dispensary. A man with a Navy SEAL hat, the next in line, frowned and crossed his arms. The evening light that fell upon him seemed to sparkle. Idris prepared Grobo's coffee and added two shots of espresso and a touch of cream.

"This is an outrage!" The man in the Navy SEAL hat yelled. "I risked my life for your freedom to act like a dummy, but we've been waiting in line for twenty minutes!"

Grobo shrugged. "Look, I'm jealous you got to work with seals. They are so cute." The monster said. "But I'm in a hurry, and your little outburst here is costing me a lot of my precious time."

"So is everyone else here! Do you know what I am? I'm a spice vampire! If I don't get my pumpkin spice latte soon, I'm going to start craving blood. Wait your turn!"

"Nah," Grobo said.

Idris watched as the man stuck out an arm to stop the monster from leaving. "Someone should teach you a lesson,

you nasty thing! You act like you can do whatever you want!"

Grobo took a sip of his coffee in one mouth, but made a slurping sound with all its other mouths. "I can totally do whatever I want. Don't make Idris use the forbidden carrot wand on you."

Idris sighed.

The man rolled down his long sleeves and got into a boxing stance. "You walk around acting like you can cure cancer or something!"

Idris walked from behind the counter. The room fell silent. The man in the hat looked around, appearing confused at the people with their heads hung low. Appearing confused at the people with their heads hung low

"Grobo can cure cancer," Idris said casually. "Here you go. Hope you aren't too late for your appointment at the children's hospital."

Grobo waved with one hand, saluted with another, then all the hands gave her a thumbs up. "See you later, Idris, my fellow sin against nature!"

The man in the Navy SEALs hat leapt out of the monster's way. Everyone else in the packed store stepped aside so that his path was clear to the door.

Lost in her thoughts, tugging at her dozens of beaded bracelets, she closed the front glass doors of the "Not a Magic Tea Shop". She bid the people setting up tents on the sidewalk for the next day's opening goodbye then ducked into a small path between the dispensary and the shop next door that led to a parking lot. She expected to walk up the grassy hills to her home in the foothills near the shoreline. Her night was to end quietly, alone, like every night.

Ever since she was brought back to life, ever since she was forced into becoming a Yo Yo Wizard, she felt conflicted. In one sense, she felt blessed. While others marvelled at the abilities of the vegetable welding magic users, Idris worked with the world's most expert herbologist. Many would pay to obtain her level of knowledge of the magic world. After she graduated high school, and had full-ride scholarships to secret magic colleges of Hogsnorts. Not as a student, but as a teacher. A non-magic user teaching magic. This was an unheard-of event in the coastal circles. Idris Whitaker had a bright future ahead of her if she wanted it. The problem was, she didn't want it. Maybe that is why she always kept a small bag of Drygonanats root and Yopersian Artifetal leaves on her. These, of course, are the needed ingredients to break her bond. If she were ever to find someone born of magic who was willing.

A young man appeared seemingly out of nowhere, grabbing her arm. His face was pale as an onion. His eyes were glazed over. His lips quivered. This did not seem the type of fan who drove from the other side of the country to get a picture with Grobopalopacus.

"I need your help." He said.

He unbuttoned his dress shirt's cuff, folding back the blue sleeve to reveal two bite marks.

"Some people would pay a lot of money for that," Idris said. "Stay out of my personal space. I don't repeat myself."

She tried to pass him, but there was not enough space between the buildings. He stood firm, frantically shaking his bitten arm.

"My neck too!" he said. "I have. Urges. I can't stop. Please."

Idris rolled her eyes and changed directions back towards the main street. In the light where she could be

seen. Yet another craved fan of the shop. Claiming to have one illness or another. More often than not, these types of encounters turned out to be people struggling with things far greater than magic or physical well-being.

I feel so burned out. I should care. But I don't. Idris thought.

"The cure isn't effective until pumpkin spice coffee season starts. Stay away from loved ones and anyone you've ever wanted to bite for fun, and you should be fine with a cinnamon boost and extra whip. Unless you get urges starting howling, then that's a different bag of tea."

She felt his hand on her shoulder as he drew closer. She yanked at a bracelet. It snapped off her wrist like the crack of a firecracker. The world around them shook. Wave upon wave of frogs began to fall from the sky, filling the space with amphibians.

"What part of my instructions was not clear?" Idris asked.

"I'm not a spice vampire!" He yelled as he threw the creatures off his person.

She turned back, holding a nearby trash can lid to shield herself from the falling nonstop frogs. Each one letting out a "Ribbit" as they splattered on the ground.

"You've taken the Swift treatment for vampirism? And that stopped the glittering, but not the cravings? Who bit you?"

To her surprise, the man cried. "I don't know. It happened outside the Spinner Bait pizza shop. I don't know how to stop hurting people. You're the only one who can help me."

The sky cleared. They stood in the alley, listening to the laughs coming from the crowd camping in front of the store.

"You are telling me someone is going around attacking random people here in Whisper's Bay? Who are you?" Idris

finally asked.

The man stepped forward, sticking out his chest.

"Kurt. Stop playing with me, tell me what I am?" he said in a growl.

"No," Idris said, witnessing the man's surprised expression. "I don't know. Call the shop and leave your info. Get to some place remote, far away from people."

"You need go find this thing." He said.

She shook her head. "That is not something I do. I do not hunt. Do as I say. I'll see what I can find out, and then I'll call for you."

Mr. Finkerhoppers house. Night.

When Idris needed anything dark or occult, she knew to go to Mr. Finkerhoppers. This man worked as a library, but specialised in abnormal book requests. The sort of person who keeps a few copies of "The Book of the Dead" around. However, that night, no one came to the door when Idris rang. Mr. Finkerhopper stayed up at all hours of the night. He welcomed anything strange or questionable Idris came across in the shop. So this struck her as odd. She checked the door and found it unlocked.

"Mr. Finkerhopper!" She said, entering the house. "If you forgot your anti-werewolf treatment, howl three times."

No howls came. She looked around, checking under piles of magic spells and cookbooks. Just in case he had become trapped in a book avalanche like he had a few weeks before. Idris had learned that dealing with the occult always comes with unintended consequences. Some random curse or jinx always happens when least expected.

"Excuse me." She heard an annoyed voice from atop a

bookshelf in the dining room. There was a white cat, its hair painted with a black tip, squinting at her. "You don't live here."

"I didn't know Mr Finkerhopper had a cat. Where is he?" Idris asked, approaching the cat.

"Are you freeing me from my existence? If you aren't, I don't understand why you think I should care about whatever you asked."

Idris examined the creature. Nothing about the feline looked off; if it had not been talking, it could have been mistaken for normal. "Oh. You are a transmutation. Look at us, sins against nature, rocking out alongside each other."

"You know not what I am, thank you." The cat said. "I insist you leave at once. Or I will call the police!"

Idris smirked at this and crossed her arms. "Okay then. Go on. Call the police on me. Pick up that phone with your little paws and call."

The cat stared. "I find your manners insensitive. And your existence intolerable. Mr Finkerhoper is away with Luni for something or another."

"I don't find you adorable." Idris deadpanned. "I have a college quarterback with some bite marks. Says he has cravings, and that he has fed on others."

"Pumpkin spice latte." The cat said.

"No, that was tried. This could be new. An unidentified strain that doesn't have a craving transfer treatment yet. If this spreads fast, this could be bad. I need to identify what kind of vampire did this."

The creature coughed up a hairball. "Do you know what would be beneficial to your position? Grab a slice of pizza. Spinner bait pizza used to have marvellous anchovies. With garlic and extra buttery crusts. A new owner bought the restaurant. Moved it out of town and turned half the place

into a dance floor. That's who you need to go pester with these questions!"

"Why?" Idris asked.

"Because." The cat said. "They are now closed during the day. And no longer serve garlic on their pizzas. The anchovies are still good. And that sauce is blood suckingly amazing. They are spice vampires, of course. But seek your answers from the White Walkers. Not me. You know the toll of living as one of the taboo. They don't suck up to me like I hear they do to you, though."

"I'm not here for group therapy," Idris said. "You need a can of tuna opened or something?"

"How dare you!" The cat said. "You of all people should understand the life I am doomed to live. I'd challenge you to a duel to retain my honour. But instead, I will take my leave. Good day."

"People don't suck up to me," Idris said. "They wanted me to be something different from what I feel I am. I have a debt to pay. And I don't know how to pay it back."

"Cryth me a river, and I shall bring my rowboat. You, of such sorrow." The creature dispersed into a stack of books.

Spinners Pizza and Dance Club

The DJ reached across the mixing table. Handing Idris a slice of cheese and jalapenos. She took it, but set it down a few moments later. The sub bass rumbled so loud that Idris could feel it in her toes. Dark dance music pumped through the floor. Several of the dancers were pale-skinned, but most were normal-looking people enjoying their time after work.

"He's been calling on you soon." The DJ screamed over the drop. Smoke rose from the DJ stand and lights flashed in a colourful display. The row of singing fish heads still

moved their mouths, but no longer made sounds. Not as they had in the old location. Sometimes, when Luni would feel she and Idris could walk and enjoy a slice of pizza and a stroll in the park. Things weren't the same. Not with all the "No Garlic" signs plastered all over.

Of course, Idris knew what this was. The world in front of her dispersed. She could see nothing but black and thick smoke. When it cleared, she found herself sitting in a chair in front of a large oak desk. She had been transported into the back office. Lit by only a lava lamp. A safety inspection notice was framed next to the window, which was drawn shut. The place smelled of tomatoes and onion.

"Welcome to Spinners." The chair spun around. A man with a handle moustache and thinning hair smiled. "I am Mr Todachini. Owner. I understand you are inquiring about our association with the undead?"

"Well," Idris said, crossing her legs. "I saw about five of them out there dancing with some normals. I know your association. Kurt, QB from the college? Two bite marks. Deep, triangular and thin. Not like bat bites. Swift treatment didn't work. Whatever attacked this man is unlike anything I've ever seen. I need help to find out what kind of vampire is an attacking people in Whisper's Bay."

"We are open to everyone twenty-one and above. We have no sides at Spinner pizza." Mr Todachini said.

"You give out ranch in a cup. That is a side," Idris said. "I saw five-spice vampires dancing out there. I'm not looking for trouble. If this is a new strain..."

"Impossible." Mr Todachini stood to his feet. "Look here. I don't like your tone. No one here is attacking anyone. Only if you mean our two-for-one breadstick sale. But. I know which event you are talking about. I've heard people are dealing with it. And those sorts of lower life forms are. Taken care of in-house. There is nothing to worry about, I'm

told. This will be dealt with once the Person is found."

"So the vampire council or whatever is looking for who did it, but haven't found them. Hard to believe, even for a spice vampire. I'm here to help."

"I hope you enjoyed the sliced cheese and jalapeno." The man said. "It is one of our most popular. As to anything else, I have no authority over anything. My words are meaningless. I just cook the dough. There is one thing I can offer you, if it is of any help."

"Oh, now?" Idris said, standing and pushing in her chair. "That seems sudden."

"You know the shamed Barry Diecknine? And his experiments? Some of us. I mean. Some people I've talked with wonder if he wasn't trying to break his yo-yo bond in some messed-up ways."

Idris sat back down. "Spill them beans."

"You understand his sheer number of victims. And his desperation to be rid of the wizard of Snufferclyde. It is possible, actually likely, that if he were to experiment with an undead as to try to break his curse? Something Barry's left behind might tell you what you need to know. Because if this strain is new, and it was created here, chances are it reeks of Diecknine."

Diecknine Manison.

After fifteen minutes, Idris found her way inside through an unlocked bathroom window. The property facing the ocean had sat untouched. It had ever since Taylor sent Barry to the void five years before. Before she knew of magic and vegetable wands, she didn't even know the place existed. When everything the Glardorian had done came to light, the town locked away his property. Idris found it odd walking

down the giant hallways. Her footsteps echoed all through. She wondered who would decorate their house with statues of themselves. The gold furniture and hand-woven rugs seemed over the top even for rich people. property

Barry had visited her when she was in the hospital as a child. Before, everyone thought she had died for a couple of years. She remembered it because the strange man in round glasses acted as if he had taken something. She told the nurse drawing her blood, who did not believe her. Looking back, she was thankful that was the worst he had done. Taylor's parents had their souls and identities stripped, and morphed with 18 others to form Grobopalopacus.

After wandering in the dark, she found the library and flipped a switch. A red glow rose from the floorboards of the room, lighting row after row of scrolls and old books. Sectioned off with a Dewey decimal system number and a topic.

She took the staircase by the fireplace up to the second floor. There she found a section marked with a black dot. The binding of the books was made of animal skin. What she hoped was animal skin anyway. She thumbed through a few of these sets, looking for anything that might be useful. Within the covers, she found dark magic spells and chants, but nothing relating to the undead. She found little until she came across an odd title in the middle of the row. In a bright cream colour sat "The Secret Garden." By Frances Hodgson Burnett.

She tried to pull the book out, but something in the bookcase shifted. The floor began to rotate under her feet, and the light from the room bent in a circle around her. The air left her, and she fell from where she stood.

When she came to, she was face down in dirt next to a shovel. Once she stopped crying from the specks of dry soil, she realised she was no longer in the library. But she lay

somewhere in a central courtyard. Surrounded by a circular wall. Next to her was a boxcar filled with dead plants. She looked around. Nothing in the ground seemed to be alive still. But she could see a light illuminating from inside the boxcar.

She dusted herself off and searched the area. On a shelf in the boxcar were flowers in the shape of skulls. Red mushrooms grow in the soil beneath them. Red petals with black tips fell from the flower.

That is amazing. Idris thought, reaching for the flower. I've never seen anything like it. This is not a Western plant.

She felt an icy hand on her back. She turned to face Kurt, who smiled. Another man joined him, looking like another football player.

"Oh, help me, only you can save me." Kurt mocked. "You're an idiot. Put your hands up. Get out and face the garden wall."

Idris did as she was told and faced the circular stone wall. She listened as the two men approached her from behind. Her eyes darted to the shovel below her.

"Drain half of her. Save the rest for when the Uncreated man gets here." Kurt told the other player.

"What did you say?" Idris asked.

"You've heard of Uncre," Kurt said, shoving her into the wall. "The creation so foul that God took back his creation. They call him the Uncreated Man. And your soul is going to heal him beyond what you can imagine."

She felt the man's warm breath on the back of her neck. His mouth opened, and his fangs touched her skin.

Idris ripped a bracelet off her wrist. Everyone was knocked back by the wave of sound. Like a techno song on the dance floor, the waves kept pulsating over and over. Idris tried to stand, but she and the two men kept being

dragged down by the force of the music. She reached for the shovel.

Kurt's hand met hers.

They fought over it, each trying to find their footing. Kurt took hold and swung at her, hitting her side. She keeled over in pain.

Kurt circled her and began spoke. "Nice bracelets." He swung at her arms. She moved, but the edge of the shovel nicked her. It stung, and her ribs felt out of place.

"Go ahead," she said. "Finish me. Send me to the void. My soul bond will gladly stake you through the heart."

"What, you out of bracelets?" Kurt asked. "I wanted to try my luck on the next one you got."

Idris clutched her last bracelet. "Funny you ask. I have one left." She looked at the boxcar. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. The bracelet snapped off her wrist. Flames erupted from the ground, catching the two men within. They yelled as Idris felt around for the weapon. She found it and followed the sound of the screams. Enduring the pain, she opened her eyes and stabbed Kurt in the chest with the end of the shovel. He left out a primordial cry before turning into floating blue dust.

Idris closed her eyes. She recognised this as an occurrence that happens when a soul is being held captive. A magic clone of the person was created. These fake people, so to speak, walk soulless until disrupted.

"What are you?" She said to the last remaining man, still engulfed in magic flames.

"I'm one of the ragamuffins. Like everyone else. You can end me. But we are only going to get stronger."

"Okay, your voice is annoying. Go back to your sleeper."

The bracelet spell ended, and Idris staked the last remaining vampire. Smoke rose from the boxcar.

"The flowers!" She shouted. She managed to reach inside and break the thick stems of a handful of skull flowers. The dead plants around her burst like bottle rockets in the flames. With the plants in her arms, she ran back to the circle where she had lifted the book. In an instant, she returned to standing in a library.

Not a Magic Tea Shop

Idris called for a messenger owl while she attended to her wounds at the front counter. Who arrived after a while, but seemed to only be interested in making it known she was part of the union now.

"I need to get word to Luni and Mr. Finkerhopper right away. Whatever this is, it's going to get a lot worse."

The owl shook her head. "Then you are going to have to wait until my holiday ends. I'll be glad to take your delivery first thing for a fee, but I'm not doing anything until then."

"It might be too late by then. Then that's it. I'm on my own," Idris said, crossing to the window. The moon lit the misty forest around them, enough to see a figure standing in the street in front of the shop. He wore a tweed suit and a white mask. His forehead looked deformed, unnatural. The man stared back at her.

"Well, that's certainly the point of it all, isn't it?" The owl said, heading for the door. "No one tells us what to do anymore. Not without paying us for it."

The man left, limping into the darkness. Leaving Idris standing at the window, feeling uneasy.

"It's not safe here, you know," said the owl. "Tourists keep going missing. People are pointing fingers at each other all over the place. Someone should do something about it."

"If you send my message, maybe I could help." She said.

“But I’m on holiday! You don’t seem to understand the work-life balance. If you work hard, you gotta play hard, you know!”

Idris filled a vase with water and placed the skull flowers in it. But instantly the water disappeared as soon as it touched the stem of the plant.

“I don’t have time. I’ll hunt these vampires on my own.”

: Tap Dance

Whisper’s Bay Medical Centre, The next morning.

“What do you mean, Kurt is missing his kidney?” Idris asked, closely inspecting the real body of Kurt sleeping in his hospital bed. He was pale, but not as pale as his magic clone had been. The nurse said that she had witnessed some colour in his skin return about the time that Idris staked his clone. The real kurt had been laying in a bed while the husk of his soul fought the cursed yo yo wizard.

“If you are asking me to repeat what you overheard me say in the hallway you can forget it.” The nurse scoffed. She shotgunned a can of iced coffee, with drink dripping off her chin. Idris might have mistaken her for a vampire if she had not been a nurse. This, of course, is common, which the two share many similarities. Having spent looking over Taylor’s books and personal things, she knew that nursing people were different. She wondered if she should take offence to her implied rudeness, but she decided she didn’t care either way.

“Are there others like this?” Idris asked.

“There’s a HIPPA violation waiting to happen. Look, I’ve

been on shift for 11 hours, and I am staying on a few extra hours because of things going on, are you done asking questions?"

Kurt's eyes were closed, and to Idris he looked peaceful. Not the troubled person his magic husk had been. Not the beast she had fought.

"No. If they got you staying after that long of a shift, well. I can figure that out for myself. That is all for now. But don't complain if I'm back."

"Wouldn't dream of it, yo yo." the nurse said.

"Don't call me yo yo." Idris said.

"People like you make me sick. If the shoe fits, go, go tap dancing," The nurse motioned with her hands towards the door.

Idris picked up a card that sat next to a basket of flowers on the counter. It read "Night Fall Baptist Church"

Whisper's Bay Community College. Afternoon.

The whistle blew. Idris watched closely the group of students sitting in the bleachers, hardly watching football practice. The team seemed distraught without their star quarterback and wide receiver. Students even wore shirts with "Team Kurt" written on them. Idris found herself wondering what they would think if they knew that a magic husk of Kurt had intended to drain her blood the night before.

"Isn't Brad so dreamy?" She heard a college student say. A perky woman who seemed to be hanging out for the sake of hanging out.

"I don't care." Idris bluntly said.

"He's second string, but he has a chance with Kurt in the hospital. I'd catch some passes from that." She went on.

"You're that girl from the magic shop. You sell like, potions and hang out with the grobopalo thing right?"

"You seemed to have forgotten to add the point to your question," Idris said. "You've got the wrong person anyway."

"You look like her. My name is Eden." The woman sat next to her. Pads clucked together, and a wide out dropped a pass on the 15 yard line.

"Why are you talking to me? You who is called Eden?"

"Because if you are that person, you must be here to look into the strange magic going on with Kurt." She said. "Since you're one of those... weird magic people. If you were, I'd tell you that there's more than a few men on the team with bite marks. And I don't mean mine."

Idris turned with a shocked expression. "You are one of those. Vampire groupies. What's a girl like you doing chasing fangs like that?"

"My therapist thinks it's deep-rooted. Borderline maybe, definitely manic in some way. I'm at peace with my demons. Unlike some people. But if you are looking into who attacked Kurt. And who took his body parts? I was told to tell you to go to the black box theatre tonight. Someone in the fan club will get your back stage."

Idris shook her head. "I think not. I met a few of the so-called ragamuffins last night, and I didn't care for their company."

"They heard you were looking for them." Eden said. "They are expecting you. These are not the types you want to disappoint. Not unless you are into that kind of thing, like I am."

Blackbox Theatre Dressing Room 1A Evening

* * *

The white cat with frosted black tips licked its paws on the makeup desk. The bright lights in the room made Idris feel like she had gone snow blind. Other actors put on make up, and warming up with seemingly ridiculous exercising. Such as the girl next to them who kept saying "I'm a BIG LION!" As loud as she could before whispering "Now I'm a little lion". Over and over again.

"Is this a joke?" Edris asked.

"The clean horse fell in the mud. That's a joke. Sorry if it was a dirty one." The cat said, inspecting his claws. "You checked out the Spinners pizza new place, was I right? The establishment is run by blood enthusiast?"

"You're a raggamuffin? You're associated with these suckers?" Idris asked.

The cat flicked its tail, stood up and spun in a circle. "I am a cultured person, and am known many social circles. Trust me, you do yourself no favours burning bridges. It seems like the new owners of Spinners might be friends to the, what did you call them? 'Ragamuffins?'. This is good news for sure."

"Cut to the chase, what are you trying to tell me?" Idris said.

"Oh, poor move, sport." The cat said, walking to a script nearby. It looked over its lines for the evening performance. "Ever heard of the art of war? Sun Tzu says that one must know their enemy better than themselves. If you cut to the chase every time, how much would you learn? Arrogance is such a waste, don't you agree?"

"I don't have time to sit around looking at tea leaves. Are you saying you are my enemy or what?" Idris said.

The cat jumped down at Idris feet and rammed its head into her ankles. "Do you want to be my enemy?"

"Who are you? For real." Idris backed away.

"You can call me Langhorn." The cat said. "That is one of many names by which I am called. There is one I am more commonly called, however."

Idris tried to exit through the door. But she found the door locked from the other side. She pulled as hard as she could and pounded on the door. She turned back. The white cat with black kissed hair glared at her, seemingly with an unnatural smile.

"I am the Uncreated man."

Idris grabbed her wrist. But she had no bracelets remaining. Before she could realise what was going on, the creature leapt at her. She fell, hitting the wall with the back of her head. Before the world went dark, and she lost consciousness, she heard the cat speak.

"Now excuse me, I have a crowd to entertain. I'll deal with you soon enough."

["Big lion! Little lion. Big lion!"]

Feeding house. Evening.

"Wake up! You don't want to miss this."

Idris wasn't sure who the voice was at first, as she slowly regained consciousness. When her vision returned, she realised she was tied up alongside with Eden, the woman who had approached her at football practice hours before. She could hardly move her hands or feet the ropes were so tight.

"No, I'm fine with skipping to the end." Idris said, trying to break her hands free from her bonds. The rope was too sturdy to budge.

"We are so lucky we got picked." Eden said, moving closer to Idris. Acting more like she was at a slumber party than being kidnapped. "You have to have the right blood

type and everything to be chosen. I knew my chances would get better if I talked to you like they asked me to. I can't thank you enough! This is the best day of my life!"

"So the attacks aren't random?" Idris gave up, and sat with her back against the wall.

"If only this would have happened to me ages ago." Eden said. "Everyone is carefully chosen, and consents."

"I sure as hell ain't consenting right now," Idris said.

The door to the room opened. The white cat walked casually into the room.

"I do admit," Langhorn said. "An all cat version of hamlet is distasteful, but the turnout is always wonderful. You missed a good performance Idris."

"I was all tied up." She said. "Why are there two of us here? That's a lot of blood for one vampire."

Eden sat alongside of Idris and gave her a slight jab in the ribs with her elbow. "Don't ruin this for me."

In front of them, the cat morphed into a man seemingly in his twenties. Wearing a white tweed suit covered in black powder. He was the figure Idris saw from the window the night before. Yet his mask had hidden his hideously disformed face then. The gasp from Idris lips could not be helped as she looked upon the man. He looked frail, and pale. As if he could pass out at any moment.

"I need to recover." The man unrolled the sleeves of his arms. What was left of his forearm was flesh and bone together being held together with pieces of magic.

"So are we doing this together, or is she watching, or how does this work?" Eden asked.

The beast of a man tilted his head at hearing this. "You... do know you are being drained so that I may heal myself with your lifeblood. You understand that, right?"

"That's hot," Eden said.

"I have plans for Idris. The grand finale, so to speak. For now, I ask for your consent for me to place my fangs upon your neck to feed."

"YES!" Eden shouted.

Langhorn bite the woman, who smiled as her skin grew pale. Idris watched in horror as she turned purple. When he had finished with her, he stood up. His arm was healed, appearing normal. Eden's arm, however, was missing, replaced with a see through magic replica in it's place. She lay on the floor. Breathing, but sleep. Her skin cold and lifeless. A purple cloud of dust rose from her body and formed a clone husk of her. The person, now looking exactly like Eden had when she was awake, nodded at the man. She left the room.

"You literally feed on people to stay alive." Idris said, backing herself into the corner of the room.

"That's called living, yes." Langhorn said, crossing to her side of the room. Still walking slowly with a limp, every step causing him pain that Idris could see on his face. "But you are living on borrowed time yourself. Your time here means Taylor is in the void. How do you not feed on her existence? That's all this is, everyone eating each other in one way or another."

"That's not what we are." Idris said. "This is a good town with good people. They opened up magic to the entire world. My soul bond has nothing to do with it."

"The Gladorians refused to help when I needed it. No, the magic community shunned us. All of us. You included. You know this to be true. That is why I am here. To make things better. You can't see it yet, though."

"Untie me." Idris demanded.

Langhorn knelt down next to her. "Don't you understand, I need you."

"You need to stop hurting people. And get out of Whisper's Bay."

[I need to write this fight scene still. Action scenes on podcast are hard]

Not a Magic Tea Shop Supply Closet Lake

"Those are some of the nastiest rib injuries I've ever help you recover from," Grobopalopacus had spit Idris out from one of his many mouths, healing her of all her wounds. At first, using another sin against nature as a doctor had felt odd, but Grobo seemed to understand much more than the nurse practitioner with a House complex. In the years she had returned from the void, she had been lucky to work in the same shop as the creature, or 20 souls combined into one monster, rather. The creature spent all its time going from hospital to hospital, eating children with cancer and terminal illnesses. Then spitting them back up perfectly healthy of course.

"A shapeshifting, body part stealing vampire is creating an army of followers. To take over Whisper's bay." Idris put on her jacket and wrung Grobopalopacuses spit out of her hair over the edge of the lake.

The monster hook its head, and failed some of its arms about. "I can not cure that kind of magic. My abilities are more natural healing. There is nothing I can do to return the victims' souls to their bodies. I don't have time to fight an army either, I have places to be."

"I don't know how to defeat it." Idris said. "Worst of all, in cat form he can follow me anywhere I go. I'm a herbologist Grobopalopacus. I'm not a hunter. But I have to do this. I have to stop Uncre before he takes over. I feel like an ant trying to push a slice of watermelon up a hill. There

has to be a better way."

Grobobalopacus places one of its arms around the woman, "You got this. If you can handle rush hour at the shop, you can stop a body stealing vampire from controlling the town. Sometimes when things seem impossible, you have to dig a little deeper. That is all. Though maybe some advice, take some items with you next time. In case you have to fight puss n boots again."

"No time." Idris said, heading up the hill to the door leading back into the shop. "I thought I found the spice vampire hive at the pizza place. But I don't think that's their lair. The coastal magic council isn't going to want to get involved, since they are doing business only these days. The spicers might help me."

"Be careful, Idris. I don't think your yo-yo curse would mix well with becoming undead."

"I know Grobo. I know. If I can find a way to cut off support for the ragamuffins, that might cut off his supply. But I don't know where to look."

"Take a spike." Grobobalopacus said. "There's an abandoned track not far from the lake. If I were you, I'd take that with you no matter where you go."

: Least of These

Sunset Baptist Church Evening

A man with dreads screaming into a mic on the pulpit. The drummer on stage banged on his double bass and kick drums as the guitar distortion shredded through the congregation of pale churchgoers.

"My God is in control!" The man screamed, head banging once every word.

Idris stood in the aisle between the wooden pews, dumb struck from the sight of worshipping vampires. People held onto Bibles as they listened, bopping their heads along and flipping through the pages. The hymnal ended. An old man with grey hair stood in a suit and tie. He walked to the pulpit, and after embracing the worship leader with a hug, addressed the church. Idris felt her railroad spike attacked to her belt as she sat down.

"Thank you all for that wonder song. As I always say, any song unto the Lord is a good song, can I get an amen!"

The congregation screamed "Amen!" back in union in a death metal like scream.

"Before I dismiss you all, I wanted to remind you there will be a breakfast prayer meeting tomorrow at 6 am."

The room grew silent. A few awkward coughs could be heard.

"Y'all can walk around in the daylight, you can make it to prayer breakfast." The preacher scolded. Still, the awkward silence would not leave the room. Finally, the man shook his head before going on with his closing reminders. "Those of you who need to take 'communion' can stay after. And for the rest, there are refreshments in the fellowship hall. Lastly, I would like to welcome someone if they aren't too bashful. Idris over there, folks know about her. I am glad you are here. And I welcome the chance to speak to you. You fellow Ragamuffins are dismissed."

To Idris's shock, the churchgoers began to shake her hand and welcomed her. A few of the faces she recognised, one even being a classmate from years ago. They were not of the bitten either, some were spice vampires untreated. Others seemed mortal, and there for the heavy metal music

and the strong community outreach program. Idris knew the church donated to Whipper's Bay events and charities, even sending out checks when a fire had swept through a few years before. How could a place like this be supporting something like the Uncreated Man?

"Pastor Branson." Idris waved the man down as she walked towards him. "Can we speak?"

"I sure hope so. We can write it down if we can not." The preacher smiled.

Pastors Office

The framed cow photos hanging on the wall might have been the strangest thing Idris had ever seen. He had row upon row of them. Along with photos of him holding large cups, standing next to cattle with sponsored saddles on them.

Idris touched the gold frame of one of these pictures. The preacher looked happier to her. He now looked emotionally drained.

"There is no need for weapons here." He said, pointing to her railroad spike. He leaned back in his desk chair. "We aren't that kind of Southern Baptist church."

"I've been jumped a few times by members of your group. Why are you supporting this uncreated man?" Idris said, taking a seat on an old sofa facing the preacher's cluttered desk.

"I. Am the pastor of the church. I do not support anyone, which way or another. My job is not telling people how to think. That's how you get your tax exemption pulled now. I'm the shepherd."

Idris laughed at this. "Your sheep are getting sucked up, and use. That's not much of a shepherd. The uncreated man

has to be getting help somewhere, needing to regenerate as much as he does. And here you are, a church full of money and resources to help him. What are you getting in return?"

"I do not appreciate your tone." The preacher said. "Always have I helped everyone who has needed it. And I am not the kind of person who would go about getting people hurt willy nilly. I think we can all come to some sort of agreement. You give the uncreated man what he wants, we all live in peace. Now, that's an easy way of putting it. It's not complicated, it's complex you see."

"What does uncre want?" She asked.

The preacher shrugged. "If you ask me what John 3:16 is I could do that. But anything beyond that is out of my realm of expertise. Anything dealing with Barry and his experiments is out of my ballpark. If you were to ask about the creation, that is all I know. Barry created Langhorn. That is what we have going on here. I work with the vampire council, you see, and all the different vampires and monsters hiding in Whisper Bay. The entire city is healing, and doing what Langhorn says this is best."

"That's a firm no from me, preacher." Idris got up from her seat. "I find it hard to believe Jesus would be thrilled about any of this."

The preacher smiled. "'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' I must warn you. If you do not agree to what he wants, the town is going to look down upon you more so than they do already."

"Thanks for the encouragement. Are there waffles at the prayer breakfast?"

"No, toast, muffins and coffee." The preacher said.

"That's a no that for me as well. Get some sunlight, preacher. Might do you some good."

Whisper's Bay streets, off the 101. Morning.

She walked the streets in the roaming mists for hours, looking for any sign of a ragamuffin's or their feeding house. After walking the entire length of the town, she doubled back. There had to be something. The Sunset Baptist parking still remained empty, and Mr Finkerhoppers home was void of pets. The town's park contained nothing but the songs of seagulls nesting on top of a light pole. She knew she had to be missing something. The town was small. Something this big could not remain this quiet. Yet it did. She knew somewhere the ragamuffins were acting.

Suddenly she heard a scream from behind her. She turned and saw two figures smoothly hovering towards her in the fog. The scream rang out again. Idris grabbed her railroad stake and drew it back, ready to fight.

A scream came again, but this time Idris realised it came from a child. In front of her on a scooter, a thirteen or fourteen-year-old boy's knees buckled as he started to hyperventilate at the adult holding a weapon against them.

"I'm sorry! I won't scream again! Please! Please!!! Don't hurt me!" The frightened kid yelled.

A kid on a bike not far behind him shouted. "Get away from him, you monster!"

Idris slowly dropped, returned the spike to her waistband. The sea spray grew thicker around her as the kids ran off in a panic. Leaving her in the middle of the street.

She had been called a monster. To her face. While she knew what the kid meant, she felt as if for the first time in years someone had said it to her face. It was a confirmation that, to her, she had a mission to be fulfilled at all cost. To

everyone else, she was a devil, brought back to life from dark magic. People feared her.

How can I fight the monster if everyone thinks that monster is me? She thought.

A raven cawed nearby. Hearing the sound of an engine, she returned to the sidewalk. She saw a familiar face in a brown car. Thankfully, she was able to duck behind a tree and, with the of the fog, was not seen by Mr Todachini. In the back seat of the old car was a blanket covering something large.

She waited and watched Mr Todachini and another carry the large wrapped object into the house. When they left, and she felt she had not been seen while watching in the mist, she entered unlocked house.

Feeding House

The sleepers were stacked on top of each other on wooden boards throughout the entire house. From the bathroom to the kitchen, Idris found sleeping people who had been bitten by the uncreated man. Some missing arms or more. Every time she looked, she found more people in the room than she has seen last. Like trying to count hay barrels. She could feel a cool breeze drift in from the open window in the living room, giving a little relief from the heat from all the people.

If this is only of their house. Idris thought. *How many husks do they have? How many people have been hurt? Because I can't fight an entire army and town by myself.*

A door on the other side of the house opened. Idris hid herself among the sleepers in the back bedroom of the house.

"Do you know what the best part about this job?" She heard the sound of footsteps approaching.

"Not having to work in an office?" Another man said.

"That, and the pay is great! I was about to steal an RV and move to New Mexico to cook drugs, but then that Pastor Branson guy offered me this job. Now I'm clean, my bills are paid and we are helping out those in need. How lucky are we? I wonder how that Branson guy made all his money. Dude is loaded."

"I also almost turned to a life of sin." The other man said. "I had it all planned out. I'd steal every toaster in the neighbourhood and sell it back to everyone."

"Dang it, that's a really good idea. I wish I would have thought of it back during my life of crime."

Idris could believe what she was hearing. Did the men not understand the sheer number of people in a coma like state? That no matter how willing, that this was not natural? How long had these people been like this? How could these men not know?

She clutched her rail stake. There were only two of them. She could easily send the husks' souls back to their sleeper. But a horrible thought struck. How was she to tell the magic clones from real people? There was no outward difference between the two. She could not risk attacking them without hurting someone real.

The two men leapt back at the sight of Idris appearing in the hallway. She flashed her wallet with her thumb over her driver's license.

"I'm here about a house fire safety check." Idris said, snapping her wallet shut and placing it back in her pocket. "Can I speak to the owner, please? This is an extreme health and fire risk."

"This is private property you can't be here." One of the men said.

Idris opened her cellphone and dialled the fire department. "I'm calling this in. And taking this notebook of

addresses!"

One of the men pushed the other to towards Idris. "Get her, Bob!"

"Dude, do you see that spike in her belt?! I'm not 'getting her'. The pay isn't that good. Run!"

The men bolted out of the door.

"Yes," Idris said into the phone to the dispatcher. "Something horrible has happened here." She gave the address and ended the call. A clank came from the other room. Idris checked to see what had caused the noise. She saw in the living room a metal counter below the window. On it, she saw a paw print.

Not a Magic Tea Shop

When she saw smoke coming from the building downtown, she panicked. She had driven in and out of traffic down the 101 and parked the truck half blocking the highway. A large blasted explosion from the dynamite history museum, sending pieces of building flying her direction. She braced herself behind her truck as the blast grew. Pieces of the "Not a Magic Tea Shop" flew off the building. Clouds of colourful magic smoke rose and cracked. Suddenly a crack rang out, and a vortex formed in the sky above the shop.

She heard a voice that sent chills down her spine despite the intense heat of the flaming chaos reigning around her.

"Hello. Idris O. Whitaker. You tried taking something from me, I thought I'd remind you the rules of the game. You strike, I will strike back. Swiftly." The white cat said. He crept slowly as the streetlights above cracked and bursted into flames and landing as ash on the ground.

"The tea shop had nothing to do with it! That's not right!" Idris said.

“Then don’t touch my food.” The cat said.

The museum kept burning, but the “Not a Magic Tea Shop” stopped. Its walls were now black, and the roof and Luni’s apartment had caved in. All of Luni’s positions were gone. The skull flowers she had collected were now ashes. The circle was now complete. Because of Idris, Luni had lost everything in the blink of an eye.

Idris tried to kick the cat, but Langhorn gracefully sidestepped. He sprang back out of reach and said with a huff. “Tsk tsk. Of course, you would attempt to duel me in my feline form. Wise tactic. But I think not. Til we meet again, sister.”

The woman picked up a piece of hot debris and flung it towards the cat. With a rage unseen from within her, she hurdled object after object towards the slippery creature. Sirens roared behind her, with firetrucks and ambulances racing down towards them.

“What did you call me!” Idris shouted.

“Til next time.” The cat ducked into a sewer. Idris tried to go after him, almost getting stuck in the hole in the street.

“I AM NOTHING LIKE YOU!” she shouted after him.
“Nothing! I have no siblings!”

: Sister

Hotel room, noon

“Before I met your mom, it could have been with the dancer in the green top in Ada. Or after your mom, with the fake magic performer in Vegas. I know I had some wild parties back in my younger days that would put some rappers to

shame. But you do not have a brother. Unless I messed up somehow."

They had rented a room for her father to stay until things calmed down. She brought up the last of his bags and wiped the sweat off her face. Containing mostly hunting and fishing books. Idris sat at the coastal inn desk with her arms crossed and her brow lowered. She hated having any sort of conversation with her father when it came to the past. Anything post her assumed death was fine. Anything about her mother felt like to her like being branded.

"You are not inspiring confidence." Idris said to her father. She did not like that Mr Whitaker had already finished a second cup of hotel coffee and was filling the pot from the bathroom sink to make more. But after her mentor Luni told her about his behaviour when she was ill as a kid, the coffee addiction was a vast improvement.

"I haven't always been perfect. Or. Good. Even. I'll look up some of... the women I dated, and will double check. You sure this vampire feller, Uncre, wasn't telling a lie to get a rise out of you?"

"No." Idris headed towards the door. "Not with how Uncre said it. This is somehow personal. I need to find out why. Stay in the room, don't tell anyone where you are. This vampire is dangerous. I have to go talk to the sheriff about the shop damage. Dad, most importantly, don't let any cats in here!"

Police Station Interrogation room

"That's what I hate about this magic stuff, I can't tell what's real and make believe anymore." The detective said, lifting up his pants. "So we have your statement, and we will look into these, what you call them? Feeding houses? Have you

heard from the shop owner since the building went ghostbusters?"

"I haven't heard from Braylynn in five years." Idris said. "No one knows how to get ahold of her. She told Luni that she was off fighting monsters or something. Are you going to do anything about the uncreated man? A threat to the public?"

"I told you I'll call animal control. They'll be on the lookout for a white cat who's stealing body parts. Now, no matter what you do. Promise me you aren't going to take things into your own hands. The shop's loss is big. But it can be rebuilt. You can't be."

Idris sighed. "I can actually. I'm immortal technically. You can't search your big brother is watching computer system to see if there's any family member of mine out there?"

"That's not a real thing." The sheriff said. "Unless you and whatever family member it is have a record that isn't going to show on our system. I can't help you. That's not what you want to hear, I get it. But Whisper's Bay has a unique police problem with all the craziness that goes on around here. We try to take everything seriously, but a complaint like that against a well-respected church? I don't think..."

"They are building a literal army, and you still won't do anything. You won't even take the stupid address book. I can't listen to you keep rambling. I'm out of here. If I'm free to go." Idris finished her cup of coffee. She didn't really want anything to drink, but she always wondered if they really brought you something if you asked for it. It felt simple. In a strange way, she found that act satisfying.

"Tell your daddy I said hi. We miss him at the bar, but we never want to see him again. Don't forget your railroad spike." The man tipped his hat to her.

"Sure," Idris said.

As she exited the station, her thoughts dwelled on her father. She had hardly known him at that point, even though she lived with him. So, hearing the sheriff's reaction started something in her. If someone in a small town suspected something as juicy as someone having a secret child, it would be discovered. Part of her wanted to go check family records. But if the sheriff seemed to doubt it, it seemed unlikely. But where did this leave Idris?

Barry had to be the answer, but how did Idris factor into his experiments? Why was she dragged into this? Any of it, even. She wished she were a child again. Before the yo-yo wizards and the knowledge of the magic world. But the life she longed for she could no longer live.

She opened the address book she had recovered from the feeding house and placed her finger under the second house listed. She headed for her truck.

Buffie River RV park.

The abandoned cars and train tracks sat near the wide river's edge. Idris lowered herself from a high branch toward the forest floor of pine needles. She had to watch the massive numbers of cloned husks and vampire fan clubbers go in and out of the encampment. Many more than she had ever seen attending a Portland Trail Blazers game. They all seemed to live there, some in tents, others in the abandoned rail cars. From one of the boxcars she spotted plants.

Like the garden where he was born. He's recreated it. She thought. I'm never getting to him through all of those people. If I have to fight everyone myself, I don't stand a chance. This is impossible.

When her foot reached the ground, she felt something jabbed into her back. She raised her hands.

"Freeze. Don't move."

She felt a person behind take the spike off its clip and remove it from her person. Soon she was facing a tree as the person patted her down.

"What did you think you were doing, hunting Dracula? You're lucky all those tin foil wearing people didn't see you." The person said. It sounded female, and not at all familiar to Idris.

"Dracula would be easier." Idris scoffed. "Stop frisking me, please."

"The ring around your wrist, those are hand charm marks aren't they? Did you have something to do with my shop blowing up?"

Idris turned around. A woman with shoulder length dark hair and a top hat examined the weapon. She recognized her from cleaning the "Not a Magic Tea Shop" basement print shop. The building had no basement, of course, the space existed else where but everyone understood it easier that way.

"Braylynn? What are you doing back in Whisper's Bay?"

"That is a name I have not been heard in ages. Now I am called Rerockha."

"No," Idris said. "You're not called that. No one seriously calls you that."

"Well, you don't know who I am. So that's assuming a lot, and you know what they say about people who assume? Some people totally call me Rerockha, let me have my cool nickname. Who are you, why are you packing heat?"

"I work for you. Braylynn."

"It's Rerockha. The shop has more than one worker? I

thought Luni did everything. Good going, getting the place sent up in flames. What in Kergons wrath happened?"

"Let's get out in the open and somewhere we can't be seen from."

Truck, parked at beach access 2.

"See, you have to belittle the kitty a lot, and say something like 'My pot pie!' as you shove them into a steel cage."

"I tried that." Idris crossed her arms. "Uncre is too quick. And he has too many protecting him to attack."

Braylynn stuck out her tongue while she flipped through a CD case. She picked one and inserted it into the truck's player. French pop music played. "Then you are going to have to find a way to trap him next time he is in cat form. Cause what we got here is a vampire with hive tendencies. If this spreads to anywhere but the coast, there is no stopping it until it gets too big to control then collapses, bringing back the old traditions and ways of life that were snuffed out. Always how that works if you have ever read a history book."

"I've mostly read your herbology notes from working at the shop. Your handwriting sucks, by the way. We don't have time for that. How do we kill this monster? I haven't been close enough to try it, but I don't think those spikes would do it. I found some flowers that looked like skulls at Barry's in a garden portaled away. Could that be something?"

Braylynn slammed her fist on the console, ejecting the CD. Her mouth dropped, and she let out a nervous cough. "You. Found. Skullflowers? Real ones that you can't water? Cause the water vanishes the moment they touch the thorny stems? Grown with mushrooms? Where is it?"

"Why are you getting excited? They were in the apartment when the explosion happened."

Again, Braylynn hit the console and cursed. She got out of the passenger side and walked towards the shore. Idris followed after her. The waves crashed as they walked.

"What I say? What are you doing?" She called out to Braylynn.

"To look for that boot." She said, not slowing down at all. "Because the only chance we had at breaking your yo-yo bond and getting my friend back? Went up in flames. Why didn't you protect them!"

"I put them in the safest place I could! Never once have your notes mentioned anything about those flowers."

"Cause it's dark magic, stupid. Some magic we don't talk about," Braylynn said. "The council might be all chill now, but they still aren't cool with that sort of thing. First, do you know how much someone would be willing to pay for one of those? Second, those are hard as hell to grow, like we are talking master gardener sort of stuff here. And lastly, Luni didn't want you knowing about certain things. She thought it would bring you trouble."

"Trouble found me anyway. There is another garden at the boxcar. Maybe there are more flowers in there."

"The odds of my winning the lottery are better. That confirms Barry was trying to find a way to break his bond. But what was he going to do with it? That kind of magic has been believed dead for hundreds of years. No, I recommend a Grobopalopacus blessed item. Don't use this one unless you mean it. It's designed to literally suck souls from people. It's awesome."

Braylynn opened her battle bag and handed her a wrist charm. At first, Idris did not accept it.

"I don't know if I can do this," Idris said. "I'm not this

person."

Idris watched Braylynn pick up a smooth rock and fling it into the ocean. "The worst monster I ever faced made me feel like that. He made me questioned everything I was. When I figured out I was in trouble, it was too late. No one understands the seriousness of the situation."

"How did you defeat the beast?" Idris asked.

"Ibroke up with the loser." Braylynn said. "But walking away from a monster is never easy. If Luni has kept you around all these years, and if Taylor gave up everything for you? You are that person. Get the vampire along, and when you are close enough to touch him, pull the charm."

Hotel Evening

Idris gasped at the sight at the door. There was the lid of a can of chips filled with milk. Leading into the room were red paw prints.

She ran inside. There she found her father, turned sleeper on the sofa. The Tv was turned onto the weather station, and a forecaster squinted at the screen.

"It's uh. Going to be raining, I guess. Does that say storm, Carl? I can't read that!"

"Hello Sister. Your father was a delicious snack." She heard a voice say. It came from somewhere inside the hotel room. Frantically, she looked about. The voice sounded small, which led her to believe that the uncreated man was in cat form. All she had to do was find him.

"Show yourself." Idris shouted.

"You'll have to forgive me. I only stopped in for a bite."

Idris checked the ceiling. There were vents running the length of the room with the opening grate left open.

"Why are you calling me sister?"

“Barry created me from you. Have you not read the journal? How he took your hair at the hospital? Or did that go up in flames as well? Like everything else in your life ever has. Oh, yes, Idris. I know everything about you. Cause in a magic sort of way, you are like a sister.”

“That’s an interesting interpretation. How about hell no?”

She heard a noise coming from the bathroom. Slowly she crept and opened the door. The bathtub shower curtain was drawn, and the window was open. She pulled back the rose patterned plastic. From above, she saw something move. There on the shower head the white cat sat.

“You found me. Now It’s my turn to find you. Count to 100.” The cat sprang towards the window. Idris caught it in her arms before it could reach. The uncreated man was in her arms, but she had no way of pulling the charm on her wrist.

“Release me!”

She wrestled with the cat, knocking over the fold-up table and sending her father’s playing cards everywhere. The cat bit her and cawed trying to free himself.

With one hand, she squeezed as hard as she could to hold him in place. With her other hand she reached for the charm. The cat broke free and rocketed out of the hotel. Idris ran after him but was helpless as he crossed traffic and vanished in the night.

: Soul Break

Encampment outside of Whisper’s Bay

* * *

Idris arrived at the smouldering ruins of the “Not a Magic Tea Shop.” She approached Braylenn and swept dust into a pan.

“Where is it!” Idris yelled. She searched through the wreckage and ashes, throwing pieces of wood and crumbled brick as she went. She is cursing and spitting. Her face was red.

“Calm down, kid. What’s wrong?” Braylynn said.

She did not answer. Her search went on. Braylynn followed her as she rushed pile to pile, looking for something.

“What,” Braylynn said. “Cat got your tongue?”

At this, Idris grabbed both of Braylynn’s shoulders, giving her a shake.

“The cat got my father! THE CAT GOT MY FATHER AND I AM GOING TO GET HIM.”

She threw Braylynn down. “That’s a great way to treat your boss! Help me clean up so we can rebuild the shop. Then we can track down the vampire. You have to be patient.”

Idris did not listen. A flash caught her eye. Where the counter had once stood, sat a metal box in a pile of burned wood. She blew off the soot and opened the container, revealing a large petrified carrot wand.

“You’re not supposed to touch that,” Braylynn said. “Normals using magic is dangerous, you don’t understand the responsibility...”

Idris pointed the carrot at a nearby streetlight, shouting the word as if it were a curse.

“Blaburtgilocus!”

A bright beam shot out from the tip of the gar, rocketing towards the wooden pole, snapping the structure in half. The air around the light was pulsating like a subwoofer

cranked to 11. The people waiting for the store to reopen ran at the sound of the top of the streetlight crashing.

Idris began to walk away, but Braylynn stepped in front of her.

"If you leave here with that weapon, you are fired. You can not do this. This is not the way. What would Taylor think? This is what we have been fighting against, Barry's magic and the entire magic world. This is not what we stand for at the 'Not a Magic Tea Shop'!"

"You don't care about the shop at all. Or else you would have been here. This is the only way. Sometimes the only way to defeat something so heinous is to become the very thing you fought against. And rise from the ashes."

Idris walked away from the shop ruins in the direction of Sunset Baptist Church.

Sunset Baptist

The walls crashed and crumbled as Idris used the carrot wand to make herself an entrance next to the front doors of the church. People and spice vampires fled in a panic as she made her way to the pulpit in the sanctuary.

The pianist, who had been playing, grabbed her music book from the piano. "Are we not playing the third verse then?"

Idris screamed, "Where is the Uncreated Man!"

The preacher entered from an adjoining hall, dressed in a silk suit with a floral pattern. He looked at the wreckage Idris had caused and shook his head.

"Why in heaven's name didn't you use the door?" Pastor Branson asked. "There is no need for such..."

"Blaburtgilocious!"

The shot from the wand cracked the edge of the

sanctuary open. People screamed. Where windows had been was a clear view of the Wanderer's mountain range. Full of rolling forest inhabited with sky-reaching conifers.

"Where. Is he?" Idris demanded.

"You are making a big mistake." The preacher said. "We are trying to build something here. Don't you see, you can be a part of it! You can set all the sleepers free."

"Don't lecture me on ethics, you of all people." She said. "Tell me, or the entire building goes. I'll give you three more seconds before this becomes an outdoor worship centre."

The preacher stuck up his hands. "Stop. He's in a cabin in the mountains. Take the trail at the end of town up. It'll lead you there. You don't understand, you can not harm him."

Forest Path

Old world trees surrounded her as the sun began to set. The grass swayed back and forth with the wind, and crickets chirped nearby. The mist had again taken the mountains and swirled above Idris, who walked along a rocky path. She reached a point on top where, on one side of her, through the timber, she could see the vast curvature of the ocean in the distance. For an instant, the light above the water flashed green. The rare phenomenon did little to pull her from her state. She continued on the path, with her fists clenched and teeth gritted.

When the last light of the day had faded and the stars came out, she reached a cabin at the end of a steep slope. Its roof was full of moss growth that weaved along the wooden shingles. The air felt damp in the fog.

She opened the door to the cabin and shouted, "Show yourself!"

But when she took a step in, she found there was no floor beneath her. Unable to find her balance, she fell through the darkness until she landed on cold, wet stone. From above her, she heard chuckling that echoed through the hollowed-out stone tunnel.

"Greetings, sister. Have a nice trip?" She heard.

"You think of that all by yourself, Langhorn?"

"Unless you randomly decided to take up hiking, I assume that you are here to end me. I thought we were only starting to get to know each other. You and I need to listen to each other."

Idris pointed up with her wand and sent a curse up the tunnel. When she did, the tunnel lit up in front of her. It broke off in several directions, each one running deep into the mountain. Close by were cans of applesauce and crackers, along a bed made of ragged clothing. She thought she saw squares on the stone wall. She fired off another curse. When the light returned, there her face was in hundreds of photos that were posted everywhere she looked. Photos of her working in the tea shop and graduating from Whisper Bay High. Her professional prom picture of her standing in a black dress scowling her eyes.

"What is this?" She said, tugging at the railroad spike attached to her jeans.

"I've been watching sister," Uncre said from above. "It is with a heavy heart that things must end. It is fate. With your essence, I can uncreate myself. My followers have already marched on Whisper's Bay. It is only a matter of time before we establish our rule. Our better world can start. Please. Just give me your hand, sister. And I will pull you up."

There was no way up. Her hands slipped too much on the stone walls to climb. She could flee into the mountain,

but she did not know where it led. There was no escape.

She looked at the ground. She pointed and screamed the curse with her carrot wand as long as she could. The beam blast sent her flying upward. She landed on the other side of where the floor had been hollowed, with the uncreated man standing expecting her. In his human, disfigured form. With his large claw-like weapon readied.

"Your blood doesn't need to be warm for me to drink it." He said. "And be free of this non-stop existence of endless having to recover from feeding from my followers. Let them wake! Let your father wake. Make Taylor's sacrifice worth it. This is your purpose."

She sent a curse at him, sending him flying back into the cabin wall. It shattered the wood framing and sent him through to the outside. The earth shook. Repeatedly, she sent curse after curse at him, striking him over and over. Until suddenly, she could no longer stand. The mountain rumbled, and the ground shook so hard it felt like water under her feet. A deafening roar sent both of them covering their ears. The surrounding air got intensely hot, and the mist turned into rain. Rocks, dirt and debris flew from everywhere.

"Stop using that!" The Uncreated man shouted over the chaos while holding his ribs. He was broken and bruised and swayed side to side in his stance uncontrollably. "It is doing something to the mountain."

She sent another curse and came to stand over him. The mountain above them erupted, and flames and lava could be spewing from its blown top. Bits of fire and lava fell around them.

She removed the railroad spike dipped in white ash from her buckle and knelt beside him. She drew the weapon back and aimed at his heart.

"Wait!" he shouted, too frail to fight or run. "If you send me to the void, then everyone I have fed on never wakes up again. Including your father. The only way I can wake them is if we uncreate each other."

She lowered the spike. "This would do nothing. I am a yo-yo wizard. Taylor would return in my place. This bond can not be broken unless a willing person exchanges places with the two."

The forest filled with black smoke. The surrounding air grew hotter, and she could feel sweat rolling down her spine.

"I beg you. Let me break your yo-yo bond. Let me save all the people I had to hurt to live. So that I no longer have to wake up every day with the feeling that I have to pay them back!"

The mountain erupted again. Idris reached out her hand and helped him to his feet.

Arcadia Park, Whisper's Bay

Idris and the uncreated man stood under the large tree in the centre of the park. Most of the blue-green needles had fallen from branches of the volcano. The main street of Whisper's Bay was packed with traffic heading both ways out of town. Cars honked. Children cried. The forest above them burned brightly in flames. Panic filled the air. Lava spewed from the top of the mountain and rolled into the ocean below. Magic Clones and the Ragamuffins ran helplessly and lost in the panic.

And there the two stood on the magic circle that surrounded the tree. The man's gaze was glued to the bare cherry blossom trees nearby.

"Under the cherry blossoms, strangers are not really

strangers," He said. Seemingly quoting something she was not familiar with.

"By accepting to break my bond," Idris seemed to pay no attention to him. "You absorb both Taylor's and I's curse. And will be trapped in the void for the rest of time. Do you wish to do this?"

"I submit."

She passed the cup of mixed Drygonanats root and Yopersian Artifetal leaves, brewed in water and handed it to him. He lingered for a moment, looking into the bone cup at the swirling black liquid.

"I wish we could have known each other." He said. "In a different world, maybe. In a place where we don't have to be the monsters."

He lifted the cup to his lips. She stared into the man's sad eyes, seeing a reflection of herself.

"Stop." she said.

He did not. He brought the cup back to drink. She slapped the cup out of his hands with all her might. Forcing him to drop it. He shapeshifted into his cat form and tried to lick the tea from the ground. She picked up the creature and held him tight in an embrace.

"Let me drink!" He shouted.

"This is not my calling." She said with tears filling her eyes. "We can find another way."

From the sky, a voice came hurling out of nowhere above Idris. She dropped to her knees and covered the cat with her body.

"Hello Idris!" a white owl said. "I'm back from holiday. Have a letter from Grobo... err. Grogoba..."

She let down the cat and took the letter. She read it.

"Yo Idris.

Nice find on the skullflowers you put in Luni's

apartment, but those feed on living plants in order to survive. I thought you might want them to fade away, so I took them to the lake and placed them in the mushroom patch. Congrats on your once in a lifetime find. The unknown abilities may keep you studying them for years. Also, I owe Luni one gallon of milk and 23 frozen chicken nuggets."

Idris stared at the letter in amazement.

Hogsnorts College of Fine Magic Arts, Animal Studies, Gar Craft, Potion and Herbs, and Competitive Walking.

"Hello class. My name is Idris Olivia Whitaker. And I'm a herbologist and vampire hunter. I am also a manager of the "Not a Magic Tea Shop" in a coastal town," she steadied herself on the speaker's podium in front of her. The class was half-filled with other magic students.

A girl in the front row eating a bag of Cheetos sneered. "You're my age. What makes you qualified to teach this class?"

Something furry rubbed against the legs of the student. She jumped onto her seat, letting out a scream. A white cat leapt onto the desk and spun in a circle. It morphed into the uncreated man, who opened his mouth to reveal his fangs. Everyone panicked, and people began to flee the classroom.

Suddenly, Langhorn laughed. Idris joined in his laughter.

"Everyone sit down. I need you to write down the most important lesson you will learn in this class."

Idris walked to the whiteboard and wrote on the board, "*There are no monsters but the ones we let live inside us.*"

"My brother, Langhorn, and a magical experiment gone wrong are here with us today. He'll be dropping by to help

out. With his help, I learned the Skullflower, origins unknown, is a cure for dark magic. It can repel and reverse a number of different curses. Except a yo-yo bond, apparently. It did nothing to me. But to Langhorn, it broke his curse. And woke up everyone he had feed on. They are all home now, safe, including my father. We will get into that topic some other time. Does anyone have questions?"

Langhorn raised his hand.

"Yes, brother?"

"Can I take a picture with everyone and you in the class??? I have a sister!"

"After class, I think that's a good idea. Oh. And I will be grading on a curve."

The class moaned.

And there, Idris learned her true calling. To be a healer of all, and a destroyer of none. Though she still felt a weight on her, she chose to find a way for life instead. And while Luni and she had not seen eye to eye on that yet, she was proud of herself. Luni would understand in time and was being controlled by her own little monster. She was sure that someday it would blow over. From that day on, she strove to learn all she could about these flowers. And how they could help those around the world with the darkness being held.

THE END