

Chapter 6

Watcher in the Cemetery

The bus tires hissed to a stop in front of my driveway. I stepped off, my eyes instantly protesting the brightness of the afternoon sun. Tomb House's facade loomed like a final weight on my crushed spirits. First the invite to the party I doubted Mom would even allow me to attend, then the Eden revelation, shattering the first few social connections I'd managed to form. After Jennifer and Ashton's looks, Matt's withdrawal, and worst of all, Amy and Jess shutting me out completely... I couldn't face the oppressive walls of Tomb House. Not with Aurora's photos waiting to remind me of a night I'd rather forget.

Kate's words echoed in my head: "You belong with us." But if I did, why hadn't anyone told me before?

Instead of going inside, my feet carried me across the brick road to Elm Grove Cemetery, where weathered gravestones protruded like aging teeth from the earth. The Eden family plot lay in a secluded corner, enclosed by a low moss-covered wall and shaded by a mature white oak. Long-reaching branches creaked in the breeze above.

Along the back wall, Isaac had erected a double headstone when Grandma Evelyn died some fifty years ago, with her name and details on the right and room for his name on the left. Between them, an etched tree much like the one in Eden's logo sprouted skyward to a canopy of stars that bordered the stone—the stars she'd loved in life now watching over her in death.

Long and wordy sentence. Break up or use parallel list structure.

I wouldn't expect tombstones from a big, influential family to be secluded. But that's just me.

split up sentence, too many commas

Avoid 2 back-to-back lists. Also wordy.

oppressive walls

Passive voice

Make this scene more romantic! Isaac X Evelyn!

Describe these
more! Also, add sequencing makes
Aurora's gravestone Carter / Tomb House / 45
feel like it is between the parents.

My parents' headstone came next, Mom's side still incomplete, then Aurora's. My

finger traced the inscription under Dad's name. "Here lies James Isaac Eden, a devoted

husband and loving father." With no witnesses around, I sank to my knees and unleashed
months of pent-up tears. I thought about Dad's affectionate smile, and how the world held
less color now that the magic of his smile was gone. How I might never be as close to anyone
ever again, especially after losing my new friends and discovering I was somehow different.
No italics needed

Special still had Mom, but she didn't understand me like he did, didn't know the right
words to say to brighten my mood after a hard day.

Gemi's perception is slowed down to relive memories and sensations.

We are not watching Gemi. We ARE Gemi. Time passed in a haze as I huddled there in my memories. The sun, orange and tired, sagged low on the horizon by the time I finally looked up. I wiped my drenched cheeks and mentally prepared myself to head home. We were having dinner at Isaac's soon. The thought of facing my grandfather now, after learning about my Eden status at school, sent a fresh wave of anxiety through me. What else had my family been keeping from me? Rephrase so not a question

With a sigh, I straightened and brushed the dirt from my pants when something

rustled in the leaves behind me. I turned and caught a figure emerging from behind the oak.
Need more suspense here. Jess appears too naturally.

And then I saw brown, guilty eyes under a tumble of dark hair over a pale forehead. *Jess.* No ital.

My blood boiled at the sight of him. *I hated that he'd seen me crying here.* And after ignoring me all day! Before I could speak, black spots crowded the edges of my vision in a familiar warning sign. I closed my eyes and took deep breaths. *In for four, hold for seven, out for eight.*

I think we can see that clearly already. More show, less tell.

He seemed to sense I needed a moment and thankfully kept his mouth shut while I worked to compose myself. After a few more rounds of the calming exercise, I asked, "How long have you been standing there?"

The color rose in his cheeks, and he dropped his gaze. "Since you walked over here."

"You shouldn't spy on people!" My words cracked like ice after his cold shoulder at school.

I feel like Gemi would not be willing to answer that so readily. "Yeah... didn't mean to." He ticked his chin to the grave behind me. "That your dad?" I nodded though my head still swam from his unexpected appearance. And that he was talking to me again. Fragment

Maybe just have her be silent or look away. "What happened?" He seemed genuinely to want to know, which dampened my anger... a little.

"Why should I tell you?" I threw my hands up, the words tumbling out. "One mention of Eden and suddenly I'm not worth talking to? That hurt, you know."

His shoulders hunched, and he stuffed his hands in his pockets. "Yeah... you're right. I was a total jerk. Should've been there for you instead of..." He kicked at the ground. "I'm sorry."

The rest of my anger fizzled. "He died of cancer three months ago. That's why we moved back here, where I was born, actually." I hugged my chest, unsure why I was sharing so much. "So, why were you being a jerk?"

His mouth twisted. "It's nothing you did. There's... history with the Eden kids. Bad history." He lowered his voice. "When Flynn and Rowan invited you to that party, it reminded us which side you're on."

"Which side?" My cheeks blazed. I'd had more than enough of this Edens versus normies crap. "Why does there even have to be sides? Why can't I be friends with whomever I want?" I thought of Ashton's tears in the cafeteria and wondered if that had to do with this "bad history" Jess mentioned.

I took a calming breath. "Being an Eden doesn't make me different from anybody else. I'm not special, not rich, just an ordinary girl."

Confusion flickered across his features. "Wait... you really don't know?"

Not something I imagine teens saying.

I shook my head, again wondering what I could be missing, and sank down onto a tree root to keep from pacing.

Jess shifted his weight, then settled opposite me, maintaining his distance. "What do you know about Eden?"

I shrugged. "Just that my grandfather founded it, and my parents worked there before Aurora died." I gestured toward her tombstone. "My sister. Died before I was born."

Jess pushed his bangs back, his expression troubled. "Wow. Your family's been through a lot. And you really don't know about..." His eyes searched my face.

Readers will know why she's panicked. Focus on feelings.

About? I stared blankly back at him.

Something in Jess's expression shifted, and he rose abruptly. "Forget it. I gotta go." Panicked that he might leave before I had some answers, I stepped into his path faster than I'd meant to. He tried to stop short, but his momentum carried him forward into me. His hands caught me by the waist before I could tumble backward. My spine tingled in unexpected ways at the contact.

More description of what the heck is happening.

Move sentence to next paragraph.

I glanced up in surprise, acutely aware of our proximity, of our faces only inches apart. At this distance, I could smell the crisp, woodsy scent of his deodorant, of the slight hint of cherries that hung about him, though I couldn't tell where that came from. His eyes, however, captivated me the most. So much deeper than I'd imagined, dark and intense and impossible to look away from.

Metaphor opportunity

This does not tell us much about how he is feeling. Is he stunned? Flustered? Totally chill?

Jess stared back, his arms still cradled me. My pulse quickened as the seconds stretched between us.

"I—" My voice caught in my throat. His warm hands, still against me, were suddenly all I could focus on, and whatever I'd been about to say evaporated into the wind. My brain scrambled to finish the sentence. "I won't fall."

He blinked, and slowly his arms withdrew. "Sorry," he mumbled with an unsteady step back. He rubbed the back of his neck. "Look, I... uh... thought you knew... But if you don't... ask your grandfather. Just be careful at that party. Especially around Flynn and Rowan. The Edens... they're not like the rest of us."

Not like the rest of us. The words echoed as I steadied myself, my pulse racing from his touch and the warning in his tone.

"What do you mean?"

"I should..." He took another step back, but his eyes stayed fixed on mine. "It's getting late." His words were soft, almost reluctant.

"Wait," I urged. His expression turned wary, and as he waited, I realized I didn't know what I'd meant to say. Not wanting him to leave, I'd acted on impulse. Now, my brain fumbled for something that wouldn't sound silly or desperate. "Will you ignore me again tomorrow?" My cheeks heated. *So much for not sounding desperate.* But what surprised me more was how much I cared about his answer.

A ghost of a smile touched his lips. "I won't, I promise."

"You better not," I warned, relief washing through me, though he still seemed troubled. *Separate into 2 sentences.*

"I'll see you tomorrow." His eyes lingered before he headed toward the other entrance.

With a flurry of unanswered questions swarming through my head, I hurried back to the street. There, about thirty paces away, a man leaned against a black sedan, its dark paint ~~seemed~~ ^{and} ~~was~~ seeming to absorb the surrounding ~~early~~ evening light, his attention fixed on Tomb House. His dark clothes matched his vehicle. The monochrome effect made him appear more shadow than man. When he turned to watch me, his grin widened as if I were exactly who he'd been waiting for. ~~telling me~~ his presence had nothing to do with the cemetery.

Move here.

Use shorter, more abrupt sentences to create suspense.
Too many commas take away from eerie feeling.

Carter / Tomb House / 49

My steps faltered at his disconcerting smile, and a chill ran up my arms despite the afternoon warmth. I kept my eyes on the brick road, then on the paved path to the porch, feeling his gaze boring into my back the whole while. As I climbed the front steps, I couldn't resist glancing over my shoulder one last time. I found him still watching. He tilted his head slightly, slid his sunglasses into place, then ducked into the car. His door closed with a barely audible click before he cruised away.

Unsettled, I went inside. *Who was that?* The way he watched me, like he knew exactly who I was... an easy ten on the creep scale. I peered out the window to make sure he'd really gone. The street sat empty, and I heaved a sigh of relief.

Need transition from creepy to normal.

“Mom! Sorry I’m late!” I made my way to her office.

“Gemi! There you are.” Mom sat at her desk, which looked much tidier than it had the previous day. “Did you forget we’re going to your grandfather’s tonight? He’s really looking forward to seeing you.”

“I know, just went to see Dad for a while.”

Mom’s eyes flickered, but her smile held steady. “I know you miss him.” Her voice trailed off, and her eyes lowered to the desk.

“Yeah. Hey, Mom? There was a guy outside staring at our house. Kinda weird.”

Mom froze. “Oh?” She gave a nervous laugh. “It was probably Frank. I asked him to look at our windows. I’m thinking about replacing them.”

I frowned. ~~What was she hiding?~~ ^{The fact} The man in black clothing was definitely not a window guy. That she knew about him, and was covering for him, only added to my certainty that something was off.

My thoughts drifted back to Jess’s cryptic warning about the Edens. With any luck, tonight’s dinner might finally bring some answers.