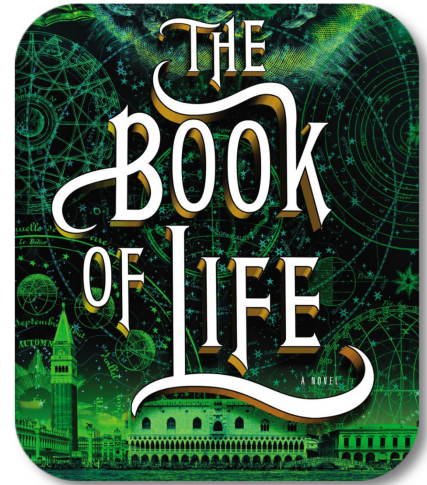


The Book of Life; a novel

Book three of the ALL SOULS trilogy (a summary by Pat Evert)

Ghosts didn't have much substance. All they were composed of was memories and heart. Of all the things Philippe disliked about being dead—the inability to touch his wife, Ysabeau; his lack of smell or taste; the fact that he had no muscles for a good sparring match—invisibility topped the list. Emily insisted these were nothing more than human myths, and **it was only when the living moved on and let go that the dead could appear to them.** *It's not just Diana's hair that has changed.* Philippe's face had a look of wonder. *Diana is with child—Matthew's child.* “No one will prevent Matthew from doing what he must. Avenging Emily's death is a matter of honor.” The scene on the mountain had been oddly peaceful. There had been nothing but silence and the sight of Emily Mather kneeling inside a circle marked out with pale rocks. The witch Peter Knox had been with her. Upon the news, Corra, Diana's firedrake, appeared. Gallowglass twisted his arm to show off a tattoo of a winged creature that strongly resembled the airborne beast. “Like this. I might have left out one or two details, but I did warn everybody that Auntie Diana wasn't going to be the same witch she was before.”



“It's true, honey. Em is dead.” The stress of telling Diana and Matthew was clearly too much for her. Sarah could have sworn that she saw a dragon. “She'd suffered a heart attack. Emily must have been under enormous stress trying to resist whatever Knox was doing. “Before Emily fell unconscious, Knox saw Margaret and demanded to know how two daemons had given birth to a baby witch. Knox invoked the covenant. He threatened to take Margaret to the Congregation. It was not easy for the three otherworldly species—daemons, vampires, and witches—to live among humans. **All had been targets of human fear and violence at some point in history.** Now that Diana and Matthew were home, the Congregation could go to hell and take their covenant with them as far as Sarah was concerned.

“The more active the firedrake is, the calmer Diana seems,” Matthew said. “Perhaps, but Corra is hell on the decor.” “Just tell Ysabeau that Corra's clumsiness is good for the grandbabies.” Young Phoebe Taylor works at one of the auction houses in London. “Marcus met her when he was picking up something for Ysabeau. I think it's serious. Marcus's scent is all over her. He's mated.” “She is too young for a relationship with a

vampire,” Matthew said. “She can’t be more than twenty-two, yet Marcus has entangled her in an irrevocable bond.” Marcus, the family’s democratic idealist, had fallen for a blueblood. “Even if I’d performed an autopsy on Emily—which Sarah didn’t want—there would have been no way to determine if she was killed by magic or by natural causes.”

Matthew’s heart calmed and his restlessness seeped away as Diana provided the peace that was eluding him. Here, within the circle of his arms, was all that he had ever wanted. A wife. Children. A family of his own. He let the powerful rightness that he always felt in Diana’s presence sink into his soul. They had not made love since London, and Matthew noticed the additional tightness of Diana’s abdomen—a sign that the babies were continuing to develop. There was a shadow on her lower back. It was deep within her skin, a pearly gray outline that looked a bit like a fire Drake, its jaws biting into the crescent moon above, the wings covering Diana’s rib cage, and a tail that disappeared around her hips. He wondered if it would be visible to others or if only his vampire eyes could detect it. “It’s beautiful. Another sign of your courage.” Vampires were secretive creatures, but when a vampire took blood from his mate’s heart vein, there was a moment of perfect peace and understanding that quieted the constant, dull need to hunt and possess. When she kissed him on his third eye, she also caught glimpses of his innermost thoughts and the dark places where his fears and secrets hid. Matthew felt nothing more than a tingle of her power as she gave him her witch’s kiss. Baldwin barged in, “you forget: I’m the head of the de Clermont family. I don’t need an excuse. Meet me in the family library, Matthew. You, too, Diana. Don’t keep me waiting.”

We were not the only ones to have been summoned to Baldwin’s impromptu meeting. “Verin.” Matthew had warned me about Philippe’s daughters, who were so terrifying that the family asked him to stop making them. The look she gave me was frigid. “Witch.” A vampire’s blood vow sings for a year and a day. All vampires can hear it. Philippe had been protecting me during every step of our journey through the past. “Atta summoned me a few days before he died,” Verin said, “Philippe was worried that you might ignore his blood vow. He made me swear to acknowledge it, no matter what.” “Diana is carrying my children,” Matthew said, his eyes dangerously dark. “Impossible,” Baldwin stated flatly. “True,” Matthew retorted. “If so, they’ll be the most hated—and the most hunted—children the world has ever known. Creatures will be baying for their blood. And yours,” Baldwin said. I registered Matthew’s sudden departure from my side at the same moment that I heard Baldwin’s chair break. When the blur of movement ceased, Matthew stood behind his brother with his arm locked around Baldwin’s throat, pressing a knife into the skin over his brother’s heart. “You may be head of the family, Baldwin, but never forget that I am its assassin,” Matthew growled. “Assassin?” I tried to hide my confusion as another hidden side of Matthew was brought to light. I pushed Verin against a wall with a blast of witchwind, keeping her away from my husband and Baldwin long enough for Matthew to exact some promise from his brother and release him. “Baldwin cannot know of Diana’s power. I’d appreciate your help with that, Gallowglass. Fernando’s, too.” Unbeknownst to

Matthew or me, the Bishops and the de Clermonts had been working for years, even centuries, to bring us safely together: Philippe, Gallowglass, my father, Emily, my mother. Just before his death Philippe wrote this letter:

*Diana— **Do not let the ghosts of the past steal the joy from the future. Thank you for holding my hand.** You can let go now. Your father, in blood and vow,*
Philippe

P.S. The coin is for the ferryman. Tell Matthew I will see you safe on the other side.

“So Philippe does expect me to return his coin.” He would be sitting on the banks of the river Styx waiting for Charon’s boat to bring me across. Perhaps Emily waited with him, and my parents, too. “What did he mean, ‘Thank you for holding my hand’?” Matthew asked. “I promised him he wouldn’t be alone in the dark times. That I’d be there, with him.” “He left written proof that **he freely and gladly wanted you for his daughter**. Between the jewels, your dowry, and this letter, it will be impossible for any of Philippe’s children—or even the Congregation—to suggest he was somehow forced to bestow a blood vow on you,” Matthew explained.

The Congregation is not playing games. They’ve been looking for a reason to disband the Knights of Lazarus for years. “They’re doing so now because I brought official charges against Knox for Emily’s death?” Marcus asked. “We considered your request—again. It’s been denied. Again.” “Marcus and the other participants in his little rebellion called for an end to the covenant in April. Marcus declared that the Bishop family was under the direct protection of the Knights of Lazarus, thereby involving the brotherhood.” Telling witches, vampires, and daemons to keep to themselves no longer makes sense—if it ever did,” Marcus insisted. “Knox has been stripped of his seat and banned from ever serving on the Congregation again.” “The Congregation selected an impartial delegation—one witch and one vampire—and charged them with inspecting Sept-Tours from top to bottom. Gerbert and Satu Järvinen will be here in one week’s time. The Congregation wants insurance. Someone that will keep the de Clermonts and the Knights of Lazarus on their best behavior. Gerbert has generously agreed to keep Ysabeau at his home. “I’ll need to go to Oxford as quickly as possible. My father made sure that the Book of Life would come to me if I need it. Ashmole 782 is your chief concern, and finding its missing pages,” I said. “Without them the Book of Life will never reveal its secrets.” For protection, the text had burrowed into the parchment, creating a magical palimpsest, and the words chased one another through the pages as if looking for the missing letters. It wasn’t possible to read what remained. I have to put the Book of Life back together again,” I said. “You don’t have to go after Knox for me,” I told him, “or for Baldwin.” “No,” he said softly. “I have to do it for Emily.” “The Congregation’s inquiry will make it more difficult to keep our secrets. And Matthew has more to hide than most of us.” “Like the fact that he’s the family’s assassin?” I asked. “Yes,” Ysabeau said. “Many vampire families would dearly like to know which member of the de Clermont clan is responsible for the deaths of their loved ones.” **“But secrets are unreliable allies. They allow us to believe we are safe, yet all the while they are destroying us.”**

“The round tower - Philippe built it for a prison. He seldom used it.” The oubliette on the ground floor was a place of forgetting, but the tower’s second floor was a place of remembering - the de Clermont family archives. “You’ll love this, Diana,” Sarah said. “Marcus said it’s a de Clermont family tree. It looks really old.” “Twelfth century,” Phoebe said. “Who’s Benjamin?” asked Marcus. “Why is his name erased? Did someone make a mistake?” “Yes, he was a mistake,” Matthew said. “But Benjamin does exist,” I said. “I met him in sixteenth-century Prague.” “There were rumors of Benjamin in the nineteenth century, but I never saw any proof. I disavowed him. So did Philippe. Benjamin began to trade in de Clermont family secrets. He swore he would expose the existence of creatures—not just vampires but witches and daemons—to the humans in Jerusalem. Philippe dreamed of creating a safe haven for us all in the Holy Land, a place where we could live without fear. Benjamin had the power to crush Philippe’s hopes, and I had given him that power. I wanted him to suffer as we creatures suffered. I made him a vampire so that if he exposed the de Clermonts, he would have to expose himself. Then I abandoned him to fend for himself. Because I abandoned Benjamin, I didn’t know that I had given him the same blood rage that was in my own veins. I found out what a monster Benjamin had become. It turns you into a cold-blooded killer, without reason or compassion. I’ve learned to control it,” Matthew said. “Most of the time.” “If the Congregation were to find out, there would be a price on your head. According to what I’ve read here, other creatures would have carte blanche to destroy you,” Hamish observed. “Due to New Orleans the other vampires on the Congregation were convinced that the old scourge of blood rage had returned,” Matthew said. “They wanted to raze the city and burn it out of existence, but I argued that the madness was a result of youth and inexperience, not blood rage. I was supposed to kill them all. I was supposed to kill you, too, Marcus.” Ysabeau said, “I brought the disease into the family. I am a carrier, like Marcus. The disease was in my sire. He believed it was a great blessing for a lamia to carry his blood, for it made you truly terrifying and nearly impossible to kill. As a punishment,” she repeated slowly, “I was locked in a cage to provide my brothers and sisters with a source of entertainment, as well as a creature on whom they could practice killing. My sire did not expect me to survive. I lived for a very long time in that tiny, barred prison—filthy, starving, wounded inside and out, unable to die though I longed for it. But the more I fought and the longer I survived, the more interesting I became. Philippe did find me in a fortress and rescued me from that terrible place. But I was no beauty then, no matter what romantic stories your grandfather told later. Philippe spared me. It is why Philippe forgave Matthew for not killing you, Marcus, though he had ordered him to do so.

Philippe knew what it was to love someone too much to see him perish unjustly.

Any vampire even suspected of having blood rage was immediately put down, as was his sire and any offspring,” Ysabeau said dispassionately. “But I could not kill my child, and I would not let anyone else do so either.” “The Congregation doesn’t know that the sickness is in my veins.” “They may not know for sure,” Ysabeau warned, “but some of the Congregation suspect it.” “They fear that blood rage is back because of the vampire murders,” Marcus said. **“And if we all did what we should, we would wake to find ourselves in paradise.”** “I’ll take Sarah and Diana to Oxford. If what you say is

true, and another vampire—possibly Benjamin—fathered a child on a witch, we need to know how and why some witches and some vampires can reproduce. And to find the cure for blood rage. Fight to have the covenant repealed, and refuse to support a Congregation that upholds such unjust laws.”

“After we get to Oxford, I want you to stop wearing your disguising spell.” Matthew crossed his arms. “I hate that thing.” “I can’t go around the university shimmering.” “Will the twins know their father has blood rage, or will you keep them in the dark like Marcus?” “It’s not the same. Your magic is a gift. Blood rage is a curse.” “It’s exactly the same, and you know it.” I took his hands in mine. **“We’ve grown used to hiding what we’re ashamed of, you and I. It has to end now,** before the children are born. “It’s very fatiguing pretending you’re in charge when your wife actually rules the roost.” “I’ve decided to become a vampire.” Phoebe’s eyes shone with happiness as she looked at her once-and-forever husband. “Marcus insists that I get used to that before we marry, so yes, our engagement may be a bit longer than we’d like.” “Do you want to take that risk, knowing what we know now about blood-borne diseases?” Matthew said. **“If you truly love her, Marcus, don’t change her.”** Matthew switched on the phone’s speaker so the warmbloods could hear as well as the vampires and answered the call. “Miriam?” “No, Father. It’s your son. Benjamin. I’m told there was trouble at Sept-Tours. Something about a witch,” Benjamin said. “The witch had discovered a de Clermont secret, I understand, but died before she could reveal it. Such a shame.” Benjamin made a sound of mocking sympathy. “Was she anything like the one you were holding in thrall in Prague? A fascinating creature. You always said I was the black sheep of the family, but **we’re more alike than you want to admit,**” Benjamin continued. “I’ve even come to share your appreciation for the company of witches.” I felt the change in the air as the rage surged through Matthew’s veins. At last I’ve found a way to destroy you and the rest of the de Clermonts. Neither the Book of Life nor your pathetic vision of science can help you now. I’ll be in touch,” Benjamin said. The line went dead. Benjamin has been watching and waiting for Matthew. “Em discovered something important here at Sept-Tours—something she’d rather die with than reveal.” “There’s something else—something we haven’t told you about the Book of Life,” Matthew said. “It’s written on parchment made from the skins of daemons, vampires, and witches.” Marcus’s eyes widened. “That means it contains genetic information.” **Sometimes we just have to throw caution to the wind and trust the people we love.**” My chords had gone into my hands. Nine of my fingers displayed a different color chord. And my shimmering was getting brighter. “So the dragon—or firedrake—is your familiar?” asked Vivian. Unlike dragons, firedrakes are as comfortable in the sea as in the flames. Vivian said calmly. “But **this isn’t just a test—it’s an opportunity.** When witches set out to destroy the weavers those many years ago, **we lost more than lives. We lost bloodlines, expertise, knowledge—all because we feared a power we didn’t understand.** This is our chance to begin again.” “For storms will rage and oceans roar,” I whispered. When Gabriel stands on sea and shore. / And as he blows his wondrous horn, / **Old worlds die and new be born.” Were we in the midst of just such a change?**

“Dark doesn’t have to mean evil. Is the new moon evil?” I shook my head. **“The dark of the moon is a time for new beginnings.”** Humans made up those stories about the moon and nocturnal creatures because **they represent the unknown.** “Black is the color of the goddess as crone, plus the color of concealment, bad omens, and death. Here we have the color of the goddess as maiden and huntress, folding in my silver middle finger. And here is the color of worldly power in my golden ring finger. As for your pinkie, white is the color of divination and prophecy. It’s also used to break curses and banish unwanted spirits.” “Emily wasn’t very good at the higher magics. What about Mom?” “Rebecca excelled at them. She went straight from bell, book, and candle to calling down the moon,” Sarah said wistfully.

The house was still not fully awake, but periodic rumblings of activity reminded us that its self-imposed hibernation was drawing to a close. “There’s power in the woods, Matthew. Dark power. I could feel it. And it’s been calling to me since the sun set! I felt its allure, and the darkness in me responded to it. **Should I loathe myself, then?**” “Without you I would never have known Philippe or received his blood vow. I wouldn’t be carrying your children. I wouldn’t have seen my father or known I was a weaver. **In saving your life, I saved mine, too.**” When I turned on the kitchen light, something unexpected was waiting for me - Rebecca Bishop’s Book of Shadows. “This is my mother’s missing spell book—the one she used for the higher magics.” “You possess an extraordinary combination of your parents’ very different magical abilities,” he replied. “That’s why I can tie the tenth knot,” I said, understanding for the first time where the power came from. “I can create because my father was a weaver, and I can destroy because my mother had the talent for higher, darker magics.” “A union of opposites,” Matthew said. **“Your parents were an alchemical wedding, too. One that produced a marvelous child.”** **“Do not refuse me because I am dark and shadowed,”** I whispered, remembering a passage from an alchemical text I’d studied in Matthew’s library. “That line from the Aurora Consurgens used to remind me of you, but now it makes me think of my parents, as well as my own magic and how hard I resisted it.”

[To Chris, a best friend] “You’ve just learned that I spent most of last year in the sixteenth century, I have a pet dragon, and that you’re surrounded by daemons, vampires, and witches, but it’s my pregnancy that you find implausible?” Another call from Benjamin. “Benjamin is repeatedly raping that woman,” Fernando said with barely controlled fury. This witch had to be a weaver. “The witch miscarried.” Benjamin’s voice had the detachment of any scientist reporting his research findings. “It was the fourth month—the longest she’s been able to sustain a pregnancy. So far. “I can’t help wondering how long you’ve known about the power in our blood. The witches surely knew. What other secret could the Book of Life possibly contain?” Benjamin paused as if waiting for an answer. “Not going to tell me, eh? Well, then. I have no choice but to go back to my own experiment. Don’t worry. I’ll figure out how to breed this witch eventually—or kill her trying. Then I’ll look for a new witch. Maybe yours will suit.”

“Somebody complained to the Congregation about covenant violations in Madison County,” Vivian told us. “Think what you want, but **forced segregation**—or the covenant if you want to be fancy about it—**is often about concerns for racial purity.**” Chris propped his legs on the coffee table. “Your covenant probably came into being because witches were having vampire babies. Making humans more ‘comfortable’ was just a convenient excuse.” Is it just vampires who are dying out, or are witches and daemons going extinct, too? And which of these so-called species cares the most about racial purity?” Chris really was a genius. With every insightful question he was delving deeper into the mysteries bound up in the Book of Life, the de Clermont family’s secrets, and the mysteries in my own—and Matthew’s—blood. “I think we should go to Fernando’s house in Seville without delay. **The change my mom was expecting? It’s here,**” I said simply. “**And even more change is on the way,**” Chris said. “You’re not going to be able to keep the existence of creatures secret from humans for much longer. I’ll stand with you, if that helps,” Chris added, “provided you meet me halfway.”

Living in New Haven with Matthew was going to require some adjustment. It had never occurred to me that there would already be creatures in Chris’s lab. “I want to remind you that every person here has given Tina a signed nondisclosure agreement,” Chris said. “We are working on a highly sensitive, highly confidential research project with far-reaching implications. What happens in this lab stays in this lab. No talking to your friends. No telling your parents. No boasting in the library. If you talk, you walk. Got it?” “CC stands for ‘creature chromosome. Okay, team. Hands up if you’re a daemon.” The Asian woman raised her hand. So did a young man who resembled a giraffe with his ginger-colored hair and long neck. “What’s a daemon?” Scully asked. “A highly valued member of this research team who colors outside the lines,” Matthew said. “The DNA sample is mine. I’m a vampire.” I’d seen him stand up to a queen, a spoiled emperor, and his own awe-inspiring father. **His courage**—whether fighting with swords or struggling with his own daemons—was bone-deep. But nothing compared to how I felt watching him stand before a group of students and his scientific peers and **own up to what he was.** “How old are you?” Mulder asked breathlessly. “Thirty-seven.” Matthew took pity on them. “Give or take about fifteen hundred years.” “There are witches at Yale, too. We’ve lived alongside humans for millennia.”

I was pretty sure it wasn’t human skin, more probably daemon, vampire or witch. Scully’s eyes popped at the idea. The prospect of other creatures being flayed to make a book didn’t seem to alarm her. “The book this came from isn’t just bound in creature remains—it’s completely constructed from it.” Miriam showed up. “Who are you?” Chris demanded. “Your worst nightmare—and new lab manager.

In an effort to be prepared for any magical eventuality when finally it came time to recall Ashmole 782 and reunite it with its missing pages, I had called up books that might inspire my efforts to weave new higher-magic spells. Though my mother’s spell book

was a valuable resource, I knew from my own experience **how far modern witches had fallen when compared to the witches of the past. Each one brimmed with hatred—for witches and anyone else who was different, rebellious, or refused to conform to societal expectations.**

“Oh, they’re not arguing,” Gallowglass said, holding the door open for us. “They’re flirting.” “Miriam . . . and a human?” Matthew sounded stunned. “She will break Chris’s heart, of course, but there’s naught we can do about it.” A few days ago, I’d worried whether the vampires would survive being at Yale once the students and faculty were around. Now I wondered whether Yale would survive the vampires.

“Edward Kelley removed those pages before Ashmole 782 was sent back to England. Kelley temporarily put them inside the Voynich for safekeeping. At some point he gave two of the pages away. But he kept one for himself—the page with the illumination of a tree on it.” Luci Meriweather accompanied me to the university lab to see some of our newest findings on our page from Ashmole 782. “If a single page weighs thirteen ounces, the whole book would weigh close to a hundred and fifty pounds. That’s not all. The page isn’t always the same weight. Now it’s down to seven ounces.” He took up a clipboard and noted the time and weight on it. “It’s been fluctuating randomly all morning, before the weight had risen to a full pound. Vellum can’t lose weight and gain it again. It’s dead. Nothing I’m observing is possible!” “The page is clearly some sort of **magical container**. There are other pages inside it. Its weight changes because **it’s still somehow connected to the rest of the manuscript.**” “If so, that would make Ashmole 782 a palimpsest, a magic palimpsest.”

Jack and Andrew Hubbard paid us a visit. The centuries had done little to change the London vampire famous for his priestly ways and his brood of adopted creatures of all species and ages. Jack said, “Benjamin Fox is my sire.” Andrew Hubbard’s origins had always been shrouded in obscurity. Some mysterious vampire had brought Hubbard back from the brink of death—but no one seemed to know who. “Benjamin hoped I would have blood rage,” Hubbard continued. “He also hoped I would help him organize an army to stand against the de Clermonts and their allies. But he was disappointed on both counts.” “Benjamin wants Jack. I can’t let him have the boy again.” “Father Hubbard made Jack a vampire.” Corra let out an answering cry of welcome, followed by a stream of fire and song that filled the entrance with happiness. She took flight, zooming up and latching her wings around Jack. Lobero padded over to his master and gave Corra a suspicious sniff. Jack was made a vampire in the plague of 1603. “I should have had the courage to face death and accept it, but I couldn’t go to my grave without seeing you again. My life felt . . . unfinished.” “And how does it feel now?” Matthew asked. “**Long. Lonely. And hard**—harder than I ever imagined.” “Philippe visited me whenever he came to London,” Jack explained, oblivious to the changes in Matthew. “He spoke only of his admiration and said you would **teach me to ignore what my blood was telling me to do.**” Matthew jerked as though he’d been hit. The shudder traveled through Jack from the marrow of his bones to the surface of his skin. His eyes went full black without warning, filled with horror and dread. **Jack’s present**

suffering was far worse than what Matthew had to endure. With Jack a wider range of emotions triggered it. “I killed. Again and again. The more I killed, the more I wanted to kill. The blood did more than feed me—**it fed the blood rage, too.** I had to keep moving. There was so much blood. I had to get away from the police, and the newspapers. . . .” Jack shuddered. “But it’s the ones that lived who suffered the most,” Jack continued, his voice deadening further with every word. “My grandsire took my children from me and said he would make sure they were raised properly. And my daughter. My daughter. They—” He clamped a hand over his mouth, but it was too late to keep the blood from escaping as he vomited. “**I can promise there will be no nightmares.**” “How can you be sure?” Jack asked. “**Magic.**”

My spell had knocked him out cold. **Magic was nothing more than desire made real.** “The only thing in my briefcase is this.” The chattering grew louder as a jolt of power entered my body. Every sense I had was heightened, and the threads that bound the world chimed in sudden agitation, coiling and twisting in the space between me and the sheet of vellum that Andrew Hubbard held in his fingers. My blood responded to the faint vestiges of magic that clung to this solitary page from the Book of Life. **Two alchemical dragons locked together**, the blood from their wounds falling into a basin from which naked, pale figures rose. It depicted the stage in the alchemical process after the chemical marriage of the moon queen and the sun king: conceptio, when a new and powerful substance sprang forth from the union of opposites—male and female, light and dark, sun and moon. “Edward Kelley sent it to me the autumn after you left.” One of the alchemical dragons was indeed a firedrake, with two legs and wings, and the other was a snake with its tail in its mouth. The dragons’ rapt expressions as they gazed into each other’s eyes, the striking balance between two such powerful creatures. “Jack made sure Edward’s picture was safe no matter what. Plague, fire, war—the boy never let anything touch it. He claimed it belonged to you, Mistress Roydon.”

“Jack’s done this before,” Hubbard said. But he’s never made so many images so quickly. And never . . . him.” Benjamin’s eyes, nose, and mouth dominated one wall, looking down on Jack with an expression that was equal parts avarice and malice. His features were unmistakable in their cruelty, and somehow more ominous. The pictures around the room followed a rough sequence of events leading from Jack’s time in London before Hubbard had made him a vampire all the way to the present day. Matthew watched, riveted, as Jack brought Diana’s familiar, lovely face to life against the wall’s creamy surface. Seeing her portrait confirmed what Matthew already suspected. Matthew might make Jack feel safe the way a father should, but it was Diana who made him feel loved. “**Even the darkest places need to be brought into the light of day**, or else they’ll grow until they swallow a man whole. Two wolves live inside every creature: one evil and the other good. Nana Bets said the wolf who wins is the wolf you feed. The evil wolf feeds on anger, guilt, sorrow, lies, and regret. The good wolf needs a diet of love and honesty, spiced up with big spoonfuls of compassion and faith. So if you want the good wolf to win, you’re going to have to starve the other one.

There are five of us in this room - Matthew and Gallowglass, Hubbard and Chris. Your big bad wolf doesn't stand a chance." Both Hubbard and Jack had been swabbed and given blood samples. They'd been rushed through processing, and their genome report was due any day.

Baldwin dragged Jack home with the shame of a dishonored slave. But Diana didn't need help—not from Matthew, not from Lobero, not even from Corra. She straightened, splayed out her left hand with the palm facing down, and directed her fingers at the floor. The wooden planks shattered and split, re-forming into thick canes that rose up and wound themselves around Baldwin's feet, keeping him in place. Lethally long, sharp thorns sprang out of the shoots, digging through his clothes and into flesh. Diana was as single-minded as Baldwin when it came to destroying the obstacles in her way. "Jack is the vampire murderer. I saw it in his thoughts, and now I see it here on the walls. We've been looking for him for more than a year. How has he evaded the Congregation all this time?" Baldwin asked. Baldwin saw in Jack what Benjamin had seen: a dangerous weapon, one that could be shaped and twisted to make it as deadly as possible. "Kill him," commanded the head of the de Clermont family.

"Baldwin ordered me to kill Jack." "You can't give up on him. Jack won't always have blood rage. You're going to find a cure." "Chris and Miriam traced the blood-rage gene from Ysabeau through me and Andrew down to Jack. Blood rage is a developmental anomaly. There's a genetic component, but the blood-rage gene appears to be triggered by something in our noncoding DNA. Jack and I have that something. Maman, Marcus, and Andrew don't. We know that **vampire genes are brutal—they push aside what's human in order to dominate the newly modified cells.** I am her child—a combination of the genetic ingredients I inherited from my human parents as well as what I inherited from her. Jack possessed the triggers the blood-rage gene needed to express itself. The more we understand the better the treatment might become, but this is not a disease we can cure. He won't suffer. I promise you." "But you will. Jack will be gone, but **you will live on, hating yourself,**" Diana said. "You don't understand the forces that would gather against us if I do this. Everything my children and grandchildren have done or will ever do is laid at my doorstep under vampire law. The vampire murders? I committed them. Benjamin's evil deeds? I am guilty of them." Matthew had to make Diana see what this decision might cost. "I'll go to New Orleans—on one condition." Diana's relief was evident. "Anything. Name it." "You don't come with me. Eleanor thought she was safe. Then I killed her in a moment of madness and jealousy. Jack's not the only vampire in this family whose blood rage is set off by love and loyalty. **You have become as vital to me as breath and blood. My heart no longer knows where I end and you begin.** I knew that you were a powerful witch from the moment I saw you, but how could I have imagined that you would have so much power over me?" "What will I do while you're in New Orleans?" Diana asked. "There must be some way I can help you." "Find that missing page from Ashmole 782. Phoebe will help you look for the third illumination. Go to Sept-Tours. Wait there for me. There's no telling how long this will take, Diana. You will tell the twins I had to stay

away because I loved them—and their mother—with all my heart.” Matthew’s voice broke. But **it was Matthew’s heart that was breaking**, taking with it his composure, his sanity, and his last traces of humanity. “Are you going to make it without her?” Marcus asked his father. He had been away from Phoebe for less than twelve hours and already he was uneasy at their separation. “I have to,” Matthew said, though at the moment he couldn’t imagine how. His instincts demanded he go to her. And it would only get worse from there. He was listening for Diana’s voice, her distinctive step, the rhythm of her heartbeat. There was only silence, and stars too faint to show him the way home.

“Vampires are creatures ruled by their desire, with instincts for self-preservation that are much stronger than any warmblood’s. Whenever I see Matthew **struggle to give you the freedom you need—to let you do something without him** that you think is minor but that is an agony of worrying and waiting for him—it reminds me of Philippe.” Gerbert released Ysabeau from captivity at his home. Gerbert sighed, “But do try to remember we are at war, Ysabeau. To keep up appearances.”

At our townhouse in London. “I never believed that being separated from him would be so hard.” My voice was muted. “Being the consort in a vampire family is never easy,” Ysabeau said with a sad smile. “**And sometimes being apart is the only way to stay together.**” “You are a sire’s consort, Diana. You must learn to tell others only what they need to know, and nothing more,” she instructed. After a whispered word of thanks to Ysabeau, I rested my head on the soft pillows and drifted off into troubled sleep. Upon waking I found my suitcase resting on a folding stand. From it I pulled out the two pages from Ashmole 782 and my laptop. Most scholars agreed that the image of the tree referred to the **hidden magnetic influences that Kircher believed gave unity to the world: “All things are at rest, connected by secret knots.”** Athanasius Kircher and the Villa Mondragone sale were crucial links in the series of events that led from Edward Kelley in Prague to the final missing page. Somehow, Father Athanasius must have learned about the world of creatures. Either that or he was one himself. Having an art historian, Phoebe, now in the family was going to be an unexpected boon. Finally I had someone to talk to about arcane imagery. “These are two illuminations removed from the Book of Life in the sixteenth century—the manuscript known today as Ashmole 782. One has yet to be found: an image of a tree. It looks a little like this.” I showed them the frontispiece from Kircher’s book on magnetism. “We have to find it before anyone else does, and that includes Knox, Benjamin, and the Congregation.” “Why do they all want the Book of Life so badly?” Phoebe’s shrewd eyes were guileless. “I’ve held it in my hands twice: once in its damaged state at the Bodleian in Oxford and once in Emperor Rudolf’s cabinet of curiosities when it was whole and complete. All I can say with certainty is that the Book of Life is full of power—power and secrets.”

“My job is to find the missing pages from the Book of Life and then put it back together so that we can use it as leverage—with Baldwin, Benjamin, even the Congregation. My

life doesn't make sense without Matthew," I said. "He can't be your whole world, Diana."

"T. J. Weston, Esquire. This is who bought the page from Ashmole 782?" "Come and meet your sisters. Here is our Diana Bishop, come back to us once more," Linda said. "She has brought her aunt with her, Sarah Bishop, and her mother-in-law, who I trust needs no introduction." "None at all. We've all heard cautionary tales about Mélisande de Clermont." Linda had handpicked the witches who would help us. "Give the picture of the chemical wedding to Sarah and the one with the two dragons to Ysabeau," I said. "The chemical-wedding picture came to me from my parents. The dragons belonged to Andrew Hubbard." Each witch took her place outside the ring of county maps. Letter by letter, I wrote the name of the person I sought. The power roared through it, keening and crying out for release. Corra wanted out, too. She was restless, shifting and stretching inside me. "Patience, Corra," I said. I recited my spell:

Missing pages
Lost and found,
Where is Weston
On this ground?

The compendium's gears whirled, and the hands on the main dial moved. A roaring filled my ears as a bright thread of gold shot out from the compendium. Corra swept down and pounced on the spot, crying out with triumph as though she had caught some unsuspecting prey. A town's name illuminated, a bright burst of flame leaving the charred outlines of letters. The London witches raced to the map that revealed Weston's location. There, on the map, was the blackened outline of a very English-sounding village called Chipping Weston.

A stranger engulfed me in a hug. This was one of the daemons I'd seen in the Bodleian last year when I'd first encountered Ashmole 782. He liked lattes and taking apart microfilm readers. "Timothy?" "The same." "Why do manuscripts interest you?" "They're like the house—they remind me of something I shouldn't forget," Timothy said. A tail wagged from between a leather-bound folio and a box of pens. Puddles stood with **the missing page from Ashmole 782** gripped in her teeth, looking very pleased with herself. Phoebe placed the page in my waiting hands. As soon as the parchment touched them, they brightened, shooting little sparks of color into the room. Filaments of power erupted from my fingertips, connecting to the parchment with an almost audible snap of electricity. "It needs to go back into that book you discovered in the Bodleian. You're the one. The one who will learn how it all began—the blood, the death, the fear. And the one who can put a stop to it, once and for all." Timothy sighed. "You can't buy my grandfather, and you can't borrow him. But if I give him to you, for safekeeping, you'll make his death mean something?"

Not even the sight of the three pages, had improved my mood. I'd been anticipating and dreading this moment since we left Madison, but now that it was here, it felt strangely anticlimactic. A soft keening had come from the pages, followed by a chattering that everybody heard—even Phoebe. "You can't just march into the

Bodleian with these three pages and stuff them back into an enchanted book,” Sarah said. “It’s crazy. There are bound to be witches in the room. They’ll come running. And who knows how the Book of Life will respond?”

The goddess’s eyes were silver and black in the moonlight. **“You will have to give something up if you want to possess the Book of Life—something precious to you.”** The goddess put the arrow shaft into her bow, aimed and shot me in the chest. Of all the exigencies we had planned for this morning—the Bodleian Library’s decision to move rare books and manuscripts from Duke Humfrey’s to the Radcliffe Science Library. No matter how many rare books and precious manuscripts they’d relocated, I was absolutely sure Ashmole 782 was still here. Suddenly Benjamin’s arm was draped over Phoebe’s shoulders, and there were spots of red on the collar of her white blouse. For the first time since I’d met her, Phoebe looked terrified. I had wished that Benjamin didn’t know I was pregnant with twins. His final words—and the prospect of the future they painted—taunted me as we drew closer to the airport. “I hope your children are both girls.”

“As you’re aware, I’m here to bring you to heel. Your brothers and sister have all agreed to support me and the new scion.” Matthew sat back in his chair. “You’re the last holdout, Ransome.” If any other vampire found out about their condition, they could face immediate death. Marcus’s children needed Matthew as much as he needed them. Without him, they would not survive. “Care to play a game of chance with me, Matthew? My sworn allegiance if you win,” Ransome replied, his smile foxy. Ransome drew the ledger closer. “If you can name every sister, brother, niece, nephew, and child of mine you killed in New Orleans all those years ago—as well as any other vampires you killed in the city along the way—I will throw myself in with the rest. How can you possibly remember all of them?” “How could I ever forget?” The endless list of names had stirred up too many memories, none of them pleasant. Guilt had followed in their wake. Fernando looked at Jack thoughtfully. “Jack, you remind me of Matthew, back when he was a young vampire. Same compassion. Same courage, too. And you share Matthew’s hope that if you shoulder the burdens of others, they will love you in spite of the sickness in your veins. **If you truly love someone, you will cherish what they despise most about themselves.**” Matthew and Jack worked on the cradles for almost a week. Every cut of wood, every swipe of the plane helped to reduce Matthew’s blood rage. Jack was a good pupil, and his skills as an artist proved handy when it came to carving decorative designs into the cradles.

While Matthew was in the sixteenth century, Marcus had admitted women into the brotherhood. He began with Miriam, and she helped him name the rest. Matthew wasn’t sure if this was madness or genius at work, but if it helped him locate Benjamin, he was prepared to remain agnostic. Now that Matthew was back, he expected to play a significant role in determining how the twins would be brought into the world. And we had with us six godparents per child. “There’s been another message from Benjamin. The witch that Benjamin captured is dead. Her child died with her.” I felt not only for

the young witch but for myself, and my own failure. If I hadn't hesitated, Benjamin's witch might still be alive. I felt a pop, a trickle of liquid. Matthew looked down to my rounded belly in shock. The babies were on their way.

Thus far this had been the most physically intrusive four hours of my life. I'd had more things jabbed into me and more stuff taken out of me than I thought possible. "Is it okay?" I asked, looking down. "She is perfect," Marthe said, beaming at me proudly. Twenty minutes later, at 12:15 A.M., our son was born. He was larger than his sister, in both length and weight. Unlike our firstborn, our son had reddish blond hair. "I don't know how you women survive it," Matthew said, pressing his lips against my forehead. "I want to name him Philip, after your father," I said softly. At my words our son cracked one eye open. "Is that okay with you?" "Only if we name our daughter Rebecca," Matthew said, his hand cupping her dark head. "We've spent all this time searching for ancient secrets and long-lost books of magic, but they're the true chemical wedding. A little bit of you, a little bit of me. Part vampire, part witch." "Leave it to you two to have twins that aren't even born on the same day," Sarah said. "They're different signs of the zodiac, too. Rebecca is a Scorpio, and Philip is a Sagittarius. The serpent and the archer," Sarah replied.

"Your witch is fertile. Why is that, Matthew?" Matthew remained silent. "I'll find out what makes that witch so special." Benjamin leaned forward and smiled. "You know I will." "You will never touch her." Matthew's voice—and his control—broke. Sept-Tours was so busy with the preparations for the twins' christening. "Everybody's been wondering for months what the children would be. Well, here's one mystery solved: Rebecca needs blood to thrive. Philip seems satisfied with my milk," I said. "Maybe, in time, Rebecca will take to a more varied diet. But for now she needs blood, and she's going to get it. She came to us this way. And she's not a vampire. She's a vampitch. Or a wimpire." It was the blood rage, more than whether they were vampire or witch, that was worrying Matthew. "If Rebecca or Philip has blood rage, then we will deal with it—together, as a family." One year and one day since Philippe had marked Diana with his blood vow. On Isola della Stella, a small island in the Venetian lagoon, a sworn testament of her status as a de Clermont sat on the desk of a Congregation functionary waiting to be entered into the family pedigree. "Dinner is waiting for you at Les Revenants. "Philippe built the castle to house Crusaders coming home from the Holy Land," Matthew explained. "It belongs to Maman." Though we rattled around Les Revenants, it gave us a chance to finally be a family. "Rebecca Arielle Emily Marthe," Sarah said, her voice ringing through the clearing, "we welcome you into the world and into our hearts. Philip Michael Addison Sorley," Sarah said, "we also welcome you into the world and into our hearts." "Congratulations, sister." Baldwin's deep voice filled the space. "I've come to welcome your children into the de Clermont family." "Our children are not de Clermonts," Matthew said coldly. He reached into his jacket and thrust a folded document at Baldwin. "They belong to me."

"It would please me if you would reconsider my respectful request to establish a de Clermont scion. Let me go, Baldwin. After all these years, I want to be something more

than the de Clermont family's black sheep. Release me and mine, Baldwin," Matthew said. "You don't want us anyway." Fighting the Congregation and protecting vampire-witch children was one thing. A disease that might transform you into a bloodthirsty monster was quite another. "If I gave you my word, as Philippe's blood-sworn daughter, that any of Matthew's kin with blood rage can be brought under control, would you recognize him as the head of his family? If any member of Matthew's family acts on their blood rage, I will spellbind them," I said. "Agreed? Very well," I said promptly. "Our probation starts now."

Matthew looked down at the preserved stillborn fetus. A girl. "He's even more insane than I thought." Baldwin looked pale, and not just because of what had happened in the church. Matthew read the note again. "Congratulations on your children's birth," it said. "I wanted you to have my daughter, since I will soon possess yours." The note was signed simply "Your son."

"Diana must go to Oxford. Only she can find the Book of Life," Matthew said. "If something goes wrong and I can't find Benjamin, I'll need that manuscript to lure him into the open." The truth was far worse than I had allowed myself to imagine. Based on the letter Benjamin's killing spree had lasted centuries. He'd preyed on witches, and very probably weavers in particular. Gerbert was almost certainly involved. And that one phrase—"They search within us for the Book of Life"—turned my blood to fire and ice. I watched in silence as the parts of Matthew I knew and loved—the poet and the scientist, the warrior and the spy, the Renaissance prince and the father—**fell away until only the darkest, most forbidding part of him remained**. He was only the assassin now. **But he was still the man I loved**.

"There are no students or library staff on-site at the moment because of the Christmas holiday," Andrew said. "But there are builders everywhere." I doled out the pages from the Book of Life, and Sarah, Linda, and I each stood at one of the points of the triangle.

Missing pages lost then found,

Show me where the book is bound.

Gallowglass emerged from the shadows. "Benjamin has Matthew." Anger burned through my veins, followed by a crashing wave of power. I felt I had lost something vital. "The goddess told me **I would have to give something up if I wanted Ashmole 782**. But it wasn't Matthew. Corra, fly!" I spread my arms wide, and my firedrake screeched into the room. "What was it, then?" Linda asked. "Fear." I'd let the **fear** take root inside me until it clouded my thoughts and **affected how I saw the world**. Fear had also choked out any desire to work magic. It had been my crutch and my cloak, keeping me from exercising my power. Fear had sheltered me from the curiosity of others and **provided an oubliette where I could forget who I really was**. I grabbed the pages from the Book of Life and held them up to Corra's nose. She sniffed. "These pages come from a book. It's somewhere in this library. I need to find it. My only hope of getting Matthew back may be inside it." "**Like your fear, I cannot go unless you set me free**," Corra said. "I am your familiar. You have no more need of me. You

brought the magic back, as it was foretold.” “Bring me the book, then go with my blessing.” I looked deep into her eyes and saw her yearning to be her own creature. “Thank you, Corra. I may have brought the magic back, but you gave it wings.” **“It’s hiding in plain sight,”** I said. “Auntie? I think Corra found your book.” Gallowglass pointed. Gently, aware of the many creatures within it, I lifted Ashmole 782 out of its protective carton. I rested my hand flat on the cover. “I choose you,” I whispered to the book, releasing the clasps on Ashmole 782. Linda thrust the pages that belonged in the Book of Life in my direction. I fitted the illustration of the chemical wedding into the gap, pressing the edge to its stub. Page and stub knit themselves together before my eyes, their severed threads joining up once more. I took up the illumination of the orobouros and the firedrake shedding their blood to create new life and put it in its place. Without hesitation and without fear, I slid the final page into Ashmole 782. The Book of Life was once more whole and complete. It was a vast repository of knowledge: creature names and their stories, births and deaths, curses and spells, miracles wrought by magic and blood. It was the story of us—weavers and the vampires who carried blood rage in their veins and the extraordinary children who were born to them. It told me how such a miraculous creation was possible. I pressed my hands against my ears, wanting to block out the drumbeat litany of **names and more names. Lost . . . Forgotten . . . Feared . . . Outcast . . . Forbidden . . .**

The Book of Life clapped shut, the clasps engaging. I felt power surge within me, rising to unprecedented levels. “Wait,” I said, scrambling to open the book again so that I could study the new image more closely. It was empty. Blank. Panic swept through me. “Where did it all go?” I turned the pages. “I need the book to get Matthew back!” I looked up at Sarah. “What did I do wrong?” “Oh, Christ.” Gallowglass was white as snow. “Her eyes.” **“The book hasn’t gone far.” Sarah swallowed hard. “It’s inside you.” I was the Book of Life.**

A long, red-hot iron spike was driven through Matthew’s right forearm and into the wooden chair beneath him. As it cooled, the stench of burning flesh and bone lessened somewhat. He did not have to see the other arm to know that it had undergone a similar treatment. “Smile. We don’t want the family back home to miss a minute of our reunion.” Benjamin grabbed him by the hair and wrenched his head up. Matthew heard the whirring of a camera. Matthew had entered Benjamin’s compound knowing he would be taken. It was the only way to force Benjamin to make his next move and bring his twisted game to a close. “Why?” said Benjamin. You made me a vampire and flung me out into the streets of a city crowded with warmbloods. **Matthew had prayed that Benjamin would be cursed with blood rage.** “You cared more for Philippe’s good opinion than you cared for your own child.” It had been Benjamin—his son—who had tortured Philippe during the war and not some Nazi functionary. Benjamin struck Matthew across the face, breaking his cheekbone. “But that’s enough family talk for now. Prepare yourself, Matthew. This is going to hurt.”

“You will find Diana . . . **altered,**” Gallowglass said. **I was a far cry from what I had been before.** No disguising spell could hide the way my eyes went milky white and

displayed letters and symbols at even the hint of a query, more letters appearing on my forearms and the backs of my hands. When **my body had absorbed the Book of Life**, a tree had appeared on it as well. Its trunk covered the back of my neck, perfectly aligned with the column of my spine. Its roots spread across my shoulders. Vampires can only feel the effects of drugs if . . . Benjamin has been feeding him—or force-feeding him—with spiked blood. “What is he on?” “A cocktail of ketamine, opiates, cocaine, and psilocybin.” And the same creature who had done that to Philippe now had my husband. “Matthew didn’t walk into a trap. He sprang it deliberately. And if the witches there have been Benjamin’s victims, a group of vampires **will need the Chelm coven’s blessing if we want to succeed, as well as the Congregation’s support**,” Baldwin added. “That means persuading Satu Järvinen to side with us,” Sarah pointed out, “not to mention Gerbert and Domenico.” Baldwin handed me a sheet of paper that was waiting on the table. A de Clermont ouroboros was pressed into a disk of black wax at the bottom, next to Baldwin’s decisive signature. He handed it to me. “You can present this to the librarian when you arrive.” It was his formal recognition of the Bishop-Clairmont scion. Baldwin replied. “I’ll find him, Diana. And I’ll bring him home.” “Thank you.” I hesitated, then said the word that was not only on my tongue but in my heart. “Brother.”

Diana presided over a meeting of the Congregation. In attendance was Satu, Agatha Wilson, Domenico, Gerbert, two other daemons and two other witches. Having handed off the papers that formally established the Bishop-Clairmont scion, I circumnavigated the table. My jacket had long sleeves to hide the Book of Life’s text, but my eyes were fully on view. And I’d deliberately pulled my hair back into a long red braid that revealed the tips of the branches that covered my scalp. “I call this meeting to order. I am Diana Bishop, Philippe de Clermont’s blood-sworn daughter, and I represent the de Clermonts. **The de Clermonts formally request the assistance of the Congregation in tracking down a member of the Bishop-Clairmont scion, Benjamin Fox or Fuchs.** Mr. Fox contracted blood rage from his father, my husband, Matthew Clairmont, and has been kidnapping and raping witches for centuries in an attempt to impregnate them, mostly in the area surrounding the Polish city of Chelm. My husband, in an attempt to draw Benjamin into the open, went into Poland where he disappeared. We believe Benjamin has captured him and is holding him in a facility that served as a Nazi labor camp or research laboratory during the Second World War. The Knights of Lazarus have pledged to get my husband back, but the de Clermonts will need witches and daemons to come to our aid as well. Benjamin must be stopped.”

“No scion can be established under a diseased sire,” Domenico said. “It’s unthinkable. Matthew Clairmont must be put to death, and all his children with him.” The vampire’s eyes gleamed. I placed the Book of Life on the table while the Congregation gathered around me. “The book is blank. What have you done to our book of origins?” “Here is your sacred text.” I pushed up my sleeves. Letters and symbols swirled and ran just under my skin, coming to the surface like bubbles on a pond, only to dissolve. “And it chose you. Why did the book choose Diana Bishop?” “Because I’m a weaver—a maker

of spells—and there are precious few of us left. We had too much creative power, and our fellow witches killed us.” “And there it is,” I said. **“The disgust. The fear. The dislike of anybody who doesn’t conform to your simpleminded expectations of the world and how it should work.”**

“Being spellbound, Satu, is nothing compared to what Benjamin will do to you if he discovers that you are a weaver. You’ll have no way to defend yourself and will be entirely at his mercy. I’ve seen what Benjamin does to the witches he tries to impregnate. Not even you deserve that. Vote for the de Clermont motion this afternoon.” I released Satu’s arms, but not the binding spell that limited her power. “For your own sake, if not for Matthew.” We won the vote: six to three. Once the vote was tallied and recorded, we headed across the lagoon to the airport. As planned, I sent a three-letter text to Hamish with the results of the vote: QGA. It stood for Queen’s Gambit Accepted, a code to indicate that the Congregation had been persuaded to support Matthew’s rescue.

“Tonight the Knights of Lazarus will use the tunnels to enter Benjamin’s compound from below. Twenty, maybe thirty, should be enough.” They connect his compound and the town and provide a way for him and his children to prey on the city without ever appearing aboveground.” Together Janet and I freed the compound from its invisible barbed-wire perimeter. Baldwin and Fernando were waiting for us at the intersection of three tunnels. Two blood-spattered mounds covered with tarps and a powdery white substance that gave off a faint glow marked where Benjamin’s children had met their death. Marcus was already inside the perimeter, propped in the crook of a tree, a rifle aimed at a window. Ysabeau went in search of Matthew. Baldwin, Janet, and I were after Benjamin and Knox. I’d made a web that engulfed Peter Knox. My father’s hands were among those that reached out of the dark void to grasp him while he struggled, keeping him in a whirling vortex of power that would eat him alive, reducing Knox to a lifeless shell. I drew the goddess’s arrow from my spine. A bow crafted from rowan and trimmed with silver and gold appeared in my left hand. My feet raced up the stairs. Benjamin was standing behind a chair. This time the creature in it was undeniably the man I loved. His eyes were black and filled with blood rage and pain, but they flickered in recognition. The arrow sprang from my hand through the center of the spell, picking up momentum as it flew. It hit Benjamin’s chest with audible force, cleaving him wide open and bursting his heart. He dropped heavily to the floor. It was over. Benjamin was dead and could no longer torment anyone. And Matthew, though broken, was alive. “You can’t hide from me, my love,” I said instead. **“I see you, Matthew. And you will always be perfect in my eyes.”** It was the wounds to his heart, mind, and soul that had me worried, for no amount of vampire blood could heal those. “Love and time,” I murmured, “That’s what he needs.”

Ysabeau’s blood, as promised, was slowly mending the crushed bones, damaged tissues, and injuries to Matthew’s internal organs. Matthew had returned home more ghost than man after what Benjamin had done to him. **“Take care of yourself—first**

and always," Baldwin said. "Seeing you healthy and happy will do Matthew more good, than his maker's blood or Jack's music. One of us must make the case to the Congregation. So that our children can grow up in love instead of fear." The covenant had been drawn up because of a fear of miscegenation and the desire to keep bloodlines artificially pure to preserve the power balance among creatures. Centuries of inbreeding meant that vampires found it difficult to make new vampires, witches were less powerful, and daemons were increasingly prone to madness. Both Philippe and Ysabeau believed that careful upbringing and hard-won control would be a counterweight to whatever illness was present in his blood—a classic example of nurture over nature. "As long as we approached daemons, vampires, and witches as separate species distantly related to humans but distinct from one another, the truth was going to elude us. As Diana told us **the Book of Life was about what joined us together, not what separated us,**" Chris continued. "It was all there in the creature chromosome," Miriam said, "**hiding in plain sight.**" "Diana was able to conceive Matthew's child because they both have daemon blood in them," Chris explained. "It's too early to know for sure, but our hypothesis is that weavers are descended from ancient witch-daemon unions. There just has to be enough daemon DNA in the mix to trigger the weaver and blood-rage genes." "The science makes the covenant completely irrelevant," Matthew said. "**We're not separate species.** Racial identity has no biological basis—at least none accepted by most scientists." "But that means—You aren't monsters after all. **There are no such thing as daemons, vampires, and witches. Not biologically. You're just humans with a difference.**" Chris grinned. The days of the covenant were done. And if the Congregation wanted to continue to function, it was going to have to find something better to do with its time than police the boundaries between daemon, vampire, witch, and human. "The covenant has been repealed." Baldwin's golden-brown eyes gleamed. "As of today, overseeing the Congregation is your job Diana." "*You no longer need my help.*" Philippe's gaze met mine. "Tell Emily I love her." "*She knows that. So does you mother.*" Philippe winked.

My husband's condition was steadily improving after his ordeal with Benjamin but his mood was still volatile and his anger quick to catch. And I'd had a few tricky moments when it seemed it might be impossible for me to return to the work I loved, but each additional day made that goal more achievable. Chris, Matthew, Miriam, and Marcus had been presenting research findings that expanded the limits of what was considered "human." They showed how the evolution of Homo sapiens included DNA from other creatures, like Neanderthals. They'd received a huge grant to study noncoding DNA. It would lay the groundwork for the revelations they would one day make about other hominid creatures who were not extinct like the Neanderthals but were **hiding in plain sight among humans**. Matthew's former bedroom had been converted to a nursery and was now the twins' special kingdom—complete with a zoo full of stuffed animals, enough equipment to outfit a baby army, and two tyrants to rule over it. I was busier than I'd ever been. Happier, too. In place of the Reynolds was another canvas: a portrait of Matthew and me. It was clearly Jack's work, with his trademark combination of seventeenth-century attention to detail and modern

sensitivity to color and line. This was confirmed by the small card propped on the mantelpiece with “Happy birthday, Dad” scrawled on it. My eyes met the viewer’s, touched by an otherworldliness that suggested I was not an ordinary human. Our family had begun with the surprising love that developed between Matthew and me. It grew because **our bond was strong enough to withstand the hatred and fear of others**. And it would endure because we had discovered, like the witches so many centuries ago, that **a willingness to change was the secret of survival**. The ouroboros symbolized our partnership. Matthew and I were an alchemical marriage of vampire and witch, death and life, sun and moon. That combination of opposites created something finer and more precious than either of us could ever have been separately. We were the tenth knot. Unbreakable. Without beginning or end.