To the fans. May your lives be full of AWESOMESAUCE!

–S.C.
“Dan! Dan! Can you hear me?”

Dan gripped the cell phone, squeezing it so hard that the plastic creaked. “Amy! I’m here!”

He shook it. He could hardly see her: the screen was a blizzard of static, his sister’s face a frightened mask.

Her voice crackled through the speakers. “I—I don’t have much time, Dan. You have to listen. . . .”

“Where are you? Tell me!”

Amy sighed. Her shoulders slumped and she seemed to crumble from inside. He’d never seen her so small, so beaten.

How could she be? She was his sister. They’d been through everything together and had always come out on top.

Always.

“Amy, tell me.”

Her face was stained with bruises.

Dan gritted his teeth. Whoever had done this to Amy would pay a thousand times over.

She put her fingertips against the camera of her own phone, as if she was trying to reach through
the screen to touch him. A weary, weary smile spread over her lips. “I can see you, Dan.”

“Where are you? I’m coming to get you. Just wait. It’ll be okay. I promise.”

“Dan . . .” Amy shook her head.

“I promise!” Dan yelled.

The image disappeared into a cloud of static and the speakers rose to a deafening, mind-tearing buzz, as if a million hornets had been freed.

“Amy!”

She was shouting; he caught the edges of her words, but she sounded so far away, as if her cries were coming out from some fathomless depth. The screen jolted back into focus.

“Dan? Are you there?”

“I’m here! Right here!”
Amy bit her lip, like he’d seen her do a million times before and hadn’t thought anything of it; but it was such an Amy thing that now, at this very moment, he realized he was crying.

Her gaze hardened. “I know why Nathaniel wants the clues. I know what he’s planning.”

“I don’t care about the clues, Amy. Just get somewhere safe!”

“They’re all that matter.” She smiled. “Only you can stop him. It was always down to you.”

“No, that’s not true. It’s both of us, Amy. I can’t do it without you.”

The image shook. Amy glanced to the side, off screen, and gasped. “He’s coming.”

“Run, Amy! Run and hide! I’m coming!”

She stopped, her lips not quite forming her words. Amy’s gaze lifted. There was a flicker of fear in the way her eyes widened and the small gasp that caught in her throat. “No . . .”

A crack like a gunshot burst through the speakers. Dan froze. “Amy?” he whispered.

The cell, fallen from Amy’s hands, faced up at a ceiling.

Someone lifted it. As it moved, Dan caught a half-second glimpse of Amy lying on the floor.

Alek Spasky appeared. His eyes narrowed with curiosity as he peered into the phone’s camera. “Nathaniel? Are you there?”

“What have you done to my sister?” Dan could barely form the words.
“Nathaniel?”
“What have you done to Amy?” Dan yelled.
*It can’t be. She can’t be...*
He couldn’t finish the thought. He couldn’t allow it.

“I’m here, Alek,” said Nathaniel, taking the phone from Dan’s numb fingers.

“It’s done,” replied Alek, quite casually. “The Cahill girl is dead.”
Ian closed his eyes and allowed the scent of the tea to rise up gently, temptingly, through his nostrils. He sighed happily.

Now this is how tea should be brewed.

Ian leaned back into his chair, enclosing the cup with both hands, letting the tea’s aroma envelop him.

The tea tasted so much better now. Why?

Because he was no longer leader of the Cahills. He’d unburdened himself of all the dreary responsibilities of the family, and he felt . . . reborn.

He’d been up early, before the others, and strolled, breathing in deep the London air. It was sharp and heavy and delicious. He’d watched the trees in Hyde Park, full of early-summer blooms, and been dazzled by the vast palette of colors.

Now, breakfast. Not the hurried toast snatched and bitter coffee gulped down as mere fuel for the
body, but freshly made croissants and this . . . divine cup of tea, all to be savored, enjoyed.

He was glad he’d been leader, despite the disasters. Glad because it made him appreciate all the little things. Appreciate them properly.

He opened his eyes slowly and met Cara’s amused gaze.

“Honestly, Kabra, it’s just boiled water and some leaves.” She poured half a jug of milk into hers and added a heaped spoonful of sugar.

The absolute best thing about surrendering leadership?

That kiss she’d given him right after. He hoped there’d be another soon.

And the worst thing?

Dan and Amy being in charge. Again.

And arguing. Again.

Maybe that was why Nellie and Sammy were taking so long getting the croissants. They’d left ages ago.

Dan was sitting at the kitchen table, fists clenched and glaring at his sister on the opposite side. “We should go after Nathaniel. No more messing around.”

Amy groaned. Ian could see her exasperation. He knew that look all too well. He’d seen it in every mirror every day he’d lived at the Cahill mansion. “Let me explain once more for the hard of thinking,” started Amy. “We have to assume Nathaniel has found the ingredients for the serum. All he needs is
the formula. Which is in that thick head of yours, Dan! So you sit this one out!”

Dan rose from his chair and leaned halfway across the table. “I am a part of this team and I want to help take down the Outcast!”

Amy sprang up. “Over my dead body!”

Ian looked around as the others gathered. They were all together again, at his apartment just off Hatton Garden. All of them safe, for now.

Rain splashed against the window, the drops sparkling on the glass, as if the sky were crying diamonds. Despite the gloomy grayness of the skies, London still looked beautiful. The streets were shiny with puddles, and the leaves on the trees that lined the streets were as glossy as emeralds.

Diamonds and emeralds were what Hatton Garden was famous for. It was a street of jewelers, hidden behind the old lawyer domain of the Temple. He’d passed a couple this morning, huddled under an umbrella, admiring the rings in the window. He saw how they had their arms wrapped around each other under the protection of the umbrella, keeping the outside world at bay with their own closeness. The idea of being that close to someone, trusting them so much, was new to him. New, and a little bit frightening.

He looked over to the opposite sofa.

Cara sat with one leg tucked under the other, chin resting on her knee. She leaned her head slightly, as if she could listen better, see the world better, at an angle.
She looked at him, and there was a clever, maybe too clever, smile on her lips, as if she was on the verge of laughing.

Ian stiffened. *Laughing at me, as usual.*

Was he that comical?

His tie wasn’t straight. That would not do.

Ham was on to his third (or was it his fourth?) burger. Jonah’s fingers twitched nervously on the remote and his eyes kept switching to the blank screen up on the wall. That was the world he lived in, and he couldn’t keep away from it forever. Being out of the media spotlight for a week was like being away from your job for a decade in real years. Ian met Jonah’s eyes; Jonah shrugged and put the remote back on the table.

There was a loud, window-shaking burp from the sofa.

Ham blushed, then grinned. “Better out than in, right?”

“Wrong,” muttered Ian. He lowered his teacup. The joy had gone. He glanced over at Ham’s own breakfast.

Who but Ham would start the day with burgers?

“What I don’t get is why he wants the clues at all,” said Ham. He rolled up the rest of his burger and pushed it into his ever-so-wide jaw. “Muumph mumm ummph.”

Ian watched the bits of bun and diced onions tumble down Ham’s T-shirt and onto his
Turkmenian carpet. Early nineteenth century. If he remembered correctly, this one had come out of a little dacha near Kiev, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He sighed a little, he died a little. It wasn’t just a carpet, it was history. He glared at Ham. “Do you mind?”

Ham pointed at his mouth. “Whhump uhmm?”

“No, I don’t want some. You do know that’s processed meat? Forty-three percent of it is actually—oh, never mind.” Ian whipped out his handkerchief, marched over, and tucked it into Ham’s collar, just in time to catch a drip of ketchup.

Ham reached for another burger.

Ian grabbed the tray. “First explain what you meant.”

Ham’s gaze fell longingly at the pile of juicy food. “Nathaniel’s, like, really old. Wrinkly-crinkly old. How long has he got? Five years? Ten with a healthy diet and exercise? The serum makes you crazy-smart and strong but doesn’t extend your lifespan.”

“No, it doesn’t, it actually makes it shorter,” said Amy. “Maybe he wants to give it to someone else? Someone younger who’ll continue his legacy?”

Dan shook his head. “He doesn’t come across as the kind of guy who shares his toys.”

“Whatever he wants it for, we know it’s not for anything good,” said Ian. “Which brings us neatly around to the problem at hand.” He looked across
at the younger Cahill. “And that is, what to do with you, Dan?”

“Forget it,” said Dan, looking over at his sister. “The plan stinks and I’m not going along with it.”

“Dan, be reasonable. . . .” said Amy.

“No,” snapped Dan.

“If Nathaniel gets his hands on you, Dan, then he has all the clues. He’s won,” continued Ian. “Have I lost anyone yet, or are we all clear?”

Double thumbs-up from Ham.

“Amy’s plan is simple,” said Ian. “Keep you safe, and force Nathaniel to waste time and resources looking for you. You’re bait, but you’re safe. And while he’s busy doing that, we can be working to stop him, once and for all.”

Cara nodded. “And the system’s up and ready. We know Nathaniel’s using the Cahill satellite and facial recognition software. What we need to do is have it working for us. A hack would be noticed, so we need to be subtle.”

Cara walked up to Dan and put her arms around him. “We need to have Dan’s pretty face showing up throughout the world.” She ruffled his hair.

Dan frowned but didn’t stop her. “How?”

Cara pinched his cheek. “I’ve downgraded the facial recognition software’s accuracy. Not too much because that would be obvious—just to eighty-five percent.”
“Huh?” said Ham.
Ian took over. “Face recognition is all about finding unique facial features of the target. Bone structure, eye color, skin pigmentation. The shape of his or her ears. Nathaniel is looking for Dan, but there must be thousands of young men who sort of look like him. Cara’s reset the accuracy, so, on a typical day, there’ll be a dozen or so triggers. The software will fit young men in Paris. In Moscow. In Nicaragua and Ulan Bator. Nathaniel will have to spread his forces out to try to verify which, if any, is the real Dan.”
Dan scowled at his sister. “So that’s what you meant about using me as bait?”
Amy drew out a folder and put it gently on the dining room table. “We can’t let Nathaniel get his hands on you, Dan. You have no idea what he’s capable of.”
Ian looked at the folder, its cover wrinkled with age.
They’d found Grace’s secret blackmail files. The dirt she’d collected on her own family, all so she could maintain control of the Cahill organization. What was worse was that if she couldn’t find any dirt, she’d invent it. But some of it was all too true.
“I think it’s about time we realized what sort of monster our grandfather is,” said Amy, pushing the file toward Dan. “And why Grace ordered his death.”