

SILVER  
IN  
THE  
BONE

BOOK 1

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*For my sister, Stephanie*





BEDIVERE'S COTTAGE

ARTHUR'S TOMB

FAIRY MOUND DWELLINGS

KEEPER OF THE ORCHARDS' COTTAGE

THE BARROW

THE ELDER WOOD

THE MIST WOOD

THE DAUGHTER RIVER

# SEVEN YEARS AGO

## *Lancashire, England*

The first thing you learned on the job as a Hollower was to never trust your eyes.

Nash, of course, had a different way of saying it: *All sorcery is half illusion*. The other half, unfortunately, was blood-soaked terror.

In that moment, though, I wasn't scared. I was as angry as a spitting cat.

They'd left me behind. Again.

I braced my hands on either side of the garden shed's doorframe, drawing as close as I could to the enchanted passageway without entering. Hollowers called these dark tunnels Veins because they carried you from one location to another in an instant. In this case, to the vault of a long-dead sorceress, containing her most prized possessions.

I checked the time on the cracked screen of Nash's ancient cell phone. It had been forty-eight minutes since I watched them disappear into the Vein. I hadn't been able to run fast enough to catch up, and if they'd heard my shouts, they'd ignored me.

The phone screen blinked to black as the battery finally croaked.

"Hello?" I called, fiddling with the key they'd left in the lock—one of the sorceress's finger bones, dipped into a bit of her blood. "I'm not going back to camp, so you may as well just tell me when it's safe to come in! Do you hear me?"

Only the passage answered, breathing out whorls of snow. Great. The Sorceress Edda had chosen to put her collection of relics somewhere even colder than England in the winter.

The fact that Cabell and Nash weren't answering had my insides squirming. But Nash had never been deterred by the promise of danger, and he was about to discover I wouldn't be deterred by anyone, least of all my rotten bastard of a guardian.

"Cabell?" I said, louder this time. The cold gripped my words, leaving white streaks in the air. A shiver rippled through me. "Is everything all right? I'm coming in whether you want me to or not!"

Of course Nash had taken Cabell with him. Cabell was *useful* to him. But if I wasn't there, there was no one to make sure my brother didn't end up hurt, or worse.

The sun was shy, hiding behind silver clouds. Behind me, an abandoned stone cottage kept watch over the nearby fields. The air was quiet, which always stirred up my nerves. I held my breath, straining my ears to listen. No humming traffic, no drone of passing airplanes, not even a chirp from a bird. It was like everyone else knew better than to come to this cursed place, and Nash was the only idiot too stupid and greedy to risk it.

But a moment later, a fresh wave of snow carried Cabell's voice to me.

"Tamsin?" He sounded excited, at least. "Watch your head as you come in!"

I plunged into the Vein's disorienting darkness. Outside was nothing compared to the barbed cold that wrapped around me now, knifing at my skin until I couldn't draw breath.

In two steps, the round doorway at the other end of the Vein carved itself out of the black air. In three, it became a vivid wall of ghostly light. Blue, almost like—

I glanced down at the broken chunks of ice scattered around the doorway, at the swirling curse sigils carved into them. I turned, searching for Cabell, but a hand caught me, stopping me in my tracks.

“I told you to stay at the camp.” With his head lamp on, Nash’s face was in shadow, but I could feel the anger radiating from him like the warmth from his skin. “We’ll have words about this, Tamsin.”

“What are you going to do, ground me?” I asked, riding high on my victory.

“Perhaps I will, you wee fool,” he said. “Never do anything without knowing the cost.”

The light from his head lamp danced over me, then swung upward. My gaze followed.

Icicles jutted down from the ceiling. Hundreds of them, all capped with razor-sharp steel, poised to fall at any moment. The walls, the ground, the ceiling—all of it was solid ice.

Even in the darkness, Cabell was easy to spot in his tattered yellow windbreaker. Relief poured through me as I made my way to his side, crouching to help him pick up unused crystals. He’d used the stones to absorb the magic of the curses surrounding the doorways. Once the curses were nullified, Nash had taken his axe to their sigils.

All Hollowers could perform a version of what Cabell was doing, but they could only clear curses with tools they’d bought off sorceresses.

Cabell was special, even among the Hollowers with special magic. He was the first Expeller in centuries—someone who could redirect the magic of a curse away from one source and into another, deflecting spells from our path.

The only curse Cabell couldn’t seem to break was his own.

“What curse was this, Tamsin?” Nash asked, pointing the steel toe of his boot toward a sigil-marked chunk of ice. At my look, he added, “You said you wanted to learn.”

Sigils were symbols used by the sorceresses to shape magic and bind it to a location or object. Nash had come up with stupid names for all the curse marks.

“Wraith Shadow,” I said, rolling my eyes. “A spirit would have followed us through the vault, tormenting us and tearing at our skin.”

“And this one?” Nash pressed, nudging a chunk of carved stone my way.

“White Eyes,” I said. “So, whoever crossed the threshold would be blinded and left to wander the vault until they froze to death.”

“They probably would have been impaled before they froze,” Cabell said cheerfully, pointing to a different sigil. His pale skin was pink from the cold or excitement, and he didn’t seem to notice the flakes of ice in his black hair.

“Fair point, well made,” Nash said, and my brother beamed.

The walls exhaled cold air around us. An otherworldly song rippled through the ice, cracking and twanging like an old tree playing puppet to the wind. There was only one way forward—the narrow pathway to our right.

I shivered, rubbing my arms. “Can we just find your stupid dagger and go?”

Cabell reached into his bag, retrieving fresh crystals for the curses that lined the hallway. I kept my eyes on him, tracking his every move, but Nash’s gloved hand caught my shoulder when I tried to follow.

Nash tutted. “Aren’t you forgetting something?” he asked knowingly.

I blew a strand of blond hair off my face, annoyed. “I don’t need it.”

“And I don’t need attitude from a sprite of a girl, yet here we are,” Nash said, rummaging through my bag for a bundle of purple silk. He unwrapped it, holding the Hand of Glory out to me.

I didn’t have the One Vision—something Cabell and Nash reminded me of every infernal chance they got. Unlike them, I had no magic of my own. A Hand of Glory could unlock any door, even one protected by a skeleton knob, but its most important purpose, at least to me, was to illuminate magic hidden to the human eye.

I hated it. I hated being different—a problem that Nash had to solve.

“Whew, he’s getting a bit crusty, isn’t he?” Nash asked, lighting the dark wick of each finger in turn.



“It’s your turn to give him the bath,” I said. The last thing I wanted to do was spend another evening massaging a fresh coat of human lard into the severed left hand of a prolific eighteenth-century murderer who’d been hanged for his crime of annihilating four families.

“Wake up, Ignatius,” I ordered. Nash had attached him to an iron candlestick base, but that didn’t make holding him any nicer.

I turned the Hand of Glory so the palm faced me. The bright blue eye nestled into its waxy skin blinked open—then narrowed in disappointment.

“Yup,” I told it. “I’m still alive.”

The eye rolled.

“The feeling’s mutual, you impertinent piece of pickled flesh,” I muttered, adjusting the stiff, curled fingers until they cracked back into place.

“Good afternoon, handsome,” Nash crooned. “You know, Tamsy, a little sugar makes everything nice.”

I glowered at him.

“You wanted to come,” he said. “Think about the cost next time, eh?”

The smell of burning hair filled my nostrils. I switched Ignatius into my left hand, and my view of the world flickered as his light spread along the surface of the ice, bathing it in an unearthly glow. I sucked in a sharp breath.

The curse sigils were everywhere—on the ground, on the walls, on the ceiling—all swirling in and out of one another.

Cabell knelt at the entrance to the path. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he worked to redirect the curses into the crystals he slowly set out in front of him.

“Cab needs a break,” I told Nash.

“He can handle it,” Nash said.

Cabell nodded, setting his shoulders back. “I’m fine. I can keep going.”

A drip of burning lard scalded my thumb. I hissed at Ignatius, meeting his narrow, spiteful gaze with one of my own.