

Excerpt from *Revenge & Rapture*

Vancouver was burning.

Glass broke outside my office window, followed by a wailing alarm and angry voices yelling ugly taunts. The simmering tension of the past couple months between Nefesh and Mundanes had exploded on this June night.

Police and ambulance sirens shrieked in the distance and the smell of smoke drifted in through my locked window. Every cop in the city must have been on patrol.

Inside, all was still, the air sharpened to a point. I rolled my chair back and forth in front of the wall that I'd turned into a link chart. At the top were photos of the four scrolls of the *Sefer Razi'el HaMalakh* held by Team Jezebel. Small cards pinned underneath detailed the place of their capture and the nature of the encounters with Chariot in obtaining them, with pieces of string running between connected information. I'd rejiggered the chart numerous times, but had yet to find either the one piece of the *Sefer* still held by Chariot or any more of the Ten's identities.

My phone buzzed and I distractedly stabbed the answer button. "Stop waiting up for me, Pri."

"They've closed the bridges in and out of downtown," my best friend and roommate said in a tense voice. "And I don't know how much longer Hastings Street will be open. It's almost midnight, so if you don't come home now you might be stuck there."

"I'll sleep in my chair. I spoke with the company who bought the party warehouse where the golem was patrolling. Totally legit local developers are turning it into condos." I fired a dart into a photo of Isaac Montefiore's head, half-turned away from the camera. "Another dead end."

"Cut yourself some slack. Jezebels have been fighting this for four hundred years. You've barely been on it four months. And right now, you need to sleep."

"Saving the world comes first," I said.

"Is it about saving the world or is it more about beating your enemies?"

"Does it matter so long as they're stopped?" I said.

The noble cause of dispensing justice warred with my desire to destroy Isaac Montefiore so comprehensively that his life would be a smoking ruin, my signature writ large in the ashes like a painter signing their masterpiece. Work goals were important.

"It matters a lot," Priya said gently. "Your dad was murdered. Don't you think you should get help? This isn't healthy."

“I had enough of talking out my feelings when I was thirteen. Taking Isaac down is the only therapy I need,” I snapped.

Mrs. Hudson, my pug, lifted her head from her doggie bed in the corner and whined softly. She hated when her mommies fought.

“That’s exactly what I mean.” Priya gave an aggrieved sigh. “This isn’t about Chariot anymore for you. It’s all about Isaac. He’s cost you both men you loved and—”

I hung up on her and rubbed my eyes, nearly blinding myself when a boom rocked the building. After a second boom—someone ramming the front security door downstairs—came the joyous cries of emboldened rioters about to pilfer.

Not on my watch.

“Stay,” I told Mrs. Hudson and crept down the two flights of stairs to the lobby.

The looters shattered one of the office doors.

I cornered a man carrying a stack of laptops out of the small game design company owned by two Nefesh women. They’d recently moved in after working out of their apartment for years and struggling to get a toehold in a male-dominated industry. I’d learned this while waiting in line with them at the café at the end of the block.

“Put them back,” I said.

The looter’s eyes narrowed. A short man in need of a haircut, he stank of stale beer and sour hatred. “You one of them fucking Nefesh?”

I crossed my arms. “If I was?”

His eyes darted left for a fraction of a second.

I spun, my spiky blood armor in place, and blocked the strike with my forearm. The baseball bat my attacker had used cracked down the center. My armor held up fine. Wrenching the bat away from him, I swung. It cut through the air with a whistle, embedding in the plaster inches shy of his head.

The stench of urine filled the air and he bolted.

“Now.” I turned to the other man, my armor gone, and a cold smile on my face. “You’re going to put the computers back, tidy up the office, and then you and your friends are going to stand guard here the rest of the night and ensure no one else tries the same thing.”

With a scoff, he marched past me, still cradling the computers. I grabbed his arms and yanked sharply downward, dislocating both his shoulders.

His scream was a thin, high cry that sounded rather kitten-like. The laptops hit the ground, his arms dangling uselessly at his sides.

I made a note to check with the owners on how many computers would require replacing. “Do we have a deal?”

He whimpered, his gaze unfocused and his breaths coming in quick rasps.

“You big baby.” I popped his joints back in one at a time, using a technique I’d learned from Miles during a training session, when he’d dislocated my shoulder during a sparring round. He showed no mercy when we trained. As a result, he’d taken my fighting abilities to a new level, but every time I staggered out of the gym looking like a piece of tenderized steak I hated Levi for abandoning me on that front.

“Deal or no deal?” I said to the looter.

He hugged his shoulders. “Crazy bitch.”

Wrenching the baseball bat free with a shower of white dust, I tapped it against my palm. “I have magic and a baseball bat. You have about two hundred and six comically fragile bones. What’s it to be? Insult me or conclude our business transaction?”

“We’ll keep guard.” His sneer was blown by his flinch as I hoisted the bat to rest it on my shoulder.

I raised an eyebrow. “Run along, then.”

He fled back into the office, issuing instructions to his friends.

Satisfied that my building would be protected until these riots ran out of steam, I headed upstairs to retrieve Mrs. Hudson. With the fractured bat stowed next to my corner safe, I grabbed my leather jacket with a soft whistle.

The puppy knew the deal since we had the same routine several times a week. She stood still, allowing me to clip the leash to her collar, then we made our way down the stairs and into the night. The intruders, busy cleaning up the office, didn’t notice our departure. I appreciated a man who followed orders.

Outside was pandemonium. Store windows had been smashed in, people using any excuse to ransack buildings. Someone ran past me brandishing a box of tacky Canada T-shirts like it was the Olympic Torch. Hopefully their own stupidity would weed them out of the gene pool sooner rather than later.

I picked Mrs. Hudson up to spare her paws from the glass that made the cobblestones glitter like diamond dust. As we walked through the chaos, a distant part of me insisted I should give a damn. After all, my mother had written the proposed anti-Nefesh bill that had stirred this particular powder keg of hatred and fear.

We passed an old heritage building that was on fire. The roof had caved in and firefighters battled the flames furiously, using long jets of water to save the exterior art deco façade.

A couple of months ago, the Queen of Hedon had given House Pacifica intel that one of the original founders of the Untainted Party had laundered money through the magic black market. That was bad enough, but it was for a business venture that Jackson Wu, the current head of the provincial party, had a stake in.

I gave a chin nod to an enterprising youth with a duffle bag full of spray paint cans who was doing a brisk business—mostly to Mundanes with Untainted Party shared values, if the slogans freshly graffitied on nearby walls were any indication. Capitalism at its finest.

For reasons I couldn't fathom, Levi was sitting on that information about Jackson. The bill loomed large in news reports, and the daily coverage of Mundanes angry and Nefesh worried about its potential impact stoked public anxiety. Why did Levi put everyone through this emotional rollercoaster when he could just end it?

A cop on horseback trotted past me and blew his whistle at some people rocking a car. The industrious group whooped at the young man who stood on the hood stomping out the windshield.

As the days grew longer and warmer, tensions between the two communities had grown, until a simple altercation between a Nefesh and a Mundane sports fan over Stanley Cup tickets earlier today had blown up into a city-wide riot that was now ten hours strong with no sign of abating.

I chuckled and stepped out of the path of a wildly veering pick-up truck with actual lightning crackling above it. Hockey tickets. How Canadian.

The young woman powering the electricity screamed, “Die, Mundanes!” as the truck careened past me.

Mrs. Hudson and I made it to my car, Moriarty, without incident. Even though my gray Toyota was the lone vehicle on this level of the parking garage, and as such should have been easy pickings, it was untouched.

At least this particular nemesis was never going to leave my life.