



Headless Beauty

Death Rider Series

Book 1

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Prologue

Cassian

My twelve bondmates and I listen to the Oracle as she gives us the prophecy we traveled here for. We were content and almost complete, and blissfully happy the only piece missing was our center, the one woman who would love us all. The woman we would love and cherish above all else. I would literally burst into flames of happiness to be reborn in this moment and live it all over again. I am so excited to be here.

Until The oracle dismisses the rest of our bonded and Turns her gaze directly on me and me alone. My good humor vanishes as fear curdles in my stomach. Something tells me that this moment will change everything. This moment right here, right now is a precipice just waiting for us to fall over it. My gut churns, as more dread sinks in my stomach like a stone.

“Not meaning to be rude, but your other bonded are completely incidental to this prophecy!. Your center's fate and that of your other mates will depend entirely on you and your choices and actions!”

“What, surely as it's our center the prophecy is for all of us?” Kyanite asks with irritation sparking in his voice. The tension between us all is simmering around sinisterly, and our bond for the first time since we all got together feels unsettlingly wrong. She flicks her wrist and my other mates disappear from the room. I have no idea where she has transported them only that I alone will be the only one to hear what she has to say.

“Do you want to hear the prophecy or argue about whom it concerns? As I said before, the rest of your mates are incidental. Your choices and only yours will decide the fate of the whole! It's your actions alone that will set things in motion.”

“Please, just share the prophecy with all of us, Oracle!” I plead, I never plead, yet here I am begging. Hoping like anything it will change the outcome of whatever it is that's about to come out of her mouth. She simply looks at me stoically, until I shut up.

“Fated to die at the hand of jealousy”

Her voice echoes around the room unnaturally, and that first line strikes fear into my heart. Our center, the woman we have been anxiously waiting for is fated to die by my choices.

“The woman of death and life will die

A love will be lost

And a life will be reborn

To what end, you will need to choose

To love or leave?

Destiny of three entwined

The queen will reign again

See as I said, your choices will set the path!” She then waves a hand, and I am transported back to the Academy grounds of Silver Hollows.

Despair and defeat dog my every move and I hate it! Maybe though she’s right, I can change our fate! I’d rather split our bonded and all be alive than risk living with the agony her death will cause us all. My heart is breaking, I love our family and this choice is going to destroy us, but hopefully it will keep our center alive and safe.

I have never hated myself or my choices more than I do right here at this moment. But my love for them all is so strong. I’m willing to smash all our hopes and dreams.

Chapter 1

A few years later

Aislynn

The pounding of the horse’s feet falls are all I can hear over my thundering heart. I can’t even spare a second to look over my shoulder. I need to make it to the bridge. I’ll be safe once I’m across it.

“Come on, you can make it.” I chide myself as pushing myself to run as fast as I can in this god forsaken dress. The branches from trees have torn at it and my hair has fallen out of

the pinned hairstyle I had. Now my long red curls are flying, wild and free in the wind. While the rest of the world seems to be holding its breath, waiting, and watching to see what happens. Will the man on his horse catch me? Or will I make it across the Silver Hollow Bridge to safety? I should have known better than to walk home alone. He always appears when I'm alone.

Normally he watches from the shadows.

Tonight, though is different, the moon is red as blood and the night dark even with its giant presence lighting up the sky. The cool breeze hitting my skin makes me feel like death is near. I smile triumphantly as the bridge is less than 10 feet away. Being so close to safety, I chance a look behind me. Shocked to find the mystery man and his horse having disappeared. Stopping in place. Looking around to see if he moved off path. But he is gone.

I'm safe.

Smiling to myself, I feel like I have won this battle with death. Until I turn around running right into a dark figure.

"I'm sorry." His deep voice says before he swings his golden scythe with an hourglass sitting on the top. I close my eyes, but I feel no pain.

Shooting up in bed, my eyes frantically search around the room while I'm panting worse than Ash, my Pegasus after I make him run. He prefers flying and gladly reminds me every day. After a few moments my heart drops to my normal steady beat, I look over at the clock to see it's only 2 am. Why me? I've been plagued with nightmares for weeks now. It's not fair. Why can't I dream happy dreams? Or no dreams. I could get down with a dreamless sleep.

Giving up on sleep, I head over to my window seat, my book from earlier still sitting where I left it only a few hours earlier. Picking up the book I settle down amongst the hundreds of pillows I have placed in this nesting nook and settle in. Securing my ultimate comfort by covering myself with a sage green knitted blanket. Once I'm all sorts of comfortable, I talk myself out of wanting a nice warm cup of tea too. I open the book to the page I left off and dive back into the world that isn't my own. Maybe escaping into this world will help me escape the nightmares in my own.

This is my perfect heaven and the calm moment I needed before leaving for Silver Hollow College. Located in Findara, the central hub of all our lands. It's where the fates rule from, they run the college that allows them to make sure each future ruler and others are still fit for their destiny.

I'm amongst one of those others. As the daughter of the God of Life, and the Goddess of Death. She told me once there were thousands like us for all different purposes, but a great war broke out and now only less than a hundred of us are still alive.

I was definitely an "other" with that parental mixture with gifts that not even my parents knew I'd have. After my mother had me, they moved to Cosmotellurian, the only island

that isn't sectioned for specific species aside from Findara. And now for the first time ever I am leaving my home, to learn more about my gifts and hopefully return with a purpose.

One thing is for sure I'm glad I'll have my best friend Piper with me on this new adventure.

"Aislynn, you need to get up! It's almost time for you to leave." I hear my mother say from the other side of my bedroom door.

Even without trying she scares the living day crap out of me causing me to fall off the window seat that I must have fallen back asleep on.

"You okay Aisly?" My mother asks while trying to hold back a laugh.

"Just peachy." I reply untangling myself from my blanket that has wrapped itself around before standing up.

"Good! Get dressed and meet us downstairs." she adds before walking back out the room before I can say anything else.

Heading to my bathroom I jump in the shower washing up quickly, my stomach is swarming with butterflies. I'm nervous about what may happen while I'm at Silver Hollow.

Most of the others are the same species, and rarely do others mate outside of their own kind. Gods and Goddesses are mostly myth. There are only a few of us left and very few are able to have children. Lacing up my boots I check out myself in the mirror smiling, my long red hair I left down in natural waves while my makeup is set to perfection. I decided on a long green riding jacket with silver buttons.

The smell of coffee and bacon comes from outside my door. My mother's special way of calling me down to eat. Taking one last look at my room I head downstairs for the last time till winter break.

"There is my darling daughter," my father says as he pulls me into a hug. Dad gives the best hugs, they're so tight they almost, but not quite nearly squeeze the breath out of you. I chuckle as I soak in his warm comforting embrace. He hasn't given me a hug like this in ages, I can't help but roast him a little bit, "Been getting into the fae wine again dad?" I ask, as I look up at him with a raised eyebrow.

"I told you not to be weird Theo, now she is going to rush right out that door without eating if you keep this up." my mother chastises my dad while handing me a mug full of coffee.

"He's not the only weird one." I say with a smile, as I take my precious cup over to the table. I take my seat in my regular spot while my parents sit down in theirs. We all load up our plates with food. It's a cozy and familiar scene, and a small pang reminds me that it's the last time we'll have like this for a while.

"Do you have everything you need for school?" my mother asks again, even after we packed up everything a few days ago and sent it off to the school yesterday along with Ash, my familiar.

"I believe so," I reply, before shoving a bite of my waffle into my mouth. I'll miss my mother's cooking, though thankfully my parents informed me there was a student cafeteria. This girl and cooking is not a good combo, I get too easily distracted and forget about the food till it's burned to a crisp and smelling up the place.

"If not, we can send it to you, just let us know when you mirror us to chat." My father adds in, as he spears another piece of waffle onto his fork before popping it in his mouth. We all fall into a companionable silence while we eat. When we're done, we clean everything up together, my parents talking about their own fond memories from their time at Silver Hollow. Telling me how they met there, a story I've heard my whole life but never get tired of hearing.

It's a tale made of all the feels, they found each other. Normally there is a group of bonded males. But not for my parents it was just my dad and my mother. Every year the college holds the trials. Tasks put forth to make sure the ones claiming their bonds before permanent bonding are indeed worthy of their claims. At the end of the trials everyone who truly is Fated to be with each other will know 100%. This year though people have been uneasy, I've heard whispers that they may actually be making some changes to the trials.

"It's time to go, Aislynn," my mother says to me. I nod as we make our way out to our stables, I wish Ash was still here so I could ride him over to the portal in the center of town.

To keep everything organized each student and their family has a certain time to arrive at the portal all of our things and familiars if we have one are taken the day before. I guess it makes the process a lot faster.

"Aislynn Vortez, you have five minutes to say goodbye and step through the portal." Agar the portal mage for our island tells me. Nodding my head in understanding, before I turn back to face my parents.

"I'll call you as soon as I can." I tell them.

"Be safe." my mother says, "and try to experience everything you can."

"I will." I promise her before my father is pulling me from her hold into his arms.

"Don't forget you're a Goddess! And you are more than capable of kicking any male's ass and handing it back to him on a platter, if you need to." My dad tells me while giving me another one of his precious hugs.

"I know." I remind him.

"I know you do, my little reaper. Now go find your adventure."

Nodding, I pull away from my parents and with my head held high I walk to the portal, looking back once I wave at my parents before I step through.

Chapter 2

Aislynn

The trip through the portal wasn't long but damn I feel sick.

"Welcome Aislynn Vortez to Silver Hollow College, your bags and familiar arrived yesterday. I'm sure you're ready to get settled in and check on Ash, but first we personally wanted to make sure you made it safely."

"Thank you! That is so kind of you Headmistresses Endora, Theadosia, and Oriena." I say giving a slight bow of my head to each of them in recognition of who they are.

"We wish we could take some more time to show you around your new home but unfortunately, we've found that if we aren't here when all the students are arriving, the whole thing goes to Bedlam. We did, however, happen to ask another student to escort you to your room." Theadosia says to me.

"Thank you." I reply glad I won't have to find my way across this large campus. I know from the map my mother showed me of the school the classes are on the right side of the building while the left side is housing, and the stables are located behind the school not far from the student housing.

"Jasper will show you to your dorm, all your bags and everything else you need will be in there."

"Thank you again Headmistresses." I add, mama didn't raise an impolite woman.

"And Aislynn?"

"Yes?"

"Welcome to Silver Hollow College, we expect great things from you." With their last message to me I was then left alone with my tour guide.

"I guess I'm all yours to show, around this place. Do you know if there is a coffee shop close by? If so, could we make a quick stop there?"

Jasper doesn't say a word to me, or even acknowledge my presence, the grouch! He just turns and leads me away from the portal and inside the school we walk in a door next to the cafeteria. My silent as the grave guide, takes an unexpected sharp left turn before heading up a never-ending staircase.

By the tenth floor I pause next to a large double door with a numeral ten above it. Meanwhile Jasper just keeps going, breathing normal, no sweat rolling down places it shouldn't. Not even a hair out of place, meanwhile I probably looked like I just crawled out

of a swamp. And all though I was fit you couldn't tell by how heavy my breathing currently was

I tilt my head up to see how much further I may possibly have to climb. Fuck, I feel myself falling backwards, apparently, I was closer to the edge of the stairs then I realized. I scream as I try grasping for the railing, only to find myself clutching air. This is going to hurt! I wince as I mentally prepare for the pain of landing on the black stone stairs, keeping my closed eyes so I don't lose one of those as well.

"I've got you." Someone says.

Peeking one eye open. Fuck me on a stick. This man is all sorts of delicious.

"Thanks." I say as he helps me stand back up.

"No problem, I'm guessing you're new here."

"What makes you say that?" I ask as we both start heading up the stairs.

"You're checking to see how high the stairs go."

"Can you blame me? They go up for miles."

"You have no idea." He mutters.

"So what level are you on?" I ask

"I'm on level 24 in the Snowball Hall. What level and hall are you in?"

"No clue my tour guide ditched me; he is somewhere up ahead. I'll find him eventually." I answer not wanting to risk going over the railing. The space between is too small for my wings to be of use. So, I'll walk up keeping an eye out for Jasper's powder blue hair.

"I'm Aislynn by the way."

"I'm Drystan"

"It's nice to meet you officially." I reply with a shy smile.

"You as well."

"Aislynn, could you stop chatting and keep up? I have better things to do with my time than play tour guide." Jaspers says as he stares me down before turning on his heel.

"I'll see you later." I say to Drystan before I run up the stairs to catch up with Jasper. Three flights of stairs and severely out of breath I finally catch up to my tour guide. We continue our walk of silence till we reach floor 31.

Yup the 31st floor. Like all the other floors, twelve large doors block the halls, and every level seems to have similar themes to the hall's names. Mine is Pumpkin Hall, across is Bat Hall and so on.

“After you get past the living room, take the hall to the left of the kitchen. Your door is the last room on your left. Here is your key, don't lose it!” He grumbles at me, while pulling my key out of his pants pocket and tossing it my way. “The headmistresses absolutely hate creating new ones.”

Nodding my understanding just as he vanishes into thin air.

“Thanks for the help,” I mutter sarcastically, while inserting the key into the lock.

Opening the door, I'm utterly taken back by how large the living room is. Straight across from the door are floor to ceiling windows taking up one wall and a fireplace on the wall in the center of the room next to the scenic views. In the middle of the room sits a large black leather L shaped couch. I walk past it heading towards the kitchen.

A long island rests between the living room space and the kitchen with seven chairs lined along the front for sitting and oh my gosh cookies!!! I walk around the kitchen spotting a coffee maker and while taking note how well equipped this place is. Not that I can cook, this girl is a food burner. The only thing I manage not to burn is coffee. With self-promise to get better acquainted with the kitchen later.

For now, I want to check out my room. Making my way past the cookies, snagging one and biting into it. I moan as it melts in my mouth, this is the best chocolate chip cookie I've ever had. This totally makes up for the long tedious climb up here. Stepping back into the kitchen I snag a couple more before I make my way back down the hall. Only to pause and curse Jasper's name when I see the black ornate elevator right across the hall from my room.

Honestly, I want to be madder but at the moment all I want to do is get into my room and shower and maybe take a nap before I go see how Ash is settling in. I can get revenge on Jasper later.

Balancing my cookies in one hand I unlock my bedroom door with the other. Thankful that Jasper didn't give me the wrong key. Stepping inside I stare in awe. Not only did this look like something I'd decorate for myself, but it also felt like it was home. Such a strange thing since this room reminded me of my own. The room was larger than I expected, a little sitting area with a fireplace and a small comfy couch that sat across the room from my bed. On the far side of the room was a floor to ceiling wall of glass that opened somehow as I could see a nice sized balcony with a small table and two chairs. A spot I planned on enjoying later.

The room itself was beautiful, with natural hardwood floors and walls that were a mixture of brick and wood. Turning in a slow circle soaking in the rest of the room, I see across from my bed is bookcases and a desk the floor is covered with a large fur rug.

Two doors off to the right, opening the one closest to my desk I see it's a closet. The next one I open I smile as I have a private bathroom. The counters are a white marble with grey veins running through them that match the floor and shower stall. There is even a large soaker tub and toilet. Above the sink is a large mirror and thankfully I only have one sink that is off center leaving me plenty of room for my stuff and self to sit in the morning while I get ready.

Smiling, I make my way back to the bedroom and start sorting out my boxes I carefully labeled and placing them in their specific area's before I start unpacking.

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