

“Blue Light”

By: Lauren Foster

Snow painted the landscape in its pure winter form. The streetlights that are usually orange tinted bathed a new color of egg white as restless cars were engulfed into individual snow caves, forced to retire from motion. The streets were quieter in the winter. It allowed stillness as the world became pure. It allowed frantic and hurried movement to pause in said stillness as its snowflakes fell with urgency and grace. Nonetheless, some still wandered in the night, unaware of the growing blizzard.

“Can you just slow down?” A male voice slit the silence. Footsteps echoed more intensely as footprints indented in the snow. The two bodies walking found themselves at the walkway of the park that meets nature and city. The woman strode faster than the man as he struggled to catch up.

“What do you want? Just leave me alone. Go back to your voodoo witch doctor of a girlfriend.” The woman insisted, still marching on to an unclear destination.

“Jess, whatever happened back there meant nothing! I went over there to tell Yue things were done.”

“You shouldn’t have gone over there at all, Trey,” Jess turned to finally face him, “You know she is just as in love with you as I am. She will try *anything* to be with you, and she will not stop until she has her way.”

“She won’t get her way this time, baby. I promise you.” Trey grabbed Jess’ right hand and caressed it with reassurance. Jess blinked away developing tears while looking at Trey’s thumb rubbing on her skin. Rejecting her contradicting heart, she pulled and turned away.

“She always gets her way, Trey.” Jess whispered loud enough for him to hear before slowly walking forward in defeat. Trey, refusing to give up, stepped steadily to reach for Jess, but just then, Jess stopped walking.

“Jess? Jess, what’s wrong?” Trey asked as he sought his opportunity to come face-to-face with Jess once again. He noticed her staring straight ahead as her eyes fluttered with fear and intrigue. He followed along with his eyes to the pinpoint and noticed a feminine being in all white, camouflaging with the white atmosphere.

Although they were a good distance away, her crystallized eyes sparkled in melancholy and her mocha complexion tattooed in ice added more allure to her presence. Her flowing hooded sleeveless dress left her exposed in the cold, yet it appeared she was unaffected by it. The mysterious woman took a step forward toward Trey and Jess, still maintaining her distance. Once she stopped, she caught her breath as if that step were a challenge. Jess saw the woman trying to come closer to them, so she stepped back. Trey looked towards Jess the minute she moved, but he was also too memorized by the ice goddess to do the same. The woman seemed to be struggling walking to them as she began to silently sob and sulk in defeat. She relaxed her hyperventilation and attempted to open her frozen chapped lips. All that came out was a frosty smoky breath let out by a squeak. Her words were held back by raging anxiety as Jess and Trey remained speechless and motionless. Trey broke away from her unintentional trance, backing up in front of Jess to stand guard.

“To stay in misery is to stay in marvel.” A deeper male voice boomed from behind them, sending an eerie chill of harsh winter and uneasiness. Jess and Trey immediately stopped in their tracks, slowly turning to reveal the face of the demanding voice.

A man in a light blue suit stood on the parallel opposing side of the woman as he approached the couple in full confidence. The wintry air brushed off him with conviction as the snowflakes that touched him turned into mini fractals when met with the ground. His dreadlocks mimicked the sharp ice, and his eyes, which were crystallized as well, were colored blue with intensity. His presence emanated a stronger command as Trey and Jess refused to divide their attention. The woman's squeaks got louder and louder, still fighting with herself to fully speak.

"What a humble self-sacrifice without possible virtue. Praying for a miracle to obtain some sort of reward. A light at the end with *congratulations* jumping on top of tongues." As he spoke with diction and authority, the man's eyes shot directly at the woman. Her last attempt to articulate abruptly stopped as soon as she felt his stone-cold gaze. She hiccuped bubbles of panic as she began hyperventilating once more.

"You've wasted years on this, Danielle," The man smirked while proceeding to amble forward menacingly, "I pity you honestly. Defeat will serve you much better than... whatever this is."

"W-Who are you?" Trey asked, trembling with cold and fear. The man let out a small laugh, paying no mind to Trey's query, as he eyed Danielle with a smug look. Jess stood still even though her breathing became inconsistent. As if he heard her shaky breath, the man's conceited gaze softened the second his eyes landed on Jess.

"In my past life, I was Maverick," Maverick introduced himself, holding his gaze on Jess, "I have seen so much and in the midst lost my identity. I almost forgot how my name sounded."

Noticing his undivided attention to Jess, Trey blocked Maverick's vision, still standing guard. In the name of unpredictability, Jess compulsively held onto Trey's arm tightly for protection yet simultaneously feeling a surge of intrigue.

“Maverick?” Jess’s voice wavered, looking at Maverick over Trey’s shoulder. Although she felt safe with Trey, the longer she stared at Maverick, the more she felt a weird sense of security. Maverick smiled brightly but then lowered it into a half smile acknowledging Jess’s meekness. Danielle resumed fighting with herself to unlock her lips to grasp speech’s freedom.

“Okay, Maverick,” Trey barked, “what the hell is all this? Some kind of reunion?”

Maverick shot a fierce look at the couple, sending colder chills than the winter breeze down their spines. He held his gaze until he suddenly had a mischievous grin on his face. Jess’ chest progressively caved in with nervousness and anticipation, and Trey backed up into her instinctively.

“Alright man,” Trey fully positioned himself as Jess’s human shield, “what do you want? I mean, we don’t have anything to give. We don’t-”

“It’s not what I want,” Maverick stated matter-of-factly as his mood switched from arrogant to numb, “it’s about what she wants.”

Following Maverick’s head nod toward the other direction, Trey and Jess turned their heads to face Danielle. She refused to merely hold eye contact with anyone as it was obvious she was desperately trying to swallow her tears. She squeezed her eyes shut, lowering her head with it, as thin layers of tears fell.

“Would you like to tell them? Or should I?” Maverick said with the intention of a threat, but it came out as if this encounter were a stale mundane routine. Danielle was still losing an internal war, but hearing Maverick’s empty threat prompted her to pop her head up and hold eye contact. Without saying a word, she begged Maverick to stop.

“Tell us what?” Jess asked, still holding tight to Trey. Maverick directed his focus to Jess, noting her uncomfortable body language and suddenly fell quiet. Danielle coughed out frost

softly and held herself tight. Maverick went to take a step forward but immediately retracted when Danielle shot him a mixed look of agony and malice. Jess tensed up from the second-hand tension being exchanged, and Trey stepped more into her chest, determined to keep her safe from uncertainty.

“Look,” Trey whispered and turned to face Jess, “whatever game this is, we’re not playing it. Come on, it’s cold out, and we need to get you home.” He held her forearms with gentle firmness and began guiding her straight ahead. As they started walking past Danielle, they bounced backward as if an invisible shield prevented them from trekking on. Trey and Jess gave Danielle a bewildered look, noticing a shift in her posture and attitude. Her eyes were closed again, but she was eerily calm. She was no longer fighting a seemingly endless solo war, and she stopped hyperventilating. She slowed her breath as more frost escaped her iced lips, but it was sharper than before. Maverick stared at Danielle stone-faced.

“I’m afraid,” Danielle’s voice finally cracked through with soft elegance with a hint of authority, “you cannot leave.”

“Why not?” Jess gripped Trey again, more urgent than last time.

“What is going on?” Trey stood taller as his back and Jess’s chest hugged each other again.

Danielle flicked her eyes open staring straight at Maverick, matching his stone-cold expression. Maverick’s hard look cracked slightly but remained firm as a bone-chilling shiver singed up his spine.

“You cannot leave because *he* has been enchanted.” Danielle held intense eye contact with Maverick, destroying and combating his previous confidence with an unreadable, unpredictable tone of voice before she flitted her eyes toward Trey.

“What?” Jess’s grip on Trey loosened as she stood back a distance from him. He quickly turned to Jess, desperate to hold her delicately again and reflect authority like the two beings presented. Maverick’s sternness crumbled more with the passing seconds of Danielle staring at Trey and Jess, refusing to look at him.

“Me?” Trey pointed to himself puzzlingly, looking back and forth at Jess and Danielle, “W-What do you mean enchanted? Ain’t that shit in fairy tales?”

“Far from it, Bounded One.” Danielle’s speech shifted anew: bolder, dignified, and impactful. While her voice still quivered with nervous energy, she stood taller than Maverick in her eyes.

“Bounded One…” Maverick scoffed as another shivering-cold look from Danielle was shot his way. His stoic look softened but still expressed betrayal and hopelessness. Their eyes sparked the stiff atmosphere with even more tension. However, Maverick’s stoned face cracked a little as he now looked with longing and enhanced hopelessness. Danielle slowly inhaled and exhaled, closing her eyes as a power move.

When she opened them up again, her eyes only landed on Trey. Although he felt compelled by Danielle, he knew she was something bigger than him and fought through to get to Jess. Nonetheless, Jess still distanced herself away.

“Baby…” Trey whispered toward Jess as the air around them grew colder.

“I will tell you the story. I will tell you all of it. Everything” Danielle spoke the loudest she has spoken since arriving, spitting her words at Maverick. He subtly sunk into his body.

Danielle stepped forward toward Trey, “Centuries ago, there was a coven of enchanters and enchantresses. Not only were they powerful, but they would also rebel, secretly aiding the cities by studying, learning, and teaching whatever the government was too incompetent to

worry about. Although they would help and make cities much better, there was one rule: never make the coven's existence known. All upheld the rule and stood adamant in coven morals and duties. That is until one enchantress fell in love with a Weak One. A human. You have been enchanted by someone with the power of God. Whoever has this magnificent gift can bind anyone to you for life. It's a forbidden spell, and yet here we are."

Just then, Danielle walked in closer hesitant at first, but it didn't take long before her steps were marked in confidence. Confidence so brazen and defiant, it sent collective shivers down everyone's spines.

"That enchantress and Weak One had a passionate forbidden love, and they prayed there would be a day they could be together free of judgment and limitations. Then, on that fateful night, the enchantress decided to run away with the Weak One. Daring to love, caring for no one. Her heart's leap of faith was courageous yet foolish. Grotesquely imbellic,"

Danielle's aura darkened, "When she arrived at their secret spot, not only was he already there, but he was there...with another Weak One. Female," She spat to an apprehensive Maverick, "The enchantress' heart broke in agony. Her very soul ripped in half as she toddled back to her coven's obscurity, regretful yet vengeful. She was so heartbroken to the point where she accidentally created her own forbidden binding spell that was very powerful and dangerous. Against all of the coven's teachings and morals, she casted the spell on the Weak One who had just betrayed her. Now, he is bound to her for life, and the enchantress conjoined their souls so that they would never separate."

Jess stood petrified in the middle of Danielle and Maverick, witnessing the dominant energy shift between the two beings.

“Okay,” Jess cleared the anxiety lodged in her throat, “that doesn’t explain why you’re here.”

“Yeah, nice exposition and all, but we need answers now!” Trey demanded.

“Don’t speak to me that way!” Danielle yelled as her eyes glowed a blinding white light, and the quiet wind formed into a mini blizzard behind her. Some frost got into Jess’ eyes, and Maverick instinctively covered her. Trey went to run to her, but an invisible force propelled him backward, landing him straight into Danielle’s claws. She dug them deeper into his shoulder enough for white meat to show with no blood.

Then, Danielle politely cleared her throat, “Since you are *so* eager for the end of the story, I’ll tell you. But, just so you’re warned, it doesn’t have a happy ending. You see, the spell was forbidden, so the enchantress was banished and cursed for her actions. The coven hid the spell away in The Lost Scrolls...until curious followers and family members of the enchantress. They passed the spell down for years to generations of wayward and future wayward enchanters. Whenever the spell is performed, the Cursed Enchantress and her Bounded One appear to deliver the new Bounded One to their Beloved, the caster of the spell. And it looks like you’ve been binded, my Dear.”

“No, there’s no way any of this is real. There’s-”

“On, never say never, Bounded One,” Danielle snarked at Trey, “Because the first Bounded One is standing right before us.”

Danielle released one of Trey’s shoulders to point in Maverick’s direction. His poise has completely changed: head bowed and eyes closed, yet he still scowled. As if he sensed Jess and Trey’s look of confusion and despair, he unbuttoned his jacket and opened his shirt, revealing the

coven's emblem imprinted on his chest. Jess and Trey stared in horror from Maverick to Danielle.

Jess trembled, "Then, you are..."

"I am Danielle, the Forbidden Enchantress, here to deliver you, Bounded One, to your Beloved. The amount of power used to cast the spell this time was almost as strong as mine." She softly chuckled with relief.

Jess walked forward but was hit with a track-stopping revelation, "Yue."

"What?" Trey shivered, coughing up more frost than usual.

"I told you she always gets her way. She was into witchcraft and shit, and she's obsessed with you," Jess flitted her eye to the ground, "She's still in love with you."

"That doesn't mean it's mutual. I love *you*, Jess. And no spell or crazy voodoo is going to stop-Ah!" Trey let out a wail of pain, gripping on his heart as he fell onto his knees.

"Trey!" Jess went to run to him, but Danielle extended her hand and propelled her into Maverick's arms.

"It begins." Danielle stated with a small smile.

"What are you doing to him? Leave him alone!" Jess squirmed in Maverick's strong arms, and while he related to her pain, he knew Danielle was stronger than both of them.

"Danielle, that is enough! Years and years, you've tortured me with reliving this fate. How many more souls must you tear apart!" Maverick yelled.

"I bring souls together! And you're one to talk. You broke my heart! You broke *me*!" Danielle shrieked, revitalizing the blizzard to her command.

"I never meant to hurt you! I was protecting you!" Maverick enunciated, determined more than anything to get through to her.

However, the effort was futile as she let out another yell of frustration, channeling her deep anger and projecting it onto the storm.

Jess and Trey called out for each other in the midst of the chaos, but they were drowned out by Danielle and Maverick's passionate arguing. The winds blew more fervently and blinded everyone, making the park a sheer white sheet with a foggy view.

"Enough of this, Danielle!" Maverick begged as the storm got a little softer, "How much more agony must you make me endure that I have not self-inflicted?"

Danielle finally made eye contact with him, and Maverick took a risk to get closer to her. For a second, she had tears in her eyes. He was able to make it inches to her face and attempted to hold her hand, desperate for her touch.

"No! He's mine!" Danielle screamed, pushing Maverick back towards Jess and resuming the raging winter storm.

Suddenly, Jess and Maverick were trapped in a storm bubble Danielle curated out of a vile whim. Jess began to fly away, but Maverick was able to hold her down in his arms. He begged and begged profusely for freedom, but it fell onto deaf ears. All of his pleas were met with more wind and chilling silence.

After what was an endless winter, the bubble was destroyed, and Jess and Maverick stumbled out with their visions blurred. Frost stuck out in their hair, and stinging snowflakes burned their flesh. The two of them tried their hardest to clear their vision because Danielle and Trey had become shadows. However, Trey was surprisingly still, and Danielle was eerily calm once again.

"It is done." Danielle spoke softly with a hint of solemnity. She then turned Trey around, revealing his full blue crystallized eyes and lips.

“No. No, Trey? Trey! Baby!” Jess panicked and went to run to him, but Mavericks held her back. She squirmed for freedom as angry tears boiled down her face. Finally, she lost the fight and began sobbing, sinking into Maverick’s arms in defeat.

Although he couldn’t talk, Trey’s face was painted with a pained expression watching the one person he truly loved cry.

”Now,” Danielle sighed, “I must deliver the Bounded One with his Beloved, so their souls can reunite...once more.”

Danielle shot Maverick one last cold, numb look disguising the yearn she still had for him. However, her heart was bigger than her head, and her hatred and hurt outweighed the love she once had. Maverick mouthed “I love you” right as Danielle and Trey vanished into the thin night air.

Yue stood by her bay window staring at the moon. She held on to her necklace as she whispered a prayer to it.

Just then, a knock at the door alerted her. She ran down that stairs in anticipation and got to the front door. She let out a short, sharp exhale and opened it.

“Trey.” Yue scoffed in disbelief and excitement. Trey still had his pained expression yet he looked more dazed.

“Your dearly Beloved has arrived, and now your souls are tethered for the rest of this life into the next.” Danielle half-smiled going through her rehearsed century-old speech. Yue released her grip on her relic necklace, revealing the coven emblem.

“Thank you, Forbidden Enchantress,” Yue glinted with relief, bringing Trey inside, “Those who believe trust your power.”

Danielle smiled at her heart flutter but couldn't help but feel guilt as Yue closed the door. She looked down at her flaky hands from Trey's iced body, suddenly becoming weary of her tactics. Suddenly regretting her choices. She started loathing the title "Forbidden Enchantress." She always had menial feelings of shame, yet they never lasted. However, this time was different. It actually...hurt her. She went to fly in the night when two blue lights, moving in a speed that made it look like one single line, streaked the sky. While one would exhibit nature's miracle, Danielle's chest caved in as if something stronger than her was on the rise.

She whispered, "There's only supposed to be one. It's supposed to be just him."

EPILOGUE

"We can't just stand here and do nothing! Are you sure there's nothing we can do?"

Jess pleaded. Maverick stood tall and sighed, turning away and walking in the opposite direction.

"Hey, don't walk away from me! I'm talking to you!"

"And I heard you," Mavericks stated calmly when suddenly, he dug in his pocket and pulled out a small white orb. As soon as the orb bounced on the ground, an ice blue portal appeared, "Come with me."

Jess waddled in place apprehensive but ultimately gave in, grabbing Maverick's hand. The two then went through the portal, sending two blue streaks in the sky. Once they arrived on the other side, there was a utopia completely parallel to their winter nightmare: yellow-orange tinted with white and gold outlines.

"What is this place?" Jess asked.

“This is the Nixen society where those who have been enchanted before and those who are aware of the coven’s existence can share their research and findings. When we realized we couldn’t return to society, most of us were not the same and had trouble forgetting everything that happened to us or for the ones who witnessed. We grew restless, so we united to find a way to permanently break the spell.” Maverick explained.

Jess’ eyes grew larger in wonder as beings, human and mythical, crossed them with mountains of papers that left magical dust in their trail. She scanned the entire bright atmosphere before her eyes landed on a tall tower with a subtle beacon at the top.

“Who created this?” Jess turned to Maverick who was wearing a smug look, “Was it you?”

“I would hate to take all the credit,” he lied, “but yes, I did. Since I was the first one who got enchanted by Danielle, obviously I was the first who had to deal with the aftermath. Regardless, I’m bound to her, so where she goes, that’s where I follow. Once she completed her missions time and time again, I’d recruit those affected here, so we can figure this shit out together.

Through our research, we found out there’s a key to defeating Danielle, and that’s if a transdimensional being like myself, of the Forbidden Enchantress and coven, exists, then they shall summon her and challenge her using that beacon. It’s supposedly like a dog whistle that she’s binded with that tells her the coven is accepting her with open arms.”

“Has anyone been successful? Or at least close?” Jess asked directly, eyes back on the tower.

“Unfortunately, no,” Maverick walked up beside Jess, “but with a new discovery, we might finally have a chance to fight back.”

“What new discovery?” Jess snapped her head toward Maverick puzzled.

He smirks, “You.”

“Me?”

“Out of everyone here, you’re the only human in the real world who knows about the coven and the enchantment other than me. With you, we can finally be truly free from these chains. With you, you can save Trey.”

“So what you’re saying is...”

“You’re the missing key.”

Jess took in a deep breath as the pressure enhanced in the span of seconds. She looked over at Maverick and then became transfixed with the tower. Her chest heaving with anxiety soon transitioned into rage and determination. Maverick let out a soft determined laugh as he too faced the tower.

Jess nodded her head assuring herself, “I am the key, and I’m going to save Trey.”