

## CHAPTER ONE: THE INQUISITION

*Mid-August*

*A few hours south of Tijuana, Mexico*

“Christoph!” I yelled. “Come get this guy!”

Christoph scooped up the bloody guard, and he and Kenji ran around grabbing the remaining men as they tried to run past. One of the men got past Christoph and took a swing at Rebecca, but she stepped nimbly out of the way and threw him to the ground, where I grabbed him and tied his hands and feet.

I was about to congratulate Rebecca when suddenly the captain appeared at the door. In slow motion, I saw him draw back his arm and hurl a large knife. It spun through the air straight at Claire. Kenji and Christoph were both blurs, racing to jump in front of her, but they were too late. I ran forward as I watched it plunge deep into her back.

She screamed as she arched her back in agony and fell face first into the dirt.

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*Five months earlier*  
*Isla Vista, California*

I awoke to the sound of a gull crying as it flew past the window. I stretched my hearing toward it, then automatically took inventory of the other sounds around us. Most people in Isla Vista were still asleep, and almost all I could hear was the gentle crashing of the waves on the beach a few blocks away. Next to me, the sound of Kai's breathing brought a smile to my face, and I opened my eyes as I rolled over.

I stared at him in amazement, as I had so many times before, wondering what I had done to deserve having this incredible guy in my life. He stirred, then slowly opened his beautiful green eyes, blinking a few times.

"Hey," he said softly.

"Good morning. Happy spring break."

He smiled and pulled me to him, and I nuzzled into his chest, listening to the deep rhythm of his heart beating.

"I suppose we should get going," he murmured.

"We have two whole weeks. I'm not in any rush."

"Me neither, but it's going to be really nice to get back on the road with you. And it's better that we get tonight out of the way."

I sighed. "I need some breakfast before we hit the road. Can't face this on an empty stomach."

"Ashlyn," he said, tilting my chin up so that I was looking directly into his eyes. "It's going to be fine. I promise."

I wanted to believe him—I really did. But I knew better.