



## Blood Bound

By Selina A. Fenech

### *Complete summary including spoilers.*

When Everly used to daydream about having Rylan Howell in her bed, this was never how she imagined it: him in his supernatural, vegetative state, in semi-vampire form. Although he still appears to her every night in her dreams, they don't know why he is there, or how to get his spirit out of her dreams and back in his body.

Meanwhile, Harper is approaching Shroudhaven's deadly supernatural side with enthusiasm that Everly doesn't like; she wants to keep Harper away from harm, but Harper is eager to be involved and has taken to wielding an axe that Callan gave her.

Everly, Harper, Callan, Cherry, Tammy, and Denny go eidolghast hunting at Rook's Hotel, hoping to collect vasmire parts they can use to sustain Rylan.

When they arrive at the hotel, Callan says this is the worst beshadowing he has ever seen. The shadyrs transform into vampire-like forms, which means a vasmire is nearby. Callan warns Everly and Harper against the knock-out gas that vasmires secrete.

Inside, they find a group of zombie-like, beshadowed hotel staff and guests. In order to save these people, they must kill the vasmire. It doesn't take long for the vasmire to appear and drag away one of the hotel guests, eating him alive. But just as the group prepares to launch an attack against the monster, everyone freezes.

Everly finds herself in a strange, cheery, dream-like state. The group is in the hotel, and everyone seems fine. The others seem to believe that the incident with the vasmire was weeks ago, and they are here now on holiday, which only confuses Everly more. But when Rylan appears, Everly knows once and for all that this isn't real. He urges Everly to wake up because she could be in danger, but she's unable to. The others are shocked to greet Rylan here, and are all brought to the realization this is some kind of shared dream.

None of the team can wake themselves up, so Callan convinces Tammy to try to teleport herself to the Dark Corner shroudpool so that she can go get help, but Tammy has never been able to teleport at will—only by accident. At Callan's encouragement, Tammy tries, but fails.

But when Callan touches his forehead against hers, she gasps and disappears. The group has no idea if this means it worked, or if because something horrible has happened to Tammy's body in real life . . .

But it does work. Flustered by the shock of Callan's touch, Tammy teleports to the dormant shroudpool at Dark Corner—the same shroudpool that ruined her life when her best friend Blaise Mesman disappeared into its depths even as she tried to catch him. Her hands have been black ever since.

Tammy runs all the way to Boderleth Place where Lian is standing watch over Rylan, and warns her about the danger at Rook's Hotel. Lian and Rushelle rush to the group's aid, leaving Tammy behind to guard the sleeping Rylan. Tammy feels insulted by this, stung that she is no longer needed.

Everly wakes up to find herself being tackled by Rushelle while Lian battles the vasmire. Callan and Denny are also awake, but Harper is nowhere to be found. While the battle unfolds, Everly searches for Harper, and finds her in a beshadowed daze like the others at the hotel.

Everly is horrified to learn that there is not one, but two vasmires here in the hotel when the second beast goes after Harper. Everly knows that if she unleashes her dragon, she could save Harper—or inadvertently kill her.

With little choice, Everly makes her decision. As she releases the dragon, something strange happens: she hears a voice calling her the beast of teeth and stars. She quickly dispatches the vasmire and ends the beshadowing in the hotel. Then Rylan's old Darkfrey brace arrives: Vonny, Annabeth, and Jasper, with their new leader, Nilson Darkfrey, Mordan Darkfrey's son. Vonny is interested in Everly's powers, and says that Jasper had already informed her about these strange abilities but she wasn't sure if it was true.

Cherry is enraged to learn that his secret boyfriend shared private information with his Darkfrey teammates, and breaks up with Jasper via subtext right then and there—only Everly and Harper recognize it as a breakup, because the others don't know about the secret relationship. The Howell House team collects some of the vasmire parts to bring to the comatose Rylan then departs.

Everly and Harper head into town to celebrate their victory against the vasmires at The Crow's Nest with the others. On their way, they spot Cardboard Box Barry who has been a fixture in town for as long as Everly can remember. They are intrigued when they witness another man come out of Barry's box, finding it interesting that he would host visitors there.

Inside The Crow's Nest, a local song called "There's a Mermaid in My Lighthouse" plays—another backdrop to life in Shroudhaven, just like Cardboard Box Barry.

The group raises a glass to the heroes of the night: Tammy and Everly. Disturbed by the voice she heard earlier when she unleashed her dragon, Everly asks Lian if eidolghasts can speak. Lian says yes, but only other monsters seem to understand them. This doesn't comfort Everly in the slightest, and she confesses to Lian that she heard the vasmire refer to her as the 'beast of teeth and stars.' Lian has never heard of such a thing—but she *has* heard of an artifact at Darkfrey Estate called the Bane of Teeth and Stars.

Everly high-fives Tammy for their pivotal roles in the night's events. But when their hands touch, a flash of light bursts between them as a minor explosion occurs, plunging the whole bar into darkness. Everly is concerned that her dragon may have just manifested without her permission, and Tammy is upset because she feels that she is cursed and ruins everything she touches. No one knows why the phenomenon occurred.

That night, Everly goes out to feed the zombie cougar, which she has named Zozo. She feels a connection to the creature. But when Harper comes outside to ask what she's doing, Everly lies, because

she is concerned about Harper's safety—and how easily she seems to be adapting to supernatural life. She wants to try to keep Harper separated from it all if she can.

In her dreams, Everly tells Rylan about the events at the hotel, and Rylan hates that Everly endangered herself just to keep him alive. Everly becomes aware of the fact that the dragon inside of her seems to not want to let go of Rylan, and she worries that maybe she has inadvertently kidnapped Rylan's soul somehow.

Everly becomes embarrassed when Rylan suggests that maybe a kiss could wake him up, like with Sleeping Beauty. She suggests instead that they could try to reach the wishing stone fabled to sit in the middle of Myrkur Lake, but Rylan says the whole lake is beshadowed and would be far too dangerous, if such a thing even existed.

Meanwhile, Jasper contends with the fact that Cherry has broken up with him, and he feels guilty that Cherry felt so betrayed—but the thing about Everly was too big not to report to his superiors. When the Darkfrey group returns to Mordan to report on the night's events, Jasper is surprised when Vonny leaves out some of the details about why the Howell House crew was there to begin with: to collect vasmire parts for Rylan. Jasper speaks up, and says it might be helpful if the Darkfreys supported the Howell House team's efforts to keep Rylan alive in his comatose state, but Mordan tells Jasper to be quiet and do as he's told. Jasper worries he doesn't really fit in with the Darkfreys—but if he's not a Darkfrey, he's a nobody.

When Everly is awake, she works up her courage to kiss the sleeping Rylan like he suggested, but nothing happens, and she struggles with her feelings for him.

The next day, Everly continues to clean out the antiques store. As she remembers the flash of light she witnessed when her father died, she realizes that the dragon has been a part of her life longer than she thought.

Everly and Harper get an unexpected visit from Annabeth, who has come to deliver an invitation to Everly for tea with Mordan Darkfrey. Then Annabeth asks to see the sleeping Rylan, and Everly realizes that Annabeth is in love with him. Lian volunteers to accompany Everly to Darkfrey Estate for tea with Mordan. But she has ulterior motives: this is their chance to try to steal the Bane of Teeth and Stars.

Lian and Everly pay a visit to Mordan Darkfrey where they make a story to downplay Everly's powers. Things escalate when the conversation turns to Rylan, and Lian accuses Mordan of stealing her boys from her when they were young in order to brainwash them. She tells Mordan that if he had anything to do with Rylan's situation, she'll kill him. Then they storm out.

The ploy works, and Lian and Everly are able to sneak off deeper into the estate, disguised as Darkfreys. Lian knows the estate well, and she leads Everly through a maze of secret passageways. While they walk, Lian explains that one night years ago, an eidolghast showed up to her house. Her boys fought as best they could untrained, but the monster killed Lian's husband. Mordan convinced the boys they needed the training he could offer, and was able to slyly acquire custody of them. She'd just wanted her sons to lead normal lives.

When Lian and Everly finally arrive to the archive, they find that some of the artifacts are missing—including the Bane of Teeth and Stars, which dashes Everly's hope of finding more information about her

dragon. Inside the case where the Bane is supposed to be, they find its wrapper, which Lian takes. Then Everly spots Jasper spying on them, but he quickly runs off. When Everly and Lian make their escape, they find their path blocked by Vonny and her extremely muscular husband, Kole.

Lian gets into a heated discussion with the two. Kole resents Lian for taking in Tammy after the girl's involvement with the death of his son. Working himself up into a rage, he tries to attack Lian, but Vonny holds him back. Lian and Everly leave unscathed, but Everly can't get the sight of that murderous glint in Kole Mesman's eyes out of her mind.

Everly and Lian regroup with the rest of the Howell House crew at the gates of Darkfrey Estate. Jasper approaches them, but when Lian accuses him of ratting them out to the Mesmans, he truly doesn't know what they're talking about. He assures them he didn't tell anyone anything.

When Everly asks why he didn't tell on them, he explains that they know one of his secrets, and now he knows one of theirs—and it would be best if neither secret got out. If the estate finds out that he's gay, they'll kick him out.

Feeling like he owes Cherry, Jasper shares more private information: The missing artifacts are in the nearby town of Gorhanmere, in the possession of the local shadys there.

At home, Everly secretly goes outside to feed Zozo, but Harper catches her this time. Harper is offended by Everly's need to keep this information from her. Everly tries to explain that she has a certain connection with Zozo—and Rylan—because her dragon may have somehow eaten pieces of their spirits.

In her dreams, Everly tells Rylan she finally knows the truth of what happened to his dad, and why he left home. He suggested that they try the Sleeping Beauty kiss again, but here in the dream this time.

Rylan and Everly share an explosive kiss. Rylan realizes he never really thought it would work; he just wanted to kiss her. But he knows he can't be with Everly if he wants to keep her safe.

The Howell House team drives to Gorhanmere to find the town deserted, except for a Darkfrey van. The leader of the brace turns out to be Lucas, a friend and previous mentor of Callan's. Lucas explains that they're investigating a beshadowing caused by an auerdax—a rare kind of eidolghast that is only tangible in darkness, and which turns completely incorporeal in the light. This means that when darkness falls, they could be in danger.

Soon, the crew is greeted by a small group of independent Gorhanmere shadys who tell them they have no business here. The Gorhanmere team announces that they're extremely strong and that the Howell House team should leave them alone. The group notices that there is something very "off" about these people.

Everly and the rest of the group settle into their rooms at a local motel. Callan asks Harper out on a date, but Harper politely declines. Instead, she tells him that Tammy might have a thing for him if he's interested. Callan explains that he's not interested in Tammy like that; she's like a little sister to him.

Outside the room, Tammy overhears the conversation, and so does Everly. Everly explains to Tammy that she knows what it's like to experience unrequited love with one of the Howell boys, but Tammy denies her feelings.

While talking, the two decide to test the phenomenon that occurred when they high fived at The Crow's Nest. This time when their hands touch, sparks sizzle and erupt with black flames. Meanwhile, a cloudy substance begins to engulf the motel. Lian finds them, and Everly and Tammy are shocked to learn that they have been outside for almost an hour.

Lian suggests that the reaction between them could be caused by a minor beshadowing somehow. Tammy and Everly learn that the sword Lian stole from the Darkfreys makes her blind when she wields it—but it has a special ability to harm an auerdax even when it's in an incorporeal state, as Lian learned the night one of the beasts attacked her family. It was an auerdax that killed her husband. Lian explains that since that night, she has trained tirelessly to be able to wield the sword.

Everyone leaves their lights on when they go to sleep as a precaution against a potential auerdax attack. Everly and Rylan reunite in her dreams. Rylan tells Everly that he needs to tell her something important—but just as he is about to, the dream shatters, and Everly wakes up to find that all of the lights have gone out, and the Howell House shadys have taken on ghost-like forms, which means the auerdax has arrived.

Outside, Cherry works with the Darkfreys to evacuate the motel guests. Everly and Harper make a run for it, but the auerdax—now solid—blocks their path. It speaks to Everly and says the beast of teeth and stars must be destroyed, *again*. It attacks. Harper tries to fend it off with her axe.

Someone yells that they need more light because the monster is too powerful in the dark. Everly and Harper make it to the campervan, and Harper turns on the headlights to light up the battle—but the auerdax is intent on tracking Everly.

Knowing that the beast is specifically after her, Everly makes a run for it, trying to lead it away from her friends. She and Harper take refuge in the light of a streetlamp where the auerdax can't touch them—until the monster destroys it, forcing them to run to the next one, which it also destroyed.

When the monster gets Harper in its grasp, Everly has no choice but to unleash the dragon. The dragon's light makes the auerdax vanish. Lian enters the fray, attacking with her sword, able to make a strike even though the creature is incorporeal, injuring but not killing it. Everly holds the light as long as she can, until the auerdax retreats.

With the battle over, Lucas offers to point them in the direction of the stolen artifacts if they agree to share the booty. Callan agrees.

When the group returns to the motel, they find their rooms ransacked with a message painted in a mix of eidolghast bloods telling them to leave before it's too late. Everly realizes the Gorhanmere shadys must have tripped the fuses, stripping the group of their light protection. Harper is angry with Everly for trying to be a martyr during the fight.

The next day, the group goes to an abandoned mansion in town, as directed by Lucas. As they approach it, Everly starts to feel sick, and she can sense that something is in there. The crew finds an entrance into the basement where they follow a hidden passage. Inside, the group sneaks up on a man carrying an automatic rifle. They attempt to knock him out, but he is uncannily strong and puts up a fight. Meanwhile, Everly struggles to control her dragon; something about this place is affecting her, and she's feeling sicker by the minute.

Deep inside the cave, they find a strange object pulsing with light and bleeding eidolghast blood: the Bane of Teeth and Stars—and the culprit for Everly's illness. But then the Gorhanmere shadyrs show up. Their leader states that they've brought a sacrifice—and the group realizes that an auerdax is quickly approaching.

The Gorhanmere shadyrs herd the auerdax into the cavern, and the battle begins. The Gorhanmere shadyrs attack the Howell crew, evidently having gone crazy from all the eidolghast blood from the Bane.

Everly and Harper find a stash of flares and use it to create light as a defensive mechanism against the monster, but they quickly run out. In desperation, Everly lets the dragon loose, and it begins to feed ferociously on the Gorhanmere shadyrs. She struggles to prevent it from harming her friends. Tammy appears gravely injured and Harper narrowly escapes getting killed. Lian finishes off the auerdax, and then takes the Bane, wrapping it in the parchment she took from the Darkfrey archives, which stops it from bleeding.

The only way Everly can stop her dragon's feeding frenzy is to force herself near the Bane, which seems to weaken it. Then, Everly confronts Harper about her nonchalant attitude towards these dangerous situations. Harper is offended that Everly is treating her like a fragile princess.

At The Crow's Nest back in Shroudhaven, the group enlists Crowea's aid. Crowea uses her psychometry on the Bane of Teeth and Stars and tells them it is powerful and deadly. She informs Everly that the Bane knows her intimately. It remembers the *thing* inside of her, and that this is the weapon that broke the thing into pieces. The dragon, Everly learns, is a soul-eater.

Harper and Everly continue to clash over their disagreements. Harper is angry that she doesn't get special powers like everyone else, and because Everly is shutting her out. Everly realizes she is doing to Harper exactly what Rylan did to her: shut her out in attempt to protect her, which only makes things worse.

Everly asks Harper to look after the Bane and make sure it doesn't fall into the hands of the Darkfreys.

Eventually, Everly and Harper decide to experiment and see if the Bane can help Everly dispel the piece of Zozo's soul that the dragon consumed. In the backyard, Everly calls Zozo, then uses the Bane to cut her arm. She feels a huge expulsion of energy, and Zozo runs away. It seems to have worked, but Everly becomes extremely ill as she copes with the effect of the Bane and the dragon's anger. Everly wants to free Rylan too, but Harper insists that she needs to recover first.

In her dreams, Everly tells Rylan she knows how to free him now, but he feels that it sounds too dangerous. When she wakes up, Everly secretly steals the Bane from its hiding spot, knowing that Harper and Lian would try to stop her.

Harper discovers Everly just as she is about to cut herself with the Bane, and tries to stop her. They both get cut in the process.

When Everly comes to, she discovers that Rylan has finally woken up—but that there are complications. She also notices that she has terrible cracked wounds around where she cut herself with the Bane, but she covers these up, not wanting to worry anyone.

The real, awake, living Rylan enters the room, and Everly discovers what the complication is: He can't go near her. Her presence seems to make his shadyr powers react chaotically. He tells her she needs to leave town, and that she never should have risked his life for him. Everly is upset by his reaction. After all, her plan worked, and she saved Rylan. When Rylan tells her there is no reason for her to stay in Shroudhaven any longer, Everly is devastated.

Everly and Harper prepare to leave town. When Everly asks Harper if her hand is okay where the Bane cut it, Harper doesn't seem to know what she's talking about.

Harper has found it upsetting that this strange trip to Shroudhaven has caused best friends to keep secrets from each other. But now she has a secret of her own.

It surprised Harper how quickly the gash from the Bane healed up. And it had been easy to hide with concealer. In the basement, Harper secretly uses the Bane to cut her own flesh, and relishes the power it causes to erupt inside of her. She understands why the Gorhammere shadyrs were all scarred, they had been exploiting this power source too.

This is the type of power that could change everything.



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