

## Chapter One

I am not like you and I am glad for it. My life has never involved itself with the latest trends in clothing, the scores of some asinine sports game, or even the latest reality shows on television. No, my life was and still is far richer, thanks to my violin. And, of course, *mon oncle*.

My name is Graydon Cole Fayette, a proud member of the centuries old Fayette family right here in Memphis, Tennessee. Our history intertwines with the history of the city like lovers clinging desperately to each other, knowing that the rising sun shall soon send them apart. My family assisted in ways not known to everyone who cared for more than a smidgen of this city's history. While other wealthy families donated money to build art museums in their name for the glory of Memphis' citizens, my family dwelt in the shadows, making shady deals with unsavory characters to ensure that certain people would be "erased" like a blemish on a woman's face. We made sure that certain "troublemakers" would not be around to further spread their cancerous ways. The Fayette family has always been of secrecy, darkness, intrigue, and eccentricities startling enough to make even the most brutish person blush. I love it all.

I shall not bore you with the details of my birth and early childhood, although it would make quite a sensational novel. Rather, I shall begin my tale with the day that I was brought fully into the family, i.e., endured the Fayette Test. Whenever a family member comes into their own, it must be completed on one of the Sabbats during the year. My family, as it were, more than just dabbled in the metaphysical. In fact, it was my parents who

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raised me as a true child of the Darkness. Not Satanic, mind you, just a different perspective of magick and its role within the world. They showed me the ways of the world and that magick, true magick, was alive and well. The stories that parents read to their children were daily occurrences in my life. When my day came, it fell on Samhain, or Halloween. *Mon oncle*, Julien, thought that the day was rather fitting for me. Invitations had been sent out a month in advance, all written on the Fayette stationary: vermilion coloured paper with black silk trim and handwritten with squid ink. The day before the event, Fayettes from literally all over the world came into Memphis, barely able to contain their excitement at the induction of a new Fayette into the clan. This was the first time I had met most of my family from the rest of the world and I was immensely happy and proud that they came in droves just for me: Cousin Tempest from Boston, Massachusetts who operated a school for wayward girls, lived the life of a spinster (although she was too beautiful to be denied the touch of a man) and grew roses of every colour behind her home. She also owned over 200 snakes and “bred” them for their venom. When I asked her what she used the venom for, she only smiled and asked if I ever read the obituaries in the *Boston Globe*?

Another relation of mine was Aunt Clotilda from Jackson, Mississippi. She was a withered old thing and yet her still naturally flaming red hair pulled into a thick ponytail down her back was enough to make me want to talk with her. When she looks at you, you can actually feel a bit of your soul leaving your body, although she’ll cough and apologize for it. She was also quite insane, another somewhat “trait” of being a Fayette. Some of our relations had been rather “dipped” into the well of extra special consciousness, as it were. Relations like Aunt Clotilda, who was also the caretaker of the Jackson Fayette graveyard. She told us over a lovely cup of tea the day before my ceremony that she always made sure that the gravestones were clean, free from debris and trash, and that the bones were arranged nicely, but that was a job for her husband, Wyatt. Wyatt, who had been dead for over five years and yet, thanks to Auntie, still shuffled around to

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assist her. When I asked how she did it, she only told me that she no longer minded his stench of Death.

Then there was also Cousin Edgar who currently lived in a small town in Japan. After living the life of a wealthy international broker, he suddenly left it all to train in the ways of the samurai, or Bushido. He had always been fascinated with the East and when he learned that a samurai of the old ways was still alive (by means of sheer will), he had to train under him. He informed me that the samurai who, according to his calculations, should have been several hundred years old, looked to be no older than 20. In order to leave his training, he had to make a special promise to his sensei that he would return within ten days or else everything he had learned would be lost forever. When I saw Edgar at my parents' home, he wore the clothing of an ancient samurai and his eyes were much older than his 30-year-old body. I merely smiled and welcomed him home, if only for a brief period of time. He smiled back and blessed me in Japanese. These people were just a sample of the blood that flowed in my veins and I was and still am proud of every drop. They all came for me and I loved them so.

Thankfully, my parents' home was large enough to accommodate every last Fayette; not only did they have a plantation style home on several acres of land, but they also built several smaller homes around the main home, thereby making it into a town of sorts. A "town" for our kind. When I was younger, I used to love playing around the forest area, thinking that I was a prince of the Fae who got lost and ended up on the other side of the Veil, or I would find a rather thick book from my parents' library and search for a thick tree to hide in as I turned the pages and became one with my latest adventure. Although I had an older sister, Julia, we never really saw too much of each other. She was in her world and I in mine, yet whenever we did spend some time together during meals, we always asked what the other one did during the day and compared our stories to who had the better time. She was also, quite literally, the love of my life. I'll talk more on that subject much later.

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I had the family library at my disposal, plus many areas just waiting to be explored and discovered around the area. The basement alone gave me hours of thrills; it was our wine cellar and warehouse of family possessions. I never knew what to expect whenever I opened one of the boxes; several leather journals tied together with a single vermilion ribbon, or a human skull with quite long canines (my father still won't answer my questions about that), or even bottles of perfume that, when opened, actually sighed like a woman lost in love.

At the stroke of midnight, signifying that Halloween had finally arrived, everyone solemnly walked to the main parlour room lit by tall white candles. Julien guided me. I can now confess that I was nervous; not for the event but to see so many of my family there for me. I wanted to make them proud. I felt *mon oncle's* hand on my shoulder, reassuring me that all would be well. I straightened my back and continued forward while two people walked in front of me with lit red candles. When we arrived in the main room, everyone had created a circle around my parents who stood by a tall stone basin. I had never seen the basin before and as *mon oncle* led me towards it, I realized that it was full of water. Julien released his grip on my shoulder and I stopped next to my father. My father was a taller version of me: somewhat dusty coloured skin, Roman nose, indigo coloured eyes and more salt than pepper hair while mine was a true pepper. My mother, dressed in a black floor length gown with her thick hair piled atop her head, never looked lovelier.

"Thank you one and all for coming to this special gathering," said my father in his deep and commanding voice. "This night, the night when the Veil between the worlds is thinnest, is a perfect time for a Fayette to become a true Fayette." He looked at my face and said with a smile not only on his face but also in his voice, "My beloved son, Graydon. My blood flows in his veins just like it does in all of us. This is his night." He turned to the basin and dipped a small wooden cup into it. He then handed me the cup and while I held it with slightly trembling hands, he

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nicked his finger with a small knife to allow several drops of his blood to fall into the cup. He then passed the knife to my mother who did the same. My father made the motion for me to drink and so I did. The water tasted sweet and the blood only added a hint of something spicy to the otherwise cool flow. When I finished, I handed the cup back to my father. My mother then walked forward and began to sing. It was a strange dirge in an archaic language, one I could not place, and yet it filled my heart to bursting. When she finished, my father then took me in his arms and said, "Graydon, you are now a Fayette. Welcome home!" Everyone then clapped as my father embraced me. I returned the embrace and knew then that my path had just begun.

The party afterwards was one that only a Fayette could throw: a full orchestra, tables filled with exotic foods, all kinds of liquor, right down to the best sake and absinthe, and a snake charmer in a smaller side room where people could also indulge in opium and other such decadent delights. I, with my single glass of wine, walked around the house and thanked people for coming, met relatives from all over the world, accepted envelopes that I knew were full of money, and basked in the night's glory. A while later, I stepped out into the back lawn to enjoy the cool night air as well as watch revelers enjoy themselves as they romped around and sought out distant cousins to be willing participants for sordid activities. I lit a cigarette and smoked slowly as I made my rounds while listening to soft noises of pleasure freely given and accepted behind trees, bushes, or even out in the open. As I walked around, I felt a small tap on my shoulder. I turned around and saw a lovely thing dressed in a deep purple velvet dress. She took a deep sip from her cup filled with something dark and thick while her kohl-rimmed eyes sought mine.

"And which cousin are you, my dear?" I asked in a teasing voice. There were simply too many of us to keep up with.

"Why, I'm your cousin Josephine, twice removed and thrice be damned!" She finished off her cup and threw it to the side then grabbed me and kissed me fully on the mouth. I felt her small beating heart against my clothing as her woodsy perfume enveloped my senses. I crushed her velvet with my arms and

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returned the passion as the music continued to play such a strange, strange tune.

When I awoke the next day, I found myself in my bed with tangled sheets and no cousin Josephine. I sniffed the pillow next to me and smelled hints of her strange perfume then threw on a robe and raced downstairs. When I reached the breakfast area, I saw my parents and Julien enjoying a nice breakfast. All eyes turned to me as I sauntered into the room and made myself a plate. When I sat down and dug into the delicious food with relish, my father said, "And how did you find last night's revelry?"

"Quite wonderful," I said after swallowing a mouthful of eggs. "It was good to see so many relatives; which by the way, where are they?"

"Oh, they all left when the sun rose," said Julien while lazily buttering a piece of toast. "You know us Fayettes; we never like to stay too long once the deed is done."

"True. Oh yes, I spent the most wonderful night with my cousin Josephine, whoever she was related to." As I bit into my toast, I noticed that three sets of startled eyes were upon me. I swallowed my now dry toast and said, "What? Was I not supposed to?" They still stared at me in shock then *mon oncle* laughed his well known deep throated laugh. Soon, my parents joined in the merriment and it took all I had to not ask them just what in the hell was so damned funny.

Finally Julien, after calming down, said, "My dear Graydon, it would appear that we were most certainly blessed last night. Did Josephine say anything to you?"

"She said 'I'm your cousin, Josephine. Twice removed and thrice be damned!'"

Julien sighed. "Ah yes. Cousin Josephine died 100 years ago. She only makes an appearance if she thinks highly of the event or, in this case, person."

"But, um well, we-" My mother raised up a hand to silence me while a soft smile played upon her lips.

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“My dear,” said my mother as she placed a hand on my shoulder, “you ought to know by now that the Fayette family blood is strong. Take it as a compliment.” So I did.

Later that day, Julien drove me to his home in Central Gardens, one of the neighbourhoods in Midtown Memphis. Midtown has always been the place for artists, thinkers, intellectuals, and bullshitters. *Mon oncle* was none of that yet so much more. He was a famed luthier and violin instructor as well as my teacher of the violin for 20 years. When I first expressed an interest in wanting to learn the Devil’s Instrument, my parents were joyous at such an idea and felt that only Julien could be my teacher. Only a Fayette could teach a Fayette. When I first met him, I wasn’t sure how to take him. He stood about the same height as my father except that while my father was slender like a wood elf, Julien was broad shouldered and quite muscular. His piercing green eyes stared at me up and down as my parents introduced me to him. I gave him my hand to shake and he took it in his own. I felt power emanating from his hand and I knew right then and there that I wanted to be just like him.

“But you can not,” he said, much to my surprise. His lips curled into a sneer then quickly changed into a warm smile reserved for me. “You can not be me as I can not be you. You have your own path to follow, yet I am here to show you the entrance to the life of the violin.” He then pulled out his violin from his case and handed it to me. I stared at it from top to bottom, noticing the warmth that emanated from the reddish wood, then handed it back to him, who quickly placed it back into the case. He then turned to my parents and talked with them of my soon to be instructions.

As we pulled into his driveway, my eyes looked around to the wonders of the Autumn day. His trees were dressed in golds and reds while the other trees in the area had already lost their leaves,

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their skeletal hands reaching for the sky that would never be theirs again.

“Julien,” I said as I got out the car, “I can’t thank you enough for being a part of last night. It was quite wonderful.”

“*Ne rien*, my dear boy,” he replied as we walked into his house. I was always amazed at his home every time I stepped inside. It was the ultimate scholarly bachelor’s house, complete with full personal library, antiques from many explorations, framed wall maps of places I had heard of and others I never knew existed, and a full music room complete with CDs, instruments, sheet music and, of course, his precious violin. As I sat down on the couch, he took out the violin from the case, tuned it up, and then began to play a simple yet haunting song. I closed my eyes and saw a young woman walking through a garden that had long since gone. Her face was wet from tears as her eyes focused on the dead flowers with love rather than remorse. Did she not realize that her garden was dead? She cupped a dead rose, watching some of the petals fall to the ground. Her tears still fell as a smile crept across her face. This rose, what did it mean to her? She released the dead rose and walked on, not caring, not thinking, not-

“Understanding that the world, her world, had moved on without her,” said Julien in a soft tone. I opened my eyes and realized that he had stopped playing several minutes ago, yet I could still see the woman fresh in my mind.

“Who was she?” I asked.

“Someone from my past,” he replied. “Someone who loved things yet could not love people. Someone who could bring a rose back to life with only a word yet never knew what it meant to die.” He placed the violin back in its case then took a seat next to me. Of all of my relatives, Julien was the closest to me. Being my father’s older brother, he had seen and done much more than he was willing to let on. His deep green eyes sought mine, his way of seeking out the truth even when the person was willing or not to give it to him.

“Graydon, I brought you here because I have a special present for you. Do you remember how you used to watch me make

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violins for customers?” I closed my eyes and instantly smelled the wood and varnish lingering in his workroom. Whenever I visited him, he spoke little as he worked yet he did not need to for my sake; all I wanted to do was just watch him. His hands could produce such beautiful violins; I knew I witnessed pure magick. “I have made a violin especially for you, one that I know you will be proud of. You no longer need your student violin. You have become quite the master.” He then walked over to a side table and removed some papers from a bulging object. When he turned around, I wanted to cry. In his hands was the most beautiful violin I had ever seen. The colour was a deep brownish red with a pure black fingerboard. He handed the violin to me along with a bow and before I knew it, I stood up and began to play.

The notes coming from this beauty were simply exquisite, pure and raw; she was a virgin. I played with eyes closed, thinking of myself performing before a large audience, each note capturing them in its thrall and not letting go. I heard gasps from the audience, driving me to play longer and harder. I played because I wanted this moment to be real, wanted this energy to be real. I felt emotional lines from the audience drifting towards me and the violin as they wanted to be connected to such an instrument. I let them touch it with their lines, for their touch would only strengthen the sound. I felt sweat running down my face yet I did not care; I wanted to hear the notes. I wanted to hear Her. I turned away from the audience and saw Her for the first time. She was a tall and slender being covered in a soft light. Her long hair flowed on its own behind Her and She wore a simple dress that hinted that She was something more than a human. Her eyes flashed at me as a smile played across Her lips. *She accepted me*, I thought while I continued to play. She accepted me because She knew what my heart looked like and how it sounded. She who made the violin smell and sound so sweet. It was for Her that I played. I returned my attention to the audience. This was beyond sex, beyond any orgasm I had ever had in my life. My violin sang and the audience gladly gave up their essence to hear more. Just when I couldn't take any more of

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it, I gasped and opened my eyes, to find myself standing in the middle of the music room with Julien slowly clapping his hands.

“That,” he said in a very deep voice, “is the nature of Her.” I looked down at the once again innocent instrument then laid her down on a nearby table, slightly fearful of her. “I made her just for you, Graydon. She will play, very much so, yet she needs so much more.” I looked down at the violin again and shuddered; not from fear but sexual excitement. This was truly a treasure.

Because of Her, I am now a world-renowned violinist, yet I do not give ordinary performances. My performances are by select invitation only to those who can appreciate “different” techniques of the musical world. When people whisper that I am coming to their city, they know what to expect. They know that I am coming to tease and entrap their souls.

The crowd was nervous and excited, as well they should be. I sat in my dressing room, applying the last touches of kohl around my eyes while knowing that soon, I would give them what they came for and so much more. I checked my clothing in the mirror a final time – black slacks, long sleeved purple shirt and polished black shoes - then walked out with violin and bow in hand to greet my latest audience. As I walked through the narrow dimly lit hallway, I heard whispers around me, whispers from previous performers of the night who stayed behind to experience me.

“Oh look, it’s him!”

“Such a beauty. . . . such a beauty.”

“The Devil is ready to play.”

On and on it went yet I paid no attention to them. I had heard it all before. As I arrived at the velvet curtains, someone quickly walked up to my side and said in a nervous tone, “Mr. Fayette, are you ready?” I turned and looked down at the shivering creature, nodded once curtly, then turned back. The curtain pulled back, revealing me as I walked onto the stage. No one applauded; they waited with baited breath to hear the first note, the open A

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string that would begin the night of decadence. The other acts before me were just filler. Everyone knew why they were there and who it was they wanted to see. I made my way to the center of the stage and stared into the still crowd. My eyes glanced over them, barely acknowledging them with my gaze. I then smiled a seductive smile as I placed my violin under my chin, took a deep breath, and then slowly played a single note. A. Before the sound died, the thunderous applause was deafening. I looked out into the frenzied audience and knew then that I had them in my hands. When the noise settled down, I began to play one of my own compositions.

As the notes lovingly came out, I heard people gasping in ecstasy while a young woman in the front row moaned in pleasure. I played and they listened; oh, such a deal was being made here tonight! At one point during my performance, I opened my kohl-rimmed eyes and scanned the audience with my mind. I always found it to be quite humorous to “feel” my audience and their current mental state. While some intrigued me briefly, others left me feeling dirty and stained. Tonight was no exception. Sitting in the fourth row was a young man who dabbled in witchcraft yet had no idea his body was being used as a vessel for a demon he “mistakenly” conjured up one liquored night. Poor idiot. What made it worse was that I knew the demon that latched onto him like a starving tick. The demon, crouched right over him, watched me with slit cats' eyes and more than just a passing interest; it knew of my “background” and that I knew it was there. I nodded ever so slightly then continued to scan. On the second row were two adult twins dressed in all white, watching my every movement, wondering if perhaps they could possibly persuade me for a nightcap in their room. I dug deeper then quickly recoiled when I realized what they had in store for me if I said yes to them. There are some things even I would never do.

A young woman sat to the side, dressed in a deep purple dress with the same shade on her lips, her eyes closed while her body trembled. She was a virgin and had never experienced love. She wanted to watch me tonight; a pity since no man's touch

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would ever come close to what I'd been doing to her with the sound of my violin. Even if she ever decided to have sex, it would pale in comparison to my music. Once again, a pity.

Other people from all backgrounds sat here and there, watching me, wanting me. Men who claimed to be alpha males in their dreary lives trembled under me and my violin, willingly giving into whatever I commanded through my music. Women wanted me in every possible way, not caring that they would never have a chance with me. My tastes for female flesh were quite picky; I refused to just "bed" anything that resembled a woman. That was a waste of my time and my experiences. I closed my eyes and gave into the music again, washing the accumulated dirt of the audience from my mind and soul. . . . only to open them once more and focus on a woman seated towards the back. She wore a simple cut black dress and her brown hair was pulled back into a thick chignon with loose strands gracing her tender neck. Her makeup was simple and yet . . . and yet . . . . I could smell her perfume through all of the wasted efforts from everyone else. Her scent was strong and completely original. She made the perfume herself. I could smell lilacs, jasmine, dew kissed grass, and something deeper and darker that the rest of the audience would never be able to detect. She was special, this one. She was like me. I had to meet her. Delicately, I sent out a small shadow tendril towards her, hoping to "taste" her before –

My tendril hit a small wall and I immediately pulled back. Oh, she was good, this one. She knew exactly what she was doing. I closed my eyes again and completed my performance. When the last note flew out into the audience, it was met with rousing applause. I took my bows and then quickly left the stage to my dressing room. Fans appeared all around me as I tried to make my way to my room while murmuring *thank you* to each face that pushed itself towards my own. I felt hands touching my sweaty head yet I continued towards my goal of reaching my room. After an older woman dressed in a soft pink ballroom dress handed me a dozen red roses, I reached my room, opened the door, and literally jumped in while slamming the door shut

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behind me. Of course, that little show of anger and arrogance did nothing to quell their appetites for me. They heard my music. They heard what I was capable of and they wanted more, more of my life to fill in the holes of their lives. I set my instrument in the case and locked it tight then placed the roses in a vase. While the security guards held the public off from trying to break down my door, I sighed then ran my hands through my damp hair just as someone surprisingly knocked on the door. I opened it only a few inches wide as a gloved hand offered me a card followed by the body that owned the hand as the crowds howled for her blood. Why should SHE gain access to the Devil, I could hear them saying in loud drunken voices. I no longer heard them; all I knew was that she was now in my dressing room wearing a smile that I knew all too well. It was the same smile I used on those who were mentally weaker than I, easily manipulated and controlled and ready to do whatever I asked or demanded of them. She walked towards me then waved a hand at the door. Instantly, the sounds of the mob disappeared, leaving only the sounds of our hearts beating.

“So, you’re come,” I said in a deep voice. “How exquisite.”

“You knew I would show up,” she said as she walked by me and sat down on my couch. Her scent lingered in my nose for some time.

“Your perfume is divine.”

“I-”

“Made it myself.” She arched a slender eyebrow at me finishing her sentence and then relaxed as she should. Of course she knew I would. I glanced down at her card then back into her lovely face. Her deep caramel skin glowed as she stared at me. Without another word, I took her into my arms and kissed her passionately. She, thankfully, did not fight back.