

# OUT OF THE FIRE

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# CHAPTER ONE

We were like fire, the four of us. Catching each other's sparks until the flames grew, spread, raged beyond our control.

They told us this would happen. They said it like a warning rather than a promise.

But *we* promised. We promised each other.

We made the flame and gave it life. Stoked it. Let it breathe until it became a thing outside ourselves.

And now we watch as the wind lifts it higher, stretching the fire's orange tongues toward the gray-black sky. The flames destroy everything they touch, snaps and groans piercing the night air, as the walls of the home below grow black and blistered.

The wind shifts and heat caresses my face, tears prickling in my eyes, and the muted wail of sirens grows sharper.

Margot squeezes my hand, and on my other side, Ori shudders.

Nomi is still, quiet. Her hand links to Ori's, but it may as well be mine.

We're all waiting for her, to tell us when she's seen enough. We'll stay all night, perched on the overlook that frames her former stepfather's house below. Mosquitos swarming our ankles and creatures rustling in the trees at our backs.

We'll stay until Nomi's ready to go. That's the deal. The promise. The vow we made that night, deep in the woods where crickets chirped and wolves howled.

"Cass." It's the first word anyone's spoken in fifteen minutes, but none of us are surprised to hear Nomi's voice. "I'm ready."

Our hands unchain, separate now but no less connected, and the flash

of lights paints our faces in blues and reds as we fall back from the fire we made.

Tonight is for Nomi. But there are more nights to come.

They warned us bad things would happen.

They didn't know we were just getting started.