

Yadriel moved in closer, and he could feel energy swarming beneath his feet, like standing on a geyser, water rushing just below ground.

“Do you feel that, too?” Maritza asked.

He nodded. “It’s stronger in here,” he said. Whatever spirit had led them here was close.

Yadriel took a step back, and something crunched under his shoe. Hopping to the side, he found a silver chain with a small pendant lying on the dusty floor.

Maritza moved in. “What’s that?”

“I think it’s a necklace,” Yadriel murmured, setting the lantern on the ground.

Carefully, he picked it up. As soon as his fingers made contact, a shiver rolled through his body. He held it up to the light. A medal hung from the chain, barely larger than his thumbnail. The edge of the medal read *SAn judAS tAdeo* across the top, and *RuegA poR noSotRoS* along the bottom. In the center stood a man wearing long robes with a book held against his chest and a staff in his hand.

The medal was in bad need of cleaning. The silver was tarnished, but it certainly wasn’t old enough to have been abandoned in the old church all this time. Only the raised form of St. Jude himself was bright silver, as if it had been polished by someone rubbing their thumb against it over and over.

Yadriel reached for the medal, and as soon as his fingers touched the cool silver, electricity flooded through his veins. He sucked in a

sharp breath. Something pulsed under his feet in rhythm with the thudding of his heart.

“What’s wrong?” Maritza demanded as Yadriel tried to catch his breath.

“It’s a tether,” he said, and a spike of adrenaline made him feel light-headed.

Once a spirit was attached to a tether, they couldn’t venture very far from it, which was why things like haunted houses existed, but there weren’t many stories about a single ghost who roamed an entire city. It was only when the spirits were free of their earthly bindings that a brujo could release them and help them pass peacefully to their eternal rest.

Yadriel had never actually held a spirit’s tether before. They were incredibly powerful. Some of the brujx claimed mishandling a spirit’s tether would get you cursed.

But Yadriel had never heard of anyone ever actually getting possessed, and he had no intention of disrespecting this tether.

“But it’s not Miguel’s, that’s not his portaje,” Maritza said, reaching out as if to touch it before thinking better.

“It *could* be Miguel’s,” Yadriel tried to reason, his hope of finding his cousin fighting against logic. He squeezed the medal in his hand. Warmth spread through his palm and up his arm.

He turned to Maritza with a smile. “There’s only one way to find out.”

Maritza gave him a skeptical look.

“I have to try—what if Miguel’s spirit got tethered to this instead of his portaje?” he said, twisting the chain between his fingers.

“It might be attached to someone who’s gone maligno,” Maritza said, casting a pointed look around the dilapidated church.

“Then it’s a good thing I’ve got this, isn’t it?” Yadriel said, pulling out his portaje.

Maritza eyed the dagger but then grinned. “All right, brujo, work your magic.”

The rush of excitement made Yadriel feel giddy as he knelt before

Lady Death. Maybe it was the feel of the dagger in his hand or the magic he now knew flowed through his veins, but for someone who usually erred on the side of caution, Yadriel felt recklessly brave.

He dug into his backpack and pulled out the clay bowl. Quickly, he poured in the rest of the small tequila bottle and some chicken blood, then grabbed a box of matches. He stood and tried to take a deep breath, but he was too excited, practically buzzing. His palms were sweaty, making it difficult to light the match, but it finally caught.

He glanced over at Maritza, and she nodded encouragingly.

Yadriel had seen his father summon a spirit. He knew what to do and how to do it. He just needed to say the words.

The flame inched toward Yadriel's fingers. There was no time left to second-guess.

He held out his arm, the medal hanging from the chain looped around his hand. It glinted in the dim light.

"Te—" Yadriel cleared his throat, trying to breathe around the lump that had formed. "¡Te invoco, espíritu!"

He dropped the match into the bowl. For a second, it sizzled in the blood and alcohol before there was an explosion of heat and golden light. Yadriel sprang back, choking on the smoke.

The fire in the bowl burned calmly, casting orange light over a boy. He was doubled over on his hands and knees before the statue of Lady Death, clutching his chest.

Yadriel could hardly believe his eyes. "It worked!"

The spirit's face was screwed up tight in a grimace, his fingers knotted into the material of his shirt. He wore a hooded black leather jacket over a white tee, faded jeans, and a pair of Converse.

"That's *not* Miguel," Maritza tried to whisper, but she'd never had a very good inside voice.

Yadriel groaned and dragged a hand over his face. On the bright side, he had actually summoned a real-life spirit.

