

Prologue

*Virginia Beach, Virginia
August 2016*

“What time are they supposed to be here?” Luke Callaway asked his wife, Jen, and not for the first time.

Jen had a cousin named Sarah whom she had met after doing a DNA test through Ancestry and discovering that they were related. Sarah was married to Jason Barnes, and Jen and the rest of her family had just recently discovered that Jason was half-human, half-dark angel.

Sarah and Jason, along with their children, Tori and Grayson, were coming for a visit. Jen and Luke had met Jason before, even coming to their wedding in October of last year, but at that time they had no idea that Jason was half-angel.

“At noon,” Jen answered.

“Where is Arielle?”

Arielle was the product of Luke’s daughter, Cassie, who was also Jen’s niece, and a dark angel who had posed as Skyler, Cassie’s then-boyfriend.

“She is in the treehouse,” Jen answered her husband’s question about Arielle. “Why are you so nervous?”

“The more people who know about Arielle, the riskier it becomes for her abilities being exposed,” Luke answered.

Arielle was a special half-human, half-dark angel who could communicate with animals, and she had wings. She loved flying around in the garden of the big estate that Jen and Luke had inherited.

“But Jason is the same kind of being that Arielle is. He just doesn’t have her ability to fly,” Jen said. “We need to know what to expect for her next several years, besides what Dr. Adeline told us.”

Arielle had a special doctor, Dr. Adeline Brelane, who was half-human, half-guardian angel. Originally from Norway, she had the ability to heal people and was raised by her human grandparents, eventually moving to America. Adeline did a lot of research on halvesies, as she called them, and found Jason Barnes when it was discovered that Arielle was maturing at a much faster rate than a normal human. Apparently, Jason had the same growth pattern.

“Are you sure we can trust him?” Luke asked.

“He has had to hide his age for all these years, Luke. He will have no problem hiding what Arielle is,” Jen said.

Jason Barnes was 167 years old when he found out that he was half-human and half-dark angel. His mother, Aurora, had fallen in love with Griffin Shackleton, who was a dark angel. When Jason was born in a hayloft, Griffin, Finn for short, tried to take the baby. However, Aurora figured out Finn’s plans and cut the tiny wings off of Jason’s back in order to save his life from the dark angel. This stripped Jason of any special abilities except for one: longevity.

So when Dr. Adeline had found Jason, she told Cassie and Skyler, now married, about Jason, that there was another product of a half-human, half-dark angel. They were surprised that he happened to be in the same Wellington family, as he had been married to Belle Wellington in the past, one of their ancestors, and was now married to Sarah Barnes, who was also in the Wellington family.

Jen and Luke had no idea about anyone being an angel in the past at all until Arielle was born with wings on her back. There was no hiding it anymore, and they all had to come to terms with it. It was shocking to say the least, to find out that Skyler, Brad, and Jason all had been angels or part angels.

Jen placed her hand on top of Luke's across the table in their tropical breakfast nook, trying to dispel his nervousness. "This will be good for us all. It will be nice to talk to another person about all of this. I have had to hide it from Sarah up to this point, and now I won't have to."

They wanted to speak with Jason about how he grew up so that they could compare that with Arielle's life and be more prepared for what was in store. There was the one difference, of course, in that Arielle still had her wings whereas Jason's were severed. He had no special abilities, unlike Arielle.

"You're right," Luke said. "Of course he's good at keeping secrets. I just worry about someone finding out where we live, you know? I want our privacy. I dread every time anyone comes down the driveway."

Luke himself had been in a country band, Renegades, and they had produced an album. They had toured around the country and had a song on the radio, but Luke decided to leave that lifestyle. He was now living in Pungo, a quiet, country rural area of Virginia Beach, trying to hide the fact that he had a half-angel for a granddaughter. He also didn't want any musicians, producers, or even crazy fans finding out where he lived. The only friend who knew was Steve, a former band member and his best friend.

They had installed an iron gate and protective privacy fence around the whole property, only allowing people to enter the gates that they trusted. Anyone who drove up would have to press a button to buzz the house, then someone in the house would either approve or not approve their entry. If they were approved, that household member would push a button inside the house to open the gate. Anyone not permitted was told they could not enter the property. All deliveries were left outside the gate, to be retrieved by a family member at a later time. They also had installed a security system in the house and had motion-detected lights outside. They wanted to do whatever they could to protect themselves, and especially Arielle.

"I know," Jen agreed. "I am always careful to drive home the long way around in case anyone tries to follow me," she confessed.

At noon, there was a buzz from the gate.

"Yes?" Luke said, pressing the microphone button.

"Hey, it's Jason and Sarah," Jason said. "And the kids."

"Hey, Jason. I'll open the gate and let you through," Luke said.

He pushed the remote to open the gate and Jason's black truck passed through. Luke then closed the gate back. Moments later, the truck pulled up towards the front door, and soon the doorbell chimed, sounding like the bells at Big Ben in London. Everyone in the house excitedly piled into the foyer to greet them.

Jen opened the door to a smiling but obviously nervous couple, Sarah and Jason, with their children smiling behind them.

"Sarah, Jason! It's so good to see you both. Come on inside," Jen said, hugging them both and ushering them inside. "Tori, it's so good to see you, too," she said, hugging the teenage girl.

"You remember my son, Grayson?" Jason said.

"Of course," Jen said. "Nice to see you again, Grayson," she said, giving him a quick hug. She then closed and locked the front door.

The rest of the family greeted them: Luke, Cassie, Skyler, Tyler, André Laurent, who was Tyler's grandfather through his mother Scarlett, and André's wife, Odette.

Luke hugged Jason like it was the first time. "Hey," was all Luke could say. He seemed to be full of emotions.

Finally, Arielle greeted them. She flew into the room like a fairy.

Sarah gasped. "Wow, you really are an angel, aren't you?"

“Impressive,” was all Jason could say.

Arielle landed on the floor in front of the couple. “Pleased to meet you both. I’m Arielle.”

“It is wonderful meeting you,” Sarah said, stooping over to give her a hug. “I’m Sarah.”

Jason greeted her next. In true nineteenth century fashion, he bowed, took Arielle’s hand, and kissed it. “It is indeed a pleasure to meet you, Miss Arielle. I am Jason, and I am fascinated.”

Arielle laughed in a pixie-like voice.

“How old are you?” Jason had to ask.

Arielle looked at her mom, Cassie, who nodded. “I am three months old, sir.”

“Please, call me Jason. This is amazing,” he said. She looked more like three years old than three months.

“Come on, let’s all get comfortable in the family room,” Jen said. “I have made coffee, iced tea, and lemonade for anyone who wants a drink. I also have some wine and whiskey if you’d like something stronger.”

“This way.” Luke guided them into the family room, which was originally called the ladies pink parlor. The walls were a dusty rose with beige trim and dark wood accents. Upholstered chairs in beige and taupe surrounded a round table covered with a white tablecloth which held an array of food, cheese, crackers, and cookies. The drinks that Jen had mentioned were on a sideboard.

“This house is a museum,” Jason observed, looking around at all the rooms along the way.

They had left the house decorated the way Scarlett had it, French and English furniture from the nineteenth century and a few from the eighteenth. There were brass chandeliers in each room, statues, grand vases filled with flowers, and portraits of bygone family members.

“Thank you,” Jen said. “We inherited this house from Scarlett, Tyler’s mom. She had kept it the same way as her mother and Andre did, and we have kept it the same, too.”

“You used to live here before?” Sarah asked André.

“Yes, I did. We divorced and I moved back to France for a time. This is home again.”

“That’s nice,” Sarah said.

“Luke has a smoker in the back where he’s been tending barbecue all morning,” Jen said. “We can eat after we talk a little. What time will it be ready, honey?”

“One o’clock, so we have a little time. Jason, can I get you some whiskey?”

“Sure, what kind do you have?”

“I have some Tarnished Truth, which is a distillery at the old Cavalier Hotel on the oceanfront. It’s pretty good.”

“Sure, I’ll try some.”

Luke poured two glasses of the amber liquid.

“Sarah, would you like some wine?” Jen asked. “I have some chardonnay that’s chilled.”

“Sure, that would be great,” Sarah said.

Jen poured two glasses, handing one to Sarah. “Cassie? Tori?” she offered.

“No, thanks.” Cassie got up and poured some lemonade.

“What about you, Tori?” Cassie asked.

“I’ll take lemonade.”

Cassie poured another glass for Tori and handed it to her. The two sat near each other and made small talk, while Grayson and Skyler did the same.

Everyone else sat down on sofas, settees, and chairs with their drinks.

Sarah glanced over at Arielle, who was hovering in a fake tree in the corner.

“Arielle, please be human for our guests,” Cassie said quietly.

“Yes, Mama.” Arielle flew out of the tree and sat down in a side chair.

“So, Jason, tell us all about yourself,” Luke said.

Jason proceeded to tell the family everything he had learned about his upbringing from a diary of his mother's. The diary had been discovered at the home where Jason and Sarah were now living, a home which Jason grew up in, on a plantation called Misty Hill.

"We brought the diary to show you," Jason said.

Sarah took it out of her big purse and passed it around for everyone to look at, handing it to Jen first. "It's very old, handle with care," he cautioned.

He said he had been born in 1843 in a hayloft at Misty Hill. The diary explained how Jason had developed. At three months of age, he looked like a three-year-old, just like Arielle did now. At one year of age, he looked like a seven-year-old; at three-and-a-half, he looked to be 11 years old; at eight years of age, he looked like an 18-year-old. His growth was rapid for the first seven years of his life, but then the growth stopped and slowed down tremendously. He's hardly aged at all in the past hundred and some years, looking like a 40- or 50-year-old.

"So Arielle will look like an 18-year-old by the time she is eight?" Cassie asked.

"I believe so, since she is growing rapidly like I did," Jason replied.

Jen handed the diary to Cassie, pointing out the last pages of the journal where this was further explained.

"It's hard to believe you've been around since the Civil War," Luke said.

"Yes, I've been through many wars," Jason said quietly.

"That is amazing, and I'm sure terrifying at the same time," Luke said.

Jason nodded his head in agreement. "All my children have had longevity to a certain degree," he said. "My daughter Amanda lived to be 120; my daughter Victoria was 99. My great-grandson, Seth, who was Tori's dad, was killed in Iraq but had incredible strength. Tori has the ability to communicate with spirits, and Grayson has the ability to move things with his mind."

"Wow," Jen said.

"Amanda could sense danger. Victoria could see the future sometimes. What are Arielle's abilities, besides being able to fly?" Jason asked.

"I can communicate with animals and other angels," Arielle said, smiling.

"Is that a fact? That's wonderful," Jason said.

"Where are all your family members buried?" Jen wanted to know.

"Most of them are at Misty Hill, including my children."

"I'd like to see their graves sometime," Jen said.

"You could all come for a visit anytime," Sarah said. "We'd be happy to give you a tour of everything."

"That would be great. I want to write all of this down for my genealogy too," Jen said.

"You'd have to keep it private on Ancestry," Sarah warned, "at least about Jason being the same person as Henry. Believe me, I had a headache trying to figure out his genealogy at first, where he fit into it all. No one can know how old he really is."

"Yes, of course," Jen agreed.

They spent the rest of the day eating smoked barbecue pork, potato salad, cole slaw, watermelon, having more drinks, and talking about family. It was decided that Jason, Sarah and their children would spend the night in spare bedrooms of the big house. They talked into the wee hours of the morning.

They slept in the next morning, and then Odette had a big brunch waiting for them all in the dining room. Jen gave them all a tour of the house and gardens after that, and they sat on a covered porch with mint juleps and talked some more. They talked about Arielle and watched her fly in the garden and talk to the squirrels and birds in the trees.

When they finally left later that afternoon, Jen hugged them tight. "We need to do this again soon," she said to Sarah.

“Yes, you should all come to Misty Hill.”

“We will.”

“Next weekend?”

“It’s a date.”

They watched them drive down the driveway, and Jen was thankful for family. Family would see them through any hard times in the future, and they would handle it together.

Chapter One

*Virginia Beach, Virginia
Six years later, October 2022*

"I want to get out of here. I want to see the world," Arielle complained to her parents and grandparents, and not for the first time. It was a warm sunny morning, and they were enjoying breakfast out back on the covered patio.

"Honey, it's too dangerous," Cassie said.

"Yes, you're not allowed," Arielle's Papa Luke said.

"But Uncle Jason lived a life. He joined the army and fought in the Civil War when he was nearly my age." Arielle was now six years old but looked and acted like a teenager of about sixteen.

"He was eight," Jen reminded them.

"Please, I'm so bored being cooped up in this house and garden. I need something else to do. Can I go to an actual school like you did, Mama?"

Cassie had told Arielle recently about how she had met Skyler, how romantic it had been, after Arielle had asked. Arielle knew that her real father was a dark angel, but she called Skyler her dad and had been curious about their relationship. She certainly was acting like a teenager in that respect.

"Maybe I'll meet a nice boy," Arielle continued with a dreamy look in her eyes.

"You may not go to school," Cassie answered. "Homeschooling is fine for you."

"She could come to my school," Tyler said. He was fourteen years old now and just starting high school. "I can keep an eye on her."

"I don't think that's a good idea," Cassie said. "She couldn't have every class with you, and it wouldn't be fair for you to have to keep such a close eye on her."

"You act like I'm going to do something bad, or that someone is going to kidnap me," Arielle said.

Her family all looked at each other, thinking the same thing. Arielle had been kidnapped by her real father the day she was born, and had fooled all of them on numerous occasions, transforming himself to look like other people.

"How about if I become a vet?" Arielle said. "You know how good I am with communicating with animals here in the garden. I could help other people's animals too. I can heal them, just like Dr. Adeline does."

Cassie looked at Skyler and then at Luke and Jen. It wasn't a bad idea, but she feared other people finding out about Arielle's special abilities, in particular the wings on her back. They flattened out well enough and she could hide them under clothes, but still, when she became overly excited about something, they would open up spontaneously without her realizing it.

"I'm getting better at controlling my wings," Arielle said, seeming to read her mother's thoughts. "I could come to the vet with you, Mama, and help out and learn on the job. Please?" she pleaded.

Cassie had been working as a receptionist at Coastal Veterinary Hospital for the past two years. It was located just up the road from Pungo.

"That's not a bad idea," Jen said.

Odette, Tyler's step-grandmother, came out to the patio with some freshly baked pumpkin muffins, followed closely by André, Tyler's grandfather, "grand-père". Odette had begun cooking for the family when

she and André moved in. Harry, their Havanese dog, came bouncing out the door with Odette. He ran over to Arielle excitedly. He always got excited when Arielle did. Arielle petted Harry, then suddenly jumped up, reached for a muffin, and placed it between her palms, offering it to Cassie. "Please, Mom?"

She smiled so sweetly at Cassie, what else could she do. She took the muffin and looked at Skyler. "What do you think?"

"Since you work there, you could keep an eye on her," Skyler said.

"Yes, Daddy's right. I would only work when you're there."

"You're too young to work and get paid," Cassie said. "Maybe you could be a volunteer."

"Yes, I can do that. Let's go." Arielle stood up, bouncing on her toes like she was doing ballet. Harry barked his agreement.

"We can go talk to Courtney after breakfast," Cassie said. Dr. Courtney Beck was one of the veterinarians that Cassie worked for.

"Oh, thank you, Mama." Arielle leaned over and hugged Cassie, then Skyler, and continued around the room, hugging Luke, Jen, Tyler, André and Odette.

"I'll go with you," Luke said.

After breakfast, Cassie, Luke and Arielle drove up Princess Anne Road to Coastal Veterinary Hospital. Before clocking in for work, Cassie went upstairs where Courtney's office was.

"Dr. Courtney?" Cassie said, knocking on the door.

"Come in, Cassie." Dr. Courtney Beck was forty-something, slightly plump, with layered straight blonde hair, blue eyes, and an easygoing personality. "How's it going?"

"Good, good. I was wondering if I could talk to you for a second about something."

"Sure, what is it?" Courtney was pulling on her white medical scrub top which had the office's logo stitched on the left upper corner.

"It's about my...cousin." They had decided that if Arielle was going out into the world, she would be called Cassie's cousin on Skyler's side. That way Arielle could keep their last name of Garrett.

"Your cousin?" Courtney sat down and glanced at her computer, looking at the day's schedule. She looked over at Cassie expectantly.

"Actually, she's Skyler's cousin on his dad's side. She has recently come to live with us after losing her parents." Cassie hated lying, but reminded herself that Jason did it for all those years, and sometimes it was necessary to keep people safe. Specifically her family.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. That is sad. How old is she?"

"Sixteen."

"It's nice of you guys to take care of her. What's her name?"

"Arielle."

"Why did you want to talk to me about Arielle?"

"Well, she's been homeschooled her whole life, and we want to continue that, but she is really good with animals. She has like a sixth sense with them or something. Like an animal whisperer. We were wondering if maybe she could work here as a volunteer?" Cassie smiled, trying to look pleasant, wondering how her daughter talked her into this.

"That sounds like a great idea. We could use the help around here. We can try her out for a week and see if she's a good fit. How does that sound?"

"That would be great. Do you have time to meet her now?"

"Absolutely. Is she here?"

"She is. She's downstairs with my dad."

“Okay, let’s go on down.” Courtney grabbed an iPad and followed Cassie downstairs. Arielle and Luke were standing in the waiting room, looking around. Arielle looked like a kid in a candy shop for the first time, observing everything.

“Well, who do we have here? Oh my stars, is that Luke Callaway?” Her eyes brightened and she was beaming from ear to ear.

“You know who my dad is?” Cassie asked.

“Luke Callaway is your dad? Oh my goodness, Cassie. You never told me that.” Courtney rushed over to shake hands with Luke. “Aren’t you just the cutest? I have all your music. Oh, I’m sorry. Here I am going all fangirl on you.” She blushed, taking her hand back from Luke. She then smiled, putting the back of that hand up next to her lips. She was either hiding behind it from embarrassment or smelling her hand that had just touched Luke’s. “Now that I look at the two of you, of course there is a resemblance.” She turned back to Cassie. “But your last name is Garrett since you’re married, so I never put it together.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” Luke said, finally getting a word in. He looked pleased at the attention.

“This is Arielle,” Cassie said, pulling her gently in front of Courtney.

“And you are just adorable. Are you related to Luke? No, wait a minute. You said she’s related to Skyler, right? She looks a lot like you and your dad, Cassie, with that blonde hair.”

Cassie laughed uneasily and was at a loss for words momentarily.

“My mom had blonde hair like me,” Arielle spoke up.

“Oh, I see. Forgive my manners. I’m Courtney Beck. Dr. Courtney.” She shook hands with Arielle and glanced at Luke again, as well. “I understand you’re interested in working here as a volunteer.”

“That’s right, I am,” Arielle said.

“That’s just wonderful. Let’s see how you are with animals. You can help me with my first patient. It’s an English bulldog here for a set of shots. The owner’s name is Brenda DeLoach, and the dog’s name is Bentley.” Courtney turned back to Luke. “It was wonderful to meet you.”

“Same here. You made my day,” Luke said.

“Oh, no. You made *my* day,” Courtney said.

Chapter Two

“What’ll you have, sugar?”

Jolene, an ivory-skinned, auburn-haired bartender at Mermaid Brewery was offering Luke a drink.

Over the past year, Luke had been playing his guitar and singing songs one Saturday night out of each month at the local brewery. It was located in the northern part of Virginia Beach on the Chesapeake Bay. He still wrote songs and sold many, won some awards, and attended award shows once in a while, with Jen on his arm. But he itched to perform. So when he and Jen had gone to the grand opening of the brewery the previous year, he had been approached by the owner, a short Italian guy named Carmine. He had recognized Luke from his wife’s love of country music, and he offered Luke the monthly gig. It took some convincing, but Jen finally agreed that he could do it as long as he promised not to drink alcohol while he performed, so that he would be sober enough to drive home. He agreed.

“I’ll have a sparkling water as always, Jolene,” he said.

“You got it,” she said, filling up a glass with an etched mermaid on it. She handed it to him at the end of the bar.

“Thanks.”

“Of course.” Jolene flashed him her bright green eyes, which popped in the green top she wore. She was always flirty with all the men, so it didn’t concern Luke nor did it tempt him. The attention from Jolene certainly was flattering, but his heart and soul belonged with Jen, the love of his life.

He sat back down in the front corner of the main room, took a big sip of the cold bubbly liquid, set it on a tall speaker, and picked his guitar back up again.

“I had a request to sing my first hit, ‘Stay.’ This is a song my band used to close our shows with at every concert. I wrote it about the love of my life, my wife. This will be my last song tonight. Thank you all for coming out tonight. I hope you’ve enjoyed it as much as I have.”

He sang the love song that he had written years ago about Jen. When he finished, the whole room applauded and cheered. He beamed and thanked them again. He began packing his guitar and microphone into his bags. He then downed the San Pellegrino drink and took the empty bottle over to the bar.

“Can I tempt you with something else?” Jolene asked, raising her eyebrows and smiling suggestively. “How about a shot of whiskey before you go?”

“Ah, no thanks, Jolene. I’m trying to be good.”

“What’s the fun in that?”

Luke laughed. “I have to be good for my wife or else I’ll get in trouble.” He was trying, not the first time, to remind Jolene that he was married while also trying to joke around.

“If you were *my* husband, you wouldn’t get in trouble with me for *anything*, particularly not for having a little fun.”

“There is such a thing as too much fun, Jolene. I’ve been in one too many car wrecks to drink and drive again.”

“I can give you a ride home, sugar,” Jolene said.

“The only one giving him a ride home is me,” Jen said from behind him.

“Jen! There you are, baby.” Luke turned around and gave her a big kiss on the lips. He had nearly forgotten that his truck was in the shop for the weekend, getting routine maintenance done on it, and that Jen was picking him up. Which meant that he could have had that whiskey after all. But it was probably a good thing that he didn’t.

Jolene cleared her throat behind the bar. Luke and Jen both looked at her. “Care for a drink?” she asked Jen.

“Jolene, I don’t think you’ve met my wife. This is Jen. Jen, this is Jolene.”

“Nice to meet you,” Jen said politely, “and no, thank you. We should be going.”

She grabbed Luke’s hand and steered him out of the brewery, picking up his guitar case for him.

“Nice meeting you, too,” Jolene called out as they walked out the front door.

When they got to the parking lot, Jen lit into him.

“How long has this Jolene been working here? Is she always here when you play on Saturday nights?”

It was clear that Jen was jealous.

“I don’t know, baby, six months maybe.” He took his guitar case from Jen and placed it in the back compartment of Jen’s Honda Pilot.

“You’re not allowed to play here when she’s working,” Jen said.

“Oh really?” Luke said, getting a little perturbed at her bossiness.

“Yes, really. I saw the looks she was giving you. She could eat you up if you’d let her.”

“Baby, a lot of women look at me like that.”

Jen shoved the speaker into the back, pushed the button for the door to close, and glared at him.

“But I only have eyes for you. My body belongs only to you.” He pulled her into his arms. “You trust me, don’t you?”

She sighed and pulled her arms around his neck. “Yes, I do. It’s the women I don’t trust. They can be really aggressive, and they might be tempting when they’re as beautiful as her. She looks like a dang mermaid.”

Luke kissed her and caressed her hair. “She’s not nearly as beautiful as you.”

Jen smiled. “I don’t smell alcohol on your breath, so you’ve been good, haven’t you?”

“Yes, ma’am, I have. Come on, let’s go home. I believe it is our anniversary weekend.”

“It sure is.”

“Let’s go somewhere then and have a drink. Or I can have a drink and you can be the DD, and we can dance.”

“We can do all of that at home.”

“But there are children and grandparents there,” Luke complained.

“Not tonight. I asked André if he and Odette could take Tyler to the movies, and they said yes. Cassie, Skyler and Arielle are joining them. So we have the next couple of hours at the house to ourselves. We can have a drink and dance under the moonlight.”

“Mmm, that is definitely good news. What are we waiting for then, let’s get out of here.”

Since their anniversary was on Halloween, they oftentimes had to celebrate on another day so that they could take Tyler trick-or-treating and then watch a scary movie with the family. Tyler was 14 years old this year and too old to trick-or-treat, but they all planned to go to a haunted house together.

There was always somebody home in the big house ever since they moved in, especially with trying to hide Arielle, and for everyone else to be gone was a rare treat. Jen sped down the road quickly in order to get back home so they could start celebrating.