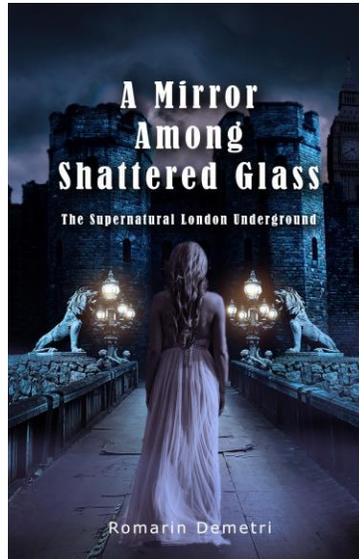


**The Supernatural London Underground
Book One: A Mirror Among Shattered Glass**

By: Romarin Demetri



Sample Chapter

Chapter 23: Flapdragon

“Are you going tonight?” Travis asked me, as I sat with Kit in the common room, talking excitedly about Fred, not ready to be interrupted.

“Going where?”

“You bloody tourist,” he accused me. “Seven’s for Flapdragon and Halloween.”

“It’s today?” I questioned.

“If you’re going; are you?”

I looked to Kit, who was combing her slender fingers through her dark brown hair in thought, as if this wasn’t her conversation.

“What’s Flapdragon?” I asked her.

“I’m not sure,” she said, disappointed.

“You’re not going, are you?” I asked her, knowing the answer.

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” she answered, clearing her throat after her voice fell a little. I knew she was right. “But please go, it should be fun.”

“Well?” Travis asked.

“Okay.”

“But you have to promise to play or I’m not taking you.”

“Flapdragon?” I asked, to which he nodded, “Alright, I promise.”

I left with Travis and Audin, and they swore to me that they wouldn’t tell me what Flapdragon was until we got to Seven’s Pub to make me stop asking. It worked.

I could now walk from the castle to our favorite bar with my eyes closed, and with some practice, I was learning to shake the feeling of doom from my not-so-favorite alley, enchanted with little invisible, shivery hands that threatened to shake mine to make me turn back from the winding brick passageway. It might have been the jack-o-lanterns that helped me this time, as if Halloween lifted some of the hesitation from me, and probably the rest of London. Perhaps those who wouldn't ordinarily end up at Seven's would tonight, as if someone wanted the company—or the Flapdragon competition.

The jack-o-lanterns, a few feet apart, lit our way to the pub with their glowing orange lights and crooked teeth. Their little faces told me that tonight would be different, and I should soon be glad that I left the castle, even though something in me felt guilty in leaving Kit behind. We finally made it to a wider passageway, and the blue neon sign that named the pub.

It was the only place we had to meet other people remotely like us, and just a decade ago, no one would have dared walk into a meeting place like Seven's, not when paranormal people were being taken off of the street to be locked away in a laboratory of horrors. It was ironic that Kit, whose evil side had everything to do with the liberation of London seven years earlier, decided it was in her best interest to stay home.

The place was only lit with candles, and I might have thought I was stumbling upon an ancient ritual if the jukebox still wasn't going. There were more people than usual, shrouded in the low lights, hanging around the bar, and seated at some of the high-tops. Some were dressed up in costume, but most, like me and my housemates, weren't. In the middle of the room there was a display of lower tables pressed together, allowing a long rectangular plate of sorts to rest across them, and they were now one large table, unified under the shiny object.

"It begins in about twenty minutes," Audin told me, "so make sure you sign your name to the list."

"You got a pen?" I dared.

"You have blood, right?" he asked in all seriousness, before turning his lips into a grin and walking towards the signup sheet to record his own.

I signed my name after him with no hesitation, still unaware of what I was getting myself into, but able to finally measure the faith I had in my new friends. I saw a few other names, one of which was perfect cursive: Tristan, the sweet-talking London vampire I had met on my very first trip to Seven's. Travis had accused me of drooling over Tristan, after warning me about how conspicuously enticing he could be.

Tristan was incredibly easy to find when I looked around the bar for him, his dark features even more intriguing in the low light, and he had on a perfectly ironed silk shirt, plum-colored. He waved at me.

"So how does this work?" I asked the bartender.

"You have to grab as many raisins as you can out of the bowl, but the catch is, the bowl is filed with brandy, which is set on fire."

"No way!" I said excitedly, sipping on my drink.

"If you're too greedy, you might get burned, but if you're too indifferent, you'll lose."

"Sounds like I'll get burned either way," I mused, "Have you ever played before?"

"No," she laughed, "I haven't. Whoever eats the most raisins wins. You better hurry and get over there. It's about to begin."

The tables were pushed together to make room for the shallow bowl of brandy that was six feet long, and a foot wide. Another barkeep poured the brandy into it. It looked metal, but I

wasn't sure. The raisins sat in clusters, dispersed evenly down the length of the bowl. I surveyed my competition.

Travis and Audin were both playing, and I looked to see Tristan, as well as two more that I suspected were vampires who loosely called themselves "Libertines". Snatching fruit out of burning brandy was definitely something London vampires would get behind. I didn't know much about them, but it didn't take long to realize they were all about living fast and free alcohol, whether it was on the rocks or on fire.

One of the witches I had seen before, Brent, who was usually with the three other members of the London Coven, was also playing. He seemed to keep to himself, but there was something about Halloween that made him connect with us.

"Careful, Row, you're playing with a fire witch," Travis jested, glaring quickly at Brent.

"I'm not a cheater," Brent said, "but I have been playing this game since I was twelve."

I looked at my friends, who probably bet each other every year to play the game, and I wasn't going to ask them what was on the line. There was no one else I could pick out that had the same powers as they did, and I wondered if they were the only ones left of their kind.

"I'm Row," I said to Brent.

"Hey, I'm Brent," he smiled. "Get ready to lose."

"Okay then," I laughed, averting my gaze. He had brown hair and eyes, and a focused demeanor, but I knew this was probably the first time he had mustered up the courage to play in public. It was the first time I had talked to him, and supposed that maybe he didn't wish to speak to me because I wasn't a witch.

"Good luck," Tristan told me.

The rectangular bowl was set alight with blue flames, and I watched the raisins flicker as they counted down with us.

At zero, we started.

I quickly plucked one of out the liquid and popped it into my mouth. It wasn't hotter than coffee, but I wondered how many I could take until it got too hot and I had to quit.

I grabbed another burning raisin, this time feeling the heat on my fingertips. The blue fire grew larger.

Tristan was the first out, which somehow surprised me. The two other Libertines were sucking on their burnt fingers, and shared a mutual glance, conceding their places in the win soon after.

I heard Travis say something about being bored while he stepped back from the table, his piercings glinting in the light of the brandy fire, but I kept my attention on the burning raisins.

Brent was an intimidating player, and he started off strong, consuming more raisins than all of us, and then started to slow down to an unimpressive pace. I could tell he was on his way towards losing, and that as promised, he wasn't cheating. Brent swore, to which his other three counterparts issued a look. I wasn't sure why he had to be on such good behavior, but I could always tell, from the intensity in which the whole place watched the four of them as the London Coven, that they had a reputation to uphold.

It was down to me and Audin, and there were three raisins left.

Our counts were even.

I grinned, intoxicated, and giddy. I could win.

We each grabbed one and popped them frantically into our mouths.

There was one left.

I splashed into the brandy on the last one, and retrieved it victoriously, burning the roof of my mouth as I extinguished its warmth around my tongue.

Everyone cheered. A sense of elation washed over me, and I couldn't help but smile.

"Congrats, Row," my rival bade, a sportsman. I hoped he wasn't mad I broke the tie. Had I lost to Travis, he would have been jumping up and down and screaming, just to make extra sure I knew I had lost.

"Thank you. Happy Halloween, Audin."

"I'm not disappointed I lost," he said before I had even realized I was worried about it.

"I didn't—" I laughed lightly, "I somehow forgot I was in the Supernatural Underground on Halloween," I said of his power.

"I didn't. Burning brandy is a big clue." He kept a straight face, but not for long. "Happy Halloween," he laughed.

Our barkeep came out from behind the bar to hug me in congratulations.

"How's that for a bloody tourist?" I asked Travis, who wore a smug look from defeat. I thought he would be tougher, on account of his skin already regenerating from the burns.

"Beginner's luck," he said bitterly, not meaning to narrow his powder blue irises as much as he did. "I'd never played before either."

He leered at me before walking away, and I knew he'd be over it in about a second.

"Congratulations," Tristan said, with a sycophantic hug, one of those lingering ones where his hands stayed just above the appropriate area of my body and made slight movement.

"Thanks, Tristan!"

"Do you know what you win?"

"A prize? I thought it was just eternal glory for being so daft and reckless."

"No, it's better than that," he said seriously. "It's said that the person who picks the most raisins out of the brandy on Halloween night will meet their true love within a year."

"Really?" I said, interested, hoping he wasn't implying anything about himself. "Maybe I've met my one true love and don't even know it yet."

"It's possible," Tristan said. "Sometimes the heart knows before the mind."

"Or the raisins do," I said, laughing, remembering the burn starting to work at peeling back the roof of my mouth. I thought of Fred and I wished he could be here to share my victory with me, and perhaps that soon, I might tell him that our world exists. He would understand; I knew it.

I convinced myself and my friends that I belonged, but I still had my parents left to prove something to. They kept me safe for so long without knowing the extent of their adopted daughter's abilities, and I owed them a lot for it—maybe even the fake cotillion we were planning at the castle—but I knew that more than owing them, I needed to avoid disappointing them. Though I was fitting in here, I feared that the only parents I knew wouldn't ever understand or like whom I was at the core of my being, when I used my powers.

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