

Reminiscent Beginnings

By Sean Boyle

The sheep on the Siverly farm were starting to regrow their wool, and their sheepdog, Ginger, had a litter of four pups less than a week before. Rosalee loved puppies, even more than she loved the little baby lambs. She played with them as much as she could. Seeing them rolling and tumbling around made her smile, even in the worst of moods. She wanted to keep all four, but she knew they would have to be sold. Taking care of a herd of sheep and a contingent of dogs was plenty of work for the family; they didn't need four more mouths to feed. Besides, the extra cash that four thoroughbred Old English sheepdogs could bring in would help, even if only slightly.

Rosalee was grateful for the puppies, especially during the boring summer months. She didn't have any friends from school, so she spent her time with the animals. She was clumsy, she knew, and felt overbearing, even annoying, at times. She was on the swim team, and one of the lead swimmers, but her teammates avoided socializing with her outside of practice and competitions. She even tried making friends by showing them the tricks she could do; she was getting better at moving things just by concentrating on them, and had learned to start fires too. But anyone she showed just avoided her even more, like some kind of freak. She hadn't had any real friends since Ewan. But he left years ago.

She brushed a lock of thick, Irish red hair out of her face, pulling it behind her ear with her fingers, and went back to playing with one of the puppies. This one was mostly black, with white ears and marks around his eyes that made him look like he was wearing glasses. It made him seem sophisticated and thoughtful. "Well, Einstein," she said to him, holding him up to her face, "ye'll be someone else's baby pretty soon." She touched her nose to his, and he licked her, whining faintly. She set him down, and he bounded clumsily over to join his nursing brothers and sister.

Rosalee stood up, nearly tripping over her own feet as she did so. She went over to the door to the barn, and looked out. Her sister, Annalisse, was carrying a lamb, which looked none too pleased with the situation, toward her. Annalisse's freckled face peered over the lamb's head as she made her way across the rocky yard. The girl, four years younger than Rosalee, seemed to be talking to herself, as she often did. Her short red pigtails bobbed as she walked, while her emerald green eyes remained fixed on the ground to keep from tripping. Her "work" clothes, which were mostly Rosalee's hand-me-downs, were dirty from her playing with the lamb rather than doing her chores.

Rosalee herself would be turning fourteen at the end of October, which meant she would be starting high school next month. In some ways, she would be glad; while she wasn't the best student, at least school gave her something to do besides sit around being lonely. Even her sister wasn't much company, still spending time with her imaginary friends more than with real people.

"Rosalee!" the girl called out, shifting the weight of the lamb in her arms. The animal bleated uncomfortably. "The mail truck just came!"

Rosalee rolled her eyes. "So why didn't ye get the mail?" she hollered back.

Annalisse shrugged, almost losing her grip on the lamb. "Me hands were full," she replied. Then, before Rosalee could respond, she skipped off into the barn. "I think so too, Georgie," she said with a giggle.

Rosalee stormed over to the gate: an old, rusting collection of metal pipes on a squeaky hinge. She fumbled with the latch, and swung the gate open. The street was an old dirt side-road, and met the muddy driveway a good thirty paces beyond the gate. Rosalee took her time meandering to the mailbox that stood at the corner of the two, carefully avoiding the puddles in the driveway filled by the rain the night before.

She reached the mailbox and popped it open. Inside was a handful of letters, mostly bills from the looks of them. But beneath the smaller envelopes, dwarfing them all by its size, was a large yellow padded mailer the size of a book. She tucked the letters under her arm, and pulled out the package. It

was difficult, since it barely fit in the mailbox, and in her struggle she dropped a couple of the envelopes in the mud. She chided herself for her clumsiness, and finally managed to wrench the package from the mailbox.

She closed the box, snatched up the muddy letters, and turned on her heels back inside. Again, taking her time to avoid the puddles, she made her way back toward the house. She could hear her father working in the garage, probably trying to get the tractor running again. It was always breaking down, and both Rosalee and her mother kept trying to convince him to just buy a new one. Not that they really needed it in the first place; it was more a hobby of his, since sheep didn't really need a tractor, and the farm was far too rocky and hilly to really make good use of a tractor anyway.

Rosalee walked past the open door, and saw her father kneeling next to the tractor's partially dismantled engine. The tractor itself was at least thirty years old. It was originally red, but due to rust and peeling, was repainted a few years ago in green. Inside the engine compartment, the old red paint was still visible amidst the grease and soot. Her father wiped his brow on his flannel sleeve, and absently ran a greasy hand through his thick, strawberry-blond hair. She thought better of bothering him with something as trivial as the mail.

She pushed the kitchen door open without touching it; a habit she had developed recently as an outlet for her unusual abilities. The kitchen itself was small, with a doorway on each wall; the one she entered through was in a corner, and adjacent to it was a pair of doors, each leading to a stairway. Across from her entrance was a wide doorway leading to the dinette, and on the opposite end was the entrance to the sunroom. The floor was old stone, worn smooth and shiny by over a hundred years of traffic. Pans and herbs hung all over, and the room had a generally cozy sense of clutter. "Oy, mum," she called out, "the mail's here!" She tossed the envelopes on the table and grabbed a paper towel from above the sink, trying to quickly dry off the muddy envelopes.

Her mother came down the stairs that led to the second floor. Heather Siverly was tall and slender, with long, auburn hair down to her knees. She wore it in a single thick braid. She nearly always wore a loose, flowery tunic and a long skirt, both in bright colors (with a few too many in tie-dye, Rosalee noted) that were loose enough to show off her plethora of tattoos. Her ears were pierced in multiple places, and her fingers were almost lost in the collection of rings she wore. She had an aversion to shoes, and went barefoot whenever possible; in public, she always wore sandals, even in winter. Her emerald green eyes, set in the middle of her freckled face, smiled down at Rosalee. "More bills, probably," she muttered, her voice cheery despite the somber words.

She swept through the kitchen and to the table: a heavy, ancient wooden affair on which Rosalee had set the letters. Rosalee regarded her mother for a moment; in some ways, she felt strange around her. This woman was her mother, a new age hippy who never outgrew her own youth, who seemed at all times both irresponsible and too mature for her years. She had given birth to Rosalee when she was seventeen, just barely through with school, married her high school sweetheart, and the two immediately took over his hereditary sheep farm.

The nice thing about having Heather for a mother was her extremely open mind. She believed Rosalee had a true, unique gift. She called her a "medium," a "psychic," even terms as hokey as "chosen one." But she never doubted, even for a moment, that Rosalee had an amazing ability. In fact, when the fancy struck her, she would encourage Rosalee to use her powers. Never to show off, but seemingly just to confirm that she still had them.

Rosalee grabbed a glass from the dish rack, still splattered with water droplets from being recently washed, and took it to the refrigerator. She poured herself a glass of grape juice as her mother sifted through the mail. As she was taking a sip and putting the bottle back, her mother intoned, "Rosalee, dear, there's somethin' here for ye."

Rosalee arched an eyebrow. She *never* got mail. Who would send her a letter? It's not as if she had any friends who would write to her on holiday, and she didn't subscribe to any magazines. She

didn't even know how anyone would even get her name and address, unless it was from school. A momentary twinge of fear ran down her spine, but it subsided just as quickly. She didn't have anything to fear; she hadn't failed any classes, and report cards had gone home two months ago. So who was it?

"It's big," her mother continued. "From some sort o' Foundation. I wonder if it's a scholarship o' some sort? For swimmin', maybe?" Rosalee looked over at her, mulling over those words. Why would she get a scholarship for high school? She noticed her mother was hefting that yellow package. Of course, it hadn't even occurred to her to check the addressee on it; she had never gotten a letter or package before. "Or," her mother went on, "maybe it's some research foundation, wantin' to see ye 'bout your psychic abilities. Oh, now I'm all excited, open it!" She tossed the package at Rosalee from across the kitchen.

Her hands full, Rosalee didn't even try to catch the package. Instead, she reached out with her mind, snatching it out of the air easily. Despite its size and weight, compared to regular letters, it was relatively light, and simple to lift, unlike larger things like people. Occasionally, Rosalee would "practice" her telekinesis on her sister, which typically resulted in excessive crying and screaming.

She levitated the package in front of her face as she sipped her juice. It was certainly addressed to her, there was no doubt about that. "Rosalee Siverly," it read on the white address label, in bold blue type. Below that was her address. The return address wasn't in Ireland. It had some sort of international postal code, but no actual address. All she could see was a small blue crest, the details of which she couldn't make out, and the words, "The Demongate Foundation" to its right.

"Open it, open it!" her mother encouraged excitedly.

Rosalee set her juice down on the counter beside the sink, and let the package drop into her hands. She looked it over, trying to see how to open it, and found a tear-tab. She took hold of it, and ripped it open. Its contents were a tight fit, but she managed to get her fingers around them and pull them out. On the top was a letter, on letterhead bearing that same crest and name. She read it silently.

Dear prospective student,

As you are about to enter your first year of high school, you have been chosen to join the student body of Demongate High due to your unique talents. Each year, we recruit the best and brightest of the world's youth so that we may teach them to better use their special talents in a way that will most benefit all humanity. We promise to help you better understand what you are fully capable of, and to offer exciting coursework and extracurricular activities. Each month, we conduct field trips to sites around the world where you will have the opportunity to learn many new and exciting things.

There is little doubt at this time that you have begun to realize that most people your age do not possess your talents. You have remarkable abilities. Our goal is to help you understand those abilities, and guide you on the path to best using them.

Demongate High, founded in 1892, has been the world's premiere school for instruction in the use and control of such abilities for over a century. Throughout its illustrious history, Demongate High has produced alumni who have gone on to do great things for the world and humanity. Most have worked in secret, protecting the world and its people from behind the scenes, while others are more renowned.

This fall, you will join one hundred other new students from around the world in the academic year's welcoming ceremony. Classes begin the second Monday in September. However, I implore you not to openly advertise your acceptance to Demongate High School. To better serve its purpose, as you will soon learn, its existence must remain secret from those in the world who do not possess your abilities.

The Demongate Scholarship Fund has waived your tuition, room and board. Enclosed with this letter you will also find round-trip airline tickets, dated for departure one week before classes begin. Upon your arrival, you will be fitted for a set of uniforms, assigned a dormitory and roommate, and

provided a schedule of coursework tailored to fit your individual needs.

I warmly welcome you to our family, and sincerely hope we can meet your educational and vocational needs. I promise you your stay with us will be four of the most enlightening years of your life.

Sincerely,

Lucien DeLefeu

Rosalee wasn't sure she believed it. She read the letter over again, ignoring her mother who kept pestering her. "Rosalee, what is it? Tell me! Who's it from?"

Silently, and stunned from the shock of being "discovered," she handed the letter to her mother. Heather took the letter and read it over quickly, her eyes widening more and more in excitement until Rosalee thought they would pop right out of her head and roll across the kitchen floor. When she finished reading, she looked at her daughter with an exuberant smile on her rosy face. "Rosalee," she exclaimed, a bit too loudly, "this is amazin'! I knew ye were gifted, it's about time someone else recognized it too!"

Rosalee was still in shock, her face impassive. "But how did they know about me?" she asked softly, in almost a whisper. "I don't really go around showin' off me powers." In a moment of sudden realization, her gaze hardened and she glared at her mother. "Did *you* tell anyone?"

Her mother looked shocked and injured. "O' course not!" she replied, again too loudly. "Well, just a few people. Ye know, from the New Age Society. But they don't have nothin' ta do with this," she looked at the letter again, examining the letterhead, "Demongate Foundation."

Rosalee's eyes remained fixed on her mother for a moment, then she looked back to the rest of the contents of the envelope. It contained a handful of forms, a smaller envelope with a pair of airplane tickets (oddly devoid of any airline identification), another small yellow envelope bulging from something hard and circular inside, and a glossy white paperback book bearing the full-size seal from the letterhead. The blue circle enclosed a shield atop a five-pointed star, broken into four sections by a cross-like sword. In the four sections, Rosalee tried to work out the symbols she saw. In the upper left was an eye, with lines emanating from it as if it were shining. Below it, beneath the crosspiece of the sword, was a flame. In the lower right was the silhouette of a wing. In the upper right was a symbol Rosalee didn't comprehend, what seemed like just a random scribble. Behind the shield, peeking out from its sides, were the sun and moon. Running the circumference of the circle were two sets of words: arching over the top was printed, "Demongate High School," and below were the Latin words, "cum humanitatis vis, protegete malite."

She flipped through the other forms, trying to make sense of them. One was already filled out, and contained all her personal information. Name, birth date, address, physical description, and some other information she didn't think anyone could have possibly have known. Reading it over, her eyes went wide.

Frantically, Rosalee waved the form at her mother, causing it to wrinkle and crinkle loudly. "Ya told 'em everything!" she shrieked. "Look at this! How is it anyone's business that I play dress-up with the sheep?!"

Her mother stared back at her. After a moment, she replied, "Ye play dress-up with the sheep?"

Quickly changing the subject, Rosalee rummaged through the papers some more. "Here," she said, handing a couple of forms to her mother. "Ye need to sign these." One was an admissions acceptance form, the other was some sort of universal permission slip, giving Rosalee permission to go on field trips and take part in "potentially dangerous, yet closely supervised activities." In her haste, the little yellow envelope fell to the floor, striking the stone with a muffled "clank."

Leaving her mother to look through the paperwork, Rosalee telekinetically levitated it into her hand and opened it. The flap was not sealed, merely tucked under the outer edge, so it was a simple matter to open it. Inside was a badge, a metal pin, colored red, on which was a black silhouette of the top of a person's head with its eyes closed. Jagged lines, like lightning, radiated from it, no doubt representing the mental powers of a psychic. She flipped the badge over; on the back was a small white label, the kind that could be found at an office supply store, on which was printed "ESPer." Rosalee nodded absently, recognizing the term from the list on the personal information form. Her memory, crystal clear when it came to images, allowed her to go back over the list in her mind.

Alchemist, Artificer, Cambion, Demon Artist, ESPer, Holy Chosen, Inheritor, Mystic, Petitioner, Seer, Shaman, Songstrel, Soul Wielder, Spirit Energist, Summoner, Touched, True Martial Artist. She had to admit to herself that she was getting excited. She knew, deep down, this school had to be real, and if there were enough people her age to have an entire international school, she wouldn't be alone any more. She wouldn't have to deal with people avoiding her because of her "annoying tricks" and she might actually start to fit in. That would be nice. An unconscious smile spread across her face. "I'd better start packin'," she said.

The remainder of the summer passed quickly, as she ached with anticipation for the coming year. She hoped she might actually make some real friends, friends who would appreciate her "tricks" and her powers. Unfortunately, several weeks in, she only had Ewan and Ingo. She didn't even really feel like her roommate, Tina, was a friend. They rarely spoke, despite the commonalities between them. They had similar powers; Rosalee being an ESPer, and Tina being a Seer (Rosalee learned early on, when she first arrived, that Seers and ESPers shared many of the same abilities). One of her favorite teachers, in fact, was a Seer: Mandara Darjiling.

Professor Darjiling was a short, skinny Indian woman with shoulder-length hair and glasses. She spoke English perfectly, not even the least bit accented, although Rosalee knew she was born and raised in India. She was soft-spoken and patient, always pleasant and smiling, always seeming to know what anyone was going to say before they said it. She was the supervisor for the swimming club, which Rosalee joined eagerly as soon as she learned club membership was mandatory (although she still didn't know if Ewan had ever attended a meeting of whatever club he had joined).

But Rosalee's favorite teacher, by far, was Professor Foxtail. Patrick Heffernan, to be more precise, was Ingo's teacher in Ability Focused Studies, teaching Ingo to use his powers as a Half-Demon. He was also Rosalee's assigned guidance counselor, most likely because he, like she, was from Ireland. The first time she saw him was when the students all gathered on the airstrip in Porta, the tiny town on the point of the western peninsula of the cross-shaped Demongate Island. He had been there as the students disembarked, along with Darjiling and two other teachers.

One was Professor Teivelstern, a tall, muscular, shaven-headed American man with a red mustache and goatee and a pair of small, pointed horns on his brow. His eyes glowed like red-hot coals, and almost seemed to flicker like dancing flames. Teivelstern had a loud, commanding voice, and took up the first half hour of the students' arrival lecturing them all on the school's rules and the equitable treatment of Half-Demons.

Also there to greet the students was Professor Gottschalk. He was a plump man with a receding mat of black hair and a thick beard. He wore a black shirt and pants: a Catholic priest's uniform, and thick-rimmed glasses over eyes that seemed distant and somewhat aloof. He had an odd, backward-leaning posture, as if his round belly was so heavy that he had to tip back in order to keep his balance, and wobbled rather than walked. Rosalee quickly learned that he was jovial despite his gruff manner, and a Holy Chosen, which was why he kept his distance from the Half-Demons. With him, Rosalee caught her first glimpse of Janos. Thinking back to that moment made her blush, and she felt her face turn even redder as she recounted her brief encounter with him in Ewan's dorm.

Beside the monster of a man that was Teivelstern stood another, who looked like he could be one of the school's students. He was shorter, perhaps a little below average height for a man, and had golden-yellow hair, spiked in the front not unlike Ewan's. He wore rectangular wire-framed glasses, from behind which his yellow, fox-like eyes darted between the crowd and some papers he held. He was wearing an upperclassman's school uniform: a white button-up shirt that looked more than a size too big for him, with its sleeves rolled up, and a black necktie hanging loose from his neck. Likewise, his navy blue pants were oversized and baggy, and the black boots on his feet were well-worn and scuffed. Rosalee found him strikingly attractive, and began to try and figure out his age, when another of his features caught her eye: from his posterior swayed nine fox tails. Her jaw involuntarily dropped open. She had seen Ingo's goat legs, and the tall man's horns, but never expected to see something like this. This was Professor Foxtail. He spoke with an Irish accent thicker than Rosalee's, probably from farther north, and just one more of the many unusual, supernatural things she would come to expect at Demongate High.

Ewan had done well enough in class. He was motivated to excel, and tried perhaps a little too hard at times. Ever since learning he was a Summoner, he had been thinking of little more than learning how to summon those demons that killed his parents, and enact some sort of revenge. It had been an obsession that occupied all his thoughts and time, driven by anger that welled in him every time he thought of their grinning, fang-laden faces. But his teacher, Professor Stilling, had to repeatedly convince him to slow down.

Alex Stilling was from America, and apparently the same age as Foxtail, although he looked more his age than the Half-Demon. Stilling was slightly taller than Foxtail, with light brown hair parted to the side that hung down to his eyebrows. He had brown eyes, and alternated between glasses and contact lenses. Like the other teachers, when teaching he wore a school uniform, although his feet were always clad in comfortable-looking sneakers. He also was often seen in a long brown coat.

Ewan didn't remember many details from the first few days of class. His mind had still been reeling at the time from the sudden barrage of new experiences: coming to the school, learning about and seeing so many students with supernatural powers, being away from his home and grandparents, on his own, for the first time in his life. It had taken some adjusting, which meant time, and by the time classes started his brain still hadn't caught up.

He vaguely remembered the first day in Summoning class. The class was made up of freshmen and sophomores, totaling around twenty students. The sophomores had amused themselves summoning imps and kobolds, harmless demons they could get away with. The rest of them, Ewan included, stood uncomfortably and nervously in the classroom, which looked like any classroom Ewan had ever been in before except that all the desks and chairs were piled up against the back wall, giving the young Summoners plenty of room to learn and practice their art. The chalkboard was clean and black, and there were two stacks of books on the desk: *The Beginner's Guide to Summoning* and *The Intermediate Guide to Summoning*. The students waited for their teacher to arrive, and Ewan remembered noticing it was five minutes past the hour and still no sign of him.

Ewan heard a voice that made him cringe. The cocky American accent, the loudness, it could only be Jake. They had met on the plane trip, and their first encounter had begun with Jake harassing Ingo, as bullies were apt to do when presented with small, unassuming targets. Ewan had told him off in a suitably witty way, and Jake proceeded to try to pour a bag of crushed potato crisps on Ewan's hair. Ewan later found out his attempt was thwarted by a well-timed burst of psychic energy from Rosalee, which she called a "mind blast," that left Jake unconscious for the rest of the trip.

Since then, Ewan and his two friends had a few more run-ins with Jake, and each time he was just as annoying, and each time it ended in much the same way, with Rosalee judiciously applying her powers to his detriment. Ewan was rather shaken to learn Jake was a Summoner, but pleased that the jock kept his distance.

Professor Stilling swept into the room, trailing papers as he went. “Sorry I’m late,” he said, glancing at the clock as he dropped his papers on the desk. “Always a bit hectic around here on the first day. Now, let’s see...” he rummaged in his papers until he found the attendance sheet. He quickly rattled off the names, having trouble pronouncing more than a few, and then quickly launched into a well-practiced welcome lecture. The sophomores mostly tuned it out, but remained quiet and undisruptive as he explained, “In this class, like the Focused Studies for any other type of ability, you will learn to control the supernatural power that allows you to call upon demons. Along the way, you will learn about the types of demons, although the real Cosmology course won’t be until your second year.” He nodded to the sophomores, standing idly near the back of the room, and added, “some of you may have already had your first Cosmology class already.

“Now, I suppose I should start by explaining exactly what it is you... *we* do. Could I get a volunteer from the second-year class, please?” He beckoned to a scrawny African boy, who looked around as if he did not believe he was being called upon. “Yes, Nabalung, you.”

The boy smiled nervously to his friends, and stepped forward. Stilling went on, “Why don’t you summon us something? Something small. How about a spriggan? Should be easy enough to deal with.”

The boy nodded, then closed his eyes. Ewan tried to pay careful attention to anything the boy might do, and observed a strange gesture with both hands, and the boy mumbling something. Unmoving, the boy continued muttering for a few seconds, then opened his eyes and pointed at the center of the room. In a puff of black smoke, a little green humanoid creature appeared. It stood about to Ewan’s waist, and had a mottled green hide, and an ugly little face. Scrawny though it was, it was well-muscled. It looked around, then looked up at the boy. “You summon me?” it said with a grunt, speaking directly into the minds of all the students.

The boy nodded, and replied in English accented by an African dialect Ewan wouldn’t have been able to recognize or repeat, “Yes. Just for a moment, if you don’t mind.”

“You think I’m not busy?” grunted the demon back.

The boy held up a hand, and was about to respond, when Stilling interrupted. “What you see here is a typical summoned demon,” he said, walking around the little creature. “You’ll learn more about spriggans and other demons soon. But what you all have is an ability to get demons’ attention.”

A girl behind Ewan called out in a Spanish accent, “Señor Stilling, what do you mean ‘get demons’ attention’?”

The spriggan glared up at Stilling. “Hey! Was talking!” it grumbled.

Ignoring it, Stilling continued, “Each generation only produces about two hundred individuals with supernatural powers. Some get that power from their heritage; you’ve no doubt met Professor Foxtail? His mother was a kumiho. A nine-tailed fox demon.” Some whispers went through the room in waves. “Others are chosen by the heavens to wield holy powers to help us fight against the evil demons cause in the world. We call them Holy Chosen.”

“Hey!” grunted the spriggan again.

“We, on the other hand, have an ability to reach out and make ourselves heard across the barrier between dimensions, between our world and the Demon World. In that way, we can call demons to us, pulling them through that barrier, as long as we know the right words to use, and the right way to manipulate that barrier.”

“Hello?” said the spriggan, now jumping wildly up and down, trying to get Stilling’s attention.

“When we summon a demon, we have no more control over it than we have over each other. They have their own will, and most often will not appreciate being summoned.”

“That right!” grunted the spriggan.

“So, not only will you be learning the rituals needed to summon particular demons, but you’ll also learn how to deal with them, negotiate, and convince them to help you. You’ll also learn what to do if you *can’t* reason with them.” He paused and looked down at the spriggan. It stopped its agitated hopping, and looked back at him. “About time,” it muttered. “Now, you give me something for coming, yes?”

Stilling smiled apologetically. “I’m sorry for disturbing you. You can go back home now.” He nodded to the boy who’d summoned the creature.

The spriggan looked back indignantly. “What?” it screeched. “Nothing for trouble?!”

Nabulung pointed at it and said a few words. A moment later, the spriggan vanished with a pop and another puff of black smoke. A variety of reactions rippled through the room, but quickly calmed down, and Stilling said, “And that is what we call banishing. It sends a demon back to where it came from. And that will be the first thing you will learn.”

Ewan practiced banishing as he was told, but didn’t much care to try too hard. It seemed like it all came naturally, with little effort, especially once he started summoning. As they started, he had asked Stilling when they would summon kamaitachi, and the teacher brushed the question off, simply saying “not this year.” After class, he took Ewan aside and advised him, knowing about the attack on his parents, not to pursue anything relating to kamaitachi, and definitely not to do anything brash out of a thirst for revenge. But, of course, that wasn’t what Ewan wanted to hear, so he did research on his own at the library, with a loaned copy of the *Intermediate Manual of Summoning*. Ingo had seen the book in their room, open to the kamaitachi page, and the news had spread to Rosalee.

Rosalee. Now there was someone Ewan had never expected to see again. When they were reunited at the airport in London, she had been overjoyed. His response had been less than enthusiastic. Her clumsiness and loud voice were sources of embarrassment, as he remembered from when they were younger, and she kept referring to him as her “best friend.” In a way, it made Ewan a little sad. He never really liked her much to begin with, and if he was her best friend, then she must not have any other friends at all. Ingo seemed able to tolerate her fairly well, but Ewan also knew that Ingo’s experience with other people was very limited.

Ingo was the son of a wealthy Half-Demon named Jørgen Sinnex, head of the Sweden-based Sinnex Corporation. Ingo had explained that the company dealt in archaeology and antiquities, as well as financial services to museums and universities. The company had many dealings with the Demongate Foundation, the school’s benefactor, and was apparently responsible for securing a good number of supernatural artifacts. Mr. Sinnex himself was able to pass for human more easily than his son: in pictures Ewan had seen, the man looked normal. He had Ingo’s light blond hair and bright blue eyes, overshadowed by thick eyebrows. Ingo explained that the blue eyes were, in fact, colored contacts, and that the man’s eyes were actually pale yellow with horizontal slit pupils, like a goat’s. The Sinnex bloodline had a trace of demon blood that fluctuated each generation. Ingo got the goat legs, but he also got the frigid powers, which he now practiced to good effect by chilling drinks, and probably mitigated any need for air conditioning in the summer months.

Ingo was friendly but shy, accustomed to many years being sequestered behind closed doors to conceal his demonic heritage. He seemed to go out of his way to be agreeable, and studied hard, even on his first week of school, as his parents apparently had very high hopes for him. As far as roommates went, Ewan certainly could have done worse.