

Tales of the Darkworld 6.5: Breathe Me In
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Chapter One

Wilson North stood at the back of the church, hidden in shadow, and watched his two former lovers marry each other. Every breath he took sent pain arrowing through his ribcage. He leaned against a stone pillar, hoping it would ease the amount of effort it took him to remain upright. He shouldn't have left the rehab hospital so soon, but he'd wanted—no, needed—to see Corey and Seth marry. Watching them exchange vows gave him hope. And after the car accident that had almost taken his immortal life, Will was all about being optimistic.

Before anyone could see him lingering uninvited at the wedding, Will eased back farther into the vestibule's shadows. He peered between the decorative wooden carvings and watched the two men he'd slept with embrace, their mouths fusing with a kiss so filled with love it made his chest ache. As banged up as he was, he hadn't needed another ache or pain, but at least this kind of ache was the good kind. When the kiss ended, the small gathering of family clapped loudly and cheered. Will used that moment to slip away.

Limping his way slowly to his car, he got in and drove through the cemetery to the huge stately mausoleum where most of the vampire families had crypts. Granville Cemetery held the remains of many of the North family including Wilson's parents, his grandparents, and assorted aunts, uncles, and cousins. It had been several months since Will had been there. He didn't often think of the mortal remains of his family, preferring to envision them enjoying their non-corporeal lives in the Afterworld. Visiting bones and rotting flesh, the remains of their bodies, had never been high on his list of priorities.

However, his brush with death had profoundly affected his view of his mostly immortal life. He'd never really thought about the things that could kill a vampire before he'd found himself bleeding out, crushed beneath his car on the side of a freeway. That was when he'd realized he'd gone about his life all wrong. Enjoying himself had always been important, but he'd prioritized his life in such a way that he played at most things he did. He'd never taken anything very seriously from his work, to his family, to his relationships. He'd gone through the years with a casual, easy-going attitude about pretty much everything. He now knew there were some things in life one should not be casual about, starting with relationships.

Getting out of the car, he limped his way up the mausoleum steps and headed to the corridor where his parents and grandparents had their crypts. Once he reached them, he eased down on a bench and admired the flowers that he paid to be placed there weekly. This week, they were bright red carnations with petals the color of spilled blood. Sucking in a breath at the pain that lanced through his left leg, he stretched out both legs and tilted his head back against the cool marble, his eyes drifting closed.

Corey and Seth's happiness made him ache. He wished them both well, but he admitted to himself that jealousy had found a toehold in his heart. He didn't want Corey or Seth though. He wanted what they *had*, a mate. He envied them their relationship, and he'd never felt so alone as he did watching them exchange vows.

"It's very peaceful here, isn't it?"

The deep voice caused Will's eyes to pop open but he moved his body cautiously, aware of the pain that lurked within, ready to spring forth at even the smallest movement. Easing his head up from the marble, his gaze fell upon a tall man in a long black coat. Dark waves as black as a raven's wing nearly reached his broad shoulders and bright silver eyes gleamed from beneath hooded eyelids.

Will's nostrils flared as he caught the scent of patchouli. He breathed deeper and the scent of the man's blood told Will what he faced. An immortal, but not a shapeshifter nor an Acerbian. The vampires – Acerbians – were easily found out by the

scent of their blood. This man's blood didn't smell like one of Will's kind. Instead, it had a scent that made Will's mouth water in the same manner that chocolate cake did. And underneath that sweetness, Will detected the odd scent that came from magic. The man before him was Magia, a wizard.

"Yes. It is quite peaceful," he replied automatically.

The wizard's beautiful mouth quirked up on one side as Will drew another deep breath, trying to analyze why the man smelled so strongly of patchouli. With movements as graceful as the lazy summer flow of a mountain stream, the man leaned a shoulder against Will's uncle's crypt. His smile widened slightly.

"You need the peace."

Startled at the man's perceptiveness, Will nodded. "Life altering events will do that to you."

"Your lovers marrying each other is life altering?" the wizard asked, one brow lifting in an expression of disbelief.

Will chuckled. "No. I'm glad they found each other. I do envy them, though. The peace of finding their mate."

For a moment, Will wondered how the wizard had known that both Corey and Seth had been his lovers. Then he dismissed his questions. Wizards often knew things other people didn't. It was best not to question what they knew. You might not want to know the answers, he thought with a smile.

"Ah, but maybe you do want to know the answer, Wilson North."

The gentle words stiffened Will's spine despite the pain that lanced through his body at the movement. The scent of patchouli intensified, underwritten with the scent of the Magia's blood. Will's heart pounded, and his breath shortened. Something metaphysical stirred within him and he had the sense that he stood on a precipice, his life as he knew it falling away behind him as a vast new frontier opened before him.

Another deep breath. The patchouli wove its scent through his body and his skin tingled.

"That's it. Breathe me in..."

Will's eyes snapped open wide, his gaze drawn by force of nature to the wizard's. Sound rushed in his ears and he realized it was the sound of the Magia's blood in his veins. Shock and awareness brought every detail of the moment into startlingly sharp focus.

The man before him was his bloodmate.

* * * *

Garrick Forrester had always been a Dom. He'd known it since before he'd reached adulthood. He'd also known that he was gay. He'd never bothered to hide being a Dom but he kept his sexuality under wraps. In the beginning, he'd just been a very private person. That hadn't really changed, but in his younger days his need for privacy had bordered on fear. Now, he just preferred to not have to state his preferences.

As the owner of an exclusive BDSM club in Paris, he catered to clientele of both sexes and every sexual orientation. Keeping them all guessing about his sexual preferences seemed to work really well for business. He dominated both sexes in public and never let his private life see the light of day. His brother Dave had a notable preference for women, but many of them found him too enigmatic and not open for a relationship. Neither of them had done well in the relationship department albeit for different reasons, and both of them usually found relief from sexual tension with high class, outrageously expensive prostitutes.

So it was with trepidation that Garrick had awakened that morning in his brother's house in California with the persistent and increasingly insistent sense that he needed to visit the cemetery to meet a man. His Magia abilities had always been stronger than most other Magia he knew, yet Garrick had been afraid to ever utilize his powers to their fullest. The half-dream he awakened from had been filled with the

snarling, slashing fangs of a vampire, a man he'd never met but whose face lingered in his head as the most handsome man Garrick had ever seen. He'd also had the internal nagging sense that he needed to visit Granville Cemetery.

In the past, urges of that nature had been impossible to ignore. He knew that if he tried, he'd end up in severe pain. So he'd gotten in his rental car and driven to the cemetery. His *Magia* sense drew him to the mausoleum, a huge structure over 150 years old. He wandered the marble corridors silently, letting his wizard senses draw him to the place he needed to be. Whisper soft thoughts began to fill his head. Physical pain, heartache and loneliness, envy and yearning permeated the thoughts and called forth his own volatile emotions. When his feet stopped at the head of a short corridor, the first thing he noticed was the lean form of a beautiful man seated on a marble bench. His libido went into overdrive. His *Magia* senses pinged like crazy. And no matter how hard he tried to stop it, his cock hardened.

With that innate sense of a strong *Magia*, he knew instantly that the beautiful man with the pale skin and dark waves of a Botticelli angel was his destiny. The man smelled lushly of cinnamon, and Garrick filled his lungs with the scented air. In his mind's eye, flashes of erotic scenes kept his cock at nearly full mast inside his now tight jeans. The scenes were of himself with the beautiful dark haired man. Will. *His Will*. Well, his if he could bring himself to tame the angel, something the devil in him begged to be allowed to do. However, his practical side, his *Magia* genes, cautioned him that the road ahead would not be simple nor free from bumps.

His heart thudded almost painfully and it was that organ that begged to claim Wilson North. Already the man's scent pulled him like a tractor beam on a spaceship. Inevitable. Inexorable. Impossible. But the impossible part must be worked through because Garrick knew that not claiming Will would ruin them both, and he didn't know if he could handle the heartache that entailed. Wilson North would be work, but Garrick had never been afraid to get his hands dirty, and looking at Will's beauty, he figured there would definitely be some rewards in it for both of them.

Garrick knew the instant Will figured out their connection. The glint in the vampire's wide, dark eyes gave away his knowledge. The hissed in breath was a clue, too. Confusion and lust warred on his beautiful face and sympathy tugged at Garrick.

"I don't even know your name," Will muttered and carefully levered himself more upright on the bench. He winced as his left leg shifted.

Garrick tensed slightly, almost feeling the stab of pain himself. Its footprint drifted in his head much the same as Will's thoughts did. From the vampire, Garrick got flashes of the accident that had gravely injured Will and nearly taken his life. A very real panic, organic and unbidden, churned inside Garrick at the thought that he'd nearly missed out on knowing the man before him. Somehow, that thought wasn't easy to bear.

"Does it matter?" he replied to Will's question about his name. He smiled, trying to coax Will's thoughts away from his painful leg and the shock of discovering his mate in a mausoleum.

Humor brightened the vampire's dark eyes. "I suppose not. I could always just make up a name to shout when you bring me to orgasm."

Heat rose within Garrick and his groin tightened further. He shifted his stance, hoping to somehow ease the tightness of his jeans. Will's long eyelashes fluttered, not coyly but in preparation for his gaze dropping the length of Garrick's body. That dark gaze settled on the bulge that strained the front placket of Garrick's worn jeans. Will's thoughts became preoccupied with wondering what Garrick looked like naked and whether or not he was gay.

"I'd be happy to show what I look like naked any time you like. And yes, I am gay. My name is Garrick Forrester," he murmured answering Will's silent questions.

Dark lashes flicked up and the beauty of Wilson North blazed through Garrick's very soul when their eyes met this time. The lure of such angelic masculinity proved too much for him and he found himself pushing off from the marble crypt. He glided

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TALES OF THE DARKWORLD 6.5: BREATHE ME IN | 7

toward the bench where Will sat, his sole thought to lose himself in the salvation those dark eyes promised.

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