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Beautiful Darkness

Written by

Kami Garcia, Margaret Stohl

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BY

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For
Sarah Burnes, Julie Scheina, and
Jennifer Bailey Hunt
because for some silly reason
they wouldn't let us put their names on the cover.



We can easily forgive a child
who is afraid of the dark;
the real tragedy of life is when
men are afraid of the light.

— Plato

BEFORE

Caster Girl

I used to think our town, buried in the South Carolina backwoods, stuck in the muddy bottom of the Santee River valley, was the middle of nowhere. A place where nothing ever happened and nothing would ever change. Just like yesterday, the unblinking sun would rise and set over the town of Gatlin without bothering to kick up so much as a breeze. Tomorrow my neighbors would be rocking on their porches, heat and gossip and familiarity melting like ice cubes into their sweet tea, as they had for more than a hundred years. Around here, our traditions were so traditional it was hard to put a finger on them. They were woven into everything we did or, more often, didn't do. You could be born or married or buried, and the Methodists kept right on singing.

Sundays were for church, Mondays for doing the marketing at the Stop & Shop, the only grocery store in town. The rest of

the week involved a whole lot of nothing and a little more pie, if you were lucky enough to live with someone like my family's housekeeper, Amma, who won the bake-off at the county fair every year. Old four-fingered Miss Monroe still taught cotillion, one empty finger of her white-gloved hand flapping as she sashayed down the dance floor with the debutantes. Maybelline Sutter was still cutting hair at the Snip 'n' Curl, though she had lost most of her eyesight around the same time she turned seventy, and now she forgot to put the guard down on the clippers half the time, shearing a skunk stripe up the back of your head. Carlton Eaton never failed, rain or shine, to open your mail before he delivered it. If the news was bad, he would break it to you himself. Better to hear it from one of your own.

This town owned us, that was the good and the bad of it. It knew every inch of us, every sin, every secret, every scab. Which was why most people never bothered to leave, and why the ones who did never came back. Before I met Lena that would have been me, five minutes after I graduated from Jackson High. Gone.

Then I fell in love with a Caster girl.

She showed me there was another world within the cracks of our uneven sidewalks. One that had been there all along, hidden in plain sight. Lena's Gatlin was a place where things happened—impossible, supernatural, life-altering things.

Sometimes life-ending.

While regular folks were busy cutting back their rosebushes or picking past worm-eaten peaches at the roadside stand, Light and Dark Casters with unique and powerful gifts were locked in an eternal struggle—a supernatural civil war without any hope of a white flag waving. Lena's Gatlin was home to Demons and

danger and a curse that had marked her family for more than a hundred years. And the closer I got to Lena, the closer her Gatlin came to mine.

A few months ago, I believed nothing would ever change in this town. Now I knew better, and I only wished it was true.

Because the second I fell in love with a Caster girl, no one I loved was safe. Lena thought she was the only one cursed, but she was wrong.

It was our curse now.