



CENTIMETER

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Untamed

Book Jacket

Series: House of Night [4]

Rating: ★★★★★

SUMMARY: Life sucks when your friends are pissed at you. Just ask Zoey Redbird – she’s become an expert on suckiness. In one week she has gone from having three boyfriends to having none, and from having a close group of friends who trusted and supported her, to being an outcast. Speaking of friends, the only two Zoey has left are undead and unMarked. And Neferet has declared war on humans, which Zoey knows in her heart is wrong. But will anyone listen to her? Zoey's adventures as a vampyre finishing school take a wild and dangerous turn as loyalties are tested, shocking truths come to light, and an ancient evil is awakened in PC and Kristin Cast's spellbinding fourth House of Night novel. (Recommended for readers age 13 and older)

UNTAMED

A HOUSE OF NIGHT NOVEL

P.C. CAST and KRISTIN CAST

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This one is for the students, past and present, of South Intermediate High School in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Thanks for your enthusiasm, sense of humor, and support for the series. SIHS is the best!

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Also for the ladies of Tulsa Street Cats. They're not nuns, but they do qualify as cat saints!

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Thank you to the fans of the House of Night—we appreciate you!

Thank you to Tulsa Street Cats for their support, sense of humor, and all they do for cats. To find out more about them and/or donate, please go to www.streetcatstulsa.org. Kristin and I heart Street Cats!

CHAPTER ONE

The *caw! caw! cawing!* of one stupid crow kept me up all night. (Well, more accurately, all day—'cause, you know, I'm a vampyre fledgling and we have that whole issue of day and night being turned around.) Anyway, I got zero sleep last night/day. But my crappy nonsleep is currently the easiest

thing to deal with since life *really* sucks when your friends are pissed at you. I should know. I'm Zoe Redbird, currently the undisputed Queen of Making My Friends Pissed Land.

Persephone, the big sorrel mare who I could consider mine for as long as I lived at the House of Night, craned her head around and nuzzled my cheek. I kissed her soft muzzle and went back to brushing her sleek neck. Grooming Persephone always helped me think and made me feel better. And I definitely

needed help with both of those things.

“Okay, so, I’ve managed to avoid the Big Confrontation for two days, but that can’t continue,” I told the mare.

“Yes, I know they’re in the cafeteria right now, eating dinner while they hang out together being all

buddy-buddy and totally leaving me out.”

Persephone snorted and went back to munching hay.

“Yeah, I think they’re being jerks, too. Sure, I did lie to them, but it was mostly by omission. And yeah,

I kept some stuff from them. Mostly for their own good.” I sighed. Well, the stuff about Stevie Rae being

undead was for their own good. The stuff about me having a thing with Loren Blake—Vampyre Poet

Laureate and professor at the House of Night—well, that was more for my own good. “But still.”

Persephone flicked an ear back to listen to me. “They’re being really judgmental.”

Persephone snorted again. I sighed again. Crap. I couldn’t avoid them any longer.

After giving the sweet mare one last pat, I walked slowly out of her stall to the tack room and put up

the array of currycombs and mane/tail brushes I’d been using on her for the past hour. I breathed deep of

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the leather and horse smell, letting the soothing mixture ease my nerves. Catching my reflection in the

smooth glass window of the tack room, I automatically ran my fingers through my dark hair, trying to

make it look not so bedheady. I’d been Marked as a fledgling vampyre and moved to the House of

Night for just over two months, but already my hair was noticeably thicker and longer. And supergloss

hair was only one of the many changes taking place with me. Some of them were invisible—like the fact

that I had an affinity for all five of the elements. Some of them were very much visible—like the unique

tattoos that framed my face in intricate, exotic swirls and then, unlike any other fledgling or adult

vampyre, the sapphire design spread down my neck and shoulders, along my spine, and most recently had moved around my waist, a little fact no one but my cat, Nala, our goddess Nyx, and I knew.

Like who could I show?

“Well, yesterday you had not one, but three boyfriends,” I told the me with the dark eyes and cynical half smile that was reflected in the glass. “But you fixed that, didn’t you? Today not only do you have zero boyfriends, but no one will ever trust you again for at least, I dunno, a gazillion years or so. Well,

except Aphrodite, who totally freaked and took off two days ago because she might have suddenly been

turned back into a human, and Stevie Rae, who was chasing said freaked re-humaned Aphrodite because she might have caused the fledgling-to-human issue when I cast a circle and turned her from creepy undead dead kid to odd-red-tattooed-vampyre-but-herself-again kid. “Either way,” I told myself

aloud, “you have managed to mess up just about everyone who has touched your life. Well done, you.” My lip had actually started to quiver and I felt the sting of tears in my eyes. No. Bawling my eyes red wouldn’t do any good. I mean, seriously, if it did, then my friends and I would have kissed (well, not literally) and made up days ago. I was just going to have to face them and start trying to make things right.

The late December night was cool and a little misty. The gaslights lining the sidewalk that stretched from

the stable and field house area of the school to the main building flickered with little haloes of yellow light,

looking beautiful and old-worldly. Actually, the whole campus of the House of Night was gorgeous and

always made me think of something that belonged in an Arthurian legend more than in the twenty-first century. *I love it here*, I reminded myself. *It’s home. It’s where I belong. I’ll make it right with my friends, and everything will be okay then.*

I was chewing my lip and worrying about just exactly how I was going to make it right with my friends

when my mental stressing was interrupted by a weird flapping noise that filled the air around me.

Something about the sound sent a chill down my spine. I looked up. There was nothing above me but darkness and sky and the winter-bare limbs of the huge oaks that lined the sidewalk. I shivered, having a

walking-over-my-grave moment as the night went from soft and misty to dark and malevolent.

Hang on—dark and malevolent? Well, that's just silly! What I had heard was probably nothing more sinister than the wind rustling through the trees. Jeesh, I was losing it.

Shaking my head at myself, I kept walking but had taken only a couple of steps when it happened again.

The weird flapping above me actually caused the air, which seemed ten degrees colder, to flutter wildly

against my skin. I automatically flailed a hand up, imagining bats and spiders and all sorts of creepy things.

My fingers passed through nothingness, but it was frigid nothingness, and an icy pain sliced through my

hand. Completely freaked out, I yelped and hugged my hand to my chest. For a moment I didn't know what to do, and my body was numb with fear. The flapping was getting louder and the cold more intense

when I finally managed to move. Ducking my head, I did the only thing I could think to do. I ran for the

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nearest door to the school.

After slipping inside, I slammed the thick wooden door behind me and, panting for breath, turned to peer through the little arched window in the center of it. The night shifted and swam before my eyes like

black paint poured down a dark page. Still, the terrible feeling of icy fear lingered within me. Wh

was

going on? Almost without realizing what I was doing, I whispered, “Fire, come to me. I need your warmth.”

Instantly the element responded, filling the air around me with the soothing heat of a hearth fire. Still staring out the little window, I pressed my palms against the rough wood of the door. “Out there,” I murmured. “Send your heat out there, too.” With a whoosh of warmth, the element moved from me, through the door, and poured into the night. There was a hissing sound, like steam rising from dry ice. The mist roiled, thick and soupy, giving me a sense of dizzy vertigo that made me a little nauseated and the strange darkness began to evaporate. Then the heat completely beat away the chill, and as sudden as it had begun, the night was once again quiet and familiar.

What had just happened?

My stinging hand drew my attention from the window. I looked down. Across the back of my hand there were red welts, as though something with claws, or talons, had scraped across my flesh. I rubbed at the angry-looking marks, which stung like a curling iron burn.

Then the feeling hit me strong, hard, overwhelming—and I knew with my Goddess-given sixth sense that

I shouldn’t be here by myself. The coldness that had tainted the night—the ghostly something that had chased me inside and welted my hand—filled me with a terrible foreboding and for the first time in a long

time, I was truly and utterly afraid. Not for my friends. Not for my grandma or my human boyfriend,

or even for my estranged mom. I was afraid for myself. I didn’t just *want* the company of my friends. I

needed them.

Still rubbing my hand, I made my legs move and knew beyond any doubt that I would rather face the hurt and disappointment of my friends than whatever dark thing might be waiting for me in the concealing

night.

I hovered for a second just outside the open doors to the busy “dining hall” (a.k.a. school cafeteria) watching the other kids talk easily and happily together, and I was almost overwhelmed with the sudden

wish that I could be just another fledgling—that I didn’t have any extraordinary abilities or the responsibilities that went along with those abilities. For a second I wanted to be normal so bad that it was hard for me to breathe.

Then I felt the soft brush of wind against my skin that seemed warmed by the heat of an invisible flame. I

caught a whiff of the ocean, even though there is definitely no ocean near Tulsa, Oklahoma. I heard birdsong and smelled new-cut grass. And my spirit quivered with silent joy within me as I acknowledged

my powerful Goddess-given gifts of an affinity for each of the five elements: air, fire, water, earth, and spirit.

I wasn’t normal. I wasn’t like anyone else, fledgling or vampyre, and it was wrong of me to wish otherwise. And part of my not-normal-ness was telling me that I had to go in there and try to make peace

with my friends. I straightened my spine and looked around the room with eyes that were clear of self-pity, and easily found my special group sitting at our booth.

I drew a deep breath and then made my way quickly across the cafeteria, giving a little nod or small

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smile to the kids who said hi to me. I noticed that everyone seemed to be reacting to me with the usual

mix of respect and awe, which meant that my friends hadn’t been talking crap about me to the masses. It

also meant that Neferet hadn’t launched an all-out, open attack against me. Yet.

I grabbed a quick salad and a brown pop. Then, holding on to my tray with such abnormal tightness that

it was turning my fingers white, I marched straight to our booth and took my usual seat beside Damien.

When I sat down, no one looked at me, but their easy chatter instantly died, which is something totally

hate. I mean, what's more awful than walking up to a group of your supposed-to-be friends and having

them all shut up so that you knew for sure they were all talking about you? Ugh.

"Hi," I said instead of running away or bursting into tears like I wanted to.

No one said anything.

"So, what's up?" I directed the question at Damien, knowing that my gay friend was naturally the weakest link in the don't-talk-to-Zoey chain.

Sadly, it was the Twins who answered me and not gay, and therefore more sensitive and polite Damien.

"Not shit, right, Twin?" said Shaunee.

"That's right, Twin, not shit. 'Cause we can't be trusted to know shit," Erin said. "Twin, did you know we're totally untrustworthy?"

"Not until recently I didn't, Twin. You?" Shaunee said.

"Didn't know till recently either," Erin finished.

Okay, the Twins aren't really twins. Shaunee Cole is a caramel-colored Jamaican-American who grew up on the East Coast. Erin Bates is a gorgeous blonde who was born in Tulsa. The two met after being

Marked and moving to the House of Night on the same day. They clicked instantly—it's like genetics and geography never existed. They literally finish each other's sentences. And at that moment they were

glaring at me with twin looks of angry suspicion.

God, they made me tired.

They also made me mad. Yes, I'd kept secrets from them. Yes, I'd lied to them. But I'd had to. Well, mostly I'd had to. And their twin holier-than-thou crap was getting on my last nerve.

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