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NYT BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF CRAVE

TRACY WOLFF

Praise for Tracy Wolff's *Crave*

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—**A. K. Wilder, author of *Crown of Bones***

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—**Read Your Writes Book Reviews**

“An addictive and fun paranormal read that had me giggling and swooning big time! If you’re like me and love a good vampire romance, definitely gotta read this one!”

—**Books and a Cup of Joe**

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

TRACY WOLFF

Table of Contents

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[1 Woke Up Like This](#)

[2 So...What Did I Miss?](#)

[3 Sleeping Beauty's Got Nothing on Me](#)

[4 Turns out the Sixth Sense Is Actually Human Sacrifice](#)

[5 Gargoyles Are the New Black](#)

[6 Vampire Roulette Isn't the Same Without the Blood](#)

[7 What I Don't Know Will Hurt Me...and Everyone Else](#)

[8 Put a Little Love on Me](#)

[9 Livin' on a Hope-Induced Hallucination](#)

[10 One Giant Pain in my Ass](#)

[11 Just Call Me Stone-Coldhearted](#)

[12 #FactionFightClub](#)

[13 Sucker Punch Me One More Time](#)

[14 She-Nanigans](#)

[15 Let's All Play Find the Homicidal Maniac](#)

[16 Nothing Wrong with Being a Little Horny](#)

[17 Tunnel Vision](#)

[18 I Think I Had Amnesia Once...or Twice](#)

[19 Caught Red-Handed](#)

[20 Karma's a Witch's Cousin](#)

[21 Keep Your Enemies Close, Unless They Bleed a Lot](#)

[22 Family Is My Favorite F-Word](#)

[23 Saturday Morning Cartoons Never Prepared Me for This](#)

[24 Go Smudge Yourself](#)

[25 And the Blackouts Just Keep on Coming](#)

[26 Possession Is Nine-Tenths of the Law](#)

[27 When the Evil Within Really Needs to be the Evil That's Out, Out, Out](#)
[28 Sometimes Girls Just Wanna Take Charge](#)
[29 I'm Too Sexy for My Coat...and So Is Everyone Else](#)
[30 Winner Winner Bloodletter's Dinner](#)
[31 Welcome to the Ice Age](#)
[32 One Person's Reality Is Another Person's Total Mind F*ck](#)
[33 It's Hard to Pick My Battles When My Battles Keep Picking Me](#)
[34 This Place Isn't Big Enough for the Both of Us](#)
[35 I'm Going to Wash That Psychopath Right Out of My Hair](#)
[36 DIY Exorcism](#)
[37 Sweet Dreams Are Made of Anything But This](#)
[38 Take Me Under Your Dragon Wing](#)
[39 Salem WTF Trials](#)
[40 Survival Is So Last Year](#)
[41 Turns Out the Devil Wears Armani](#)
[42 Ben & Jerry Are the Only Two Guys I Want to Fight Over](#)
[43 Even Homicidal Maniacs Have Their Limits](#)
[44 Two Heads Aren't Better than One](#)
[45 Leave Your Daddy Issues at the Door](#)
[46 Gargoyles Need a Little Glamour, Too](#)
[47 Are you Bloodstoned?](#)
[48 Win, Lose, or Die](#)
[49 Teamwork Makes the Dream Work...\(or it Gives You Nightmares\)](#)
[50 It's Getting Crowded Under the Bed](#)
[51 Get Your Magic On](#)
[52 Come on Baby, Light My Candle](#)
[53 Everybody Wants to Rule the World](#)
[54 Who Needs a Magic Carpet When Your Bestie's a Dragon?](#)
[55 Ain't Nothing but a Wing Thing](#)
[56 Just Shut Up and Dance](#)
[57 Pulling all the \(Heart\) Strings](#)
[58 Always Look on the Bite Side](#)

[59 Two Vampires Too Many](#)
[60 Paranormal Telenovelas Are a Lifestyle Choice](#)
[61 The Monster Mash-Up](#)
[62 Gravity Bites](#)
[63 There Aren't Enough Happy Thoughts in the World](#)
[64 Pardon My Existential Crisis](#)
[65 No Exit: A Biography](#)
[66 Frenemies Are Forever](#)
[67 Talk Darcy to Me](#)
[68 The Truth Hurts](#)
[69 To Bite or Not to Bite](#)
[70 When the Devil Comes Up to Denali](#)
[71 Revenge of the Body Snatched](#)
[72 Welcome to the Paranormal Jungle](#)
[73 Live and Let Love](#)
[74 A Whole New Kind of March Madness](#)
[75 Now You See Me, Now You Don't](#)
[76 From Jock to Cock-a-Doodle-Do](#)
[77 Comet Me, Baby](#)
[78 Talk About a Bone to Pick](#)
[79 Talk About a Trust Fall](#)
[80 A Gargoyle's Guide to Antigravity](#)
[81 One Hundred Percent That Witch](#)
[82 Ride or Die](#)
[83 Sometimes Homecoming Really Does Mean Coming Home](#)
[84 Two Vampires, a Witch, and a Werewolf Walk into a Boneyard...](#)
[85 Dust and Dragon Bones](#)
[86 Grace Under Fire](#)
[87 All the Right Moves](#)
[88 Subconsciously Yours](#)
[89 Bend Till You Break](#)
[90 Fire and Bloodstone](#)

[91 Family Feud Has Nothing on Us](#)
[92 Is It Really a Throw Down if it Makes You Want to Throw Up?](#)
[93 Betrayal Is a Four-Letter Word](#)
[94 Some Days the Glass Really Is Half Empty](#)
[95 Second Star to the Right and Straight On Till Siberia](#)
[96 Get Fanged](#)
[97 Another One Bites the Dust](#)
[98 Fly by Night](#)
[99 With Baited Breath](#)
[100 Carpe Slay-Em](#)
[101 Heaven on My Mind](#)
[102 We Are the Monsters](#)
[103 Going Through the Potions](#)
[104 Because We Could Not Stop for Death](#)
[105 Fall from Grace](#)
[106 Stone Hearts Can Be Broken](#)
[107 I Never Asked for This Anyway](#)
[108 Pom-Poms and Pompadours](#)
[109 Where Do Broken Bonds Go?](#)
[110 Heeeeeeeeere's Hudson](#)
[111 Talk About a Power Trip](#)
[112 It's High Noon and Justice Doesn't Serve Itself](#)
[113 A Match Played in Hell](#)
[114 Fake It Till You Break It](#)
[115 He Totally Deserved That](#)
[116 Death By Ice Cube Is No Way to Start an Obituary](#)
[117 Raining Cats and Dragons](#)
[118 Stop Dragon my Wings Around](#)
[119 Gargoyle Girls Do It with Grace](#)
[120 Fee, Fi, Fo, F*ck](#)
[121 And the Crowd Goes Wild](#)
[122 You're So Jelly](#)

[123 It All Comes Crashing Down](#)

[124 Long Time, No Sea](#)

[125 Between a Rock and a Hard Place](#)

[126 Amazing Grace—Hudson—](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[The Afterlife of the Party, by Marlene Perez](#)

[Crown of Bones, by A.K. Wilder](#)

[Dating Makes Perfect, by Pintip Dunn](#)

[Escaping Eleven, by Jerri Chisholm](#)

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To Elizabeth Pelletier and Emily Sylvan Kim
The two most kick-ass women in the business
There's no one I want to take this journey with more than you

Woke Up Like This

Being the lone human in a school for paranormals is precarious at the best of times.

At the worst of times, it's a little like being the last chew toy in a room full of rabid dogs.

And at average times...well, at average times, it's honestly pretty cool.

Too bad today is most definitely *not* an average day.

I don't know why, but everything feels a little off as I walk down the hall toward my Brit Lit class, the strap of my backpack clutched in my hand like a lifeline.

Maybe it's the fact that I'm freezing, my whole body trembling with a cold that has seeped all the way to my bones.

Maybe it's the fact that the hand clutching my backpack is bruised and sore, like I got into a fight with a wall—and most definitely lost.

Or maybe it's the fact that everyone, and I mean *everyone*, is staring at me—and it's *not* in that “best of times” kind of way.

Then again, when is it ever?

You'd think I'd have gotten used to the staring by now, since it kind of comes with the territory when you're a vampire prince's girlfriend. But nope. And *definitely* not okay when every vampire, witch, dragon, and werewolf in the place is stopping to stare at you with their eyes wide and their mouths gaping even wider—like today.

Which, to be honest, really isn't a very good look for any of them. I mean,

come on. Aren't I supposed to be the one weirded out in this equation? They've known all along that humans exist. It's only been about a week since I found out the monster in my closet is real. As are the ones in my dorm room, my classes...and sometimes in my arms. So shouldn't I be the one walking around with my mouth wide open as *I* stare at *them*?

"Grace?" I recognize the voice and turn with a smile, only to find Mekhi gawking at me, his normally warm brown complexion more waxy than I've ever seen it.

"Hey, there you are." I shoot him a grin. "I thought I was going to have to read *Hamlet* all by myself today."

"*Hamlet*?" His voice is hoarse, and the hands that fumble the phone out of his front pocket are anything but steady.

"Yeah, *Hamlet*. The play we've been reading for Brit Lit since I got here?" I shuffle my feet a little, suddenly uncomfortable as he continues to stare at me like he's seen a ghost...or worse. This definitely isn't typical Mekhi behavior. "We're performing a scene today, remember?"

"We're not rea—" He breaks off mid-word, thumbs flying over his phone as he sends what his face says is the most important text of his life.

"Are you okay?" I ask, stepping closer. "You don't look so good."

"I don't look so good?" He barks out a laugh, shoves a trembling hand through his long, dark locks. "Grace, you're—"

"Miss Foster?"

Mekhi breaks off as a voice I don't recognize all but booms through the hallway.

"Are you all right?"

I shoot Mekhi a "what the fuck?" look as we both turn to find Mr. Badar, the Lunar Astronomy teacher, striding down the hall.

"I'm fine," I answer, taking a startled step back. "I'm just trying to get to class before the bell rings." I blink up at him when he stops directly in front of us. He's looking a lot more freaked out than an early-morning hallway exchange warrants. Especially since all I'm doing is talking to a friend.

"We need to find your uncle," he tells me as he places a hand under my

elbow in an effort to turn me around and guide me back in the direction I just came from.

There's something in his voice, less than a warning but more than a request, that gets me walking through the long, lancet-arched hallway without complaint. Well, that and because the normally unfazed Mekhi scrambles to get out of our way.

But with each step I take, the feeling that something isn't right intensifies. Especially when people literally stop in their tracks to watch us go by, a reaction that only seems to make Mr. Badar more nervous.

"Can you please tell me what's going on?" I ask as the crowd parts right in front of us. It's not the first time I've seen the phenomenon—once again, I *do* date Jaxon Vega—but it is the first time I've seen it happen when my boyfriend is nowhere around. It's beyond weird.

Mr. Badar looks at me like I've grown a second head, then asks, "You don't know?" The fact that he sounds a little frantic, his deep voice taking on an incredulous edge, ratchets up my anxiety. Especially since it reminds me of the look on Mekhi's face when he reached for his phone a couple of minutes ago.

It's the same look I see on Cam's face as we sweep by him standing in the doorway of one of the Chem classrooms. And Gwen's. And Flint's.

"Grace!" Flint calls to me, bounding out of the classroom so he can walk alongside Mr. Badar and me. "Oh my God, Grace! You're back!"

"Not now, Mr. Montgomery," the teacher snaps, his teeth clicking together sharply with each word.

So definitely a werewolf, then...at least judging by the size of that canine I see peeking from beneath his lip. Then again, I guess I should have figured it out by the subject he teaches—who's more interested in the astronomy of the moon than the creatures who occasionally like to howl at it?

For the first time, I wonder if something happened this morning that I don't know about. Did Jaxon and Cole, the alpha werewolf, get into it again? Or Jaxon and another wolf this time—maybe Quinn or Marc? It doesn't seem likely, since everyone has been giving us a wide berth lately, but why else

would a werewolf teacher I've never met before be so panicked and single-minded in his determination to get me to my uncle?

"Wait, Grace—" Flint reaches out for me, but Mr. Badar blocks his hand from connecting.

"I said not now, Flint! Go to class!" The words, little more than a snarl, come from low in his throat.

Flint looks like he wants to argue, his own teeth suddenly gleaming sharply in the soft chandelier lighting of the hallway. He must decide it's not worth it—despite his clenched fists—because in the end, he doesn't say anything. He just kind of stops in his tracks and watches us walk by instead... just like everyone else in the corridor.

Several people look like they want to approach—Macy's friend Gwen, for example—but a low, warning growl from the teacher, who's pretty much marching me down the hallway now, and the whole group of them decides to keep their distance.

"Hold on, Grace. We're almost there."

"Almost where?" I want to demand an answer, but my voice comes out sounding raspy.

"Your uncle's office, of course. He's been waiting on you for a long time."

That makes no sense. I just saw Uncle Finn yesterday.

Unease slides across the back of my neck and down my spine, sharp as a razor, causing the hairs on my arms to tingle.

None of this feels okay.

None of this feels *right*.

As we turn another corner, this time into the tapestry-lined hallway that runs in front of Uncle Finn's office, it's my turn to reach into my pocket for my phone. I want to talk to Jaxon. *He'll* tell me what's going on.

I mean, this can't all be about Cole, right? Or about Lia. Or about—I yelp as my thoughts crash into what feels like a giant wall. One that has huge metal barbs sticking out of it that poke directly into my head.

Even though the wall isn't tangible, mentally running into it hurts an astonishing amount. For a moment, I just freeze, a little shell-shocked. Once

I get over the surprise—and the pain—of it, I try even harder to move past the obstruction, straining my mind in an effort to get my thoughts together. To force them to go down this mental path that is suddenly completely closed off to me.

That's when I realize—I can't remember waking up this morning. I can't remember breakfast. Or getting dressed. Or talking to Macy. I can't remember anything that's happened today at all.

“What the hell is going on?”

I don't realize I've said the words out loud until the teacher answers, rather grimly, “I'm pretty sure Foster was hoping you could fill him in on that.”

It's not the answer I'm looking for, and I reach into my pocket for my phone again, determined not to get distracted this time. I want Jaxon.

Except my phone isn't in the pocket where I always keep it, and it isn't in any of my other pockets, either. How is that possible? I never forget my phone.

Uneasiness moves into fear and fear into an insidious panic that has question after question bombarding me. I try to stay calm, try not to show the two dozen or so people watching me at this very instant just how rattled I really am. It's hard to keep cool, though, when I don't have a clue what's going on.

Mr. Badar nudges my elbow to get moving again, and I follow him on autopilot.

We make one more turn and end up at the door leading into the front office of Katmere's headmaster, also known as my uncle Finn. I expect Mr. Badar to knock, but he just throws the door open and propels us into the office's antechamber, where Uncle Finn's assistant is at her desk, typing away on her laptop.

“I'll be right with you,” Mrs. Haversham says. “I just need one—”

She glances up at us—over the top of her computer screen and her purple half-moon glasses—and breaks off mid-sentence the second her gaze meets mine. All of a sudden, she's jumping up from her desk, her chair clattering

back against the wall behind her as she shouts for my uncle.

“Finn, come quick!” She circles out from behind her desk and throws her arms around me. “Grace, it’s so good to see you! I’m so glad you’re here!”

I have no idea what she means, just like I have no idea why she’s hugging me. I mean, Mrs. Haversham is a nice-enough lady, but I had no idea our relationship had progressed from formal greetings to spontaneous and apparently ecstatic embraces.

Still, I return the hug. I even pat her on her back—a little gingerly, but I figure it’s the thought that counts. On the plus side, her soft white curls smell like honey.

“It’s good to see you, too,” I respond as I start to ease back a little, hoping a five-second hug is all that’s necessary in this already bizarre situation.

But Mrs. Haversham is hanging on for the long haul, her arms wrapped around me so tightly that it’s growing a little hard to breathe. Not to mention awkward.

“Finn!” she shouts again, paying no attention to the fact that, thanks to the hug, her red-lipsticked mouth is right next to my ear. “Finn! It’s—”

The door to Uncle Finn’s office flies open. “Gladys, we *have* an intercom —” He, too, breaks off mid-sentence, his eyes going wide as they find my face.

“Hey, Uncle Finn.” I smile at him as Mrs. Haversham finally releases me from her honeysuckle-scented death grip. “I’m sorry to bother you.”

My uncle doesn’t answer. Instead, he just keeps staring at me, mouth working but absolutely no sound coming out.

And my stomach suddenly feels like it’s full of broken glass.

I may not know what I had for breakfast, but I know one thing for sure... Something is very, very wrong.

So...What Did I Miss?

I'm about to work up the courage to ask Uncle Finn what's going on—he has a history of not lying to me (at least not when directly confronted)—but before I can force the words out of my absurdly dry throat, he yelps, “Grace!”

And then he's bounding across the office, straight at me.

“Grace, oh my God! Grace! You're back.”

Back? Why do people keep saying that to me? Where exactly did I go? And why wouldn't they expect me to come back?

Again I search my memory, and *again* I slam right into that giant wall. It doesn't hurt as much this time as it did the first—maybe because the shock has worn off—but it's still uncomfortable.

Like Mrs. Haversham, Uncle Finn grabs on to me the second he reaches me, his arms going around my back in a huge bear hug, even as his familiar woodsy scent winds its way around me. It's more comforting than I expect it to be, and I find myself sagging against him a little as I try to figure out what on earth is happening. And why I can't remember anything that might cause this kind of reaction in my uncle...or anyone else I've run into, for that matter.

I was just walking down the hall to class, the same as every other student in the place.

Eventually Uncle Finn pulls back, but only far enough to look at my face. “Grace. I can't believe you've really come back to us. We've missed you so much.”