



CHAPTER 1

MAYA AND ALFIE

On the screen, I see her sweep down that golden staircase, her shiny dress jet-black and her shoes crimson. Head held high, dark hair streaming in the artificial wind.

Her eyes look wrong. Over-painted and ancient.

They've made her look like some kind of goddess. They must have given her contacts, because she'd be almost blind without her glasses.

Music thunders, an electronic fanfare. I know what it is — it's based on an old song from the 1970s, one my nan likes, called 'Hold On Tight

to Your Dreams'. (We've always laughed at the bit where it goes into French for no reason. My nan says it's really bad French.)

She spreads her arms out wide, drinking in the applause. Her mouth is a big stripe of red with impossibly ice-white teeth. Her face is caked in make-up, but you'd only know it if you knew, like me, what she really looked like. A pretty girl — yeah, for those who like girls — but not one of those shiny TV goddesses, not one of those music princesses. Not Maya.

Except she is.

She is now.

They've taken her, taken Maya Barnes, my best friend since we were five, and they've turned her into something else. Something new. Something *wrong*.

They've made her into a monster.
