

Prologue

a deleted scene from *Hostile Takeover*

by Cristelle Comby

What would you do if you knew with certainty the date of your death? What if someone gave you the exact number of dawns you have left until the grim reaper comes knocking at your door?

Given the right amount of time, you could say goodbye to your loved ones. Or party like you never have before, all the while eating the most exquisite food. Maybe, if the timing's right, you could travel the world and see the most breath-taking sights?

Yeah, wouldn't that be fun...if only you knew.

Well, *I* can tell you how long I have left with the exact certainty and absolute precision of a Swiss clock. Some may see this as a chance, a gift—I say ignorance is bliss. This is a curse, my curse.

I have no loved ones to kiss goodbye and no desire to travel the world. Why would I want to go away from the city I love? This place, Cold City, it runs in my blood.

The golden bay area, lined with top-of-the-range sky-scrappers is filled with tailor-made suits and high heels. It's buzzing with upright citizens living their lives to the tick of a clock, like a never-ending ballet of Prada manikin under a jar of glass.

And then, there's the flip side of the coin where, even when the sun shines, things look grim. The part of town where the streets aren't paved with gold but filth and no woman in her right mind ventures outside after dusk. Yeah, that's my city alright. It's not perfect, but I like it the way it is.

I grew up on its streets. I found love around one of its corners and was doomed in one of its back-alleys. Makes sense that I should draw my last breath on its soil too.

My name is Bellamy Vale, and this is the story of my death.