



Enraged By Magic

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Category: Romance, Paranormal

Description: Hate consumes love. At least that's what the demon would like Norah and her coven to think. After seeing his old friend, Travis reverts to his former self. Norah knows, though, that now more than ever, they need to become one if they're to defeat their enemy. The only thing the coven has to do is get Travis on board the demon-slaying train...and fast. Now that his identity was revealed, the demon has turned his hate on all of Salem, destroying things and people at will. The more anger and fear he spews, the coven realizes they can't do the job themselves. This is a job for all the magical people of Salem. With help from friends and frenemies—and Norah's magical element—they embark on a fight for their lives in this finale to the Order of the Akasha series. Like Granny says, "Pure will always win." But is it pure hate, or pure love?

Total Pages (Source): 48

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Prologue

Travis

Promises made when you were younger seem so much bigger.

Back in the days when the summers never ended, and the days were just as long. When the world seemed like an infinite place, and the stars were almost touchable. When I was five, I thought I could be anything, do anything. So, I made promises. To myself, to my friends. Nothing seemed finite, so why not wish for the world, or promise the world for that matter?

Jax had been my best friend since Kindergarten. We were the only kids in the class who realized we were different. Not only that, but we were something special. Together? We were something magical.

No pun intended.

It seemed stupid now, but when I was a kid and I made that blood oath on a July afternoon that Jax and I would be brothers instead of friends, I meant it. I meant it with everything I had in me, and that oath may be the most important thing to me. More important than the Order, and on par with my feelings for Norah.

Jax and I were more than friends. We were partners in crime. Best mates, Gabe might say. I really didn't have a word that truly summed up what we were to one another. So, did I jump in front of him and let him get away? I did.

And I would do it again.

I caught the rest of my coven staring at me every once in a while. I knew what they wanted to ask, but I also knew they wouldn't ask it. Not yet anyway. We were back to the point where they felt I was made of glass and I was about ready to explode. I was well past that point though. I deserved everything I had coming to me. Being marked. Jax's fury. Even the backlash that was sure to come when Jax resurfaced again.

The Order superiors had told me that whatever Jax did next was on me.

I would take that. Because I fully believed that I was the reason why he'd become this thing. Nothing would change my mind about that. Not Norah, not the rest of the guys. They would never be able to convince me otherwise because they didn't know the two little boys lying stomach-down in the dirt across from their army men. One-by-one, they threw rock missiles over to destroy the bad guys. They didn't know the two kids who practiced magic together even when they knew they weren't supposed to.

They just didn't know.

Whatever happened from here, I had hope I could turn it around. For that little kid inside of me and that little kid inside of Jax, I had to hope he wasn't lost. He could be as mad as he wanted at me. I deserved it. But to me, Jax would never be too far gone.

I stared at the phone, then sat back to rub my neck. I knew what I had to do, but I just didn't want to do it. Jennie barely liked me anyway. I'd let my sister down in all this too, but I didn't want to continue to do that. She deserved to know what was going on. I picked up the cell phone, my stomach twisting in knots. Hopefully, she'd moved so far beyond Jax that the news he'd returned and had summoned a demon to get his powers back wouldn't knock her off course. Hopefully she'd just say, "Oh. Good to know." Best-case scenario, it wouldn't faze her a bit. Worst-case scenario? I'd have to make another trip to Adams, Virginia, and I really didn't want to do that.

“Fuck it,” I murmured. I pressed Jennie’s name and brought the phone to my ear. It rang a couple times and I could almost see her on the other end staring down at the screen and wondering if she should answer. I was sure she’d have some sort of smartass remark because that’s how us Shaws were. “Pick up, pick up,” I whispered.

The line clicked. “The prodigal son returns...”

“Hey,” I said, almost choking on the word.

There was a pause. The wheels were no doubt turning in her head, wondering if she should get caught up in my shit. “What is it, Travis?”

I rubbed my temple with my free hand and leaned my head back to stare at the ceiling. “It’s Jax, Jen. He’s back.”

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Gabe interlaced his fingers with mine. I looked over at him, staring into those captivating and carefree blue eyes. He’d been like the flame to my moth this past week. He felt everything as much as everyone else, but he handled it in a way that I admired. In a way that relaxed even my anxious soul. When I was with him, I could almost—almost—close my eyes and pretend that we were just some college couple walking around town, or a couple out sightseeing for the first time.

He reached over and brushed his finger over my nose. “You’re so cute when you look serious.”

I swallowed. I was with Gabe. The last thing I wanted was to be serious right now. I could reserve serious for when we were back at the Order headquarters by the wharf.

“I can’t believe you’ve been in Salem for this long and we haven’t done any of this

stuff yet,” he said, trying to change the subject.

I smiled back at him, holding my tongue on what I really wanted to say. He didn’t need reminding about the stuff we’d actually been spending our time on. A cursed sorority house. Witches getting their power drained. A demonic familiar attaching itself to Liam. A warped djinn. Now, Jax, ex-coven member turned demon-friendly witch. It was just like Gabe to think that we could do all that and still let me live the tourist life too. I didn’t want to tell him that since I’d come from New Orleans and been there, done that, every tourist trap was the same to me.

He pulled me to a stop in front of Old Burying Point Cemetery. It was ancient. The stones inside looked like gnarly teeth sticking out of rotted gums. Most of the stones were so worn you couldn’t even read the names of the deceased. Like us, there were other people milling around to take in the sights. Some just walked through to get to another site, but most looked down at the various tombstones, pointing down at the dates or the names or some other random point of interest.

I had to admit, this cemetery was far different from St. Louis Cemetery #1 in New Orleans. Our ancient burial places held crypts that looked like stone monuments to the dead. It was interesting to see the differences between the north and the south.

Gabe gestured toward the perimeter of the cemetery after I read one of the stones at our feet. “On the other side of that iron gate is the Salem Witch Trials monument,” Gabe said, his hand squeezing mine. He kept doing that as if he thought I needed a reminder to stay in the present, and I guessed I did.

I looked past the black iron gate to a rectangular grassy area surrounded by a stone wall. “Can you take me?”

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His smile grew wide, and he gave my arm a short tug. “I would literally do anything you wanted right now, baby.”

I could think of a few things I wanted to do with Gabe, and none of them involved a cemetery.

I smiled, and his deepened right alongside mine. “You’re sick,” he teased.

“Well, I wasn’t talking about doing that here,” I said, pretending to be affronted.

The truth was, I might consider it. They were dead. None of them would be complaining. On the other hand, I was brought up to respect the dead, so I probably wouldn’t. Granny would have a field day if she’d known the previous thought even entered my head.

We walked out of the peaceful cemetery and then followed the sidewalk around. It led us right to our destination. The sidewalks did that around here. A red line, also known as the Heritage Trail, led to all the popular tourist stops in Salem. If you followed the red line around the city, you’d see everything you came here to see. Of course, everywhere you looked in Salem, there was something to see. Despite what I’d thought earlier about being over the tourist traps, I really did think Salem was a beautiful city with an abundance of historic New England charm.

He pulled me to a stop in front of the walkable monument. Flat stones jutted out from a rectangular rock wall, each one depicting one of the souls Salem lost during the hysteria. My skin crawled just thinking about what this place represented. To think that witches were persecuted like that, and now, those that claimed to be witches and

psychics and mediums were out and proud in a very big way around Salem. Most of these people were Wiccans, but there were real witches here too. That's why we were here, to enforce the magical laws.

"It's sad," I finally said. We walked around the paved perimeter and I read each of the victim's names and the manner of their deaths on the flat rocks. The majority of them were hanged to death.

Gabe walked alongside me, his head hung low as we took in the site.

I envisioned their bodies hanging from a noose and shivered as one by one I read "Hanged" carved into the stones. I flashbaked to the Order placing the Akasha mark on Travis. Wasn't that kind of the same thing as this? They had trials to determine their innocence the same as the Order did. I supposed the only difference was the magic in the Akasha. We were never wrong. The magic didn't lie, just as it hadn't when it knew Travis was truly good, despite the fact that he'd saved his friend Jax from his fate.

"Hey," Gabe said. He pulled me toward him, sliding his hand up my cheek and into my hair. "I don't think you're getting the point of this little outing at all."

I smiled up at his teasing tone. "I do get it. I just suck at it." Here he was trying to get me to forget everything that happened for a while and no matter where I looked, I kept going back to everything we were faced with.

He dropped his head back and sighed. "Please don't make me go back to headquarters with all the sulking. There's so much sulking."

I chuckled. He wasn't lying. There was a hell of a lot of sulking going on back at the wharf headquarters. We'd chosen that over the headquarters in the woods. At least there was running water there, and I still got to be by the ocean. I rose to my tiptoes

and kissed his soft lips. “Why don’t we move on to the restaurant?”

His thumb traced over my cheekbone. “Whatever my baby wants.”

“Your baby wants food, and a happy ending.”

He laughed—loudly—gathering the attention of some other tourists taking in the sights. Most of them smiled when they looked at us. Maybe we reminded them of a certain time in their lives. Maybe we just looked like two people having a good time.

When we turned to walk back toward the car, I smiled up at them, wishing we were exactly what they thought in their heads.

As we turned onto the block where we’d parked the car, Gabe pulled out the key fob and unlocked it. The car made two short beeps, and the lights flashed. He smiled at it as if he was in love.

“You really like that, don’t you?”

“Oh, you have no idea.”

He guided me toward the passenger side of the car and opened the door. The new car smell wafted up and both of us breathed in deep.

That was right. The Salem Order was driving around in a brand-new car. It was on the small side, nothing fancy, but at least it would help get more of us from point A to point B. No more having to finagle the ride situation. This, of course, after we decided to move back into Salem city limits at the old headquarters instead of Liam’s parents’ house. We thought it was safer for us there.

“I just love new gadgets,” Gabe said, beaming. He held my hand as I lowered myself

into the front seat. When I pulled my feet in, he shut the door for me.

After he ran around the car and got in the other side, I turned toward him. “You better have a full report ready for Liam when we get back. You know he’s going to ask you all about the car, right down to the nitty gritty detail.”

“Oh, I’ve been working on my write-up ever since our date started.”

“Oh really?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “I’m quite the multitasker.”

This I knew to be true in some very delicious ways.

Gabe winked and then pushed the ignition button to start the car. It came to life underneath us and Gabe looked like a kid on Christmas morning with a new toy. “I know we could’ve walked there,” he said as he put the car in Drive, “But this was much more fun.”

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I had to agree with him. Even though we were closer to everything now, we used every opportunity to drive the new car around as much as we could. Even Travis liked trading in the Jeep for the smaller more economical car some of the time. The only thing Liam splurged on was the fact that it was a hybrid. We joked that not only were we here to save the residents of Salem, we were also going to save the environment while we were at it.

When you thought about it, Jax was just like pollution. Everything he touched, he damaged. It might not show right away, but it was there. Inside him, there was a demon like a living cancer. He thought the demon gave him powers, and I guessed it did, but it was nothing like the effect it was taking on him personally. Once he got everything he wanted, he'd never be the same again.

Most of us realized that. Jax still didn't. Or he didn't care.

Which was much, much worse.

It turned out, we could've walked to the restaurant too. But in a life where there was so much to worry about, why not splurge now and then?

We were seated right away. As I eyed the old-world charm in the place, Gabe eyed the menu. When the waitress came with our drink orders, I had to ask for another few minutes with the menu since I hadn't even looked at it yet.

Gabe sipped his water and then stared as I read. After making my decision, I put the menu back down. He held his hand out to me. "I thoroughly enjoyed doing this with you today. It was great to get a break from soccer and just come spend time with you

without staring at the other mooney faces in the room.”

Gabe looked away, his jaw clenching. He wasn’t the type that enjoyed all the sad bitterness going around. Travis was back to his usual moody self. I couldn’t blame him. He’d done something he thought was right, and the Order wasn’t going to let him forget that it was wrong.

Gabe ran his finger over my bare wrist. “You better make yourself a bracelet soon, Norah. I don’t like thinking that you’re unprotected.”

I stared down at the blue all-seeing-eye bracelet I’d made for him. Making the all-seeing-eye bracelet wasn’t the problem. It was figuring out what stones to use for mine. I wanted to get stones that represented all my guys. Somehow, I thought it would tie us even more together, and Lord knew we needed that more than ever right about now. “I will,” I told him.

“Maybe we can take a look at a couple of shops before we head back,” he offered.

Was it wrong that a shopping trip sounded like a good idea? And it wasn’t just because I wanted to get the all-seeing-eye bracelet made for myself. A lot of it was wanting to run from everything that was going on too. I didn’t want to run away from my guys, but just everything around us. All the stress we found us under.

Gabe’s phone buzzed on the table. He tilted the screen up to look at it and then put it down again. I lifted myself off the seat to see it. It was still ringing, vibrating on the table in quick bursts. The name Liam ran across the screen. “You going to get that?” I asked.

“Do I have to?”

“No,” I told him honestly. It sounded mean, but it wasn’t meant to be. We weren’t

trying to ignore the others, we were just trying to find that little bit of normal. “But you better,” I told him.

He was already reaching for it on the table. I knew he would. “Hey, mate. What’s up?”

Gabe nodded into the phone. Behind him, a man stood from a table near the front of the room and threw his napkin back down onto it. The woman and two kids he was with stared up at him and the littlest one started crying.

His voice rose. Even from here, I could hear his harsh words as he raged about how difficult it was to even go out to eat with all of them. I bit my lip, unsure of what to do.

I heard Gabe say, “Yeah, we won’t be gone too long. See you soon.” He hung up the phone and then twisted around to see the commotion that had started.

The guy was red in the face now, his fists clenched at his sides. The woman reached out and squeezed his forearm and he stopped midsentence, staring at her with a lost look. Afterward, I watched as he took a few cooling breaths and then sat back down.

“Wow. He was pretty upset,” Gabe said. He turned around but kept shooting glances back at the table.

I watched as they continued with their meal, the father acting as if nothing had happened. It was like the top had blown off and then he was able to piece everything back together inside, so he could go back to normal.

I understood that sentiment. Not that it was fair for those around him, even us, interrupting our nice, quiet meals with his blow up, but we didn’t know what kind of life he led. Maybe he was the CEO of a company with a lot of stress. Maybe he

owned a company that was just about to go under. Maybe with the two kids on top of all that, he hadn't been able to get a full night sleep in a year.

I would definitely break under all that stress. I turned back to Gabe. "We need to have a talk with everyone."

He raised his eyebrows. "Yeah?"

I could tell already he thought I was insane. He turned around in his seat looking for the waitress. I covered his hand, bringing his attention back to me. "No, I mean it. We just need to get everything out there, so we can go back to normal."

"Normal?" His lips slid into a grin as if he thought my last sentence was absolutely insane.

I shrugged. "You know what I mean. Normal for us. For Christ's sakes, Liam just called and part of me didn't even want you to answer it because I didn't want to get pulled out of this moment. Who does that? I love Liam."

"Things are just a bit off right now, Love." Gabe covered my hand with his other. "It's not your fault. You're allowed some carefree moments like this."

"But it is my fault," I said. "Not what's happening but letting it get as far as it has. That's all our faults. We're living in the headquarters like we're just roommates, moping around from one thing to the next."

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“We’re just all dealing with the Jax thing differently.”

“That’s the problem,” I said. “We shouldn’t be dealing with it differently or separately. We’re a team, we’re a coven,” I said, whispering the last part. “We need to be in this together.” I didn’t know why but ever since Travis moved in front of Jax, I’d felt separated from all of them. I was still connected to them each individually, but maybe there was just something about what he did or having to place the Akasha mark on him. In a way, it blew up what we had until we were all just separate pieces trying to make things work again. “We need to go home.”

“Right now?” Gabe asked.

I nodded. “Right now. Please?”

He nodded, then threw down a ten to cover what the waitress had done for us already before getting up and holding his hand out to me. I took it, and he pulled me close. “Whatever you need, Norah. Always.”

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Gabe side-eyed me as we pulled up to what looked like a vacant building on the wharf. “I don’t know why you seem so giddy. I don’t think I’ve seen Travis and Randy talk to one another since that night other than to make sure everyone was okay.”

I shrugged. I really didn’t care what they wanted at the moment. We all had to grow up. “Too bad.”

“Sometimes forcing it isn’t good.”

Even though he still had his sexy accent, Gabe’s words were grating on me. “Look where that’s gotten us in the past. Travis couldn’t even talk to me without saying something nasty.”

“But he figured his stuff out...in time.”

“Listen, Brit,” I said, glaring at him from the passenger seat as he pulled the car to a stop in front of the side door. “I think this is a fantastic idea. And I’m sick and tired of everyone acting like the other doesn’t exist. It’s time for a change.”

I threw the door open and unlatched my seatbelt. Next to me, I heard him take in a deep breath. He wasn’t going to discourage me though. I knew what I was doing in my heart. I didn’t even need Granny’s next life knowledge to understand that staying quiet about all this wasn’t good for us. Especially since we knew that Jax wasn’t done with us. He certainly wasn’t going to let it go, and we needed to be ready...as a team...when that happened.

I yanked open the side door and waltzed right up the stairway next to it. Up there were offices that we’d turned into makeshift bedrooms. Sure, we were all pretty much sleeping on couches or pull-out couches, but it was what we had at the moment. Because this was a sacred place to the Order, our magic was stronger here. It just made sense to stay here while there was a demon inside Jax. Call me crazy, but I liked the idea of having any help we could get.

Besides, Liam promised that when we got to move back into his parents’ house, he’d buy me a hot tub. I could put up with this until I got my hot tub.

Gabe was behind me as I ran up the stairs. Like usual, all the offices/bedrooms were closed. Maybe that was part of the problem. This place wasn’t set up like a house.

There were no communal areas that we could all hang out in unless we wanted to go downstairs and hang out in the big room where the Order determined Travis wasn't a bad witch. We'd all pass on that.

I walked down the hallway, knocking on each of their doors. It was a Saturday evening, so I knew they were all in. "Get up. Get out here. Coven meeting."

Gabe snickered behind me.

When I got to Randy's room, I kept going. I went all the way down to the very end of the building and opened that door. The room was dingy, but I went over to the window and looked outside. It had a view of the ocean at least. This was now going to be the temporary living room.

Down the hall, I heard doors open. Gabe leaned against the doorjamb to the temporary living room smirking at all the guys. "Yes, Mates. You heard that right. Norah wants a coven meeting."

As each of them walked in, my heart lurched. Liam looked as if he'd had his nose stuck in a web page for hours. The back of his hair stood straight up. Travis moped in. His eyes were far away, as if his mind was displaced from his body. Randy.... well, Randy had a sneer on his face that immediately raised my hackles. "What's this about, Norah?"

"Coven meeting."

"Did you guys find something out about Jax?" Liam asked.

Travis immediately perked up.

"No, nothing like that."

Randy rolled his eyes.

“Simmer down, big boy,” I said. “This is all more important than that. This is about all of us getting our shit together.”

Gabe stood in the back, his eyebrows raised high over his eyes. “Um, Norah?” Liam said. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about how the last week or so we haven’t done one thing together. We may as well be living in an apartment building where each of us don’t know the other. All we do is say hi when we pass in the hall.”

“I think everyone’s had their mind on different stuff,” Liam said. He came forward. Out of all of them, I expected that he would be worried. That somehow me getting mad about this meant that our relationship was in jeopardy.

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I smiled at him and squeezed his hand to let him know it wasn't personal. But then I turned toward all of them. "So, hey, how did we figure out how to take out Dupre at the sorority house?"

"We didn't take him out. We put the Akashic cell on him and then he just disappeared."

"Then how did we put the Akashic cell on him?"

They all just stared at me.

"The answer you're all looking for is 'together'. We did it together."

"How did we save Liam from the Familiar and Randy from the Liderc?"

Travis folded his arms in front of his chest. "We're not not working together, Norah."

"Speak for yourself, Shaw."

All eyes turned to Randy. I knew as soon as he walked in that he was itching for a fight. This could be a good thing. This was what I saw at the restaurant. The father got angry, let it out, and then everything was better again.

Travis looked bored. "What's that, Randy? Is there something you'd like to say?"

Randy's hands turned to fists. Gabe's eyes turned to me, then went right back to the pair of them. "We could've been done with all this. We had the chance to grab Jax,

but you interfered. We could've been done. Our lives could've been normal by now, but we're living in fucking Order headquarters."

Travis's jaw tensed. "That's not Jax."

"Oh, wake the fuck up. It was Jax. He was the same overconfident prick he always was."

"I don't think he was that bad," Gabe said, grimacing. "He was our friend."

"And that's why I can call him a prick," Randy said. "I'd expect all of you to call me a fucking asshole if I was being one."

"Fine," Travis said. "You're a fucking asshole."

"I'm not the asshole who's responsible for all this!"

Each of them breathed in deep, facing off from one another. Liam looked conflicted, as if he should be standing next to Randy, but let's face it. None of us wanted to be standing next to Randy when he was like this.

"This is good," I said. "We need to get all this out so that we can talk it through and get over it."

Randy turned his glare on me. My stomach clenched. "You don't get it, Norah. None of this is going to change anything." Though his voice was much calmer, his eyes were still dark.

"Why do you say that?" I asked, feeling uncertain for the first time.

"Because faced with the same thing in the future, Travis would do the same thing."

He's not going to let us do anything to Jax."

"Haven't we done enough to Jax?" Travis asked.

I spun toward him, trying to read his face. The truth was evident on his face. I moved forward and grabbed his forearm. "Randy's right, Travis. That wasn't Jax."

"It was," he said, his muscles underneath my touch bunching.

"You know what he did," I told him, speaking softly. "You know he called upon a demon to give him back his powers. There's no other way he would be that powerful without it."

"Travis seems to forget that Jax was the one leading Dupre on a string. That he was the reason you were taken, Norah. That a bunch of witches got drained, and some even died. He was the reason why Liam had a God damn familiar on him and we thought we were going to lose him."

"That's not Jax."

"Exactly!" Randy said.

Travis moved within a split second. He shoved Randy against the wall, the smell of cinnamon spicing up the room. My heart fell through to my stomach as I watched them both. I went to move forward, but Liam squeezed my hand. "That wasn't him!" Travis seethed. "That wasn't him, but he's in there. My friend is still in there."

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Randy was red in the face now, trying to control any reaction he might have had. Gabe put his hand on Travis's shoulder and moved him away. "He was all our friend, Mate."

"Not like he was with me. You guys all know it. I'm not trying to be mean, but you know how long we were friends. I can tell that the real Jax is still in there. It's like when Liam had the familiar on him. He couldn't control what he did, and as soon as we got the familiar off him, he was back to being Liam. It's going to be the same way with Jax."

Liam and I exchanged looks. What Travis was forgetting was the fact that Jax called the demon to him. Liam never asked for the familiar to jump onto him. Never. He didn't even possess whatever quality it was that would let him do that. Maybe it was like Randy said, Jax was a prick. It was that kind of attitude, that kind of mentality, that would let someone use a demon to gain their witch powers back.

"I don't care what you say," Randy said, his teeth clenched. "That's not Jax, and when the time comes, I'll take him out myself."

Travis staggered back a few steps. I held my hands out to steady him. When I looked around to his face, it was white as if a pale sheen had fallen over it. "You wouldn't."

"I have to do what's best for everyone."

"That's not what's best for everyone," Travis said, moving forward again, this time with a hint of pleading in his voice. "It's not what's best for me."

“It’s what’s best for the majority, and that’s how we always vote, remember, Travis?”

He shook his head. He looked at each of us. “You all don’t think that, do you? You all don’t think that we need to kill Jax, do you?”

He looked at me first. Even though I held his gaze, I didn’t know what to say to him. I’d been in Jax’s presence the most, and I wasn’t sure there was any good left to him. But I couldn’t tell him that. He looked so lost.

“I agree with Randy,” Liam said.

Travis looked as if shy, quiet Liam slapped him across the face.

“It’s what’s best for Norah. He wants to hurt her, Travis.”

“Because of what we did to him,” Travis said. He moved forward and grabbed both of Liam’s shoulders as if he was going to shake him. “He only wants to do that because we turned our back on him. He wants to get back at us for what we did to him.”

“I know you think that,” Liam said. He opened his mouth to say something else, but Travis had already moved to Gabe.

He walked straight up to him, causing Gabe to stand up with his shoulders back. “What about you? Do you think Jax needs to die?”

“I don’t know,” Gabe said. “We certainly can’t let him go around Salem doing what he’s been doing, that much I know. It’s safer not only for Norah, but everyone else. He has possession of a demon, Travis. That’s not something we can just look past.”

He backed up, not bothering to look twice at Randy, but his gaze roamed over Gabe,

Liam, and then back to me. “Norah...”

The building shook. Puffs of dirt exploded into tiny particles away from the walls, and for the first time, I recognized it for what it was. Someone had breached the wards.

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We sprang into action. Liam threw up a visibility spell so fast I almost got dizzy when the walls disappeared and I saw nothing but the exterior parking lot.

Travis and Randy took point in front of Liam, Gabe, and me. Travis, though, inched forward as if all he needed was a reason to run out in front of us.

His hang-ups were deeper than I thought. Maybe this hadn't been the best of ideas since it turned out to be a rag on Travis meeting. I just really wanted us all to start thinking and planning again. I'd have to sit down and talk to him by myself to see where his head was at. Maybe he'd open up to me more about it. Maybe then I could understand it because right now, I was just trying to make sense of his words.

“Oh, for fuck's sake,” Randy said. “It's the Order.”

Gabe and Liam relaxed. Gabe never liked to see them, but Liam at least was relieved to see that it wasn't Jax, I thought.

Liam took down his invisibility spell and Travis quieted the wards. We walked down the stairwell slowly. I didn't know how the rest of my coven felt, but just because they knew I existed now, that didn't mean they gave me all the warm and fuzzies. And an unannounced meeting was never good.

Gabe echoed my sentiment as we walked down. None of us responded, most likely

because we were all thinking the same things in our head.

We met them by the side door. They nodded at us as they moved into the main room. In front of our eyes, chairs from the surrounding seating lifted and flew through the air to the center of the pentagram. Five seats facing another five seats.

Well, that was cozy.

Walter sat in the middle, and Travis took the spot opposite him. I sat next to him with Randy to my right. Gabe and Liam flanked Travis on the other side.

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“Hello,” Walter said. His gaze ran down the line until it hit me. He stared at me a few seconds longer than he did everyone else. After Travis’s ceremony, he and I sat down together many times. I was grilled and asked every question I could think of. It was a stressful time, but I hadn’t seen him in days. “Sorry to come unannounced.”

Randy bristled, no doubt thinking that it never stopped them before. Now that we had nothing to hide though, it really didn’t matter. They knew about me. Travis had been found to be true. What could possibly be wrong?

“There’s much to say, so we’ll just get right to it,” Walter said. “After many meetings with the other Orders, we’ve decided to begin a new Order decree.”

We all shifted in our seats. The air was thick, and we all waited for what felt like a bomb to drop. “What’s that?” Randy asked, his leg jumping up and down as he tried and failed to sit there calmly.

“As you know, we had to tell the other Orders about your new coven member.”

“Norah,” Gabe said.

“I know her name, Mr. MacDonnagh.” He looked away from Gabe, his expression steely. “We didn’t think it right to keep her presence a secret as you all kept it from us.”

Randy’s fingers clenched into fists.

“After much deliberation in which some Orders thought it best to disband the Salem

Order, we've—"

"Disband the Order?" Travis argued.

Walter held up a hand. "Thankfully, it has not come to that. In order to keep the faith in your Order and for Orders to better serve their cities, we've decided on a ruling."

Gooseflesh erupted over my arms. Walter wouldn't look at me, and I knew this had not just something to do with me, but everything to do with me. The Order of the Akasha was a long-standing club. They didn't like change. Change was their enemy.

"From now on, Order members are not to have any intimate relationships with one another further than friendship."

A sour taste coated my throat. They'd just taken everything dear to me and threw it down and stomped on it without any thought to what it would do to us. These guys were my everything.

"You can't do that," Travis said.

At the same time, Randy said, "Fuck that."

After the two outbursts, Liam said, "That seems rather harsh, don't you think?"

Gabe leaned back, his lips pressed tightly together. For some reason, he'd always been the black sheep of this Order.

"I expected this reaction," Walter said, "But please believe me that everyone had nothing but the best of intentions for your coven. It is our belief, however, that one cannot have a flourishing coven with the types of relationship that you all have."

I couldn't take it any longer. "That's not what this is about, though, is it?" I asked. "Tell us what it's really about."

Walter slowly moved his gaze toward me. His disinterested look sent me into a spiral.

"What about the rumors of the other covens? Is it true?" I asked, rising to my feet. "Is it true what we heard that adding in a female Enforcer does something to the coven?"

"We can't substantiate those claims," Walter said. He never rose to his feet, but his look itself said he was superior than me.

"But you might as well have," I said. "If not, why would you even make this rule? If there was no evidence behind it, why couldn't we continue on as we have been to see what happened?"

"It's for your own good," Walter said.

A shiver went up my spine. "You know, it's been my experience that people who say, 'It's for your own good,' are either copping out or lying. Which is it with you?"

Travis stood. He put a hand on my forearm to hold me back. "I've got news for you, Walter. Our relationship with Norah is none of your business. We'll continue to do whatever it is we please on that level."

"Then you will be breaking the law," Walter said, his voice morphing from one of just generally relaying news to feeling the truth behind it.

"Then you can disband us," Liam said.

Walter's head reared back. "You would do that?"

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“That and more,” Gabe said, his British accent thick. Whenever he was in a heightened emotion, it always seemed as if he’d just stepped out of England itself.

“This isn’t fair, and you know it, Walter. Either you have something that shows evidence of why you’re trying to enforce this law, or you’re being bullied into it by fear.”

As I’d always said, fear leads people to do crazy shit.

“Is that your answer then?” Walter asked. “Rather than do your life’s calling, you’d rather give in to your feelings?”

Travis looked back at us. It felt as if a spotlight was on me. I was the reason that this was happening. If I’d never been called to them. If I’d just gone back to New Orleans.

A whole highlight reel of what I would’ve missed out on flashed in my mind. Yeah, I wouldn’t give them up for the world. The Order could kiss my ass.

After getting the affirmative from all of us, Travis turned back around. “The Akasha doesn’t lie. When you guys start believing in your own teachings, you can come back and talk to us.”

Walter swallowed. The faces on the other Order members were blank, expressionless. They’d almost always taken their cue from him. How dull that was. I couldn’t imagine any one of us letting Travis speak for the rest of us.

In one fluid motion, they all rose. Collectively, they turned toward the side door and started walking away. Their shoes echoed off the floor and bounced around the walls as they left us there. Walter let them all go ahead of him and when he was the last one in the room, he turned. “You have one day to vacate the premises.”

“You know Jax is still out there!” Travis said. Evidently, he thought he’d been calling the Order’s bluff, but it hadn’t worked. They were going to be dicks about this.

“That is none of your concern now,” Walter said.

He walked out, and the slamming door echoed around the room as if it was the call to recess in a courtroom.

We all sat or stood stunned into silence. They’d really done it.

“I’m so...sorry,” I said, my voice breaking. Shock still poured through me. I hadn’t seen this coming. Then again, I hadn’t really been thinking about it. There were so much more important things to think about that what the Order was going to do about us had been put on the back burner. Evidently, that wasn’t what they were most worried about.

“They have to have a reason for doing this,” Liam said.

“It doesn’t fucking matter,” Randy said, renewed anger wafting off him. “We don’t matter to them, so...”

“So...?” Liam asked. His cute little face was bunched up.

I looked at all of them down the line. Gabe seemed resigned. Liam was confused, and Travis just looked lost while Randy’s emotions weren’t hard to guess. I knew this wasn’t my fault. I knew this down in the bottom of my gut, but that didn’t stop the

sorrow from leaking into me like I'd been riddled with little tiny holes that were just now giving way to these other emotions. These guys had much more at stake in this than I did, and I knew they would do anything for me, and I them. That didn't make this any better.

I took a deep breath and started to walk toward the doors. Liam reached out for me. "I'm okay," I said, dodging him. "I just need to be alone for a second."

"Norah..." Randy said, some of the anger left him, but was replaced with concern.

I turned around and walked backwards. "It's really okay. I just need a moment."

Without waiting for an answer, I spun on my heel and walked quickly toward the exit. When I got to it, I pushed it open and kept walking. The chilly night air washed over me in an instant douse of cold. I hoped they would let me do this and when I was on the other side of the parking lot and they hadn't come after me, I knew they'd listened to me.

My mind wouldn't cooperate. I walked, staring out at the ocean and wondering what we were going to do now, but my mind wouldn't focus. Shock still rang through me. I wasn't sure what I expected, but it wasn't this. The superiors just dropped us all like we were yesterday's dinner special. They didn't take into account what the guys had been doing for Salem since they were inducted into the Order. They hadn't even taken into account what Salem needed now with Jax on the loose. What the hell were they thinking?

I had to agree with Liam. The Order must've known something that they weren't sharing with the rest of us. I supposed it was their secret to keep. Hell, it wasn't even any of our concern now.

Though, that was just ridiculous to say. I could think all I want about how I had free

time now and that I could really start to get my shop up and running at full steam. I could think about maybe taking some business classes or taking up yoga, or...the future. What was the next steps with the guys and me? It wasn't something that we'd even talked about. Families, kids. Maybe that hadn't been an option before, but now...?

I shook my head. What mattered now was what always mattered. The coven and keeping Salem safe. Just because the Order didn't recognize us anymore, that didn't mean that we still couldn't continue to do what we were doing. The Akasha was still at work. I bet if something was going on now, we would still get the call.

Funny how that we'd all been arguing right before the superiors had come in, but when they'd tried to separate us, we came together.

Nothing would stop us from being together.

4

After a half hour of walking by myself, my phone rang. I fished it out of my back pocket and brought it up to my ear after seeing Travis's name. "Hey," he said.

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“Hey.”

“Where are you? We decided that we weren’t going to stay in here another night. We packed up all our stuff and we’re going to head to the apartment.”

I smiled when he mentioned apartment. That was the first place I’d seen all of them. I’d been spying on them because I wasn’t sure what I was getting myself into. In fact, I still didn’t know what I was getting myself into but going to the apartment sounded fine. Sounded better than fine. Almost as if we were coming full circle. “I’m...” I spun in a circle trying to find where I was. “I’m by the Pirate’s Museum.”

“Okay, stay where you are. One of us will be by to pick you up, and we’ll all meet at the apartment.”

I ended the call and looked around. Seeing the life-sized cutout of the pirate, I decided to stand right next to him. This was one place I hadn’t been yet. One place I wasn’t sure I’d like either. I wasn’t really a pirate person. The artifacts they had in there were probably fascinating, but that was probably one tourist trap I could skip, and it wouldn’t break my heart.

It only took a few minutes for Travis and Randy to pull up in the Jeep to get me. Randy rolled down the window, so I could see into the interior. They were both just sitting there as if their earlier argument hadn’t even taken place.

Damn. To be a man, huh?

“Hey there, Sexy.”

I smiled and shook my head, then I pulled open the back door to get in. We hadn't brought all that much to the Order headquarters by the wharf, but apparently it was enough to fill up the back of the Jeep and most of the backseat too. Who knew what Gabe and Liam had in the car. "What about your bike?" I asked Randy as soon as I hopped in.

"I'll go get it tomorrow."

Travis pulled out onto the road and I buckled up. The drive to the apartment wasn't all that long, but I was silently pleading with them not to say anything about what had happened. I didn't want to talk about what we were going to do now. I didn't want to think about the future, I just wanted to think about the right now. The right now where all of us had stuck up for one another when someone had tried to break our bonds. I was proud of us. No matter what, I could always say that about what had just happened tonight.

"Is Liam okay?" I asked, unable to help myself.

Randy snickered. "It'll take him a day, maybe."

I sighed, thinking about how lost he looked. He'd get over it. And, like I'd come to terms with during my walk. I wasn't sure there was anything to get over.

"So..." I said. "I think we should order a pizza and grab some beer."

Travis stared at me through the rearview mirror, the corners of his mouth crinkling. Randy turned in his seat, a full-on smile gracing his face. "I knew there was a reason we got along so well. To the store, Travis."

Travis took a quick right, driving up a side road. "Gabe and Liam are probably already there. Want to text them to order the pizza?"

“On it.”

I sat in the back, smiling to myself. Some people may have thought I was losing it. I’d just been effectively fired from a job, but inside, I felt like we should celebrate. We had a lot to be thankful for and now seemed as perfect a time as any.

When Travis pulled into the parking lot of the corner store, I got out with him. Randy answered his phone. Apparently, Liam was unsure what he really meant when he said order us pizzas in his text.

Travis reached his hand out and I interlaced my fingers with his. He held the door open for me and we went inside and straight to the coolers in the back. Travis picked out a thirty rack and then we made our way to the front of the store to pay. It was stupid, but this was the most normal thing I’d done in a long time. When you were a witch for all your life like I was, things like this just didn’t happen all the time. There was more abnormal in my house than there was routine. And when I had stepped inside the box to do things normal kids did, Granny always found out, which somehow turned it into something “other” again. God, I missed that woman.

“Have fun,” the guy behind the counter said after he ran Travis’s card. We walked out of the store and I hopped back into the backseat. Randy was laughing when we got in. “Jesus. You guys look like you’re doing something wrong.”

“I think Norah’s giddy,” Travis said.

I couldn’t disagree with him.

“Just drive us home,” I said. As soon as I said it, a cascade of warmth hit me. The Order headquarters was never home. The apartment was, and Liam’s parents’ house was becoming one.

When we pulled up to the apartment, the little car was parked out front. I pushed open the backdoor and got out. For the first time, I was going to walk into the apartment feeling like I was a part of it. That wasn't just the guy's apartment anymore. Or the place where I had to do the walk of shame, but it was a place for all of us together.

Randy grabbed a few boxes from the back of the Jeep, and Travis grabbed the beer and followed me in. Gabe already had the TV on while Liam's head was stuck in a book. I went right over to him and shut it before planting myself on his lap. "Hey," he said in protest.

"Tonight, is a worry-free night," I said. "No Order, no witchy stuff, just us."

He looked unsure, so instead of trying to convince him with words, I handed the book off to Randy on his way through the apartment and pulled Liam to me. I kissed him softly at first, enjoying the way he always seemed surprised at first, then willing and able to do whatever I wanted.

I pulled away, then gave him a chaste kiss on the lips. "We have beer."

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He cocked his head, his forehead creasing.

“Beer?” Gabe said, perking up.

Travis came forward and opened the thirty rack up on the coffee table. He left five out and then went to the refrigerator to put the rest in. “When will the pizza be here?”

Liam checked his watch. “Fifteen minutes.”

“Excellent,” Gabe said. He popped the top on his can and took a healthy drink before laying back down on the couch with a perfect view of the soccer game on TV.

“Who do you want to win?” I asked, taking a can for myself and handing one to Liam.

He frowned down at it as if he had no idea why we were all acting in this way, but he shrugged and followed along. He opened his can right after me as I settled deeper into his lap. Randy came around the other side of the couch and sat down next to Liam and me. “Grab me one of those, will you?” he asked.

I leaned over and passed him one. Travis took a spot on the armchair directly facing the TV as we waited for the pizza. Soon, we were all into the game after Gabe explained who he wanted to win. I shouldn’t have even had to ask. One of the teams was clearly British. God, there were a lot of hot football players.

Ha. “Hey, Gabe, I just said football in my head instead of soccer. You must be rubbing off on me.”

“I’ll rub something on you.”

I burst out laughing, then grabbed the pillow that was next to Liam and threw it at Gabe’s head. It hit its mark then fell forward, hitting Gabe’s beer which splashed up and over the edge. He turned his face, all smiles toward me. “What?”

The announcer erupting into a play-by-play got his attention back toward the screen. Shortly after, the doorbell rang, and I moved off Liam, so he could answer it. “I’ll be right back,” he said.

My stomach growled just thinking about how good this pizza was going to taste. I felt as if I hadn’t eaten in a long time.

The smell wafted in before I even saw Liam with the actual pizza boxes. He waltzed in and placed them down on the coffee table. It was a free-for-all. I’d never seen so many hands reach for something in my life as I did those guys reaching for slices of pizza. It was as if every one of them sprouted two more hands and they were all going for different slices. I sat back and waited until it was my turn, but when Liam came back, he had two plates and handed one to me.

“Suck up,” Randy said.

“You’re just mad you didn’t think of it,” Liam countered.

“Thank you,” I told him, giving him a nice juicy smack on the cheek.

Travis smiled, but then we were all silent as we chowed down on the pizza. The whole time, I just kept thinking how normal this all was. How if we looked into other people’s apartments right now, we could see people doing the same thing. Not everyone always had their nose stuck in a century old spell book or had to Google things like demonic familiars. And they weren’t tethered to their computers when

they got a video call from their superiors. Nope, tonight we were just us.

The only thing separating us from normal people was the fact that we were all in a relationship. And that was the one thing we would not break up. Push come to shove, that meant more to us than anything else. We would fight for it. No matter what.

5

“You’re so lucky, Norah Girl.”

I blinked until my vision cleared. Two glaring eyes were inches from my face. I reared back until I heard a grunt. “Jesus, Granny. What the hell?”

Granny moved away, shaking her head. “I’ve been waiting for you to go to sleep. I don’t know why I even bother to come sometimes, but you sure as the crows fly keep needing my help.”

She twisted to walk away, moving through the small living room in the apartment. She moved right through Gabe and then turned back around again until her hazy clouds blocked him. I sat up and yawned, stretching my arms out over my head.

“You’re not tired. You’re still sleeping,” Granny said, her gaze focused on me again.

“How do you know how I am?”

She came forward again, the fog billowing out to get out of her way. “I know things, Girl.”

I smiled at the reminder of those words from her mouth. She used to say that to me all the time. She was always knowing things. “What’s going on?” I asked, stifling another yawn. She said I shouldn’t be tired, but I was. I was super tired, and my eyes

felt like they kept wanting to close on me.

“I said,” she said, her eyes growing round again. “You’re lucky you pulled this around. I kept waiting for you to go to sleep, so I could talk some sense into you. You’re falling apart.”

I took a deep breath, trying to focus on her. She was right. We had been falling apart. “I think we’re better now.”

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“You might be better, but you’ve still got a long ways to go. Looooong,” she said again, drawing out the word. “I didn’t think I needed to remind you that the enemy is still out there. Demons aren’t a joke, Norah Girl. They suck all the good out of people. They kill everything around them out of pleasure and then they keep going. They thrive off hate and anger and death. This thing needs to be taken care of.”

“Well, apparently we’re not Order members anymore. The superiors—”

She threw her hand up. “Oh, I saw. But what I didn’t see was you coming to grips with the fact that this is still your problem. I didn’t need no Order or covenant to change my magical world, and neither do you. Fight against the darkness, Baby Girl. You need no one’s permission for that.”

I swallowed, staring up at the grandmother who raised me. She’d done just as she said. Granny didn’t take crap from anyone, and I could do the same. Who was the Order to tell us we couldn’t do what every magical person in this town should be afraid of? Who knew what else Jax could do? If what he’d already done was any indication, we were in for a world of hurt.

“You are not a puppet on their string. This is everyone’s problem.”

“I just said that.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“In my head, I did.”

She gave a doubtful look.

“Really, I did.”

“Like I tried to tell you when you were a teen, I still can’t read your mind.”

It was my turn to give her a doubtful look. There’d been plenty of times I was sure she had that ability. It seemed like she always knew exactly what I was going to do before I even knew it myself. “It doesn’t matter. You’re right.”

She beamed. Her teeth almost glowing in the shadows. “Alive or dead, being told you’re right never gets old.”

I ignored her statement. “Granny,” I started. Looking over at Travis, he looked so peaceful in the arm chair sleeping, but his brows were just a little furrowed as if even when he slept this whole Jax thing got to him. He was carrying a lot of weight on his shoulders and I wasn’t sure I agreed with him on his belief that Jax could be saved.

“Well, out with it,” she snapped.

“Granny, I, um, Travis thinks his friend can be saved. The one who summoned the demon to give him his powers back.”

Granny turned toward Travis as I spoke. She’d come to him before in his sleep and I had a feeling that she had a soft spot for him.

“Is it true? Can Jax be pulled back?”

“I wish I knew, Norah. I wish I knew. I always strived to live in the light. I never got into the messy dark side, and I sure as heaven wouldn’t have gone that far dark nor spoke to anyone who did. But I think...I’d like to think that if that person wants to be

saved, they can be. All of us have a choice. Just like you, Norah. You can choose to sit around this place eating pizza and drinking it up, or you can get up, and start working on what's more important. Get everyone involved. It's not just your fight. It's all the witches here. It's everyone here who has any shred of magical abilities. Those that burn the brightest dim the quickest." She stepped forward, a frown tugging at her lips. "That's why I'm scared for you, Norah Girl. So scared for you. The minute you were born you lit up everything. Everywhere you go, light, light, light. You can't let the dark affect you. You'll be the first, I'm afraid."

I shook my head. "I'm going to be fine. We all are." A surge of adrenaline shot through me. At the same time, it seemed to die out way too soon. Talking with Granny kept me alert, but I had a feeling that as soon as she left, I'd be passed out. I didn't have a clue as to why I was so tired. Maybe that talk earlier with the guys had taken a bigger toll on me than I thought. Or maybe it was the fact that we hadn't been a unit that had taken its toll on me and this was the aftermath.

"All I know is, I'll be right here for you. I'll always be right here for you."

The familiar pain of losing Granny struck me again. I knew enough not to reach out to her as she slowly faded away, but it made it all the worse to lose her again and know that not even trying to catch her would work. "Miss you, Granny."

"Did you not hear what I said?" She shook her head as the shadows rolled in, taking her away.

I couldn't help but smirk. She was always so literal.

Somewhere in my unconsciousness, I was still there. Caught somewhere in that strange realm of dreaming and not dreaming. When Granny came to me, I wasn't dreaming. I was fully conscious of it all even though my body was in a state of sleep. I didn't understand it, but I was one of the lucky ones. Still able to see the most

important person to me in this life even after her death.

I yawned again, my eyes stinging. I tried closing my eyes, wishing I'd go back into sleep. Back where I wasn't conscious of the fact that I was just laying here on top of Randy. This only happened when Granny came though.

I opened one eye. Was she fully gone? Maybe she was coming back.

I looked around the room. I couldn't see her. Her usual flourish of fog and haze was gone. I saw everything just as it was before we went to sleep. Gabe sprawled out on the opposite sofa. Travis in the recliner. Liam on the floor in front of me while Randy and I took up this couch.

I closed my eyes again, waiting for this part of my brain to turn off. Or was this a magical thing? Did I control it before and not know it? "Sleep," I mumbled.

Nothing.

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I breathed in deep, frustration overwhelming me.

Wait.

I breathed in again. A smell perforated my senses until all at once it felt like a blanket of fog was all around us, and that blanket of fog smelled like rotten eggs.

Gas.

In my mind, I was alert again. My eyes flew open. I struggled to move, but I—the me that was my physical body—was still asleep. No. No, this wasn't happening. I sent out alert messages trying to get someone else to wake up. I couldn't move. I focused on my fingers, trying to get them to wake up. If they could move, maybe the rest of my body could too.

If this place was filling with gas, we could die. Or maybe it was a dream. Or maybe it wasn't gas at all. Bad magic smelled like rotten eggs.

I breathed in again, almost choking on the foul aroma. Maybe someone or something had gotten through the wards. Maybe someone spelled us into not waking up.

In my head, I turned toward Travis. Granny had been able to come to him before. Maybe I could come to him too. Maybe I could send him a message to wake up. To help us out of this. In my head, I knew something was going on even if I didn't know if it was magical or real-world problems.

When you're magical, but you can't even save yourself from dying a normal death.

Ha. Hashtag real-world problems.

“Travis!” I shouted. My lips didn’t move, but I felt the urgency straight through to my toes. “Wake up, please, Travis! Something’s going on.”

I pictured his faith in people. His love for me, and his coven. His leadership qualities, and of course his assholishness that sometimes knew no bounds. But at his center, he was so good. So kind.

“Travis, we need you!”

His eyelids fluttered. It was working! I refused to think that my mind was making this up. I couldn’t think like that.

“Travis, get up! Something’s going on and I can’t move. I can’t get out of here and if I can’t, maybe the others can’t either.”

His eyes flew open. He stared at me. Still not moving, our gazes locked. Fear rang through his. If he was trying to talk to me the same way I was talking to him, I couldn’t hear it, but I hoped he smelled what I did. And if he did, I hoped he could do something about it.

“Get up!” I urged him. “Figure out what’s going on!”

His nose moved first. Then his lips. Then his head started to shake. The movement worked its way down his body until every appendage of his moved. Fingers, legs, and even though I couldn’t see them, his toes probably did too.

His face strained, he sat up. He dropped down onto all fours in front of me, narrowly missing Liam’s head. He stared down into my eyes. I wasn’t sure what he saw. Did he see the me I felt now? The me with her eyes wide open pleading with him to do

something? Or did he just see what I saw in the rest of them. Me sleeping there calmly, wrapped up in Randy's arms.

"What's going on?" I heard him say.

He looked around, taking a deep breath. Immediately, he started to focus. He stood, his feet shuffling from side to side as if his equilibrium was off. At the same time, a spark of red came from his hand. He moved to the center of the room and I the red grew. At first it was just centered on the outside of his hand in one little pin point. Then it got bigger and bigger until it encompassed his whole hand.

Then I felt it, the wind. My hair tracked over my face and goosebumps sprouted over my body.

The window by the door flew open, and Travis's wind blew that direction. For a few moments, it felt like we were inside a tornado. The lid to the pizza box flopped wildly and empty beer cans topped over onto the rug.

Gabe moved next. He woke much quicker. His eyes only blinked a few times before he threw a hand over his face. "What are you doing, man? It's in the middle of the night."

The wind died. "Gabe!"

"Mate, you're making a mess."

"Something's wrong. Get up," Travis said.

In my own head, I tried and tried to move. My body just wouldn't cooperate though. The air was better in here, fresher. I didn't smell the overpowering gag-worthy rotten air as much though it had traces.

“Wake everyone else up,” Travis said. “Get them up.”

I could see Gabe sniff the air. In an instant, he was up and off the couch. He jumped over the coffee table and landed just in front of Liam. He kicked him, “Get up.”

Liam grunted.

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In my head, I reached out to Gabe. I was trapped in a prison of my mind. This was the worst feeling. Like, no matter what I did, I wouldn't be able to make a difference.

"Norah, Randy, wake up!"

Randy grunted, and the sound made my heart crack. He was always such a bear to get up. He slept like the dead.

He tried to roll away, but I was still there. "What the fuck?" he muttered.

Gabe punched him in the arm. "Get the fuck up, Mate. Something's wrong."

I felt him move behind me. Liam had sat up, his head in his hands. His body vibrated from a yawn that seemed to overtake him. "Why am I so tired?"

"I don't know what happened," Travis said. "But something just went down."

He spun on his heel, finding me. He knelt. In my head, I was screaming at myself to wake up. "Norah?" he said. "Norah?" he said again, shaking my shoulders.

Fear rounded his eyes.

Hearing it in his voice, Liam spun around too. He took me by the hips and shook me. All at once, they all were saying my name, trying to wake me up. "Norah!" Randy bellowed.

It was so loud it made me cringe, but this was just the me that was in here. The me

that was out there couldn't do anything.

"What's wrong with her?" Gabe asked.

His blond hair was sticking up on its ends. It reminded me of the first morning I woke up with him.

Another fissure was working its way through my heart. I felt so removed from then. Not able to tell them I could hear them and see them.

"I heard her," Travis said. "In my head while I was sleeping. I don't know," he shook his head. "She told me to wake up. She told me something was wrong."

"Bad magic," Randy said. He pulled himself out from behind me and they laid me down on my back. He came around. His shirt was off, and his gym pants hung low on his waist. I loved Randy like that. His muscles, tattoos, and piercings on full display. He was never more himself than when he was shirtless to me.

I reached out. "Please!"

My limbs never moved.

"We should take her to the hospital," Liam said.

"But if it was magic..." Gabe said.

"We don't know that," Liam said. He'd already put his glasses on and turned to look in all the obvious places for the car keys.

At once, they all moved to the background. I could still see them, hear them, but something else moved forward. A dark mass with two razor red circles for eyes. It

was like when Granny came to me, but Granny never gave me chills right down to my bone.

“Norah...” it sang.

My jaw clenched. I knew right away who it was.

“Do you feel that, Norah? Do you feel that debilitating fear that you’re right there, but you can’t even talk to them?”

“What do you want?” I shouted.

“You already know that. Revenge. Revenge in all the ways I was wronged. I want everyone to understand what not having magic did to me. What not having a coven did to me.

A growl ripped through me. The guys were so close. They were so close, but it was as if I wasn’t even there at all.

“Do you feel that?”

“I hate you.”

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He laughed, loudly. The sound so evil it made me cringe. “This was so much fun. Please do tell them it was all me.”

In an instant, everything went back to normal. I sat up straight on the couch, taking in a deep breath as if this was the first time I’d been able to breathe in a long time.

“Norah!”

I stared back at Travis. He reached for me and I felt his hands on my forearms. I squeezed his arm, too, my limbs moving when I asked them too. I never thought I’d be so relieved to feel that way. To know that I had control over my own body. “Jax,” I said. “It was Jax.”

“What was Jax?” Travis asked.

Liam stood right behind him. All four pairs of their eyes were on me. “Jax. He made it so I could see everything that was going on, but I couldn’t move. I couldn’t even talk. I woke you up,” I said, staring at Travis.

He nodded. “I heard you.”

I breathed in a rugged breath. “He said he wanted me to feel what it was like for him. He also wanted you guys to know it was him who did it.”

A muscle in Travis’s jaw feathered. Liam looked down, his head shaking back and forth. Gabe ran his hands through his hair. And Randy? Well, Randy cracked his knuckles in front of himself as if he was preparing for a fight.

Jax had invaded me. He'd gotten into my head. He—

My skin tingled.

“What are you doing, Norah?”

“Nothing.”

Pin pricks started all over my body. I looked at the four of them surrounding me and smiled. I was back here with them, and I could feel all their energy intent on keeping us safe.

“You’re doing something,” Gabe said.

I glared at him. They were ruining this moment for me. This moment of true love I felt just bursting from me in waves. If I’d felt this when I was trapped inside my own head, there was no way Jax could’ve ever been there at the same time.

“Sweetie,” Liam said. “You’re glowing.”

6

I stared down. The most brilliant white infused purple shone from me as if I was my own personal spotlight, lighting up everything within a few inches from me.

Travis pulled his hands away from my skin, then put them back on me. “You’re so warm. It’s overflowing.”

Randy’s face scrunched. “Does anyone else think this is really weird? The only other time one of us glows with our color magic is when we’re using our elements.”

Liam echoed the word at the same time as if the same thing dawned on him at the right moment.

“So, what’s Norah’s element?” Gabe said. “Lighting up like a Christmas tree?”

“Maybe it’s light?” Liam asked. He moved forward. He put his arms on my shoulders as Travis touched my forearms. “He’s right. She’s so warm right now. Not hot, but just...” He almost sighed.

Each of them held their hands out to me. “You feel like a bonfire,” Randy said. “Like a bonfire that would never burn me if I got too close.”

“That is the most romantic thing I’ve ever heard,” I said, rolling my eyes.

Randy shrugged.

“You’re beautiful,” Gabe said, his voice in awe.

“Okay, okay.” I stood and pushed away. I hated when they all looked at me like that. It felt like a lot of pressure to be something perfect and I was a far cry from that. “I’m just me.”

Liam cocked his head. “You’re dimming.”

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I sucked in a breath. What was it that Granny had said? “Those who burn the brightest dim the quickest.”

“What?” Liam asked. He moved closer.

“It’s something Granny said.” It was odd how the fact I saw my dead grandmother didn’t even seem to faze them anymore. They all just stood there waiting for me to continue with my story. “She told me Jax and his demon are more than just our problem. It’s every witch’s problem.”

“We’ve kind of all seen that,” Gabe started. “Jax just hasn’t been focusing on us. He’s drained and killed witches, too.”

“You tell her she’s not the first to come up with it.”

Gabe stilled and looked around. “She’s not still here, is she?”

I smiled. “No, she’s gone. But she just said that we should be getting everyone with us to fight against him. She also said that we don’t need the Order to fight against something that’s not right. Everyone should be doing that.”

Liam eyebrows raised as if he was impressed with Granny’s sentiment. “She’s right.”

“Oh, she knows,” I said. “Trust me.”

“He’s hurt a lot of people,” Randy said. “There’s a list too long to even say.”

Travis swallowed. I knew he hated us talking like this, but what were we supposed to do? We couldn't just act like none of this happened, or act as if it wasn't his childhood friend that was doing all that.

"Are we okay in here?" Gabe asked, looking around the apartment once again. It took me a moment to realize he wasn't looking for Granny and that he actually meant Jax.

"I don't think Jax was actually here," I said. "I think it was just all in our heads."

"That's somehow way worse," Gabe said.

Yeah, I didn't think of that. I was just too preoccupied with thinking that we needed to be physically safe, but what if our minds weren't safe from him? He'd already tried to take us apart by separating us, though he probably hadn't even intended to do that.

"I vote someone stays awake just in case," Gabe said. "It's two in the morning. The rest of us can sleep, and then when we wake up, that person can take a nap."

"I'll do it," Randy said. "I'm awake now, anyway."

Around me, the guys settled in again. Gabe took his spot on the opposite couch, Travis sat in the armchair and Randy gestured toward the sofa. Liam took it and looked up at me. "I'm going to need a moment," I told him.

Randy walked away. He headed toward the bathroom and I heard the shower go on.

Liam nodded and laid down by himself. As sweet as ever, he still squished himself into the inside in case I changed my mind.

My fingertips buzzed. The sour taste from the beer last night was still in my mouth, so I followed Randy into the bathroom. "It's just me," I said when I walked in. I put

some toothpaste on my finger and pressed it onto my tongue. I swished it around in my mouth and spit it out, my mouth feeling so much more refreshed right afterward.

My hand started to shake afterward, and I had a feeling I knew what was going on. That light, or whatever had come from me, if it was my element, I'd probably used a lot of magic to get it to do it, even unwillingly. I was about to crash.

At least Randy was awake. I pulled the shower curtain back and peeked inside. Randy faced me, pulling his hands through his hair as the water from the shower cascaded down over him. Rivulets of water ran down his body. Over his tattoos. Over his pierced nipples and further. Past his abs and off his cock. "Psst," I said.

His eyes immediately opened, and he stared at me, startled at first. "Yes?"

"Meet me in your room?"

A wicked smile pulled at his lips. "Be right there."

I gave him one last smile and then I put the shower curtain back before moving to Randy's room. I wish I had a selection of lingerie to choose from. Randy enjoyed stuff like that, but I had no idea where any of my sexy stuff was at the moment. Most likely in a box one of them threw together from headquarters, or it could still be in Liam's parents' house for all I knew. I hadn't thought about being sexy for one of them in a long time. At least it felt like a long time. When you enjoyed sex as much as I did, a whole day was a long time. We hadn't been in that frame of mind recently, but something clicked earlier today.

The door creaked open and Randy walked in. He hadn't even bothered to dress himself. Standing there in all his glory reminded me of the first encounter we'd had in this room. How he'd brought me home here from the bar after a ride on his motorcycle. How I'd stopped us from going too far even though I knew how amazing

it could be between us. Come to think of it, that was one of the hardest things I'd ever had to do.

“Why are you still dressed?”

I chuckled. “I don't know. Indecisive, I guess.” He frowned, and I quickly shook my head. “Not about doing this, but I was trying to look sexy for you.”

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“You don’t have to try,” Randy said. He moved forward, his cock already hardened from the promise of our time together.

While I sat on the bed, he moved my shirt off my shoulder, dropping feather light kisses there. “Sexy shoulders,” he murmured. “I bet you didn’t even try for that.”

I shook my head, my heart rate starting to pick up already.

“See? You don’t even have to try.”

He grabbed the hem of my shirt and started to pull. I raised my hands and as soon as the material passed my fingertips, he dropped it on the floor.

“Lean back.”

I did as he said. He unbuttoned my jeans and then pulled on the hem of the legs. I lifted my ass to help and before long, they were moving past my thighs and then fell to the floor with my shirt.

I sat back up, his belly button in line with my face. I licked there, moving my tongue up in a sweeping motion as my hands grasped the Adonis cut to his hips. He groaned, moving closer to me, but I placed my hands on his stomach and held him away while I stood, kissing my way up his stomach and chest. I ran my tongue over his nipple piercing and then moved higher, kissing his neck until I felt his cock against my stomach.

“I’ve missed you,” he said.

I moved up to his lips, claiming him. I was glad I wasn't the only one that felt like that. That felt like our priorities had been way off lately. He yanked me closer, his hands settling on my lower back. He kneaded me there, sending delicious warmth through my body. His right hand dropped lower, cupping my ass until he brought me against his stiff dick. "Mmm, Randy."

He smiled into my kiss. "I could say the same."

"Please do."

He groaned into my mouth, kissing me silly until he pulled a moan of my own out of me. "I can't wait to push inside your sweet, sweet pussy."

My insides clenched, and I focused on the area between my legs. I was getting wet, preparing myself for him, for the closeness I would feel, and the pleasure I knew he'd give me. That we'd give one another.

"Fuck, Norah," he said after I flicked my finger over his nipple.

He reached around my back and unclasped my bra, helping me out of it before I felt it fall past my hips and add to the growing collection of clothing on the floor. Right away, he cupped me. He moved away to look, watching as he fondled me.

"Perfect breasts." He leaned over, claiming my nipple inside his hot mouth.

"Oh God."

With his other hand, he stroked my nipple until it hardened. My breasts felt full, and aching, waiting for more.

He kissed his way across my chest, licking his way up the swell of my breast until he

settled over my other nipple, already so sensitive from his touch. My mouth clamped around another sound.

While he stroked my nipple with his tongue, his other hand dropped. As he went, my body responded, moving into it. He slipped past my panties and I spread my legs for him. He massaged my clit before he moved lower, finding his destination and slipping a finger inside. I let out a short scream. “Yes, Randy.”

He moved his finger in and out, his mouth never giving up its hold on my nipple. I wanted him to enter me, but at the same time, I didn’t want him to stop what he was doing.

I moved with him, my hips moving over his finger until he broke his hold and swore. In the next instant, he pulled my panties down and came forward. I fell on the bed and he came forward just as quick, never letting any space between us. He hooked his arms around my legs and pulled out and up, leaving me wide open for him. He paused over me, his chest heaving.

I reached down, trying to grab hold of his ass and help him inside me, but he didn’t need any help. He coaxed the tip of him inside, and I let out a breath of air.

“Jesus, Norah. Every time.” He pushed harder, sliding his entire cock inside me until the base. He rolled his hips into me again and again, still holding onto my legs and out of my reach. All I could do was meet him stroke after stroke.

I peered down to where we joined, his hard cock entering me again and again in a rhythm that took my breath away. The feeling of needing this subsided, and it was just Randy and me and our breathy sounds.

Randy edged me closer and closer to the breaking point. To the point I knew my orgasm was on the horizon and not just some magical thought, but a place I knew I’d

get to. “More,” I said, pleading with him. Now that it was there, I wanted it. Now.

He obliged me, moving faster and faster until the bed dipped and creaked. His face strained, and my body pitched higher and higher.

“Fuck, Randy, yes.”

For a blissful moment, my orgasm hit as Randy kept stroking inside driving me impossibly higher. Then, I screamed out as the world seemed to fly out from underneath me. Randy leaned in, changing to short, quick pumps until he stilled, then roared and slammed into me one last time. Inside, I felt him pulse, and I stared up at the ceiling as my heart fluttered.

Thank fuck for tattooed muscled men with large cocks.

7

Randy and I lay on his bed, still wrapped up in one another. As promised, we hadn't fallen asleep. The rest of the guys were counting on Randy to make sure that nothing happened to them while they slept. They never said we couldn't have fun while they were doing it. "Everyone's going to want to take watch now," Randy said, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"And you all shall be rewarded," I said, kissing the tip of one of his tattoos.

We were silent for another few moments. His fingers brushed over me, making my skin buzz. "I'm worried about Travis," he said finally.

I nodded into him. "He thinks Jax can be saved."

"He's delusional."

I shrugged. I wasn't sure if that was the case or if he just wanted to believe. "I'm just worried about what might happen to him if this all goes the way we think it will. The Order wants him stopped and they'll kill him to do it."

"And wouldn't he deserve it?" Randy asked. "Look at all he's done, Norah."

I lifted my head and propped it up under my hand, so I could look down at him. "I'm not saying he doesn't. Forget about what Jax deserves or doesn't. I'm just worried

about Travis in all this.”

Randy clamped his mouth shut, and then eventually, he nodded. “I’m worried about him too. I’m worried he’s going to do something stupid to save his friend that’s not even his friend anymore.”

“I asked Granny about it,” I confided. “I asked her whether she thought Jax could be saved or not.”

His eyebrows rose. “What did she say?”

I shook my head. “She didn’t know. She didn’t even want to venture a guess. But,” I said, needing him to hear this part because it was so important. “She said we all have a choice. She said just like we have a choice right now not to listen to the Order and go after Jax anyway even though we’re not technically an official coven, Jax has the choice to be good...I guess that’s what she was trying to say.”

“But if he has the choice, hasn’t he already made it?”

A weight settled down on top of me. Randy wasn’t wrong. Jax had made a choice, but was that it? When someone made a choice one way or the other, was that it? They couldn’t change their mind at some point? Sure, he’d have to do a lot to come back from this, but if he made the choice to come back, couldn’t he?

Randy’s phone rang. It was faint, not even sounding as if it was coming from this room. He swore and maneuvered himself away from me while still keeping me wrapped in the blankets. “I must’ve left it in the bathroom.”

He walked away, his butt cheeks moving up and down as he strode away. I shook my head. Was seeing him naked ever going to get old? Probably not.

“Yeah,” I heard him say. “What do you want?”

He paused midway down the hall and then kept coming. When he got inside, he pointed down the hall with a strange expression. He mouthed something to me, but like I’d ever understand him. “What?”

He sighed. “Hold on, Ren.”

Ren? My eyes bugged out of my head. What the fuck?

Randy covered the speaker. “Check Liam’s room, would you? It sounds like he’s sick.”

I stood immediately, grabbing the sheets around me and putting them on like I just stepped out of the shower. Then, I pulled them up and walked to Liam’s room. Sure enough, there were some very unpleasant sounds coming from his room. I didn’t even bother knocking on the door. I walked right in.

He looked up and saw me, then turned away. “Liam, honey, are you okay?”

I moved over to him and rubbed his back as he vomited into a trash can. “I’ll be fine,” he choked out. “You don’t have to be in here for this.”

“Shh,” I said, rubbing his back. “It’s fine.”

He emptied his stomach, then stayed over the trash can for a few more moments. He breathed in deep, his back moving under my touch, before he sat on the bed again. “Can you get me a glass of water?”

I got up and padded through the hallway and out into the living room. Travis and Gabe were still asleep in their various positions as I waltzed into the kitchen and

grabbed a glass of water. From the faint light streaming in through the front windows, I'd say it was very early morning still. On my way back through, I tripped on a beer can, the water sloshing over my hand. Oh no. I hoped he hadn't had too much to drink last night. Liam wasn't a very heavy drinker at all.

I hurried up, coming into his room again and giving him the water. He drank it down until he swallowed every bit. "Thank you," he said. There were tears at the very corners of his eyes. He laid back in bed, staring up at the ceiling. "Is it from the beer?" I asked.

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Liam shook his head, then stopped immediately and cringed. “I only had one.”

Randy appeared in the doorway with a fresh pair of gym pants slung around his waist. “It’s not just Liam. Dead Reid is sick too.”

Liam moaned, then moved over the bed again, angling himself over the trash can.

Looking up at Randy, I frowned. Poor Liam.

Randy gestured with his head for me to come there, so I did. When I got there, he said, “That was our friend Ren. He said Dean’s been feeling off.”

“Like Liam?” I asked.

“Not exactly,” Randy said. “Skin itching...” He lowered his voice. “Almost like he can feel the familiar on him again.”

My eyes rounded.

“It’s not there though. He’s fine.”

“Randy, Liam—”

“I know,” he said. “I wonder if this is remnants of the familiar? It’s making them both sick.”

“Or Jax is doing something,” I said, anger bubbling up inside me.

The bed creaked, and Liam laid down again. Big tough Randy took Liam's garbage can from the room. I smiled after him as I did so. He disappeared for a few minutes while I ran my hand through Liam's hair and then he returned with a clean trashcan.

"Don't look at me like that," Randy bristled. "You should see the shit that Liam has cleaned up for me."

He shivered at the memory, and I had to stop myself from smiling. "I wasn't judging."

Liam rolled onto his stomach. "I think I'm okay now. I'm just going to sleep some more." In no time at all, his chest raised and lowered in a steady beat.

Randy put a hand on my shoulder and squeezed. We left Liam's room, closing the door behind us until we made our way back out into the living room. Gabe shifted when we walked in, as if he was on the verge of waking up. I cleaned up after us from last night as Randy rummaged around the kitchen. "There's literally nothing to eat in here."

"Are you surprised?" I asked. "We haven't been here in the longest time."

He grunted in a non-answer that only proved how hungry he was. "Why don't you go grab something?" I asked. "I'm sure Gabe and Travis will be up in a little while. Liam probably doesn't want anything."

"Did someone say food?" Gabe asked from the couch.

"Yes," I whispered as I picked up the beer can that lay on its side next to his couch. Travis's wind that morning had sent everything everywhere. I felt as if I was stuck in a college movie. I never had the experience myself, but this was what I imagined it would look like after drinking the night before. Evidence everywhere, yet still hungry

the next day.

“Can’t you see that I’m still trying to sleep here?” Travis asked, his voice still sleepy.

Gabe grabbed a pillow from his couch and threw it at him. “Food, Mate.”

Travis sighed and put the recliner down on the chair until he was sitting straight up. He shook his head and ran his hands down his face. “Alright, but I’m going with Randy or he’ll just pick healthy shit.”

“I would not.”

Gabe laughed, his eyes still closed. He looked as if he’d been fighting about getting up for a while and still hadn’t given up the hope that he might fall back asleep if he’d just keep his eyes closed.

“Fine,” Randy said, “but we’re leaving now. Get your ass in the Jeep.”

“It’s my Jeep.”

Randy shook the chair Travis was still in. I stared at him. “Damn. Don’t poke the bear,” I said to Travis.

Randy smiled at me, then came over and kissed me on the nose. “Just hungry.”

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“Alright, you guys go,” Gabe said. His hands came around my hips, and he pulled until I sprawled out on him. “Norah and I will cuddle until you get back.”

I chuckled out loud and gave him a playful slap. “I’m cleaning up the house.”

“Alright,” he grumbled. “Norah and I will be cleaning up the house while you’re gone.”

He let me go, and I stood. He stood up after me, his cute blond hair spiking up.

While Randy and Travis were out buying food, I filled Gabe in on Liam being sick and the call Randy got from Ren. When Randy and Travis came home with several grocery bags including a box of doughnuts, Travis launched right into a conversation about what was happening, so obviously, Randy had done the same with Travis on their excursion to find us some food for the house.

“It can’t be a coincidence,” Travis said.

“Definitely not,” Gabe agreed. “When has anything been a coincidence?”

“We just need to figure out what it means,” I said, staring at Liam’s closed door. Whatever it was, I hoped Liam got over it soon.

I shoved the custard filled doughnut into my mouth, waiting for inspiration to strike about what we should do. It was hard to fight someone you couldn’t find. That had been our problem this entire time.

“You know,” I started. “Granny told me yesterday that this isn’t just all our fight. We need to get all the other witches in Salem on our side. Or at least warn them that Jax is out there and that they may be affected.”

Gabe shrugged. “It makes sense. Since we don’t have the backing of the Order anymore, someone has to do something.”

Travis cocked his head. He grabbed his phone and pushed the screen. “Do you guys realize what the date is?”

I shook my head. I hadn’t really thought about it.

“We’re so close to the Spring Equinox.”

“Perfect,” Gabe said.

“Um, what?” I asked, feeling lost.

“The Spring Equinox,” Randy said. “A lot of witches celebrate solstices and equinoxes, and it just so happens that there are usually big parties that happen around that time. Lots of witches gathered in one place.”

I nodded. Definitely could be perfect...but it also sounded like the right time for someone to attack people too.

Everyone seemed to realize that at the same time. A sense of dread filled the room and then sounds of Liam vomiting in his bedroom wafted toward us. “We’ll act there,” I said. Then I got up and moved to Liam’s room. I couldn’t stop him from getting sick, but I could help him through it. Maybe that was something we could do for all these witches. We couldn’t stop Jax right now, but we could at least warn them about the danger. Who knew? Maybe some of them would have information on

taking out a demon.

While I walked away, I thought of the Reid's secret room again. Maybe there was something in there about demons too.

8

Ifelt like this was a recurring theme: me showing up at the Reid's house uninvited.

Except for this time, I had Travis and Gabe with me. Randy had decided to stay back with Liam. I walked up to the iron gate and gripped it. I looked around to see that it wasn't Owen guarding the gate. Then again, it wasn't nighttime either. I guessed that was one thing that was different from every other time I'd been here.

When I mentioned that I thought we should go see the Reid's, everyone was all for it. Liam still wasn't feeling well, so he'd stay behind with someone, but they thought it couldn't hurt. Like me, they probably all wanted to do something, even if it wouldn't make a difference in the long run.

I grabbed the iron bar and looked inside, getting the guard's attention. "Can you tell the Reid's that the Or—"

Travis interrupted. "Please tell them, Travis, Gabe, and Norah are here. We're friends."

The guard gave us a doubtful look, but he turned away anyway, talking into his microphone that linked up to the main house. A few moments later, the main door opened, and Owen walked through it, still dressed in the same guard outfit. "Hey," I said.

He smiled at me, and Travis and Gabe immediately tensed. If we didn't have an

audience, I would've laughed at them. I liked Owen, but I didn't like him like that. "I was wondering when you guys were going to show up. I figured it wouldn't take this long."

He nodded at the guard to open the gate, and soon, we were following him up the walkway. Like usual, I was impressed by the Reid's house from the exterior and the interior. It also made me yearn for our place by the ocean, and my room that overlooked the waves.

Owen dropped his voice as he led us inside. "Dean hasn't been feeling well."

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“That’s why we’re here,” I said, taking his cue and whispering as well.

His eyebrows rose as if he were surprised that we’d already known Dean’s condition. “He’s in the back room with his father. I’ll take you there.”

I looked back at the guys and smiled. At least we were a lot more welcomed this time around.

We walked in to a pale Dean sitting on the couch while his father sat at a desk in the corner. Dean looked our way and smiled. His lips were cracked. “How are you feeling?” I asked. His look didn’t remind me exactly of Liam, but he definitely wasn’t looking too hot either.

“Sick,” he said.

Mr. Reid stood. “Do you know what’s going on? I was going to call you.”

“Ren called Randy,” Gabe said.

The old man nodded, then looked up expectantly, as if we held all the answers to everything.

“The first thing you should know is that we no longer work for the Order,” Travis said. “I figured we’d put that right up front.”

Mr. Reid sneered. “I don’t care about that. I never was too fond of the Order, anyway.”

I wanted to roll my eyes. The only reason why he wasn't fond of them was because the Reid's were borderline naughty witches.

Travis nodded once. "I just wanted it known."

"Well?" Mr. Reid asked, staring at his son and then back to us.

I shrugged. "Liam is sick too. The only correlation we can think of is that—"

"Liam and I both had the familiar on us," Dean said, his voice shaky.

"Exactly," I said, frowning down at him. He really didn't look good at all. He looked as if he could pass out at any moment.

"So, it's that bad witch again?" Mr. Reid said.

Travis bristled, but I grabbed his hand and held it. It was one thing to tell his coven that he wasn't sure Jax was all that bad, it was a whole other thing to tell someone else that he believed that way. Especially since the Reid's were affected by Jax too. Which was evidenced by the sick Dean on the couch.

"Do you have anything in your archives about how to get rid of a demon?"

"Get rid of a demon?" Mr. Reid said, surprise and humor lacing his voice.

Gabe moved forward. "Not just the demon's familiar, but the demon itself."

Mr. Reid looked lost. "I have no idea all of what's down in those books. I'm just a collector," he said sternly.

Travis, Gabe, and I exchanged a look. Yeah, right.

“I don’t think there’s anything like that down there,” Dean said. “But you’re welcome to look.”

His father glared at him, but then Dean went into a choking fit and his sour face immediately lifted. “Absolutely. Do whatever you have to do to figure this out?”

“There’s one more thing,” I said, as Mr. Reid went to Dean and started to rub his shoulders like I’d done with Liam. “Jax is all of our problems now, as you can see,” I said, motioning toward Dean. “We plan on going to the Spring Equinox Celebration and telling every witch we know that they need to be securing their personal wards and keeping one another safe. They need to be on the lookout for anything negative because it just might be him.”

“But,” Dean said, his voice raspy. “Doesn’t he just want you?”

“We think he does,” Travis said, “But that hasn’t stopped him from using others to get to us.”

I squeezed his hand, knowing how difficult it was for him to talk about his friend like that. He still held so much guilt.

Dean nodded. “We’ll tell everyone we know.”

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Mr. Reid nodded to Owen. “Take them down to the room. It’s open.”

Owen took us back out of their ritual room and into the kitchen where the stairs to the basement were. We stepped down it and I got the sick feeling I usually did about this room. There was just something not right about it. Owen opened the door wide for us and Travis and Gabe walked in. I stopped next to him. “You’ll tell everyone you know, too, right?”

He nodded. “Of course.”

I slipped past him and walked into the room. Like before, it all seemed so overwhelming. There were so many books and Liam was really the only one of us who had the patience for this stuff. But because we didn’t know what to do and wanted to do something, we sat down and pulled books off the shelf, leafing through them. I read passage after passage, scanning for the word demon until my eyes were tired and dry.

Owen turned when footsteps sounded on the stairs. Ren, in all his slimy glory, ducked into the room. “Hello there.”

We all just looked at him and then looked back to what we were doing.

“Rude,” Ren muttered. I still ignored him, but then he said Randy’s name. “Randy called me. He said Liam would like to see the book that Dean ripped the page out of for the familiar spell you did. Since I happened to be here when he did it, I figured I’d come down and look myself.”

I looked back at him, surprise registering on my face.

“Don’t look that way, I’ve always been a team player.”

I bit my lip to keep from laughing. Whatever got him through the days, I’d let him believe.

“Well, good,” Travis said, closing his book and putting it down on a nearby table. “We’ll let you get to it then.”

It wasn’t that I disliked Ren, he was almost on the same par with the Reid’s. They weren’t bad people, but they weren’t good people either. They had some form of conscience, but it wasn’t as strong as ours.

Ren twisted to make what was sure a sarcastic remark, but he did a double-take. He moved over to the stack of books that Gabe had looked at and picked up one. “This is it.”

“I already thumbed through that one,” Gabe said.

Ren shrugged. “I’m telling you I recognize it from that day where Dean ripped a page out of it. This is the one Liam wants.”

It made sense to me that whatever help we were going to find would be in the same book that had helped us before. I held my hand out for the book. Ren hesitated-briefly. But then he smiled and placed it in my hands.

“Are you going to the Equinox celebration?” I asked.

“I use whatever excuse to party,” he said, his brows furrowing. “That doesn’t seem like your scene though.”

“We’re getting the word out about Jax,” Gabe said, moving up behind me. “We all need to be cautious, and we’re spreading the word there.”

He nodded. “I’ll see you there then, I suppose.”

Gabe and Travis turned and were already making their way out of the room. “Thank you,” I said to Ren, motioning to the book. We could have been down there for several more hours and never found anything useful.

I followed the guys out, but Owen stopped me by the door. “I’m glad to see that you’re okay.”

I smiled at him. “Same to you.”

Ren rolled his eyes. “You know she already has four boyfriends. It would be impossible to add another one.”

“Thanks, Owen,” I said, trying to talk over Ren. “That was nice of you.”

Travis and Gabe each had shit-eating grins on their faces when I walked into the main room. I gave them a look, and they began climbing up the stairs. What was I going to do with these guys?

Travis’s phone started to ring, and he fished it out of his pocket as he climbed. “Yeah? What’s up?”

He stopped dead in his tracks. “What?”

Alarm spread through me. Whatever news Travis was just given didn’t sound good.

“Son of a bitch!” He pushed past Gabe and ran through the house.

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Gabe and I looked at one another for a moment before we started running after him.

We ran past a startled Miss Reid who again looked wistfully at Gabe, but I didn't have time to focus on that. Travis threw open the main doors ahead of us and we sprinted after him down the sidewalk. The guard stood in front of the gate when he saw us all running toward it. Owen had to shout from behind us that everything was okay and to let us through.

The day guard opened the gate in just enough time for Travis to sprint through it. I had a feeling that if he hadn't, that guard would've been sprawled out on his ass while Travis figured out how to open the gate himself.

He ran right to the driver's side of the Jeep and started it, his hands curling around the steering wheel as he waited for us to jump inside.

"Christ, Mate," Gabe said as he got in the back.

I pulled open the door and hopped inside. "What's wrong?"

I could hear my heartbeat in my ears, drowning almost everything out. I really had to focus on Travis while he spoke in order to understand what he said. Even when he did, he had to say it twice because I hadn't understood.

"My sister is here. At the apartment. Right now."

I gasped, and I quickly buckled in as Travis took off. This was the last place he wanted his sister right now.

Randy

Liam still didn't feel well, but at least he was upright and on the couch. Both of us just stared at Jennie. It had been a long time since we'd seen her. She'd been so pissed at Travis that I wasn't sure I'd ever see her again. When she'd showed up at the door, I wasn't even sure I recognized her. It was almost like looking at a memory.

She was always with Jax back in the day. Not when we went on Order missions but when it was just the five of us hanging out, she was there. Travis was never too happy about it, but Jax didn't give a fuck. Jax never really gave a fuck about anything but magic and the Order and Jennie. We were a whole different dynamic when Jax was in the coven versus Norah being our fifth. She brought a sense of togetherness that we were missing when it was just the five of us before. We were all friends, some of us tentatively. We tolerated one another more often than not. It was like one of those relationships you might have with a black sheep of the family. You would do anything for them, even when you didn't fucking want to or feel like it.

It was forced.

With Norah, it was as easy as living.

"I can't believe you guys don't have anything to eat in here."

Liam had more patience for people, but since he was barely in commission, it was my turn to play host until the rest of the gang returned. "What are you talking about? We got groceries earlier."

Jennie made a face as she rummaged through the cabinets again. I glared at the back of her head. From the corner of my eye, I saw Liam move, so I stared over at him. He

gave me a quick shake of his head. He was telling me to knock it off, but I couldn't help it.

Jennie sighed as she grabbed a bag of chips off the counter and then plopped down on the sofa opposite Liam and me. "So, where was my brother off to?"

"He's with Norah and Gabe trying to figure out our next step."

"Norah's your new fifth?" Jennie asked her gaze darkening.

I swore if she said anything about her, I'd— Well, there wasn't really anything I could do. I supposed I could make her dump the chips all over herself.

Liam cleared his throat. "Yes, she's the fifth. I think you'll like her. How are your parents?"

Jennie shrugged. "They're fine."

"How do you like Virginia? Has there been any more problems?"

Jennie looked down at her lap. "No. We've been fine."

"Not to be a dick," I started after there was a long gap in conversation. "But why are you here?"

I figured I knew why, but I needed someone to say it. Who the hell told Jennie Jax was back? It had to have been Travis, but what the fuck was he thinking? Having his sister here would only complicate things.

"To visit my brother," she said, her cold eyes lifting to me.

“Now we both know that’s a crock of shit. You hate Travis.”

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“I don’t hate Travis,” she said, exasperated.

I chuckled. I’d been there in the aftermath of when Travis accidentally stripped her powers. She fucking hated him.

“You try suddenly being non-magical and see what you do,” Jennie said.

“I don’t think Randy meant it like that,” Liam said.

I said, “Yes, I did,” at the same time Jennie said, “He did.” She sighed. “You’re just always sticking up for him.”

I smirked. It was true. Liam was always trying to make me seem more manageable to everyone else. It was a good thing Norah understood me.

Finally, the front door opened. Travis ran through it, then stopped to a walk when he saw the back of his sister’s head. She paused, too, before cramming the handful of chips she had in her hand into her mouth. She crunched away, not looking back even though she had to have known Travis just came in. To me, she almost looked a bit frightened.

Travis came around the side of the sofa and then reached for her hand, hauling her up into a hug. He held onto her tight. “What are you doing here, Jennie?”

Jennie’s eyes widened. “We’re a hugger now?”

Norah and Gabe stood back on the other side of them, taking it all in like Liam and I

were. He let her go, and she stumbled back a few steps.

“Well?” he said.

“You know why I’m here,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“I told you to stay in Adams.”

She rolled her eyes. “Like I’m going to listen to you. Jax means as much to me as he does to you.”

“There’s nothing you can do here.”

She moved her shoulders back and stood straighter. “You don’t know that. Maybe he’ll come out of hiding if he knows I’m here.”

“Maybe you’ll just get yourself hurt,” I said.

Both Travis and Jennie glared at me at the same time. I didn’t care. I thought this was a horrible idea. She shouldn’t be anywhere near here.

“Mate,” Gabe started. “Why don’t you share with the group what’s going on...”

Travis fell back into the recliner and Jennie did almost the same thing, taking up the middle of the sofa. Gabe put his arm around Norah while Travis said, “I called Jennie to tell her I saw Jax.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Because I fucking deserve to know,” Jennie said.

Norah's eyes widened, and a flash of anger swept over her.

Travis shook his head. "I thought she deserved to know. What I didn't think would happen is that she would believe it was a good idea to come to Salem to what? See him?"

Jennie ground her teeth together. "I—"

"He's not the same Jax," Liam said, his voice soft and weathered.

"We don't know that," Travis said.

I stood. "Are you fucking kidding me? We don't know he's not the same Jax? How about all the shit he's done? Did you bother telling Jennie about that? About the witches he drained and killed, about the different paranormal creatures he's sent after us including a familiar. The fact that he tried to kill Norah."

Jennie finally looked up. She blinked when she saw Norah standing there with Gabe. She zeroed right in on his hand around her shoulders. "Wait. I thought you were with my brother."

"She's with all of us," Gabe said.

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Jennie's face puckered. "How—?"

"It doesn't matter," Travis said. "That's not the point of this, and that's obviously not what I meant, Randy. The demon is making him do all this. We don't know if he's the same person underneath it all."

"I knew about the demon," Jennie said, interjecting her thoughts.

"Good, so you know your ex-boyfriend has gone off the fucking rails, and you still decided to come back? That's smart."

"Oh, shut up, Lacone," Jennie sneered.

"Whatever. Your death wish." And I meant it. He'd been trying to take us out. What did Jennie think he was going to do? See her face and then suddenly remember he didn't want to kill everybody? Seeing her made me think the opposite. She's fucking annoying.

Norah widened her eyes at Liam. Still pale, he leaned over to me and whispered, "Calm down." He leaned in a little closer. "That was from Norah, but I agree with you."

He moved back to leaning his head on the back cushion. I really hoped he'd be feeling better soon. I hated to see him like this. Norah must've had the same instinct because she came over and ran her hands through his hair. "Do you feel any better?"

He nodded. "I'm not queasy anymore."

“That’s something,” she said, her voice soft.

“I just feel wiped.”

She nodded. “Dean’s the same.” Her lips were a thin line as she looked at him. “Now seeing both of you, this has to be familiar related. Have you ever heard of anything like that?”

Liam shook his head back and forth. “This is all such new territory for us.”

“We did get you the book though,” she said. She held her hands back and Gabe came over and placed an antique book in her palm. “Ren said this is the one you wanted.”

Liam sat up and took the book from her. She moved back on her heels and made some room for him. His face pinkened a bit, a renewed look that suited him better than pale corpse. “I’m going to take this into my room and see what I can find.”

Norah stood and helped him up. We were all silent as he walked like a zombie toward the hall and then disappeared around the corner. I patted the sofa cushion next to me and Norah sat, scooting next to me to give Gabe some room on the other side.

“Is he going to be okay?” Jennie asked. “He looks like shit.”

Norah tensed, but Gabe grabbed her thigh. I would’ve just let her at Jennie, but that was me.

“I just don’t think this is the safest place for you right now, Jennie,” Travis said. “We don’t know how he’ll react when he realizes you’re here.”

Jennie shrugged. “I have to find out, Travis. I couldn’t just stay in Adams with all this going on. You know I—” She cleared her throat. “You know I love him. If there’s a

chance.”

Travis nodded. Though my heart went out to her for losing Jax, I still thought this was a terrible idea. But Travis ate it all up. He moved from the recliner to the couch. “I know. Just promise me you won’t do anything stupid.”

I clamped down on my jaw. As far as I was concerned, she’d already done something stupid.

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Travis’s sister hadn’t said more than two words to me since she got here and she’d pretty much taken over the place. This could sound odd, but I really liked it when it was just my coven and me. Outsiders made me nervous, and made me feel like I couldn’t be myself. She already thought it was odd we were all together together, but in reality, she was probably just jealous. I couldn’t think of one woman who wouldn’t think it was a great idea to be with more than one man. Things are literally never dull. But people fear things that are out of the ordinary. Being a witch, you would think Jennie wouldn’t be that way, but she was.

I was moping around in Liam’s room while he slept when Randy walked in. “Hey.”

“Hey,” I said, whispering. Liam had fallen asleep with the book over his chest earlier, so I’d moved it to the nightstand.

Randy held up the keys to his bike. “You want to get out of here for a little while.”

“Fuck yes,” I said, feeling relieved already.

He held his hand out to me and then we walked through the living room, telling Travis and Jennie that we were going out. Travis stood immediately, coming up

behind me. “Hey,” he said, grabbing my waist.

Randy and I both stopped.

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Travis leaned over, whispering into my ear, “You’re not mad at me, are you?”

My hackles were up, but it really wasn’t his fault. It was just the situation. I put my hands on his. “No, I’m okay.” I turned and gave him a peck on the cheek. “Have fun with your sister.”

He turned into me, giving me a kiss on the lips, slow and deliberate that made my heart beat against my ribs. It so wasn’t fair. I was conscious of his sister watching us and the whole thing—besides the kiss—just felt awkward.

I pulled away. “I’ll see you later, okay?”

“Be safe, guys,” Travis said, pinning Randy with a look that he didn’t see. He was already tugging my hand out the door.

When we stepped outside, Randy breathed in deep. “It feels so much better out here, doesn’t it?”

I laughed, squeezing his hand. “Someone feeling cooped up?”

“Worse than that,” he said. “I just don’t like Travis’s sister being here.”

I smiled to myself, hearing my thoughts being echoed right back to me. At least I knew I wasn’t the only asshole in the house. I hadn’t gotten the chance to talk to Travis alone regarding his thoughts about Jax and who knew if I’d be able to now.

Randy led me down the street. “I thought we’d go pick up the bike at the wharf and

then go for a ride. You down with that?”

I nodded eagerly. While I was thinking about it though, I took out my phone and sent a quick text to Gabe: Went out with Randy for a bit. Be back soon.

His reply: Wankers.

I showed Randy the screen, and he laughed. “He’s just mad we didn’t invite him to come with us.” He paused for a moment. “But three of us can’t fit on a motorcycle, so...”

Sirens sounded in the distance. I looked in the direction and saw a huge red fire engine screaming down the street toward its destination. For a moment, it was too loud to talk, but once they were further away, I said, “Geez, I hope everyone’s okay.”

Right as I said it, two more trucks went by. These were just regular trucks with a small siren on the top letting everyone know they were emergency vehicles.

When the ruckus passed, I turned to Randy. “Why do you think Travis told Jennie about Jax?”

He shrugged, rolling his eyes. “Part of me thinks it’s as he said, that she deserved to know. But another part of me thinks that he wanted at least one person on his side that knew Jax really well. Maybe they think they’re going to prove to us that Jax can be saved.”

“If he even wants to be saved,” I said.

“I can’t wait until the equinox party tomorrow. We can help spread the word about Jax so that hopefully no one else will get hurt. I hate the idea that there’s a demon roaming around somewhere. I don’t care if that’s Jax with a demon or just a demon in

general.”

My insides twisted. I knew the feeling. That demon had already brought a lot of hurt and pain to Salem. Jax could say all he wanted that it was just about getting revenge on his former coven, but then what about the other witches? Why bring them into it?

I shivered, and Randy put his arm around me. “We’ll figure this out. We always do.”

Randy and I turned the corner toward the wharf. A man ran straight at us, his face filled with rage. I froze, but thankfully Randy was right there to pull me out of the way. In the next second, two police officers on foot came around the side of the building, guns drawn. “Get out of the way!” they shouted.

Randy and I plastered ourselves into the wall of the store we were next to as they ran by. Turning, I saw another police officer come from where we just were and lunge toward the angry man. He tackled him at his ankles and he fell onto the road, his hands outstretched to stop his fall.

My heart leaped into my throat, and my magic tingled at my fingertips. Smoke filled my nostrils, and Randy tugged at my hand. “Norah, look.”

I turned his way and saw a billowing cloud of black smoke rise in the distance. Shouts rose up and the fire trucks we’d seen rushing down the road were pulled up outside of a church. I gasped. “Oh no.”

“I didn’t do anything,” someone yelled.

I turned back around to the police officers cuffing the man they chased down. They pulled him up to his feet and shoved him back toward us. Randy positioned himself in front of me, but when the guy walked by, he glared at us. His eyes were dark gray.

Wait.

A black sheen completely covered his entire eye. I blinked. His eyes were gray again.

“Fuck. Did you see that?” Randy asked when they were far enough away from us that they couldn’t hear.

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“His eyes?” I asked, replaying his eyes turning color over and over again in my head, trying to see if I had somehow made that part up.

“Yes,” Randy said. He immediately took out his cell phone, pressed on the screen, and then held it to his ear. “Gabe,” he said immediately. “No, just listen. Norah and I just saw someone with black eyes. What the fuck? They turned. One second, they were gray and the next, they were dark as fuck. We didn’t imagine it.” There was another pause. We watched the guy get loaded into the back of a police car as the other officers walked up to talk to a fireman on a walkie talkie. “We think he burnt a church down.”

My gaze moved up, noticing for the first time the steeple and the stained-glass windows. One of them was broken and clouds of gray smoke were wafting out of it and reaching toward the sky. Why would anyone do that?

I stared back at the police car they put the guy into. He stared back at us, his face cocked into a half smile. I swallowed, a sense of dread filling me at once. In my gut, I knew this had something to do with the demon. People’s eyes didn’t just change color and they also just didn’t burn churches to the ground.

“What?” Randy yelled. He turned toward me, eyes big. It was a feat to see Randy scared, but he was just then. He held the phone away from his ear. “Gabe said someone has set fire to all the churches in Salem. Just now. They think it was an orchestrated terrorist event.”

Terror, maybe, but not terrorist. This was the work of that demon. Now we just had to find out if it was Jax controlling the demon or the other way around.

Randy pulled me in the opposite direction and we broke into a run toward the wharf. He started the bike, and I got on right after him. It looked as if we weren't going to get our nice drive around town. Not with what was going on. He drove us back to the apartment and then helped me off the bike. He pulled me close, kissing me on the lips. "This feels big, Norah. It sounds weird to say, but this feels bigger than just the witch world in Salem."

I nodded into him. I always loved that when Randy put his huge arms around me, I felt safe. He did so now and even though I felt better, I also knew that Randy's arms couldn't save me from this. It was a nice thought but not actually the reality.

We walked up the porch and into the front door. Liam was awake now, leaning toward the TV. Everyone else was there too as the news anchor talked about the church fires all around town. Apparently, all of them had been set at exactly 3:33 pm. She went on to say that it was thought the arsons were a part of a bigger terrorist sect that had stayed hidden.

Liam rolled his eyes. He looked a little better. "It's not terrorists. It's Jax."

"We don't—" Travis started.

Liam stood. "It's fucking him, Travis! It's Jax. We know this. I don't care that you want to argue about the fact that your friend Jax might still be in there, but the truth is, it's Jax and the demon. They're one and the same right now and it's not fair to anyone out there that you're having an internal war about it."

My stomach bottomed out. Liam hardly ever got angry, which probably accounted for why the room got silent very quickly.

“More people died, Travis. You heard her. There were a few members of the clergy in some of those churches, and one had a pre-school. Small children, Travis.”

I inhaled sharply, my hand coming up to cover my mouth. I had no idea about that yet. How terrible.

Travis turned. His eyes were full of sorrow, gleaming in the light. “I’m so sorry, Norah.”

I rubbed my face, then strode up to him. “What are you sorry for? Stop it.”

“This is all my fault.”

I wasn’t even going to dignify that with an answer. Travis was just really confused right now. That was his friend. It may have looked like Jax, but I above any should know that it wasn’t. And it sure as hell wasn’t if he was going around setting fire to churches and killing little children. “We’re working on it,” I told him. I couldn’t think of anything to say but the truth.

Gabe’s phone rang. He peered down at the screen with a confused expression but answered it anyway. “Hello?”

He looked at me when the person started talking. Travis put his arm around me and held me to him. It was comforting to me too, but I was pretty sure he was doing it for himself.

“Yeah?” he said, eventually. Then his face cleared as if he finally understood. “Got it. I’ll pass on the information.”

He hung up the phone.

“What is it?” Jennie asked.

“That was a girl I had a class with last year. She was a nursing student and has a job at the Salem Hospital now. She just called to tell me that there’s been an influx of patients coming to the ER who swear they’re hearing voices.”

Jennie’s face pinched. “What does that mean?”

“She said the voices are telling them all to do bad things. Drown their children. Ram their car into a tree. Set fires to their church.”

I swallowed. This was like an epidemic. How the hell were we going to combat this?

Liam ran a hand down his face. “We need to call Walter.”

“Walter fired us, remember?”

“Technically, we quit,” I said.

Jennie gasped. “You guys aren’t Order members anymore?”

“They didn’t want us involved with Norah,” Gabe said, filling her in on the most recent events.

She looked over at me again, staring me up and down. “Well, that’s bullshit. You guys should be able to do whatever you want to do.”

Okay. Maybe I was beginning to get along with her now because I wholeheartedly agreed.

“We’ll get the Order involved,” Liam said. “We’ll tell them our plan for the equinox but maybe they can make it bigger. Maybe we can put some sort of safety spell over Salem. I don’t know. I just know that it’s going to take a lot more than us right now. This is far-reaching. This isn’t just one person going around doing stuff that we can track and follow. This is that demon taking control of several people. How would we ever be able to watch the entire town by ourselves?”

We all looked at Travis. He ran a hand through his black hair and the faint smell of cinnamon filled the room. “You’re right. There’s no way we would be able to handle this on our own.”

I rubbed his back, and Liam ran to the bedroom to get his laptop. He walked back

into the room with it already open in his palm. “I’m going to try to video chat them right now. They may not answer.”

Liam tried several times, but they didn’t pick up. They either didn’t want to talk to us, or they weren’t around.

Reluctantly, Travis fished his cell phone out of his pocket and went through his contacts list, choosing Walter’s name out of the many. “I’m calling Walter. Call every witch you know and tell them to try to help as many people as they can. People won’t understand this, and even if they can put a protection spell on one person, it will help.”

Everyone got on their phones. Since I didn’t know anyone the guys didn’t know, I hung around Travis. Even Jennie got on the phone to her old friends. I could hear her talking softly into her cell phone telling others that what they were seeing on TV wasn’t terrorists at all, it was the work of a demon.

But what I was most interested in, was Travis. He walked to his room, and I followed him. He sat on the bed and I took his hand in mine, giving it a quick squeeze as soon as Walter answered. “Hello, Travis.”

“Walter,” he started. He swallowed, and I rubbed my hand down his arm, trying to give him the courage to talk. “It’s getting bad here. Salem needs something big.”

I listened as Travis filled Walter in on what was going on. The fires, the hospital. He must’ve asked Travis if we’d gotten the pull and Travis told him no, but that Liam had been very sick all morning.

As soon as he told him we hadn’t gotten the pull, I sat up straighter. With everything going on, I hadn’t noticed that we hadn’t gotten the call like we should have. Since Jax was going around doing all this stuff, we should’ve been alerted to it. I’d felt fine.

Stressed, of course, but no tug in my stomach. Had the Order really taken that from us right away? And how could they have without us even noticing?

I tugged on Travis's sleeve. "Did they take it from us?"

Travis repeated the question to Walter who told him they did. My jaw tightened as soon as I heard his response. Assholes. Take away our only warning system for what was going on. We may have been able to prevent one of the things from happening.

"Listen, Travis," I heard Walter say. His voice sounded dejected. "I want you to know I argued for your coven. You've always been very good Enforcers, but the others felt the risk was too much to take. There's another Order coming in."

Travis sighed, his eyes closing. "I think you're going to need to send more than one."

I looked at Travis, shocked. He just lifted his shoulders at me. They got off the phone soon after that. "You're not mad?" I asked right away.

"I assumed they would do something like that. We told them we weren't going to abide by their rules and I knew they weren't going to let Salem go unguarded."

I supposed I should've thought about that as well. But, I didn't because I thought the whole thing was stupid. We were being ostracized because of the way we wanted to love, but it wasn't as if the Order had a union we could go to and complain. The superiors could pretty much do whatever they wanted, and there was nothing we could do about it.

"Do you believe Walter?"

"That he tried to help us? Yes. Walter has always been good to us. I don't think he's as stuck in the old ways as some of his coven members and other Orders that have

been around for a long time. The truth is, things are changing. We aren't just policing witches here and there that might do a little something wrong. This is so much bigger and requires different tactics that we aren't equipped for."

"Like when we used the spell to get the familiar off of Liam?"

"Exactly," Travis said. "I don't think anyone could have predicted that would happen. A witch going that bad is unthinkable."

I watched as Travis's face morphed. It was unthinkable, and yet, it was his friend who had done it. "I know you're taking a lot of this on yourself, Travis, but I just want you to know that I think this doesn't have anything to do with you at all. I know you don't want to hear it, but I'm going to tell you anyway. All these decisions were Jax's. He decided to start doing the wrong thing. He decided to call the demon to him to get his powers back. I don't care if you did strip his powers, you were doing what you had to do, so things like this don't happen. If I went bad, and you did something to keep me from hurting others, I would be thankful. Now, I might not be in the right frame of mind to tell you that if it ever happened, just as Jax isn't now. But, if you love Jax like I know you do, and you know what a good person he is, don't you think the last thing he would want to do is hurt all these people? Because of that, we need to stop him. Can you imagine the guilt?"

Travis lifted his gaze to mine. "I hadn't thought about it like that."

I cupped his chin. "You need to save him from himself, Travis. And we can do that."

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He dropped his forehead to mine, then moved forward to kiss my lips. “Thank you.”

He kissed me again, this time lingering. His soft lips pressed into mine with more urgency before he broke away. “I feel like I’ve really made a mess of things, Norah. I can’t even keep my head straight.”

“It’s because you really care, Travis. It’s just confusing because of who we are. That’s all.”

He tucked my hair around my ear. He was still close enough for me to feel the air from his even breaths. “You know what’s not confusing? How much I love you.”

I smiled, then moved forward, pressing my lips to his knowing that whatever happened, nothing could take this away. We could be Order members or not. We could be witches or not. But I would still have these guys. We may be not a coven anymore, but that didn’t mean we wouldn’t always be together like this. And that was what was most important. These feelings we had for one another were the best reasons to deal with what we were dealing with now. It gave us strength. It gave us purpose. It gave us love.

I kissed him until he fell back on the bed and I moved on top of him. I would never give up an opportunity to show any one of them how I felt. And this time was no different.

The more we watched TV, the worse it got. The media personnel kept commenting

on different things going on around town, but they didn't have all the information. They couldn't see how they were connected, but of course, we could. I never thought I'd say this, but I wanted the superiors to come. This seemed like too big to manage all on our own.

"Can you mute that for a sec?" Liam asked.

Gabe grabbed the controller and muted the woman we'd been watching all day. It was a hard thing to look away from. They say that happens when you're looking at something tragic like a car accident. You can't look away. It's just too terrible.

Liam pushed the book we'd gotten from the Reid's house onto the table. "It's not much to go on, but I do see in here that a sign of demon possession can be eyes that turn black. Supposedly it's a window into their soul. If the eyes are black, the demon has taken over and the soul is now dead."

"That's uplifting," Gabe said.

I wanted to kiss him for it. The whole day had been filled with dread and confusion, but just his cute little accent saying something funny made me want to smile. It made me remember that I wasn't alone.

"Anything on how to kill a demon?" Randy asked.

Travis perked up. He'd been better about not sticking up for Jax, but he was clearly still on the fence about what to do. Liam nodded slowly. He looked away, his foot bobbing up and down. He looked much better than he had that morning. His pallor was returning to normal, which calmed my insides a little. "It's crazy," Liam said.

"Well?" Gabe asked. "What is it?"

“According to the book, Jax must have summoned the demon to him from hell. In order to get it to go away, we have to send it back to hell.”

Travis leaned forward. “Are we talking about an exorcism?”

“Maybe?” Liam said. I could tell he was hesitant and that his mind was telling him it was an exorcism, but he didn’t want to believe it. It seemed so cliché. Did we need a priest for that type of thing?

I drew in a breath. “Is that why they set the churches on fire?”

Liam shook his head. “If you’re thinking what I think you’re thinking...no. They set the churches on fire because they’re evil. There’s a spell to send the demon back to hell that’s not an exorcism, but the problem is going to be finding and containing the demon. We don’t know if it’s stayed inside Jax and he’s using his magic to control the people. Or, if the demon is moving in and out of people at its whim.”

All of this because someone wanted his magic back. The concept seemed so foreign to me. For the longest time, I hated that I was different. I understood the value of it now, but it was hard to understand someone who just thought so completely different from me.

The doorbell rang, and we all stiffened. Travis had broken the news earlier about the new Order coming. None of us really thought they would come here, but at the same time, we didn’t know where else they would go. We were the ones that knew this town. They would be so out of sorts.

Travis got up and moved to the door. Liam pulled me closer to him on the sofa, then moved forward and grabbed the book, shoving it under the couch in front of us.

I looked around Travis when he opened the door and sure enough, Walter was right

there. His face was stricken as Travis opened the door wider to accommodate his whole coven moving into the small apartment.

Liam stood. “What’s wrong?”

“We lost contact with the new Order.”

My eyebrows rose. I locked gazes with Randy who’s jaw set right before he looked up at the Order. “Not to sound like a dick, but what do you want us to do about it?”

I rolled my eyes. No one held a grudge better than Randy.

Gabe rubbed the back of his neck. “Randy has a point.”

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“Oh, come on, guys,” I said, my voice rising. “Yes, it was a shitty thing they did to us, but that means five other witches are now pulled into this shit.”

Gabe clammed up, but Randy looked unapologetic. The Order had truly pissed him off. At this point, I didn’t know if he’d even go back to them if they were to suddenly tell us that they didn’t care that we were all with one another.

“When’s the last time you had contact with them?” Travis asked, ignoring the looks we were all giving each other. We’d all decided to call the Order though. And of course, they’d be upset that a whole coven was missing. I was upset a whole coven was missing. I just kept thinking, ‘What’s next?’

“They were supposed to check in hours ago when they arrived in town.”

“Jax must have gotten to them,” I said.

“The demon must’ve gotten to them,” Travis clarified.

Liam’s hackles were raised again, but the last thing we needed was to scream at one another again.

“Well,” Gabe said. He picked up the remote and unmuted the TV. “This is what’s happening around town, so take your pick. Maybe they checked themselves into the hospital because they were hearing voices. Or maybe they got called to slaughter a bunch of kids at pre-school.”

“We have a plan,” Liam said, interjecting. “We know all the witches and Wiccans

will be celebrating the equinox tomorrow. There's always this big celebration at the main park by the Hawthorn Hotel complete with rituals and prayers. We're going there to tell everyone what is happening. We're going to ask for everyone's help in all this," Liam said. "We think this is even bigger than the Order."

"What else have you found out?" Walter asked.

Liam looked to Travis. He'd hid that book under the sofa for this very reason, but it also seemed like the superiors needed to know everything. "I have a spell to exorcise the demon, but we'll have to figure out a way to capture it first. That'll be the hard part."

"A spell to eliminate a demon?" one of the other superiors scoffed. "Never heard of it."

"It wasn't in any of the Order books, that's why," Liam said. "At times like this, I think it's necessary to look up any possible information that could help us and that includes something like this." He knelt and pulled the book out from under the sofa and dropped it on the coffee table. Walter moved forward, reading the title on the cover. Liam quickly turned the page to what he'd found, holding it open for them. Walter reached forward, and his coven member said, "I don't think we should be concerning ourselves with a text like that."

"I disagree," Walter said simply.

He read through the spell, looking up after he was done. "I think this will take a lot of magic."

"I guess it's a good thing we have our lightning rod then," Liam said.

He smiled down at me, and at first, I smiled. But then the realization came over me as

to what he meant. I heightened all their powers. I wondered if I could heighten any witch's power or if it only worked with my coven.

"What did you say?" Walter asked.

"Norah," Liam said, not even thinking twice about what he was going to say. "Ever since she joined us, she's made our magic stronger."

"Because you got your fifth."

Gabe shook his head. "No, because she makes us stronger. It feels different with her than it ever did with Jax."

Walter turned then. "I suppose we should get some dinner."

Travis and I exchanged a look.

"Weren't you just saying how hungry you were?"

"Welcome to the club," Jennie said. All five of the superiors turned toward her as if they just realized she was there. She shrugged. "They don't have anything in the house."

"Excellent," Walter said. "Take Miss Shaw and pick up some food, would you? We'll have to make Salem our home base for right now."

Gabe rolled his eyes. "If they think they're staying here, they can knob off."

Walter turned. "Don't worry. We'll stay at the hotel down the street, but isn't anyone else hungry?"

He gave us all such a full stare that we each agreed. The other coven members left, Jennie in tow. None of them seemed all that pleased about it, especially Jennie.

When the door closed behind them, Walter moved forward. “You must not say that in front of them again. Now, tell me exactly what happens.”

“With what?” Randy demanded.

“Norah.”

Walter stared at me, his expression earnest. “How do you affect them?”

I took a deep breath. “When we do magic together, their magic levels up.”

He nodded. “And what else? Is there something else?” Walter asked.

Liam clucked his tongue. “There is something a little different. Ever since she came, we’ve been able to control an element. I can make fire appear in my hands and use it,” Liam said.

“And water?” Walter asked, looking around.

Gabe nodded, not even bothering to look at him.

“Earth for me,” Randy said.

“Wind,” Travis tacked on.

Walter moved around in a circle, waiting for each of them to tell him what they could do. When they were finished, he moved to me. “And you’re spirit.”

“Spirit?”

He nodded. “Spirit. That’s why you can make them stronger. You give yourself to them whenever they need. It’s both an amazing talent and a tragic one.”

My stomach twisted. I didn’t like the sound of that.

“What do you mean?” Travis asked. “It wears her out sometimes, but we haven’t seen any other side effects.”

Walter ran his hand over his forehead and then took a seat in the recliner. “This was why we were forced to tell you you could not be with one another. There are stories about covens like you. One female, four male Enforcers. They are stronger than any other coven because of the bonds between them. When their bonds grow, such as with intimacy, so does their magic. It gets stronger and stronger until...”

“They implode,” Gabe said.

Walter looked up, his fingers tapping on his chin. “How did you know?”

“My grandfather said he heard rumors.”

“They aren’t rumors,” Walter said. “It’s the truth.”

“But we couldn’t find anything about it in the Order books,” Liam said.

“You wouldn’t,” Walter said. “All the stories were erased from journals. The Orders vowed to never let anything like that happen again. So, when we heard that your fifth was a female, our mind went there. It wasn’t until we saw you with one another that we feared that you had already taken your relationships to the forbidden level.”

“Forbidden?” I asked, about to put up a fight.

“It was for everyone’s own good.”

“So, how many covens has this happened to?” Liam asked. His face held that open look like it always did when he was interested and learning something.

“They’re rare,” Walter said. “Very rare. They’re power cannot be matched, but it comes at a cost.” He looked up, his eyes sad. “You’ll have to be careful. I know you don’t understand our decision and I can’t speak for the others, but I thought it best that we at least try to help you guys through this. Use your magic in stride.”

“Nothing’s happened to us yet,” I said, grasping at straws. That wasn’t entirely true because how many times had I gotten depleted after we did magic with one another. I’d been taking the brunt of it, but that came with the territory, right?

At that moment, Granny’s words filtered through my head that she’d told me all along. I wasn’t safe, but I was also exactly where I should be. Was this all destined then?

“Maybe not yet,” Walter said, “But there isn’t a coven in history like yours that hasn’t just...”

“When we say implode, we mean...?” Randy asked.

“Died.” Walter swallowed. “They died. All of them.”

13

It turned out we were willing to give up our bedrooms as long as we all got to sleep together on the living room floor. I slept squished between Travis and Liam. It reminded me of that one night at Liam’s parents’ house when we’d all slept in my room. This was a lot less comfortable, but still felt the same. I loved being next to all of them, especially after the news we’d been given. I didn’t believe it.

Well, I did believe it, but to me, something could never be wrong with the way we were. If what they said was true, then we’d just have to be careful about how much we used our magic. The other thing I couldn’t believe was that maybe Walter wasn’t that bad of a guy after all. He seemed truly concerned for us and knowing what he said to Travis on the phone earlier; I felt like he had our best interest at heart. Ever since I heard mention of the superiors and knew that I needed to keep myself hidden from them, I distrusted them. But I was also willing to admit when I was wrong. It was possible I was wrong about this. Gabe and Randy still weren’t pleased with him, but level-headed Liam took what he said to heart. And Travis, too. He’d never had a problem with the Order, so I knew how he felt about what Walter told us.

“Are you awake?” Gabe asked.

I nodded, feeling him down at my feet. “Yeah.”

“We’ve got a big day tomorrow. You should sleep.”

By me, both Travis and Liam were breathing softly. Randy, the big lump on the other side of Liam was a heavy breather with the occasional snore. “I could say the same thing to you.”

He chuckled. “I guess I’m just trying to soak everything in. You know, just in case.”

I frowned. Judging by the humor in his voice, I knew he was trying to joke with me, but that wasn’t something I really wanted to joke about. I sat up and hovered over him. “Don’t talk like that. I love you, you sexy Brit. Now go to sleep. We’ve got a big day in the morning.”

“Witches to save. Demons to send back to hell.”

I snickered. “If everything works out perfectly, yeah.”

He laughed. “So, basically we don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow because things never work out perfectly.”

“Exactly,” I said. “It’ll be a shit storm. But at least we have the Order with us.”

I couldn’t even keep a straight face and Gabe knew it too. He laughed out loud, then quickly put his hand over his mouth. “Good night, Norah.”

Gabe eventually fell asleep, but I stayed awake. Now that Gabe had put the thought in my head, I couldn’t let it go. I’d never had a lot of friends, so of course now that I had everything I never knew I wanted, I was some sort of freak coven that could basically be our own downfall. Not doing magic wasn’t a problem for me. As I’d said before, it came in handy, but I didn’t need it. I never even wanted it, so giving it up if needed, although difficult, wouldn’t break me. I just hoped I could say the same for the others.

Then again, we might just be the one coven who could break all the odds. Fuck that. We were that coven. Nothing was going to happen to us. I'd make sure of it.

When the first rays of light came in through the window, I got up first and hopped in the shower. I didn't want to have to fight for it later when everyone and the Order had to take turns in our one bathroom. I wasn't sure where their notion of going to the motel had gone, but I supposed it just wasn't said that we would all be safer together, especially what happened with the new Order of Salem. Wherever they were.

I had just slipped under the warm water when the door creaked open. "I'm in here," I whispered.

"I know," a voice whispered back. I smiled when I realized it was Liam.

I looked out from around the shower curtain. "Do you feel better?"

He nodded. "I don't know what that was about, but I have a theory." He took his shirt off and started working his pants off too.

I just stared at him as he did so.

"I think that the demon was expending a lot of energy and since Dean and I had been touched by it before, it was taking its toll on us too. It was touching everything it had ever touched."

"Oh," I said simply as he took a step into the shower with me.

He looked me up and down. "What?"

"I didn't see you as a share the shower type of guy."

He moved closer, putting his arms around me while the warm water cascaded down my back. “I just wanted to be close to you.”

His hand slipped down over my ass.

It seemed that he had something else in mind too. Not that I could blame him.

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“Liam,” I warned. “There are like nine other people in this apartment.”

“And six of them are guests,” he said. He pulled my chin up and angled his face down. Our lips met in a sweet gesture that quickly turned passionate. It may or may not have had something to do with the fact that Liam cupped my breast with his hand. I dropped my head to his shoulder, trying to stifle my moan. The last thing we wanted was a Superior audience even if they only could hear us.

Liam didn’t seem to mind though. His other hand made its way up between my legs, massaging my clit. I held onto his shoulders to steady myself before I reached out to grip his dick. He bit down on his lip. “Maybe I should’ve thought this through.”

I shook my head. “You’re not getting out of it now.”

He was already hard in my hand. I moved my hand up and down him, sliding my thumb over his tip until he swore under his breath. “Let’s play a game,” I said.

“Aren’t we already?” he asked.

“Let’s play who can keep the quietest.”

With a teasing grin, I dropped to my knees and took Liam into my mouth. His hands shot out to steady himself, but one got lost in the shower curtain before his other planted onto the tile. “Fuck, Norah. That was evil.”

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t play dirty.”

I licked him from base to tip, then moved my mouth down him again. He breathed out, keeping his mouth closed. I watched him struggle and did my best to undo him. I grabbed his base and worked him into my mouth at a steady pace. He sank his fingers into my hair. I thought I had him, but he squeezed my shoulder and moved me away. "If you keep doing that, I'm going to come in your mouth and there will be nothing for you."

"I'm sure you can think of something."

I let him squeeze my shoulder as I darted forward again. Cum had beaded at his tip and I licked it. If Liam wanted to join me in the shower, he certainly was always welcome.

I returned my efforts to getting him to explode. His hands got lost in my hair again as I worked him even harder. I loved seeing his pained face, trying not to give into his pleasure.

This was a fun game.

His hips started moving into me. My pussy was already wet, waiting for whatever he had in mind after this. "Oh, Liam," I said, running my tongue down his length again.

"Oh, yes," Liam said, his voice coming out in a hushed whisper. "I'm almost there, baby."

I grabbed Liam's ass and forced him to me, taking him in all the way to the base before releasing him and doing it again and again. Liam made a guttural sound, then held my head to him as he pumped inside my mouth a few times, then jerked when his cum emptied into my mouth.

I sucked his tip, taking it all in. He let out an excited cry, but then pulled me away

before he got too loud. “Jesus, Norah.”

He brought me up onto my feet and then moved me to where he just stood. He shut off the water, then thought better of it and put the faucet on instead of the shower head.

“Lay down.”

I did as he asked. He lowered with me, keeping my knees open as he positioned himself between my legs. He kissed everywhere around his final destination. He kissed at the apex of both my thighs. He kissed a trail down from my belly button, just shy of my clit. He kissed just mere centimeters away until I was shaking in his hands. Then, he looked up at me. His deep brown eyes told me I was going to pay for what I’d just done.

Finally, blissfully, he moved over, his tongue moving over my folds until he caressed my clit. He did it over and over again until I gripped the side of the tub. The rushing water was filling the bath up, but it didn’t deter Liam. His face got lost between my legs as he sucked and kissed. I did my best to hold it in, but at one point, it didn’t even matter anymore because it was Liam and I together, and shit this good, shouldn’t be held in.

“Fuck, Liam.”

His eyes rounded as he stared at me, but he never stopped. He ran his tongue over my clit, swirling it back and forth.

Heat pooled right where he gave all his attention. My breaths came out in quick gasps. Even with the water running, I wasn’t hiding anything. And secretly, I think Liam loved it.

He stayed where he was, my body inching closer and closer until there was no inching toward the apex. I was running full speed ahead. “Yes, yes!”

My fingers dug into the side of the tub as my orgasm hit hard and strong. He lowered me back into the tub and water sloshed over my stomach. His eyes glinted as he stared at me. I let out one final breath when my body finally calmed down enough so that I could talk. “You win.”

The corners of his mouth tipped up. “I’d say we both won.”

14

If anyone heard Liam and mine’s dalliance in the bathroom, no one said anything. It was a good thing too because as far as I was concerned, they were all guests in our home. The place where it all started. It felt weird to think that just a short time ago I’d been living in New Orleans with my shop that was just barely getting by and now I had more than I’d ever wanted and then some. Sure, these times with my coven had been stressful. People had died and been hurt. But I’d never learned more about myself. And, I’d never felt more alive. Even with all the threats and the danger, I was happier than I’d ever been.

This was my calling.

On the way to the park where the equinox festival would be held, a surge of hope sprang through me. The way the guys talked about it, this would be a mass convergence of people who were like me. Not everyone would be a Natural, but everyone would understand what it was like to be a witch, no matter how much power they had. That's where Jax had gone wrong. It wasn't about how much power you had; it was about who you surrounded yourself with that gave you the feeling of having power. It was hard to explain. And I had a feeling that even if Jax was in front of me and I tried to, he wouldn't get it. I didn't want to say anything to Travis, but I was pretty sure Jax was already gone. Any shred of the person he once was would've been eaten up by the demon. Even Liam with just the familiar on him had been a different person, and that was just a fraction of the energy an actual demon had.

But since he had hope, I would too.

I got out of the Jeep and stretched my legs. Tourists as well as Wiccans and witches—some dressed normally, some dressed as if they'd just returned from a wood fairy convention—walked toward the square. Tents were set up all the way around, and it dawned on me then that I'd heard of this festival even before we thought of coming here. I'd gotten a letter from the Salem Business Administration at the shop about buying a table here to sell some of my goods. I'd just tossed it aside, knowing that I would be too wrapped up in other things to do it.

When all this was over, it would be nice to just worry about how to grow the shop and explore my life with the guys without having to worry about a demon taking over the entire city of Salem and me being only one of a few people in the world who

could do anything about it. Talk about pressure.

Jennie stuck close to Travis as we crossed the street by the Hawthorn Hotel. That was another place I hadn't been in yet since coming here. I heard it was haunted, which gave me the chills to even think about, but people flocked there nonetheless. It could be an interesting thing to do with one of the guys over a weekend, maybe. See what spooky fun we could get into.

"Welcome to the Equinox Festival," Jennie said, throwing her hands out wide as we hit the sidewalk that crisscrossed through the park. The whole area was lined with tents with different shops from the area. Just looking around, I saw several names I recognized. Some who just sold Salem trinkets while others were psychics and well-known witches from the area. This was the place to be if we wanted to reach people who were like us.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Walter scan the crowd. His gaze was sharp and beady. With all these thoughts in my head about the future, I shouldn't forget what we were actually here for. There was a very real possibility that the demon and Jax would target this place. Especially if they knew we were coming here.

Over to an open grassy area to our left, someone had set up an altar. Candles flickered there with bouquets of flowers resting at their base. Liam leaned over. "Someone set up an area to mourn what's been going on around here."

My heart felt heavy in my chest. It was difficult to process everything going on. Even more so when you knew what the actual cause of it was. It only renewed inside me that we needed to find Jax and the demon immediately. No more innocent people should die just because people were determined to be evil.

Mr. Reid and Dean started walking toward us. Dean's sister was in tow, already staring straight at where I knew Gabe was standing to my right. I didn't know why,

but it made me smile. Pride, maybe? I knew what I had. I was very lucky that they only had eyes for me.

“This is interesting,” Travis said, keeping his voice low.

“We did say we needed everyone’s help,” Gabe said. His cheeks were pink, and he tried to avoid the girl’s gaze.

“I’m with Travis,” Randy said. “I’m glad they’re here, just surprised.”

Liam went out to greet them as Travis reminded Walter and his coven as to who they were. Owen was with them too. Other guards also flanked them. I gave Owen a short wave. More and more people started to gather around us. Most of them, I didn’t recognize, but they must have at least known some in our party. Girls Jennie’s age came around directly to her, giving her hugs. Old friends who probably hadn’t seen her in a long time. My heart hurt for her when I thought about it. She’d left Salem after Travis accidently stripped her. She was so mad that she gave up everything here. She’d lost her boyfriend, her home, her friends, her brother. I could see why she came back. Maybe that same hope I had that she could put all this behind her. That she could once again return to Salem and at least have some closure about the events in her past.

Walter and Travis spoke amongst one another. None of us had a clear-cut idea of what we were going to do once we got here. We had our target audience in front of us, but how to get to them all without alerting the outsiders as to what was really going on. There were always tourists in Salem. Always. There was no getting around them which was good for some things, like business, but bad when you needed to talk about a demon terrifying Salem.

No one wanted to believe that bad things like this existed. They just liked the promise of the magic, not the flip side that went with it.

And the truth was, most people didn't need to know about it. That's why we were here: The Enforcers.

I took a deep breath and settled on Travis and Walter. My coven and his coven had converged on the same area, all waiting for what to do. "I say we put everyone who's non-magical in a sleep spell. That way we can talk to anyone who is magical without fear of being overheard."

Travis nodded. "Walter and I were just discussing something similar. I told him how good you were at sleep spells."

I shrugged. "The thing is, I've never targeted it before."

Walter looked me square in the face. "I don't think you'll have a problem doing that. Think about where your powers come from inside you." He gazed at me intently as if he was trying to say something without saying it.

Gabe leaned over. "He's talking about tapping into your element, Love."

Right. Spirit. I'd done some research this morning with Liam, looking up what I could do with my newfound power. The guys' powers were obvious. Spirit was a little more out there. I could mess with people's emotions, for one. I was used as a lightning rod, that we already knew. If I thought about the purple tether inside me, I could focus on that and search within everyone to see if they were magic, letting those that were stay awake.

"Just be careful," Walter warned, his face grave. Not too much, he mouthed.

I had a feeling that I wouldn't know if it was too much until it was too late. I didn't bother saying that to him though.

My coven and I all joined hands. When Liam reached out for Gabe's hand though, Walter interceded. He stepped in, then we made the circle bigger to accommodate his coven as well as ours. When we were all linked, a buzz ran through the air. Magic escalated all around us, causing the hair on my arms to rise and goosebumps spread over my body. Those magical and non-magical turned our way. Anyone could sense something was up. Electricity was in the air, sparking this way and that.

The wind picked up, and I glanced at Travis. I didn't think he was intentionally doing it or if he was even doing it at all. I could have been nature responding to us, to the strength we all had. The ground vibrated.

I was taken aback by all this that I'd almost forgotten why we were even doing this at all. Shaking my head, I closed my eyes and started the search. I tagged those who I couldn't find any magic in whatsoever. I gave them a quick tap to fall into sleep, knowing I would just have to say 'wake' when I wanted them to be conscious again. Easily, I spread through the whole park differentiating between magic or not. Then, at the last second, I put a barrier around the park. We didn't need anyone coming in at the last second wondering what the hell was going on while we were talking. Why some people were sprawled out on the ground and the remaining people were talking about demon possession.

"It's done," I said simply, after I'd tagged the last remaining person in the square.

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We dropped hands. When I finally opened my eyes, I took a step back and almost stepped right on someone behind me. Witches surrounded us. They were drawn to us, or the power of us. We were like a beacon, and I didn't want to sound conceited or anything, but they all looked as if they were staring straight at me. Eyes peeled and in awe, I felt like I was an attraction at the zoo. Murmurs rose up from the crowd. My stomach twisted.

We had their attention. Now we just had to do something about it.

Walter moved to center himself in the middle of the circle, but Travis grabbed his hand and moved forward instead. I smiled to myself. Of course it should be Travis. We were the Salem witches after all. No one would know Walter or trust him.

“What's going on?” a voice said from the crowd.

Travis, with his dark hair and perfectly calm face moved to the center and commanded the audience's attention. His shoulders were back, chin held high. Even I, who'd been with him, even slept with the guy, was surprised at the way he worked the crowd. He didn't tell people to listen to him. They wanted to listen to him. That was a major difference.

“We apologize for the secrecy. Please know that everyone who's fallen asleep will wake up soon. Some of you know us, some of you don't. We're from the Order of the Akasha.”

More murmurs rose. It was as if the Order was a fairy tale to some people, and they were just learning now that it was fully real. Enforcers weren't just made up

superheroes. They were real life badasses.

“We wanted to talk to the magical people of Salem to explain a threat to all of us. You may have noticed the strange happenings around town. The church fires, the influx of hospital admissions... The list goes on. We have a demon that has come to prey on Salem and we need all of your help.”

A shock ran through the crowd. Some witches stared wide-eyed at one another as others all together went pale. “I know this sounds concerning, but we felt it necessary to warn everyone, and to help those we could. You may have already received a call from us, telling you to make sure your personal safeguards are up, and to help those around you. The men and women who started those fires were possessed by this demon. If you can help save even one person, please do so.”

“What are we going to do about it?” someone yelled.

Travis nodded, bringing his fingers in front of his lips. “He will be taken care of. If you see anything suspicious, please let us know. We have a way to defeat the demon, we just need to find him first.”

A dark laugh rose above the crowd. Suppressing anger bared down on my shoulders. So much so that I cringed inwardly and stooped. At once, I felt the very real demonic presence surround us. The hate. Anger. Fear. Lies. Every negative thought one could ever have was like a sopping wet blanket on all our shoulders.

The voice spoke, ricocheting around the park as if it came from a concert speaker, complete with echo and reverberation. The voice was Jax’s but darker and more threatening. “You. Are. Fools.”

My heart thudded in my chest like the beat of angry drums. Surprise had ricocheted through me when the demon made himself known, but that wasn't the main emotion spiraling through me. Anger. Hatred. Everything I'd ever been mad about bubbled to the surface. Now when I looked at Dean's sister who stood so close to my Gabe, I wanted to wring her neck. I wanted to squeeze it until she turned blue then lifeless. When I stared at my coven, I hated the fact that they'd brought me here. Hated that I'd had to deal with so much just because of them. Because of the stupid pull. I glared at the back of Travis's head for not wanting me from the beginning. Because he hadn't liked me, I hadn't liked him.

Dean Reid had hurt me. A growl ripped through my throat as I spotted his silhouette in the crowd.

But then there was Liam. He turned toward me, the blankest of looks on his face. He tilted his head in that serene manner, staring at me as if he was trying to figure me out like one of the equations in his textbooks. "What's wrong, Norah?"

In the crowd, people started to argue. Family member turned on family member. Randy bumped into Travis and they started swinging.

But Liam, he took my cheeks in his hands and made me look at him. "Don't let him do this to you. Don't let him take over who you are."

A flicker of light sparked within me. I knew the feelings that had started to burn weren't right. I knew that although I had felt them in the past, they didn't consume me. That was it, wasn't it? That was the point. You could admit your negative feelings, but you didn't let them rule your life. You could admit that you were selfish, that you were afraid, that sometimes you told lies, but you should always strive to be a better person.

"Live in the light," Granny's voice said.

I blinked, and she was standing just beyond Liam, her eyes wide and hopeful.

“Norah Girl, it’s like I always told you. Live in the light. No matter what, live in the light. In the truth. In the beauty. Be who you are.”

I blinked at her. She looked almost real this time. There were no clouds billowing out around her, but clear as day. She reached out. And this time, when she touched my face, she touched my face. I felt the imprint of her fingers on my skin. She closed her eyes in a sigh and I closed my own right with her, imprinting this memory inside me for all eternity.

“Do it, Norah Girl. You can.”

To combat all the hate, I thought of all the love I had. I pictured seeing Randy for the first time. How attracted to him I was with his tattoos and muscles. I thought of my first time with Liam. How sweet and shy he was, but also how determined. In my head, I saw Gabe laughing, and how that always made me smile. And Travis. Pig-headed boy that he was didn’t mean I loved him any less. I felt the feelings grow inside me. I felt them burn bright until my skin pricked again and my body warmed instantly.

“Holy hell,” Liam said.

When I opened my eyes, I agreed with his sentiment. I was burning purple white. Purple as bright as could be closer to my skin, but as it moved away, it turned into white streaks. I focused on the feelings and spread them far and wide. The demon fed off hate. I understood that now. I’d always understood it, but he’d made it apparent right at this moment.

The demon still spoke, but I was drowning it out. He called out to those who held so much hate inside them. He called out, asking for them to join him. He said there was

still so much to do here That it wouldn't stop at church fires and madness. He said the people of Salem deserved it. That they'd persecuted those like us all those years ago and now they made a mockery of what witches really were.

I didn't think anyone believed in that bullshit, but it was easier for a negative person to fall down the rabbit hole than someone who thrived on good when someone spewed hate.

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Jax walked onto the sidewalk. The crowd parted for him. Some backed away as if he was a red-hot poker they didn't want to get burned with. Others moved as if to gawk, as if they were drawn to his hate.

"You haven't won," Jax said.

Travis moved in front of me. Jax looked up at him, his head cocking to the side as he took him in.

"How can you live with yourself?" Jax/not Jax said. He looked like Jax and spoke like Jax, but his voice was amplified by darkness, as if hatred itself lived inside his words.

"Come back to us, Jax," Travis said.

I touched him. I saw the tension in his muscles and the curling of his fingers. He was at war with himself. He fought against the negative inside him, and if I could give him any sort of boost, I would.

"You should talk," Randy spat at Jax. His chest heaved. He stood there like a baby Hulk, getting ready to pounce. "Do you see what you've done?"

"Do you see what you've done?"

"J-jax?" a female voice said.

My heart fell into my stomach so fast I thought I'd almost stopped remembering how

to breathe.

I'd forgotten about Jennie. I'd lost track of her in the chaos.

She moved to Travis's side.

Jax shook his head. For a moment, emotion flickered on his face that was something other than hate, but in the next instant, his eyes glazed over into the onyx black.

Jennie screamed in frustration. She reached up, tearing at her hair. "No!"

"They did this to us," Jax said. "Both of us."

She threw her hands to her side and screamed, her face twisting in hatred.

Travis reached out to touch her, but I lunged forward, grabbing his arm before he could. In my head, she was a pulsing red warning sign. Touch, and you wish you hadn't.

"Come here, Jenn," Jax said.

She stalked toward him. Travis fought against me, but Liam and Gabe came to help, grabbing onto him. He wriggled out of our grasp, pushing Liam to the ground, and walked forward. "Jennie, don't!"

She turned on him, her eyes ablaze. "Why would I listen to you, brother? Jax is right. Do you see what you've done? Have you seen all the hurt you caused? The death?"

He shook his head. "Death?"

"Of me," she sneered. "Me. I'm not the same. I haven't been since you took my

Natural magic from me. When you took my magic, you took the real me.”

She walked back, getting dangerously close to Jax. “Stay away from him,” Travis warned.

“He was the only one who ever got me,” Jennie said.

“It’s not her,” I said, walking up to Travis. The world had stopped. Everyone stopped and stared at the spectacle going on ahead of us. It was pure light versus dark scenario. Each trying to gather one more team member for their side and Jennie was caught in the crossfire. I understood her hatred, her pain, I really did. It was festering inside her still, even after all these months. Even after she’d recouped some of her powers by practicing Wicca.

Grudges rotted inside our bodies and fed off us like maggots to our soul. Forgiveness, in theory, was easy. But often, it was the most difficult step forward to take.

“It is,” Travis said.

He pushed away from me and lunged for her again. His fingers slipped over her arm, but at the same time, Jax reached out and they both disappeared right before our eyes. One second, they were standing there like shadow deacons for hate, and the next, they were gone.

An instant rush of peacefulness descended over everyone. It was easy to feel relieved when you didn’t have hatred stomping at your doorstep. But in the next moment, it was hard to imagine feeling relieved when Jax had just taken Jennie.

Travis was on his knees, his head in his hands right where they’d stood. His back was hunched over. All around us, witches started apologizing to one another. They started making plans for how to make this right. Some of them openly gawked at me again as

I moved for Travis. Randy came up too. He put his hand on Travis's shoulder and squeezed. "I'm sorry, man. I didn't mean any of that stuff I said."

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But had he? Everything I'd felt inside me when Jax was around were all fleeting thoughts I had before. Just because I didn't act on them or let them be anything more than just a passing thought didn't mean I really didn't feel that way, did it?

I looked around. Liam stood and spoke with the superiors. Gabe had his hand on Dean Reid's sister's shoulder, calming her down since she'd practically fainted into him. I didn't have any more thoughts about killing her, which was a good thing. Luckily. I'd never had murderous tendencies unless we were talking about people who threatened my guys.

"He took her," Travis said. His muscles bulged as he unfolded into a standing position. His fists were clenched, and he turned, his eyes filled with anger. They were laced in panic, but the other emotion was far greater than that one. "He took Jennie."

I walked forward and grabbed his hands. "Hey, look at me."

I squeezed his hands again when he didn't listen at first. Finally, his alluring green eyes met mine.

"We're going to get her back," I said. And I meant every word. We could save Jennie. Jax, I still didn't know about. He'd looked promising for a split second. Maybe he had the barest of amounts of goodness left in him, but I wasn't sure it was enough to pull him back from how far he'd slipped.

After that, witch after witch approached us, asking what they could do. I couldn't number how many times I'd given out Granny's all-seeing-eye bracelet spell. I told them I'd open my shop as soon as possible. I'd give them everything they needed for

free as long as they'd make the bracelets and hand them out. I wasn't sure why I hadn't thought of it before. I had the best stockpile and the knowledge to do this. But I didn't have the time. Now I had volunteers. Volunteers who wanted to do nothing more than to help fight against the evil they'd just witnessed. It was worse than that too. They didn't just see it with their eyes, they felt it into their very marrow.

Pure evil at its worst.

Granny was right. It was all our problems. And to conquer this, it would take all of us.

Travis stood at the edge of everyone, lost in himself. It reminded me of when I first came here. It had been so hard to breakthrough his walls, and it looked like that was happening again. He stood there stone-faced, body stiff yet alert. He held the aura of 'Don't even think about fucking talking to me right now' which was odd considering how we'd started this trip into the Equinox. He'd stood in front of everyone like the leader he was. But now, it was as if he wanted nothing to do with it.

This wasn't Travis.

After the talk of the demon started to die down, I whispered, "Wake". I hoped it would work on everyone, not just the non-witches. Silently, I thought to myself, "Wake up, Travis. Snap out of it." Sometimes it was worse being caught up in your own head. It could be a dark place when you didn't let anyone else in there with you.

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We were back to tiptoeing around Travis again. Not only that, but we were quiet. Like me, I guessed that we were all dealing with the thoughts that had popped into our heads. I could still feel the wish in my heart of seeing the breath leave Dean's sister. It made me sick to my stomach to think about it. I simultaneously wanted to

talk to someone about it and keep it quiet. Would they still love me if they knew that about me? If they knew I had such a black place.

The superiors were quiet. Walter barely made conversation for the rest of the day and they kept to themselves. It didn't bother me. In fact, I liked it better. I was glad to have them around for more protection, but the fact that they were staying out of our hair was a good thing.

"We can do a locator spell," Liam said.

Travis shook his head. "I think he's gotten too powerful for that. There's no way we'll find her."

"But Norah's strong," Gabe said. We were all grasping at straws. Again.

"I touched her," Travis said. "I felt how cold she was, how angry. I think she might even block her being found. I knew she shouldn't have come. I shouldn't have called her."

I wasn't going to let him fall even further down the hole. "You did what you thought was right. Jennie's strong. Anyone can see that. There's still hope, Travis." I looked around at all of them, remembering the feeling of pure love bursting from me. It felt like the only way to push back against the demon. It certainly drowned out his voice, and voices were one of the powerful tools we had. "Speaking of," I ventured. "I wasn't the only one who felt—"

"Like you wanted to murder someone?" Randy said. He glanced at Travis and a slight shiver racked his body.

"That," I said, "but something more too. Didn't you feel when he started to lose power?"

Gabe looked up. His blue eyes weren't as troubled as the others. "I felt your warmth."

"It was more than that," Liam said. "It was like her love personified. I think you were able to use your Spirit element to calm everyone down."

"I felt it," Travis said. "I think we probably felt it more than most of the people there. Or, at least we were more affected by it."

"Due to our personal relationships with her," Liam mused.

Travis nodded. "We just need to harness that when we go up against that demon again."

"While still being careful," Randy said. "Walter said we can't use too much or..."

He stopped midsentence. We all knew the implication that was there. If we used too much magic, it would not be good for us. Implosion. Death.

But this, this was where my determination sprung to action. That wasn't going to happen to us. We could do this. "We'll do what needs to be done," I said, looking around at each of them. "We're the Order in Salem, so we'll handle the demon problem and send him back to hell."

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They all nodded right along with me.

“There’s still one problem,” Liam said. “We don’t know how to find them.”

Gabe scratched his chin. “We’ll have to draw them out.” We turned toward him, and he sat a little straighter. “Think about it, all the witches together like that made him come out. He wasn’t hiding behind the fires and the psychos anymore. He came out to talk to them, to get them to his side just as we were trying to get them to go against him. If we do something similar, we can draw him out. Then, we’ll try the spell.”

“We know the Akashic cell won’t work on him. It hadn’t even worked on Dupre.”

I remembered how it disintegrated in front of us and how shocked the coven had been. Since I was new to the whole thing, I wasn’t aware that the cell was their bread and butter move to lock people away until they could do the Akasha ceremony.

“We’ll figure something out,” Liam said. “If we get other witches to help us, we might just be able to come together to defeat him. I felt so...powerful out there with everyone.”

I glanced at Travis. “You were amazing, you know that?”

He didn’t even hear me at first.

Randy kicked the chair. “Dude, Norah’s talking to you.”

He shook his head, trying to force himself out of his own head again. “What?”

“At the park, they all listened to you. I said that you did amazing.”

He rolled his eyes. “Yeah, I’m a regular winner, aren’t I?”

“I told you already,” I said, sighing. “She doesn’t really feel that way.”

His gaze narrowed. “She does even if only a little, and for me, that’s just a bit too much. I’d rather my sister not hate me at all.”

I clenched down on my jaw. Now was not the time for pity parties. “You can’t undo what’s already done. You can only make it better from this point forward.”

He stared at me for what seemed like a full minute without commenting, then looked away. His green eyes were dark and flat. It was hard to tell where his emotions were at.

“So, we agree?” Liam asked. “We’ll draw him out. We’ll cast the demon out and save Jennie.”

Walter walked out of one of their rooms. He shuffled out to us, his face pinched in concern. “This is too much. We’ve never dealt with anything like this before, and now that I’ve seen all the power you hold...” he trailed off, just shaking his head.

“We talked about that already,” I said. “We’re going to do what needs to be done. Don’t worry about us, we’ll be fine. There will be no imploding here.”

Randy nodded first. He’d be the first to follow me into a bad situation that could only get worse. Not because he cared about me most, but because he was a risk taker. I’d already known that. Gabe was next, giving me a small half smile that melted my heart. Liam, too, eventually nodded. He’d always be on board after he thought things through in his own head. But still, it was Travis who was late to the party.

“Just help us do what we need to do,” I said, looking away from Travis to Walter.

He nodded once. Though his face still said he’d worry about us, I was hoping he wouldn’t bring it up again. We didn’t need to focus on negative thoughts right now. The demon would latch onto those with its claws and hold on, drawing out every little inch of bad thoughts with it.

“We’ll invite all the witches in Salem together again when we’re ready,” Walter said.

I looked at Travis, hoping he would speak up, but his head was down. I wasn’t even sure he was listening anymore. “When we give them a signal,” Liam said. “We’ll meet...”

“In the woods...next to headquarters?”

“It would be easier,” Gabe spoke up, “If we go somewhere where I would have access to water in case I need to draw on my element.”

“Gabe has a point,” Walter said. “We should go somewhere like Norah suggests, somewhere with power, but also have access to all the elements that you guys can use in case we need to fight.”

“By the ocean then,” Randy said. “Gabe can use the ocean. I can find ground anywhere. Liam can draw on fire, and Travis is good to go. There’s always wind around us.”

“The wharf then,” Travis said, finally speaking up. “We’ll meet by the wharf when the time comes.”

“Now we’ll just have to hope the demon comes out,” Liam said, the gears in his head already turning.

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“He’ll come,” Travis said. “Jax never turned down a fight.”

I watched his silhouette, but I didn’t get the chance to study him for long. He turned to me. “I heard you tell people they could come by your shop, right?”

I stood after him. The rest of our coven stood too. Walter watched the rest of us stand and told us he’d wait back here with his coven to contact some other Orders for backup if we needed it.

We stepped outside, and Gabe chuckled to himself. “I sure hope we get our flat back when all this is over. My idea of a good time is not having five more roommates.”

“You forgot way older roommates,” I said. “They’re kind of duds, aren’t they?”

Liam snickered. “It’s just like you guys to be thinking about that. I’m sure Walter and his coven have no intention of staying on with us. I doubt they like staying with us either.”

“I don’t know,” Gabe joked. “I think I’ve seen Walter checking out Norah’s ass.”

Randy held back a smile, and even Travis’s lips turned up. I knew he had to be feeling this more than the rest of us, but I also hoped he’d come out the other side okay.

We all jumped into the Jeep and drove downtown. For an evening, there weren’t a lot of people walking around. That was odd for one of the main shopping areas in town, especially right where the shop was. It was hardly ever deserted.

I unlocked the shop and then pulled the sign out of the window that said, 'Temporary Hiatus'. I hadn't known what else to call it when I knew I had to lie low from the shop a little while. I couldn't very well say, 'Doing the Enforcer thing. Peace out.' Temporary hiatus seemed to sum it up nicely.

I went through and turned on all the lights. Like usual, I took a deep breath while standing in the middle of the floor, taking it all in. Liam squeezed my shoulder on the way through. This was our baby. We'd lived and breathed it while getting it off the ground. The others helped here and there, taking over watching the counter if I needed or just coming into visit during breaks from school, or in Randy's case, work.

Travis came up behind me. His normal cinnamon scent wafting over me in a soft caress. Even now, I could tell that he was lighter than he had been since the park. He slid his arms over my hips and gripped me there. "I'm sorry."

"For?"

"I'm trying not to retreat again," he whispered.

I twisted in his arms to face him. I grabbed his shirt at his sides and pulled him close. "When you're falling away, just keep your eyes here," I said.

He locked gazes with me, his green eyes rolling in turmoil but at least he was seeing me now. "I will."

I nodded. I knew he would. I knew he would try at least. We'd come a long way since I first got here, and he was as committed to this coven as any of the rest of us were now.

Liam and Randy came out of the back with boxes in their hands. Gabe had stopped behind the counter to clear a space off. I squeezed Travis's hand and moved forward,

digging through the boxes until I brought out the beads we needed, and the right stones. Then, I walked over and got some incense off the shelf that worked well with protection spells. Then I grabbed the herbs and spices, bringing everything over until I smiled at them. “Okay, this is how you make the best all-seeing-eye bracelet you can make. It wards off evil as we know. It doesn’t let anything past.”

Liam nodded, and I could already see him making mental notes in his head.

I took them through the process. We infused our magic into the tangible objects, making five strong as fuck bracelets. When Liam finished making his, he handed it to me. It was made with a mixture of dark purple and light purple beads. “This one’s for you,” he said.

I smiled at him before slipping it on my wrist. Leaning over the counter, I gave him a kiss. This time, I dug deeper, reaching into all the warmth I had for every single one of them and infused it in that kiss. It couldn’t hurt to give any of them a little something extra for the battle to come. “Thank you.”

17

Murphy and Anna were the first to arrive.

Anna looked like a brand new person. She had color back in her face, and a smile that could light up the whole room. Seeing her now and remembering what she looked like then when she was getting her powers drained from her, I realized what a ride she had been through, and how terrible she must have felt. They wanted to be put to work right away, and so Gabe showed them how to make the bracelets.

Ren was next.

I didn’t care, but it would still take me by surprise no matter how many times he

showed up to do something good. Randy reluctantly became his teacher. All of us had varying degrees of power, but at this point, a little would help anyone.

Dean and Owen came next. Mr. Reid had stayed home with his daughter, but Mr. Reid had sent a sizable check with his son. He handed it to me, telling me it was for my supplies. I sneered at him and handed it back, but Liam took it right out of my hand. When he looked at the amount of the check, his eyes widened. His gaze tracked up Liam and he said, "I'll pay for half of whatever this cost. I'll cut you a check when we know the difference."

"Suit yourself," Dean said.

Randy looked on at the two of them interacting. Sure, Dean was pompous and the type of witch that got anything he wanted, but he wasn't a bad guy. If Liam wanted to pursue another friendship with him, one that he would remember, I was behind it. There was more than enough Liam to go around and Randy didn't need to worry. Randy and Liam needed one another just like I needed both of them.

As we worked, Travis went around and told them what the plan was. Walter had called and told us that the signal would be fireworks in the sky. Something inconspicuous, but also out of the ordinary enough that witches would notice, but regular folk and tourists would just chalk it up to locals having fun. Or some sort of witch event. I could see fear in their eyes when we spoke about it, but everyone seemed as determined as we were. We knew we were fighting for something bigger than ourselves. It wasn't just our own individual lives at stake. It was our families, our friends, our children, and our next-door neighbor.

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Salem was under siege by a demon. It didn't get any more real than this. A few hours into our bracelet craft time and together we'd already made a few hundred bracelets. A few of us had left the shop to go out around town and start handing them out to people. They chalked it up to free shop promo, but we all knew it was something far more important than that. I'd just finished one and stood up to stretch when I got a tug in my stomach. My hands immediately lowered to my stomach when the next cramp started. I doubled over the table. Owen saw me first. "Are you—?"

Liam butted in. He put his hand on the back of my neck to sooth me. I knew he had to have been feeling similarly, but he looked at everyone instead. "Don't be alarmed. It's how we get the call when something bad is happening."

Did I mention I really fucking hated cramps?

I looked up and locked gazes with Travis. He nodded, and we all moved toward the door. "Feel free to stay and keep working. We'll be back."

Anticipation grew in my stomach, twisting my insides to knots. The sick feeling grew as we jumped into the Jeep. It was close. The Akasha wasn't taking us to a place too far away. Up front, I saw Travis get on the phone from the passenger seat as Randy asked for the keys. Immediately, he said, "Why are we getting the pull?"

Of course, I thought. We weren't Akasha members anymore. Why the hell were we getting the pull?

Travis nodded as he heard Walter out on the other side of the line. "A little heads up would've been nice," he snapped.

A moment later, he hung up the phone and shook his head. Gabe peeked around the seat. “What did he say?”

“He said they decided to reinstate us as the Order in Salem.”

“A heads up would’ve been nice,” I said, grimacing through the latest cramp. I had a feeling that because I was a girl whose body was already predisposed to cramps, I felt them more than they did. It was a theory, and I was going with it no matter if it was the case or not.

I knew instinctively when Randy was going to take a left down the street and then another left just past the Salem Witch Museum. We were kiddy corner from the park where we were earlier, but that was where the pull took us.

“Are they going to meet us here?” Liam asked.

Travis shrugged. “I don’t know. I hung up on him.”

I didn’t know why, but it made me laugh. All this other shit was happening, and it still felt good to get back at someone who’d been a dick.

Liam didn’t find it all that amusing. “We could probably use their help.”

“I doubt it,” Travis said. “You know yourself that wasn’t a really big pull. I doubt it has anything to do with the demon. Or if it does, it’s not Jax himself.”

I checked on Travis. His face was clear, yet concentrated. I wondered if he thought he’d find his sister in here. He at least had to have a small fragment that that could happen. If it was her, I hoped she wasn’t hurt.

We emptied into the small foyer. There were people gathered there, waiting for the

next showing. Gabe went up to the counter, all smiles. He came back with stickers for each of us that allowed admission. Luckily enough, the girl running the register was a witch and had been at the equinox celebration earlier. She'd give us five minutes to check the place out by ourselves.

After a minute had gone by, she stuck her head in the door and then waved us through. We each inched past her and she shut us in from behind. I heard her voice coming from under the door where she said there would be just a slight delay in the next showing.

There was one single faint light shining down in the middle of the floor. The rest of the room was in shadows. I didn't know where to look first, but the guys started checking out the side walls and when I looked a little closer, I saw that there were scenes depicted in different areas around the room. It took me looking at two different scenes before I realized why we'd gotten the call.

Where there was supposed to be wax people to represent the different characters in Salem's witch history, there were real people.

Gabe got out his phone and shone the flashlight on it into the corner of the room. I recognized the scene from one of the stones I read when Gabe was taking me around to the cemetery and the Witch Trials monument. Giles Corey had been pressed to death. Instead of seeing a model there, there was an actual guy laying between the piles of stone. His face was pale, and blood poured out of his mouth.

The faint smell of rotten meat trickled into the air around us. These guys had been killed somewhere else. The stench was still on them. But they'd been moved here as a statement.

Randy cleared his throat. "I think I know where Walter's new Salem Order ended up."

My mouth dropped. Of course. Who else could it be?

Reluctantly, Travis took out his phone and called Walter. His coven would be the only ones to identify them. How the hell had this happened? If this was them, were they not prepared for what they were getting into? Had Jax ambushed them. There were so many questions and not enough answers to go around.

When Travis got off the phone with Walter, he took a closer look. I noticed the shine of his flashlight strayed the longest on the female models. Luckily, those were still wax.

Jennie was still alive then, as far as we knew. She'd better stay that way too because I wasn't sure how Travis would handle that at all.

It didn't take Walter and his coven very long at all to make it to the museum. They'd mastered the art of just showing up places. I guessed that was what age and wisdom got you.

Gabe had arranged it with the girl at the counter to let in the superiors. Soon, they'd learn that not another person was going to be let in here anytime soon. I assumed the Order would want to take the bodies away instead of involving the local police, but all that still took time.

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When he walked in, his face paled right away. Randy's flashlight was spotlighting one of the guys. The peek of modern-day clothes was unmistakable. "That's them," Walter said, his voice gruff.

The other superiors looked on horrified.

"They didn't make it very far," Randy said. Then, he looked at the others who'd just entered. "I'm sorry to find them like this."

Creases gouged his forehead, and I wanted to go to him, but there were so many solemn faces in here right now. All these guys had friends and families just like us. They didn't deserve this.

"No Jennie?" Walter asked.

Travis shook his head.

"That's good," Walter said.

I happened to agree with him. I was hoping that if there was any piece of Jax left in there that he would somehow remember his feelings for Jennie and let her live. Let her come out of this without any scars or hurt or pain. If he ever loved her, he could at least give her that. I would vow that to my coven right here and now. If it was at all in my power, I would never see them hurt or in pain again. It was a vow I would die to keep.

"You know what this means," Walter said, speaking directly to Travis.

His jaw ticked. I watched them both carefully. Sometimes I still felt as if I was very much a newbie at all this. I'd dove right into this headfirst without an instruction manual, so sometimes I didn't quite understand the ins and outs like they did.

"He's declared war on the Order."

Travis stared up at the ceiling, his head dropping back as if he'd given up all fight. "He won't be shown any mercy," Travis said.

I looked to Liam. He nodded. "If a witch kills an Order member in retaliation for any wrongdoing, they are immediately proclaimed an enemy." He paused. "They won't even think about taking him alive now. I'm not sure they'll even care if they can separate Jax from the demon. He'll have to go under the Akasha again."

Travis's lips moved, catching my attention. Mumbled noises came out of it, and when I looked at him, I noticed he still stared at the ceiling. I followed his gaze and noticed there was writing on the ceiling in blood.

The mighty will fall.

18

We decided to go home so the superiors could clean up the mess. After all, it was their idea to bring in another Order.

I wished they hadn't. I wished they had just trusted us to know what was right.

The mighty will fall.

How poetic. I had news for the demon, or Jax, or whoever he fucking was. Nothing was happening to us. I forced Travis into the backseat of the Jeep. I held tight onto

his hand while he tried to drive, but I wasn't going to let him. Out of all of them, he needed me right now. And I needed them.

I pushed him in the back and then climbed on top of him, not giving him room to protest. Not that he would. I yanked his shirt up and over his head, then sealed my lips to his, trying to get as close to him as I could.

“Well, alright,” Gabe said.

“What are you doing?” Travis said between kisses. He didn't let up. He didn't push me away.

“Shh. Just go with it.”

He kneaded my ass through my jeans and I plastered myself over his lap, grinding into him. “Stay right here with you?” he asked.

“Exactly.”

He pulled my shirt over my head and I felt another pair of hands on me too. I sneaked a glance to Gabe who had a wicked glint in his eye. His hands moved over my hips to the front of my jeans where he unclasped the button while Travis slipped his hand under my bra, skin-to-skin. I let out a low groan, then reached down to undo Travis's jeans before helping him shimmy them down his hips. Gabe worked on mine while Travis took my bra off, dropping it between Gabe and us on the seat.

“That's it. Get him, Norah,” Gabe urged.

Oh, God. All the hotness.

I worked Travis's dick free of his boxers as we kissed. Everywhere Travis's hands

weren't, Gabe's were. As Travis's hands worked up and down my back, pulling me closer and closer, Gabe's snuck between us and rubbed against my nipples with the pads of his fingers.

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I threw my head back and took in a deep breath. Yes. Sometimes I didn't remember how lucky I was until I got to share this experience with more than one of them.

I gripped Travis's cock in my hand and poised myself above him. Right before I lowered myself on top of him, I looked at Gabe. "Take your pants off."

Inch by inch, I forced Travis into me, my insides quivering as I took every inch of him inside. He groaned, long and deep.

In the front seat, I heard Liam and Randy sigh, as if they too were all a part of this.

As I rolled my hips into Travis, taking him in time and time again, I checked on Gabe. He sat right up against my leg now, his pants around his ankles and his cock standing at attention. I gripped him and as I lowered onto Travis, I moved my hand down over him. I matched my hip movements to my hand movements as if I could be riding Gabe at the same time I rode Travis. Their mixed moans of pleasure only made it more exciting for me. Travis tweaked my nipples as Gabe's hand clenched my ass, moving me over Travis faster, therefore, increasing my pace on his cock as well.

"Fuck him," Gabe grunted. "Both of us. Fuck both of us."

He hissed as I tightened my grip on him. Travis lowered his head, taking my nipple into his hot mouth. I cried out and Randy swore in the front seat, mumbling something about having blue balls. If I had enough hands and holes, I'd invite them all.

Travis's hands settled on my hips. "God, Travis. You feel so good."

My grip on Gabe faltered, so he closed his own hand around my own. He took over the strokes as my pleasure increased. Travis pulled me down over him again and again.

I looked at Gabe. His attention was on my breasts. Or Travis's tongue swirling my nipples, to be exact. His attention never wavered as his hand speed increased until I was pumping him faster and faster. "Fuck, Norah."

"Please, Gabe."

I wanted him to feel as good as me. I wanted him to feel a part of this.

He didn't need to be told twice. He pulled me down over him and paused. A second later, he cried out. His cum hit my forearm, dripping off and down onto his legs.

"Oh fuck," Travis swore. He looked down at Gabe and moved faster. "Fuck, I'm going to come."

My pussy tightened in reaction. Had Gabe's coming just pushed Travis over the edge?

Fuck, I hoped so.

Gabe sat and inched his hand down my body, finding my clit. He massaged me as Travis started to shake and then pulled me down hard before emptying himself inside me with a yell. As soon as I felt him lose himself and Gabe's fingers urging me forward, I came on top of him. My world broke into a million dazzling diamonds before my eyes, and then I collapsed over Travis.

Gabe sneaked his hand out from in between us and then laid it on my back as I

breathed in deep. Cinnamon and the fresh smell of rain swirled around me

“When we get home,” Randy warned.

“Don’t tempt me with a good time,” I said, still trying to catch my breath.

As Travis held onto me and Gabe rubbed my back, I felt fulfilled, whole. With so much ugliness around us, we needed this. It could only help us moving forward.

19

I awoke with a jolt, my head spinning and my heart thumping about what I’d just seen in my head. Now, I saw lots of things in my head and sometimes, they actually happened like when Granny came to visit me. This was like that.

Jennie. I saw her tied to a standing cross in the middle of a field, screaming for Travis. Her eyes were bloodshot and large. Around her, the wind blew, and she choked on the smell of evil along with...the smell of gas.

Shit. The demon was going to kill Jennie.

I’d been staring at the ceiling working this all out in my head, but I sat now. We were all laying in the middle of the living room again, Randy and Liam sleeping closest to me this time since, as they put it, Travis and Gabe had already had their time. But where was Travis? Just on the other side of Liam, I saw a peek of dark black hair. I reached over, practically shoving my breasts in Liam’s face and shook Travis. “Wake up!”

Fuck this.

I threw the covers off me and stood. “Everyone wake up. Now. I just had a dream.”

Gabe, Travis, and Liam were alert within a few moments, but it was Randy that needed an extra shove to get him going, which Gabe was all too happy to do.

“It’s your sister, Travis,” I said, looking around the room for my clothes. I pulled a shirt on over my head. “I saw her in my dream. She was on Gallows Hill, I think, tied to a cross. He has her there. She was screaming for you...Where the fuck are my pants?”

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Travis stood and grabbed me by the shoulders. His green eyes intense. “You’re sure?”

“I’m sure that’s what I saw,” I told him, looking deep into his eyes. “That’s all I know.”

“It’s good enough for me to go on,” Randy said, pulling his large body up. His left hand clutched onto something and he pulled it up.

I snatched my leggings out of his hand and put them on. “Come on. We got to go. We have to get there in case this is the real thing.”

We all left the apartment in various stages of undress. Travis was just pulling his shirt on when he opened the door to the Jeep. Gabe was struggling to pull his pants on as he walked down the porch steps. I slid into the backseat with only one shoe on.

“Wait!” Walter yelled from the porch.

“It’s Jennie,” Travis said. “We think we know where she is.”

Walter shouted more things, but we all piled into the Jeep, leaving him looking after us from the porch. Liam had squeezed himself into the driver’s seat before Travis could, which was probably a good idea. Travis driving right now with his mind on a hundred different things probably wouldn’t bode well for us. Randy, too, who was usually the next to speak up and want to drive was still waking up like a bear out of hibernation.

We went outside of Historical Salem and pulled into a baseball field parking lot. I looked around. “We aren’t going up by Headquarters to get there?”

“This way’s quicker,” Liam explained. “There’s a trail just over there.”

Travis was already out of the Jeep and running toward the trail. He disappeared up an embankment. If there was a clearly marked trail, it was hard to tell in the middle of the night with only the moon as guidance.

“Wait up!” Randy yelled to him, but I had a feeling it would all be useless. If we wanted to all get there at the same time, we were going to have to go at Travis speed right now. And Travis speed was ‘hurry the fuck up because my sister is tied to a cross.’

The thought of it made me shiver. So much witch crucifixion symbolism lately since the demon came. Finding the Order bodies at the Salem Witch Museum, now this.

You don’t even know if this is real, I reminded myself. Best-case scenario we got to the clearing and nothing was there. Then, I’d apologize to Travis and go home and back to sleep.

I thought all this while running down the trail, and I used that description loosely. I ducked under branches and felt the grass from the side of the trail whipping at my legs as I ran by. Only Gabe ran behind me and that was because they wanted someone other than me bringing up the rear. I was sure Gabe could’ve been the first if he’d tried. He was the only one of us that was involved in athletics on a regular basis. Still, it was comforting to know he was there. Especially when it seemed only to get darker and darker still the more we worked our way up the trail.

Up ahead, I heard a thrashing and Travis swear. Randy was just behind him, and I heard the same thrashing as Randy emerged into the field with the high grass. “Shit,”

Randy said. “She’s there. Hurry up.”

My stomach bottomed out. She was there. Just like I’d seen.

The wind tracked hair across my face, and with it, came the pungent odor of evil.

I choked on it. Sprinting through the woods and having to gobble in air only to have it taste like death was very unpleasant.

Liam burst through next, not even slowing down as Gabe and I came up behind him. When we were in the clearing, I saw Travis already halfway to Jennie with Randy hot on his heels. Who knew such a big guy could be that fast. He worked at a gym, but I just assumed he mostly lifted weights when he was there instead of hopping on the treadmill. From this, though, it looked like I was wrong to assume that. He was quick and agile, making it to Travis as soon as they were in front of the cross.

“Travis,” Jennie screamed, her voice coming out cracked.

“Are you okay?” Travis asked. He observed the area, looking for a way to get her down. Liam scanned the field, and I joined him. The last thing we needed was to be blindsided by the demon right now. But he had to have been here. The smell was too potent.

“I’m so sorry,” Jennie cried. “Please get me down.”

A burst of fire ignited underneath her. She screamed, trying to pull her feet up, but cringing at the pain. Nothing but the ropes around her waist, arms, and legs held her up to the wood.

Randy sent a burst of magic toward the base of the cross. The earth shook, and the cross followed. It leaned, and Jennie hung off it unnaturally to the right. “Catch her,”

Randy shouted.

He sent another burst of magic, the air lighting up green around him and the smell of maple mixing with the toxic rotten aroma already plaguing the area.

Travis moved just in time, catching the top of the cross as it came toppling down. Randy had ripped a hole in the earth which shook the cross free. Gabe and Liam ran to the cross, untying the rope holding Jennie in place while Travis kept the cross upright and out of the path of the fire. I moved to her front, taking her hands as soon as they were free and helping to guide her to the grassy floor.

She hissed in pain when I grabbed her wrists but didn't shy away. "Where is he?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know. He put me up here and left." Her body cracked with sobs. "That's not Jax."

Liam untied the last rope from around Jennie's ankle and she fell completely free to the ground. Travis dropped the cross and knelt next to her. "What do you mean?"

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Gabe closed his eyes. He surged with blue magic like a halo around him. The smell of a summer rain shower filled the area, and all around us, tiny droplets of water shone in the moonlight as the dew lifted from the grass. He brought his hands together and the droplets all formed one big bubble of water, which he moved over the fire and then dropped it. The fire sizzled and crackled out. I stared in awe of what he'd just done. He hadn't needed any large bodies of water for that. He'd just used the dew and probably any water from the air. It was genius.

"What are you saying?" Travis asked, his forehead pinched together. He grabbed her hands away from me.

She shook her head. Tears ran down her cheeks. "It's not him, Travis. It was him. But it's not him anymore. He's just a...shell of who he used to be. What made Jax who he is isn't in there anymore. It's just..." She shivered. "Evil. That's all he is."

"Jennie..." Travis said, drawing her name out as if he couldn't believe what she'd just said. Or refused to believe it.

"I know," she said. "I wanted to believe it too, Travis, but he's just not there. That thing killed him."

Randy looked away. One could argue that he'd done this to himself, but this wasn't the time or the place.

"Trust me," she said.

She looked so much like Travis at that moment that my heart went out to her. I knew

I didn't understand exactly what it was like to have friends who were that special, but I could relate it to one of them. I could see how I would react if something like this had happened to Travis, Gabe, Randy or Liam. I wouldn't want to believe it. I'd do anything possible to try to save them. I'd have hope until the very last moment.

Travis tugged Jennie to him. It looked as if that was the very last moment. The moment Travis realized that Jax was truly gone. Maybe he wasn't dead in the typical sense, but for all intents and purposes, he was. He wasn't who he had been. He wasn't Travis's best friend. He wasn't Jennie's boyfriend. He certainly wasn't a member of the Order anymore. Maybe he could have been pulled back if they'd gotten to him after he got stripped. Maybe he could have been like Jennie and found another avenue to work her powers again. But he'd been hasty and selfish, and now he was dealing with the outcome.

Travis pulled Jennie up, holding her to him as he turned to the rest of us. "Jax can't suffer anymore," he said. "If that's not him, then he needs to be killed. Jax wouldn't have wanted to be like that. He wouldn't have wanted his body used like that."

I didn't understand demon possession. I'd be the first to admit that, but the way Travis talked, he thought that maybe Jax was still in there, at least a little part of him, whether that part was evil or not now didn't matter. He wanted to put his friend out of his misery, and we were going to do that for him.

"Send the firework," Travis said. "This ends tonight."

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It took a moment for all of us to realize he meant right then. We all stared at one another. I wasn't ready.

But was fighting a demon really something you could prepare for. We had numbers

on our side...and strength.

Liam held his hand in the air. It glowed orange until sparks like shooting stars soared into the air, crackling into the night sky. Travis looked up. Cinnamon engulfed us as he controlled the wind to move the fireworks higher and higher. The witches would be able to see that for miles around.

Liam's phone rang immediately. He fished it out of his pocket and handed it to me to answer while he sent out more magical fireworks.

"Hello," I said, answering Walter's call.

"Is it time?"

"Yes," I said, staring at my coven. Then, I ended the call and handed it back to Liam as we moved toward the Jeep. It was slower going this time since Jennie was sore and tired. It would be smarter to leave her at the apartment, but she insisted on coming.

I climbed on top of Gabe as we got into the Jeep. I needed his reassurance, his comforting nature as we drove back into Historical Salem. We passed the street my shop was on and I thought that somehow in another life, I might have been at the shop already doing inventory or stocking a new item instead of speeding down the streets of Salem to confront a demon.

Would I give this all up though? Hell no. This was mine. Every fucked up hair-raising piece of it.

I cuddled into Gabe with Walter's words in my head. "Be careful. Don't use too much magic." And Granny's singsong tone as she told me that I was exactly where I was supposed to be, but somehow that wasn't right either. I understood it all. It was the life I'd chosen. Well, the life that had chosen me in the beginning, but every day

after that, I'd chosen it. I was walking my path with my head looking forward and not back no matter what.

"Everything will be okay," Gabe said. I nodded into him and he kissed my cheek. "I finally told my grandfather about you."

I looked up at him. "You did?"

The barest of smiles claimed his lips. "He says you sound amazing, and that he wouldn't give you up either."

"He sounds really smart," I said.

His lips curved higher. "I must get it from him."

"Well, obviously." I pulled him down for a kiss, showing him how thankful I was that he'd told his grandfather about me. I knew how worried he'd been, especially since his grandfather had seemed to know a thing or two about covens with one female. He'd heard the rumors. The fact that he would be behind Gabe still walking his path, made my heart soar.

Liam looked over, wincing. "You're glowing again, Norah."

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I stared at all of them, a rush of emotion coming to the surface that I couldn't even stop. It felt like this was the moment in movies where the music started picking up with a dangerous yet triumphant tune. This was the part where the heroes made all the right choices and basked in their glory. This was the part where I looked around and realized how much I would lose if this didn't go well, and I couldn't stop the love I had for them all brimming to the surface until my heart felt ten times its normal size. Heat gathered behind my eyes, but at the same time, my will cemented into my body.

I didn't give a fuck about what Granny said, or Walter. I was supposed to be here. I would do anything to be in this moment right now because that's where being with them led to.

Randy pulled up to the wharf where people were already starting to gather. I looked up and met his eyes in the rearview mirror. "Let's go kick some demon ass."

He smiled at me and each of us took a second to look at one another. Who would have thought that all those weeks ago when I just showed up at Randy's birthday party that we'd be here right now? It wasn't what I would call full circle. Nothing should end in a demon showdown, but I guessed that this could be the beginning. Nothing was going to end here. Nothing.

We got out of the Jeep and were met first with Murphy and Anna, then Ren, then others I recognized who'd helped at the store earlier. All around, I noticed all of them were wearing their bracelets. One woman with red curly hair had a bag of them hanging off her wrist. She gestured down to it. "In case someone shows up who doesn't have one."

“Good,” I said. “I know for a fact that this wards off the demon’s familiar.”

Her eyes rounded, and maybe it could’ve been better to ease people into the idea, but we didn’t have time for that. “I’ll make sure everyone gets one,” she said. I smiled at her. She started to walk away and then turned back around. “No more fires in the area. The news is dying down. I’d like to think we had something to do with that.”

I swallowed the emotion gathering in my throat. “We did. We all did.”

She nodded once, then turned back around, shouting about having all-seeing-eye bracelets that would help us as people started to gather near the wharf.

We walked toward the center of the grassy area. To the right out on the dock was the ship called Friendship. Yet another tourist thing I hadn’t had the time to go through, but who knew? Maybe tomorrow?

Down the street to the left where even more people were coming, there was the Nathaniel Hawthorn house and a customer once told me about a nice chocolate shop down that way too. To think that we were here to help with a demon problem when there was so much positivity around.

Actually, that could only help.

Travis rubbed his forehead.

“He’ll come,” Jennie said.

We’d given her a brief update on the way here and she agreed with the plan. The demon wanted to make a spectacle out of all this. The bigger the crowd the better.

It looked like he was going to get that.

Beyond the wharf, the ocean rippled with small waves. I could hear them breaking against the shore and even that soothed me.

Randy came up behind me and put his hands on my shoulders. "I love you, Baby Girl."

I dropped my head back and kissed him on the lips upside down. He soothed his hands up and down my arms as we waited.

In front of us, I saw Jennie lean over to Travis. She stared back at us, then ahead. It was pretty loud all around us, but for some reason, I could pick out exactly what she said. "Doesn't it bother you when the others touch her?"

Travis stiffened. "No. They love her as much as I do."

"But you must get jealous, right? I mean, what if she spends more time with someone else than you?"

He raised one shoulder. "It's happened, but I feel like we all think that about the others too."

She tsked into his ear, her lips curving into a smile. "I don't know. If you ask me, I think she has a thing more for Liam. You heard them in the bathroom that one morning."

Travis turned to her. His jaw tightened. "Just stop, Jennie."

I glared at her, and she caught my gaze for a second before shifting away. "Suit yourself. Did you tell her about Sarah?"

"What the fuck Jennie?" Travis said, his voice rising, gathering looks from those

around us.

My stomach curdled. I knew there'd been someone before me, but I hadn't known her name.

"Sorry?" she said, posing a question but in a way that meant she didn't mean it to be a question either. "I saw you with Sarah, so I know, Travis. I know you don't love Norah as much as you say you do."

My hands turned to fists. That little bitch.

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Just as I thought it, I saw the peek of a snake tail vibrating just under the cuff of her sleeve.

I gasped in a breath, and Travis immediately turned to me. He took in my expression, his face worried. “Don’t believe what she says.”

Jennie turned. “She should believe it. It doesn’t matter because she doesn’t love you as much as the rest of them, anyway. It’s plain to see when you’re an outsider. I’m sorry to have to break it to you, brother.” She turned to me. “And don’t worry, Norah. Randy’s so fucked up in the head that he won’t ever be able to love anyone enough. So, you don’t have to worry about liking Liam best.”

Randy’s hands fell off my arm.

“Though, I don’t know,” she said, her voice hypnotizing. “Gabe might give Liam a run for his money. It’s the accent. But just remember that accent has gotten him plenty of ass in the past, Norah. I doubt he thinks you’re the best piece he’s ever had. Top thirty, maybe.”

“Jennie!” Travis shouted.

But he didn’t understand. None of them did.

I lunged at her. I pounced on her with a roar, thanking my lucky stars that I now had an all-seeing-eye bracelet around my wrist, and I knew that everyone around me also had one. The demonic familiar was on Jennie. Jax, aka the demon knew that we’d go looking for her and knew that we’d be bringing her back to us with a piece of him on

her. He knew all about the plan. Everything.

We struggled on the ground. Jennie was strong, most likely getting most of her strength from the familiar, but that didn't help me when she kept flipping me onto my back and sliding her hands around my throat. I captured her leg and bucked, taking the upper hand again only to have Travis yelling in my ear to stop. That Jennie was hurt. No fucking shit. She had the fucking familiar on her.

He tried to pull me off, but I resisted, slapping at his hands until he let me go. When I turned back around, Jennie punched me in the jaw and pain radiated.

Randy came up behind me then, grabbing me up by the shoulders and picking me up off her in one swoop. I kicked out, but he resisted. Jennie got up and ran, breaking through the crowd. "Stop her!" I yelled.

Travis moved into my line of sight. "What are you doing, Norah?"

"It's not her," I said, finally getting Randy to put me down. "She has the familiar on her."

Travis's eyes widened and then he searched the crowd for where she went.

"Shit," Randy cursed, pushing me toward Liam as he followed Travis into the crowd. "Move out of the way. Move it!"

The crowd dispersed for them quicker than I'd seen anything like it. I felt the earth shake under my feet and then a blood-curdling scream. Liam, Gabe, and I moved to follow. Up ahead, Randy has Jennie in a vice grip while Travis lifted Jennie's sleeve to see the familiar there. It bulged out of her skin. The witches that gathered around for the spectacle gasped. Most of them had never—and would never again—see anything like this.

We ran up to them, just steps away from a stone ship slip. The superiors ran up in front, inspecting Jennie like they were doctors with a patient who had a terrible skin disease.

An eerie laugh broke through the commotion. It bounced around the area again like the demon was using a megaphone to spread his hate far and wide. We looked all over until someone shouted, “the Mast.”

I looked up, and sure enough, Jax was hanging off the mast of Friendship. “I see you’ve found my pet.” Even though he was fifty yards away, his voice was as clear as day, sinking into my pores and twisting my stomach. “I’d hoped that she’d throw you for a little while, but your Norah is something else.”

“You have no idea,” I said, glaring up at him.

If he hurt Jennie, and in essence, tearing Travis apart again, I was going to kill him myself.

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Jax smirked. There was no hiding his eyes now. They were glazed over in black like the shiniest onyx I’d ever seen. In his eyes were the bottomless evil thoughts he harbored. To look at him was to feel a negative thought take hold of your mind and start to grow. It was a good thing I had those I loved surrounding me or I just might forget what I was doing here.

The crowd got restless, and he laughed again, this time darker than the previous.

He let go of the mast, but instead of falling onto the deck of the Friendship in a crumpled heap, he floated. He glided through the air and settled himself fifteen feet above the ocean, just a step beyond the grassy square that led there. “Since that fun is

gone, I suppose I'll take my pet back."

Jennie screamed. The snake bulged out of her skin again like it was truly a real-life snake that wanted to break through her skin. Her head rolled back as a sob raked her. Randy held on to her tighter and her body writhed as the snake poked and stretched her skin.

"Yes, it can be quite painful," Jax said.

Liam moved forward. He'd known what that felt like.

The snake finally poked its head out, its tongue darting out in a quick hiss as he slithered out. He grew and grew until the last of his body emerged from Jennie and she slumped to the grass. Travis followed her.

The crowd again parted as the snake slithered past. Everyone gave it a wide berth. Its head swung from side to side, hissing at anyone who looked at him.

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“Don’t let it get to the demon,” I shouted.

Familiars were a demon’s pet, right? It would make sense that part of the demon’s powers lived inside the familiar, so if we could kill the familiar...

Randy ran forward. He dove, holding out his arms so he could capture it, but Jax held his hand out. The snake reared back, ready to make the jump into Jax’s palm even though he was yards and yards away.

Liam shot his palm out, sending a ball of fire his way. It missed and landed on the grass where a bonfire built. The crowd gasped, leering at Liam. He didn’t even notice. He kept doing it and doing it, each of the fireballs missing as the snake soared through the air.

Gabe grunted. To my left, a huge burst of blue light lit the sky. The ocean pulled up from the wharf. It moved out toward the snake in a concentrated blast, hitting him in the air. The wave of water fell onto the grass. We waited for it to recede back, and sure enough, the snake was there, slithering again toward Jax.

Randy threw a blast of green magic in front of the serpent, making him change direction. The gap in the earth opened, spreading over the entire wharf. The snake looked back and hissed.

Jax sighed. “Oh, you lot are so tedious.”

Gabe, again, brought up a wave of ocean from just under Jax and sent a tidal wave toward the snake. It hit him full force. It got caught up in the wave, tumbling end over

end. The wave splashed up over witches' knees and kept going. It ran over my sneakers, but with it came the snake.

The superiors burst through the edge of the crowd and threw up an Akashic cell.

"It won't hold," Travis and I yelled at the same time.

Jax laughed maniacally again. "Oh, old people. They're so cute."

He threw his hand out again, summoning the familiar to him, but this time, Randy jumped on it, wrestling with it until he pinned it down. Walter and his coven moved forward. As it had in the barn, the magic in the area intensified. It far escalated any of the power I felt the last time we'd faced off with the demon and its familiar in the barn. This time, there were witches upon witches there, gathering with us to lend us their magic, to lend us their help and power and hope.

The magic whipped out of Walter, who stood at the front of his coven. My heart surged in my throat. If their aim was just a little off, they'd hit Randy and if they hit Randy, there was no doubt in my mind that he'd be dead. No one could survive that amount of magic.

Randy screamed. The sound reached a fever pitch as the combined magic from the superiors burned bright, brighter, brightest, until it just fizzled out.

Jax howled. I pushed past the crowd and saw Randy's arms folded over nothing. The serpent familiar had just disappeared. I threw myself at Randy, tackling him back into the ground when I saw that he was okay. He held me tight, his chest heaving against mine. "Are you hurt?"

He shook his head, his hand grasping me over and over again as if he couldn't get me close enough. "I can love, Norah. I can."

It took me a second to understand what he was referring to. I shook my head when I knew he was worried about what Jennie had said when the serpent familiar was attached to her. “You of all people can love the most because you understand what it’s like to live life without it.”

Damn. That sounded like a Granny thing to say.

It was true though. Love, just like anything else, could be taken for granted. Those who had all of it and then some didn’t understand living with scarcity and emptiness. They would only learn if it got taken away, which I would never wish on anybody. Randy, though, he understood what it was like to live without it, which meant he truly understood the power of it. Just like me.

Jax roared. Randy’s eyes widened, and he scrambled to his feet, taking me with him. Screams rose up from the crowd. Jax dropped from the sky and landed at the very edge of the wharf before barreling forward. The crowd moved to the outskirts as Randy and I moved to the center. Gabe, Liam, Travis, and the superiors were already there. “You take something more from me?” he screeched.

His face pulled back into an angry snarl and for a moment, it wasn’t Jax’s outward appearance anymore. The true demon showed through into the stuff nightmares were made of. Gaping holes where the eyes should be. Sinewy, rotten muscle stretched over a skull with jagged-like teeth. Before I knew it, it was back to Jax, and I was caught thinking whether I’d just imagined it or not.

“It’s not him. It’s not him,” Travis said, chanting the words to himself.

“You did this to me!”

It’s not him. It’s not him.

Randy growled and moved forward. He threw his green magic at the earth, trying to make Jax trip, but it didn't work. Anger surged to the surface after each failure until he was breathing out his nose like a raging bull. The demon stopped in front of him, its face pulled back into a sneer. He reached out and poked Randy, and Randy fell to the ground in agony, his hand covering the spot where they touched.

Water and fire came at Jax all at once, each of them canceling the other out. Travis still spoke to himself. Chaos ensued around us. When Jax walked by people, they either fainted or pure hatred consumed their eyes. He didn't turn them into hateful beings, he used their hatred for him against them, consuming them with it.

He walked up to me, his head cocked to the side. "I still haven't figured out what makes you so special."

This woke Travis up. His hands glowed red and a fierce wind whipped up out of nowhere. Witches screamed as some got knocked off their feet. Jax leaned into it, his face still a smirk. His hatred blinded me. It poked at my exterior until it was all I could see.

Behind him, the world went fuzzy. Hair tracked across my face and I planted my feet so I could stay upright, but the hate he had for everything was like a blow to the gut. My spirit magic curdled inside me, hiding away like a tortured puppy. It didn't want to come out with all that negativity.

"Feel the love, Norah Girl. The love."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 3:42 am

I heard her beside me, as if she was speaking into my ear. When I looked that way, I saw her again just as plain as day as if her body was truly here. “You never,” she stressed. “Never combat hate with more hate. You always fight it with love. Reach deep down. Feel it inside you.” Her words made hope spark again. It was a small ignition, a little flame that started in my heart and grew outward like tentacles trying to take over my body, but the demon kept pushing back. “Fight it! Use it!” Granny said. Her Creole accent took over, reminding me of the life she’d given me. I would’ve been lost without her. Parents who died way too young and a grandmother who took in a snotty kid who hated her ancestry. But Granny. She’d made it all worth it.

As if she could hear my thoughts, Granny said, “You were my greatest achievement, Norah Girl. Not one ounce of magic or voodoo could’ve made up for you. Not one ounce.”

Tears sprang to my eyes and tumbled over. The wind froze them on my cheeks at the reminder of what I meant to other people. I let that hope, that love, fill me. His darkness was reaching in, but the bright white stained purple was fighting against it.

He pushed, and I pushed.

“Feel it!” Granny urged.

My hand reached out. It linked with Travis’s, and I let my love for him flow into him. I let every last thought I’d ever had about him seep from my hand into his until he glowed too.

Would it sound corny to yell out, ‘Think good thoughts’? Well, fuck it.

Repeating Granny, I said, “Love fights hate! Let it fill you!”

His shadows receded, and I could see more of the witches who were still there. Still intent. The hatred I’d seen in their eyes earlier pulled back, and little by little, I saw the shift in them. I saw how just the tiniest bit of light could shine through and make a world of difference.

Gabe grabbed my other hand. He glowed blue. His blue and my purple made the prettiest violet that beamed through the air. The light sparked love inside others as they watched. Randy crawled toward us, his face still a mask of pain. Liam helped drag him until they were at my feet. Randy reached out a hand to touch my leg. His mouth dropped, and his eyes rounded into two large spheres, his dark brown eyes almost gold as he stared up at me.

Liam stood, backing up into Gabe and I until he put his arms around both of us. A surge of love shot through us all. Sweet, sweet, Liam. He had enough love for all of us.

Jax roared. Travis still held his forward momentum with the wind, but little by little he was being pushed back further.

In my head, I started to say the spell that would rid a demon. The one Red had found for us in the Reid’s secret spell book room. I looked out, gazing at the onlookers. Sure enough, Ren was right there. He glowed, too. Seeing love and compassion come from a guy like that made my own bubble up to the surface. He held Dean Reid’s hand, and Mr. Reid, and the youngest Reid was there too. Next to them was Murphy & Anna. Anna’s hair wild about her face, but I already knew the two of them held love for one another. That much was evident when Murphy came to us when Anna was sick. And even next to them, there were a few of the sorority girls I’d met my

first week here when we battled Dupre. Travis's friend that I'd gotten so jealous of, but none of that mattered.

We were all together. All fighting for one thing.

"You're doing it, Norah Girl."

Granny's voice fell over me like a security blanket. It was as if her own arms came around me, pushing me even that much over the love train that I could almost burst with it.

Jax cried out. I looked over to lock eyes with him. His fire was already dying inside.

My lips moved. My coven started to join me until Jax rescinded into himself.

Hate can't live where there is love. And that was all a demon was, the personification of hate, and we only gave it strength when we paid attention to the hate inside us. Not anymore.

He shriveled, his face morphing and shrinking until his whole body was just a ball of black that spun like mad until it was just a speck. And then it was nothing.

Travis pulled back on his wind and collectively, we all fell forward with a sigh of relief.

The demon was gone. It was dead.

Travis slipped to his knees and the rest of us joined Randy and him there, forming a circle where it was just the five of us. "You guys were right," Travis said, holding back tears. "The demon had consumed him. If it hadn't, at least Jax's body would've been left."

I swallowed, and we all inched closer until Randy hissed in a breath.

Liam pulled back. “Norah, can you help him?”

Randy immediately raised his hand. “No. We’ve already used enough magic.”

Around us, cheers went up. I pulled back out of our circle and looked around. Witches kissed other witches. They hugged, they smiled. In general, the love and glory were still all around. “I don’t think it was just us,” I said.

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Travis hugged his sister, and she stepped back, waving at all of us in the process.

We watched as she bound down the steps and out to the street to get her taxi. She was the last of our house guests to leave.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 3:42 am

The superiors had left right away, doing whatever it was they did after a coven took out a demon. Oh, that was right. We were the first coven to do that. Thank goodness they'd been smart enough to reinstate us as the Order in Salem. They'd really have a mess on their hands if they didn't.

Randy had a bandage over his chest where he'd always have a black mark from where pure evil had touched him. The doctors were stymied by what was plaguing him, but we weren't. I ended up using magic on him anyway, at his protest, but that wasn't all I did. I made sure he knew every day since then how much I loved him. That was the only way I knew how to get that black mark to fade. Maybe one day it would just be a memory.

Murphy and Anna had gone back to their lives in Boston. Same with the Reid's. Liam and Dean had exchanged numbers, but to my knowledge they hadn't called one another yet. Ren, too, had left to go do whatever he was going to do with his life. I had a hard time believing a guy I saw that much light pour from would go back to having his magical whore house, but stranger things had happened.

Randy, Travis, and Gabe sat on the couch and Liam and I piled on top of them, making sure not to jostle Randy too much. It had been like that since the big showdown. If people thought we were strange before, they were going to think it even more now. We couldn't keep our hands off one another. It wasn't always sexual, but I still liked that a hell of a lot. I had an inkling that's why Jennie left so soon. She couldn't take it here anymore, but hell, what were we supposed to do? She had invited us to Adams, though, and that was a good start in the right direction when it came to Travis's relationship with his family.

I sighed. I was able to touch them all with at least one part of my body. My arm was thrown over Gabe while I sat on Travis's lap. My feet touched Randy and Liam's hand was on my back. I couldn't think of a better way to live my life than to be with all of them for all the days to come. My heart lifted, clogging my throat. I'd been a real sap lately, which was something new for me.

Granny poofed into my vision. She smiled down at me. I wasn't sure what had happened, but it seemed as if she could come to me whenever she wanted now. She didn't need me to go to sleep to do it. "You've made something really special for yourself, Norah," she said.

I smiled at her. "Because of you."

Travis stiffened. "Are you talking to her again?"

I nodded, chuckling. None of them really thought it was a good thing Granny could just pop in whenever she wanted now. They looked around even when I was just staring off into space sometimes, and they especially didn't like the idea of her popping in if we were having sex. They made me promise to tell her those times were off-limits, to which she replied exactly as I would have expected. "Do you think I want to watch you guys play hide the pickle? Tell them to get a grip. They're not all that."

Granny winked at me, then disappeared again, leaving her warmth in the aftermath.

This was my life now. My big, beautiful life, and I couldn't be happier.

"Now about that hot tub at the ocean house," I said, raising my eyebrows at Liam.

He smirked. "Oh, I didn't tell you. They put it in yesterday."

I sat straight up. "Are you kidding?" I stood, a smile overtaking my face. "Last one to

the hot tub is a rotten egg!”

We all stood, clamoring toward the apartment door. Travis grabbed the Jeep keys off the kitchen counter and we were off to have this lovely adventure I called a perfect life.