



Haunting Salem

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Description: My name is Simone Hadley, and I've been touched by the Devil.

Since the moment I decided to research and prove/disprove the events that have taken place in Turnbull Canyon, my life hasn't been the same. Not only did I receive a grant from Cal State Long Beach, but I was also recruited by The Adventure Channel who are notorious for their shows dealing in the occult and paranormal. For the next two years, I'll be going to different locations trying to uncover the truths and the mysteries of each site. First up: Salem. Yep, you read that right. We'll be investigating sites that purportedly haunted along with some of the most famous sites, like Gallows Hill and Proctor's Ledge. Spooky, amirite?

And, if the stories about the town are true and the witches have cursed the land... Well, at least I have my guides with me—Gaspar, Kael, and Ember. Did I mention they're all dead? But, they're not the only ones with me. Jack, Nolan, and Owen have joined my team and if I thought my guides kept me on my toes, the addition of these three guys will rock my world as well.

Question is; by the time the first season is over, will any of us survive?

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Prologue

Two years after the Turnbull Canyon incident...

We're waiting for you... Come find us, Simone.

The words echoed through my mind as I sat in the small screening room, the pilot for The Simone Hadley Files docudrama played out across the jumbo screen, but it might as well be blurred mush for all I cared. I couldn't concentrate to save my life, and my stomach churned with anxiety.

It's only nerves, I tried to tell myself.

I didn't expect the far left turn my life took two years ago when I decided to investigate the paranormal activity in Turnbull Canyon. I sure as heck didn't think I'd win a film award from Cal State Long Beach either. Nor a grant to continue my studies of the afterlife and if hauntings were, in fact, real.

Yet, here we were.

Two years ago, I went into the hills of Whittier to uncover whether the stories about Turnbull Canyon were true. For as far back as I could remember, I hated that place. I can't give you a rational explanation of why the place churned my stomach. Or why I hated riding the road with friends. Why I hated being near the switchback curves. My mother, on the other hand, loved the area. She'd take a trip up there just because. When I pressed for why, she'd never say. Only, she liked being there. Her infatuation with the place had been one of the bones of contention I had with her and the canyon.

The second was the truth. She hid it from me all of my life until I went in on my own to investigate. I hate to say it, but sometimes, the truth is best left undiscovered.

I learned that the hard way too.

FYI: I don't remember much about the night I spent up in the hills. Piecing together the footage I captured with Paul and Felix had been a bit of an out-of-body experience. I could hear my voice and see myself, but it was as if I wasn't physically there. Though I spoke in my normal cheerful voice while narrating, thanks to Nolan, my ADR—Audio Dialogue Replacement—guy, however, the vacant look in my eyes still haunted me.

I'd received several comments about it too. Some people were freaked out while others were sure I'd taken drugs. Peyote to be exact. The rest, well, they happened to think I was the shit. According to the glowing comments I received, I made the Blair Witch Project and The Conjuring look like B-movies played on Elvira Mistress of the Dark—not that I had anything against Elvira, I only wished I'd look as good if not better in my sixties. I wasn't bragging either. I believed in karma. What I put out into the world, came back to me. So, I tried to be the best person I could. I appreciated the compliments, and I allowed myself a moment to swoon when I received them.

Anyway, I digress.

The other thing I had to fix before I could present my findings, was the fact Kael, Ember, and Gaspar weren't visible. When I replayed the message left by Paul and Felix, it finally made sense. The screeching echo at the end, not so much. But, Paul and Felix saw Kael, Ember, and Gaspar because my guides wanted them to. However, they were also dead. Yes, you read that right. Kael, Ember, and Gaspar are dead. As such, they wouldn't have shown up in photos or audio or on film.

Must have freaked Felix and Paul out when they didn't see the guys in any of the

photos or videos.

It also made for an interesting playback, because I, Simone Hadley, talked to myself. I laughed about it now. Dead-eyed me walking around in the hills above Whittier, California carrying on a conversation with three men who weren't there—but were... I'm surprised my professor didn't have me committed.

I snorted.

About the only thing keeping me out of a padded room was the footage of the ritual, and the fact, my professor was just like me. But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

To be fair, most of the recording was grainy, almost too dark and shitty to tell what was going on. Nevertheless, it wasn't until Nolan cleaned up the audio, after promising he wouldn't ask any questions, and my professor, we'll call him Mr. GQ for now, watched it several times, did I realize I'd picked up the one thing others had tried several times to prove—chanting from the spirits of the Gabrielino-Tongva Tribe. I couldn't believe what I heard. It hadn't been heard for over a hundred years and, at that, the phonograph cylinders used to capture their chants and songs were scratched, making their songs impossible to hear.

What separated my discovery from others? The chanting in my video was that of a death song. Something no one had ever heard before.

Pretty cool, right?

From the moment the video played in class, to the moment I sat in that seat in the small room watching myself discover the ghostly ghouls lurking in the Cecil Hotel, my life had become a whirlwind of activity. Sometimes, I had to pinch myself to make sure it was all real.

Of course, there were caveats when this whole thing started. I'd been okay with it, I mean, everyone always needed proof, right? The biggest clause was, The Adventure Channel picked the site we were going to investigate, so I couldn't "tamper" with the place nor could I study up on the site before I arrived. I kind of liked the fact they sent me in blind. It made my discoveries and the emotional tension more authentic, something most of the other paranormal shows lacked.

So much shit went down in the hall of that hotel. For example, "The Night Stalker," Richard Ramirez stayed there along with Elizabeth Short, also known as the "Black Dahlia." In more recent history a student by the name of Elisa Lam went missing inside the hotel. A few days later, her naked body was found in the water tank on the roof of the building. And, the only reason they found her then, was due to the water running brown and a foul scent coming from the taps.

There were also suicides and murders in the establishment dating back to 1931, a scant four years after the hotel opened. The youngest victim; a minutes old baby thrown from a hotel room's window because his mother had a mental breakdown.

But, that's beside the point. With Kael by my side as my guide along with the very alive, Nolan, Jack, Lucy, and Owen—a second-year student of Mr. GQ, we investigated the hotel. The shit we captured... I didn't sleep for days afterward. The place left a creepy hairs-standing-on-end sheen coating my skin.

The same could be said for Jack as well.

Jack is like me in a way, he can see dead people and hear them, but he can't speak to them. I, on the other hand, can do both. Sometimes, I can also relive a person's death. It's not something I enjoy, but it helps convey the story of their life. Nevertheless, I feared by the time we were done with our exploration of the hotel, Jack would quit. He experienced much more than I think he bargained for, all of us did.

While in the hotel, I connected with Elisa and Grace—the mother who threw her son to his death then committed suicide herself, Richard Ramirez, and a few others. Again, I'm not bragging or trying to name drop, that's not my style. Each one of the spirits who joined us left a lasting impact—trust me. The image of The Nightstalker's pentagram on the palm of his hand as he laughed after saying "hail Satan," was seared into my brain—and I believed we conveyed that through the editing process. We were also respectful of the dead. Because for those who replayed their fateful days there, that hotel was their graveyard. The rooms and halls and stairways were their tombs.

Nolan elbowed me, drawing me from my thoughts. “Well, what do you think?”

If the soft murmurs behind us were any indication, I suspected the production team was eating it up. "Should be interesting." I shrugged. As a pragmatic person, I never tried to look at the glass half full or half empty. I saw things as they'd either happen, or they wouldn't. I had several different podcasts, and online shows willing to work with me—us if this whole Adventure Channel thing fell through.

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I'd be happy with whatever job I received.

"I think we're a shoo-in," Lucy muttered to my left. "Did you hear the gasp when the photo of the floating woman appeared on screen?"

Apparently, I'd missed it. I'd been so concerned about how the meeting would go; I was missing the whole thing. "Eating it up?" I cocked my head to the side.

"More than," Lucy gushed. "You rocked the assignment."

Lucy was one of my biggest cheerleaders and supporters. She practiced Wicca and had a degree in the Occult, like me. She reminded me of the crazy chick in *The Craft*. The one who said to the bus driver, "We are the weirdos, mister." She was also crazy loyal, which unnerved me a bit.

Gaspar had also taken an affinity to her and not in a good way. Death kept a little black book with all our names in it. When our time was up, he came to collect. He had come to collect me twice in my life but spared me both times. Why? Because that starry-eyed bastard said my destiny needed to be fulfilled first. Lucy, on the other hand, bewildered him. She wasn't in his book. I didn't know what that meant, I don't think he did either, so it put him on high alert.

"Well, we'll have to wait and see what they say," I reminded them. I wouldn't get my hopes up.

We're waiting for you, Simone... Come find us. The message rang out in my mind once more as the lights came up and the projector shut off. The group of men behind

us along with Jack shook hands with one another. Not only was Jack an investigator with me, but he was also our team leader/director.

“Lunch would be great,” Jack said. “We all have the afternoon available.”

"Perfect," Henry our producer for the Cecil Hotel replied. "I'll have a meal called in for us. There's much to discuss before the Halloween episode can begin pre-production." I blanched as he patted Jack on the shoulder. "I can't wait for our loyal viewers to get a chance to see Simone and your team in action. What I saw today... I can't explain or disprove."

I beamed. I couldn't help it. I shouldn't have been listening in on their conversation, but Henry was talking about me—us, so it was only right I got to know the truth about it. Nolan elbowed me again while Lucy preened, and Owen blinked a few times. Yep, none of them understood the magnitude of the situation. But, they would—eventually.

On the other hand, I did, and I thought I was going to throw up.

Halloween was our first “official,” episode.

An hour later, we were in the producer's office signing the contract for the show. Lunch tasted like cardboard, to be honest, though it could have been amazing for all I knew. Unfortunately, my stomach churned, and my palms were too sweaty to enjoy anything. I didn't want to sound ungrateful for everything the studio was giving us, but I would have rather signed the contract and gotten out of there. So, when the table was cleared of our mess, the big boss had our contracts placed in front of us.

The terms were pretty simple, to say the least. For the next ten months, we would have to film twelve episodes at twelve different sites. Five were already picked out for us by Adventure Channel and the remaining six would be our choice, depending

on how well the first six went. As of the moment we signed the contracts, the Cecil Hotel would be our first episode to be aired the week of Halloween, before our first "official," live stream/show.

I had to pinch myself several times to make sure I was awake and not dreaming.

As I continued scanning the contract, I noticed the pay wasn't much to start, but there was also a clause for merchandise, and a pay raise depending on how well the show did. Plus a bunch of bonuses along the way. With this contract, we'd be sitting pretty soon.

We also had another clause that said, for Halloween, we'd work with another crew on the live show. I didn't know how I felt about doing something live or with others outside of my circle. So many things could go wrong, including someone getting hurt. Then there was the fact my guides would make an appearance for sure, and then what? Would whoever was with us pull another Paul and Felix? I scrubbed my head going over the smaller details within the live broadcast sub-section of the contract.

"Other shows have done it," Henry said. "We'll do the first-hour commercial-free, and then the remaining three hours will have embedded marketing. A final hour—the witching hour—will be done on a live stream. We have the demographics for the late-night crew, so we'll have no problem with the crossover. Plus, the team joining you has experience and they've done several Halloween specials over the years."

Still didn't settle right with me. However, if I wanted this shot at showing the world what goes bump in the night, I had to sign the contract. Well, I mean, I didn't, I could probably do this show on my own. Conversely, if I signed this contract, I'd have the backing of a studio, with a budget. I didn't have to worry about running out of money half-way through an episode.

"I'm assuming the Halloween episode is within the first six sites we'll be visiting?"

Jack asked, as though reading my mind.

“Yes,” Henry replied. “If you flip to the third page of your itinerary, you’ll see which sites have been chosen for you.”

I did as he said and tilted my head. Salem(several locations), Fort McAllister along with the Marshall House Hotel, Eastern State Penitentiary, Myrtle Plantation, and The Stanley Hotel, made famous by Stephen King. Several of the properties could have been the Halloween special. So, I looked back up at Henry. “Which one?”

“Salem. Tons of people love Salem, Mass. They also are enthralled by the Salem Witch Trials. I believe the Witch Museum will give you a chance to walk in the pioneers’ shoes along with visiting little locations along the way to hear the history of Salem. From there, you can pick the remaining places you’d like to investigate while in Salem.” Henry beamed.

The idea had merit, but it also seemed showy. “It’s a little on the nose, don’t you think?”

He chuckled. "Maybe." He held his finger up. "But, we've compiled the numbers along with surveys, and people are enchanted with Salem. They're curious. A bit morbid. The tourism for the town is out of this world and we want the truth, to be frank with you, Miss Hadley. We think you can get that for us."

Wonderful.“Peachy.” I glanced at my team. “So what you’re saying is that it’s more than twelve sites, more like sixteen.”

Henry nodded. "Yes, technically. Also if Cecil Hotel episode does well, you'll be paid an extra twenty-thousand for your Halloween episode."

“That’s in the contract,” Owen said, flipping through the pages.

“No,” Henry answered. “It’s here in this special document addressing one-time payments and extra benefits.”

The packets were passed around and I read through it. It was pretty much what Henry said. We had incentives to make sure the show was successful, but they were also a double-edged sword. It would be easy to fake our way through these, than do the work, as long as we made a connection with viewers and scared the shit out of them.

"Well, you heard the man. Twenty grand if we bring in the ratings." I made a deal with the devil two years ago, and I re-upped it sitting there. "Let's get to it."

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Two months later, we were on the road, quite literally. Adventure Channel wanted us to document the drive to our first "official," location. We all agreed, because, why not. They were also paying us to do this part of the trip, so I thought it was a fair trade-off. Nolan had booked us a hotel in Salem, once we arrived, so we wouldn't have to sleep inside the RV with all of the equipment, which, let me tell you, was a pain in the ass while on this little road trip.

Since we signed the contract, I'd been researching different locations where I wanted to go after our obligatory episodes were up. Every day, while we were on the road, I added another place. Today, I was checking out Mount Washington Hotel, in New Hampshire. The place seemed spooky enough. The hotel was built in 1902 by Joseph Stickney. However, a year later Joseph died, and the rumor is, his wife, Carolyn, supposedly roamed the halls searching for her dead husband. Some of the activity included seeing Carolyn descending the staircase or leaning over the balcony to spy a glance at those who entered her hotel. Carolyn's spirit had also shown up in photographs visitors had taken, along with lights flickering—common ghost activity—and guests reported, the most haunted of the rooms was 314, Carolyn's room.

I put the location in the maybe category then moved on.

“You’re always working, aren’t you,” Owen murmured, drawing my gaze from my laptop screen.

“Well, I know the first half of the trip will kick ass, so I want us prepared for the

second half.” I shrugged, closing my computer.

“I’m glad you have a positive outlook.” He sat beside me. His brown hair brushed his forehead in a boyish way. It was hard to believe he was twenty-three sometimes, especially he flipped his hair out of his brown eyes, giving him an innocent quality. Yet, when he opened his mouth and spoke, he was, in my book, wiser than his years.

“You didn’t? You were with me at the Cecil Hotel.” I canted my head. “Are you still not a believer?”

He chuckled softly and rolled his shoulders. "You're right, I was with you. I guess I'm still looking at it from a psychological perspective."

I nodded. “I get that. Are you trying to reconcile what you saw, with what your belief system?”

"Yeah." He scooted in closer to me. Our knees touched and a spark of energy worked through me. If he felt it, he didn't make any outward indications. "I saw Kael. I saw Elise. I saw all of it. But my brain is still pumping out the same question over and over again. Did I see them or was it due to 'wanting,' to see them so bad, I conjured up imagined images of them to satisfy my yearning?"

He had a point. The intent expression on his face matched the determination in his eyes. I noticed in the last couple of months since I met Owen, he had an intensity about him. He went full-on or not at all. I liked that about him, but at the same time, he also wore me out. "Kael only allows those he deems friendly enough to see him." I kept my tone low. So far, only Nolan, Jack, and now Owen had seen Kael. Lucy either ignored him or Kael had a reason for keeping her in the dark. I went for the latter explanation and wondered if it'd been something Gaspar told Kael. "As for the other, we all did. We even captured it on film."

“I know.” He ran his tongue over his bottom lip. “It’s like an overlay, yeah? Our world and theirs. Ours is the bottom layer, while theirs is the top layer. Sometimes they bleed together. I understand the ‘science,’ of it, but again, am I forcing it to happen?”

I chuckled. "No. You can't force a spirit to show up. You can, however, piss one-off or several if you're an asshole." I'd seen it done countless times and hated every show that demanded a ghost pay attention to them. There were only a few paranormal docudramas I'd watch, because of the shit some crews pulled while on location. So far, Amy and Steve from *Dead Files* and Amy and Adam from *Kindred Spirits* were my favorites. They showed the right amount of compassion and control a site needed when it came to investigating and helping families out.

“So, it’s all real.” He let out a shuddered exhale.

I didn’t answer.

“Do you think the sites we’re going to—Salem in particular—will be as haunted as the Cecil Hotel?” He stared at me half-terrified and half-excited. He practically vibrated beside me. I chalked it up to adrenaline and surprise, maybe a bit of euphoria at realizing we were never truly alone. I enjoyed that feeling—the kid like wonder. It made everything fresh and new and, I wanted to show him everything, as if it were the first time, since his eyes were fully open—in the figurative sense, of course.

“Well, if the minimal research we were given before we left was any indication of what we’re walking into, I think we’re in for a badass trip.” I grinned, watching him light up with amazement.

"Cool." He shoulder checked me playfully then snickered. "You're good at this. I can see why they wanted you so badly."

Heat filled my cheeks and warmth bloomed in my belly. I stared at Owen for a moment longer, studying the way his eyes crinkled when he smiled and his lips curved at an angle, always giving him a sly appearance. "I think that's one of the nicest compliments anyone has ever given me."

We exited the freeway and the nerves I'd tried to hold at bay swamped me. We were close. Super close. "We're almost there."

Owen lifted his chin in my direction. "You okay? You look kind of pale."

"Happens all the time." It wasn't a lie. I couldn't explain the sensation other than a mix of dread and emotional turmoil. None of it was ever mine, but a mix from all the turmoil surrounding the area. Some people didn't know they put off emotional energy. When a sensitive, like myself, entered a dense area of that energy, we tended to be consumed by it. It became ours and we then projected what they were feeling.

When people say, sometimes, not all the time, they're not feeling like themselves, they literally aren't themselves. They're picking up whatever residual emotion might be around them. It's also why poltergeist activity can now be traced back to a person in a home or office or any space and it doesn't have to be the current occupier. A PK manifestation was their feelings come to life. It usually happened when a person was angry or stressed to the max.

"What do you do to fix it?" Owen hedged.

"Usually, I block it out. However, this is Salem. There's too much hate and anger and blood and death seeped into these roads and on those grounds." I peered out the window and frowned. Halloween was a jovial time now for Salem. Everyone decorated. Everyone attended the town festivities. Some people also mourned those who were lost to the trials and paid their respects to the dead. The awful blemish in history wouldn't go away though, no matter how many times people begged for

forgiveness.

“What do you see?”

"Nothing," I answered. "I've closed myself off to pretty much everything. I can't prepare properly if I am being bombarded." And, truth be told, I was already being inundated by the spirits twenty miles back. The thick tension surrounding them threatened to swallow me. That's why Kael was sitting to my right at the moment, though no one saw him, and he didn't say a word. He'd been keeping the dearly and not so dearly departed at bay.

“Makes sense.” Owen squeezed my hand. “For what it’s worth, if you need anything on this trip, don’t hesitate to ask, okay Simone?”

Kael glowered at Owen out of pure jealousy more than anything, and I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing at the incredulous look on Kael’s face. “I appreciate it. I think the more we work together, the stronger we’ll become as a team.”

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Kael rolled his eyes. He's flirting with you. His words floated through my mind.

Awe. Don't be jealous. No one can ever take the place of my Kaely-Waely. Laughter filled me.

Kael grunted and shook his head. You're impossible. It's why I love you so much.

Bet you didn't know a ghost could love, did you? Kael had been with me for years. At first, I never saw him. Then progressively he started to show himself. He wasn't the typical guide, I didn't think, anyway. Kael was all sinew, lean but strong. His black hair was slicked back, exposing the sides of his shaved head and the tattoos on his neck. He pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket while narrowing his brilliant blue eyes at me—a signature move whenever he showed up. He placed the tip of his smoke at his full, lush lips and cracked a crooked smile. He was devastatingly handsome. His strong jaw frame hollow cheeks and a straight aquiline nose. Kael wore Dickies and Doc Martins along with button-down shirts. The sleeves were always rolled up, exposing the brilliantly colored tattoos on his forearms. He reminded me of the lead singer from the band I liked, BVB, and I wondered if maybe he showed himself that way, because it was familiar.

“Why do I smell cigarette smoke,” Lucy mumbled staring back at where Owen and I sat.

I cut my gaze to Kael who let loose a silent chuckle before disappearing completely.

“Not sure. But, I don't smoke. Do you Owen?”

He held up his hands. “Nope. Never.”

"It's probably your imagination," Jack muttered then glanced at me from the rearview mirror.

"Maybe," she agreed. "So weird though. It only happens every so often. When we're all together."

I kept my head down.

"It's probably Phantosmia," Nolan said. "An olfactory hallucination."

Kael laughed even harder in my mind. He was such an asshole, but as much as he loved me, I loved him. He understood me. Protected me. He kept me on my toes more often than not and opened up more of the spiritual realm than I probably was supposed to see. Come to think of it, it's probably how I got on Gaspar's radar, besides the whole almost dying twice thing as a kid.

"I am not hallucinating." Lucy crossed her arms over her chest with a pout. "My dad smoked two packs a day before he died. I know cigarette smell when I smell it."

Okay, so maybe poking the bear wasn't such a good idea. "Might have been something on the side of the road. It's a bit cooler here than the west coast."

The lie rolled off of my tongue with practiced ease, still, I didn't think she'd buy it until Jack glanced at me again and said, "Could be why you scented it and we didn't."

"Maybe." Lucy still pouted. For being such a badass bitch, she could sulk with the best of them. "Anyway, we're almost there. We should have two cars waiting for us at the hotel. One for us to take to the location while you, Jack, and Nolan go to the library for research."

"Perfect," I replied. "Then we can meet back up for dinner and a movie in the room."

“Horror flick?” The eagerness in Owen’s tone reminded me of a little kid being able to stay up late for the first time.

“I vote for Annabelle,” Nolan said. “That shit’s crazy.”

“The Covenant,” Lucy added.

“A little on the nose, don’t you think?” I laughed.

She shrugged. “A smidgen but this is Salem.”

“You’re up Jack, what do you want to see?”

He cackled from the driver seat. “Hocus Pocus.”

Ohmigod. I didn't know if I should've laughed or cried or both. But, the movie selection was too perfect and groan-worthy at the same time. It was one of my favorite movies as a little girl. However, I had another ace up my sleeve. "Practical Magic."

The interior of the RV went quiet. The air, still. I thought my suggestion would get vetoed automatically then Nolan clapped. “Bingo. Perfect movie.” He shifted in his seat to face me, the smirk on his face devastatingly handsome. “As long as we can make margaritas.”

I cocked a brow. “Guess we’ll have to stop by the store to get the lime and the coconut.”

Lucy fist pumped and her mood instantly improved. "Besides, The Craft, Practical Magic is my favorite movie.”

“So why did you pick, The Covenant?” Owen asked.

Lucy gave a cheeky grin. “Hello, have you seen Sebastian Stan? He’s the hottest guy in the movie.”

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He was also the bad guy.

I was more of a Taylor Kitsch person.

Owen pulled a face. "Winter Soldier is in the movie?"

Lucy nodded. "Yep and he's yummy."

"Well, I guess we have our movie selection for the night." To be fair to everyone, I'd pick up all of the movies they'd selected and we'd have a marathon. Once we got the research out of the way, of course. Then we'd have a few days to interview a few people around town and set up our locations. Before our downtime was up, we'd have several rolls of B-footage, which was used to help tell the story of each site. The extra film would also help us get a lay of the land come Halloween night.

"Sounds like a plan," Jack said, pulling into the hotel parking lot. The place was modern and away from the main thoroughfare for Salem. They even had spots for RVs which made parking easier. "I'll go check us in. Be back in a second." He popped the breaks on our vehicle then turned it off before getting out.

Most of our equipment would stay in the RV tonight then tomorrow we'd offload at the Pioneer Village since that would be the base of our operations. While we were talking with the local historian, Lucy and Owen would start capturing some filler footage. Tomorrow we'd game plan the rest of our sites and start the arduous task of piecing out our production equipment for the live broadcast.

"Do we know who is meeting us for the live show yet?" I hoped it was one of the

other paranormal investigator showrunners. It'd be nice to have someone with us who knew what they were doing and not some twitchy starlet or douche actor.

“Not yet.” Lucy frowned. “We have a few days here still. I’m sure Henry will tell us as soon as he arrives.” Speaking of our producer. He too was flying out for the live show to be on the ground just in case we needed him.

“Good to know.” I grabbed what I’d needed, including my laptop, and shoved it into my bag. “We’ll meet you guys back here at five then we’ll figure out dinner from there.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Owen said, joining me. “Shouldn’t be too hard to get what we need and get out.”

Lucy nodded. “According to the email I received late yesterday, tours of the village will be shut down for the next several days while we’re in town. Plus, the Sheriff said he’d help keep the lookie-loos away, so we have some privacy.”

“Are you saying people know we’re coming?” I didn’t mind if we caused a gathering. What I did worry about was it affecting our ability to investigate. One overzealous fan could ruin everything.

“Again, not sure,” Lucy said. “If it comes down to it, we’ll close the set and make sure to have police and deputies patrolling the area to keep everyone away. I know we might have some interference from time to time, just because the locations aren’t secluded, but we should be fine.”

“I have returned.” Jack handed a set of keys to Lucy. “Our rooms will be ready when we get back.”

“Great,” I replied. “Let’s go.”

We arrived at the library right on time to meet with the local historian, Betty Good, a direct descendant of Sarah Good. After parking the SUV out front, we took a minute to appreciate the library. Built in 1855, it was originally the home of John Bertram, a prominent sea captain, and his family. Not even thirty years later, the house was donated to the town of Salem, and in 1889, the public library was opened.

Outside of the old Brownstone manor, a small group had gathered near a sitting area off to the right. The hushed whispers reached us as they quickly glanced in our direction then back to the group.

Nolan chuckled. "You have some admirers."

"I bet they're staring at you and Jack, not me." Both men were drool-worthy.

Jack had black hair with some greying at the temple. Like Kael, when Jack rolled up his shirt sleeves he had tattoos. Some depicted gory horror scenes while others commemorated his sobriety. Speaking of which, he was due to get another one soon. He had the body of Gaston—brawny in all the right places, tapered in others, and grey eyes. He also sported scruff to give him an edgy, silver fox appearance.

I teased him all the time about it.

Nolan on the other hand had sinful burnished bronze skin, light eyes he swore came from his mother's side of the family, and he was built like a god. The man should be illegal because I tripped over my tongue several times before I got to know him. Between them, I was a bit lacking. I know, I know. I shouldn't put myself down, but these men... They were out of my league, hence why I still couldn't figure out what Nolan saw in me. Or Jack for that matter.

I'll preface this whole thing by saying, we weren't exclusive by any means, but Jack, Nolan, and I did have some wild times together. More often than not though, because

Jack was still a professor, (did you figure out he's Mr. GQ?), it had been Nolan and me. I know what you're going to ask, but what about Kael and Gaspar and Ember...

Well, they're dead.

But the canyon, Simone...

I know.

Even though bits and pieces of my memories from that night in the canyon returned, I still couldn't be sure anything I remembered did indeed happen, beyond what I videoed. My relationship with Kael, nevertheless, was everlasting, and Jack knew that, so did Nolan. They'd met Kael and gotten to know him in his corporeal form almost from the get-go. Their acceptance of him took the weirdness out of our relationship and allowed me to enjoy all three of them.

"They're all women," I muttered, pulling my jacket tighter around me to stave off the late fall chill. "They're not looking at me. They're looking at you."

Jack chuckled. "They could be adoring fans."

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"I could only wish." If they were, I hoped we did their town justice and those still seeking justice for the travesties befallen them. I wanted this to not only be a hit series but a showcase of different towns. Sappy sure, but if we could give back a little to each community, we'd be putting a hell of a lot more 'good,' out into the world.

When we stepped inside the building my senses went on high alert. My skin prickled and the hairs on my arms and neck stood on end. Someone was watching us.

The place was alive with activity.

As I glanced around the spacious interior, I gauged whether or not anyone else felt the spike of energy. Beside me, Jack tensed. I squeezed his hand in reassurance before stepping farther into the space. Whoever was there held no malice, they were simply curious. Jack glanced at me and gave me a small smile.

Part of the reason Jack celebrated his sobriety every six months was due to me. I'm not saying that in a cocky way either. When I met Professor Jack Quinn—aka Mr. GQ—he was a functioning alcoholic. He came to class more often than not bleary-eyed and staggering. The last straw was finding the bottle of whiskey in his desk drawer.

So, I questioned him.

I was naive back then. I thought talking about feelings and therapy could help everyone if they put in the effort. For some people, therapy didn't work. Instead of them talking and finding the tools to help them heal, it only made the wounds bigger. They needed to find their way of coping. Jack used alcohol. One day he came to class

a little bit tipsy from the night before, and after I gathered everyone's names, effectively canceling the class, he spilled his guts to me.

Jack saw ghosts. He was a medium like me, only he couldn't communicate with them. He felt their pain. Saw flashes of the dead person's life. For years he thought he was schizophrenic and took medication to boot. He also thought he was having visual hallucinations. When the medication did nothing, eventually making him sicker than he already thought he was, he turned to alcohol to tamp down on what he witnessed. But, in the few years before we'd met, it became unbearable for him. That day, when he stumbled into class, he'd planned on killing himself just to find a little morsel of peace.

Sitting there, listening to him, I did what I had to do. I asked Kael to step forward. I introduced Jack to my guide and then I began helping Jack rebuild his life. The last four years hadn't been easy by any means for him, but Jack was learning. He was setting rules for the spirits who visited him. He had blocks he could reenforce at night to keep them out so he could sleep. And, more often than not, he'd learned to ignore the spirits who hung around him.

"So, this is interesting," I murmured.

"They're everywhere," Jack muttered.

He was correct. Spirits were in the stacks, at tables, staring out windows. Most of it was residual energy. Usually, when an entity saw me, they approached. The majority seemed oblivious to us being there, some were curious though. "I don't think this is the place to dally."

"I believe you're right," Jack answered. "Should we find Ms. Good?"

"Let's." I started for the front counter but came up short when a little girl darted in

front of me. Her period dress fluttered in the breeze while her giggle echoed in my mind. She carried a small brown teddy bear and a ball. Her hair had been pulled back into two ringlet ponytails and her fingers were adorably chubby.

"You see her too then," the librarian said when the little girl disappear into the children's section.

"Yeah. Who is she?"

"We don't know for sure. None of our records show a girl of her age dying at this location. But, then again, this is Salem." The librarian held out her hand. "Welcome. You must be here to see Betty."

"Yes, we are." I shook hands with the woman and grinned. "I'm Simone Hadley and this is Jack Quinn and Nolan Day."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," she said. "I'm Wanda Putnam. We are so excited to have you visit our town." She leaned in close. "I watched your video on Youtube. It was thrilling and scary. I loved it. My husband thought I was insane leaving the bathroom light on for a week afterward."

I gaped. "Wow, thank you."

"You're welcome." She motioned for us to follow. "Betty is in the research section of the library. She'll have everything you need."

"Mrs. Putnam, I have to ask," Jack started.

"Is my husband a direct descendant?" She chortled. "Yes, he is. You'll find several of the original families still have offspring here." She glanced over her shoulder at me. "Between us, I believe it is our ancestors who created the activity around town. None

of them, God rest their souls, are happy."

No, I'd suspected not. The Salem Witch Trial brought out the worst in people. The term mass hysteria was fitting for the time. People used religious extremism coupled with false allegations to prosecute innocent people for crimes they never committed. Had level heads prevailed, along with the use of practical law, no one would have died. The only ones who'd have faced any type of consequence were those who made false accusations.

"I don't guess they would be," Jack agreed.

"Some of the families after the trials moved away. Mostly it was those who caused the fracas. Good riddance I say, but they never apologized. They never made amends to the families they destroyed. Those deeds, slinking away at night like scalded dogs, were worse than their accusations. They offered not one ounce of remorse for the suffering they caused, especially when they knew they were lying."

The OG mean girls, I mused.

I tucked away the bit of information she imparted on us. "Anger is a powerful emotion, Mrs. Putnam. "It can cause all kinds of issues in the long run." As we turned the corner, I spotted the white-haired, older lady sitting at a table. She had several small boxes of microfiche along with ledgers and folders spread out around her. This lady came prepared.

"This is where I leave you. Ms. Good, these are our guests, Simone, Jack, and Nolan. If you require my assistance, please let me know." Mrs. Putnam squeezed my shoulder as she turned to leave while Ms. Good offered up the chairs across from her.

"Please sit. It's so good of you to come to Salem," Ms. Good said. "Maybe now, someone will get our history right."

I cut my gaze to Jack then Nolan. Something told me, we were in for a crazy adventure. “All right, Ms. Good, please tell us about the history of Salem.”

The trip to the library brought about tons of research material and we weren't even done. Jack left Nolan and me to bring all the materials to our room—thank you luggage cart—then took off to join Owen and Lucy to meet up with a LEO familiar with the goings-on in town—Sheriff Adock. While they were gone, Nolan and I began sifting through the materials given to us by the library.

I liked Betty. She was quiet. Attentive. She had this confidence about her when she explained what happened in Salem during the trials. One of the locations we would be visiting while in Salem was built in 1668 by a sea captain, John Turner, for his family. Over the years the House of Seven Gables increased in size as the family became richer. However, the Turner family lost the house when John Turner III lost everything. Eventually, Samuel Ingersoll purchased the house and his daughter Susanna inherited the mansion at his death.

This is when it gets dishy.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was the great-grandson of John Hawthorne the judge for the Witch Trials. Nathaniel spent more time in the mansion than not writing his novels and generally enjoying the place. The mansion inspired the novel *The House of Seven Gables*. However, there's also a tragic past to the house, and I couldn't wait to get inside.

According to the research Betty gave us, John Turner's son, fell from a cherry tree after being pushed from it by the specter of Ann Pudeator, a widow who was accused of witchcraft by John Proctor's maid Mary Warner. Also, the sister of John Turner,

Elizabeth was the first wife of Eleazer Gedney, brother of Bartholomew Gedney, another of the judges for the witchcraft trials. This also led me to this nugget of a statement from Sarah Good; I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take my life, God will give you blood to drink. The curse was hurled at Reverend Nicholas Noyes before her execution, but I had a feeling, it was more of a general statement/curse to anyone involved in their murders. Because, let's be realistic here, three men along with several bitter, jealous women murdered their neighbors due to lies. This little foundling country of ours had conspiracy theories before conspiracy theories were a thing.

But, again, I digress.

It appeared, to me anyway, anyone who bought the house and lived in it, who had an ancestor who was part of the trials had something befall them causing them ruin. Though Susanna loved the house her adopted son, Horace, lost the home as well. From the land deeds and trusts, the house went into ill-repair until the Upton family bought the mansion and turned it into a museum. Ida Upton even made and sold the first notable souvenir—a hand-painted "witch cup."

The dark secrets didn't stop there either. If I had to guess why the Gable house was haunted, I'd say it was due to the death and anger surrounding it. I'd be pissed. Come to think of it, I was pissed. I pushed the articles and books away from me and stood. I needed to clear my head. I knew when this project started, I would have a hard time with it. But, learning the history in high school and being in Salem, I don't know, it was like the trials happened yesterday.

I tried to rationalize what I was feeling along with not dismissing the spirits or the fact it could all be manufactured rage. The Salem trials were and still are a black spot on our history as a country. We have this horrible way of destroying ourselves from the inside out. We've done it time and time again, and I didn't believe we'd ever stop. In a way, it seemed like the whole country was cursed.

"Hey." Nolan came up behind me, placing his hand on my hip. Warmth spread from his touch, and I sank into the sensation. "Need a break?"

I swallowed hard. "I think so."

"Want a distraction?"

Did I ever. I nodded, afraid of how weak my voice would be if I spoke again. Jack and Nolan had this uncanny ability to always know when I needed help. Like Kael, they sheltered me when the voices and visions and bullshit became too thick or too real. I appreciated them. More than I said most days.

Nolan skimmed his fingers along the hem of my shirt the silky tease drew my attention away from the tombs sitting on the table to the here and now. Electricity sparked along my skin, leaving a trail of goosebumps in its wake. My flesh tingled. My heart beat at an excited pace. Closing my eyes, I laid my head back against his chest, allowing him to banish all the waywardness filling me.

By the time he had me naked, I ached for him.

He loved it when I begged. I loved seeing the flare in his eyes when I finally pleaded with him to stop teasing me and fuck me. It was as if he became this whole other person. This beast of a man. His muscular frame covered my body and in the next second, I was protected and secure in his arms. Nolan kissed me with a reverence so mind-blowing, my brain imploded. His tongue tangled with mine mimicking the glide of his body. I panted and moaned like a bitch in heat.

His rough chuckle sensually slipped down my spine causing my lower region to tingle in pleasure. I arched to him, desperate for him to fill me, but he held off, drawing a desperate mewl from my lips. He kissed me again while fitting his middle finger against my clit. When he gave a tentative stroke of the hard nub, I gasped,

digging my fingernails into his biceps.

“You always get so worked up,” he whispered across my lips as he sank his finger into me. “I swear if we weren’t with you, you’d work yourself to death.” Nolan curled his finger as he withdrew then added a second.

“No more talk about work.” I strained against him, not wanting to acknowledge the truth about his assessment. “Make me forget about everything.”

“Working on it,” he grunted, before nipping at my bottom lip. “How do you want it, babe?”

How did I want it? I'd laugh if I could. Nolan pressed his forehead to mine, his dark brown gaze meeting my hazel eyes. He continued to tease me, pushing me to the edge over and over again before backing off. He had to have the words. Had to hear me say it. We were always safe and careful. I'd been on birth control since I was sixteen due to an irregular cycle, and he carried condoms. Yet, there were times when I threw caution into the wind. He wanted an answer for this time though.

“Bare.” I arched to him again. “Please, Nolan.”

The sinful smirk tugging at his lush lips undid any illusion of control I might have had. He removed his fingers from me and fit his tip to the entrance of my pussy. He surged forward with a silky smooth motion that stole my breath and left me lightheaded with euphoria. His jaw clenched and he hissed out a breath. Every inch of him went taut as I quivered and pulsed around him. I'd never get used to this. I'd never not be amazed by how it felt to have him inside of me or how my body accommodated his.

His pace was slow and methodical, keeping me primed. He explored every inch of my body with his hands, lips, and tongue. When he buried his face in my neck and

sucked on the sensitive flesh behind my ear, I cried out. His groan of approval sent a wave of butterflies through my belly. I could honestly say we didn't fuck, Nolan made love. He was good at it. If I needed a quick fuck that was filled with heat and steam, I went to Jack. This, with Nolan... I couldn't put words to it.

I wrapped my legs around his hips and dug my heels into his firm ass, encouraging him to grind against me. He grabbed my hands and put them above my head, pinning them in place with one of his big palms. His gaze sparkled. His big body glistened with a layer of sweat. We didn't have to speak. Our bodies did the talking for us. When he kissed me again, he quickened his thrusts. I writhed below him. My sobs for more filled the room. This was us. This passion and fire. The unspoken way we knew what each other needed, continued to amaze me.

This time when the crawling yearning of pleasure seeped through my limbs and settled behind my clit, he didn't stop. Instead, he grabbed my hip and lifted me slightly, hitting the one spot inside of me he knew would have me climaxing in a hot second. The minute the crest of his thick cock rubbed over the area, I lost it. I clung to him, trembling in his arms as the powerful orgasm washed over me. Nolan filled me twice more before making a sound at the back of his throat that was sexy as fuck.

His lips brushed across my ear as he murmured, "That's my cum filling your pussy, babe. Don't ever forget it."

His rough tone had sparks of a mini-orgasm rushing through me. "You're so filthy." I tried to laugh but each time the small sound left my lips, I clenched around him and we dissolved in a fit of moans.

"Nonetheless true." He rolled us so that both of us were comfortable, palming my ass in a purely possessive way.

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“Are you jealous or something?” The way he jerked inside of me, didn’t surprise me. Nolan had stamina.

“Don’t have to be,” he said, placing his free hand over mine. “I share because I want to, not because I’m in a forced situation.”

We never really talked about it. It kind of happened between the three of us, Nolan, Jack, and I. I suppose we should have at some point, but why rock the boat if there wasn’t any cause to. “What if I want to make it permanent or add someone else?”

He gave a full-body shrug. "I guess we'll have to talk about it when it happens. Do you want to add a third or should I say fourth?"

I stared at him for a moment. He took my relationship with Kael in stride. I couldn't even explain how it worked or why it did, or what kind of person I was to admit I had sexual relations with a ghost, but here we were. Psychologist called it Spectrophilia. Whether people believed humans could have sex with spirits didn't matter, I knew what Kael and I did, and that's where my concern lies.

“What does it say about me, if I said yes?” I glanced up at him, almost afraid of his answer. To me, it made me a greedy bitch. Like I collected men. Or a whore.

"That you like variety?" He chuckled and placed a kiss on the crown of my head.

I narrowed my eyes. “You could at least say you hate it.” Or something. Anything. He could tell me no. He could make me feel guilty, even though I already did.

“Do we make you happy?” He caressed my arm and back, easing some of the tension from my shoulders.

"Yes," I answered. They did. Before everything that happened, I'd have said no to an open relationship like I was in with Nolan, Jack, and Kael, now however, my whole perspective about life and what it meant to me, changed.

“You’re worried about if people find out.” I stared up at him as the spark of truth in his words dawned on me.

“Yeah, I think so.” We were all going to be public figures now. Jack had his position at the university to worry about and though he had tenure, would the board of governors at the college poo-poo the idea of him being in such an unconventional relationship?

“Don’t worry about it,” Nolan said. “We’re all big boys. We can handle it. Besides, what are the other ghosts going to do to Kael, tease him? That son of a bitch is probably eating up the attention right now.”

I laughed. I couldn't help it. He was right. As much as I wanted to protect all of them, I also had to realize they were their person and they could handle themselves. "You're right."

His mouth split into a confident grin. “I know I am.” He sat me astride him. “Now, how about round two. All this talk about fucking and relationships has put me in a mood.”

Who was I to say no?

I stretched as the shower came on in the bathroom. Nolan and I spent the better part of two hours in bed with each other. Probably wouldn’t have moved either if Jack

hadn't have called to say they found out some interesting information about the locations we were going to investigate Halloween night. Even though our little tryst had come to a close for the time being I lounged for a few extra moments before I'd have to get cleaned up as well.

"You like them, don't you?" In my peripheral vision, I saw Kael come into being. He surrounded me in his light and warmth as he pressed his chest to my back. There was a few seconds before he was fully corporal where it was almost as if our bodies melded together and then he was as solid as a ghost could be.

"You're...naked?" I tilted my head and laughed.

"Well of course. You and Nolan were talking about me. I got excited." He rubbed his groin against my rear and the thick heavy flesh there pulsed.

I gasped. "Kael... I can't right now, everyone is on their way back."

He cupped my breasts, tugging on my nipples with each squeeze of his palms. "You like him more than me." He feigned a pout. "It's because his dick is bigger, huh?"

I laughed softly. "No, asshole. I'm serious, everyone is on their way back."

He slipped one of his hands down my body and cupped my sex. "Mmm, sloppy. I love this shit." He nuzzled the side of my neck. "I think, when I was alive, I got off of seeing another guys cum in a pussy I wanted to fuck or did fuck." He circled my clit with his finger and the zap of electricity that went through me, left me trembling.

"Kael..."

"You can always tell me the truth, Simone," he whispered while teasing me with the head of his cock. "It's not like I have feelings. I'm dead."

A truth and a lie. When he was like this, he felt alive to me, and I know he had emotions, because he loved me, as I did him. "Don't lie, Kael. It's unbecoming of a spirit." I wriggled against him, craving his dick, but knew he was running out of time.

"Then don't lie to me either," he muttered, filling me in a single, hard thrust. "It's unbecoming of a medium."

He had me there.

My eyes rolled up and I groaned. "Hard and fast?" The question rolled off my tongue.

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“This time, yes,” Kael hissed. He wrapped his arms around me as he pounded into me in at such a desperate pace.

I couldn’t think or talk. Kael covered my mouth with his palm because he knew when he got this way, I was a screamer. Maybe it was the kinetic energy of him being a ghost or some other mind-fuck kink I had, but when Kael was unhinged my body wasn’t my own anymore. A current of static ran through my body and settled deep within my pussy creating this crackling of power I couldn’t control.

The constant sounds Kael made as he buried his face in my neck only added to the arousal and pleasure swamping me. And, when he snapped, we both shattered, leaving me a quaking, quivering mess. I sucked in a lungful of air when Kael removed his hand from my mouth and shivered. Maybe I’d like it if he was a little jealous at least. It made for some interesting events.

He chuckled behind me. “Even though I physically can’t orgasm, whenever I am with you, I feel like I can and do. And, for that split second, I’m alive again.”

Ditto. It shouldn’t be possible, but here we were, tangled together in the bed I shared with Nolan, trembling from the mind-altering orgasm, that like he said, shouldn’t be real. “Same.” I listened for Nolan and cuddled back against Kael when I heard the water still running. “What if I said I wanted to add another guy to our group.”

“Ah, that question.” Kael pressed his lips to my shoulder. “I was here when you were talking to Nolan. I think it’s up to you and you alone. Remember, I’m dead. Not like I can say no.”

I frowned. "You can always say no."

"That's what I love about you, Simone. You treat me like I'm still alive." He sighed. "It's Owen, isn't it?"

"Certainly isn't Gaspar. Bad enough the freaky asshole is death." I shivered. "And, in all honesty, Ember is too... Nice."

Kael laughed again. "Which leaves, Owen or Lucy. Oh, is it the freak? Tell me." He practically squealed in anticipation.

I rolled my eyes. "I didn't think you liked Lucy. You haven't made yourself known to her yet. I figured you showed yourself to Owen, Nolan, and Jack because you were cool with them."

"She's... Off." Kael sat up in bed drawing me to his side. "I can't put my finger on what troubles me more about her."

"Oh? It's more than one thing?" I quirked a brow.

"Well, it's a tight race between her obsession with the occult and her obsession with you." He glanced down at me. "She worships you. I mean, we all do, but hers, if not handled properly, could become more of a stalker than as a friend and business partner type thing."

He had a point. "Okay, say no more." Lucy, though extremely good at her job, ran hot and cold. I think I turned more of a blind eye to her fascination with the occult because I too had a degree in the subject, but I used mine for research and along with my parapsychology degree. The preoccupation with me, I thought of more like a kindred thing. We both had experiences and we were both after the same goals. "I'll take care of it."

“As for Owen,” Kael said. “The kid is smart. He’s a little young, but sometimes being young isn’t a bad thing. He appears generally interested in this project and bonus points for not freaking out when he saw me for the first time.”

“Who didn’t freak out when they saw you?” Nolan stepped back into the room with a towel wrapped around his waist.

“Owen,” Kael answered. “I’d ask how it’s hanging, but...”

Nolan chuckled. “Couldn’t stay away, could you?”

"Nope." Kael held me closer. "Heard its movie night. Figured I'd stick around. Maybe join in tonight."

I glanced from Nolan to Kael. “Uh...”

Nolan snickered as he grabbed his clothes from where he dropped them then headed back to the bathroom. “You should. Might be an interesting night for us.”

“Ooo, mystery and intrigue,” Kael said. “Count me in.”

The connecting door opened at the same moment Nolan closed the bathroom door, and Lucy rushed in. Her cheeks were flushed. Her breath came in soft pants, like she'd ran to the room. A second later, Owen and Jack stood there. Anger burned through my veins along with a heady dose of embarrassment.

"Who's this?" Lucy pointed to Kael, who stayed in his corporeal form.

Owen opened his mouth to answer, but I gave him a stern look. Kael was on to something. Lucy knew better than to just enter my room or any of our rooms for that matter. She wouldn’t like it if we did that to her. I glanced at Jack who gave me an

apologetic look. He was just as much out of breath as Owen and Lucy were. They must have tried to stop her.

"I'm Chris," Kael lied. The silky fib slid off his tongue with ease. "A friend of Simone's from California. "You are?"

Lucy grinned. "Lucy. Her assistant." The water in the bathroom came on and her gaze snapped to the closed door. "Who's in the bathroom?"

Kael chuckled. The dark sound wrapped around me. The look on his face, however, demanded Lucy read the room. "A friend of Simone's as well. So, if you'll excuse us..." He went to slide out of bed.

"That's our cue to give them some room," Jack said. The flare of desire in his steely gray eyes captured my attention. "We'll see you for dinner then?"

I nodded. “Yep. We’ll be there.”

Owen lingered a bit as Jack ushered Lucy from the space. His gaze was pinned at where Kael held me, and I didn’t miss the longing in his expression. When the door finally closed, Kael peered at me. “See what I mean. No boundaries for her. She also wasn’t too happy to see me in bed with you. The fact she didn’t even think about Nolan being in the bathroom says a lot too.”

Maybe he was right after all. “I’ll talk to Nolan and Jack tonight. If you want to join us, the more the merrier.”

Kael growled. “Fuck yes, I’ll be here. You’re my priority.” He nuzzled my temple. “Until then, I guess it’s time for you to grab a shower and get ready.”

“Think Nolan will join us?”

Kael grinned. The feral look in his eyes sparkled. “He’s a fucking idiot if he doesn’t. Last one to the bathroom gets DP’ed.”

I laughed, shaking my head as Kael disappeared. With a last look at the entryway connecting our rooms, I promised myself I’d talk to all the guys about Lucy. I’d hate to lose her because she was a great addition to the team, but I wouldn’t risk any of us. First, however, I had two men waiting for me in the bathroom.

Sometimes, it was good to be greedy.

We found a table in the back of Mass Hysteria, away from the bar and noise—not that it mattered because the place was alive—literally. The minute we stepped over the threshold of the establishment, like with the library, my senses went on high alert. We weren't alone and there was something unusual about the people surrounding us. Jack noticed it too, and he'd needed a moment outside to gather up enough courage to be in there. The place was cozy, so it wasn't the physical atmosphere that had me glancing around. I felt so tightly wound, the minute someone approached, I'd jump out of my skin and there was no rhyme or reason for it.

"So this place," Nolan said. "Ever get the feeling you're being watched?"

Always. "Yeah."

"But not from one particular spot," he added. "It's everywhere."

Sure was. I kind of liked it. Mass Hysteria added to the charm of Salem. "I wish I understood what we were feeling."

"Same," Jack agreed. "Though the place is... Interesting."

I laughed. "Totally."

"Is the bartender staring at us?" Owen pointed to the man with green eyes who appeared watchful and astute. A shadow-ish thing appeared behind him, larger than the man's already imposing size. The grey-brown image swirled with silver and

carried a power I'd never seen before. Come to think of it, if I paid attention to the others inside the bar, I noticed the same, only they were different colors mixed with that silvery shimmer. What the fuck is going on here?

I pulled my gaze away from the man, determined not to stare, even though he'd piqued my curiosity. "Maybe. He probably does the heavy lifting if shit goes downhill."

"Here are your menus, your server is Ryan, he'll be with you shortly," the hostess, Lore, said, pulling me from my thoughts. "Enjoy your night and remember, you're never alone when you're at Mass Hysteria."

Not too creepy.

Halloween was only four days away and the atmosphere around town was supercharged. I'd asked Kael before we left the hotel if he could dampen any of the residual activity playing out around us. I knew Jake would have a hard time processing it for starters and two, nothing says spooky like seeing live people carrying on ruckus conversations while enjoying their dinners, and a barmaid in colonial garb walking through one of the people on her way to the backroom or the old fireplace at the back of the tavern. Most were oblivious to it. Some paused and glanced behind them, while a scattered few paid attention.

Kael had done his best, but residual wasn't something any one spirit, guide, or guardian could switch off. It'd been the leftover energy from the dead. Every house has it, even new build sites, believe it or not. We all leave our imprint wherever we go, which, if you think about it, when we die, someone else will see or sense us going about our daily routine. However, Kael had managed to dial back the active hauntings. Yes, the idea of seeing ghosts and whatever else people hoped to experience in Salem was the draw and the moneymaker for the town, but they were also a distraction for me and Jack—for now, anyway.

“I want a beer,” Nolan said.

“Coffee for me,” Lucy added.

“Same,” I replied.

Jack took a moment to stare at the menu card in his hand. “I think I’d like a soda, root beer sounds about good right now.” He pointed to the menu. “Looks like they have a local company that sells to them—The Brewmstick. Might be interesting to try.”

“Soda here too,” Owen agreed, “and some nacho fries.”

I’d been eyeing the fries as well. “Great maybe we should grab a triple order along with some burgers?”

“Add in a double order of wings,” Nolan said, “and you’ve got yourself a deal.”

“Perfect.” I grinned.

When Ryan made his way to our table the same kind of shimmery shadow followed him. The question sat right on the tip of my tongue, but I swallowed it and instead put in the order, minus the blue cheese dressing for the wings. Some of us at the table were highly allergic to the dressing, namely me. I was the one. Once Ryan left to put in our order, Jack retrieved his tablet from his bag and set it up in the middle of our table along with a few of the articles we’d gathered about Salem. Jack recalled all of the information Betty Good gave us during our initial meeting, including a few curious deaths around the area.

In the winter of 1979, a woman was found out in Harmony Grove Cemetery, propped up against a headstone two days after a nor’easter blanketed the area in three feet of snow and ice. According to the newspaper article and the information Betty gave us,

the woman wasn't from Salem. She'd been part of a traveling performing arts company who'd decided to stop in Salem only hours before the storm struck. The official cause of death was hypothermia due to prolonged exposure to the elements. Consequentially, she was found next to the grave of Caroline Emmerton, the founder of the settlement for The House of Seven Gables. It gets even crazier. Captain John Bertram was also buried there along with several other notable citizens of Salem.

Also in 1979 a boating accident happened no more than fifteen feet from the dock, both boats were slow-moving and there shouldn't have been any fuss or muss. Unfortunately, due to the boats colliding as they did, one person fell overboard and drowned. The way Betty explained it, the person was an excellent swimmer, the dock and inlet area were clear of debris, so the person should have been able to swim back to the surface. The body of Jim Askew was found six days later downriver at Pickering Point.

Then about twenty years later, near Gallows Hill, there was another freak accident involving a mother and her three children. The mother, Elizabeth Paul, had brought her children out to her vehicle to put them into their safety seats, but as she turned to grab her coffee—which she was in desperate need of after not sleeping the night before—her car began rolling backward down Hanson Street toward Varney Street. Elizabeth screamed for help, for someone to save her babies, but it was too late. At the same moment, a trash truck driver had been collecting garbage, not more than a few hundred feet from the runaway vehicle. As both approached the intersection, the driver never saw her vehicle until it was too late. All three of her children died upon impact. The youngest was only sixteen months old and the eldest was five.

But, the story gets worse.

Hours after the scene had been cleared, and her children's bodies had been carried away, tragedy struck again. Elizabeth's husband, Howard Paul, had been on Swissair flight 111—bound for Switzerland. Of course, all of the passengers had perished, but

the official word hadn't come until a clergy member along with another officer came to her door to inform her of her husband's fate. In a macabre turn of events, a sheriff's deputy and a member of her church were already at her home to console her about her children.

Elizabeth Paul killed herself only hours after the deputies and clergy left. Her suicide letter read more like the manic ramblings of a woman who'd experienced profound loss and grief and couldn't continue a life without her husband or children. But what struck me as a little odd was a sentence in the suicide letter; Oh Lord, help me. It is false. I am clear. For my life now lies in your hands... The original author of that quote was Rebecca Nurse, seconds before she was hanged. And, in typical spooky form—for Salem—Elizabeth was found hanged in a tree not far from Proctor's Ledge, which was formally the crevice where all of those convicted and killed for witchcraft were thrown.

“But, what does all this have to do with the bigger picture or is it all build up?” Owen said, before stuffing a handful of nacho fries into his mouth.

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“Ever heard of a devil’s triangle?”

“Threesome, right?” Owen grinned. “When there’s a guy at each end of a girl and they high-five each other?”

I pulled a face, not sure if I was disgusted or amused. Jack and Nolan snickered beside me while Lucy rolled her eyes. “No.”

“Oh, well, then no. I don’t. Sorry.” Pink tinged Owen’s cheeks and I huffed out a laugh.

“It’s all good, Owen.” I patted his hand on the table. “A devil’s triangle is usually where strange shit happens. Like the Bermuda Triangle, for instance. Anyway, the graveyard where the actress was found leaned against, frozen solid, is parallel to The House of Seven Gables museum we’re also investigating Halloween night. Add in the boat accident not more than fifty feet from the back door of the home, plus where Elizabeth Paul killed herself and we have not only creepy coincidences, but a devil’s triangle.”

“Speaking of ‘spooky,’” Lucy said, brushing her hands off. “Being inside the witches house/museum is a bit unnerving.”

Lucy and Owen had first dibs on the place, and I was kind of jealous. But, it was also important we researched the area before we went into any of the locations. I wanted to make sure we weren't walking into a setup. It was something I'd seen one too many times on some of my favorite paranormal shows. I still remember the episode Grant and Jason walked into a bar to investigate only to find out it was all a hoax. The

establishment owners were pranking everyone with holographic mirrors and sensors. Though I never thought I would be in the position I am today, I always told myself to be vigilant.

“What happened?” I grabbed a fry and slid it through the three melted cheeses.

“It wasn’t so much what happened,” Owen said. “It’s what didn’t.”

“I always expected to turn around and someone would be behind us.” Lucy shrugged, taking a drink of her coffee. “Or like that sudden rush of adrenaline when you think someone is running up on you... Crazy right?”

I knew that feeling all too well. Some mediums say it’s an intimidation thing, others say the spirit is trying to get someone’s attention, others say it’s how the spirit manifests. I think it is a combo of both intimidation and trying to garner a person’s attention. “Not at all crazy. You should see some of the stuff spirits will do for a cheap thrill.” I chuckled. “What else?”

"Well, the curator took us up the small staircase, and let me tell you, that will give you vertigo fast." She took another sip of her coffee. "Then there was the attic."

“The stairs didn’t bother me as much as the attic did,” Owen added. “It’s odd.”

Another adjective to describe the house. Interesting. “Can you describe what you mean by odd?” I hedged, hoping he’d give me something to work with for tomorrow night.

“Again, being watched, but from the floor. Almost as if someone sat in the middle of the room just to watch the comings and goings.

Look at Owen, using his intuition. “Could be.” I nodded. “Anything else?”

“Yeah,” Lucy said, digging in her jacket pocket. “I caught this.” She placed her digital recorder on the table and hit play. For about twenty seconds there was nothing but dead air, then a guttural scream crackled and vibrated from the small speaker on the device. The sound was filled with agony and terror. I’d only heard that kind of scream once in my life—I’d made it. “Owen and I didn’t hear a thing.”

“Where did you record this?” I said, pointing to the device.

“The kitchen where the giant fireplace is,” she replied. “The curator had just finished telling us about how the women would drench their skirts in water so that they didn’t fear catching fire while they cooked. Some weren’t so lucky and burned to death.”

“I like.” I rubbed my hands together then sat back as our food was brought out. “We’ll continue our discussion after we chow down.”

The food was delicious. Ohmigod. The burger melted in my mouth the minute I bit into it. I swear all of us experienced a foodgasm right there at the table. Thankfully, everyone in the place was paying more attention to themselves than us and didn’t hear our collective groan. By the time I finished eating my burger—the one I inhaled apparently—I was stuffed and happy. But, we still had work to do.

I wiped my mouth with my napkin then cleared my throat. “Okay, so tell me, how much time are we going to have in each location once we start investigating?”

Lucy beamed. “Well, since the sun sets sooner here, we will have approximately eight hours to explore the area. That includes answering questions and small histories about the location. We’ll also need to have small clips of you speaking with the curator or manager of the property to get some insight on the place and what they or guests have experienced then cut scenes of the equipment going up. You get the jest.”

Yeah, so a little over five and a half hours for all of the sites. Not long enough to

become too comfortable, yet still enough time to capture activity. “Got it.”

“We can do the setup the morning of the show and have it dubbed in for the live broadcast,” Nolan said. “It’ll save us time and give us a chance to study the locations.”

I agreed.

Jack pulled a floor plan of The Seven Gable House and the Witches House/museum up and began marking certain areas with x’s then he turned the screen toward us. “I believe this will be the best place to set up for the locations. We’ll have the optimal coverage with a little overlap for each place. Since the reports are light on ghostly sightings information, we’ll have to go with gut and what Simone sees.” Then he retrieved photos of the outdoor sites. “These are a bit trickier. Since we’ll be outside, we’ll have to get creative with our shots, but it should be doable.”

A grunt of approvals went around the room.

“For all the hype about Salem and these places...” Lucy frowned. “I mean, energy pours from every surface in this town. What the fuck? Why isn’t there more?”

More? “Um?”

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“Shouldn’t the activity be around the clock?” Lucy quirked a brow.

I chuckled. “Sometimes it’s what you can’t see that’s scarier.” I popped another fry in my mouth even though I didn’t need it.

"True," she whispered. "Okay, so we've been given access to a couple of extra rooms for our live show." Her cheerful demeanor returned. "There is a bedroom, the garden, and the basement we have been allowed to investigate with the live crew."

Speaking of which. "Have we heard anything yet about our host for the evening?" I know I was being obsessive, but I hoped Adventure Channel would send someone who was well versed in the paranormal. Of course, I had a list of my top ten favorite people, but I also knew I had to take what we were given. My team—our team were the newbies on the block, so we had to earn our way to the top.

"Chase Jenkins III, host of Monster Builds, the number four show on the network," Lucy replied. "I got the email about two hours ago. I was trying to gather some information about him. I've never seen the show, to be honest."

I had. I wasn't impressed. The guy was a douche bag. He had frosted tips, waxed brows, and the obligatory sleeves of tattoos, like they gave him street cred or something. The guy talked down to women and always tried to low-ball all of the contractors and companies he used. I was less than thrilled about Chase being our host, to say the least. "I have. You're not missing anything. Before he arrives, I give you a little sneak peek at what we'll be dealing with."

“Doesn’t sound ominous,” Owen muttered.

“He’s scummy,” I said, “with a capital S.”

“Anyway,” Lucy said. “From the notes I received late this afternoon, hence why I came to your room, he’ll arrive sometime tomorrow night while we’re setting up and getting a better feel for all the sites we’ll be visiting Halloween night. Then he’ll meet us once we’re ready to go Halloween night.”

“Great.” I rolled my eyes.

“You’re not happy,” Jack stated, his grey eyes bore into mine. “You wanted someone else.”

Well, duh. It could have been those assholes who ran from every house they investigated like loons, and I would have been happy. Chase... I had a horrible feeling about letting him anywhere near our crew. “I had my hopes up? For the first time.” I made the last statement under my breath.

Nolan chuckled. “When don’t you? You’re already visualizing us shooting into the stratosphere of famedom and we’re barely taking baby steps.”

True. I wanted us to be ranked among the best paranormal hunters out there. Couldn’t do that if we half-assed everything. “You’re right. I set my expectations high. Maybe it’ll be fun. I mean Chase does build haunted houses after all.”

“Yeah, out of old murder homes.” Lucy shivered. “Who the fuck likes that?”

“He has a niche in the market,” Jack said. “So, obviously people enjoy it.”

“Gross,” Lucy muttered.

“I heard his Halloween special that airs during the afternoon run of shows is supposed

to be the remodeling of Sharon Tate's house." Jack flipped his tablet closed. "From what I understand, the house isn't selling and even when people move in, they quickly and quietly, I might add, leave."

"Do you blame them?" I quirked a brow. "I can't even imagine the residual energy in that place let alone the active, activity. It's a gold mine and a hellhole all under one roof. The realty company would be better off tearing down the house and burning the ground then cleansing the plot." Fun fact—the house had been torn down in 1994 by some studio producer, only to have him build a house on the site. The guy should have just left it, in my humble opinion. And, yes, I read articles about how some people had been there and never experienced anything, but they were oblivious. Even Trent Reznor experienced something in the house.

"Please tell me he isn't going to do anything to desecrate Sharon Tate's legacy or her unborn child's," Owen whispered. Surprise, surprise, the youngest among us, knew about the murder too.

"Not sure," Lucy said. "It's supposed to be top secret. What I could get from the production manager for the project was that they put up tarps all over the place to keep the media and lookie-loos away while they worked. Also, they had a hard time getting supplies in due to the fact people didn't want anything to do with 10050 Cielo Lane."

Didn't blame them. "So, that's what we have to work with?"

Lucy sighed. "Yeah. Are you ready?"

No. I was never ready for anything like this. What I didn't tell my team, was that I occasionally had flashbacks to Turnbull Canyon, so I had to be on my toes. If something triggered one Halloween night, our little adventure—no pun intended—would be over. "As I'll ever be."

I don't like it. There out of the corner of my eye, I caught Kael leaning against the bar. There's more activity than what you know, Simone. He glanced at the bartender who appeared to be staring right at him. When the man turned his head to look at me, that silvery shadow also seemed to be trying to figure me out. See what I mean. He knows I'm here. He knows all of us are here. Why he's acting like it's no big deal is beyond me.

I had no doubt Kael was right. However, I made it this far, and I couldn't back out now. I glanced over my shoulder at Kael. Tension radiated from him. His shoulders were bunched. His brow furrowed. Even the laugh lines around his mouth were tight. Is it a trap?

He shook his head. Nope. Vengeance. The witches are angry still. Can't even fuck the hate out of them. They're too old and too pure. Besides, whoever these people are, around here, they might rip our heads off if we try something improper.

I snorted mentally. Not the visual I needed. Nor wanted.

Yeah, well, now you know my pain. He shrugged. Anyway, I know you can't say no to this. I'd hate it though, if we spent more time kicking ghost ass than actually telling spirits stories.

That was the one thing I could always count on with Kael. He had my back, even when he wasn't comfortable in a situation, he never let me get hurt. Then I know I am safe in your hands. Don't worry, about the only thing that will happen tomorrow night is me making a dork of myself. Trust me.

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He laughed. The bombastic sound made me wince. I do. That's why I'm worried.

Well. Fuck. In for a penny. In for a pound. I suppose.

Watch out, ten o'clock. Kael lifted his chin before apparating.

I glanced in the direction Kael pointed and tensed. The bartender was coming our way. I glanced at my team then back to the man. He had an affable smile on his face, but there was an undercurrent of control and dominance too. His dark red hair had been slicked back and fell to his collar, curling at the ends. His hawkish green eyes took in every inch of the area even though he'd been focused on my table. He exuded power and commanded attention, however, when the man's name was called by, who I could only guess was the Sheriff, his demeanor changed.

"No need to mess with them," the Sheriff said. "They're here in an official capacity." He held out his hand to me. "Zane Adock. You must be Simone Hadley."

I took his hand and a zap of current went through my palm. Every alarm bell went off in my mind and for the first time in two years, Gaspar appeared in my peripheral vision along with Kael. "I am. Thank you for allowing us to be here, Sheriff."

Zane leaned forward and whispered, "Put the reaper away, Miss. We mean you no harm. You're a curiosity to Cian."

I cut my gaze to Gaspar who nodded then disappeared in a flash. If anyone had seen him, no one at the table said a word. "Sorry. We're a little jumpy right now. This place runs a little hot."

Zane's chuckle sounded more like cut rocks tumbling together. "You should see it on the full moon."

"I beg your pardon?" I tilted my head.

"Never mind that," Zane said. "Cian, everything okay?"

"Yeah, I guess I came in a little too—hot?" He relaxed and instantly the tension surrounding us dropped a few notches. "How was your dinner, did you enjoy the food?"

Fuck yes, we did. "The burgers were amazing."

"So were the nacho fries," Owen added.

Zane pulled up a chair and Cian retreated to the bar. "So, I heard you've all been on little adventures today. See anything exciting?"

I didn't quite know what was going on in this little bar, but whatever it was, I didn't want to leave. "We did. I have to say, for only being here a few hours, I almost don't want to go home."

"Then don't," the Sheriff said, glancing at Lucy then Jack. "We're always looking for new witches in these parts."

And, once again, I had a sinking suspicion I was missing something big. "Well, thanks for the offer. We might have to consider it after all of your hospitality."

"You do that." He stood then. "My shift is starting. Dinner's on the house. I'll let Lore know and if you need anything while you're here, don't hesitate to stop by the Sheriff's Department or come back here, okay?"

I nodded. “Sure. Thanks again. We appreciate it.”

Zane inclined his chin. “Not a problem.”

I glanced around the table and could see we were all on the same page. Something big happened between us and the Sheriff. What I didn’t know, but I had a sneaky suspicion, before our time in Salem was over, we’d find out.

4

Back at our hotel room, I couldn't shake the feeling we'd missed something big. The people were nice, don't get me wrong, but there was something else otherworldly. Plus, Cian, the bartender had seen Kael, even if no one else paid him any mind. What was I overlooking?

"You're thinking awful loudly over there," Nolan said, joining me in bed.

"Mass Hysteria was interesting," I mumbled. "Don't you think?"

We'd come back to the hotel after making the final plans for the live event and jumped right into our movie marathon. No one brought up the atmosphere at the bar. If Jack had seen the shimmery silver outlines surrounding the people there, I wasn't going to bring it up either. Yet, I also couldn't let it go.

"It was," he agreed. "You saw more than we did. What made you so anxious there for a minute?"

"They weren't normal," I muttered. "Plus, what was up with that, whole 'we're always looking for new witches,' statement. Didn't make sense to me. Also, why was he eyeing up Jack?"

"Maybe he thought I was cute," Jack said, joining us after a quick shower.

"Well, you are, but..." I shrugged. "There was a double meaning to his words, I know it." Lucy was a witch, well, practicing Wiccan. But, why would the town have any

use for them? Or was the Sheriff being cute about it?

“Well, I can tell you emphatically, I’m not a witch,” Jack replied. “What I am is jealous.”

“Oh, jealous?” I snuggled between both men and smiled. “Why’s that?”

“Well,” he wrapped his arm around my middle and tugged me back against him. “Not only did you have fun with Nolan this afternoon, but you also got to play with Kael, leaving me to my own devices.”

I chuckled softly. “Awe. Poor Jack.”

“Indeed, poor me.” He slid his hand down past the band of my panties and ran his finger along my slit.

I pushed back against him, wiggling my hips while Nolan kissed me. Sandwiched between them, I was safe there. Secure. Both of these men were my buoys in a world that was chaotic. Jack groaned behind me as he nibbled on the juncture of my neck and shoulder. His fingertip rubbed my clit in a slow circle, teasing me with each pass. I shuddered in his arms. He methodically awakened every nerve ending in my body, until I was nothing more than a ball of sexual tension waiting for the right moment to burst.

Nolan removed my sleep shirt, exposing my flesh to the cool air of the room. I shivered and he was there. His big hand splayed across my stomach and torso, warming me. These two men were always in sync with one another. It was shocking and exciting. Nolan bent his head and took one of my nipples into his mouth. A gasp of surprise and arousal fell from my lips. It was as if each time he sucked; the sensation shot straight to my clit. Add in Jack toying with the bundle nerves at the top of my sex, and I was poised on the edge of the building climax threatening to

consume me.

"You're so fucking wet," Jack murmured. The hard press of his erection at my back showed how excited he was as well.

"I always am when I'm between the both of you," I said, scraping my fingers across Nolan's scalp.

Jack flexed his hips, grinding against my rear. "I heard a rumor Nolan took you bare this afternoon." He groaned, grabbing my hip. "I also heard you showered with him and Kael, so your pussy still has his cum deep inside of you."

I whimpered. Of all three guys, Jack was the dirty talker. He could wind me up in seconds, just by saying something naughty. "What are you going to do about it? Are you even more jealous now?"

His rough chuckle tickled the side of my neck. "Damn right I am. This might be an open relationship or polyamorous or whatever the fuck you want to call it, but your pussy is still mine." He tugged off his boxers then pulled my panties to the side before teasing me with the tip of his cock.

"Jack, please," I whispered, breathless and on edge.

"I love the husky quality of your voice when you're beyond aroused," he muttered, filling me inch by inch.

The bite of pain as the walls of my vagina stretched to accommodate his girth and length was delicious. I wrapped my arms around Nolan, clinging to him as I orgasmed, the pleasure so intense, I thought I'd blackout. Jack grunted. His fingers dug into my hips as he held himself still. Anchored to both men, I gave over to the bliss. My soft sobs must have spurred Jack into action because he began to move. His

thrusts were measured. The head of his cock rubbing over the sensitive area behind my clit, turning me into a pile of goo. It felt so good. So intense. I couldn't speak. I babbled and made incoherent sounds while Jack groaned and grunted like a barbaric man rutting for the first time.

"Touch me," Nolan groaned, lowering my hand to his groin. His cock was heavy and hard, the tip covered in his precum making it sticky.

I wrapped my palm around his throbbing shaft and matched Jack's pace. There was a franticness that came over all three of us as we laid there. The sensual tension filling my limbs grew more consuming by the second as the tingling tendrils of my impending climax spread through me.

"Inside of me, or out," I said, looking Nolan dead in the eyes. His glassy dark-brown eyes were almost black from his pupils being dilated with arousal.

"Inside," he grunted. "Fuck, this feels so good—more so than usual. Why though?"

Why indeed. "You feel it too, Jack?" I glanced over my shoulder and liquid heat slid through my veins. The excitement and pain etched into his features turned me on. Jack's eyes fluttered closed and his head fell back on his shoulders. His lips parted and a long low moan passed his lips.

"Fuck, yes," he murmured. "Gonna come, Simone."

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“So hot,” Nolan groaned. “Fill her up.”

Shit, both of them had me twitching and ready to scream. Jack's pace quickened. His bruising hold on my hips aided in getting me off once more. And, when he slammed into me the final time and I felt the heated rush of his release filling me, I cried out, finding my pleasure in his arms. However, I wasn't given long to recover. My pussy continued to flutter when Jack pulled out and Nolan was entering me.

I arched to him. My mouth opened on a silent scream of bliss. Nolan grabbed my hips and worked me over his cock, in deep grinding pumps. I couldn't speak. I could hardly breathe. Locked between both men, my mind shattered and my body was no longer my own. I clung to Nolan as his pace increased. Like with Jack, Nolan was unhinged. His grunts of pleasure were tight and desperate.

My body filled with expectancy, waiting for the tidal wave to snap over us and we were sent tumbling through our orgasms. Nolan kissed me with a ferociousness, that stole my ability to think. His tongue tangled with mine as he swallowed down my cries of pleasure. It was too much and yet not enough. The force of this, whatever we should call it, frightened me. I dug my nails into Nolan's shoulders for purchase, holding onto him for dear life, praying we'd survive this churning miasma of energy building between all of us.

Behind me, Jack pressed kisses to my spine. His fingers pinched and tugged on my nipples adding to the stimulation inundating my body. We were out of control, and I liked it. This hum of emotional chaos swirled around us. Nolan's breath hitched when my pussy rippled around him.

“Nolan, please,” I whimpered.

“Don’t stop,” he grunted. “Come on my dick.”

Fuck, he shouldn’t sound so damn sexy when he talked like that. Both he and Jack were good at it and both knew when to use those guttural tones on me. Jack circled my clit twice then pressed down on the throbbing nub. A sob was ripped from my chest as I jerked in Nolan’s arms and shuddered. My release slammed through me, blinding me for a second as my hips worked over Nolan’s cock harder and faster.

He slammed into me twice more and moaned, burying his face in my neck as his release filled me. I went limp in Nolan's arms, a trembling mess of post-orgasmic bliss. I didn't want to be separated from either of them. Jack pressed kisses to my back while Nolan nuzzled my neck and continued rock his hips. There was something so sexy about a guy continuing to move after he climaxed.

“Not exactly how I thought our night would end,” I whispered, teasing them.

Nolan groaned. “I couldn’t help myself. Seeing Jack fuck you, I had to have you too.”

“Too much stress,” Jack grumbled. “We needed a night to relax and the movies weren’t cutting it.”

No, I suppose not, especially after the comment Sheriff Adock made. “Well, I am feeling a thousand times more relaxed now.” Nolan had yet to pull out, so I snuggled into his chest, inhaling his spicy scent.

“I swear if you were a cat, you’d be purring right now,” Nolan teased, and he wasn’t wrong either.

“Maybe I am purring, and you can’t hear it.” I grinned against his chest and tugged

Jack closer to us. His hard cock rubbed the inside of my thigh and butt cheek. “Someone has tons of stamina.”

“You would too if you watched the way Nolan fucked you,” Jack said. “It was hot. I won’t lie.”

“I agree,” Kael said, appearing behind Nolan.

Nolan’s eyes narrowed. “Dude, are you naked?”

“I’m dead,” Kael said. “What difference does it make if I’m naked or not?”

Jack and I laughed while Nolan moaned, shoving deep inside of me. “You guys aren’t right.”

I gasped and shuddered. “Us? I think you fit into this category too.”

Nolan gave a few more lazy thrusts before pulling out. “I feel like I could go all night.”

Kael grunted. “It has to do with the area. There’s a certain magic in the air here.”

I snickered. “Because of the witches?”

Kael shook his head. “I don’t know. I started experiencing it at Mass Hysteria. It’s only become more intense as the night’s gone on.”

“Full moon, maybe?” Jack asked. “Halloween does fall on it this year.”

“Could be. I think it also has something to do with what Sheriff Adock had to say and the way Cian stared at me.” Kael frowned. “Everyone saw me in that bar.”

Okay, that got my attention. “What do you mean everyone saw you?”

Kael sat up a bit. “Just what I said. Everyone saw me.”

Weird. No one had ever seen Kael unless he wanted them to. “I got a bizarre vibe from the place too.” I glanced over my shoulder to Jack. “Did you see the silver shadows?”

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“The halos?” He quirked a brow. “I saw them. I didn’t say anything because—”

"I know. I understand." Salem was unusual. I'd never felt anything like it before. The air crackled with residual and active hauntings, plus whatever surrounded some of the people. Not everyone had it though. At least from what I could tell, so it begged the question what were they, and if we asked, would we get a straight answer? "I think we should ask the sheriff tomorrow. I feel like we're walking into all of this blind and we shouldn't be."

“I agree,” Jack added. “All it’ll take is one misstep and we’re all going to be in trouble.”

“Speaking of trouble,” Kael said. “This afternoon was interesting.”

“What happened?” Nolan stared down at me, his penetrating brown eyes ensnared me. “Besides Kael joining you after I went for a shower.”

Jack groaned. “It was my fault. I told her to wait, but she had to show you our research.”

“Lucy barged into our room,” I said. “Thankfully after, you know.” Heat filled my cheeks. It was one thing to discuss sex between the three of us, it was another to have someone storm into our room after the fact, especially with Kael.

Nolan sighed. “She’s a great addition to the team, but...” He shrugged. “Boundaries.”

I agreed. “I’ll talk to her tomorrow. She has to understand our privacy.” If she

couldn't, we might have to cut ties with her, no matter how much I liked her. Plus, there was the little fact she wasn't in Gaspar's book.

"So, how are you feeling about the show?" Jack rubbed my arm as we all snuggled together in bed. "Anything you saw today bothering you?"

I shook my head. "No. I think we're going to be fine. The only unknown we have to face is Chase. I just hope he doesn't fuck us over. This is our big chance to make it. If he does something ridiculous, it'll reflect on him and us by default."

"I'll talk with Henry in the morning when he arrives, explain your hesitation. I'm sure he'll understand." Jack kissed my shoulder. "I know you wanted someone else and you had your hopes up, but I'm sure all of them are working on spectacular episodes for Halloween night and couldn't be here."

"Yeah, maybe." Jack had a point. The Adventure Channel went all out for October, so it made sense no one else but Chase would be available. Still didn't ease the disappointment though.

"There will be other times," Nolan assured. "We're not a one-trick pony."

"Besides," Kael pipped up. "All of us will be there and we'll make sure everything goes off without a hitch." When he said, 'all of us,' I knew exactly who he meant. Him along with Ember and Gaspar. I hadn't seen both of them much since that night. I was equal parts excited and trepidatious to have them back with me.

"Thanks for making me feel better," I whispered. "I needed that."

Kael chuckled. "I don't think we're done with you yet, though." He apparated in front of me, a translucent figure of his corporal self. Nolan gave him an incredulous look while shaking his head. "I believe we're all up for round two."

I woke up at the butt crack of dawn, unable to sleep. All three of us, Kael, Jack, and Nolan had fallen into a heap of limbs and bodily fluids, passing out almost instantaneously, except for Kael, he didn't need to sleep. My mind churned with unanswered questions, and I guess that's why I couldn't sleep anymore. So, I untangled myself from the guys, took a quick shower, and got dressed. I needed answers for what I saw yesterday, so I could understand what was happening around there.

After grabbing my satchel and key card, I headed out. We were only a mile away from downtown Salem, so I figured I'd grab everyone coffee and breakfast while I was out. Today was going to be long and hard. Filming the introduction information on each of the sites would take at least a few hours each place leaving us little time to rest or grab a snack.

"You're up early," Sheriff Adock said, stopping next to me in his SUV as I crossed the street heading into the proper of Salem.

"Good Morning, Sheriff," I replied. "I could say the same about you."

He chuckled softly and the shimmering shadow surrounding him the night before was dampened, almost becoming more of an aura than anything. "Crime never sleeps, even in Salem. Can I buy you a cup of coffee?"

"Are you hitting on me?" I teased, cocking a brow.

"No, my wife and partner would have my balls if I was," he answered, his tone full of humor. "Hop in. I know a place where we can talk."

"Thanks." I slid into the passenger seat of the vehicle and glanced around. "Mass Hysteria is an interesting place. I didn't know you worked there."

“I own it with my partner, Cian, and our wife, Jamie,” he replied. “I work there mostly on the weekends but Jamie’s brother, Gideon, needed the night off so, I filled his shift.”

Interesting. “Can I ask you another question? This one might be personal, though.”

Zane pulled up to a small coffee shop in the middle of town and parked. “Sure, but I reserve the right to not answer.”

“Deal.” I nodded, getting out when Zane did. We walked into the shop and the scent of fresh brewed coffee and hot pastries made my mouth water. It wasn’t until after we ordered and were sitting at a table that I asked him the one thing I couldn’t stop thinking about. “So, I saw something last night. Do you know you and Cian have these shimmering balls of energy surrounding you? The colorings are different too. I mean, you’re not the only ones that have them here. I’ve seen quite a few.”

He narrowed his eyes. “You have, huh? Do they have a form to them or are they balls of light?”

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They didn't have a distinctive shape. "No more like a halo." Like Jack had explained last night.

His gray eyes narrowed. "I'm not sure, to be honest. You're the first person who's ever said anything of the sort. Is it a bad thing?"

"No, not at all. I've never seen it before either," I replied. "This place is so unusual though, wouldn't you agree?"

Zane chuckled. The deep rich sound eased some of the anxious energy filling me. "This is Salem. Everything around here is a little unusual."

He had a point. "Touché." I sat back as our coffee and breakfast danishes were placed in front of us by the owner of the shop. "Looks amazing." I couldn't wait to dig in.

"Enjoy your breakfast," the woman said then turned to walk back to the front counter.

I leaned forward, trying to keep my voice down so as not to draw attention. "Do you believe in witches and all the hauntings going on here?"

He took a sip of his coffee and considered my question. "I do. I believe there is a lot we don't know or can't see. I believe some have a second sight, like yourself, and I believe there are witches among other things in this world."

Other things? What other things? I had a feeling, sitting there, if I pressed him, he wouldn't say, but then again, he might. "True. You have abilities don't you?"

This time the corner of his mouth lifted in a rueful smirk. He ran the pad of his thumb back and forth along the lip of his mug. “Suppose I do. What do you think they are, Simone?”

Hmm... I didn't know. He wasn't Wiccan like Lucy. He also wasn't a medium like Jack or me. Yet, he was something and I couldn't put my finger on it. “I don't know. A friend said you could see him last night. That just about everyone in Mass Hysteria could. No one has ever been able to do so before. Kael has to want you to see him before you can.”

“The guy at the bar who couldn't take his eyes off of you?” Zane asked, before drinking his coffee. “He sticks out. He's pretty powerful in his own right. Who's he to you?”

I contemplated how to answer his question. Kael was powerful. If anyone found out what he was capable of, it might terrify them. “He's my guardian.”

“Ah, makes sense.” Zane nodded. “He was projecting himself in a way none of us could ignore. Hence Cian's initial disposition.”

“He's worried.”

“He can speak for himself.” Kael appeared beside me. “My ears were ringing.”

“Zane, this is Kael. Kael, this is Zane.” I took a bite of my breakfast, impressed Zane didn't appear surprised by Kael's appearance. “We were discussing the area and why it's so different.”

“That's why you got up early,” Kael said. “Couldn't shut off your brain. You'd have thought after last night you'd—”

“Okay,” I said. “Enough of that.” My cheeks burned with embarrassment. “Anyway, I went for a walk to grab everyone breakfast and Zane spotted me.”

“Not to be a dick or anything,” Zane said. “But, if I didn’t know any better, I’d swear you were alive.”

Kael got that a lot.

“Thanks. I’ve been perfecting it over the years.” Kael shrugged. “You’re not human either are you?”

Human either? I stared at Kael then Zane who didn’t appear upset by the comment. “Uh, what?”

Zane shook his head and snorted. “It’s nothing. Right, Kael? Just a joke. I mean, I’m sitting here with you, so I must be human.”

Kael lifted his hands. “Right. A joke. Come on, Simone, lighten up.”

Sure. Lighten up. I slid my gaze between both men. I didn't like being out of the loop, but it was Zane's secret and if he didn't want to talk about it, far be it from me, to press the issue. Not like we'd become besties or something. "Anyway, in respect to the energy you feel here, last year we had a major incident." Zane pushed his dish away and straightened himself. “We don’t want anyone to know about it, because I have a feeling we haven’t captured all of the suspects.”

Not too ominous. “I understand. We won’t use this information for the show.”

"Thank you," Zane said. "Anyway, for several years we had boys and girls go missing. Their ages ranged anywhere from fifteen to twenty-six, with some of them being older still. They were all practicing witches."

I held up a hand. “You mean Wiccan?”

“Witches, Wiccan, same difference for us. But, here, we call them witches.”

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“Okay.” I glanced at Kael unsure of where this was going.

"By the third body, we knew we had a serial killer on our hands. He only kills near Halloween or on Halloween night. The person believes when they kill the witch, they can absorb their power. The reason we believe there is more than one suspect is because of the fact this has gone on for thirty-plus years, with the incidences only ramping up in the last couple of years. We thought last year we were close to capturing all of the culprits, but in a sickening turn of events, the last person he kidnapped, also turned out to be someone who fought back. And, in our attempt to subdue to the suspect, a fight ensued, and he was killed, leaving us in the dark once more."

“Who did he take?” Kael hedged.

“Mine and Cian’s wife, Jamie. Someone he’d or they’d been trying to take since we were young.”

Woah, talk about heavy. "That's why you said witches were welcome here and Jack and Lucy could stay."

“Lucy mostly,” Zane said. “She’s a witch for sure. Jack, I think, is more like you, Simone, am I right?”

“You don’t want her,” Kael blurted, and I was glad the place was empty. “Lucy isn’t—”

“Death can’t find her in his book,” I stated. “Death or the network of reapers, have

books with everyone's name in it. Lucy's name can't be found."

Zane grew serious. "Are you certain?"

Uh, yeah. Gaspar wasn't happy about it. He'd pitched a fit, scaring the shit out of me. Had he been corporal at the time, I'm sure he would have torn Jack's office to pieces. "Yes. Very. It pissed him off because he couldn't find her, then he warned me to be careful with her."

Zane scrubbed his chin. "Do you mind if I dig into this? I know I told you not to run with our secret, but this... For a witch to not be known, is rare. I have someone who might be able to help us—you more specifically."

I stared at Zane for a moment. If he could give us answers, I would take them. I had a feeling the reason why all of us had some kind of wariness about her, was due to the whole not in that little black book of Gaspar's, knowledge. Maybe if we could get some reassurance, I could relax some or better yet, all of us could relax. "Thank you, we'd appreciate it."

"Great. Now, is there anything else I can help you with to make your time in Salem easier?"

Kael grinned. "We're going to have a free day before our live Halloween event, have anything interesting going on here?"

"As a matter of fact, we do. There's a ball we throw every year. It'll be at Mass Hysteria. You can dress up or don't it won't bother us. Come on out and have fun."

A ball, in a bar? I wanted to say no because we'd be super busy on Halloween night, but we also deserved a little time to celebrate our first adventure. Plus, maybe we could get a little footage while we were there. I mean, nothing says Halloween like a

spooky party. Amirite? "Sounds like fun, we'll be there."

"Great." Zane shoved out of his seat. "Would you like a ride to the hotel or were you going to explore our quiet little town some more before heading back?"

"Explore a little more," I said. "Thank you for the offer."

"Not a problem. I'll have Blake check in with you since he'll be on patrol too. He'll give you a lift if you need it." Zane said his goodbyes then headed out to his vehicle, leaving me with Kael.

"Well, that was interesting," Kael muttered. "Just what the hell is Lucy and what have we gotten ourselves into?"

I laughed, sliding out of the booth. "We haven't gotten into anything yet. Come on, I wanted to inspect our sites then grab breakfast for everyone before heading back."

"I'd kill for some breakfast, sucks being dead." Kael sighed. "Oh well, at least we can still fuck."

"See, there's a bright side to everything."

“This is going to take most of the night,” Jack said. “We should do a bit of history along with where we’ll be investigating.”

I gave the thumbs up. “It’s cold tonight.” Rubbing my hands together, I stared out over the graveyard. The place was eerily quiet. Almost like a dead zone. The wind didn’t blow. The leaves didn’t crackle under our feet. Even the mist evaporated the minute it drew near the boundary of the cemetery.

“Low is supposed to be thirty-six,” Lucy said, pointing the camera she’d been carrying at me.

“Groovy,” I muttered. Thankfully, unlike other shows, we didn’t have actors playing out the history of the location while one of us dubbed over the sequence, not that it wasn’t cool. I liked it, but sometimes the imagination was a better tool. Plus with a live show, it would be ten times harder to accommodate for it.

“Here is how we’ll do it,” Jack said, coming up beside me. “We’re going to pan in on the headstone of Caroline Emmerton while Simone stands off to the side to give us the information. And, should anything else appear, we’ll capture that too. Then we’ll move on.”

Should anything else appear? I snorted. This place was flat. Empty. “Sure, sounds good.” I gave Jack the thumbs up.

“Everyone set?” Jack asked, glancing at each of us. When he was satisfied, he

pointed at me. “Action.”

“They say, you can never be too careful in a cemetery, you never know who you might run into.” I grinned as I stood there. “Meet Caroline Emmerton. On a cold night over forty years ago, she welcomed a weary traveler to her side and never let go.” I recalled the story of the performing arts troop that stayed in Salem during a freak storm and how a member of the team had been found frozen next to Caroline’s plot. “Local paranormal groups along with several members of the community say on cold winter nights, a young woman can be seen walking through the cemetery, lost and frantic. She has been known to ask for help, but then disappears when someone offers directions back to Salem Hotel.”

Movement out of the corner of my eye caught my attention. With a flick of my hand, I pointed to where it came from. As still as the graveyard had been, the minute I began to speak, the place came alive. The darkened figured watched us from behind a giant oak tree, peeking out every so often.

“It appears tonight we’re not alone.” I stepped away from the headstone and started for where the figured stood. “I doubt we’re ever alone.” As I approached the shadow, I held up my hands. “We’re not here to harm you. Do you want to talk?” Kael stepped into my line of sight but stayed a shimmer of light not visible by the naked eye.

They’re curious.Kael’s words floated through my mind.A little afraid. They want to know why you're out there.

I grinned.Tell them we’re here to document their existence.“Can you tell me your name?” All of us carried audio recorders to pick up voices not heard otherwise. Owen also had a thermal camera while Nolan was tracking us from the RV outside the cemetery.

The closer we got, the farther into the darkness they went. Bummer. I'd hoped to have a small conversation with them, even if no one could see them. When they disappeared, I played the audio back on the recorder, hopeful we'd caught something. But, there was nothing. All static.

“Okay, let’s reset and go again,” Jack said. “We have tons of footage from this incident, maybe we caught something.”

I nodded. “Sure.”

“This time, I want you to tell everyone who Caroline was and how she is connected to Salem and The Seven Gabble House.”

Three more times we reset until Jack was sure we had enough information, then we moved on to Gallows Hill and Proctor's Ledge. These stories were a little harder to tell due to events surrounding not only the deaths but also the tragedy that befell Mrs. Paul.

As we climbed to the spot where the Gallows once stood, I could see all of Salem below us. At one time, the place was isolated. I could only imagine how it must have felt to be ferried up the hill to the tree, a mob of angry villagers screaming at those women and men who were all innocent of the charges, yet were seen as heretics, and devil worshipers, to take their final breaths. When I said blood-soaked this land, I wasn't kidding. This place was cursed. The historical marker for Gallows Hill shown proudly in the background as I stood away from the area. The activity there was overwhelming. What I heard more than anything was the screams of those about to die and their pleas for mercy.

"Gallows Hill," I said. "A place most today would find peaceful and charming, was once blood-soaked and damned. Just there," I pointed to the sign behind me, "men and women lost their lives due to hysteria and the lie of witchcraft." I started down

the hill toward the old Paul home. "Or was it all the truth?" I glanced at the camera. "This used to be the home of Elizabeth Paul, a mother and wife. Over twenty years ago, Mrs. Paul walked down this hill, through the trees beyond." We followed the same path Elizabeth took that fateful day and stopped at the tree she'd found to take her life. "Was it her day to die? Or had some unseen force compelled her..." We broke through the tree line to the new and radically improved Proctor's Ledge. The nice stone walkway and benches surrounded a small area where a sapling had been planted had been illuminated by the soft glow of streetlights. "Or was it a cruel coincidence she was no more than thirty feet from this once gruesome site?"

"Jesus, do you have to be so creepy," Owen said. "The way you recount what happened is a bit intense."

"Well, it is for a Halloween special," I replied. "Can't go into this with a happy-go-lucky demeanor."

"But you do it so well, it's kind of frightening," Owen shivered. "You're almost too good at this."

I took his statement as a compliment. "Thank you. Jack, what do you think? Should we go again?"

"No, I think you captured the whole situation here, well enough." His gaze darted around the area. "Are you picking up the stuffy vibe?"

"Like you're surrounded?" I quirked a brow.

He inclined his chin. "Being watched too."

"Well, we are standing on a burial site." I shrugged. "I think the area is waking up, though." Nothing like a million pairs of eyes peer at you from the darkness. Was I

exaggerating? Sure. However, the dreadful prickling sensation on the back of my neck drove me insane. I wanted to crawl out of my skin and take up residence in someone else's, just to have a moment of peace.

Not going to happen, Simone. You have the gift. Stephen King called it the 'shining,' the ability to communicate with others, the dead, and see what no one could with the naked eye. As much as I loved my abilities, I had moments where my gift of seeing the dead and communicate with them, freaked me out and, this place—Salem, was freaking me the fuck out.

“The quicker we get to each location the sooner we can go back to the hotel,” Lucy said, coming up beside me. As much as she clung to me and could interrupt intimate moments, she also had a heart of gold and thought of me first before even herself. That was worrisome though too. Ugh, I wish I could figure her out.

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“True. It won’t be too much longer, and we’ll be back on the road and headed to our next location.” Positive vibes. Positive outlook. We had to keep pushing forward and not dwell. As much as I wanted to have fun in Salem, because, hello, spooky, it was draining emotionally and mentally. I wondered how many other mediums had felt the same way over the years coming there?

“You’re doing great,” Owen added. “I know this is a lot for you, maybe too much, but if anyone can handle this, it’s you, Simone.”

“What if I can’t though?” Pity party for one, coming up. As much excitement as I felt when we arrived, I could feel it all waning. Strange how that happens. Quite peculiar how unseen forces could steal my energy quicker.

“Then we’ll be here to support you and help you any way we can,” Owen replied. “We’re a team and that’s what we’re here for.”

His words encouraged me and bolstered my resolve. “You’re right. I need to happy the hell up. We’re supposed to be on an adventure and I’m being a morose asshole. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Jack said stopping in front of us. “You’re taking on a heavy load here. If you need help, I’ll step in too. That’s why I am here.”

True. It was. But, I didn’t want him to be overwhelmed. I snorted. The whole place has to be overwhelming him, yet he hadn’t taken a sip of alcohol nor had he tried to smoke the dead away. Maybe Jack was conquering his demons after all. “How many more locations do we need to visit tonight?”

Jack grinned. “You’re almost done. You have two more.”

“Perfect,” I said. “Let’s get to it.” The sooner we were done, the quicker I could rest and recharge for the next chapter of this little adventure.

So, this was Mass Hysteria during Halloween... I stared up at the sign over the bar. Fake spiderwebs clung to the wooden planks. A row of candles were spaced out along the banister, their soft light flickered, casting dancing shadows across the walls. Pumpkins were propped up in the corner of the porch and near the door. Off to the side was a stack of hay bales with more gourds, pumpkins, and squash adorning the decorations. There was also a tongue-in-cheek witch sign for storing brooms. It was cute and a fantastic nod to the community. Lucy decided to stay at the hotel and watch a horror movie marathon with Henry, leaving me with Owen, Jack, and Nolan. Not that I minded, I didn't. Kael lingered somewhere, but he also gave us room, which I appreciated, but also felt a little bummed too.

“Well, should we go in?” Jack grabbed the handle on the door.

When we stepped into the space, the atmosphere changed once again. It wasn't the hum of energy from the other night. No, this was more sensual. Those in costume and out writhed and danced in the area where tables once were. The music was a mix of erotic rifts and slow ballads meant to draw people closer together. At the bar, Cian filled orders while two others did the same down from him. The serving staff hustled bringing people drinks and small snacks while patrons loaded up plates at the small buffet.

“You made it,” Zane said, drawing my attention. There was something off about this man. He took seeing Kael in stride and spoke almost like he believed in the paranormal, which, I mean, it’s Salem, but a healthy dose of skepticism would’ve made him less suspicious. In my book, anyway.

“We did,” I agreed. “Thank you again for the invite. You already know Jack from your meeting with Lucy the first day we were here.” They shook hands then, and I introduced Nolan and Owen. “This Nolan and Owen the two other members of our team.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. This is Jamie, or James if you listen to my sister, Ava.” The woman beside him grinned and rubbed her growing belly.

“The name is ridiculous, and I can’t tell you how many times I’ve told her to stop.” Jamie rolled her eyes. “Welcome to Salem. I heard you’ve had quite the adventure so far.” She was beautiful with her dark auburn hair and brown eyes. Her skin glowed with energy and there was a small hum of energy surrounding her. On her wrist was a small crescent moon and star tattoo that was adorable yet fit her too.

"We are." Last night turned into one freaky mess of an occasion. After we left Proctor's Ledge, it was almost as if we were being followed. At one point, Kael pushed forward with Ember to stymie the activity. But it didn't last long. At the hotel, after we were finished with our intros to the different sites we were going to investigate, a spirit or three could have been more but Ember had been working overtime to keep them at bay, decided to come home with us. Lights flashed on and off so did the television. We heard cries for help and the cold draft of being touched by the dead. I shivered just at the thought of it. "We're not done yet. I have a feeling it'll get more intense tomorrow night."

“Well it is or will be All Hallows Eve,” Jamie said. “Everyone comes out to play then, more so because it’s a full moon.”

I liked her. She had this charm about her. She was sarcastic and funny, but also sweet and understanding. I could see why Zane and Cian would fall in love with her. “Something tells me, they’re never far away.”

“So, what’s up with everyone here,” Owen said. “It’s almost like they’re hypnotized.”

Zane looked at him and then to me. “Do they? I see a bunch of people having fun.”

"Well, of course, they're having fun," Owen replied, "but it's more than that."

Zane leaned in and smirked. "Maybe it's the coming full moon?" His laughter was full-bodied and deep, just like his voice. There was also a wildness about that had me doing a double-take. "I told Jamie about the halos you saw around me and Cian. She's curious how your ability works, I thought if you ladies would like to talk, I could introduce your men to a few important people."

I glanced at Jack and Nolan first then Owen who had a stupid, shocked look on his face. “Oh, they’re not my—”

“Where’s the other guy?” Jamie asked hooking her arm with mine. “Zane said something about a guy named Kael?”

“We’re her men,” Nolan said, correcting Owen, “and we’d be honored to meet your friends. Come on, Owen. Time to learn the ropes.”

Poor dopey Owen, he didn’t know what he was in store for with Nolan and Jack. I returned my attention to Jamie and shrugged. “He comes and goes as he pleases. I’m sure he’ll be here when he’s ready.”

She frowned. “I have to admit, last year at this time, I was having a bit of an issue getting used to the idea that there were other things—beings in this world.” She shook her head then grinned. “Guess that’s what happens when you lose your memory though, right?”

“Well, that sucks,” I muttered. “I don’t know who I’d be without my memories.”

“You’d be surprised,” Jamie said. “So, have you met anyone else in town besides Cian and Zane?”

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“Uh, no. Well, technically we met Mrs. Putnam and Ms. Good at the library.” Which seemed to happen so long ago. “We’ve kind of not wanted to disturb anyone while we’re here. You deserve your privacy, so I’ve been trying to keep to the history and the abstract of Salem.”

"We appreciate your thoughtfulness. It's one thing to be a tourist hotspot and another to be a tourist attraction." I understood Jamie. She was right. I'd seen it too many times. The people involved in a particular haunting became the spectacle the curious wanted to see, not the location or why it was potentially haunted.

“So, what do you do in the great town of Salem?” I folded my hands on the table, relaxing slightly.

“Would you believe I’m a travel agent?” The twinkle in her eye said there was more to it than just being a travel agent.

"You don't fit the travel agent mold." I narrowed my eyes. "I'm good at spotting different people."

“Hit me with your best shot then.” She laughed.

“You’re Wiccan—a witch,” I murmured. “You radiate power and life. You... God, saying this makes me sound pervy, but you attract people to you. Like, they always enter your gravitational pull, don’t they?”

She tapped the end of her nose. “Good guess, Simone. There are more like us here tonight. You’re the first seer—medium psychic we’ve had join us in years. I think it’s

why Zane wanted you to join us tonight.”

“Uh, I’m deff not into cult things,” I said, afraid of a repeat in the canyon.

Jamie laughed harder this time. His hand went to her belly while the husky melodic sound filtered around us. "We're not a cult. I've seen your video from Turnbull Canyon. You had an amazing experience. Do you remember any of it?"

I frowned sitting back. "Bits and pieces. Not all of it, and I don't like talking about it." A chill raced up my spine and I shivered.

“Don’t push, witch,” Kael said wrapping his arm around me. “That night holds horrible memories for my liege.”

Jamie yipped in surprise and Cian was at Jamie’s side in an instant, slamming his hands on the table and growling, like physically growling at Kael. “No, Cian, it’s okay. He startled me, that’s all. Plus, I pushed with a sensitive subject. It’s my fault. Down puppy.”

Cian frowned. His gaze locked with Kael's. If the man meant to beat the shit out of my guardian, well, he'd be in for a rude awaking. "Are you sure?"

Jamie laughed. “Apologize to Simone, please. It truly was my fault. I asked a personal question.”

Cian blew out a breath. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you, Simone.”

“Oh, you didn’t. Surprise me, sure.” I elbowed Kael. “Apologize, guardian.” I rolled my eyes and Jamie giggled.

"I'm sorry," Kael said, not removing his gaze from Cian's. "That night is a bit off-

limits for us."

I glanced up at Cian again and the shimmery shadow seemingly grew in form and color. "What are you?"

Finally, he broke the pissing contest he was having with Kael and looked at me. "What?"

"What are you? You're not normal." I held my hand up when he curled his lip. "You have an amazing halo or aura surrounding you that's fierce and protective. I've never seen that before."

Cian cut his gaze to Jamie. "Huh, I don't know. But, thanks for the info. Now, since I'm here, what can I get you?"

After taking our orders, Cian stepped away and Jamie rushed to apologize again. "It's no biggie. It happens. Kael is very protective of me. I think in a way, Cian and Zane are like Kael when it comes to me."

She nodded. "They are. Zane told me he explained to you what happened last year."

"He did. I'm so sorry. That had to be a confusing, scary time for you." I placed my hand on hers. The warm jolt of electricity between us had a little gasp of surprise falling from my lips. When I looked back up at her, two men and a woman were surrounding her. The pulse of love and longing filled them. Their hands were on her shoulders as they stared down at her. "Hey, tell me what do your parents look like?"

Jamie's gaze snapped to me. "What?"

"Quick, what do your parents look like?" I glanced at the woman with auburn hair and brown eyes, she was the spitting image of Jamie, but she could also be Jamie's

sister or aunt or an even distant family member.

“Everyone says I am the spitting image of my mother. My fathers, one had blond hair and the other had dark hair. Both had blue eyes. Gideon, my brother, looks like Collin.” She pointed to the guy working the bar with Cian.

Yep, these were her parents. “Your mom and your dads are here. They’re right behind you. Your mom is so proud of you and so excited that you’ll be having her first grandbaby.”

Her mother looked at me and nodded. You hear us then?

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I inclined my chin. "She's surprised I can hear her. It's one of my parlor tricks." I winked at Jamie. "Anyway, all three of them are happy. They were with you that night. They protected you. They also said to keep Zane and Cian on their toes, like you always did."

A single tear slipped down Jamie's cheek. "You don't have to do this for me."

"I want to. Plus, your parents look like badasses, so I don't mind." I glanced at her mother. Anything else?

Tell Jamie we love her very much and we're so sorry we didn't make it. We tried so hard. And, we're always with her. The woman's bottom lip trembled, and the two men pressed their lips to her temples.

I blew out a breath. Low blow guys. "Your mom said, she's sorry they couldn't make it and they tried so hard. She said they love you so very much and they are always with you."

Jamie bowed her head at the same time Zane and the guys joined us. "Thank you."

"Hey now," Zane said, appearing a bit frantic. "What happened? Is it the baby? Are you okay?"

"It's my fault," I said. "Her mother and fathers appeared when I touched her hand and they had a message for her."

Zane's gaze softened as he slid in beside Jamie. "Ah. When she lost her memories,

she also lost her memory of her parents. So when she could finally remember, we had to tell her that her parents—”

"Died," I muttered. "I'm so sorry, Jamie. If it's any consolation, I can feel their love for you, and ohmigod, I wish I had all of that too. They're super great people and you were all lucky to have each other."

“Thank you.” She gave a watery smile. “You’ve made me very happy, Simone. I know I’m crying, but they’re tears of happiness, I swear.”

I laughed. “I figured as much.”

“So, why did Cian hurdle the bar and charge over here?” Owen asked, pulling up a chair.

“My fault, this time,” Kael said. “Jamie asked a sore question of Simone, and I jumped the gun.” At least he had the decency to appear remorseful.

“Ah.” Jack sat beside me and Nolan pulled up a chair beside Kael. “Makes sense now.”

“So, I was asking the guys if you were ready for tomorrow night,” Zane said, changing the subject.

“I think we are,” I said, glad for the change of pace. “Sometimes these things aren’t so black and white. We could have a ton of activity or none at all.” Speaking of which, I’d yet to see Chase and his crew, which was a bit worrisome.

“We could cast a spell,” Jamie said. “To drop the veil a little more for you.”

I shook my head. “There’s no veil for me. My abilities show me everyone, dead and

alive. Kael is my block along with Ember.”

“That must be terrifying,” Jamie said. “I don’t know how I would feel as a child being able to see what you do.”

"Nightlights were my friends for a long time." I chuckled. But, she had a point. I guess it's why I had Kael from such a young age. I couldn't handle it. Everything, dream, or not felt real. The dead, to me, were people. I could touch them. See them. Talk to them. I felt their pain. I relived their best and worst moments. If I didn't have Kael, I probably would have gone insane at some point. "I'm most thankful for Kael, he's been my rock, up until now, with all of this."

“It helps when you have support,” Jamie agreed as she stared at Zane. “Even if it takes time to figure it out.”

“Stubborn to a tee,” Zane muttered. “But, it’s why I fell in love with her.”

“Awe,” I whispered.

"Anyway," Zane said. "I want all of you to enjoy your night here, on us, of course, and if you need anything tomorrow night, don't hesitate to ask. We're here for you."

I appreciated Zane’s candor and his help. “Thank you so much. I just know tomorrow night is going to be a blast.”

Boy, I wish I could go back in time and prepare myself for the worst.

Chase Jenkins III, I hated him. Why you might ask? Because the dickless wonder was a complete douche. I mean, I already knew he was, but there's a difference between knowing due to seeing him on television and seeing all of his assholishness in person. The guy had frosted tips—who does that anymore, besides Guy Fieri? No one, that's who. He had a face I'd like to smash if I was the aggressive type, though, I guess I might be, because every time I look at him my stomach churned, and not in a good way.

The vibes rolling off him in sickening waves said he wasn't a good person, though he performed being this cool, slick, dude who everyone loved. I saw right through it. The man had skeletons in his closet, and I wanted nothing to do with him. Unfortunately, I had to spend the next six hours with him for this live event. I curled my lip in disgust. Thankfully, I guess, he wouldn't be around us. We would have to do a few spots with him, but I would be standing far away from him, just in case.

“There you are,” Chase said walking in my direction. “They said you're elusive, but this is more like you're hiding.”

From him, yes. Plus, who are the 'they,' in his statement? I held up my hand, halting his steps. "I'm trying to center myself for the evening—" a lie—"and I can't be interrupted." Not a lie. I can't explain what made Halloween or the Day of The Dead—Día de Los Muertos such active days, but they were, which meant bolstering my shields with the help of Kael and Ember, while also allowing me the ability to hear and see those who wished to communicate. It was always a delicate balance for me.

“Come on now, don’t be like that,” Chase muttered. “We’re supposed to be friendly.”

I arched a brow. “We’ve met all of how many times?” I gave him a once over then snorted. “No thanks. I’m doing this show because it’s in my contract, not to become your friend.” The longer he stood close to me, the more my skin crawled in disgust. I hated the feeling. I also hated not being able to put my finger on ‘why,’ I was feeling that way.

Nor did he take the hint. “Come on, Simone, we can have some fun together.”

Double, no triple, negatory. No way in hell I would do anything willingly with him. Especially when he didn’t take for an answer. “Sorry, no can do.”

“You need to lighten up, babe.” Again he advanced on me. “I can help you go places.”

Ew. Gross. I shivered in revolt. “Sexual harassment in the workplace is illegal Chase. Before you say anything, Henry is right there. I will tell him.”

He laughed. The tool doubled over as he continued to chortle. Then he stood to his full height, his eyes darkened with menace and intent. “Who’d believe you, Simone? You’re a nobody who happened to get two-million views on YouTube.”

"I would," Jack said, coming up behind Chase. "Henry would. Nolan would. Our whole production staff." A cruel grin split Jack's face. "I bet if we called your production crew, they'd believe Simon too. So, why don't you walk yourself back over to the pre-production area and stay out of our way? You're just the host after all. Everyone's tuning in to see Simone and only Simone."

Chase swallowed hard, his face went pale and there was a real fear there. Good. He should be feeling an ounce of the terror he inflicted on others. Jack had him by the

balls, I was sure about it. If I had to guess, more women than not had to deal with Chase's gross advances.

I shivered again for good measure

“Well, Chase, what’s it going to be?” I’d never seen this gallant side of Jack or the fact he could become so intimidating either.

I crossed my arms and lifted my chin, turning away from Chase when he didn’t say a word. Didn’t bother me, though. Because I didn’t have anything else to say to him nor did I want to look at him either. He’d turned a night that could have been fun and interesting for all of us, into this slimy, nauseating mess.

“Simone, Henry wanted to speak to you for a minute,” Jack said, placing his hand on my shoulder. “I’ll take you over to where he is.”

“Thank you, Jack, I appreciate it.” And, I did. I wanted to be as far away from that man as I could be. The less I had to deal with him, the better off I’d be.

“I’m not getting the best vibes from him either. I should have listened to you more when we were discussing this after the contracts were signed.” He sighed. “We don’t need his shit tonight.”

No, we didn’t. We would have to be on our toes the whole time. “Not like it would make a difference, haven’t you heard, the good ol boy club is still running strong.” I shrugged, as we walked back over to the covered area where the rest of our team waited.

“What crawled up Chase’s ass and died?” Lucy muttered, gripping her cup of coffee.

“The foot Jack firmly lodged up it,” I replied, grabbing a waiting cup. “It’s nothing

though. We have to get ready to start.”

This was it. We were finally going to begin our investigation and though it was starting on a shitty note, I wanted it to be the best live event Adventure Channel ever had. I waited as the production team attached our mics and handed us our radios. When they were done, Henry joined us looking frazzled around the edges. My thought, Chase just bitched Henry out for being caught red-handed trying to be sleazy with me.

"We'll start with the cemetery first then work our way up to Gallows Hill, remember all of this will be done in real-time, so try to keep the cursing to a minimum. It's hard on our tech people to bleep it out."

I laughed. “We’ll try to be good about that.”

“Also should anything, and I do mean anything happen, while you are at one of the locations, tell us to shoot to commercial. Then use the radios you’ve been given to let us know what’s happened and what you need help with.”

The standard procedure. I understood why Henry had to say all that, but I figured we already knew it, sans the commercial part. However, I also understood, standing there, that I too was a liability. The canyon proved once I was involved in a site, I could go too deep. I only hoped this time around, my team would have my back and bring me out if things went sideways.

"Once we're done with the televised live portion of the show, you'll have a twenty-minute break and then we'll hit the stream where you'll continue your investigation and answer some questions from the fans as you work." Henry looked to me. "We already have over five hundred questions for you, Simone."

I blanched. “What?”

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"Yep. People are curious about you. The projected numbers for this live show are in, and we're going for a record. Also, there are several watch parties around the country as well. We'll give a shout out to them as you investigate. This show will also be live-streamed on Twitter so that fans can interact with Chase and you along with everyone watching from home. I have never, and I know it sounds like a bunch of bunk, seen the amount of excitement for a new show." He pulled his phone from his pocket. "Have you checked out your video?"

I shook my head, in shock from what Henry said. "No. Not for a while. I mean, we've been kind of busy."

Henry laughed. "You have twenty-three million views as of right now on your video." He pulled the video on his phone then turned the screen toward me. "Congratulations, Simone. You're a star."

Staring at the screen, I didn't know what I felt. Surprised? Anxious? Worried? I scrolled through the comments and found the skeptics pretty fast, but even the comments were pretty positive. Someone even posted the link for our live show. "Someone pinch me."

Nolan did then chuckled when I yelped. "You said pinch you. Congratulations, Simone, you earned all of this."

Yeah, I guess I did. "Thanks. This is amazing. I don't think I can process this right now." I swallowed hard and took a shaky breath. "Wow."

"Indeed," Henry replied. "Okay, so let's get you to our first site of the night. We're

starting in ten minutes.”

I gathered my frayed wits and turned to follow my team, only to be stopped by Henry. When I turned, concern replaced his warm features. He’d been hiding his worry with his excitement. “Something wrong, Henry?”

“Did Chase do something to upset you?” Curious how he phrased the question. I guess it was better than ‘Chase said you were rude to him.’

“Henry, even if I said yes, and it was vile, what would happen? You need a host for the show and we’re about to go live.” I rolled my shoulders.

“I’ll host,” he replied. “I can do it. I have time in front of the camera, I know what to do.”

Yeah, but people wanted Chase too. “It’s cool, we’ll talk about it after.”

Henry narrowed his eyes. The frown tugging his lips down would frighten anyone who didn't know the happy go lucky person. "Fine, after. But, I'm holding you to it, Simone. If something happened, we need to know. We don't try to cover up stuff at the Adventure Channel."

I inclined my chin. “After the show then. I will tell you everything.”

“Thank you.” Henry motioned for me to lead the way. “If you don’t mind, I believe I will stick with you for the rest of the night. I want to make sure everything goes off without a hitch.”

“Uh...” Nervous energy pooled in my stomach. “Sure. Why not. Then you’ll get to see how everything works for us. But, be prepared to see some shit.” I should have told him about Kael, but at the time, I didn’t think he would believe me even if I told

him. No, Kael was a see it to believe it kind of spirit.

“Have you enjoyed your time here?” Small talk wasn’t my thing, but I liked Henry he was always genuinely curious about everything.

“Yes,” I replied. “If I could pick somewhere to live it would be here.” Even though the air could be a little oppressive sometimes. “Everyone has been so friendly and warm. Did you know the Sheriff invited us to a pre-Halloween ball at Mass Hysteria?”

“I heard,” Henry chuckled. “Sounds like I missed out on a pretty great night.”

He had. By midnight the energy in the bar had turned ravenous, in a sexual manner. Men and women hooked up leaving little to the imagination and I found I couldn’t keep my hands off Kael, Nolan, and Jack. Owen... He was there but he also seemed a little bit too shy maybe, to initiate anything, so I was back to square one with him. Once we were back at the hotel, Nolan, Jack, and I barely made it into our room before we were naked and fucking. I was surprised we didn’t wake anyone and when the guys fell asleep, I had a little fun with Kael too. When we woke, I wondered if maybe Zane and Cian spiked the food and drinks, then I remembered everything they’d been through over the last year, and I knew they’d never be so reckless with their wife or their friends and family. There was something special about Mass Hysteria, I just couldn’t put my finger on it.

“Maybe next time you could join us while we’re out.” I shrugged. “See what it’s all about.”

“I’d like that, though I don’t think my wife would approve.” He chuckled.

“Bring her with you,” I said. “The more the merrier.”

Henry grinned. “We’re here. Get into position and good luck tonight.” He gave me a final wave as he joined the crew members standing to the side. Maybe Jack had been right. Henry was different.

We’d been investigating for an hour when the activity picked up. Chase stayed out of our way mostly, unless it had to do with the show or questions asked by those watching at home. The cemetery was kind of a bust to be honest, too. There were a few blips and bings here and there, but nothing. It was weird. I expected to find the woman who died at the headstone, but she too was gone. That’s when Ember showed up and explained the situation. It was too much. Too much light. Too many people. Too many gadgets and doodads.

So, we decided to pare down and only allow my core group into the cemetery. That meant Lucy and Owen would be the only ones with cameras and at that, they would be set to night vision while the others stayed out. The change in atmosphere was almost immediate. It was downright cold in Salem, but this was bone-chilling. My fingers were numb. I could see my breath. A soft hum of a melody drifted up from the small meditation pond in the middle of the graveyard. We slowly and quietly trekked through the rows of tombstones over to the area where I’d heard the singing.

“Hello,” I whispered. “You don’t have to be afraid. I’m sorry for the intrusion, but you have a lovely voice.”

A wispy, translucent smoke twirled and swayed in front of us and it seemed, only I could see her, the dancer. Or at least I thought it was her. She looked in my direction and the pain of being frozen solid and being afraid hit me instantly. I grimaced. My teeth chattered and my body burned yet ached from being stiff. Help me. The woman continued to stare at me, her form dancing as she sat on a reflection bench. The pain intensified. I glanced down at my hands and watched as they turned a startling shade of purple then back. Hypothermia plus frostbite equaled a deadly combo.

When I went back through all the research information we received from Betty, I found the autopsy report for the 'Jane Doe,' the performance troop member, later named Victoria Franks when her body was identified. She'd had severe frostbite on her fingers, nose, and toes. Her body had been so cold, it'd taken days before they could lay her out flat or even attempt to take fingerprints from what was left of her hands. According to the M.E., her skin was frail and waxy, too brittle to touch, causing skin slippage when they examine her making it nearly impossible to identify through fingerprints alone. Had her troop not gone to the police in search of their friend, she might have been buried in an unmarked grave as an unknown person.

The burn in my hands, feet, and face were from her. This was part of her death. The unrelenting lock of my joints as the blistering cold settled deep into my body, causing me to tire and ache. My eyes grew heavy and I swayed forward. Giving myself a mental shake to pull back from her some, I glanced at Jack who was pale and a bit green around the jaw area. "Owen, I need you to help Jack for a minute. He doesn't do so well with this stuff. Death isn't his thing." I returned my focus to the woman in front of me, and I took a step toward her again while calling forward Ember to help me out.

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The one thing I liked about Ember was the fact he didn't care. He wore the same band shirt and the same low slung jeans. He had pink hair and a genuine smile. He glanced at the woman and frowned then looked to me. You want to send her on, don't you?

I did. She deserved to rest. Yes. "I know it hurts. I wish it didn't. I wish whatever happened to you, wouldn't have. But, you don't have to stay here." I cut my gaze to Ember and gave a curt nod. He formed in a mist of shadows and light and walked across the water to the woman. "You can go now. Follow the light and you'll be free."

Ember held his hand out to the woman. At first, I didn't think she would take it, but it also appeared she and Ember were having some type of conversation. At last, she took his hand then stood. Her body repaired itself right in front of my eyes, but I knew all Lucy would capture was the tendrils and smoke, not the real woman. As they disappeared together, I grinned. This was the best part of my job, allowing spirits to finally rest after years of wandering or reliving the worst moments of their lives—their deaths.

The soft, "go to commercial," brought me back to my surroundings and I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding. I glanced over at Lucy who was wiping her eyes. Her bottom lip trembled. Had they seen it all too?

"You okay, Lucy?" I went to her; afraid she was either scared out of her mind or something else had happened.

"Yeah," she answered. "That was kind of amazing."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone darting toward us, their heavy footfalls had me bracing myself, just in case they weren't human. When Henry came to a skidding halt in front of us, Nolan not far behind, his cheeks were pink and his eyes were wide with wonder and joy, maybe. I don't know. But he freaked me out. "Play back the recording. Please."

Oh yeah, I had one of those things hooked to my shirt because I hated carrying stuff around with me while I worked. I unclipped it and rewound the recording. I figured I'd only hear myself speaking, but what came through blew my mind. We heard Ember ask what the girl's name was and her age. The woman introduced herself to Ember. Victoria Franks. She wasn't more than nineteen at the time of her death.

I needed to sit down.

"A class A EVP," Henry whispered, his tone filled with awe. "You captured a class A, Simone. And it's not one word, it's a small conversation. How..."

I held up my hand. "I didn't do anything. The spirits did." That made me sound all mystical and shit, but I didn't care. Because I hadn't influenced any of it. I only asked for Ember's help.

"Well, Twitter is blowing up right now. People are losing their shit online," Henry said, growing more excited by the second. "We have another thirty seconds to reset and go again, do you want to stay here, or move on?"

"Move on," I said without hesitation. "The cemetery is quiet now and it's time to let the dead rest here." More spiritualist bull shit, but nonetheless true. The cemetery had a peacefulness to it. No need to continue to stir up trouble or invite it forward.

"Great, we can start the trek to Gallows Hill if you'd like. Walking through the area while you investigate might give you a chance to catch other unexplained things."

Henry grinned and practically bounced with unspent energy.

“Sounds perfect.” I grinned. “Besides, it’s gotten pretty cold out here tonight. The walk should warm me up.”

He nodded. “Exactly.” He handed me palm warmers then called for hot chocolate and a scarf. “Show us what you can do, Simone.”

Okay, if he wanted a show, I'd give it to him. So far, I'd been a little reserved trying to go with the wholesome vibe. Now that Henry had given me the go-ahead, I was about to unleash the Kracken, so to speak. I called Kael to my side then Ember, knowing full well no one could see them then devised a plan.

"What are you thinking?" Kael asked, his gaze pinned on our producer Henry. "And how far are you willing to let this play out?"

“How about medium,” I answered. “I want them to be able to hear those who are here, maybe some apparitions of the spirits?” I glanced at Ember.

“They’re not toys, Simone.” Ember crossed his arms. “They don’t perform for you on command.”

“But, aren’t they all here anyway?” I gazed out over the area; the space ripe with activity. “I don’t want them to put on a show per se. But, if we could lower the veil even a tiny bit to show everyone they were real and they were still hurting and searching, wouldn’t it also help?”

“Are you seriously asking us that?” Kael narrowed his eyes. “Exposing one’s pain isn’t for public consumption. You of all people know this.”

“So, what can we do, or I do? People need to see what happens when society gets a

bug up its ass.” Frustration set in, I know I wanted to go hard and that sometimes my ambition got the better of me, but weren’t viewers expecting a huge production? I mean, let’s be honest. I will never be able to recreate what happened in the canyon anywhere else. So, I had to be realistic about the whole situation.

"We can go with a few voices, maybe some real-time answers to questions," Ember said, biting his bottom lip. We don't want to upset those here on this hill. Remember, they're still caught in the last traumatic moments of their lives. No sense in harming them more."

Right. He was right. We had to be practical and fair. I pushed my hair from my forehead and blew out a breath. “You’re right. You’re right. I just don’t want to screw up, is all.”

“Go too big,” Kael muttered, “and you’ll end up being labeled fake and then more will question the validity of your video. Can’t have that.”

Of course, Kael had to be my voice of reason. "No, we can't. So a little big show then. Make grand on a small scale."

“Exactly,” Ember replied. “Looks like you have an audience.” He lifted his chin in the direction of where Henry took off toward. There standing under one of the makeshift canopies was Zane, dressed in his uniform. “What is he?”

I snorted. "We've been asking ourselves that question the whole time. Whatever he is, I've never seen anyone like him or several other people in this town. It's kind of unnerving, to be honest. I raised my hand and waved. "FYI: he can see you, Ember. We found out the first night here."

“You’re shitting me,” Ember whispered on an exhale.

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“Nope,” Kael answered. “She’s not. He’s cool about it though. He’s not biased.”

“Interesting.”

Zane moseyed over to where I was standing, joining us while we planned. “Good evening, Simone, Kael.” He nodded at both of us then stared at Ember. “Who’s your new friend?”

“This is Ember, he’s a caretaker of sorts. He protects the dead at their places of rest, especially on the anniversary of their deaths,” I replied. “He’s here to help keep the spirits calm and explain what’s happening, though some will continue to go through the motions as though we don’t exist.”

“Cool.” Zane shoved his hands into his pockets. “Well, enjoy your night. Jamie said she’ll meet you by the Witches Museum if you want to tour the place with her. She has a good handle on the history there now. Plus, I kind of get the feeling she’s a little star-struck too.”

I laughed. “I’d love Jamie to join us. Will Cian be there too to watch over her?”

“Nah, he’s at the bar, you know, full moon and Halloween, everything is about to get freaky.” Zane chuckled.

“Well,” Ember said. “The freaks do come out at night.”

Zane gave a hardy chortle. “That they do. Don’t hesitate to call us if something should happen, we’ll be here for you.”

I appreciated his concern, especially with the creepy Chase hanging around. "I will Sheriff. If I need you. Until then, be safe too." I waved as he walked away heading deep into the dark shadows surrounding Gallows Hill. Yeah, there was something different about that man.

"Well, he seems interesting," Ember said. "But, I can't get a bead on him. He's different, but not in a bad way."

"Yeah," Kael agreed. "I got the same vibe too."

"If he has our backs, then that's all I am concerned about." I glanced up when Henry gave us the signal. "It's time. Let's have some fun, guys."

Kael and Ember smirked before disappearing into wispy tendrils of smoke. Once they were gone—but never far away—I joined my team and prepped them for the next set of discoveries. "Kael and Ember are going to help us out a little. We shouldn't push though. Be gentle but first. We'll gather some solid evidence up on this hill promise."

Jack nodded. "Let's do this."

We took our places near where the hanging tree was once located and from there, we would make our way down to Proctor's Ledge. In 2019 the town of Salem finally made the area where so many were thrown after death, a memorial. I suspect the neighbors who bought their property near Gallows Hill, didn't necessarily expect all the attention their little plot of land and home would garner after all these years. As it was, the younger members of their families stood at the fence line, bundled up, with their phones out watching us. I only hoped they'd enjoy the show.

I waved at them before turning to face the camera to begin again. Jack was behind me and Owen to my right. Nolan was at our command center watching all of the cameras still recording at the different locations. I don't know exactly what we caught beyond the initial responses, but I hope it was keeping everyone entertained.

"So, Simone," Chase said, as we went live once more. "What can you tell us about this spot?"

"This is where people died." I shrugged. "This site marks the end of their journey." I began to walk the area we'd been afforded to investigate, taking everyone closer to where the original hangings occurred. "Imagine being shackled and carted up to a big sturdy tree; your life all but over. You know you're innocent of all the charges, but no one will listen. As you get closer to your final destination before dying, the people of Salem have gathered. They're hurling insults at you and raging about you being a witch. You're scared, obviously, but you're angry too. Some of the accused witches were defiant in the end. Giles Corey specifically said, as he was being crushed to death, "more weight." A knowing smile tugged at my lips. "He also cursed the town

of Salem by saying, “Damn you! I curse you and Salem.” Rebecca Nurse was quoted as saying; “Oh Lord, help me. It is false. I am clear. For my life now lies in your hands...” the same thing Mrs. Paul wrote in her last letter before she took her life in the wooded area down the hill from us.

"Speaking of curses, do you believe in them?" Chase asked as we stopped at the clearing in the middle of Gallows Hill park.

“I do. Words said in anger or grief carry weight. Do I believe the whole of Salem has been cursed for their abhorrent actions? I do. Can the curses be broken? Yes. I think Salem has come a long way in over three hundred years. The memorial helps. The act of publicly stating for the record no one in Salem was ever a witch, to begin with, puts souls to rest too. However, even though it was a case of mass hysteria that caused the trials, it does a disservice to those who died."

Chase tilted his head. “How so.”

"It rationalizes the act and takes the blame off of where it belongs—on the people who lied." I shrugged. "There is nothing written about the main accuser Elizabeth after the trials came to an end. Unlike today, when someone is caught perjuring themselves they can be charged and convicted if proved to be lying. Back then, people disappeared. There isn't or hasn't been any justice for those who died. Sure, the courts deemed them all innocent later, but they're still dead."

“Shouldn’t someone have questioned the trials when these people died, instead of surviving their punishment?” Though Chase was an asshole of epic proportions, he asked all the right questions which I was grateful for.

“I think there were people who did question the validity of the trials and questioned why, if they were witches, did they die. I think the situation was a vortex of chaos and punching through to show people the whole thing—accusations and trial—was a

farce, and those doing the accusing were faking it, would have also caused them to be accused of witchcraft too. So, they kept their mouths shut and probably prayed for the souls of those wrongfully suspected.”

The trees rustled behind us and the soft mutterings of activity drew my attention. Ember stood in the middle of the field. His gaze locked on where trees once stood. Beneath my feet, the terrain changed. Tall hardwood and pulp trees reached toward the sky. The air was chilly and the kiss of fall hung on the breeze. Wheels of an old wooden cart pulled by horse squeaked while the clomp of hooves trotted over the dead leaves and clumps of hard dirt. I glanced up and squinted as the sun burned bright, high in the sky, but did nothing to ease the bone-cold sensation taking root in my body.

I’d done this before, I think. Maybe in the canyon. But, I couldn’t push past the barrier blocking my mind to remember. The chains surrounding those memories were so strong, I feared I’d never get past them, so instead, I focused on what I was seeing. Ember or Kael had transported me to one of the many hangings during the trials. Two women sat in the back of the wagon. Their hands had been tied along with their ankles. I snorted. If they were witches, real witches, they wouldn’t have been tied for very long. They could have escaped. But, my thoughts were rational, back then, those who feared these women and men were not.

“What do you see, Simone?” Jack murmured, drawing me back slightly to the living.

“We’re experiencing one of the hangings,” I whispered. “There is so much violence and venom being spewed at these innocent people. It’s almost unbearable. They all know they’re about to meet their maker. I believe some are content in the fact the truth will set them all free, but there is also that anger I was talking about. They don’t want to die. They have no reason to die.”

Their fear of death and dread threatened to swallow me up. The muscles of my

stomach knotted with anxiety and sorrow. They were all alone out there. I turned away, unable to take the vileness of the act. Their anger and resentment became mine. I worried if I spoke at that moment, I would lash out at everyone. I needed to step back for a second and gain control over myself. Kale was at my side then. He didn't show himself to the others as he wrapped his arm around me infusing me with his strength.

Thanks, I needed that.

He gazed down at me and gave me a wry grin. This is a little intense, huh?

Yeah, more so than even the cemetery. I figured this would be a hot spot though.

He chuckled softly warming me with the sound. It's hot all right.

"What's that over there?" Owen pointed to a grouping of trees where a bright white orb appeared, steadily standing there, watching us as we observed them.

Time to get back to work.

"Hello," I called out and motioned for our small crew to follow us. "We're not here to hurt you, but if you want to speak to us, we'd certainly be appreciative. You should be able to tell your story."

"What's your name, if you don't mind me asking?" Owen said, catching up to me. "I'm Owen. This is Simone, she's pretty amazing. Behind us are Jack and Lucy. We're mean you no harm."

The ball of light pulsed with energy floating in the same spot between the trees. Lost... The word floated through my mind.

“We can help you, if you’d like,” I replied, stopping a good bit from the spirit. I had to remember not to push.

They’re a child...Ember’s voice was clear in my mind. An orphan it would appear. The little girl says she’s seen you before at the library.

The girl with ringlet ponytails and a teddy bear. “We’ve seen her before it appears.” I looked over my shoulder at Jack. You can’t see her true form, but she is the little girl from the library.”

Jack stepped forward and narrowed his eyes. His gasp of surprise had me smiling. “She is.”

“Where are my manners,” I said, kneeling in the cold, wet grass. “There, now we’re at eye level. What’s your name, sweet girl?”

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The orb of light swayed then seemed to move forward, lowering to the ground as it went. I hope to God we were getting this on film because as much as I'd been a part of a situation like this on my own, besides the woman in the cemetery, I'd never seen anyone like this little girl. She was an intelligent haunting.

Mabel...Her light giggle had me chuckling as well. Where's my mommy? I want my mommy.

"She lost her mom," I muttered. Ember?

He appeared next to the girl and placed his hand on the little girl's shoulder. I think I know where she is.

I repeated everything Ember said then to those around us. "Mabel is missing her mother, but from what I am being shown there was an outbreak of cholera here along with several other places in the area. I believe Mabel is one of the young victims."

Owen whistled low. "Harsh. But, not unexpected at the time."

"Didn't the librarian, Mrs. Putnam say she didn't know of any girl who would be of that age who died here?"

She had. "We have a name. I am sure with some quick research we can find information on her at the next break." I glanced back at the little girl who'd taken Ember's hand. Go with him little one, he'll find your mommy. He's good at his job. Okay?

The little girl stared up at Ember then back at me. He's really tall. Tall as my daddy. I miss them both. She sniffled.

Ember grinned at me. Don't worry. It won't be long now.

"Cut to commercial," Henry said. "A minute thirty. We're already searching for the child in death records. Give us a few, Simone."

Chase had already pulled his camera crew away from us and was speaking to the audience before throwing it to the break. I glanced at my group and smiled. "Well, that was fun."

Owen stared at me in awe, while Jack's gaze was still glued to where the little girl and Ember had been standing moments ago. The little show was draining, but I also felt invigorated. It was almost time to make the trek to Proctor's Ledge. I had to pull Jack aside. I had a feeling before this was over, Jack was going to see gruesome scenes, worse than the clearing.

"You ready for this, Jack?" I quirked a brow. "It will get worse from here on out."

He nodded. "It's been pretty interesting so far. I think I've seen more tonight than ever."

"Perks of the trade," I teased, squeezing his hand. "I wonder what Henry will find for us?"

"Well, hopefully, something to validate what we saw." Jack crossed his fingers.

The radio went off again and Henry's voice echoed into the still night. "We've found her, Simone." There was an excited edge there in his voice. "Her name was Mabel Thomason, she was born in 1762, and died in 1768. Cholera was her cause of death.

In 1773, her parents, Eliza Thomason and Zebadiah Thomason perished in a house fire, along with a baby born only five months prior to the fire. His name was Andrew Thomason.”

My heart sank. “Thank you, Henry. Good job.”

“Don’t thank me, Nolan figured it out for us,” Henry replied. “You’re back on in ten, don’t forget the info.”

"I won't," I answered. "I'll give the audience our findings as soon as we go live again."

Chase gave the countdown before we continued with our investigation. He turned his smarmy smile in my direction, and my insides coiled in revolt. “I heard you have an interesting update for us, Simone.”

"I do." I repeated the information Henry, or in this case, Nolan found on Mabel and her family. "A tragic end for all of them. But, hopefully, they will be reunited. After all, there is nothing like a mother's love to heal all wounds."

“I couldn’t have said it better,” Chase said. “Now, where are we off to?”

“Proctor’s Ledge, the site of where several of the victims of the Salem Witch Trials were thrown into the crevice after their death. But, first, we’re going to be visiting the site of where Mrs. Paul tragically passed away. I believe we should pay our respects before moving on.”

I didn’t want to see her. I didn’t even want to call her forth. Her death was a tragedy. I didn’t blame her for the way she took her life, the grief must have been unbearable for her, and I believe in her situation, she shouldn’t become an attraction or be judged by people. While everyone had been working, I’d gathered a dried bundle of lavender

and chamomile and bound them together to help soothe Mrs. Paul soul. I meant to place it at the stump of the tree where she'd been found. My little offering of peace.

However, when we arrived in the area, the tree had been defaced. There were upside down pentagons spray painted into the wood. In areas where bark was missing, devil horns and other vile symbols were carved. On some of the limbs were talismans hanging from their spindly branches. This place was no longer a peaceful bastion. Perhaps it never had been. "Hey Lucy, are there any spells I should be worried about here?"

She stepped forward. Her breath hitched as she shook her head. "No, just a bunch of assholes who have nothing better to do with their time. The talismans are for protection. Whatever you have planned will be fine here."

"Thanks, Lucy." I pulled the bundle of herbs from my jacket pocket and bent down. "I didn't have anything planned. I wanted to pay my respects to a mother who lost everything in a blink of an eye." I glanced at the camera. "Everyone in the Paul family should be remembered not because of their tragic ending, but because they were a loving family who were taken too soon."

After we paid respects to the family we continued down the hill to the ledge. I don't know what I expected to see at night. At first, it was silent. Tranquil. The names of each of the victims had been etched into each of the bricks laying the foundational wall. Owen began to read the names one by one, giving the person a legitimacy they might not have had in over three hundred years.

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“We haven’t learned from our mistakes,” Lucy said, surprising us. “You know? It’s what we do. Over and over and over again. If it wasn’t witches, it was indigenous peoples, if it wasn’t indigenous peoples, it was African-American people, if it’s not them it’s women or the LGBTQA+ community, or Muslims or Hispanics/Latinx, or Asians of any ethnicity who came here for a better life. Or the Irish or Jews or Italians or Sicilians or—”

I put my hand on her shoulder and Lucy glanced up at me. She shuddered then, blinking to clear her hazel eyes. “You okay? You kind of went on a little tirade there.”

“Yeah, I—”

A terror-filled scream rent the night air causing all of us to jump. I stared back in the direction we came, but there was no one there. The scream came again, and this time, I looked back down the street, in the direction of town, and saw a medium statured woman limping toward us. Automatically, I knew she wasn’t alive. The bottom of her dress was translucent as was the apron on the front of her frock. I could also see the streetlight through her midsection. Whoever this was, didn’t have an issue announcing herself.

“Are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Jack bumped my shoulder to grab my attention.

"Yes," I replied as humor filled me. It was always interesting to see his reaction to when he saw a spirit. Because I knew the internal war he waged with himself for so many years. To not see the fear, though he did have a mild discomfort still, in his eyes, was amazing. The radical change he'd gone through, even though this our first

ghost hunt and he'd been taking all of this in stride, wasn't even quantifiable. Jack was a new man, though he continued to conquer his demons daily. "She's coming this way. Should we talk to her?"

"I don't like her energy," Jack whispered. "I don't think she's a good person."

"Send Ember out first then?" The air beside me changed and I gasp. This wasn't Ember's energy. Gaspar. Darkness churned around us. The smell of sulfur and brimstone swirled in the air, making it hard to breathe. Jack took my hand, tugging me into his side as a large black shadow whirled from the crevice, and crossed into the street.

"Uh, are you all seeing this too?" Lucy muttered. "I mean, I'm not seeing it on video but with the naked eye, yes."

"Me too," Owen whispered.

"Same," Chase muttered. "What is it."

Death. Literally. Gaspar shot off down the street without fully forming and wrapped himself around the woman. The tendrils of smoke leaking from him twirled around causing a mini-storm to form in the middle of the road. I'd seen many things when it came to Gaspar, this... This wasn't one of them. Yet, as quickly as he was there, he and the woman disappeared. The air returned the quiet gentleness we'd experienced the minute we stepped foot into the area.

She was trying to curse you, Kael's voice whispered through my mind. We all heard it and Gaspar acted. She's stuck in her moments before death. I can't help her, neither can Ember. Gaspar is the only one.

I nodded. "Condensed version of the story, this was one of the women from the trials,

she was innocent of course, but best as I can understand, she was in the middle of cursing the town and the people of Salem as the trapdoor was opened and her life was ended. She was repeating the curse.”

“Doesn’t explain the black mass that consumed her,” Lucy said. “I mean, I saw that right? You didn’t spike my hot chocolate, did you?”

“No. I didn’t spike your hot chocolate, you goof,” I said with a soft laugh. “What you saw was one of my protectors taking care of the issue.”

“This is all too real,” Chase mumbled from inside Proctor’s Ledge. “Way more than I signed up for, for sure.”

"What can I say, I'm a conduit for the weird." I shrugged. "However, you should know all is well here. There is a sense of peace and rest now. I worried, those who were abandoned here would be furious, but those who built this reflection garden cleansed the area properly. I like it here."

“You would,” Jack teased. “You little weirdo.”

I shrugged again. “Meh. So, where too next?” As calm as my voice had been, my heart still pounded. I hadn’t seen Gaspar’s true form in two years and this time, the one time I didn’t realize I needed him, he wasn’t the man with stars in his eyes, he was a raging beast, coming for his supper in a way. My heart went to the woman who couldn’t find her peace. I couldn’t imagine three hundred plus years of pure torture her soul must have endured. She wasn’t the person she’d been, but an aberration of who she once was.

“That’s my cue.” Chase turned and began walking down the street away from us with his crew. “And, with that our time is up, but what a way to go out. We hope you stick around for the final hour over on YouTube. Keep sending in your questions and

Simone and her team will continue to answer them. Until next time, I'm Chase Jenkins III, and you've been Mashed."

"Now we close down for the show," Henry said, "and get ready for the final hour on the stream. You'll all have about a twenty-minute break."

Already? It didn't seem like we'd been out here all that long. I thought for sure only an hour had passed, but as I glanced at my phone, I was surprised to see it was already two in the morning and Henry was right. We were heading into the witching hour. "Great. Thanks for the update."

When Lucy went with Chase's crew to reset for the next hour, Kael stepped forward. His features were grim, and the set of his mouth told me there was something wrong. He wasn't angry per se but more worried. "That was close. Are you okay?" He pulled me into his arms and the static shock I always felt whenever he embraced me, spread through my body. The tingle chased away the last vestiges of my fright.

"I am. I've never seen Gaspar do that before," I murmured.

"Neither have we. But he was furious. Someone set her free." Kael pressed his lips to the crown of my head.

"Lucy?" I hated my suspicion went straight to her, but after everything I'd learned and witnessed with her, it wouldn't surprise me.

"No." He shook his head. "Something or someone more malevolent than she could ever hope to be."

Okay, that didn't sound foreboding. "Should we tell the Sheriff about what happened?"

“I have a feeling he already knows.” He stared off in the direction of where the woman had been. “But, if it will make you feel better, we can tell him later today, since it’s already the beginning of a new day.”

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“True. Thanks, for the help.” I placed my head to Kael’s chest and the unusual quietness of no rushing blood or beating heart or inhales were oddly comforting at the moment. “We have two locations left and then we’re done.”

“Exhausted yet?”

Yeah, in all honesty, I was. It wasn’t so much because I’d expended energy to talk to the dead, but the change in atmospheres from spot to spot was draining. “An hour is all I need to get through. I’ve got this.

We made our way over to where Jack and Owen were waiting for me and followed the trail back to the Witch House and The House of Seven Gables. The last two locations of the night were going to be the easiest, but the more interesting of the sites, at least to me anyway.

“So, Lucy’s little outburst, huh?” Kael glanced down at me. “That was a bit strange.”

Yeah, she hadn’t seemed herself at all. “I was going to ask you about it. Could it have been the witch’s influence?”

Kael shook his head. “I don’t know. Something, again, entity or ability turned her into a puppet. Sure, she used modern terms, but the message was generational and no less meaningful.”

“I don’t like that whatever it is, is using us and the dead,” I said. “I wish I could figure out why she’s isn’t in Gaspar’s book.”

“Maybe she sold her soul,” Kael said. “I’ve been thinking about it a lot. Trying to figure out the whys. Some Wiccan give their souls to their deities. It’s their way of showing loyalties or whatever. Anyway, if she has sold her soul, it would explain why she wasn’t in a death book. She would end up somewhere else. With someone else.”

I scrunched up my face. “Who would she sell her soul to and why?” Lucy might be a lot of things, but I didn’t see her ever fucking with something so dark, she’d use her humanity for a trade. It didn’t make sense.

“There are tons of deities that practice soul exchange. It’s not so farfetched. What she has to watch out for, is giving it to someone who can manipulate her into doing their bidding for evil.” Right... Not creepy at all.

“Well, Zane was going to look into her situation and let us know. I’m sure there is a logical explanation for everything.” I hooked my arm through his and changed the subject. “We’re almost done with tonight and then we’ll move on to our next adventure.”

Kael laughed. “I believe we’ve created a monster with you.”

I grinned. “Maybe you have.”

“This is the last hour,” Henry said, as we stopped in front of The House of Seven Gables. “You’ll split your time between here and the Witch House. They’re not far apart and you’ll be able to interact more with those watching on the stream. The scene out in front of Proctor’s Ledge has generated a lot of content, so if you’d like to a minute to answer questions, that would be a great opening for the stream.”

“Sure,” I replied. “I’d love to.” Though there wasn’t much I could say about it. I mean, who’d believe death took a soul because they were trying to curse us?

Henry handed me a tablet and showed me all of the Twitter comments and questions. “You can either pick out your favorites to answer live or you can respond to some of them in a comment.”

"Wait... There are over twenty thousand comments. How am I supposed to pick?" I scrolled through the replies to the original Adventure Channel post. Some were comments others were genuine questions, while a few were calling the whole show fake. I didn't care about them. Some people couldn't be convinced anything beyond what they saw, was real. It was like their brain shut down.

“Yes, more on YouTube right now too. You’re a hit, Simone. I knew we were going to have a successful show on our hands when we watched the Cecil Hotel pilot.” Henry grinned. “I don’t want to freak you out, or anything, but the President of AC is watching along with us tonight and he is enthralled. I see a bonus in your future.”

While I was super stoked about the information Henry shared with me, I wasn’t doing

this for the money. I wanted to show people there was another reality out there. Where spirits, intelligent or residual existed. "Thank you, Henry. Thank you so much."

"Why do I feel like there is a but coming?" He cocked a brow.

"Oh, there isn't." I chuckled. "I'm not worried about the money part, I'm glad everyone is enjoying the broadcast. I'm honored to have this platform to share my story and the stories of those who don't have a voice anymore, as well."

"You're welcome, Simone. Now, figure out how you want to answer the questions and we'll be ready to go live one last time." Henry squeezed my shoulder before walking away.

Jack approached then. "Wow, a bonus huh?" He gave me a cheeky grin. "I suppose you'll be leaving all of us beggars behind."

I gave him a playful shove. "Shut up. I'm sure all of us will be getting it not just me." I rolled my eyes. "Help me find a couple of good questions."

Jack snickered then took the tablet away from me. He whistled low. "How do they expect you to choose?"

"Good question, hence, why I asked you to help me."

"Well, there is one about the figure and Gaspar. Maybe that one?" Jack glanced at me. "There's another one about the Paul family too. Since we didn't get much time at their spot, we could answer those if you want?"

"Sure. Sounds good. I bet we'll be answering questions even into the next week." Jack showed me the questions he believed were suitable for us to answer then we turned

them over to Chase's team for the Q&A. By then, Lucy had joined us as had Owen. While Nolan was with Henry over at our control center keeping up with all the cameras we'd placed at the different locations.

It was officially time to start.

"Welcome to the late-night stream of the Simone Hadley Files," Chase said. "Now, before we get started, there have been over twenty-thousand questions and comments on Twitter and over fifteen thousand on YouTube as well. So, we've picked a few for Simone to answer for us. Ready?" He glanced in my direction.

"As always," I replied.

"This question comes from @BattyMom22346; Who was the woman in the street near Proctor's Ledge and what happened after she appeared."

"That's a complicated question to give a simple answer to," I answered. "So, I am going to do my best and give a short but informative response. I didn't get her name; however, she was one of the original women hanged for witchcraft. I have guardians and guides, and when they believe someone is getting too close to me or can hurt me, they react. Anyway, she was repeating the curse she'd been saying as the trapdoor opened and she perished. My guardian did what he does, protects me."

"So, we witnessed a supernatural fight?" Chase prodded.

"Um, not necessarily. It's like when we put up protection around an area. He does the same only his is more spiritual—literally. I am sure, he also helped her crossover so her torture would end finally. Because no one should have to continue to relive their most horrifying experiences, especially their deaths."

"Compassionate release, then?" Chase asked.

“Yes,” I agreed. “It might have seemed malevolent, but it wasn’t.” Liar, liar, I chided myself.

“Excellent,” Chase said. “This second question comes from @Sunnybuns; You gave a little background on Elizabeth Paul family; can you tell us how long it was before she was found?”

Macabre for sure. But, the curiosity was there as morbid as it was. “So, Elizabeth died hours after the confirmation of her husband’s death and her children being brought to the morgue. Her body however wasn’t found for a few days. Friends and family became concerned for her welfare when no arrangements were made for the burials of her children or her husband. She also wasn’t answering her door, nor was she answer her phone. By day three, the Sheriff went out to her home to do a welfare check. From there, they began the search. One of the volunteers found her a couple of hours into their investigation.”

“This story is so tragic,” Chase said. “My heart goes out to her family. I can’t even imagine.”

“I feel the same. She is at peace though, her spirit isn’t trapped and if she had been, I would have done everything in my ability, to release her,” I said.

“Some people commented on the markings on the tree where you visited. Is there anything the locals should be worried about?”

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"No," I answered. "It's why I asked Lucy to take a look at the markings. I trust her judgment and had there been anything bad attached to the location, she would have cleared it."

"What did you leave behind for Elizabeth Paul?"

"Lavender and Chamomile," I replied. "Both have calming properties and will help Elizabeth continue her rest. She deserves it after everything she'd been through."

"Final question," Chase said. "Are you ready to get back at it?"

I grinned. "I'm excited. These two locations will be the most fun."

"Lead the way," Chase stated. "And, now, what you've all been waiting for, the last hour of the Simone Hadley Files."

I headed up the cobblestone lane toward the Seven Gables House where my team was waiting for me. Owen was wide-eyed, and a bit wound up while Jack stared at the house a little hesitant while Lucy appeared unaffected once more. "We've got this. We have an hour to explore and see if the rumors are true or false."

We stepped into the house and the first thing striking thing I noticed was the fact it was so dark. In the corner of the room, I could see the red light of our camera along with the rem pods we'd placed in each room. The lights were steady. I also noticed the abnormally still air. It had been as though the structure was lying in wait, leaving me a bit uneasy. I closed the door behind us as we stepped farther into the home.

“Okay guys, Lucy, you go with Owen and check out the small staircase where a child’s laughter was heard. Jack and I will check out the kitchen and the cooking hearth where it’s said a cook was killed because her skirt caught fire, then we’ll investigate the attic together and the basement.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Lucy said. “Come on, Owen.” She lead him to the staircase while Jack and I went in the opposite direction.

“It’s said a woman’s screams can be heard in the kitchen. Some people have seen the image of a woman falling to the ground after her skirts have caught fire.” I stepped into the area first and glanced around. “Interesting...”

“What?” Jack questioned, stepping next to me. “Wait...”

“Yeah, nothing. It’s dead air in here.” Confused I continued into the space and began calling forth the spirits to talk to us. “You’re quiet. Could you talk to us for a minute? Please? We just wanted to know what happened to you. Did you die because of a fire in the hearth? Was there any water placed before the fireplace so you could protect yourself?”

“How long did you work here?” Jack asked. “Did you enjoy your job?”

“It might be residual,” I whispered. “The screams, the scene playing out. If it is, we might not receive a response.”

“I thought about that too. Plus, there is so much going on we might have scared them, instead of the other way around.” Jack chuckled softly.

"True. Overstimulating ghosts can cause them to tire easily enough." We gave the area another ten minutes then we went to find Lucy and Owen, who were still at the staircase where the young boy liked to play. "Did you have any luck?"

Lucy shook her head. "Silence. Maybe we're too late?"

"No," I said, "I don't think it's that. I think they're overwhelmed maybe."

"Too much going on," Jack added as the rem pod in the attic went off. "Or not."

We climbed the stairs to the attic where Nathaniel Hawthorne used to play as a child and then his son. "Hello?" I glanced at the small device in the middle of the room. The red lights were steady, and the alarm had silenced. "If you're here, and understand me, can you touch the rem pod and make the light turn green?"

I held my breath. I wanted this to work so badly. All of our experiences tonight were beyond my expectations. I didn't want the investigation to end, but I also knew we were running out of time too. The light flickered to green before going back to red.

"Good job!" Owen said. "Red is no and green is yes. Ready?" The light flickered again. "Super. Are you a child?" The lights on the rem pod changed to green. "Perfect. Thank you so much. Are you Nathaniel Hawthorne's son?" The lights stayed red. "Are you another child?" The green light flashed. "Did you die here?" The green light came on again.

Owen asked several more questions, but no responses were ever recorded. The house had gone quiet once more and with our half-hour almost up, we left the Seven Gable house with more questions than answers. I didn't discount the eye-witnessed accounts of what happened in the house, however, I wondered if maybe we missed something important. I looked back at the structure as we made our way to the Witch House. The darkened windows were eerily empty. Almost as if the building was devoid of any energy at all, which wasn't true. So, how did it temper itself? A mystery for another day. Besides, the mystic of the house is what keeps people coming back. I had to remember not every place we go would be a hotbed for activity.

When we arrived at the museum, I could feel the darkness of the space beckoning us forward. It took my breath away. My heart pounded just as it had when Gaspar stepped in front of us. My fingers twitched and trembled, and I had this unshaken resolve to not enter the place, stupid as it sounded. Jamie waited for us by the gate to the entrance. She wore the same worried expression I'd been feeling since entering the area.

“I want to give you the tour,” Jamie whispered. “But, I can’t. There’s something in there that’s preventing me from stepping foot on the property.”

I frowned. “Have you felt it before?”

She shook her head. “No, strange, right? I’ve never had any issues going into the museum before. Now... I don’t get it.”

Well, I wasn't going to jeopardize her safety. "It's okay. We'll do this. Don't need Zane or Cian jumping our asses for you getting hurt." I tried to keep my tone teasing and filled with humor, but deep down, the dread of the unknown churned within me.

Jamie grinned, hugging me tight. The gesture caught me off guard, but the warmth of her embrace, imbued me with energy. "I'll be right here though. I won't go far. I have enjoyed everything you've done tonight."

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“Thanks.” I stepped away from her and entered the property first. I had a bad habit of stepping into trouble before allowing anyone else to do it for me. Plus, I also had protectors. I glanced around the space and shivered. Something dark was here. The not nice presence called me toward the center of the building, while the sensible side of me yelled at me to run. I hated when that happened. I always had a hair-trigger fight or flight response. Kael, Ember, and begrudgingly Gaspar, helped calm the urges, so I could understand where they were coming from, but the sharpness never went away fully.

I should have listened to the half of my brain that said run.

“Guys, please tell me you feel this too,” I whispered.

Jack shivered beside me. “Yes, more than I want to admit.” He rubbed his eyes while taking in the space. “Whatever is here, it’s almost like pouring black sludge down my back.”

Yeah, I felt it too. “They want us here, but also don’t. I don’t understand.” I tip-toed farther into the first floor of the museum, almost as if I had to creep around so as not to be seen. “We have to remember this used to be Judge Jonathan Corwin’s home during the Salem Witch Trials. He was called upon to investigate the accusations of witchcraft. His investigations and the trials following sent nineteen innocent lives to the gallows.

Most of the activity was attributed to a little girl, the youngest of those accused. People have said they hear her disembodied voice or have been touched by a small child. There have been several cold spots within the house recorded as well.

This—whatever we could call it was more dangerous. Menacing. I didn't understand why the oppressive air around us was getting thicker the longer we stood in one spot, but he had to push through and investigate the structure.

We broke apart, this time Owen and I went together, and Jack went with Lucy. They started upstairs while I continued to search the downstairs. Beside me, Owen trembled. The temperature had dropped a few more degrees since we started the show, so I didn't think anything of it. When we heard footsteps behind us, we stopped and turned. There stood Chase and his crew.

"We were asked to join you," Chase whispered. "This place doesn't feel right."

"No, it doesn't," I said. "I'm trying to understand why."

"Do you think the spirit of John Corwin is still here, passing judgment on people?" Chase asked, coming up behind me.

The question had merit, I had to admit he might be onto something. "Maybe. A man who had that much power, who accused then convicted innocent people of witchcraft, might still be emboldened to continue his job even into the afterlife. But, the slithering blackness coiling its tendrils around us, causing the house to be darker than natural, was something else completely.

A child's murmur caught my attention along with Chase and Owen. "Downstairs?" Chase pointed to the staircase leading to the basement. The door was opened for us for easier access if we wanted to go explore the area.

I nodded. "Sounds like it. Let's see what's going on down here."

We went down the stairs in a single file line, keeping a few inches away from each other so we didn't trip and fall. The air down in the basement was cloying. Each

breath I took made my head swim. I'd experienced this sensation before. I knew I had. I couldn't place where though. Then I was falling. I didn't scream, I couldn't scream. It'd been as if my body had been chained and bound from being able to speak or hear. When I landed, I screamed in agony as pain shoot through my body, but the sound of my cry was distant scaring the shit out of me. The room swam before me. My vision wavered as darkness encroached upon me. I couldn't pass out. The unnatural fear I'd experienced when we first stepped into the museum returned with a vengeance. My heart hammered, my chest constricted, causing my breath to be labored. Anxiety prickled across my skin.

Something was wrong. The whole area was wrong. The dark oily tendrils Jack spoke about manifested down in this area. But, who called this beast of energy forth? It was negative. The words Black magic filled my mind and another shudder of terror worked through my injured body. I leaned against something sturdy, my ability to hold myself up, gone. I tumbled once again, limp and in a fog, unable to form the words or ask for help of any kind. Then there was warmth. The soft murmurs of someone, I couldn't place who drew me back from the darkness. I blinked several times, trying to orientate myself. Witches House. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of Chase flying through the air and hitting the wall in front of me with a sickening thud. I blinked again, convinced I was dreaming, trying desperately to understand what the hell was going on.

"Hey..." Kael was there. He had me in his arms. The illusion of his breath brushed against my neck, comforting me. Then Ember was beside him with Granger above the... Hole? Was I in a hole? How did I get into a hole? "It's okay." Kael's voice was a bit tinny still. I shook my head trying to clear the cobwebs and figure out what happened.

"Cut the feed," Owen shouted and all at once everything went dark once more as I slumped against Kael.

Don't worry, Simone, we're here. We'll protect you...

The soft beep of a machine pulled me from the darkness. My eyes fluttered open and I closed them again at the brightness. Where was I? I recalled everything from the night including the hole. I gasped sitting up straight, then groaned as my whole left leg throbbed like a son of a bitch. What happened?

"She's awake," Lucy said. "I'll go get the doctor."

Doctor? I blinked a few times then peered up at Nolan, Jack, and Owen. "Hey. You guys look like shit."

Jack chuckled first. "You don't look so great either." He pushed a lock of my hair behind my ear. "You gave us all quite a scare."

"What happened?" I scrubbed my face then winced at the pinch in my hand. Shit, I was hooked up to an IV and why did my leg hurt so much? In fact, why did I hurt so much?

"What do you remember?" Nolan hedged.

"I remember stepping into the Witch House and not feeling right. I remember hearing the little girl and Chase joining us. I remember going down the stairs, then the next thing I saw was Chase flying against the wall." I swallowed hard. "Is... Is he okay?"

Nolan snorted. "The bastard is alive. We think he set a trap for you as a prank."

What? That made no sense. How could he have done it without anyone knowing?

"What happened to him?"

"Concussion from what the doctor told Henry. He's going to be sore for weeks with

those bruises too.” Jack took my hand. “Owen isn’t doing so good either.”

I looked at Owen. He was pale. His eyes were red from... Crying? He shook as he stood beside me, staring at me. "Hey you. I'm okay." I took his hand in my free one. "Did you get hurt?"

“I fell a little bit.” He rolled his shoulder. “Nothing a couple of bandages can’t handle.”

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“You saw what Gaspar could do?” I whispered the question so no one else could hear us.

Owen nodded. “He is terrifying, but he saved me too.” He swallowed hard. “I thought... I thought you were dead the way everyone appeared so fast. You didn’t move either. You were so still.”

A knock came at the door and Zane poked his head inside the room. “Heard you were awake. Want to answer some questions for me?”

“Sure. I mean I guess I’m okay, just sore.” I situated myself in the bed a little more, making room for the guys to sit with me.

“I brought you something for the pain.” Zane held up a pouch. “Lore said this will cure all your aches and breaks.”

“Wait, I have a broken leg?” Made sense with the pain I was in.

“No.” Jack gave a tired chuckle. “It’s a severe sprain. Nothing’s broken. You have tons of bruises of course, since you fell into a hole.”

I took the pouch from Zane. “Thank you. Thank Lore for me too.”

“I will,” Zane said. “So can you tell me what happened?”

I recounted every bit of what I could remember while in the Witch House. There were gaps though, things either the guys, Kael, Ember, and Gaspar didn’t want me to

remember, or I couldn't put together because I was disorientated. I knew without having to see it, Gaspar threw Chase, but I didn't know why. What had Chase done, besides set the trap? Had he pushed me? "Have you ever felt those oily tendrils, Sheriff? Around town or specifically in that building?"

He gave me a contemplative glance then nodded. "I have. I believe it's the works of our serial killer."

I tilted my head. "What is he?"

"That, I can't answer, because I don't know. My guess is a dark practitioner. Someone who can not only manipulate the atmosphere but also spirits. I think his cycle is about to begin again."

I swallowed hard. The idea of a man or being having the ability to control humans and spirits scared me more than I could annunciate. No one was safe around this practitioner. "The trap?"

"Manipulation. I think he saw an easy target with Chase. The guy is easily influenced. Doesn't mean he still won't be charged with destruction of property or assault and battery for that crazy little stunt."

"The same for the witch near Proctor's Ledge?" I hedged.

"Heard about that too." Zane rubbed his brow. "I believe so, yes. Our suspect can control the dead."

"Never thought I'd see a necromancer, especially since they're fictional." I laughed then regretted it as my body tensed as a wave of pain hit me. "Ow."

"Easy there," Zane said. "Not a necromancer, per se, because the ghosts of Salem

can't be resurrected now, but more like manipulator of the spirits."

The door to my room opened and the doctor along with Lucy and Henry stepped into the room. Zane tipped his chin to the doc. "Well, that's my cue to get the hell out of your hair for now. Use the herbs as a tea. Might taste like shit, but everything is made better with sugar." Zane winked at me before exiting my room.

For the next twenty minutes, the doctors explained how my ribs were bruised my ankle was sprained and the millions of other tiny contusions I had all over me. He wanted to keep me there for overnight and considering what we'd all experienced, I agreed. I needed to take a moment to gather my wits and try to understand what happened. Plus, since Kael comforted me, I hadn't seen any of the guys, and I wanted to.

When the doctor left, Henry stood in front of me. Shit. The channel had to be pissed. We ended up cutting the feed before the hour was up. People were probably proclaiming us fakes and frauds. All the good I'd done was gone now. "Hey, I'm so sorry, Henry."

He held up his hands. "First, I am glad you're okay. Second, don't worry about a thing. All of your medical bills will be covered by the studio. Third, you're a hit. My phone has been ringing off the hook since the feed got cut. You're even trending on Twitter. People have cut and spliced the film off right when you were falling and swear they see two spirits surrounding you while another was seen shoving Chase. This... This is all so real for everyone. The site has shut down a couple of times because we've been overcapacity. I know I shouldn't be hyping you up because you are injured. But, I wanted to let you know, you've done everything right. We're excited for what's to come with your show and your new adventures."

I shook my head, trying to process what Henry was saying. "I'm not in trouble then?"

He chuckled. "I tell you how excited we are to have you with us, and you're worried about being in trouble." Henry sighed. "No, you're not in trouble. Though I might be a little spastic right now, we're very glad you're okay." He touched my hand. "Chase has been fired though. We found out a few suspicious things about him tonight after you were both rushed to the hospital. He is now a liability for the channel."

I stared at Henry for a moment. "Wow." I didn't know what else to say.

Henry handed me, my phone. "Why don't you take a moment to decompress and check out all the comments and well wishes for you. You and your team will be given a couple of extra days here in Salem to rest and recover, then you'll be off to your next assignments. In the meantime, if you need anything—" his gaze bore into mine— "anything, please call me. I will do my best to get it to you."

"Thanks," I murmured. "I think."

"Get some rest, Simone. You deserve it." Henry squeezed my hand then exited the room, leaving me with my team.

"That's our cue to get out of here too," Nolan said. "Sleep as much as you want Simone. We'll be back later to check on you."

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After saying my goodbyes to everyone, I laid back and sighed. What a night. I couldn't believe what Zane told us. I knew there was something fishy about the place, but I could never put my finger on it. Now, I had more questions than answers. Just as I started to doze back off, my bed dipped three times. I grinned to myself, it had to be Kael, Ember, and Gaspar. I opened my eyes and relief flooded me. There they were.

"You okay?" Gaspar's gravelly voice ran down my spine and made my belly flutter. I missed his stary eyes.

"I am because you three saved me... Again, I think, right?" I took in each of the guys. Their gazes, including the resolute Gaspar, who didn't seem to have any kind of feelings, were filled with worry.

"If we hadn't been there," Kael muttered. "That bastard."

"You threw him, didn't you Gaspar?" I asked, sure it'd been death who'd shoved Chase to teach him a lesson.

"No," Gaspar said. "If I'd touched him, he'd be dead. "That was Ember."

I gasped fully believing it'd been one not the other. "Look at you." I teased Ember because the expression on his face was still too serious.

"Do you know who is causing mischief in Salem?" I pressed. If I could help Zane find the person or whatever the dark practitioner was, it might help the man shut down the activity.

Kael shook his head. “He can cloak himself and he’s pretty fucking powerful too. I also don’t want anything to do with that kind of evil.”

I frowned. “Well, shit.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Gaspar said. “Something tells me Zane has a handle on this. I’m sure he’ll end the asshole.”

I hoped so too. I yawned. “Will you stay while I sleep?”

“We don’t have anywhere else to be.” Kael snuggled beside me. Then pulled me into his chest, giving Gaspar room to join us, while Ember took the chair closest to me. “Sleep, Simone. We’ve got you.”

I hummed in approval then allowed the darkness to take me away once more.

Epilogue

Two days later...

Nolan tucked me into his side and sighed. Twenty-four hours after the attack at the Witch House, I was released from the hospital. Since then, I'd been laid up in the hotel room, recovering from my injuries. Yesterday I woke up feeling like I'd been run over by a Mac Truck. Today, I was stiff but better. I mean, I couldn't run a marathon or anything, but I did want to move around, even if it was only in our room.

Owen, Lucy, and Jack were already on the way to Savannah, and Nolan and I would be following them shortly. The studio, true to their word, paid for my hospital stay and ordered a car for us so we could drive in comfort. With the small bonus we received, Nolan had already set up a reservation for us at another hotel halfway between here and Savannah. He was optimistic. With how I felt, I was hedging my bets we'd be stopping sooner than later.

"You're thinking again," he murmured against my neck.

"You caught me." I chortled. "When am I not thinking though?"

He hummed. "I can think of a few times you're not."

"Ew, pervert."

He chuckled. "Well, at least you sound better. I swear to God, Simone, you took ten years off my life when I saw you go tumbling down those stairs. I thought we lost

you.”

When you have death in your back pocket, you lose your fear of dying. "My back was being watched."

“Yeah, we caught that too. Do you know how incredibly scary those three are?” Nolan placed his hand on my hip and the warmth of his touch spread through me, easing some of the aches.

“Very,” I murmured. “I understand them better than anyone. They were only trying to protect me.”

“Well they did it very well,” he replied, tucking me closer to him. “The website and all the social media accounts are going crazy with comments and questions. There are already conspiracies being put together to discredit what happened out there on Halloween. This shit has gone viral. Are you ready to face the music?”

I glanced at the window of our room. The pale morning light barely seeped in from under the curtain. We had to leave soon. Early starts meant early nights. I had pain meds I could take if it became too much, but I'd rather stick with over the counter stuff than the crap doctors give out. Usually, it messed with my head and never touched the pain, so, what was the point? "Can I phone a friend?"

Nolan chuckled again. "You're too much." He turned my face to his and placed a kiss on my lips. "If we get up now, I can take you to that spot you went to the second day we were here."

God, it felt like weeks ago when I walked into the little coffee shop with Zane and ordered those tasty pastries. “You’ve got a deal. Help me get a shower?”

Desire flared in his dark-brown eyes. “I think I can do that.”

An hour later, we were clean, well fucked, aching, and ready to conquer the day. I threw on my thick coat, since the one the show provided for me had been destroyed in the incident, and grabbed my crutches. Because of where the sprain was, and the severity, I was forced to keep it up as much as I could. Hence why traveling by car would be interesting. I had to stop every so often to get out and move around. Plus, I had to put my leg up on the dash or spend the majority of the trip on the back seat—a non-starter for me.

“You good?” Nolan wheeled the luggage cart to the elevator.

“Yeah, hungry is all.” It was more than that though. I still had so many questions about this place. I felt like we were missing something important here. I couldn’t say why I thought as much, but I couldn’t shake the feeling no matter how much I tried.

“Well, food is the second item on our list of things to do this morning.” We stepped into the waiting elevator and proceeded to the lobby.

“Don’t you mean the third?” I cocked a brow and grinned.

“Oh, you know what, you’re right.” Nolan bent his head and pressed his lips to mine. “Can I tell you how happy I am to be leaving here? Since Halloween, I can’t shake the sensation of being followed.”

I guess I wasn’t the only one feeling stalked. “I hate leaving. I want to stay and learn everything, but you’re right. It’s almost as if we’re in the middle of an unseen war or something equally as important.”

Nolan nodded. “Will it always be like this?”

I hoped not. “Nah, I think Salem will always be the exception to the rule.”

The doors to the elevators opened and there standing at the front desk was Zane holding two bags and a drink holder. “Heard you two were leaving our fair town early. Thought you could use a little treat on the way out.”

I grinned. “How did you know? We were about to head to the coffee shop on the way out.”

“I have a nose for these things.” Zane winked at me. “Plus I have more herbs and phone numbers from all the women who want to keep in contact with you.” He stared at me for a moment. “You made an impact here, Simone. We’re better for your visit.”

Heat filled my cheeks. “Thanks, Sheriff. If you don’t mind, I’d like to come back and visit when I get the chance.”

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“We’d love to have you.” He wrapped me in a hug. “Besides, I’m sure when Jamie has the baby, she’ll be wanting you to oh and awe over the little sprite.”

I laughed. “Definitely. It’s a deal.”

Zane shook Nolan’s hand then helped us out to our waiting car. By the time we were on the road, the sun was climbing higher into the sky, burning off some of the frost on the ground. I settled into my seat and sighed while enjoying my danish. Beside me, Nolan flicked on the radio. Small note, I hate early morning radio. It’s more talk than music, yet, I also didn’t like the silence in the vehicle either.

“Did you see that show—The Simone Hadley Fines, Halloween night?” one of the DJs said to another person in their studio. “Do you think it’s real?”

“Well, she was in the hospital,” the second person replied. “I’d say it was pretty real, plus there was caution tape up around the Witch House.”

I rolled my eyes. They could believe what they saw, or they didn’t have to. It was up to them. I could care less about their thoughts on what happened. I was there. I went to turn off the radio, but Nolan stopped me. “Listen. People will start defending you now.”

I snorted. “My ankle is grateful.”

He shook his head. “Give them a second. People are so hyped.”

“Don’t go all fangirl stalker on me,” I said, half teasing.

“I’m not. I think I’m still in awe of it all. Sorry, I’m fixating, and I shouldn’t be. You probably don’t give a shit about this.” He scrubbed the top of his head.

“No, you’re trying in your way to show me the impact we made, and I appreciate it. I do. I feel like one show shouldn’t make us. Like, maybe we’re setting the bar too high and we’ll disappoint everyone in the coming weeks.”

Nolan waved me off. “We don’t have a show this coming Friday night to give you a little more time, but I believe in the long run, you’re going to win everyone over.”

“Okay, hype man, I believe you.” I laughed. “But, seriously, can we hook my phone into this system and listen to some tunes? This shit is a little boring.”

Nolan grinned. “Go for it.”

I hooked my phone into the system and hit play. The minute the music began, I gazed out the passenger window as the miles ticked by. The farther we got away from Salem, the less I felt like I was being watched. The prickling sensation at the nape of my neck had been a constant companion since we arrived and now that we were almost out of the area, I could breathe again. I leaned back in my seat and contemplated everything that happened in the last week. Most of it I would never fully understand. The rest, I chalked up to doing my job. We set some people—spirits free which was a good thing, they should have been, but what’d been unleashed there, as well, hadn’t been good. I had to hope Zane knew what he was doing, and he would reach out for help if he needed it.

Nolan threaded his fingers with mine as we crossed over into Boston. The oppressiveness disappeared completely then, and I relaxed. When I glanced over at Nolan, he too appeared a bit more like his usual self.

I couldn’t, again, quite tell you what happened to me at the Witch House, but whatever happened there, I knew would stay with me for the rest of my life. Did

some malevolent spirit possess Chase and force him to dig that hole I fell into? Had he been doing it as a prank the whole time? We might never know. According to the doctors, when Chase woke yesterday morning, he couldn't remember even arriving in Salem, let alone what he was doing there. I felt bad for him in a way. I understood what he was going through. I'd been through the same the next day after being in the canyon, but unlike him, I hadn't done anything to hurt anyone.

Now, even if he couldn't remember what happened, he'd have to face a reality where all the shitty things he'd done to people were about to nip him in the ass. I didn't feel good about the idea of him having to face the looming charges or the social media backlash, I never wanted that karma thrown back on me, however, in this case, I hoped justice handed down a punishment befitting of his crimes.

"What are you thinking about over there?" Nolan caressed the juncture of my thumb and forefinger with the pad of his thumb.

I took a deep breath then grinned. "How much I can't wait to get to Savannah so I can see what kind of trouble we can get into again."

Nolan threw his head back and barked out a laugh. "You are a strange, strange woman, Simone Hadley."

A small smirk tugged at my mouth. "And you enjoy my strangeness."

"Damn straight I do."

I stared at him for a moment longer then turned my attention to the road laying out before us. Here we come, Savannah. I hope you're ready for us...