



# Ravished By Magic

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**Category:** Romance, Paranormal

**Description:** Magic...a simple gift, or a tool to barter power?

The coven is hard at work helping Liam with his slight demonic problem when the pull once again interrupts things, taking them straight to a house with a drained witch. One-by-one, more Salem witches are found depleted, the one thing they cherish most only a flicker inside them. With Liam succumbing to the evil more everyday, the coven's resources are stretched thin. They reach out for help in the unlikeliest places, promising a favor they're not sure they can keep to someone they shouldn't even be associating with. However, they'd do anything to save one of their own, even if they suspect he's falling into the black hole of bad magic.

The coven must hurry to find answers if they want to save Liam, and the other witches, before they all give in to the evil infiltrating Salem.

**Total Pages (Source):** 54

# Page 1

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## Chapter One

Holy hell.

My eyes flew open, and I laid there, staring at the ceiling, my heart thumping a mile a minute. That was...amazing, yet torturous. Yet, so fucking amazing.

I let out a breath and sat up; the comforter dropping to my hips. I ran my hands through my hair and smiled. What a dream. A crazy Travis dream.

That was a first, and hopefully, not the last. Actually, hopefully, it would be real this next time around. A fierce flush crept up my neck as I thought about what I'd been dreaming. It was just too yummy to put into words, and too naughty to even describe.

Why was I suddenly having full-on sex dreams starring Travis? No idea. Call me clueless. Other than the fact that he was super-hot and had been talking to me like a human being recently, nothing else had changed in our relationship status. My body wanted its own way though, but she was just going to have to be patient because on a checklist of things I had to accomplish, screwing Travis was at the bottom, if he was even on there at all.

So much had happened in the short amount of time I'd met my coven. I'd made a major move, shut one business down and started another, and oh, there was the whole thing about some maniac wanting me for revenge, and having to deal with people dying and me and my guys getting hurt.

A picture of Liam popped into my head. Though his "tattoo" was hot as fuck, he'd

been different since that night. Pulling away from me little by little. Even Randy hadn't been able to get through to him as if he was trying to ostracize himself from the rest of the group. It pained me to watch him do it. Little by little, separating himself from us.

A knock came on the door. I rubbed my forehead and called, "Come in." I wasn't sure why we bothered knocking anymore. They'd all seen me naked, either getting me to that point themselves, or if they were Travis, accidentally walking in on it. Maybe if he came in and saw me sitting here like this, it would push him over the edge. My animal print pajamas were hot if I did say so myself. Though, they'd look hotter on the floor under his clothes...

"Good morning, Love," Gabe said, walking in and kicking the door shut behind him. He smiled as he came closer, and I smiled back up at him. "Just making sure you're up."

"I'm up," I told him, if not a little reluctantly. I could've done with a couple more minutes in the Travis extravaganza that was going on in my head before I woke myself out of it.

Gabe sat on the bed next to me, both arms on either side of my thighs as he leaned forward and kissed me on the forehead. "This might shock you, Love, but you're nipping."

I looked down and sure enough, my nipples were hard and showing straight through the cotton tanktop. I shrugged. "Crazy dream."

His eyebrows shot up at that. "I hope I was the main character. Feel free to tell me all about it so we can reenact it right now."

I chuckled to myself. The amount of sexual tension running through this house was

astonishing. “Don’t you have practice this morning?” I asked, dropping my head to the side. “A very important practice.”

“All my practices are of equal importance, but they’re still not as important as you.”

My heart did a giddy flip. “You shouldn’t come see me in the mornings,” I teased him. “It only gets you in trouble.”

“If that were the case, I shouldn’t look at you at all. You get me in trouble 24/7.” He shot forward and kissed me on the cheek, puckering his lips and leaving a hard smack that made me laugh. “Come on, Baby. Randy put some toast down for you.”

I pulled the covers down to my feet, but stayed where I was, reluctant to get out of bed. I didn’t know what I was walking into down there. “How’s Liam?”

Gabe let out a breath and stared at the comforter. “On the computer since he got up this morning.”

“He has to go to class,” I said. Obviously, I wasn’t telling Gabe anything he didn’t already know, but it felt good to talk to someone about the whole situation. Liam was just off. Not going to class, not eating well.

“He’s dressed today,” Gabe offered.

I guessed that was better than nothing, but it still wasn’t great. He’d told his professors he got the flu, so he could take some time off to do research on how to get the familiar off him. Since we weren’t telling Walter and the other superiors about what actually happened, we only had to go on what we found out by scanning through texts and the internet. Liam was obsessed with it. He wanted it off, and I’d never seen him with such a singular focus before. He was determined. “I’ll talk with him.”

Gabe traced a finger across my hand, his face thoughtful. “Just don’t get all worked up if he says something off to you.”

“I know,” I told him, trying to smile. We’d already gone down that road. Liam blew up, had a total meltdown practically taking the rest of us with him. He’d already apologized, but I had to wonder if the familiar was making him moody or if it was the pressure he put on himself to figure out how to rid himself of the demonic serpent.

Gabe kissed me on the forehead, and got up, reminding me again that I had toast waiting for me downstairs. I waved goodbye and took out the all-seeing-eye bracelets I’d finished making last night. I’d had my own bracelet on the night the familiar attached itself to Liam. The thing had crawled past me first but kept going to attach to Liam. If only I’d been faster with the bracelets. We could’ve avoided this mess. Leaving the bracelets out on the bed, I dragged my ass off to the shower to get ready. After washing up and throwing on a dressier outfit than my normal t-shirt and jeans, I walked downstairs with the bracelets in my pocket.

The silence gave me pause as I reached the bottom of the steps. I checked the kitchen first, but there was no one there, only the sound of the TV talking away in the background. I looked up to find the guys’ huddled around it in the living room. The room hadn’t even had a TV before yesterday, but Gabe had practically begged for one because there were big “football” games coming up and he wanted to be able to watch them without going to a bar or a teammate’s house. Ever since the last run-in with Dupre, we tried to stick close together, so another one of us wouldn’t find ourselves alone and spelled by the bad guys.

I walked up behind Randy and put my hand on the small of his back. His shoulders were tight, bunched up as if ready to strike. If he was shirtless, I’d probably see the ripple of muscles as he stood there, tensed. He looked down at me as I approached, his face a little on the pale side. “What is it?” I whispered. I glanced around the room. They were all there, including Liam, his laptop on his lap. For once in the past few

days, though, he didn't have his head buried in it. He was staring up at the TV.

I looked up and gasped. Madame Serena. Her face was on TV. The headline read "Local Psychic Found Dead In Home".

We'd been waiting for this to happen. There was no way we could have Madame Serena's body found in Randy's parents' house, so we moved her back to her place and just left her there. We figured one of her clients would eventually make a missing person's report when she didn't show up to the shop or a reading, and we'd been right. It took them longer than we'd thought, but they must've checked on her yesterday.

## Page 2

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The anchor on the TV spoke in her clipped monotone. “Police are saying they’re investigating whether foul play was involved in the death of a local psychic in the Salem area. Her body was found in her house yesterday after multiple calls were made to the local police regarding several missed engagements over the past week, including the non-opening of her shop in Historic Salem where she owned a spiritualist business.” A picture of the front of her shop appeared on the TV. We’d magically cleaned up the shop’s broken windows when we’d taken off with the psychic to track down Randy. We didn’t need the local police following us around Salem as we tried to do the work of the Order.

People weren’t aware of the supernatural world living around them. They didn’t know about things like Liders and demonic familiars. Sometimes, I wish I didn’t either. Living under a rock wasn’t in my nature though, and since I’d been born into it, I really didn’t have a choice.

“This is good,” Travis said, nodding at the TV, though he looked troubled like the rest of us. “I’m glad they’ll be able to put Madame Serena to rest now. She helped us that night. She deserves to be at peace.”

I blinked at him. It wasn’t as if he’d done a one-eighty since the last fight with Dupre, but he had a few noticeable changes. For one, it didn’t feel like he was searching for reasons to say shit to me anymore. It made it much more relaxing to be around him if not confusing.

Without saying anything, Liam looked back down at his laptop and continued typing away on it. Randy followed my gaze and pushed me toward him. I went willingly. I was going to talk to him, anyway. I’d been trying to talk to him, but for whatever

reason, the guys just assumed I'd be the one to get through to him when he was ready to listen.

I made sure to come around to the side the familiar was tattooed on him. I was trying to prove a point that it didn't scare me. He always flinched away, but before he could this time, I grabbed his forearm and sank down into the couch beside him, snuggling into his arm. "Hey," I said, looking up at him with a big smile.

He stilled, frozen there staring straight ahead.

I poked him in the side. "I was wondering if you wanted to visit me at the shop in between your classes today." He didn't say anything, so I just continued. "You are going to class today, right? You said you'd just take a week off before you went back, so I'm just checking."

Liam shut his laptop and leaned over, placing it on the coffee table in front of him. He sat right back in the same position, not even looking over at me once, or even acknowledging that I was holding on to him. "I am going to class."

Sweet relief poured through me. "That's good. I wouldn't want you falling behind or anything."

"I'm not falling behind," he said, pushing his glasses up his nose with disdain. "I'm far ahead of most people, and besides, Gabe's been getting my work for me."

The guys dispersed at that, Travis looking at me for longer than usual before retreating to the kitchen. "Hey," I said, tilting Liam's chin down to look at me.

When we locked gazes, I didn't know what to say. His normally brown eyes were even darker than usual. Shadows had crept up under his eyes, making him look sick and tired. I knew he'd been spending too much time on his computer and in the Order



books trying to figure a solution, but it looked as if he'd barely slept now. When I walked by his room at night, I'd hear him click-clacking away on his laptop keyboard.

As far as I was concerned, there was no problem yet. So, he had a demonic familiar attached to him. So, what? We didn't know if it was, or would, do anything to him. With Madame Serena, it had only given her powers she never had before. Liam already had powers, so it wasn't clear if there would be other affects. The only thing it gave him now was a bad attitude, and I didn't know if that was because of the familiar or because he had a problem he couldn't figure out.

He looked away, but I pulled his chin to face me again. "Liam, please," I said, my voice strong, but also desperate at the same time. I hated this change in him. All I wanted to do was help, but he wouldn't let me in. "I don't want you to hurt yourself anymore. We don't know—"

His jaw tightened. "We don't know anything. That's the problem, Norah." He glared down at my arm wound around his. He'd taken to wearing long sleeve shirts because he couldn't stand the sight of the serpent on him. If he hadn't been wearing one, I would've been touching the "tattoo". He closed his eyes and swallowed. "Can you please stop touching me? I know it's not a big deal to you, but it is to me. I don't want you to get hurt."

"Liam, you act like it's going to fly off you and eat one of us."

"And what if it does?" he asked, his voice rising. "He took a chunk out of Dupre that night and I certainly don't want him to do it to anyone I care about."

A few of the guys glanced over, so I lowered my voice. "I've been thinking," I said, trying to stay calm for his sake. "You must be able to control it. If it were going to do that, it would've done it by now."

Liam shook his head, his fingers starting to tremble. He rubbed his hands down his pants and stood. I fell to the side of the couch to allow him room and then just stared after him as he shoved his laptop in his bookbag and yelled out that he'd be at the car when we were ready.

I rubbed my chest as I watched him go, and then leaned forward, my elbows on my knees and my hands in my hair. Randy's voice was the first I heard. He walked up behind me and put his hands on my shoulders, working his thumbs into my taut muscles. "We'll keep trying."

I nodded and then stood, heading toward the kitchen to grab the toast and something else to eat before heading over to the shop today. The good news was that we'd opened. The bad news was that with everything else going on, we didn't have the big opening celebration we'd planned. We also didn't have regular hours. We didn't know when the next big thing would happen, so being able to shut the shop down at a moment's notice came in handy.

"Oh, before I forget." I stopped mid stride and pulled out the bracelets. Throwing the green one Randy's way, I smiled. "I made these for us." I then turned and threw a red one to Travis and a blue one to Gabe. "They're all-seeing-eye bracelets. They ward off evil spirits."

Travis caught his in the air and stared down at it. "This is what you said kept you safe when the familiar was looking for a host?"

I nodded once. It was just a working theory, but I was going with it. It was Granny's special recipe, and I knew she wouldn't let me down. If they wore those bracelets, nothing evil would come to them. I'd worked extra hard on theirs trying to make them perfect.

I patted my pocket to still feel Liam's bracelet in there. I had it ready for when the

familiar decided to leave, or if Liam figured out a way to get rid of it. I'd miss the tattoo, but I could try to convince Liam to get one of his own. Weirder things had happened. Like, suddenly acquiring a demonic familiar.

"Thanks, Norah," Gabe said, tugging his on. Somehow, he made it look cool.

Ugh, jocks. I wanted to roll my eyes.

"Will this also help me score some goals in practice?"

I shook my head. "Nope. Not that kind of magic." I strolled over to him in the kitchen and pinched his butt on the way past him to get my toast. "Not that you need any help."

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“Oh, he needs help,” Travis muttered.

No one spoke. They all watched Travis and I interact. Instead of saying anything, I shoved a piece of toast in my mouth and walked out with the other slices. I’d rather take my chances with the demonic familiar than to try to have a decent conversation with Travis.

### Chapter Two

“A Touch of Magic” was still everything and then some. I still got that excited feeling when I walked in at all the possibilities it provided. And plus, it was just so cool looking. It was a shame I hadn’t been properly putting my all into it. It was destined to stay that way though. I was a member of the Order of the Akasha now. Building a business wasn’t my sole goal in life, it was the Order and nothing else. Not that saving others from evil wasn’t a badass goal. It helped me feel closer to Granny that was for sure. I had to do something else though. I certainly wasn’t going to stay around at home all day just waiting to get cramps. That sounded like hell.

I smiled as a family came into the shop. I recognized them from the last several days. They had the cutest daughter, her hair always up in pigtails with pink ribbons. She was in love with one of the bright jade stones my store had, but her parents had successfully been able to circumvent the purchase. I didn’t mind. They seemed like nice people.

As soon as the daughter came in, she ran for the stone. “See, Mommy. It’s still here.” She held it up, the green stone such a contrast to her pale, white skin.

“I see, Honey.” I smiled at the mom and she returned it. “Every day since we got here, she’s been begging to come into this store. She says you have the prettiest stones.”

I came out from around the counter and smiled at the young girl. “I do?” She nodded eagerly. “Well, thank you. Do you know what that stone’s supposed to do?”

She shrugged. “I just think it’s pretty.”

I laughed to myself. “That’s exactly what it does. It just sits there and looks pretty.” She had the stone in her open palm and I wrapped her fingers around it. “Why don’t you take that home with you? It’ll look much prettier in your bedroom at home.”

“We can’t—,” the mother said, already waving her hand.

“It’s okay,” I said. “It’s on the house.”

The woman looked around, her mouth dropping. “Will the owner get mad?”

I stood, almost laughing to myself. “I don’t think so. I’m the owner, so…”

She shook her head. “I’m sorry. That was so rude. I didn’t mean anything by it. You just look so young.”

“I’ve been told that before,” I said, already making my way back to the register to mark down the inventory. If I didn’t do it now, I’d forget, and then when we didn’t have any more jade stones around, I’d wonder why.

“Well, thank you,” the woman called out after me.

I heard the young girl say thanks and then two small hands clutched at my legs. I

looked down to see the young girl had wrapped her hands around my legs. “So much! I love it!”

I laughed and patted her head. “You’re welcome. Take good care of it.”

“I will!”

She ran back to her parents, and I gave them a wave as they turned and walked out of the store. The cute little girl should have a jade stone if she wanted to. Smiling to myself, I took the rock off the inventory and sat back on the stool I’d purchased for the area behind the counter. There were times when the store was crazy busy with customers, but there were also times when no one came in for hours. I could always find something to do around here, but some of the time, I just liked to sit and think. Especially lately with Liam.

The bell above the door rang again, and I glanced up. The perfect specimen of a man walked through. Large shoulders, peeks of tattoos staring out from under the collar of his shirt and a wide grin just for me. I grinned from ear to ear. “What are you doing here?”

“Coming to see my girl before I head over to the parlor. How’s business?”

Randy leaned over the counter, and I moved forward, giving him a kiss that ended too short. “Not bad.”

“There was an excited girl out front.”

“Pigtails?” He nodded in answer, and I smiled. “I gave her one of the jade rocks. She really wanted it.”

He smiled at the counter before glancing back up at me. “I know a little about

business, and if you want to make a profit, you can't give away your inventory for free." I opened my mouth to counter him, but he held up a finger. "And excuses like 'but she looked so cute', don't pay the bills."

I shrugged, laughing to myself because that was exactly what I'd thought. "It was just one rock and you should've seen the look on her face. It was well worth it."

He shook his head. "You're so much like Liam it kills me."

"Me?" I stuttered. I was the least like Liam. Liam was in his own category of goodness. Granny could give him a laundry list of how inept I was at being selfless.

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Randy ran a hand through his hair and stared back at me, his lips turning into a thin line. “We’ve got to do something to help him, Norah. I’ve never seen him like this. He doesn’t deserve the torture he’s putting himself through. He acts like he asked for the familiar to attach itself to him, and he won’t let anyone else help him. He’s hurting himself daily.”

His hands curled into fists in front of me. I took a deep breath. I’d been thinking all those things myself lately but hadn’t expressed them. It was getting to the point that something had to be done though. “I want to help,” I told him. “I’ve tried talking to him, but he just won’t open up. I’ve even tried saying that I don’t care about the damn familiar. He’s still Liam, so what’s the difference? It’s like he doesn’t hear me though. He’s so fixated on it.”

“Same,” Randy said. “He doesn’t want to hear whatever we say. He’s so caught up in his own personal torment that he won’t see reason, which is so unlike him. He’s the king of common sense.”

“He’s driving himself crazy,” I agreed, uncertainty overwhelming me. “He has a one-track mind. I didn’t even expect him to go to school this morning.”

“Hopefully he stayed,” Randy said. “It’s not like him to miss school. He loves school.”

“Even if he stayed, he’s probably still thinking about the damn serpent on his skin. It’s not healthy.”

Randy looked up at the ceiling and sighed. When he looked back down, his eyes



turned cautious and the air around us changed.

My heart flipped in my chest. Did he know something I didn't? "What is it?"

"I swore to myself I'd never fucking do this, but it's Liam we're talking about and nothing else is working."

I blinked at him, not having the foggiest idea of what he was suggesting. "Do what, Randy?"

"I know someone who—" He looked away. "Shit. Ugh, Travis is going to go ape shit."

"What?" I said, grabbing his hand. I wanted to crawl across the counter and shake the information from him.

"I know someone who dabbles in the not-so-good side of magic." He looked up. "He's not all out bad. It's on the border." He ran a hand through his short-cropped hair. "I've been thinking lately that he might be able to tell us a thing or two about the familiar, including how to get the fucking thing off Liam so my best friend will go back to normal. The thing is, Travis can't know. There's no way he would let me do it, and I really don't want to get a fucking lecture about Jax and Jennie and how easy it is to trip over to the dark side."

I remembered my own lecture I got from Travis when I wanted to blast the pants off Madame Serena. I couldn't actually disagree with him though. We all had to be careful. "How do you know this guy, Randy?"

His eyes practically closed over. It was as if they were open doors and they just slammed shut with bolts being shoved into place. He shifted from foot to foot. "I know someone who went bad. So, I know of this person because of that."

“Jax?” I asked. That was the only one I’d ever heard them talk about.

“No,” Randy said. “My father.”

I sucked in a breath. Holy shit. “Your dad? He’s a bad witch?”

Randy’s throat worked as he got up the courage to look me in the eye again. I wanted to grab his hand and throw my arms around him. How had I not put two and two together before? He beat the shit out of Randy when he was younger. That much had all come out, but not this other part of him. “He went bad. That’s why I don’t know where the hell he is, and my mom doesn’t either. We’re both actively trying to avoid him. He doesn’t live in Salem anymore. No one knows where the hell he is, and I’d like to keep it that way. But, I know someone I could ask about this. He lives a few towns over.”

My throat felt thick, and I swallowed hard, unsure of what I felt about this. I wanted to help Liam, but something like this? I didn’t know if it was the best idea. “You think he’d help us?”

“I’m not going to give him the option, Norah,” he said, his voice hardening by the second.

I took a step back. “Okay, okay.” I came around the counter and stood in front of him. “Your dad’s evil. You want to talk to an old friend of his to help Liam. I’m getting all this correct, right?”

“Yes.”

A bundle of wrong formed in my stomach, but I pushed it down. Travis wasn’t my mother, and he definitely wasn’t Granny. That would be some scary shit. The truth was, I’d do whatever it took to help Liam out with this. He didn’t deserve it.

“They can’t know, Norah.”

Oh fuck. Here we were again. Keeping secrets. I hadn’t even come out with the one Gabe and I kept and now I had to secret another one away too? That didn’t change the fact Liam needed our help though. “I understand. I’m down.”

Randy peeked behind him as if Travis stood just behind us, frowning. “We can go there tonight. We’ll just tell everyone you want to take a ride on the bike again. We’ll have to cleanse ourselves before and after and your bracelet will help.” He touched the green beads at his wrist. Thank God I’d made those.

“We won’t be in danger, will we?”

“None that I know of, but when you go into the lion’s den, you have to be prepared. I’m not taking any chances, especially since you’re coming with me.”

I nodded, then stood there staring at the floor. It was still sparkling clean. Brand new, basically.

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“If you don’t want to come...” Randy started.

I stared up at him. “I’m coming. I just can’t help but think that Liam wouldn’t like this idea either.”

“He’d fucking hate it. But he hasn’t found anything in any of our texts, so we have to take a different route. I just want Liam back to himself again. He won’t say how much that familiar is bothering him, but I know it is. I don’t want it to change him.”

“Is that possible?” I asked, afraid to even voice the question. What if the answer was yes?

“I have no clue,” Randy confessed. “But the sooner it comes off, the better.”

“Okay, we’ll head out tonight. Agreed. We won’t say anything; just act like we’re going for a ride.”

“Don’t act weird around them.”

“Me?” I asked, pointing at myself.

“You,” he clarified. “You’re a terrible liar.”

“I don’t think that’s actually true.” It wasn’t. I’d known something for weeks only Gabe and I knew, and I hadn’t come out with it yet. It was amazing the things you would do to the ones you loved out of love, or in the name of protecting them. Sometimes it just felt wrong and icky.

Randy told me he'd see me tonight and then left. I took a deep breath. I was willing to do this to help Liam. It wasn't even an option not to in my head. I just wished I didn't have to. If I hadn't worn the bracelet that night, the familiar would've attached itself to me, and we wouldn't even be going through this mess.

If only.

### Chapter Three

As promised, Randy picked me up on his bike at six that evening. We'd texted on and off throughout the day and he told me how he'd called Gabe and informed him we were going out that night. Just for a bike ride and nothing special. That part felt like a little white lie. We were going for a bike ride. It was just what we were doing at the end of that bike ride that we were keeping a secret from the rest of them.

I locked up the shop and Randy and I walked together down the cobblestone street. The evening hours in Salem was full of tourists and residents leaving work or walking around trying to figure out where to eat. Most of the stores were still open, and one of these days, I'd have to commit to staying later, or possibly even hiring someone else to run the shop while I wasn't there. Order business took priority, especially when it involved Liam and magic of the evil variety. The tourists who wanted their little trinket bags and magic candles could wait.

We got on the bike and drove South out of town. The wind whipped against my face and I held onto Randy tight. Usually his big muscles relaxed me and made me feel safe, but he'd been on edge ever since he'd picked me up, which only made me more nervous. The city of Salem turned into country roads. The further we traveled, more houses started to pop up here and there. Old, broken down farm houses that would've been beautiful in their day were dotted across the countryside. We stopped at a four-way intersection and Randy dropped his feet to the road to steady us. He turned toward me. "We're almost there."

“So close?” I thought for sure this place with questionable people would be further away from Salem and the Enforcers. Wasn’t that like throwing things in their face?

Randy nodded and pulled his feet up again. He throttled the bike and pulled away from the stop sign. Just to the right a dilapidated gas station seemed to grow out of the weeds. Next to that stood the dingiest diner I’d seen in a while despite there being several cars out front. Just down the road, we came upon a small village. A church, a convenience store, pizza places, all of which looked like they’d seen better days. Just on the edge of where it looked as if the road was going to turn back into the country, Randy pulled over and cut the engine. “This is it,” he said, motioning toward the falling down house we parked in front of. “Ren’s den.”

“The dude’s name is Ren?”

Randy shrugged, throwing his leg over the bike and helping me off afterward. “I’ve never met him before. I only know of him.”

Randy placed both our helmets on the bike and then ran a hand through his hair. I watched as he did this, his movements jerky. Even a cricket in the nearby woods made him jump.

“You seem worried,” I said, cautiously. “Should I be? What if they want to fight us?”

“I doubt it will come to that, but just stick with me. Don’t go off with anyone else.”

I gave him a look. “And just who am I going to go off with?”

The corner of his lip tipped up. “I don’t know. It just felt like the right thing to say.”

I shook my head. “Let’s just get in there. We’ll figure it out as we go. We’re asking for Ren, right?”

Randy nodded. “It’s the only name I had...from before. It should get us to where we need to be.”

Wonderful.

He took my hand, and we turned to make the walk up to the decaying porch. The wood sagged under our weight as I knocked on the door. A woman answered, her eyes dark with heavy shadows under her eyes that she tried to cover up with makeup. She looked both of us up and down but spent quite a bit of time looking over Randy. It raised my hackles, but I kept my cool. “We’re here to see Ren,” I told her, hoping I wouldn’t have to explain anything else.

She leaned against the doorjamb and crossed her arms over her chest. “Both of you?” She eyed Randy.

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“Both of us,” he said, sounding bored.

Usually people were intimidated by Randy. The looks we got while walking around Salem were downright hilarious sometimes, but this woman, who had to have been in her thirties, didn’t seem afraid in the least. It made me worried for what we might see in here if Randy wasn’t the type to be fearful of.

“So, is he available?” I pressed.

The woman pushed the screen door open and Randy caught it. He gave her a curt thank you and we followed her into the house. It reminded me a little of the small shack I grew up in. Though, mine never had the smell of ass in it before. Though we didn’t have a lot of money, at least we kept up with the place. It wasn’t even the faint trace of rotten meat, which I expected from witches of this sort, it just smelled like people who didn’t know how to put on deodorant and old cigarette smoke.

The woman walked into the living room and plopped herself down on a guy. He had a shaved head, just the fuzz of dark hair peeking out. He looked up at us as we approached and then looked at his lady friend. “They’re here for you,” she said.

Ren, presumably, looked up at us, his gaze guarded. “And who are you?”

Randy seemed to relax a bit. I wasn’t sure if it was a show, or if he’d truly cased the joint and figured there was nothing to be afraid of here. “Enforcers,” he said, his lip tugging up into a full-blown smile.

The woman on his lap’s smile faded until she gaped at us. Ren merely matched



Randy's demeanor. "I was wondering when you guys would show up."

From a nearby room, a yell pierced the air that sounded suspiciously like the pleasure from a climax. I gazed at the wall close to us and then returned to the pair in front of us. The woman had sat straight up. "She's done. Is it my turn?"

Ren nodded once, and the woman placed both feet on the floor and got up, her legs separating a little as she did so, which I could only guess was for the benefit of the guys in the room. I watched as she passed. There was something weird going on here. I closed my eyes and felt the flecks and surges of others magic, yet just trace amounts. Specifically, there was a brighter burst coming from the area the girl sauntered off to now.

These guys were witches alright, even Ren. He was the brightest of them all, smelling of spruce and earthy pine. The closer we were to him, the easier it was to breathe in this place. There were other smells as well, just hidden deep under the nasty odors in this place. "I take it you're the leader around here?" I asked, eyebrows raised.

"You must've known that otherwise you wouldn't have come in here asking for me."

Randy, who'd gone still after hearing the interruption, now faced Ren again. "My name is Randy Lacone. Ring a bell?"

A small smile spread Ren's lips apart. "And how is the old man?"

"Wouldn't know, but I'm assuming he's off being a douchebag, as ever."

Ren waved Randy's comments away. "Ah, your dad wasn't that bad. I actually liked him. He—"

"I couldn't really give two shits about what my dad did here," Randy said, his teeth

clenched together. “We’re here for something else.”

This raised the eyebrows on Ren’s forehead nearly up into his non-existent hair line. “You’re here to take part.”

“Fuck no,” Randy said, grabbing my hand. “We don’t want any part of what you got going on here.”

Just then, a girl, only half-dressed fell out of the room the other girl just entered. She straightened up, trying to pull her hair together in a pony tail and pulling her tanktop down to cover her midriff. She blinked a couple times and then turned toward us. Her eyes lit up, and she took two steps toward us as if she was pulled gravitationally.

Ren held his hands up. “Not now, Jessie. Our friends aren’t here for that.”

Randy made a noise at the back of this throat, completely discrediting the fact that he called us friends.

Jessie looked from Randy to me. Her eyes zeroed in and she walked forward. “Are you sure? I like the looks of her, and she has some color, too, doesn’t she?”

Ren patted the couch next to him, and Jessie eyed it with a frown. “Sit,” he demanded, and she did so. He patted her on the shoulder. “Not that I wouldn’t mind watching you two together, but they’re not here to share their magic with us. They actually haven’t gotten to the part about why they’re here yet.”

He eyed both of us, but I wasn’t paying attention to him. I watched as the woman’s eyelids grew heavy. Her blinks got longer and longer until she fell back into the cushions of the couch and fell asleep. I looked from her to Ren. “You’re doing what exactly?” I asked, not liking the looks of this one bit. It looked like a prostitution ring with this guy as the pimp. It wasn’t just about sex though. It was something else, too.

Red had mentioned sharing magic.

“These witches,” Randy said, spitting the word out, making sure we all knew exactly what he meant about associating these people with the word witches, “got addicted to using their magic. They used it and abused it until their magic got smart and took it away from them. They’re coming here to get whatever ‘hit’ they can and however they can.”

“Like drugs?”

Randy shrugged. “Basically. Magic is like their drug, and Ren here exploits that.”

Ren chuckled. “I don’t exploit anything. I’m just helping these guys out.”

Bile rose up my throat. He traded magic for sex. That was disgusting.

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Randy agreed with my sentiments. “Magic is a living, breathing thing. If it wanted these witches to have it, they’d have kept it. What you’re doing is sick.”

A crash came from behind us. I twisted to find a couple had fallen to the floor just outside the area that led to the kitchen. Two guys continued to kiss, and the surrounding area surged in electricity as magic poured from one to the other. The one on the bottom latched his lips to the other and wouldn’t let go. The girl on the couch woke up, her eyes growing round as she watched them.

Ren stomped on the floor. “Take it to a room!”

The guy on top smiled, pulling the other guy up with his hands and taking him right back in through the kitchen to God knows where. No wonder why the witches who didn’t have but a flicker of magic left stayed here. It felt nothing like when I was around the rest of my coven, but you could still taste the magic here, and I imagined if you wanted nothing more than that, you’d be drawn to this place.

“Listen, Enforcer,” Ren said. “I hope you didn’t come here just to pass out judgments.”

There were a lot of things I’d like to do while here but pissing off Ren when we wanted his expertise wouldn’t help us at all. “Listen,” I said, putting my hands on my hips and facing him. “We’re willing to look the other way on what you got going on in here if you can give us some information.”

Ren looked amused. “And what’s that, little star baby?”

Star baby? Creepy fucker. “How much do you know about familiars? As in the demonic kind.”

Ren nudged the woman next to him on the couch who’d fallen asleep again. When she didn’t wake up right away, he nudged her more forcefully. “Find a place to lay and go sleep it off, Jessie.”

She gave him a dirty look and pulled herself off the couch like it took everything inside her just to do that. I moved out of the way as she stumbled past me and made her way into the kitchen, walking like a zombie who hadn’t fed in days.

He eyed her until she was out of earshot. “Why would you think I’d know about that? You can tell yourself I don’t have anything that bad going on in here. If I had, it wouldn’t have taken you this long to come to me. I’d have tipped you off long before. I don’t know about anything that evil.”

“Cut the shit,” Randy snapped. “I know what kind of magical shit goes down in here. No, you may not be doing anything wrong, technically, but you’re treading the line, and that line is getting thin. It’s damn near frayed, Ren, so answer the girl’s question. What do you know about demonic familiars?”

“I haven’t messed with that shit,” Ren said, his jaw tightening. “I don’t play with that evil stuff. Like I already said, if I did, you guys would’ve been called here a hell of a long time ago. I’m clean.”

Ren looked around, his leg jumping up and down. Classic paranoia signs.

“You know people who do, though, don’t you?” Randy continued, inching closer and sizing Ren up. “We need to know everything we can about familiars, but specifically how to call one off, and you’re going to tell us.”

Ren's eyes widened as he searched every inch of our exposed skin. His eyes lingered near the cut of my shirt and I rolled my eyes. Yeah, there was a familiar in my cleavage. Jackass. "What can you tell us?" I urged, following Randy's lead and walking forward, boxing the disgusting asshole in.

He shook his hands in front of him. "Nothing. I don't mess with that. If there's demon happenings around here, I don't know anything about it. I stay out of that shit. I have my little situation going on here, but that's it. You should know that better than anyone, Lacone."

Randy took another step forward. "I don't know anything," he seethed. "I know that you corrupt people, that's what I know. I know that you cut people down and cut people down until there's nothing left of them and then they go searching for other ways to get their fix. So, excuse me, if I don't give a flying fuck about any of your excuses. Talk to me about familiars."

Ren ran a hand over his buzz cut. His eyes darted around the room as if he was strung out on something. It didn't convince me he didn't know anything, it only served my suspicions that he knew a hell of a lot more than he was letting on. Ren shook his head. "Don't bring me into this. Please. I don't want any part of this."

Randy kicked back. The coffee table that was right behind us tipped over, the wood splintering. "Don't make me fuck this house up even more than it already is."

Ren jumped, but stayed with his lips firmly shut.

Randy searched the room. I watched as his face bloomed red and the muscles in his arms jumped. He took a beer bottle from the table next to the couch and threw it against the wall. It shattered, and the beer ran down the wallpaper. Now I could put a name to the other disgusting smell in this place. Stale beer. My stomach rolled. This place was a pigsty.

“Alright,” Ren said, standing. His hands came out in front of him and trembled as if he was going through withdrawals. Maybe he was. If he was orchestrating all this, he was a step away from being a coked out magic addict like the rest of them. “I heard of a book once. I heard of a book that talks all about bad magic. What you’re looking for might be in there.”

My heart leapt. “Where is it?” I asked, my voice rising. A surge of hope spreading through my limbs. Maybe we really could help Liam.

Ren shook his head and looked at the nasty floor.

“Damnit, Ren,” I said, at my wit’s end. “We need to know, and we need to know now.”

He shook his head again. “I don’t know, though. I really don’t. It was only a rumor. I tried to get my hands on it once, but the people who have it are scary motherfuckers.”

I nodded toward Randy. “Scarier than him because I’m pretty sure he’s a few seconds away from tearing this place apart and then how can you take advantage of these poor women and men?”

His eyes darted from Randy, then back to me again. “Maybe I can get it for you?”

“Maybeyou can get it for us? Is that a question? It better be a fucking statement,” Randy said. “We’re not playing around. I’ve wanted to demolish this place ever since I found out my dad had made his way here. Just give me a fucking reason, Ren. All I need is one more, and you can kiss your little fucking pussy operation goodbye.”

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“I-I’ll get it for you,” Ren said, true fear in his eyes. “I will.”

My heart squeezed. Not that I wanted to put all our eggs in the strung-out Ren basket, but it was better than doing nothing. I stared up at Randy and tried to keep my cool. We had something to go on now. Sure, it may have only been a shot in the dark, but we were one step closer to figuring this out.

Randy nodded, his face still all business. “We’ll be back in a few days. If you’re not here with that book...” he trailed off, eyeing Ren dangerously.

The look on his face even made my skin crawl and I knew Randy would never do anything like that to me. Ren was probably shitting his pants about now.

“Do we understand each other?” Randy asked.

“We understand each other.”

I took Randy’s hand and squeezed it as we walked away from that dump. What did it say about me that him going all crazy animal on Ren’s ass made me want to jump him?

### Chapter Four

There was only one thing I didn’t like about the bike in comparison to a car. On the bike, you couldn’t have actual conversations. During the ride back, my mind was brimming with the new information and with what happened, however there was no one to share it with but myself. It was nice to have a moment alone with just me and



my thoughts, but I really would've liked to take this time to talk to Randy about what had just happened. It blew me away that there were people like Ren in this world who exploited people of their own kind. Then, of course, it led me to thinking about what Randy was going through knowing his father had frequented Ren's den before he moved on to more evil shit. That place was disgusting. If there was a part of Randy that cared still, it must have made him sick.

Randy's mood hadn't improved when we left the house. He hadn't spoken when he put the helmet on my head and helped me on the bike. He didn't even speak as we got off the bike back at Liam's parents' house. Not knowing what to say to him, I looked up at the house itself. Liam's light was on in his bedroom, but the lights downstairs were all on as well. I had to guess Travis and Gabe were downstairs most likely watching the soccer game Gabe was all excited about while Liam stayed in his room doing who knew what. I never would've described him as a loner before, but I did now. It ate at my heart knowing that there was nothing I could do about it at the moment.

We walked up to the house and as soon as we got in, Randy bent over to kiss my temple. He then ran up the stairs, not even looking back to ask me to follow. I had half a mind to follow him up there anyway, but Gabe called out, "Baby!", making me laugh. He patted the sofa. "Come watch a little of the game with me." I gazed up the stairs, unsure of what to do when Gabe yelled, "Some of these athletes are hotter than me!"

Ha. I walked forward, dropping my light jacket on the closet doorknob and went right into the living room. "Not possible," I said. "No one can rock a soccer uniform better than my Gabe."

Gabe patted my hand on the couch. "I love you dearly, Baby Girl, but please don't call my sport soccer. It makes me go mental. It's football.Football," he said, over pronouncing it as if I were hard of hearing.

Travis and I both chuckled. “Got it,” I told him.

I stared down, noticing the guys had pretty much obliterated the snack aisle in the local grocery store. My stomach growled just looking at the array of chips, dip, and chocolate.

Travis peered over at me. “You and Randy didn’t get anything to eat?”

I checked the time on the new cable box. It was nine o’clock already, and I hadn’t eaten since lunch. I shook my head. “No, and I’m freaking starving.”

He moved over on the sofa and patted the spot between him and Gabe. I eyed him, then the spot, then Gabe. Taking a deep breath, I walked around the couch and sat between them. From Gabe’s side, I felt nothing but heat and the attraction that pulled us together. On my left side, the side toward Travis, there was nothing but confusion. A mix of anxiety and uncertainty. Yes, I had the pull. It was strung tight, as if it wanted to pull tighter, but our resistance to it was beginning to fray everything. It wasn’t really my resistance, anyway. A blush crept up my cheeks when I remembered the hotter than hell dream I had about him that morning.

“Are you a potato chip or Cheetos kind of girl?” he asked, motioning toward the snacks.

I stared at him from the corner of my eye. It was evident he’d been trying lately, and I was doing my best as well. I just wondered if we’d taken it to a point where it was too little, too late. “Both,” I said, moving forward and dipping a big ol’ potato chip into some sour cream and onion dip.

I continued to feast on what they had as Gabe explained more and more of the game of soccer—shit, I had to stop doing that—of football to me. Travis interrupted with his own thoughts from time to time. Eventually, Gabe placed his arm around me and I

cozied into his side, reveling in the way his chest moved up and down when he breathed, and how I could hear his heart thump away inside. When his team got closer to the goal, it picked up speed ever so slightly.

Travis shifted on the couch, his thigh coming to rest on my leg. I almost pulled away, but a spark tingled my skin. I looked over to find him staring at me. It squeezed my stomach, the pure longing in his face, but at the same time, a confusion that muddled everything up. If I had bigger cojones, or any at all, I would've asked him what he wanted right then and there. Why did he show up in my room to get some, get us both over-the-top excited, only to leave without finishing the job? How could he look at me with two such clear emotions written all over his face with none of them clearly winning over the other? There was so much to be said, yet it never seemed to be the right time. It was getting exhausting though, this back and forth. Something needed to be done about it.

I kept my leg there to see if he'd shy away, and he didn't. If anything, he kept it there on purpose. I couldn't deny the attraction that pulled us together every time we touched. It was the same I had with the rest of the guys. I almost hated that I had it. Travis had given me a lot of shit since I'd come here, and I knew, deep down, that when Travis finally got over his hang-ups, I'd let him in. It didn't mean I wasn't going to make him beg for it, but I was going to let him in nonetheless. It wasn't an option not to.

He scratched his jaw, and then his hand came down. It landed on top of my leg and I flinched. Gabe kissed the top of my head. "You okay?"

I bolted off the couch, Travis's hand sliding away from me. "I'm okay. I'm just...exhausted. I have a big day at the shop tomorrow and I should probably just head to bed before I fall asleep right here."

Gabe reached for my hand and gave a small tug back. "If you fall asleep, I'll carry

you up to the room.” It was a sweet gesture, but then he lifted his eyebrows suggestively.

I chuckled. “It’s okay. Thanks for offering though.” I walked by Travis, peeking at him as I did so. A shadow had crept over his features. I continued my way toward the stairs and was halfway up when a voice whispered my name.

I turned and looked down. Travis was there, his green eyes focused on me. “You don’t have to leave on my account. I won’t...touch you again, I promise.”

“It’s not that,” I said. Though, it was. His hand on my leg, his intentional touch, had freaked me out. That was only the second time he’d done that.

“I’m sorry. Okay?” Travis said, obviously not believing me. Maybe I wasn’t a good liar like Randy had said.

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“I just...I don’t want to do this right now, Travis. Okay? I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I turned and ran the rest of the way up the stairs and right into my bedroom. Once free, I took a deep breath and let it out. My magic was surging inside me, practically begging me to go back downstairs and be surrounded by Gabe and Travis. It really liked when Travis touched me. Like, really, really enjoyed it. I was full of expectation, sweaty palms, twisting stomach, excitement burrowing through me. I was giddy. There was no way around it.

I stood in the middle of my room and took deep, calming breaths before I returned to a somewhat normal state. Then, I pulled my pajamas on and got ready for bed. I was finishing up brushing my teeth when Randy sauntered his way into my room. I saw him through the bathroom mirror as he sat on the edge of my bed. “Hey,” I said, wiping my mouth one last time and putting my toothbrush away.

I turned and walked over to him. He eyed me in my short silky shorts and my flimsy tanktop. I stepped right into his space and his hands rested on my legs and then moved up my thighs where they stopped just at the hem of my shorts. I wound my hands around his shoulders and stared down. “You okay? You seemed out of it after we left Ren’s.”

Randy closed his eyes and a hundred different emotions flickered across his usually passive face. He shook his head and burrowed it in my sternum. “I just want to say something.”

“Okay...” I said, pulling him closer to me. “What is it?”

“I’m nothing like my dad.” He looked up, his dark eyes intense as he stared at me.  
“I’m nothing like him.”

“Of course not,” I said, reassuring him. I pulled my hands through his hair. “You don’t have to tell me something like that. I saw you at your old house, Randy. I saw some of the horror your dad put you through. You’re not capable of that.”

“But I threatened Ren. I wanted to beat his ass, and more.”

“We all have those moments,” I said, thinking back to me trying to take out Madame Serena. I would have too if Travis hadn’t stopped me.

“I just...” He sighed, and fell back on the bed, taking me with him. I landed on top, my knees on either side of his torso and my elbows next to his shoulder blades. “It felt wrong being there. I’ve dreamt about fucking shit up for Ren and whoever else goes to that Godforsaken place, but I never did because I thought it might put me over the edge.”

His hot release of breath hit my chest, sending a shiver down me. “I know,” I told him. “We went for Liam, though, and we found something out, too, so it wasn’t a lost cause. There’s a book full of bad magic that probably has something about familiars in it. Even if Ren can’t get it for us, we can look for it ourselves. One exists, so we can get answers one way or another.”

“I just want him to be okay,” Randy said. “I tried to talk to him when we got back, and he completely blew me off.”

“I wish he would talk to one of us,” I said, biting my lip. I tried to tell myself we were closer, but it still felt like we had a ways to go yet. “It’s obvious he’s scared, but he’s keeping it all inside.”

He shook his head. "I thought maybe if I invited him to your room, he might come."

"You're trying to pimp me out?" I teased.

"I just wanted to connect with him somehow," Randy said, his eyebrows pulling in. "Besides, you love it when the three of us are together, don't deny it."

The rush of heat to the area between my thighs left nothing in doubt on that front. "Well?" I asked, curious to see if he'd gotten through to Liam that way.

He shook his head. "He hasn't answered, and he probably won't."

"Maybe we could go in there?" I suggested.

"I don't want to push it on him. He acts scared to be around us. I don't want to push him too much and have him just completely retreat."

He had a point there. That would be the worst-case scenario, and I wasn't ready to consider that. I could lock myself in a room with him some other time and get it out of him. "What you did today was a really good thing. Brave, too. I know how much it must've killed you to ask someone like Ren, who helped destroy your father, for something. Liam knows how good of a friend he has, and as soon as we can get that familiar off him, he'll be back to his old self."

"I hope so," Randy mused. He pulled me over until we lay side-by-side. Tugging my tanktop down, he kissed the swell of my breast. "Are Gabe and Travis still watching the game?"

I nodded, his hot breath caressing me and exciting me at the same time.

"So, we can have some time to ourselves?"

I moaned. “If that’s what you want.”

He took my hand and placed it around his cock, which was already hard.

I smiled. When Randy and I were together, it never took either one of us very long before we wanted to jump the other. The electricity between us turned me on. I rubbed his cock on the outside of his pajama bottoms. “You definitely came in here with too many clothes on then.”

“I wasn’t sure if you and Gabe, or you and Travis had made it up here.”

I stuttered out a breath. “Me and Travis? You’re insane.”



## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 3:43 am*

“Don’t tell me you don’t want him buried deep inside you, Norah. Remember, you’re terrible at lying.”

My head fell back against the bed as an image from my dream popped into my head. Travis’s cock buried so deep inside me that his base rubbed against my clit. Damn. I moaned just thinking about it.

“Yeah, it’s only a matter of time,” Randy chuckled. “He’s been getting the same look on his face, too. Now I’m going to have to share you with one more. How will we find the time?”

He lifted my tanktop and wrapped his sweet lips around my nipple. I arched into him. “Oh, we’ll find the time. And if we double up, we can have even more fun. We don’t have to sleep.”

“Mmm,” Randy said, pushing my shoulders to the bed as his tongue teased around my nipple. “It’s so weird I don’t care about someone else getting you off. I’d like it even more if I was involved though.”

I urged his pants down and grabbed his cock, stroking him from base to tip. He slipped my tanktop over my head and stared down at me, his face in awe. My nipples strained, wanting his attention again. “Fuck, Norah,” he practically purred. “Every time I find something new to marvel about you. Your skin is the perfect shade of beautiful.” He darted forward, taking my nipple into his hot mouth again. “Especially this area right here.”

Randy’s hand slipped under my shorts and found my clit. He flicked his finger across

it several times and my hips came off the bed, begging for more. He trailed a line of kisses down my stomach to my belly button, and then lower as he worked my shorts off. He parted my legs, pulling them to the sides until I was fully exposed to him and he was stationed between my thighs. "I think I need a taste tonight. It's like licking candy down here." He made a long stroke with his tongue, swirling the tip over my clit at the end.

"Yes," I said, my breath coming out in gasps. I placed my hand on the back of his head and pulled him closer, urging him to do the same thing again.

He did, then stayed on my clit, running his tongue over it again and again in different angles and pressure. I held him there, almost too hard, but Randy didn't seem to mind. He hummed, sending a vibration through me and I gasped.

"Sweet, sweet sugar," he breathed. "Addicting. Travis is going to have fun with you."

Oh, fuck. I stoked his neck, urging him to stay there, and he did so. His tongue played and massaged, switching directions and speed until I was looking down the arrow of my orgasm. "God, yes, Randy. More. I'm almost there."

He pressed harder, his tongue flicking faster, and I peered down, looking at the sweet look of pure pleasure on his face as he gave me exactly what I needed. At that moment, he opened his eyes, and we locked gazes. My orgasm ripped through me and I gasped, clutching Randy's head and holding him there until my body came down from its high.

He pushed his pajama pants down and off as he sat back on his haunches. I followed him, straddling his thighs and pushing myself down on his cock until every last rigid piece of him was seated inside me. We both sighed as I wrapped my legs around his waist and he gripped my ass, pulling me down over him time and time again. "Shit, Norah." He played with my breasts as we drew our pleasure out. Finding new

rhythms that made us want more and more, and then switching it up again like we were teasing one another, drawing the moment out, not letting us reach the culmination too quickly. A trickle of sweat ran down my back, and I smiled at the sheen on his forehead. “I feel like I could do this all night.”

We stayed that way for a long time, just enjoying one another. I ate up his kisses, giving as much as I got. My hands traveled all over his hard, chiseled body, outlining his tattoos. Of course, I also spent time playing with his piercing as he explored my body, giving and giving. All of it was perfect. Every last moan and sigh was pulled from my soul.

He teased my neck, pulling the skin away with his teeth before kissing the pinch of pain away. “I just can’t get enough of you. Lean back,” he said. He placed a hand in between my breasts and pushed lightly. I did as he asked, my shoulders retreating and my back arching. He kept a firm grip on my hips and then moved his touch down, his finger trailing down the curve of my body until it settled on my clit. My body jumped. “You know what’s going to happen if you do that, don’t you?”

“Don’t tell me you don’t want another one. I’ll be forced to call you a liar again.”

His thumb played over it and I sucked in a breath. “Oh, no, I want it.”

His thumb pressed down, and I groaned. I was so close now. “God, I wish Liam could see you like this. Fuck, girl. The look on your face is pure lust. Everything about this is erotic as fuck.”

My insides squeezed as he pumped inside me. The thing about this position was that I couldn’t see or do anything, only feel what Randy did to me, and damn it was amazing. His hips picked up speed as he rocked into me and his thumb massaged me, peaking my pleasure until I was about to lose all breath.

“Yes, yes, yes,” I chanted. Fuck if he didn’t always feel like heaven.

Randy rocked faster, his base teasing my clit along with his thumb. I tightened my hold on his waist with my legs as a tremor started to take hold of my body. He rocked one more time and my world blissfully fell apart. I screamed, letting the waves of pleasure take me away as he continued his lengthy strokes inside me. When I finished, he pulled me up and guided me down on him hard a few times before coming, his cock spasming inside me. I clenched my walls tighter and Randy let out a short gasp as he held me to him. “Fuck yes.”

Afterward, we fell back on the bed in a heap. He wrapped his hand around my neck and bent forward, giving me a solid kiss on the mouth as we both tried to catch our breath. I cuddled in closer to him, laying my head on his chest as we stared at the ceiling, waiting for our hearts to return to a normal rhythm instead of this crazy, cracked out one.

Randy kissed the top of my head. “We’ll figure all this out.”

“I know,” I told him. Then, I shut my eyes and tried to get some sleep. For the moment, I was safe surrounded by Randy’s huge arms, and we were a step closer than we were that morning to helping Liam.

## Chapter Five

I woke the next morning to find Randy gone. It wasn’t so surprising because he had to be to the gym super early in the morning to work out the people who came to the gym before they had to go to work at an also early time in the morning. I didn’t know how he did it. My body was so relaxed this morning, fulfilled. I didn’t even want to wake up. I hated that he always got up without me noticing too. I would’ve loved to send him to work one morning with a present. Something to remember me by as he trained the women in their sports bras and tight pants. Then again, I wouldn’t want

him walking around with a gigantic hard-on all day. I bet women looked at him enough as it was. They didn't need another reason and seeing what he was packing would've been distracting. I should know. I was constantly distracted by it.

I pulled my pajamas on after sleeping naked next to Randy all night and walked into the hallway. All the doorways were shut, most likely the rest of the guys were still sleeping before we all had to get up and do what we needed. I walked to Liam's door and pressed my forehead against it. It was the only one that felt as if it was closed off to me. Even Travis's door felt more inviting at that moment than Liam's, which was saying a lot. I twisted the doorknob and walked in. His still form lay on the bed facing away from the door. I padded closer to him, itching to see his face when he didn't have his mask on like he did all the other times since he'd acquired the familiar.

Bending over, a slow smile crept over my face as I caught his peaceful look. He was peaceful. It was the Liam I'd first met. Even in sleep, his nose was a little scrunched up as if he was thinking about something major or trying to keep his glasses on.

A knot pulled in my stomach though when a dark shadow crawled over his neck. My heart rate spiked. I moved in, getting down closer and noticing that it wasn't a shadow at all. It was the serpent familiar. It coiled around Liam's neck until its head crept onto Liam's cheek. It paused, his head moving upward until it stared at me. Its beady, black eyes latched right onto mine.

I gasped and took a few steps back. My hand flew up to cover my mouth. It moved. It looked at me. There was no doubt about it. It was as if it had thought all its own. "Don't you dare hurt him," I said, whispering coldly in the dark.

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The snake's tongue shot out, a dart of red on Liam's cheek.

A shiver ran up my spine. "I mean it," I said, my voice trembling now. "I swear to God, I will end you."

The snake curved back around, dismissing me. Its body wound around, its tail flicking in my direction before it slithered over Liam's neck, then down his shoulder blade until it disappeared under the comforter. I sat there, staring, almost unbelieving.

Tentatively, I moved forward. Liam hadn't woken up through all of that and I just needed to know he was okay. I put my hand on his shoulder. Liam jumped, practically coming right out of his skin. "It's okay, it's just me," I said.

Liam whipped around, his feet already pulled up onto the bed in a crouched position. He regarded me, his body relaxing just a fraction. "What are you doing in here?"

"I came to check on you."

"Why? What happened?" Liam searched his body for the snake and relaxed even further until he found it wrapped around his bicep.

"Nothing, really," I said. "I just need to talk to you. You're pulling away from me and I don't like it."

This got his attention. He sat back on the bed, crossing his legs in front of him. Taking that as an invitation to do the same, I perched myself on the edge, keeping one eye on the serpent familiar who was back to not moving. Asleep, maybe? Or just

pretending? Who knew that he could slither over Liam's body like that whenever he wanted?

"I'm okay, Norah."

"You're lying," I said. I didn't want to hear any of his excuses. I wanted to hear the truth now. "You haven't been yourself, Liam. I know it's the familiar, but what exactly is it about it? Are you just preoccupied with finding out how to get rid of it?"

I could've sworn I saw the snake tremble, and Liam hardened, his hands turning into fists on the bed.

I'd once thought that was it, that Liam just wanted to figure out how to get the thing off him, but what if it was something else? What if this thing was affecting him somehow? "Liam, talk to me."

He gave a quick shake of his head. I crawled toward him on the bed, dipping my voice low until it was just barely a whisper. My lips brushed against his ear as I talked. "What is it? You can tell me?"

He didn't say anything. He didn't even move. His shoulders just barely raised an inch with his breaths.

I tried again. "Is it the familiar? Does it hurt you?"

Liam turned his face. "You shouldn't be here right now. It's not safe."

We were face to face. Close enough to kiss, yet he felt so far away. We could've been on different planets. "You are one of my safe spaces, Liam."

"Not anymore," he said, his head already shaking. "I can't be. Not right now." His

whole body started to tremble. “Can you please leave?”

“Liam?” I said, my voice breaking.

“It’s not you,” he said. “It’s not even me.”

I believed that. For once, he’d said something that made sense.

“Please,” he begged.

Before slinking away, I pulled him close, my lips finding his. I kissed him, urging his lips open and when he relented, I dipped my tongue into his mouth, trying to tell him with everything in me that I was going to fight for him. That he was worth it to me. He wasn’t going to be alone in all this because he had me, Randy, and the rest of the guys. We’d all figure this out. He didn’t need to carry this burden on his own. That’s why we were a coven. We helped one another.

Liam’s hand came up to rest on my neck. I relaxed, moving into the kiss more. He wanted it. I deepened it, pushing against him with my body.

His grip tightened, his fingers pressing into my skin harder and harder. Something in the air switched.

I hissed, and Liam’s grip immediately relaxed. “Please,” he begged again, looking me right in the eye, his eyes a mixture of pain and promise.

I scrambled off the bed. His eyes were the same dark shade of brown they’d always been, but within their depths, there was a yellow hue that wasn’t there before. It scared the shit out of me. I backed out of the room. “You’re not alone. I’m right here, Liam.”



“Please,” he said again, his voice desperate.

I backed up over the threshold and the door slammed in my face with no one touching it.

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I stood there, blinking, just staring at the door. He'd used his magic to slam that door right in my face. My breath caught.

"Whoa," a voice said from behind me. "You okay?"

I looked up to find Travis standing at the top of the stairs with his hair already perfectly styled and his clothes for the day on and looking sharp. A shiver rocked my body, and I took two steps back until I hit the opposite end of the hall.

"Norah?" Travis came closer, standing right in front of me. "Did you and Liam get into a fight or something?"

A fight? I wished it was just a fight. I looked up at Travis's emerald eyes. My voice still came out in a whisper as if I was afraid to acknowledge what I saw, but really, I didn't want that thing knowing how much it affected me. "I saw the familiar move over Liam. He was sleeping, and the thing moved on him, Travis."

Travis's eyes narrowed. "Just now?"

I nodded. "Then I woke him up, and he's just not himself. He told me to get away from him and that he couldn't keep me safe right now."

With all the conflicting things running through my head, Travis just watched as I had my mini breakdown. "He has been acting off."

Off? I wanted to laugh, but that just seemed too cruel. "I think it's more than just that."

A thud sounded from Liam's room. Travis peeked behind him and then pulled on my hand. We walked down the stairs together and into the kitchen where Travis busied himself with the toaster and the stove. "I don't know what to think," Travis said. "We haven't come across anything like this before. I didn't know it was even possible for someone like us to even get something like that. I've heard about it with bad witches. Familiars on bad witches is a no-brainer, but we're inherently good. That's why we're the Enforcers. That's why we get the pull."

"So, what does that say to you?"

"It says to me that either that familiar was spawned from a super powerful demon, or..." He trailed off, his shoulders sagging as he flipped a few eggs in a frying pan. "Or," he started again. "It says to me that our magic is still haywire. Liam can't find a trace of anything about a demonic familiar attaching itself to anything that wasn't bad. Maybe that's why he's so paranoid and doesn't want you around him anymore."

"But he's not bad," I said, trying not to come apart. "If anything, he's the best one out of all of us."

"Yeah," Travis muttered. "Poor choice for the familiar because if he thinks he's going to be getting Liam to do anything terrible, he can think again. He'll resist him. He's as pure as they come."

Travis turned around with the eggs and grabbed a plate. He slid two off the pan onto one plate and another two onto the other. He then nudged the first plate toward me. "Thank you." I sat there and ate my eggs at the same time mulling things over in my head. "Maybe that's why he's been acting so strange lately. He could be having an internal battle with himself all the time and we don't even know about it."

"Anything is a possibility at this point," Travis said. He raised his eyebrows after shoving a forkful of egg into his mouth. "I'd love to hear what you and Randy were

doing last night.”

I stilled, a cold wash of reality sweeping over me. “Last night?”

Travis nodded. “I hear you went for a ride, yet when you came home, Randy ran up to the room without saying anything to anyone. I’ve known him long enough to know that was odd behavior for him. Did you guys get in a fight?”

“No,” I shrugged, my face heating. Why did it have to be Travis giving me the third degree? If it was Gabe, I could just distract him.

“Didn’t think so considering the sounds that were coming from your room last night.”

I was not going to apologize for that. That was too much fun. “I think we need to soundproof things in here.”

“It certainly might make it easier for the rest of us who want to get some sleep.”

“I’m not that loud.”

“It wasn’t you last night,” Travis said. “It was Randy.”

A smirk tweaked my lips and Travis turned away. He’d had a huge orgasm last night, that was for sure. “It would be worse if we were all still in the apartment,” I mentioned, not bothering to hide how much last night had pleased me.

“Ha. Yes, it would. I guess that’s one thing to be thankful for. We definitely have a lot more room here than we ever did at that place.”

Travis placed two pieces of bread in the toaster and pushed the lever down. “That’s your toast.” He walked around the counter and stopped just on the other side of the

bar. “I just hope you and Randy know what you’re doing. Be careful.”

I reared back in surprise. “You’re not mad?” He’d surmised we were doing something behind his back and he...didn’t care?

“I know Randy is just doing whatever he can think of to keep everyone safe. Hopefully your presence will ground him since he tends to go off the deep end when left to his own devices.”

I nodded, and eventually Travis turned away and headed back up the steps. I called out after him. “You didn’t fall and hit your head this morning, did you?”

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He chuckled. “No, I think I fell and hit my head about a month ago though. I haven’t been right since.”

I bit down on my lip, knowing full well what he was getting at. I’d come to them about a month ago, and no, nothing had been right since. Well, except for the five of us. That would never be wrong. It was just the world that was going to shit around us. We could deal with that though. We were witches after all. As Granny would say, “All you need is a little magic and determination, and you, too, can get the grease off these frying pans.”

If that wasn’t a euphemism for life’s shit, I didn’t know what was.

### Chapter Six

Travis and I waited in the Jeep for Liam and Gabe. Liam had been MIA after my encounter with him, so I wasn’t even positive he’d be going to school. Eventually, though, both came out the front door and Travis and I both sighed in relief. Liam got in the front with Travis as Gabe slid in beside me in the back. He wrapped his arms around me and gave me a kiss on the cheek before turning toward the front. “So, here’s something.” He dribbled his fingers along the seat back. “I’ve been watching the apartment. I’ve got a tracker on the place just to see if Dupre or Jay or anyone else magical went there once we left it.”

Travis rolled his hand over to get Gabe to hurry up with the rest of his story.

Gabe grinned. “It’s not Dupre or Jay, but someone’s been poking around there all morning. Someone witchy.”

“Someone witchy?” I asked, trying not to smile.

“Yeah, a normal person wouldn’t even blip on my radar. I don’t care about seeing the mailman, you know what I mean? I have it set up to alert me if anyone with magical powers goes there.”

Made perfect sense. “So, we should probably go check it out, right? Do people usually come see you if they notice something’s up or...?”

Liam turned toward the car door and propped his elbow up on the armrest. He stared out the window as we talked. Travis looked from him, then back to me. “They have in the past. Rare, though. If something is up, we usually know about it before anyone else.”

I sucked in a breath. Oh shit. What if Ren was poking around the apartment looking for Randy and me? What if he’d found the book? I hadn’t even thought of that happening. “Maybe I should call Randy.”

Gabe put his hand on the phone when I took it out of my pocket. “He’s at the gym. He won’t want to be bothered. Trust me.”

He would about this. But was I supposed to say? Randy and I were actually waiting on information from a semi-bad witch and he wouldn’t mind this interruption?

Travis raised his eyebrows at me and I shrugged, pretending like I didn’t care. It wasn’t as if I was positive it was Ren, anyway.

“Let’s just take a drive by there on the way to drop Norah off. It might be nothing,” Gabe said.

Everyone agreed, even a half-hearted one from Liam, so Travis drove the Jeep

outside the gate and took the highway to Salem. Part of me hoped it was Ren waiting there with the book, and part of me hoped it wasn't. If it was, I'd have a hell of a lot of explaining to do about how we visited a questionable witch regarding Liam's familiar. Travis seemed cool with it earlier, but that's because he didn't actually know what we'd done. He might change his mind when he found out.

"So," Travis started, catching mine and Gabe's stares in the rearview mirror. "Walter sent me a text yesterday. He asked if we'd gotten a tug lately. I think he's checking up on us to make sure our magic is working."

"I haven't felt a thing recently," I said. "Not since that night with Dupre and the..." I peeked at Liam and trailed off. Leaning forward, I touched Liam's shoulder. His head whipped around, and he stared at my fingertips on his collarbone. "How about you?" I asked, trying not to be deterred by his reaction. "Felt anything recently?" I knew we were all trying not to talk about the familiar, but maybe that was making it worse. Maybe Liam felt as if it was something he had to hide in shame. I mean, we all knew he'd acquired it, so why not talk about it? "Just curious as to how the familiar is affecting you." I echoed the same sentiment from earlier. Maybe if the others were around, he'd open up.

Liam's gaze narrowed in on my hands until I removed them from him, the tips buzzing. Yikes. Sorry?

"I haven't felt that much different," Liam said, his voice casual, unperturbed.

Liar. A blind person could tell his whole attitude had shifted.

I looked at Gabe and he only shrugged. "I haven't felt anything either. We felt it a lot that last time, but that was because what was going down was the big time. If we don't feel anything right now, hopefully that means everything is okay for the time being. I don't think we're missing out on anything if that's what Walter's getting at."



“That’s pretty much what I told him,” Travis said, his lips pulling down. He’d been the only one not to feel the pull as much as the rest of us had. “I just hope they stay where they are for right now.”

We all hoped for the same thing. With me here, and Liam in possession of a familiar, I couldn’t imagine what their reaction would be.

Travis took us down the familiar streets and we passed the small hotel I’d stayed in when I’d first come to Salem. I smiled at it, remembering how I’d showed up with such a pissed off attitude as if it was the guys’ fault that I was getting cramps all the time. So much had happened since then. Most for the best, but some could be better.

Travis parked the Jeep down the road a little way, so we could get a view of the apartment without showing ourselves first. Liam sat forward in the front seat, peering through the front windshield. It was evident someone was there. There was an unassuming sedan parked out front with what looked like a person in it, just staring at the house. I looked inside myself to test the magic waters, so to speak. I didn’t see anything bad or negative going around, but there was a clash up against another witch that wasn’t one of my guys, or anyone else I’d ever met.

Gabe opened the back door. “Let’s go see what this person wants.”

“Agreed,” Travis said. “Norah, you and Liam stay in the car. Gabe and I will go see what they want.”

I glared at the back of his head as he got out of the Jeep without bothering to look around to see how I’d taken his “order”. I knew why he’d done it. Liam was a loose cannon right now, and if someone else were to see the familiar on him, things might get misconstrued. As for me, no one but them knew about me, so I shouldn’t go rushing forward when we weren’t sure what kind of situation we were putting ourselves into. That didn’t mean I cared for his instructions. Asshat.

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Gabe and Travis approached the little gold car, and the guy inside immediately stepped out. His face was drawn, and he gave both Gabe and Travis a handshake as I watched. I looked at Liam. “Do you recognize him?”

“Yes. He’s a local witch. He and his girlfriend, also a witch, live out toward Boston way. His name’s Murphy, and he has a girlfriend named Anna.”

“I wonder what they want. He seems to have been waiting for you guys to show up.” I inched forward, practically hanging over the front seat trying to get a better read on the guy but was coming up empty.

“Looks it,” Liam said. Though he carried on a conversation with me, his voice was a monotone, as if his heart wasn’t in anything he said.

When I peeked back out the windshield, Travis and Gabe were on their way back to us. Travis got in the car first as Gabe ran around the other side to scoot in beside me. Liam and I looked at them, waiting for them to explain.

“That was Murph—”

“Murphy,” I finished for Travis. “And he has a girlfriend named Anna and they live out toward Boston. What’s going on?”

“Anna’s pretty sick,” Gabe said, filling us in.

That would be the reason for Murphy’s pallor, but not for anything else. “Okay...”

Travis gripped the steering wheel. In front of us, the little sedan's tail lights flicked on as he moved the car from Park to Drive. Travis did the same and pulled out behind him. "He thinks it has something to do with bad magic."

"We told him we didn't get the pull," Gabe supplied, shrugging. "We didn't tell him our magic has been off. Anyway, he's still pretty insistent that Anna somehow is the victim of some bad shit."

"So, what are we doing now?"

"We're on our way out there," Travis answered, following Murphy's car as he took the next right up ahead. "Someone text Randy what we're up to. He won't be able to come, but he'll want to know what's going on."

I looked at Liam, but he made no move for his phone whatsoever. Pulling my own out, I sent him a quick text about what we were facing today, and then told him I would text back when I knew more.

The drive didn't take as long as I thought it would. I was too busy thinking things through in my own head. Liam had a familiar. Randy and I had contacted some questionable witches yesterday, and now we'd found out that a witch they knew might be sick due to some negative magic.

We pulled down a suburban street and sensing that we were close, Travis caught my eye in the rearview mirror. "You can come in with us, but we'll just introduce you as a witch friend. I think it's still best we don't say anything about you being the fifth."

I agreed completely. The less everyone else knew, the better.

The gold sedan pulled into a driveway and Travis pulled up to the curb outside the house. It was a one-story golden yellow ranch. Murphy immediately got out of the car

and then waited for us to pile out as well. Travis and Gabe went up ahead while Liam and I lingered behind. It was odd not to have him say anything or introduce any new facts about the case. He was just so quiet. Too quiet.

Travis introduced me like he said he would, and then we all made our way into the house. The house was outdated, but cute. Small rooms lent itself to a chopped-up feeling, but it was also homey and pleasant.

Murphy jiggled his car keys as he led us into the living room. A blue shag carpet at our feet, I only barely noticed the woman who slept on the couch. Murphy knelt next to her and rubbed her shoulder. “Anna, Honey. Do you remember Travis, Gabe, and Liam? They’ve come here to visit.” She blinked, the hollows under her eyes became more pronounced. Murphy helped sit her up. It didn’t help her appearance that her hair was stringy as if she hadn’t washed it in days. She had a small smile, but it didn’t reach her ears.

Travis and Gabe glanced at one another. They seemed to have acknowledged something in their minds to one another, but I wasn’t privy to it. Unfortunately. However, I didn’t have to be a mind reader because we had Liam, and Liam said whatever was on his mind now. “Anna, you’ve lost some weight.”

She looked up at Liam, her lips chapped. She did look frail, but I wasn’t sure if that was a normal look for her. Some girls had that skin stretched over bone look. “I just don’t have an appetite,” she said, her voice crackly.

Travis shot Liam a warning look, but Murphy didn’t notice. He was staring at Anna with such affection. It didn’t go unnoticed by me and made my heart wrench. It was how I looked when staring at Liam now.

“I keep telling her she has to eat,” Murphy said, smiling for Anna’s sake, but I could tell he didn’t feel it.

She looked at him and her face did show a little sign of life as color rushed to her cheeks.

“When did you get sick?” Travis asked.

“About five days ago,” she said, coughing into her fist. “It just came over me all of a sudden. Murphy is freaking out, of course. That’s why you’re here, I’m guessing. I keep telling him that nothing is going on though. I haven’t done anything.”

Gabe moved forward. “Something is clearly going on though, I’m not sure it’s magic related. Have you seen a doctor? You should probably get to one.”

Murphy shook his head. “It’s not that. You’re not telling them everything, Anna. Tell them everything that happened. Tell them about the magic.”

Her head twisted toward him and her mouth dropped. “Why would you say that?”

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“Because I’m worried about you. We need to tell them everything.”

She pressed her lips together and shook her head. “I can’t believe you just said that. I’m just sick. Okay? Maybe I got the flu or something. I don’t know.”

“The flu?” Murphy prodded. He tried to stay in control of himself, but he was losing that battle. “You don’t have the flu, Anna. You can’t even do magic right now. It’s almost as if magic has left your body, taking your health with it.”

Taking what he said into account, I searched inside myself again, using my purple magic to push out against the seams and search in front of me for any truth to what he said. I felt his magic, and I recognized those who were usually with me right away though Liam’s essence was a little cloudier than it usually was. As far as Anna’s power, hers was just a spark, a little ember barely on fire. If she was a witch, she was dangerously close to losing her magic.

“Have you used a lot of magic recently?” Travis asked her.

She shook her head. “No. Not at all.”

“I can vouch for that,” Murphy said. “We aren’t heavy magic users to begin with. Just inherited—Naturals—and learned the basics. Nothing like you guys do though. I’ve never seen her like this before. I was hoping you guys would be able to tell us if she came across something she shouldn’t have.”

“Murphy,” Anna said, but her words cut off into a cough that doubled her over.

Travis looked around at the rest of us, but there was nothing else to say. There was absolutely no evidence of evil magic here. None. No feelings. No tugs. No awful aromas. There was one sickly woman though. “I’m sorry, Murphy. No signs of it or anything. I don’t know what to tell you.”

Gabe placed his hands in front of him. “I really think you should get her to a doctor, Mate.”

I nodded alongside him. It didn’t appear to be a witch problem, it just seemed to be a natural human problem. Though, as witches, we didn’t get sick like humans did. There was something about the magic in our blood that helped us repel things like the common cold or flu. I hadn’t known Anna when she was healthy, so I didn’t know if she was a powerful witch or not. It was clear she wasn’t now though. It was heartbreaking to see her like that. Someone’s life stripped away from them, almost glaringly so. She lacked the glow most people had.

“We’ll keep in touch, though,” Travis said. “If something comes up, we’ll let you know.”

“Let us know, too,” I added. “If you take her to a doctor, please let us know what they say.”

I’d seen Granny heal a witch once who’d gotten sick. Something about chakras and a lot of things I hadn’t understood at the time. If it came down to it, I could get Granny to visit me in a dream again, so I could ask her what to do.

Anna stared up at me and she smiled. “Thank you.” Her cheeks pinkened just a bit more. Just our presence had improved her mood a little, or so it seemed. Maybe she needed fresh air and company other than just herself and Murphy.

We all said our goodbyes and then Travis, Gabe, Liam, and I walked wordlessly back

to the big Jeep.

“Poor thing,” Gabe muttered. “She looks so different.”

We got in the car, and Gabe held me to him a little tighter. I knew that feeling all too well. It hurt to watch Murphy with Anna. It was obvious they cared so much about one another and that he was going through this illness with her. I peeked at Liam and frowned. There was a lot of that going on lately.

## Chapter Seven

By the time we got back into Salem, it wasn't worth it to open the shop for the day, and the guys had already missed their classes. Gabe still wanted to get dropped off because he had practice and he wasn't willing to miss that. It was becoming evident that having one car and one motorcycle between all of us wasn't cutting it. The idea of having a Jeep big enough to fit all of us in it was a good one, just not practical when we all had our own things going on. Especially when the guys graduated college. Everyone would probably be going in separate directions then.

If we didn't want to get another car, we were going to have to find a new place to live. Somewhere closer where we could walk to where we needed to be.

I fell asleep in the Jeep on the way home and only woke up when I felt the vehicle come to a stop. I blinked, disoriented for a moment before recognizing the walkway that led up to the front of Liam's parents' house. Head still groggy, I pushed the Jeep door open and hopped down.

Randy was in the kitchen making himself a sandwich when we came in. Travis filled him in on the particulars, and then Randy motioned for me to follow him up the stairs. My heart lurched. I grabbed a banana from the bar and tried to step around Travis when he said, “Um, Norah?”



I stopped and looked back at him.

He ran a hand through his dark hair, his green eyes glinting. “Can you wait a sec?”

I looked back at Randy. “Talk to you later?” I guessed. Since Travis and I rarely ever conversed, this must be important.

Randy waved at us both and headed up the stairs, a small smirk on his face. Liam had already sat himself on the couch in the living room and pulled the laptop into his lap. Travis motioned for me to follow him into the vestibule. Instead of stopping there, he led me out the front door. “Sorry for being so secretive,” he said. “I didn’t want Liam to hear what I was going to say.”

“Oh. Okay.” That didn’t give me much information at all, but sure.

“I’ve been thinking we should probably practice magic together. I know you four have done it together and found some things out...”

“And you didn’t want to join,” I added. I didn’t want this to turn into a conversation about him being left out. He was the one who refused to join in on shit like that. It was never us excluding him.

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“Right,” he said. “I didn’t want anything to do with it, but today’s a different story than it was before. We’ve got a lot more things going on. With Liam having the familiar and Dupre lurking around somewhere, I need you to be up on your defensive skills. But also,” he sighed as if it killed him to admit this. “I need to work with you. I need the feel of having you be part of the coven instead of...the other person.”

I swallowed, staring at Travis as we walked around the side of the house. His gaze already focused out at the water. It had taken a lot for him to say that. It wasn’t anywhere near an apology, but all the little things that had been going on lately made me sure we were moving in the right direction. “I agree,” I told him. “When we get into a situation like we were the other day, we need to see how we can react and how we all work with one another.”

Travis looked up. “And Liam is scaring me a little. We’re not sure what the familiar is doing to him. We know the familiar allowed the psychic to mark the Liderc’s targets, so it could really be capable of anything. We know she wasn’t aware of that part, so what if Liam is doing something he’s not aware of...”

My stomach twisted. I hoped to God that wasn’t happening.

I stopped when we were in the wide-open clearing, about in the same place we had been when it was just Liam, Randy, Gabe, and myself out here. I took a seat on the grass and stared up at him. The sun made my eyes squint, so I used my hand to ward off as much as I could. “Let’s see what you got.”

Travis did what I’d seen the others do. He took his stance, right foot forward with this hand taut as he waited to pull his magic from him. I concentrated on his hand, waiting

for a color to show up like I'd seen with the rest of the guys. Nothing really accumulated there like it had with the others. Instead, a swirling wind came up from around Travis, catching at his sleeves and flapping the extra material in the wind. The more Travis concentrated, the more the wind picked up. Pieces of my hair even came around and stuck to my lips.

Wait a minute. Liam made fire. Randy moved the earth. Gabe used the water from the ocean. "You're wind," I told him.

"What?" he snapped, frowning down at his hand. The magic flickered and went out. He'd obviously felt as if it should've been going better than it had, and I'd just ruined his concentration.

"Wind, Travis," I said, standing up and moving toward him. "Try again."

He pulled at his magic again. I waited until the wind picked up once more and then I stepped into his vortex. When he finally looked at me and noticed the wind swirling around us, his eyebrows rose.

"You were watching from the window before," I told him. "You saw how Liam made fire, Gabe moved the water, and Randy—"

"—made a big fucking hole in the ground?"

"Well, yeah," I said, chuckling. That pretty much summed it up. "I've heard of witches being able to control the elements, but isn't it weird that you each gravitated toward one?"

"I've never been able to do that before," Travis said. "Though, it's not as if I've ever tried."

“Did you try that time?”

“No, I was just trying to call my magic out, maybe make a hole in the ground like Randy had to see how much power I could get.”

“Instead of that, wind came to you. Every time you concentrated harder, the wind swirled faster. Is this an Akasha coven thing?”

Travis gave a curt shake of his head. “I’ve never heard of it before. It makes sense though. Randy also buried the Liderc alive at his parents’ house. He moved the earth again to do that. Maybe we can control separate elements.”

Yeah, that had been badass. I’d wondered how we were going to get rid of that thing and when the psychic mentioned sending him back to hell, I hadn’t realized we were going to physically send him there by breaking open the ground and shoving him so far deep inside that he would never be able to get out again.

“If we can do that,” Travis said. “What’s yours?”

I shrugged. “I’ve never felt anything like that. Maybe I’m different because I come from a voodoo background. I don’t know.”

For the next half hour, Travis used his newfound magic to fling things through the air at me while I practiced my defensive skills by deflecting them away and sending them spiraling in the other direction. When I felt the magic start to tug at me, as if the edges were splitting and fraying, I held my hand up at the rock he’d sent at me about a hundred times. I tossed it to the ground in front of him. “I need a break.”

He dropped his hands to his side, blinking, as if he’d just come out of a trance. “Wow. I guess so. We’ve been doing that for a while. Are you okay?”

“Time flies when you’re flinging things at me, I guess.”

“Actually,” he said, pausing. An enormous smile graced his face, and it was hard not to get swept up in it. “It really does.”

I rolled my eyes. Then, we just stood there staring at one another for an awkward few moments before I started toward the house. I looked over my shoulder to find him running to catch up. When he got next to me, I said, “If we can’t find a way to get the familiar off Liam, we’re going to have to find a way to get him to live with it. You see how his whole demeanor has changed, haven’t you?”

Travis nodded. “He’s not telling us the whole story. When I think about it, it’s just like him to do that. He doesn’t want to be the center of attention, therefore, he’s not going to tell us what’s really going on with this thing on him. He doesn’t like to rock the boat, you know?”

“I’ve tried talking to him,” I said, feeling completely helpless. “He told me he couldn’t be a safe space for me anymore. That stung like a bitch.”

“We should all keep trying,” Travis said, emphasizing the ‘we’. “Maybe we could sit him down and try to talk to him when Gabe gets back tonight.”

“He’d hate that,” I said, picturing an intervention in my mind. That would make him crazy. “Maybe we could each try to talk to him separately to see if we can get anywhere with him.”

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Travis rubbed his chin. “You’re right. It’s been long enough, and we can’t keep letting him try to do this alone. If you think back, it’s only gotten worse. When the familiar first attached to him, he was better off than he is right now. He helped heal you. Now he acts as if it’s a chore to be around you.”

My hands turned to fists. “Thanks for that.”

He shrugged. “It’s the truth.”

I’d had my fill of Travis time for the day. We went inside, and I immediately climbed the stairs. We’d been doing so well, too, but apparently, I still had my limits when it came to him. I headed to Randy’s room, but when I opened the door, he wasn’t there. I stopped at Liam’s room next. I stuck my head in and found him sitting on his bed with his laptop in front of him. He looked up when I came in. “Have you seen Randy?”

“He left to get Gabe from practice since you and Travis were busy.”

It wasn’t so much the words he’d said, but how he said it. I stepped in and closed the door behind me. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” He kept his bloodshot eyes on the laptop screen. My patience was wearing thin. A few hours with Travis could do that to anyone. I sat down on the bed and put my hand on his calf. “Come on, Liam. Talk to me.”

“I told you this morning there really isn’t anything to say.”

“You also said a bunch of other crap I don’t believe either.”

He looked up at me, the shadows under his eyes darkening. Before he could turn back to his laptop, I shut the screen and tossed the whole thing to the side of the bed. “Liam, this is getting serious. Everyone’s worried about you and you won’t talk. We just need to know what’s going on. If we don’t know what’s going on, how are we supposed to help you?”

“I don’t need help,” he said, sighing, and reaching for the laptop again.

I grabbed his hands and pulled them to me. He tried to yank them from my grasp, but I squeezed tighter. “Not happening. Liam, I miss you.”

His hard exterior chipped a little. It was a brief flicker, but then the shadows grew over his face again. “Miss me, huh? Is that why you’re outside doing magic with Travis?”

My mouth dropped. He’d never so much as raised his voice to me before. I gritted my teeth. “I’m outside doing magic with Travis, so we can both practice. We hadn’t practiced together before. You know that.”

“Yeah, and suddenly he can stand you now? He’s not biting your head off at every turn.”

I resisted the urge to release his hands because I had a feeling that was exactly what he wanted. It was clear that this wasn’t Liam saying these things. He was trying to push me away. “Yeah, it seems you guys have traded places.”

He visibly flinched.

I saw it as my opening. I dropped my voice to a whisper and worked my way closer

to him. "Liam, Randy and I are working on something. Just stay strong for a little while longer. You're doing great. You're so brave."

His hands relaxed in mine. I retreated to look in his eyes and it was almost as if I was staring at the old Liam again. His jaw clenched. "Please," he said.

That was all I needed to hear. We needed that damn book. Or an exorcism.

An exorcism? I hadn't thought of that before. Maybe that would get the damn thing off him.

I leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. This time, he let me, his eyelids drooping low for a brief second.

I stood to leave him alone when a soft pull started in my stomach and then grew and grew. I whipped around to face Liam. "I feel it too," he said. "Faint, but it's there."

I sighed in relief. At least he felt it and wasn't the cause of it. That was all I could ask for now.

## Chapter Eight

I turned toward the door only to hear the thump, thump, thump of someone running up the steps. I met Travis at the top of the stairs. His eyes were wide. "I feel something."

"Me too," I told him. "Bad."

Liam came around behind me and I moved so my back was to the wall. He was giving me off a creepy vibe all of a sudden. I hated to admit it, but it was true. Liam wasn't being the Liam I knew. Not at all. "Well, are we going or what?" he asked, his



tone clipped, almost exasperated.

Travis peeked at me and then back to Liam. “Let’s go.”

Liam pushed past us, and Travis and I gave one another conspiratorial looks. The sooner we could get that fucking serpent familiar off him, the better. He was taking a nose-dive into moodyville. He wasn’t my shy, safe, Liam anymore. “We should probably call Randy or Gabe.”

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“They’re on the bike,” Liam called out over his shoulder. “They won’t be able to answer. They’ll probably get there before us.”

I glared at the back of his head. I expected attitude like that from Travis, maybe even Randy if he was in a mood, but the fact that Liam was pulling that shit pissed me off even more. I clenched my mouth shut and followed them both to the Jeep. Instead of letting Liam get the front seat, I took it myself, closing the door in his face. It was petty, and I knew I was being irrational because Liam’s mood was darkening only due to the demonic familiar attached to his body and not anything to do with me or our relationship, but I couldn’t help myself.

This time, Travis didn’t need me to give him directions to where we were headed. He navigated us smoothly toward our destination. With the ferocity of this pull, I was glad Travis and I had taken the time to practice some defensive blocks today. Who knew what we were heading into?

When we were close, my phone rang. Randy’s name popped up on my screen, so I swiped at it to answer his call. “Hey, we’re here. How far out are you guys?”

“A few minutes,” I told him, hoping I wasn’t wrong. I was new to this pull business, but I just went with my gut feeling.

“We’ll wait outside.”

“O—” The phone clicked in my ear and I pulled it away and frowned at it. He’d hung up on me. I slipped the phone back in my pocket and turned toward Travis. “They’re there. They’re waiting on us, then we can all go in together.”

“Good,” Travis said, turning back to the road and taking the next left up ahead. It took us down a mostly deserted road with a few houses dotting the countryside. They were modest homes, older without being the historical type from right in downtown Salem. “The good thing to come from this is that our pull does seem to be returning. I can tell Walter now without feeling like I’m lying to him. This time, I really did get the pull.”

“Has he asked you about the fifth in a while?” I hedged, sliding a glance his way.

“No, but I imagine he won’t let that sit for much longer. Orders are always made up of a group of five. Not four or three. It has to be five. We need to think about telling them the truth about you soon before they figure it out on their own.”

I didn’t say much to that. Mostly because I didn’t know what to say. There was so much going on at the moment that the fifth and the Order not knowing about me seemed to be put on hold, but it certainly wasn’t for their superiors. They would want answers soon.

Up ahead, the Jeep headlights splashed against a motorcycle. The cramp in my stomach intensified, and Travis was already pulling over to the side of the road right behind Randy’s bike. Two figures walked toward us, and we got out. Randy came forward, cupping my head in his hand. “You okay?”

I nodded, and we walked forward, meeting the rest of them in between the bike and the Jeep. Liam stepped forward and stared intently at the house. The exterior flickered and kept on flickering. Liam’s gaze intensified as he worked his magic, trying to power it up. I looked at him and then back at the house. The scene before us looked like a staticky TV station when the weather was bad outside. Brief glimpses of the interior of the house showed up, but immediately faded back to siding and shutters.

“The fuck?” Liam said, stepping back when he just couldn’t do it. I tried to reach out to him, but he pulled his hand away. “Someone else is going to have to do it.”

We all stared at him. Nerves rattled around in my stomach. Liam was the best at visibility spells and now suddenly he couldn’t do it? Something was wrong.

“Can I try?” Liam had been helping me with a few of the Order spells and now seemed like the perfect time to try one since Liam wasn’t able to.

“Sure,” Randy said, pushing me forward.

I closed my eyes and let my magic encompass me like I’d felt Liam do with his when he showed me how to do the visibility spell before. My fingertips tingled as I thought about the siding, the shutters, the wood, everything, disappearing and revealing to us what was inside. To me, this was one of the best spells we could have. We never wanted to just run into a situation where we felt negative magic without knowing what we were running into first. That would be a nightmare.

I didn’t open my eyes until Gabe said, “Good job, Love.”

Slowly, I blinked, and the interior of the house appeared in front of me. We couldn’t see much. The house was dark as if everyone in there had gone off to bed already. No one in rooms like the living room or kitchen, which left the bedrooms. Bedrooms were always difficult to see into though, especially if people were lying in beds. They were usually hidden by mountains of sheets and pillows.

“All seems clear,” Travis said. “Let’s head in.”

We strode forward through the dewy grass until we hit the sidewalk that led to a few short steps. Randy unlocked the door with his magic and then twisted the doorknob to let us in in front of him. We squeezed past, separating as we’d done now on

numerous occasions. It wasn't hard to figure out where to go to in this house. The rotten meat smell was a dead giveaway and eventually, those that went to check on the downstairs gravitated toward the upstairs where it wafted from. I stuck close to Randy and Gabe as we ascended the steps.

Travis was the first to call out. "Found...something."

We turned the corner and found a body lying on the floor. Half of the torso laying in the hallway, and the other half lying just inside what looked to be a bathroom by the presence of the ceramic tile at the feet. "Are they—?" Randy started.

Travis knelt and touched the shoulder of the person. "Alive," he said, relief flooding his voice.

Thank God for that. I couldn't have Randy going off the deep end again. Not when Travis and Liam seemed to have switched personalities.

Travis turned the body and moved hair away from the face. As soon as he did so, rotten garbage funk spewed into the air. I almost took a step back. The woman's mouth was agape, and her eyes were wide and stricken. Her skin was an ashen color. Not even pale, but almost gray as if it were decaying right out from under her. Pronounced shadows dominated under her eyes and she was rail thin.

"I know this person," Travis said. He held his hands up to her neck as if he were checking for a pulse. Satisfied that he felt it there, he sat back, staring at the body with a perplexed look.

"Not to be crude," I said, "But she stinks. Awful." I pulled my shirt up over my nose to try to filter out some of the scent. "What the hell did she do?"

Liam leaned down over her and felt her forehead. "She's burning hot. Did she just

pass out?”

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Passed out from trying to murder someone was what it smelled like. None of us had explanations though. Randy left my side and started another search through the house to see what he could find. Maybe he could find evidence of the type of evil magic she did and what its purpose was.

He came back empty-handed. “Nothing. It all seems to be centered around her.”

“We really have no choice then,” Travis said, his lips thinning. “We have to mark her.”

He lowered his hand to her forehead, and I panicked. “Stop.” They all stared up at me, varying degrees of surprise. “I don’t want to seem like the newbie here in all this, but it just doesn’t seem right. Doesn’t this girl look like she has the same symptoms as Anna?”

“Except Anna didn’t have the putrid smell.” Travis offered me a small smile. “It’s what we do, Norah. We’re not saying she’s guilty. It’s not really for us to decide. This is just going on the facts we have and the natural abilities we were given. The Akasha takes care of the truth, and that’s never wrong.”

My stomach tightened, and I looked up to Randy for help. He only shrugged. “Maybe nerves over your first marking?”

I guessed that could be it. I just didn’t want to be judge, jury, and executioner. Travis stared at me, his green eyes intense. “Close your eyes and feel my magic when I do this.” I did as he asked, and then his clear, concise words came up and over all of us. “By the power of the Order of the Akasha, a trial has been set to prove your

worthiness. If you be true, let light live within you. If you be false, may the light flush out any darkness. To thine own self be true.”

Magic pricked my fingertips and goosebumps coursed all over my skin. The wind whipped up around us and I caught my hair and held it down before it tangled. It only lasted a few seconds, but it was enough that a power surge lifted me. It felt as if I was glowing.

I opened my eyes to see Travis’s red magic pulsing out around us along with the smell of cinnamon thinning the nasty aroma this area carried. The magic had burned a symbol into the woman’s forehead. An O with an A inside of it etched into her skin there as if Travis had written it with dark ash. I frowned down at it. “It’ll disappear if she’s found innocent,” Travis said.

“And if not?”

“Then, it’ll be visible to anyone magical as a symbol of their disgrace.”

I glanced at Liam without even thinking. My eyes going straight to his forehead. Of course, he was clear, but he did stare back at me, his lips a straight line and with dark, dark eyes that sent a shiver up my spine.

Randy threw an arm around me. “You’ll get used to it.”

Gabe needled me in the side. “You’re going to have to. You’re stuck with us now.”

It was most definitely the other way around. “So, what do we do now?” I asked, staring down again at the barely moving body. Her chest rose and fell, but beyond that, she looked—and smelled—like death.

“Now we take her to headquarters and wait for her to wake up, so we can perform the



trial.”

“Should we take her to a hospital?” I asked. It was what we’d wanted Murphy to do with Anna. Maybe an IV to get fluid pumping through her would do her good.

“A hospital isn’t going to make a difference in the magical world, Norah,” Gabe said. “This has evil magic written all over it. We just have to see if it was her doing, or someone else’s.”

I didn’t like the idea of just leaving her like this. It seemed cruel, especially when we weren’t sure if she was the one who’d used the bad magic. “Can we stop by the shop? I’d like to pick up some healing herbs to see what I can do for her.”

Travis and Gabe grabbed the body, both putting an arm around the shoulders. “Yeah. Randy, you take Norah to the shop and meet us back at headquarters. I’d like to get this done as soon as possible.”

He didn’t say anything, but his eyebrows were drawn in. He’d said he’d known the girl. Did he think she was innocent? Or was it just that marking someone had made him think about his friend and his sister? It was hard to tell with him because Travis wasn’t one to share what he was thinking. At least not with me. Yet, anyway. Maybe all that was changing now.

Randy, Liam, and I followed them down the stairs and Randy and I sat back and watched as they all loaded into the Jeep. Gabe waved as they pulled away, but Liam had just gotten in the Jeep with his head down, and if I wasn’t mistaken, with the tail of the snake peeking out from the back of his collar.

“Was that—?” Randy started to say.

“Yeah,” I answered, knowing he’d just seen the same thing. “New update to the

Liam-familiar saga. It moves on him. Oh, and he can't stand to be around me now."

Randy pulled me to him, his large arms enveloping me in the most enormous hug. "You know that's not really him. I've been doing some thinking, and even if the familiar isn't doing anything to Liam or wanting Liam to do anything to other people, it can't feel good to have that thing on your skin. Think of all the hate and the evil it encompasses, and it's on you all the time and there's nothing you can do about it. He's probably battling it as best he can right now."

I nodded into his expansive chest and hugged him tighter. Liam was fighting it. So long as he had some control, he'd fight it.

## Chapter Nine

Randy and I stopped briefly at the shop. I grabbed what herbs I could think of that Granny used and threw them all in "A Touch of Magic" bag from behind the counter. I tried to tell myself to remember to take these vials off the inventory list, but I wasn't kidding myself. I knew I'd forget.

We walked out the store and stopped short when a couple of policemen were just coming out of Madame Serena's place. They tipped their hats to us, and I immediately turned around to lock up the store. Guilt washed over me like it did every time I thought about what she'd done for us. She was just a victim, the same as us. She didn't realize that Dupre was a monster and twisted magic to his own ugly devices instead of using it like it should be used.

We walked past, and I gave the two policemen a half smile as Randy kept a hand on the small of my back. He leaned down and whispered, "Breathe, Norah."

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I took a breath and tried to relax. I looked over my shoulder and watched as someone else locked up the shop's door for the police. "I just feel bad," I said. "No one will know what really happened to her. She did sacrifice herself in the end."

"She wasn't a bad person," Randy agreed. "Just in a bad situation."

I stuck the vials in my pocket as we approached the bike. Before we got on it, Randy pulled me close. He tipped my chin up to look him in the face. Slowly, his mouth lowered over mine. I pushed up to my tiptoes to pass the distance quicker. With so much going on around us, it was easy to get lost in the stresses, but I had this, too. This beautiful connection with four guys. Randy's hand worked up into my hair and angled my head to deepen the kiss. I followed his lead, the world falling away around us as I lived in this moment with him.

Sadly, he pulled away, his breath caressing my lips. "I'm right here, Norah."

I nodded, needing to hear that. Then, we hopped on the bike and started toward headquarters. Driving down the back road in the bike was a lot different from the comfort of the Jeep. The ruts that were just little nuisances in the Jeep were like giant craters to the bike. Randy had to slow down at an almost unbearably slow speed as he maneuvered around and straight over the ones he couldn't avoid. When he finally pulled to a stop right behind the Jeep, he helped me off and then rubbed my butt after he got off himself. "Little sore?"

I smacked him in the hand. "I think I'd prefer to ride in the Jeep next time. My God. You ever thought about getting another vehicle?"

“I thought you liked the bike?”

“I do,” I said. Maybe just not when we had to go to headquarters.

“I could probably sell it back to Travis if—”

I turned. “What? This was Travis’s bike?” I stared at the black bike as if there was some marking on it that would tell me it used to be Travis’s. It didn’t. I never would’ve guessed it belonged to him.

Randy nodded. “Yeah. I bought it off him when I started my own jobs.”

That was interesting. I hadn’t pegged Travis as the type of guy who rode a bike. “I don’t want you to get rid of it,” I told Randy. “I love the bike. I just maybe don’t want to ride on it when we come down that road again. That wasn’t fun.”

Randy smiled and reached down to give my ass another pat. “Maybe I can make it up to you later.”

“Maybe there’s no maybe about it,” I said, raising my eyebrows and walking past him toward the tree I remembered the entrance was close to. Just before I got to the right place, the air started to shimmer and transform. The shape of a door formed, and Randy opened it for me and I took the steps down to the cavernous area. The torches on the wall flickered. I hadn’t even taken two steps when a shrill scream rose up.

“Oh, shit.” I ran forward, my feet slapping against the rock at our feet until I got to them. The witch was sitting up now, her legs crossed in front of her. She stared up at Travis with a murderous glare. “I told you I didn’t do anything! How many times do you need me to say it, Travis? You know me. You know I shouldn’t even be here.”

Travis paced in front of her. “We have to go with what we see.”

“And tell me what exactly you saw again. Me passed out? Me looking like this? Yeah, I look like a threat, don’t I?” she asked, rolling her eyes. I hid a smile. I loved it when Travis got shit.

“Just shut up,” Liam said, coming forward suddenly. The girl flinched away from him. I stopped, surprised at Liam’s words and Randy ran right into my back. “You’re here. Get over it,” he snarled.

The woman’s eyes widened, and she stared at Liam’s back when he finally turned from her and went back to sitting on his stone bench.

“A little more tact, Mate,” Gabe said, throwing an accusatory glance his way. “Just maybe? She is one of us, you know.”

“Then she knows what we need to do. It shouldn’t be such a shock to her,” Liam fumed.

I walked forward. “Okay, what’s going on?”

Travis ran a hand through his hair. “Jules woke up. She has no memory whatsoever of what happened, and she can’t believe we’ve even brought her here. That about sums it up, right?” Travis asked, looking right at her.

She completely ignored Travis and stared at me. “Who are you?”

Randy pushed forward. “A friend.”

The girl, Jules, gave him a withering look. We were losing this battle fast. Liam would’ve been the one to reassure this lady, but he wasn’t going to do that now. He might’ve even started the gas on the fire. I stepped forward. “I am a friend. The truth is,” I told her, “We found you around a foul smell that translates to evil magic. That’s

why we had to mark you.”

She hissed in a breath and stared at Travis. “You already marked me?”

He peeked over at me, his head dropping to the side.

Oh shit. She didn’t know that part yet. I shrugged. I hadn’t realized they didn’t tell her. Why would they not tell her?

“It’s no big deal,” I told her, mimicking what they all said to me earlier. “If there’s nothing bad about you, you’ll continue on your way. If you’re doing something bad, you’ll pay, so if you always strive to be good, we shouldn’t have a problem here.”

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“I shouldn’t be surprised,” Jules snapped. She turned toward Travis, her shoulders moving up and down with every deep breath she took. “I mean, you even marked your own sister! What the hell, Travis?”

His face blanched, and he staggered back a step.

Okay. She’d gone over the line now. I walked up to her and crouched down. “He’s just doing his job, Jules. Now we’re going to do ours. Like I just explained to you—nicely—if you’re not bad, you have nothing to worry about and you can leave right away.” I leaned toward her. “And really, we’d prefer if you left right away if you’re going to act like that.” I rose to my feet and turned toward Travis. “Alright, let’s do this. I guess stopping to get supplies wasn’t necessary.” Not that I’d help her with how she was being now, anyway. The anger that coursed through her brought back some life to her body and she was completely flushed with anger. She no longer held the decaying look but was sporting a major bitch face.

I moved to my stone bench, and the others did the same. The pentagram in the middle glowed white as we sat there staring at Jules. She stayed where she was, her gaze flitting to all of us in turn. As I stared back, it was as if her physical body gave way and I could see straight through to her soul. She glowed white, a pink aura around the edges, but she was pure. Inherently, I knew that if we’d got someone like Dupre into the pentagram, it would’ve been a different story. I could imagine scenes of death and chaos, and a black soul like a bottomless pit of tragedies.

Travis stood, and the magic stripped away, leaving my hair standing on end. As I watched, the mark on her forehead faded into nothing. It just disappeared right in front of us. The Akasha had done just what they said it would do. “You’re good,

Jules. You have to know I didn't mean anything by it. I'm just doing what I have to do, whether you like it or not. The Akasha doesn't lie, and it didn't lie in your case either. I want to know, though, you're sure you don't remember anything? Because there was something going on in your house. Something evil."

Jules stood on shaky legs. Travis reached out to steady her, but she shied away, her hands coming over her chest. Her voice was much softer now when she spoke. "I told you I don't remember a thing. It's almost like I blacked out. I woke up feeling like I got hit by a truck, and there you guys were all staring at me."

I walked toward her, hoping a woman-to-woman talk might calm her down even further. "I was there, too," I told her. "There was something in your house. I wouldn't go back there if I were you." I pulled out the vials from my pocket and held them out. "I stopped by my shop to pick these up. I was going to try to heal you, but it looks as if your color is already returning. Do you want any of this?" I held the vials out to her, basic herbs that any witch would know.

She shook her head. "I'm fine."

"Okay. Do you have any place to go besides your house? We want you to be safe until we can figure out what's going on. Your house definitely isn't that right now since we don't know what did something to you, and we don't even know what they did to you."

"You mean if something got done to me?" She headed for the stairs. "I want to go home."

Travis threw Gabe the keys. "You mind?"

Gabe plucked them out of the air. "No problem."



Before they got too far, Travis cleared his throat and then pointed at his head. He then motioned toward me. It dawned on me what he was trying to say. Jules now knew I was part of the order. Travis was asking Gabe to wipe her memory of that fact.

Gabe nodded.

Jules stomped up the steps and Gabe followed, raising his eyebrows at us as we watched them leave. I tugged on his hand before he disappeared. “Please don’t take her home. Tell her you’ll take her any place but there.”

He gave me a small salute. “You got it, Baby.” He kissed my forehead and jogged all the way up the steps. I turned, addressing the rest of us. “Well, that could’ve gone better.”

Travis ran a hand through his hair and swore. Liam looked bored, and Randy and I shared a confused glance.

“Have you guys ever marked someone before who didn’t turn out bad?”

“Yes,” Travis said, his lips thin. “But it’s usually when we have several people and we know it’s one of them, and it turns out to be one and not the other. We don’t have another person,” he said, turning around in a circle and motioning toward the pretty much empty room besides the rest of us.

“She wasn’t the one who did something bad, which means someone did something bad to her,” Randy said.

That much was clear. But we didn’t know who, and we didn’t know what. “She didn’t seem like she believed us,” I said, trying to tread very carefully before Travis spiraled even further down.

Liam smirked. “People didn’t like it when Travis accidentally took all of his sister’s powers. They especially didn’t like it when they found out one of us was found bad, too. I mean, we’re supposed to be the good guys.”

He snorted, and Travis glared at him. His eyes narrowed, and he stared at Liam menacingly. “You think that’s funny?”

Liam met his stare with a nasty one of his own. “Do I think it’s funny that one of us, an Enforcer, who is supposed to be the purest of them all, was found to be bad? I mean, yeah. If it’s not funny, it’s ironic.”

Travis moved forward, his steps like sledgehammers as he moved forward. Randy stepped in front of Liam while I intercepted Travis. “Seriously?” I said, whispering. “Wasn’t it you who told me that the familiar is affecting him? Give him a break, would you?”

Travis’s green eyes locked on mine and then looked away.

We were all trying to coddle Liam, but I agreed, he’d gone too far with that remark. Especially in front of Travis, who’d probably never get over the fact he’d accidentally stripped his own sister. That was a low blow.

I took a big breath and released it. That could’ve escalated into something bad. Since Liam wasn’t feeling much like Liam, I was going to have to play the common-sense part in all this. “Here’s what we know so far,” I said. “We know that Jules smelled like negative magic, but she’s not bad herself. So, we can only conclude that she had a negative spell done near or around her, or perhaps to her. If it was done to her that would explain how she looked like she was practically dead when we saw her. Sunken in eyes, limp hair, so pale she was practically gray. She looked like she was strung out.” I peeked toward Randy. She looked like one of those magic users at Ren’s place. Like a magic junkie. If I’d thought about it, I would’ve asked her if she

knew him. “We can look in the books for things that leave their victims like that. That’s what we did for the poor people we found dead.”

Travis nodded. “It’s a start.”

“You said you know her? What can you tell us about her? Is she the type to get mixed up in something bad?”

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Travis stared at the ceiling, his jaw working. “I’m not the best judge of character, Norah. That much must be abundantly clear to you right now.”

“We all missed the signs, man,” Randy said. “We’ve told you that again and again. You can’t just keep the blame for yourself.” Randy scratched his jaw and turned toward me. “We all know her. She’s a good person, a good witch.”

“Is she an...” I peeked at Travis and then back at Randy. “...an over-user?”

“No,” Randy said. “Nothing like that.”

Well, there went that theory. Though, I wasn’t sure what I was even trying to prove. Ren’s magical whore den didn’t reek of bad magic. Why would the two even be related except for the look on the poor girls?

Liam, who’d been too quiet through all this, coughed. He coughed again and then started to choke. Eyes wide, he stood from the stone bench. “...air...”

I went to run up after him, but he was already up the stairs, the door closed behind him. Randy put a hand on my shoulder and squeezed. “I’ll go after him. I don’t think you should be alone with him right now, Norah. He’s not himself.”

Randy took the stone steps two at a time. A rush of air went through the cavern when the door opened, sending a chill through me.

“It’s weird,” Travis said. “He has to be somewhat himself because we wouldn’t have been able to perform the Akasha ritual if we didn’t have five members. I was worried

the familiar might somehow block his Enforcer powers, but that doesn't seem to be the case."

"Well, that's good then," I said. It wasn't enough for me though. I wanted Liam all the way back.

"Yeah," Travis said. "Except, it doesn't explain why he's being such a dick."

If we were on better terms, I would've gone up to him and given him a hug. Instead, I just stood there. "Sorry he said that to you."

Travis looked up, and we just stared at one another. This was happening far too often lately. It was as if we were trying to figure out what made the other tick.

## Chapter Ten

Edgy. That's what I'd call how everyone was acting. After reading through some Order books the night before and finding nothing, I went to bed. When I woke up, no one was speaking to anyone. Randy was already gone. Gabe acted like he needed a morning just to sleep in, or sleep all day possibly, with the look of the shadows under his eyes. Liam was ignoring me, and Travis, too, seemed stuck in his own head.

The ride into Salem was quiet. They wordlessly dropped me off at the shop, Gabe asleep in the backseat with me. I only had a moment to lean him against the cushion instead of my shoulder, so I could get out of the Jeep without waking him. Now that I was at the shop, the tension I'd been feeling at the house and in the Jeep was more pronounced. My nerves were frayed, and I was restless at the same time. Every time a customer came in and the bell over the door rang, I nearly jumped off the stool. I'd even taken to doing a Google search about how to rid someone of demonic familiars. There were actual websites out there, but none of them seemed like they knew what they were talking about. Which I shouldn't find that odd because most people didn't

really think that things like familiars existed.

I'd even regressed to searching how to do an exorcism. That's how bad things were in my head. I wouldn't quite call it possession, but it was evident Liam wasn't himself.

I rang up customers, smiling when I needed to, and showing them different things in the shop when they asked, but for the most part, I, too, was caught up in my own head with everything going on. I tried not to wish Granny would visit me again. Every time she did come, I had another question to ask her. If I asked too many, she was going to start thinking I couldn't take being alive without her. That part wasn't true. I just wished I'd asked her so much more when she was alive. When she had been around, though, I didn't care about magic all that much. I even hated it a little. I hated the fact that it made me different from everyone else. It was stupid, but it was true.

A tug started in my stomach. I leaned over the counter to brace myself for the cramps, but they never came. The bell over the door rang. I looked up to find Randy walking toward me. My body hummed in happiness and I sighed in relief. I didn't wait until he made his way to me. I walked around the counter and threw my arms around him, meeting him in the middle of the store. "Hey, what's going on?" he asked, rubbing circles into my back.

"Everything's going to shit, and we don't know what we're doing. We don't have Liam, and Gabe's tired as fuck. And Travis...well, Travis is being Travis."

His chest vibrated, and I looked up to find him holding back a laugh. I narrowed my eyes at him. "Sorry," he said, biting down on his lower lip.

"It's not funny, Randy."

"It's actually not funny. Not at all. It's just that you kind of word vomited that all out there really fast. And Travis is being Travis. I don't know what to tell you about that."

You two are going to have to figure it out.” He paused, smiling once again without fear that I’d yell at him again. “I do have some good news though.”

“You do?”

“Ren called me. He wants to meet. Do you think you can close up the shop for lunch?”

I was already grabbing my keys from behind the counter. “Let’s go.”

I locked up behind us, and Randy and I walked toward his bike. Riding with him was beginning to seem like second nature now. The vibration of the engine underneath us, the wind roaring past my ears, the feel of his firm muscles on the insides of my forearms. It took me away from my problems as a new hope started in my chest. If Ren had the book, we could figure out how to get rid of this familiar tonight. That would move one puzzle piece back into place and then we could work on what the hell had happened to Jules, and possibly even Anna. With Liam himself that would go much smoother.

We stopped outside Ren’s house, which looked even more like a dump in the daylight than it did when we came by here at night. We dodged trash in the yard, and then Randy used his huge hand to knock on the door. A different girl answered this time, but she had the same lost look, the same sunken face and sallow appearance. Despite that she had a different hair color, she could’ve been the same girl from the other night.

“Bring them in here,” a voice called out.

We followed the stumbling girl through the house and stopped once again in the living room where Ren was perched in the same exact spot, and in the same exact clothes he’d worn the other day. “Did you even leave the house to look for the damn

book?” I asked, gesturing toward his smelly ass.



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His head reared back, his eyebrows raising. I motioned toward his clothes. He took his collar away and brought it up to his nose before sniffing. His nose crinkled, and he dropped the shirt. “Babe,” he said to the girl who’d plopped down next to him. “Get me a shirt.”

She got up, doing as he asked. She walked out of the room and I sneered at him. “Do you even know her name?”

“Why do you care?”

“Because you’re just using them,” I seethed. I hated that she’d just stood and went to go get him a shirt just like that, just because he told her to. He didn’t even ask for crying out loud.

He opened his hands out wide. “What do you think they’re doing to me?” I pressed my lips together. He nodded and smiled as if he’d won. “We’re both doing the same thing to one another.”

“The book,” Randy snapped. “What did you find out?”

The girl walked back into the room and handed the shirt off to Ren. Ren whipped his previous shirt off right there in front of us and I looked away. He was nothing to Randy, or even Liam and Gabe. A new shirt also wasn’t going to help the odor in this place. He needed a shower, and the whole house needed a top to bottom cleaning.

“Do you have it?” Randy asked, not even waiting for him to do any basic grooming. His patience was wearing as thin as mine.

“I don’t have it.”

Randy and I both took a step forward, and Randy nearly growled.

Ren held his hands up. “But I know who does. Jesus, you two are slightly more on edge than you were the other day.”

“You have no fucking idea,” I said, shaking my head.

“Alright, alright,” Ren said, his hands still in the air. “I won’t mess around with you. The Reid’s have it.”

“The Reid’s?” Randy asked, recognition coating his words.

“Yeah, you know. That posh witch family from Boston that’s about as crooked as the mob. But they’re old blood, you see, so nobody gives them hell for it. Word is, Mr. Reid has a bit of a titillation for the black magic, acquires things like the book I was told about. I asked around and was told he purchased it off a rogue witch for his personal use.”

“And you can’t get it for us?”

“You see who I am?” Ren asked, looking around his dump of a place. “I’m a peon. Reid isn’t even going to see me. I won’t even get past his front gates. Believe me, I’ve tried. But someone like you, he might see. It might cost you though.”

“We need that book,” Randy said, his forearms bulging as his hands turned to fists.

His eyes started getting that look in them again, and Ren dropped his nonchalant attitude. “Listen, that’s all I know. Reid has it. I don’t know if you can get it, but that’s who has it. You certainly aren’t going to get it here, or by doing anything to me

or to my business.”

“You’re sure this guy has it?” I asked, praying he wasn’t leading us astray. He’d be stupid if he did because we knew where to find him, and he seemed genuinely afraid of what Randy might do to him.

“One-hundred percent. I know one of his guards.”

“Guards?”

Ren shrugged. “I don’t know what he’s got in there, but he’s got the place locked down tight. He is a rich son of a bitch so that might be all it is. Listen, that’s all I know.”

Randy took my hand. “Fine. If you hear anything—”

“Yeah,” Ren said, finishing for him. “If I hear anything, I’ll let you know.”

Randy pulled on my hand and we walked from the house.

“Damnit,” I growled when we got back to his bike. I kicked the dirt at my feet. “I’d thought we were going to be leaving with the answer to fix Liam tonight and we still have nothing.”

“Not only that,” Randy said, his voice tight. “This Reid family isn’t anything to mess with. We can try. But I can’t promise we’re going to be able to do anything about the damn book now.”

My heart dropped into my stomach.

No book, no lead on the evil things going on around Salem. Yep. Perfect.

### Chapter Eleven

Liam

I could feel it crawling again, slithering around my neck. Its scales tickled as he shifted close to my ear. I rubbed at the skin there and the serpent hissed.

He was always crawling all over, looking for a chink, an easy place to slip inside. “Stop it,” I said.

Outside, the sun was going down. Randy and Norah hadn’t come back yet, and I’d been pacing back and forth ever since they called to say Randy had picked her up from the shop. Jealousy, rage, fear. All those things I’d never felt before when it came to Norah and any one of the guys surged through me. It was irrational and scary.

The snake laughed. That sounded insane. I knew it did, but I could hear it in the back of my mind. It was mocking me. It showed me images of Randy and Norah, even Norah and Travis. I was pretty sure the ones with Norah and Travis hadn’t even occurred yet, but still the same bile rose to my throat. The images of Randy and Norah used to make me hot. Horny. Used to make me want to jump right into bed with them. But not now. Fury threatened just under the surface, and still, the fucking snake slithered down my back and circled around my waist.

I was getting tired. Too tired. If I couldn’t keep this thing under control, I was going to have to leave. I wouldn’t be the reason I hurt someone. I wouldn’t be able to live with myself if I hurt one of them. I’d already hurt Norah though, I reminded myself.

Every time I dismissed her, I saw her face fall even further. It was getting to the point where she even approached me tentatively, not a hint of a smile anywhere on her face. I'd done that to her.

She doesn't really love you.

"Stop it!"

I smacked my head several times with my palm. He'd started to talk to me recently, his voice hissing in my brain. I sat on the edge of the bed and held my head in my hands. I was strong enough. I could hold on until we found a way out of this. That's what they were doing. That's what Norah said they were doing, anyway, trying to help me.

They just left to find a place to fuck away from you. They're done with you.

"That's not true," I said, shaking my head.

They don't want you anymore.

"No!"

None of that was true, I tried to tell myself. This was Randy and Norah we were talking about here. I was closer to them than I was to anyone. Add Travis and Gabe and we were a family. One slightly dysfunctional family who was supposed to help rid the world of evil, but that was what we were. We were Enforcers. We were also all in love with the same girl, and we didn't care. She'd brought us together, deepening our relationships with one another.

The serpent showed me a picture of Travis doing Norah from behind. Her head thrown back in passion. Her breasts bounced up and down as he tugged her hair back,

slamming into her again and again and again. They were hot and sweaty, and she loved every second of it.

“I don’t care.”

How could you not? She wants others, too. And look at you compared to them. She doesn’t want you, Liam. She just feels sorry for you. You’re the outsider. You always have been. You’ve never fit in anywhere, and you certainly don’t belong here either.

“That’s not true.”

Isn’t it? Gabe plays soccer. Randy is built, practically a bodybuilder. And Travis, he has that cocky asshole thing going for him. What about you? You’re nothing.

“I’m smart.”

The laughter rose in my head again, blocking everything else out. It laughed and laughed and laughed until I was rocking on the bed. It mocked me.

No girl wants the smart guy. They’ve never wanted you in the past. You think Norah’s that special that she’s the only person to have ever wanted you in your entire life? Your own parents didn’t even want you, Liam. They gave you up. They had everything, and they didn’t want you to have any of it, so they adopted you out like a lost puppy.

I ran my hands through my hair and pulled at the ends. Rationally, I knew what this was. This was the familiar trying to get to me, trying to make me emotionally unstable so he could find his way in. I thought I’d be able to fight it, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe I wasn’t strong enough to fight the damn thing. Maybe I was never destined to be the hero.

The hero? Ha. You're not even in the novel. You're the guy they cut from the story because you ruin everything. You're sad.

My head started to pound. I grabbed my phone and pressed play on the music player, jamming the earbuds into my ears. This was the only thing that seemed to quiet the voice, so I could get some time to myself.

My name is Liam. I'm an Enforcer for the Order of the Akasha. I'm in love with a girl named Norah, and she...well, she at least likes me back. I have three of the best guy friends I could ever ask for. We share the same girl. I'm not jealous. I am not mad. I am not filled with rage.

Anything else was the familiar talking.

I said that again and again in my head, but this was getting old. I needed to come clean with them about what was happening to me. About how the familiar was too much. The fury was starting to take over. I didn't like the awful thoughts in my head. At first, I could combat them, but not anymore. He wanted me to hurt people, and I would never do that. But to make sure I wouldn't, I might have to leave. I could do that for them. I would need to because now that I'd finally found the family I'd always wanted, there was no way I was giving them up, even if I had to leave to do it.

My name is Liam...

### Chapter Twelve

I stumbled into my room after looking through the Order books again for hours. Familiars. Petrifying bodies. Were those books even helpful at all? I couldn't find a damn thing useful in any one of them.

I shut the door to my room behind me and pulled my shirt off. I unbuttoned my jeans and pushed them down, stepping out of them as I made my way to the bed.

“Norah?”

I jumped, my heart flying into my throat. The bed creaked, and a body turned toward me.

Liam.

“Holy shit. What are you doing in here?”

“I was waiting for you to come up. I must have fallen asleep.”

Still trying to wrangle my emotions in, I didn't fully ascertain that it was Liam in my bed. Liam. I prowled forward in my bra and underwear. “Are you okay?”

He nodded. “I'm sorry I've been out of it lately.” He sat up. “I'm sorry I've hurt you. I don't know what else to do. It's this...thing.”

I pulled him to me, practically crushing his head against my chest. “I know,” I said.



“I’m so sorry. I’m trying, Liam. We’re working on it.”

“I know.”

His grip around me tightened, and the air in the room shifted. He pulled me close, his head rising so he could look me in the eyes. “I’ve missed you.”

A whisper of breath rushed from my lungs. “You have?” I hadn’t meant it to sound so girly, but Liam was being himself, and he hadn’t felt that way for a long time now.

He nodded and moved closer, throwing his feet over the side of the bed. He placed his hands on my hips. “Can I kiss you?”

I didn’t even bother to answer him. I pulled him close, sealing our lips to one another. I appreciated kissing him before this, but from now on, I was going to appreciate it even more. I soaked up this feeling, reveling in the way his lips felt on mine. It had been too long since we were close like this. He didn’t even want me near him, let alone touch him. A muscle in my stomach danced around as if it waited for this for too long too.

Liam laid back and rolled until he was on top of me. He pushed my hands above my head and held them there before pulling away. “I want you.”

“God, yes,” I said, the ache intensifying between my thighs.

Liam nipped at my skin until he traveled to the swell of my breasts. His hot breath made my back arch, hoping he’d kiss me there. He didn’t. He kept going lower and lower. Kissing and nipping at my skin until he got to my panty line. “You’re so beautiful,” he murmured.

I hooked a leg around his waist and pulled him down. His hips met mine, and I sighed

at the hard cock I found waiting for me. I wiggled out of his grasp and pushed him over until I was on top. I helped him out of his shirt, then trailed kisses down his body like he had on mine until I got to his boxers. I tugged them down, teasing his cock as I went past with my hot breath and whisper of a kiss.

The look in Liam's eyes eased my soul. He was back. I couldn't take it anymore. As soon as I dropped his boxers to the floor, I lay down next to him and pulled him to me, kissing him with everything I had. He moaned and turned, pulling my hips to his. "We have to get you out of these," he said, tugging on my panties.

"You know what to do," I said, teasing him. Without even a second to think about it, he ripped my panties from me, and my heart stuttered. "Fuck yes, Liam. Oh my God." He hadn't needed encouragement that time.

"See? I learn," he said.

"You don't need to learn," I said. "You're already perfect."

He swallowed as he took me in. Then, he lowered his head, pulling my bra cup down where he—finally—took my nipple into his mouth. He savored it, kissed it until it hardened, then he did the same with the other. Liquid heat pooled between my legs. His hand slid down, pushing just his fingertip inside me. "You're ready for me."

"God, yes."

He teased me for a couple seconds, circling my lower lips before hiking my leg around his hips and pulling me close.

I took his face in my hands and stared. He smirked, his eyes growing cold. "This might hurt."

His irises flashed black. My heart stopped, sinking into the pit of my stomach as I saw the serpent lay its head on Liam's cheekbone. Liam pushed his hips forward, but I backed away. "No. No!"

I scrambled out of bed. Liam sat up, his feet thrown over the side of the bed before he stalked after me. "I thought you wanted it, Norah. Isn't that what you told me?"

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Holy fuck. His whole demeanor had changed. His hung head low, and he looked up at me. "Liam, this isn't you." I backed straight into the door and then turned away, not wanting to get stuck.

"Of course, it is. Don't you want me to be the type that rips your panties off? Who dives inside you again and again until you come around me?" He stopped as I continued to arc my way around the room. "Norah?"

"Stop," I said. "You're not him. Where's Liam?"

He lunged for me, and I yelled. "No!"

The door to the room flew open. Randy burst inside. He stopped once he saw what state we were in, but I hurried toward him. "It's not Liam."

Randy shoved me behind him. Liam's body trembled, and the serpent familiar moved off his face. It coiled around his neck and down to the arm where it stayed before.

Liam sucked in a breath. "I-I'm sorry."

Just from the way his voice was, I could tell it was really Liam. I came out from behind Randy and moved toward him, but Liam skirted around me, grabbing his clothes as he went. "I'm so sorry, Norah."

He ran from the room.

"Liam?" I called after him, but he didn't answer.

Randy pulled me close. “It’s okay.” We looked at the empty doorway, Randy rubbing small circles into my back. He swallowed and then kissed the top of my head. “I’m staying with you tonight.” He pushed the door closed and locked it before calling both Travis and Gabe, telling them what happened.

I made my way to the bed and sat, pulling the comforter around me. “He’s losing the battle. We have to do something, Randy.”

“I know.” His hands dove into his short hair. He reached out for me, then laid down on the bed, pulling me with him. “We will. He just needs to take a breather.”

I agreed, but what we didn’t say was that neither one of us had any idea what to do once he’d taken that breather. He needed to calm down now, but the familiar was still on him, doing these things to him. I was two seconds away from calling a priest to do an exorcism. Anything to get Liam back.

A knock on the door sounded. I tried to spring up, but two tree stump hands held me down. “Just let me get it, would you?”

I waited for him to ease out of the bed and then approach the door with caution. “Guys, it’s Travis,” a voice called out.

Randy’s shoulders relaxed.

“And Gabe,” Gabe called out, his British accent piercing right to my soul.

Randy pulled the door open, and they both piled in. Travis took one look at me and then glanced away toward the opposite wall. “Is there ever a time when you’re wearing clothes?”

I smirked, caught off guard by his statement. “Not usually when I’m in my own

bedroom.” I found my tanktop on the floor and pulled it on and then slipped the rest of me under the blankets. “I’m decent now. You’re welcome.”

“Well, just so you two know,” Gabe started as he moved into the room. “You can’t call and say Liam’s gone bonkers and then hole off in your room by yourselves because then it just makes me feel bad. And unwanted.” He prowled toward me. “You don’t want to make me feel unwanted, do you, Love?”

I smiled and pulled him down to give him a loud smack on the lips. “Of course, not.”

“We actually thought it would be better if we were all in the same place tonight,” Travis said. “In case Liam...changes again.”

“Travis thought that.” Gabe shrugged. “I was just worried I was going to miss out on some fun and I really did feel unwanted.”

Randy shook his head. “Just whatever with you two.”

“And,” Travis said again, eyeing both Randy and me. “I think it’s time the rest of us were let in on what you two have going on?”

Gabe’s forehead wrinkled. “What they have going on?”

“Football’s not everything, Mate,” Travis said, mimicking Gabe’s accent. “There are other problems going on in the world too.”

Gabe frowned, and I scooted over on the bed to give him some room. He plopped down, and I snuggled into him, squeezing his side to let him know it was okay. He was allowed to act as if we had a life outside of what was happening. If he wanted to watch football, he could watch football.

“So?” Travis asked, continuing to press us. “Maybe start from the beginning on what’s going on.”

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I turned toward Gabe. “Well, first of all, I saw the familiar move on Liam. It was while he slept, and I swear, the thing looked at me. Plus, you know Liam’s been acting off. More moody, dark...mean.”

Gabe took my hand and held it in his. “He doesn’t mean it.”

“I know. That’s kind of the problem. I don’t think Liam is just too preoccupied with getting the familiar off him like I originally thought. I think the familiar is affecting him.”

“Like tonight,” Randy said.

I nodded. “It was Liam, at first. He was acting more himself than he had in a long time, so we were...” I peeked at Travis. “...we were getting ready to have sex, but then he just switched.” I snapped my fingers. “Like that, he was someone else. His eyes darkened, his mood changed. He wanted to hurt me.”

“When I came in,” Randy said, “I saw the tail end of what was going on and Norah was truly frightened, and Liam was...not himself.”

“Okay,” Travis said. “Now we’re up to date on that. Where have you two been off to on your own? I know it has something to do with Liam.”

A muscle ticked in Randy’s jaw. “Ren’s place.”

Travis’s head reared back. “Ren? The guy who exchanges magic for sex?”



Gabe's eyebrows lifted. "Why there?"

"He knows some bad witches. I thought he might be able to tell us something about familiars and turns out he kind of can. He told us about a book, an evil magic book. He couldn't get it for us, but he knows who has it."

"That's good, right?" Gabe asked. "Maybe there will be something in this book that we can use to help Liam. We have to do something now if he's acting that way toward Norah."

"It's not him," I said, if only to keep reminding myself that the person who did that to me was not the Liam I knew.

He squeezed my hand. "I know. I just told you that."

"I know," I said, sighing. "I just needed to say it again to keep myself convinced."

"We're all positive it's not Liam, Love. I'm sure as soon as we can get the familiar off him, he'll go back to being himself. He's fought it for a long time." He turned toward Randy. "So, where's this book?"

"The Reid's have it."

Gabe let out a harsh laugh. "The Reid's? As in one of the most powerful witch families in the area?"

"That's the one," Randy said.

"Ren said they have guards. What kind of shit are they mixed up in?"

Travis sat on the edge of the bed. "Well, they're definitely not using bad magic. We

would've been called there before. Like with most people, though, they have a fascination with power. They think being rich makes them important, makes them above others. They also think that their magic makes them powerful. And sometimes that can lead good people down the wrong path."

"So, what are the chances that we show up at their doorstep as the Order and they give us the book?"

"Slim to none," Randy said. "First, they're going to deny they even have it. Why would they tell us they have a bad magic book? We're the last people they're going to tell."

I looked up at the ceiling, wishing that something would go right for us. "Any other ideas?"

"We could take it," Gabe said. We all just looked at him, and he shrugged. "We can head in there, on witch business maybe, and then try to find the book while we're there."

"Witch business?" Travis asked.

"Or, no one knows me," I said, an idea forming in my head. "I could go in, tell them I'm new to the area, and heard they were witches and introduce myself."

"That could work, except then how are you going to get the book? Ask them to see their super-secret bad magic collection?" Travis asked, disdain dripping from his voice.

"I don't know. But you guys are recognizable, and so far, I'm not. No one knows about me. Sending you guys in there will automatically tip them off."

“Or, we could just go in there and steal it,” Randy said. “Watch the house, and when they leave, use our magic to go in. If it’s a bad book, we might be able to follow our instincts to its exact location. A book like that would give off some sort of stench.”

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Travis rubbed his jaw. “That’s the best idea yet.”

We all knew it wasn’t the best idea, but we were running out of options and time. Liam was getting worse, and none of us wanted anything to happen to him. In fact, we weren’t going to let it.

Gabe settled in next to me, and I laid my head down on the pillow. Randy walked around the bed and got in on the other side. He winked at Travis. “Pull up somewhere to sleep, Trav.”

Travis looked around the room. Not seeing any other place inviting, he pulled himself further onto the bed and laid across it horizontally. The three of us pulled up our feet to give him some room, and we all settled in.

“Do you think Liam’s okay?”

“He’s tougher than he looks,” Randy said. “He’ll be fine. We might not be able to get him to come out of his room again.”

“Or until we get the blasted thing off him,” Gabe supplied.

A hand covered my foot, making soft strokes over the comforter to my ankle. I swallowed and bit my lip. The pull to Travis was getting stronger and stronger. “Everything will be okay.”

Chapter Thirteen

I blinked. The sound of the bedroom door careening off the wall brought me to a sitting position. “Shit. Guys!” Randy bellowed.

Gabe burrowed into the pillow, but Travis whipped around, his black hair standing on end.

I shoved Gabe, making him at least turn over as we took Randy in. His face was pale, and his hands were fists at his sides as he stared at me. “He’s gone.”

“What?” The fog of sleep still overpowering me, I couldn’t put two and two together yet. “Liam?” I finally asked.

“He’s not in his room. I’ve called his cell phone like a dozen times and he’s not answering. It’s fucking four thirty in the morning and he’s not in his room. He’s nowhere in this house. He’s gone.”

I pushed Gabe out of my way and flew off the bed, picking up clothes as I went and tugging them on. “Where would he go?”

Randy rubbed his forehead. “I don’t know. The apartment?”

“Alright, let’s calm down,” Travis said. He stood from the bed, shirtless. His sweats hung around his hips unnaturally low showing off his ripped figure. My brain barely recognized that this was the first time I’d seen him without a shirt on, and it was worth the wait, but damnit, Liam. “He’s probably at the apartment. He didn’t trust himself to stay here last night because of what happened. He’s probably embarrassed and didn’t want to put any of us in danger. I’m sure he’s fine.”

“Then why isn’t he answering his fucking phone?” Randy asked. He was coiled up tight. One touch and he would blow.

“I knew we should’ve went after him last night. He was afraid. I could see it in his eyes. Oh my God. We just let him leave after he did that. No wonder why he’s freaking out.”

Randy’s gaze zeroed in on me, his jaw pulsing. “You’re right. I should’ve went after him.”

He ran his hands through his hair and then laced his fingers at the back of his head. I went toward him, but he backed away. I tried again. “It’s not your fault. I could’ve went after him, too.”

“I told you not to.”

Please. “Like I would actually listen to you if I really wanted to do something.”

Gabe yawned, standing from the bed lazily as he pulled on his shirt. “I don’t know why you guys are so upset. It’s Liam we’re talking about. He’s the most level-headed out of all of us. It’s not like he’s gone off to do something stupid. If anything, it’s like Travis said, he just left last night to get away from us.”

“Because he has a familiar on him, Gabe,” I said. “A demonic familiar. Does everyone need a fucking reminder about that?”

Gabe’s cheeks pinkened, and he stared at the floor. Shit. I was a terrible person. “I’m sorry. I’m just...stressed.”

Travis walked forward, putting a hand on my shoulder. The connection tying us together tightened, and I leaned into his touch. Now, more than any time before, I needed them around me.

“Meet everyone downstairs in five. Norah, you try to get him on his cell phone.

Maybe he only wants to talk to you,” Travis said, taking control. “We’ll head to the apartment first and then take things from there. If he isn’t himself, we can’t have him out all over Salem.”

I took a steadying breath. The rest of the guys dispersed, jogging toward whatever they had to do to get ready in the time limit Travis set for us. I wished he’d said two minutes. Or one. We needed to find him right away. On that thought, I ran to the bathroom, threw water on my face and brushed my teeth. Looking down, I’d managed to put on a pair of jeans and someone else’s shirt, but it was good enough for me.

I ran down the stairs and paced near the front door. Randy was already down there. “I’m sorry,” I said, biting my lip. “I didn’t mean to say it was your fault.”

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“But it is,” he said, his voice monotone. “I don’t know what the fuck I was thinking. It’s just what Gabe said, though. Liam is the most level-headed out of all of us. Of course, he can handle a familiar on him.” He shook his head. “I should’ve went after him. Now he’s God knows where, and who knows who he is right now. The Liam we know, or the Liam he was last night with you.”

I pulled out my cell phone, praying he was the Liam we all knew. The Liam who was with me for a brief second last night was scary, evil. I touched Liam’s name, and it rang and rang, but no one picked up. Randy watched me eagerly, but I finally lowered it and shook my head. “Nothing.”

Travis and Gabe ran down the steps at the same time, then we all headed outside. I sat in the back with Gabe, his hands interlaced with mine as I sat on the edge of my seat while we drove from Ipswich to Salem. The distance had never bothered me as much as it did right now.

“Your bike was in the driveway, wasn’t it, Randy?”

He nodded.

“Maybe Liam couldn’t have gotten that far,” I mused.

Travis locked eyes with me in the mirror. “He was gone all night. He could’ve walked into Salem in that time, or called a taxi, or an uber, or anything.”

I sat back, deflated for the moment. Gabe whispered pretty things in my ear as I scoured the tree line, hoping to see something. Maybe Liam walking, Liam sleeping,



just Liam in any way, shape, or form. A piece of me was missing, and a hole had formed in my stomach.

As soon as we pulled up to the apartment and got out of the Jeep, I knew he wasn't there. I couldn't feel him at all. We went in anyway, looking at anything that was out of place or any sign that he could've been there. Everything was just as we'd left it before though. His room was immaculate. He'd even made his bed before we moved into his parents' place in Ipswich, as if someone was going to come in and see what type of person he was by how clean his room remained when we weren't even staying there.

"What now?" I asked, the hope that had been building inside of me seeping out little by little.

"Do you think he's at school?" Gabe asked.

Travis checked his watch. "It's way too early for that. What about the shop?"

I gasped. "He has a key. He might go there."

We ran back out of the apartment and Travis took us through Historic Salem until we were at the end of the cobblestone street. He parked, and we all got out, practically running toward the shop now. My fingers trembled as I put the key in. Travis covered my hand with his, helping me twist it into place. I looked up at him. "Thanks."

He nodded and pushed the door open, pulling the key out for me and handing it back. Again, there was no sign of Liam. No tug he was anywhere near here. I ran to the back anyway just in case I couldn't feel him. When he wasn't there, I kicked the desk. Hard. Gabe wrapped his hands around me from behind. The smell of new rain on a hot day washed over me, soothing me a little.

Randy swore loudly, smashing his fist into the backroom door, leaving a dent in the wood.

“Alright,” Travis said, loudly. “Let’s stay calm. Just because he’s not in any of these places doesn’t mean anything bad. Let’s try a locator spell.”

I was somewhat familiar with those though I was sure Granny worked her magic in a different way. She had a knack and though she used magic to do it, she didn’t always use a spell. Sometimes it was intuition, or just a feeling. Why couldn’t I have inherited that from her? That would’ve been so handy right now.

“We won’t be as strong,” Randy said.

“At least it’s something,” Travis countered. “If we can even put a little bit of a trace on him, it will help.”

We all held hands and closed our eyes. I brought up a picture of Liam, his adorable, awkward self. Him, pushing his glasses up his nose. Him, paging through a book. Or him, with the laptop screen glow highlighting his features. The guy who was in my room last night wasn’t him. I should’ve known better than to just let him go. It wasn’t Randy’s fault. It was mine. I shouldn’t have let him leave like that because when it finally was him, he would’ve hated himself for what he almost did to me. It may have pushed him into an even darker place, and that was the exact opposite of what he needed.

An image of a street popped into my head.

“There,” Gabe said. “We got something.”

It wasn’t exact. It was just a street. We didn’t know if he was there at this exact moment or if he’d just been there. The image was cloudy, barely visible. It could’ve

been our magic, or something else, like the familiar blocking him from us.

“You know where it is?”

“That’s Chestnut Street,” Travis said. He pumped my hand and then pulled. “Let’s go.”

Chestnut Street wasn’t that far from downtown Historic Salem at all. In fact, it was still in the historic part. We passed the Witch House on the way there, and we drove slowly down the street, looking and searching for something that stood out as Liam. “Does he know anyone who lives here?”

Randy shook his head. “Liam doesn’t know anyone but us. He’s never felt comfortable around others.”

Right. I knew that. I was just grasping at straws.

A sharp tug gripped my stomach. I doubled over. At first, I thought it was for Liam, but then the pain started and the rest of them also reacted. “Shit.”

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“It’s close,” Gabe said. He dribbled his hands over the armrest, his gaze searching the houses. “Why are we getting the pull to somewhere where we think Liam has been?”

His question hung in the air, heavy, like concrete. I refused to think any deeper into that question. The two couldn’t be related. They just couldn’t. Demonic familiar or not, Liam would never do anything bad.

Travis pulled the Jeep sharply to the curb in front of a blue house. Yep. That was the one. Liam would’ve normally thrown up a visibility spell, but Randy did it first. Maple aroma filled the car as he worked, but still only a staticky view of the interior appeared. My eyes darted over the rooms in the house but was pulled to the living room where a woman stumbled toward her couch.

Gabe had the door open within half a second. He ran toward the house and we all followed. Unlocking the door before we got there, he burst in and turned right, making it almost in time to catch the woman as she was falling to the floor. He pulled her hands forward, guiding her toward the couch. Her eyes widened as fear pierced through. “No.” Her nose sniffed the air and then curled in disgust. “No. I swear to God it wasn’t me.”

Her face paled. Right before our eyes, her cheeks sunk in and dark shadows moved under her eyes like creeping black clouds.

“Who was just in here with you?” Randy asked.

The woman shook her head, her dark curly hair snagging on her chapped lips. “No one. I was here by myself. I think. I don’t know.” Her hands started to tremble. “I

can't remember now, it's all dark. I was in the kitchen, and then I got a headache. I—I was then in here, trying to make it to the couch." She turned scared eyes toward us. "What happened?"

Travis pushed Randy, and they both took off. The stench in here was fresh and just awful. I wanted to hold my breath to steel myself from it.

"You don't remember anything else?" Gabe asked. "No one was in here with you? You didn't see anyone? A boy?"

I blinked at him. "Gabe. You can't think..."

He shrugged, and we both stared back at the lady. Her eyelids drooped. "What's happening to me? I feel sick. Drained." She rubbed her fingertips together, and I knew what she was searching for. The magic. We always felt it there first. It didn't live there, but it escaped from there. "I'm...nothing."

The woman passed out.

Gabe and I took a couple steps back, eyes darting around the room for any sign of what had happened here. Randy and Travis ran back in and noticed her sprawled out on the couch. They both shook their heads. "Anything?" Travis asked.

Gabe moved forward, picking up her feet and laying her across the leather couch. "Nothing. She didn't remember a thing and then she just kind of fell apart. She changed right in front of us."

"Whoever was here was close," Travis said. "It's downright putrid in here, and whatever they did to her, theyjustdid it because she didn't look like that when we first came in."

I ran my hands through my hair. “I think someone’s stealing their magic.” They shifted from foot to foot, so I kept going. “Or at least draining them. Anna, she’s sick, right? No magic. We found Jules the same way as this woman and it wasn’t her either. The Akasha found her pure. And at the magic den,” I said, staring at Randy. “All those girls looked like these ones. Maybe not as bad, but they were like drugged-out fiends looking for their next fix. Is this what it looks like when you get your magic taken away from you?”

Travis shook his head. “We’ve stripped people before and they never look like this.”

“But you do it with the Akasha. This is different from that. Someone is doing this to them against their will, and with negative magic, for evil purposes.”

“Dupre,” Randy said. “It has to be. He still wants Norah. He’s not going to give up.”

Gabe sighed. “Or Liam.”

I whipped my head toward him. “What?”

He held his hands up. “We got an image of Liam on this street. Now we find this here.” He motioned toward the still passed out woman. “He has a familiar on him. He could’ve been doing this all along and we wouldn’t have known.”

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “No. It’s not him.”

Gabe stood and took a step toward me. “I don’t want it to be him either, and I’m not saying it’s even him. Remember what Madame Serena said? She thought she was doing good. She had no idea she was marking those clients of hers for the Liderc. She didn’t mean to do it. Liam could be the same type of situation. The familiar could be controlling him.”

My hands started to shake, and my stomach rolled over itself. My skin went cold, clammy, and it was difficult for my brain to process anything anymore.

“Let’s get her back to the house,” Randy said. “She used a shit ton of magic to help find Liam. I know that wasn’t me back at the shop.”

Gabe put a hand around my waist and led me from the room.

“What about her?” Travis asked, pointing down at the woman on the couch.

“Well, if it’s the same thing as Jules, she’ll recover in an hour or so,” Randy said. “We’ll check on her later.”

Cinnamon wafted toward me as Travis put a tracking spell on her. My feet moved ahead step by step, but only because Gabe had a tight hold on me. As soon as we got into the Jeep, I fell asleep in his arms.

### Chapter Fourteen

I blinked my eyes open. Thoughts hovered just beyond my reach as I shifted back into being fully awake. In front of me were the beautiful windows that led out to the view of the Atlantic. The waves pummeled the shoreline time and time again. We were in the room I dubbed as mine upstairs. The one that was a mirror of the living room downstairs, only this one was slightly smaller and a little more perfect. My head ached, and the shakes started to take over my body again. I tried to hide, digging myself into the couch, but instead, I came up against a hard body.

I inhaled, and cinnamon coated every inch of me. Travis.

I lifted my head slowly up, trying to ignore the pull toward him. He was asleep, or had been, too. He was just now waking up. The sun from outside shone in on the both of us. “Hey,” he said. His hair was all out of style, and I resisted the urge to make it right. I hardly ever saw him like that.

I sat up, inching myself away from him and pulling my knees to my chest. “Where is everyone?”

He rubbed his face. “They headed back out to look for Liam. They knew you were out of it, so they left us here. You practically fueled that whole locator spell, Norah. You can’t do that.”

My hands shaking only reinforced that idea. I tried to hide it, but Travis noticed anyway.



“Here,” he said, sitting forward and moving a candy bar into my view. “They said you would need this when you woke up.”

I smiled down at it, then tore the wrapper open and took a piece. The chocolate helped soothe me a little, but it wasn’t just that right now. It was everything else, too. It was the frayed nerves, and Liam missing, and being this close to Travis without being close to Travis. I chewed the chocolate bar and swallowed.

“Better?” he asked.

I shook my head. “Not really. Liam’s gone. Someone is stealing witches’ magic. It may even be Liam, but not Liam because he has a familiar on him, Travis. A familiar.”

Travis took my shaking hands in his. “You were trembling when we laid you on the couch, so I sat here with you. That seemed to calm you.”

Why was he telling me this? Why did he care?

“I lost a friend once, Norah. I know how this feels.”

“Jax?” I asked, curious. He’d never talked about it with me before. I dared a glance at him. His face was pale as he stared out at the breaking waves.

He nodded, an almost invisible movement. “He was my best friend. Him leaving us was—” He broke off and shook his head. “When you think you’re going to have someone forever, the thought of not having them doesn’t even enter your head. I know what Jax did was wrong. I know he had to be punished, but stripping him, sending him away, was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do. Sometimes, I still wish he was here.” He looked away and blew out a breath. “I’m telling you this because I won’t let the same thing happen to Liam. We’re a coven. There are five of

us. You, me, Randy, Gabe, and Liam. Nothing is happening to any one of us like it did with Jax. I won't let it."

"How can you be so sure, though? I mean, it happened to Jax, and you were a coven then."

Travis wiped a hand down his face and then squeezed my hands again, staring me straight in the eye. "I'm not blind. I'm not dumb. It kills me to admit this in one way because Jax and I were so close, but the coven didn't feel the same with Jax as it does with you." He swallowed, his green eyes drawing me in, and the tug in my stomach tightening. "With you, Norah, it feels complete. I don't know how else to describe it. You know I feel it. From the other night in your room..."

Yeah. That. My heart lifted up through my throat and my fraying magic bubbled at the surface. It was shimmering and aching.

"Listen, I know I've been a dick. I can be a dick. It's kind of my thing. I was—"

"Broken," I offered, moving closer to him. "Losing Jax broke you."

He nodded. "And with my sister on top of that, and..." He trailed off, troubled, looking like he didn't know what words to say.

"There's something else?" I asked. "The rest of them, they say you won't talk about it, but they think something else happened when you were with your sister."

A small smile lifted the corners of his lips. "It's so stupid. It seems even ridiculous to say anything right now, but yeah, something did happen." He took a long pause and then stared at me. "I thought I was in love with this girl."

My heart constricted. I tried to pull away, but Travis held on tight.

“I thought I was in love with this girl. I was broken up about it because she didn’t choose me, Norah, and it wouldn’t have mattered anyway because of the Order. Then, you came. You came and there was an immediate attraction. I resisted it because I was mad at everything. Mad at Jax. Mad at the Order. Pissed at the girl. But she doesn’t even matter anymore because it hasn’t been about her since you showed up.” His throat worked. “It’s just you now, Norah.” His gaze burned into mine as my heart did flips. “I hate that it’s taken me so long to figure any of this out because I was so fucking stubborn, but I—”

“You want me?” I asked, my eyebrows raising.

He half laughed. “Not just like that.” He swallowed. “When you had a knife sticking out of you, I thought I knew what it felt like to lose someone, but I didn’t know a damn thing until then. That was the moment I realized what a fucking ass I’d been this whole time.”

A smile worked its way to my face. “I could’ve told you when you were being an ass.”

“You actually did tell me, a lot, when I was being an ass.”

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“There were plenty of times when I didn’t tell you.”

He chuckled. “I’m sure that’s true.”

His hands roamed up my arms and over my shoulders to my cheeks where he cupped my face. “I’m sorry.”

The magic inside me pulled taut. His touch sent shivers throughout me, tingling my skin and sending goosebumps over my body. The longer we stared at one another, the more intense the pull became until I didn’t want to resist it anymore. I leaned forward, pressing my lips to his. Finally.

It was as if a balloon popped. Restraint was gone. He pulled me closer, deepening the kiss, and I loved every second of his sure lips moving against mine. My body stopped shaking as Travis filled me up. All the while, my magic brimmed at the surface, oozing happily through my veins as it stitched us together. A new tremor shook my body. It was from something way different than magic fraying my nerves. This was from complete and utter pleasure.

Travis pulled a breath away. “My God.”

Sounded about right. My hand snaked around his neck. “You’re sorry you resisted for so long?”

“Am I an asshole if I say yes?”

“Yes,” I said, pulling him toward me again. His lips were like heaven on mine. He

took control, burying his tongue in my mouth, taking the breath right out of me. Our relationship had been like drilling a tiny hole in a dam and waiting for the water pressure to break down and crack the rest of it until a big rush of water engulfed us. The little touches, the long looks, all of it was a small crack, another fissure. This was the outcome, the barreling water of us coming together.

I pulled back and reached for the hem of his shirt. He helped me take it off and then I sat back and stared at him. He was beautiful. Hard lines, chiseled. I didn't hide the fact that I was ogling him. It had been too long until we'd gotten to this point.

He smirked. "My turn."

He tugged at my shirt, but I slapped his hands away playfully. "You've already seen me."

His jaw hardened. "I know. Too many times without it being my hands on you."

He reached for the bottom of my shirt. He pulled it over my head and dropped it on top of his. I didn't give him any time to look, I just plastered myself on him, soaking up the way his body fit to mine. He reached up to cup my breast, and I sighed. "Fuck, Travis." His cock already strained against me. I pitched my hips over it, feeling its hardness between my legs.

He unhooked my bra, then slid the straps off, revealing my breasts. His gaze locked there as he swallowed. I continued to rub against him as he took one of my nipples in his mouth, showering it with attention while playing with the other. I stared down at him, taking this all in. I was with Travis. Finally. My panties were already coated. "God, Travis, I'm going to need you inside me."

"I thought that's what we were doing."

I pulled on his zipper and yanked his pants down. "I'm going to need it faster."

His face darkened as he slipped his hands down the front of my jeans. He hooked his fingers under my panties, feeling how wet I was. "I see."

He rubbed me, and I undid the clasp on my jeans to give him more room. "Travis, please." I rubbed against his cock while his finger played with my clit. His face was serene, determined. "Damnit. I'm going to come," I moaned, unable to stop myself from moving against him.

"Again, I thought that's what we were doing."

"I want you inside me."

He ignored me, arching down to draw a nipple into his hot mouth. His finger teased and played with me, egging me on. My whole body shook.

"But—"

"But I'm going to make you come like this, Norah. Then, I'm going to take your pants off and push inside you. But not until you come on my finger."

God, why did he have to be so hot telling me what to do? And his tongue as he played with my nipple. Son of a bitch. I moaned. "Yes."

He smirked. The asshole smirked.

"You're so fucking beautiful. You're practically dry humping me, you know that?"

"I'd be fucking you, but you're stubborn."

His finger moved faster. “And you love it.”

I gripped his shoulders as my orgasm hit. “Fuck yes.”

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His finger worked over my clit until it was too much. I pushed him away. He went to work on my jeans, doing exactly what he said he was going to do. He pushed them down, taking my panties with them until I was naked. I worked on his next, pulling one leg down, then the other. It was almost like opening a present. I hadn't seen Travis's cock. I'd felt it. I'd felt him. I peeled his boxers down and the silky head stood at attention. He helped me take his boxers the rest of the way off because I got sidetracked looking at him. My stomach tightened, the little string tethering us together pulled us closer and closer.

Travis beckoned me forward, placing one of my legs in between him and the couch cushions and the other on the outside of his hip until I was poised just above him. He pulled down on my hips and I lowered over him, slowly, at his guidance. Every last rigid inch of him pushed inside me. My mouth dropped, the feeling of completeness took over. Hot shit, I wanted him. I wanted him to come inside me. I wanted to strangle him with my climax. He knew he had me at the end of my rope. He lifted his hips, sending a shiver up my spine, then he pulled me down, sealing our lips together as we came together, our hips moving in sync against the others. He sucked in a breath as I rolled my hips into his over and over and over again. It wasn't just me that was affected. He was shaking, too. With need. With a fullness we'd both resisted.

"Jesus, Norah. Fuck me, this is amazing."

God, I couldn't get enough. I rolled my hips, taking him in as far as he would go. "I can't believe you made me wait for this. I fucking hate you," I said, breathless.

"I know. I told you I'm an asshole." His hands squeezed my ass, and I let out a low moan.



He did it again and again as he set the pace, faster and harder. I was going to show him what he'd been missing though. I'd promised myself I'd make him beg for it.

I held onto his hips to keep him down and then rocked into him hard before retreating again. His eyes widened as he moaned.

I pulled away until just the tip of him was inside me and then did it again, pushing us both to the edge until we let out short cries.

“Fuck, Norah.”

I retreated again, swirling over his tip until I felt my orgasm coming, and then rolled into him hard, putting an exclamation point on my orgasm. It ripped through me, and I screamed. Travis's fingers sank into my ass, urging my hips up and down and right into his own climax. He locked eyes with me as it hit him, and I took control sliding over him as he emptied everything into me. Fuck that was hot. When we were both spent, he pulled me down and kissed me, not letting me get away.

My magic brimmed at the surface, teasing my skin. It wasn't just the two of us that had come together, I now felt closer to all of them as a unit as if we'd just been waiting for Travis to stop being an ass this whole time. But as we came together, there was a little lost piece where Liam should have been. He was faint. The bonds around all of us strengthened, but I still couldn't feel him as much as I could the others.

“Is it going to feel like that all the time?”

“It has so far,” I said, nipping at his lip and kissing my way down his neck.

“How do you guys ever leave the fucking house?”

“It’s a daily struggle.”

He tipped my chin to make me look at him. His throat worked as his eyes shone a dazzling emerald. “In all seriousness, it’s us now. All of us.” He wound my arms around his neck and pulled me close. With him still seated inside me and encased in his strong arms, I believed him. With everything that had happened, how could it not be true? I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

## Chapter Fifteen

A long finger with a sharp nail poked me in the shoulder. I tried to ignore it at first, but it became more incessant. Then, a voice pierced the air. “Norah Girl, I know you are not laying naked with that boy.”

I blinked, my eyes resisting opening. Sex with Travis was...just wow.

Fingers snapped in front of my face. “And get that dreamy ass look off your face.”

I blinked harder, and the room came into view in front of me. Granny bent over Travis and I, but the rest of the room was awash with colors straight out of the Impressionism Period. Nothing in the room but Granny, Travis and I looked real. “Am I dreaming?”

Granny shook her head, her tongue clicking off the roof of her mouth. “My goodness but you just don’t know what you’re doing, do you?”

“Granny...” I whined, sitting up now, taking the small blanket Travis must have pulled down on top of us with me.

She shook her head again after watching me trying to situate myself.

“Well, maybe if you didn’t just pop in, you wouldn’t have to see me like this.”

“Well, maybe if you didn’t need help all the time, I wouldn’t just be popping in.”

True. There really wasn’t anything I could say to that. “What is it?”

“You,” she said nodding toward Travis. “You’ve done something, Norah Girl.” She placed her hands on her hips and started to walk around the room. “He was the last one, right? The one you hadn’t connected with?”

I sputtered out an awkward laugh. Connected? That made it sound so formal. What I did with the guys was nothing like that. “I don’t think we need to talk about that.”

“I really think we do because the strength of the magic coming off you is no joke. If that Dupre guy is half as powerful as he said he was, he’ll be able to find you. Find you all. The only thing saving you right now is that the one with the glasses is gone.”

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“Liam,” I said, my heart wrenching all over again. “Granny, it’s the familiar. It’s done something to him.”

“Well, of course it did. We can’t just walk around with familiars and pretend everything’s okay. My goodness but you’re lost without me.”

“Trust me, I’m not without you,” I said, almost begrudgingly.

“That better not be sarcasm I hear. I’ve done saved you now more than a few times and I’m here to help again.”

I glared at her as she wore a path into the carpet in front of me. I loved the woman. I just needed to remember that, and that only. It may have just been me, but I think she was getting surlier in death. Weren’t dead people supposed to be all-knowing and all-caring? Her attitude had only about tripled since crossing over. I took a deep, relaxing breath because she was my grandma and I really did need her. “Please tell me you can find Liam for us. We’ve been searching.”

“Oh, you’ve been searching alright,” she said, motioning toward Travis. “You’ve been playing ‘hide the pickle’, that’s what you’ve been doing.”

I pressed my lips together to keep from laughing. Along with getting surlier, she’d learned new terms, too. I bit down on my lip until it was safe to talk. “Granny, we need to find Liam. He’s not himself. He ran away because the familiar is getting too strong for him. We can’t leave him alone like that. He needs to know there are people out there who care for him.”

Granny stopped, her forehead wrinkling as she gazed at me. “The only thing that ruined that nice sentiment is the fact that you called me Granny. I know, Norah Girl. Liam—the one with the glasses. He needs you now more than ever, but I can’t help you with that.” She held her hand up when I tried to interrupt her. “I’ve tried. Believe me, I’ve tried. It’s the serpent. It’s blocking him from me.”

I ran a hand through my hair and laced my fingers behind my neck. Next to me, Travis still snoozed, looking peaceful as ever. All his asshole tendencies were gone when he was asleep. Maybe because there was no possible chance of him opening his mouth and ruining it all.

Granny snapped her fingers in front of my face again. I reached out to grab them, but my fingers went right through her. My heart lurched. When she came to me like this, she was so real, so true-to-life. It made me forget for a moment that she wasn’t really there. Granny had known me my whole life. She knew me deep down into my soul. What made me tick. Each and every thing that happened to me, she knew it. We loved to push each other’s buttons, but that didn’t mean we cared any less. We only pushed each other’s buttons because we knew how to.

Granny sat. A piece of magical furniture appeared just behind her before she fell through the coffee table. “I know, Girl. I know.” She reached out to brush my hair back but took her ethereal hand away. “You can’t afford to lose someone else. I get it. I tried, Norah. As soon as I saw him leave, I tried to keep track, but that familiar is a tricky one. He’s clouding him from me. I can’t get a read on him other than that he’s not so far away. He’s not so far away that you’ve lost him, baby. That much I do know.”

I pulled my legs up to my chest and placed my chin on my knees. A worry tugged at my heart. Gabe had thought Liam might be responsible for the girls drained of magic. I didn’t want to believe it. I looked up to find Granny still staring at me, her hard edges gone. “Have you seen what’s going on? With the drained witches, I mean?”

She nodded, her shoulders hunching over.

“Is it...him?”

Her eyebrows raised in a familiar gesture. “I don’t know. All I know is that the quest for power can destroy you. That much has always been true with those who wield magic. For some witches, what they have is never good enough. Magic has always been seen as power, not the gift that it is. Whether you can save the whole world or save one person, you should be happy with what’s within you. You determine the type of person you are, not the things around you or the magic within you. Some people, though...” She shook her head as she trailed off. “Some people never get it. Be satisfied with yourself, Norah Girl. Always.”

“I know, Granny.”

I’d heard the speech before. Not that it meant any less. Each time she said it, a spark of acknowledgment always formed in my belly. That was a truth nugget. A truth nugget not everyone believed in, but one all the same.

“I know you’re planning on going to that family—the Reid’s. Be careful. There are those who have one toe in the dark and one toe in the light. They straddle the line between what’s right and wrong, and you never know what side they’ll come down on.”

“Do you know about familiars? Anything at all?” I asked, not wanting to wait for a trip to the Reid’s to get an answer. Liam needed us now, not later. “Any rumors or fairy tales? You never know what might help.”

She shook her head. “I always lived within the light. I thought it best never to think about the dark, so I’d never have a reason to wonder.” Her shoulders lifted and then fell back down as if she was actually breathing. “I’m sorry you have to go through

this, Norah. It's not the life I wanted you to have. It's the life I wanted to protect us from."

And she was nothing if not overprotective in life. "I understand. Being an Enforcer means I have to think about these things though."

"Not just that," she said, her gaze focusing on me. "It's these boys, too. You're not just doing your job when it comes to helping Liam. You're doing it to protect the ones you love. That's just about all we can do with this life to make it perfect. I did my part and now you're doing yours. I'm proud of you, Norah Girl."

A small smile split my lips. "Thanks, Granny."

Her gaze narrowed. "Don't make me take that back."

"I love you."

"I love you too."

The wisps of clouds rolled in, pulling her away from me. I didn't bother holding my hand out this time to try to touch her. It wouldn't work, and I'd just leave myself with heartache. The room returned to normal, and I shut my eyes, knowing I was still sleeping, but understanding it was real all the same. If she'd told me before she passed that she'd be visiting me in my dreams and that it would be more real than real life, I would've thought she was going nuts. The truth was, I was happy she came to see me in any way she could. Though I was old enough to be on my own, and had been for years, that didn't mean I didn't want someone by my side to take the journey with me.

My eyes fluttered awake, for real this time. The room came right into focus, only proving that when Granny came to see me, though real, it was just a dream come true.

Those things did actually happen.

I propped myself up on my elbow and smiled down at the still sleeping Travis. He looked the same as in the dream. His bare chest on full display, I almost smirked when I realized Granny hadn't said anything about it. She commented on my lack of clothes, but not his. Probably because she liked it. I slipped the blanket down, and down further. Every inch it lowered, it revealed the dips of his abs, the shadows his muscles created, then finally, that v that led south. No wonder why the guy was a cocky asshole. He had what most women would call the perfect body. Not too slim, not too big, but generously muscled and sculpted.

I pulled the blanket down a little further, his cock head just revealing itself. He was hard under there. I peeked at his face, wondering if I'd woken him with my perusal of his body, but no, he was still asleep, the corners of his lips tilted up as if he was in some sort of good dream.



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I could show him a good dream.

Trying not to move him too much, I inched lower, taking the blanket with me. He was just perfect, standing at attention, as if he was calling to me.

I gripped him in my fist, making small movements upward. He fidgeted, and I smiled. My smile grew as I leaned forward, licking his tip. Mmm. I closed my eyes, doing it again and again. He moaned, and I peeked at him. His eyes were still closed, but his hips came up in slow but sure pumps.

God, yes. I placed my lips around him and urged him into my mouth.

He made a soft moan which only egged me on.

I took all of him inside, fisting him into my mouth. His eyes flew open. He stared down at me in awe, and I smiled, pulling up and then back down over him again.

“Jesus fuck, Norah.” His hands came to rest in my hair, his eyes zeroing in on mine as I took him in my mouth again. In the air, his cinnamon and my sugar mixed, creating an almost aphrodisiac as I worked him upwards. He made small movements into my mouth. When he lifted his hips, I slid a hand under and played with his balls, fondling them until he was short of breath.

“Tell me when,” I told him.

He nodded. “Close,” he said, barely able to get the words out.

I quickened the pace, easing him in and out of my mouth with my lips securely locked around his hard ridges until his hips never went back on the couch cushions.

“Now,” he said. “Fuck, now.”

He went to push me away, but I gripped him tighter. His eyes widened as I flicked my tongue over his tip catching his cum as it flowed into my mouth. He pulsed inside me, his orgasm drawing out, as he chanted my name. When he finished, I swallowed what I had and then licked him before placing the blanket back over him and resuming my position next to him.

I laid my head on his beating chest, playing my fingers over the area where his heart beat the loudest.

“Are you serious?” he asked. “That’s that?”

“I just wanted to say good morning.”

“It’s not morning. We’ve barely slept, Norah.”

“Oh, then maybe ‘happy sleep’? I’m glad you stopped being a douchebag for a whole day, so we could finally do this. It was a present for not being an asshole. Yeah, that’s what it was.”

His green eyes flared, and a teasing grin pulled at his lips. He moved on top of me and kissed his way down my chest, pausing to play with my breasts. “I wish you hadn’t made me come, I would’ve liked to be inside you again.”

“Oh, you wish I hadn’t given you a blow job? Really?”

His grin widened. “Okay, I’m only partly lying. That was the absolute best way to get

woken up. What I'm saying is, I wish it was still physically possible to pleasure you with my cock. You'll just have to settle for my tongue."

He parted my legs, and I grinned as he kissed a trail over my stomach to the area between my legs. His nose nuzzled me as he licked, just barely taking a taste. "Mmm, sugar. Sweet."

His mouth sealed onto me. My hips pitched forward as I dug my fingers into the cushions. He went for it right off the bat, not easing into anything. He pushed his tongue inside me, dipping in and out and then trailing upward over my clit.

"Oh fuck."

"I know you like that."

Even though I wanted to wrap my fingers into his hair, I kept them gripped into the cushions, wanting him to be in charge of this. He was doing a damn good job already. He wrapped one of my legs over his shoulder, then the next, then almost completely disappeared between my legs. He sucked, licked, kissed me there until I screamed. Then, he kept going, my cries urging him on.

"Yes. Tell me," he demanded. "How fucking good are we together?"

"Oh fuck," I said, my head dropping back. He was right. "So fucking good."

"Tell me how good I am."

My eyes bugged out of my head. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

He pulled his tongue away. "No." He gave me a quick, teasing lick. "Tell me how good I am."

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“I’m going to fucking kill you.”

He teased me again, licking me slowly but surely only around the areas he already knew drove me wild. “You want more?”

I nodded, pushing my hips up into him.

“Tell me.”

I swallowed my pride and locked eyes with him. His were like molten emerald and flashing with mischief. I smiled because, really, this was all just a game. A game I would’ve played, too. He could be in charge in the bedroom if he wanted to be. “Travis, I want you on me, licking me, entering me. You feel so good.”

“I’m...?” he said, flicking his tongue over my clit.

“So fucking good,” I said. “Give me more, please.”

He did. He buried his head in my pussy again, giving me everything I wanted.

“Yes,” I urged him on. “God, you feel so good. Oh, Travis. Fuck, yes. Please. More.”

He rewarded me again and again until words escaped me. I could barely breathe. I was so close when his tongue flicked out against my clit and it was all I needed. I came. Hard. He didn’t relent as I screamed his name. He kept at me, prolonging my orgasm until my body felt like Jell-O.

He crept up my body, his dick stiff against me. I reached down to it. “You’re hard. Thank God.”

I widened my legs, and he pushed right inside, his body slumping over mine. “Oh God. This might take a while. I wouldn’t mind living in here, anyway.”

I didn’t know if it was the angle, or just the fact that Travis and I were together, but my body was all hyped up and ready to climax again. I grabbed his ass, helping his movements. “Travis. I’m going to come again. Oh my God.”

He hissed in a breath, his strokes determined now rather than just lazy and exploring. “Say that again.”

“I’m going to come.”

“Fuck, Norah.” He angled his body over mine as he started to tremble. “You feel so fucking good.”

“You’re going to come, too?”

He nodded, his face strained.

I held steady as he pumped inside me, moaning as he entered again and again. “God, I’m so close.”

His hand came between us and rubbed against my clit. Stars exploded in front of my eyes as I clenched around his cock. He moved his hand to poise himself over me, rocking into me two more times before he, too, cried out again.

He lowered himself on top of me, claiming my mouth as we wrestled for breath. My chest thumped against his and his matched my rhythm.

He kissed me thoroughly, then pulled away. His disheveled hair gave him a black halo. "I'm not sure how to move on from that," he teased.

I caught my lip between my teeth. I really liked this Travis. The one who opened up to me. The one who told me about his friend and his sister.

I ran my hand through his hair and laced my hands behind his neck. "Just don't go back."

"I promise."

## Chapter Sixteen

Travis was a sleeper. As in, he just loved to fall asleep after sex.

We'd worn one another out, but sleep didn't come to me like it did him. I couldn't keep Liam out of my head. Granny had said she knew I was going to the Reid's place. The thing was, we all weren't going to get in there, and no matter what they tried to tell me, I was the only one who they didn't know. I had a better shot at getting into that house and coming out with the book and they knew it.

I slipped off the couch, pulling the blanket around Travis and tiptoed upstairs. Randy and Gabe were both asleep in their beds. I wondered what they saw when they came into the house earlier. Did they get a peek at what Travis and I shared? Was everyone now aware that we were fully a coven more than we had ever been? Shit, I thought, as I looked in on Gabe. We needed to tell them all what his grandfather said. It couldn't be avoided now I'd made it official with everyone.

Instead of focusing on that, I pulled on a tight pair of jeans and one of my most revealing shirts. I had the start of a plan in my head. I knew it wasn't a great one, but it wasn't a terrible one either. Finding the keys to the Jeep on the counter in the

kitchen, I plucked them off and walked out the door, pulling it shut behind me. We needed to find Liam, but we also needed the solution ready when we did get him back. Channeling him, I looked up Reids with a Boston address and found one that looked promising. I pulled up the street view to make sure it was the type of house a rich person would live in. It was. It was basically a mansion, so I dropped it into Google Maps and pushed Directions.

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Once I started the Jeep, I pulled out of the driveway as fast as I could. I wanted to be gone before any of them realized I'd left. If they needed me, they could call my cell phone. I didn't want to alert them until then. The truth was, they'd shit on my idea. They were wrong though. They'd make decisions out of worry for me and not what was actually a good idea.

The drive from Ipswich to Boston was further than Salem to Boston. This late at night, however, the roads were clear, and it took me a lot less time than it would have had I tried to make the journey during rush hour.

Like we did when we were following a pull, I parked down the street from the house. The Spanish style mansion loomed in front of me in the distance. We weren't right in the city of Boston. We were on the outskirts next to a lot of nice houses. These people were loaded and flaunted it. Taking a deep breath, I pushed the car door open and decided to do a walk by. I could just pretend I was anyone. Alone. At night. Taking a walk.

I shrugged and did it anyway. An iron gate blocked off the driveway. I could see that much even before I got that far. A four-foot stone wall outlined the perimeter of the property, too. Several of the other houses on the street had the same thing. My confidence wavered. Both of those would effectively keep me out of the house tonight.

A whistle pierced the air. Not the kind that called dogs, but the catcall kind. I turned to find the whistler just as I crossed the pavement of the driveway. Sure enough, there was a guard just on the other side of the iron gate staring at me. A smile curved my lips. I knew the outfit would come in handy, I just didn't know how until then. I



pointed at me, pretending to be coy. The guard nodded. I moved closer, standing just inside the circle of light from the streetlamp above. “Hi,” I said, cozying up to the iron gate.

The guy moved closer. He was magical, but I couldn’t tell if it was inherited like a Natural or learned through Wicca. It didn’t matter, he didn’t have much magic at all. Probably not even enough to clue him in to the extent of mine. He pulled the hoodie of his sweatshirt down, revealing a head of dark hair and thick, black eyebrows. “Hey there.”

I looked up at the house, pretending to be wondering what he was doing. “You just stand in people’s lawns and whistle at girls who walk by?”

He snickered, showing off a dimple. “Just the hot ones.” I gave him a look, and he shook his head. “Actually, no. I’m a guard. This is the Reid house.”

“Oh,” I said, grasping the iron bars. “I’ve heard of them. They’re like super rich, right?”

The guy nodded. “Loaded.”

“Is that why they have guards?” I asked, looking him up and down and forcing an interested face forward.

The guy moved closer. He unfolded his hands from around his chest and gripped the iron bar right below my hand. “One of the reasons.” He cocked his head to the side. “So, who are you? I’ve never seen you around before.”

“I’m new to town. Just, you know, out looking for people like me.”

I raised an eyebrow, and he nodded knowingly. “Well, you found one.”

No shit. “Yeah, I just moved from Louisiana. I heard there was a lot of people like me around here, but I haven’t found very many. Well, few who I actually care to know. Are the Reid’s at home? I’d love to meet them.”

A shadow crossed over his face. “No. They’re gone for the day. Out to some party on Martha’s Vineyard with all the other wealthy witches.”

I teased my lip and moved my hand up to graze against his. “Could be better. Maybe you can show me around the house?”

His eyebrows raised, but he looked interested. “The Reid’s wouldn’t like that.”

“Oh,” I said, shrugging. “That’s okay. I guess I’ll just come by some other time.”

I walked away, hoping my little act worked. “You’re leaving?” he called out.

“Well, yeah,” I said, turning around and walking backwards. “I’m looking for something fun to do tonight. Not talk to someone through iron bars.”

The bars made a low, groaning noise as he pulled them open. “Well, hold on.” I stopped, and the guy stepped out. “We can take a walk around the outside.”

I walked forward. “The Reid’s won’t mind that?”

“No, they wouldn’t like that either. They’re private people, but...” He shrugged.

“Rebel,” I said, teasing as I brushed past him and beyond the front gate. That was one barrier down. Now I just had to get into the house, find the book, and leave. I shrugged, trying to play it light. “I understand, but what can someone like me do? I’m just here to try to make some friends who are like me. Normal people are so hard sometimes. You ever just want to put a mute spell on them?”

He laughed, loudly. “More than you know, babe.”

The urge to vomit crawled up my throat. I’d thought this would be easy, but ew. I wasn’t his babe. The four guys I had in my coven were a thousand times better than this guy. Not that he was all that bad, he just wasn’t them. “So, how old are the Reid’s anyway? They got any kids?”

“They’re like forty-somethings. Their ancestry goes back to the Salem Witch Trials, so they have deep roots in the area.”

“Wow,” I said, truly meaning it. That was a long time. They were most likely powerful witches. A shiver worked its way up my spine.

“And they have two kids. A teenage girl, and a guy who’s twenty-two. He’s cool, sometimes. I mean, he can be a dick, but most of the time he’s pretty cool.”

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“Happens sometimes with people who have money, huh?” I said as we walked toward the main entrance. “So, what are they so secretive about?” I whispered conspiratorially. “Guards. Iron gate. Stone wall. Are they hiding something?” I raised my eyebrows a couple times. “I’m always up for some fun.”

The guy chuckled. He leaned against one of the stone pillars and smiled down at me. “I don’t really know. There are rumors though. Whispers they might dabble in something you might call questionable. I know there’s a room in the house we’re absolutely not allowed to go in.”

A muscle tugged in my stomach. That’s where the book was. I knew it. Of course they would try to keep their books about bad magic away from prying eyes. People like this guy would turn in or blackmail people like the Reid’s. “Ooh,” I said. “Scary. I’ve heard about people who dabble in that. My Granny always told me to stay in the light, but I often wondered...”

“It’s hard not to,” he said, staring up at the house. “I think that’s how they got so rich. I mean, who can make this much money? And they don’t even work.”

“Really?” I asked. “That’s crazy.”

He reached out and touched my hand. I pulled away and pretended to be cold, wrapping my arms around myself.

“Chilly?”

“Not used to the north yet,” I said. “You know it’s like eighty degrees already in

Louisiana. I'd probably be wearing less than this."

His stare caught on my cleavage and I almost gagged.

"Is there a place where we can talk out of the wind?"

He looked toward the front of the house, his eyes unsure.

"Are you the only guard on tonight?" I asked. "I mean, I certainly won't tell anyone since you'll be doing me a favor."

"I am at least for another half hour. The other guy went on break."

A wash of cold hit me in the face. Holy hell. I needed to hurry. "Come on," I said, pulling him by the hand and yanking him up the steps to the front door. "Just for a bit. I won't get you in trouble, I promise."

I swallowed those last words with a bitter pill.

He pushed the door open, and I followed in afterward. While he shut the door, I searched my magic, looking deep inside to try to find something that pulled on the negative end of the spectrum. There was something. A little something, but it was so faint, I wasn't sure what it was. I was running out of time though. I tiptoed into the house, trying to be funny. "So, where's this super-secret room we're not allowed to go in? I want to make sure we're as far away from it as possible."

He smirked. "It's in the basement. There's no way we're making it down there." I crept a little further away. The foyer opened into a great room. Everything was old school charm with antique furnishings. Hands gripped my hips. "Where are you headed? I thought you wanted to talk."

I froze but tried to make myself relax before turning into his arms.

“Your accent is really sexy,” he breathed.

Okay. I just didn’t have the guts to do this. “Sleep,” I mumbled. Mr. Handsy fell forward immediately. I held him up, so he wouldn’t bounce off the floor. I knew where I needed to be, so I just had to get there and back in the thirty minutes I had until the other guard showed up. I’d find the book, wake the guy up, tell him thanks, and then leave without the other guard even seeing me.

As soon as I lowered him to the floor safely, I walked further into the house. I needed a basement door. In my life, I’d always known basement doors to be in the kitchens. I walked that way, pulling open doors as I went. Some led to rooms, some to closets. There. On the far side of the kitchen was a white door with a black handle. I pulled it open. Jackpot.

I took the stairs that led down. The tug in my gut fluttered. I was headed in the right direction.

Their basement was not a dingy, dark place. It was basically a tech extravaganza with the huge TV’s and sound systems. I followed my instincts. It took me to the door to another room. I tried the handle. Locked. I performed the unlock spell, but it didn’t budge. Shit. It was magically locked, not just locked with a deadbolt or something.

I searched my magic, tugging at anything that could help me out with this, but I couldn’t find anything. The faint trace of negative magic called to me on the other side of the door. I looked around for something to smash it with when I heard a car door slam.

I hissed in a breath. Fuck. I was screwed.

I ran back up the steps, closed the basement door behind me, and got to the guard, who still slept on the floor, at about the same time the front door opened. I shook him. “Awake,” I whispered. He blinked up at me. “You passed out and there’s someone else here now. How can I get out?”

He shot to his feet, but it was too late. Footsteps rounded the corner. “Owen, you...” the voice trailed off as a young kid caught sight of me. Shit. We were caught. “Who are you?”

“Hi,” I waved. “I’m Deborah,” I said, saying the first name that popped into my head.

Owen ran a shaking hand through his hair. “Shit, Dean. I’m sorry.” Owen looked at me, his eyes remorseful.

“Me too,” I said. “I apologize. I’m new to the area and heard about your family and wanted to come by. Owen told me you weren’t here, but then I got cold and he offered to let me step inside to get warm. I’m from Louisiana,” I explained, or at least I hoped it explained everything.

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Dean, who I could only guess was the son of the Reid's, raised his eyebrows. He was dressed in a pair of khakis and a button-up shirt. Sure, I was type casting in my head, but I was pretty sure I was right, and this was the son to a rich family.

A figure came around from behind Dean and I paled. I locked gazes with him, trying not to show any recognition on my face. It was Ren. A better looking, more put together Ren than I'd seen the two times I'd met him before. He didn't look high on his magic or his girls. He looked like a businessman. I swallowed, knowing he had the power to take me out right there if he wanted to. Hopefully, Randy's scary ass put enough fear into him that he would keep his mouth shut. "What's this?" Ren asked. "A new witch in town?"

He smirked at me, and I smiled back, trying to tell him to fuck off with my eyes. He knew exactly what I was doing here. He's the one who told me about this place to begin with. Dean chuckled. "And I suppose Owen was trying to show you some northern hospitality?"

Owen grimaced. I kind of felt bad for him. He reminded me of Liam in a way, and I hated bullies. "Yeah, he was being really nice. Again, I'm so sorry. I know it's not cool to just walk into someone else's house. But did you know it's like eighty degrees back home, and I definitely didn't dress for the weather."

Shameless move to try to distract them. That I had to admit. Even Ren looked his full, and I wanted to punch him in the stomach. I still might yet once I got myself out of this mess.

"I should probably get going." I walked around them, giving them a wide berth. If I



had to, I could use magic if they wanted to stop me, but I hoped it didn't come to that. I might have to use this connection in the future. Well, until they found out I was an Enforcer. Then, all bets were off.

Owen took a step forward. Dean raised his hand. "You, stay."

Owen's jaw snapped shut. His face blushed a fiery red. My heart really did go out to him. "It's really my fault."

Dean turned toward me. "My friend Ren is going to show you out." He looked me up and down. "Just next time, ask for me, okay? I'd be happy to show you around."

"O-okay." I turned toward Owen and mouthed 'sorry'. His face lifted a little, but then Ren's gross fingers wrapped around my hips to steer me out. When we were out of their line of sight, I twisted and pushed him away from me. "Don't touch me."

He peeked back, then moved me forward faster. "Are you stupid? You thought coming here and just waltzing in and getting the book was a good idea?"

"I don't really have a choice. My friend is worse. He needs it off him."

Ren shook his head at me like I was a child. "You're getting mixed up with the wrong people. I know damn well Randy doesn't know you're here."

I lifted my chin. "Randy's not my boss. Trust me, he's aware of the fact too."

"That may be, but show up here again, and you won't like what happens. These aren't forgiving people."

"They don't know anything about me."

“Yet,” he said, the word lingering in the air.

“Yet,” I agreed. It wasn’t that Ren was threatening me, it was just we all knew keeping my presence a secret here wasn’t going to last much longer. Red had probably already figured it out.

“I’ll give Randy a call. Let him know he should be expecting you soon.”

I walked down the steps, turning back to give him a sly smile. “I can tell him myself.”

“I’d really love to tell him, though,” he said, his hands moving into his pockets. “I want to be the one to tell him how one of the Reid’s guards, and Dean Reid himself, are now very interested in you. It’ll be a fun conversation, I’m sure.”

I gave him a look, then turned and headed back toward the iron gate. I couldn’t believe I was walking out of there without the fucking book. I’d been so close. So, so close.

I ran back toward the Jeep, hearing my phone ringing from the inside before I even got there. So much for them being able to get ahold of me if they wanted to. I hurried up and unlocked it before answering. “Hello?”

“Norah? What the fuck?” It was Travis. The tension in his voice sliced his words through me. No doubt he woke up still expecting me to be there next to him, and then when I wasn’t...

“I’m sorry.”

He blew out a breath, the receiver crackling as he did so. “Are you coming home now?”

I hopped in and started the Jeep. “On my way.”

“Good.”

Then, he hung up. I threw the phone down in the passenger seat and did a U-turn on the posh road. I slammed my hand down into the steering wheel a couple times. Frustration fueled me. I was so close. Heat gathered behind my eyes. I’d put a lot of hope into this plan and it all ended with nothing. And we were nowhere closer to finding Liam or figuring out how to get the stupid familiar off him. We were running out of time...and plans.

Chapter Seventeen

Randy

My phone buzzed and rang on the table next to the bed. I shot up immediately, my heart slamming in my chest. I scrambled to pick it up, but it slipped through my sleep deprived fingers not once but twice. Gabe and I had been out searching all the places we could think of for Liam. We went to Headquarters, restaurants, the library. He wasn't anywhere. But who else called in the middle of the night when you were searching for a missing person?

I stared down at the screen where a simple phone number stared back at me. Not Liam's name, but he could be anywhere at this point. I swiped at the screen. "H-hello?"

"Ah, Randy."

I gripped the side table, not recognizing the voice.

"You want to tell me why your girlfriend was at the Reid's place tonight?"

My heart clenched, simultaneously afraid for two different reasons. One, that it hadn't been Liam on the other end of the line, and two, that Ren was talking to me about Norah. "What?"

"Your girlfriend. Miss Sexy Southern Accent. You know, the one with the—"

"I swear to God, if you finish that sentence I will fucking end you. I know who my girlfriend is." My lips felt numb. Girlfriend. I'd just said girlfriend. I wasn't the type

to have a girlfriend, but it was all out there now, and the truth to it was evident, seeing as how I wanted to blast Ren with a shit ton of my own magic right to the chest.

Ren chuckled. “Which is why I’m fucking calling you. Your girlfriend was at the Reid’s place tonight trying to cozy up with one of the guards to get the book I told you about. She might have gotten it too, except for Dean Reid himself came home. You know enough to understand you don’t want any of the Reid’s interested in what you have. I covered for her as much as I could, but Dean’s not likely to forget a pretty face like that.”

I ran a hand through my hair. “Where is she now?”

“On her way home to you, I guess. I didn’t ask her for a play-by-play, but I tried to warn her from doing anything stupid like this ever again.”

I threw the blankets off, my bare feet sinking into the carpet. When I’d gotten home, she’d been laying on the couch with Travis sound asleep. “You better not have touched her.”

“If I had, do you really think I’d be calling you or letting her go? Come on, I may not be an Enforcer, but I’m not a fucking idiot either.”

“Let’s just keep it that way.”

Silence descended on the conversation. I got up from bed and searched the room for something to pull on. I was going to head downstairs and wait for her ass to come home to make sure she was securely in bed. We didn’t need another missing coven member right now. Fucking Christ, she could’ve just told us where she was going.

“Listen, Randy, I know you need the book. That’s why I’m over here tonight,” he

said, lowering his voice. “I’m going to see what I can do. I’ve tried making a business partnership with the Reid’s before, but that was with the dad. I thought I might give junior a try to he seems more open to the type of business I’m in. I’ll see what I can find out.”

“And why the hell would you do that?”

“We’ve all got our reasons. Just know there might be a time I might need a favor and I’ll expect it.”

I stood up straighter. “If it’s a favor of the black magic kind and I’m not allowed to mark you, you can just stop right there. That’s what we do.”

“No, it’s nothing like that. It’s something far more personal.” His voice held a hard edge.

There was no weighing options. We needed information and Ren was the closest to getting it.

“Shall I continue?”

“Yes,” I said. I’d be willing to give up a whole hell of a lot for that book.

At that, I ended the call and pulled my sweats on before heading downstairs. I stopped at the end of the staircase. Travis was there pacing in and out of the foyer. “Dude?”

He looked up, startled. When he got his bearings back, he said, “Norah’s gone. She’s on her way back though.”

“I know,” I said, holding up my cell phone.

“She called you?”

I shook my head. “No. Ren called me. She was at the Reid’s house trying to get the book we told you about.”

Travis ran a hand through his thick dark hair. “What the fuck?”

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“Yeah, that about sums it up,” I agreed. A flurry of overprotectiveness washed over me, but that shit wouldn’t sit well with Norah. But to pull this with Liam missing? That was fucked up. “She could’ve told us where she was going.”

“We would’ve tried to talk her out of it.”

“No shit.”

“Well, that’s probably why she didn’t tell us,” he said.

I glared at him. Obviously, that was the case. Jesus. Slept with her once and now acted like he knew everything about her. He was well behind the curve when it came to Norah for fuck’s sake. He could barely stand to be around her a fucking week ago.

“Don’t give me that look,” Travis said. “Yes, I’m into her, too. Have been,” he admitted, dropping his voice.

“So, you were just what? Determined on being a dick?”

His gaze narrowed. “That’s between me and Norah.”

Fair enough. I didn’t really want everyone knowing the ins and outs of the intimacies of our relationship either.

“Listen,” Travis said, holding his hand up. “I don’t want to fight about this. We’re a coven. We’re all interconnected now more than ever. Is this thing with her and me going to be a problem for you?”



“No, it’s not a problem. Just don’t act like you know her and I don’t. That would be a problem.”

Travis looked away, continuing his path from the front door to the kitchen island. I moved to the island and sat on the stool, hoping she’d get back soon. I wanted to make sure she was fine, and that Ren was telling the truth when he said he didn’t hurt her. Not that she couldn’t protect herself. She had enough magic for that. She was stronger than the rest of us

Travis stopped in front of me. He waited until I looked up at him, then said, “Dude, I know I’ve been a dick lately. I’m sorry. I don’t want to be that guy anymore. I just want to move forward with the way things are now. Jax is in the past. Jennie’s doing good...”

“Adams?” I asked. He’d never opened up that much about what happened there, but if he was still hung up on some girl, he didn’t deserve Norah yet.

“Not even a sliver of a memory compares to what we’ve got in front of us.”

I nodded. That was exactly what I wanted to hear. “Should we wake up Gabe?”

Travis shrugged. “Only if we’re going to have a group meeting. Other than that, I guess it can wait until morning.” He checked his watch. “You know, in a couple hours.” He pulled up the stool next to me. “We must’ve done something wrong if she went to the Reid’s by herself without telling us. I’d rather know about her plans before she implements them rather than being blindsided.”

“That’s the fucking truth,” I told him. “When Ren asked me why the hell Norah was at the Reid’s place, I had no idea how to answer. It wasn’t a great feeling.”

“She does what she wants to do when she wants to do it. She’s not used to having a

coven.”

I scratched my jaw. The earlier conversation we’d had with her came back to me. “We did kind of tell her she wasn’t going into the Reid’s place without us even though her idea wasn’t that bad. She is the only one they don’t know or haven’t heard of. Especially Liam.”

“Liam?” Travis asked, his eyebrows arching.

“Yeah, Liam’s family and the Reid’s were tight. Both rich. Both powerful. I’m kind of glad he’s not around for this. He doesn’t like being reminded of shit.”

“But he didn’t know them? How could he? He was adopted.”

“No, of course not. He just knows they were close friends when he did research once he found out who he was. He’s always wondered about them, and if they’re as close as he said they were, I’m sure they would’ve known about him. Maybe even why he was sent away.”

“I see what you’re getting at,” Travis said, suddenly finding the floor very interesting. “Yeah, best he wasn’t here for this one.” He ran a hand down his face, stifling a yawn. “We’ll have to tell him when he gets back though.”

The door handle jiggled and both Travis and I stood. It opened, and she stepped through. I did a once-over in my head, looking for just one hair out of place and Ren was getting another call from me. Not that any of it would’ve been his fault, but I needed some place to vent my anger.

“Oh, good. You’re both up,” she deadpanned.

“Yeah, well, that’s what happens when the owner of a magical whore house calls you

in the middle of the night.”

Norah made a face. “He’s so skeevy.” It fell just as fast as it came though. “I supposed he did help me out this time. He could’ve blown me in, but he didn’t.”

She stopped just in front of us, throwing the keys down on the counter. Then, she stared at us one after the other. “You guys are mad?”

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I looked at Travis and he looked back at me. He gave in first. “I have to admit, I was just freaked out. I woke up on the couch and you weren’t there.”

I closed my eyes, remembering how Gabe and I saw them on the couch together, all cuddled into one another’s arms. I couldn’t imagine waking up and having her not be there.

“So, I searched your room, then the house, then the garage, then the yard. You weren’t anywhere.”

She bit her lip. “I took the Jeep.”

“That’s when I realized the Jeep was gone and called you.”

“I’m not going to apologize,” she said, sticking her cute nose up in the air. She was so fucking stubborn. I loved that part of her. Loved that she just saw things and went for them. She knew her own mind, and that was damn hot.

“I’m not asking you to,” Travis said, answering a question she didn’t even ask, but we knew she wanted to.

She peeked at me. “Are you?”

“If I said yes, would I be the dick now?”

She nodded. “Yes, actually.”

I moved forward and grabbed her hands. “Can you just leave a fucking note next time? Or better yet, don’t get caught. Ren calling me in the middle of the night is not my fucking idea of a good time. You know what I mean?”

She chuckled. “I didn’t plan on getting caught. Owen, the guard, said the family was out of town at some rich people party. He was the only guard on duty and he catcalled me. I had an in. If I didn’t think it was safe, I wouldn’t have done it. I found the door to his secret stash of magic shit, but it was locked. Not human locked either, magically locked. I did everything I could think of, but still couldn’t get the damn thing open.”

Her face pinched, and she looked at her feet. Liam being gone was affecting her just as much as it was us. It was like a piece of me was missing.

“Those kinds of locks are tricky,” Travis said. “It won’t just open with regular magic. It depends on how well he wanted it concealed whether you can get it open or not. He might have only limited it to himself, or people with his DNA. Who knows? Think of it kind of like the magic that runs through us as Enforcers. No other magical person can just come across the Order headquarters in the woods. They might be able to tell there’s something magical about it, but they won’t be shown the way in unless they were called to it. And, in order to be called to it, they need to be one of us.”

Norah blew out a breath. “I don’t know what we’re going to do then. Granny told me the familiar is taking over Liam and she can’t find him either.”

“Wait,” I said, letting what she’d just said sink in. “Granny came to you?”

“Yep,” she said, popping the p. “She couldn’t find him. Has no idea where he could be. She can’t get a grip of his ‘essence’ because the familiar is on him and that thing is trying to take over.”

Well, that made sense why she woke up and decided she needed to try to find the book in the middle of the night. She was worried about Liam.

There were three big problems on our hands. Finding Liam was my major concern, but there was also the Order business and getting a lockdown on who was draining these witches. The other was trying to find the damn book so we could help Liam when we did get him back.

I didn't even bother telling her I thought Liam was going to be fine. The heaviness that draped around all our shoulders was enough to handle. I didn't need to throw out promises I wasn't sure I was going to be able to keep. The only thing I wished right now was that he wasn't the one draining the other witches. Even if we did get him back and kicked the damn familiar off him, the chances of him recovering were slim if he'd allowed the familiar to control his body into taking those witches' magic. He'd never be able to forgive himself for hurting another witch, whether he was under the influence of black magic or not.

I craned my neck toward the stairs. "Let's get up there and get some sleep. We'll tackle this all again in the morning."

"Seconded," Travis said, stretching his hands high above his head.

"Thirded," she mused, already turning toward the stairs with her head hanging low.

She moped up the steps, and I pushed Travis forward. Not that I also didn't want the time alone with her, but I couldn't imagine how he must have felt when he woke up and couldn't find her anywhere. He probably needed this moment a hell of a lot more than I did.

Chapter Eighteen

I woke up in Travis's arms in my bed. I thought—briefly—about waking him the way I had last night, but my mind immediately flooded with everything we had to do today. I peeked down at him, still loving the fact that his face was so serene while he slept, and that at least while he slept, there was no way for me to get pissed off at anything coming out of his mouth.

An almost silent knock came on the door, and it immediately pushed open, revealing my blond British hunk. I waved him forward. His face looked pensive, thoughtful. I turned in Travis's grip and waited as Gabe came around the side of the bed and knelt in front of me.

He frowned. "I hear you went out for a joyride last night."

Oh. I'd almost forgotten he didn't know about that. I propped myself up on my elbow. "Randy's got a big mouth."

Gabe stifled a laugh and looked over my shoulder at sleeping Travis. "He was just bringing me up-to-date with everything. I don't like the idea of this guard person he told me about catcalling you."

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I grinned, kind of loving the fact he at least played at being a little jealous. There was no way any of them had anything to worry about. We were all one as far as I was concerned. Now more than ever as I remembered who owned the body heat at my back. I shrugged, playing into his teasing. “His name is Owen. I think I might have to marry him in order to get this book.”

“Well, that’s going to be a problem there, baby, because the way I see it, you are full up on boyfriends.”

“Well, yeah, but this one would be my husband. I mean, that’s what he said, anyway.”

He arched an eyebrow at me as I grinned from ear-to-ear. He crept closer. “Boyfriends, husbands, they’re practically the same thing.”

I missed Gabe’s easygoing nature. Not that he wasn’t serious about what was going on, but he just felt more carefree than the others. “I don’t know. I heard husbands will wake their wives up with a certain something.”

A teasing smile filled his face. “A certain something?” He looked over my shoulder to Travis and then met my gaze again. “Like...?”

I inched forward, halving the distance between Gabe and I. “Use your imagination.”

“I’ve definitely got one of those. Will Travis mind?”

I peeked over my shoulder. “He won’t if he’s committed to this as much as I am.”



I rose to my knees and inched my tanktop up over my head, watching Gabe's intense gaze as I did so. I dropped it on the floor and then ran my hands down the front of my chest until I found my flimsy shorts, working them down as I went.

He laid a hand on my chest and gently pushed me over so he could remove them for me. Afterward, he crawled into the bed next to me. His boxers were already bulging, and I reached out to touch him. Before I did though, I pulled my hand back. "You're not mad at me, are you?"

His eyebrows rose. "Why would I be mad at you? You just got naked for me."

I bit my lip and pushed him down on the bed until I straddled his hips. "I mean about where I went last night. Are you mad about that?"

"You're safe, aren't you?"

I nodded.

He nodded to match mine, his gaze searing straight through me. "I'd love it next time if you told me. I'd rather be right by your side making sure you're okay than asleep in bed, not having a clue to what's going on."

That made sense. I guessed. "Would you have come with me though?" I asked, pulling his shirt up and freeing his arms from it.

"If you were intent on going, yes."

I reached down, my hands roaming over his athletic body. "Do you have practice today?"

"Yes, but we have better things to do. The team will just have to deal."

“Better things to do?” I asked, just playing with him. “Are you talking about me?”

“No, you’re the best thing to do,” he said, his eyes glazing over.

“Such a suck up,” I teased.

A grin peeled his lips apart. He glanced over at Travis. “So, I see we got together with Mr. Attitude. Was it as explosive as I said it was going to be?”

Heat strained toward my cheeks as I thought about the several times we came together last night. We hadn’t been able to keep our hands off each other. That’s what happened when things stayed pent up inside and you held it in.

“I see that look,” he said. He moved his hands to my hips and pulled down as he rolled his upward. With nothing but the thin boxer material before us, I could make out the hard ridges of his cock already.

“Sweet Lord.” I looked at Travis who was still asleep. I wished he’d wake up and join us. The two of them? Sexy accent Gabe who liked to try new things, and Travis when we were still on the high of getting together? God, yes. Please.

He inched his boxers off. “Love, can we try something?”

I reached for him, fisting his cock and running down the length of him in easy strokes. “Yes,” I told him, my hips already wanting to be around him.

“Stay here but face the other way.”

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I did as he asked, and he pulled my hips back until his cock was right in front, angling toward me. I started stroking him again. “You want it like this, Gabe?”

He pushed my hips forward in answer. I angled myself over him, guiding his cock right into my entrance.

“Holy shit.” He moaned, his hips coming up in the air, as I pushed forward. This was different, but oh so good.

“Fuck, Gabe,” I said, making exploratory movements to find what felt the best. It was definitely hot, I just wished I could see his face.

His hands held firm on my hips as I moved. I let out a low moan, unable to keep quiet. The bed dipped where Travis was. My heart pounded when I glanced his way.

He turned, the sheets still around him, his gaze on fire. “You guys aren’t even trying to keep it down.”

“This is nothing,” Gabe said, his voice tight, heady. “You should’ve heard you two last night. Fuck. I’ve been horny all night just listening to her.”

Travis pushed the comforter down. He appraised the situation, watching me rock back and forth over Gabe’s cock. I arched my back, hoping he would get the hint, and he didn’t disappoint. He moved in front of me, his knees coming to rest on the outside of Gabe’s. His chest was on full display and I ogled it while taking Gabe deep inside. “Oh my God,” I moaned.

Gabe's hand moved to the small of my back, keeping pressure there as I rolled my hips into him.

Travis moved forward, grabbing my face in his hands before kissing me. He angled my mouth, forcing my lips open as he ravished me with quick strokes. His hands moved down my neck to my shoulders, then to play with my breasts.

I twitched over Gabe and he swore punctuating it with a low moan. "Don't stop what you're doing, Travis. Holy fuck. Her whole pussy just spasmed right on me. Christ, as if she wasn't tight enough."

Travis smirked, lowering his head to my breasts, taking first one nipple into his hot mouth, then the next. I quickened the pace as Gabe's fingers sank further into my skin. His hips moved up to catch my forward motion until we were slamming into one another. I didn't know what to concentrate on, my pussy or my breasts. All of it was overwhelming.

I reached down, gripping Travis's dick in my fist and stroked him. His face hardened as he watched me. I bent at the hip, changing up the angle at which Gabe entered me and making it easier to stroke Travis.

Gabe swore. "Oh fuck." He grabbed my hips, pushing me forward as he thrust upward.

I could tell he was about to come. "Yes, Gabe," I encouraged. "Right inside me while Travis watches. Oh fuck."

Travis's green eyes turned steely as he sat back, his gaze intent on the area where Gabe and I joined.

"Norah, mmm," Gabe said. "Oh, Love. I'm right there."

I took my cues from him until he jerked inside me and I cried out, loving the fact that at this very moment, he was emptying everything he had, and Travis watched it all.

I moved back. He pulled out, then scrambled from underneath me. Travis pushed me forward, his boxers around his ass now, his dick straining. Gabe didn't miss a beat. His head bent over, taking my nipple into his mouth as his hand played with my other one.

Travis gripped my hips, but they came off the bed toward him, anyway. Thankfully, he didn't make me wait. He pushed inside me, and I cried out. "Yes. Fuck me, please." I held Gabe's head to my breast, and he licked and teased the way I liked. Gabe's hand lowered, reaching down past my belly button to my clit, so dangerously close to the cock that pumped in and out of me. His finger played there, massaging it back and forth as my hips came off the bed.

"Shit," Travis said. "This is fucking hot. She is so fucking aroused right now. Give it to her, Gabe."

Gabe worked harder, and I was almost coming off the bed in pleasure. The way they played off one another, spoke to each other even.

"Faster, Travis," I moaned.

He complied, picking up the pace as Gabe's mouth tortured me. I was so right there. Gabe tweaked my nipple, and it sent me over the edge. I gasped out a breath as it broke over me, then I let out a low moan until Gabe claimed my mouth for his. Travis's movements turned jerky until he cried out, losing himself inside me just as Gabe had done before him.

Looking up at them both, it only served to remind me that we had so much to fight for. "I know," Gabe said, kissing my forehead after all our breathing returned to

normal. “I can feel it too.”

He slid off the bed as Travis backed away from me. All of us pulled on clothes, getting ready for another day of trying to figure everything out. It would’ve been nice to lay in bed, exploring the both of them like this, but we had more important things to do.

“Randy’s going to be pissed if we don’t get down there,” Gabe said.

“How do you know?” I asked, zipping up my jeans.

He bit his lip to keep from laughing. “He sent me up here to get you guys. I bet he wasn’t expecting that to happen.”

I pulled my tanktop off the ground and snapped it at Gabe’s chest. “I bet not. He’s going to be so pissed.”

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He sauntered toward me, his jeans low on his hips. “Don’t tell me you didn’t love every fucking second of that.”

“Oh, I did,” I told him, looking him up and down. How lucky was I to have a body like that to come home to at night? And not just one, but four. Four of the best guys I’d ever known. “Now, you have to go down there and tell Randy we’ll be right down.”

He shrugged like he could give two shits. “Won’t bother me.” He pulled a shirt on over his head and then tucked it into his jeans on his way out the door. He turned to both of us on his way out and winked. “See you down there.”

I grinned at Travis. “Your coven is a freaking mess.”

“Oh, they’re my coven now?”

“Only when they’re behaving badly.”

He chuckled and shook his head. “Then they’re always my coven.”

That sounded pretty accurate, actually.

### Chapter Nineteen

Randy greeted Travis and I at the breakfast bar with piles of cold toast stacked on a plate.

“He’s only mad because he wasn’t invited,” Gabe called out from the living room.

I waltzed up to him and kissed him square on the mouth. “Who said he wasn’t invited?”

Travis laughed and grabbed a couple pieces of toast before joining Gabe in the living room. I pulled on Randy’s hand and we joined them.

“Well, while you guys were busy,” Randy said, tweaking an eyebrow my way. “I heard from Murphy.”

Travis paused with a slice of toast halfway to his mouth. “Is Anna okay?”

He shook his head. “No. He’s taking her to a mental hospital today. She’s significantly deteriorated since we saw her. She keeps mumbling things; her exterior is getting worse even though the doctors say nothing is wrong with her.”

“It’s got to be magic,” I told them. “She’s being sucked dry, too, but for whatever reason, it didn’t leave the negative taste the others did.”

Randy put his hands on the back of the sofa as I stared at him. “That’s not the only thing though,” he said, his shoulders hunching over. “Liam came to see them yesterday.”

I choked on my cold toast and stared up at him. “He did?”

Nodding, he took a deep breath. “Murphy said he acted perfectly fine. He told him that we, as the Order, wanted to check up on Anna and that’s what he was doing. She had already started to get worse before he got there. It sounds like they were thinking of putting her in a psych unit for the past few days, so...” He looked away. “...I don’t think he’s the reason for her deterioration.”



“Why the hell would he go visit her, though, Mate?” Gabe asked.

Travis shook his head. None of us could figure it out. There were too many variables to be considered. Even though Randy seemed relieved Anna was already in a bad place before Liam got there that still didn’t explain why he went there. None of this added up.

“Did you ask him if they happened to know where he was?”

“I couldn’t really ask too much,” Randy said. “I didn’t want to give anything away, so no, I didn’t get a thing out of them. There was nothing I could say that wouldn’t lead him to think we didn’t know where Liam was or that he wasn’t under our guidance anymore. We can’t risk anyone finding out he has a familiar on him.”

“The superiors will pull the plug for sure,” Travis said.

“We’re just going to have to head out and try to find him again,” Gabe said. “Try a different locator spell. Maybe. Search for clues...”

With my heart heavy in my chest, I picked myself off the couch and went for the keys on the countertop where I’d left them the night before. “We’ve got to go, guys. Liam needs us.”

We all piled into the Jeep. On the way into Salem, I filled Gabe in on what I hadn’t found at the Reid’s place, and told him how Granny had visited me last night. He seemed troubled by the fact Granny couldn’t trace him because of the damn familiar. Every little piece of evidence seemed to be pointing directly at the idea that Liam was slowly but surely being taken over by that thing. It wasn’t fair.

Once we were on the outskirts of the city, Travis pulled the car over. Randy took out the bag he’d brought with him. He pulled out the silver laptop I recognized as Liam’s.

He turned in the seat, so he could face us all. “I thought maybe if we brought something of Liam’s it would make it easier to trace where he was. Let’s just do some searching, see if we can’t find a true connection to the person Liam was before the familiar.

He closed his eyes first, and I followed suit. Where there was nothing but emptiness before, there was a little something more, but just a flicker. Wordlessly, Travis steered the Jeep back onto the road. I kept concentrating on the little glimmer of hope. Travis took to the streets, weaving in and out of intersections and around parked cars. It was hard to tell what was going on because I’d kept my eyes shut as he drove through Salem, so one of us could at least keep the connection.

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When we got to the end of the line, the pull of bad magic twisted my stomach into knots and made me cringe. Cramps.

“Son of a bitch,” Gabe said.

Travis pulled the Jeep over sharply. “Another negative magic pull on Liam’s trail.”

“It doesn’t mean he’s guilty,” Randy said, his sudden outburst in Liam’s defense wasn’t a surprise. In fact, all of us, I was sure, wanted to scream the same exact thing. Just because we were aware what connections we would draw if this weren’t Liam, didn’t automatically make him guilty.

Travis pushed his door open. “Be prepared for anything. If Liam’s there, subdue him until we can figure shit out.”

“If he’s not?” I asked, scrambling out of the car after Gabe.

“Randy and I will take off and see if we can’t find where his trail leads.”

We approached the house. “How much do you want to bet there’s a drained witch in here?” Gabe asked.

That was a stupid bet. It was pretty much guaranteed at this point.

Gabe unlocked the human lock, and we all walked in. The house was wide open and sprawling. We followed our noses right to the passed-out witch. It didn’t take long to find him because he was just inside the main area of the house. Gabe and I knelt next

to the witch, a man this time, as Randy and Travis took off. They stormed through the entire house, making sure there was no sign of Liam anywhere until they barreled right back down and out the back door.

I helped Gabe pick up the witch and move him into the living room. We waited a couple minutes until his eyes fluttered open. He backed away from us, his eyes wide until they got even wider with recognition as he stared at Gabe. “What the hell happened to me?”

Just as the others, his face was sunken in and pale. His magic wasn’t even buzzing at the surface. From what I could discern, it was under layers and layers, stripped right back to its center. “You’ve been drained,” Gabe said. “We’re trying to find out who did it to you. Do you remember who was here?”

The guy blinked. “I was just about to head out for work.” He shook his head as his vision turned inward, sifting through his memories. “No. It’s weird, though. I don’t remember. It’s not hazy, it’s almost as if the memory just stops.”

Gabe’s eyebrows furrowed. “Have you ever felt that before?” he asked, peeking at me.

“Yeah,” he said. “When someone took my memories away.”

Gabe put a hand on the man’s shoulders and pushed him to relax against the couch. “We’re going to get you water. Be right back.”

He took me by the hand and led me away from the man. “That explains why no one remembers who is doing this.”

“Yeah, someone is intentionally trying to keep quiet about it.”

“It’s got to be someone who knows about us,” Gabe said. He looked through the cupboards until he found a cup and then filled it with tap water.

“Dupre.”

“Or Liam.”

“Or someone we haven’t even come across yet,” I said.

“I don’t want it to be Liam either,” Gabe said, frowning at me. “I’m just being realistic.”

I wrapped my arms around myself and rubbed my forehead. “I know.” If it were anyone else, I’d be blaming them, too.

We walked back into the kitchen. The man’s hands shook as Gabe handed him the glass. “If you can tell us everything you do remember, including which witches you’ve dealt with recently, that would be very helpful to us,” he told him.

The man agreed, immediately talking. It turned out he didn’t deal with many witches. He was an adjunct professor at Salem State who’d just moved here at the suggestion of his cousin who was also a witch.

“And you’d heard about us?” Gabe asked.

From what I’d gathered, that was rare. If you didn’t live in a city near an Order, you might not ever know witches like that existed.

The guy took a sip and nodded. “Of course. Rumors spread, you know. Especially right now. I’m not the only witch who’s been drained lately. People are starting to talk.”

I didn't like the sound of that. If the word was getting around that witches were showing up drained, we were going to have some hysterical witches on our hands. Like Granny said, for most, it was all about their power.

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The guy turned to me. “Am I going to get everything back?”

I peeked at Gabe. He opened his mouth to answer, but this was my gig, too. I knew as much as he did. “We have no reason to believe your powers won’t return. If you think of anything else, please don’t hesitate to reach out,” I told him.

Gabe took a paper and a pen from the coffee table in front of him and wrote down his name and number. “We can help,” he said, emphasizing the word.

The witch hadn’t seemed clear on that point. We weren’t here just to wait and see what happened to people and deal with the aftermath. We were here to make sure it didn’t happen again.

Gabe held out his hand, and the witch shook it. “Thanks. I’ll let you know.”

We walked outside and met Randy and Travis by the Jeep. “The guy going to be okay?” Travis asked, his mouth tight.

“Yeah,” Gabe said, peeking back at the front window. “He’s going to be fine. Doesn’t have much trust in us though. Apparently, it’s going around Salem how there’s someone out there draining witches’ magic.”

Randy put his hands on his hips. “Of course, there is. Because all they care about is their magic. No one says a damn thing when we stop something evil from hurting someone.”

“Well, now it’s knocking on their backdoor,” Gabe supplied “When you think about

it, you can't blame them."

"I can," Randy muttered. His lips thinned, and he got that angry look in his eye.

Gabe ignored him. "We usually deal with things happening to normal people. Not usually Naturals or Wiccans. Here we have witches who are getting drained. It's normal for them to be afraid. If witches were out in the open, this would be all over the news. Think about if this was happening to normal people. What if they had a serial murderer on their hands who had a certain type of victim? If you were that person's type, you'd be worried yourself."

That much was true. Something was happening to the witches in this town and it wasn't good. The Order didn't need any bad press. What if one of these scared witches decided to give the superiors a call? We'd be fucked then.

"We need to figure this shit out," I said. "We can't risk anyone coming to town and snooping around."

"My bet's on Dupre, but we've never been able to find him before."

"Yeah, well, Granny says since we're all linked now, we shouldn't have to wait long for that."

Travis perked up, his eyes blazing. "She did tell you that, didn't she? She told you we were stronger now and that Dupre would be able to find us. What if we made it easy for him to find us?"

"You mean like...?"

"Call his ass," Travis said, a smile pulling his lips apart. "He obviously wants magic and we're the strongest witches around. Let's show him what we can do. He'll be



drawn to us. He won't be able to help himself."

Randy nodded. "I like it. Let's find a place that's more suitable for us. No flying in blind, not knowing what's behind the door to get us. We can do a strong spell somewhere where we're familiar, then we'll see if he takes the bait."

"In the meantime," Gabe said, "let's send out a message to the witches in Salem to be careful. We should take a proactive stance on this. Plus, they might even be able to lead us to Dupre before we can sucker him in."

"How do we send messages to all the witches in Salem?" I asked, genuinely curious. Was there some sort of messaging system I wasn't aware of? Sounded awesome.

"Start with the people we know and have them call everyone they know," Gabe said, lifting his shoulders.

That was disappointing and sounded like a hell of a lot of work. "There's no magical way to do it?"

Gabe took his phone out of his pocket and wiggled it in the air. "It is magic. It's called a cell phone."

I shook my head at him and got in the car. While Travis drove, Randy and Gabe got on the phone to every witch they knew, telling them to be careful and to look out for someone who fit Dupre's description and asking them to let us know if they came across anyone like that.

They'd hit a big zero on the list so far. No one knew a thing but appreciated the heads up. It wasn't until we pulled into the driveway that Randy suddenly sat up straighter. "Yeah, yeah, we'll be there as soon as we can." He hung up the phone and twisted around to face us. "That was Ren. He needs to see us."

He looked at me. I saw the flame of hope building in his eyes once again. I hoped we could at least solve one piece of the puzzle tonight.

## Chapter Twenty

We pulled up outside Ren's dilapidated ranch. I reached for the car door handle, but Gabe held me back. I looked up to find him staring out the window. "Anyone else think it's weird there are no lights on in that place?"

"It's a magical whorehouse," I explained. "They're all fucked up. They probably think the lights are on."

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“I don’t know,” Travis said. He leaned forward over Randy, his eyes roaming over the house and the trashed lawn. Sure, it wasn’t the best of places, but that hadn’t stopped us from going in before.

I eyed Randy, and he sighed. “Well, I’m going in there. That book is the only thing we have to go on to save Liam and I’m not going to let it slip from our grasps because the freaking lights aren’t on.”

He pushed the car door open and jumped out. I was right behind him. Gabe swore and came out after me. “I wasn’t saying we shouldn’t go in. I was just saying we should be prepared if there’s something there.”

Travis’s door slammed, and he ran up to us. “I also wasn’t saying we shouldn’t go in, just remember what happens when we get impulsive.”

“They’re all cracked out in there and high on magic. The only thing you can get in there is—”

A shattering noise obliterated the stillness. We all looked at one another and then ran inside. The door was already unlocked, and Randy immediately ran toward the area we’d met Ren in before. We stopped halfway there. The girl who’d answered the door when Randy and I came the first time was face down in the carpet, her hair a tangled mess around her. Gabe pulled his shirt up and over his nose. “It smells like a freaking fresh cemetery in here.”

Randy bent down and pulled the girl over. Unstaring, grayed-out eyes met our own, sending a shiver through me. “Son of a bitch!”

He stood and moved on. Another body, a shirtless guy, was only a few feet away, staring straight up at the disgusting ceiling.

A gurgling sound pulled us out of the search for more bodies. Gabe ran forward. “We’ve got a live one.”

Randy and I moved forward. Next to a broken lamp, Ren’s body lay on its side. His chest barely moved, and his pale face was almost gray in the dusky room. “Ren?” I called out, taking his hand. It was cold and clammy.

Randy picked him up and set him on the couch. His head lolled to the side. His eyes stared at everything but us. If I hadn’t known better, it looked as if he’d OD’d on drugs. Crazy the amount of comparisons there were to magic and meth.

Gabe slapped Ren’s face a few times, and he finally shook it, his eyes coming into focus. He blinked. “Randy?”

“Yeah,” Randy said, his eyes still catching on the bodies strewn all over the floor. There were probably even more bodies in the bedrooms. This place was literally a whore house, so it wouldn’t surprise me if every one of them was full. Randy must’ve been thinking the same thing because he pulled on Gabe’s arm and looked at Travis. “You guys check the rooms.” He hiked his thumb over his shoulder pointing down the narrow hallway.

I knelt beside Ren, not daring to take his hand again. “What happened in here?”

Ren coughed. “Well, I found that guy you were calling to warn me about.”

I closed my eyes, taking in the information. Dupre had been here. As we’d suspected, he was the one draining all the witches’ bodies.

Ren reached out and pulled on my sleeve. “He wants you.”

I nodded, acknowledging him. We’d already known that.

“Cassie?” he said, his eyes suddenly widening. “Is she dead?”

I looked around the room. So far, he was the only one we’d found alive. “Which one’s Cassie?”

He looked around us, his face suddenly paling even further. He shook his head, his mouth twisting in agony. “She was alive when I first walked in. She told me this guy had shown up and offered them a magical hit.”

“He did the exact opposite,” Randy said, his voice threatening.

Ren nodded. “Drained them. Drained them right down into nothing. They barely had a damn thing to give him.”

I locked gazes with Randy. That was probably why they were dead. They didn’t have enough magical juice to even amount to anything, so he probably kept taking and taking until they died on him. If he wanted powerful witches why the hell would he come here? They bartered sex for magic.

I turned back to Ren. “You walked in on him, didn’t you?”

The corners of his eyes pulled down. “After finding Cassie, I gave her a bit of magic, hoping it would help her, but I just couldn’t stay with her. I could hear others moving around, so I kept going. He was draining Caleb when I got into this room. He’d tried to protect them, but this guy was all over him. When Caleb fell, it was my turn. I did what I could, but he was so strong. We fought for a while.”

That must've been one of the other reasons for the smell of sulfur and rotten meat in here. They'd been throwing negative spells at one another. It smelled like roadkill had been burned in the oven.

Randy sat back on his haunches and shook his head. "I think you're going to be okay, man." His jaw hardened. "Everyone else, though. It doesn't look like they made it."

Travis and Gabe came walking back up the hallway at that moment with solemn faces. They certainly didn't look like they'd found someone else alive back there. What a senseless waste and use of life. No, these weren't upright citizens, but they didn't deserve to die so one insane fucking witch could get a little hit of magic that probably wouldn't make a difference in the long run. Then again, he hadn't just taken out the women and men in here who wanted the magic, he'd also taken out the ones who were willing to give up some of their magic for sex. Maybe he'd gotten a bigger dose than I originally imagined.

Gabe came forward and put his hand on my shoulder. He gave a quick shake of his head.

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A muscle in Ren's jaw twitched. "These were good people."

"I know," Randy said.

What else could we say?

Ren sat up straighter as life began to return to him. He looked more like the Ren I knew from before. Not the Ren from the Reid's house. That had been an extra clean, more business-like Ren. The Ren who sat on the couch now looked like the Ren from when we first met. He leaned forward, his elbows coming to rest on his knees. "While he was leaving, he told me to give you a message."

My heart dropped into my stomach.

"He knows where your other coven member is, and he says he knows he still has the familiar on him. He's been watching him. He wants the familiar back." Ren looked up. "He thinks the only way to get the familiar off is to kill him."

The world blurred in front of me. Liam...dead? That wasn't going to happen. Gabe's fingers sank into my shoulder, grounding me.

"He said that was how the familiar got onto him in the first place. He told me he was going to kill him unless you guys found him first."

Travis swore. "How would he know where Liam is, and we don't? We're the ones connected to him."

Gabe ran his hands through his thick blond hair. “Maybe Dupre’s connected to the familiar and since the familiar is the one taking things over, he’s more attuned to him than we are to Liam.”

“Fuck!” Randy roared.

We all cowered a little at his outburst. Randy wasn’t scary. He truly wasn’t once you got to know him, but shit, I was right there with him. I wanted to break something or maim something, especially Dupre.

Ren stood, pushing us all back. He swallowed as he noticed all the bodies on the floor, but then he moved around the room, looking at things and under strewn pillows and broken glass while clutching his side. Finally, he turned. He stood up straight, or as straight as he could get, his hand outstretched holding a piece of lined paper. “The spell you need to get the familiar off him.”

I ran forward, tearing the paper out of his grip. “You got it? From the book?”

He nodded. “Turns out Dean wants to do business with me and was all too willing to give me this spell from his father’s book. You never would’ve gotten into the room, star baby. It has a familial lock on it. Only Reid’s can access it. I just played it off like one of the girls was so cracked out she thought she had a familiar on her and wanted to prank her about getting it off. He thought it was funny. Even led me down to the room to get this. The book is old, dark. The room itself is unlike anything I’ve ever seen. It gave me the creeps just being in it.” Goosebumps spread out over his body as he told us the story. “That guy, Dupre, he doesn’t need that familiar. If he gets it, he’ll be too powerful to take out.” Ren looked over, his scowl etching further into his skin as he found Cassie’s body. “And he needs to suffer like they did.”

I couldn’t agree more. He’d killed enough people.



Gabe took the spell from me and read it over. Travis stepped forward and told Ren to clear out of the house and go somewhere else for a while until they could get the house picked up. It was one of the jobs of the Order. We'd probably have to call in Walter and the other superiors to take a look. I peeked at Ren. He'd probably gathered by now that I was more than just Randy's girlfriend. If he brought me up in front of the superiors, they were going to ask questions.

Gabe pulled on my hand and we left the house, stepping our way over trash and dead bodies. It made me sick to my stomach to see the way these people died and in these gross conditions too. Dupre was a special brand of fucked up. He needed to be taken out, so he didn't hurt the people, or witches, of Salem anymore.

Despite not knowing where to find Liam, we all picked up the pace toward the Jeep. Travis connected with Seth Hartle but shook his head afterward. Whatever Dupre had going on, Seth Hartle wasn't involved with it anymore. He'd dropped his goon and went on to more disgusting things.

"Liam wouldn't have gone very far," Randy said. "He'd stay in Salem. I know it. Let's go back there and see what we can find."

Gabe and I both buckled our seatbelts, preparing for Travis's death-defying driving. We needed to find Liam before Dupre did. However, there was no chance of that happening because Dupre already knew where he was, and we hadn't a Goddamn clue.

"Listen," I said, "Granny said we were stronger now that Travis and I..."

"Fucked?" Randy suggested.

"Yes," I said matter-of-factly. "Let's just do a locator spell again. Throw everything you have into it. If we don't get to Liam..." I trailed off. No reason to beat the

implications of not finding him over their heads. We'd all heard Ren and knew what was at stake.

"We should go to headquarters and do one on the pentagram," Travis said. "We'll be stronger there and we could use every bit of magical help we can get."

Now that he had a destination, I sat back, watching the world pass by as if nothing else was wrong with the world. The trees still swayed in the wind, the clouds still rolled in. Nothing could change nature. No matter what was going on outside it, it didn't relent. Just because a piece of my world was falling apart, didn't mean the actual world was slipping through the cracks. It seemed so contradictory. So wrong. If Liam really was in danger, wouldn't something in the world be going wrong? Maybe the sun wouldn't come up tomorrow. Or maybe the birds wouldn't sing. It was only fair that some other jaw-dropping thing would happen alongside it. If someone like Liam died, the world should feel it.

But no, I couldn't think like that. Liam would be fine. We would all be fine.

Gabe leaned over and pressed a kiss to my ear before whispering. "Ren knows too much. When we call in the Order..."

I nodded, understanding what he was saying. Liam wasn't here, but we'd procrastinated too long. Gabe interlaced his fingers with mine. I sat forward, clearing my throat. Randy twisted in his seat and Travis caught my eye in the rearview mirror. "I know this isn't the best time to bring this up, but Gabe and I have been keeping something from you guys. Something we haven't been able to figure out an answer to, and now that we're most certainly going to have to come out as a coven now, it's going to affect everyone."

Shadows moved in under Randy's eyes. He glared at Gabe first, then me. "And?"

“Gabe’s grandfather—”

Gabe squeezed my fingers, and I stopped talking. He gave me a small smile and then stared down Travis and Randy. “You can be pissed at me. It was my idea not to say anything. Norah didn’t like it from the start. I have talked to my grandfather about a girl being the fifth. He said it would never happen again, that it would throw the balance of magic off. He said it happened before, back in the day, and that the coven ended up self-imploding.” He shrugged as if that was that. Much like how I wouldn’t apologize for putting myself at risk with the Reid’s, Gabe was unapologetic about this. It was what it was.

“So, this is why we aren’t telling Walter about Norah?” Travis said, his voice hard.

“That and the feelings we all have,” Gabe answered. “You can’t deny you also didn’t have those same feelings or else you would’ve been the first one to say something to them.”

“Me?” Travis asked, his voice incredulous. “You’re the one who is all up on Order business. It’s in your family.”

“Don’t fight,” I begged. We really needed to be a team at the moment.

Gabe ignored me. “If I’m the one who should’ve thought it a bad idea to lie to them, which obviously I didn’t, then we shouldn’t even be having this conversation. It’s better that the Order didn’t know about her, and it’s still better they continue not to know about her.”

“Do you think there’s truth to it?” Randy asked, staring at me. “Norah’s being here will affect us in that way.”

I swallowed. “Granny said I was exactly where I was supposed to be even though it wasn’t the best place for me.”

“And Walter himself has said the pull doesn’t pull the wrong person in.”

“Which is why I don’t understand why we can’t just tell him Norah’s the fifth,” Travis said.

Randy crooked a finger at me and I moved forward. He pressed a soft kiss to my lips. “It doesn’t matter to me what happened in the past or what happens now. Norah’s here to stay. They can’t break us up. She got the pull, and even if they tried to do that. It’s not like we would let it happen.”

“Agreed,” Travis said.

I looked up, smiling at him in the mirror.

“I’m glad you said that,” Gabe started. “Because you were the main reason why we weren’t saying anything. You weren’t on board the Norah train yet, and I was worried you would’ve turned us all in if you thought we were going to implode.”

Travis’s eyebrows furrowed. “You guys thought I would do that to you?”

I needled my finger into his shoulder. “You have been known to be a dick.”

He ignored my teasing, his mouth slightly open as he tried to catch Gabe’s eyes in the mirror. “I just thought you guys knew it’s always been about the coven for me. Majority rules. Even if I’d never hopped on board the Norah train, that wouldn’t

mean I would've turned you guys in for it. That's not who I am."

"Can we stop using train as an analogy for me?"

"What should we use?" Gabe asked.

"Sweet ass?" Randy suggested.

I glared at him and shook my head.

Travis chuckled. "If I'd never hopped on Norah's sweet ass, I still wouldn't have turned you guys in for it."

I burst out a laugh. "That means something completely different."

The vehicle erupted into ridiculous laughter. At the same time my heart leaped, it came crashing down. We were missing one very specific, one very important piece. I needed Liam here, so he could blush at the 'jumping on Norah's sweet ass' comment. I missed him. Holy fuck, it was like a hole to the heart.

The Jeep silenced in an instant as the heavy dose of reality hit us over the heads. "We'll be there soon," Travis said.

Right now wouldn't be soon enough for me.

## Chapter Twenty-One

As soon as we entered the city of Salem, my stomach clenched. I hissed, trying to breathe through the pain. Travis lost control of the car for a second and then twisted the wheel to get it back on track. I looked up. "You felt it too."

He cringed. “It’s back to normal. Damn. I don’t know why I was ever mad I was missing out on this. I forgot how bad it sucked.”

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“Me too,” Gabe said. He rubbed his abdominal area. “More powerful than before. I guessed you getting with Travis has everything right back on track.”

Travis smirked. “Who knew my dick could change lives?”

My mouth dropped, then I laughed. Loud. I pushed his shoulder. “Just follow the fucking pull. I bet it’s going to take us right to Liam and Dupre.”

Travis’s gaze narrowed at the road in front of him. He blew past yellow lights and rolled through stop signs. It became obvious we were being pulled toward the wharf area of Salem.

“Hopefully this means we’re not too late,” Gabe said.

“We’re not too late,” Randy said, his voice terse.

I moved forward and put my hand on his shoulder. He reached behind and covered mine with his big mitts. Heat flowed off him. He was burning up.

We were getting closer. The pull was at its peak, and that could only mean we were almost at our destination. “No fucking way,” Gabe said.

“What?” I asked, peering through the windshield.

“We fucking checked here,” Randy said.

I looked up at a big building, stone, and ancient, sat against a backdrop of the ocean.

“What is this place?” I asked.

Travis maneuvered the Jeep to the side of the road and slammed on the brakes. He sat back in his seat as he jammed the shifter into Park. “This is where we stripped Jax. We haven’t used it since.”

“Another headquarters?”

“Kind of,” Gabe explained, pulling me out of the car. “It’s not our secret headquarters. This is official Order business offices. The witches around Salem know about it and come here when they think they need us. We haven’t really used it much after Jax.”

We all stood outside the Jeep, staring up at the building. For them, this all meant something deeper. Travis’s face was pale when I looked at him. I stood up on my tiptoes and kissed his cheek. “You couldn’t save Jax, but we can save Liam.”

His gaze hardened, and we all strode forward. A blast of fresh rain aroma hit me in the face as Gabe did the visibility spell to see what we had going on inside. Sure enough, Liam and Dupre were there, locked in a magic battle. We started to run, Randy barging in through the door and leading us all to an enormous room. A huge painting that reminded me of the Last Supper adorned one wall above a row of chairs. In the middle of the floor where Dupre and Liam currently fought was an enormous pentagram.

“And here they are,” Dupre said. He sent a zap of magic toward Liam that knocked him on his ass.

I gasped. Liam. Poor Liam. He looked like absolute shit. He had bruises and cuts all over his body. His usually short hair had grown out and was wild around his face. His glasses hung crookedly on his nose. I ran toward him. “Liam!”



Travis pulled me back. The serpent familiar on Liam coiled in and around his skin. Liam sat up, eyeing us, but there wasn't anything recognizable in his features. His eyes were hard, his gaze was cold. My heart split jaggedly as if ripped apart. He looked as if he'd barely recognized me.

"Look, Liam, they're here to save you," Dupre prodded.

He laughed darkly. "Save me?" He shot to his feet and smirked. His eyes glinted red as he pulled on his magic, forming a fire ball in his palm. "I'm perfect. I'm strong, I'm powerful. Look what I can do now." The flames rose upward toward the ceiling in a quick burst. It heated my face, and we all stumbled back. I tripped over my own feet, as my body surged, some of the magic leaving me and flowing into Liam's trick. He raised his eyes to the ceiling in awe. No doubt it had never been that big before.

"I'm going to need that familiar back now," Dupre said.

Liam matched his disdainful tone. "That's not going to happen. We've bonded. We understand one another."

Randy stalked forward. "Don't say that. You're not like that familiar. You're good."

Liam's gaze narrowed at Randy. "You just want to keep me the shy, unimportant piece of shit I was, so you could have all the girls to yourself. You're just trying to keep me down."

"You have Norah."

Liam's gaze flicked to me. "And you still involved yourself in what we had. She wouldn't even want me if you weren't there either."

"That's not true," I said, shaking my head. "That's not true at all. Is that what the

familiar is telling you? It's a lie, Liam."

"No, it's not. The Liam before didn't get girls like you. I'm just a charity case. I'm a member of the coven, so you have to be with me too. Well, I'm not just the shy, smart one anymore." His eyes glittered as he threw the flames to the side of the room where they exploded and made a charcoaled dent in the wall. "I can do things now other than recall information and look stuff up on the computer. I'm not going to be the guy who just sits around and waits for you all anymore. I'm not going to be the outsider again. The weak one. The one everyone takes pity on."

Gabe moved forward, his hands outstretched. "You were never that person."

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“What would you know?” Liam asked. “You were never the one who accompanied you guys to parties and had the girls look at you like you were the odd one out. Scrawny, ugly.”

My temper flared. “That’s bullshit,” I said. I stepped forward, but Travis held me back.

Liam never missed anything. His stare found where Travis and I connected. His eyebrows flew in the air. “Ah, so I see we’ve finally managed to get Travis, too. Come on, Norah, you can’t really think you would’ve kept stringing me along now that you have him. You would’ve dropped me.”

I pushed Travis off and ran forward. I took Liam’s hands. They flared so hot they burned, but I kept them there, anyway. “You know that’s not true.” I looked him deep in his dark eyes. “You know me, Liam. We have a connection separate from them. I want to help you. I want to take the familiar off, so you can go back to who you were. Who we were.”

Liam laughed in my face and tore his hands away from mine. “I don’t want to go back.”

“This is all very touching,” Dupre said. He flicked his gaze toward the second floor of the room where other chairs sat looking over the railing. “But I don’t have time for this. You can join me, Liam, if you want, but I’m going to need you to take Norah, too. I still have a promise to uphold.”

I turned toward him. “Go fuck yourself. Liam would never join you.”

Liam scratched his chin, his head dropping to the side as he regarded Dupre. “What’s in it for me?”

My eyes bugged out of my head. I turned toward Liam, who openly looked at Dupre curiously. He really wanted to know.

“Liam,” Travis said, his voice hard. “What the hell is wrong with you? This isn’t you.” He swallowed, no doubt seeing Jax in front of him. We were in the same building, probably in this very same room. The seating, the pentagram. It was the witch equivalent to a courtroom. “Did you...” He stopped, taking a deep breath before he started again. “Did you hurt those witches, Liam? Did you drain them?”

Liam blinked, and my heart soared when he was repulsed by the idea. Thank God. He hadn’t gone as bad as we thought he had. Or at least didn’t let ourselves believe he had.

“No,” Dupre said. “That was all me. I just followed Liam around after I sensed the familiar one day. He led me to a bunch of witches, so I just went right back after him, soaking up all the witches’ magic.” An evil grin crossed his face. “I’m more powerful than you now, with or without the familiar.”

He shot his hands forward. A tangle of white magic exploded from them. I tried to block it, but Liam’s fire stunt had me weakened. The tangle of white fell over me. I tripped to the ground. The magic secured my wrists and feet and then dragged me toward Dupre.

I slid over the hard ground, coming to rest right next to his feet. Dupre smiled down triumphantly. “I knew I’d get you sooner or later.” He peeked up into the balcony again. “Jay will be so happy.”

A gust of wind knocked Dupre into the wall behind us. I looked up to find Travis’s

hands glowing red as he used his magic to control Dupre. I twisted and turned, but I couldn't get out of the magical restraints.

Liam diverted Travis's magic until it was pushing on me. I slid back into the concrete wall, hitting my head off it. For a second, I couldn't breathe with all the air rushing at me, but Travis immediately stopped the spell, and I gulped in a few breaths.

"I want to listen to him," Liam said, flicking his hand out at Travis. He sent Travis flying into the air, landing hard on the ground. Randy bent over to help him to his feet, and Gabe rushed toward them, the paper with the familiar spell on it in his hand.

With the two not paying attention, the guys pulled together. They closed their eyes, trying to get the restraints off me, but all it ended up doing was taking some of my magic, and nothing happened. I pushed and pulled against the white magic-like ropes, but they wouldn't budge.

"The more you struggle, the worse it is for you," Dupre said, smiling. "Jay came up with the spell himself."

"Well, good for fucking Jay."

Out of breath, and my body frazzled, I leaned against the wall and stayed still. Liam's gaze flicked toward me, and I held onto it. "This isn't you," I told him. A piece of the magical ties splintered my view of him. "Liam, you're the best person I know. Yes, you're smart, but that's not all you are. You know I find you attractive. You can't fake an attraction like that, and you certainly can't fake sex like that either." You and me, I mouthed, a little smile forming on my lips. It was impossible not to take happiness in all the moments we shared. He was sweet and caring. This person in front of me was not him. We needed that familiar off him. "Guys," I called out, looking at Randy, Travis, and Gabe.

They looked at me and nodded. I didn't know what the spell was, but I could certainly lend them any magic they needed.

"Now," I said.

I closed my eyes and felt what magic I had in me flow through my veins and skirt over the top of my skin. I built it up and built it up into my fingers before reaching out toward the group, releasing what I had toward them, hopefully giving the familiar spell a fighting chance. I needed my Liam back.

"I don't think so," Dupre said, realizing what we were doing.

He sent a blast of magic at Liam's chest and Liam flew backward into the opposite wall, hitting it with a sickening crunch. The magic flared and then went out in my fingertips. I looked around. The guys ran toward Liam, and here I was, still encased in this magical web.

Liam pushed himself to his feet, completely ignoring the guys. His eyes reddened as he gathered his magic in his hands again. I cried out, feeling the tug on all of us.

"Look what you're doing to her!" Randy shouted.

Liam looked to me, his expression almost complacent. He stared at me for a long time, but ultimately, the familiar won. He shot a fire ball at Dupre, which he fended off, sending it into a wall where another black, singed mark now decorated the place.

I hissed in a breath. I could feel myself growing cold, and knew I was getting pale, and worse, losing all my magic. My face was probably sunken in by now, but to top all of that off, I didn't care. The life that was inside me was being taken away. I had no idea my magic was that attached to everything inside me. It wasn't just a piece of me, it was me.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 3:44 am*

I sucked in a breath as Liam gathered his magic again. Travis grabbed Liam's wrist, and I slumped to the floor. For the moment, Liam was taking from Travis, and not just me. This was what was happening all along. Every time we all used magic together, the magic inside me got used up first. Like I was a lightning rod fueling them.

My head pounded, and my heart raced.

Travis grabbed Randy's hand and then Randy grabbed Gabe's. They closed their eyes, and I did the same. They started the spell again. Frayed at the edges, I tried to give them even the faintest spark in me.

Finally, Liam cried out. I opened my eyes just in time to see him fall to the floor. The snake leapt from his arm, coiling into itself and hissing.

Dupre laughed, calling to the serpent. "Thanks for doing my dirty work. Come here..."

I watched, looking at the scene, trying to crawl away from the serpent with as little noise as possible. I checked the guys' wrists quickly, noticing they still wore their all-seeing-eye beads which was supposed to help them from evil magic. I was still convinced that was why the familiar hadn't attached itself to me that night and attached itself to Liam instead. Liam and Dupre were the only ones who didn't have bracelets on.

"Don't let him attach to Dupre!"

The serpent swiveled his head around to me. He elongated, getting bigger and bigger. He moved along the pentagram, coming to a stop just in front of me. He towered over me, and I reached my bracelet hand out. The snake let out a loud hiss.

Thank fuck. That actually worked.

Dupre stepped forward. "Come here, serpent. You belong to me now."

The serpent lazily turned its head toward Dupre who shuffled back a few steps. The snake's bright red tongue shot out, and he hissed.

Another matching hiss came from the balcony, and the snake turned, his scaly neck arching and then moving to the floor again where it slithered away.

"What?" Dupre yelled, staring up at the balcony. "Why?"

I looked into the shadows, but I couldn't see anything. This guy was fucking crazy.

"I'm getting her!" he shouted. "Right now, I have her!"

A loud hiss erupted, so loud I cowered and still the sound reverberated through my head. It was like it attacked my brain cells, overpowering them, until that was all I heard.

Dupre grimaced and staggered back. I peeked over to the guys. All four of them were linked. A tiny knot formed in my stomach until it grew and grew. I started to fill with light again, feeling the purple spread through my limbs. I reached out and touched the white net and it sputtered, falling away.

I backed up, putting space between Dupre and I. He roared. He brought his hands together in front of him and threw a spinning ball of magic at me.



I blocked it, sending it into the wall holding up the balcony. A huge crack formed, and stones fell to the ground.

Rage overtook him. He shook, his body fueling his magic with madness. The guys ran toward me and we stood in a line facing him. He tried again, forming his magic in his palms. The negative around us was sucked into that one spot. We linked hands, forming a barrier. Nothing was getting through to us again. We had too much to fight for.

He released the ball. It spiraled through the air. I closed my eyes, feeling the impact of it until it bounced right back, barely getting through any of our defenses.

I peeked just in time to see the ball barreling right back for Dupre. His eyes widened, but it was too late to do anything about it. It hit him square in the chest. His mouth dropped, and he went flying into the wall. His head hit it with a sickening crack, and then he fell forward, landing in a heap face down on the stone floor.

I swallowed. Blood trickled from his head. Inching forward, it didn't take much to guess. Dupre was gone.

We'd won.

The air in the room shifted. It was no longer filled with negativity. The breath whooshed out of my lungs and I fell to my knees. I looked up, eager to find that one face to make sure he was okay. Liam was right there. His deep brown eyes staring back at me. His glasses were cracked, the lens splintered. He knelt next to me. I reached out to take his glasses off, letting them fall to the ground beside us. "Is it you?"

He bit his lip and looked away. "I'm so sorry, Norah. You know I would never—"

I launched myself forward, tackling him. Warmth spread through me as his arms came around my waist. I hugged him to me, and the others came right with us, their hands touching me, searching for any injuries on either of us.

I looked up, blinking at them. “We’re all okay.”

Travis nodded. “Dupre’s gone.”

I bit back the sarcastic retort. That much was clear based on all the blood and the fact that he hadn’t moved within the last minute to try to take us all out again.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 3:44 am*

Liam sat up, putting me in his lap. He stared at the guys. “I’m so sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Randy said. “It was the familiar.”

Liam nodded, but he didn’t look as if he fully believed him. None of us would’ve been able to take that serpent familiar on. It wasn’t just a demon’s plaything. It had a mind of its own. It could’ve went to Dupre once we expelled it from Liam, but it didn’t. Instead... I looked toward the balcony. The others followed my gaze. “There was someone else here.”

Travis shook his head. “They’re not here anymore. I can’t feel anything but us.”

“Jay?”

“I don’t bloody care right now,” Gabe said, pulling himself to his feet, and then helping me up. “Let’s just get back to the house.”

I waited as Liam got up after me, and then I took his hand. I wasn’t going to be letting that go anytime soon.

### Chapter Twenty-Two

We all squeezed together as close as we could in the living room. I sat on Liam’s lap while Randy was right next to us. Gabe sat next to him with Travis pulling a chair up next to Liam and me. It was a couple days after the big fight and Gabe had begged us all to watch the football/soccer games that were on TV.

The superiors had come and gone. They, along with the guys, cleaned up Dupre and the poor people at Ren's place. Randy gave him a heads up before they got there, telling him to go stay someplace else for the time being. The Order wouldn't approve of the kind of 'work' Ren did and was bound to try to do something about it if Ren was there. Plus, it worked in our favor because Ren wasn't there to tell them anything about me. Not that the Order wasn't skeptical.

Amazingly enough, Anna had made a full recovery. Since Dupre was dead, we couldn't really ask him what he'd done to her even though we were positive he was involved somehow. She may have been his first attempt, so something hadn't gone quite right with it. In any case, Murphy called Travis the day after Dupre died to tell him how much better she was doing. She was now home in their cute little house instead of in some psych ward.

Liam and I had been attached at the hip since we got him back. The other guys were getting antsy, I could tell, but I was just so scared of losing him again. Travis had told us on the way home that night that he used Liam's own powers to stop Dupre and get the familiar off him. We knew Liam was still connected to us because of the way he drained my magic, so he figured it would work the other way as well. With the five of us working together, plus the power from the Order pentagram, we were able to expel the familiar and take care of Dupre—finally.

I was relieved to see him go. He wouldn't be around to hurt anyone in Salem anymore. No more frazzled sorority houses, or cracked out witches, or sad people strangled to death by a Liderc. Jay was out there. He knew we'd killed off Dupre and he still hadn't gotten me yet either. That was still one thing I couldn't fathom. I could understand Dupre wanting revenge on me for giving him a fake voodoo doll, but Jay? As far as I knew, I didn't know the guy at all.

In the aftermath, we'd told Liam what Gabe's grandfather had said about me making the coven implode. He only laughed. "You think I didn't know that already? Gabe and Norah are the worst liars in this place."

Like the rest of us, though, it didn't really change anything. We were together, and we were staying that way. Implosion or not, we would come to that problem if it happened. If not, we would continue to do what we were brought together to do—help save Salem from lunatics like Dupre and Jay.

The only piece of new information that startled Liam was the mention of the Reid's. He was taking his time processing their involvement. Since we'd just gotten him back, I wasn't going to push it.

Liam kissed my cheek, and I stared up at him and smiled. "What was that for?"

He leaned over. "For not giving up on me."

"Never," I said, pulling him down for a real kiss. I sat back, brushing my finger across the orange all-seeing-eye bracelet I'd finally been able to give him. No more familiars for him. Ever.

Someone cleared their throat. "Don't tell me you guys are going upstairs again."

It was Gabe. He gave me a smirk when I looked over at him.

"You're too busy watching your soccer game, anyway." I bit my lip to keep from laughing.

"I'd give up football for you," Gabe said, emphasizing the word. He was bound and determined to make me say football one way or the other.

"Me too," Travis said. "Easily."

"I don't even like it all that much," Randy said, his eyes intent on mine.

Shit, I'd just opened a can of worms. It was a good thing we'd beaten Dupre and

weren't currently working on a case right now. As far as I was concerned, we had all the time in the world.

The End