



Dark Rapture

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Category: Dark Erotica

Description: The Catholic Church warns us about demonic possession. They teach us not to play with witchcraft, or we will open a door that no one can close. A door that will allow spirits and demons to enter our lives. So when I felt a pull towards the craft to find protection from my abuser, I did my best to ward off any evil. My focus was protection, and my spells were simple. I called to my ancestors and spirit guides to protect me. It wasn't enough. Instead, something insidious and profane answered my call. A demonic entity, hellbent on possessing me. The demon is offering me everything I want and need, and with each day that passes, it becomes harder and harder to deny him.

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Dark Rapture is an erotic horror novella with paranormal themes.

If you are devoutly religious, please reconsider reading this book. You may find that many parts of this story and the dialogue are too offensive. Content herein includes classic horror vibes, demonic possession, graphic sex, graphic violence and gore, flashbacks of childhood abuse, and blasphemy.

Readers discretion is strongly advised.

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The potent scent of cinnamon floods my senses, and I let my eyes drift closed as I breathe it in deeply. I've always loved cinnamon, mostly because it reminds me of the safety of my childhood home, and the delicious homemade banana bread my mom used to bake for our family every Sunday afternoon.

Reaching into the fragile glass jar that holds the aromatic spice, I pinch a small amount between my fingertips and set the jar aside. As I hold open a pocket sized brown cloth bag with my spare hand, I sprinkle the cinnamon over the mixture of herbs already deposited inside.

I lean forward slightly so that I can better peer inside the plain pouch, admiring the heady blend of burdock root, blackberry thorns, thistle, bay leaf, witch hazel and now cinnamon. The warm, earthy scents rise to meet my nose, and I allow my eyes to drift shut for a second time as the fragrance soothes me like a healing balm to my soul.

This isn't the first beginner spell I've attempted to cast, but the energy flowing around me right now makes me think that it will be the most powerful one yet. My lips part on a happy sigh, and I speak my intentions into existence, my body swaying gently back and forth as the incantation flows from me.

"I draw energy from the North, the South, the East, and the West," I begin, one hand cupping the brown pouch while the other moves in circles just above it. "I invoke the power of earth, air, fire, and water. Ancestors and spirit guides, hear my voice and lend me your power."

As I open my eyes, my attention is stolen by the silky wisps of flame from the five black candles set before me, each one placed at the five points of a pentacle at the

center of my altar. The gentle, amber light of the fire fights dutifully against the shadows clinging to every corner of this small walk-in closet that I recently converted into my altar room.

The space is big considering the size of my apartment, the landlord had mentioned they turned a second bathroom into closet space. There is enough room for me to kneel comfortably before the compact, custom built altar made of dark oak, with additional space around me to spare. The table is lined in a sheer tapestry, and adorned with various statues and symbols of witchcraft, all of which I purchased from a cozy little occult shop here in downtown Toronto.

The five candles are handmade from the occult shop as well, but it was me that carved intricate sigils into the soft, dark wax. Four runes to assist with the manifestation of the protection magic I am calling upon today, and one special sigil engraved into the candle situated at the top point of the sacred star.

I place the protection spell bag down at the center of a silver and black pentacle disk, surrounded by the burning candles, before reaching for the mortar and pestle on the far corner of the table and setting it in front of me.

Reaching into a medium sized selenite bowl on my left, I take out a smooth shard of obsidian and a rough piece of black tourmaline and drop it into the bowl before beginning to crush the fragile stones and combine them into a single, glittering dust. Using a delicate, decorative silver spoon, I gather up the crushed stones and deposit a generous spoonful into my protection spell bag. The crushed gems fall like stardust, settling over the herbal mixture. When the candlelight catches it just right, it looks as though I've caught tiny stars in my spell bag.

Chanting again, I steady my voice and lift the half-filled pouch up in my cupped hands. "Ancestors and spirits of protection, I invoke thee. I call upon your defensive energy, bind it to this bag and guard me against all that seek to harm me."

Closing my eyes, I visualize the manifestation runes I carved into my spell candles. I hold them in my mind's eye, directing all of my own energy towards them. Then comes the lone protection candle with the unique sigil. When it flashes to the forefront of my mind, I feel a surge of dark power that has me drawing in a sharp breath.

This particular sigil is ancient, that much I know for sure. I discovered it when I was exploring an occult shop that belonged to an elderly woman, her beautiful store was hidden among the back alleys of Rome.

The antiquated shop had a beautiful, old occult library situated at the back of the winding aisles. I spent well over an hour browsing through her collection, in awe of the dusty old books containing all the knowledge and guidance a new witch could ever dream of. I had never seen such an incredible collection anywhere else.

I was in Rome on vacation with my best friend, and she was upset when she woke up to find me gone from our hotel room, having spent half the morning in this woman's occult shop without her.

In the far back corner, there was a heavy, old book kept secured in an oversized glass box under a pair of bright lights. There was even a camera in the top corner of the room, directly facing the eerie hardcover book. I ignored the camera, because I felt compelled to look inside of the old tome, despite it clearly being off limits to the public.

Something from within the book was calling out to me, that much I'm sure of. The compulsion to open the box and get my hands on the old, worn out pages was so intense that I felt as though I was on auto-pilot as I lay my hands on it.

I still remember the smell of the book vividly, and the way the stiff pages felt beneath my fingertips. While it was obviously old and exposed to years of dust, it also

smelled faintly of wood smoke and midnight air. For the short period of time I held it in my hands, I was mesmerized by it. Obsessed with what it contained, with an intensity I can't explain. The language written inside was foreign to me, but that didn't stop me from devouring all that I saw.

The very first page that I opened it to had the word *praesidium* written in a heavy, old script at the top, with the most beautiful symbols painted onto the page beneath it. Four symbols, to be exact. It was one in particular, however, that stood out to me. I knew the moment that I saw it, that I would never forget it. The strange seal remains stuck in my memory to this very day.

When I eventually checked the internet for translation of the word I had found above the inked symbols, it became clear to me that its meaning pointed towards protection and defense. Since protection is both the reason for, and the primary focus of my journey as a witch, it felt like I was receiving guidance from some force within the universe. Something greater than me had called me to investigate that shop, and led me straight to the mysterious book hidden in the back.

A witch must always trust her intuition, and mine told me that I was meant to find this shop, this ancient book, and the memorable sigil contained inside. I had no intention of ignoring what could be a message from the universe, or divine guidance from my spirit guides.

I left Rome less than twenty-four hours after finding that book, something the shopkeeper obviously intended to keep away from the general public. The symbol I found printed on those well-worn pages was burned into my mind's eye, and the plane ride home was full of obsessive thoughts of what I had discovered that fateful morning.

As soon as I got home, I carved the sigil from memory onto one of my black candles and then set it back among the others on my altar. That particular one, which I

deemed my official protection candle for future spell casting, stood out among the rest. The rest of the candles were simple enough, with well known manifestation and intention runes etched into the soft wax.

Intuition guided me once again this morning, and I made the easy decision to use that sigil in today's important spell.

With my eyes still closed, I continue to cast my spell over the bag I now hold securely in my left hand. My right hand is held up, palm facing the candles on my altar. My body rocks forward towards the flickering lights, then back again, as I sway gently in the darkness.

The dark space outside of my closed eyes suddenly becomes brighter, which has my eyes fluttering open against the creeping shadows that surround me. The flames of the candles have doubled in size, flickering wildly as though charged with energy from my manifestations.

"Forces of divine protection, power of unbreakable defense, guard me. As I will it, so it shall be," I whisper with excited breaths, repeating the mantra three more times before tying the protection bag closed with a thick, black thread.

Once secured, I tuck the protection pouch into the front pocket of my jeans and rise from the floor, rubbing my now sore knees as I lean down to blow out the candles. Once they are all out, I turn away from my altar and reach out for the closet doorknob, only to find it suddenly illuminated by a single flickering flame from behind me.

Startled, I turn to stare at the candle that has once again become lit despite my surety that I blew it out a few seconds prior. I watch it for a moment, the orange and yellow flame dancing proudly before me.

Frowning, I step closer and blow it out a second time. I wait in the darkness for a few moments as the scent of smoke from the charred wick reaches my nose.

When it doesn't ignite back to life on its own yet again, I turn and leave my walk-in closet and re-enter my bedroom. The spell bag in my pocket is a comforting weight, and I sigh from the relief its presence brings me.

I feel good about the spell I've cast today, confident in my success. I may be new to witchcraft, but everything feels so natural and innate for me. It is as though I was destined to walk this path.

As I head for the bedroom door, my phone rings, vibrating along the top of my dresser where I set it down before heading into my altar space. I grab it as I leave my bedroom and head into the kitchen to make some tea.

"Hello?" I answer as I walk into the kitchen, immediately searching the metal tin on the counter for a suitable bag of tea.

"Hi Selene. How are you feeling this morning, honeybee?"

Involuntarily, I wince at my mom's nickname for me. When I was a kid, she explained that it was because I was sweet as can be unless someone was mean to me. My temper was apparently comparable to the sting of an angry bee.

As a child, the nickname used to make me feel special. An innocent, affectionate gift from my doting mother. It used to be a positive moniker, up until my uncle spoke the word into my ear while he forced himself on me.

It fell from his twisted mouth, defiled and poisoned. Now whenever I hear it, I have to fight back the urge to throw up.

“Hey Mom. I’m good, just about to start getting ready,” I tell her, rubbing my eyes with my free hand as I select a bag of fragrant green tea and start brewing it.

“Great! I’ve got the roast started in the crock pot, but I’m going to need your help with the macaroni salad and the vegetables,” she tells me, her voice loud over the clatter of dishes I can hear in the background. She is likely cleaning up as she cooks, something she has always done without fail. She used to tell me growing up that a good housewife didn’t leave a mess while she was cooking, she always kept her kitchen clean.

My father used to joke, and lovingly refer to our kitchen as her base of operations. Dad has always been a doting husband to my mother, never failing to thank her for all of her efforts around the home. I was a lucky kid, in the sense that my parents always had a strong, healthy relationship.

“Did you confirm who is coming?” I ask, already dreading her answer. I love my family, all except one particular member of it.

“Oh, yes. It will be me and your father, your brothers, grandma and grandpa. Oh, and Aunt Claire and Uncle Jake are coming too.”

I’m looking forward to seeing my paternal aunt, but that’s where my excitement ends.

Uncle Jake. I flinch as though his very name is a slap across the face. As my stomach turns, I am suddenly very grateful that I haven’t eaten breakfast today because I likely would have lost it right then and there.

I’ve repressed many memories associated with my mother’s brother, even our benign encounters. My subconscious mind has effectively blacked out his name and face from my memories to protect my psyche from the splintering distress of post traumatic stress.

“Okay, Mom. I’ll see you soon.” My thoughts turn back to the protection spell bag in my pocket, because nearly instantly it feels as though it has doubled in size and weight. The forces that guide me must be trying to remind me that I’ve cast this spell, therefore I will be safe no matter what I have to face at this family dinner.

My hand, trembling slightly, drops to feel the outline of it beneath the layer of denim fabric that conceals it. I close my eyes and take a steadying breath, trusting in the magic.

“Oh, okay, honeybee. Don’t forget to bring the vanilla extract for the cookies. See you this afternoon!”

“Bye Mom.”

“Bye Selene!”

I end the call and tuck the phone into my back pocket, grabbing the dark green mug from the coffee maker on my kitchen counter so I can walk it over to stand in front of the sink. As I stand there, I gaze out of the slightly dirty window at my small patio garden out back. The window is large, surrounded by hanging pots with various plants I use for spell casting and wards.

There are several hand crafted hanging ornaments made of old wood and glossy obsidian stone, with protective runes burned into the rough wood pieces, hanging among the assorted greenery. Nobody could enter this space and feel anything but the safe, positive energy I’ve brought into my living space.

All of my thoughtful warding controls the energy here in my apartment, blocking the negativity that pokes and prods at the barriers shielding me from the outside world.

With a weary sigh, I turn my attention to the large wooden box at the center of my

garden which grows atropa belladonna, otherwise known as deadly nightshade. The plant has been growing out of control in the last two weeks, and has required a lot of pruning to keep it in the space I had designated for it.

I haven't done anything differently with my garden lately, so I couldn't figure out why the poisonous plant has suddenly decided to grow rapidly. Especially considering the fact that it's autumn, not spring. At this point, it really shouldn't be growing anymore until spring.

I bring the warm ceramic mug to my lips, tipping it towards my mouth to drink the steamy, earthy tea. The feeling of warmth spreads from my mouth and down to my belly, soothing my nerves.

Lingering on thoughts of my forbidden plant, I can't help but wonder if my own thoughts had anything to do with its sudden speed of growth. It was only a couple weeks ago that I stood in this exact spot, staring at the plant as I fantasized about inviting my uncle over and sharing a cup of tea with him.

A lethal cup of nightshade tea. Sweetened with honey and a few of the midnight black-coloured berries from the unforgiving plant.

I smile to myself, taking another sip of my tea, realizing that it was likely that fantasy that fed my sweet little plant into growing so big for me. I have learned that intention is everything, and since I started my journey as a witch I have been very conscious of how I direct my thoughts and words.

The day I stood in front of this window, watching my deadly nightshade patch while rain poured heavily from the darkened sky above, I set my intentions for it.

Words and thoughts are magic. As above, so below. As I wish it, so it shall be. The fantasy was so powerful in my mind, I must have sown it into the plant itself.

My thoughts wander as I stand there sipping my tea, trying not to focus on tonight's family dinner for my father's 56th birthday. I let myself zone out, staring out into the beautiful little garden, until the sound of glass shattering on the floor shocks me out of my quiet contemplation.

I turn so abruptly, if my mug wasn't already mostly empty it would have splashed hot liquid all over my hands. My eyes scan the room until I find the remnants of a glass cup scattered in sharp shards across the floor, on the other side of the room. My eyes focus on the mess, my heart thumping wildly in my chest, before turning to glance at the cupboard to my right.

The cupboard door is cracked open slightly, and confusion settles in as I investigate it. I always do the dishes before bed, and put everything away in the cupboard. It's my nightly ritual, so I know that I didn't leave that glass out on the counter where it could have fallen.

Even if it did fall, there's no reason it should have ended up all the way across the room as far as it could reach. The force needed to send it flying that far across the room must have been significant, much greater than what gravity alone could cause.

It dawns on me how eerily silent my apartment has become. Not a single sound can be heard except for my breathing. Not a single bird is singing outside, none of my neighbours are making any ambient noise, and my apartment is as quiet as the dead. The silence is a living thing, an ominous presence invading my usually peaceful and positive space.

I shiver as goosebumps erupt across my skin, feeling an urgent twinge of fear from the pit of my stomach. Something feels... wrong. I can't quite put my finger on exactly what that something is, though.

"What the fuck," I whisper, and even that seems far too loud in the deafening silence.

I glance around the apartment, and it suddenly feels too empty. Despite living in a triplex on a busy street, I feel strangely alone right now. Alone, but not quite.

It feels like there is something else here, but that thing doesn't feel particularly human. My intuition is telling me that something sinister has invaded my home, a presence I need to try to send away.

My gaze narrows as I stare at the shattered glass, scattered across the worn wooden floor, the broken pieces like a dark omen. With a sigh, I turn back towards my window to grab a bundle of dried white sage from the sill.

There are several smudge sticks scattered around my apartment, gifts given to me by my best friend Talise who is both a green witch and a knowledgeable Indigenous woman. She wanted to make sure I had all of the protection I needed as I began to practice witchcraft, and I was grateful for her foresight now.

Talise told me that her sacred Haudenosaunee ancestors had blessed the bundles during her rituals, which she explained as she placed them around my home one quiet Saturday morning during a visit. My beloved friend assured me that they would lend their strength to help keep me safe on my journey.

That's why I instinctively reach for one now, holding the bundle firmly in my hand and grabbing a packet of matches to use to ignite the tips of the dried herb.

When I turn back towards the shattered glass, I strike one of the matches on the side of the box to light it. With a strong puff of breath, I exhale on the small flame until it reduces to embers, the smoke billowing dutifully from it, filling the space in front of me with fragrant wisps.

I speak in hushed tones, my breath mingling with the smudge smoke, "Ancestors, please guard my home from forces that seek to harm me."

I walk through the eerie silence, each tentative step made with careful consideration for where each shard of glass landed, waving the sage bundle to disperse the smoke. I touch the four corners of every room, repeating my mantra, until my entire apartment is bathed in the cleansing and protective presence of white sage.

When I'm finished, I extinguish the embers and set the bundle back on the sill. Grabbing a broom and a dust pan, I sweep to collect the broken glass so I can throw it away. When I'm done cleaning the mess, things feel better. Whatever presence was here moments ago, it doesn't feel heavy and oppressive anymore.

Breathing a sigh of relief, I put everything away and finish tidying up in the kitchen. I take the opportunity to tidy the rest of the apartment, too. Organizing and cleaning always makes me feel more grounded and in control of my space.

As I wander from one end of my apartment to the next, my thoughts turn to the spell I cast earlier today. Something tells me that the broken glass and the re-lit flame in my altar room are connected, and I can't help but wonder if my protection wards are strong enough to keep me safe as I dabble with witchcraft.

Not even I know what dark entities linger in the spaces between this world and the next. Growing up, the church warned us all to steer clear of magic and the occult. I still remember the Priest warning us that exposing ourselves to magic meant exposing ourselves to the Devil.

What's done is done, and I have no regrets. I've done what I need to do to protect myself from him, and I won't apologize for that. All I can do now is strengthen the protective warding around me and my home, and hope that it is enough to deter any baneful evil that may find me casting spells in the dark.

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The cold autumn winds rustle the leaves of every tree in the neighbourhood, the sun hanging low in the sky and casting brilliant rays of light through the various colours of leaves adorning each large, towering tree.

The bus ride over was chilly, but beautiful. It's a charming late afternoon in the middle of fall, the city painted in the stunning spectrum of rustic hues and pale, yet warm shades. The sky is clear and blue, which means the warmth of the sun is a pleasant contrast against the bite of the cool wind.

I am in a pretty decent mood as I wander up the long driveway that leads to my parents' modest, two story brick house. Although it's an old structure, my parents have maintained my childhood home with a lot of love and care. It shows, despite its age.

As I reach the middle of the driveway, dread begins to bloom inside of me like disease taking root. Although my bus ride over here was enjoyable, nothing ruins my mood quite like knowing my abuser is just behind the door I now have to walk through.

Before I can spiral down into the unforgiving depths of my anxiety, something unusual catches my attention on the periphery of my vision.

A massive bird is perched in the gnarled branches of my parent's ancient maple tree, sitting at the center of their front yard. An owl, oversized and unusually dark, sits silently among the vibrant red leaves.

The raptor's beautiful feathers are dark like black smoke, with pale grey speckles

catching the beams of sunlight as they break through the leaves. What bothers me the most are the two massive, black globes of eyes like infinite voids set in its pale face.

I am struck by both the sight of it, and the oddity of seeing it out in broad daylight in the middle of suburbia. This has to be the largest owl I have ever seen, watching me with its unnerving gaze, as still as a statue.

If its head wasn't following me as I moved, I'd almost believe it was a lifelike decoration my dad stuffed up there himself. He loves birds, and he has a few special figurines of his favourite types on the mantel in the living room. A cardinal, a blue jay, a yellowhammer, a starling, and a swallow. I remember each one, because my mom and I bought them for him as gifts for holidays over the years.

As I watch the unusual owl, a shiver travels from the nape of my neck all the way down my spine. Pulling my dark grey cardigan tightly around me, I keep my eyes on the bird as I will my feet to move and keep walking up to the front door.

I wish it would do something normal, like flutter its wings or hop along the branches, but it doesn't. I can't shake the feeling that something is wrong with it, like it's another omen promising the coming of something bad.

"Today just keeps getting weirder," I murmur out loud as I step up onto the modest, covered porch. With a narrowed gaze, I offer the owl another few seconds of my attention before a noise pulls me away.

The door opens, though I can't remember knocking, and my mother ushers me inside.

"Oh, honeybee, it's so chilly out. Come in!" she says, placing a gentle kiss on my forehead as we move. I step into the entry way of their cozy two story home on the outskirts of North York.

“The sun is still warm, though. I’m looking forward to curling up with a book and a blanket tonight,” I tell her with a smile, and the smile she returns is beaming and full of adoration.

“Oh, and a hot cup of tea!” she exclaims excitedly, taking my bag from me and setting it on the tall side table on the right. It must be genetic, because my mom’s love of tea rivals my own. I’m fairly certain we both polish off anywhere from three to five cups of the steamy brew every single day.

“Don’t worry, we’ll send you back with a belly full of home cooking, and it will be perfect!”

My sweet mother. She is the epitome of gentleness and warmth. If she knew what her brother did to me whenever she left me at his house for him to babysit me, she’d never be able to recover from it. I am almost certain that confessing his crimes to her would give her a very real heart attack.

I never had it in me to be the reason my mom develops something heavy like depression. Not to mention the risk of my uncle killing her, like he always promised he would do, if she ever found out about the abominable things he was doing to me.

“Come say hello to your father!” she says with excitement in her voice, guiding me deeper into their home with a gentle hand on my back. I walk through the entryway and into the living room, the cozy modern feel is as welcoming as Mom is.

The warm beige walls are adorned with black framed photos of birds, and many photographs of me and my brothers. The bay window is open wide, the brown and honey coloured curtains fixed to the sides to let in all the gorgeous evening light.

I find Dad sitting in his favourite recliner in one corner of the room, pointing at the TV with a scowl on his face, raving about the football game he is currently watching

with my brothers Josh and Sam, my grandpa Rick, and him.

I choose not to look at Uncle Jake. “Hey, Dad,” I say, only to be met with my dad’s cheesy grin.

“Hey, Selene!”

As he rises from his chair to come greet me, he opens his arms for a hug and I immediately step into them. His soft cotton argyle sweater vest smells like his woodsy cologne, and I bury my face in his shoulder to delay the inevitability of saying hi to everyone else. “Happy birthday, Dad.”

“Thanks sweetheart, I’m glad you came,” he tells me, giving me one more squeeze before releasing me.

My dad loves me, of course he does, but I am also certain that he would catch a murder charge if he knew what his wife’s brother did to his only daughter. Telling my family what happened to me would cause too much damage, and that’s the main reason I’ve kept my uncle’s secret for so long.

I love my family, and the last thing I want to do is destroy them all with the truth of what happened to me. Even if it means enduring the monster’s presence at family gatherings.

I smile up at him as I exit the safety of his embrace, leaning around him to wave to the small group of people sitting on the big, comfortable tan sectional facing the wall mounted TV.

“Hey, guys.”

My two older brothers greet me with a wave before turning their attention back to the

game everyone is watching, while my uncle just stares at me without uttering a single word. Nobody notices, because he is notorious for being quiet and keeping to himself when we all get together. I only offer him a split second of a glance before turning my attention to my grandpa.

“Hey, babydoll,” he says with a soft smile, his kind eyes full of warmth and happiness. He loves spending time with us all like this, he’s always bragging to everyone about how amazing his grand-kids are.

“Hi Grandpa,” I greet him warmly as I step into his arms for a hug. My grandpa is a good, kind soul that really loves the outdoors. He’s the sole reason Dad developed a love of bird watching, who in turn passed that same hobby on to me.

Once I am done saying hello to the people that matter, Mom wraps an arm around my shoulders and ushers me into the kitchen, where my aunt and grandma are busy putting our dinner together. I greet them both before pulling the requested supplies from my bag, depositing them on the counter before stepping aside to wash up at the kitchen sink so I can help with the remaining cooking and baking.

As we settle into our appointed tasks in preparation of family dinner, the conversation between us flows easily. Mom tells us about the pottery class she runs every Saturday, and grandma gives my mom and my Aunt Claire a cookie recipe she tried recently that was a huge hit at her church a few weekends ago.

I listen to them chat away while I prepare a tray of honey oatmeal cookies to put in the oven, nodding and smiling when necessary, trying not to focus on who is lurking in the living room just beyond the kitchen doorway.

I subtly touch the protection spell bag in my pocket several times, any time I feel I need to refocus and clear my head. It’s also helping to keep my anxiety down, which I am grateful for. I believe in the magic, and I believe in the love of my ancestors, so I

force myself to believe that I am safe because I have it with me.

When dinner is finally ready, I help Mom finish setting the table before she calls everyone in to eat. We gather around the one of a kind, old oak table in the dining room, and I take the chair closest to the exit.

Of course, Uncle Jake decides to sit across from me at the table. As much as I try to set myself up to maintain the utmost distance, he always finds a way to achieve the closest proximity to me that he can without garnering any attention from the rest of our family.

My stomach twists and flips as dread and anxiety finally overwhelm me, but I still manage to put a decent amount of food on my plate despite my trembling hands. I will not let him see me upset, and I won't let the rest of my family think anything is wrong. I'm not a child anymore, and I can handle this.

I can handle this.

I can.

Nausea slams into me. I take a deep breath in an effort to calm my frantic heart. My hand drops to my hip, slipping into my pocket to grip the spell bag contained within. I hold it until my heart stops racing, and my stomach settles. Only a few moments, moments that I keep my eyes on Mom as she explains what food we've prepared tonight.

The spell is working, my nerves are soothed by the protective forces I've manifested to get me through today. When my hand returns to the table, I feel in control again.

Mom says a quick prayer, thanking God for our food, and for Dad's good health. Although I don't pray with my family, I do say a private thank you to the magic I

keep in my pocket.

When we all finally begin to eat, a foot bumps mine under the table. I freeze as though the brutal winds of winter have descended upon me, my gaze lifting to the man sitting across from me. He's watching me while he eats, his arrogant brown gaze narrowed ever so slightly. Just enough to tell me he is upset that I haven't spoken to him.

My mind represses the nightmarish memories most of the time, but my body remembers. It always remembers.

Pain sparks at the base of my spine, rippling through me like a bolt of electricity. I flinch, and try desperately to hide the swell of emotion, but a memory assaults me against my will.

"Honeybee." He groans the pet name into my ear. Sweaty hands leave my waist, reaching forward to grip my throat. Tears fall from my eyes like acid rain, leaving hot trails all over my face. I can't stop him. I'm so small, and he is too big. He never listens when I cry and beg him to stop.

"You tell anyone about this, and I'll kill your mom and dad. I'll kill your brothers, too. The police might catch me, but everyone will be dead first."

My body hurts so much. I hate when he babysits me.

"Do you want to be all alone with no family, Selene?"

I shake my head and cry. I don't want to be alone. I want to be safe.

"Then don't you tell anybody."

I was only six years old. What feels like fire-breathing dragons with knives for wings rip around inside my stomach like a destructive tornado, and what little food I've eaten so far threatens to leave me. I swallow the agony down, deep down where I can hide it from everyone around me.

"Excuse me," I say quietly, getting up from my seat and heading straight for the bathroom. When I shut the door behind me, my numb fingertips struggle to lock it. Once it clicks securely into place, I turn away and lean back against the door so I can slide all the way down until I am sitting, drawing my knees up to my chest.

Silent tears fall so fast and thick that I struggle to catch my breath and stay quiet. I let it out as quietly as I can. I let several years of trauma induced misery fall from my eyes in silence.

It takes every ounce of strength in me to stay quiet despite the violence of the tears pouring from my eyes. The effort drains every bit of energy from my body.

In an instant, my soul feels like a lifeless desert. Scarred from scorching winds, fracturing rocks, and devastating earthquakes leaving fissures like gaping wounds. My chest aches so profoundly I feel like I'm having a heart attack, but death never comes, and the suffering remains the same.

I close my eyes and rock back and forth, desperate to soothe myself.

When I can breathe again, I stand up and turn towards the sink, turning cool water on to splash across my face. I pat myself dry with a towel from the rack and then stare up at my reflection.

Reaching into my pocket, I pull out my protection spell bag and open it up. Reaching inside, I grab some of the contents between three shaky fingers and sprinkle it in a circle around me. The dried herbs and glittering dust fall around me like a spectral

shield.

“I need you. Hear my voice and protect me,” I say quietly, taking another smaller pinch of the mixture and sprinkling it directly over me. “Please. Hear my voice and protect me. As I will it, so it shall be.”

I take a few more minutes to put myself back together before I finish up and head back to the dining room, only to see Dad shaking my uncle’s hand and Mom escorting him to the door.

“What’s going on?” I ask my brother Josh as I sit back down at the table, turning my head to face him so he can hear my hushed words.

“Jake’s going home. He got all pale and dizzy suddenly, says he feels sick,” Josh shrugs, like he doesn’t care either way.

I glance down at my plate as my parents say goodbye to my uncle, and he promptly exits the house. My hand falls to my lap, and I clutch at the bump where my spell bag sits within the denim pocket. I squeeze my eyes shut and say a quiet thank you in my head, before we all settle back in to finish dinner.

“Thank you for coming, sweetheart,” Dad says as I give him another hug.

“Happy birthday, Dad,” I say for the second time, genuine love for my father evident in my voice.

Mom embraces me and gives me a gentle squeeze, “Please text me when you’re home so I know you’re safe.”

I hug her back, “Of course, Mom. Thanks for dinner, it was amazing as usual.”

“Love you,” my parents say in unison as I head back down their driveway and turn down the street in the direction of the bus stop. “Love you too!” I call back with a wave.

The bus ride home is quiet, and unusually empty for this time of day, except for one guy wearing black pants and a matching hoodie sitting behind me somewhere at the back.

I looked at him briefly when I first got on the bus, only to be met with his blank stare. Knowing that it’s never a good idea to stare at strangers on the bus, I quickly looked away and took one of the seats somewhere between the middle and the front. I tried not to pay him any attention, just in case he turned out to be a creep.

Sitting farther towards the front of the bus doesn’t make me feel any better, however. The longer I sit in my seat, the more on edge I begin to feel. The energy in here just feels wrong, like something foul is hiding somewhere in here, making the atmosphere dense and unpleasant.

I’m trying my best to convince myself that I’m just overreacting. The guy is probably totally innocent, and it’s getting late in the evening so I’m just feeling unsettled after my run in with my uncle.

With a deep sigh, I pull out my phone so that I can scan through a couple of previously ignored text messages from my friends. Arianna wants to meet for lunch next week, so I shoot off a message letting her know my schedule. I’m working full time at a local used book store, and my hours tend to be pretty stable, which helps when making plans ahead of time.

Despite spending about five minutes engaged in texting my friends, I can’t seem to

shake the unnerving feeling that has taken up residence here on the bus. I feel compelled to look behind me, the feeling so intense that my skin crawls.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, I shift my body and make it seem as though I am simply repositioning myself to get more comfortable. Turning my head, I glance behind me to check on the stranger riding the bus with me.

He's moved three rows of seats closer to me. I'm sure of it. There are only two rows separating us now.

My skin is suddenly covered in goosebumps as my stomach tenses, a feeling of dread washing over me. I really don't like how close he's gotten. What reason could he possibly have for crowding me on an otherwise empty bus?

Not to mention, he's staring at me with an empty look on his expressionless face. Before I can think to control my own expression, my gaze narrows suspiciously at him. Why is he staring at me like that? How can one man's eyes feel so intense and yet oddly empty at the same time?

"I'm sorry, do I know you from somewhere?" I ask him boldly, forcing my voice to carry some semblance of confidence despite feeling so apprehensive. I can only assume we've met before considering how peculiar he is acting right now. It's not normal to watch someone as closely as he is watching me unless you know the person.

The stranger doesn't answer me. In fact, he doesn't respond like his brain has processed the interaction whatsoever. He's like a statue locked in place, his eyes affixed directly on mine, his facial features seemingly frozen in time.

"Hello?" I call out a little louder, but still he doesn't answer me. We hit a rough patch on the road that causes his body to bounce slightly, and I watch him for a moment as

he sways with the movement of the bus.

It really bothers me that I've addressed this man twice and he hasn't reacted to me at all. Maybe he has some sort of condition, or is deaf and unwilling to engage with a stranger on the bus. I want to believe either of those things, but even if that were the case it is completely unnatural to sit there like a statue and stare at a stranger endlessly.

Giving up on my hopes of getting any sort of response out of him, I turn away. It feels a lot like turning my back on a dangerous predator, but what else am I supposed to do at this point? I focus my attention out the window, watching the dark city as it passes me by. I contemplate all the benign reasons someone would act the way this man is behaving, hoping one of them is the truth.

No matter how hard I try to comfort myself with positive thinking, I cannot shake the uneasy tension between us. The immense relief I feel when I see that we are approaching my stop is enough to make me giddy. I quickly reach up to tug on the cable that alerts the driver to my upcoming stop.

As the bus driver pulls up along the curb, I stand up and grab my bag, turning to glance at the man one more time. He hasn't moved this time, but he is still watching me. Nothing about him has changed, he still wears the same hyper-focused expression on his otherwise ordinary face.

I force myself to look away, crossing the narrow aisle towards the door and stepping down and out onto the sidewalk.

When I turn to glance back at the bus, I startle so badly that I stumble backwards. There he is, sitting at the window seat closest to me, which is the exact opposite side of where he was just sitting when I got off.

He is still staring. His eyes are wide, empty and fixated on me. The rest of his face is lax, expressionless. He reminds me of a mannequin, and it makes me so uncomfortable to just stand here and watch him.

There is something seriously wrong with this man. Normal people just do not behave like this.

My autonomic nervous system blares a warning alarm, and my heart begins to pound within the cage of my chest. I hold his stare as the bus pulls away from the curb and carries on its way. The man's eyes follow me unapologetically, and I am suddenly struck with a surge of anger.

I'm getting really tired of people making me feel unsafe today.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

A disquieting tension coils around me like a snake, pulling me from the comfortable fog of sleep. My eyes flutter open against the thick shadows that envelope my bedroom, and I groan softly as I turn my head towards the window to the right of my queen sized bed. It's still dark outside, because my vision fills with faint amber light from the streetlight outside my apartment.

It must be the middle of the night, because there isn't even a hint of morning light in the dark sky. My tired eyes struggle to focus, the light from outside just barely illuminating my room from behind the heavy curtain. Wondering what time it is, I turn my head away from the window to glance at the clock on my nightstand.

3:33 am.

With a groan, I turn back to my right, curling up into the fetal position on my side. I squeeze my eyes shut and will myself back to sleep.

It has been several days since the stress of my family dinner. Sleep hasn't come easy to me since my recent encounter with the man that abused me.

I didn't get home until late last night, struggling to manage the new inventory of books my boss brought into the drab used book store where I work. It took me several hours of overtime to sort the fragile old texts, the expensive first editions, and the popular new releases for shelving the next day.

Knowing that my next shift would require me to haul heavy stacks of books around the shop for hours on end, organizing shelves and rearranging sections, I figured it wouldn't hurt to put myself to bed early after I finally made it home.

Despite hitting the sack early, I still found myself lying awake for several long hours, unable to actually drift off until well past midnight. My head has been a chaotic whirlwind of repetitive thoughts lately, and I can't seem to quiet the noise when bedtime rolls around.

Just as I am starting to doze off again, a loud creak pulls me right back to wakefulness. This time, when my eyes open, the only thing I notice is how the dense shadows linger heavily in every corner of my room. The dim light filtering in from the street isn't strong enough to chase those shadows away.

In a drowsy haze, I wonder where the creaking sound came from. Nothing seems out of place. The three-unit building my apartment is a part of is quite old, so maybe the sound I heard was just the floors shifting. My apartment is full of old, worn wooden floors. Hearing them creak and shift is common enough, especially when the temperature changes with the seasons.

I lay there waiting for something to happen, the silence so intense that it brings with it a bout of tinnitus. After several tense minutes, when the tinnitus finally dissipates, I sigh and turn back to my right to curl up in the same position as before.

My mind eventually falls silent once again, and I find myself drifting along the foggy edge of sleep. I am on the cusp of slipping away when a rasping sound pulls me back. At this point, I am so exhausted and so close to sleep, that the distant sound comes and goes and I never fully rouse.

Until I feel the unwelcome brush of fingertips across the back of my neck, accompanied by the nearly inaudible whisper of an unintelligible voice.

Unfamiliar words. The tone impossibly low, and slow moving like molasses.

Jolting awake, I practically fall out of bed as I scramble to get to the window. My

shaking hands reach out to grasp the curtain keeping the light at bay, tugging it open so the streetlight can spill inside my room. Uncoordinated, I stumble on my feet as I turn to face the intruder, my back pressing tightly against the chilly window pane.

Except, there's no one there.

My heart pounds like a frantic prey animal in the cage of my chest, my eyes open wide as the sound of my panicked breaths fill the room. My eyes rove back and forth from wall to wall, desperate to find something to explain that strange sensation I just felt on the back of my neck.

The street light outside bathes my room in an uncanny orange glow, but it is still too weak to light up all of the dark places lingering on the other side of my bed. I am fatigued and terrified, so my brain is seeing shapes in the shadows that my rational mind knows cannot possibly be there.

I see faces devoid of features, and shadow figures contorted into crouched positions, hiding in the dark corners, trapped in the shadows. Some staring wide-eyed at me, mouths gaping, as still as statues.

I take several slow, deep breaths as I try to calm the frantic rhythm of my heart. Then I give my head a shake to clear the fog of confusion and paranoia.

"There's nothing here. It's just my overtired brain seeing things," I whisper quietly, desperate to comfort myself. I don't know what could have touched me, because nobody is here. Maybe it was just a dream, a dream that felt entirely too real.

My eyes dart back and forth as I continuously search my bedroom for anything out of the ordinary, fear coiling tight in my gut as I try to pretend like I am not actually seeing monsters in all of the dark places surrounding me. The longer I stand there reassuring myself, the faster the faces begin to vanish.

A few minutes pass, and my pounding heart finally settles. I stand there with my back pressed against the window, fear giving way to confusion. The cold from outside radiates from the window pane and seeps into my skin, making me shiver as I stand there surveying my bedroom.

“It must have been a dream,” I tell myself out loud, lifting one shaky hand to brush across my face and rub the exhaustion from my eyes.

That completely reasonable theory is proven false when the door to my altar room slams shut. I startle so violently that a small scream escapes me as I catapult myself right over my bed, and head straight for the light switch across the room. I slam the switch to the on position and reach for my bedroom door, throwing it open to launch myself out of my bedroom.

Panic has my body trembling while the bright light from my ceiling fan stings my eyes.

I step back into the doorway to face the direction of the walk-in closet, eyeing the closed door suspiciously. I had done such a good job convincing myself that I was just dreaming, that when something significant finally happened it scared the living hell out of me.

“Who’s there?” I call out, my voice far more shaky than I intend it to be. The bright light has me blinking rapidly, squinting while my vision struggles to adjust as I stare at the door.

I wait and listen, but no other sound can be heard. Everything is eerily silent now.

Staring at the closet door, I wonder what the hell just happened. I always leave that door shut, and it remained closed every time I glanced at it tonight. I did hear a door creak earlier, so perhaps something happened and it popped open.

Maybe I didn't close it properly, and the latch didn't fully engage. Perhaps it was a draft from the open window that somehow made it open. Maybe a mouse pushed it open.

Or it could have been a ghost.

Turning my head to look at the only window in the room, my hope for a rational explanation dies when I confirm the window is closed and secured with the lock.

My bedroom door was closed, too. I just threw it open so hard it bounced off the door stopper with a loud rattle. There is no reason that the closet door should be doing anything other than remaining closed.

My skin is crawling while I stand there and try to decide if I want to leave the apartment, or go back into my bedroom to figure out what made that door slam shut. A sane person would leave and come back with a police officer. Someone both sane and smart would have someone qualified investigate this during the damn day.

I shake my head and let out an audible sigh, my eyes traveling around the seam of the closet door. At the bottom, ever so faintly, I see a warm flickering light. I reach inside the room and hit the light switch to confirm what I think I'm seeing. A weak, gentle light spills from beneath the door. Turning the lights back on, I suddenly feel like throwing up.

"What the fuck..." I take several tentative steps forward until I'm standing in front of the now closed door. My hand reaches out for the door knob, my fingers curling lightly around it. It's unusually warm, which is strange considering how chilly my apartment gets in the colder months.

The knob turns slowly with a twist of my wrist, and my heart rate picks up yet again as I pull the door slowly towards me. I stand there in the doorway, peering inside the

dark space, holding my breath as if expecting something to jump out at me.

Something definitely isn't right. One of my protection spell candles is lit, the tall black stick positioned at the farthest point of the pentacle disk at the altar's center. The tapestry that covers the glossy surface is rumpled in a few places, and the other candles I left organized to one side have fallen to lay haphazardly in spots I definitely did not leave them.

The candle that is lit is the one on which I carved that arcane sigil, the sigil I found in that ancient book from the occult shop in Rome. The wick harbors an impressively large flame, the light dancing as it flickers purposefully among the shadows.

Although the candle's flame is significant and tenacious, the candle does not illuminate the room the way it should. I glance from wall to wall, but cannot make out any features inside the closet. The only thing I can see is the surface of my altar about a foot all the way around the candle.

That's definitely not normal.

The candle should brighten the whole closet, but it just... doesn't. The shadows are so dense, I can't make sense of it. It's like the laws of physics decided to go on vacation.

There's a dark and oppressive energy in here, swirling around like an insidious creature. Intuition tells me to run, to get out of the house and wait for the light of day to chase the darkness away. Unfortunately for me, I can't seem to move. My mind and body are disconnected, because instead of stepping away, I stand firmly in place.

Everything feels very, very wrong. Obviously whatever is happening here has nothing to do with an ordinary human intruder. This is definitely paranormal.

I'm a witch. I may be new to my practice, but this is my world now.

I can handle this.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, I pretend to have all the confidence in the world as I step into my altar room. The second I enter, the shadows close in around me, and the closet door gently shuts at my back.

I startle slightly at the sound of the door closing, immediately turning to open it again. It doesn't budge, no matter how hard I try to turn the knob. Movement from somewhere in the closet has me spinning back around, my back pressing tight against the door frame.

The darkness is so heavy, and that one candle's flame is soldiering on but something sinister is at work here, preventing the light from doing its job.

The sound of distant laughter carries around me, shifting deep and low. My hair stands on end as my eyes try desperately to find the source of the sound, but all I see is the inky blackness.

My bottom lip trembles as the fear overtakes me, my hand reaching behind me to once again try to open the door. Witch or not, I am not equipped to deal with this. I groan with frustration when the door refuses to give.

Before I can scream for help, with the hope that one of my neighbours might hear me, a wave of tranquility washes over me. All of the fear and panic swirling around inside of me like a destructive tornado suddenly diminishes, the feelings dampening under the calming fog that settles in.

My lips part on a heavy sigh as my body relaxes, the shadows pressing against me from behind. Taking two steps forward until I am closer to the solitary candle, I

watch as the flame dances wildly on the lengthy wick. Back and forth it sways, mesmerizing, captivating.

Warmth spreads through me as I watch it, lost in the hypnotic way it moves. I don't know how much time passes as I stand there watching it, but eventually a stream of thoughts flutter through my mind.

This isn't right. Something is manipulating me. Scream for help! I should be scared!

Another wave of calm washes over me, and the thoughts drift away as though they don't matter at all. Lifting my shoulders, I peer into the darkness beyond the candle's light, only to see the silhouette of someone standing there.

A large, towering figure. A shadow against the rest of the shadows, so easy to miss. I question my sanity for a moment, until I see it move.

A normal person would scream at this point, that much I am sure of, but there is only the warmth spreading through me with every steady breath. I feel as though I am sinking through the ground beneath my feet, slipping deeper into a dark pool.

My stomach drops as a new sensation hits me, the air becoming suffocating as I am submerged in something I cannot see. The flame in front of my eyes dims so low I fear the flame will give out while my lungs struggle to draw in a full breath.

In an instant, I breach an invisible surface, the flame popping back to life as the air surrounding me returns to normal. I draw one long, deep breath into my lungs as my breathing quickly regulates. The silhouette in the distance moves, the frightening shadow figure stepping to the side.

A disembodied voice, deep like the darkest of ocean depths, breaks through the fog in a soothing whisper. So low and deep, it sounds entirely inhuman, as though whatever

is here in this room with me is trying to mimic a human's voice.

“Little witch.”

Lightning sparks across my nerve endings, every single hair on my body rising. I begin to tremble, goosebumps erupting across every inch of my skin as the voice brushes across my senses. The terror surges from the pit of my stomach, my intuition ringing like an alarm, but the calming waves radiating from the sinister entity beat my emotions back down.

The shadow moves, but all I can see is the ghastly outline of it. What looks like thick, black smoke clings to its ethereal form.

It speaks again.

“What do you seek?” The disembodied voice is horrific, the tone and pitch so unnatural that I can barely stand to hear it as it infiltrates my senses. The darkness surrounding me is heavy, oppressive, and threatening to bring me to my knees. My body suddenly feels sapped of strength, my bare feet rooted to the wooden floor beneath me.

I watch it with my eyes, but my body is frozen. I cannot move. I cannot turn my head.

The entity's question bounces around inside my head, demanding my answer. What do I seek? The only thing I've been looking for is protection.

I finally find my words through the heavy fog that has descended over me, the calming waves still washing over me and keeping my hysteria at bay.

“I-I needed p-pr-protection,” I stutter, trying my hardest to force myself to move, desperate to regain control of my own body. All I want is to keep the entity in front of

me, but I am helpless as it shifts closer to a position behind my back.

“I can give you protection,” it promises, its voice shifting until it sounds distinctly masculine, although still quite inhuman.

“W-who are you?”

Faint laughter is the response to my question, low and ominous, shifting through the darkness. The entity keeps moving, and still I cannot turn to face it. Once it takes up position to the right of me, it speaks again, the voice entering exclusively through my right ear.

“I am the teacher,” it says, barely audible. “The protector.” Louder now.

The disembodied voice echoes around me, repeating three times, the sound so haunting that it makes me want to crawl out of my skin.

There is whispering now, rising all around me. Words that I cannot comprehend, a cacophony of voices, maddening and disorienting. I struggle to focus as the legions of voices speak to me. The sound crescendos and then everything suddenly falls silent. It is so silent that the sudden absence of noise makes my ears ring.

The silence stretches between us as the entity disappears on the periphery of my vision. Dread swells inside of me as I lose sight of it, feeling the malevolent presence standing behind me now.

Lips brush against my ear, and warm breath trails along my sensitive skin. I shudder as tears gather at the corner of my eyes, frustration and fear beneath the calm being forced upon me. I can’t turn to face it. I can’t escape.

The silence is too intense. A tear slips free and glides down my cheek.

“A Prince of Hell,” the entity’s grim voice echoes, finally answering the question trapped behind my trembling lips. More tears fall, and a scream gets caught in my throat. A dark hand, as black as a starless night sky, moves in from the left of me to settle over my mouth.

“Shhhh,” the entity soothes, his unsettling voice sounding more and more human with every word, distinctly masculine and less disorienting. It is as though he is making an effort not to give me a heart attack from the fear and dread threatening to break free from his control.

The scream dies inside of me, and I moan my defeat as my shoulders slump and my head drops.

I called for my ancestors during that ritual, no one else. I did not intentionally summon the demon trapping me here now. I am nobody. I am nothing. Why would a Prince of Hell, and all else it claims to be, give a shit about me? I’m just a newly awakened witch with barely any experience.

The hand slips away from my mouth, and I inhale sharply to draw air deep into my lungs.

“Please let me go. Please don’t kill me,” I beg as the entity steps closer, his big body pressing against my back. My voice and body are trembling so violently I think I may faint. I don’t know what else to do, what more could I possibly say to whatever thing is here trapping me?

Without warning, warmth spreads around me and engulfs me, reminding me of those steamy candlelit baths I used to take all the time when I was stressed out and in need of comfort. Those baths are always so soothing and warm... and they always make me feel safe.

Safe. The demon is trying to make me feel safe. That disturbs me just as much as the rest of this nightmare, if not more.

All I can feel is him, wrapping around me from behind. His muscular arms wrap around my waist as he holds me in his embrace, securing me against his powerful structure.

Why is he holding me? I don't understand. I expected this entity to kill me, but now all I can feel is comfort as he cradles me in his arms.

"Your soul is marked by my sigil, little witch," he explains, and before I can answer, I feel my body falling until I am kneeling before my altar, the candle flame dancing wildly before my eyes.

I gasp loudly as I am pulled backwards off my knees, directly into his massive torso. Hard, warm, and immovable.

"I will not harm you, little witch." His voice still fluctuates, the tones shifting, failing to sound like anything but a failed mimicry of a man.

I still can barely see anything around me beyond the single flickering flame ahead. The darkness has swallowed everything but the tiny space around the candle on my altar. This demon's mastery of reality is terrifying.

"You..." he whispers against my ear, and a shiver charges through my entire body. He no longer feels like a misty shadow figure. He seems corporeal now. Real. "...belong to me."

Shock strikes like lightning while the fear threatens to overwhelm me, but he holds me tight against his body and forces both of those emotions down. The absolute control he has over me should terrify me, but I am lost to him in this moment. I have

no control here. Not anymore.

I didn't want this. I just wanted protection from the man that abused me. I was desperate. I made a mistake. A stupid, stupid mistake.

As though he can hear my inner dialogue, he presses his warm lips to my ear and speaks softly. "I will protect you, for you are mine." The tone of his last word deepens, sharpens, and shifts.

"Only mine."

The sound is entirely inhuman once again.

I just can't adjust to the unsettling sound of his voice, and I know the memory of it will haunt me forever. "I will give you all that you desire, little witch. I will make you strong."

"You just need to let me in..." he whispers, his deep voice penetrating my senses and threatening to fracture what remains of my fragile sanity. His hand drops, settling between my thighs, and shock registers for a second time.

Against my will, a soothing heat and a gentle pleasure flares from the palm of his hand, where he rests it at the apex of my thighs. The shock of him touching me there makes my head spin with a tumultuous mix of confusion and unwanted arousal.

The change from terror to comfort and arousal is dizzying. None of this makes sense.

He's controlling everything, including my feelings.

"Let me in, Selene." His words are a soothing, demonic growl up against the shell of my ear, his warm breath causing my skin to erupt in goosebumps. His fingers, long

and thick, with what feels like heavy talons on the ends of each one, stroke through the soft folds between my thighs. He's coaxing me, I realize, as he places an ardent kiss to the sensitive spot beneath my ear. "Give yourself to me."

Arousal burns deep inside of me against my will, and although I know my body should not be reacting like this, it is. I feel enslaved to his touch, like my body didn't get the memo that I'm not currently laying in the arms of a human lover.

This is madness, and my body is betraying me. I am in the arms of a demonic entity, and I'm trapped here in the darkness with him. Is he really asking me to be his lover, in exchange for his protection?

Suddenly, the legion of voices I heard earlier are back again. So many frantic and desperate voices, growing so loudly in this small space, that all I can do is squeeze my eyes shut and wince against the auditory onslaught.

I try to focus my mind on what they are saying, but the confusing jumble of panicked voices are hard to sort through.

No! Stop! I hear.

KEEP HIM OUT!

The unearthly scream that accompanies that despairing plea rattles me down to the very core of my soul, and I struggle hard against the demon that has taken hold of me. I fight against his control with everything I've got, but the noise only escalates around me.

The demon growls, deep and low, and the voices once again dissipate to nothing.

"Somebody please help me!" I shout in my desperation to escape this hellish

nightmare. My nervous system can't handle this anymore, it feels as though I am on the precipice of descending into irreparable lunacy.

As though he is aware of my fracturing mental state, he whispers soothing sounds in my ear, rocking me back and forth in his embrace. I sob quietly, a hiccup rattling me, the earlier arousal long gone.

"Please," I beg him, "just let me go."

Without another word between us, I feel the darkness begin to lighten. The warmth of his body recedes as he releases his hold on me.

The candle that once burned brightly, slowly begins to dwindle down, until the flame disappears entirely in a wispy puff of smoke. The weight that once pinned me down lifts, the entity retreats, and within seconds I am left alone in the darkness.

In what feels like the blink of an eye, the demon is gone.

My trembling hands brace against the floor as I pull myself to my feet, standing up and swaying towards the door. I open it, slipping out and shutting it closed behind me.

I should be feeling relief, but the entity is gone and all I feel is empty. Empty, alone and unsafe. I don't have the mental strength to contemplate those feelings right now, so I keep walking until I reach the door to my tiny backyard.

I step outside into the cold night air, the gentle breeze fluttering across my skin, and wander over to the back corner of my garden. I fit myself into the small space next to one of my planters, the only one that contains common kitchen herbs.

Collapsing onto the patio stones beneath me, I pull my knees to my chest and duck

my head. I rock back and forth in a desperate attempt to soothe myself, trying to keep my mind clear and my breathing slow and deep. My skin is crawling, as though I can still feel the demon's hands on my flesh. Echoes of the experience that I desperately wish I could just wash away.

I'm exhausted. I feel it from the top of my head to the soles of my feet, and I'm cold. So cold. At some point between exiting the closet and leaving my apartment, I must have grabbed a jacket. I don't remember doing it, but I am grateful either way. I'm certain I'd have fallen unconscious from hypothermia if it wasn't wrapped tightly around me, shielding me from most of the cold.

As my eyes adjust to the morning light, I feel a little more human. I suddenly remember that I'm meeting Arianna for a coffee date this afternoon. I need to try and sleep a few more hours, so I can make it through the day. Normally I would just cancel on her, but she broke up with her boyfriend last week and isn't handling it very well.

I unfold from my position, wincing at how stiff and sore my body is, and slowly get to my feet. Heading back towards the door, I step inside my apartment and gaze around the homey kitchen. The energy feels calm and light, a significant difference compared to what I felt in my altar room.

I wander over to the living room, unwilling to go back into my bedroom right now, and crawl into my large plush reading chair.

I'll sleep for just two or three hours, and then head over to the coffee shop.

It's still mostly dark in here, the early morning light barely illuminating the interior of my home. The atmosphere is comfortable and feels completely normal, unlike earlier. I pull a grey fleece blanket up over my body, and nestle into the oversized recliner.

My eyes slowly close, and I drift away before I can form another coherent thought.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

The alarm I set on my phone yesterday went off about an hour ago, leaving me very little time to get ready to meet Arianna.

Trying my hardest to keep my mind off of what happened last night, I hop into the shower and allot myself ten minutes to speed through it.

I get dressed in record time, too. Quickly tossing together an outfit consisting of a pair of dark jeans, a maroon t-shirt and a brown cardigan. My hair has grown a little longer than I usually like to keep it, so instead of wasting time taming the soft waves, I braid the long brown strands and let it hang down my back.

Grabbing my bag, I head for the front door and step out into the chilly Autumn air. The moment the sun hits my face, I instantly feel better. Although the temperature outside is unusually cold, the sun is bright and warm and that makes it much more tolerable.

The call of a raven draws my attention to the towering trees that line the concrete city street, and my eyes scan the branches overhead until I find the source of the loud noise.

The big, black bird sits perched on a thick branch. The sunlight catches its feathers as it caws excitedly, a vibrant blue sheen glittering in the light of day. I don't think I've ever seen a raven in the city before, so I watch it with curiosity for a few moments as it shakes out its wings and peers down at me.

As I step away from my front door and head down the street toward the nearby coffee shop I frequent, Java Heart, I take notice of many more large black birds scattered

around.

There are several ravens perched in the trees that are scattered periodically down the sidewalk. I've definitely never seen one in the city before, what I normally see here are crows.

I can tell these aren't crows, however. They are too big, and their beaks are larger and curvier than the crows. They are also strangely quiet now. They watch me intently, as though I'm carrying a bucket of bird food in my arms and they haven't eaten in months.

I love birds. Dad and I used to go bird watching when I was younger. Living with the consequences of trauma as a child, I really felt drawn to birds because they could so easily escape and fly far away. He taught me about all the small ones that take up residence around the city, but he often spoke favorably of the larger birds.

Sometimes we would drive up north to go bird watching with his best friend Chris and their high powered binoculars. I would marvel at the ravens, owls, and falcons with their impressive wing spans, their beautiful colours, and their ability to fly freely— high up in the sky.

Watching these ravens now, there seems to be something off about them. I can't quite pinpoint exactly what, but as I near the end of my walk I feel it has more to do with how they are acting than how they look. Perhaps they're sick, or there's another predatory bird in the area.

Seeing the charming mom and pop coffee shop up ahead, I pick up my pace until my feet land on the small concrete step leading to the dark glass door. Stepping inside, I am greeted by the glorious aromas of coffee, tea and freshly baked pastries.

My eyes drift around the shop until I catch Arianna's green gaze, a sympathetic smile

lifting to my face. She looks as though she hasn't slept much, but she still offers me a timid smile in return. The warm sunlight is filtering in through the floor-to-ceiling storefront window pane, lighting up her eyes and casting the cozy space in bright light.

I head up to the counter and order a café au lait with a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar before heading over to the circular table Arianna chose, taking the seat that faces her.

"Hey, girl," she says, after sipping from her steamy mug. "Thanks for coming."

"Of course," I respond, setting my drink down and reaching out to gently touch her hand in greeting. "I'm so sorry I'm late."

She smiles again, but it's weak. "That's okay. I'm just glad to see a friendly face."

"How are you holding up?" I ask her, before lifting my drink and wrapping my hands around the warm, dark brown mug. I lean down slightly to blow across the surface, the pretty swirl of cinnamon sugar partially sinking beneath the rippling surface thanks to the gentle force of my breath.

"It's been horrible, Selene," she begins, setting down her drink and dropping her head into her hands. "Connor is posting all over his socials about going to clubs and partying with his friends, like this break up doesn't bother him at all."

Her voice has a distinct quiver to it, and the sound breaks my heart. "Oh, Ari. I'm so sorry. Men tend to cope with their emotions a lot differently than we do," I tell her, hoping to make her feel better about the terrible way he's handling things. "But still, he's definitely being a giant asshole."

She laughs softly at my insult, lifting her head to regard me with teary eyes. "I feel like I can't stop crying over him, and he is just glad to be single and free of me."

“He lost the best thing to ever walk into his life, and is probably using partying nonstop to ignore his feelings.”

“You think so?” she asks, watching me closely.

“For sure. He probably drinks so he doesn’t have to deal with his own shit,” I say with a smile.

She laughs again, though it doesn’t do much to mask her sadness. I watch as she lifts her cup of coffee to her lips for a sip.

I wish I could say more to comfort her, but I’m not the most experienced person when it comes to real relationships. I’ve had a few casual hook-ups that were short term and not serious, and that is about the extent of it. I didn’t feel much of anything when we decided to go our separate ways, because I never felt the need to make deep and lasting connections with men.

Thinking about it now, I realize that it’s likely a result of my abuse. My uncle is probably the reason several of my wires have gotten crossed growing up. If that cruel man taught me anything, it’s that even the most seemingly safe relationships can turn out to be dangerous.

As a child, you never expect a member of your own family to hurt you the most.

I give my head a subtle shake, abandoning my selfish thoughts and turning my focus back on my friend. “I’m sorry, Ari. This is a shit situation, and it is going to hurt like hell for a while, but I promise you something better is coming your way.”

“I hope so,” she says quietly as she takes another long sip, and I mirror her action.

The aromatic coffee warms me as I drink it down, soothing and familiar, its cinnamon

scent reminding me of cold winter days spent reading a good book right here in this shop. I used to come here to spend an hour or two after a leisurely walk around my city neighbourhood.

“What about you?” she asks me in between sips. “How are things at work?”

I wince, then laugh softly. “Mr. Kline has me sorting and shelving his most recent order of books. The boxes are massive, and the back room is stuffed floor to ceiling.”

“That man has an addiction,” she says with a smile, and I nod in agreement.

“An addiction I’m paying for. I’m going to be sick of hauling stacks of books around by the time the week is over,” I confess, slightly exasperated.

I don’t bother telling her about the entity I encountered last night. She wouldn’t believe me, anyway. I’m not actually certain that anyone would, except maybe my witchy friend Talise. A priest might believe me, too. Maybe I should pay a visit to the church around the corner from my apartment. See if they happen to employ an exorcist or something, ideally someone that can come bless my apartment.

Arianna tells me a little more about her break up with Connor, but then we settle into lighter conversation about our plans for this coming winter. We drink our coffees slowly, just enjoying each other’s company, until the sun slips behind a heavy cloud and someone approaches our little table.

Arianna sees him first as he wanders up from behind where I’m sitting, an odd expression on her face. Feeling a heavy presence at my back, I frown and turn to face whatever she is looking at.

A stranger.

Staring at me with a blank expression.

“Did you need something?” Arianna asks, setting her nearly empty coffee mug down.

He says nothing. He just continues to stare at me. I shoot a confused glance to Arianna, then look back at the stranger. He has dirty blonde hair, brown eyes, and is wearing cargo pants and a black hooded sweater. There’s nothing special about him, except for the empty look in his eyes.

He reminds me of the guy that frightened me on my bus ride home from my parent’s house. It’s unnerving the way he is staring at me so intensely, while his face remains expressionless and he stands as still as a mannequin. Instantly, I am extremely uncomfortable, considering how frayed my nerves already are after last night’s paranormal encounter.

I stare at him, analyzing every detail of his features, until I am certain this is not the man from the bus. Two different men, but the same bizarre behaviour. What are the chances?

“Do you know this guy, Selene?” Arianna asks, but I can’t turn away from him to respond to her. I refuse to turn my back on him. Instead, I scoot my chair farther away from him and shake my head in response to her question.

“Alright, dude. Fuck off, will you?” she barks, clearly angry now. I knew her nerves were likely equally frayed today, but I wasn’t expecting her to snap at him like that. Arianna isn’t the type to swear at anyone, let alone tell them to fuck off. Ari is a gentle soul, and happens to be very slow to anger.

The stranger still says nothing, and when I finally pull my gaze away from him I notice Arianna fishing for her phone out of her oversized purse. “Alright, then, I’m calling the cops.”

I shift my empty mug away from the edge of the table and turn to stand up, but I fall back into my seat because the man is now towering over me with one hand on the corner of the table, preventing me from leaving.

“He can save you,” he says simply, his voice eerily monotone, his pupils dilating as he speaks. I shudder as goosebumps erupt all over my body. His voice sounds off, I can’t shake the weirdness of this encounter. Normal people don’t act like this, speaking without inflection.

“Oh, hell no,” Arianna groans. “We are not interested in learning about your lord and savior today, dude.” With that, she stands up and forces herself between me and the unknown man. He stumbles back but quickly regains his footing and resumes standing there like a human statue.

Arianna grabs my hand and helps me to my feet, wrapping her arm around the back of my body to usher me towards the door. He speaks again, in that same monotone voice.

“You just have to let him in.”

I glance back at him, just in time to see him turn his body to face us as we exit.

He’s smiling. The most terrifying smile I think I’ve ever seen.

His eyes are still empty and his face is an expressionless mask, except for his mouth. It looks so unnatural that I can’t help but shudder, knowing my own face is easily displaying how uncomfortable and unnerved I am.

His freakish smile is stretched so wide you can see almost every single lightly yellowed tooth. Even his gums are visible, because the strain of exerting such a huge smile pulls the muscles around his mouth so taut that it looks painful.

I can even see several thin lines of crimson appear as his lips crack from the effort, drawing a tiny amount of blood to the surface of his dry mouth.

It scares the shit out of me. My heart is pounding wildly as Arianna guides me through the door and onto the street. “Do you need me to call you a cab? That guy is a weirdo.”

“No. I’m only two blocks away from home,” I tell her, still so shaken by the encounter that I likely seem like I’m wandering out into the sidewalk in a haze.

Glancing back through the storefront window, the strange man is now gone. I’m not sure if his sudden disappearance makes me feel better or worse.

Arianna hails a cab for herself, and I glance around the street, looking for the man in the crowds of people walking around us. That is when I notice the ravens.

So many ravens, hanging around the trees and buildings, quietly watching.

“Fuck,” I mutter, as the cab pulls up for Arianna.

“What is it?” she asks, turning away from the curb to regard me carefully.

“Nothing, Ari. Go on home, I’ll text you in 10 minutes to let you know I got home safe.” She nods, and I give her a quick hug. The embrace is warm and feels so comforting, I almost don’t want to let go.

“Please be safe. Love you, girl,” she says as she opens the cab door and gets inside. I offer her a wave of my hand, then head off in the direction of home. The ravens seem to follow me, flitting from one tree to the next, almost as though they are escorting me.

I don't know what to think or feel. All of these weird things started happening after I cast my protection spell, after I used the candle with the unknown sigil. A symbol I carved into the wax with my own hand. I thought the sigil was for protection, but maybe I was wrong.

I can still see the intricate design in my mind's eye. The symbol, like an ancient rune, is burned into my brain. I don't think I could forget it even if I made a serious effort to.

I keep my eyes on the ravens until I reach my front door, not wasting any time as I unlock it, step inside, and bolt the lock behind me.

Turning my back to the outside world, I lean against the door and close my eyes. With a deep, cleansing sigh, I try my hardest to clear my mind and organize my thoughts.

Short of going back to Rome and talking to the shop owner, which isn't a viable option right now, I don't know how to investigate the symbol I found in that old book. I want to understand what is happening here, but I don't know where to start. It's not like I can plug the unique marking into a google search. Even if I drew it on a piece of paper, scanned it into my laptop, and used reverse image searching technology, what are the chances that this archaic rune would be found anywhere online?

Another deep sigh, this one out of frustration, pushes past my lips. I open my eyes and head for the kitchen, intent on making a cup of tea and reading the one book in my collection that mentions demonology.

As I wait for the machine to brew my green tea, I head over to the narrow, black bookshelf in my living room and pull free a heavy textbook called Gods, Demons, and Familiars.

“I have a few things to work with,” I think aloud, heading back for my tea. “He said he is a Prince of Hell, a teacher, a protector. There are ravens everywhere. Then there’s that owl I saw at my parents house...” my words trail off as I stare out into the garden through the window over my sink, my tea mug secured in one hand with the book tucked up under my armpit.

The deadly nightshade has doubled in size. Overnight.

“Uh, that’s not subtle,” I whisper, my eyes wide.

“Maybe he likes poisonous plants, too.”

Taking my tea and my book, I wander over to my cozy reading chair and crawl into it, grabbing my fleece blanket and getting comfortable. I glance at the clock on the far wall, taking note of the time. It’s five in the afternoon, and since I work tomorrow I’ll give myself a couple hours of research time before I need to sleep.

Opening the modern looking book, I take a sip of my tea before setting it aside and beginning to read. I’m not hopeful something so pretty and contemporary will have the information I need, but I need to try.

Witches usually worship under patron Gods and Goddesses to guide them during their journey, so maybe that is why I left myself so open and vulnerable to supernatural attack. I thought wards, protection spells and my own ancestors would be enough to keep me safe from evil forces. Apparently those things are not enough where Princes of Hell are concerned.

I sigh, dropping the heavy book into my lap. “I was just trying to protect myself. I just want him to disappear and leave me alone.”

I was never one to speak my thoughts out loud, but since I started my practice a little

over a year ago I have become acutely aware of the fact that our guides and ancestors often linger around us, watching and willing to help. Sometimes all it takes to find answers is to speak the questions out loud where our guiding spirits can hear us.

I thought everything I was pursuing would be enough to send my uncle away, but now I am questioning everything. I came into my craft with no experience and very little information, hoping to wing it and learn as I go. That may have been where I went wrong.

Just two months ago, my abusive uncle showed up at my work to buy a book. He walked around the store, and I was frozen in fear. I couldn't move from behind the counter, my body paralyzed by his presence.

When he finally made his way to the counter and dropped a book on the surface, he decided it was the perfect opportunity to tell me he missed me. To tell me that he dreamed of me almost every night.

I had what I can only assume was a post traumatic stress response and fled the scene. I literally ran from the store, all the way home, leaving it completely unattended.

I nearly lost my job. I would have, I'm sure, if not for the fact that my boss Mr. Kline is a good friend of Dad's.

It was after that experience that I decided I couldn't wait any longer. For my sanity and for my survival, I had to try and get rid of him myself.

Sitting here now, my book in my lap, feelings of guilt and sadness suddenly flood me.

Where is God? If there are demons, there must be angels, right? That must mean God is real, too. Does he hate me? Did he abandon me as a toddler and leave me vulnerable for evil to find, ravage me, and then pick my bones clean?

These thoughts hit me like a freight train. I'm breaking my own heart as I sit here, questioning everything. Does God truly hate me? Did I do something so horrible, that he abandoned me to be molested and abused by my mother's brother?

If demons are real, and angels are real, then God is real... that means, the Devil is real too.

A shiver passes through me. With a demon proving its existence to me, that proves the existence of the other religious aspects, too.

So, where is God?

Lifting my book back up, I continue reading.

Before I know it, day turns to night, and I've been reading for so long that my home has now fallen under the dark shroud of night. Tendrils of shadow fill the corners of every room, and overwhelm the hallway that leads from my main living area to my bedroom.

My eyelids start to feel heavy, as my mind becomes drowsy; filled with far more information than is likely healthy to consume in a single evening. Before I can form another lucid thought, I drift off into a light slumber.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

Selene.

My name is a whisper in the dark, a deep rumbling like a storm brewing in the distance. It barely pulls me from sleep, rousing me just enough to hear it spoken to me. Like a lover's voice, so soft that I ignore it as though it is just a soft breeze through a cracked window.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

My eyes shoot open then, wide against the pitch black of night. I groan and shift in my chair, uncertain how long I've been out. I squint towards the clock on the far wall, but the shadows are so heavy that I can't see what time it is. I'm guessing the hour is very late, because it's still cold, dark and quiet outside.

Pushing the blanket off my lap, I watch groggily as my book clatters on the floor. I sigh, and reach down to pick it up, setting it on the table and reaching for my phone. I activate the screen to check the time.

3:33 am. I narrow my gaze down at the numbers on the screen.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

I startle so violently that my phone flies from my hand and lands somewhere behind the table I had left it on. I spin to face the direction of my front door, my heart thumping like a caged beast desperate to flee.

Who the hell is knocking at my door at this hour? If anyone I cared about had an

emergency, I'm certain they would call me first instead. I checked my phone moments ago, so I know I didn't miss a call that would warrant showing up at my apartment like this.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Three distinctly separate, deliberate raps on the old wooden door. Every strike sends a little electric shock of fear coursing up and down my spine.

I wander slowly, quietly, towards the narrow hallway leading to my front door. The only barrier between me and whatever is on the other side of that piece of wood. Every step is carefully placed as I try to remain silent.

I think back to the strange man at the coffee shop. I imagine him standing like a statue on the other side of the door, smiling his hollow smile, his dead eyes like something out of my nightmares.

The image in my mind has goosebumps erupting across my skin, the intensity of my anxiety reflected in the pins and needles I now feel in my fingertips.

When I plant both of my feet in front of my door, I try to will my knees to stop trembling. I listen, waiting to see if my visitor is still there. A few moments pass, the silence weighed down by my potent fear.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

I flinch with every heavy thud, the sound demanding my response. Leaning forward, I glance through the peephole.

Nothing. Absolute blackness. I should see the street lights, the concrete slab and the iron railing of my front step, and the potted plant to the right of the door. Most

importantly, I should see a person.

I see nothing.

“Who’s there?” I call out loudly, my trembling voice far too loud in the odd silence that surrounds me. I realize in that moment that aside from the knocking and my shaky voice, I hear nothing at all. Not a bird, not a cricket, not a single car or train in the distance.

I stare at the door, waiting. The silence is deafening.

I take a reluctant step forward, turning my head to the side and drawing my ear close to the space between the door and the frame, straining to hear anything at all. Holding my breath, I close my eyes and listen.

“Honeybee.”

I stagger backwards away from the door, the familiar male voice striking me like a heavy fist directly into my sternum. Bile rises in my throat, scorching as it crawls up my esophagus and threatens to expel my stomach contents all over the floor.

His voice. He’s here. At my home.

My soul feels like it’s shriveling up inside of me, flashbacks of pain in fragile places sparking to life in the most cruel echo of all the terrible things my uncle did to me when I wasn’t even old enough to understand any of it.

I continue to stumble backwards until I am standing in my kitchen, my trembling fingers dragging along the cold surface of my island countertop. Pins and needles continue to spark through my hands and feet, and I know I should tell him to leave and call the police, but the words are trapped in my throat.

I am fighting to keep the vomit from spilling up from my churning stomach, and all I can think about is running. Running as far and as fast as I can, until I reach the very ends of the Earth. When I get there, I can fall off the perilous edge and plummet straight down into oblivion. Maybe then, I'd never have to hear that terrible voice ever again.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

I feel my mind snap, like the lock of a rattling cage breaking open. I turn and run for the door leading into my backyard, leaving it wide open as I race through the threshold and head for the farthest wall.

Using a foot to hoist myself up on the side of a planter box, I launch myself up and over the old wooden fence and down into the narrow alleyway behind it. I fall to my hands and knees, the pain of scraping my palms along the old, cracked cement lancing through me.

I force myself to my feet and run down the walking path behind my garden, my bare feet numb to the rough surface and tiny stones cutting into my soft skin. I push myself so hard I see stars flicker at the edges of my vision, but I don't dare stop.

I don't slow down as I emerge from the alleyway and run down the sidewalk. I stagger slightly and duck my head as flock of ravens scatter around me, cawing loudly as they take to the wind in the cold Autumn night air.

The birds sound enraged as they dive down around me, forcing me to turn down the block unless I want more than one of them to hit me as they glide on by.

As the ravens begin to settle into calmer soaring, I lift my head and search the immediate area for a place I can take refuge.

A memory assaults me against my will.

“Don’t cry, honeybee,” he tells me, his rough hands moving down to a place nobody touches. I do cry, though. I can’t stop myself. It hurts when he touches me between my legs, and he smells like sweat and whiskey. Whiskey he poured over his fingers before he put them inside of me.

I didn’t know it was whiskey back then, of course. I know now. The first time I smelled it, I was at a bar. I vomited all over my date.

Everything burned. That spot down there, the places his lips touched my skin, and my hands where he forced me to touch him too.

“Oh, honeybee. That’s it. You’re my good little girl.”

I was dying, only my heart wouldn’t stop beating. I just went through the death process every time he hurt me.

Numb to the core, I come back to myself.

My eyes fall on the old church at the end of the street, towering proudly in the darkness. There are dim lights sitting behind the baroque stained glass of the windows, guiding my way.

Surely a house of God is as safe a place as any.

Maybe the flashbacks won’t follow me there, maybe there are angels there willing to help keep them at bay.

I sprint until my feet hit the first step leading up to the imposing, ornate wooden doors. My lungs ache and burn from the exertion, my vision blurry and my muscles

fatigued.

I slow down enough to walk up the stairs, flinching at the sound of something shuffling loudly overhead. My eyes lift, and I'm met with the vision of a massive owl perched above the impressive, carved doors.

The same owl I saw at my parents house the day of Dad's birthday dinner.

The raptor spreads its massive, dark wings. The white speckles along its dark feathers remind me of stars in the night sky. The creature's face is unnerving. Its large black eyes are like voids in that stark, pale face.

The bird of prey lets loose one long, loud screech, and the noise startles me out of my shock in seeing it here now.

I hit the top of the stairs and reach for one of the heavy doors, grateful when it opens with a tug. Slipping inside, I let the door close behind me and wait for my eyes to adjust.

The interior of the church is warm and welcoming, with dark wood furniture and an intricate carpet in shades of tan and dark red. There is a strip of solid red carpet leading from the entrance of the building, down the wide center aisle and up to the large altar at the front of the room.

The walls are made of wood and stone, with sophisticated archways nearly everywhere. The design is classic for an older church, and beautiful as they often are.

The electric lights along the walls are turned off, the bright moonlight filtering in through the stained glass windows to mingle with the candles littered around the sanctuary.

There are so many candles, the pale wax pillars sitting in transparent red glass holders. There are three at every substantial window, and one at the end of each pew.

The pews are long and sturdy, the wood lighter than the darker accents around the anterior chamber, the backs of each row fully stocked with well worn bibles and prayer cards.

I glance at the candles, most of them burned halfway down, as I wander slowly down the center of the church.

I'm still fighting to regulate my breathing as I move deeper into the house of God, walking through until I reach the front pew. I sit down on the cold wood, glancing behind me to make sure I'm still alone, before closing my eyes and dropping my head into my hands.

My body feels weak from both the lack of sleep and the effort it took to run here from home. It is only when my breathing evens out that the numbness dissipates, and my hands and feet begin to ache from the beating they endured getting here.

When I lift my head from my hands, my vision is blurred from tears. I smell a hint of blood, and look down at my hands to take stock of the angry scrapes and ghosting of bruises on my palms and fingertips.

I wipe my eyes on the backs of my hands, before settling them tentatively over my knees. I take several deep breaths, blinking the blurriness away until the altar ahead of me comes into clear view.

Above and beyond, a massive cross depicting Jesus looms. The white marble cross holds his holy image cast in polished iron. The ornament is obviously expensive and sacred to this congregation. There are candles at the base of the cross, too, driving the shadows away from the church's holy symbol.

My mind empties as I zone out, watching the flames of the flickering candles dance along the polished surface of the beautiful cross, until the creaking of a heavy door startles me out of it.

I turn my head towards the doors I entered earlier as I stand up from the pew, my aching feet uncomfortable on the rough carpet as I pivot to face the direction of the sound.

No one is there, the only movement to be seen comes from the way the candles flicker and dance, scattered around my field of vision. My eyes wander to every dark corner, fully expecting to find someone lurking somewhere there.

I can't shake the feeling that someone is here. With a sigh, I lift my arms and cross them over my chest so I can rub the chill from my arms.

The temperature in the room, once warm and inviting, drops significantly in the blink of an eye. I shiver against the sudden cold, taking note of my frosty breath which I can now see with every exhale.

"What the hell?" I rub at my upper arms a little faster in an attempt to generate some warmth. I really need to stop leaving my house without the proper clothing, especially considering what season we're currently in.

Ideally, things need to stop scaring me and triggering my fight or flight response in the middle of the damn night.

The temperature fluctuation must have been a warning of what was coming, because the flames of all the candles in the church suddenly triple in size.

I gasp, staggering backwards until my lower back collides with the edge of the hefty wooden altar.

I may be a slow learner, but I do eventually learn. Gone are the days of an uneventful life. Now, my existence seems to be marked by terrifying paranormal events. One after another, haunting me relentlessly.

“Who’s there?” I call out, trying to feign bravery in the face of whatever has entered this sacred place. My voice doesn’t tremble, for that I am grateful, but the rest of me is shaking like a leaf.

The shadows shift before me, the double doors that lead out of this place swallowed by a great black chasm. Darkness like thick, impenetrable black smoke falls from the elegant ceiling into the void below.

I watch in rapt horror as a figure descends from the ceiling, its form comprised of the thickest of shadows, like the pitch black smoke of a deadly fire. The inky darkness is being pulled inwards, like the entity is a black hole swallowing every photon of light on these blessed grounds.

Massive wings made of billowing black, the shape of a great owl’s, spread so wide they fill the entire width of the church. Once the entity’s massive body lands both of its feet on the ground, those wings fold to rest behind its broad back.

I cannot make out any details, only vague shapes. It is a shadow figure, devoid of all light, but there are a few things I can distinguish among the darkness.

A massive set of horns sits atop its head, holding what appears to be a dark, polished crown. The lengthy spires curl up and out from where I imagine its forehead is intended to be, with two other sets of spires along the outline of its skull. Though distinctly demonic, they are also awe-inspiring in their size and shape. Like the entity’s horns are a crown all on their own, even without the visual aid of the unholy adornment they hold in place.

This entity is humanoid, but colossal, with spikes protruding from various points around its dark silhouette of a body.

The scream that threatens to explode from my chest is lodged inside of me, my breath caught like a mouse in the trap of my throat. I can't breathe through the horror of witnessing the being that stands before me.

I've lost my fucking mind. At some point between leaving home and arriving here, I've slipped into a frenzied psychosis. That is the only way to explain the shadow of a demon standing at the other end of the church.

Tears pool at the corners of my eyes as I stand with my back to the altar, my body trembling so violently I think I may pass out.

The shadows move again, flickering and shifting, until the vision of the great demon turns to a static image my mind just cannot comprehend.

Reality bends, and in the monster's place, a man stands. Though he is still shrouded in heavy darkness, the man's body looks far more real than the demon that preceded it.

"Little witch."

It's him. The demon from my altar room.

His haunting, disembodied voice fills the church, and if the man is speaking I cannot see his lips moving. It's still far too dark where he stands for me to make sense of him at all.

The image of him is flickering in and out of existence, one moment he is a man, and the next that monumental demon stands in his place. My mind is fracturing, I cannot

understand what I am seeing. Man, demon, both.

“What do you want with me?” I call out as my body presses back against the altar, desperate to escape, with nowhere to go. This entity stands between me and the only known exit.

His voice echoes through the church again, deep and soothing, but still clearly inhuman.

“It is you that calls to me.”

I shake my head, terror gripping me. “I didn’t... I...” I whimper, the words dying on my tongue. “Protection spell.” I force myself to speak to the entity, desperate to convince him I didn’t want any of this.

My trembling hands reach out behind me as I try to shimmy slowly along the front of the altar, my instincts screaming at me to run.

“You wear the sigil of my great name upon your soul,” the voice growls deep and low, his presence filling the entire church with an oppressive, dark energy.

Again, I shake my head in response. My head moves so violently that strands of hair slip out of my braid, falling in messy pieces around my face. “P-lease. Let me l-leave.”

“There is nowhere you can run that I won’t find you, little witch. You belong to me,” the incorporeal voice booms around me, and instead of running like I originally intended, I drop down to my knees like every ounce of strength has been ripped from me.

I lift my head, staring wide-eyed at the entity as it takes a step towards me. It flickers

again, a man in its place for just a moment, until the demon returns to fill my vision.

“There is no undoing what has been done. I will not let you go.”

Pain courses through me, but I can't bring myself to scream. I try to pinpoint where it originates, but I cannot. It's a ghost, a phantom; the pain is spiritual, not physical.

My face is contorted in agony, but I can't tear my gaze away from the demon. Its body continues to flicker, shifting from the shadow of a man to the shadow of a demon. My mind is fragmenting, insanity clawing its way up from the depths of my psyche.

I am just a human girl, my fragile mind cannot process this horror. Another minute of this and I am going to break beyond repair, I just know it. Human eyes aren't meant to look upon evil incarnate.

The demon must know what is happening inside of me, because the candles that surround us and illuminate the church are extinguished instantly with the swipe of his dark hand. I cry out as we plummet into a lightless void, the temperature dropping so low I flinch against the searing cold, until it rises again.

Warmth and silence encompass me, wrapping around me like a comforting blanket, and I feel something in the pitch blackness. A hand, gentle and warm, stroking the side of my face. Fingers slip through the wayward strands of my braid, pulling them all the way loose, before relocating them behind my ear.

The hand pets my hair, and a wave of serenity washes over me. There is no room for confusion or fear now, just this comfort. Just this moment. I'm safe here in the darkness, with him.

When I finally feel myself relaxing, and a deep sigh slips past my lips, a few candles

flicker back to life. A gentle amber glow fills the church, and I blink rapidly to clear my blurry vision.

When I can finally focus, a pair of human eyes watch me closely. A pale blue, shimmering brightly, hold me captive from mere inches away.

Adoration floods me as I gaze up into his eyes, leaning heavily into his warm hand. When he speaks, his voice is entirely human. Soothing, deep and dark, like silk against my senses. “You have nothing to fear. I will never harm you, little witch.”

He moves himself away from me slightly and my eyes adjust, roaming over the form he has taken in front of me. He is tall, his shoulders broad, his body robust. He wears nothing but a pair of loose fitting, black pants that hang low on his hips. His sun-kissed skin is radiant against the glint of candlelight.

He pulls his hand away from me, shifting his body backwards slightly to give me a little more space. As our physical connection breaks, the intense calm that blanketed me lifts.

Panic swells and brings with it a fresh surge of fear. Oh, God, he’s a demon, not a man.

I stare at him wide-eyed, watching as the image of him turns to static once again. Flickering back and forth, I see the shadow of a demon take his place. Every single one of my muscles tense, but before I can move away from him, he reaches out and touches me.

His fingers slide along the side of my face, and a dense wave of calm washes over me. I exhale deeply as the terror seeps out of me, as if he is drawing it out through his anchored hands. His touch is a soothing balm to my ruptured sanity.

The shadow of the demon is gone again, replaced with him. Solid, real, and warm. He is safety. He is peace. When he pulls me up to my feet, and draws me up against the solid wall of his chest, my body relaxes further.

“Breathe. You are safe,” he soothes, and my body obeys. I take in a steadying breath, feeling centered. I know he is doing this, because just a few moments ago I was descending into endless madness. It’s like he snapped his fingers and put the broken pieces of my mind back together again.

“I don’t understand what is happening,” I whimper, my voice small in the vast space that surrounds us. I regard him more closely now, and I am surprised how devastatingly handsome he is.

He is well over six feet tall, broad and muscular like I imagine a viking warrior would be. His black hair is wavy and a little longer at the front, falling across his forehead and a little into his eyes. His eyes are an ethereal pale blue, and he has a mouth that looks like it belongs to a fallen angel.

The man looks like he is the incarnation of sin.

“Ask your questions,” He says simply, walking me backwards until I’m pressed against the altar. I allow him to move me, because he is gentle and strong where I feel frail and weak.

Once my back hits the altar, he gently lifts me and sets me on top of it in a sitting position. His hands linger on my thighs, committed to steadying me. I am grateful that he gives me some space to breathe and collect myself.

“Who are you?” I question him.

His voice fills the entire Church, rumbling like a coming storm until it echoes all

around us. His mouth doesn't move, but I know the haunting voice belongs to him. "I am the protector. The teacher." Just like in my altar room, his voice shifts in such an inhuman way, it makes my hair stand on end. "A Great Prince of Hell."

"Tell me your name," I demand, my voice a little stronger now that he is helping keep me calm. I'm hoping that if I walk away from this encounter alive, I can figure out exactly what I am dealing with.

He smiles. "I have many."

"Tell me who you are," I demand more firmly, knowing that if I learn anything from our meeting, it must be his name. A demon's name carries a great deal of power, and I need some kind of advantage here.

His face contorts with a scowl, and he steps into me. His imposing body presses against mine, pinning me to the altar, his hand lifting to collar my throat. "I am a Great Prince of Hell, commander of twenty-six legions. To utter my true name is to turn the eyes of Hell upon you."

He lowers his mouth to mine, his voice a demonic growl uttered against my trembling lips. "Is that what you desire, little witch? For all the legions of Hell to gaze upon you?"

Fear sparks like striking a match, and for a moment my vision is flooded with the image of the demon; the incarnation of darkness and evil, standing before me. The monstrosity towers over me, and I recoil so violently I nearly fall from the altar.

In the next instance, he appears human again. That addictive wave of calm clarity washes over me, stabilizing me.

He's hiding his true form, protecting my mind. The thought enters like he placed it

there himself, kind of like dropping a stone into the calm surface of my psyche.

Every time fear takes hold, the image of the man before me breaks, giving me glimpses of the true demon that stands behind the veil. He meant it when he said he wouldn't harm me, he proves it every time I panic and he enables me to become calm and clear.

One more steadying breath, and I shake my head in response to his earlier question. He nods his assent. "My true name holds great power, and should be spoken with purpose." I don't question him, my most recent research into demonology mentioned that we should only utter a demon's name if we intend to summon it, or worship it.

"What do you want with me?" I ask next, forcing my mind to focus on his striking blue eyes. As much as I want the truth, I also don't want to have a conversation with an eldritch horror. I want to help him hold this reality, I want to believe that his warm skin is real where it touches mine.

The demon watches me closely for a moment, before his hand drops from my throat. His fingers brush along the soft contours of my jaw before lifting to slip into my hair.

I sigh softly as I gaze up into his ethereal eyes, suddenly unable to resist his magnetic pull. With his fingers gripping tight at the base of my head, he pulls my mouth to his.

I gasp in surprise as his lips press into mine, his pillow soft mouth capturing my own in a feverish kiss. I melt into him, desperate for comfort from the very entity that has nearly destroyed my sanity not that long ago.

His dark energy pulses around us, and I am lost to his expert mouth. His kiss is so enthralling that for a minute, I forget I am standing in an empty church with a demon who has taken human form. I moan softly as his tongue slips past the boundary of my lips, coaxing mine to move.

His left arm winds around my waist, pulling me tight against his warm body, and I find myself desperate for more. My hands roam his brawny torso, my fingertips following all the dips and curves of muscle.

My body responds to him against my better judgment, intense arousal flooding in and leaving me with a needy throb between my thighs. The demon groans, as though my body's response pleases him.

Our lips part as he pulls away from me and takes a step back, gazing down at me with lust evident in his sinfully beautiful face. "I want you to let me inside of you, little witch."

A frown wrinkles my forehead as my eyes narrow, his words snapping me out of whatever spell he put me under with his kiss. "What?"

He doesn't answer my question, and I get the sense that the sudden change of subject is meant to distract me from the panic bubbling up from the pit of my stomach.

For a single second, a massive shadow flickers into existence in his place. I don't have enough time to understand what I saw before another wave of calm descends on me.

"Once upon a time, many centuries ago, I wandered the Earth in this body," he begins, stopping briefly to glance back over his shoulder.

I follow his line of sight, gasping when I see a hundred shadowy figures flicker into existence, scattered around the church in clusters. They watch us in silence, and the shock of seeing what I assume are demons standing here on hallowed ground has my mouth parting in horror.

A strange, unintelligible whispering that sounds like all of them speaking at once can

be heard for several disorienting seconds, before the demon sends the entities away with a flick of his wrist.

As though nothing happened, he continues speaking. I focus back on him, trying to pretend like a hundred demons didn't just pay us a God damned visit.

"The humans called me Daemon," he explains. Day-mon, not demon, as I had been referring to him in my head. "This name is safe to speak."

Daemon.

"Yes," he confirms, as though he can hear me speak the given name in my mind. I shake my head, not willing to let him keep changing the subject when I have one very important question I need an answer to.

"Why would I let you in? If you exist, that means the Devil exists. That also means God exists." I tell him, and the name of God causes his face to contort in disgust. "Tell me. Why would I let you in, and damn myself to Hell?"

He smiles, then. Something so unsettling, I recoil. "God is dead."

What?

"God is dead," he repeats firmly, once again acting as though he can read my internal dialogue. "The only heaven you will find is the one that I can give to you."

I shake my head, so confused it makes my head ache. How can God be dead?

"I will give you everything you desire, Selene," he promises, leaning forward to invade my space. My head falls back just enough to drown in the light of his softly glowing, blue eyes. Adoration fills me once again, and I suddenly feel the intense

urge to drop to my knees and worship the man speaking such puzzling words to me.

Son of a bitch. He's manipulating my emotions. The longer I remain calm, the more clarity I'm awarded. There is no reason for me to adore the demon in front of me, so the feeling is not coming from me. These out of place feelings are coming from him.

"A life of pleasure and decadence, of power and wealth beyond imagination. I will awaken your magic and give you all the knowledge you need to bring this world down to its knees."

His head lowers just enough to brush his lips against mine, the ghost of a lover's kiss. "All you have to do is bind your soul to me."

I frown up at him. I just cannot fathom what a Great Prince of Hell could possibly gain from acquiring my soul. I am nothing. No one.

"All that you are is mine to know, Selene. From your history, to your future, to every corridor of your brilliant mind."

Is this demon trying to tell me that I am a powerful, natural born witch with a limitless fountain of magic hidden inside of me? Locked away, requiring a key. I still cannot fathom how any of this benefits him, or how an ordinary girl like me can have potential like this.

"After I bind your soul to me, you will awaken as a witch, and your power will strengthen mine."

I listen to every word he is saying, trying my hardest to understand what he is attempting to explain. This sounds like a fairy tale, or a wild nightmare. If it weren't for all of the paranormal experiences I've been having lately, some of which I've shared with other people, I'd be certain I was simply trapped in a state of psychosis.

That none of this could possibly be real.

“As above, so below. My power from below will amplify yours, and your power from above will amplify mine. Do you understand?” It takes me a minute to make sense of his explanation, but eventually it clicks.

“My soul will connect you to the world above you, to the universe beyond your domain in Hell.” I state with certainty, unsure where that sudden burst of knowledge came from.

He smiles, and nods. “Already my magic has taken root in you. I am the teacher, and omniscience is my birthright.”

“Why me? There has to be someone better for you than me? I am no one.”

He laughs gently, a darkly musical but masculine sound. “I told you, there is nothing I do not know. I know everything about you, and what you harbor within.”

He leans down towards me, pressing his lips against mine. The kiss is just firm enough to feel soft, yet demanding. He takes my mouth as though he owns it, and I guess he believes he does. I cannot help but kiss him back, because despite everything, it feels good. He feels good.

Even though I know he is manipulating my feelings, I’ll take this over fear any day.

Demon, Great Prince of Hell, inhuman entity... regardless of all those things, he has never actually harmed me. He has only promised safety, power and protection. He knew I couldn’t handle his true form, so he is protecting me from it now.

Sure, he has scared the living hell out of me. I’m not sure if that was his intention or an act of malice on his part, it’s just the nature of dealing with a demon. Before this

year, supernatural things didn't exist to me.

I was raised Catholic, which means I was taught to fear the Devil and the hell that awaits us if we do not follow God's commandments. Before I decided to become a witch, I realized that doing so would lead me away from the church and away from God's light.

God never saved me, he never helped me, he never made me feel loved. So why did I still feel loyal to him? Daemon is offering me everything I want and need, all I have to do is let him in.

Unlike God, this entity standing before me in his human form is tangible. Present. He's the only thing that has proven itself to be real, beyond the little spells I have cast since starting my journey as a witch.

I've lit candles with my words, and called my ancestors to me to help protect me. I've found success in those things. What can I achieve if I bind myself to this demon and allow him to awaken my true potential?

Will letting him in damn me to eternal torment in hell, just as I was taught would happen when I was a child?

"You will never suffer damnation. When your time on earth is done, and you've weaved the threads of the universe down from the stars, and rooted them in me, you will join me in our own personal heaven."

What if he is lying?

"I have nothing to gain in lying to you. If I want you, I can take you whether you let me in or not. You will feel unbearable pain if I possess you, and eventually die, because demons cannot inhabit humans for long without tearing their souls to

shreds.”

I wince at the thought, but that revelation only confuses me again. He’s inside my head, I can feel him. Listening to my thoughts, flipping through them like the pages of a book.

“Let me in. Let me love you,” he says, his voice shifting tone rapidly, briefly sounding as though he is not just one being, but a legion of demons inhabiting one single body. “Let me in so that I can unlock what is within you. I can set you free.”

Love me?

“A love you cannot even fathom, so deep and true that it can never end. No force could take you from me, not even death.”

I have so many questions. So many it makes my head ache even more than it did before.

This is a lot to digest.

I watch him warily. “I don’t know what to think, what to do, what to feel.”

His beautiful eyes narrow slightly as he contemplates me. He releases me then, taking a step back so that I can slide off the altar and stand on my own two feet.

“I will give you a gift, little witch,” he promises.

“A gift?” I ask, wrapping my arms around myself once again. I feel as though all this information is going to overflow inside of me, crack me open and end with me falling to pieces right where I stand.

“The gift of vengeance. To prove my devotion to you, to us.”

An image flashes in my mind, one I can only assume he planted there. The image is a hellish nightmare. My uncle, Jake, screaming in a lake of fire. I shudder, stomach acid rising in my throat. It burns, but I swallow back the pain.

“On the night of the blood moon, six days from today, you will return here,” he explains as he turns away from me, abandoning me at the altar to consider all that he has offered me.

He doesn’t regard me again as he heads straight for the exit, his voice disembodied and drifting around me. “It is then that you will bind yourself to me.”

“Where will you be until then?” I call out, taking a step forward. The desire to follow him is overwhelming, and I don’t understand it. I am drawn to him, that much I can’t deny. Our meeting here today made him real in my mind, less of a threat and more like... a potential ally.

My dark companion.

Everything is different now.

I watch in awe as dark wings like black smoke spread from his back, and he lifts up into the chasm of darkness above the church doors, the place he descended from at the beginning of this whole encounter.

“With you. Always with you,” his voice fades into the emptiness of the church, and just like that, I don’t feel him here anymore.

God almighty, if you’re out there, please help me.

Of course, there's no answer. God has never taken the time to connect with me, or give me even a whisper of his guidance. Perhaps he really is dead.

Hit with a wave of bone deep exhaustion, I step away from the altar and walk down the center aisle. The once lit candles diminish as I pass them by.

I am so overwhelmed, the exhaustion is the only thing I can focus on as I exit the church and head back in the direction of home.

The walk home is dark and cold, the biting winds of winter seem to have arrived tonight.

Though as promised, I am not alone. That owl, with his dark feathers and frighteningly intelligent eyes, follows me every step of the way.

I don't know what late hour I finally crawled into bed at last night, but the insistent ringing of my phone has my eyes drifting open to my bedroom bathed in late morning light.

I groan, rolling over towards my bedside table and grabbing for my phone.

Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I answer reluctantly. "Hello?"

"Honeybee," Mom's voice trembles, the single word accompanied by a gentle sob.

"Mom?" I immediately sit up in bed, gripping the phone to my ear with both hands.

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, honey. Uncle Jake passed away last night."

Her words hit me like a baseball bat to the gut. I recoil away from the phone feeling all the warmth from a restful sleep drain from my body, before bringing it back to my ear.

“His roommate found him having a seizure, and he died before the ambulance could get him to the hospital. They think it was an aneurysm from an injury or something.”

“I’m so sorry, Mom,” I tell her, working hard to hide the fact that I want to vomit. I can’t even begin to process the emotions I am feeling in the wake of this news.

“The doctor says he has bruises all over his body, like he has been in a fight. The police said it looks like there was foul play. They’re doing an autopsy. It’s just terrible, sweetie,” she says, her voice cracking as she cries softly into the phone.

“What can I do?” I ask, not knowing what else to say.

“There’s nothing anyone can do, Honeybee. It’s an awful tragedy. I’ll let you know when I get a date for the funeral, okay?”

We speak for a few more minutes, before she lets me go to make some more calls. When the call finally ends, I get up and head for the bathroom. I don’t even have time for my knees to hit the cold tile before my stomach clenches and I dry heave violently.

If I had eaten anything recently, it would all be at the bottom of the toilet bowl with the force my stomach is trying to expel its contents. Bile burns its way up from my empty stomach, scorching my throat. When my stomach finally settles, I stand up, my eyes watering excessively from the ordeal.

I step over to the sink and brush my teeth, rinsing a mix of toothpaste and the foul taste away with some cool water.

The gift.

If I wasn't damned before, surely I am now. How can anyone come back from dealing with a demon like this? I've done this to myself when I decided to practice witchcraft. In theory, I accepted the potential consequences. The reality hits harder.

God abandoned you long ago. He abandoned us all. This is the right path.

Was that thought even my own? I have no way to know for sure. All I know is this path is mine now, and I can't change course. Not after everything that has happened. There is no way I can find salvation after receiving a gift from a demon.

I stare at my reflection in the mirror above my sink. My eyes are changing, how had I not noticed this before? Once plain brown, there is now a vibrant ring of brilliant gold around my pupil. The strangely coloured band is thin, but it's there. It glows softly, giving my face an otherworldly appearance.

Everything is changing, and so am I.

My faith has been broken, but now it has come full circle. There are six days remaining before I must make a decision. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't tempted by all the demon has offered me.

I have six days to either deny a demon what he wants, which is me, or embrace my power and bind my soul to a Great Prince of Hell.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

Abreathy sigh escapes my lips as he moves over me, his hard frame pressing me down into the soft mattress and luxurious satin sheets. The whisper of a moan leaves me as the cool, delicate material shifts against my feverish skin, and his hands begin to roam every curve of my body unapologetically.

I turn my face to the right, my eyes searching the darkness, only to find a huge open window. The only vestige of light in the vast space. The window glass is missing, allowing the breezy summer air to flow into the room and tame the balmy temperature.

Large and long flowing curtains catch the pale light of the full moon, the soft white silk billowing from the pleasant airflow.

The silk is everywhere. All around us, in varying shades of silver. My eyes catch glimpses of the sheer drapes as they dance in the breeze around the room, glittering in the light of the pale moon.

Where am I? The words are whispered into the opulent darkness, or at least I thought I spoke aloud. My eyes wander around the dark expanse, only to see more silky white sheets billowing softly throughout the heavy shadows.

His mouth descends on my neck, his soft lips trailing passionate kisses along my highly sensitized skin. His gentle hand grips my chin and turns my face back to his, but my eyes cannot see anything but the shape of him. He captures my mouth and steals the inquiry from me with a devouring kiss.

His tongue teases the seam of my lips until I open for him, moaning as he sweeps

inside of me and tastes the lust he is building in me. I arch against him, allowing him to dominate my mouth with his searing kiss.

The cool breeze hits my fevered skin, drawing another sigh out of me. My dark lover pulls away from me to watch my face as his hand drifts slowly down the curving contours of my torso, dipping down to slide between my thighs. I am lost to his touch.

I lift my arm towards the window, the silky materials floating up to meet my waiting fingertips, and I play with the ghostly edge of the curtain for a few moments.

My mind drifts back to wondering where I am. Before I can ask him, his shadow of a hand reaches out to grasp my wrist and pull it to his waiting mouth.

His full lips part to gently bite the palm of my hand, and I hiss in a breath before he soothes the sting with a kiss. The small pain and sensual pleasure of that one act makes my head feel foggy, and I rub my thighs together in an attempt to dispel the tension gathering there.

His hand is pinned between my supple thighs, but he doesn't seem to mind it. He strokes two fingers up and down my slit, coaxing my legs to part for him. They do, and I am rewarded with his fingers rubbing gentle circles around my clit.

I gasp, arching my body again, into his welcoming embrace. He snakes his other arm around my waist and anchors me to him while he dips two fingers into my eager body. My swollen pussy accepts him easily, wet from his seemingly endless teasing.

The walls of my pussy tighten around his fingers as he fucks me with his hand, and the intensity of my pleasure erupts like a volcano from the base of my spine, building towards blissful climax.

My hands lift to press against his chest, my nails biting into his warm skin, my hips lifting unbidden to rock against his skilled fingers.

His head drops, his tongue dragging sensually along the shell of my ear, before his deep and exotic voice filters through the fog that has taken up residence in my head. “That’s my good girl. Fuck my hand like the needy little witch I know you really are.”

Little witch.

Confusion strikes like the lash of a whip, and I flinch. What?

His hand grips my jaw again, pulling my mouth to his. His kiss is so intoxicating that I lose myself to him again, seduced by the way he feasts on me like I am his only salvation. His only oasis on this hot and dark desert night.

I moan softly as his teeth rake along my bottom lip, swollen from the intensity of his kisses. When he breaks our kiss, I am breathless, gazing up into the shadow of his face.

Just as my pleasure starts to peak, he pulls his hand from between my trembling thighs and draws them up to his mouth. Most of his face is hidden in shadow, but now I can see his fallen angel mouth as he places his drenched fingers between his lips and sucks them clean.

I gasp at the erotic sight of him licking me off of his fingers, my face flushing as a sinful smirk spreads slowly across his face. The light of the glimmering moon through the window catches on something, and my mind tries to make sense of what I am seeing. His canine teeth are unusually long and pointed. How strange.

“Who—“ My question is lost as his mouth descends on my jawline, nipping and

kissing his way to my ear, shifting his body until his hips settle heavily between my thighs. The feel of his cock sliding along my aching pussy has me moaning brokenly as he places a kiss against my ear.

“Beg me to fuck you, Selene.”

His words are filthy, and I shiver as he strokes along my pussy with his hardened length. My body is electric, supercharged, and begging for release. I writhe beneath him as he torments me, keeping me on the edge of ecstasy until I give him what he wants.

“Pl-ease. Please fuck me,” I beg with a needy whisper, my hands raking down his broad chest. The muscles beneath my fingertips tense, and his powerful body surges forward against me. The feel of his cock sliding deep inside of me makes me cry out, but he captures the sound in another worshipful kiss.

I am lost in rapture as he thrusts inside of me, his rough fingertips gripping my body like he must anchor us together so we don’t drift apart. His hips are pumping at a maddening pace, while he kisses every part of me that his greedy mouth can reach.

Every time his cock slides deep, I moan into his waiting mouth, losing parts of myself piece by piece to his reverent kisses. He takes every bit of me, and I know without a shred of doubt that this man would sooner die than pull our bodies apart.

I writhe beneath him as he drives us both towards a mind-shattering orgasm, unable to make sense of the array of sensations assaulting me. The billowing silk surrounds us, the cool summer breeze mingling with the sultry air; all while his hands, his mouth, and his cock overwhelm me with pleasure.

Lowering his hand between our bodies, his fingers find my clit and he rubs slow circles over it. My pussy tightens and my head falls back as he drives me to the peak,

his dark growl in my ear as his cock drives into me harder. “That’s it, little witch, come for me. Come all over my cock.”

Little witch?

The pressure at the base of my spine explodes as my body obeys him, and a tidal wave of pleasure pulsates through me, radiating out from the apex of my thighs. A breathy moan escapes my lips as the heat blooms deep and my pussy ripples around his hard length, his head dropping to my shoulder as he groans his release against the column of my throat.

I wrap my arms around him as he shudders his release, spilling his seed inside of me to coat the walls of my pussy. His moans are dark music to my ears, and I savor every sound from him as we both come down from our highs.

He leaves a trail of reverent kisses from my shoulder to my lips, before he pulls away and lifts a gently trembling hand to cup my cheek.

The shadows dance between us, shifting, and for a moment I catch a small glimpse of my shadowed lover. His eyes, two pitch black voids devoid of light, gaze down at me.

I lose myself in the endless black of his strange eyes, his deep and soothing voice echoing around me in the exotic space we’ve found ourselves adrift in. “I love you, Selene.”

My stomach drops, and I suddenly feel like I am falling.

I gasp as I am pulled from the lucid dream, my upper body jolting upwards. I lean backwards, falling onto the palms of my hands as my arms stretch out to prop me up in my bed.

My tired eyes navigate my surroundings until I once again feel rooted in reality, safe in the familiar space of my room.

I hear only the sound of my heavy breathing, the atmosphere of my bedroom calm and quiet despite my upset. I feel no presence here.

Between my legs, my clit still throbs periodically and gently, from the orgasm I am sure I really had. I'm still wet and swollen, instantly feeling the absence of my dream lover. I lower my hand to touch myself, shocked by just how wet I am.

It is as though his release is coating the soft lips of my pussy, promising it was more than just a heated dream.

I lower myself back down to lay within the rumpled sheets of my bed, sighing deeply as I throw an arm over my eyes and think about the dream I just woke up from. Part of me questions whether or not I should be afraid, but the serenity I feel paired with the afterglow of the experience has me drifting back off to a dreamless sleep before I even know it.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

The clouds overhead are dark and heavy, threatening to drench the city in a cold rainstorm on this dreary October morning. I pull my thick black cardigan tightly around me as I pass under the arches of the walkway leading up to the funeral home doors.

A few people are filtering in and out as another end of life service finishes, and I manage to slip inside the somber, old building while a teary eyed mother and her two children leave.

The interior is lit by incandescent bulbs, casting a warm light that is easy on the eyes. The walls are beige, trimmed with white, and the ceramic floor tiles are a warm tan hue. For a funeral home, it is clean and cozy inside.

The part I hate the most is the abundance of flowers. I can't get over the idea that all these flowers are meant to cover up the smell of the dead.

They are beautiful and the intention behind them is sweet, but the smell is something that does not remind me of peaceful summer gardens. Here, in the funeral home, the scents are an amalgamation of every variety of flower you can think of, concentrated and missing the sweet summer breeze.

The smell reminds me of death and mourning, and I can't help it.

I sigh deeply, dreading what comes next, and make my way through the foyer. I glance briefly at each photo board that showcases which loved one is in which room. I stop when my uncle's face comes into view, his full name written in cursive below a recent photo of him at a barbecue from this past summer.

As I stare at his face, my stomach does a little flip and a wave of nausea comes and goes. Squeezing my eyes shut, I talk myself through this quietly in my head.

He's dead, he can't hurt me, the only thing left are the memories.

I open my eyes and straighten my spine, stepping forward to gently push open the two doors leading into the room the service is being held in. I slip in quietly, and stand just inside the doors and off to the side.

The priest is up front next to the open casket, reciting a lengthy prayer to the people sitting scattered in groups around the room. My mom is sitting in the front pew next to my dad, my grandma and my brothers.

Mom and Grandma Rose are holding each other, listening to the priest as he shares verses from the well-loved bible in his hands.

I keep my eyes away from the casket, unwilling to look at him just yet. There are massive bouquets of flowers around the room, as well as small clusters of people. Extended family is scattered here and there, as well as Jake's friends, and his coworkers.

I stay standing along the back wall, off to the side of the doors. I listen to the priest, his calming words intermingling with the soft cries and sniffles from the people gathered before him.

People loved my uncle, it seems. I imagine I'm the only one who ever had to face the evil he harbored secretly within him.

Evil people are good at hiding, good at manipulating the people around them. You often hear people who were friends with murderers, rapists and abusers talk about how they would have never known. The person in question seemed so gentle, so kind.

They never acted like monsters before.

How can you tell that the beautiful fish you just caught in the crystal clear lake is full of deadly parasites until you cut it open and expose the corruption to the light of day?

The priest pauses, and a short Catholic hymn plays as he sets his book aside and prays over the casket. My eyes wander to Jake, his body laying among the off-white satin of the coffin's interior.

He looks like Jake, but his face doesn't look quite right. There is a heavy smattering of make up, likely to hide the bruising Mom mentioned he had all over his body. He doesn't even really look peaceful, the way you imagine every dead person is supposed to look. It's almost as though the muscles in his face froze in agony at his moment of death and never fully relaxed... like the mortician couldn't make the muscles cooperate.

It's strange and unsettling. I glance down at my hands, fidgeting in front of me. I pick at some dry skin around my nails, waiting for the hymn to finish and the priest to resume.

"Family and friends," the priest begins, and I lift my gaze to watch him. "Our God has called Jake home to him."

That's when I hear it. Laughter, so low and deep and distant—as though it is coming from somewhere far away—that I don't think I actually hear it at first. When I slowly turn my head towards the door, I startle when I see the man standing there, staring at the priest with an empty look on his face. His face contorts rapidly, like the man is in silent agony, before fully relaxing again.

"God doesn't care about Jake, priest," the man says, his voice distorted. The tone is totally wrong, his naturally deep voice laced with some unnatural higher pitches. The

hairs on the back of my neck stand on end, and I instantly recognize that whoever this poor man is, there is a demonic entity possessing him right now. Right here in the funeral home, standing next to me in a room full of people.

I force my eyes to the front of the room, but the priest just continues with his service. He doesn't seem to hear us, nor recognize we are even here. I look back to the man next to me, terrified to move or speak.

The stranger's head turns slowly until his empty gaze meets mine. His pupils expand until his eyes are entirely consumed in black, like two unnatural voids set in his human face. "Jake is drowning in the fires of Hell, his screams so loud that his vocal cords keep breaking."

The man shrugs as if that confession doesn't bother him, like Jake's suffering is just another day at the office.

I swallow back against the knot of fear that forms in my throat, and take two steps back, away from the possessed man. I want to scream, but it gets caught in my throat. No matter how much paranormal activity I've been exposed to lately, this hasn't gotten easier to witness.

A dark wave of soothing energy hits me, settling along the surface of my skin. I know that power, I remember its influence like it was yesterday.

"Daemon," I choke out, my voice a trembling whisper.

His hand lifts and reaches towards my face to trail softly down along my jawline. His mouth slowly spreads into a wicked grin, and he just watches me for a moment.

"My little witch," he whispers to me, his voice so unsettling my brain just can't recognize it as regular human speech.

His face contorts yet again, as though Daemon's arrival and departure within the innocent man's body is torture to his very soul.

I watch the black recede into his pupils, and the man's face relaxes. He jolts silently, as though snapping out of a stupor. Confusion pulls his features tight, and he pulls his hand away from me. I can't stop myself from flinching, and he suddenly looks ashamed. As though he didn't mean to touch me.

I don't think he knows what just happened to him.

"I-I... I'm s-sorry," he stammers quietly, pulling his attention away from me to figure out where he is. He shakes his head and quickly exits the room, but the heavy weight of Daemon's presence lingers.

I feel him in the space around me, like a shield enveloping me. It is still so hard to come to terms with the stark juxtaposition that is the innate fear of this demon, and the comfort his attention and protection grants me.

As the priest finishes, my eyes wander to Jake's resting place. I can't pull my eyes away from him, imagining him in hell. Suffering in damnation for what he's done to me, all because I accidentally formed the beginning of a bond with a powerful demon. Strong roots woven into my very soul, and something I cannot break, let alone take back.

Daemon killed him as a gift to me. There is no going back from that.

Lost in my dark thoughts, I startle when a gentle hand rests on my arm. My eyes snap to my mother, her glossy hazel eyes full of a harsh combination of grief and exhaustion.

"Honeybee, why didn't you come sit with us?"

I lean in and give Mom a gentle hug, “I didn’t want to interrupt. I saw the whole service, though,” I reassure her, and she places a kiss on my cheek.

“Okay, darling. We’re going to the reception room next for coffee,” she places her hand lightly on my back, and I allow her to guide me through the doors.

All of the guests slowly make their way to our reception space, and I watch them sit around the tables and chat quietly while I sip a hot cup of tea.

After about forty minutes of visiting with my family, I pull my mom aside and tell her I’ve got a headache and need to head home. I say my goodbyes, toss away my empty cup, and leave the building as quickly as I can without making much noise or drawing any attention to myself.

As I exit, I am greeted by the caws of several ravens where they sit perched around the building and the surrounding trees. The rain has already started to fall, darkening the pavement, but it isn’t too heavy yet.

I decide to hail a cab, which emerges from traffic before the consideration even finishes as a complete thought in my mind, and it pulls up along the curb so I can get in out of the rain.

I buckle myself in and give the driver my address, which is only about 10 minutes from here. When he confirms my address and plugs it into his GPS, then doesn’t make any attempt at further conversation, I relax into my seat and stare out the window.

The sun is setting now, I can see the dark pink and orange hues breaking through bits of the heavy cloud cover. A few wayward rays of sunset’s light hit the car’s window, making the droplets in their path look like golden beads as they glide across the glass. I’m mesmerized by it, and before I realize it, we’ve pulled up along the curb in front

of my triplex building.

I grab my bag from across the seat and glance at the meter above the dashboard, pulling what I owe from my wallet and holding it out for the driver. When he makes no move to take it, I frown.

“Sir?”

“He’s suffering so much.”

The driver’s voice is monotone and empty, and every muscle in my body tenses in response. “Excuse me?”

The driver doesn’t turn to face me, but I catch his gaze in the mirror.

Black eyes. A demon’s stare.

This doesn’t feel like Daemon, though. The energy is all wrong. Nothing about this encounter makes me feel safe, or protected.

I reach for the door handle, but it doesn’t budge. I hold his gaze, trembling lightly.

“He’s been screaming endlessly ever since your Great Prince dragged him down through the earth,” the driver says it with an unnaturally wide smile, though his voice is still completely monotone.

Who the fuck is in this car with me?

I’m shaking more now, but I don’t know what to say. I’m too scared to open my mouth.

“There’s a golden statue of you, you know. Down in Hell. So uncle dearest never forgets why he’s there,” the driver explains, turning his head finally to look at me. There is something so insanely unsettling about the face of a possessed man. I will never grow accustomed to it. “He rips out his guts over and over again, and feeds them back to him. Your uncle just cries and screams and begs for God to save him.” The last sentence is spoken in a singsong voice, the change unexpected and disturbing.

“Let me out!” I shout into the confined space of the sedan, pulling on the door handle in a desperate attempt to exit the vehicle.

The driver begins to laugh, an awful sound that grates on my already frayed nerves. Tears pool at the corners of my eyes, because I don’t know what entity this is and what it plans to do with me.

Just when the panic starts to completely overwhelm me, a shadow descends on the car and the driver’s body is pulled upwards towards the roof. He contorts and smashes up into it, before falling like a rag doll back into his seat.

I startle, but the darkness pulls up and away just as quickly as it came. It’s like the entity possessing the man was ripped right out of his body by something else, and now the poor taxi driver sits crumpled in the driver’s seat, unconscious and unaware.

The sound of the car doors unlocking startles me again. With a hand that is shaking violently, I toss the money I owe the driver into the passenger side seat and exit the car as fast as I can. I don’t even look back as I pull my keys from my pocket, unlock the door, and rush inside.

Breathing heavily, I let the tears fall. This is too fucking much.

I pull off my cardigan, drop my bag, slip off my shoes and head directly for my

reading chair. I slide into it, still shaking and quietly crying, before pulling my large blanket up over my head and silently willing the world to just stop and give me a chance to catch my breath.

I can only assume Daemon pulled the errant demon from the man's body and let me out of the car, and part of me is thankful for it. I don't know what would have happened to me if he didn't show up to save me from the unknown entity.

A thought enters my mind: If I bind myself to Daemon, will that stop other demons from bothering me? Can he protect me from these beings that I know so little about?

Pulling the blanket down from over my head, I let my still blurry eyes roam my apartment. It's empty, and quiet. There's a light on above my stove in the kitchen, one I often forget to turn off. It provides just enough light to keep the darkness at bay as the sun continues to set in a sky already dark from the rain.

I will my reluctant voice to leave my lips, although it sounds weak in the quiet that fills my apartment. "Daemon, I know you can hear me. Please... leave me alone for the night. I can't give you anything else. I need sleep."

As I expected, there is no direct answer to my request. Just a gentle quiet that doesn't feel oppressive, and no presence of a demonic entity to be felt.

I close my eyes, and sleep comes hard and fast. Exhaustion pulls me under so deeply, that my eyes don't open until the morning light arrives.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

The rain is falling heavily from the dark sky above, beating against the thick glass of my bedroom window. The sound is incessant, but deeply soothing. This weather made it difficult to get out of bed this morning after an exceptionally long day at work the day before, but I knew I couldn't lay in bed all day and just wait for this day to end.

Pushing open the door of my altar room, I step inside the cozy space and immediately close the door behind me. Moving to stand in front of my altar, I lower myself down into a kneeling position.

So much has happened since I last knelt down in this sacred room. The protection spell I cast on a little brown pouch and kept securely in my pocket for my dad's birthday party was a success, my childhood abuser was sent away thanks to the defensive magic I carried with me.

The strength and control that I felt after that fateful day was how I imagined a drug would feel to a new addict. Intoxicating, heady, and triggering all those sore places inside of me that are desperate for relief.

My need for safety and control over my own life is overwhelming, since it was stripped away from me at such a young age. With the use of magic comes control of the world around you, and that is incredibly irresistible for someone like me. Someone that feels the inherent drive to protect herself and prevent the horrors that could befall her.

Last night, it took me forever to fall asleep. I keep fantasizing about the potential Daemon was promising me. Could I stop people from hurting me entirely? Could I

bring real success and luck into my everyday life? How far could my magic take me?

Those thoughts haunted me late into the night, and it wasn't until I promised myself that I would seek the answers to those questions the following morning that my mind finally relaxed enough for me to actually sleep.

Kneeling here now, before the altar I assembled a few months ago as an inexperienced witch, I feel in charge of my life for the first time.

Although my spell was a success, everything that led me to this moment also led me to Daemon. A Prince of Hell, a dark entity that was the very thing capable of proving the existence of the paranormal to me.

Something put me in the direct path of the most horrific supernatural experiences, events I never imagined possible in this reality, and there was no turning back now.

All I want is to take full control of my life, and find out exactly what Daemon is offering. I want to know every single detail if I am going to allow a demon to bind my soul to him forever.

Knowledge. Strength. Control. If those things are within my reach, I want them. I don't ever want to be somebody's helpless victim, not ever again.

Leaning forward slightly, I take a few minutes to light the candles and position two of them on either side of the altar for lighting, before shifting my body back into position.

I close my eyes, settling my hands palms down over my bare thighs. The bottoms of my loose-fitting black silk shorts tickle my wrists, so I reposition myself and take a deep, steadying breath.

I focus my mind on Daemon, on the memory of our first time meeting here in this room. I recall the sound of his voice, the feel of his otherworldly body, and the way his presence overpowered me.

“Daemon, Prince of Hell, I call to you,” I call out, my voice sounding louder than it feels like it should be in the quiet atmosphere of my apartment. “Show me what I am capable of.”

I wait for several long minutes, expecting to feel a shift in the energy or hear his voice from somewhere beyond. I can’t quite describe what it is I am feeling in this moment, but it doesn’t feel like his arrival. Perhaps Daemon didn’t hear me? Maybe I need a formal ritual to summon him.

Opening my eyes, I cannot stop the startled scream that escapes me as every hair on my body stands on end.

There’s a shadow figure in front of me, its body contorted on top of the comparatively small surface of my altar. I can hardly make sense of the outline of its manifestation, but I can see enough to know it is a poor mimic of how a real person is supposed to be shaped.

The demonic entity is horrifying, with vibrant red eyes and a set of horns curling from the crown of its head. It is staring at me wide-eyed, like something that crawled out of Hell and tried to make my altar its new home.

Before I can break through the terror of its sudden appearance and move away, I watch in horror as the monster’s mouth splits unnaturally wide and its head falls back in an awful, soundless scream. Frozen in fear, I am shocked into silence as whatever this is, is pulled violently towards the back of the closet, vanishing into the thick blackness beyond.

As my entire body begins to shake from the adrenaline pumping through me, I shuffle back towards the door, only to collide with a hard wall of muscle and warmth.

Daemon.

“Little witch.” His voice is the most smooth and deep sound I have ever heard. It sinks into me like warm water through thick cloth, soothing all of the nerves set on fire from the other entity’s sudden appearance moments ago.

“You scared the living hell out of me,” I gasp, taking a steadying breath before I force myself to relax into the contours of his substantial, strange body. I still don’t understand how a demon can make me feel so safe, but he achieves the impossible every time we meet.

Daemon, or whatever his true name is, is also an unholy being from Hell. There is absolutely no reason I should feel safe with him, I know that. I can’t explain my feelings, or why they came on so suddenly. I just know what I feel when his body touches mine.

I’m already well aware that he can alter my reality, make me feel things that don’t come naturally to me. He forced me to become calm and clear headed back at the church, when faced with the unimaginable horror of what I know now was just a shadow of his true self. He’s capable of more than I can fathom, and for all I know, everything I feel and every word from his mouth has been a lie.

He also has not given me any indication of intent to harm me. He killed my uncle for me, and saved me from that demon in the taxi. If anything, he has shown me through his actions that he wants to protect me. His previous words, and his reasoning for wanting to bind my soul to him, make me believe he isn’t lying. It all makes sense to me when I put it together, like pieces of a puzzle.

If there is indeed an untapped well of power within me, of course he wants access to it. Especially if it elevates him and increases his own power.

“That was not me,” he whispers, his soft lips brushing against the shell of my ear. His breath comes out in warm puffs, making me shiver against him. He seems to enjoy how my body responds, because he winds an arm around my waist and pulls me in tighter against him. “Another demon heard your call, but I cast him back down.”

“I’ve never had paranormal experiences before. Why are all these demons showing up everywhere now?” I ask him, closing my eyes as I nestle a little harder into his embrace. He is so much larger than me, I can’t imagine any lesser demon harming me while he is holding me so protectively.

The warmth of his body seeps right down into me and settles, driving all the fear and coldness away. The things he makes me feel are addictive, which makes him dangerous. I can’t help but wonder if he wants me to feel this way, drunk on his presence.

He feels like safety, and although I know that thought is madness, I can’t resist the pull of it. I’ve always sought safety in life, which I’m certain is a byproduct of my childhood trauma, so when someone indomitable enough to give it to me actually offers it up on a silver platter, I feel compelled to accept it against my better judgment.

Safety is a seductive, instinctual need for me. The desire for protection is a seed that was planted in me when I was just a broken child. That seed grew as I did, into a gnarled tree rooted deep in my gut. A twisted tree that is still dying of insatiable thirst, dehydrated all the way through.

“They can feel the power awakening in you,” he says gently against my ear, his voice so pleasurable to my senses that I shiver yet again in response. “Every demon would

want you for themselves, so they can possess you and use your power to climb the ranks of Hell.”

My eyes shoot open. Dread settles over me as I process his words. “No. That can’t be true. There’s no reason for demons to want to possess me. I’m nobody!”

Light laughter slips from his mouth, a gentle rumble in his broad chest. “Lies. I am omniscient, and there is nothing about you that I do not already know.”

Right. That means, if there is something special inside of me, he already knows all about it. I’m the only one in the dark here. The lack of information, with demons becoming aware of my existence, puts me in grave danger.

“You need not fear them, little witch. I will tear them apart until they are nothing but broken atoms in the cosmic wind.”

I don’t know what to say in response, I can only hope he is right. I am not equipped to deal with demons, I’ve only recently begun exploring protection magic as the first steps on my journey to becoming a witch.

Surely a Great Prince of Hell can protect me from everything that would seek to harm me, right? That means giving myself to him fully, and letting him bind my soul to him for eternity.

That is far from a small price to pay for protection and knowledge. For power. I sigh, shaking my head. I cannot believe this is my reality.

One of Daemon’s oversized hands travels across my body, drifting up towards my throat where it settles comfortably beneath my jawline. Logically, I know that should scare me, but he applies minimal pressure and uses one clawed finger to stroke the line of my jaw.

I sigh once more, a deep and expressive sound. A wave of calm like I felt back at the church spreads over me, soothing me. I give in to him, not just because I crave the comfort he offers, but because I am tired of feeling like life is a losing battle that I am endlessly fighting. I am tired of being afraid, of questioning everything and everyone. I want to be in control, and most importantly I want to be strong enough to protect myself.

“You have nothing to fear, Selene. You are mine, and only mine, and once our bond is complete you will bear my mark all over your mortal soul. Any demon that comes for you will know what will happen if they touch what belongs to me.”

As I process his words, my peripheral vision catches the sight of his hand as it moves. Stroking my face soothingly, I see what looks like fingertips that end in thick, curved talons.

I try to turn my head to look at him, but he stops me from doing it by tightening his hold on my throat.

“I want to see you,” I try to explain as I lift my hand to his, the attempt to pry his hand from me is completely useless. He doesn’t budge even a little bit, reminding me that his physical strength is far beyond what I ever imagined. He could kill me in an instant, and I couldn’t fight back no matter how hard I tried.

I take note of the way his skin feels beneath mine. Smooth, warm and hard with muscle and tough sinew. He doesn’t feel human, but that isn’t necessarily a bad thing. He’s just... different.

“You are not ready to see me,” he explains gently, the tone of his voice fluctuating and reminding me just how inhuman he is. In the darkness, with his human-like body pressed against my back and holding me like one would hold their lover, it’s easy to forget that he isn’t even a little bit human. “When humans see my true form, they

tend to descend into irreparable insanity. You've experienced it."

I don't doubt that even a little, considering how he needed to make a major effort to protect me back in the church when he first showed himself to me.

Recalling the memory of what the silhouette of him looked like, I can't stop myself from picturing him as an eldritch horror, with long spiraling horns and a misshapen face that is something people only encounter in their darkest nightmares.

"Shhh," he soothes, dropping his hand from my throat. "Do not dwell on such things. Once you fully awaken, you will have what you need to protect yourself as you gaze into the void."

I nod in response. I have to trust him in this. The last thing I want is to spend the rest of my days in a straight jacket, sequestered away from society.

"Let me give you what you seek, a taste of the power I can unleash within you," he whispers to me as another pulsating wave of tranquility settles over me.

Daemon's hand grasps my wrist as his arm rises to the right of me, holding me in his firm grip. I am shocked to find that his muscular forearm is black like the most beautiful obsidian stone I've ever seen. I am in awe at the sight of it, my gaze wandering across the muscular expanse of dark skin.

"Inside of you, there is a fire. A primeval source that sits at the root of your soul," he tells me as I examine the small portion of his body I can now see. It's hard to concentrate on his words when he is giving me a glimpse of what he truly looks like.

His hand is double the size of mine, dwarfing my slender fingers. There are intricate runes and demonic symbols imprinted into the black of his shadowy skin. They glow, dim and subtle, like the embers of a starving fire. The patterns are haunting and

beautiful, despite being very clearly demonic. They remind me of the sigil I carved into my protection candle, and the other symbols I saw in the old book I originally found it in.

Demonic and meaningful. I wonder if they are all over the rest of his body, too.

“My touch.” he explains, his sharp teeth biting gently at my earlobe before leaving a hot trail of soft kisses down the side of my neck, causing my body to arch involuntarily as I melt against him. “My touch stokes that fire, and turns it from a bed of embers into a roaring inferno.”

His touch shouldn’t feel this good. It’s sinful, the way my body responds to him.

“Did you put it there?” I whisper in response, my voice a breathy whisper in the darkness that surrounds us. His mouth feels so damn good on my skin, I can feel heat gathering at the apex of my thighs. Unbidden is the response my body has to him, but I feel no shame.

We are far past the point of shame.

“No, little witch. Your ancestors did. Witchcraft is your birthright, there is magic in your blood. Etched into your DNA.”

“I can’t feel it,” I tell him, unable to truly believe what he’s telling me. I’ve never felt special, I certainly don’t feel any ancient fire inside of me. Sure, I’ve felt called to the craft, but I assumed it was because of my dire need to find protection and safety from my now dead, abusive uncle.

“The power of magic can come from several sources within us. The fire can grow with extreme focus and discipline, or stem from the pit of one’s endless rage.” His other arm shifts, moving across my lower abdomen. The trail of his talons across the

thin fabric of my tank top has shivers erupting in their wake. “Pleasure and passion can make the fire burn wild, too.”

My head falls back against his shoulder as his hand roams my body, and in that instance I feel intoxicated by his touch. His soft, hot mouth trails fervid kisses along the column of my throat, slow and sensual. An ache settles low in my abdomen, and desire like I’ve never experienced before emerges from somewhere deep within.

I want him. I want this Great Prince of Hell more than I’ve wanted any of my human lovers in the past. I can’t fully explain it, but he instinctively knows exactly how to touch me to get the strongest reaction.

Something dark and warm flutters across my skin, like a spectral fire blazing an unyielding trail, an energy that emanates from his touch and threatens to consume me. “It is me that you feel on your skin, my own great power, an energy born in the deepest, darkest regions of Hell.” He is allowing his dark life force to pulse across me in waves, to touch me directly, to explore my body like it has every right to do so.

“Religion oppresses, Hell liberates,” he speaks quietly, his voice disembodied and moving around me like a serpent in the darkness. I shiver again, everything about what is happening is overwhelming to my very human senses. “Only a demon can awaken what lies hidden inside you, but a lesser demon cannot give you what I can. Only I am powerful enough to unshackle your magic and set it completely free.”

Daemon’s hand shifts and settles over my lower abdomen, his fingers flirting with the hem of my delicate sleeping shorts. I groan as his hand slips lower, beneath the frail fabric, those talons moving dangerously close to the most sensitive part of my body.

Another time, long before Daemon entered my life, I’d feel ashamed of myself for what I was feeling right now. The thrill of danger is only amplifying my arousal, and I don’t want to waste time fighting with myself on why our connection is so

sacrilegious. I just want to feel.

“I will show you a glimpse of your true power, but I want something in return,” he whispers, his lips once again grazing the shell of my ear. Several gentle bites, and my concentration wavers. I can feel the fire within me now, called to his touch. A flickering flame, hungry and desperate for fuel.

And his teeth, I can tell they’re not human. He has long, sharp fangs that could easily tear the jugular vein clear out of my throat. The feel of them is an aphrodisiac to my corrupted mind.

Anything. I’ll give him anything he wants right now.

“What do you want?” I ask, my voice so low and quiet that if he were a normal person he probably would not have heard me. I can’t project my voice, not with the white hot arousal sparking to life beneath his wicked hand. If I hadn’t already been on the floor, I am certain the way he is touching me would bring me to my knees.

With a soft exhale, Daemon bites at my throat, soothing the sting from his sharp teeth with a languid kiss. I moan, and he chooses that moment to slip his fingers down until they brush along my clit. “Your pleasure,” he growls against my ear, his hand moving again to firmly cup my pussy as he settles in between my thighs.

Another moan escapes me as I arch against his hold on me, the feel of his energy and his hand over my sex almost enough to bring me to orgasm. My body is a livewire of desire, and right now I am certain I’d give him anything he asked of me if he just promised he wouldn’t stop.

“Take it,” I tell him, and he does. His fingers move through the folds of my pussy, where I am wet and swollen and more sensitive than I can ever imagine being before. “Please take it,” I beg, feeling the fire deep inside of me roaring to life under the

coaxing intensity of him.

“That’s my good girl. Let me in so I can feed that starving inferno.”

His words are gasoline on the fire, and I moan again as I grind against his hand. Already so close to explosive pleasure, to a delirium that threatens to break me apart, while my body begs him for more.

“No one can give you what I can. No one can love you like I can,” he tells me, his dark voice an inhuman growl in my ear. I quiver, feeling so overloaded with sensation that I feel entirely out of control of my body.

“Let me in.” Again, his seductive last words are disembodied. Demonic.

I should be praying to God for absolution, but all I want to do is worship at this demon’s altar of sin.

I force my own thighs to fall open, inviting his touch. He growls his pleasure, and two of his large fingers slip inside of me. The sound that comes out of me is divine, I am certain of it. A sound born of absolute bliss, of embracing one’s own rapture. Something that can only be described as the incarnation of wicked lust.

I nearly come undone, but I feel a blazing heat sparking at my fingertips and the intense sensation pulls my attention to where he firmly holds my hand in his. “You must concentrate. Embrace the fire within you, and will it to move through you. Pull it towards your fingertips, coax it out of your body and into this world.”

Daemon points our intertwined fingers towards the center of my altar, and I obey him without resistance. I can now feel the fire at the root of my soul. I let it burn up through me, until the heat of it fills my entire body. For a brief second, I feel as though I will combust. I can feel it in my eyes, and I know without seeing that they

must be blazing red and gold from the power burning through me.

I would self-destruct, I am certain, if not for Daemon's power funneling my own safely through me. His body, his strength, and his zealous presence protects me from the nuclear explosion I now know without a shred of doubt I am capable of.

His fingers move inside of me, making me ache and throb under his adept touch. As he promised, he is stoking the fire and building it higher. As his power amplifies, the markings on his arms begin to glow brighter. They are so beautiful, and I am captivated by the rolling flames beneath his obsidian skin.

It is only when sparks burst from my fingertips that my attention is refocused from his otherworldly body and how damn good he is making me feel.

Holy fuck.

Wisps of fire dance along the edges of my fingers, shooting out from behind my skin.

"Just like that. You are magnificent, Selene. A dragon born among lambs." He praises me, catching some of the sparks with the curved talon on his index finger and flicking them outwards. They burst into small flames, dissipating into the darkness.

I am mesmerized. Everything he told me about the power I hold is real. I can feel the fire flaring within me, and I am certain this is not coming from him. I will never in a thousand years forget this feeling of pure, limitless strength.

"Focus. Let your fire free." I narrow my gaze as he coaches me, turning my attention inward. The scorching blaze I possess, his own devilish power, and the feel of his fingers deep in the tight, wet space between my thighs; I am tempered by it all.

I focus as he instructs me to, I visualize the fire breaking loose, and watch in absolute

awe as an extraordinary inferno roars to life from my hand.

It grows so great, spilling out into the room and lighting up every dark corner. The blaze dances along the walls, up on the ceiling, and down across the floor before us. It is wild, out of control, threatening to burn my home to the ground.

A little jolt of panic sparks to life inside of me, but his hand that grips my wrist tightens as if to remind me that he is with me. The three middle fingers on his hand flex as they extend, and his own life force, like pools of black ink, pour from them and dance along the boundary of my fire. “Trust in me, little witch.”

I relax my body, willing myself to trust in him to guide me away from utter annihilation of all that surrounds me.

He chants briefly, his voice dropping low as words I can’t comprehend command the wild magic before us to bow to his will. The fire burning in front of my eyes bends to his will without so much as a shred of resistance. He shapes it, his darkness forcing it to yield until the blaze forms a mirror image of me. I gasp, shocked by the sight of myself made of fire.

“Focus, Selene. That fire is yours and yours alone. It knows your soul, and only you can call it home. Call it back, or it will destroy all that it touches,” he speaks to me, but his voice is disembodied again. It is everywhere, outside of me and inside my head all at the same time. He is guiding me, making me feel safe as I play with this dangerous force of nature I am harboring. I can only nod in response, worried that speaking may cause my focus to waver.

“Use the roots of your fire to reach out, take hold of, and guide the fire outside back to you.”

I narrow my gaze, and imagine the source of my magic snaking out of me like a

living thing. White hot tendrils reach out of my very soul, coiling tight around the edges of the fire I cast out, pulling it towards me. The burning image of myself bends to my will this time.

Daemon's movement between my thighs starts again, and his palm grinds down against my clit. Pleasure explodes, stealing my focus, the fire snapping and popping against my hold like I may lose control of it again.

His laughter, both soft and teasing, echoes around me. It is a dark sound, though I don't feel like he is poking fun at my weakness. He enjoys what his touch does to me. "Focus, Selene."

I do. I focus, and pull the flames back inside of me. The burning heat flows through my fingertips, through my eyes, and into my solar plexus. It fills me from my toes to the crown of my head, rioting through my body like a drug that promises to keep me captive to this new addiction until the very end of time.

Once the darkness swallows the room again, my head crashes back against Daemon's shoulder and his skilled hand brings me to orgasm so hard and fast that everything I fought to contain detonates inside of me.

The bomb goes off, and he bites the side of my throat beneath my ear, hard enough to draw blood.

I feel no pain as his sharp teeth puncture my skin, only white hot pleasure. The ecstasy is so intense it steals the breath from my lungs and consumes every inch of me. I writhe in his embrace, expecting to combust and dissolve into nothingness from the insane intensity of my pleasure.

I can hear dark chanting, reverberating through me as his energy moves over me. He is containing the fire, soothing it, willing it to be calm and contained inside of me.

I am lost, lost in the tidal wave of bliss that crashes into me mercilessly. Daemon holds me in his tight embrace for what feels like an eternity, until my body settles quietly in his arms. I am satiated like I have never been before, every ounce of stress and pain absent from my body. Just a glowing warmth, absolute safety, and vitality vibrating beneath the surface of my skin.

“I am so fucking proud of you, Selene,” he whispers against my ear, rocking me gently in his arms. “So many witches would have burned from the inside out attempting what you just did, but your body and soul were made for me. Together, there is nothing we cannot achieve.”

I melt under his praise, then blossom like a desert flower starved of water beneath the rarest of rain. The archaic inferno inside of me is no longer dormant, and I feel so alive I don't know how to stop myself from chasing this feeling to the very ends of the earth.

Daemon wasn't lying about my innate power, or how he could set me free. In that moment, I know without a shadow of doubt that tomorrow I am going to say yes to him. I will give myself to this demon, and he will take my very soul.

I wait patiently as he works, soothing my scorched soul and putting the necessary protection in place to prevent my inner magic from consuming me before I learn how to truly wield it. When he is finished, serenity washes over me like a balm.

Pressing a kiss to my throat, he shifts away from me and I am painfully aware of the cold space between us. “Wait,” I whisper out loud, fighting against the sudden wave of drowsiness that floods my body as exhaustion takes hold. “Don't go.”

“You need to rest, little witch. Your body must recover,” he whispers, his voice suddenly becoming disembodied again, as though it is coming from a distance. “I'm always with you.”

Just like that, his presence dissipates. I feel the sudden absence of him like a weight on my chest, as though I can't quite catch a full breath. Yesterday, I would have been surprised by this feeling. Not today. Not anymore.

The connection between this demon and I is as real as anything I've ever known, the roots of it reaching deep. As I lift myself up, swaying slightly on my feet, I remind myself that there is no going back from this. You cannot break this kind of connection to an ancient evil, not once it has taken hold.

Leaving the walk-in closet, I enter my bedroom, surprised to find it cloaked in the darkness of night. My eyes wander to the clock on my bedside table, unable to fathom how an entire day has passed me by when it felt like only an hour, maybe two.

9:13pm. I'm too exhausted for a shower, so I strip off what little I am wearing and climb into bed.

Exhaustion slams into me like a freight train, and within minutes of closing my eyes, I am lost to a dreamless sleep.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

I feel as though I am floating through a dreamlike fog, drifting endlessly in some sort of subconscious purgatory. It must be an eternity that I am there, trapped on the edges of sleep. Part of me wants to stay here forever, while the other part realizes that life hasn't stopped and I need to wake up.

Drunk on the soothing silence of this place, I stay. It is not just my body that is resting, but my mind too. The peace I feel here is heavenly. My body is so exhausted, I know instinctively that I need this rest.

Although I plan to stay here and heal whatever invisible wounds need healing, something tears me out of my blissful state and thrusts me back into reality.

I jolt awake, shooting upright in my bed. My breath comes out in harsh pants like I just broke through the murky surface after diving deep into some dark body of water.

I glance around my bedroom, but it is still dark, and the orange glow from the street lamp outside casts an eerie light throughout the room. I turn my head to stare at my clock, frowning at the time.

3:33 am.

Seriously? This again?

I sit there, knowing that something woke me up. Fear bubbles in my gut, wondering whether it was Daemon or another errant demon. The silence that surrounds me is heavy, but nothing happens. I sit there for at least five minutes, but I don't feel any presence, good or bad.

Sighing, I lay back down and pull the soft cotton sheets up around me. If something woke me up, it isn't here now. Considering it was 3:33 am when I looked at my clock, I can only assume it was paranormal in nature.

My mind drifts towards thoughts of protection wards for my bedroom, and soon enough I am flirting with the edge of sleep once again.

Just as I feel myself slipping out of consciousness, I am shocked back into reality as my bed sheets are pulled down away from my body. I heave myself upright, using the surge of adrenaline to throw my back towards the baseboard of my bed, trying to clutch at the sheets that are now out of my reach.

My breath comes harshly, my chest tight from panic. I blink rapidly to clear the blurriness of sleep, my eyes shooting back and forth across the foot of the bed where my sheets are clustered together in a mess.

My room no longer feels empty. There is an oppressive darkness, a cold air that has found its way inside, threatening to turn my rapid breaths into hyperventilation.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

From underneath my bed.

I want to scream, but the sound is lodged in my throat. My eyes focus, the darkness shifts, there's something there.

Something at the foot of my bed.

There's a hand snaking up from beyond the baseboard to grip at the cluster of bed sheets beyond my feet, long skeletal fingers black as night, clutching desperately at the soft material. Fear explodes inside of me and my vision pulses from my

skyrocketing blood pressure. It's not Daemon. The energy feels so wrong.

"Li-tlllle... wiii-tch..." The sound it makes is sickening, like a hundred inhuman voices layered on top of each other. The sound is so unnatural it makes my head ache to hear it. It's mimicry, a poor imitation of the way Daemon says those words to me.

The hand moves, the fingers flexing in a way that a human hand never could.

Crack, pop, snap.

Backwards, they bend. The horrific sight of it strikes me like a punch in the gut, and the scream finally breaks free from the tight cage of my throat.

"DAEMON!"

A loud roaring erupts in the space around me, like the jaws of Hell split wide open and all I can hear is the suffering, screaming and despair of every soul trapped down there. The sound is deafening, and my hands fly up to shield my ears from the assault.

There's a brutally loud wail as a gigantic shadow erupts from alongside my closet door, spilling into the bedroom like black smoke. I know immediately Daemon is here, because his power rushes over me like the burning tides of hell's unbridled fury.

The shadows shift and contort until they form the vague resemblance of Daemon in all his demonic glory, powerful and broad and towering over whatever is lurking at the foot of my bed. A kingly set of horns curls upwards from the top of his great head like a crown and press up into the ceiling above. Expansive wings, reminiscent of an owl's, spread out behind him in all their dark, spectral magnificence before folding away into his back.

Just like at the church, I can see no details, only shadows. Just his outline, and the

sight is terrifying. There are sharp points to his astral body, shapes that remind me of the eldritch horror I originally pictured when he told me his true form drove people to madness.

I wrap my arms around myself in an effort to soothe myself as I watch in horror, the shadow of Daemon reaching down and grabbing the unknown demon from beneath my bed. The thing twists and screeches in his grip, a dark hand wrapped tightly around its slim throat.

Daemon's body ripples as though his rage is a living beast, shifting and flowing like liquid darkness. His image is like TV static, flickering wildly, as though threatening to lose control and drop the veil that protects my human mind from what he truly looks like. It is unlike the demon he snatched up in his unforgiving grasp, because that lesser entity looks completely real.

The entity's face is unholy, just looking at the thing feels like my very soul is being poisoned by the sight of it. This demon is a poor impersonation of a human, as though it was once a man that was tortured so viciously that its very body became something twisted and rotten to the core.

Its pallid skin is translucent, with gaping holes that leave rotted entrails on exhibition for my petrified gaze. The lidless black eyes in its skull are unnaturally wide, with a long-toothed grimace framed by thin black lips. The thing looks like a shambling corpse, with its bones protruding and every limb dipped in the blackness of decay.

Daemon snarls, the sound making fresh panic surge up from the pit of my stomach, and my jaw falls open in shock as I watch him tear the entity in half with his hands. Black blood and rot spills around him as the body ruptures, the thick ropes of entrails collapsing into the darkness and turning straight to ash.

"Insolent worms!" Daemon's voice booms around the small confines of my bedroom.

“Tell your master he will pay for this impiety!” he shouts, and the hellish noises I heard earlier rise once again to a crescendo.

I cover my ears, and watch as Daemon’s mouth opens wide, the shadows within his infernal jaws turning into shades of fire as he roars.

The room shudders and trembles like the earth itself is rattled by the sound, and the unholy noise dissipates under the rush of Daemon’s wrath.

My shaking hands drop away from my ears, and I hold them up in a placating gesture as I watch Daemon come down from his fury. The sudden silence soothes my aching head, the ringing in my ears warning me that my human body is not built to withstand the sounds of Hell itself.

“Selene,” he whispers, his voice gentler now, though I can sense the violent current of rage brewing within him. “Beneath my rule are twenty-six legions, one of which rises now from the greatest depths of Hell to guard you.”

My voice is trapped in my throat as Daemon grows larger before me, his shadows shifting and whipping out around his dark body as his power mirrors his fury. “The other twenty-five will follow me down into the Halls of Decay, where I’ll tear the Marquis of Worms asunder for his insolence.”

I swallow hard against the tides of his rage, his power rushing over me in hot waves, like the tantrum of a tsunami upon the shore of the earth. Thankfully, the way he appears to me is far less damaging to my sanity than it was back at the church. The ghost of my power, awakening slowly, must be helping to shield my mind from the nightmarish reality of a demon in my presence.

If only people knew what existed beneath their feet. What power, what horror, what evil lurked in the depths of the earth.

“Daemon,” I finally manage to say, the tension in my body easing enough to allow me to shift towards the end of the bed. His presence is the only one I now feel. “Thank you for coming.”

I watch as the colossal horned demon leans forward slightly, his shadowy chest expanding as he breathes deeply. It dawns on me that taking my scent into his body seems to soothe his temper. As though he is reassuring himself that I’m okay.

“Daemon?” I call to him again, because the great Prince of Hell has fallen silent. I reach out towards him with my hand, unsure. I want to touch him, but something tells me he would not allow it. Not yet.

“When the blood moon rises, you will find me at the House of God,” his voice is discordant and disembodied. “Sacrilege beneath the dead God’s sightless eye. Your soul will be mine until eternity’s end.”

With that, the shadows dissipate and he sinks down through the floorboards. Gone, as quickly as he came, leaving me alone in the dark with so many questions, and yet I am stunned into absolute silence.

Oh, how my world has changed so completely. I went from knowing very little of the paranormal, to feeling a powerful connection with a Great Prince of Hell and dealing with demons almost daily.

I remind myself once more, that things will never be the same. Once the veil is lifted, it cannot be put back in place.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

The setting sun is upon me, the intense colours of dusk casting my bathroom in shades of orange, purple and pink. I stare at my reflection in the mirror, regarding the way the long brown strands of hair frame my face. I look normal, for the most part. Just your average brown haired girl, nothing unique or special about me. At least, that is what I would have said a few weeks ago.

Now, as my hands lift to pull my hair back away from my face, I am captivated by my own eyes. Once brown and ordinary, now they are anything but that. My pupils are devoid of any light, deep and cavernous like the Mariana trench. The thin rings of ethereal gold that surrounded my pupils just a few days ago have taken over my eyes, tendrils of shimmering fire reaching out from the rings and devouring the brown I was born with.

My eyes are otherworldly, now. Windows down into the archaic flame burning at the roots of my spirit. The resplendent golden glow ensuring that for the rest of my life, people will assume I am wearing contacts. Perhaps with time I can learn how to project a different image, like Daemon does, and conceal what I really am from everyone else.

With a deep breath, I exit my bathroom. Night is falling, and the moon is rising high up in the sky. Once the last rays of sunlight disappear beneath the horizon, the moon will wear a rustic, shadowy hue. The blood moon.

I'll be at the holy altar then, ready to complete my bond with the Great Prince of Hell.

I don't know exactly what will happen during this ritual, but I know that Daemon will guide the way.

When I step back into my bedroom to get dressed out of the robe I put on following my long after work shower, I am shocked to see black fabric sprawled across the foot of my bed.

It wasn't there 10 minutes ago.

I walk over and touch the incredibly soft silk, lifting the dress up to preview it. It is a floor length, form fitting gown. There is a long slit up the front of the left side, and a plunging neckline. It is simple, but beautiful, with an intricate sigil in delicate gold thread weaved into the fabric beneath the point of the plunging neckline.

The sigil is from the old book in Rome, the one I carved into my protection candle.

This must be his sigil. I don't know why this only occurred to me now. I drop one hand to trail my fingertips over it, the dress shifting as it now spills down from my one hand as I hold it up to gaze at.

I set it back down on my bed so that I can slip off the thin black robe, allowing it to drop from my shoulders and pool at my feet. Standing naked in my bedroom, my attention is pulled towards the window as the ravens that have been surrounding me all day begin to caw loudly.

I know now that these large black birds are the manifestation of demons, some of the members of the first of the twenty-six legions under Daemon's rule.

They are of his oldest, most loyal soldiers.

Little bits of insight have been coming to me since Daemon's power first touched my soul, and left a mark. Things I just know, without understanding exactly how. One of those gifts of knowledge led me to the understanding that his gift of insight will be mine once we are bonded.

Reaching down, I grab the dress and slip it on over my head. It is the perfect fit, of course. It hugs my waist, flaring out at my hips and flowing around me beautifully. I've never been the most beautiful woman in a room, or the type of girl men go crazy over. However, Daemon has made me feel like I am the most beautiful star in the vast expanse of space. Endless galaxies, a billion beautiful cosmic events, and an infinity of time, yet I am the most beautiful thing he has ever known.

I feel it coming, another burst of knowledge that comes to me easily.

“Within you is the provenance of magic, as old as the universe itself.”

His voice echoes in my head, this time it is not distorted. It may not be human, but I understand every word in its entirety.

I smile, feeling the ancient flames at the foundation of my being. Once upon a time, I woke up as a normal person playing with witchcraft in her closet. Tonight, I transcend my own humanity and fully awaken as the witch I was always meant to become.

There are demonic entities outside of my house, they've been spiraling around me like vultures. I move to stand in front of my bedroom window, my eyes lifting first to regard the sunset's beautiful display, before I gaze off into the distance and see a few bodies scattered around the city that surrounds my home.

Possessed people, standing as still as the dead and watching me with hungry eyes. These demons do not belong to my Prince of Hell. They belong to others, others that feel called to my awakening power, desperate to take it for themselves so that they can transcend, too.

Daemon, or whatever his true name actually is, must be a formidable force of Hell. None of the possessed men and women that have been following me around have

gotten too close. They maintain a respectful distance, the ravens become increasingly aggressive if they wander too near to me.

On my walk to work this morning, people kept stopping to marvel at the black birds as they flew around me, escorting me through the city. A couple of people even pulled out their phones to capture the unnatural event, in awe of the birds' strange behaviour.

It doesn't bother me. Not anymore. With knowledge comes confidence in the things that once scared me only nights ago. I know now that if any demon tries to harm me, Daemon will come roaring out of the depths of Hell to destroy them.

Knowing I am guarded not just by him, but by his devoted legions, calms me greatly. So does that knowledge that once I let Daemon in, he will show me how to protect myself, too.

This is my world now, and I will embrace it.

Turning away from the window, I head downstairs. I haven't eaten all day, so I quickly fix myself a sandwich with a side of fresh fruit and sit at the small, wrought iron table in my garden to eat it. It is incredibly quiet this evening, which is extremely unusual for the bustling metropolitan city I call home. The ravens are quiet now, too.

Every once in a while, I can hear distant whispering. Murmurs I cannot comprehend, but something tells me that the voices belong to the demons keeping me safe tonight. I cannot fathom what they are discussing, so I do my best to ignore it when I hear it.

Once I am finished, I gather my plate and head back inside. The sun has set, and the time has come. Butterflies take up residence in my stomach, fluttering around wildly with razor blade wings. As I get myself ready to leave, I can't help but question my sanity.

Is this the right thing to do? Surely giving oneself to a demon is damning, what good could possibly come of it? I must have lost my mind. I'm making a terrible mistake.

I take nothing with me as I open my door and step out into the chilly night air, startling when I see a man standing at the bottom of the narrow concrete staircase just outside my door. He is staring off in front of him, his gaze empty.

"For centuries, witches have bonded to demons in exchange for power," he explains in a monotone voice, his sightless eyes still staring out at nothing.

He's answering my question. Whoever this demon is, using this stranger's body as an unwilling host, he heard my thoughts and seems to have the answers.

"And what became of them?" I ask, watching him warily as I carefully descend the set of four steps down to the sidewalk.

"Some still live, immortal in their human shell; others transcend and become extraordinary demons, too," he answers, and I can't shake the unsettling feeling talking to a possessed person brings me. As I pass him, he finally turns his gaze to meet my own. I startle again at the unexpected eye contact.

The fear and uncertainty only lasts a few seconds. I remember who I am, who I belong to, and what I harbor inside of me.

"All of them?" I ask, stopping in front of him.

"Some witches grow tired of the mortal world. Sometimes they join their demon in Hell, or retire to their demon's realm for all of eternity."

I have more questions now than I did before I stepped outside my door. Is what he is saying to me true? Witches can either stay here beyond what their human bodies

would normally allow, become a demon, or live alongside their bonded demon in Hell or some ungodly heaven?

I watch him for a moment, and shake my head.

A disturbing, unnaturally wide grin spreads across his otherwise expressionless face. It is as if he is trying to mimic a human expression just to soothe me. “He awaits you. He will answer your questions.”

I narrow my eyes, and his gaze shifts away from me so he can stare off into nothingness again, his face falling slack.

I bite my lip as I consider what he has said, eager to get to the church and talk to Daemon. Without another word exchanged between us, I turn down the sidewalk and start heading towards the church.

The moon overhead is larger than it usually is, the bright disk cast in umbral shades of red. I keep my eyes on the sky as I walk, trying my best to ignore the possessed people lingering along my path. Stolen bodies and quiet ravens are my companions on the cold, dark walk down the street.

When I finally reach the church, the beautiful stained glass windows are glowing softly with a fiery light as though there are candles still lining the window sills. The old building looms tall and tired, now that this House of God has been fully abandoned. Daemon’s presence has chased away what remains of the holy power it once exuded. I know it is still in use by the public, but I get the insistent thought in my mind that God hasn’t been here for a very long time.

Is God really dead?The thought bounces around inside my head as I ascend the mottled stone staircase, dodging several deep cracks as I go.

At the top of the stairs is a woman, standing as still as the dead and staring off into the distance. When I approach the church doors, she moves slowly to the side to push one of the heavy doors halfway open. She says nothing as the darkness opens up, beckoning me inside.

I watch her for a few seconds as I pass her by, slipping in between the doors without a word exchanged. It closes behind me immediately, and I am greeted by hundreds of candles lit and placed carefully around the anterior chamber.

The warm, flickering light of a hundred candles illuminates the church. The pews are empty, the altar at the end of the center lane dressed in a heavy black cloth with Daemon's sigil at the center. The polished, white holy cross looms just beyond it.

I wander slowly down the aisle towards the altar, my fingertips brushing along the edges of the rows of pews. I'd call out for Daemon, but I feel him all around me. He's here, in the shadows that fill every corner of the chapel.

When I reach the altar, I lean forward and run my fingers along the lines of his sigil. It matches the one on my dress, and the one on the candle that summoned him to me.

I love him.

Wait, what? Why did that thought pop into my head? I don't love Daemon.

"You will."

His voice echoes around the anterior chamber, and a wave of warm calmness settles over me. With a soft smile on my face, I turn to face where I assume he is standing at the other end of the church.

Shock hits me like a freight train when my eyes adjust to the sight of him descending

from a swirling pool of darkness above the center of the church, the shadows that once concealed him from my vision now dripping off of him like ink melting away from stone.

I stumble several steps until my lower back collides with the edge of the altar, my wide eyes roaming the colossal form of a demon far too horrifying for words. He is gargantuan, the bulk of him filling the church and pushing ruthlessly at the very fabric of reality.

The horror of what I am seeing is more than I can bear, and I drop to my knees in reverence for the monstrosity as it creeps inexorably closer, his Hell-born life force radiating off him in oppressive waves.

The demon is a terrifying amalgamation of brutal horns, vicious talons, gnashing fangs and chaotic hellfire. The enormous skull of an owl pressed to his face, shielding my vision from the demonic visage behind it. He is perfect in Hell's design—made in the image of the Devil himself.

He takes one great step towards me, and all at once the demon pulls back and collapses inward like a dying star. Darkness spills out, and from the depths of a dense and endless ether, a shape materializes.

The metamorphosis is violent as he takes another step forward, my eyes affixed to his chest as his rib cage closes in and flesh knits together to contain his black, beating heart. I watch, captivated by the astonishing terror of it, as the diabolic organ vanishes beneath his skin.

There are eyes like two infinite, black voids in a face both recognizable and not. His body is magnificent, laden in thick muscle and sinew, his broad chest marked by demonic runes in black ink. And his arms, dipped in darkness as black as obsidian, carrying those sigils I recognize from when he afforded me just a glimpse of himself

back in my altar room.

Three sets of tall, black horns split from his skull to crown his head, the first two taller than the ones behind it, set throughout the lengthy black hair that falls in waves across his forehead.

He is wearing nothing but a pair of loose-fitting black pants, golden thread accenting the material where it hangs low on his narrow hips.

My eyes lift to his, this entity manifested as something in between human and demon, and I'm graced with a wicked grin spreading slowly across his devastatingly handsome face. Lethal fangs accentuate that sinful smile, and I can't help but think that despite his best efforts, he could never look truly human. Reality can only bend so much before it shatters.

"Does this form please you, little witch? For it is one of many." Dark laughter rumbles from him, and I swallow against my inability to speak.

What I just witnessed would destroy any normal person's sanity, just as he had promised.

"Daemon." I finally manage to speak, forcing the words from my trembling lips. He walks towards me, extending a dark hand.

"Come, little witch. Let me soothe you with my touch."

I reach out, my petite hand slipping into his, desperate to feel the unyielding domination of his dark power. As much as he still frightens me, I cannot resist the safety and protection his touch affords me. I don't want to feel afraid.

Black talons graze my skin as he grips me firmly and pulls me against his body.

Serenity washes over me the moment we connect, soothing my rattled nerves and loosening the words caught in my throat. My eyes drop to his chest, one hand lifting to trace the complex markings etched into his skin. When my eyes lift to his, I drown in the great, dark depths I find there.

“Your true form... it—“

Daemon’s mouth descends on mine, one hand slipping into the waves of my hair to hold me captive as his languid kiss devours the words that die on my lips. His tongue sweeps against the seam of my mouth, and he coaxes me to let him in.

I do. Of course I do. With a soft sigh, my lips part and I kiss him back. My tongue grazes the tip of a fang, and the coppery taste of blood blooms between us. He moans, deep and low, licking at the nick on my tongue as if there is no greater taste in this world.

When he finally releases his grip on me, my eyes are half-lidded and the heavy haze of lust has taken hold of me. Staring up into his half human, half demon face no longer leaves me feeling unsettled.

He will be mine, in all his forms. My Great Prince of Hell.

His hands fall to my hips, one slipping beneath the silken fabric of my gown through the slit, stepping into me to guide me back towards the altar.

I’m not ready. “Wait,” I tell him, taking a deep breath to bring myself a little more clarity.

“Ask your questions,” he says, his whisper-soft voice stroking my senses as it often does. Leaving one of his hands on my hip, he takes a step back to give me a little more space to speak without his intense influence clouding my mind.

“I need to know what will happen to me when I die.”

“What do you desire?” he asks, a slight tilt to his head as he regards me carefully.

“What, you don’t already know?”

He laughs, the sound dark and musical, it seems out of place coming from the mouth of a demon. “I have learned that humans absorb information better when they have conversations that include equal exchange.”

I narrow my eyes and don’t answer him for several long seconds, contemplating his words. He knows everything, he has the gift of omniscience.

“Are you God?”

His laughter returns, but this time it is maniacal and inhuman. I flinch at the sound of it. “I may as well be. God has been dead for eons. We are our own gods now.”

Tension spreads across my forehead as I contemplate what he said, and thankfully he doesn’t seem to mind the stretch of silence between us. What he tells me of God is a lot to digest. “There must be angels?”

“Some have fallen. Many are quiet, drifting up among the stars.”

Another stretch of silence as I think carefully about what to ask next. The weight of what he is saying is really, really heavy.

“Who is in control now?” I ask, hoping he understands what I am trying to ask him.

“You are. We are. Whoever gains power, holds it, until they don’t.” He shrugs, as though this information is well known despite humanity’s ignorance to everything

supernatural.

“What happens to people when they die?” I ask, getting to the root of my original inquiry.

He watches me for a minute, as though trying to determine the best way to say what he needs to say. “Those that do not bind themselves to a non-human entity fade away into oblivion.”

“They become nothing? Gone forever?”

He nods.

I don’t know how to respond. I don’t want to disappear into nothingness. I don’t want to cease to exist.

“And those that bond to a demon?”

Daemon reaches out to brush a long strand of hair away from my face, tucking it behind my ear. It’s such a human gesture, it surprises me. “Whatever you desire.”

I narrow my eyes, frustrated with his evasive answer. My mouth opens as I prepare to ask for specifics, but he continues speaking before I can get out a single word.

“You can stay on earth for however long you desire, little witch. When your magic is fully awakened, and connects to my own, it will keep you alive and well. You will never age, you will never fall sick, and you will not die until you are ready.”

Immortality. The direct consequence of giving myself to him.

“When you are ready to depart the earth, I will guide you where you want to go. You

can rule by my side as my witch Queen, or you can reign in Hell as a demon born under my sigil. When you grow tired, when you need peace, you can rest in my realm for the rest of eternity, or... until you get bored.” He smiles with that, hoping the touch of humor at the end of his explanation brings me a little comfort.

Binding myself to him is the only way to avoid fading away into nothingness, the only way my spirit lives on. Without God’s tether, we all drift away.

Insight fills me with warmth, and I know the gift of it is from my demon prince.

“Your realm?”

He nods. “Like a heaven, but unreachable to anyone other than you and I.”

“I can go there?”

“Whenever you desire, for however long you desire.”

I don’t want to be alone, I don’t want to fade away.

“You’ll never be alone. You haven’t been, because I’ve known you long before you found me.”

We stand there in silence as I consider all of the things he has told me. I am hesitating, because one thing isn’t clear. True to his nature, he answers before I can even ask the question.

“I will protect you, teach you, and take care of you from now until oblivion claims every realm and existence within it. I will love you, and give you all that you desire, all you must do is let me in.”

We stand there, facing one another, for several long moments before I finally speak.

“How do we complete the bond?” I ask him, my voice quiet within the dark, dimly lit space of the church.

“Sacrilege,” he says simply. I turn my head and look at the altar at my back, then lift my eyes to regard the heavy white cross looming over us.

“Sacrilege?” I whisper, turning back to face him. He steps into me, his other arm lifting to wrap around me. He pushes against me until my back presses to the front of the holy altar. His head lowers, that blasphemous mouth brushing against my own.

“Desecration of the holy ground He once blessed,” he confirms, taking my lips in a devouring kiss. As his tongue sweeps against mine, I melt into his arms. He is warmth and safety, a dark decadence that promises rapture and sin. I am lost to his touch, his dark energy radiating out from him and calling to me in a way that leaves me helpless to deny him any longer.

As though I were made just for him, like we are two pieces of the same damned puzzle.

“You were made for me, Selene,” he whispers as he pulls away, his hands lowering to grip my thighs. The claws adorning his fingers dig in just enough to spark little ripples of pain, before his skilled hands massage the sensation away.

I whimper softly as he drops his head to kiss my neck, his lips leaving heat in their wake as they move from my shoulder to that soft spot below my ear. My head drops back, giving him all the access he desires, and my body thrums with an arousal so deep I can't escape it.

“You are magnificent, little witch,” he groans, his unusually long tongue trailing up

my throat until he breaks the contact to take my mouth again. The kiss is feverish and hungry, like we are both starved and desperate for one another.

His hands grip my ass and he lifts me up effortlessly, depositing me to sit on the altar. I look up into the darkness of his solid black eyes, awestruck by the sinful smile on his face. His fingers drag down across my thighs slowly, before slipping between them to pull them apart.

“Daemon,” I moan his name as he pulls the bottom of my dress up until it gathers at my hips, exposing me to him. He kisses my mouth fiercely before he drops to his knees, pulling me to the edge of the altar and burying his face against my aching pussy.

He kisses me there the way he kissed my mouth, all lips and tongue, worshipful and ravenous. My head falls back on a desperate cry, and I slam my palms down against the surface of the altar to stop myself from falling.

He draws his lengthy tongue up and down along my slit, before placing long, drawing kisses against my clit. My hips buck as I moan, heat pulsing through me from where his mouth feasts.

The onslaught of pleasure is so intense that it steals my sanity, turning me into a wanton creature here on sacred ground, placed atop this altar like a sacrifice.

He knows exactly how to fuck me with his mouth, his demon tongue a dark magic I won't ever recover from. “Oh, Daemon,” I moan as I shiver and shake, desperate for everything he is offering me.

The rush towards orgasm is so unyielding, I can do nothing but endure it and hope I survive. The wave of soul crushing bliss crashes into me with an obliterating intensity, and in the throes of my orgasm I wonder if I'm dying. Every atom of my

body feels explosive, like he doused me in gasoline and took a flamethrower to my soul.

The pleasure hits me in multiple waves, and he kisses and soothes each one from my body. When I finally come down from the unimaginable high, I glance down at him to see him watching me. His pitch black eyes are locked on me, and I watch as he drags his tongue from bottom to top, making me shudder as an echo of the orgasm strikes me.

It is then that I see the shadows from his lips, physically connecting us like dark webs. He blows across my heated flesh, and the shadows retreat inside of me. I gasp when I realize I can feel his power inside of me, there between my thighs, reaching and stroking.

The archaic inferno at the base of my soul calls to the tendrils of dark energy his mouth left behind, and I know without a shred of doubt that the process has begun; this demon is binding my soul to him. Weaving the unbreakable threads of his dark power through the very essence of my being, in a way that can never be undone.

The arousal doesn't dissipate, it grows. I rub my thighs together as my need for him rises to a fever pitch. I want him so damn badly, I can't think straight. His essence is addictive, and for the first time in my entire existence, I want a demon to fuck me. To own me. To keep me, and never let me go.

I watch as he rises to his feet, my bottom lip caught between my teeth, unfolding in front of me like a dark God. His hands move to his waist, where he pulls the golden thread loose and drops his pants to his feet.

My eyes fall to his cock, jutting out from his waist. He is male perfection, built for sin. He is thick and long, and sure to fill me and hit as deep as my body can stand. He steps into me, forcing his way between my thighs, one arm snaking around my waist

to pull me against his strong body.

I gasp as I feel him slide up along my pelvis, his hard cock pressing along my lower belly. My head lifts and I meet his dark gaze, my arousal spiraling through me.

“Give yourself to me, little witch,” he says, his otherworldly voice echoing throughout the church. The candles lining the anterior chamber of the church flicker wildly, threatening to combust. “Let me in.”

Just like that, I can feel his darkness wash over my entire body, oppressive and forceful, seeking entrance. I groan as the magic within me sparks bright, desperate to connect with his darkness and break free of its chains.

I want to let him in, I do, but I don’t understand how. Without a doubt, I know what will happen when I do. My power will awaken and fill me like a dam breaking free, and the rush of his darkness weaving tightly with mine will be a pleasure unlike anything I’ve ever known.

“Let me in, Selene,” he groans, taking a step back so he can guide the head of his cock to the swollen entrance of my pussy.

My head falls backwards and I arch my back, pushing my hips towards him. As he slides inside of me by the smallest increment, heat roars to life at the base of my spine.

I cry out at the sensation of my soul igniting, while the walls and foundation of the church begin to shudder and quake. The demon’s energy is coming in blast waves as our bodies connect, pushing at the doors of my soul.

“Selene,” he growls my name as his head drops to my throat, his teeth grazing my oversensitive skin making me whimper and moan in response. “Give yourself to me.”

I want him deeper. This feels so right. I need him inside of me, in every way I can take him.

“My soul is yours,” I confess, my voice a prayer on this sacred ground. I moan as I feel the barrier between us shatter, his dark energy spilling inside me and flooding me with his essence.

His pelvis slams forward and he fills me completely, one hand on the altar while the other controls my hips. Mind-shattering pleasure surges, and I am lost to him. He fucks me like he owns me, and with his claim laid on my soul for the rest of time, he does.

The feel of him inside of me in every way imaginable is more than I can fathom. He’s in my body, in my mind, pressing down against the very root of my being. I can feel him wrapping around me with every thrust of his hips.

He is pouring his darkness inside of me, this demon infiltrating my soul to lay claim to the power hidden within me. It is then that I feel the full force of my magic, trapped behind some kind of barrier, pressing against him as he bears down on what chains it there.

“I need more, Selene,” he growls against my ear as he thrusts relentlessly inside of me, the blinding pleasure his body brings mine enough to steal my focus. “It will feel like you’re dying, but you need to let me all the way in.”

“How!?” I cry out, frustrating building as the feeling of the immense pressure inside of me builds to dizzying heights. I need him to free me from my own prison before this destroys me. Desperate, I cling to him, my nails digging into the sun-kissed skin of his shoulder, and the obsidian skin on his muscular forearm.

“Call my name, little witch,” he commands, the blast waves of his energy crashing

into me like the waves of an ocean hurricane upon a fragile shore.

“What is it!?” I plead, the pressure becoming cataclysmic. I know if he doesn’t break me free, I’ll self-destruct like my soul is a nuclear bomb.

“You know my name. It is written on your soul. Call to me!” he commands, thrusting inside of me with a violence that pulls me back from the edge of insanity. We are both so close, but I’m the one that is pushed to the very edge of what my body can take.

My eyes squeeze shut, and I focus just like he taught me to.

His name. It’s here. I feel it. It surrounds his sigil, the one that is being burned into my very soul.

S t o l a s.

Stolas.

“STOLAS!” I scream, my voice fracturing into something unrecognizable, as a ragged moan breaks free from him. My head falls back yet again as an orgasm crashes into me with the force of a star going supernova. He comes, too, because his power pours out of him full force on a guttural groan.

Like an unholy battering ram, Stolas breaks the spiritual dam that holds me back, and it feels as though my soul is splintering and disintegrating as the tides of Hell rush through me. My mouth opens on a soundless scream, a brilliant red-orange glow spilling from my lips as the ancient fire is set loose within me.

Stolas and I crash into each other, like two galaxies merging on a battlefield. The divine threads of my magic collide with the dark hell of his, twining together to

become something greater. Something more than Heaven and Hell.

The only thing keeping me from self destructing right here in this church and taking the world with me, is Stolas. His dark power has replaced my chains, rooting me to him, giving me an unshakable foundation to stand on.

Our combined power is monumental. Omniscience awakens within me, and I am suddenly aware of what this all means. Stolas is the hellfire, and I am the cosmic winds. He is all the power of the primeval earth and the hell at its core, and I am the universe made flesh.

Through his connection to me, he will ascend and become a God. The realms of Hell and Earth will belong to him. So will my realm of magic, the one beyond the stars, the arcane divinity that belongs to every true witch.

My eyes open wide as I watch the candles around the church roar to life, pulled towards my own internal power. I feel the fire spill from my fingers, my lips, my eyes, my nose, and engulf the entire church until everything around me is ablaze.

Stolas' dark laughter erupts around me as he holds me in his embrace, watching proudly as the fire pouring out of me begins burning the church to the ground.

The newly awakened magic inside of me is more than my human body can hold, and before I know it, I descend into the stark blackness of unconsciousness.

My last vision, one of fire and destruction, and the grinning demon who has bound my soul to him forever.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

It feels as though I've left the mortal world, and have been drifting in a dark and endless sea for an eternity. The deep and infinite waters are a mirror of the night sky, and I watch with a somnolent gaze as glittering stars pass me by, slipping effortlessly through my fingertips as I drift without any destination to reach.

One thing I am sure of, is that Stolas is here with me. Surrounding me in his dark power as he continues to weave his demonic energy into the very fabric of my being. I feel sheltered by my Great Prince of Hell as he soothes my splintered soul, allowing me the space to safely recombine and recalibrate to my new reality.

As I sleep in a place that exists between all that was, and all that is, enlightenment finds me. I understand now why he told me that although a lesser demon could amplify my spellworking, it takes a demon of immense power to protect his witch from the pure, unshackled force of her own magic.

It is because of Stolas that I have awakened and embraced who I was always meant to be. I was born of the sacred, primordial universe, with limitless magic intertwined with my very essence. I am power, I am strength, and I will never again be someone's victim.

I feel the surface of consciousness well before I near it, like I've taken a breath of unrestricted awareness into my lungs and that one breath is pulling me out of the fog.

When my eyes finally flutter open, the first thing I see is the patchy surface of my bedroom ceiling. The sight is so familiar, bathed in the warm, flickering light of what must be twenty lit candles strewn across the room.

I notice immediately how well rested I feel as I stretch my limbs across the wide expanse of my bed, the soft sheets falling away from me as I shift. Everything looks normal, save for the assortment of candles, a display I am certain Stolas left for me.

Closing my eyes, I focus my attention and search the immediate space around me for him. I don't feel him here with me. In fact, my bedroom feels tranquil and blessedly empty. I take another moment to enjoy the peace and quiet before I lift myself into a seated position, leaning back on my arms with my palms spread across the soft mattress.

I don't know exactly how long I was asleep, but a shower sounds amazing, so I swing both of my legs to the side of the bed and stand up. While heading in the direction of the bathroom, I pull back my curtain to peer out the window into the city beyond. I see nothing but empty streets, until one lone car quietly drives through.

Abandoning the window, I head into the bathroom for a quick shower. The hot water feels heavenly, so I linger there a little longer than is necessary. Keeping my eyes closed, I sigh deeply as the heat of the water penetrates my body and drives the remnants of sleep away.

I have a lot to discuss with Stolas today, and that's really the only thing I want to be doing. My life is different now, and I want to better understand where I go from here. I plan to quit my job, and I don't feel like I am meant to stay here in this small, cozy apartment anymore.

It's time to embrace change and figure out how I want to live my life now. Do I want to stay in Toronto? My gut instinct is telling me that I don't, simply because barriers that once existed for me just aren't a reality for me anymore.

My eyes drift closed as images flood in. A quaint cabin tucked away in the mountains, warmed by a wood burning stove, featuring countless potted plants and

dried herbs. A quiet, private place I can grow into my power. The perfect spot to practice until using my magic becomes as effortless as drawing breath.

My future is one of unlimited potential, and I want to explore that.

Excited to call upon Stolas and get answers to the questions bouncing around in my head, I finish up my shower and step out. Once my feet land on the soft shower mat, I am pulled from my thoughts by the sound of knocking at my front door.

I am not sure how early in the morning it is, but it is still dark outside, so I am surprised that someone is here. For all I know, it's 3:33 am again and another demon has come to harass me. Grabbing a towel from the rack just outside of my shower stall, I quickly dry my hair and grab a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt. The knocking starts up again, and I sigh my irritation. I was hoping the peace and quiet would extend well into the morning, at least.

I grab something to tie my hair back with on my way out of the bathroom, when another set of knocks fills the dark space of my quiet apartment.

"Just a minute!" I call out as I hurry from my bedroom to the entryway. When I reach out and grab the doorknob, I freeze in place. The moment my skin makes contact with the cold metal of the handle, a spark of something sinister and unwelcome goes shooting through my fingertips.

A frown takes up residence on my face as I peer down at my hand, second guessing whether or not I should open the door or leave it be. My intuition tells me something is wrong, but I immediately deny the feelings of worry. I am a witch that is capable of immense power, bonded to a great demon. Whatever is on the other side of this door, I can handle it.

I pull the door wide open, and darkness is all I see.

The ambiance turns menacing as I gaze out into the pitch black void, my mind unable to comprehend what I'm seeing. My front door leads to the outside of my three-story apartment building. There should be a slab of concrete with a rough, brown welcome mat right outside my door. There should be a narrow concrete staircase and a potted plant. Hell, there should be an entire city outside of my home.

There is nothing. Absolutely nothing. A space so devoid of light, that nothing exists.

Every hair on my body stands on end, and I take an unsteady step away from the door, but I can't pull my eyes away from it. I am awash in feelings of dread, despair and discomfort and I just can't shake it.

When it becomes too much to bear, I finally pull my eyes away from the void and look back into the rooms beyond my hallway.

The sense of true wrongness has permeated my home. My confusion only intensifies when I glance around the interior of my apartment, only to find it looks... very strange. Like someone snapped a photo, turned down the saturation, and cast a haze over it all. It reminds me of the way things look in my nightmares, when your mind stops processing the details and colours because the intense emotions matter more.

For a moment, I wonder if I'm still in my bed. If I never actually woke up. My hand moves across my body to my other arm, and I pinch the skin as hard as I can manage. When I wince against the spark of pain, my heart begins to beat a panicked pace in my chest.

Nope, this isn't a dream.

Turning back to the door with the intention to close it, I am shocked to find the actual door now missing. All that is left is the frame, and the black void beyond.

“Yeah, that’s not supposed to happen,” I whisper, my voice a little unsteady.

I turn away from the door once again, taking a step forward to put some space between me and the hole in reality.

Only this time, my heart stops. Standing only a few feet in front of me is a creature so horrifying, I’m rooted in place by a nauseating wave of fear.

The demon standing feet away from me is burned and withered, emaciated in the way its black as coal skin is taut over its malformed bones. The smell of scorched rot hits my nose like a slap to the face, and I gag violently as I take a step back. The demon doesn’t move, its head heavy on its shoulders, slumped forward like the very act of standing here in my entryway is too much for its deformed body.

My eyes wander to the gaping hole in its torso, where blackened guts spill out and slough off to the floor to land at its twisted feet. Its heart, ashen and sickly, beats slow and weak in its hideous chest cavity.

My shaking hand lifts to cover my mouth as my eyes travel up its spindly body to the entity’s face, gasping as one swollen eyeball dangles from the socket by tattered muscle. The festering hole is full of worms, writhing and wriggling in the space its eye once was.

I take another step back as the demon begins to lift its head. Its neck cracks as it moves, and it stares up at me with that one remaining eye. White and cloudy from a cataract of decay, the globe is focused on me as I grip the frame of the door to keep myself from stepping through.

I don’t know what’s worse: the void at my back, or the monstrosity standing in front of me. It grins, and my skin crawls.

Before I can figure out what to do, the entity lurches forward and charges at me. I am so stunned by the unexpected strength and speed of its movement, all I can do is scream as its gnarled, rotting hands slam into my chest and send me flying backwards through the open door.

With a blood-curdling scream, my arms flail and my hands reach for the frame of the door as it rapidly recedes from my field of vision. The demon that shoved me through is standing at the precipice, a mocking grin on its twisted face, until the sight of my home disappears.

My hope dies with it.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

I must have passed out, because when awareness returns to my body all I can sense is the sickening feeling of falling without end. I am spiraling ceaselessly through the darkness, my body folding and twisting on repetition as I grasp desperately at nothing with my unsteady hands.

I cannot tell where I am, what direction I'm facing, or where I am going. All I know is that I am falling at a speed so unimaginable that I keep passing out and regaining consciousness. A cycle that annihilates my sanity and leaves me begging for death.

I'd give anything to collide with the ground. To end this torment now, so I don't have to experience another minute of this. The idea that I may be trapped here forever has me screaming and begging for mercy. I scream so hysterically that my throat aches, but I cannot even hear my own voice.

The air I am falling through booms with the violence of a hurricane all around me, and all I can hear is relentless whooshing as my body gives up and I black out again.

This time, when I jolt back into a state of awareness, pain echoes all over my body. A broken scream escapes my stinging throat as the sensation of rough hands grabbing at me fills my senses. It is no longer pitch black, and for that I am grateful, despite the onslaught of pain as I am grabbed and pulled until my descent slows.

There is a low, flickering light from somewhere far below. The incandescent glow of fire, illuminating my path as I plummet down through the shrinking space between the jagged, dark cliffs surrounding me.

What I believe, at first, to be dead trees, turns out to be bodies. Countless, writhing

bodies, with arms outstretched and reaching for me as I fall. Every time their mangled hands grab at me, my descent slows a little more, until I am slipping through a mass of thrashing corpses.

Although I am no longer free falling through a void, I am not sure this is any better. The endless rows of charred bodies are dragging me down, pulling at every limb, ripping at my now tattered clothes, and even pulling out a couple chunks of my hair as they guide me lower down.

Just when I think I'll pass out again, I hit the surface of what feels like a system of thick, wet webbing. My movement stops for the first time in... I don't know how long, and immediately every bit of stomach contents empties from between my gasping lips.

My blurry eyes struggle to focus, but when they finally do, I can see the small, smoldering fires littering a black, rocky ground below. I scream in agony when I shift my body, pain lancing through me from the trauma of my descent, but the movement I make breaks the webbing I am laying across, and I fall the rest of the way to the ground below.

Reaching my bloodied hands out in front of me, I scream something unintelligible, until a gust of hot wind rises up to meet me. The dusty tornado collides with my body, and instead of smashing into the rocky face of the floor, I am lowered gently until my exhausted body collapses in a heap.

I lay there without moving for so long, that I can only assume I fainted again. It takes me several long minutes of effort, but eventually I lift myself off my stomach and prop my body up on my forearms.

My eyes, still a little blurry, blink rapidly to adjust as I stare at my battered forearms and hands. All I see is red, my skin drenched in blood from countless cuts and

abrasions. I cry out as I shift my body, and pain explodes across my nerve endings.

I should be dead. Maybe I am dead.

When I finally muster the strength to lift my head, I take a rattling breath as I survey my surroundings. Everything here is made of dark, jagged rock like tarnished obsidian. There is dust and broken bones littered everywhere, as well as pieces of flesh—both rotted and fresh.

There are small fires scattered all over the place, and the uncomfortably warm breeze carries ash and embers with it. I don't have the strength to flinch as those hot embers occasionally drift too close and land on my exposed skin.

Forcing my eyes up, I see a thick canopy looming overhead. It's the dense webbing I landed on before breaking through. I am horrified when I realize the net is made of blood, flesh, and sinew. Never in my darkest nightmares could I imagine a place as terrifying as this.

When I drop my eyes again, I scan the immediate area. I've landed in a comparatively empty clearing, one that is surrounded by jagged protrusions of black stone and menacing spires. Many of which pierce directly through the bodies of what look like rotting human corpses.

Corpses that aren't really dead. Those are people, an endless sea of them stretching beyond the reaches of my eyesight, rotting away down here. They are writhing, their mouths open wide as silent screams of agony and quiet moans gargle up through lips coated in blood and thick, black mucous.

I'm in Hell. This is Hell.

Struggling to my knees, I will my body to rise. I cannot stay here, I need to find a

way to contact Stolas. My arms quiver as I push myself up, kneeling on the dark stone beneath my sore, scraped knees.

“St—” I choke, coughing as my aching vocal cords struggle to produce sound. I mutter to myself over and over again until I can speak something more than crackled stuttering.

“Stolas...” I finally manage to whisper, my voice unbelievably hoarse and almost unrecognizable.

“The Great Prince can hear you, witch, but he cannot come to save you,” a dark voice responds, the shifting tones and inhuman vocal range telling me all I need to know of its owner. “My legions have him pinned down in the burning pits below, and by the time he fights his way to you, you’ll already be dead.”

Another fucking demon, and likely the very reason I’ve been dragged down to Hell.

Although I have no physical strength left in me, I force myself to find reserves hidden deep in my soul. It is not the strength in my physical body that brings me stumbling to my feet, but strength from the bottomless well of magic newly awakened within me.

When I finally stand, swaying in the scorching winds of Hell, I reluctantly turn myself to face whoever spoke to me. Mentally preparing myself, knowing I’m about to come face to face with the horrors of another Hell-born demon, isn’t enough to prevent the audible gasp when my eyes finally meet the eldritch monstrosity towering in the distance.

Much like when I first bore witness to Stolas, this demon has my mind threatening to splinter into a thousand irreparable pieces. Every inch of his monumental, towering form is something pulled out of humanity’s darkest nightmares.

This entity is an amalgamation of horror, gore, and petrified flesh. Blackened as though it has been aflame for eons, every orifice emitting a dark burning light as though its terrifying framework houses nothing but hellfire and viscous lava.

“Who are you?” I manage to force out, my raspy voice small and weak in comparison to his, which emanates from his jagged jaws, booming like thunder.

“Belial,” he replies, his inhuman voice contorting. “Great Prince of Hell.”

Seeing the horror of the demon towering before me, I know instinctively this is no lesser entity. But a Prince of Hell? Stolas warned me there was more to banishing these entities than the ones I’ve faced in the past.

“Why am I—” The demon moves, stopping me from finishing my question. He launches towards me with such speed and ferocity, I don’t have time to react before his massive arm crashes into my face and knocks me back to the ground.

He didn’t mean to kill me, I know that much for sure. If he intended that much, my skull would be in pieces on the rocky surface beneath me. Instead, pain blooms from my skull as blood spills in heavy droplets from my parted lips.

“Do not question me, witch. Your only purpose here is to die.”

I sputter, coughing out the blood from inside of my mouth, and struggle to get back to my feet. All the remnants of fear and panic died during my fall to Hell. When you accept your imminent death, and I mean truly accept it, you’re liberated from those pesky emotions. What use do you have for fear when death is a promise?

All I’m left with now is bitterness and rage, and the determination to survive. I didn’t die falling from grace, and I won’t die now, not while the fire inside of me still rages on.

Mocking laughter, sinister and cruel, erupts around me as I stagger to my feet. Turning back to look up at the demon towering over me.

“If I d-don’t kill you, St-Stolas will,” I sputter, spitting blood from my mouth to splatter on the blackness of his petrified flesh. He’s so close now that heat from the living inferno within his body pulses against my skin, joining with the hot winds of Hell, making it difficult to breathe.

Every breath is painful, the winds of Hell entering my lungs with each ragged inhale.

The demon lashes out with a snarl, his massive hand wrapping around my throat and lifting me up off my feet. I rise high as he brings me to eye level, his barbed jaws splitting wide as gusts of scorching air lash at my face with every word from his cursed mouth. “I will not allow Stolas to rise to power. You will die before he becomes a God!”

“F-fuck y-you,” I gasp between breaths as my vision darkens, black spots popping in along the edges of my sight. His mocking laughter booms again, the volume rattling me to my core. The bones in my body vibrate from the impact of the sound.

“I will fuck your rotting corpse after I eat your soul, witch,” he roars as his other arm snakes out to press into my sternum, talons gripping at my flesh with the intent to rip me apart.

No the fuck you won’t.

The burning rage inside of me detonates like a bomb, bursting forth from the place his claws dig into my chest. The explosion is so immense, Belial can do nothing but release my throat as he is sent hurtling backwards away from me.

I didn’t realize I was screaming, but the sound dies on my battered lips as the very

winds of Hell rise up beneath my feet to cradle my body as I slowly lower to the ground. My arms are held outwards as fire erupts from my aching hands, flowing through my fingers like whips intent on avenging all the wrongs ever done to me.

I know my eyes are spilling light like lava, because everything I see is cast in a bright golden glow. The demon gathers himself off the rocky terrain until he is standing on his cloven hooves, his chest heaving, and the horrors of his grotesque face pulsating with his perpetual rage.

“It’s not me that will die here today, Belial, Prince of Hell,” I call out, the strength of my voice renewed now that the inferno of my magic is running rampant through every cell of my body. Awake, alive, and ready to serve.

The great demon roars, his voice bellowing with so much force it moves the blistering air between us, before he breaks out into a run. The monstrosity is barreling my way like a freight train, the stony floor beneath my bare feet quaking and rupturing as he draws near.

I lift one of my hands, the once-bloodied palm facing towards him, as flames shoot and spiral out from my fingertips.

Belial is made of hellfire, and that is mine to command. My power may be born of celestial fire, but my roots through Stolas run deep into Hell. As I am bound to the Great Prince of Hell, the forces of Hell are also bound to me.

“Come, hellfire,” I chant in a whisper, my own burning magic erupting from me and spilling out into the dark space, lashing like the tails of a whip as it explodes forward to meet the charging demon. “Bend to my will.”

Belial collides with the wall of fire radiating out from me, and his face contorts with shock as it reaches deep into his being and wraps tightly around him like a python

striking out and imprisoning its prey.

He bellows in absolute agony as his atoms are torn asunder by the tendrils of my white-hot fire, ripping and tearing and drawing his evil into me like a siphon. Belial's essence floods me like a tsunami, crashing into my starving soul and willingly feeding the insatiable well inside of me.

The feelings of brutal starvation wreck havoc inside my soul, and my desire to consume all of Hell has the attention of every demon affixed to me.

This new, maddening addiction burns brightly, as bright as the demon Belial as he slowly disintegrates before me. Every bit of his infernal power feeds into me, merging with my own until there is a nuclear bomb capable of destroying worlds lodged in my chest.

A soundless scream breaks free from my throat, just as the shadowy forms of lesser demons begin to materialize everywhere around me. Legions of demons, tasting of Belial's dominion, emerging from the burning pits below. Their enraged screams, full of madness, echo around me like a sickening cacophony.

When the last vestiges of Belial dissolve into my body, a strangled gasp leaves my trembling lips. Battered and war-torn, I collapse to my knees, hands gripping at my chest. Though the fire singed the blood away, the wounds remain. The biggest wound ripped across my very soul, as Belial threatens to take up permanent residence inside of me.

His mocking laughter echoes in my head, and I know without a shred of doubt that I must obliterate Belial by exorcizing him from my body before he destroys my soul. My soul that is bound to Stolas, my soul that sits dead center of a catastrophic bomb—a bomb created when my power collided with Belial's.

“Stolas. STOLAS!” I scream, feeling the fabric of my physical body threatening to split open. I cannot contain this energy, not without my demon’s help. If he cannot hear me, I am going to die, and the calamitous detonation may take all of Hell with me.

Belial’s lesser demons roar in my direction, lumbering towards me, intent on helping rip me to shreds for consuming their master. My vision darkens, and my body trembles as power radiates in dizzying pulses from me.

The ground is rumbling beneath me again, dark stone fracturing and cracking wide. My skin burns with the pain of all I am holding inside of me, and in that moment I am certain that I am dying.

Until the tranquil wave of Stolas’ dark lifeforce crashes into me, knocking me away as a large fissure splits the ground beneath me. My vision returns just as tendrils like thick, black smoke descend upon me.

“Stolas...” I whisper, falling to my back as those dark tendrils snake around me and engulf my body. Before darkness descends on my vision, I see the terrifying manifestation of Stolas charging towards me.

A cool calmness captures me, just as his massive arms wind tightly around me and pull me up and against his heaving chest. My sight returns in flickers, coming and going, giving me glimpses of Stolas and the black blood dripping from the countless wounds that adorn him.

“I’m here, Selene. I’m here,” his voice is deep and dark, soothing despite the inhuman fluctuation of its tones.

He must have bulldozed through the legion of Belial’s lesser demons descending on us, because when I gaze through a gaping hole in his colossal body, I see an opening

in the festering crowd. An opening leading down into the fiery pits of Hell, where Stolas' own war-torn demons rise to join us.

"I'm going to die," I whisper, my body suddenly shivering violently as though I've been dropped deep into the coldest level of Hell.

"No, little witch, I forbid it," he growls, rocking me soothingly against his otherworldly chest, while the power radiating off of me scorches him everywhere my skin connects with his. "But you must cast Belial out."

I shake my head, dizzy from the pulsing waves of energy from the unstable bomb inside of me.

"I c-can't. Don't kn-know... h-how," I respond as my teeth chatter ruthlessly. Have you ever felt so cold, it burned? That's what my entire body feels like as Stolas cradles me against his inhuman body, shielding me from everything but him.

"You must release it, Selene. Let it go, cast it out," he tells me urgently.

"No... everything... destroyed..." I manage to say as my teeth clatter together so hard they must be chipping.

Stolas growls, and we both know time is running out. Or perhaps he knows, and that knowledge is also mine by right of our bond. "Listen to me, little witch. Trust that I will hold you together. Cast him out, do it now!"

I'll kill him. I can't do this. I can't kill my Great Prince of Hell. He saved me, he showed me that I can be strong, and gave me the vengeance I could not give myself. He found me in the darkness, just like he found me dying here in Hell.

Belial's dark laughter fills my mind, the remnants of this infernal entity interwoven

with the power I consumed. He's inside of me, festering like a parasite, threatening to take hold.

I shake my head, and his voice booms around me with unyielding authority. "You are mine, Selene, and you will obey. CAST. HIM. OUT!"

Stolas' darkness sweeps inside of me, no longer needing permission to invade. His possession of me feels so different from Belial, so comforting and safe where Belial wants to destroy me just as I've destroyed him.

Stolas pushes at the fragile trigger inside of me, and the sensation has me gasping. My trembling hold on the explosive force my body is failing to contain gives out, and my eyes open wide as the bomb detonates.

The force of the blast breaks the sound barrier, and the brilliant gold light of the shattering inferno is silent until the sonic boom strikes. A rippling wave of immense pressure sweeps out in the wake of the explosion, colliding with the horde of demons. The nuclear fission is ruinous, ripping the demons apart on impact – until they are nothing but particles of ash disintegrating in the blaze surrounding us.

Everything in the bomb's path is leveled. The obsidian structure of the terrain, the tormented souls lanced upon the cruel spires, and even the canopy above is incinerated. Darkness descends and swallows Belial's dominion in Hell, leaving nothing but dust, ash, and demolished rock.

The entire realm trembles as Belial's power decays, his place in Hell utterly destroyed.

When the damage is done, my wide eyes flutter closed against the creeping nothing that sweeps in to take up residence here.

I feel like I am a dying sun trapped in the depths of Hell, my skin made of plasma as radioactive decay has gentle pulses of unstable energy wafting out from my ruined body.

“St—” My throat burns until something cracks, and his name dies on my tongue.

“Shhhh,” he soothes, this eldritch horror of a demon holding me securely against him as he lowers his strange mouth to mine. What I recognize as lips press against my own, absorbing the blazing heat emanating from me at devastating temperatures.

His dark power slithers further inside of me like an insidious serpent, dark tendrils like living ink slipping between my scorched lips from the cavernous depths of his jaws. He fills me from head to toe, taking full possession of my body, sinking in deep where Belial once took hold.

Demonic possession isn’t supposed to feel like ecstasy. When I consumed Belial, he took root inside of me and poisoned everything he touched. It hurt like being struck by lightning, over and over, searing my nerves endlessly.

Stolas’ possession is the polar opposite. He takes hold of all that I am, and tucks it safely away, the spirit of him a balm to my soul. Euphoria is all that I feel now. If this is death, I accept it gracefully. Giving in to his possession is orgasmic. He is filling me with his love, his tranquility, his knowledge. All that he is, weaves itself into me.

“I’ve got you, Selene.” His voice is in my head. Quiet, comforting. Safe. “Sleep now, give yourself to me.”

I smile warmly as I drift away.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

I'm lost again, drifting aimlessly through the vast, dark ocean. My tired eyes are heavy, but open against the inky darkness that surrounds me. There are stars here, small, twinkling orbs of gentle light slipping through my fingertips as I meander through the shadows. Without gravity, my body is cradled by darkness. I float, unencumbered, without a care in the world.

This time, I am certain Stolas is with me. I feel him all around me, the dark tendrils of his power coiled around me protectively. My soul is fragmented again, my body broken. Once I finally blacked out after the battle with Belial, the demonic possession took hold. Completely, irrevocably.

He is deep inside of me, holding all of my broken pieces together. Repairing the damage and soothing my mind, just as he promised he would.

I don't know how long I've been here, or how long I need to stay, but none of that really matters. All that matters is him.

My Great Prince of Hell. My protector, my teacher, my lover.

Eventually, after what feels like an eternity, I feel Stolas embracing me. The massive, eldritch horror of a demon coils around me protectively. His voice is a dark whisper, inhuman and indistinguishable to my human ears. Somehow, I understand him anyway.

"Little witch."

"Stolas," I whisper, feeling the ritualistic magic of his name on my tongue. His talons

press into my skin as his massive hands grip my hips, pulling me across his lap. “Where are we?” I speak, though my words come out slow and barely audible.

“Safe. Hidden.”

An attempt to lift my gaze to look up at Stolas is fruitless, my eyes feel heavy and blurry and wherever we are, it is as dark as a moonless night. All I can see is his monstrous silhouette, completely inhuman, with those colossal horns jutting out from the dark framework of his skull.

My hands roam his otherworldly physique, drawn to the warmth of his strange skin. He is strong and inhuman beneath my touch, but I feel no fear. My conscious mind knows this demon is pure, maddening horror to look upon, but my body doesn’t care.

Arousal burns like an awakening fire, low in my body. I want him, exactly as he is, in all his unholy splendor.

Once upon a time, the thought would have made me seriously question my sanity. I would have never dreamed of wanting to make love to Stolas in his true form, but right now it’s all I can think about.

I feel so damn good here, wrapped in his alien embrace and floating endlessly through the dark ether. The quiet tranquility and the absolute safety of this realm Stolas has created is giving me the opportunity to explore the feelings of desire I’ve carried with me since our bond was made complete.

Aware of my thoughts, a low rumbling growl emanates from Stolas’ chest.

“You cannot take me like this, little witch.”

I need to. I feel him wrapped around my soul like the unyielding root of an ancient

tree, and I now need him inside of my body too.

“Please, Stolas,” I whisper in a needy moan, my hand slipping down his body to feel for his cock. When I find it, the feel of it brings a sharp hiss from my lips. It is heavy and thick in my hand, though the shape is strange, I know without a shred of doubt that he was built for the most wicked pleasure imaginable.

“Oh, Stolas,” I groan, gripping him tightly in my hand. I cannot wrap my fingers all the way around him, nor can I see anything beyond the misty darkness, but his cock would fill all of the empty space inside of me with no room to spare.

My imagination runs wild. He would come, and it would spill into my womb, the head of his cock would be pressed right up against my cervix as his thick release spilled inside of me. Those dark tendrils that accompany his seed would fill me up, stroke every dark corner of my body, make me ride orgasm after orgasm until I am nothing but a quivering, broken mess.

I cannot stop the moan that escapes me as I imagine what fucking him like this would feel like.

“Little witch, you will be my undoing,” his disembodied voice is a sultry whisper, full of lust and wickedness.

His hands grip me again, talons digging into my skin just enough to ignite my nerve endings, as he lifts me. Sensation erupts across my skin, it feels as though we are moving through water. We are drifting through it effortlessly, but despite being in this dark ocean, every breath I draw into my lungs is full of clean, comfortable air.

Pure magic.

My legs are forced open wide as my knees settle on either side of his waist, since my

legs cannot comfortably straddle his massive thighs. When he pulls me closer and presses my smaller body against his, I moan at the feel of his monstrous cock wedged firmly against my aching pussy.

“What do you desire, little witch?” His voice echoes around us, disembodied, ethereal.

“You,” I moan softly, rolling my hips to grind my swollen, wet slit along the hard length of his very inhuman cock. I whimper at the unexpected feel of ridges combined with smooth hardness in my most sensitive place, idly wondering how anyone could resist something so obviously made for gratification.

Part of me wishes I could see it, the other half of me is desperate to just feel him. All of him. Hard, long, and impossibly thick. He’s smooth, and hot, and covered in ridges that feel incredible with each roll of my hips. He was made for mind-shattering pleasure in his true form. Although I don’t know how he could possibly fit inside of me, I am desperate for him anyway.

I need him to take me, and devour me. To possess me as deeply as he possesses my soul. I want my body to be his divine temple of sin, the very altar of demonic worship.

I don’t want him to manifest as anything but who he is, to pretend to be human, not right now. I want him as Stolas, a demon, Great Prince of Hell. My demon.

“Please, Stolas. Take me. Possess me,” I whimper, grinding myself against him, making us both moan against the rush of pleasure. I can see the silhouette of his ghastly head falling back as his jaws part, a guttural moan escapes him. His hands tighten on my hips, until one massive hand lifts to collar my throat.

“You are mine, Selene, until the very end of time. Not even God himself, risen from

the cosmic grave, could take you from me now.”

“Please, Stolas,” I beg again, my body relaxed in his possessive hold, the arousal building to a fever pitch.

“So needy,” he teases, the fluctuating tones of his voice deepening to levels that human vocal cords could never achieve. “So desperate to be fucked by your demon.”

I mumble an affirmation, my swollen pussy grinding against his shaft as my hips undulate shamelessly.

“I must prepare you, so I do not tear you apart,” his dark laughter makes me shiver, and suddenly he releases my throat and pulls me up his body. His hands maneuver me until my legs fall up over his massive shoulders, colliding with the thick muscle enveloping his fearsome structure.

I moan brokenly as his hot mouth presses against me, his devilish visage nuzzling between my thighs. One powerful hand splays out across my lower back to hold me in place, while the other grips my thigh.

I am so wet and ready to be fucked, that the tip of his wicked tongue slips into me with ease. I cry out as the inhuman muscle slithers deep inside of me, my eyes opening wide in shock. I blink rapidly against the darkness, my body writhing as he pins me against his mouth. “Oh, God, Stolas... what... is—”

The mention of God has him thrusting his tongue so deep I nearly scream, the sound melting into a fevered moan, as a deep and deadly growl radiates from his colossal form. His tongue is unbelievably long, thick, and hot. It twists and pumps wildly inside of my throbbing pussy, filling me more than anything ever has before.

The pleasure is white-hot, so extreme that I can hardly draw a full breath as my body

careens wildly into rapturous bliss.

The orgasm has my hands reaching desperately, grasping whatever part of him I can use to anchor myself, while my pussy spasms violently around his tongue.

He fucks me through the seemingly unending wave, pressing me tight against him, so deep inside of me that all I can feel is the hot, thrusting muscle as he fucks me with it.

Even when my orgasm ends, he doesn't stop. I can feel his chest expand on a deep inhale, then the exhale brings with it a wave of hot breath fluttering over my hypersensitive clit. With a pleased hiss, my back arches as his tongue pumps harder inside of me.

My pussy is so primed for him, my arousal so extreme, that all I can do is hold on as he ravishes my body and forces me to come over and over again. After what must be the fifth soul-shattering orgasm, I begin to beg and beg until finally his unholy tongue slips free.

A deeply satisfied groan leaves him as he lowers me back down to settle into his lap, my body utterly spent and weak in his grasp. Every atom in my body is vibrating as a constant pleasurable warmth radiates out from the apex of my thighs.

Like an addict hooked on a powerful new drug, I ache for more of him. I am drunk on lust, dizzy from the constant waves of intoxicating pleasure, desperate to stay right here with him forever. Lost in this enchanted dark ocean, drowning in the depths of his possession, a slave to the limitless euphoria he brings me.

His powerful arm snakes around my waist, lifting me just enough to notch the head of his cock at my entrance. The throbbing in my clit intensifies as I anticipate what it will feel like for this monstrous demon to force his way inside of me.

“Beg for me, little witch,” he commands, his voice heavy with lust, as I obey him without hesitation.

I can feel Stolas’ profound need through our bond, secured by the unbreakable self control he has had eons to perfect. The truth of his thoughts and feelings come to me not in images nor words, but I understand them just the same.

This demon’s love for me is absolute, unconditional and undying. Even if the magic inside of me vanished into thin air right this second, he would love me just as thoroughly as he did before.

“Please, Stolas. Please fuck me,” I whimper, the feel of him poised to penetrate me sends a shiver right down my spine. I try to spread my legs wider, but he pins me in place.

“Breathe, Selene.” Those fluctuating tones are soothing, deep and smooth like silk, as he begins to thrust up into me. I inhale deeply as the gently pointed head of his unfamiliar cock presses in.

My demon’s dark power surges between my spread thighs as he sinks every inch he can inside of me. I shudder and tremble as he enters me, filling me to complete capacity.

The feel of his substantial cock lodged so damn deep inside of me makes my pussy spasm as another euphoric orgasm crashes into me. I writhe as the burning pleasure consumes me, devouring my sanity, leaving my body trembling uncontrollably.

“You are sin made flesh,” he groans, seated so deep inside of me as this all-consuming orgasm finally ends, drenching him in the silky wetness of my arousal. “Divine sacrilege,” he hisses, his talons digging in my skin as he fights to maintain his self control.

His thoughts are mine, as is his unbearable desire to pound into me until we both succumb to enraptured ruin. I experience it all through our bond, and all at once I want nothing more than for Stolas to lose himself inside of me.

Before I can beg him to fuck me, he pulls back and slams his hips between my thighs. His size is so monumental inside of me, I don't know how long I can last before my body shatters again. Already, pleasure burns hot and bright where our bodies are connected.

My head drops back on a moan as he thrusts inside of me, fucking me with a slow but savage pace. His talons press harder into my skin, the small bursts of pain amplifying the incredible pleasure.

"Stolas..." I whimper, addicted to the hard pumping of his hips between my thighs. My legs are spread so wide, I cannot fight against the blissful assault of his inhuman body on mine. I feel as though he will shatter me into a thousand pieces, but I don't care. He feels so damn good, and his cock is hitting me so deep that my mind is lost in the euphoria.

"I need you to come," I moan as my body spirals frenziedly towards another orgasm. "Fuck me hard until you come. Please," I beg, suddenly desperate to be bred by my Great Prince of Hell.

I never wanted children, not before this moment. But an image flashes into my mind that I cannot ignore. I am laying in a nest of a bed, full of silk and luxurious pillows, a dark God in the form of a precious child held to my breast. Stolas towering over the decadent bed, protective and watchful.

Our son, heir to the throne of Hell. The distant future, I recognize as the images drift away.

I gasp, my eyes opening wide. I see nothing but shifting shadows and the faded light of stars, but I can feel the rumble of a pleased growl as Stolas' arousal surges.

“Wicked little witch, desperate for me to fill her womb with Cambion.” The thought passing between us through our connection has him wild, pressing me backwards so he can move his great body over me, giving him the angle necessary to fuck me brutally, pounding between my thighs with raw hunger.

A normal human could not survive this, but a bonded witch can. With magic to protect my physical body, I give myself to Stolas as he lets go of his control and comes undone between my legs.

The ridges at the base of his cock, spreading up his pelvis, grind roughly against my sensitive clit. The pleasure is so intense I rocket towards climax, his name leaving my lips on a tortured groan.

The thick muscles enveloping his monstrous structure tense as his pleasure peaks. I cry out as I feel the first heavy pulse of him inside of me, his demonic essence spilling from the head of his cock, those dark tendrils snaking deep into my body and filling every bit of space they can.

The base of his cock thickens, expanding until our bodies are locked together, my head falling back on a broken moan as heat blossoms inside of me and the pressure at the base of my spine erupts again.

Euphoria flows through us both as he floods my pussy with his release, the excess forced through my cervix to fill my womb with his dark magic. His rapturous moans join with mine as we spiral through our joined orgasm, the pleasure so intense he pulls me tightly against his inhuman form to anchor us together.

When the orgasm finishes, I am left panting and trembling beneath him as his

colossal body shudders above me. He pulls me into his embrace, wrapping his immense arms around me. The movement has me gasping, the overwhelming sensation of fullness steals my breath, even as the swelling at the base of his cock begins to recede.

A soothing, healing warmth has bloomed inside of us, spreading through our bodies in blissful waves. We are silent as we hold each other, my smaller human body wrapped up in the overwhelming mass of this demonic entity in his true form.

A form I once gazed upon in horror as the very sight of it threatened to destroy my sanity, that I now see only as Hell's divine design. A dark, deadly monstrosity that would send any human spiraling into irreparable lunacy. My demon, my Prince, perfectly mine.

We drift through his dark ocean for so long that I lose sense of time again, watching stars as they are born and eventually die, somewhere far beyond the reaches of the world I call home. I know this isn't reality, that time moves differently here, because Stolas whispers to me while I slumber in his arms.

He speaks to me of ancient magic so old I cannot fathom, when the first humans made deals with demons. He tells me of chants that can create violent storms and level civilizations, of incantations that can turn the ocean waves into leviathans to do my bidding. He teaches me as we sleep, suspended in time, until my body and soul are whole once again.

Eventually, my eyes drift open, and I can see. The constellations strewn throughout the vast, empty space are closer now... illuminating us both in a gentle, dim light. Just enough that when my eyes roam up his body, I can see his demonic visage.

He watches me carefully, one hand lifting as he uses one massive, black talon to brush hair away from my face and tuck it gently behind my ear. I am in awe of his

gentleness when he touches me, because the slightest use of force would damage me.

“What happens now?” I whisper, gazing up into his large, owl-like eyes. The globes are black as the night sky, cosmic constellations trapped within.

His voice reaches, deep and soothing, dark and low. “We conquer the world, little witch.” A wicked smirk lifts the corners of his eerie mouth, and I mirror it.

Images flash before my eyes, manifested through his gift of omniscience, of a beautiful and wondrous future together. Of the two of us, soaring high in the night sky, reading the constellations. Roaming in endless, sandy deserts in the Middle East, hand in hand, as we read through archaic tomes filled with black magic and ancient knowledge. Lessons in controlling the forces of Nature, taught in wild forests where man does not tread.

A son, one day far away, a crowned Prince destined to become King while his parents dominate the earth and the stars. A future I would have never imagined possible.

Stolas’ magnificent, otherworldly eyes close, and I follow suit. I am wrapped in his embrace as we shift from this realm, back to the one I call home.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:31 am

I deserve retribution. I understand that now.

Regardless of his threats to kill my family—his own flesh and blood—and regardless of his promise to hurt me worse than he already did, my tragic story deserved to be heard.

I was an innocent child, one that fell victim to my uncle in the secrecy of his home, and it's not my fault that I couldn't speak up about what happened to me. Trauma is complicated, and it more often than not steals the voices of the innocent victims.

It's the suffering that silences us, and the selfless need to protect our loved ones from being poisoned by what we've endured. It wasn't my fault that I lost my voice. There's nothing wrong with wanting to keep my family safe. I didn't do anything wrong, even though I've blamed myself for everything.

Maybe if I was better behaved, and always listened to my parents, they wouldn't have left me with my uncle to babysit me. I was a child, and there was so much I just didn't understand. I couldn't fathom what I did to deserve what was happening to me. I just blamed myself for everything.

I have to forgive myself for that.

I have, but it took the unconditional love of a demon to remind me that it is okay to love myself, too. Stolas showed me who I really am, and that woman is worth loving. That woman is worth having her voice heard.

Now, as I stand in front of uncle Jake's empty house, the warm night air brushing

across my face, I feel good for the first time in my life. Truly good. It's not an 'I'm good, how are you?' kind of feeling. It's the feeling of being exactly who I am meant to be, walking a path I chose for myself.

Life is not just trauma and anxiety anymore. Of course, what happened to me will forever be part of who I am, but it doesn't have to eclipse everything else in my life. Now, there is love, and wonder, and magic.

This life is mine to live, and to live in a way that brings me true happiness, despite where I came from and the events that shaped me.

I can't drown in misery anymore. I can't live alone in the dark. Stolas is the light of every star, lighting up the endless night sky of my soul. He is a thousand burning suns, warming every cold place within me. He is the foundation beneath my feet, steadfast and sure. I have rooted myself in him, and my growth has been monumental.

I'm a different person now, so perhaps that is why I feel no pain as I stand at the doorway into the house that once haunted my nightmares. A house that held my traumatic memories, triggered by every foot step of the monstrous man that walked the floors inside of those walls.

A house that once held my guilt, my shame, and my feelings of worthlessness. Anchoring all of that poison deep in my being.

I didn't come here for redemption from my self-imposed sins, nor did I come to forgive the man that molested me as a child. No, the only forgiveness to be had is what I've given to myself.

Tonight, I come for catharsis.

With a soft exhale, I walk towards the front door of the modest two-story home. It

looks similar to the surrounding homes, with grey vinyl siding, white trim, and a dark roof. There's nothing special about it, and in all honesty I don't feel any particular attachment to it.

Well, that isn't entirely true. I feel an unwelcome connection to Jake's guest bedroom, a connection I came here to sever. My uncle is a part of my past, and although I cannot erase what he has done, I can get rid of what is left of him as I move on to better things.

Pulling the key from my pocket, I open the door and enter the house without hesitation. The door closes behind me, and the key drops from my hand to slide across the laminate floors.

The house is unoccupied. Jake's roommate moved out after his death, and the property never went up for sale. Stolas used demonic possession and manipulation of all the necessary people to leave this place exactly as Jake left it, his gift of omniscience showing him that it had one final purpose.

I'll thank my Great Prince of Hell one day, for giving me this gift.

I don't bother looking around, because there is only one room in this place that really matters. I head up the stairs to the left of the entrance, and walk down the narrow hall until I am standing in front of the final door.

Pushing the door wide open, my eyes immediately fall on the bed at the center of the room. The core of my suffering. The double bed has a high white baseboard, with two pillows and a set of cream and pale pink sheets.

My body remembers the old blanket he left tossed haphazardly across the foot of the bed, the scratchy texture from the worn-out polyester fibers used to make me cry even more. He would wrap me up in the itchy thing before tucking the bed sheets around me. I would sweat during every assault, from the pain and distress, and the

sticky moisture only amplified the discomfort that blanket brought me.

I hate that fucking blanket. Years of pent up rage and anguish rise from the depths of my soul, spilling out of me in an unrestrained bellow. I feel the fire within me roar to life, spiraling up through my body and spilling out from my fingertips, from my eyes, and from between my parted lips.

Hot golden tears spill from my eyes, leaving molten trails down my cheeks, as I lift up from the dusty laminate flooring at my feet. Hovering a foot off the ground, the wicked inferno arcs between my fingertips as I lift both of my hands in front of me.

Memories flood in, but they don't take hold. They pass across my vision like a movie on fast forward, and all the horrors of my childhood abuse play out for me to see in my mind's eye. I let them come, I embrace the emotion they bring with them, and let every ounce of rage and pain feed the fire pouring out of me.

Flames swirl wildly around my levitating body, cocooning me in a blazing shield. The heat doesn't burn me, it never has. This fire is mine, this magic is mine, and the destruction at my fingertips is mine too.

The memories collapse under the weight of my rage, my emotions feeding the blazing inferno emanating from me. I purge myself of all the guilt, the shame, the self hatred, and the blame. I let those thoughts and feelings die in the fire pouring out of my soul, watching with a triumphant smile as the flames lash out and engulf the damned bed before me.

Relief washes over me as my anger and misery are purged, cast out of my body with the unforgiving flames. Red and orange tendrils lick up and down the walls, catching the floor and ceiling on fire. I watch as the room begins to dismantle, every detail reducing to cinder and ash before my eyes.

The immense heat in the room is brutal, but it causes me no pain. The solace I feel,

watching the origin of my suffering fall into ruination, is divine. In a matter of minutes, the entire room is consumed by my fire.

Every blanket that touched my skin, every pillow that soaked up my tears, and every stupid teddy bear and children's book I was forced to interact with perishes in the fire.

Just as Jake is paying for his sins in Hell, this room is paying for his sins on earth.

I am mesmerized by the destruction, captivated by the sight of everything burning down before me. It isn't until a set of large, powerful arms wrap around my waist and pull me out of the room that awareness floods back in.

As Stolas pulls me out of the burning room, my back pressed against his broad chest, an invisible barrier keeping the fire contained to that one room shatters. The rest of the house begins to catch on fire as the room collapses, the inferno spreading so quickly that within seconds the entire house is engulfed in flames.

Wrapping me in his arms, my demon turns and heads for the stairs. He walks down them with ease, cradling me protectively against his chest as the fire destroys my uncle's home.

Stolas tightens his embrace, his dark power rushing over me like cool water. Tranquility fills the empty places my rage left behind when I purged it, soothing all the scorched places inside of me. I close my eyes and relax in his embrace as we hit the bottom of the stairs. His lips press against my forehead in a kiss as he sets me down on my feet.

When my eyes open, I gaze up into his. Two endless black voids peer back at me, full of constellations and dazzling stars. The demon is unbothered by the fire, and he offers me a knowing smile as he extends his hand towards me.

My smaller hand slips into his, and he wraps his fingers around it. We turn together as the structure of the house begins to crumble, falling to ruin at our backs. He guides me forward, the door opening with a quiet chant falling from his lips.

I step through the burning door first, pulling him with me. The house collapses the moment our feet hit the driveway, but I don't bother looking backwards.

There's nothing for me in the past, no reason to turn around. Life exists on the path ahead of us, and I don't intend to leave it waiting.

As we walk together down the driveway, Stolas tightens his grip on my hand. I turn my head to look at him, catching his otherworldly gaze. His smile is wicked, full of promise. "Feel better, little witch?"

I nod, because words aren't needed. He knows everything. His smile widens and he turns his gaze upwards to the clear night sky. His beautiful eyes mirror the view overhead, reflecting the cosmos back at me.

"Would you like to learn how to fly, Selene?"

I smile, a new excitement blossoming within me. "Absolutely."

...

I thought wielding my magic in the form of fire felt transcendent, but flying through the starlit heavens with Stolas is a whole new level of divine happiness.