



How To Summon A Memory (Cauldrons and Kisses)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Ethan

Who is the beautiful demonic stranger in my dreams? That's what I want to know. But between teaching at Hex University and preparing for my unfortunate nuptials to a fellow witch, I don't have time to explore why the demon seems so familiar. I just know the demon is important, but why?

Warwick

I've been searching for my best friend, Ethan, for six years. One minute he stood in front of me, finally ready to make his crossroads deal to free him of his arranged marriage, the next he's gone and he took my heart with him. I'll do anything to find him, if only to tell him off for leaving me right when we could finally be together. Color me surprised when one night Ethan walks through the door of the bar I'm moping in. But he's not the same sweet, goofy boy I fell in love with. No, this is a man who has forgotten me and his true self. Will my crossroads magic be enough to bring back his memories? It better, I won't be forgotten.

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Chapter 1

Ethan

I press the handle and the fire extinguisher spews foam all over the lab table. Tanner, one of my students, stands with his hands behind his back and a glum look on his face.

“Sorry, prof,” he mumbles.

“Is anyone affected?” I ask as I wave the fumes from the potion gone wrong from my face and try not to breathe in the acrid air.

The half a dozen students all shake their heads, and as I look on, my head spins. But I push on, like I always do. I’m practically immune to these beginner potions, aside from a few headaches when they go wrong.

“Does anyone know why the potion backfired like that?” Florence, my best friend and co-teacher, asks. Their long dark blonde hair is braided and wrapped around their head. They wear a calf length dress with a cute pumpkin pattern. Black ankle boots and a silver belt complete the look. Flo always loves to dress for the season and we’re inching closer to Halloween and my birthday. How cliché, a witch born on Halloween.

They drop a hand to my shoulder and steer me towards the front of the classroom, where we share a single behemoth of an oak desk.

Lettie, an advanced student who shouldn't even be in this class, raises her hand. "A drop of sweat made its way into the ingredients, messing up the proper components."

"Good catch," I say as I yawn, starting a chain reaction through the class. I plop into the chair behind the front desk and scrub at my face. I haven't been sleeping well.

Lettie preens at my words and nibbles on her bottom lip as she eyes me. Every year since I started teaching at the ripe old age of seventeen, students try to catch my attention. And every year I turn each of them down.

Unlike Universities out in the human world, it's not frowned upon to date the students. In fact, students are encouraged by family to hook themselves a teacher since we're all from prominent families, either here in Hex or any of the other towns just like it. We're hidden behind veils and seals created by witches and demons to create a town safe for the likes of us and any other supernatural that wishes to live in peace.

Florence stands next to me and places their hand on my shoulder, giving it a squeeze. Everyone also knows Flo and I are engaged. Technically.

Neither of us wants it and never has. We love each other to the moon and back, but doesn't mean we want to tie ourselves down with each other.

For one, I'm gay. For two, Flo is non-binary, which isn't a problem, and neither is them being aroace. All they want is to finish their teaching contract, then set up shop for hedge witchery. That's what they'd be doing now if not for their family forcing them into teaching.

I, on the other hand, have always been passionate about magic and teaching it. We make for a good teaching team. For the most part.

“What would have been a good counter to the sweat had Tanner caught the mishap in time?” I ask the class.

“It depends on the potion.” Lettie bats her lashes and her cheeks go pink. “Tanner was working on a protection potion. He could have countered the saltiness of his sweat with a few grains of sugar to neutralize it.”

“Perfect,” Florence says, making Lettie’s face sour.

I have to bite back a snort. I don’t tease the students because it gives them the wrong idea.

“But—” Lettie focuses on me. “He could have added a variety of things. Like I said, it depends on the potion.”

I nod and address the entire class. “How about we get the table cleaned up and everyone start again? Finals are next week, and we want everyone to be able to do each of the potions on the list without a problem.” I raise said list from the desk. Each potion is child’s play for most of the students in this class, yet they all opted to take it because of me .

Ethan Speller. Sole offspring of former Speller coven leader Aiden Speller. Nephew of Drake Speller, who almost ran Hex into the ground. The Speller name brings awe, fear, and respect behind it. And apparently people think I’m cute. No one knows if I’ll be strict and fearsome like my father, or a deadbeat who soul tethered some unsuspecting immortal to him like my uncle had. Hell, I don’t even know, except I lean towards kindness as much as possible.

The students clear off the lab table and everything’s reset quickly. Flo and I still have tests to grade and essays to read, not to mention make sure that the potions are done properly. It’s exhausting. I’m just grateful we have resources unlike our human

normie counter parts. I couldn't be a teacher of any sort out in the human world. That's too much for me, but behind the veils, we're safe, and well compensated.

Glasses clang softly and the chatter of students fill the air. I put my head in my hands and massage my temples.

"Still not sleeping?" Florence asks softly as they slide into the seat across from me. Concern clouds their face.

"Hardly. I get a few patches of sleep every night, but nothing substantial."

"Do..." Florence leans in. "Do they still show up?"

I nod. "Every time I close my eyes. I'll be laying in bed, half asleep and then the demon shows up. Just smiling that charming smile of theirs." The demon in my dreams is gorgeous. All blue skin with big gray eyes. Plump lips. A fun tail that gets darker towards the tip. Horns. And a laugh that fills my heart with joy. But it's that smile that steals my heart.

"And you still don't know who they are?" Flo's brows scrunch together. "Do you ever think it's something nefarious?"

I shake my head, knowing the answer. "They're familiar. I just can't place them."

"They're familiar because you've been dreaming about them for years ." A smile tugs at Flo's lips.

I can't help matching the smile. "True. I don't even remember when they started showing up."

"I do. It started when Cordia sent us to Hellion, Illinois, for our first full year of

teaching. You had nightmares for weeks, then they showed up.”

I tip my head as I try to trace back my memory. It was my first time away from Hex and everything I knew. My grandmother wanted Florence and I to teach at several different witch universities before we came home to Hex. Wanted us to be more worldly, so we’d be better teachers. We’ve only been back in Hex for about six months now. “I think you’re right.”

“Somehow they’re protecting you, I think. But it could still be for nefarious reasons.” Florence taps their bottom lip. “Though I can’t think of why a demon would want to take away nightmares.”

“Exactly. I don’t understand. Are they even real?” That’s all I want to know. Through the years, I’ve hoped they’re more than just my imagination.

“We’ll figure it out some day.” Flo reaches for and squeezes my hand. “But I have something more fun to talk about.” They wiggle their brows as they whip out a hot pink flyer covered in glitter. “I know what we’re doing for your birthday.” They wave the paper in my face, raining glitter everywhere as I try to read. “It’s a masquerade party at this place called Flutter and Fangs. It’ll be perfect for your twenty-fourth. Maybe you can find a lover before our ridiculous wedding.” Their eyes roll at the same time I roll mine.

“I still plan on getting us out of the arranged marriage.” I’ve been saying that since I was nine, though.

Finally, I snatch the flyer from their grip to read the details. “I think my uncle Drake used to own this place before...” Before he lost his ever loving mind over a Fae. I never met Lark, but I hear he’s living his best life between three realms.

“Maybe? Come on. It’s been so long since we’ve been in Hex proper we need to

explore one last time before we're locked down for whatever the covens have planned for us." Florence shivers at the same time as I do. We've been begging for years to be released from the contract, but our families never budge. We're supposed to join the Speller and Hallow covens as one.

My grandmother leads the Speller coven, the leading coven in Hex. All Hex decisions come down to her. For now. If Florence and I have our way, Hex will have a leading council that shows the blend of the town: witches, demons, vampires, shifters, everyone. But as it is, Spellers rule and the two of us aren't sure it's the best decision for the town any longer.

Florence's father leads the Hallow coven and I'm not sure between him and my father, who was more demanding.

In the beginning, demons and witches worked together to create Hex and the barriers that keep us safe from prying human eyes. In the beginning, there was a balance of leadership. But over the decades, witches slowly took over, and the demons retreated back to the demon realm. That's not how it was supposed to be. Demons aren't even allowed on campus property, which I find ridiculous.

"We just have to find a way into Hex proper without your grandmother finding us."

"About that?—"

"Professor Speller," Kayla calls out sweetly before I can tell Florence I have a plan for that, but I have to smooth out the details.

Flo and I both bite off a laugh.

"Yeah?" I look around Florence without getting up, which gives me the hint of a pout from the student.

“What happens if?—”

There’s a pop and shouts ring out as a glass bobble rises in the air and spins as it glows so brightly it’s blinding.

I push to my feet. “Shut. It. Down, Kayla.”

“But—” She bats her lashes just like Lettie had.

“Don’t but me.” I stomp towards the lab tables. “You were the top of your high school graduating class and know exactly how to disassemble this. In fact, I know this exact potion was your senior study project. So shut it down. As for the rest of you, anyone else that incorrectly makes potions on purpose to gain my attention will receive a zero for the class. Am I understood?”

The students stand to attention and nod.

“Prof?” Tanner lifts a hand.

“You’re fine, Tanner. I know you didn’t do it on purpose.” He’s one of the students that actually needs the class and takes everything seriously.

The spinning bottle wobbles in the air as Kayla reaches for it. She glares at me the entire time, but I think I got my point across, finally.

There’s a pop from the other end of the table and she smirks.

“Duck!” Tanner yells before shards of glass shred across the room.

Squeals peel out from Lettie and Kayla. I shield my face with my arms. The other three students thankfully had time to listen to Tanner’s warning and dropped to the

floor.

“Is everyone okay?” I ask as sweat breaks out on my hairline and I swallow over and over, trying to keep bile from rising.

“Ethan?” Florence reaches for my hands and tugs me closer to them as I shake. I’m not scared of what happened. I’ve had much worse happen to me or around me, but I’m not reacting well to something in the potion.

“Prof?” Tanner’s eyes go wide and he races to me just as my knees collapse.

“Someone go get Abigail!” Florence commands so loudly in my ear I wince.

“I’m fine,” I wheeze out, absolutely not fine at all. My head spins. What the hell is happening? “Everyone okay?”

Florence rips the cuffs of my sleeves open, exposing my forearms, and I hear the ridiculous whimpers from a few of our students. I mean... rolled up sleeves is my catnip, but this isn’t the time.

“What have I done?” Tanner paces behind the table.

“I don’t think this is your fault,” I say behind gritted teeth as Florence picks glass from my arm.

Lettie’s and Kayla’s eyes go wide.

“What do you mean?” Lettie asks as she clasps her hands behind her back, no doubt trying to look innocent.

Florence backs away from me as I push to my feet.

I wipe the sweat from my brow while I take a shaky step closer to Lettie and Kayla. “Are you aware that Tanner takes every opportunity to use office hours and asks for tutoring? He’s actually very very competent and well on his way to being an excellent magic user. Yet when we get to the lab, his potions always find a way to backfire. Why would that be?” I glare at Lettie, then Kayla.

Lettie shrugs, and Kayla stands there, not meeting my glare.

“Does anyone know why I now suspect Tanner’s potions are being tampered with? Extra credit, if you’re right.” I’d thought he just had performance anxiety, but I know better now. I tremble at the effort of being on my feet. My vision goes hazy. I have to fight to keep upright and awake.

“Shit,” Florence whispers, so only I can hear as they catch me before my knees slam into the floor.

“I’m only allergic to one poison and I’m very careful never to touch it, let alone allow it in my classroom. It’s a little thing. Just tiny. But packs a big impact. Anyone know what it is?”

“Get havenhowl root. Now!” Florence barks the command as they frantically pick out the rest of the glass from my left arm while Tanner works on the right.

I’m on the edge of consciousness. When you’re allergic to something magical, most of the time it’s not as deadly as a food allergy or bee sting, anything, but it goes deep into your soul and wraps around until you don’t know if you’re dead or alive. And if you’re alive, you want to be dead. It’s cavenlock hallowroot for me, rumbling around and finding every pain and bad memory I’ve ever had and using it against me. Only my grandmother, the coven healer, and Florence know and Florence would never, ever use it against me.

Our arranged marriage has been a hot topic between the four covens of Hex since the announcement so many years ago. I'm the strongest witch in centuries. Again cliché, I know. And if I'm not married or otherwise bonded with someone and sharing my magic by the time I turn twenty-five, I'll be ripped apart by the very thing I love. Fun times, fun times. That's all according to different tests conducted by every healer my grandmother could find. Everyone wants to pair me off with their child-bearing offspring and all I want is to be left alone... unless the demon in my dreams is real. Then I want to get to know them.

The last time I tried to get out of the arranged marriage, six years ago, memories went missing. I don't even remember what I'd done because my grandmother stole the knowledge. I just don't know how, what, or who, but I suspect it has something to do with that demon in my dreams. The demon now smiling at me from behind my closed lids. The demon whispering sweet words in my ear as I black out in Florence's arms.

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Chapter 2

Warwick

Something's wrong. There's an ache in my chest that throbs like my heart being ripped out. I scratch, hoping it's just a bad case of heartburn.

"Another." I lift my shot glass empty of HellFire.

Gabe gives me the look as he fills my glass. The one that says I'm cutting your ass off soon, but not quite yet. The nephilim's too good to me, but he knows how I am. How I need to not feel for just a little bit.

What everyone doesn't realize is that I come to Flutter and Fangs for intel on Ethan. He's been missing for almost six fucking years to the day. One minute he's in front of me ready to finally make his crossroads deal, but the instant he turns eighteen, he's sucked through a portal and I haven't seen him since.

I've searched the crossroads demon archive on how to find him. I even used some of Ethan's old schoolbooks he gave me and nada. The only conclusion is his bitch of a grandmother did something to keep me from finding him and him from coming back to me.

But I digress. Flutter and Fangs is where most people come to hang out in Hex.

"Coming to the Halloween masquerade party?" Gabe gestures to the ridiculous glittery sign on the corner of the bar advertising said party. I'd take bets that Sparkle

had something to do with the glitter. The cat shifter practically bathes in it.

I cock a brow. “Do I look like the partying type?”

Gabe pushes some of his shoulder length black hair behind his ear as he shrugs. “Not really, but I know your brother would love it if you were more social.”

“Is that what he tells you?”

The telltale energy that is my brother Van shimmers beside me before he materializes in the seat to my right. He slugs his arm over my shoulder and pulls me closer. “I worry about you, you know that.” His hand scrubs over the top of my head, missing my horns, and I wriggle to get free from his grip, using my tail like another hand I push against him. “Besides...” Van frowns at the shot glass in front of me. He doesn’t say anything about it, though. “You still have a few weeks left of freedom from your crossroads duties. You might as well make the most of them.”

I snort as I spin on the stool and take in the sparse patrons this early in the day. “I am making the most out of them. I’m learning how to cook and bake.” Which I adore.

Van side-eyes me, his head tips as he examines me again. “When did you start that up? And why haven’t you shared?” He pouts.

“I didn’t say I was any good.” I spin back around and give Gabe a grin. He’s been on the receiving end of a few cookies that ended up not being quite right.

“You’re not heinous,” Gabe says as he matches my grin.

Van gasps. “Gabe, my love, you betray me.” He presses the back of his hand to his forehead dramatically and sucks in a breath.

Gabe leans across the bar and crooks a finger. “Awe, come here and I’ll give you something sweet.”

“Ugh,” I groan out. “I thought Pike and Lark were bad, but you two might be worse.” I stick out my tongue and shiver when the pair kiss. “Ew. Cooties.”

Gabe snorts as they part. “Would you say that to Ethan?”

“Ethan’s the only one I want to kiss. Ever .” I don’t know that I want to go beyond that, but I want to know what his lips taste like.

Van squeezes my shoulder. “I’m sorry he’s still?—”

“Don’t. I’ll save him.” I’ll save him and Florence. That’s what Ethan wanted.

“I wish I could help,” Gabe says as he wipes down the counter. “It’s like she’s blocked everyone associated with you from looking for him.” Not too long ago, he was nice enough to try a scrying spell. We figured of all people, Gabe would be able to get through. He’s an unassuming nephilim and nicer than anyone I’ve ever met. Being my go-to bartender, he puts up with my emotions, and I don’t think he judges me for them.

I nod and scrub a hand through my hair. “I know. But I can’t tell how close someone has to be to me before they’re blocked. Is it a look? A conversation? I don’t know. And how the hell is her magic so damn strong? I’m a demon, for crying out loud! How the hell is a witch stronger than me?”

Van’s pocket pings, and he pulls out his cellphone. “Well, shit. Pumpkin’s getting into something she shouldn’t again. Silly puppy.” He grabs Gabe by the apron tie and pulls him close again. “I’ll be back.”

“I’ll be waiting.” Gabe leans in and kisses him. Then my brother’s gone.

Pumpkin is their Hellhound puppy. Van earned one after he got his head out of his ass and started acting right. He used to be so arrogant and selfish, not to mention violent. I chew on the inside of my cheek. I love my brother, I really, really fucking do, but somehow he gets away with so much and gets rewarded in the end. Poe, the king of the crossroads demons, punished me several times over because of Van with no rewards in sight.

Actually, that’s not true. I’ve been given a year reprieve from crossroads duties when Van came back home after his last little spat of childishness. I don’t blame Van for how he acts. Neither of us really had a childhood. Mother gave me to him to raise when he was only seven. Seven . Who does that? Not that it was just the two of us. We lived in the creche, which is the equivalent of an orphanage for crossroads demons to drop off the kids they don’t want to raise. We helped raise each other and the other crossroads demon kids around us. Pike, the owner of Flutter and Fangs and free of his crossroads curse, is still Van’s best friend even after all the shit Van pulls. But there’s something about Van everyone gets drawn into. Admittedly, he’s a lot of fun.

Gabe gives me a shy little smile. I still don’t understand how the nicest person in Hex and my brother work, but they do. And I want my one and only back. Watching my friends and family fall in love makes me want to show them up. Show them how what Ethan and I had— have —is stronger than... than... everything.

The door of Flutter and Fangs opens, and normally I’d ignore it, but I swear I can feel Ethan’s energy. My heart pounds, but when he doesn’t emerge through the door, my shoulders slump. “Another.” I wiggle my shot glass.

“Last one,” Gabe says as flaming HellFire pours into my glass.

A group of four sidle up to the bar, all with that faint hint of Ethan. I grind my teeth and Gabe slides a bowl of gummy bears my way. One of Lark's improvements. The Fae loves sweets and instead of peanuts, the bar has gummy bears or gummy worms at intervals along the bar top. I grab a handful and toss them back, hoping they help take the bitter annoyance away.

The person next to me trembles before they slide into the seat. Their hands shake and they drop them to their side. There's the pungent and delightful scent of fear in the surrounding air.

Someone rubs circles in the small of my neighbor's back. "It's not your fault, Tanner. Those bitches rigged your jar. It could have been any of us."

"What can I get you?" Gabe asks with a cheery smile that usually has patrons melting, but the kid doesn't budge.

"Something strong," my neighbor squeaks out with a broken voice.

"Did something happen in class, Tanner?" Gabe grabs a bottle from the top shelf behind him. "Never seen you so shaken up before."

"It wasn't his fault," the one behind Tanner says as the two on Tanner's other side shake their heads in agreement.

Tanner sinks his fingers into his hair. "I should have known better than to trust either of them. Lettie handed me the bottle. She never even looks twice at me, ever. I'm like gum on the bottom of her shoe, but today..."

"She was nice, I know," the back rubber says.

Someone snuffles beside the pair and rubs at their eye. "I hope he recovers. He's the

only teacher that made protection spells make sense.”

My face grows hot. Protection spells were Ethan’s specialty. I helped him understand them. “Who needs to recover?” I ask through gritted teeth.

“Professor Speller,” back rubber says so nonchalantly I don’t think they realize how wound up I am.

“What’s the professor’s first name?” I growl.

“E—Ethan,” Tanner squeaks out.

Before anyone can blink, I shove the person away from Tanner and have Tanner pressed against the bar top with my hand gripping his throat. “What did you do to him?” My voice echos through Flutter and Fangs and everyone’s eyes are on us. On me.

My tail shakes as if to warn people off. Someone grabs at my arm and tries to yank me off him. Tanner’s face turns a delightful red and his eyes widen as he tries to gasp for breath.

“Warwick.” Gabe’s fingers glow as he lays his hand over my forearm. “Release him or you’ll know what a nephilim’s sting feels like.”

“He hurt Ethan,” my voice rumbles, shaking the walls. And I press in, just to see Tanner’s legs scramble beneath him, trying to find purchase on the floor below.

“Get off him!” Someone beats me with a purse.

Gabe’s fingers spark along my skin, but he’s just warning me.

“What is the meaning of this?” Pike stomps toward me from one of the backrooms adjusting his shirt with a disheveled Lark trailing behind him. “I’m trying to feed and you’re disturbing me.” His leathery wings fan out behind him and my feathered ones pop out, keeping him from seeing what I’m doing and pushing the students beside me away.

“Tell me what the fuck you did to Ethan.” I give another little squeeze for good measure before releasing him. It’s just Tanner and me wrapped in my wings.

Warwick—Age 15

Look at this little wannabe trying to summon a demon. They’re kinda cute in a super nerdy way. They push their thick glasses up their nose as they look around. Mousy brown hair flops in their face. They have pretty, blue eyes. They set down the tote bag they’ve been carrying all the way from the main road and start digging things out. Salt, crystals, a knife, tea lights, a lighter, and what appears to be holy water. I snort at the assortment. All they really need is the salt, a summoning statement, and a drop of blood.

Right now, they can’t see me because I’m behind the veil. I just like to hang out at my crossroads. I’m five years too early being bound to it because it’s a punishment for my brother Van. For some reason, the king of the crossroads demons decided I should get roped into Van’s punishment. I hated them both for a few weeks. But now I’m used to the soul sucking boredom of not being with the other crossroads demons my age. Being bound means I’m not allowed in classes anymore. Not being in classes means I don’t know all the rules. So I read and watch. Of course, I read the rule books I can find, but most of them are centuries old and don’t have the new rules. I figured if I’m good at this for a few months, maybe, just maybe, Poe will let me have an updated rulebook to study. Despite my brother defying Poe for years, I think the king is a good one. He keeps us all in line, though not my brother so much. No, Van wants to rule us all and honestly, I’m not in favor of it. Van is too volatile. He needs

more education, and that's me saying that.

The summoner looks younger than I am, which could be a problem. They're the first one at my crossroads since I've been bound, so I want to do this right, but if they aren't old enough, we can't bargain. I groan to myself and throw my head back.

The summoner drags the box of salt across the gravel road, making a giant circle. I'm impressed because it's big enough for the both of us. Then they take the crystals, looks like clear quartz, and make a circle within the circle. Curious choice. They circle the crystals with the tea lights and light them. I wonder if they just like showy magic because this is a lot of effort.

They shove the bottle of holy water into their pocket and step outside of the circle. It really takes everything in me not to laugh when they raise their knife to the sky.

"I, Ethan Gregory Speller, summon the crossroads demon assigned to this place."

He's the Speller heir. The lone son of Aiden Speller, former ruler of the Hex coven.

Ethan takes the knife and slices it across the back of his forearm. Not enough to make a gash, just a hairline break of his skin and he lets the blood drop on the salt in front of him.

A high pitch sound rings in my ears. My skin shimmers and before I know it, I'm standing in front of him from within his circle.

Ethan gasps and stumbles back, clutching his bottle of holy water to his chest. "It worked."

"It did." I tip my head, examining him close up. "How old are you?"

“Old enough!”

“It doesn’t work that way. How old are you?”

“I’ll answer if you do. You don’t look much older than me.”

I shrug. What harm could it do for him to know? “I’m fifteen. And you?”

“Twelve.”

Twelve?! “What does a twelve-year-old need to summon a demon for?”

“That’s none of—” He cuts himself off before finishing with none of my business. His face goes red, and he picks at the gravel by his hands.

I smile, letting my fangs show. My tail whips around behind me. He’s scared and brave all at once. “Why did you summon me?”

“I want out of my arranged marriage.”

I choke on my own saliva. “What now? You’re twelve . Why are you getting married?”

“I’m not getting married until I’m older. I have to graduate college first and establish myself as a Hex citizen in good standing. But my father and grandmother planned out my entire life. I like Florence, but...” He nibbles his bottom lip and doesn’t look at me. “Can you keep a secret?”

“Cross my heart.” I plop to the ground, crossing my legs.

Ethan scoots closer. He’s right on the edge of the summoning circle that keeps us

separated. "I'm gay," he whispers.

"I can see why you don't wanna marry them, then."

He shakes his head. "It's the principle of the thing and Flo doesn't wanna marry me either. She doesn't want to marry anyone. She thinks the idea of kissing is gross and just wants a dog and to live in the country teaching people magic. At least that's what she's told me."

"What did you bring for a sacrifice?"

"My magic. Memaw says I'm the strongest Speller in centuries. I just started college at Hex University and I love it so far, but if I don't have magic, Florence's family won't want them to marry me. I can save us both."

"You're already in college?" It's hard to wrap my brain around. I never even finished Crossroads School, but that wasn't my fault.

"Yep." Ethan throws his shoulders back. "I'm taking a dual program where I'm working through my bachelor's and doctorate at the same time. I should be teaching by the time I'm seventeen if everything pans out."

My mouth falls open. "What?" This child's life is already planned out for him and I don't blame him for not wanting what someone else decided for him.

"Memaw insisted."

I rub my chin as if I'm thinking before pushing to my feet. "I'd love to help you, but can't." I'm not sure I've spoken any truer words in my life.

"What? Why not?" His slim shoulders slump.

“You’re twelve and there are rules against making a deal with someone under eighteen. You have to be a legal adult to enter a contract unless you have your parent’s permission.” I made up the bit about parents, but it’s not like he’s going to know.

“ You’re under eighteen!”

“ I’m allowed to be under eighteen.”

“Why?” Ethan fists his hands and I swear he’s about to cry. I don’t like the idea of him being so upset, though.

“Because I’m being punished for my brother being... well, himself. I shouldn’t even be here for another five years, yet here I am. So trust me, I understand disappointments.”

“I’m sorry. Please forgive me for being such a brat.” Ethan pushes to his feet and dusts his shirt off. “But I don’t give up easily. I’ll wear you down.”

“Come back in six years and I’ll make you the deal of a lifetime.”

“ I’m already so mature and adulty I think you should make the deal.” Ethan nods, determined, and holds out his hand.

“Sorry, no can do.”

“Okay, then I’ll be here every day until you let up.” He dusts off his bottom and picks up his tote bag.

I can’t help the chuckle. “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

He nods. “Believe it. Every day. Right here. Promise.” He points to the circle.

“Don’t make promises to demons. We might make you keep them.” I wave as I blink out back behind the veil and watch as he carefully cleans up the summoning circle.

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Chapter 3

Ethan

Someone dabs at my forehead, and I fight my way to consciousness. The fast beat of wings buzzes in my ears. So familiar . Sharp pain rattles around in my head like I'm a pinball machine. A moan escapes my lips and I chew on my cheek, trying to keep the sounds at bay. My eyes refuse to open, the dream still too tempting.

That beautiful demon, with horns gleaming in the sunlight, grins at me. Their mouth moves, but I can't hear them. Why can't I hear them? They're telling me something and smirks, then turns and disappears.

"Don't go!" I gasp awake, reaching for the demon.

"Oh, thank fuck," Florence says beside me. They keep dabbing at my forehead with a cool cloth. Tears fill their big blue eyes. "I thought we lost you a few times."

Vi, my hummingbird familiar, buzzes into my vision, wings flapping frantically. Waves of sadness flow from her tiny body. Even her iridescent violet chest feathers are dull compared to usual. I'd done that to her. Our connection had to have been weak as I fought off the magic trying to drag me down and destroy me.

I grab Flo's hand and press a kiss to their knuckles. "Sorry I scared you both."

Vi titters and her tiny head wiggles as she sasses me in her own way. I'm glad I had her off on a task and not in the classroom at the time of the disaster.

Flo laughs and shakes their head. “We should have known better. You’re too stubborn to let memories steal you away.”

“I’m not so sure.” I squeeze their hand and let them go. “This demon from my dreams. I need to find them. They know something.” And until this moment, I truly thought they could have been a figment of my imagination. But since they came while I was under the influence of cavenlock hallowroot, I know they’re real.

Cavenlock hallowroot digs in and tries to tear you apart with your memories and negative thoughts. This time all I had was dreams of that demon, but I wanted to follow them into darkness where it’s just the two of us. I wasn’t dosed enough to cause real damage, just try to scare me and it didn’t work this time.

“Sounds like a birthday mission.” Flo wiggles their brows.

I push up to my elbows. “I’ve been working on the next version of?”

“Lie down.” Florence gently pushes me back into the pillow. “You’ll probably still have nightmares for a few nights.”

“I don’t think I had any . They were all dreams of the demon.”

“All of them?” Flo’s eyes grow big. “How? Last time you got dosed, you had nightmares for three weeks.”

I suck in a breath. “How long was I out this time?”

Flo nibbles their bottom lip. “Finals are tomorrow.”

I stare at the ceiling and pick at the sheet below me. “I was out that long?”

“Yeah, and get this. Cordia expelled Lettie and Kayla, then bound their magic for five years. They wouldn’t say who hired them to rig Tanner’s potion, and that was the best she could do without bringing in the council. She doesn’t want anyone to know what happened. She even sealed their tongues to keep them from speaking about it.”

I sigh and scrub at my face. “What a shit show everything is this year.”

“Understatement of the month.” Florence’s lips tip to a smirk.

October has been a mess. The closer it gets to our wedding at the end of November, the more unhinged the other covens get. They’re desperate for me to marry into either the Belladonna or Levona covens. They’re trying to scare us into breaking the arrangement. But if we’re forced to marry, we’d rather marry each other. Florence knows I’ll never touch them.

Florence smooths a hand over my forehead with a warm, wet cloth and I lean into their soft touch. Vi titters on the headboard as Squid, Florence’s squirrel familiar, dashes into the room from the hallway and scuttles up their shoulder. Squid is a plump gray squirrel with the bushiest tail I’ve ever seen.

We’re our own little family, just the four of us, Florence, Squid, Vi, and me.

I finally take in my surroundings. The old blue gray wallpaper with lines of roses tells me I’m in my former bedroom of my grandmother’s mansion instead of my studio apartment on campus. My bed is still comfortable at least. The floral scent that seems to permeate every wall of the house starts to seep through my senses and I have to breathe through my mouth to get away from it.

“I might have a way to get out into Hex proper,” I whisper, not sure if my grandmother rigged surveillance in my room or not. She used to.

Florence leans their head closer. “Yeah? Last time...” They look away from me and wring the wash cloth.

“The cloaking crystals didn’t work because they just cloaked our physical bodies. Knowing that, I think the perimeter spells are linked to our essence.”

“We can’t change our essence. It’s who we are.”

“True, but we can mask it.”

The telltale clip of my grandmother’s heels comes from the hallway. I shut my eyes and settle into the bed, acting like I’m still asleep. The door creaks open and the shuffle of her long skirt fills the room as she makes her way to me. Her bracelets jangle as she lifts a warm hand to press against my cheek when she leans in and softly kisses my forehead.

“Still not awake?” she asks.

“Not yet,” Florence sighs and dabs at my skin.

“My poor sweet grandbaby,” grandmother murmurs. “I came to tell you I won’t be able to come in tonight. I called a meeting of the covens and the only time everyone can meet is tonight. Do you mind staying?” She squeezes my hand.

“Not at all.” Another dab to my cheek.

“Thank you. I should be able to relieve you in the morning.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

Grandmother’s skirts swish as she turns and leaves the room, snicking the door shut

behind her. I push back to my elbows and grin at my best friend. I couldn't have planned the meeting better myself.

Florence leans in. "How do we mask our very essence?"

I look around and my grin grows wider. "We play dress up."

Florence cocks a brow. "Wearing your grandmother's clothes?—"

"We shower, dress in something we don't own, infuse a crystal with that essence, and we should be good. It'll confuse the perimeter spells at the very least."

"It's risky. When I said we should go to the party, I just meant you could ask Cordia for a day pass for your birthday."

I shrug. "We could do that. I'm sure it'd be a hard sell, especially after..." I wave my hand over myself. "The poisoning."

She snorts. "We're not calling it that."

"The disaster."

"You are so dramatic, Ethan."

"You have met my grandmother." That woman has the flare for dramatics, and she raised me since I was ten. We both snort.

Florence squeezes my hand. "Okay, but you still need rest. You just woke up."

"I feel fine. And I really need a shower. Do you smell me?" I wave my hand over to them and they just shake their head.

“Your grandmother has been here just as much as I have. She’s worried about you.”

“Of course she is,” I mumble as I sit up all the way.

Florence hands me a water bottle and I drink, not realizing how dry my mouth is.

“Not too much.” They pat my hand, and I set the bottle on the nightstand beside me.

I love my grandmother, I truly do. But there’s something I’ve never told Florence. The reason I’m so damn stupidly powerful and why I need to be married or otherwise bound to someone before I turn twenty-five. And I’m not sure I can forgive my grandmother for it.

“I want to test my theory.”

“Tonight?”

“Yep.” I push off the bed and strip off my shirt at the same time. “That way we know now if it works and we can enjoy my birthday even more.”

“And how will we sneak out for your birthday?”

“We’ll create a distraction at the university.”

“So you’ve thought of everything.” Florence grins as they follow me down the hall.

“Of course.” I wink as I slide into the bathroom.

Ethan—Age 9

“What do you mean, I have to marry a girl?” I ask.

“You like Florence, right?” Memaw says as she pushes me towards the dining room.

“Yeah.” I dig my heels into the carpet, trying to stop.

“Ethan, my sweet grandbaby, please cooperate.”

“Why?” I cross my arms and pout. I just wanna go play in the rain, but papa says playing in the rain is bad.

“Because I gave up everything to give you power. The least you can do is what I ask.” Memaw smooths down my collar and I drop my arms.

“How long do I have to be married to a girl for because I like someone else more? A lot more.” But I keep quiet that it’s my friend Liam. Papa didn’t like it when I said I wanted to cuddle Superman because he looks cuddly. I don’t think he likes that I like boys instead of girls.

“Sweetie, you have to marry Florence forever. You have to have lots of little babies too.”

“Ew. I don’t like babies.”

“You’re practically still a baby yourself, Ethan. Come on. It’s not so bad to marry someone you don’t love.” Memaw tugs my hand, and I don’t wanna go. Tears well in my eyes.

“I do love Florence. She’s my bestest best friend in the whole wide world.”

“See, it’s a good match.” Memaw pats my cheek and my hands fist.

“No! Florry wants a pet dog and to live in the forest. I don’t even want a pet. I want

my books and that's it." I stomp my foot.

Memaw rears to face me again, and her face is scrunched in her angry look that scares me. "Listen here. I gave up my soul years before you were born, just to have a grandchild that was stronger than either of my idiot sons. I will not let you squander that sacrifice nor end the Speller line. You will marry Florence and you will produce heirs. Spellers will rule the tri-state covens for generations to come and it starts with you." Her grip on my hand tightens, and she drags me to the dining room.

"No. Let me go!"

"Ethan!" Florence runs to us and embraces me. She's two years older than I am, but we've been inseparable since we've met. "I don't want to marry you." Tears stream down her face. "I don't wanna marry anyone. But if I must, then I'm glad it's you."

"Good riddance. The two of you always bring drama into everything, don't you?" Florence's dad says behind her.

"Maybe," Florence says as she releases me and turns towards the man. "If you let us have any choice in our lives, it'd be different. But you both want power."

I squeeze her hand. "I'll find a way out of this and you can't stop me."

"Exactly. We won't cooperate."

Her dad pinches the bridge of his nose. "You two are ridiculous. We're having the formal announcement in the coven papers this weekend. And we'll have a formal engagement party when you're older. If you're not on your best behaviors until then, you'll be sorry."

Florence rolls her eyes. "Oh, I'm so scared."

We both stick out our tongues, but Memaw snaps and our tongues stay that way. My heart pounds and I don't want to be a brat anymore.

“They’ll stay that way until you decide to have some manners.”

Florence’s eyes go wide and she shakes her head. “I’ll be good,” she tries to say, but it’s jumbled because of her tongue.

“Good. And you?” Memaw turns to me. My shoulders drop and I agree to be agreeable for the moment.

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Chapter 4

Warwick

I'm mixing the latest cookie batter in a bowl with Poe watching on. We're in my apartment kitchen in the demon realm and I love how the threads of magic outside make me feel powerful. I enjoy the human realm, but it reminds me of Ethan and how I can't fucking find him no matter what I do.

"Are you going to tell me why you asked for an audience or just make me watch you make cookies all night long?"

I sigh and set aside the batter. Poe's red eyes dart to the whisk, and I had it over to him. His long tongue snakes out to find all the bits of batter and chocolate chips still stuck to the metal. If my brother were here, I'm sure he'd cat call Poe, but I don't exactly find the tongue action hot. Not from Poe anyway. He cocks a brow as if he's waiting for me.

"I need advice."

"Stop thinking about Ethan."

My cheeks blaze so hot I can probably bake the cookies with touch alone. "That's not the advice I'm looking for."

"The batter is good, so as long as you don't over bake the cookies, they'll taste fantastic."

“Again not...”

Poe grins as he hands the whisk back to me. “I know.”

“I have a few more weeks of freedom before you send me back to my crossroads.”

He nods, and this time waits for me to continue.

“What would you do if you were me?”

Poe shrugs and spins on his stool a few times. “Dunno. I’ve been a crossroads demon, then the king, for centuries. It’s all I know.”

“I had hoped I’d find Ethan by now, but Cordia has every resource blocked. What has her so fucking scared?”

“You were planning on taking him away from her.”

“No, I was planning on freeing him and Florence from their arranged marriage. They weren’t planning on leaving. I just?—”

Poe lays his hand on top of mine. “As the king of crossroads demons, I have privy to all deals that take place.”

“Right. But what does that have to do with anything?”

“You know how Pike’s first deal was a soul?”

I nod. It made him practically royalty at the same time and made him an outcast. Only Van, Poe, and I were friendly with him until Lark came around. The Fae totally changed his world, then set him free. Jealousy tries to rage in my heart. I’ve come to

love my freedom over the last year. I want it forever, but I've never told anyone that, not even Ethan.

"Pike's deal was with Cordia."

I suck in a breath and shake my head.

"She gave him her soul to have a grandchild that's the most powerful witch the world has ever seen. What she didn't anticipate was the magic being so volatile because one person isn't supposed to contain that much magic."

"Pike wouldn't have?—"

"No one knew the effect that much magic would have on a human born witch."

"He never told me." Why didn't he tell me?

"Ethan marrying someone and binding the magic means he'll live. Cordia discovered if he's not bound by the time he's twenty-five he'll be torn apart by the very magic she sold her soul for."

"If he doesn't get married now, basically he's signing his death certificate."

"Exactly. It's a year earlier than he needs, but apparently he's been stubborn about getting married before."

The laugh bubbles out without permission. "You know what his deal was going to be? He wanted me to take away his magic. It'd free him of the marriage and obligation to produce heirs. It'd free Florence, but he's sure their father would find another witch to marry them off to for heirs. Florence is powerful in their own right."

“They are, but it’s natural. And Ethan, had Cordia left things alone, would have been powerful, and that’s why the extra magic isn’t good for him. Cordia gave him a pendant to wear that helps with the effects.”

“I hate her.”

“I know. She plays dirty.”

“I can save them both.”

“Wick.” Poe waves to the batter. “I’m not sure anyone can. It’s not something to dwell on right now. Enjoy your time off. You deserve it.”

I pull the bowl closer again and grab two spoons from the drawer at my side. His eyes light up when I pass him one. We both sink our spoons into the batter at the same time. The oven dings now the pre-heat is over. We each dip balls of cookie dough onto my prepared tray.

“Maybe you need a real vacation. Go someplace new. Someplace you’ve never been.”

I shake my head. What if Ethan shows up? I can’t risk it.

“Just a thought.” Poe smirks, probably knowing exactly what I’m thinking. “You really have become a better cook.”

“I’m enjoying it. It was the only thing I could think of.”

“Gabe tried to teach Van how to knit.” Poe chuckles as he licks his spoon clean.

“I remember. And I don’t think it’s for me, though it seems Lark has taken to it.”

“Lark’s sweet. So is Gabe.”

“I like them both a lot. Pike and Van deserve them.” Though my heart aches because maybe it’s selfish, but I deserve love like they have, too. I’ve followed every rule. Done everything asked of me. I deserve to have my Ethan.

Poe’s hand falls on mine again. “You’ll find someone.”

I pull away from him and slide the tray of cookies into the oven. “I don’t want someone . I want Ethan.”

“Have you considered perhaps Ethan really did run away? Maybe he does want to marry Florence and have lots of screaming babies.”

“ No. That’s not Ethan.”

“Not the Ethan you know.”

“That’s not Ethan. Ethan is the sweetest, goofiest guy in the world. And he’s mine. He wants to teach potions and live in a house that has a huge library where he has to use those rolling ladders. He wants to run around naked in a meadow and howl at the full moon like he’s a werewolf, just because he thinks it’ll be fun. He?—”

Poe raises a hand to stop me. “It’s been six years. He’s all grown up. You don’t know him anymore.”

I grip the counter top. My knees threaten to buckle and my heart shatters.

I don’t know him anymore.

I don’t know him anymore.

I don't know him anymore.

Poe moves faster than I can see and catches me before I drop to the floor.

"I don't know him anymore," I whisper as the king holds me close and rocks with me.

"Shhh. Everything is going to be okay. Want me to call your brother?"

I shake my head. "Van and Gabe are the last people I need right now." They're so in love they'll make me feel worse. I don't need to watch them dote over me like the sweet couple they are. Gabe really pulled out the softness of my brother and I love him for it, but those two are the last people I need right now.

"Okay. Okay. I understand." Poe helps me to the stools on the other side of the counter, then grabs me a water bottle from the fridge. "I'm sorry to be so harsh, but you've kept this image of him in your head for six years. He's not going to be the same person you fell in love with."

"I wasn't thinking."

"The two of you were so young when you met."

"He was my first summons. I didn't even like him at first."

"I remember." Poe chuckles. "You were infuriated he kept coming back every single day and there wasn't anything I could do about it."

"He grew on me." The more I got to know him, the more I realized I'd fallen in love.

"I'm glad he did, but maybe..." Poe looks away. "Maybe it's time to let him go?"

“No,” it comes out in a whisper. “Not yet.”

Warwick—Age 15, One day after first summoning

He’s back. I watch, stunned, as Ethan Speller once again sets up a summoning circle and offers blood. He’s already summoned me to the circle and I’m still blinking back at him.

“Told you I’d be back. So…”

“Still can’t.” I shake my head and take a step back. “You don’t have to make everything all fancy, you know. Just salt, blood, and words is all it takes.”

His cheeks go pink. “Good to know.”

“Go away. I can’t help you.”

Ethan looks around and plops down. “Brought homework and it’s such a pretty day, don’t you think?” He pulls a huge tome from his bag, maneuvers on to his stomach, and flips open the book. His legs kick as he turns the pages until he finds the one he wants and lays a crystal on both pages to keep them from fluttering in the wind. Next, he digs around in his bag again to pull out a notebook and pen. I half expected him to use a feathered pen, but it’s a regular ballpoint.

I poof back behind the veil to watch him. For the next several hours, he hums as he studies. What the hell?

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Chapter 5

Ethan

I scrub the towel over my hair, then wrap it around my waist. It's just me, Florence, Vi and Squid in the house as far as I know. My grandmother's familiar, a raccoon named Rosco, probably lurks outside to alert her of anything going on. I'll have to remember to pop into the kitchen to grab him an apple for a bribe.

When I leave the bathroom, I head for the crystal room, as we call it. If anyone thought dragons hoarded shiny shit, my grandmother is worse. Entire rooms dedicated to her collections. Don't get me wrong, I lived in this mansion for years before she shipped me and Florence around the US to teach at different schools, so I have my own tiny hoards of things added to hers.

Vi flitters in front of my face, and I pause. I'd forgotten what I'd sent her on a mission for before the disaster. She reminds me now. Images of demons flow through my mind. None of them my demon .

I shake my head. "Thanks, but none of them are who I'm looking for." She'd infiltrated a few of the other coven houses to read their books on demons. She's so tiny no one's wards notices her.

The next image stops me cold. The headline reads: Crossroads Demons.

I scan the article she read and something pokes at my memory. This feels familiar. Maybe not this article, but I know it's the right direction.

“Search for more on crossroads demons. Everything you can find. You’re the best, thank you.” I hold out a finger and pat her head when she lands.

Vi’s tiny head nods, and she flies from the house faster than I can see. I’ve had her for about five years, wanting to research more than I had time to and she comes in handy. Plus, it doesn’t hurt that she can get to places I can’t. In the time we’ve worked together, she’s been invaluable.

Florence finds me in the crystal room wrapped in her own towel from using a guest bathroom. The room has shelves upon shelves of crystals in all shapes and sizes and types. The windows have blackout curtains because my grandmother loves crystal balls and they do not mix well with sunlight coming through. We go to the drawers of quartz points and each chose one that’ll easily fit in a pocket.

“I’m still not sure we should do this tonight,” Florence says as we pad over to my grandmother’s room.

“If not tonight, then when? We have our final exams of the year tomorrow. Then it’ll be my birthday. Tonight is the only time we have to test my theory. If it fails, then I beg my grandmother for a day pass.” I grin at Florence’s sour face.

“You’re right. I hate when you’re right.”

I bump their shoulder with mine. “No, you don’t. We have more fun when we get into shenanigans.”

“When you get us into shenanigans.” They bump me back.

“Exactly.” My grandmother’s room is impeccably clean. Not one speck anywhere, and I’m sure she uses a spell to do it. Before we step across the threshold, I press a hand to the doorjamb and scan for any kind of spell that might ping her about

intruders and find none. “Come on.” I wave Florence in when they hesitate.

My grandmother’s room, and well, the entire mansion, always smells like roses. Always. Sometimes it gives me a headache and I often wonder if she’s hiding something. I don’t have time to think about it today. We dash to her walk-in closet.

Florence runs a hand over a shirt. “We probably should use dirty clothes, something she’s already worn.”

“You’re right.” In the back of her closet she has a small hamper where she keeps dirty clothes that haven’t gone through the cleaning spell. I grab it and pull out the first thing on top, then toss it back in when Florence starts laughing. “I did not need to touch her underwear.” I shiver and remind myself to pay attention. The next item I grab is a blood red shirt, thankfully. I spread it over one of the shelves to my left and we wrap our crystals in the soft cloth tightly. “There’s not enough clothes in here for us both.” I frown as I dig around some more. Only one outfit. The red shirt, underwear, and black slacks.

“You wear them,” Florence says as they grab a shirt and skirt from the racks around us. “There should be enough of her essence on her clothes in general as long as this works.” They wave at the crystals in the shirt. They’re right and I know it.

We dress in our stolen clothes before finishing with the crystals. It’s not a complicated spell to fuse the crystals with my grandmother’s essence, but it does take concentration. Sitting on the floor of the closet, we hold the shirt and crystals together. I shut my eyes as heat fills my cupped hands. We mumble our intentions.

Cordia Speller’s essence fills the crystals, making us one and the same.

Over and over, we chant softly until the heat becomes unbearable. I squint to find our hands glow. “It’s done,” I croak out. Now all we need is a little bit of luck.

I have to wear a belt to keep the pants up and I stuff the bottom of the shirt into the waistband. I'm thin, but I hadn't realized how much smaller I am than my grandmother. It's like I'm a child playing dress up. Florence, at least, looks put together.

"This is just to test a theory." I don't have to look like I'm dressed up or anything.

"Exactly. We'll walk through the spell and come right back."

I yank the belt tighter.

"Right?" Florence pokes me.

"Right," I mumble.

The moment we leave my grandmother's room, Squid scurries up Florence's body to sit on their shoulder. I give the squirrel a pet and lead the pair towards victory.

Grandmother's mansion is... huge. It's one of the biggest houses in Hex, boasting thirteen bedrooms, seventeen bathrooms, and seven various other rooms. It's three stories and Florence and I have played in every nook and crannie. There's also a pool with pool house, garden shed, and three garages. Not to mention the garden that has its own hedge labyrinth. When she passes, it all comes to me, but I much prefer my studio apartment on campus. Well, the freedom of my apartment. If I had all this square footage, I'm not sure what the heck I'd do with it all. I hope I don't have to think about it for a long time despite how irritated I get with my grandmother.

The glass in the front door rattles like it always does when we open it. I suck in a deep breath of fresh air. The night critters sing their songs and the stars twinkle brightly in the night sky. One of the best things about Hex is the night sky. We don't have a lot of light pollution because of the veils and wards keeping us safe from

humans. The scent of rain hints on the air and I breathe it in.

My heart pounds as we step onto the porch.

“Rosco,” Florence whispers and nods towards one of the oak trees in the front yard.

“Right!” I run back inside, racing to the kitchen to grab an apple. They’re his favorite treat and usually he’s compliant when I give him one. I grab a second, just in case.

Florence laughs when I join them again. I take their hand with my free one and we take the steps down into the yard. Rosco’s dark beady eyes track us. The moment we step onto the gravel, he scurries down his tree.

I squat as he runs towards us. Squid dashes off from Florence’s shoulder. The two never really got along, but they’ve never hurt each other. Rosco chitters at me as he takes me in.

“Hey, Rossy. I have two apples for you if you promise not to tell Cordia anything.” I hold my hand and wave it in front of him. He’s practically hypnotized as he watches the apples. He nods and holds out his little hands. “Promise?”

Another nod. I place the apples on the ground and he snatches them up.

“Come on,” I whisper to Florence and take their hand.

We run across the yard until we get to the edge where there’s a faint glow before yard turns into pavement.

“Moment of truth,” I say.

Florence squeezes my hand. “We got this.”

I hold my breath and shut my eyes while we take the final step onto the pavement. I wait for the spell to activate. To pull us back into the yard and into the house. But nothing happens. Nothing .

“We did it!” I whisper shout. “We did it!” I release Florence and throw my hands into the air and dance to a beat in my head. Freedom!

Florence palms their crystal and grins. “Okay, now we gotta go back in before it wears off.”

“Nu uh, we need to test it to see how far it works. If it’s just to the road, it’s not that useful. But...” I look towards the rest of the town with pleading eyes. “We can investigate that Flutter and Fangs place. We’ll grab a drink and come right back.”

“Sounds reasonable enough.” They shove the crystal back into their pocket. “We look ridiculous, though. Well, you do.”

I rework the belt to keep the pants up. “If anyone asks, I’m testing out a costume.” I grin up at them. “It worked.”

“It did.” Florence grins back.

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Chapter 6

Warwick

I materialize on my favorite bar stool. After Poe left, I didn't want to be alone, so I decided to come to Flutter and Fangs to drown in HellFire like usual.

"Keep it coming," I say to Gabe when he turns to face me.

His brown eyes grow wide as he takes me in. "What happened?"

"Nothing." I wipe at my eyes. "Got something in my eyes."

He nods, letting me lie to him without questioning me. "I'm here to talk if you want. That's what bartenders do. We listen." He leans in closer. "And I'll never judge you for wanting Ethan."

"I know. You're the only one, I think." I throw back the first shot and savor the burn as it slides down. I've tried human alcohol, and it never gives me what I want.

"You know what you want. I admire that." He pushes a bowl of gummy worms towards me, but I wave them away.

"I have cookies cooling at home. I think they're my best ones yet." There's a commotion at the door and I grind my teeth at the giggling pair. I'm not feeling social after the last time people came in and sat with me. I didn't hurt the student, just scared him a little tiny tiny bit then tried to infiltrate the university campus knowing

full well demons have been banned since the beginning. “I’m gonna go sit with Frankie. Can I get a tray of HellFire to go?” I nod to the leather couches against the far wall where the Hellhound sits primly in her doggie bed and snuggles with her favorite toy, a pink giraffe. She looks like a giant Doberman with blue flames kissing her curled tail and cropped ears.

Pike and Lark are probably fucking in a backroom. Since having his crossroads curse broken, Pike became the incubus he truly is, and he’s insatiable some nights. Lark doesn’t seem to mind, probably has something to do with being Fae, but who knows?

I grab my tray of HellFire and carefully make my way to the couch. Frankie yips at me, but doesn’t try to trip me as I walk. She lets me set my tray on the coffee table and get settled before she hops into my lap. “Such a good girl.” I give her scratches under her chin while she licks at my face. Thank fuck I’m a demon, or she’d burn my skin off with her lava-ish saliva. Her curled tail thumps against the back of the couch making me laugh.

I long to break my crossroads curse. Just need someone to destroy my crossroads and I’ll be free. But if I’m not a crossroads demon, I can’t help Ethan, and I desperately want to free him.

Every crossroads demon is cursed. The only way to free us is to destroy our crossroads and we can’t even tell anyone that or where our crossroads is.

Once we’re free, we’re the demon type we’re meant to be. For Pike it’s an incubus. My brother doesn’t want to be free because he wants to be the king of the crossroads demons some day. But I want to be set free. I don’t want to have to worry about being called in the middle of something, that’s why I didn’t have any hobbies until this year. Van never cared. He does whatever he damn well pleases, even if he’s in the middle of sexual relations when someone summons him. His crossroads is one of the most popular and every time he fucked up in the past, I ended up having to take on

double the deals. Which is hard when my crossroads isn't anywhere near as popular as his.

The giggling pair finally make their way to the bar. Gabe asks for their IDs when they order drinks. His eyes go wide and he looks at the one person a couple of times before he hands back the IDs. I chuckle, wondering what has him so excited.

I find out when he turns his back. My phone vibrates in my pocket.

Gabe: ETHAN IS HERE

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Chapter 7

Ethan

Ethan

I can't stop laughing.

“Apparently, one of the freshmen students added actual frog eyes to the cauldron instead of chia seeds. And well...” Florence sticks out their tongue. “Ribbit. Ribbit. Thousands of frogs pour out of the cauldron and infiltrate the classroom, then the hallway.”

“I wish I could have been?—”

My chair spins and Florence gasps beside me.

“You,” I whisper. “You’re real.”

The blue demon stares back at me with wide eyes. “E—Ethan,” they say my name with a broken voice as they reach for my cheek. Just as they connect, I’m back in my bedroom in my grandmother’s house sans Florence.

“No!” I yell, my heart broken for someone I don’t even know. “I’m so fucking close!” I press a hand to my cheek, savoring the brief moment of a rough hand against me. “So fucking close.” Dramatically, I sit on my bed and flop back. “So, so, so , close,” I whisper. “I won’t give up, you know!” I never give up once I sink my

teeth into a problem and the demon is one of the biggest problems I haven't been able to solve. That and the arranged marriage.

I force myself back to my feet as Squid runs into the room and jumps onto the night stand chittering away.

“Fuck. My grandmother is already coming back?”

Squid nods, his bushy tail swishing behind him. I dash to my grandmother's bedroom and to the back of her closet to shed her clothes. I'm back in mine and in my bed before the front door rattles. If only Florence were here too.

“Go watch for Florence. If you see them, tell them to come around back and when they come in, tell them to act like they have an upset tummy. I'm gonna tell my grandmother Florry got sick and dashed off to one of the other bathrooms.”

Squid nods and scurries from my room out the window as I scramble to get under the covers just as the clip of my grandmother's heels sounds through my room.

“My sweet sweet grandbaby,” Cordia says as she slides into my bedroom. She rips off my blanket and the sudden temperature change makes me shiver in my pajamas. “I knew you were awake that last time I visited you. You failed the test.”

“What are you talking about?” I rub at my eyes as if I'm just now waking up. “What test?”

“The one to see if you'd betray me and try to escape.” She grabs my wrists and pulls me out of bed. Her blue eyes shine with malice and the sharp line of her red lips makes her seem up to no good. My grandmother may be close to seventy, but you wouldn't know she was past forty unless you knew her birthday. Her bracelets jangle as she yanks me through the door.

“What are you talking about? I’ve only just woken up recently. Why would I?—”

“Where’s Florence?” Grandmother practically growls.

“They had a stomachache and didn’t want to stink up my bedroom.” I wave towards another bathroom. “They’ll be back momentarily.” Hopefully Squid gets to them in time.

“Bullshit. If I go in there?—”

“Cordia? You’re back so soon?” Florence says behind us. “I went—” They thumb behind them and rub their stomach. “I don’t know what I ate, but it didn’t agree with me this time.” Somehow, they had time to change back into their own clothes before coming to find us. I let out a breath.

My grandmother looks from me to Florence. Her eyes softening and she lets me go. “Oh. Sorry. I was sure?—”

“Ethan isn’t strong enough to do anything right now. He can barely keep his head up.” Florence pulls one of my arms around them and I act like it’s taking everything in me to stay upright.

The performance must convince my grandmother because she takes my other side and we all shuffle to my bedroom.

Once I’m settled back in my bed, my grandmother takes the seat Florence occupied earlier. “My poor sweet Ethan. You don’t deserve this.” She turns to Florence. “Neither do you, dear.”

“You can end this,” I say with as much hope as I can muster. “You can?—”

“No. It’s set. The two of you will marry, my foolishness will be amended, and the Speller line will continue.” She pats my hand and turns to Florence. “You can spend the night in a guest room with your upset stomach if you’d like. I’ll watch over him tonight.”

Florence’s eyes go wide. “No. No. I’m good now. I think I just needed to get rid of whatever was bothering me. I can keep watch.”

“I’ll do it.”

I scratch the back of my neck. The thought of being watched while I attempt to sleep creeps me out. “I’m awake now. I don’t need a watcher anymore.”

“I insist. What if it’s false hope?” Grandmother says.

“Fine, then I want Florence. Stay with me, Florry.” I pat the mattress. “There’s plenty of room, like always.”

Grandmother’s eyes light up. “Yes. That’s perfect.”

It’s not, but it’s better than me staying alone with my grandmother creepy watching me while I attempt not to squirm under her gaze.

My grandmother pushes up from her chair and Florence slides into bed next to me. We cuddle close.

“I’ll leave the two of you, then.” She turns off the light and shuts the door behind her.

“Holy fuck,” Florence breathes out. “Just holy fuck.”

“Tell me everything,” I whisper, just in case my grandmother can hear us.

Florence nods and we face each other.

“It was a lot. I’m not sure how to explain it all.”

“Try. Take your time. I need to know everything that happened between the time I disappeared and the time you got back.”

“I’ll do my best.” Florence sighs and flops to their back. “So many demons showed up. Apparently, our bartender alerted a bunch of people that you were there. Even the king of the crossroads demons showed up.”

“How does he know who I am?”

Florence snorts. “That demon from your dreams is the one that touched you, right? He’s a crossroads demon and he’s been talking about you to everyone he knows. I swear he broke my heart. The moment he realized you were gone, he screamed.”

“No,” I whisper, again pressing my hand to where he touched me.

“His name is Warwick. Wick or Wicky for short.”

“Wick.” The name feels right on my tongue like I’ve said it a thousand times. “If he knows who I am, who we are, why hasn’t he?—”

“He’s blocked, same as us. But his memories are intact. Now I’m sure Cordia put a memory lock on you about the demon. He knows way too much for the two of you not to know each other. And you’ve been dreaming about him. That has to mean something.”

“And you don’t know him?”

Florence laughs and smacks a hand to their mouth. We both watch the door and listen for grandmother's heels, but nothing comes.

"Apparently, he knew about me, but said you never told me about him or your plan. Just in case it didn't pan out, you didn't want to disappoint me."

Sounds like me. I squeeze their hand. "What was the plan?" I ask, even though I have the feeling I know.

"You wanted to trade your magic to get out of the marriage."

"Sounds like something I'd do. But why didn't we?"

"Had to wait until you were eighteen. According to Wick, you showed up for the first time when you were twelve."

"Twelve?" I search my brain for any memory and all I can come up with is being angry about having to marry Florence or anyone.

"Yes, twelve. And apparently, neither of you planned on falling in love. Cordia caught wind of the plan and the second you turned eighteen, she pulled you through a portal before you could follow through. I think that's when she put the memory lock on you. It's been six years and you keep talking about the demon and patches of memory not being there."

"Makes sense," I whisper. "And sounds like I had a solid plan."

"It really is a solid plan. If you didn't have magic..."

"There'd be no reason to get married." I sigh. "But your father would marry you off to someone else. Did Wick happen to say how I solved that part?"

“No,” Florence whispers. “I wish I knew how to solve that part.” They squeeze my hand again. “You don’t need to worry about me. I’ll?—”

“You shouldn’t be forced to marry anyone. I won’t be free from Cordia until we’re both free from her. You’re not getting married.”

“But you have to. Or otherwise bound. I don’t want the magic to rip you apart. I love you too much. You’re my platonic soul mate and I won’t lose you because of that bitch.”

“Don’t worry about me.” I grin. “I have a new plan.”

“Why do I have a feeling it’s ridiculous?” Florence asks.

“Because you know me.” I lean over and kiss their nose. “Trust me.”

“Always do. Always will.”

We cuddle close again. I don’t want to get their hopes up, but I’ve got the best plan.

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Chapter 8

Warwick

Warwick

My heart pounds and I'm not sure how to calm it. My hands shake and Van leads me back to the couch with Frankie.

"He was... he was right there. I touched him." Even if it was the briefest of moments. I touched him. My Ethan.

"I know. And you heard everything Florence said, right? Ethan doesn't remember you. He has no idea about the last twelve years."

"I know."

Poe joins us and slides in next to Van. "Cordia is strong. I think she's using his own magic against him. It's the only way she'd be able to steal his memories."

I nod, and despite everything against us, I have hope. "He was here. Florence said they'd tell him about me. He'll come back. I know it."

Van squeezes my hand and pats my shoulder. "I'm glad you got to see him."

"It wasn't enough." I know last time I tried to infiltrate the Speller mansion there was a barrier I couldn't cross and I'm sure it's still there. "I need to see him again. Get a

message to him. Something.”

Pike materializes in front of us. “I have a theory about that. When I teleported Florence back to the Speller house, I could get past the barrier. I think Cordia set it up for crossroads demons, but since I went through a change, my energy shifted. I don’t know that I can get into the house, but I can get inside the barrier.”

“Excellent,” I say. “That’s better than before.”

“Then why couldn’t Gabe find him when he tried the scrying spell? He’s not a crossroads demon.” Van says.

“Dunno,” Pike shrugs. “It’s not a great theory, but the one I have. We can see if Gabe can get through the barrier. If he’s willing.”

“Of course I’m willing,” Gabe says, bringing a tray of HellFire with him. “I think we all need a drink. That was a little chaotic. I like Florence.” He grins because, of course, he’d like the witch. Who wouldn’t?

“Flo is Ethan’s best friend. I like them, too,” I say.

“Anyway,” Pike says right before he swallows a shot. “When I dropped Florence off, I told them I’d meet them tomorrow at midnight. They said to meet them in the labyrinth since apparently Cordia never goes there. So I can take a message or something to him if you want?”

“I’ll gather a few things. Oh, and my phone number. Surely Cordia didn’t block that.” My heart races. Maybe I can hear Ethan’s voice again. We can talk at the very least.

“Sounds perfect,” Pike says.

“Ethan’s clever. I don’t know what he did, but I couldn’t tell it was him when he walked through the door. Those students from last week they had his essence. He must have blocked it.”

“His grandma is clever too,” Poe starts. “She let you two see each other, but the moment you touched?—”

“Don’t remind me,” I mumble. Frankie noses my hand and settles her head in my lap. Of everyone here, I think she’s the one that helps me the most when I need to calm down and right now, I need calm. “I’m gonna go home. Too much excitement for one night.” What I really want is to go to the Speller mansion and demand to see Ethan, but I’m sure Cordia has the place rigged. And what if she didn’t know he got out? I don’t want to expose him for being an escape artist.

“Take Frankie,” Pike says.

Lark nods beside him. “I think she’ll be sad if you leave now.”

“Thanks. I need someone to snuggle tonight.” In two seconds, we’re in my living room with the scent of cookies still in the air. “I think you and Gabe are the only two that get me.”

Frankie’s tail wags so hard it thumps a beat against the wall. She doesn’t seem to mind, though. I grab a few treats from the jar on my refrigerator. She eats them in two bites and yips before running to the sofa.

As much as I’m excited to see Ethan again, my heart still hurts because I can’t go to him. The Speller mansion has been blocked off to me for so long I don’t even have it in me to try.

“Come on, girl. Let’s go to bed. I’ll gather things for Ethan in the morning.” But

before I do that, I snag a cookie from the counter and bite into it. Easily my best batch yet. I pack the cookies away so they don't get stale. That'd be a tragedy.

Frankie gives a happy little bark as she follows me to my bedroom. The one thing I've splurged on in my apartment is my king-sized bed. With cozy, flannel sheets. Frankie hops onto the bed and gets comfy while I change into my silk pajamas. I just don't feel right sleeping naked. According to my brother, I'm a weirdo, but whatever. We all like what we like and I love the way silk feels across my skin.

"I saw him Frankie. I touched him." I pull Frankie close to cuddle, and she wiggles against me. I'll see him again soon, I just know it.

Warwick—Age 17

He really keeps his promise. Two full years to the day and Ethan still shows up. As usual, he's on this stomach reading one of his textbooks. This time it's a chapter on advanced protection spells. Something I know all too much about as a demon. Everyone wants to keep us out.

I squat and point to the spell written out in his notebook. "You know, if you use salt instead of seaweed, you'll get a better result."

He tips his head and looks up at me with his pretty blue eyes. It's like they can stare into my soul and I'd let him have it if he wanted. I shake my head. Where the fuck did that thought come from? He's just Ethan. My Ethan.

"Why do you say that? I questioned Professor Belladonna, but he said," Ethan drops his head and attempts to drop his voice, but it cracks instead. "This is how it's done. Write it down." He gives me the cutest grin with dimples. "I don't believe him that seaweed would make a strong protectant. I'm also humble enough to know I might be wrong."

“Seaweed, in this spell is definitely wrong.” I flip back a couple of pages in his notebook. “Now, if you wanted to use it in this one, protection from choppy and stormy sea water, then yes, of course it makes sense. But not as general protection.” I don’t know why I tell him, but every once in a while I correct his classwork. And every day I find I look forward to this little witch summoning me just for me to tell him no. Then he settles in and does his homework.

“Thank you, Wicky.” He scribbles in his notes, citing me as the source of his information.

My heart grows warm and fuzzy. What is he doing to me?

He re-situates to sit on his bottom and fiddles with some of the gravel at his side. He does that when he’s nervous. “My fifteenth birthday is in a few days. My grandma wants to take me on a trip out of town. I’m sorry I won’t be here for a few days.”

I shrug nonchalantly as I stand again. My tail swishes behind me, being the only thing to show my disappointment. “What do I care? You should move on, little witch. I can’t give you what you want.” At least not yet.

“Three more years,” he whispers as he cleans up his supplies. “Or I’ll wear you down before that. I just wanted you to know. So you wouldn’t worry.”

“Why would I worry?” It takes everything not to chew on my nails. I definitely would have worried.

Ethan eyes my tail, and he gives me another grin. “I know you’re really a softy inside. You always do this whole...” He drops his hands to his hips and pouts. “Macho act, but that’s not you.”

“It is. I’ve had to fight for everything I have. It comes with some baggage.”

“I know,” he whispers. “And my life isn’t all sunshine and lollipops, even though that’s what I want everyone to think. I’m strong. Strongest witch the world has ever seen, apparently.” He rolls his pretty blue eyes as if it’s the dumbest thing he’s ever heard. “And with that power comes experimentation.”

I swear my heart threatens to stop. “What?” I whisper and betray my whole “macho act”. “What do they do to you?”

One of his slender shoulders lift. “I try to block it out. But sometimes the coven tries to siphon magic from me and that fucking hurts.” His hand flies to his mouth. “Sorry.”

“I’m a demon. The word fuck doesn’t bother me in the least.” But his coven experimenting on him does. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

Ethan stares at me so long I start to squirm. With a huff, he drops back to his bottom. “Besides taking my magic. I don’t know.” He fiddles with one of his shoelaces. “And I know I’m being a big dick coming here every day, but...” He throws his head back. “You’re the only hope I have. I need you to take my magic and I don’t want you to forget about me. Plus, you’re really good looking, and I might have a teeny tiny crush.” He pinches his thumb and forefinger together.

My cheeks heat. “Uh, what?” It comes out harsher than I mean, and a cute, bright blush takes over Ethan’s pale skin.

“Seriously, you could be a model. I’d hang your pictures in my bedroom. And you’re so freaking nice to me even when you try to put on the air of indifference. The only person who’s as nice to me is Florence, and they have to go straight home after classes. So I come here. Where there’s a demon that watches over me and helps me with my homework.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

Ethan shrugs. “You don’t have to say anything. My grandmother says I’m too blunt sometimes. Sorry if I freaked you out.”

“No, I just... No, you didn’t freak me out.” I just don’t know how to form the words to explain what goes on in my head half the time. “You’re very sweet, Ethan.”

“But I’m not right for you. You have to have a demon partner. Am I right?” His smile falters.

“Nothing like that at all. I just...” I slide down to my bottom, too. My tail continues to swish behind me like it has a mind of its own. Some days it does. “Can I?” I hold out my hand and he hands me his. It’s so small in mine. “Before you showed up in my life, I thought I knew myself. I thought I was fully aromantic. I just didn’t care, and I was completely unbothered by it.”

“That’s Florence. They’re aromantic and asexual. There’s nothing wrong with it.” He squeezes my hand and my heart pitter pats.

I love him for saying it. “Romance, partnership, just didn’t appeal to me and I never felt like I needed it. I still don’t feel like I need it. But I can see myself with you and I don’t know how to feel about it. Most of my research points to me being demi-romantic. Just little things made me realize how much I love having you in my life. My bright little witch in my dreary days.”

His smile lights up my crossroads. “Coming here is the highlight of my day.”

Now for the awkward part. “And not to scare you away, but I’m either asexual, graysexual, or demi-sexual. I’m not entirely sure, but it’s not something I generally think about either. Everyone around me in the demon realm is always talking about

their sexual conquests, and I'd rather sit there with my fingers in my ears. I'm attracted to you, you're sweet, and I'd love to date you, but... we're young."

"You want to date me?" Ethan nibbles his bottom lip.

"Yeah, is that weird? I know teenagers date, but it feels weird to me. How does anyone know anything at this age?"

"We don't," Ethan laughs. "But it's always fun to test things."

"You're not put off by ? —"

"No. Nothing about you is off-putting. Besides, I have my hand. I used a grapefruit once and, uh do not recommend. Kinda burns in the wrong way."

I snort. "Noted, don't fuck the grapefruit."

Ethan's pocket vibrates like it does every day at this time. "Gotta go." He finishes packing his back. "I'll see you in a few days."

"I'll be waiting."

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Chapter 9

Ethan

“Prof?” Tanner says when I stroll into the classroom. “You’re okay?” He races towards me and pats my arms as if to check that I’m really here.

“I’m okay.” Better than okay, but I won’t tell him that. Florence says the demon that brought her home last night is coming back tonight with messages from Wick.

“Thank fuck. I thought... well, Professor Hallow said you’d live, but I wasn’t sure. The way you went down, that was scary.” He goes pale. “Not to mention you have an admirer or stalker or something that wasn’t too happy to find out what I’d done to you.”

“You didn’t do anything to me.” It takes me a moment to register what else he said. “What do you mean, admirer or stalker?”

“After... you know...” Courtney, one of the other four remaining students, pipes up. “We wanted to cheer Tanner up and went to Flutter and Fangs. There was this demon that heard our conversation and flipped out when he heard you’d been poisoned.”

“He was scary,” Tanner says as he paces. “He didn’t hurt me, though.”

My heart drops. “What happened?”

Courtney shrugs. “A lot of growling. The bartender was a hot nephilim and even he

couldn't get the demon off Tanner. It took another other demon to pull him off."

"He just kept going on about 'don't touch my Ethan.' I told him it was an accident. Someone set me up. But he just kept talking about his Ethan."

"I'm sorry you went through that Tanner." I really really am. "It's... complicated."

Courtney's eyes light up. "Is he your lover? Is there a lover's quarrel?"

I snort at her imagination. "No, nothing like that."

Florence snorts. "More like—" They shut their mouth though they can't stop grinning. "Hmmm..." They tap their lips. "How do we explain it?"

Courtney squints at Florence. "If the demon is Professor Speller's lover, then shouldn't you be upset about that?"

"Not in the least." Florence smooths out the front of their skirt before they take the seat behind the desk. "We'll have an open marriage. If it even happens."

Courtney squeals. "I want all the deets."

"Absolutely not," I say. "At least not anytime soon." I wave towards the desks. "Take a seat and we'll get the written exam started." We're still waiting for the last two of our remaining students. They're always late and I'm not worried.

Darla and Phillip walk in, hands clasped together with the biggest smiles on their faces.

"Looks like those two are getting chummy," Tanner says as he looks longingly to Courtney. She's totally oblivious.

“Alright everyone, have a seat,” Florence says. And we start the first round of finals, the written exam.

Three hours of staring into space, wondering what the heck Wick might send with this Pike guy. What do I want to send back to him?

Of course, my phone number. Maybe... maybe something like a note, but what do I say? Sorry, I don’t remember who the fuck you are, but I see you in my dreams every night and you’re the most handsome person I’ve ever laid eyes on. That’s so dumb. But I grab a notebook and start scribbling words down, anyway.

When the timer goes off, I’m startled out of my thoughts. The pretty demon stares at me from my notebook. At some point I’d gone to drawing him. How I know every violet freckle on his blue face, I have no idea.

“Ethan?” Florence drops a hand on my shoulder and squeezes. “Want to go grab lunch?”

My stomach rumbles in answer. “Probably for the best. That way you can help me figure out what the hell to say to Wick.”

They give me a gentle smile and I realize all our students are gone. “You’ve been staring at that picture for twenty minutes.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay. We’re at the end of a long mystery.” Another squeeze to my shoulder. “I’m happy for you.”

I rub my cheek against their hand. “You’re the best, you know that?”

“Yep. We’ll get you your demon and I’ll get me my puppy. Oh! Maybe I can get a Hellhound! Wouldn’t that be exciting?”

“Can witches have Hellhounds?” I ask. “And how will Squid take it? He’s pretty territorial.”

Florence snorts. “Squid won’t mind. He wants a sibling to play with.”

“Vi likes being an only child.” As if right on cue, my familiar flitters right in my face as usual. She fills my head with everything she’s learned on crossroads demons. Which isn’t a lot, but it’s enough. “Thank you, love. You’re amazing.” Her little wings shimmy as she preens at my praise. “I’ll get you your favorite treat tonight. Go rest.” She zig zags in front of me, then flies right back out the window she came.

“What’d she say?” Florence asks as we head towards the cafeteria.

“Not much, but it’s still solid. Like crossroads demons can travel anywhere they want, but when they’re summoned, they have to stay in the circle of salt they’re summoned with until either the deal is struck or they deny it.”

“Curious.”

“It’s a safety issue.” I go back to thinking about what I want to pass over to Wick. “I hate not knowing what I should know, you know?”

“I get it.”

“I can’t even think straight. I thought we were just testing my theory last night and I find a missing piece of the puzzle.”

“The missing piece.”

We shuffle in line and grab a tray each. I'm not so hungry now that we're here, but if I don't eat, Florence will be cross with me. I choose a salad and we find a pair of seats in a far corner.

"Do you think cellphones work in the demon realm? Do you think?—"

Florence holds up their hand. "We can ask Pike all that tonight."

"I want to go to the masquerade party. Maybe my grandmother will let me if I play my cards right."

"She'll probably make you promise to actually marry me and we can't have that."

"No, we really can't." We eat in mostly silence. My brain too active to focus on conversation. "Thank you for arranging for the demon that got you home to come back."

"It was his suggestion, but I would have come up with it had he not. You need closure on this. We need to know what the fuck happened to your memories. We can figure the why is you were dangerously close to what you wanted and Cordia cut you off."

I huff into my salad. "I understand why I need to be bound to someone before I'm twenty-five, but it pisses me off to no end. It's all on her. If it weren't for Cordia meddling in my life before I was even born, I wouldn't be forced to do any of this." I drop my fork.

"What do you mean?" Florence glares at me.

And that's when I realized I slipped up. "Shit."

“What are you keeping from me, Ethan Speller?”

I throw back my head and blink into the witch lights serving as the lighting in the cafeteria. I take a drink and tell her everything I know.

Florence sucks in a breath. “She sold her soul to make you powerful?”

“Fucked up, right?”

“Very. I’m so sorry.” They reach over and grab my hand. “So damn sorry. We’ll fix this. Fuck her, she gave up her soul, and it’s not your problem. Nor mine.”

“That’s how I’ve felt for years.” I take another sip of my water.

“I wish you’d told me this sooner. We could have carried this together. That’s what best friends are for.”

“You have your own shit you have to deal with. If I can keep a little bit of the burden off you, I will.”

We finish our lunch in silence.

Florence takes my hand on our way back to the classroom. “Why don’t you go home? I’ll take the office hours. That way, you can gather your thoughts and get ready for the meeting with Pike.”

“If you’re sure?”

“Very sure.” They wave me off, but instead of going home, I head to the dean’s office, where my grandmother sits like a queen on a throne behind the big oak desk.

“Ethan? I wasn’t expecting you here today. I thought you were staying home.”

“I feel better. And I wanted to talk to you about my birthday.” I settle into the seat across from her.

“Oh?”

“I want you to remove the barrier spell. I want to?—”

“Out of the question.”

“You will, or I’ll expose the truth to the coven. That you sold your soul to manufacture a powerful witch.”

Her eyes narrow on me. “You wouldn’t.”

“Want to take bets?” I push back to my feet. “I want the barrier down for twenty-four hours, at the very least. Better yet, permanently. I know you’re trying to protect me, but you can’t keep me locked up. I’m not a caged bird, and I’m no longer playing by your rules.” I won’t play all my cards just yet. I’m just hoping this works. “Let me out, or you’ll regret it.”

I don’t look back when I leave. The door slams a little more harshly than I intended, but I think it gets the point across.

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Chapter 10

Warwick

Pike looks at me like I've grown another head when I hand him a tote bag that weighs like I loaded it down with bricks. "Really? All of this?"

"Yes, I want him to have all of this."

"Don't be mean to him, Pike." Lark frowns as he takes his lover's hand. "And I'm coming with you. I have something I need to tell him in case he doesn't know."

"Call me when you get there," I say.

"We will," Lark says.

Before I can say anything else, they're gone and I collapse onto the couch and Frankie hops into my lap. "This is it, girl. Moment of truth." I stare at my phone, willing it to ring and we both jump when it does. "Unknown number." Grinning, I answer. "Hello?"

The person on the other end, Ethan, sucks in a breath. "Wick?"

"Ethan." It's him. My Ethan. "I've waited so long to hear your voice." Hear my name on your lips.

"Can we video chat?"

“Yeah.”

Almost immediately, we’re switched over and I’m looking into his perfect blue eyes.

“I wanted to look at you,” he says, and it seems like he’s sitting on a bench in a garden. He probably is. “I dream about you every night. It’s a relief to find out you’re real and not a figment of my imagination to block out trauma.”

I laugh because that’s exactly something he’d say. “Florence said you don’t know who I am. I hope to change that.”

“Same. I hate not having all my memories, especially ones I’m expecting to be pleasant once they’re all back.”

“They should be.” I can’t remember one bad memory between us.

“Tell me about us, Wick.”

The request throws me off-guard. “You’re my little witch that lights up my world with your smiles and curiosity. We’re stronger than this memory lock, I know it. We may be different people now, but I know in my heart we’re meant to be.”

“I think so, too.” And that grin I cherish so much graces his perfect face.

“Did you look through everything I sent you?”

“Not yet.” He leans in and whispers into the receiver. “They’re all watching me. I gave Pike a big bag for you and he snorted. Lark said he has something I need to know, but I had to see if I could talk to you first. We’ll get through this, okay? Nothing can keep us apart now, okay? Call me or text me any time. I’m working on my grandmother. I gave her an ultimatum. If she doesn’t drop the barrier, I’m telling

the coven what she did.”

“Sold her soul,” I whisper.

“Exactly. Are you going to the masquerade party?”

“I wasn’t, but I am now, if you’re going.”

“I’ll fucking be there, Wick, with bells on. Okay, maybe not with bells on. That could be annoying.” Another heart-stopping grin. “I need to go talk to Lark so they can bring you my goodies. Do you wanna stay on the line?”

“If you’re okay with it.” I never want to let him go.

“Totally okay.” He pushes to his feet. I’ve never been to the Speller labyrinth, but I imagine it’s gorgeous. “Hey, thanks for letting me talk to him first. I’m ready.” Lark, Pike, and Florence all come into view.

“What do you know about freeing crossroads demons?” Lark starts and I suck in a breath. I hadn’t imagined that’s what he wanted to talk about, but I should have known.

“Absolutely nothing, but I’m eager to learn.”

Lark bounces on his toes. “You just have to destroy the crossroads.”

“That’s it?” Ethan asks.

“That’s it. I scratched our initials into the sign of Pike’s crossroads. He got sucked into some freaky magic and spit out like he’d been reborn. Now he’s an incubus.”

“Is that what Wick is, too?”

“Dunno,” Pike says. “We’re all actually a different demon type, but unless we’re freed from our crossroads we don’t know what we are. Most of us suspect Wick is part angel like Gabe, but we’ll never know until he’s free.”

“Do you want to be freed?” Ethan asks. “Being a crossroads demon is a lot of power.”

“Yes. I want two things in my life. You and?—”

“Freedom,” Lark says. “He can’t say it without consequences.”

Silently, I thank the Fae.

“Then, freedom you will have. Where is your crossroads?”

Lark and Pike sigh together, and it’s Lark once again that opens his mouth. “He can’t tell you and none of the other crossroads demons can tell you or even know where it is.”

“But Pike isn’t a crossroads demon anymore,” Ethan points out.

“No, but I never knew where it was to begin with.” Pike shrugs. “I’d tell you if I did.”

“Okay, just a tiny kink. We’ll figure it out. Can I get a hint?”

“I’ve never tried that.” I push to my feet. “Mine is a gravel crossroads.” We all wait and hold our breaths to see if my mouth and nose disappear. When nothing happens, I continue. “You used to walk to me with a giant backpack. I could see your house from my crossroads. Well, Cordia’s house.”

“That narrows things down quite a bit. And the semester is over for a long fall break, so I should have plenty of time to search.”

“We’ll make it, Wick. I promise.”

Ethan keeps his promises. My heart settles, knowing we’re in this together again. “We will.”

“Okay, I gave Pike my gifts to you. I haven’t looked at what you sent me yet. I want to look through things together, unless you think that’s too cheesy?”

“Not at all.” I blink, trying to will my tears away. “Will one of you hug him for me?”

Lark crosses over to hug Ethan and squeezes Florence’s hand.

“Thank you for all this,” Ethan says.

Lark takes Pike’s hand and they’re in front of me again, as if they hadn’t left. Lark rushes over to me and hugs me. I breathe in Ethan’s scent. It’s a hint of cinnamon with a dash of something more masculine I can never figure out.

“Thank you,” I croak out and Pike hands me a tote bag nearly as big as the one I sent to him. I snort and Frankie hops off the couch with a grumble when I pat her bottom to move.

“I hope you like everything,” Ethan says from the cellphone. I’m assuming Florence holds the phone because he’s on the ground, using the bench as a table as he spreads out all my gifts.

Pike snatches my phone from me so I can rummage through the bag. The first thing out is a container of Jolly Ranchers, all cherry. “How?!”

“I dunno, I had a feeling and went with it.” Ethan gasps as he holds up the bag of sugar cookies I baked fresh this afternoon. “My favorite.” He snorts. “But I guess you knew that?”

“I did. And knowing you, you haven’t had any in a while.”

“Years,” Florence says from behind the phone.

The next thing he pulls from the bag are a few photos I had Sparkle take of me this afternoon, then I printed off. I figured Sparkle knew what the best angles would be with how he likes to preen for others, and I was right. Though he wanted me to get naked, I just wasn’t comfortable with that. And I didn’t think Ethan actually wanted naked pictures. “You are exquisite, Wick.”

My cheeks heat and I’m not sure if he can see it through the phone camera, but my brother whistles.

I pull a few more things from the bag and gasp at a copy of a book I haven’t been able to find for ages. “Again, how?! This one’s impossible to find.”

“Another guess. I had it in my collection and I’ve read it so much I have it memorized. So I wanted to pass it along. My gut told me you’d appreciate it.”

I hold it to my chest. “I’ll cherish it forever.”

Pike snorts above me, but Lark elbows him. “Do you forget how I cherish your first gifts to me?”

The demon blushes and bends down to kiss Lark. “Forgive me?”

“Of course,” Lark and I both say together.

Gift after gift is like we never stopped being together. It's like Ethan can look into my soul without us being near. I take my phone from Pike.

"Can we have some privacy?" I ask and push to my feet.

Ethan takes the phone from Florence and takes a few steps into the maze.

"It's like we never separated," I say.

"I want my fucking memories back," Ethan says, tears streaming down his face. "I want to know why I don't know you, and I feel like my heart's been ripped out at the same time."

"We'll be together again. I know it in my bones."

"I do too. And I'll be at that masquerade party whether my grandmother approves or not. I'll find a way, so wait for me."

"Until the end of the world."

Ethan's crooked smile soothes my sadness. He yawns.

"It's been a lot of adventure for you, my little witch. Off to bed with you."

"I know you're right, but I don't want to leave you."

"I'm here, just a call or text away."

"I'll take you up on that. And the first thing I'm doing when I wake up is searching for your crossroads."

“Don’t wear yourself out, Ethan. I want to dance with you at the party.” I keep kissing to myself.

“I want that, too. So much dancing. It’ll be great. But before that I’ll be texting you nonstop. Something has to trigger my memories.”

I hope he’s right. “But for now, you need sleep, my sweet Ethan.”

“Good night, my demon.”

“Night, little witch.”

Chapter 11

Ethan

That just happened. “We have to figure out how to remove the memory spell. I can’t take it anymore. I miss him and I don’t even know why I miss him, other than I know he’s missing.”

“Since we know he’s real, and he’s missing, we should be able to figure it out.”

“Exactly!” I hand Florence one of the sugar cookies and we moan into the bite. “Fuck, these are good.”

“Orgasmic, and that’s me saying that.”

I snort as I take another bite. I gather the gifts and lovingly place them all back in the bag. “He really knows me. It’s like he went right into my brain and plucked out my desires. The first edition of Milner Canny’s Grimoire? No one’s been able to find that in centuries.”

“I know.” Florence grins before taking another bite of their sugar cookie. “I tried to find it for you for years. I thought they’d all been destroyed.”

“I did, too.”

We take the path back to my grandmother’s house. With it being so late and close to my birthday, I decided to stay here instead of my apartment. That way, I’m closer to

the coven if she chooses not to drop the barrier at midnight tomorrow. I'm sure she thinks I'm bluffing, but I have the entire coven in a text group ready to call a meeting. There's no way she can stop me.

Just like the night before, Florence and I crawl into my bed together after quick showers. I always seek out warmth in my sleep and they're always warm. I imagine Wick is too, being a demon. It doesn't take me long to drift off to sleep and dream about my lovely demon.

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Chapter 12

Warwick

I stare at my phone, trying to come up with something to say. Anything. But my mind comes up blank. Everything I can think of feels ridiculous. I've been staring at my phone ever since I woke up. I wanted to text Ethan good morning, but didn't want to seem too eager. But who am I kidding? I need him.

Warwick: I hope you're having a lovely day

Done. I toss my phone on my bed and flop down. The shimmer of my brother's energy fills my room before he materializes.

"Wanna go help decorate Flutter and Fangs for tomorrow night?"

"Do I have to?" I smash my head into a pillow.

"No," Van snorts as he plops next to me. "Just thought it'd be something to get you out of your place. I know you want to go see Ethan and you can't. It has to be infuriating."

"I'd say you have no idea, but you probably do." I nudge my phone towards him. "I texted him. Took all morning, but I did it."

"I'm glad." Van runs his hand over my back. Sometimes I forget how soothing he can be when he wants to be. "I'm glad you two have phones now. I remember he didn't

have one before he disappeared.”

“Neither did we, though. The only reason we got cell phones was because all our friends are in Hex, and most of them can’t use portal communication.”

“True. True. Sometimes I still don’t get how to use it, but Gabe’s so patient with me.” There’s a dreamy look in his eyes every time he mentions Gabe.

I grab Van’s hand. “You know I’m happy for you, right? You may infuriate me to no end some days, but you deserve to be happy.”

“Love you too, Wicky. And you deserve your happily ever after too. We’re all rooting for you.”

“I know.” They may have all made fun of me for years, but I know they want me to be happy.

“You sure you don’t wanna come help? Do you have a mask? Lark ordered a bunch in case people show up without one.”

“I don’t think I have one. And I’m not dressing up. I don’t think Ethan cares if I’m wearing jeans or a costume.”

My brother grins. “Gabe is dressing up like a demon. I’m dressing up like an angel. I think it’s a hoot.” He slaps his knee and pushes to his feet. “Well, if you change your mind about helping, we’ll all be at F & F.” And he poofs out.

Maybe I should help? Be more social. Less grumpy.

I dig out the Jolly Ranchers from Ethan and pop one in my mouth. The sweet cherry flavor rolls over my tongue. Ethan never cared that I was a little grumpy, but I really

could be more cheerful. He's back in my life. What's there to be grumpy about other than he's still so far away?

Decision made, I throw on some clothes and teleport to Flutter and Fangs.

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Chapter 13

Ethan

I can't help the smile when I read Wick's text.

Wick: I hope you're having a lovely day

Ethan: It's better now

Wick: I can't wait to see you tomorrow.

Ethan: Same. But first, finals! Wish me luck.

Wick: All the luck!

Florence and I just have to get through the final practical exams, and we'll be free until December. My legs bounce under the desk as we finish grading the written exams from yesterday. At least I attempt to grade. My mind keeps wandering back to Warwick. At midnight, my grandmother will either drop the barrier or face my wrath. I snort at my ridiculousness.

"What are you laughing about?" Florence chuckles as they ask.

"Being dramatic in my head." I push to my feet. "Ready to set up the labs? I need to move."

“Finishing up the last essay, riiiiight now.” They make a mark and slash an A on the paper before placing it in the pile with the others.

“Everyone did great, right?” I ask. “We’re damn good teachers.”

“Heck yeah, we are!” Florence lifts their hand and I slap it for a high five.

“With the trouble makers gone, Tanner should be able to ace this part, no problem,” I say, making my way to the back of the room with the lab tables.

I spray the tables with disinfectant and clean them off, taking away any impurities while Florence gathers bottles. I help them set the stations. One for each of the seven potions everyone needs to complete.

This is my favorite part, watching everyone take what we taught them and put it together. We’ll still see everyone next semester, since Florence and I are the only potion teachers at Hex University. Other professors think teaching potions is boring. I think it’s basically chemistry, but with magical ingredients and I love chemistry.

“I love watching you get all excited,” Florence says as we place the last ingredient on the far far table. Part of the exam is identifying components, preparing them, and making the potion just right. We have cauldrons and beakers and stock pots, anything and everything to make potions and the student choses their preferred way.

If Florence got to choose, they’d use a cauldron over an open fire out in the woods. Personally, I’m happy to make magic in a kitchen rather than pull out other supplies. I just need a pot or pan and can get going with just about anything. I can’t wait until the students get to the highly advanced classes where we throw out everything we learn in 101 and 201 and learn how to improvise. It always puts a smile on my face when I tell them none of that is necessary, especially if you’ve been paying attention and realize that everything can be used for different purposes.

The door to our classroom opens and hallway chatter spills in when all four of our students arrive on time. Early, in fact. Okay, not that early, but early for them. Florence and I walk up to the front to greet the students.

“Everyone have a good night’s sleep?” Florence asks as they pass out the graded exams.

“I got an A?” Tanner asks. His eyes wide as he stares at his paper.

“Yep, good stuff, too,” I say. “Everyone ready to get this day started?”

Tanner chews on a fingernail. “I’m ready, but nervous.”

“Same,” Courtney says with Darla and Phillip mumbling as well.

“Don’t be too nervous,” Florence says.

“Exactly! The lot of you are excellent students and I expect you to pass easily. With the other two gone, there’s no one here to sabotage anyone anymore.”

Tanner relaxes and nods. “You’re right. I’m ready!”

“That’s what I wanna hear,” I say. “Let’s go.”

Florence leads our students to the back while I take up the rear. Everyone lines up in front of the first table for directions.

“Take a deep breath,” Florence says.

“And let it out,” I say. We do this a couple of times until the jittery energy in the class dissolves. “Start wherever you want and follow the directions on the card.” I lift one

of the cards. “When you’re finished at the station, call for one of us, explain what you’d done, then demonstrate the potion is correct.”

“Everyone got it?” Florence asks.

The class nods and we release them to start. Florence and I sit on top of one of the unused lab tables to watch. They have three hours for seven potions and a few have to simmer for at least an hour.

Tanner is smart and moves through all the stations, reading all the cards before he starts. He chooses the one with the longest simmer time, gets it started, then moves on to the next longest. Courtney must realize there are different simmer times and rushes to check them all before going back to where she started. The other two sticks with where they’re at, but I know they’ll figure it all out in the end.

“What are you wearing to the masquerade party tomorrow?” Florence asks.

“Dunno, probably just a mask. I don’t want to really dress up. That’s never been my thing.”

“I know, but you’d look cute all dressed up for your demon,” they whisper as they lean their head against my shoulder.

My demon. “I should be figuring out the stupid memory spell.”

“We’ll get it all worked out, Ethan.” They squeeze my hand as Darla and Phillip both call out for their first potion.

“I’ll take it.” I hop off the table and make my way to the pair, who eagerly tell me everything before downing the concoction. Their eyes change colors and I declare they passed the first potion test, a simple glamor.

I catch my reflection in the window when I make my way back to Florence, noticing the thin chain around my neck. I never take off the pendant because it keeps the rampant magic in check. Or so that's what my grandmother told me when she begged me to wear it and permanently fused it on. She'd told me it was a safeguard before I was bound to someone. But what if that's not what it is?

I settle back on top of the table. "What if this is the memory spell?"

Florence eyes the pendant I pull from under my shirt. It's a sapphire teardrop wrapped in wire. I can't remember when my grandmother gave it to me, but I've worn it for years.

They finger the pendant. "I always forget you have this."

"Maybe it's made to be forgotten. Which would make sense if it's really a memory charm."

"What if it's what Cordia said, but also a memory spell?" Florence asks. "We can't leave you vulnerable. I don't think magic can actually tell time. What if it thinks it's time to tear you apart now and not a year from now?"

"Are we sure the magic will rip me apart?" I kick my legs, needing to move again. Sitting still hurts and I jump off the table. "I've been told all my life the magic is too much for me, but is it?"

"You don't remember." Florence meets me on the floor and paces with me.

"Apparently not? I don't remember the magic being so bad I needed—" I wave to the pendant.

"You almost died, Ethan. I was spending the night, and you started... vibrating? I'm

not sure what to call it. Your eyes went to the back of your head and you got so hot we had to get you into the shower to cool you off, but nothing worked. Not even cooling spells. Sparks flew from your fingertips. Cordia took you outside because you were destroying the house. The healers said if we didn't contain the magic, you'd die sooner than expected without a bond. I offered myself, but Cordia said she wouldn't bind children together."

It takes me time to process everything they said. "I don't remember any of that."

"Maybe it was too traumatic? Maybe the pendant does affect your memory, but do we want to put your life on the line to test the theory?"

I pace, but my thoughts are interrupted when Tanner shouts that he's ready. I rush over so I don't have to face Florence. Of course, my answer to their question is yes. Yes, I'd put my life on the line to test the theory, but I'll be smarter than that.

Chapter 14

Ethan

The hallways are so damn quiet at the end of the semester. I can hear myself breathe as I make it to my grandmother's office, where I'm not surprised to find her waiting for me.

"Have you made your decision?" I ask as I drop into the seat across from her.

Her lips twitch. "I have conditions."

"No." I pull out my phone, ready to call a meeting of the covens.

"I'll drop the barrier, but you can't touch the demon."

"What demon?" I ask innocently.

She grinds her teeth. "You know the one. Somehow you remember him. I know it."

"Except I don't, and I think this has something to do with it." I pull out my pendant.

"I want it off. Take away the memory spell, now."

"No."

"Then I'll have to force it off." I yank, but the necklace doesn't budge.

“You need that for your own protection and the protection of everyone around you.”

“I may need the part where it represses my magic, but I don’t need the memory spell and never have. Take. It. Off.”

“No.” She crosses her arms over her chest and leans back as if she’s already won.

“Cordia.”

She sucks in a breath and looks like I struck her. I never use her name, always grandmother or memaw. But never Cordia. “We’re both adults and you’ve overstepped with your meddling in my life. I demand to have control over myself, memories, and magic. Release me.”

“I can’t. It was demon forged. Only a demon can remove it. But I advise you from taking it off. You may get your memories back, but at what cost?”

I push to my feet and slam my hands on her desk. “You tell me.”

She looks away before sighing and rummaging through her desk for something. She holds up another necklace, this one emerald. “If you insist on removing that one for memories of a pathetic crossroads demon, then you need to be wearing this one. It’s not as powerful, though, so I won’t guarantee that it’ll work as well.”

I take the offered necklace. “Because you didn’t use my magic to create it? Yes. I know you’re using my own magic against me to keep me trapped. Otherwise, there’s no way you’d be able to keep me behind these stupid barriers. Let me live my life. What are you so afraid of?” I sink back into the chair across from her. “I’ve done so much of what you’ve asked of me,” I whisper. “Please, let me go.”

When she blinks, tears roll down her cheeks. “I love you. Everything I’ve done is to

keep you safe after I fucked up. I didn't know how my deal would affect you."

"You have to let me make my own choices. Florence doesn't deserve to be bound to me because of you. They don't deserve to be forced into a life they don't want because a bunch of covens want power. What is power if you don't have freedom with it? I don't want to lead. I want to teach and love and enjoy life. Right now, Florence and I live a half life because of all the choices made for us. Yes, I get to teach, but Florry doesn't want that and never has. They're even worse off than I am."

My grandmother openly sobs, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. "I'm sorry, my sweet Ethan. My hands are tied. If we call off the wedding, the other covens will call for a change of leadership."

"And that's a bad thing?" I ask.

"Spellers have ruled since the beginning. I won't be the one to let us fall. You must?—"

"I won't take up the mantle of coven head or leader of Hex. I want a much quieter life. Perhaps it's time for the covens to bring the demons back into leadership and shifters and vampires and?—"

"No one else has the ability to rule like witches."

"That's totally not elitist." I roll my eyes. "I want the barrier down. I will touch my demon if I so choose?—"

"No, you won't. The moment you touch, you'll be sent right back to your bedroom in my house."

"Remove whatever spell that does that."

Grandmother waves to me. “The pendant serves multiple purposes.”

It takes everything in me not to shout. “Then it’s a good thing I know some demons.” I push to my feet. “I’m not joking. Remove the barrier or I’ll tell the covens why I’m so powerful.”

“I still have time.”

“Midnight or I’m calling the meeting.” Again, I slam the door. This time I mean it.

I pull my phone from my pocket.

Ethan: Snag. I’ll be at the party, but we might not be able to touch.

At least not until I get the necklace off. I shove the emerald pendant in my pocket. There’s no way I’m putting it on until I have Florence test it.

Wick: Just seeing you and talking will be enough for now.

Ethan: I may have found a way to get my memories back and if that’s the case, then we can touch. It’s an experiment.

To see if my grandmother told me the truth or not.

Wick: Experiments can be fun. Anything I can do to help?

Ethan: Actually. Yes. I need to talk to Pike.

For some reason I didn’t think to get his number and so far I think he’s the only one I know that can get past the barrier spells. Well, him and Lark.

Wick: I'm on it.

About a minute later, an unknown number calls and I pick it up.

"Hey, Wick said you needed to talk to me for an experiment?"

"Can you meet me at the labyrinth in like twenty minutes? I need to test something, and you're the only demon I know that can get past my grandmother's wards."

"Sure thing. See you then."

"Thank you!" We end the call, and I rush all the way to the labyrinth without stopping. Florence is off doing their own thing for the time being, and I don't have time to find them to tell them my plan. I just hope it works.

Pike joins me sooner than I expect. He's huge and his wings are tucked in, his tail wiggles behind him. "What can I help you with?"

I pace in front of him. "I didn't think this through. I don't have an offering for you or anything, just gratitude."

Pike chuckles. "I don't need an offering anymore. Besides, if this is for Wick, I'd do it for free even if I needed an offering. He's like a little brother to me and I want him happy again."

I nod and stand in front of him. "Can you take this necklace off me? My grandmother says it was demon forged so only a demon can remove it. I don't know if it needs to be a certain demon, or any demon, so this is an experiment."

Pike nods and looks at the chain. "No clasp."

I shake my head. “Yank it off if you can, please.”

He grabs the sapphire pendant and pulls. The chain cuts into the back of my neck and I’m hopeful, but even when he uses more strength, all it does is hurt.

“I think it’s a failed experiment,” Pike says.

Both our shoulders drop. “Looks like. Thank you for trying, though. I appreciate it.”

“Anytime.” Pike says before poofing out.

I sag onto the bench right outside the labyrinth.

Ethan: Experiment failed. I’m sorry.

Wick: Don’t be sorry.

Ethan: I don’t have anything to do tonight, want to talk?

Instead of texting me back, Wick video calls me.

“I’m always interested in talking with you, my little witch.”

It’s so good to hear your voice. I explain what I had Pike do and Wick grins.

“What if, and hear me out, what if Cordia rigged it so I have to be the one to remove the pendant?”

“Hmmm, explain?”

“We can’t touch, right? And you don’t remember me. She would have had to use a bit

of my essence to make such a strong charm. The chain may have been demon forged, and Pike couldn't remove it because it didn't register his energy. You can't remove it because your magic doesn't allow it. So, we have to find the break of the spell, then I should be able to remove it."

"That's the thing. I was hoping just to remove the pendant for everything to work."

"It wouldn't be that simple. She would have put a requirement on the pendant and it'd have to include me."

"I know you're right." I sigh. "In other news, I think she's going to remove the barrier that keeps me and Florence locked where she wants us. At least for my birthday. It'll be a good time for me to search for your crossroads. Maybe we can just make a deal and then we won't have to worry about anything."

"That would be perfect."

"Wouldn't it?" I say as I tip my head to the blue sky. "What's the first thing you want to do when you're free?"

Wick snorts. "I don't know. For the longest time, my only desires was to find you and be released from my crossroads. Maybe I can open up a bakery."

"Your sugar cookies are some of the best I've ever tasted."

"I'm glad to hear it. They were the ones I wanted to perfect the most. I really have fallen in love with baking. What do you plan to do when you're free of your arranged marriage?"

"Dunno." I shrug. "My life has been trying to figure out how to get out of it and hoping the demon in my dreams was real. I love being a teacher. Maybe we could

travel.”

“I’d go anywhere with you, Ethan.”

I believe him, too.

“Wick, where’d you run off to?” Van’s voice shouts in the background.

Warwick laughs and leans towards the phone. “I’m supposed to be helping with the decorations for the party.”

“You should go help your friends. We’ll have our time, Wick. I promise.”

His smile lights up his face. “I… have friends. I really do.”

“Enjoy yourself, my demon.”

“See you soon, my little witch.”

My heart aches just a bit when we get off the phone, but I’m so happy for him. I have a feeling Wick doesn’t trust people easily, and he has few friends. But somehow, I made it past his wards and into his heart. I just wish I could remember.

It’s still hours upon hours before midnight, so I decide to plot my plan for Wick’s crossroads. He said they’re gravel and he could see my grandmother’s house from it. Should be easy enough to find. Hopefully.

My grandmother will be at Hex University for a while longer. She’s always there until late on the last day of the semester, so I sneak back into her house where Vi finds me.

“Hello my little love. Would you search my grandmother’s journals for anything on this pendant? The secret journals in her bedroom.”

Vi nods with her whole body and zips out.

“Thank you!” I rush to find the rolls of Hex, Indiana town maps I remember seeing as a kid. I’d sit around for hours in the study and memorize them. How I know that, but not the town anymore, I don’t know. I grind my teeth as I unroll the first map.

I find my grandmother’s mansion and lightly circle it with a pencil, then search for all the crossroads with Wick’s description.

Ethan: What part of my grandmother’s house can you see from your crossroads?

Wick: Front door.

That narrows it down even further.

Ethan: Straight on, or from an angle?

Wick: Angle. I can barely see the pool house, too.

Narrows it down the most.

Ethan: Down to seven crossroads. I’ll find you, Wick.

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Chapter 15

Warwick

I pace Flutter and Fangs so much, Frankie whines and trots beside me. Everyone else continues on with transforming the place into a majestic wonderland for the masquerade party, but now I can't concentrate.

"Hey," Wren, Lark's older brother, also a Fae, pops his head into the backroom I'm hiding in. He looks so much like Lark. Sometimes the only way I can tell the two apart is by their hair. Lark's is bubblegum pink, while Wren's is stark white. "You okay?" He pops something in his mouth as he strolls into the room.

"I'm fine. Just nervous, I guess." Which is ridiculous.

"Wanna tell me why?" Wren plops down on one of the benches lining the far wall and pats the spot beside him.

He usually has solid advice, so I join him. "Me and Ethan have been apart so long. I have this image, this memory of him, but we were so much younger then. What if we aren't compatible anymore?"

Wren shrugs. "You'll just have to wait and see."

"I know you're right."

"I usually am." He grins and I knock my shoulder into his. "We're almost done out

there if you wanna check out our handiwork. I brought in some Fae flare.”

My phone vibrates, and I laugh when I read the text.

Ethan: First crossroads was someone named Crawford. You should have seen his face when I broke the circle without uttering a word to him.

“I think I want to see the final look when I show up to the party. Will you tell the others I left?”

“I will. I’ll see you then.”

Before Wren can leave the room, I’m at my crossroads behind the veil, just watching and waiting for Ethan. It’s like a scavenger hunt, almost. I hate that he’s out here in the dark all alone, though. While Hex is safe, it still worries me. His essence calls to mine and I find him easily on a walk over to another crossroads.

“Wick!” He runs to me, but we both stop short of hugging each other. His blue eyes sparkle in the dark night. He has a halo of stars behind him.

“I want to touch you so badly,” I admit. Hold him in my arms to feel the weight of him. Press my lips to his.

“Same,” he whispers. “And I’m sorry, but I looked, well, Vi looked everywhere for how to break the spell so we can remove the pendant, but she nor I found anything.”

“It’s okay,” I say, hesitating as I place my hands on his shoulders. “And I think as long as we don’t touch skin to skin, we’ll be fine.”

Awkwardly, we hug, keeping faces, necks, and hands away from each other, but it’s the best hug I’ve had in a long, long time.

“I want this gone,” Ethan says as he tugs on the pendant.

When he lets it fall back against his chest, I try my luck, though it doesn't budge.

“I want to remember everything.” He drops his head to add, “I want to kiss you, but only if you want that, too. There's something in the back of my head that says you might not be agreeable to it, but I hope it's wrong.”

I raise a hand. “I absolutely want to kiss you.” I dream of it some nights, especially now that we've reunited. “Perhaps your memory is coming back slowly. I told you years ago I was somewhere on the asexual spectrum.” The more I think about it, demi-sexual is probably where I land. “When it comes to you, I want kisses, maybe more.” I'm glad I'm not that awkward teenager about it anymore. I've never felt broken about any of it, but it's weird to talk about.

“I'm a virgin,” Ethan blurts. “A lot of people lose their virginity in college, but I was still a kid and so exhausted it never crossed my mind. Then I was just always busy. And I think in the back of my mind I always knew there was someone I was waiting for and it was the pretty demon in my dreams.” He sucks in a breath, going bright pink. He's so cute. “I'm not ashamed. Just wanted you to know.”

I shrug. “I'm a virgin too, on account that sex just doesn't cross my mind. And certainly not with some random person off the street.” I shiver at the thought. “I need connection. But I don't need sex.”

“Makes sense. And I was always told I'd have to marry Florence. They are sex repulsed and I'm gay, so I knew we wouldn't be doing anything despite everyone's desire for us to produce heirs. How fucking gross is that? Here you have to marry and fuck so we can continue the magic lines. No, thank you.” He sticks his tongue out and shivers. “Just doesn't make sex appealing to me. I want intimacy, not requirement.”

“I get that.” I itch to hold his hand as we walk, but alas, I don’t want him to disappear on me.

“We are a mess.” Ethan chuckles. “I ever tell you about that time I fucked a grapefruit.”

I bark out a laugh. “Actually, yes. You said it burned and not in a fun way.”

“Sounds like something I’d say.” Ethan’s laugh is magical. Damn Cordia for her meddling.

I sigh, my fingers twitch. Ethan yawns and I feel bad because he’s probably exhausted.

“You should go to bed,” I whisper.

“And miss time with you? Not a chance.” He shakes his head, and it reminds me of him as that determined boy.

Something like a flare lights up the night sky over Cordia’s mansion and Ethan grimaces. “Are you kidding me? She’s using the bat signal on me?”

“What?” I ask.

“You’ve never seen bat man? He’s got the bat signal when Gotham needs him.”

“No idea what you’re talking about, but there’s not a bat in the sky or anything.”

“No, it’s just...” Ethan flings a hand towards the light. “Grandmother being dramatic. If I don’t show up in ten minutes, she’ll punish me. I can’t believe?”

I wrap my hand around his upper arm where I won't touch his skin and we teleport right into Cordia's yard. There's a raccoon in a tree that watches us.

"That's Rosco, grandmother's familiar," Ethan says. "He's pretty harmless."

He says that, but then the little creature runs down from his tree and starts screeching. Ethan stumbles back and when he does, he grabs my hand, and he's gone yet again.

"What did you say to him?" I ask Rosco, as if I'll be able to understand him. He continues chatting and I just stare blankly at him.

Someone I don't recognize rounds the house and I take a few steps back. They hold up their hands. "You probably don't know who I am. Let me introduce myself. I'm Trever Belladonna. Head of the Belladonna coven and I think I can help you help your little Speller witch."

"How can I trust you?"

"You can't and you can't trust him either. Somehow, he'll find a way to betray you like he does everyone."

"That's not the Ethan I know. He's trustworthy."

Trever snorts. "He was supposed to marry my boy Liam. The two were thick as thieves before that Hallow bitch showed up. It's like he forgot all about Liam."

I search my brain for any mention of Liam and nothing comes up. If Ethan had to marry another boy, he probably wouldn't have had any problem. Probably never would have fallen in love with me.

"I don't think he forgot Liam on purpose. You know Cordia used a memory spell on

Ethan to forget me. She probably did the same for him to forget Liam.”

“I know all about the memory spell that keeps you out of his head because I helped her develop it. But she stabbed me in the back and I’m ready for payback.”

My heart pounds. Could it really be this easy?

Ethan pounds on the door. “Let me out!”

“My sweet grandbaby, this is for your own good,” Cordia says from inside. Then I can’t see him anymore.

Trever laughs. “The bitch thinks I’m helping her keep Ethan locked up. She’s sorely mistaken. I’m here to cause chaos. You know what my Liam did?”

I shake my head, hoping it’s not something tragic.

“He renounced his magic and left Hex.”

“But he lives, right?”

“Yes. But he said we repressed him too much. Said we put too much expectations on the coven heirs. We just want what’s best for everyone. Florence or Ethan should have married my boy to show him the joys of magic. Instead, the spoiled brats keep pushing off their wedding. Soon it’s not going to matter.” The man cackles manically. “Soon, Ethan will go BOOM! And Hex’ll be covered in the strongest magic she’ll ever experience. There’s no way we won’t all absorb it. So, of course, I’ll tell you how to remove the pendant that keeps him stable.”

“Don’t you dare!” Cordia screams from inside. “I had no idea how you felt about all this, Trever. Had I known, I never would have recruited you to help.” She can’t get

the door open fast enough.

Trever leans in. “True love’s kiss breaks the spell. Then any demon can remove the pendant.”

“You! You!” Cordia points to Trever, and he disappears. “That should teach you, you damn gnat!”

I stumble back and trip, falling to my bottom as she stomps towards me. The raccoon pounces on me and sits on my chest, growling at her.

“You betray me too, Rosco?”

He chitters something, and she fists her hands. “Then so be it.” She snaps, making Rosco go limp against me when she turns on her heel. “You’re nothing to me anymore, creature.”

I clutch the raccoon to my chest as he regains consciousness. “I’m so sorry, little guy,” I whisper. “So sorry.” Pushing to my feet, I do my best not to jostle him too much. I’m not sure what she did to him other than sever whatever bond they had. I know witches and their familiars usually have a lifetime together, so I hope she didn’t just give him a death sentence.

The lights go out in Cordia’s house. I want to rip the door open and retrieve Ethan to take him away from this woman. What’s holding me back? Nothing! I stomp to the front door, but the moment I step on the porch, magic pushes me back with each trial until I’m standing on the road outside the barrier.

Wick: True love’s kiss breaks the spell.

How the hell can we kiss and not touch at the same time?

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Chapter 16

Ethan

I rage in my locked room. Florence paces beside me.

They thread their fingers through their long hair. “She kidnapped me after finals yesterday. She wants to move the wedding to this afternoon,” they say. “I keep telling her no. That we have to have the right full moon for the stupid ritual to work and bond us, but she saw right through that lie. What the fuck are we going to do?”

My phone vibrates.

Wick: True love’s kiss breaks the spell.

“Kiss me.”

“What?! Why would we?”

I show them the text. “True love’s kiss. Doesn’t necessarily need to be romantic love. You and I love each other, right? That’s true love, too.”

“It is.”

“Then kiss me. We’ll break out of here. Find Wick. I’ll bond to him and you’ll be free. Then I’ll find his fucking crossroads and free him.”

“There’s a hitch in that plan I think,” Florence hesitates.

“Which is?”

“Wick is already bound to his crossroads. You need to destroy them first, then bind him.”

“I don’t have time before—” I collapse onto my bed. “All this for power. I just want to live my life. I want you to live your life. Everyone to be happy. Is that too much to ask?”

“Apparently,” Florence grins and settles down next to me and squeezes my hand. “You know, I could give up my magic. I don’t need it for hedge witchery. I don’t want to teach.” They snort. “Fuck. That’s my answer. I need to give up my magic, then no one will want to marry me.”

The heat drains from my face. “Are you sure you want to do that?”

“I am now.” They rub my back. “You love teaching, so I’d hate for you to give up your magic.”

“I can always teach and just not?—”

Florence shakes their head. “You know they’d never allow it.”

I scrub at my face. “I know you’re right.”

“Ethan.”

I lift my head to look at Florence. “Yeah?”

“I love you for trying to fix this problem. You’ve tried for years, but I think this is it. This is the solution.” They laugh. “I feel like I can breathe. We have a plan.”

“I mean... we don’t. We’re still stuck here, but?—”

There’s the telltale sound of a critter outside my window and Rosco scratches at the glass to be let in. I open the window and he scurries over with Vi and Squid in tow.

All of them chat at once. Images of all sorts of things flash through my head. Cordia and Trever fighting. Cordia releasing Rosco from his familiar duties. A weak spot in the barrier.

“There’s a weak spot in the barrier?” Florence and I ask at the same time.

Ethan: I’m sending Rosco out to you. Follow him and we’ll meet you there.

Wick: Will do!

“Rosco, show Wick where the spot is and we’ll be there shortly.”

The raccoon nods and scurries back out the window.

“Okay, how are we going to get out?” Florence asks.

My room is on the second floor and since I never tried to sneak out through the window my grandmother never thought to seal them, only the doors.

“Never fear,” I say as I dig in the bottom drawer of my dresser and pull out paracord.

“Why do you have this?” Florence asks. “Nevermind, I don’t wanna know.”

“It’s good to have in emergencies,” I say the truth of it. I knew someday I might need it and today is that day. I tie it off on one leg of my bed, then throw the rest out the window. “We’ll have to repel down.” I look over the ledge. “Good thing neither of us are scared of heights.”

“No, but I have no idea how to repel down a building, Ethan. Do you?”

“I know the theory of it.” We pull up a video from the internet and watch it a few times. “Seems easy enough. I’ll go first and I’ll catch you if you fall.”

“I’ll haunt you for eternity, Ethan Speller, if we die.” Florence flashes me a grin.

“You love the trouble we get ourselves into. Don’t act like you don’t,” I sass back. I wrap myself like the video and slowly slide down the side of the mansion, wishing I had gloves or something.

Vi zips around my head once I make it on solid ground. “Okay, ready to catch you,” I whisper, yell to Florence.

They straddle the window frame before doing their own slide down the side of the house. Vi, Squid, and I all watch with bated breath, but we didn’t need to worry.

The moment Florence touches down, they grab my collar and press their lips to mine. Just a brief kiss, but that’s all it takes. Something in my mind shatters.

Memories rush in and I fall to my knees.

I thought the break would just mean I can touch Wick, but everything’s back.

“Come on, we have to run,” Florence grabs my hand and yanks me to my feet. We follow Squid and Vi as we race around the mansion to the back.

There's a scream from the house.

"She's pissed," I say as we push on harder.

"How fucking big is this house?" Florence says, but we stop dead in our tracks when a row of witches blocks our path.

Ethan: Gonna be a bit later than anticipated.

Wick: I'll be waiting.

Chapter 17

Warwick

Rosco whimpers in my arms and squirms, but doesn't try to get away from me.

"Sorry, little guy, I don't know how to help."

There's a commotion ahead. What the hell is going on? I wave my hand over the barrier and it pushes me back, but not as hard as I expect.

"We're trying this."

Something isn't right. I push against the barrier and something snaps, letting me inside. Rosco bounces from my hold and races ahead.

"Wait!" I shout, but stop short as soon as I find myself in the middle of a witch battle.

What appears to be balls of light fly across the yard and explode, sending grass and dirt into the air. I'm not sure if anyone is aiming to hurt, but they're sure scary. It's seven against two, with my little witch and Florence on the winning side, it seems.

"Wick!" Ethan cries out. Something wraps around my body and I go down. "Let him go!" he screams as he runs towards me. But he doesn't make it before he disappears.

I wriggle on the ground like a snake, trying to loosen whatever magic is wrapped around me.

“Grab the demon!” Cordia screams.

Florence rushes to me, and their touch releases the restraints. “Take me away from here,” they whisper. “We can save Ethan. I have a plan.”

I take their hand and teleport us to my apartment in the demon realm. We both suck in a breath and I drop onto my couch.

“It’s like we’re playing keep away and Ethan’s the ball,” I say.

“That’s exactly what’s happening. I’m sure Cordia bets that if she keeps him away from you long enough, everything will go in her favor. And I promise you it won’t.” There’s fire in Florence’s eyes.

“What do we do?” I ask. “I’m not an idea guy.”

“Take me to a crossroads.” Florence holds out their hand. “I’m saving us both.”

“I can’t take you to mine. It’ll be a random one.”

“Don’t care, as long as they’ll make the deal.”

I nod, and in the next breath we’re standing at a crossroads. “I can’t be here. It’s forbidden to know who’s assigned where. Text me when you’re done?”

“Understood.” They nod and I pop back to my apartment.

I kind of wish I had the raccoon to keep me company. I’ll have to see if he’d like to come live with me. Being a rejected familiar, he might not want to live around Cordia anymore and I can take care of him.

Florence: It's done. Come get me, please.

That was fast, though I realize when someone knows exactly what they want, we don't fuck around. I'm back at the crossroads just as their knees buckle. I catch them before they can fall.

"What happened?" I ask before I notice the shimmer of magic no longer comes off Florence.

"I'm free. Now we need to do the same for Ethan."

"How? If you don't have magic, they'll make him marry someone else."

"No. Well, yes." Florence tips their head from side to side as if they're thinking. "He'll still need to bond with someone, but that someone needs to be you, not a witch. His magic is too strong to share with someone from any of the covens. It needs to be someone that can handle the surge of new magic. I need to know where your crossroads is, and I know he had a plan."

"I can't tell you."

"You can break the rules if you want, Wick. Rumor is your brother does all the time."

"You don't understand. I can't show you or tell you." I wave at my face. "My mouth and nose disappear and the magic bounces me away if I try to walk up to my crossroads."

"Can you draw a picture? Write out the street names?"

My mouth opens and closes. "Never tried."

“Then try.” They pull a tiny notebook and pen set from their pocket.

Why hadn’t I thought of this before?

“Hurry. Time is a bit of a factor right now. My family will know what I’ve done and the other covens will try to?—”

The brightest light I’ve ever seen shoots from Cordia’s mansion as if it’s a beacon to the heavens.

“Hurry. Hurry. I think when I kissed him?—”

“You kissed him?!”

“Yes, we figured true love’s kiss from a friend would work as much as from a lover, and I think it worked. But I think it rendered the entire pendant useless, so he’s left unprotected from his magic.”

“You’re saying. Oh fuck. That’s his magic.”

“Yes. So?—”

I scribble the street names of my crossroads in the notebook and let out a sigh of relief when nothing happens.

“Now get me as close to your crossroads as possible,” Florence takes my hand and I get them within a block. “Be ready.” They run and as they approach my crossroads, they hop onto my sign and twist until it comes off the post. Then they use the sign to dig into the gravel and wreck it all to hell.

The ground rumbles, churning the crossroads into chunks once the magic takes hold.

Florence squeaks and runs back towards me, their work done.

My fingers tingle, and my body vibrates. A thread of magic shoots up where I stand and steals my breath as I rise into the air. Florence stops dead in their tracks and watches as I'm tossed and turned as if I'm in a giant washer on the spin cycle. My head throbs and as abruptly as it all began, I'm dropped to the ground.

The thread of magic sinks back into the ground, and I laugh. My hands are the same blue they've always been. My wings fan out bigger than before, and my tail has a little tuft at the end instead of a soft point. What the fuck am I?

"No time to admire yourself. We got to save Ethan." Florence grabs my hand. "You should be able to infiltrate Cordia's mansion without a problem. Just like Pike could get through the barrier."

"But Pike isn't me."

"Just try, damn it. I won't lose my best friend." Tears leak from Florence's eyes.

I squeeze mine shut and teleport us to the outskirts of Cordia's property. The scent of magic hangs in the air, but there's no one in the yard anymore.

Her house glows unnaturally from the beam of light.

"Come on, we need?—"

"Can you even go in there?" I stop them from storming into their possible doom.

Florence stops. "I don't know. But you have to." They shove me towards the house.

"I don't know what I'm doing. How do I bind us together?"

“Shit.” They pace in front of me. “I don’t know. A wedding contract works, but that’s not going to work right now.”

“I’ll figure it out.” I leave them in the street as I pop into the house.

A hummingbird zips in my face, and I take it as my cue to follow. The closer I get to Ethan, the hotter the air is until I feel like I’m breathing the summer soup air when it’s so humid my lungs hate Hex. No one else is in the house as far as I can tell. Just me, the hummingbird, and Ethan.

“How do I help him?”

I’m not sure the hummingbird can respond to me, but images fill my head.

A kiss and a blood seal. Something like a soul tether, but not quite. My heart pounds when I get to his door. The light is so blinding I have to look away. But this is my Ethan. I push through until I’m at his bed. The light comes from him .

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Chapter 18

Ethan

I'm floating somewhere and all the memories of Wick flood back stronger than before. Love spreads over my chest. In my heart. Faintly somewhere he calls to me, but I don't know where he is. Where I am. I have a feeling someone lied to me about how long I had before the magic broke me down. My body tingles all over and my mind is washed with images of Wick.

Always smiling in my dreams, my pretty demon.

Age 16

Like always, I bring my homework to my summoning. One day I'll wear Wick down before I turn eighteen, but what's two more years? It's no hardship to see him every day. But what does it matter how old I am? I yawn as the last summoning word leaves my lips.

"You should rest," Wick says the moment he sees me.

"I have too much to study for finals. Unless..." I wiggle my brows, making him chuckle.

"No. The answer will always be no until you turn eighteen."

I whip out my thick blanket from my tote bag and lay it on the ground before

plopping down on my stomach as per my daily ritual. Another yawn escapes.

“Ethan. You really should rest. You study too much.” Wick brushes hair from my forehead.

“Gotta study.”

“Please, just a little nap for me. I’ll wake you up in ninety minutes.”

“Thirty.” Another yawn.

“Seventy-five.”

Ethan shakes his head. “Forty-five.”

“Sixty. And that’s the lowest I’ll go. You need sleep. I don’t know what time Cordia makes you wake up to get everything done, but you’re not sleeping enough.”

“Four am,” I mumble. “But I need to study, then do a few chores, go to school, study more ? —”

“Ethan.” Wick drops to his bottom. “Your homework will still be there when you wake up and I’ll help you. But ? —”

“Okay,” I whisper.

“Good.” He pats his lap. I lay my head on his thighs and I have to will myself to keep calm. “Sleep.” His rough fingers massage my scalp and he sways softly. Every touch makes me fall deeper in love with this demon. My heart.

“Sixty minutes,” I say, and it’s the last thing I remember before his gentle caress on

my cheek wakes me.

Age 17

I'm later than usual. After graduation, Cordia insisted on a party and I never wanted out of there so fast. Florence had to go home after an hour, which made the next two more hours unbearable.

I cast the salt circle and summon Wick. I laugh when he materializes. He's wearing a party hat and holding a cupcake and gift bag.

"Happy graduation!" Wick passes me the cupcake. "Do I call you Doctor Ethan now?" He tips his head and I snort.

"Please don't call me doctor. How long did you stay like that, waiting for me?" I lick the pink icing covered in colorful sprinkles. It's innocent, but his eyes narrow on my tongue and he swallows.

"Just a few hours. I knew you'd call me sometime and wanted to be ready."

"I love you. I don't say it often enough." I offer him the cupcake and he tentatively gives the icing a lick, but nudges it back to me.

"You say it to me every day." His tail wraps around my waist and pulls me close. "And I love you, my little witch." He rubs his nose against mine.

I so badly want to kiss him, but I don't think he's ready, and that's fine. I'll wait forever for him to be ready and if he never is, that's fine, too.

Turning 18

I glare at the watch face, willing time to go faster.

“So close,” I say. “So fucking close.”

“Then you’ll be free.”

“And we can be together.” I swallow as the final countdown starts.

“Ten,” Wick says.

“Nine.”

“Eight.” Wick squeezes my hand.

“Seven.” I start bouncing on my toes.

“Six.”

“Five.” My heart pounds.

“Four.” I get another squeeze.

“Three.”

“Two.” I suck in a breath.

“O—”

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Chapter 19

Ethan

I gasp awake and reach for empty air. “Wick!”

“I’m right here, my little witch.” He smooths the hair from my face. “I’m right here. I’m yours forever.” He leans in and kisses my forehead. “It worked. It fucking worked.”

My chest stings, and he stills my hand before I can scratch it.

“I’m sorry if it’s not what you wanted, but I bound you to me with a blood seal. It’s what Vi said to do, and I trusted her.”

“She’s smart.” My words slur a little and I can’t help the goofy grin when Wick comes into view.

“I thought I was going to lose you again.” Wick takes my hand and presses it to his lips. “You were so still.” He looks lost. “I never want to lose you again. You’re mine, Ethan. Mine. ”

His growl goes right to my dick, and it takes everything in me to will the appendage to stay the fuck down.

“And you’re mine, Wicky. No one else can have you.” I squeeze his hand and his tail swishes behind him. A different tail than I’m used to. I push to sit, but he presses me

back down. “What happened while I was out?”

He gives me the rundown. Florence gave up their magic. They released Wick. Then Wick had to bind us before any of the witches had the chance to.

“Apparently, most of them were afraid of what might happen if they came into your room.” He rubs his cheek against my hand. “Honestly, I was afraid too, but I wasn’t going to let the magic consume you. I couldn’t.” He lets me go to pace. “And I know we don’t technically know each other anymore. But I want to change that. I want to?—”

He stops. “I... I don’t have a crossroads anymore. I can do anything and not worry about that obligation.”

I smile up at him. “What do you plan to do with your life?”

“Besides, love you every moment?” His tufted tail sways behind him. “I think I want to open a bakery.”

“That’s perfect.”

He throws his head back and laughs. “I’m—we’re free.”

“Knock. Knock.” Florence mimes on the door as they come in. “Just wanted to make sure you’re okay. Wick’s been hogging you for days.”

I groan. “How long was I out this time?”

The pair look at each other.

“You don’t wanna know,” Florence says.

“At least I had pleasant dreams.”

Wick’s cheeks blush again.

Vi zooms in and sasses me, but she’s happy I’m awake. She gives me the sweetest images of Wick by my bed and I reach out to scrub a hand through his hair. My lovely demon.

Rosco and Squid amble into the room as if they’re buddies now.

“Come here, buddy,” Wick holds out his arms and cuddles the raccoon.

I cock a brow.

Florence scratches Rosco under the chin. “Poor guy, Cordia rejected him. She’s sorry about it now, but he won’t have anything to do with her anymore, and I don’t blame him.”

“I adopted him,” Wick says with the biggest grin. “He’s so funny. Why would she give him up?”

“He really is a hoot,” I say. “He loves apples.”

“I know, and he gets into shenanigans at my place.” He noses the raccoon. “We’re the bestest of pals, aren’t we? And you like Frankie and Pumpkin, don’t you?”

Florence snorts before sitting on the edge of my bed. “Are you mad at me?”

“For what? Saving us all? No.” I squeeze her hand.

“I basically took your plan, but made it my own. Worked perfectly, I’d say. I have no

magic to speak of and can still do exactly what I planned on doing in the first place. I have an application in to acquire a Hellhound, but we'll see if I'm approved. I have a cute little log cabin where I'll sell my herbal concoctions. I'm so excited."

I rub at my head, taking it all in. "How long was I out for?"

"Two and a half weeks," the pair say together.

"Ouch." I drop back into bed and stare at my ceiling. "Hey at least we're not getting ready for our wedding."

"Nope." Wick says. "And the best part is there's still time before the next semester starts. We can go on an adventure. Get to know each other again."

"We missed the masquerade party." I pout, but I'm not that mad about it.

Florence grins and pushes to their feet to spin. "It went so well, Pike is doing one every month. At least until he and Lark get bored with them."

Wick nibbles his bottom lip as he pats Rosco's bottom. "I also may have mentioned that I was sad to miss seeing you at a party. So Pike said he'd have one every month until I was satisfied."

"Can I kiss you?" I've never asked before because I never want Wick to think he's less than if he never wants to be intimate.

Rosco scurries out of his hold, and Wick blinks back at me and leans in.

"Time for me to go." Florence blows me a kiss. "Love y'all. See ya soon." And they're gone, all the familiars following them.

“I’ve wanted to kiss you for a very long time,” I whisper. “But I’m okay if you never want to.”

Wick licks his lips. “I want to. So badly. And some other things... sometime. After you’re all cleared by the healer.”

I thread my hand in his hair and pull him down gently. We breathe each other’s air for so long I think he wants to back out, but he presses his lips to mine and it’s everything. I swear a ribbon ties our hearts together. He moans and deepens the kiss, surprising me. He cups the back of my neck so gently as I paw at his shirt. More. I need more and lick at his lips, hoping he opens for me and he does. He pulls me closer in his embrace and it takes everything in me not to rub against him.

We’re gasping when he pulls away.

“Fuck. Fuck. We should definitely add kisses to something we do every day.” His hair is a mess and I love the look on him.

“I’m agreeable to that,” I say. “Wanna go again?”

He cages me in with his forearms and it’s the safest I’ve ever felt in my life. Wick gazes into my eyes. “You’re everything to me, Ethan Speller. Eternity is a long time, but?—”

“I’m human.”

Wick’s grin catches me off guard. “You’re bound to me, which means your life is linked to mine.” He kisses my nose over and over. “Van always said he hated the idea of us together because you’d die, but that’s not the case anymore. He’s ready to throw us a wedding if we want, but I told him it’s way too early for that.”

“You’re amazing, you know that.”

“Only because you believe I am.” Wick flops down next to me and pulls me into his arms. “Everything is possible because you believe in me. In us.”

I snuggle close and face him. “Kiss me again?”

“Every day. All day.” He leans over me and presses his lips to mine again and that’s where my grandmother finds us.

“Cough. Cough.” She fakes and Wick pouts as he plops back to his side against me.

“May I talk to Ethan alone?”

“No. I don’t trust you.” Wick gathers me in his arms and holds me so close I almost can’t breathe. It makes me giggle, and he snorts into my hair when he realizes.

My grandmother sighs and takes the chair Wick previously occupied. “Ethan. My sweet grandbaby. You’re the only family I have left.”

Wick growls, and it’s so fucking hot. “You should have thought?—”

“Wick, I got this.” I pat his hand and he nods in my hair.

“I’ll try to be good. But everything is her fault.”

My grandmother sighs. “It is. Everything. I take full responsibility.”

“You should,” Wick hisses.

“Wicky,” I whisper laugh.

“I wanted you to have everything I never did. And to do that, you needed power. I married your grandfather at eighteen. He was already thirty-two. We didn’t love each other, but he thought I was pretty and the Spellers needed heirs. Then he left me with two small boys to raise when he died a decade into marriage. Your father was my firstborn, and he was powerful . Then he arranged a ridiculous marriage with a witch outside our covens and you were born. They didn’t even love each other. Your mother died in childbirth because of me. She wasn’t strong enough to handle you.” Grandmother wipes at her eyes. “I still don’t know who killed your father, and I’m sorry. I wish he was still here. Your uncle wasn’t such a bad guy. At least not until he tethered his soul to that poor Fae boy.”

“Lark isn’t a boy anymore,” Wick snarks.

“Yes, I know. I’ve talked to him and tried to give him compensation for his time in Drake’s care, but he wouldn’t have it. I don’t blame him. I wouldn’t want anything to do with me, either.” My grandmother huffs. “What I’m trying to say is I’m sorry. I fucked up and should have let nature run its course. Perhaps your father would have chosen a different path had I not pushed him into coven leadership and he felt he had to produce an heir. Perhaps you and Florence would have chosen different paths had I not pushed you into your current life. I’m sorry. There’s nothing I can do to take any of it back. All I can do is beg for forgiveness and do better.”

“How do we know you’ll try?” Wick asks the question on my lips before I get the chance.

“Because I’ve already started the proceedings to change the leadership in Hex.”

“Really?” I say.

“Yes. We’ll have a council that represents all citizens of Hex and not just the witches. The first vote is in the new year to give everyone time to adjust to the idea. So far, no

one's fought me on it."

"Did you turn Trever back into a human?" Wick asks.

"I did. And I paid him severance for his suffering."

I wiggle away from Wick to sit on the edge of my bed. My grandmother's eyes dart to my chest and I finally take the time to examine the mark Wick made on me. A heart over my heart. The edges are a little jagged, but I love it nonetheless.

"You won't interfere anymore?" I ask.

"Never. I'll be the doting grandma." She crosses a finger over her heart and holds out her hand. "Pinky promise."

"You believe her?" Wick says, trying to pull me back.

"I'm choosing to believe in her potential." I lock my pinky with my grandmother's and we shake on it.

Chapter 20

Warwick

Once Cordia leaves, I can't stop kissing Ethan's face, and he giggles beneath me. That sound lights me up and I want to bathe in it. I fight off the dark thoughts that want to come. The ones that say he almost died.

As I scratched the heart into his chest, I swear his skin cracked and he almost split apart before my eyes. I got to him in time, though. If I hadn't, I wouldn't be responsible to my response. I've waited too long to find him again for him to be lost to me already. Now I'll always know where he is at all times.

"Wick." Ethan's voice is thick and I want to nibble on his scruffy jaw.

I let the next thought win and lick him from said jaw to cheek bone, drawing another laugh from my little witch.

"Licked you, so you're mine. All mine."

"No one else can have me. Except?—"

I growl, and he cocks a brow.

"Florence gets time with me."

"Of course. Of course. I'd never keep you away from them." I nuzzle his throat.

“I like this possessive side of you.” He pulls me down for another kiss, his hand always sinks into my hair and I love it but...

“You can use my horns if you want.” My face heats telling him that.

“Aren’t they sensitive?”

I nod. “Very. I might moan.”

Ethan licks his lips. “I like it when you moan.” He grips one horn and pulls me for another kiss. It feels so good I don’t stop from rubbing my hard cock against his thigh.

Ethan thrusts to meet me, his hardness pressed to my stomach.

“Wait. Wait.” I gasp away from the kiss. “You just woke up.”

“Which means I’m full of energy to burn.” He undulates under me, pulling a moan from me. “But we can stop if?—”

“No.” I pepper kisses across his jaw, savoring the scruff of him. I rub against it like a cat, making him laugh.

“On your back,” Ethan says and I oblige as fast as demonly possible. He straddles my waist, his ass precariously close to my hard cock. He rocks back, sliding my hardness between his clothed crack. “One day.” He leans down to press a kiss to one pec, then the other. “If you’re interested, I want you to fuck me into the mattress.”

“So interested.” I squeeze his ass. “I want to do everything with you, my little witch. We’ll explore the delights of pleasure together.”

“I like the sound of that.” Ethan grinds into my stomach when he leans into kiss me again.

“Only you, my Ethan. You’re all I need.”

“Where would you like to live?” Ethan’s question throws me off guard and I still his hips.

“Wherever you want. My place, yours. Doesn’t matter to me as long as we’re together.”

“I still wanna teach if they’ll have me. But I have a tiny studio apartment on campus.”

“We don’t have to think about this now.” I thumb his bottom lip and lift to capture him in another kiss. His mouth takes away all my cares and fears. His little moans and the little hitch of his hips as he seeks pleasure make me harder than I think I’ve been in my life. “I wanna be naked.” Naked with Ethan. It never crossed my mind before, but it took me years to realize how attracted to him I was to begin with.

He scrambles off me and almost trips over his own feet before I catch him. “Not so fast.” My tail brushes against him and he catches it.

“What kind of demon are you now?” He brushes the tufted part over his cheek.

“Poe says I’m just a minion, nothing special like Pike being an incubus.”

“You’re not just a minion. You’re my Wick.” Ethan pounces in my arms and wraps himself around me. We’re both still clothed, but I don’t care because Ethan is in my arms. Squirming against me, making me harder.

“Naked,” I growl making him moan against my neck. I yank his shirt off him and he

fiddles with my buttons, but I pull the shirt open, sending buttons everywhere.

“I didn’t know you were so sculpted.” His hands roam over my pecs. “I knew you had nice arms.” He squeezes my biceps.

“Not so bad yourself.” I eye his slim chest. There’s no definition, but he’s beautiful to me.

“Pants.” He waves and my tail shivers the moment his hands touch my waistband to unbutton my jeans. My breath hitches when he gets to the zipper and drops to his knees. “I’ve always wanted to try this.” He licks his lips and tugs down my jeans, bringing my underwear with them. The action is so slow, my cock acts to be free. His eyes widen when I spring free of the confines of my clothing. “Wasn’t expecting that.”

I watch his Adam’s apple bob as he swallows.

“You’re so, big.” He leans back to examine everything. “And... are you ribbed for pleasure?”

“Looks like.” I grin back at him.

“I wanna taste you. Can I?”

“Only if you finish getting naked, too.”

Ethan pushes back to his feet. “Alrighty, but if I’ve been asleep for weeks, you’re not going to want to taste what I got going on. I’m surprised you’ve kissed me.”

I lean in to kiss him again. “We gave you sponge baths.” Another kiss. “Naked.”

He shimmies his pajama bottoms off and I take in the sight of him. His hard cock standing proudly.

“You look good enough to eat.” I lick his cheek.

“Please, can I taste you?” He pleads with his eyes as he slides back to his knees.

His hands slide up my thighs, making me shiver. I grip his hair, not wanting him to start too fast. His tongue darts out to my tip.

“Do you feel stronger now that we’re bonded?” He distracts me before licking at my crown.

“My magic’s stronger, for sure,” I croak out. “But you always make me feel strong, Ethan.”

He stops his ministrations on my cock. “You always make me feel strong, too. Like I can fly, but I don’t even have wings.” He drags a hand over my cock and we shuffle to the bed where I drop on the edge and he settles between my legs.

“You look so pretty on your knees.” I don’t know why I say the words.

“Shhh, let me thank you for saving my life.”

I tip his head up. “You don’t have to do that.”

“Then let’s enjoy our first sexual experience together.” He kisses me again before focusing on my cock once more. The little kitten licks along my shaft, curls my toes. Somehow, he knows exactly what I need and when to let off. I’m lost in his touches and happy little moans and sighs. He works both hands, edging me over and over until finally... “Come for me, Wick.”

The words don't even finish leaving his lips and I'm already coming down his throat. He swallows what he can, but the rest lands on his face and chest. Cum drips from his chin by the time I'm finished.

I use my thumb to wipe his left eye clean, and he grins up at me.

"That was fucking hot." His tongue darts across his lips and he pushes cum from his chin to his mouth. He still grips my cock, pumping until I'm too sensitive and I stop his hands. My breathing's harsh when I realize he came, too.

"Come here." I kiss him until he's putty and pick him up in a bridal carry. "Let's get washed up."

I carry him to the ensuite bathroom and settle him into the shower. I've showered here on a few occasions and know it's big enough for both of us. I grab a fresh wash rag while he adjusts the water.

I slide in behind him and he leans into me.

"I'm going to take you on dates. Whatever you want, Ethan. We'll fall in love with each other all over again." I lather the wash rag with soap and rub it gently over his body, being as thorough as possible. "We won't have to rely on memories. On the old us. We'll make new memories that'll last forever." I kiss the back of his head before scrubbing his hair with shampoo.

"That sounds perfect." He sighs as I rinse his hair.

We stand like this, with him in my arms and warm water running over us. My cock starts to rally at his little squirms. He rubs his ass against me when I snake my arm under his to take his cock in hand.

“Let me take care of you, Ethan. Just relax.”

His hand hooks around the back of my neck the moment I slide my hand down his cock.

“I’m not going to last.”

“Don’t think about lasting, just enjoy.” I thrust against his crack. “Hands on the wall.”

Ethan scrambles to follow my directions and he sticks his ass out. I spread his cheeks, not able to help myself from tasting him.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” Ethan strokes himself while I lave at his hole. I slurp and suck, needing to bring him as much pleasure as possible. “Don’t stop. I’m so close.” His hand goes faster. A strangled moan escapes his lips when he paints the wall of the shower with cum. “I don’t think I can walk.”

“I’ll carry you.” I rinse down the shower and hose him off before hauling him over my shoulder, being careful of my horns.

Ethan squeals and we’re making a big puddle mess, but we’ll clean it up. I deposit him on the sink and grab a fluffy clean towel. He yawns when I pat his face.

“Should get you back to bed.” I pat the rest of him down before scrubbing the towel over his head.

“I’m fine.”

“Ethan.”

He yawns again. “Okay, but I want to cuddle.”

“I wouldn’t dream of leaving you right now.” Or ever.

Chapter 21

Ethan

Wick made me recover the rest of the week before we set any dates. Didn't matter because we talked through all hours of the night. We stayed at my grandmother's house simply because it has room and we need to decide where we'd like to live. It needs to be some place I can easily get to campus and where Wick's happy too.

My grandmother and Florence both came to chat and I think Wick's softening towards my grandmother, but who knows? I'm still processing everything. I'm not sure how long it'll take to fully realize what her actions cost. But I have Wicky back and that's all that matters.

Wick's still asleep, but we promised today we'd go on a date and I don't wanna wait too long. He said he had a surprise and I get impatient.

I kiss one eyelid, then the other. His mouth twitches. So I know he's already waking up.

"I'm ready for the surprise."

"Five more minutes." He throws an arm over his eyes and turns away from me with a grin.

I sigh dramatically and settle back into bed and tap my thigh. Wick snorts as he faces me again and buries his face in my neck.

This is how it is, playful Wick, and I love it. It took him so long to let his true nature out. He always felt he had to repress himself because Van was always fucking around, but Wick's allowed to be true to himself, too.

“Okay, okay. Let's get dressed.” He hauls me to my feet and pats my butt on our way to the bathroom. I love how comfortable he is being naked with me, but his silk pajamas are even sexier. The way they cling to his form makes my mouth water.

“We could get distracted for a tiny bit,” I say.

“Maybe at the surprise.” Wick wiggles his brows and I can't help the laugh.

“You have me intrigued.” I dress in a pair of dress slacks and a nice button-up shirt the same color of my eyes. When I face him, he's in skinny jeans and a t-shirt.

He holds out his hand. “Ready?”

“As I'll ever be.”

We're in the living room of a cute little cottage.

“If you hate it, that's fine. It's close to Florence and campus. Rosco and Vi will have plenty of room to do their thing. Squid, by the way, why the hell is the squirrel named Squid?”

I snort. “Florence thought it'd be funny. So Squid the squirrel.”

“Okay, they have a sense of humor.”

“You'll catch on the longer you know them.” I turn in my spot and take everything in.

“This is perfect.” There's a couch facing bay windows looking out into the woods. A

kitchen, and what I'm assuming are a few bedrooms and a bathroom.

"I know how much you hate Cordia's big mansion."

"I do. What the hell would we do with that much room?"

"Exactly. And I do like my apartment in the demon realm, so I'm keeping it. We can visit whenever. If you want to keep your campus apartment, that's fine. But I thought..." He looks around. "This could be ours. If you're interested. If you're not?—"

I launch myself at him. "Seriously, I love it. And it's perfect. Close to Flo and campus? You're so good to me." I tug him down by the horn. "Should we break in the mattress?"

Wick moans into my kiss. "I brought lube."

My breath hitches. "Fuck me."

"That's the plan," he whispers against my lips. Instead of walking, he teleports us to the master bedroom and throws me onto the bed. "You shouldn't have worn something fancy." Wick yanks off his t-shirt and stalks towards me as I scramble to unbutton my shirt.

"Don't rip it. It's one of my favorites."

"Mine too, because it matches your eyes." Wick grabs my ankle and yanks me to the edge of the bed. "Keep it on."

"Yes, sir."

“Mmmm, I think I like that.” He unbuttons my slacks and yanks them from my legs, pulling my shoes off at the same time. He flips me to my stomach. “Your ass is a work of art.” He smacks it, then massages away the burn.

We’ve been playing with toys and fingers the last few nights because I’ve been too eager to take his cock.

“Please.” I hump the bed, begging for him to stop toying with me.

His tail dusts one ass cheek, teasing me when he walks away to grab the lube from the nightstand. He’s not interested in bottoming, but I don’t care.

“Please, Wick.”

“Patience, little witch.” The snick of the lube bottle makes me shiver, and he runs a finger across my crack.

“Don’t tease me with patience. You’re the king of patience. I’m not,” I whine.

Lube dribbles down my crack, and he rubs my hole. “We have to get you ready. You’re so tight, Ethan.”

“But I’m ready, so ready.” I wiggle my ass.

“Shhh.” Wick sinks a finger in and I melt into the bed the moment he hits my prostate. It’s bliss and I mewl into the pillow when he adds a second, then a third, making my hole stretch for him.

I’m panting by the time he decides he’s done fingering me.

He lines his cock with my hole and rubs. “I’m taking you to the masquerade

tomorrow night. We're going to dance the night away and show everyone you're mine."

"Only yours, Wick."

He sinks in and I grip the sheets. My legs spread wider. "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck." I chant as I take his length. He's taking his time and I'm grateful. My breathing's harsh and I squeeze my eyes shut as I savor the burn. When he bottoms out, he doesn't move. He's barely breathing above me and I turn back to watch him concentrate so hard I almost burst out laughing.

"You are so fucking tight," he says through gritted teeth.

I squeeze my hole. "And you're huge, but feel so fucking good."

We stay in the position until Wick's ready and when he is we're both in for a ride. He pulls back and slams into me, pushing me forward.

"Yes. That! Don't you dare stop, Wick. Fuck me into this mattress." I grip the sheets and meet his every thrust. "Don't stop." I remember dreams of this. Wishes, desires, pent up angst about wanting Wick to fuck me. It was all worth the wait.

"I never stopped hoping, Ethan. I knew I'd find you again." His balls slap against me and he pulls my back to his chest. "I never gave up hope. Never." We kiss, and my balls draw up.

"I'm gonna come."

"Come for me, my little witch." Wick pounds harder. His hands dig into my hips and my head drops to the mattress. I shout my release as he slumps over me, pumping his load in my ass.

My knees give out and we lay there in each other's arm. Tears fill my eyes at Wick's completely wrecked face. I wipe his tears with my thumbs. "I'm here, Wick. I'm not going anywhere ever again. Not without you by my side." He buries his head in my neck as sobs shake his big frame. I hold him until he snuffles and flops to his back.

"Sorry. Don't know what came over me."

"Don't be sorry." I kiss his cheek, then his pec. "You've always kept things pent up. It's not good for you. So I'm glad you're allowing yourself to release."

"But it's kind of fucked up to?"

"It's what you needed, Wick. Don't apologize."

He squeezes me tight. "This is why I love you so much. You make me feel like I'm not fucked up."

"That's because you're not." I trace my fingers over his pec. "You're Wick and no one can tell you how to be Wick. Only you can discover yourself."

He seems to think that over before nodding. "That's what you've been telling me for years."

I don't even care there's cum dripping from my ass right now. I pull him closer and cuddle my demon until we both fall asleep. We don't have anything planned the rest of the day and Wick can process as long as he needs.

Chapter 22

Warwick

I eye Cordia wearily as she passes all three of us a gold leaf filigree mask.

Florence sucks in a breath as they look over the one in their hand. “Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. The three of you deserve them, and what use do I have for them? I’m not partying.” Cordia gives us a soft smile. “They were passed down for generations. We used to wear them when we danced naked under the full moon during certain rituals.” Her cheeks go pink and I have to wonder what kind of rituals they were.

Ethan shivers. “I don’t think we need to know about sex in the woods.”

Cordia snorts and Florence side-eyes him, then the mask.

“Were these cleaned since their last usage?” They ask.

“Of course.” Cordia presses her hand to her mouth to cover her smile. “Go enjoy yourselves.” She shoos us away.

We’re already in our party clothes and slip on the masks.

Ethan wears a pair of black leggings I want to rip off him and a hot pink mesh tank top. Again, I want to rip it off him. Florence wears a cute skater skirt and a crop top. And I’m in a pair of skinny jeans and a t-shirt because I’m such a plain Jane.

“Ready?” I ask and hold out my hands to the pair.

The moment they touch me, I teleport us to Flutter and Fangs. Music thumps through the speakers so loudly I can feel it in my blood and the place is packed.

Fae magic shimmers from the ceiling like a cascading waterfall and tapestries transform the bar into something magical.

Ethan’s eyes widen as he takes everything in. I have to wonder if the masquerade party was this grand the first time around, or if Pike and Lark and probably Wren doubled down.

“It’s magical,” Ethan shouts over the music. I want to tell him he’s what makes it magical, but that feels too cheesy.

“I want every day to be magical to you.”

“It already is, Wick. We’re free and together. What other magic do we need?”

Florence bounces around and grabs Ethan’s hand. It takes everything in me not to snap at them. Then they grab my hand, too. They’re both rocking to the music vibrating through my body and I give in. Who cares what I look like? I’m going to enjoy myself and my little witch.

“Wick!” my brother calls to me and I stifle the laugh. He’s dressed like an angel, with a fake halo and all. He even painted his blue, leathery wings white. He wraps his arms around me. “I’m so fucking happy for you. You never gave up.” He slaps me on the back before letting me go. “Never take my advice. I always suck at it.”

“I know, but I still love you.”

We grin and I know I'll never be mad at my brother for too long, even if he was the reason I was at my crossroads at fifteen. If he hadn't of pissed off Poe, I may never have met Ethan and that'd be a tragedy. A shiver goes down my spine at the thought.

"Don't be a stranger," Van says. "I expect to try some of your yummy baked goods, too. Gabe spilled the beans that you're really good."

Ethan takes my hand. "Wick plans to open a bakery."

"I look forward to it." Van tips his head and disappears, probably to find Gabe.

"Dance Wick." Ethan grinds against me and I still his wily hips. The rest of the dancers, other than Florence anyway, seem to be rubbing against one another and I let him go do to as he pleases. I decide to get caught up in the energy of the place instead of caring how I look on the dancefloor. Bright lights bounce around, making people blue and yellow and orange and pink. It's glorious, this place we have to meet and play. I want to create something like this with my bakery.

"You're thinking too hard, my demon." Ethan pulls me down by a horn and I can't help the moan. "Get lost for just a little bit. Let go." He kisses me over and over and I let him take me away into a place I don't think and just feel.

Chapter 23

Ethan

I bounce in my seat as I wait for Wick to unwrap the gift I got him.

“First edition of Belinda Roomy’s On Demon Magic . How?” He holds it up.

“My grandmother had it in her collection and she was just going to get rid of it. I knew you’d love it.”

“Of course, I love it.” He flips through a few pages before setting it on the table.

“Funny thing, I got you a gift, too. I saw it and couldn’t stop thinking about it.”

This is how it is with Wick. We give each other gifts almost every day. Just something makes me think of him and I have to get it for him.

He hands me a gift bag with tissue paper sprouting from the top. I pull it out and look inside the bag to find. “No,” I suck in a breath. “Elizabeth Appleby’s Memory Magic .”

“Kind of a moot point now, but I still think it’s helpful to have.” Wick grins, and he stalks around the table.

“No, you don’t.” I jump to my feet and race to our bedroom, but he beats me to it.

“We don’t have time to get into shenanigans.”

“Shenanigans? What shenanigans?” He asks innocently as he practically eye fucks me.

“You know I can’t resist you.” I hop into his arms and writhe as we kiss. “But I must.” I push away from him and drop back to my feet. The look he gives me is comical, like when Rosco does something silly and Wick just doesn’t know how to contain his laughter.

Vi buzzes in my face and sasses me with her disapproval of our potentially being late.

“We can’t be late this time, Wick. It’s super important to be there.”

“I know. I know. I’m just nervous.”

“It’s something new and we need to show our support.” I take his hand and bring him back to the kitchen to brush his shirt clean. Using my magic, I take out the wrinkles I put in it by jumping in his arms.

“Ready?” he asks. When I nod, he teleports us to my grandmother’s backyard, where all four covens convene, as well as all the candidates for the new council.

My grandmother stands tall right in the center of it all on a short dais. She lifts a hand to silent the soft chatter around us.

“My fellow citizens of Hex, we’re gathered here to discuss a new type of leadership. As the current leader, I realize our current way of relying on the covens puts a burden on the witches that need to be shared. We need more people to step up to keep our town safe and running the way she was intended.” She walks across the tiny stage. “I recognize my own part in all of this. How I insisted the covens needed to be the ones to rule. But I was wrong. We need to share responsibility with the demons and the shifters and the vampires. No one citizen should hold all the power here. So I ask

you, how shall we proceed?”

Murmurs rise up around us, and she holds up a hand. “One at a time.”

Hands raise all around us, and each person speaks. It’s going to be a long, long evening. I lean into Wick, who thankfully seems interested in what’s happening.

“I think this is going to be great if she executes it,” Wick says.

“I agree. It’s been a dream of mine and Florence’s for a long time to see leadership shift. I’m glad my grandmother finally listened.”

“I think you scared her.”

“Maybe,” I say.

I take in as much as possible, but a yawn escapes towards the three-hour mark.

My grandmother paces. “We’ll put everything up to a vote in the new year. We’ll have a pot for nominations in the community garden until then and anyone with multiple nominations will be on the ballot. Unless there are more questions, everyone’s dismissed.” She waves the dismissal.

But she’s not done yet. Several people catch her before she can scurry off and she’s stuck. We stay where we are until everyone clears out before we follow her back to her house.

“You did good,” I say.

“I hope so.”

“I must admit, I was enthralled,” Wick says, surprising me.

My grandmother stops and turns to stare at him. “Truly?”

“Yes. Everything was on point and I agreed with it all. I remember Ethan talking about it when we were younger. I’m glad his dream is finally taking root.”

She nods. “He and Florence would be good leaders.”

I hold up my hands and back away. “Nope. I don’t want that kind of responsibility. My big boy job is teaching, that’s it.”

Wick snorts at me and scoops me in his arms. “And that’s enough.” He turns to my grandmother. “I just wanted to say how much I’m impressed with how the meeting went. You did a good job.”

“I appreciate that, Warwick.”

“Wick, please,” he says.

Grandmother tips her head. “Wick.” She pats his shoulder. “The two of you need to come and raid my library some time. I’m downsizing again. Bring Flo when you do.” She turns, and before she steps up onto her porch, she asks, “How’s Rosco?”

“Good,” Wick grins. “He’s so good.”

“He’s getting apples?”

“So many,” I say as I squeeze Wick’s hand.

“Good. Good,” my grandmother nods and takes the few steps up the porch.

Wick presses a kiss to my head as he teleports us and it's just the two of us in our cottage living room.

"Have I told you how much I love Hex," Wick says. "And the new leadership is just going to make everything better."

"You used to hate it here."

"I was wrong." He flops down on the couch and Rosco scurries over and pounces in his lap.

Vi happily buzzes in the little indoor garden by the big bay window. It's got all her favorite flowers and a feeder I clean for her every day.

Outside, Florence's Hellhound, Fleece, who looks like a Basset Hound, brays at something she's found.

There's nothing I'd change. Not the journey to get here, nor who I'm with. It's been a ridiculous winding road to get here, but Wick's my person and I'm never letting him go.

SIX MONTHS LATER

Warwick

Warwick's Wicked Bakery looks like it needs a hazard sign out front, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Ethan grins up at me from the register as I flip the open sign to closed. The bright blue apron with his name embroidered into the chest brings out his eyes. I smooth his floppy hair out of his face. Without his encouragement, I never would have been brave enough to open this place.

My tail wraps around his arm and pulls him closer to me. "I think we had a successful opening day, don't you think?"

"Very successful. Everyone loves this place." His eyes take in the place. Not one goodie left behind. "You need to make more for tomorrow. A lot more. Might need to hire some help."

"I'm considering it. I need to figure out how much to make each day, but ..."

Ethan cocks a brow and tips his head.

"I got something just for you. Come with me?" I say as I nod to the back room where I bake all the goodies.

"Something just for me?" He acts all innocent. I've got him all week for spring break. That's why we chose to open this week. I figured I needed some extra help opening, but things might die down. I hope they don't. I loved today and hope it's like this all

the time. The morning rush was exhilarating. Then came the afternoon rush and I'm glad we shut down at three. I need the rest, but first... I need Ethan.

My new demon type isn't anything exciting. I'm a basic bitch pretty much, but I don't care. I'm free. Ethan is free. Florence is free. My world is peachy.

With Hex under a new leadership council, things have been different. Poor Poe got nominated several times over and ended up being the winning demon. I feel for him since he's the king of crossroads and already has a lot on his plate, but he accepted the mantle of leader. Honestly, it's probably a good idea. Of everyone nominated, he has the most experience leading. But it is a lot more work than just dealing with crossroads demons.

Cordia got nominated for the witch side of the council, but she declined in favor of a young Belladonna witch who graciously accepted. A dragon shifter took the shifter spot, and a vampire I've never met took the vampire spot. There was a wildcard where they threw all the rest of the nominees in a bucket and picked one. So there's a second shifter on the council. Since Hex is mostly shifters, it makes the most sense to me.

I beckon Ethan with my tail as he follows me to the back room. "I have something I need to test to see if it's worth keeping in my kitchen and I need your... tongue."

We're in the kitchen and I set him up on the countertop so I can rummage in the drawer below him.

He takes the place in. "I love that it smells like you."

"Or I smell like cookies, and that's what you like."

"Not just cookies. But pastries and brownies and donuts and?—"

I steal his words with a kiss before I walk over to my giant fridge. “Take off your pants,” I say.

And by the sounds behind me, he does just that.

“I know how fond of rose icing you are. I want you to taste my latest version before anyone else.” I turn to find him palming his naked cock. His eyes are half-lidded as he watches me saunter back to him.

“I needed to be pants-less for this?”

“Not at all, but I wanted you out of your pants so I can taste test the icing too.” I drop to my knees and lift my spatula. “This is the instrument I need to make sure lives up to my standards.”

He grins, knowing I need to do nothing of the sort. “Use me as you will, my demon.”

I scoop icing from my bowl onto the tip of the spatula and offer it to him. He takes the tiniest licks of all mankind before it’s clean.

“Best version yet.” He licks his lips.

I bring my spatula back to the bowl and dip more icing on. “I need to make sure.” I slather it on his hard cock. His breathing picks up, and he watches my every move. I love how he responds to my touch. I lick a strip along his shaft, gathering all the icing down that line. “Hmmm. I’m not sure. You don’t think it’s too sweet?” I dip my finger in the icing and offer it to him while I suck more off his cock.

He mimics on my finger what I do with my tongue and I’m panting. I free myself from the confines of my jeans and fist my cock. Jerking in time with Ethan sucking my finger and the licks of my tongue.

“I’m so close, Wick.” Ethan moans as I lave his cock with my tongue even as I’ve licked off all the icing. His hand grips my hair and I come over the side of the counter just as he spills down my throat. His thighs grip my head until he flops back to catch his breath. “Fuck.” He throws a hand over his eyes and he looks adorably wrecked. I did that. I did that to my Ethan. My perfect Ethan. “I got you an opening day present, but it’s not as good as an icing blowjob.”

“Whatever it is.” I push to my feet and bring him to me for a kiss, mingling the tastes of his spend with and the rose icing. “It’ll be amazing. I just know it.”

Ethan slides off the countertop and attempts to walk on his jellied legs to the far back room, where we have a few lockers. He comes back with a small box in his hand and he drops down to one knee.

My heart races. What’s happening?

“I’ve loved you for so long. You never questioned my dreams, and you never stopped looking for me. I hope I bring as much happiness into your life as you bring into mine.” He opens the small box to reveal a beautiful silver band with a blue stone the same color as his eyes in the middle. “Wick, my demon, will you marry me? I know we’re already bound, but I’d love to be bound to you in a human way, too. If you’re agreeable to it.”

I drop to my knees and gather him in my arms. “Yes.” My heart is near to bursting. “I’d bind myself to you in all ways possible. I’m yours now and forever.”

The End.