



My Dirty Witch (Horns, Hexes and Heathens #2)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: I suck at magic.

That's normally not a bad thing, but when you're a witch?

Honestly, having been banished to earth and in the company of humans isn't that bad. I mean, I have a home, friends, and even a few hobbies, but that doesn't stop me from being plagued with nightmares or make breaking the curse feel any less impossible.

And while it feels like spending my life alone is inevitable, I crave the physical touch of a lover. The itch to find my heart's mate is back and louder than ever.

When your best friend's dad is your wingman—and a demon—it's all kinds of awkward meeting the love of your life.

But here we are.

The adorable and eccentric owner of the magic store believes in witches and is into the same kink I am. I want to say that it's fate, or meant to be, but when nothing in my life has ever been easy, I don't want to get my hopes up.

Is my love life finally going to evolve from spying on my roommates or am I destined to remain a virgin for eternity?

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X

Faustus is a demon hotter than the flames of hell, and sometimes I wish he wouldn't come to dinner.

With all his designer suits, fancy watches, and sexy smiles, he makes me trip over my words.

Faustus is my roommate's father, and yes, I have a little crush on my friend's dad. Not anything I'd act on. Mainly because he scares me more than excites me, but I won't deny he's an attractive man. Sex on legs and sin personified. I can appreciate how easy he is on the eyes.

But he's not my type.

"Dinner was amazing as always, X." Faustus's smoky, rough voice, which probably sounds amazing during sex, cuts into my thoughts. He only uses that voice to compliment me, and I swear he does it on purpose just to watch me squirm.

"Thank you. Dave told me your favourite was strawberry shortcake, so I gave it a whirl."

And by giving it a whirl, I mean multiple attempts at baking that found their way into the trash before I found a winner. A good spongecake is surprisingly difficult to bake

.

"That's kind of you."

He makes a show of sliding his fork full of whipped cream into his mouth, and I look away. He laughs to himself, and if he weren't Dave's dad, I'd tell him to fuck off. The ego of some demons is beyond irritating.

"So, Dad, what are your plans for the rest of the night? It's not every year you turn 549 years old."

"Don't say it out loud," Faustus moans. "It makes me sound old, and I'm not."

"You definitely don't look a day over fifty in my books." Charles pats his hand as Dave clears away the leftover cake.

"So, are you going out to party? What has Dave planned for you?" If I have to squirm with Faustus's teasing, I'll make Dave uncomfortable just because it's his dad. Seems fair to me.

Dave whirls from the counter, eyes wide. Returning to his seat next to his father, he prepares a coffee and looks to Charles, his partner, for help. He doesn't get any.

"Uh, nothing? I mean, did you want to go out, Dad? What do you want to do?"

Faustus, to his credit, seems genuinely uncaring about the evening plans. Perhaps he's happy eating cake with his son, son-in-law and their awkward roommate.

"You know, I hadn't thought about it." He places his fork back on the plate with a final lick. Leaning back, he props an ankle on one knee before turning to Dave. "But I should go out. It's been a long time. Do you mind being your dad's wingman?"

Dave sputters into his coffee as Charles laughs.

"Wingman?" Dave's voice cracks like he just hit puberty, and I stifle a laugh. "Like

to bring someone home for sex?”

Faustus grins and catches my eye. Then he winks. I suppress my smile. He loves to poke at his son whenever he can and honestly, so do I. Dave makes it so easy sometimes.

“Sure. Why not?”

Dave grumbles and looks towards Charles again. They do that mind-reading thing that only they can do, and Charles places his hand on Dave’s shoulder.

“I think Dave finds it awkward to cruise a bar with you since he has me waiting at home. Why don’t you and X go out?”

Now I sputter.

“W-What?! No. I mean. I can’t be your wingman. I’m barely a...man. And you’re... you don’t need help to get laid, Faustus.”

His booming laugh sets me at ease, but he leans across the table. Eyes twinkling and a smirk on his lips.

“You need to work on your confidence. How about this? I’ll be your wingman, then. We’ll go out, and maybe we’ll both get lucky.”

Shaking my head and sending pleading looks to Dave and Charles, I struggle to find words.

“You’re...y-you’re...a hot demon who can have anyone he wants. I’m an awkward witch. I blend into the wallpaper for fuck’s sake. They’ll flock to you—”

Faustus claps his hands together, rings clinking. “It’s settled. Go change. You and I are going out, X.”

When I don’t move, he lifts an eyebrow.

“Is there a problem?”

God dammit , he needs to put that voice away.

“I don’t drink.”

“So have a cola then.”

“I’ve nothing to wear.”

“You can borrow something from Charles.”

Faustus and I stare each other down and I’m out of excuses. With a huff, I push away from the table. “Fine. Charles? Dress me up, please.”

Together, Charles and I walk down the hall to the suite he shares with Dave. He bumps my shoulder as we walk.

“You sure you’re okay with this? He won’t force you if you’re really against it.”

Charles has been a friend since he and Dave showed up here almost a year ago. He’s the closest person I have to confide in, and he knows I have a low-key crush on Faustus. Anyone would, but when you’ve been cursed to be a virgin until you find true love, you let your imagination run away every time you meet a man like Faustus.

He’s not relationship material in any way, and I consider him a friend of sorts—just

not one I want to go clubbing with.

“I know. It’s just...” Lowering my voice, I lean closer. “He’s a hot dude. You agree, right?”

Charles snorts as he motions me into his suite. Once the door is closed behind us, he releases a breath .

“X, I know. The man oozes sex and confidence, and he’s intimidating. I get it. But also, you said before that you want to meet someone. If you want to have the curse lifted, you need to find the person to do it.” He flings open the door to his closet. “Faustus will keep you safe and probably give you tips on how to give good head at the same time.”

“That’s not helping, Charles.”

He shrugs as he flips through his dress shirts.

“Probably not, but it’s the truth. Now tell me what vibe you want tonight. None of this all black shit. You don’t want to freak out anyone because they think you’re some kind of vampire freak.”

“No, I’m just a witch freak.”

“Here.” He hands me a lavender dress shirt and a pair of charcoal suit pants. “Put those on and let me see.”

I undress as Charles rifles through his closet, and I’m impressed his pants fit me so well. Maybe a little too well. Pulling at the crotch, I try to readjust, and Charles laughs behind me.

“Those pants really present your package. That’s one way to get noticed.”

Scowling, I focus on my reflection in the mirror as I button up the shirt.

“I’d prefer to be noticed for me and not what’s in my pants.”

Although I wasn’t kidding when I said I was plain. If it takes a look at what’s in my pants to draw someone’s interest, I should accept it .

“How long have you not been sleeping?”

Charles knows about the curse I carry, and while I’ve lived with him and Dave for over a year now, I’ve never told them the entire story.

“It’s been four years now.”

The anniversary of the fifth year is approaching. Not only do I miss my first love, but I long for some sense of normality again.

“Can you do me a favour?” Charles smooths out the collar of my borrowed shirt. “Have fun tonight. Pretend you have no problems. No curses. No lack of sleep. Nothing. You’re X, and you’re a sexy motherfucker looking for dick.”

Laughing at Charles, I shake my head. With the way he talks sometimes, you’d never know he used to be a priest.

“With your man’s dad at my side. Looking for dick with him might be difficult.”

He shrugs with a knowing grin.

“You just never know. Faustus might surprise you.”

“Dear God, where are we?”

“Don’t ask god. He’d never step foot in here. Too much skin...and sinning.” Faustus winks as we approach the doorman to the sketchiest-looking building in a hundred-kilometre radius.

The doorman recognizes Faustus and waves us both in.

“Okay, but really, where are we? I’ve lived here for four years, and I don’t know this place.”

It’s quiet, but a gentle thumping of music vibrates beneath our feet as Faustus leads us down a darkened hallway. When we turn the corner, the sight of two men making out greets us. Clearly exchanging hand jobs in the hallway, they pay no notice to us, and Faustus simply keeps walking.

I bump into the wall because I can’t stop staring. Faustus takes my elbow with a chuckle and sets me straight again.

We pass several doors. Some with windows and some without, and it’s with slow-motion clarity I register what this place is.

“Faustus!” I whisper-yell and he turns to me.

“Is this a sex club?”

“Well, yes. Where did you think I’d bring you? A bar on Main Street where anyone can get in?”

“Um, yeah. That’s what most people do.”

“Come now, X.” His lips tilt in a sexy smirk. “Am I most people?”

A flicker of flame behind his eyes blazes for a second before disappearing as fast as it came.

“How many people here know you’re...not human?”

“Are you worried about my safety, X? That’s so sweet.” He smirks before motioning me to follow him again. “The doorman and one bartender know. That’s only because my office holds their souls.”

Thank goodness I’m a friend of Faustus. I’m not sure I could survive making a deal with him.

“You’re probably right.” Faustus’s lips tilt in a predatory grin. “You wouldn’t be able to survive a deal with me.”

“Would you stop that? Reading minds without permission is wrong!” I huff my annoyance and glare at him. “I feel violated.”

He hums under his breath. “But it’s so useful with the right people. Besides, trust me. I won’t let anything happen to you. Dave would try to kill me if I did.” He cocks his head. “Not that he’d succeed, but he’d try.”

We’ve now reached the end of the hallway and Faustus steadies his hand on the door handle. “Ready to get lucky?”

“Can you please not talk like that?”

“Fine. Let’s go cruise for hot guys,” he mocks with a tilt of his head. “Better?”

“Marginally.”

That seems to satisfy him, and he pushes open the door. It’s not at all what I was expecting. Although, I’m not sure what I should expect? A room full of people fucking?

“This is the main room, X. You approach people here, or they approach you, and if you find someone to your taste, you make plans.”

Okay, that doesn’t seem too bad. I don’t have to have sex unless I want to. Which is also cool. I mean, I want to, but the whole curse thing is a bit of a drag.

When I was thrown from my coven and left to die, my brother added his own parting gift for my supposed betrayal to my family. A virgin you will remain until you find true love .

So not only am I cursed to be a virgin, but I’m also cursed with nightmares reliving that night and watching my best friend take his last breath in my arms.

And I can’t have casual sex. It’s been a real fun time for me. Thank god for mail-order sex toys.

Following Faustus around the perimeter of the room, he pauses at another doorway. “I thought we’d start here for the night. You like to watch, don’t you?”

For once, I don’t feel an ounce of shame over it and nod. “I do.”

I more than like it. I love it.

“Good. Have a seat and I’ll be right back.”

Entering the room as I'm told, I find an empty chair along the wall. Single people and couples dot the raised platform on similar seating, but it's clear the people on the platform are the show.

I don't care about the genders of those having sex. There's literally a cornucopia of couples and more for me to watch. While I prefer watching men, I'm not opposed to watching women.

Faustus likely knows I prefer men since that's what makes up 90% of the room. And he knows I used to spy on Dave and Charles, my roommates. In my defence, they fuck where everyone can see, so I wasn't being creepy. Charles also enjoys knowing they can get caught. It drives Dave feral at the possibility of anyone seeing Charles, and it's quite the erotic show if you happen upon them.

The fact that's the extent of my sex life is rather pathetic. Well, that and all the stuff I store in a box under my bed.

I thought it would be awkward coming to a club like this—not like I had a chance to even process it until Faustus had me down the hallway and I saw the couple jerking each other off—but it's very upscale and not at all what I would have expected.

The platform in front of me rotates—not quickly, but every few minutes, there's a subtle turn, and I have a different angle or couple directly in front of me.

A glass clinks beside me on the small table and Faustus pulls the front of his dress pants up before taking the seat on the other side of me. He pops the button on his suit jacket and rests his foot on the opposite knee. This is no big deal for him. He surveys the room with a casual disinterest, and I wonder what he really brought me here for.

“Don't worry, X. I won't make you watch me do anything. That would be...what do you young ones say? Hella awkward.”

I snort with a shake of my head and sniff the drink he brought me. The sharp aroma of cherry brandy makes my mouth water.

“It would make me uncomfortable to see you naked, yes. ”

“Who said anything about naked? I just want to have someone’s lips around my cock. Happy birthday, right?”

This is hell.

Not only am I sitting in a sex club with my friend’s hot dad, but he’s now cracking jokes and talking about getting blown by a stranger in a club. This whole damn night is awkward, and I hate my friends right now.

Dave can say goodbye to chocolate chip cookies for a week after this.

Faustus grins over his glass.

“How about I leave you here for a while so it’s not awkward?” He raises a hand. “I didn’t read your mind. I’m just assuming you’ll enjoy it more if I leave.”

“It’s your birthday though.”

“It is. And I’m going to find someone to suck my dick like they need it to survive as a gift to myself. Just wait in the main room when you’re done, and I’ll find you...eventually. Tell the bartender you’re with me.” He stands with his drink and doesn’t give me a chance to respond. “Enjoy yourself, X.”

And that’s how I end up sitting in a room full of voyeurs, for I don’t know how long, but I’ve emptied my drink several times and the waiter keeps bringing me more. I should go find Faustus and end this evening. It’s pointless for me to be here.

I won't be finding true love tonight.

Or ever.

The odds of me finding a man who loves me, believes in witches and wants to date a virgin are pretty low. Not to mention enjoy being watched. That's quite the combination of must haves for a partner.

Some might even say it's impossible.

The stage makes another rotation and until now, there's only been couples or groups having sex on the platform. My new view is a solo performance. And he has all of my attention.

Leaning forward, I let my arms hang between my knees and stare at the most gorgeous man on the planet.

His black hair is wild, like he ran a hand through it wet and let it dry where it landed. One stray lock hangs on his forehead in an untamed curl. He's not wearing any kind of suggestive clothing like others were. It's just him in a t-shirt that he's rucked up under his chin and a pair of ripped jeans. He's soft in the middle, with a line of dark hair leading to where he has his hand stuffed in his pants.

The man's cheeks flush when he notices he has my undivided attention. His tongue peeks out to lick his lips, and he seems unsure if he wants to show me what he's hiding. Fuck, I want him to show me.

What's the etiquette here? Can I approach him? Do I call out?

"Show me your dick and jerk off while you stare at me!"

I must project my desire well because he moves into action. He lifts his hips, sliding his jeans down his thighs. Pre-cum glistens on his belly, and he strokes himself, long and sure, while I watch.

What I wouldn't do to help him with that .

The gorgeous man's chest heaves and his head falls back as he loses himself in his pleasure. His free hand slides up his chest to tweak his nipples, and heat rushes to my cheeks. My cock aches for the same attention, but I'm mesmerized by the man in front of me. His hand quickens, and he lifts his head. The lusty stare of the stranger focuses on me. It's an electrifying jolt when his gaze meets mine. For a moment, his aura flares to life around him, and my breath catches. It had a shape! The man shudders and comes, shooting thick white ropes on his stomach and chest. His aura blazes to life again before fading away quickly.

He holds my gaze with his lips parted. Perhaps to say something? Did he feel me when his aura flared like that? My heart pounds at the fleeting notion that this could be someone for me. While I can see auras on most people, they never look like that. It has to be a sign. Fuck, I want it to be a sign.

I want to ask his name. Get his number. I want to do this again. What if he's the one?

But it's then that Faustus returns and shatters my bubble of hope.

"Well, are you ready to go home now?"

"No, I want to—" When I look back, he's gone. Vanished, like he'd never been there at all.

"Some wingman you are Faustus. The one man I've found in four years who holds a scrap of interest just vanished."

He at least presses his lips together with regret, and I shake my head .

“Don’t. Let’s just go. Did you get your birthday blowie like you wanted?”

“Heh...I did.” Smug satisfaction colours his grin. “Made a deal too that was impossible to turn down.”

Faustus smirks, and I don’t even want to know what kind of fuckery this man gets up to on the daily.

“I don’t need details. I’m glad it went well.”

With a last glance around the room for the mystery man, I leave with a sigh.

Seems fate still hates me, after all.

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Clark

“Hey, Clark? Do you want me to unpack this shipment?”

My teacup clatters on the saucer as my employee's voice breaks through my daydream.

“Please, Louis. You know what to do.”

He nods and returns to the unpacking waiting in the storefront. He's a good man. Louis needed a job that would understand his mood swings and perhaps treat him a little kinder than the rest of the world.

I don't mind taking a chance on him. So far, he's been a good worker and doesn't judge me for my eccentric shop or beliefs.

Beautiful Belladonna is my baby. This magic shop, with all the books, magic-themed giftware, and items to cast spells, is my life's dream. Ever since I was a kid, I was obsessed with magic. Even when I swore the love spell I made for Adam McIntyre worked after he punched me in the face. He noticed me when I chanted over his lunch, though. So, technically, it worked. Magic has had its hooks in me since then, and I couldn't let it go.

Bubbling cauldrons are so Hollywood. Real magic is spells cast through words and the mixing of potions with ingredients combined with mortars, not your mom's bullet blender she forgot she owned. It's watching the cycles of the moon and harnessing the power of planets with the perfectly timed spell. Magic is everywhere if you

practice and learn to work with the universe around you.

And right now, instead of balancing my monthly ledger, I'm flipping through the Spells of Today weekly journal, wondering how the heck I can summon the fantastically gorgeous man from the sex club.

Which I had never been to before in person. I'm not a cam boy, but I've gotten off while people watched me online. It thrills me almost as much as practising magic. I love being watched, and it was one million times better when the watcher was right there in front of me and not behind a screen.

A weird tingling whoosh ran through my entire body while I was on display in the club. It intensified the longer I held eye contact with that man—the hot-as-sin man in the lavender shirt.

The man with brown hair in a messy bun and molten gaze locked on me was real. I could have touched him if I wanted...well, if he agreed, that is. Lord knows I wanted to. But his companion showed up when I thought about stepping off the stage. The dude was enormous and, to be honest, scary.

So, I bolted to avoid the embarrassment of perhaps the partner not being into voyeurism. But the man in the pretty lavender shirt with gorgeous eyes has been all I've been able to think about since.

“Boss, what do I do with these alabaster things?”

My daydreaming comes to an end to tend to Louis.

“They're mortar and pestles. Price them and put them on a display.”

He hesitates, but I reassure him. “Louis, I'll check your work and if I have

suggestions, I'll tell you, okay?"

With a nod, he leaves my office and I take a sip from my tea, but it's grown cold. I should make more, but it's likely to turn cold again. I'm too distracted to drink it.

"If there was ever a time to have a spell work, it should be now. I need to find this stranger."

The way he watched me while I jerked myself off in front of him set me on fire. He wasn't like the others in the room. He invested his attention and catalogued every inch of me. The man's eyes made me feel like I was being undressed, even though I was already mostly naked. His was a stare that stood out, and his gaze was a string that pulled me to him. The man wanted to watch as badly as I wanted to perform.

And that tingling feeling was new. Not unwelcome either. People say they come so hard they see stars. I didn't see stars, but I saw...something. And I want to see it—him —again.

Of course, finding him is only the first hurdle.

Inevitably, once I find a man, the next stumbling block is having them accept my belief in magic and respect my store like it's not some stupid hobby. I make damn good money here and it's thriving. Sure, a lot of my customers think it's a big joke, but they still give me their money.

The monthly magic club meetings boost my income into a range that sometimes feels surreal by the time they leave. So, it's a legitimate business, and it thrives because I believe in it just as much as magic.

I need a man who supports my love of magic and this store.

I won't budge on that. Ever.

But I'm not a master of spells. I've dabbled my entire life, and while I've been successful a handful of times—those daffodils didn't bloom on their own!—I've never been successful with a love spell.

If I had been, I wouldn't be thirty-eight years old and still searching for the perfect man. I came close once. But asking me to give up this store was a no-go.

“A-ha!” I bounce in my chair as I keep reading.

There, in the weekly journal of spells, is a note about love spells. A new combination of words and ingredients has brought positive results! The woman claims she's mixed the same four ingredients and chanted the same words while playing Ed Sheeran music, and the next day, a man knocked on her door!

They're dating!

This is excellent news. I have these ingredients in stock and I'll check the phases of the moon before I try it.

Marking the page in the journal for later, I leave the office to find Louis still unpacking the shipment and doing a decent job arranging a display.

“Looks great, Louis. What do you have left to do?”

“I have a second box still to enter into your inventory. And I thought I'd reorganize the table of books in front. Your magic meeting is next week, right?”

“It is.”

He smiles big and taps a finger on the book table.

“They said they’re talking about spells for the fall since Halloween is coming. So I thought it might be cool to have a display of fall stuff?”

“Brilliant Louis. That’s a great idea. If you take the book down titled Seasonal Sorcery , there should be plenty of spells for autumn you can pull information from. The sky is the limit with what you decide.”

The smile on his face is my reward for trusting him.

“I’m going to run down to the bakery. Do you want one of those apple fritters?”

“Oh god, that would be great. I love those things.”

“I know.” I wink as he laughs. During his first week of work, I brought a box of fritters in, and he ate them all. But if my leaving free snacks out helps him even a little, I’ll do it as often as I can.

“Oh, Clark, you should take a flyer with you to the bakery and ask to hang it up. Having a bigger magic club wouldn’t be a bad thing, right?” Louis hands me an information sheet from the pile on the counter.

“Another splendid idea, Louis! I’ll do that. ”

Since it’s a gorgeous fall day—and winter will be here before we know it—I walk to the bakery, armed with the flyer and my wallet.

I love everything about the fall. The colours, the smells, and the drop in temperature. I’m not a huge pumpkin lover, though. They’re cute to look at, just not to eat, and that’s a hill I’ll die on.

The aroma of freshly baked donuts greets me as I step into the bakery. Nothing would ever make it to the shelves if I worked in a bakery.

“Clark! Good afternoon. How’s business these days?”

The owner of the bakery is a good man. Andy Dauphin has worked at the bakery his whole life and bought it from his father a few years ago. We met at a meeting for business owners hosted by the Chamber of Commerce when I first opened my store. Andy took me under his wing and gave me advice that I soaked up like a sponge. Knowing what store sells garbage bags at the lowest price is valuable information.

“Hi ya, Andy! Business is good. How about you?” I scan the display case, and I’m relieved to see the apple fritters still there. One time, there was a small altercation in the store over the last fritter. A ninety-year-old man won the fight with his cane. You can’t mess around when it comes to Andy’s apple fritters.

“I can’t complain. You know what they say. No one would listen anyway.”

We both smile and laugh, and I hold up the flyer for the magic club .

“Do you mind if I post this on your bulletin board? I’d like my magic club to grow. It’s been a while since anyone new has joined.”

“Of course. Pin it up there. Pull down anything that’s passed and make room. People love looking at that board.” He assembles a box while we talk, and I pin the notice. “How many fritters this time? Is Louis still working out okay?”

Satisfied with the flyer’s place, I turn back to Andy.

“He is. He’s gaining confidence but still shaky.” I point to the lemon-filled donuts. “I’ll get two of those as well, please.”

“I think I’ll hire a young lad from the outreach centre. Also, a recovering addict like your guy. He has no baking skills, but he’s been clean for two years, and the counsellor there recommended him. As an ex-priest, I trust his judgment on the guy’s character.”

Andy places the donuts and fritters in a box, and I grab two loaves of bread from the shelf.

“I hope that works out for you. I know Louis still struggles with money. It’s hard to live when you make a low wage, and I can’t justify paying him something too high. But I bring fritters and a loaf of bread sometimes. He’s proud, but he’ll take the help here and there when I offer it subtly, you know?”

“You’re a good guy, Clark. You give me the courage to help someone out.”

I pay for my purchases and chat with Andy a bit more before leaving. On my way out, a small group arrives and immediately flocks to the notice board.

I have a good feeling the magic club will grow.

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X

I wonder if Dave and Charles were rabbits in a previous life?

They certainly go at it enough to think they were. Even telling them the walls are thin doesn't deter their escapades.

But at least they're thoughtful. Last week, Dave bought me a pair of noise-cancelling headphones and a subscription to a white noise service. Which I appreciated because it at least told me they weren't being mean and rubbing all their sex in my face.

Not that I wanted their parts directly in my face, but I watched them sometimes when they were in the garden. It's my space, too, and they don't exactly seem to mind. But I'm horny and lonely—don't judge.

Tonight's lack of sleep, though, isn't due to my two closest friends screaming out orgasms like baristas calling out orders at Starbucks . No, it's nightmares again. And this one felt so real that I woke up with my throat still raw from my scream.

If I wasn't such a lousy fucking witch, I could probably make the nightmares go away. But since all the spells it seems I can really muster are domestic cleaning and cooking ones...I'm out of luck with conjuring a sleeping spell.

Dave enters the kitchen, and the light from the refrigerator spills into the darkened kitchen. He grumbles at something when the door closes, likely his loss of light, and I snap my fingers.

The small light above the kitchen sink flickers on, and he turns towards me in the darkened living room.

“You there, X? I didn’t see you.”

“Yeah, I’m here.”

My teacup clinks when I shift on the sofa. Dave finishes making his snack and sits across from me. On a dinner plate, he has two brownies, a handful of carrots and a sandwich piled high with various lunch meats.

“How do you eat so much and still stay in shape?”

He shrugs. “Probably all the sex.”

“I shouldn’t have asked.”

“Hey, don’t get mad at me. You asked. It burns a lot of calories when you’re as physical as we are.” He flexes an arm, making his biceps pop. “These babies work hard when I need to lift Charles up and—”

“I get it, Dave. Thanks.”

He chews his sandwich, and we sit in the dark.

Companionable silence. It’s how I got to know Dave over the last year since he showed up here at this wayward home for misfit beings. Imagine a demon more angelic than his devilish father, who never had the heart to rip someone’s life apart. Well, unless you dared to fuck over his beloved Charles. Then there was a problem.

“Want to talk about it?”

“It’s always the same, Dave. But I haven’t slept properly in four years.” The tightness in my chest coils tight and I breathe. I breathe again and Dave’s hand on my knee brings me back to the present. “And I feel like I’m about to slip out of control. But without my coven, there’s not much I can do. My powers are locked, and it’s the curse I have to bear.”

“You know how you do those healing spells? Like, when Charles got hurt, and you healed his bruises right away? Can you do that with sleep as the root cause?”

I’d often wondered the same thing, but when I tried, it never worked. Likely just me sucking at magic again. I may possess the power to help with sleep, but I’m too inept to actually do it.

“I’ve tried a few times with no luck.”

“Sorry.”

And he means it. I know he does.

“So...weird question, but you know how you and your dad do the mind-reading thing?”

He nods and shovels a brownie in his mouth.

“Is it...like...” I puff out a breath, and he laughs.

“What do you need help with?”

“So, your dad brought me to a sex club. Did he tell you?”

He snorts and milk shoots out his nose. I snap my fingers and the paper towel roll

zips over and thwacks him on the side of the head before falling at his feet. He glares before picking it up and wiping up his mess.

“He didn’t tell me and next time, make sure you tell me stuff like that when I’m not eating.”

“Sorry.” I wait a beat while he mops up his mess. “So, your dad took me to a sex club and left me in a voyeur room. I saw the most handsome man blow his load right in front of me. I even saw his aura, which isn’t strange, but the shape it held was, and—”

“Hold up. Was my dad with you the whole time?”

“Oh...no. He literally left me in this room.” Scowling into my teacup, I’m angry all over again. “Which is why I asked about the mind-reading thing. Your dad came back as the handsome man was about to say something to me. I’m sure of it. He was going to...well, whatever you do in that situation. When I turned to address Faustus, my dream guy was gone.”

Dave eats more of his sandwich and rolls his hand for me to get to the point.

“Anyway, if we...I don’t know, walked around town or something, can you just read anyone’s mind and maybe find my guy?”

“Well...” He wipes his fingers on the paper towel before clasping his hands together. “I’ve never actually tried. The only time the messages or visions were strong was with Charles. Sometimes I’d get bits here and there when I was still trying to do demon work, but it wasn’t much.”

“Damn. I was hoping you could be an antenna.”

He shrugs. “I can try. I’d do that for you. You said he had a different aura, so maybe I could pick up something like that.”

“Oh! Maybe! Because it’s rare for me to see anything that’s not the usual glow around humans. Unless...shit...maybe he’s not human?”

This opens so many possibilities if he’s not human. Even if he is human and he believes, that works too, but... “How soon can we do this?”

Dave yawns and stands with his dishes.

“Tomorrow? I need to take Charles to the outreach centre. Why don’t you come with me?”

“That would be great!”

With a nod, he leaves me alone to my thoughts again and the rest of my sleepless night.

“You two stay out of trouble.”

Charles leans up and kisses Dave on the cheek, but Dave pulls him closer and kisses his lips instead. Charles melts into him and they kiss until I clear my throat. Seriously, these two.

Dave steps away and shoots a glare in my direction.

“We never get into trouble.”

“Uh-huh. Sure. What about the time someone at the grocery store saw X floating? Or the time you sneezed and your wings shot out because you didn’t wear the right

shirt?”

“Okay, fine.” Dave steals another kiss. “We’ll stay out of trouble and pick you up at 2 P.M.”

Charles agrees, and once he’s gone into the outreach centre, Dave sighs.

“I don’t like him being here so much, but I know it’s important to him.”

“He needs to feel useful. I understand that.”

Most days, I feel as useless as the ‘ g ’ in lasagna. I don’t work, and I can barely cast a spell. All I seem to be good for is baking Dave cookies and keeping the back garden alive.

“So, what thoughts do you want me to try to pick up on? What’s the guy look like?”

We left the vehicle in the central parking lot earlier. Dave and I walked into the downtown core after walking Charles to the centre for his volunteer time. I figured the best shot I had to locate this guy would be where a lot of businesses and offices were—if he was even local.

“So, he sort of looks like Superman. The old Clark Kent, not the new one.” Dave stares down at me blankly. “Right. You’re not a typical person who ever watched TV. Let me show you.” Pulling out my phone, I find a photo of a young Christopher Reeve and show it to Dave.

“Oh, cute. I like the curl thing on his forehead.”

“Me too. So, my mystery guy had a bit of hair hanging down like that, too. Not in an S , though. He’s not super buff either; maybe heading to dad-bod territory, but not

there yet. Gorgeous dark eyes.” I glance up at Dave as he walks, scanning the people on the street like he’s on a mission. Which I suppose he is.

“I can describe his dick if that helps.”

Dave scrunches his nose.

“Yeah, no. I don’t need to think of anyone else’s dick but Charles’s. Tell me about his aura. Maybe that has clues.”

“So, it was weird. When I first saw him, there was nothing. But once we locked eyes, it just... poof !” I fling my hands wide. “It was all around him and the usual mix of colours, but there was a section that had a distinct shape like maybe a bell? It was gone so fast that I didn’t have time to really focus on it. But it was different.”

As I talk to Dave, I scan people on the street, and I stop right in the middle of the sidewalk, struck by how impossible this task is.

A woman behind me swears as she narrowly avoids me, and Dave pauses after a few steps to turn around and pull me to the side.

“What’s wrong?”

“This is hopeless. You’re not a mind reader. We’re literally searching for a needle in a haystack. I don’t even know if he lives here!”

“Hey.” He lowers his voice and touches a comforting hand to my arm. “I can’t imagine how you must feel, X. But we’ll try to find him. Do you want to take a break and get one of those apple fritters at the bakery? That’s my second favourite next to your chocolate chip cookies.”

Huffing out a breath, I nod.

“Yeah, let’s just...I could eat.”

We both laugh and continue walking to our favourite bakery. I agree with Dave that the apple fritter is pretty amazing, and if that can’t cheer me up, nothing will.

After inhaling one in the shop, we each take another to go. On the way out, I notice a flyer tacked to the bulletin board.

Do you believe in magic?

Join our monthly magic club and practice spells and potions in a non-judgemental environment.

We’re always searching for new witches and warlocks.

Join us on the last Thursday of every month.

Beautiful Belladonna

573 Scott Street

6 P.M.

The last Thursday. That’s this week.

“Hey, Dave. You ever heard of this place?”

He turns to see what I’m reading and shakes his head.

“No. I’m not even sure where it is. Do you want to go find it?”

“If you don’t mind? It sounds like a magic store. How did I not know it was even here?”

Dave sets his gaze on me.

“Part of the curse, maybe?”

I’d never thought of that. Could it be even after the coven cursed me with nightmares, no sleep, and hardly any magic skills that they hid something from me in plain sight that might help?

Of course, they did. They want me miserable. I was supposed to die!

With renewed optimism, Dave and I set out to find the Beautiful Belladonna.

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Clark

“ I ’ll see you on Thursday, boss.” Louis raps his knuckles on the door frame. “Don’t stay up too late.”

He smiles, knowing full well I have a habit of losing myself in the web of reading when new spells are out, along with an approaching harvest moon.

“Thank you, Louis. I’ll do my best.” Laughing, I rise from my seat and follow him to the front door. “You know me well.”

“I know what hard work and dedication look like. And I say if it brings you joy, then good. Life is too short, you know?”

“It certainly is. Have a good night, Louis.”

Locking the shop door behind him, I switch off the main lights, leaving the window security lighting on.

Once I’m back in my office, I pull out my supper from the mini fridge and eat my loaded salad while scrolling through the various threads on a witchcraft chat board. Discussions have been ramping up the last few days with excitement over the moon phase and magic pull.

I’m just as excited. My regular magic club meeting will be a larger than normal group because of the phenomenon, I hope. And I want to harness the moon’s energy and attempt a new spell.

For him.

The man from the club has consumed my thoughts. I've lost sleep researching spells and potions to bring me something, anything, to help find him. Going back to the sex club seems like a waste of time. My pass was only for one day as a trial. Purchasing a membership and going every spare moment hoping to find him seems more difficult than attempting a new spell.

"Hmm...this person added simple spearmint to a base of cardamon-infused distilled water and changed the words in her spell to... Oh ! This is interesting!"

Setting my dinner aside, I scribble notes of ingredients and outcomes and spells until my hand cramps. My eyes droop, but I fight the sleep my body wants. I want a chance to try this spell before Thursday's meeting, but perhaps I should do it in the comfort of my home tonight.

Switching off my computer, I gather my coat and pack up the rest of my dinner to eat later. Before I leave, I scan the store shelves to make sure I have the right ingredients and pack away what I need to bring home.

Patting my pockets to locate my keys, I sigh. "Crap, I forgot my phone on the desk."

Hurrying back to the office, the moment my hand closes on the phone, the entire store plunges into darkness. A thick electricity snaps in the space, making the hair on my arms stand up. A low buzz vibrates through my feet, and my mouth turns dry.

What the hell is going on?

Feeling my way out of the office, I hope the streetlights might cast a glow inside the shop, but the feeling of being rubbed against a balloon only grows stronger. There's no light, but there are muffled voices.

“What do you mean, you can’t see it?”

“I’m telling you, all I see is a brick building with paper on the windows!”

“This is the place. I’m looking at the sign. There’s stuff on the shelves inside. It’s a store, X.”

My heart pounds in an erratic rhythm. The voice belonging to the one who can’t see Beautiful Belladonna imprints on my entire being. There’s a visceral need bleeding through their voice. Like they can’t go on with life until they enter. A plea that feels oddly personal and I can’t ignore.

They need to see me.

And I need to find the owner of that smooth voice.

The voices grow distant, and the electric feeling vanishes almost as fast as it came. The lights pop back on, and an icy breeze rushes by me as I catch my breath.

“Magic,” I whisper into the silent store.

Something or someone was here. I know it as sure as I know my name.

My knees wobble, and I reach for the wall.

Who were those voices? What did they do ?

Most importantly, can they come back and teach me what it was?

Scrambling to the front window, I look out onto the street and see no one, but that static feeling still lingers.

Along with something else I can't quite put my finger on.

After tossing for hours, I slide out of bed and head to the kitchen for a cup of tea.

I've been on edge since the lights went out and that crackling filled the store. The phrase I overheard keeps running through my brain.

"What do you mean, you can't see it?"

A person speaking couldn't see the building. Standing right outside and looking at my storefront, they couldn't see Beautiful Belladonna.

Unless they're actually blind, what does that mean?

As the kettle whistles, I pull the well-used reference book off its shelf and sit at the table.

A History of Witchcraft: Spells, Potions, and Lifestyle.

The leather-bound book was the first thing I bought myself when Beautiful Belladonna turned its first profit. The kettle clicks off, and after pouring my pomegranate tea, I flip to the section on cloaking and invisibility.

Only the most powerful sorcerer could master a cloaking spell and render an entire storefront invisible. Which begs the question, why? Who or what would want to hide Beautiful Belladonna?

It's not a simple spell to learn and needs years of practice to master. But it also needs an initial potion containing fairy dust, which isn't something you can find unless you have access to supernatural beings.

Sipping my tea, I let that sink in.

“If that person couldn’t see my store...” The teacup clatters back to the saucer. “Oh, my god. Real sorcery is happening to my store.”

Shoving away from the table, I pace the small kitchen.

They noticed me and are hiding me. Why?

Am I getting too good at real magic and they’re suppressing me? That seems absurd. Why wouldn’t they want to take in the guy with magic skills? Unless they feel threatened.

And who the hell are they !?

“Shit. Maybe I’m onto something that threatens them.”

My fingers tug at my hair while I try to puzzle out what this means, and I’m only coming up with two possibilities.

Either I’m great with my spells, and they’re nervous I’ll discover a secret, or they’re hiding me for protection. I don’t know from whom, but they cloaked my shop from that voice for a reason.

Not only do I want to know why, but I want to find that voice.

I need to.

Turning back to the witchcraft book, I read until the sun comes up and it’s time for work.

But I'm no closer to any answers.

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X

“Can we ask your dad? He has connections all over, doesn't he? How can I go to a magic meeting if I can't fucking see the building!?”

What a goddam mess.

“What's going on?”

Charles arrives with a smile and settles on the sofa next to Dave.

“There's a magic shop in town, and my ex-coven has cast a cloaking spell on it. I'm positive it's their doing. Dave can see the shop, but I can't.” I pass him the flyer. “We found this today, and I'd never heard of the place. When we got to the address, Dave described something completely different as we stood outside, both of us looking at the same thing!”

Charles frowns. “Do you think whatever is inside could help your skills or break the curse?”

“Maybe? I mean, it wouldn't hurt to meet people who like magic, right? I could at least talk about it without feeling like a freak because magic is real. Why else would they hide it from me? There's something inside that can help. I'm sure of it.”

If there wasn't, why hide it from me? It's the only thing that makes sense. But I don't have the power to break a cloaking spell, and if I can't break the spell, I can't go inside the shop.

“What do you think, babe? Can your dad help? He must know a guy who knows a guy or something?”

Charles, bless his heart, bats those eyelashes at Dave.

“I’ve already asked if he can check it out and get back to me. He said to give him a day.” He hesitates, and his gaze flicks to me.

“What, Dave? What aren’t you telling me?”

“Well, you asked me to be your antennae, and while we were outside that place, I had a quick flash. It might be related to your guy, or it might not.”

“What did you see?! Don’t leave me waiting!”

“A man’s hand and maybe the letter U...it was some kind of symbol, I think.” His face falls when I don’t register any reaction. “I’m sorry I’m not much help, but it was strong, and it came from inside the building.”

“The building X can’t see?” Charles watches me closely, and I nod.

“I really hope Faustus can help.” Slumping on the sofa, I lean forward with my head in my hands. “I don’t know why exactly or what it is, but this feels like I’ve stumbled into something big.” Charles changes seats to sit next to me and reaches for my hand.

“Are you okay? Do you want to talk about it?”

Dave’s curious gaze catches mine, and the compassion that made him a horrible demon for his world shines through.

“There’s so much you both don’t know. I’ve told you how my coven threw me out

because I didn't want to practice their black magic. Much like you, Dave, I didn't want to cast those kinds of spells. I often stepped in when I shouldn't, and it got me in trouble."

Dave nods. He understands exactly what I mean, and I wonder why I never unloaded all this to him before. Of all beings, he knows what it's like not to belong.

"I'm cursed for a few reasons. The virginity thing was just my brother being extra cruel."

Horace. He hated me.

Not just because I was in love with a witch from our rival coven, but because I convinced him to run away with me. Clarence was his name. We had plans. Until it was all ripped away.

"There's a coming-of-age ceremony we do. When a witch turns twenty-one, you gather in front of the entire coven and state your intentions. It's all just a show because you've decided your role and have been practicing for years at this point. But that's what we did."

I hated it then, and I hate thinking about it now.

"Anyway, we all wore big fancy robes and met on the hallowed ground for a ceremony. The high priest would bestow a spell on you to raise your powers to the next level. That was the only useful part of the ceremony."

That day will forever be seared into my brain. I miss Clarence every day; I wish I could go back in time to push him away. He was such a light to the dark world we were in. Two kindred spirits finding comfort in a place we felt we didn't belong.

“X?” Charles’s hand wipes at the tears on my face, and I let him.

“My best friend, Clarence, died that day.” Charles squeezes closer and waits for me to continue. Dave hovers, but he listens with a tight jaw. “Me and Clarence had a plan. We were going to get the blessing and then announce we were leaving. Neither of us liked black magic.” My voice cracks. “He was so kind and beautiful.” Gulping in air, I stare at a patch of floor away from the sympathetic face of Charles. “I never got to tell him I was in love with him. I think he knew, though.”

“Oh, X.”

Charles squeezes my hand and hands me a tissue. Dave swears softly under his breath.

“They knew. Both our covens already knew our plans. My brother found out and snitched on us.” My lips twist in a pained smile. “He’s why I’m so good at all the healing spells. He liked to practice his dark magic on me. Sometimes he just used his hands, but he knew my weakness was Clarence. I took it all so my brother wouldn’t hurt him.”

A low growl sounds from Dave, and he stalks from the room. Charles watches after him for a moment before turning to me.

“Thank you for sharing that, X. You know we both care about you and want to help. Is your brother responsible for the entire curse, then?”

Shaking my head, I wipe the tears from my cheeks.

“My father set it in motion. He was the coven leader. At the ceremony, he threw us out with the wish that we both never find peace or happiness because of our betrayal. I was to spend the rest of my life alone and in unrest because I brought shame to the

coven. We were the example for anyone else.”

My father transported us to the forest that bordered the portal to the afterlife. It was a violent spell, like being caught in a tornado. We clung to each other, and with every blow to my body as we flew to our destination, something cracked or broke. Clarence took the worst of it, even though I tried to wrap myself around him for protection.

With a shaky sigh, I remember holding Clarence after the force of the spell dissipated and finally allowed me to take in our surroundings. He was a limp rag in my arms, the colour fading from his skin even as I tried to breathe life into him with my broken fingers and muttered words. All the skills I had were gone. There was nothing I could do for him except hold him close and hope death came for me, too. But my brother appeared and wanted me to suffer more.

“When I finally came to my senses in the forest at the edge of the afterlife, my brother was there. He saw me with Clarence while I was a sobbing mess, holding him and trying to use my healing spells to bring him back.” A sob escapes as I remember with vivid clarity how it didn’t work. “He...he laughed and then cursed me to remain loveless and a virgin forever. Because I should love the magic before anyone or anything. It was my lesson, he said. My punishment for being soft.”

“Can I give you a hug?”

Charles’s tear-stained face breaks my heart, and I open my arms with a nod.

I clutch at him like the lifeline he’s become. If only hugs could take all the heartache away.

“Listen, I’m tired, and I’m going to attempt to sleep for a bit. Thank you for listening.”

“Anytime, X. We’re here for you.”

With heavy feet, I walk to my room and close the door softly behind me. After stripping out of today’s clothes, I collapse on the bed. This is the part I hate. The bone-dead tiredness seeps from my pores, and yet...sleep takes forever to come. When it finally does, it’s plagued with the memories of that night. Over and over, I have to relive the loss of my closest friend and the only man I ever loved. Then I get to wake up and remember that I’ll never have that feeling again because of the curse.

A stupid curse because my brother hates me that much.

This magic club and Beautiful Belladonna are the first glimmers of hope I’ve seen since I’ve been here.

I’ll grab onto it with both hands and hope Dave and his dad can help.

Before dozing off, my thigh flares with a burn that has my hands flying to the spot where my witch’s mark sits. Another strike to my magic abilities. An incomplete witch’s mark is an incomplete witch. Incompetent magic.

But tonight, it pulses on my skin, like a heartbeat, and as I watch, the mark blazes brightly. Half of an upside-down U is how I’d describe it. Most days it sits like a forgotten birthmark. Of course, today, when I feel sleep on the horizon, it has to flare and remind me I’m alone. That I’m a shitty witch, and not even my witch’s mark is complete.

With a sigh, I lean back and stare at the ceiling and hope tomorrow will bring good news.

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X

“Fellatio!”

With a quick flick of my wrist, the spell for washing dishes comes to life.

The tap fills the sink with warm water, and the bottle of dish soap floats out from under it. I hate washing dishes.

I may be shitty with magic, but thank god I have enough skills to cobble together simple domestic spells.

“Did someone say fellatio?”

Charles wanders into the kitchen with a lopsided grin. He reaches for the coffeepot with bed-rumpled hair and a smirk.

“Calm down. I said it, but it’s not what you’re thinking. It’s my kitchen spell.”

He shrugs as he pours creamer into his coffee.

“A guy can hope it was on the breakfast menu.” Charles plunks into a chair at the kitchen table with a laugh.

“Dude. You can have it whenever you want. I’m ninety-nine percent certain Dave will never say no.”

“You’re right.” He sips from his cup. “Still would be cool to see it on a menu, don’t you think? What did you make this morning, anyway?”

“French toast, sausages, scrambled eggs, banana muffins, and chocolate chip cookies. Big as your head cookies.”

Charles pauses his coffee drinking and softens his gaze.

“How bad was the nightmare last night?”

With a puff, I lean back and scrub a hand down my face. Bad is such a general word. Sushi can be bad. A movie can be bad. But my nightmares? Bad doesn’t even come close to describing them.

“It was...very realistic. I barely slept.”

When I can’t sleep, I cook.

I also cook when I’m stressed or anxious. Cooking or baking of any kind is a soothing balm for the anxiety the nightmares leave behind. But along with the nightmares last night, I laid awake thinking of the building I can’t see.

“Have you heard from Faustus yet?”

Dave ambles into the kitchen with the same rumpled bedhead as Charles.

“Dad sent me a text and said he’d be here this morning.” Dave drops a kiss on the top of Charles’s head before pulling a mug from the cupboard. “He also asked if you baked those muffins he likes.”

“Service me!” I snap my fingers and the breakfast food warming in the oven appears.

Plates and cutlery clatter on the table, along with various condiments from the fridge.

Dave dodges the ketchup bottle as it loses its cap on the way to the table, leaving a trail of red along the floor. The bottle plops onto the table and knocks my coffee cup over. The remaining coffee inside pools on the table's surface and trickles to the edge.

With a deep sigh, I survey the mess. Dave pats my arm.

"I know it bothers you when your magic isn't perfect, but we don't mind."

Charles cleans up the coffee spill and the ketchup. Dave sits across from him and fills his plate with food, completely unfazed. He has two settings, horny and hungry. A kitchen mess won't stop him from settling the growl in his belly.

"I know. I just wish...I want better."

Dave cuts into his french toast and reaches for the syrup. Thank goodness that made it to the table without spilling. I found it by chance at the grocery store. It's from a small sugar shack in Quebec that honours the producer's late husband. That's something I can support, and it felt like the right thing to do. It's also damn good syrup.

"Back to Dad." Dave swallows and points his fork at me. "He said he has news, and if he's coming in person...it must be important."

"I have muffins." I offer weakly, and Dave smiles.

"He'd come even if you didn't make muffins. You're like family to him." Charles sips at his coffee and returns to his breakfast after cleaning the mess of my spell.

“If there’s one thing Dad regrets, it’s not being as fatherly to me as he should have. But he’s a demon.” Dave shrugs and runs his bacon through the ketchup on his plate. “He’s not built for that sort of thing. But he also has his soft spots. He loved my mother once. He’s not all bad.”

“And somehow, I’m family to him now? He likes my cooking and teases me.”

“But he’s making a personal appearance. For you. Not Dave.” Charles glances at Dave before he continues. “Faustus has few soft spots, but the three of us are important to him. He may show it in odd ways, but make no mistake, X, he cares.”

I shake my head at Charles’s nonsense.

Dave finishes his stack of french toast before raising his eyebrow at me. “Never underestimate my father. He may be more on the evil side, but he’ll help if he feels it’s right.” He tilts his head, and his forehead scrunches. “Someone could die, but he’ll help.”

Charles reaches for a chocolate chip cookie from the plate on the table.

“This reminds me of the first time we met. Remember when I was in the church kitchen?”

Dave hums and leans over to bite Charles’s cookie. “How can I forget? You were so hot when you—”

“Guys, please stop. We’re eating here.”

They both chuckle and eat cookies. Happier than anyone has a right to be. But that’s what I want. Someone to look at me like Dave does Charles and share a cookie with.

We continue to chatter over breakfast, but the entire time, my thoughts are focused on what Faustus needs to come here in person to say .

“For fuck’s sake, goddamn bullshit!”

The three of us turn to the doorway where Faustus stands. One foot is stuck in an old rubber boot, with an oversized toque on his head, and an old hockey sock over his shoulder.

“These minions better get their fucking transport systems fixed, or I’m forcing them all to eat Taco Bell for the rest of their damn lives!”

He shakes off the boot and rips the offending articles off his head and shoulders.

“If I have to enter this place from the closet one more time....” Faustus notices us staring and straightens his suit jacket. His usual composure returns and he pulls out a chair at the kitchen table.

“Can I get you a coffee? Muffin or a cookie?”

My voice squeaks as it always does when Faustus is near, and he smiles.

“That would be lovely, thank you, X.”

Skipping the spell to pour coffee, I do it myself and take a moment to will my heart to remain in my chest and for my mouth to stay shut.

But I should know myself better.

“Please don’t make me wait, Faustus. I’m not above begging. I have to know what you found out.”

Faustus presses his lips together as he pulls a muffin apart with his ringed fingers.

“Well...how much do you still love your family?”

“I...I don't? They left me for dead, and my best friend died because of them.”

He pops a piece of muffin in his mouth, a slow smile spreading across his face.

“I was hoping you'd say that.”

Faustus chews slowly and doesn't seem to care that I'm about to burst off my chair and shake him. Consequences be damned.

Dave's hand on my arm stops me when I move to stand, and Faustus notices. His ice-blue eyes focus on me, and for a moment, I see the softness Charles and Dave spoke about earlier. But it vanishes as fast as it came.

“Feel like going to visit a certain store today? Beautiful Belladonna?” Faustus wipes his fingers on the napkin before leaning back in the kitchen chair.

“I can see it now?”

He rests one foot on his knee, and his suit pants slide up to reveal a pair of smiley-face patterned socks. “See it, go inside, shop, burn the place down...whatever you want.”

His words are too good to be true.

“How? What...I mean...what did you find out?”

He runs a finger over his lip as he chooses his words.

“Your father would have made a wonderful demon. He had a deal with someone a lot higher than me for his first-born son for, well, let’s just say too much.”

My jaw drops.

“He traded my brother for power? Holy shit.”

“Well, your brother is mighty powerful himself, as you already know.” He sips from his mug and turns an ice-cold stare my way. “But he’s no match for me.” His words are like a bucket of ice and I shiver with the lack of emotion.

“It was a cloaking spell on the building, so your intuition was right. Funny thing, it turns out you need hands to cast those spells. In fact, you need hands for most spells, is my understanding.” Leaning forward, he finishes his muffin and smiles. “This is delicious as always, X.”

“Did you...is my brother...”

“Ten fingers short of a good time?” He sneers. “I know you hate your brother, X. I know what they did to you. Let’s just say I had some fun last night, and people paid for how they treated you. That’s all you need to know.”

“But why? Why would you do that for me?”

Faustus, in another rare moment of softness, gazes at Dave.

“Because sometimes you’re gifted with a family by blood. Sometimes you’re not. But it’s always something to treasure when you have a family you love.” He turns to me. “You’re a good man, X. And you’re part of this family. I did what I needed to help. I just hope you find what you’re looking for there.”

He stands abruptly and claps Dave on the shoulder.

“Son. Walk me out?”

Dave leaves with Faustus, and I sit in stunned silence with Charles.

Will I find what I’m looking for?

Dave returns a few minutes later .

“I’ll take you back to the building today if you want company.”

As much as I want to do this myself, it might be good to have a friend nearby.

“I’d like that. Let me get dressed and we can go.”

Dave parks the car across the street from the magic shop and kills the ignition.

“How do you want to do this? Want me to come in with you or wait outside?”

“Do you feel like browsing a magic store?”

Dave shrugs, but there’s a small smile forming. “I’ve never been to a magic store. It could be fun.”

Smiling back at Dave, I nod.

“Don’t touch stuff if you don’t know what it is, and ask me anything. I’ll sign up for the magic meeting and have a quick look around.”

“Don’t rush on my account, X. Take your time. It’s a big deal.”

Releasing a puff of air, my shaking hand opens the car door. He's not wrong. It is a big deal. As we walk to the building that only yesterday I couldn't even see, I'm breathless .

Beautiful Belladonna: Magic is everywhere if you believe.

The sign is gorgeous. The controversial belladonna plant set behind its name is scrolled in perfect old-world calligraphy, making my heart pang.

"Hey, you okay?"

Dave's hand on my arm has me nodding my head.

"Sorry. I was just thinking of how the sign alone reminds me of home." Swallowing thickly, I reach for the door. "Here goes nothing."

Pulling the heavy wooden door open, I hold my breath as I step into the first place to make me feel like a witch since I was a child.

Letting my eyes adjust to the dimly lit store, I drift towards the bookcases first. Pulling a book of spells out, I flip it open and browse the first recipe I come to.

"A potion to hypnotize," I murmur as I run my finger down the list with a sigh. "Clearly, this is a joke. These ingredients don't make a hypno-potion. And they're lacking a crucial ingredient."

Dave browses the shelves lined with jars of ingredients. He pulls out a pair of reading glasses and leans in closer to read the labels. I'll have to ask him what he thinks. And when he started wearing readers.

Placing the book back on the shelf, I choose another book based on the title in gilded

golden letters along its bright red spine. ‘ Casting Spells: A Guide to Snagging the Love of Your Life. ’ More garbage advice and ingredients. I’m not sure if I should be angry at the misrepresentation of witches or relieved people think this stuff works.

“Can I help you, sir?”

I spin to find an older man smiling. He wears a black t-shirt with the store’s name on the front and a pair of faded jeans.

“Yes. Do people actually buy these things?” I wave my hand at the bookshelves, and the man continues to smile.

“Oh, yes. They mostly come to buy the stuff over there, though.”

He points across the room at a table covered in various items. Crystals. Dried flowers and herbs. Little jars of bones. Butterfly wings. Dave currently holds a tiny jar up to face as he squints at what’s inside.

“And they use that stuff for what? Spells in the books?”

“Yes.”

The man clearly isn’t the owner. Or a salesperson. The owner would have me by the arm and explain why they sell this stuff. The passion for their business and, hopefully, magic would bleed into their words. I want to meet that person.

“Is there a manager I can talk to?”

“Of course. I’ll get the owner for you if you wish.”

As he walks away to find the owner, I slide over to Dave.

“What’s your vibe of this place?”

Dave places the jar he was examining back on the table and folds his glasses back into his pocket.

“When did you start wearing readers, by the way?”

“Ugh. When Charles caught me squinting at the crossword puzzle. But...I don’t hate them.” He glances around the store again and freezes. “I just saw the same vision as last time,” Dave whispers, his eyes huge, and I grab his hand.

“Just now?”

“Can I help...oh my god. It’s you .”

Dropping Dave’s hand, I spin around to stare at the beautiful man from the sex club.

He has the smoothest voice I’ve ever heard. It’s like silk sheets and Swiss chocolate.

His dark black hair, with a single curl that bobs on his forehead just like the other night, is in disarray. Brown eyes as warm as hot chocolate on a winter day blink in surprise.

Swallowing, I search for words and as I do so, once again, the man’s aura flares. Like a burst of the Northern Lights, it surrounds him in a warm glow. The longer I stare at him, the more a shape emerges. But it disappears when Dave speaks.

“This is my friend X. He’s really into magic and potions and stuff. I’m going to walk to the bakery. Take your time.”

Dave leaves me with the mystery man, and I finally find the ability to speak.

“I, uh, wanted to get your number the other night, but you left.”

His cheeks flush pink, and he swallows.

“Um, the man you were with gave me murder-y vibes. Sorry. I freaked out and left.”

Offering my hand to him, I smile again. “I didn’t get your name. It’s nice to meet you. Even if you’re not naked. ”

A firm hand closes around mine, and the contact sends zaps up my arm.

“Clark. Nice to meet you too. Sorry about wearing clothes in my place of business.”

His shy smile makes my heart trip. Then, my brain processes the words.

“You own this place?”

His smile drops, and he shoves his hands in his pockets.

“Yes, and I’m very proud of it.”

Clark takes a step away, his back stiffening.

“I love it. I need to take the time to explore it further.”

His smile returns, and his shoulders relax when he picks up my excitement to be here.

“So you practice magic, then?”

His voice is cautious, and I wonder if the cloaking spell extended to him somehow, too. Isn’t he used to people coming in here to talk about their magic and potions?

“Yes, of course I do. What about yourself?”

Clark’s lips part as his tongue darts out to wet them, and he steps closer.

“Practicing is a good word for what I do.” He ducks his head. “I’m not used to attractive men coming in here and admitting they practice magic. Forgive me. But it’s important to me for the men I like to share an interest in magic.”

Be still my heart. He’s flirting! With me!

“Well, Clark. It’s important to me too. So much so that the reason I came here was to sign up for the magic club. Is there room for one more?”

Clark bites his lower lip, and his gaze nearly burns through my clothes.

“Of course. I need your name and number and you can show up...heck, that’s tomorrow.”

He walks behind the cash register and pulls out a book.

“So, can I get your number?”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

As I rattle off my phone number, the excitement almost bubbles out to a scream.

“Feel free to use my number anytime to contact me.” And, since we’re obviously connecting, I go for it and make it extra clear. “Especially by video.”

His heated stare sears my skin, and he nods with a sly smile.

“Noted.”

Just like at the club, my body sways toward him, and I want to touch, but with some mighty willpower, I step away and keep my hands to myself.

“I’m, ah, I’ll let you get back to work. Nice to meet you, Clark.”

“The pleasure is all mine.”

Before I make an awkward fool of myself, I give him a small wave and exit the store.

And for the first time in years, the future feels bright.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:40 am

Clark

This can't be happening. It has to be a dream.

He's the voice I heard.

X is the voice and the man who watched me blow my load the other night.

And he walks into my store today to tell me he practices magic? He's either a fantastic liar or there's more to this. Real magic is involved. There's no other explanation.

After X left, I immediately copied his phone number into my cell. I'm not stupid; stranger or not, I know what he implied and I'm not about to turn that down.

But now I'm wondering if my spells worked and drew him here? Or did he try the same thing I did? Perhaps our spells met up and made it all happen. I'll need to make a post on the chat boards to get another opinion. But later.

I've been in a perpetual state of arousal since the moment we shook hands.

X is sexy. With his messy bun, leather bracelets, and ripped-up jeans, he presents like a laid-back rock star and not a man simply enamoured with practicing magic. But the ache in my whole body to have him under me is so fierce, I need to inhale multiple deep breaths and force myself to relax.

I'm not usually so quick to get involved with someone, but he ticks all my boxes, and

it's about time I get a break.

"I deserve this, dammit. Don't I?"

My words hang in the empty apartment, and I stare at the blank screen on my phone. The option to FaceTime stares at me, and before I can have second thoughts, I hit call. It goes unanswered for several rings, and, as I'm about to hang up, X's face flashes on the screen. After some fumbling and swearing, his bright smile returns and the screen steadies.

"Sorry." He laughs before taking a breath. "I saw a local number calling by video, and I knew it was you. I had to get somewhere private, just in case." His cheeks are flushed as he stares, and I'm taken aback by his honesty.

"Well, that might be a good thing. What if I called you naked? Awkward if you answered in a group of people, right?"

He cocks his head with a grin. "Not really for you, though. You like an audience, don't you?"

My neck burns as his silky voice sends shivers up my spine.

"I do."

The camera wobbles as X moves around, and there's a rustling before his face comes into view again.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course. I didn't call just to give you a show."

His plump pink lips pout. “No?”

“No. I want to know you. ”

There’s a silence before X asks his question.

“How did you get into magic? What drove you to open a store devoted to something most people scoff at daily?”

He’s made himself comfortable, propped on his bed with his phone balanced on something in front of him, and I wish we were having this conversation in person. But I’m also happy he asked with genuine interest.

“It’s a long story, but as a child, I was sick a lot. I missed a lot of school and didn’t have many friends. To create my own friends, I found books. Magic books. All kinds of them. And they took me away to a place that gave me hope.”

“Hope for what?”

“To be accepted. That magic was real. That I could help others achieve the high of discovering it. Maybe find that tight-knit group of friends I always wanted.”

“And have you found that?” X’s voice is soft with understanding, and he leans closer to the phone screen. I’d kiss him if he were in front of me right now.

“Some. I’m still practicing spells. I still believe it’s out there, though. Magic.”

X’s eyes drop as he looks away from the screen.

“There’s magic out there. It’s not always good, but it’s there.”

When he lifts his gaze back to the screen, there's a sadness there that makes me wish I could pull him into my arms. To soothe the memory that brought on his sadness.

"What's your favourite food? "

X smiles at my abrupt change of topic. "Lasagna. What's yours?"

"Cesar salad with shrimp."

"Would you like to have dinner with me? I can make both pretty well."

X again drops his gaze and nibbles his lip. Fuck, he's cute.

"I'd love to."

A smile fills his handsome face, and those warm brown eyes meet mine.

"Good, good. Ah, how about Friday? The day after the magic meeting?"

"I'd love that."

"Clark...do you..." He puffs out a breath with a crooked smile. "Do you believe in love as much as magic?"

"Yeah." Clearing my throat at the sudden emotions, I nod. "Yeah, I do."

I won't lie and say I intended to make this call to be nudity-free. I most definitely wanted to see skin. My cock has only grown thicker since hearing his voice. But our conversation fuels a different need. Something else I've wanted to satisfy for a long time.

The acceptance and love of a partner. X seems to want that, too.

“I should let you get some rest.”

“Yeah, I’ll try. Thank you for calling. I can’t wait for the club meeting tomorrow.”

“Me too. Until tomorrow, X. ”

After ending the call, I lean back in the chair and wonder if it’s too soon to have feelings for someone I’ve only just met.

But even though we just met, it doesn’t feel like that at all.

It’s like I’ve known him for years.

And he’s exactly what I’ve been searching for.

“You’re kind of jumpy tonight, Clark. You okay?”

Louis gently removes the stack of cardboard cups from my hands and sets them next to the punch bowl. This morning, I made a spiced orange punch since it’s almost Halloween. It’s also supposed to help channel creativity.

“Um, yeah, I’m just...”

With a sigh, I slump into one of the folding chairs scattered around the room.

“There’s a new person coming tonight.”

“That’s great! The flyer worked!”

Louis claps my shoulder before sitting next to me. “Isn’t it? That’s what you wanted,

right? New customers and a bigger club?”

“It is. He’s just—”

“Woo-hoo! We’re here and ready to cast spells! Tonight is the night!”

The usual four members of the monthly magic meeting arrive together; three men and one woman. They’ve been fast friends since they all met here and are the only original members of the club. New people come and go all the time, some for months, others it’s a one-and-done kind of thing. But these four are true devotees of their craft.

“Hey, guys. Come on in. You know the drill.”

They chatter away as they drop their things on the table in the middle of the room. Louis and I hold the meetings in the storefront. We move the displays over to clear a space and set up a circle of chairs with a snack table in the corner and a smaller table in the middle that, if needed, serves as our altar.

“I’m stoked for Halloween. Clark, did you get any of the willow bark in? It’s the last ingredient I need.” Henry grins as he sidles up to me. “A love spell is in the air.”

Henry has flirted since he first came here, and I politely turned him down when he asked for a date. He’s an attractive man, and we have common interests, but there’s no spark for me. I don’t think of him when he’s not here, and not once have I ever thought about him with clothes off. He’s simply not my type.

“And who might you have an eye on this time, Henry? Should I ask?”

“You can ask, but I won’t tell you. You’ll just have to wait and see.”

The group takes their seats with a cup of punch and talks like any group of friends would, except the topic isn't who won last night's hockey game or things that happened in the news. They speak animatedly about moon cycles, spell books, potions, and altars and even about adopting a new energy from within using crystals.

Our formal meeting doesn't start for another ten minutes, and my gaze flicks constantly to the door. I'm never nervous about new members. I've been doing this for years, but with X, I'm on high alert and I just hope he shows up like he said he would. The disappointment will crush me if he's not really into magic, but just yanking my chain.

To distract myself, I fill a cup with some punch and step into my office for a moment of calm. My small office space is comfortable and familiar. The scent of jasmine lingers from the incense I lit earlier today, and after a few breaths, my shoulders droop, and my heart rate steadies.

"Boss?" Louis's quiet voice breaks through my silent retreat.

"Is it time to start?"

"In a few. Just making sure you're okay."

"I'm okay. Just nervous."

I smile to reassure him, and he nods as he exits my office.

Get a grip, Clark.

After tossing my cup into the garbage, I step back into the shop just as the front door opens. X steps in with an apologetic smile.

“Am I too late for the magic club? Sorry, I’m usually early, but I…”

A pink tinges his cheeks when he notices the others watching, and he waves to the group. “Hi. Sorry, it’s my first time here.”

Hazel stands and offers her hand. “Hi! I’m Hazel. This is Henry, Zack, and Morgan. That guy over there is Clark. He runs the show. Come on in! We love having new people. Would you like some punch?”

Hazel takes X by the elbow, leading him to the punch and for once I’m grateful that she stepped in because my tongue is glued to the roof of my mouth. X’s hair is down today, and it flows to his shoulders in a perfect caramel mix of brown and blonde. A long-sleeved Henley clings to his slim frame with the sleeves pulled up to accommodate all the leather bracelets he prefers.

He’s achingly beautiful and I’m staring.

Louis nudges me to get on with tonight’s meeting and Henry’s glare is just as obvious as my blatant staring.

“I thought for tonight we could share what we’ve been working on and if you’ve had any breakthroughs. Then I’ve been working on a special spell that I’d like to get some feedback on before I try it.”

X takes a chair in the circle and smiles at the group. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to go last. I want to see how you do it before I share.”

“Of course.” I smile, and X locks his gaze with mine. One simple look is like a bolt of electricity from head to toe. Swallowing hard, I look away to focus on Hazel, telling us how she’s changed her altar at home and feels more in tune with her surroundings .

“When I swapped the clear crystal for the rose quartz, it was a vast difference. Like, I know it’s just a colour, but it’s been an amazing change for me.”

“Colours are actually very important. They line up with your aura,” X says as he leans forward. “Many people discount the importance of colours, but you really are connected on a molecular level.”

“That makes sense! And I’m not a plain person.” Hazel laughs as she motions to herself. “Look at me. I wear loud, bright clothes and dye my hair colours of the rainbow. Clear crystals didn’t have a chance with me.”

X nods along and his eyes sparkle. “Yes! That’s exactly it. Part of witchcraft is lining up that inner part of you to harness the power of the outside.”

“You know a lot about this. Do you practice often?” Henry cocks his head and focuses on X.

“I do. Multiple times a day, but I have a gift. I see auras, and while I don’t see Hazel’s right now, I sense it. Her self-assessment is right.”

“You see auras?”

All heads swivel to me, and X’s eye contact again lights up every nerve in my body like the bank of buttons in a damn elevator.

“I do. I see lots of things. Some good and others not so much.”

“That’s so cool.” Hazel breathes. “If you ever see mine, will you describe it to me?”

“Of course. I’ll let you know.”

The others in the group share their practices and discoveries, but I barely hear them. X has this energy about him that draws me like a magnet. I can't concentrate. All I want is to have him alone and—

“So, what do you think, Clark?”

Henry's voice snaps me back, and he knows I wasn't listening. The disapproval in his pursed lips makes me wince.

“Uh, you've been practicing. That's great.” To rush past me being caught not listening, I stand quickly and walk to the centre table. “I'm excited to share a complex potion and spell I've been working on with you. We talked last meeting about summoning good things and that's what this one is. I've deviated from recommendations in books and created my own.”

After setting everything up on the table and making sure the group has their notebooks ready—they love taking notes—I launch into my newest mish-mash of spells and potions.

“I'm still trying to create the perfect set of words, but since I like flowers and the rose is symbolic of love, I thought I'd add rose water to the potion.”

“Don't!”

X shouts as he stands, and the group turns to stare.

“I mean, you shouldn't do that.”

“Why not?”

He looks around the room and continues. “Because if the rose water carries the juice

of a thorn, it will kill any bit of love in the potion already. Rose water that you didn't prepare yourself is a risk."

Again, everyone fades away as we stare at each other, and I'm hyper-aware of how close X has drifted to my table.

His hand closes around mine, holding the vial of rose water.

"Let me show you how you test it. It would be a shame to kill all your work with one tainted ingredient." He glances at the shelves of product in the store. "Do you have any butterfly wings?"

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:40 am

X

Clark passes me a small glass jar. Inside, multiple colours of butterfly wings are visible, and I carefully remove a matching pair. Clark's brow furrows as he watches me.

"First question is this. Do you know if someone harvested these wings from live butterflies or gathered them after death?"

Clark nods his head. "I only use a supplier who doesn't kill. Everything here that was once living died on its own."

My shoulders relax, and I smile. "Good. That's important." With gentle fingers, I arrange the set of wings on the table. "Killing animals or insects against their wishes to become part of magic tarnishes your intent. Be sure to research that if you intend a spell to bring good."

Using Clark's dropper from the bottle, I draw up the rose water and hover over the wings. "Does anyone want to step closer?"

Immediately, everyone leaves their seats and crams around the tiny table. Clark's heat at my side reminds me of how close he is. He doesn't touch me, but I know his aura is there. It's reaching for me like an invisible hand, and rather than distract me, it gives me the confidence to show this to the small group of strangers.

"When the water touches the wings, if there's thorn juice inside, they won't keep their colour. If the water is pure rose, the wings will fly again."

After dropping two drops of the rose water on each wing, I return the dropper to the water and pass my hands over the wings.

“Broken wings soar to the sky. Make me believe with my naked eye.”

Bending low, I puff a breath across the wings. The colour returns to the faded yellow on the swallowtail wings, but they sit motionless and wet on the table.

“So, what does that mean if they don’t fly but still have colour?” Henry, despite his earlier dislike of me, peers closer.

“It means it’s not rose water, probably. Or such a low concentration that it can’t do its job. The best roses for spells must be grown with love and care.”

“How do you know all this?”

Hazel cocks her head, curiosity peaked.

“I went to school and majored in botany.” I don’t need to share that it was a school for witches and how to apply botany to magic. “When I started practicing witchcraft, I applied that plant knowledge to this. So often, potions and spells don’t work because the plants conflict with the intentions of the witch. I believe there would be a lot more magic out there if places like this shop existed. Clark’s rose water may not be good, but his butterfly wings are.” I glance over at the shelves of various jars. “I bet 90% of his product is quality because he’s taken time to source properly and not just jam plastic bones and useless crap at you to make a buck.”

Turning to Clark, I raise an eyebrow. “Am I right?”

“You are, but I didn’t think of the implications of improper ingredients. It was just something I thought was important. To source properly. If the seller didn’t create a

quality product, how could it translate to quality magic?"

His lips tilt in a shy smile, and I stand transfixed as his aura glows around him. It's white and gold, pure and radiant, as he stares at me, and I force myself to look away.

"I'm sorry I took over your lesson and butted in."

"Oh, gosh, don't be!" Hazel bubbles over as she smiles at me. "This is probably the most fascinating meeting we've had in a long time." She shoots an apologetic glance at Clark. "No offence. I love our meetings. You do a great job."

Clark laughs at Hazel's attempt to soothe his ego and shakes his head.

"It's okay, Hazel. I'm as thrilled as you. Hopefully, X keeps coming to the meetings?"

Clark focuses on me again, and I know this is a place I never want to leave. Unless it's with Clark.

"Of course I will. I love teaching people about magic."

After fielding more questions from the group, the group finally breaks to browse the store.

Clark places his hand on my arm. "Will you stay after they leave? Just for a while?"

His voice is low, and his breath tickles my skin as he leans closer. "I don't want the night to end just yet. There's something about you..." Clark lets his words trail off and I lick my lips.

"I can say the same. You're—"

“Sorry to interrupt, but I wanted to ask if you plan to go to the Halloween party in the park tomorrow night?” Hazel beams as she juggles her purchases in her arms. I can see why Clark likes these meetings if they all shop like her.

“Yes, I will. In fact, I planned to ask X tonight if he’d like to join me.” He rushes on. “I’ll tell you about it soon. Don’t answer yet.”

Before I can respond to any of it, he’s at the door wishing his group a good night as they all file out. Louis stacks the chairs to put away and when he approaches the table we were using, I step over.

“Would you mind leaving this up for now? I’ll help Clark clean it up, but there’s something I want to show him before I leave.”

“Oh, of course. I don’t mind at all.”

Louis grabs his jacket from the back room and meets Clark at the door.

“X asked if he could show you something, and then he’ll clean up. I hope that’s okay?”

“Of course, Louis. Have a great night. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Clark locks the door behind Louis and returns to me. He shoves a hand in his pocket when he stops beside the table. His other hand absently slides along the edge of the table. An inanimate caress.

“So, X, Louis says you want to show me something?” He’s back in my personal space, and his closeness almost makes me want to show him something else. The way his gaze travels over my body confirms he’d be okay with that offer.

“I thought you were the shower here and not me?”

He smiles with a quiet laugh. “True. But first, I need you to tell me the truth. Are you really into magic or was tonight an act? Because I need you to be real with me. This is important, and I can’t be involved with someone who doesn’t respect what I do.”

Oh, Clark. I hope you can handle what I’m about to do.

“How real do you want me to be?”

“What do you mean?”

“What if I were an actual witch? What would you do?”

Clark’s forehead scrunches as he thinks about that, and it’s the cutest thing ever.

“Like you’re actually a master of witchcraft or something else?”

Wiping my palms on my pants, I decide this is it. If he learns my secret and decides it’s too much, I’ll walk away right now. I’ll even move on from this town if it’s too much for him. But I don’t believe it will be. There are too many signs for Clark not to be the one for me .

“I’m an actual witch, Clark.” Puffing out a breath, I continue. “When I was twenty-one, my coven kicked me out. For the last five years, I’ve lived in this town with a curse I’ll tell you about later. But I’ve been searching for someone like you for five years.”

Clark chews at his lip, and I know he wants to believe me. We both want this, and it’s a critical hurdle for both of us.

“How do I know you’re not just feeding me this as a lame attempt to...I don’t know, use the store or even get in my bed because you know I’m into this?”

His eyes swirl with emotions I can’t pick out. Maybe hope, definitely disbelief.

“Let me show you.”

Turning to the table, I carefully remove another pair of butterfly wings from the jar and set them up exactly as before.

“Earlier, what I said about thorn juice corrupting your rose water was true.” Placing two drops onto the butterfly wings again, I watch as the vibrant colour returns. “Your water is pure.” Passing my hands over the wings, this time I utter a different phrase.

“Wings be free. Wings be light. Wings rejoin and take flight. Volant! ”

With a soft breath over the wings, I stand back and watch Clark’s reaction as the butterfly wings flutter and come alive. Without a body to attach to, they flap along and spin around the room, almost as if they were working together.

“Of course, they’re not really alive. They’re just wings. But I didn’t want to show that to the group.”

Clark’s mouth hangs open, and I’m not sure how to take his reaction.

“ Subsisto .” With a snap of my fingers, the wings float to the ground.

“My full name is Xavier. This is the best magic I can do. I mostly suck at magic, except for a few spells around the house. But yeah...I’m a witch.”

Clark swallows and looks from the butterfly wings to me and back to the wings now

lying on the floor.

“Can you please say something, Clark? I’ve never told another human. Well, except my roommate, but...is this too weird for you?”

“No. It’s...I’m...” He puffs a breath before stepping closer to me. “I’m shocked, but this is probably the second-best thing you could have told me.”

“Second? What’s the first?”

“Yes, when I ask if I can kiss you.”

“Are you asking now?”

His lips lift in a sexy grin. “X, can I kiss you right now?”

“You can kiss me now, later, all night, and in the morning, Clark.”

His eyes search mine, and the little curl on his forehead bobs as he dips his head.

“You won’t turn into a frog with a kiss, will you?”

His lips hover next to mine. “I think you have your fairy tales mixed up.” My shaky hand slides up this chest, and my fingers curl into the soft fabric of his shirt. “No frog. But I can’t promise I’ll maintain my cool.”

Clark’s lips press to mine, and time stops. Zaps and jolts burst through my body like a live wire, drawing a gasp from both of us. Pulling him closer, I open and accept his tongue. My body flares so hot that I push him back. Panting, I stare at Clark. His chest heaves and the high flush to his cheeks likely mirrors mine.

“Holy shit. Was that some kind of magic again? How does a kiss make me feel all...like I’m...” Clark gestures between us and babbles a few nonsense words before stepping forward to cup my cheek. “X...what just happened?”

“I’d say we confirmed we’re compatible.”

He laughs softly. “We’re something, that’s for sure. I wanted you to stay after the meeting because I want to get to know you and...” Clark puffs out a breath, and that cute pink tinge travels up his neck to match his cheeks. “I want to ask you on a date. You’ve invited me for dinner tomorrow, but there’s this Halloween thing Hazel mentioned, and I’d really like you to go. With me.”

He passes his thumb across my lower lip, and my knees quake.

“I’d likely go anywhere with you right now, Clark. To the park, to the store, off a cliff...”

Clark’s lips tilt into a smile. “Off a cliff? That seems drastic. But I’m flattered.”

“When you’ve spent five years of your life reliving the worst day you lived in your nightmares, you turn a little drastic when the person who can help suddenly finds you.”

“How do you know I can help?”

“You were there when you kissed me, weren’t you?” Clark laughs, and I step closer. “That’s only one sign, Clark, but your aura is trying to tell me something else. And...that’s the first kiss I’ve ever had. You’re my first kiss.”

“You’ve never...been with someone?”

“If I promise to explain it all in time, would you kiss me again?”

Clark says nothing, but he doesn't have to. Instead, he threads his fingers in my hair and tilts my head back, exposing my neck. He teases and kisses along my neck and nips my jaw before finally sealing his mouth over mine.

My entire body presses against him and I wantonly wrap a leg around his waist. Clark loses his balance, and we stumble into a bookcase. His lips smile against mine, but he doesn't stop, and if we don't slow it down, I'm likely to end the night begging at his feet. I don't want that.

Reluctantly, I place a hand on his chest and gently push us apart.

“It's getting late. I should go home.”

Clark closes his eyes with a sigh of regret. He runs his nose alongside mine and I bury my face in his neck. It's so...familiar. Comforting. It's where I belong.

“What time do you want me for dinner?”

His voice is so rough and ragged that I almost change my mind and ask to stay.

“Is six o'clock too early?”

One hand squeezes my ass before running up my leg and unwinding it from his waist.

“It can't come soon enough. Can I give you a ride home?”

“Thank you, but I brought my broom.” Snorting at the shocked look on his face, I shake my head. “I'm kidding. But my ride should be here already. I'll text you my address.”

Risking a last kiss, I drop a soft kiss to his lips.

“Thank you, Clark.”

Clark stands motionless as I walk to the door.

“The pleasure is mine, X. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:40 am

Clark

I 'm having dinner with a witch.

A real one. How is this my life right now?

Of course, I believe in witches and the occult and anything supernatural—I always have, but I never thought I'd meet one. Or kiss one. Or jerk off in front of one. That's a big ole mind fuck to wrap my head around.

And now I'm a nervous wreck, sitting in my car outside his house.

X is beyond perfect for me. He checks every box on my perfect partner list. Including the same kink I enjoy, which makes me hard just thinking about it.

But there's one thing I wasn't counting on.

Dating a virgin.

Everyone has to be someone's first sometime. But it's a pressure I wasn't expecting. When he said I was his first kiss, it didn't register that I would be his first everything. Not until earlier today, when we exchanged texts throughout the morning, did he clarify that he's never been with anyone. Ever .

And I'm not about to shy away from him after that kiss. I don't know if it's magic or just two people completely aligned, but that was a kiss I'd like to repeat every day. And if I pull myself from the car and go inside, I'll get the chance.

After wiping my hands on my thighs and grabbing the gift bag off the front seat, the front door is flung open before I can even knock. It's not X, but I recognize the man he was with when he first came to my shop. Dressed in suit pants and a dress shirt, he gives me a once-over before stepping aside and motioning me in.

"X is still in the kitchen. He's talked about you nonstop."

"Oh? I, um...if it helps, I've been thinking about him nonstop."

The man cocks his head and finally offers me his hand.

"I'm Dave. One of his roommates. I hope you know how special you are to get invited here. Because not just anybody gets in this door. And if you hurt—"

"Dave! Can you not scare my guest, please?"

X hurries over and takes my coat. He reaches for the closet door but changes his mind and hangs it on the coat rack instead.

"Is that for me?" He gestures to the gift bag, and I shift my gaze to Dave. "Um, no. This one is for Dave." I hold the bag out to the man with a smile. "I hope I chose well."

Dave takes the bag and peers inside before finally smiling.

"You got me cookies!?"

"X said I didn't need to win him over, and it was you I had to charm. Since he said he bakes for you all the time, I thought I'd give him a break and I stopped at the bakery. They make the best—"

“Double chocolate chunk cookies ever!” Dave finishes as he grabs one and takes a bite. “Fuck, that’s good. Thank you.”

Without another word he spins, humming as he crunches the cookie and leaves X and I alone.

“So that’s Dave.” X laughs but rubs his arm. “He can be overprotective, so I hope he doesn’t scare you off.”

“He seems nice.”

X hums noncommittally. “He usually is.” X steps closer and laces his fingers through mine to tug me closer. He leans in for a quick kiss, but it doesn’t stay that way. One kiss leads to two, and the chasteness disappears as he backs me against the closet door.

“I can’t get enough of you,” X breathes as he plasters himself to me and sucks on my lip.

“You’re all I’ve been thinking about. I barely got any work done.”

My hands slip down and palm his ass, pulling him tighter to me, and he moans low into my mouth.

“Why did I ask you to dinner? I should have just gone to your place.”

“We can duck out now. They won’t even know.”

A loud bang comes from the closet door and I scream as I jump away, almost falling on X.

“I’d know, and I’d tell everyone.” The man I saw with X at the sex club steps out of the closet and sets a basket of mittens on the floor. His lips curl into a devilish grin.

“So, you’re the man who likes to be watched and has our little witch’s panties in a knot, are you?”

A groan sounds from X as he steps in front of me.

“Come on, Faustus! Don’t embarrass me.”

“But it’s so much fun.” He adjusts the cuffs on his dress shirt as he rakes his gaze over me. He finally offers his hand. “I’m Faustus.”

“Clark.” His grip is firm, and his stare is intense. It’s like he can see into my soul.

“I can. So keep the thoughts PG unless you want dear old Dad to know what you’re getting up to.”

“Stop reading minds like that!” X shoves at his chest and Faustus gives him an amused grin. “For now, I will. Did you make my favourite tonight?” He bats his eyes at X, who snorts.

“I made my favourite. And Clark’s.”

“I’m not feeling the love tonight, X.”

“Just...can you go talk to the others? We’ll be in shortly.”

With a shrug, Faustus gestures that he’ll be watching me and leaves us alone.

“So, you’ve met the two weirdest of my little found family. Faustus is Dave’s dad.”

“Why was he in the closet?”

“Um, because that’s how he usually gets here. He’s a demon. A high-ranking one, too. Golfs with Satan himself, I’m told.”

“A d-demon? Two of them? You’re a witch and there’s two actual demons here?” Black spots form at the edge of my vision and X’s powerful hand on my elbow guides me to a bench in the entranceway.

“Are you going to pass out? Is this too much for you?”

With my head between my knees, I inhale a deep breath.

“I wasn’t expecting it.”

X’s hand rubs my back as I take a few more calming breaths.

“It’s a shock. And I didn’t want to warn you because your response to them will determine where we go from here.”

Finally not feeling lightheaded, I sit up to find X’s troubled eyes on me.

“What do you mean?”

He grips one of my hands and rubs his thumb across the back.

“They’ve been helping me find you so I can break this curse. They’re just as much a part of my life as your store is to you. If you have an issue accepting a mish-mash of non-humans...we probably can’t continue.” He kisses the back of my hand, letting his lips linger. “In a normal situation, I’d ease you into this, but I don’t have that kind of time. I’ve lived with this curse for almost five years. If you’re the one...I don’t

want to wait any longer.”

“They won’t hurt me, will they?”

X smiles with a soft laugh. “Only if you steal Dave’s cookies. They’re mostly good people, but they care about me. If anything went badly, they’d not hesitate to protect me.”

With a shaky breath, I bring his hand to my mouth and press a kiss to his wrist .

“I’d be a fool to walk away from you, and I don’t intend to harm you. Ever.”

X leans over to kiss me and his tender lingering kiss has my heart racing.

“If you two have finished making out, I’m hungry.”

Dave raises an eyebrow from the doorway and another man I haven’t met yet pokes around him.

“Go sit, babe. You won’t waste away.” He smiles and offers his hand. “I’m Charles and I’m human. That’s so weird to say.” He snort-laughs and drops my hand. “Unless you consider former Catholic priests too otherworldly. Which I wouldn’t.”

“Uh...no?”

X stands and tugs on my hand. “Let’s eat before Dave gets cranky. And if you’re feeling uncomfortable with questions, just...remember Faustus and Dave read minds. Faustus is better than Dave, though.”

And with that thought, I’m dragged into the kitchen and sat at the dinner table with two demons, a witch, and a former priest.

Which would make for a great lead-in to a joke if I knew the punchline.

“Dinner was amazing, X. Thank you. I’ll help you clean up.”

X places a hand on my arm. “Thanks, but I’ve got this one.”

He snaps his fingers. “Fellatio!”

The rest of the table snickers as X leans in. “It’s my kitchen clean-up spell. One of the few I’m good at.” He lowers his voice. “Although I could be good at the real thing, too.”

I feel my neck heat as he drops a kiss by my ear and a bottle of dish soap flies by. The kitchen taps run and I look on, amazed at the spectacle.

“This is so insane.” I shake my head as I smile at X. “I can’t believe this is real. That you’re real.”

Cupping his cheek, I lean over for a longer kiss and we get carried away, interrupted by the clearing of a throat.

X puffs a breath in frustration before glaring at Dave.

“What?”

“Will you be home tonight?”

Faustus swivels to watch us and X’s hand creeps up my thigh.

“No. Don’t wait up.”

My hand covers his, and I squeeze back.

X stands and taps me to join him. “The party starts soon. If you don’t mind, we’ll be going now. I hope you all have a good night.”

Charles rushes over and hugs X. “Be safe, and if you need anything, call either of us. We’ll be waiting.”

“I will.” X smiles back and takes my hand, but Faustus stands as we walk by.

“Clark. A moment, please?” He buttons his suit jacket and strides into the adjoining living room.

“Um...am I okay alone with him?”

Dave snorts and pushes me towards the living room. “He’s harmless.”

I disagree, but X nods and waits patiently as I step into the room with the imposing figure of Faustus.

“I’m sure you’re aware by now that we’re quite protective of X. I need you to promise me you’ll keep him safe tonight.”

He casually slides his hands, adorned with rings, into his pockets and waits for my reply.

“Of course. He’s...special. I won’t let anything happen to him.”

His ice-cold eyes stare at me for several beats while I try not to squirm under his gaze. “If you see a man with no hands. Stay away from him and call me.” He produces a thick business card from his pocket and passes it to me. “That’s an order.

Understand?”

When I meet his eyes again, flames burn bright, and, while it's a terrifying sight, I remain calm. This is a man I want in my corner and I'm happy he's looking out for my sexy witch already .

“Yes, sir.”

His lips tilt in a smug smile. “Good, boy. You two have a nice night.” With a clap to my shoulder, he returns to the kitchen, and I find X waiting in the foyer with a backpack.

“Can I change at your place? I want to get this night started.”

“Of course. Let's get out of here.”

After tucking the card from Faustus in my pocket, we leave the house and for the first time in a long time, I'm looking forward to not ending an evening alone.

X

The giant white canopy of a party tent stands in the centre of the park. Dance music carries through the air and the sweet, sugary aroma of cotton candy and candy apples fills my nose.

Carved jack-o'-lanterns, orange and black pulsing lights, and people in Halloween costumes laugh and dance all over the park. I dressed all in black and wore a t-shirt that says, ' This is my costume .' Clark isn't big into costumes either, and he also wore black except his shirt is mesh and cut off at his navel. Right where a delicious trail of dark hair leads downward. When I asked him what he was supposed to be, he shrugged and said he never gets to wear the shirt anymore.

"I didn't know people went to such lengths for Halloween."

A woman with a pointed hat and flowing black dress walks by us. Her rubber nose with warts jiggles as she speaks to her friend, and I grip Clark's hand.

"We don't dress like that. Ever. And I don't know where the idea of a warty witch's nose comes from."

Clark's throaty laugh warms me all over as he peers at me.

"You didn't grow up with ugly witches, then?"

"I did. But their ugly was inside." I tap at my heart. "I don't think humans really understand how magic works."

If you were powerful enough, you'd never be ugly on the outside. Over the years, humans painted us all as ugly, evil things, but many of us were good.

"I sure don't understand it, but I hope with time...you might teach me?"

The sparkle in Clark's eyes is earnest, and his aura flares again. It's so strange how his aura differs from any other human I've met. Not a single part of his aura flashes anything sinister. He's genuinely signalling that he's a good man, and he doesn't even know it.

Without testing him, I know I can trust him. Fully and completely.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Clark's thumb brushes across my cheek.

"Uh...it's complicated. But...I feel like I've known you my whole life, and we were meant to be here like this. And..." Good grief, I need to rein it in. Now is not the time to wax poetic. "Could we get a drink?"

"Of course."

Clark pulls me across the grass to the bar inside the tent, and, after queuing in line, he hands me a green drink in a mug shaped like a cauldron. When I raise an eyebrow in question, his rumbling laugh sets me at ease.

"I couldn't resist just to see your face. I honestly don't know what's in it, but I can get you something else if you prefer."

Taking a sip, I grudgingly admit it's not terrible. "It's sour apple something and isn't horrible." Grabbing his hand, I lead him away from the music and we lean against a tree in the shadows of the party.

“I can see your aura right now, Clark. That’s why I was looking at you like I was.”

“Is that good?”

“For me? Yes. Sort of. But...” Do I just blurt it out that he needs to be in love with me and my life will be normal? Do I tell him he’s the key to me sleeping and hopefully practicing powerful magic again?

Clark sets his drink down before reaching for mine and doing the same. He rests them next to a small bush, making sure they stay upright, and even that makes me smile.

“Let me tell you something first if it’s easier for you?” Clark takes my hands in his, his thumbs smoothing across my knuckles. “The moment I saw you watching me in the club, it felt like a string connected us. A short one that was so tight I never wanted you out of my sight and I never wanted it to break. But people have hurt me in the past. The men I’ve dated didn’t respect my love of witchcraft or felt embarrassed about my business devoted to it.”

He pauses and bites his lip. “When we kissed, I swear there was magic happening because I’ve never felt like that after a single kiss.” He laughs softly. “It sounds so corny when I say it out loud.”

“I felt it too. But you’re my first kiss. I have nothing to compare it to.”

“How can someone as beautiful as you have never been kissed?”

My neck heats, and the warmth of his words wraps around me.

“Am I? Nobody has ever told me I’m beautiful.”

Clark pulls me to him and curls his fingers into my hair. With a frustrated growl, he

pulls the band from my bun and my hair tumbles down. He gathers it in a fist before bringing his nose next to mine. My fingers curl into his shirt as I lean into him.

“I don’t know if it’s a love at first sight thing or what, but there’s nobody I want more than you. In my arms, in my bed.” His lips trail over to my ear. “In my whole fucking life. I want you here, X. And you are beautiful. You say you see my aura, but I feel your soul. We were meant to find each other, I know it.”

My knees tremble as Clark pulls back. “To break the curse, someone needs to love me, believe in witches, and be okay with a virgin. Enjoying the same kink as me is a bonus. But those other things? Non-negotiable.” Shaking my head, I look away. “Falling in love is bigger than believing I’m an actual witch. That’s why I’ve shown you everything so quickly. Magic and witches seem easier to believe in than love. I left the hard part for last.”

Again, Clark’s aura pulses so bright it physically hurts to look, but he tilts my chin up so I’m gazing into his honey-brown eyes.

“I believe in you and anything other-worldly, okay? That’s not an issue. And I definitely don’t have a problem with you being a virgin.” He licks his lips. “Love is...harder. But I believe I can love you. It just might take me longer to get to that part.”

“I understand. I do. And I don’t give up, Clark.” Stepping closer, I whisper in his ear. “We have lust though, don’t we? And there’re hundreds of people here to watch. Do you want to put on a show?”

Clark groans and grips me closer. “It’s a public place. I don’t want to get arrested.”

“But you didn’t say no.”

He laughs as he brings his lips to mine. “You’re right. Follow me.”

Clark kisses me once, hard, before turning and pulling me after him into the trees. We weave through low-hanging branches until we’re far enough from the party so the lights don’t give us away. Dressed in black, it’s not like we stand out either. But voices drift over the night air and all it would take is a single person looking for a place like ours to be caught.

He releases my hand and leans against a tree. Fuck, he’s gorgeous. This excites him and I’m here for it. He runs one hand up his chest and teases his nipples through the mesh of his shirt while the other rubs against his zipper.

“You’re so fucking perfect, Clark. Pull your shirt up. Let me see you pinch your nipples. ”

“Fuck.” He does as I say, and I spread my legs to lean against the tree across from him. It’s the first time his aura has pulsed like a living thing. Not a flow like a lava lamp, but a pulse like a heartbeat. Another unique thing with Clark, which only makes me impatient for love to bloom. He’s the one and the proof literally surrounds him.

But I’ve waited this long already. I can be patient. I think.

Clark’s hand dusts between his nipples and down his abs and back again. His other hand rests over the bulge in his pants, waiting for me.

“Unzip and shove your pants down so your balls rest on the waistband.” His breath hitches with the order and he complies. He’s rough in his hurry to obey and he doesn’t seem to mind. But I do.

“Be gentle, Clark. We have all the time we need.” His shoulders relax as his hand

grips his cock with a lazy tug. “There’re hundreds of people a few steps away who could see you. Do you like that?”

His eyes close as he drops his head against the tree. It may be dark, but it’s not dark enough for me to miss the shine of the pre-cum on his dick.

“Y-yes.”

Oh boy. Cute Clark, all breathy as he shows off for me in a private show, is...well, one I’m happy to have front-row seats to.

“Stroke your cock how you like it. When you’re home alone and wish someone was watching, what do you do? ”

He licks his lips as he raises his head. Honey-brown, lust-filled eyes lock on me as he slides the palm of his hand across the head of his dick and back down his shaft.

“If we weren’t out here and I could have you naked, I’d make you put a finger or two in your ass. Maybe even a vibrator.” His hand moves faster on his cock and his loud moan has me check around to see if anyone heard.

“If you’re not more quiet, someone might find us, Clark. Anyone could wander through those trees and see what you’re doing.” His chest heaves as I talk, so I keep going. “Tug on your balls and be quiet.”

Clark bites his lip so hard that I’m worried he might draw blood. But he still pins me with that stare as he does what he’s told.

“Can I come? I’m close.” He grits out and the speed of his hand increases.

He’s beautiful in his uninhibited way out here. He’s shuffled his feet a little farther

apart and his harsh pants are a compromise to the moans I'm positive he'd rather make.

Stepping closer to him, I trace a finger around one pebbled nipple. Goosebumps race across his skin as his heated gaze begs for more.

"Will you come if I kiss you?"

"Probably."

"Good."

Leaning in, I seal my lips to his, and he opens with a needy whine. The same jolt I felt when we kissed at his shop travels through me and Clark's body shudders as he spills over his fist.

"Don't stop," he murmurs against my lips. "Keep kissing me. Please."

I can't say no to that. He has the softest lips, and it's hard to stop, anyway. Eventually, his laboured breathing returns to normal and the hand stroking his cock comes to a stop, but he doesn't let me pull away.

"Babe..." He nips at my lip, and I smile against his kiss. "We need to clean you up and we should probably enjoy the party a little."

Clark kisses me again before resting his forehead on mine. "I guess we should. But..." He holds up his hand coated in his spunk. "I don't know how we can deal with this and sneak back."

"I can help with that."

Gesturing for him to give me his messy hand, he does, gasping as his eyes widen when I flick my tongue for a taste.

“X...don’t. Not here.”

With a laugh, I pull a few napkins from my pocket and wipe him off.

“I just wanted a taste.”

“Are you sure you want to go to a Halloween party now?” His voice is ragged as he tucks himself back into his pants.

“Well, my first choice is obviously to go home with you and continue this. But I want to see what all the hype is over Halloween.”

His smile wraps around my heart like a beam of sunshine on a winter’s day.

“I hope you have a sweet tooth. It’s all about candy for kids more than anything.”

“Oh! Really? I love candy.”

“Me too. Let’s go before we miss all the contests.”

He pulls me along behind him, heading back to the party, but I plant my feet and make him turn.

“Contests?”

His grin couldn’t get any bigger.

“All fun. Promise.”

And that's how I find myself half drowning in a cold barrel of water, trying to grab an apple with my teeth.

His idea of fun and mine are going to need a realignment.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:40 am

Clark

“ I can’t believe you think those games are fun!”

X scowls as he says it, but I saw him laughing in the hay maze. And how he lit up when he finally got an apple from the barrel to be rewarded with a candy one.

His innocence is so vibrant. All his discoveries lit him up, and it was a joy to witness. His smile and laugh pulled me further into his orbit, and I already know he’s someone truly special.

X slumps onto my sofa as I lock the front door and kick off my shoes.

I take the end seat where his feet are and lift them into my lap. Absently, I rub my thumb into one of his arches and he sighs.

“If you give foot rubs, you’re officially perfect.”

With a chuckle, I move to the other foot.

“You look like you need it. You’re tired.”

He stifles a yawn as he protests, and we both chuckle.

“Okay, you’re right. I’m tired. Do you mind if I shower before bed? ”

Thinking of him naked in my shower sends a wave of heat across my skin.

“No.” My voice rasps as he sits up to slide his lips across my cheek.

“You can join me.” He kisses my neck. “No pressure, though.”

He heads to the bathroom, peeling off his shirt as he goes and as comfortable as if he lived here. I don’t hear the door close, but the water runs, and I take a few calming breaths.

Of course, I want to join him. He’s sweet and sexy and pushes all the right buttons, but something holds me back, and I’m not sure what.

Once at the bathroom door, I’m on autopilot and stripping out of my clothes as I watch the water sluice down his muscular back as he dips his head under the shower spray. His long, dirty blond hair hangs around his face, and I lick my lips at his wet and naked body. This is the first time I’ve seen him naked, and he’s watched me come twice now.

That seems a little one-sided.

Sliding the shower curtain over, I step up behind him.

“I didn’t think you’d come.”

Grabbing the loofah and body wash, I squirt some on the sponge and rub slow circles across his back. The tension eases out of his shoulders.

“I didn’t think I would either, but...I wanted to take care of you. You seem a little unsettled.” X remains silent as he lets me wash his body and if that’s all that happens, then so be it.

“I’m nervous about sleeping here.” He finally whispers, and I almost don’t hear it

over the running water.

“Because of me? If you’re not ready to do anything we don’t—”

“Believe me, it’s not that.” He turns to face me and wipes the hair from his face. “I’ve watched you come twice, and I’d love to be the one to make you come apart, but...I’m worried you won’t be comfortable if I have a nightmare.”

He drops his gaze and I tilt his chin up.

“Why would I be uncomfortable? People have nightmares all the time.”

Tears well in his eyes as he shakes his head.

“I’m not some people, Clark. I-I-I scream and thrash. I lie awake or sweat or all of those. I pace.” His eyes close, and the tears squeeze out. “It’s part of the curse, and until it’s gone, it’ll be very disruptive for you.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” I pull him close to me, and even in the shower, I feel his hot tears on my chest. I ache to give him whatever he needs to feel safe and loved.

“Let’s get you out of the shower, and we can talk more, okay?”

X nods, and I rinse him off before bundling him in the fluffiest towel I own. He watches me with sad eyes, and all I want to do is put a smile on his face forever. I don’t know how yet, but I’m going to try.

“Do you sleep in anything?”

“Sometimes. ”

His lips twitch, and I steal a kiss. “I see what you’re doing. If you let me choose, I’ll always say naked.” Dropping to my knees, I dry him off and pause at the tattoo on his thigh. “Can you tell me about the tattoo?”

His fingers dust over it as he watches me. “It’s called a witch’s mark. It’s also incomplete. When a witch reaches the age of twenty-one, they have their last ceremony to receive their ultimate powers. At that time, the mark turns from grey to black and reveals the final image.”

“And does the image mean anything?”

He nods. “Yes. It’s usually something to show where your strengths lie. Like if your specialty is potions for love, for example, it would have, maybe, a heart on a cloud or something like that.”

I allow my fingers to trace the faded image on his inner thigh. How frustrating it must be to have a constant reminder etched on your body about your past. A past that wasn’t good for you and still isn’t.

Without a thought, I press a kiss to the mark on his thigh. My lips tingle and burn, and I pull away. X gasps as we both watch the space on his skin glow and pulse before fading away. His fingers shake as he touches the top.

“It’s filling in.” He whispers as he traces the U shape. “It wasn’t this big before and this is the second time it’s happened since I met you.”

“That’s good, right?”

“Yeah. It means...I might be a step closer to a sound sleep. ”

X tries to smile and make a joke, but his eyes give him away. This isn’t something

small. It's bigger than I can comprehend, and I hope I can help.

"How about we get you under the covers and try to sleep?"

Tossing our towels on the counter, I take him by the hand and lead him to the bedroom.

"Do you care what side you sleep on?"

"I haven't been able to lie in a bed more than an hour at a time for the last five years. I'm not picky."

"Okay. I like the right side then."

X hesitates before sliding under the covers. He lies flat on his back and stares at the ceiling. If he were any other hookup I brought home, I'd likely ask them to leave if they were this uncomfortable. But he's different. He's a witch, for one thing, and despite his dirty mouth and kink preference, he's vulnerable and naïve.

"Hey." He turns his head and troubled eyes meet mine. "Let me hold you? Even if it's only a few minutes or you wake from a nightmare and punch me in the face...just...let me hold you?"

After a moment, he slides closer and snuggles back into my chest. I wrap my arm around his waist, and he wiggles around, pulling my other arm around him so his head is resting on my shoulder, and the sweetest sigh leaves his lips.

"I didn't think it would feel this good...being held. You make me feel safe, Clark."

Dropping a kiss on the top of his head, I squeeze my eyes closed. This poor man .

“I won’t let anything happen to you. I hope you can sleep even a little.”

But he doesn’t hear me. A soft snore sounds, and he’s out like a light. Hopefully, he sleeps more than an hour.

It’s still dark in the room, but the bed next to me is cold, and I sit up to look for X.

“I’m still here.”

X’s voice sounds from the corner, where he sits in the dark on the chair I pile laundry on.

“Is everything okay?”

“Very.”

The bed dips, and he’s under the covers, sliding back to me. Even in the dark, we fit together like a perfect puzzle, knowing where to put our hands and legs to fuse ourselves together without an awkward jumble.

“It doesn’t sound like much to you, but I slept for three hours before a nightmare came. That’s...unheard of. I haven’t slept that long since I was cursed.”

“You had a long day. Maybe—”

“No. It’s not like that. I physically can’t sleep, Clark. When I close my eyes and reach that wonderful plane of sleep that brings rest, I’m ripped from it within minutes. By a nightmare.” His hand slides up my chest. “It’s my punishment for not wanting what my coven wanted. For the dishonour to my family.”

“What was different tonight?”

There's a comfortable pause and the air in the room crackles.

"You. It's you, Clark." His lips press to my collarbone and up my neck. "You don't love me, but you care. And it was strong enough to keep the nightmares away for a while. Thank you."

"I'm happy to hear that." He pushes me to my back and straddles my waist. "And I'm happy for this. What do you need, sweetheart?"

Leaning down, he kisses me, hard and filled with pent-up lust, and it takes no time for my dick to fill.

"I want you to touch me, Clark. Make me come. No one has ever done that."

"No one has touched you? Ever?" I know he said he was a virgin, but not even a hand job?

He shakes his head. "It was too risky with all my...issues. I had to do it myself." He huffs a laugh. "It's probably why I enjoy watching so much. I figured that was as close to real sex as I would get. But you're different, Clark." He rocks his hips to drag his hard cock across my stomach. "Please?"

"You never need to beg, baby. Sit back so I can grab us both. You okay on top?"

"Y-yes. "

He adjusts himself so he's over my hips and our leaking cocks are now touching. His eyes widen with the first brush and a small huff escapes his mouth.

"You haven't even done anything and I know this will be good."

Keeping a hand on his hip to hold him, I stretch my other hand to my bedside table and pull the lube from the drawer.

“It will never be not good, sweetheart. I promise you that. But you tell me if you don’t like it, okay?”

Squirting a liberal amount into my palm, I wrap my hand around his cock, and he drops his head forward with a moan.

“What’s not to like? Your hand is on my dick and—” With a twist of my wrist, I slide my palm over the head and down the length to cup his balls before sliding up again.

“Breathe, sweetheart.” I don’t want to laugh, but his reactions are so animated. He gulps in a breath and utters nonsense as he leans back and grips my thighs.

“This is better than watching. Ohmygod!”

“I always said sex isn’t just a spectator sport. Full participation makes it more enjoyable.”

“I’m a team player.”

His hair hangs around his face and a gorgeous pink paints his chest. Tapping his leg for attention, I draw his gaze to mine.

“Stop wiggling for a minute and give me your hand.”

After squirting more lube in his palm, I position us together and have his hand join mine. His mouth drops open as he sucks in a breath .

“Clark...oh, fuck.”

X moves his hips, thrusting into our hands with awkward hesitance.

“Take what you need, sweetheart. I could watch you do this all day.”

He’s breathtaking in his innocence. The way his expression morphs from pleasure to wonder and back again. I’ve been doing this with partners since I was a teenager, and I guess I took it for granted. Watching him experience what’s essentially his first sexual experience with someone is a pleasure in itself.

“Clark, fuck, I’m gonna come already.”

And he does. Spectacularly. As he gasps and watches his load cover our hands and coat our cocks, my gaze stays glued to his face.

“Kiss me. Now.”

X doesn’t hesitate and leans down to press his lips to mine. His tongue slides past my lips and when he sucks my tongue hard, my world shatters. My orgasm explodes with no warning and a low buzz fills my body. It sits on my skin like the most sensual of touches and when X finally sits up, his eyes are as big as saucers.

“Did you feel that?” He whispers as he brushes his fingers across my lips.

“I did. It’s...I don’t know. What is it?”

He scrambles back and flicks on the lamp. “My witch’s mark. Look.”

X holds his thigh forward and runs his fingertips over the mark.

“It just changed again. It’s almost complete...and...holy shit.”

I scramble to sit up so I can see what has X so wound up. Aside from the sex, that is.

“What is it?”

“I always thought it was an upside-down U, like a horseshoe, you know? Like it was a bad luck thing. But now...”

When I look closer and see it head-on and not looking down like X does, I reach out to touch it.

“It looks like a Belladonna plant,” I whisper, and X grabs my hand.

“Beautiful Belladonna. You, Clark.”

X

When my thigh burned, it felt like lightning struck me. A lingering zap coursed through my body, and I hoped it was good when I could finally bring myself to look.

And it was more than good. At least I thought so. I'm not sure what Clark thinks.

"You think this happened because of me? I don't understand."

"It's a lot to take in, I know, but remember when I said the mark would only be complete when the curse breaks?"

He nods and sits up further. "What are you saying?"

My hands fidget and I feel like this is the moment my life may actually end if he rejects me. There's no way I'll find anyone else as perfect as him.

"I'm saying that you're falling in love with me. And I know it's weird that I know that before you might, but this," I pull his hand over and place it over my mark, pressing him to my skin and he swallows hard. "This doesn't lie."

"Someone breaks the curse when they love you and you can live as a witch with your powers. Practice magic without screwing up. Live as you want to." Clark smiles a shy smile and his dark eyelashes flutter as he meets my gaze. "I was listening."

His voice is soft, but his fingers still dust over my mark.

“Are you freaked out?”

The stray curl on his forehead sticks to his skin, and I brush it off with a fingertip.

“A little. But...how can I possibly doubt what you’re telling me? I’ve spent my whole life trying to practice spells like you do. I’ve believed in magic, real shit, forever, and now I’m living it.” He huffs a shaky breath. “The love part is new to me, though. I’ve never been this close to anyone before.”

“You already know I haven’t either. So...can we learn as we go? Figure it all out together?”

Clark slides to the edge of the bed. After tracing his finger over the belladonna blossom on my thigh one more time, he stands and pulls me to him. His voice is thick and gravelly.

“We’ll definitely figure it out together. I already know I want more of you in every way.” He kisses me slow and deep, making my knees wobble. Clark smiles against my lips and curls an arm around my waist.

“Let’s shower off the mess and talk more.”

“Just talk?” I pout as he leads me to the bathroom.

“Insatiable, are you, my sweet?”

“I love it when you call me cute names like that.”

His beaming smile stops my heart.

“Then I’ll be sure to think of more just for you.”

He might not know he's falling for me, but I know I've already fallen for him with lines like that.

"What are you doing home already?"

Dave plunks into the recliner across from me with one of the cookies Clark gave him last night.

"I'm surprised you didn't eat that entire bag yet."

"Me too." He motions for me to talk as he chews.

"Clark had to work, and I didn't want to hover all day. What else do you want?"

He raises an eyebrow as he swallows. Disappointment on his face.

"Uh...I want all the details, X. You spent the night." He leans forward, holding his face in his hands. There's still cookie crumbs on his lips. "Is he a good cuddler?"

Dave's breathless whisper draws a bubbling laugh from my lips. While I didn't think I'd want to share, the fact he's asked me about cuddling and not sex makes me change my mind.

"Dave...he's the king of cuddling. I...I slept for three hours at his place. In a row!"

Dave jolts upright with a gasp.

"Shut up! X, that's amazing. That's never happened, right?"

"Not since I was still with the coven. It's..." Tears prick behind my eyes, the enormity of all this finally bursting through. "He's the one, Dave."

“How do you know?”

Without a word, I stand up and drop my pants to show him my mark. “This happened this morning after we, ah—”

“You had sex! Why didn’t you lead with that?”

“You asked about cuddling and it didn’t feel right to talk about him like that when he’s not here.”

Dave stares at my mark. “That looks like a flower.”

“It is. It’s belladonna.”

Dave’s gaze meets mine. “Like his store? Your mark is the flower in the name of his store?”

“Yeah and...it showed up after we, um, fooled around.”

Dave’s sly grin makes my cheeks burn. Jeez, when did I get so shy about talking with my friend about sex? We’ve had these conversations dozens of times over the last year. Maybe it’s different because this time it’s me. This time it’s a story that’s incredibly personal.

“You go, X.” He holds a fist for me to bump and I return it with a shaky laugh.

After pulling up my pants, I perch on the edge of the couch. My knee bounces and Dave’s expression softens.

“You can talk to me, you know. This is a big deal for you.”

“I’m at a disadvantage.” My hands twist at the hem of my T-shirt. “He’s human, so he doesn’t see what I do. I showed him the mark, and he understood because he felt when it changed. We both did. But, Dave...it’s...I’m literally at his mercy until he figures out he’s in love with me. And it’s scary shit. Because what if something happens to him before then? What if he changes his mind? What if—”

“X, stop.” Dave’s large hand on my jittery knee draws me away from my spiralling thoughts. “He had dinner with two demons who threatened him if he hurt you. And my dad went to great lengths for you to meet him. He’s not changing his mind. Hang in there. Good things will come.”

And I know Dave is right. But there’s this itchy thing just out of my reach that keeps me on edge.

“I’ll try. He’s coming over again tonight. We talked about gardens, of all things, this morning for hours. I’m going to show him ours. I know it’s fall and not much is in bloom, but it just felt...right.”

“I’m happy for you. But I have a serious question. When you two get together, will you still bake cookies for me?”

I throw my head back with a laugh. Leave it to Dave to think about his cookie addiction.

“Of course I will. It might not be as often if I finally get to sleep, but I’ll always do that for you.”

He nods and slaps his knees before standing. “Thank you. And I’ll tell Charles to keep his naked ass inside tonight if you’ll be having a guest.” He holds up his hand when I try to speak. “I know we have a privacy fence, but you know I hate it when anyone else might see or hear him. He loves it, but it makes me all...” He clenches

his hands at his side.

“I know you get all growly and possessive. I’ll make sure we stay in the garden or away from your fence.”

Dave says his goodbyes when his phone rings and he leaves me alone again with my thoughts. What I didn’t tell Dave is what’s really bothering me. While all these signs that Clark is falling in love with me are there, there’s one thing that terrifies me.

My brother.

I know Faustus said he took care of it, but someone lifted the cloaking spell on Clark’s store. It was there for me because my brother knew Clark had the power to break my curse. But who did Faustus enlist for help?

If my father had a deal for his firstborn, who should I be more concerned about harming Clark? Maybe my dad is dead. I just don’t know. Faustus was pretty lean on the details.

Until Clark realizes he loves me, I don’t have all the power I need to protect him.

I’d rather die than go back to the life I had before meeting Clark.

Especially if something happened to him because of me.

Clark

“Y ou’re sure you’re okay locking up tonight?”

“Of course, boss. You go enjoy your date. I’ve never seen you this excited.”

Louis smiles knowingly, and I take the moment to ask for his opinion. Tapping my knuckles on the front counter, I choose my words.

“Have you ever been in love, Louis?”

“I have. A few times, before I was an alcoholic, but there was a woman I loved more than life itself.” His lips frown and the previous happiness on his face dissolves. “She died and took most of me with her, but I wouldn’t change a thing.”

Okay. Not the comforting words I was looking for.

“How did you know you were in love? What was different?”

Thankfully, he perks back up with the walk down memory lane.

“The world seems brighter. They’re always on your mind, and even when they do something annoying, you love it, because it means they did it with you. To annoy you and not someone else.” He laughs softly as he brushes his hand over the countertop. “It’s kind of hard to describe, but when Rebecca was with me, I felt like I could take on the world.”

Louis stares off over my shoulder with misty eyes.

“You miss her. I’m sorry.”

Louis shakes his head. “I’m not. Sometimes I hate remembering her because it means she’s gone. But right now, it makes me happy because she shared her heart with me and those are memories I’ll have until I’m no longer on this earth. She was my greatest light.” Louis reaches across the counter and takes my hand in his. “You’ll know if he’s the one, Clark. I promise. It’ll be like nothing else you’ve ever felt. Is it the fellow from the magic club?”

X has definitely made me feel like nothing else, but magic can do that. Is it love, or is it just the novelty of being with a witch?

“Yeah.” I smile and squeeze his hand. “His name is X. Short for Xavier. It’s only our second date, and it feels so crazy. It’s so fast, you know? But...”

My words trail off because what Louis said about feeling different is true with X, magic or not. I met him before I knew all this stuff about him and even then, at the sex club, we were like two magnets instantly snapping together. I’ve experienced instant attraction to many people before, but I’ve never felt instantly connected to them. Not like this.

“Just because it’s fast doesn’t mean it’s not true. People are too fast to discount genuine feelings just because they happen in days rather than months. Why should that matter? Sometimes you just know. Why should you hold back just because some people’s opinions say you should? Only you know how you feel, Clark.”

“You’re right. And right now, I’m feeling pretty damn excited about rushing over to his house and just being able to hold him.” The heat rushes up my neck at my declaration, but Louis nods. He understands.

“Then you’d best get out of here and go see that man. If you need me to open up for you tomorrow, I can come in early.” He winks, and I duck my head as I shrug into my coat.

“I’ll let you know. Thank you. I don’t tell you this enough, but I’m happy to call you a friend. You’re not just my employee. I hope you know that.”

This time his eyes well up, and he turns to dust imaginary dust from the cash register.

“I do. Thank you. For everything you do for me.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

After leaving the store two hours earlier than I normally would, Louis’s words replay in my mind. I’ve thought I’ve loved people before, but it never felt like this, and I’m stuck on the fact it’s been days since I’ve met X.

Days.

But I don’t just want him naked and panting under me. I want to hold him at night and make the dreams that haunt him go away. I want us to snuggle under fuzzy blankets and drink hot chocolate on cold winter nights. But mostly, I want us both to be together and wake up with each other every morning.

Is that love?

Before I know it, I’m pulling my car into the lane at his house and bouncing up the steps to his door.

After waiting for what feels like decades, the door opens and there he is. A gorgeous smile and eyes I could lose myself in.

“Hi. You’re early.”

“Is that okay? Should I have called?”

X motions for me to come in and I step inside, already half out of my coat.

“No! I’m happy you’re here. I’ve—”

Without waiting for him to finish, I cage him against the front door and crash my mouth over his. His fingers curl in my shirt as he moans and presses into me, chasing my tongue with his own.

When we finally come up for air, he gazes at me with swollen lips and a drunken smile.

“Hi.” Brushing my hand over his cheek, I lean in and kiss his forehead. “Sorry. I just couldn’t wait to do that.”

“You never have to apologize for doing that.”

We stand for a moment, a crackle between us, and I steal one more kiss before kicking off my shoes and hanging my coat on the rack by the door.

“I’ll remember that. How was your day?”

X takes my hand, threading our fingers together as he leads me to the living room. He pulls me onto the loveseat with him and, without hesitation, he snuggles up under my arm. His other hand rests on my stomach, and while it’s not chilly in the room, I grab the throw blanket from the back of the loveseat and throw it over us. My heart stutters and thumps all over when X snuggles in closer with the blanket in place.

“My day was boring. I baked and walked in the garden and tried to read a book but couldn’t concentrate. Then I came in here and chatted with Dave while I counted the minutes for you to get here.” He lifts his head to kiss my cheek. “What about you?”

My fingers brush up and down on his shoulder. This right here is what I crave. Polite, yet intimate conversation about the most boring of subjects. But not a single word is boring.

“I left the store early because I couldn’t wait to see you. But before that, I found myself distracted while staring at spreadsheets and ordering books because I wished I was with you.”

“That’s...very sweet to say. Um...I only had plans to show you the garden. It’s not in bloom right now, but I still think it’s beautiful. If you want to go see it before it’s too dark, we can come back and continue this conversation later?”

“Lead the way. I’d love to see where you spend your time, sweetheart.”

I notice how he beams when I call him that, and I don’t think I’ll ever stop.

“I’ll get your coat.”

“No. We don’t need it.”

Grabbing the blanket again, I wrap it around our shoulders and draw him beside me. It’s like our own private burrito.

“I’m good like this if you are.” I drop a kiss to his forehead and his happy sigh warms me more than the blanket.

“Yep. A bit awkward to walk, but I like it.”

We step out the back door, and X pulls the blanket off me with a silly grin and wraps himself up. He grins bigger when I huff in disappointment.

“I’ll share when we get there. This is easier.” He sticks a hand through an opening, and together, we walk along the slate pathway.

“When I first came here, the garden was my only place to cope. Which was perfect because my specialty was, and still is, plants.”

The path gently curves away from the house and into an extensive flower garden. A line of perfectly manicured shrubs mostly obscures the garden from the house, but once past that, it becomes an oasis of sorts. Raspberry canes in perfect rows mark the back of the property and the focal point in the centre of multiple flower beds is a small waterfall and pond feature. A stone bench sits to the side, and it’s here X sits and opens up the blanket again for me.

“I bet it’s beautiful here when the flowers are out.”

“Smells good, too. The roses and lilacs are just...yeah. It’s soothing.”

X squishes next to me and I hold him tight against me. His sudden quiet has me waiting on edge. There’s something on his mind and there’s something big happening here. That same crackle I felt when he showed me his mark sits in the air, much like the charge from an impending thunderstorm.

“Why did you call your store Beautiful Belladonna?”

X leans his head against my shoulder and under the blanket, his hand rubs up and down my thigh. It should all be comforting and domestic, but yet...the slight tremor in his voice has me choosing my words carefully.

“When I was a boy, I read about the Egyptians and how Cleopatra and other women used liquid from the belladonna plant to dilate their pupils to appear more beautiful and more seductive. It was perhaps something that always fascinated me. How cultures learned about different pigments and properties from plants to enhance their appearance. Then I stumbled onto the other qualities of Belladonna and how it could poison.” X’s hand stills on my thigh and I wrap my hand around it. “It’s a beautiful flower. The sort of bell shape you have to tilt up to view the colours of the petals. And there’s another non-toxic version of it.”

My palms, despite the chill, are sweaty.

“Beautiful Belladonna came to me as a name after two important events in my life happened.”

X sits up and focuses on the side of my face, but I can’t bring myself to look at him just yet.

“What happened?”

“The man I thought I loved turned out to not be who I thought he was. Like the belladonna, he was gorgeous outside, but inside he was toxic and vile. No beauty was inside him and I almost found out too late.” Puffing out my cheeks with a nervous breath, I turn to him. “The second event wasn’t really an event, but a lesson. I learned that not everyone is as they seem, just like the plant. And that was when I knew I’d own a magic shop and pursue what I loved. Practice witchcraft. Try to find the magic that hides in our world. To be the one beautiful thing for someone in a world that might be ugly.”

X’s eyes search my face and his lips part as he watches me.

“Do you want to know why I asked?”

“I assumed it was more than just common courtesy and I hope...I hope it was the right answer.”

My words hitch, and I swallow hard. Because if it's not the right answer and he turns me away, I don't know how I'll respond.

His lips tilt into a shy smile.

“It was more than right, Clark. It was perfect.” He bites on his lip before shaking out of the blanket and walking over to a barren flower bed. “I want to show you something.”

Leaving the blanket behind, I join him in front of the mound of dirt.

“At my school, our teachers only taught us dark magic and how to bring harm. We learned all about the belladonna and its historical journey. From the Greeks to the Renaissance and every time in between. We knew how to make it darker and more sinister to deliver a spell as intended.” He shakes his head with a half smile. “But I was smarter than that, you see. The only magic I was good at involved plants. I knew them all inside out and backwards. Especially belladonna.”

He falls silent, and I reach for his hand. “I'm afraid I don't understand the connection, my sweet. You've lost me.”

“Puer Belladonna.” He holds his hand over the soil. “Grow.”

The soil shifts and a tender sprout shoots out. X bends down and carefully digs the plant out, including its roots.

My jaw hangs to my feet as he stands to face me.

“You just summoned a plant. In November to grow. Just like that.”

He smiles. “Just like that. But it’s not any plant. It’s an immature belladonna, and, like us, hasn’t reached its full potential. It doesn’t know it can do bad things. My brother often hurt me and because I learned how to harness an immature plant, I healed myself all the time. I even used it on Charles once when he had some cracked ribs.”

X holds a finger up and crosses over to the edge of the raspberry plants. He digs a small trough and places the belladonna root at the feet of the raspberry cane. After he stands, he waves a hand with a quiet phrase and whole ripe raspberries appear on the plant. With a smile, he plucks a handful and walks back to me.

He offers me one, and when I open my mouth, he places a berry inside.

“Oh wow. That’s the best-tasting berry I’ve ever had. It’s like the most raspberry of raspberries.”

“Exactly. The point of all this is that you chose belladonna for your store because you saw, no, you knew, it was better somehow. That its reputation wasn’t true. It had a good side. Just like I learned. You chose belladonna because you believed in the good out there. Am I right?”

“Yeah. That’s the gist of it. Believe there’s good and one day—” My eyes widen as I reach for him. “One day a beautiful witch will find me and prove to me there’s indeed magic in the world.”

A breeze ruffles the hair that’s escaped his ponytail and that crackle in the air returns in a way that makes it hard to breathe. The hair on my arms stands up.

Stepping closer to him as he shivers, I bend to brush my lips across his.

“What’s happening, X? Can we go inside and be alone?”

He leans against me like he might collapse, clutching my shirt in his hands.

“I need you.”

X

S omehow, we made it inside and Clark almost had to carry me at one point.

I'm overloaded. Too much was happening and yet it couldn't come fast enough.

"Sweetheart, say something." Clark's palms cup my face, and he rests his forehead against mine. "Tell me what's happening." His voice is ragged and tinged with worry.

"I'm okay. Don't worry, please?" Rubbing my nose along his, I inhale the scent of Clark, which includes the lilac soap he uses, made with goat's milk and good for the skin, the hint of his store coming from the books, and the adrenaline-fuelled panic that must result from all the weird shit he's seen since meeting me. It's all Clark, and it wraps around me like the blanket now discarded on the floor.

"I don't think I am." His voice is low. Needy and oozing sex. "Is this some kind of spell on me?" He presses into me and the bulge in his pants draws a gasp from my lips. "I've never wanted to claim someone before like I do now. It's all I can think about, and I'm freaking out. "

My thigh burns and I cry out, clutching at my leg.

"Fuck!" Pushing Clark away, my hands rip at my pants and tug them off. My witch's mark has its own pulse on the surface of my skin. No longer faded black and incomplete. It's now green and gold with purple peeking out on a belladonna bloom. Within the stems of the plant, two serpents entwine before our eyes as they settle and drop into place before the pulsing and burning stops.

“Jesus Christ, X.” Clark reaches to touch it but stops. “Is it...can I touch it?”

“Yeah. It’s okay.”

He trails his fingertips over it, tracing the plant bloom.

“It’s stunning. Just like you.” The burning of the mark may have distracted me, but my dick didn’t get the memo. It strains in my briefs, begging for his touch.

Swallowing, I take his hand and place it where I want him to touch me.

“X...” He walks me backwards until my legs hit the edge of the bed and he pushes me down. “I feel like a fucking animal right now.” He wastes no time shedding me of my remaining clothes, tossing me around like a rag doll. My skin burns hot with desire.

“I’m not complaining so far. Just don’t make barnyard noises and I’ll be fine.”

He laughs and presses his lips against mine.

“I love how you can make jokes when your dick is begging for me. ”

“My dick, my body, my fucking everything, Clark. Please.”

“Since you asked so sweetly...” A rumble sounds from Clark, and I arch my back as his lips slide down my jaw and neck. Everywhere his lips touch me, my skin burns with a need for him to do it again. His tongue swirls after small bites and I’m writhing on the bed, ready to blow once he puts his mouth on me. But he doesn’t.

Clark sits up and rips his shirt off, tossing it blindly behind him. He stands and shoves his pants down, taking his boxers with them, and naked Clark takes away the sting of

him not having his mouth on my cock.

“You’re the hottest man I’ve ever seen naked.”

He raises an eyebrow as he opens my nightstand drawer.

“I should take that as a compliment, but I feel you haven’t seen many from what you’ve told me.” He moves things around in the drawer and I enjoy the view. “Don’t you have lube?”

“Oh. Yeah. I think it’s...” I laugh and point at my closet. “I think it’s in the pocket of my hoodie. The red one.”

Clark finds the sweater and my lube and holds up the bottle.

“Care to tell me why it was in your sweater?” He stalks to the bed and tosses it next to me. “Who were you watching, my sweet? Did you like it?”

He strokes his leaking cock while he stands at the end of the bed, and I raise up on my elbows. “No one as hot as you.”

“Tell me what you saw.”

His eyes glint with a passion I could drown in .

“A guy railing his partner over the hood of a car in the woods. There’s a local lovers’ lane sort of thing. I saw the whole thing.”

Clark moans and places a foot on the bed. “How did he get him ready, X? What do you want to watch me do? Want me to bury my fingers in my ass? Make you squirm while I fuck myself?”

“Holyfuckershit, Clark. I’m gonna come if you keep talking like that.”

His lips curl, wicked and hot.

“So, dirty talk and a voyeur. You really are a match made for me.” He drops his foot and blankets his body over me. His mouth crashes on mine and I wrap my legs around his waist, desperate to keep him against me.

“I am. I’m yours. But I don’t have the patience to watch right now.”

“Good.”

Clark slides down my body and, after kissing my witch’s mark, swallows my dick in a move that makes stars burst across my vision. Crying out, I arch my back, forcing my dick farther into his mouth. Clark rides along with my wild movements. I swear I hear him chuckle.

Cool liquid and a finger at my entrance have my eyes snapping open, and he slides his lips off my cock, letting it smack against me with a wet slap. “Is this okay?” Clark softens as he kisses my thigh again. “I know you said you’d never been with anyone, but if I’m doing too much, tell me.”

“N-no. It’s...it’s fine. I want you to...to do everything.”

He kisses my leg again. “In time, pet. We will. We have forever.”

Clark closes his eyes, and feathers kisses across my stomach as he slides a finger in. “We have a lifetime.” His whispered words float across my skin and when his gaze flicks up to lock on mine, I know.

I may be new at all this, but I don’t need to hear the words. Magic has its advantages,

after all. My completed mark, the electricity in the air, and our primal urge to just claim each other. Not traditional at all to declare love, but neither am I.

“You’re beautiful like this, X. You should be a god, not a witch.” He sits up and kneels next to me while reaching for the lube. He takes my hand and squirts a glob on it. “Jerk me off so I can come all over you.”

“Clark...shit.”

I don’t waste any time and wrap my slicked-up hand around his cock. Clark shivers before regaining his focus and reaching back to continue fucking me with his fingers. When he bends down to swallow my length again, I’m a goner. He quickens the pace and crooks his finger until I rocket my hips up and force him to gag.

He sits up and takes my dick in hand as my orgasm rips through me. Hot ropes of cum hit my chest, and his hum of approval brings a sated smile to my lips. But I don’t forget what he wants either.

“Gimme it, Clark. Cover me with your load. ”

“Dirty little witch, you are.”

I smile in agreement as he bats my hand away. Clark leans down for a filthy kiss, and I comply eagerly. He moans against my lips as his body shakes through his orgasm. And it never seems to end. Clark finally slumps against my shoulder before drawing in a heaving breath.

“Holy fuck, that was good.”

Pressing a kiss to the side of his head, I agree.

After we cleaned up, we crawled under the covers, and, once again, I fell into a peaceful sleep with Clark wrapped around me. And it was peaceful. For the first time in five years, I woke up rested and by choice.

No images of my best friend dying in my arms or the pain of the beatings from my brother. It was simply how sleep was supposed to be.

And I cried.

Softly at first so I wouldn't wake Clark, but the body-wracking sobs start on their own, and I can't help it.

"X? Baby, what's wrong?"

He flicks on the lamp and pulls me back on top of him while I try to rein in the tears .

Clark tucks my hair behind my ears and wipes at my tears with a worried gaze.

"I just...woke...up." My breath still hitches, and he kisses me softly.

"No bad dreams?"

"None. It's all because of you. You know that, right?" I pull my head back to drink up this man who I never thought I'd meet. "I know that might be a lot for you to digest, but it's true."

"Yeah. I know, baby." He cups my cheek with his palm, and I sigh at his simple touch. "I don't know who I have to thank for finding you, but I'm so happy I did."

"Me too, Clark."

After wiping my tears and blowing my nose, he tucks me back under his arm against him and I drift back asleep.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:40 am

Clark

X is still asleep, snuggled against me with a soft snore and dried drool on his cheek. I don't want to wake him. Lord knows he needs the sleep, but I need to tell Louis I'll be in much later today.

After moving out of bed as slowly as possible, I tiptoe over to my jeans and pull out my phone. After placing it in silent mode, I send Louis a text to let him know he can open the shop this morning and I'll be in when I can.

Because right now, my store is the last place I want to be.

I never thought I'd ever think that, but X has changed everything.

Last night, something changed, and it wasn't what I expected. I thought love would be light and fluttery like a butterfly. Something to make me smile like a goof. While I feel somewhat light, what I wasn't expecting was this feeling of protection. A need to cocoon X into a protective wrap and let nothing bad happen to him again.

To beat my chest and tell anyone who might try to harm him to fuck off and draw them a map of how to get there. Just thinking about everything he's been through and how people treated him shatters my heart into pieces. How could anyone be so cruel to such a kind and wonderful man?

Such a beautiful man who carries my heart in his pocket in such a short time. And he does. Even before he brought me to his room, there was a change in the garden. I may not understand magic and his witch world with spells, but I understand now what it

means to find your soulmate.

X stirs and his hand reaches out for me, only to find an empty bed. His brows dip, but he doesn't open his eyes. I quickly slide into the space and pull his arm over me.

"Thod chew left," he slurs as he grabs me tighter.

"Never. Sleep, sweetheart. I'll be here when you wake up."

"M'kay."

X drifts back to sleep and I wonder how he's got this far in life with everything stacked against him. There's so much about him I don't know, and I want to take my time learning, but I also want to sit with him for hours and have him tell me everything right now.

He snorts and rolls over, flinging the covers off us in all his rolling around and I can't say that I mind. X's body is tight and lean. Lithe muscles and smooth skin from head to toe are on full display. His cock rests against his thigh, and when he starfishes across the bed, smacking me in the face, I decide it's an invitation to wake him up in a far more pleasant manner.

Sliding down the bed, I throw the rest of the covers off and position myself between his legs. I rarely get a chance to experience a dick harden within my mouth and I'm eager to try. With a soft kiss to the crown, I slide my tongue down his shaft and take him gently in my mouth.

"Mmm..." he moans and spreads his legs wider. His cock plumps on my tongue as I coax it with wet strokes in my mouth. "Clark...oh..." His breathless words are everything I hoped to hear.

A quick glance up his body reveals X gazing down at me with sleepy eyes and a crooked smile.

Letting his dick slide out of my mouth, I puff a breath over his slick, heated skin.

“I didn’t want to wake you, but then you spread out like this...and I couldn’t help it.”

A low rumble sounds in this chest. “You can wake me up like this anytime.” He motions for me to come up and I blanket myself over him as he presses his mouth over mine. It’s bruising lips and demanding tongues and leaves me more breathless than I was before.

X rolls his hips, undulating with a sexy move I’d not have expected from someone who says they’re inexperienced.

“Do that thing again, where you lube us up and fuck your hand,” he mumbles against my lips, and I laugh.

“I think we used up your lube last night.”

He draws his head back and frowns. “Shit. Let me think.”

“Okay.” I drop my lips to his neck and trail them down his collarbone. X has an addictive taste, not just from his mouth, but his entire being .

“ Maximus slip and slide !” X shouts and snaps his fingers. Lifting my head, I raise an eyebrow with a laugh.

“What the hell does that mean?”

“Give it a sec.”

He cocks his head, and a small smile appears when a half-used bottle of lube lands on the table with a quiet thump.

“Holy shit. What did you do?”

He turns the bottle around in his hand and shows me the name Dave scrawled along the side. “I summoned it from outside, where I know Dave and Charles keep some. Pretty cool, right?”

“You just...you...you did more magic! Oh, my god! This is huge, right?”

After X showed me in the garden how he still had powers with plants, he explained how his spells were never anything more than that. Summoning a bottle from outside must be an incredible accomplishment. Well, I sure think it is.

Confidence bleeds from every pore of X and it’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen. He squirts lube in his hand and grips my cock. “No, this is huge.”

My eyes roll back as he strokes me between us. “I’m average. But keep doing that.”

“I want you to do it. You woke me up, remember?”

He squirts out more lube in my hand and I bring us together in a sensual slide. He tosses the bottle aside, and it tumbles to the floor as he reaches for me, pulling my mouth back to his.

“You’re kind of sexy when you tell me what to do, you know?” I whisper over his lips.

“Don’t get used to it. I prefer it when you do all the talking.” His mouth opens against mine again and my rhythm falters.

Our hips arch and we chase our orgasms, X growing more and more confident as he whispers what he wants against my ear.

“Come for me, baby. I’m so close.”

“Oh, shit...Clark...fuck!”

Our bodies tremble and shake as we unload and I collapse over him, unable to hold myself up any longer. I want to tell him next time we’ll work on his ass, but there’s a knock on the door.

“Xavier! If you just figured out how to call my bottle of lube to you right out of my damn hand when I needed it, you had better have enjoyed that orgasm.”

“Shit,” X whispers before shouting, “I’ll replace it!”

There’s an angry huff beyond the door as X buries his face in my neck to smother his laughter.

“We will discuss rules about your magic over breakfast. And if you need a cigarette after that round, I have some.”

X’s body shakes with laughter, and I stare into his dancing eyes.

“Should I be worried that he’s mad?”

“Promise him cookies, and it will be fine. Come on, let’s shower and face the music.”

X

Charles had made breakfast when they discovered I hadn't been down. Other roommates might have been annoyed when their usual breakfast spreads weren't there, but Dave and Charles understood why. There were no annoyed huffs when Clark and I entered the kitchen well after breakfast was over to find my friends sipping coffee and flipping through cookbooks.

"Well..." Dave raises an eyebrow and glances between us. "First, I'll say I'm fucking elated you found your missing piece." He narrows his eyes. "Second, I'll say your timing to steal my lube was terrible and you're lucky I didn't race upstairs and knock your fucking door down."

"Oh, he's overdramatic." Charles smacks him in the shoulder. "He still got a blow job. He was fine."

Dave grumbles, but Charles silences him with a whisper, and Dave shifts in his chair, concentrating on the recipe in front of him like it holds the mystery of the universe inside.

"You got your magic back?" Charles stands to hug me tightly, and I swallow around the thickness in my throat .

"It seems that way. I didn't even think it would work, but I just thought, what the hell? It was always easy for me to summon objects before. I just thought..."

I thought it would be nice to feel like a witch again.

“So, Clark. It seems you’re part of our family of misfits now. How do you feel about all this?”

Charles motions for him to sit. He moves to take the seat next to Dave, then reconsiders and sits across from him.

“Um...thank you for including me.” Charles places a coffee in front of him and his gaze finds mine. “I feel like I’ve found something I’ve always wanted. To watch X’s magic grow these last few days has been...” He swallows and reaches for his mug. “It’s been incredible.”

“Awww.” Charles leans into Dave as he smiles our way. “So the curse is gone then, right? You’ve slept and Clark obviously has no issue with you being non-human. What’s next?”

“Well, I need to practice all my old skills and make sure I remember everything. I guess I don’t need to worry about registering with the witch’s guild since I’m in the human world.”

Dave laughs. “You had to be licensed to be a witch? What the fuck is that about?”

“It was like, insurance? I think? To be honest, I never really got to find out what it was all about, but I think it was just a way to track us and our skills.”

“That’s so cool.” Clark breathes as his eyes roam over me in a hungry gaze. Fuck, that’s sexy when he does that .

“Don’t do that at the table,” Dave barks and slams the cookbook closed.

This is the first time I’ve seen Dave upset and irritable that didn’t involve something going on with Charles. And I’m not sure how I feel about this hostility towards me.

“That’s not fair. You and Charles came here after I was here first and practically shoved your sex in my face. While in my garden, my fucking sanctuary, no less. So fuck off with the attitude, Dave.”

His shoulders drop, and he opens the cookbook again before sliding it over to me.

“I miss your cookies. You always had them here and I can’t make them like you do.”

Dave’s sad voice is like a dagger. How am I supposed to remain angry at one of my closest friends simply because I’ve not made cookies for him?

“I’m sorry.” Reaching over, I grab his hand. “Clark has to work today, and I’ll stay home and make them. You can help me if you want.”

Dave nods and if I’m not mistaken, he blinks back tears. Who knew the big guy was so emotional?

“Speaking of work, I should get going. Louis isn’t big on mornings, and I don’t want to leave him on his own for too long.”

Clark says goodbye to Dave and Charles, and I walk him to the door.

“Will I see you tonight? ”

Clark brushes his thumb across my cheek. “You’ll see me every night unless you tell me to go away.”

“Never,” I breathe, and lean in to kiss him. “You’re stuck with me.”

Clark pulls me against him and deepens the kiss. When he finally releases me, it’s slow, and he lets his fingers tangle in mine right until he steps outside.

“Call me when you get there.”

“I will. Go bake with your friend. I’ll talk to you soon.”

Clark hesitates before lunging forward and grabbing me again. He smashes his lips to mine for a searing kiss that leaves me panting for more. With a laugh, he runs back to his car.

“If I don’t leave now, I’ll never get to work!”

With my fingers on my lips and a smile on my face, I wave as he pulls away and I don’t stop until his car disappears around the bend.

Closing the door behind me, I collapse against it with a sigh.

Nobody warned me love could feel like this. The moment he’s out of my sight, I feel like I left something important behind and an internal countdown begins until he’s back in my arms. How am I supposed to function when all I can think about is Clark?

Returning to the kitchen, I find Dave by himself, searching the cupboards and checking the recipe. He wears an old apron, Will Cook for Sex, and I shake my head with a smile.

But my friend misses more than my cookies, I think. After all, he found me at night sitting by myself more often than Charles. Maybe I miss our random conversations in the dark a little, too.

“Hey.” I bump into him with my shoulder, and he peers down at me with a smile. “Still want to follow a recipe, or do you want me to show you how I do it from memory?”

Dave steps away from the counter and smiles.

“I like Clark. He makes you smile, X. You’re...” He gestures to me, making a circle with his hands around me. “You’re so shiny now. Rested.”

Dave has shown me glimpses of his heart from time to time, and I know he’s a giant softie, but he usually saves that stuff for Charles. This is the first time I’ve really felt how much my happiness means to him.

Stepping closer, I wrap my arms around his waist and squeeze. He returns the hug, crushing me so hard I think a rib nearly snaps.

“Thanks, Dave. I really like him too.”

“Don’t you need to love him? And if you show me your recipe, I’ll take notes. You do it better than any book can.”

“Okay, my recipe it is. Let me try something.” Surveying the countertop, I sweep my arm with the words, “Finio !” Everything Dave had gathered quickly disappears back to its place, but I point at the items I want to stay. The flour and measuring cups with bowls all float back to the counter without a hitch.

“Wow. You’ve got your groove back, don’t you?”

“I still need some practice, but yeah. I do. And to answer your question, yes, I love him. I’m in love with him and he’s all I think about.”

“Dave’s addiction come to the kitchen!” Snapping my fingers, the rest of the ingredients for my cookie recipe appear. Milk floats from the fridge without spilling a drop and the pound of butter settles on the counter from the fridge. With a quick check, it’s already at room temperature and ready to use. “Fuck I’ve missed this.”

It's been so long since I've not had a spell fuck up, I almost can't believe it's happening. Not just the magic, but everything. My future isn't a dark cavern anymore. There're all kinds of possibilities for me now, and it's because I found Clark.

"Don't worry about taking notes, Dave." Snapping my fingers, a paper flutters to the table, and he grins as he picks it up.

"Your recipe! And the step-by-step of what to do? This is great!"

"Now get over here and we can do this one together. No magic."

We work side by side; me instructing Dave how to measure the flour properly and to notice the consistency of the butter.

"Whatever you do, don't use margarine. It's the butter and extra chocolate chips that you love."

"Will you ever make these again? I mean...like, you have a life now and I'm so happy for you. But I guess I got used to having you around. And... I'll miss you."

Dave's voice hitches and I turn to face him. His apron has smeared flour handprints all over and it's just so Dave that it makes my heart ache.

"Why will you miss me?"

"I just assumed you'd be living with Clark and leaving here. He has a business and an apartment. I thought you'd want to be with him all the time. That's how I felt with Charles."

"We haven't even talked about that, Dave." I hand him the ice cream scoop. "Use the

small scoop to measure them onto the cookie pan.” Dave lines blobs of dough onto the sheet, tongue poking out with concentration. Of course I want to be with Clark, but leaving here had never been on my radar. “Should I leave here?”

“No.” Mike, the man who rescued me and brought me to live here, appears like a vapour in the kitchen. We call him a ghost whisperer and it was by complete chance he found me near death, holding my dead friend in that forest. If he hadn’t brought me here, I’d have died in that forest, too. He has a tendency to just...appear out of thin air. Or vanish if needed. It’s a bit creepy.

“You’re the sneakiest motherfucker with how you just appear like that, Mike. Scared the shit out of me!” Dave rests the scoop on the counter and turns to face Mike. “But you sound pretty firm. What’s going on?”

Mike sits at the table and motions for us to join him.

“You look good X. I heard you broke the curse. How are you feeling? ”

He folds his hands in front of him and for anyone who didn’t know him, he’d appear clinical with his conversation. But he’s the kindest person you’ll ever meet. If person is the right word. He’s immortal now, and I’m not sure what to call him.

“Like I’m on top of the world, Mike. I never knew it could feel like this, you know? My magic is back, and I slept. No nightmares or wake-ups. I’ve slept more the last few days than I have for the last few years.”

Mike nods and a small, almost smile appears briefly.

“I had a chat with Faustus. It sounds like your brother might be up to something. You should stay here.”

The bile rises in my throat. “W-what kind of something?”

Dave’s firm hand on my shoulder provides support, but I reach out to Mike and grab his clasped hands.

“Don’t keep anything from me, Mike. I deserve to know.”

Mike, forever stoic, remains silent until he sits back with a heavy sigh.

“He has a lot of high-ranking friends, X. And he’s not happy about losing his hands. His first target is Faustus, but his next is you.”

My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I almost ignore it, but it buzzes again. Pulling it out, I smile when I see Clark’s first message that he made it to the store fine. His second message makes no sense though, and my world tilts.

“X? What’s wrong?”

I hand my phone to Dave and his brow furrows .

“We need to get my dad here ASAP. This doesn’t sound good.”

He hands my phone to Mike and leaves the room, still with his apron on and a phone to his ear.

Mike reads the message on my phone and slides it back to me.

“Don’t panic. We’ll fight for you, X.”

“Don’t worry about me. Protect Clark. I won’t...” My voice hitches and I swallow hard. “I can’t have anything happen to him.”

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:40 am

Clark

“ Good morning, Louis!”

“Hiya boss! I swear if you could float, you’d be doing it right now.”

Chuckling, I hang my coat in my office and Louis leans in the doorway. His smile rivals mine and my heart feels like it might burst.

“I feel like I could float. It’s amazing, this love thing. I totally get it now.”

Louis laughs softly. “I told you. It’s an incredible feeling when your heart seeks a person like a lost puppy 24/7. It’s different for everyone, but for me, I just wanted to be with her all the time. Hear her laugh, see her smile, hell, watch her braid her hair. All of it filled these cracks in my existence that I didn’t even know I had. It made me feel whole, knowing I could share it all with her.”

“Yeah. That’s...that’s it. I feel whole.”

I want to tell Louis about the magic and the belladonna and how amazing X is with spells, but I snap my mouth shut. There’s no way I can tell anyone about what X really is. I need a diluted version.

“He’s so into magic. For once, it’s nice to have someone who really gets me and my interests. He loves the shop, and he wants to help with it. That’s so fucking refreshing.”

“Am I losing my job to him?” Louis jokes, but his voice doesn’t quite hide the concern.

“Not at all, Louis. I don’t think X wants to work here full time like you do. And I’d never let him do that. You’re just as important to me here as he is.”

His shoulders relax as he nods. “Thank you. I mean, I get it if you want change. It’s business and all. I just...I enjoy working for you, Clark. You make me feel comfortable and part of something.”

He clears his throat and knocks on the door frame. “Listen, I need to unpack the shipment that came in. I’ll leave you to it.”

Before I can respond, he’s returned to the store floor, and I know Louis well enough to know he needs a little breather from the emotions. We’ve bonded the last year and I view him as another father figure. But I understand why he would think I’d be replacing him with X. Louis supports the shop and while he doesn’t practice witchcraft, he witnessed the enthusiasm of X at our magic meeting. I’ll talk with him later to ease his mind that he’s irreplaceable to me.

Pulling out my phone, I text a message to X as he requested while I brew my morning tea. All it needs to be is a short and sweet, ‘ I’m here safe .’ But I write it and rewrite it so many times I’ve already steeped my tea, and it grows cold.

The shop bell chimes and Louis’s voice drifts into my office as he helps the customer. Maybe I should cut back my hours now? He’s more than capable of being here in the mornings by himself. I’d love to work a little less hard and spend more time with X. Maybe have him teach me how to be better at witchcraft or magic itself.

What a perfect daydream.

Sleeping in with X and showing him all the things he hasn't experienced with a lover. We could explore his voyeurism and my exhibitionism together. Maybe we could garden.

I'm so lost in my daydream that I've been staring at my phone's blank screen this whole time and I didn't press send on the damn message he's waiting for.

"Good lord. I'm in love. And I've got it so bad."

I hit send with a smile, only to have it vanish when there's a crash out front.

"Louis?"

The air in the room turns heavy, and the hair on my arms stands on end. Pushing out of the chair, I rush out of my office. My eyes scan the storefront and quickly find Louis lying face down near the table of books, a trickle of blood on the floor.

"Louis!"

I try to move to him, but my feet are stuck. Literally stuck, and panic flares through me. My entire body remains frozen in place, as if an invisible shield holds me.

"So you're the one who has the devil on his side and is in love with a pathetic witch? Clark, is it?"

The man's voice drips with hatred as he walks towards me. Thin lips twist into a sneer on his pale face. His short blond hair amplifies his all-black attire. Tight black jeans peek out from underneath a long black trench coat. If he was going for the don't-fuck-with-me vibe, he totally nailed it.

"The devil is on my side? That's news to me." I want to scream that X isn't pathetic,

but my gut says to remain quiet. “Did you kill Louis?”

He casts a disinterested glance towards Louis’s unmoving body.

“I don’t think so. Anything is possible, but it was just a shove. It’s you who I came to see. And kill.”

The man says it like it’s just another task on his to-do list and my stomach twists.

“I-I-I don’t keep money in the store. But I can get whatever it is you’re after.”

His lips tilt in a hideous smile. “Hmm, that’s right. You can.”

My phone flashes by as it races through the air towards him and hovers in front of his face. He scans the screen before flicking his cold gaze at me.

“Aww, that’s quite the lovesick message.” Then he dictates a text message into my phone. “Can you come? I miss you.”

“I don’t want money,” he snaps before my phone flies into the nearest wall and smashes into bits. The man then removes his hands from his coat pockets and grins. Except he has no hands and my guts twist into an impossible knot .

His hands are missing. Fuck.

I’m not fast enough to hide my reaction.

“That’s right, Clark. I’m here for my brother, Xavier. And after your text, I’m sure he’s on his way. So, let’s just sit tight and wait. I still need to decide if I should kill you first or him.”

“How can you still do all this without hands? I thought—I thought you need them for magic.”

I deserve to be killed if that’s the first thing out of my mouth. Nothing like making the angry guy even more angry.

“Oh, we do. It’s quite helpful. But you see, I have resources, and I’m strong enough to use other parts of my body to have spells come to life. Something my brother’s friends didn’t consider when they so rudely took my hands like that. I can’t wait to see their faces. What do you think? Should we say surprise when he gets here, or is that too much?”

A chair slides out from behind the counter and stops next to him. After he sits, he focuses on me. I don’t like it. My skin wants to crawl off my body to get away from it.

“Are your legs working? You should sit.” He chuckles at his joke. “Sorry. My humour is dark. Like me. But let’s talk, Clark. Did you know my brother used to be bad like me?”

“He was never bad.”

X is pure and kind. There’s no way I’ll believe a word from this man’s mouth.

“Well, I’m sure your definition of bad differs from my own. But I’ll tell you a secret.” He leans forward and stage whispers, “He killed a woman once. Such a sweet thing, too, and for no reason. Just... BAM ! Pushed her off the bridge.”

“I won’t believe a word you say about him, so there’s no use.”

One side of his mouth lifts in a smirk, but at least he stops talking. The man’s

comment about having the devil on my side makes me wonder if Faustus does more than golf with the lord of the underworld.

I sure hope X has some kind of witch's intuition and doesn't walk into this trap.

If he dies in front of me, I'll take my life to join him.

Closing my eyes, I do the only thing I can do. I tell him I love him, and hope he gets the message.

X

Can you come? I miss you.

Not a message to get in a panic over for most people.

But I'm not most people. And I know the text wasn't from Clark. Even without my full magic powers, I've always had a sixth sense that goes along with seeing auras. Just as I can see Clark's aura in all its glory, I know the text wasn't from him. My phone crackles with negative energy, and the letters on the phone screen drip with blood only I can see.

Dave stalks back into the room, his jaw set as he removes the apron and tosses it onto the counter.

"Dad and a few of his men will be here shortly. He said he told Clark to watch out for your brother and gave him his number to call. I'm guessing he must have surprised him."

"Clark's not a stupid man. My brother definitely surprised him and that makes me nervous. What if he's already hurt him? Or worse." My voice trails off and I press my lips together to keep the tears away. I can't let my mind go there. Horace doesn't get to take from me again.

Dave sucks in a sharp breath and reaches for the counter to steady himself.

"Dave! What is it?" I rush over to steady him.

Dave blinks and stares through me. “I just got a message from Clark. He’s okay, but it’s like he’s...captured? Stuck? He can’t do anything, but...” Dave blinks again and takes my hand as he focuses on me. “He said to tell you he loves you.”

Charles steps up and gathers me in a hug as Dave still grips my hand.

“We won’t let anything happen to him, X. They’ll bring him home.” Charles turns my head towards him, and I focus on his kind eyes.

“He’s coming home.” I push away from Charles to stand next to Mike at the kitchen table. “That’s what you meant when you said to stay here, isn’t it, Mike? So my brother couldn’t sneak up on us.”

Mike nods.

“As a supernatural, you have protection here. To be out anywhere else puts you at risk. It’s not like walking down a street. His place of business still needs a layer of protection, like we have here. You’ll have to discuss with Clark what he wants to do, but if you want to remain together...this is your home.”

A commotion sounds from the entranceway and Faustus enters with two of the largest men I’ve ever laid eyes on. Both of them are wider than doorways at the shoulder and just as tall.

Faustus adjusts his suit jacket and strides towards me. His hand grabs me by the back of my neck and squeezes. “ X...there’s one thing about me you should know. When I’m pissed off, I’m a very dangerous man. Your brother has pissed me off and he’s going to pay. Clark will be back here tonight. You have my word.”

With another squeeze, he lets go and seats himself at the table with Mike.

“Mike, nice to see you again. I wish it was under different circumstances.”

“Me too. We should arrange a dinner next week. Maybe a BBQ if it doesn’t snow.”

“Now that sounds like a good idea. I know a butcher who owes me a favour. Oh, how about we watch the Grey Cup and make it a tailgate party? It’s been some time since I’ve watched anything other than hockey.”

Mike and Faustus continue their talk about eating and watching sports, like the love of my life isn’t in danger, and I curl my hands into fists.

Charles whispers in my ear. “Let’s go to the garden.”

I want to stay and hear what they have planned and learn exactly what my brother has done to piss off Faustus. But I’m also aware enough to know I need to collect my thoughts if I’m going to be of any help at all. Wordlessly, I follow Charles outside.

“You know, it’s odd to adjust to all these things demons and witches can do. As a normal human being, it can be a total mind fuck.” He loops his arm through mine as we walk in the chilly November air. “But as weird as it is, I completely trust them.”

Charles sits on the bench by the pond and rubs his arms with a shiver. Without a thought, I twirl my finger and a fuzzy blanket appears over his shoulders.

“See? That’s a mind fuck.”

A sad smile plays on my lips. “Well, you might not like what I need to do next.”

As much as I don’t want to think the worst, I need to be prepared. With all the power of my magic restored, I’m rusty. But I’m a healer and those skills never went away. They just weren’t as powerful. Just strong enough that I healed Charles’s bruises and

ribs, along with the odd injury to an animal I came across.

But I need the belladonna root in case someone is...well, critical.

Kneeling in front of the plot where belladonna grows, I hover my hands over the frosted soil.

“There’s no death. Only life. Bella juvenilis velociter !”

Several tender shoots reach up out of the soil—much like when I showed Clark just last night—and when I slash my hand through the air, they stop growing. With gentle fingers, I pick the shoots and turn to find Charles watching me with wide eyes.

“Wow. I have questions, but they can wait. Do you want to talk at all?”

“I...I don’t think so, Charles. Not right now. I just want to have Clark back, you know?” My jaw clenches as I think of my brother and how he’s done nothing but torment me my entire life. From beating me and practicing his spells on me to outright cursing me for the last several years of my life. “I’m making this right. I deserve this.”

“Fucking right you do.” Charles stands and clutches the blanket to him. “Let’s get you back there.”

With more purpose in my steps and Charles strong beside me, we return to the house to find everyone in the kitchen.

Dave’s gaze flicks from me to Charles and back again.

“Everything okay?”

Charles nods and they pass a silent message before Charles leaves my side to sit with Mike at the table.

“How are we getting Clark out of this?” My fingers stroke the belladonna roots in my pocket as I scan everyone in the room. These beings have come to my aid, possibly not even knowing what they’re about to walk into. One day, I’ll repay them the same way.

Faustus stands and adjusts his suit jacket. His rings click in the heavy silence.

“Charles stays here with Mike. You’re coming with us. I’ll fill you in on the way.”

He strides to the door and pauses. “What do we have for a vehicle?”

Dave chuckles. “Get bendy, Dad. We only have the Rogue right now.”

“I’ll get the shoehorn, boss.” One of the massive guys says with a laugh and honestly, he’s not wrong. Dave and Faustus are big guys. Both of them over six feet tall with broad shoulders and long legs.

These two guys are, well, brick walls. Easily over six-foot-five with wide shoulders not suited for compact cars with multiple passengers. Pretty sure the one guy has a tail he needs to adjust, too.

“I can sit on someone’s lap if it’s easier. I’m sure the police won’t be pulling us over.”

“Excellent idea. Dave, you drive. I’m shotgun. X, you figure out which one’s lap you’ll sit in. Let’s get going and show this asshole he’s not winning on my watch.”

Dave parks the car on the street opposite Clark’s store.

It's not invisible again, like I thought it might be, but my brother has made it appear like the shop is closed to discourage anyone from walking in. Brown paper taped to the store window declares it's under renovation and reopening soon.

Without a word, the demon I'd been sitting on places me on the seat as he exits the car with the other one Faustus brought with him. Together, they walk with purpose towards the store.

"So they're just going to guard the back? Will they know if we need them inside? "

Faustus nods. "Oh, they know what to do, X. We've done this before." He turns in his seat and locks his gaze on me. "I know what you're thinking. Just because your brother knows magic doesn't mean he has the upper hand here. You forget we demons have powers of our own."

"He's more evil than your boss, Faustus. I just don't want anything to go sideways. We only have one chance, or he'll kill Clark. Fuck...Louis too." My heart breaks. "He's innocent in all of this."

Dave steps out of the car and opens the back door for me. Once I slide out, he takes my shoulders and forces me to look at him.

"X, you're not who you used to be. You can defeat your brother on your own. Believe that, okay? We're here as backup. Stick to the plan and we'll all be home for supertime."

Faustus raises an eyebrow as he adjusts his suit jacket. Always an impeccably dressed and refined man, even when things are about to get messy.

"My son is right. Now enough of this lovey-dovey shit. Save it for Clark later. I have revenge to complete."

Dave nods, and with a last squeeze, we cross the street towards Beautiful Belladonna. Faustus doesn't even wait to be sure we're following. He just has that much confidence it will all go down as planned that he steps into the store and in the path of my maniacal brother without hesitation.

My eyes quickly scan the store, and it takes every bit of willpower in me not to rush to Louis, who lies unmoving on the floor. Instead, I step past Faustus and wait for my brother to give away his position.

Which he does.

The table with a display of books near the front wiggles slightly and, without thinking, my right hand shoots forward. "Stay right there!" A bolt of light flashes from my palm, and my brother immediately appears, hands in the pockets of his duster and the unamused chuckle of Faustus is the only sound.

"Oh, Horace..." Faustus steps closer as he shakes his head in mock disappointment. "We had a deal."

My brother stands tall and faces Faustus.

"You break deals all the time, old man. Don't be so surprised." His gaze shifts to me. "Well, well, little brother is all grown up, isn't he? I knew you and your bleeding heart would rush here to save a piece of ass. Still predictable after all these years, I see."

"Fuck off, Horace. What do you want from me?"

A dark laugh leaves his lips as he continues to stare at me.

"I'd rather show you."

With a tip of his head, Clark appears and a small cry escapes me. My beautiful Clark is bound to a chair, one eye swollen, already blackened, and a trickle of blood is still running from his temple. His other eye leaks a lone tear when he focuses on me.

I've never felt such intense rage before. I've reasoned and walked the sensible line, always weighing my emotions before reacting. But this? No fucking way can I do that. My hands clench at my sides and my words burst forth.

"What do you want from me, Horace? You get one answer before shit gets messy. What the fuck do you want!" My throat burns with the force of the shout as both Faustus and Dave stand like sentries and I move towards my brother. My palms itch and I curl my fingers inward.

"You really have to ask? I thought you were smarter than that. Your friend behind you took something of mine, and I want them back."

My brow scrunches and it finally clicks.

"You think I'm powerful enough to give you your hands back?"

His gaze darts to Faustus, and he lowers his voice. "I know you are, Xavier. The prophecy stated that a male born in our coven with the name of a letter would fall from grace. That same male would find new life and meaning, but their powers would remain buried until a new life purpose was found."

"And you think that's me?"

"Of course it's you, you idiot! If you ever paid attention at home when Dad taught us history, none of your life would be a surprise." Horace licks his lips and glances at Clark. "I knew what you were capable of before I cursed you here."

“Then why do you think I’ll help you after everything you’ve put me through?”

Horace turns quickly to Clark. “I think he wants me to hurt you more.” He nods his head, and a howl escapes Clark’s mouth as a book appears and smashes into the already damaged side of his face.

“You motherfu—”

I move to attack Horace, but a powerful grip on my shoulder holds me. Dave shakes his head and silently wills me to stick with the plan. Which I know is the right thing to do in order to end this, but I can’t bear to watch Clark suffer.

“You promise to let him go if I can do it?”

“Of course.”

His sly grin isn’t truth-worthy. With a shaky hand, I draw one of the belladonna roots from my pocket and my brother eyes it with hope.

“Hold out your arm.” Horace does and I don’t hide my cringe when he presents the messy-looking stump to me. With a quick glance at Faustus, he gives nothing away, but the still-healing skin tells a story of ruthless pain, and I’m grateful not to be on Faustus’s bad side.

Stepping away from him, I shake my head.

“No. I don’t believe that you’ll let him go. Let Clark free first.”

Red rage blooms on Horace’s pale face. “So you wish to hold another lover while he dies in your arms? Suit yourself.”

Everything happens so fast after that.

The moment Horace moves to harm Clark, both my hands shoot balls of white light that stop him momentarily, while he's stunned Faustus's men enter from the back. The store's air crackles and zaps of electricity pop around us. Visible slices of electricity like streamers from a party grow around us, and a hot wind swirls, kicking up the pages of scattered books.

Faustus looms taller and the demon with the tail morphs into...what I can only describe as a black maw. A screaming pit of suffering and despair that I'm grateful Clark can't see because of his eye.

"No one crosses me or goes back on their deal, Horace." Faustus's voice booms so loud I almost cover my ears. "You crossed the wrong demon."

My brother still stands as if caught in his own binding spell and hasn't reacted to the changes around him. The other demon behind him screams in a language I don't understand and Horace spins, losing his balance. He tries to disappear, but when his form flickers, a mumbled spell from me won't let it take.

And then he's gone.

Swallowed by the black maw.

A whoosh, like all the air leaving the room at once, makes my ears pop. The crackling energy is gone, along with my brother and the two demons Faustus brought along.

Clark slumps forward against his ties with a pained moan.

"You get him, I'll check on Louis." Dave rushes to the man on the floor and I kneel

in front of Clark.

“Baby? Clark? Can you hear me?” His pulse is faint, but he’s still alive. Taking one of the belladonna roots from my pocket, I wrap it around his left arm loosely and chant. “From these roots come life. Rapido amour . ”

Holding my breath, I watch as the root slides up his arm and dissolves into his body. His pulse grows stronger beneath my fingers, and he moans while attempting to lick his lips.

“X?”

“Yeah, babe.” My voice cracks. “It’s me. I’ve got you.”

Clark forces the better of the two eyes open and squints at me.

“I’m gonna get you all fixed up, okay?” Tears flow down my cheeks as I assess the rest of his injuries. “Trust me?”

“With my life.”

His fingers curl around mine and squeeze with a strength I didn’t expect him to still have after the torture my brother put him through.

“I love you.” His voice is rough, filled with the physical pain he still has. “I knew you’d be here.”

Blinking hard doesn’t stop the tears streaming down my face. Not just for Clark’s declaration, but for his aura. It glows bright white, almost heavenly. The shape I couldn’t make out before is the belladonna flower and I’m shocked I didn’t know what it was until now. It’s so obvious. One plant dips into the edge and reaches

towards his chest. The side with his heart. A rush of emotions, too overwhelming to name, swamps me as his beautiful aura beams for only me to see.

“Hey.” Clark extends a shaky hand to my face. “Don’t cry, beautiful. You’re gonna take care of me and we’ll be okay.”

“We will, babe.”

“Hey, X? Louis is awake. Can you come check on him? ”

Clark drops his head back. “He’s like family, X. I’ll be okay until you’ve checked on him.”

“I think after what just happened, we’re all some kind of special family now.”

Clark

One week later

“ I told you, sweetheart. I’m fine.”

X hovers just out of my reach as I lay on his bed. After the events of last week, he’s nursed me back to health in his room. While I clearly appreciate it, he’s been keeping his distance and I need him to get out of his head.

“My brain agrees. I know you’re okay. I’m...I guess I’m still scared.”

Finally, he steps forward and sits on the edge of the bed. Taking my hand, he presses the palm to his lips with a shaky sigh.

“Baby...please? Just a kiss? I need you.”

I hate begging, but X has kept his distance, and my arms ache to hold him. To feel him wrapped around me at night. Sure, for the first few days, I was a bruised and exhausted mess. Sex wasn’t on my mind as he used his touch and plant potions to heal me. I was in awe. Even in my beaten state, my heart yearned for the love of this man who literally saved my life.

Near-death experiences at the hands of supernatural beings have you second-guess a lot of your life choices and compel you to live in the moment.

The last three days X has fed me soup when I really want a giant plate of pasta or a

huge hunk of steak. But I noticed the tremble in his hands and the shake of his voice. While I was the one refusing to believe I could love someone this fast, he was all in since day one and scared to lose what we had growing. X wears his feelings on his sleeve.

“The first night you were here, you were a purple mess.” His voice hitches and he swallows. “But I knew I had the power to save you. Everything to help you heal existed within me and I just went for it.”

He presses my hand to his cheek, and I stroke his soft skin with my thumb.

“You did and thank you isn’t enough.” As I push myself up, I wince, acknowledging that my ribs are still tender, but I’ll deal with it. “X...”

He turns to me, and those enormous brown eyes that bare his soul lock on mine.

“Baby, you’re a gifted witch and I’m so honoured to watch you flourish. To see you do what you were born to do. And I know it likely scared you seeing me like that and treating me, but there was one thing I needed most that you didn’t let me have.”

His brow furrows and I tug him until he relents and gingerly straddles my lap.

“Kiss me.” Touching our foreheads together, I dust my lips over his. “I need you to kiss me.” Pressing my hand over his heart, I curl my fingers into his shirt, waiting for him to lead.

His hands cup my face, and he angles his head. His lips are tentative at first, barely brushing mine, but I meet him and hope for more.

“Tell me if I hurt you?” he whispers.

“I promise.”

And he finally opens up, kissing me long and deep, his fingers curled in my hair and pulling with a gentle sting. His hips rock on me in a subtle grind and it's the rush I've been wanting. The all-consuming passion that's been between us since the day I saw him in the club.

My hands slide up his back, and I press him against me.

“Fuck, I've missed you. Missed this.”

X's hands drift down and slide under my shirt. I lean back and he pulls it off with a gentleness that's so like him. Still hesitant not to hurt me, yet desperate to touch and taste now that he's confident I won't break.

X removes his shirt and tosses it behind him. A pink glow travels up his pale skin, and he looks at me from beneath his long lashes.

“Why are you so shy suddenly? Talk to me, baby.”

“I want to hold you. I want to lie with you and hold you and hear your heartbeat against my ear because it's the sound that makes me feel safe. It's the essence of you, and I want to be as close to it as I can.”

I don't even know what to say to that. I can only nod and tug at the blankets while he crawls off me and I ease myself down next to him.

“Clark...I, we, need to talk about what comes next.”

“It's not you wrapping yourself around me and falling asleep on me?”

“After that.” He slides his leg between mine and tucks his head up onto my chest with a contented sigh. “We need to be like this every night. I know you have your own place, but you rent, right?”

I trail my fingers lazily across his skin and watch the ripple of bumps that follow.

“I do. Do you want us to get a new place together?”

“Um, so, the thing is...this house gives us protection. Me and Dave live here because it's not a house that anyone could sneak up on us in.” He lifts his head to make eye contact. “If there was ever a legit witch hunt or a purge of demons, we'd never be found here. Or if angry brothers were looking for me or my boyfriend, he'd not be able to sneak up on us. It's kind of like that.”

“God, X. So you need to live here? Is that it?”

His fingers swirl across a faded bruise on my chest as his head nods against my body.

“It's been recommended, yes. Would you live here with me? There's a larger suite on Mike's side of the house. We'd have our own bedroom and bathroom like this, but much larger. He even has a fireplace in his and he said he'd be happy to take something smaller if we'd like his. I know it's not the same, and it might be weird having roommates but...” He shifts up and stares down into my eyes. “This is the only home I'm able to have, and I'd very much like you to share it with me.”

“C'mere.”

X lowers his head until our lips touch and I kiss him.

“I'd love nothing more.”

His lips linger on mine before he lowers his head to my chest again and presses his body closer.

“Then we need to talk to Louis. Thankfully, he was unconscious and didn’t witness all the shit you did, but he’s been asking to see you.”

Not that I’d forgotten about Louis, but, well...I’d lost track of the days, and we haven’t been in touch.

“Shit. I need a new phone too. How is he?”

“He’s physically okay, but I think he’s worried about you. I would’ve brought him yesterday, but I wasn’t sure if you’d want him to see you like this or not. And...what do we tell him about this?”

“Whatever you feel comfortable sharing. Should we keep you being a witch a secret?”

X remains silent for several minutes, but his finger traces hearts on my chest and it makes me more gooey for him than I was before.

“It’s not safe for me to tell many people. Not that I think Louis will blab all over, but the more people who know...the more risky things become. Dave and I talked about it already and we think we can explain it all away, so Louis won’t question anything. But just because he doesn’t know what I am doesn’t mean he’s not welcome to come over or whatever. We have things in place for that.”

He presses a kiss to my chest. “I don’t want you to think you have to give up your friends to be with me. It doesn’t need to be like that. I’d never ask that of you.”

My eyelids droop, the exhaustion slamming back into me, and I hug X close.

“I know, babe. Whatever you decide, I’m on board with. You have more at stake than I do.” Yawning, I drop a kiss to the top of his head. “But I’m in love with you, X. I’ll do whatever you need to keep you safe. You have my word.”

He also has my heart and my last breath if he ever needs it.

This man will never know what it’s like to be alone again. Not as long as I’m in the picture.

X

“ You sure own a lot of stuff. Good thing Mike offered to move to a smaller suite. We’d never fit all your cookbooks in my old space.”

Seriously. How many cookbooks does one guy need? Hasn’t he heard of the internet? Just look up a recipe when you need it. Or ask your witch boyfriend. There are easier ways.

Clark grabs me by the waist and tosses me onto the bed. Laughing, I pretend to get away, but we both know I want him to pin me down and have his way. Even if it leaves me hard and breathless.

When I asked him to move in with me, it took longer than I thought. He had to give notice on his apartment and then spent weeks downsizing. I refused to let him sell his favourite recliner and since this was now his home, it’s in the living room next to the picture window. Besides being naked with Clark anywhere I can, sitting with him in his chair is my favourite thing to do. I squeeze onto his lap with my tea in the evening as he reads or does crosswords. The simple happiness that comes with his companionship will never get old .

“I like my cookbooks.”

He nips at my ear, and I laugh more.

“We’ll get you another bookshelf in the living room, then. You need space for your tripod set up in here.”

He pauses and lifts his head to stare down at me.

“You still want me to cam?”

“Of course I do. Why wouldn’t I?”

It’s not like he does it often, but he enjoys the thrill of it and I certainly don’t mind watching. Plus, it works for us.

“I don’t know. I guess I just thought you might want me to yourself.”

“Well, I do, but that’s the intimate part. You like people watching you and I like to watch how hot that makes you.” Wrapping my legs around his waist, I squeeze. “But it’s only me who gets to know what you taste like or how your cock feels. That’s all mine.”

Clark groans and takes my mouth in a hungry kiss.

“I swear you’re trying to kill me. You’re so fucking perfect for me, baby.”

“Yeah? Well...I was thinking...” Clark lifts his head, his lips tilt in a sexy grin that sends my heart racing faster. “Do you know it’s been three months now since I first saw you stroking yourself on that stage and coming all over yourself?”

“Has it been that long already?”

“Mmhmm. And I thought it would be a great place to celebrate. Maybe recreate our meeting, but with a different ending. ”

Clark’s hardness pushes into mine, and I tease him with a tilt of my hips.

“You seem to like that idea.”

“I love it. When do you want to go?”

Laughter bursts from my mouth at his eagerness.

“After supper. It’s all planned out already. I just needed you to say yes.”

“I’ll never say no to that.” He pushes off me and pulls me up, delivering a well-placed smack to my ass. “The sooner we eat, the sooner we can get there.”

Well...I can’t argue with that.

After paying the Uber driver, Clark holds his hand out to me as I step from the car. No borrowed clothes this time. Clark insisted we dress up and even chose my outfit. I can’t say I’m unhappy about it, either.

Clark revs my engine in his fitted dress pants and dress shirt. The gold flecks in his eyes glint as we walk under the streetlight and he presses a hand to the small of my back.

“I can’t believe we found this place again. When Faustus brought me here, I’d never noticed this place before.”

Of course, maybe because Clark was here, the cloaking spell followed him. Who the fuck knows at this point? I’m just happy that we’re now in the building we first met. I didn’t know I could be this sentimental, but Clark seems to love it.

The hallway is the same, minus the couple jerking off, and once we show our passes at the main door, the rush I felt coming here the first time is tenfold.

Because it's not just the thrill of the club's voyeur room. It's the heady anticipation of knowing the night will end much differently.

Clark flags down a server and orders our drinks to be brought to the voyeur room.

"Christ, I feel like I might blow in ten seconds. I'm walking a razor's edge right now." Clark adjusts himself and I sneak a glance at the bulge behind the zipper.

"We're just getting started, Clark. Please don't let tonight be the night you don't have staying power."

Clark playfully pinches my ass. "You're much more calm about this than I am. I'm so horny I could fuck a hole in a wall right now."

I can't help the bark of laughter that sounds, and it earns me a few glares as we step into the voyeur room.

"Just save it for my hole. That's all I ask."

Clark chokes on air and stares at me. "What? Here?"

"I thought you were supposed to be the cool and collected one." I grab his elbow and pull him over to an oversized chair in the corner. "Yes, here. But in private, I booked a room."

Clark gapes at me, and I gently close his mouth with a finger under the chin and a soft laugh.

"You want your first time to be in a sex club? Don't you want...? I mean...it's not romantic or anything. Are you sure?"

“Clark, I’m sure. I don’t need rose petals and soft music for it to be romantic. Trust me. This is what I want. You’re what I want, and I might have pre-planned tonight’s events in the shower earlier.”

Just because I’ve never had penetrative sex with another man doesn’t mean I’m as sheltered as a nun. I watch. A lot. And I’ve tried things. Many, many things. Some alone and some with Clark. I know he didn’t want to push me, and I love him for it, but I’ve been waiting for this night, and for him, for what feels like forever. There’s no more perfect way for this to play out.

His eyes darken as he leans closer. “There’s my dirty witch.” He kisses me softly at first, but I place a hand behind his head to keep him there, to deepen the kiss.

“Damn right, I’m yours, and this is a fantasy come true. I want everyone watching to salivate over you while you stroke yourself so close to coming it hurts.”

His breathing quickens as his hand slides up my thigh. I grab his wrist and whisper next to his ear. “Then I’m going to take you to that room over there. See the mirror? It’s one-way glass.”

“You should stop talking or I’m going to put on a very short show for you, sweetheart.” His voice is so raspy you’d think he had a pack-a-day smoking habit.

“Okay. Use your imagination while you’re up there then. I’ll save the rest for later.”

The server sat our drinks next to us, but neither of us noticed until Clark tried to swallow and looked around. He gulps his whiskey sour while I sip my gin and tonic. Without a word, he leaves me and steps up onto the stage, which isn’t as heavily occupied as the first time and is stationary tonight. Wednesday evenings, I guess, aren’t busy enough to justify it. Who knows? But Clark takes a seat where several people can watch him along with me.

He lets his belt hang open and pops the button of his pants before slowly unbuttoning his shirt. He peeks up occasionally to see who is watching, and a few have changed their seats for a better view.

Let them fucking look all they want. I can't blame them. Clark steals my breath like nothing else. That boyish dimple and stray lock of hair that has a mind of its own and flops on his forehead, turns me to mush every single time.

He leans his head back and spreads his legs wide as he rubs himself through his clothes. Two men to my right hum their appreciation loud enough for him to hear, and he watches them while he frees his dick from his pants.

Fuck. Me. Sideways.

Biting my lip to contain my growl of want, I glance at the men watching Clark. I don't know if they know each other, but they've shifted closer to touch thighs and my brain short circuits. My desire to watch anybody, and not just Clark, was a factor I failed to consider .

Glancing back at Clark, a small smile plays on his lips.

He fucking knows what just happened to me. So much for my impeccable self-control tonight.

Clark's cock leaks so much that it shines in the low light. He tucks the waistband of his boxers under his balls and drifts a hand up his chest to pinch his nipples. The men next to me audibly moan and when I glance over, one is kissing the other man's neck with his hand down his pants.

Drawn to Clark by the invisible string, I know he's watching me and when I shift my attention back to the stage, his hand quickens as he stares at me. The strawberry blush

on his chest and the frantic pace of strokes are sure signs he won't last much longer. Time to get to the next part.

Standing so fast I knock into the table next to me, I tilt my head for Clark to follow.

I'm barely pushing the door open with the pass card and he's plastered on my back. Hard and hot and groping me like an octopus.

"I saw you watching that couple." His hands are on my belt, rushing to get my pants off while I fumble with my shirt. Whose idea was it to dress up? T-shirts are so much easier.

"I know you did. It seems I didn't consider that, and I might have been overstimulated."

My shirt flies off and Clark drops as he pushes my pants to my ankles. He licks a stripe up my dick as he straightens back up.

"Clark. Fuck. "

He rips off the rest of his clothes and looks around the room. It's nothing special, except there's no bed. There are a few chairs, a loveseat, and a cabinet with drawers in the corner. One drawer stands open to offer condoms and lube. Since we already had the ' no-condom talk ' earlier, I take the bottle of lube and toss it onto the chair closest to us.

"I've been sitting here, at the supper table, and in the car with this thing in my ass and I want you to fuck me in front of this glass." Placing my hands on the one-way glass, I arch and stick my ass in the air. Clark groans like a wounded animal and drops to his knees behind me.

“X...mother of god...I had no idea.” He parts my cheeks, and I shiver as he taps a finger against the flat end of the plug I placed after I had some fun with a dildo in the shower. Whoever invented suction cups that powerful deserves a medal. “Baby, you’re gonna be gaping for me. How big is this one?”

His lips kiss my ass and I now know how he felt when he said he could fuck a hole in the wall.

“The biggest one we have. Five inches.”

He flicks his tongue around the edge, and I drop my head with another groan.

“That’s a good start, then. How long have you been putting this in without telling me?”

“A few weeks. I know...I just...I want it to be you, Clark. Please stop talking and fuck me while we watch the room.”

His chest presses against my back, and his breath skates across my overheated skin. “You’re such a dirty thing, X. I love it and I love you.”

Cool lube hits my crack, oozing around the plug before Clark tugs gently to slowly remove it.

My fingers curl against the glass as he works it out and I can’t suppress the low keening groan as it pops free. Clark’s palm presses against the small of my back and the head of his cock is already there, nudging into me.

“Holy shit, you feel bigger than the plug.”

“You’re good, baby. I wish you could see your ass swallow my cock.” He pants into

the back of my neck. “Fuck.”

One arm wraps around my waist, and he kisses my shoulder. Every touch and kiss from Clark are logs on the fire.

“Everything okay?”

“Yesss...Clark...”

He presses impossibly farther and I cry out.

“Do you need me to stop? Take your time, babe.”

Somehow, he finds my softening dick and strokes me as I experiment with the feeling of having a body attached to what I’m fucking. It seems you can prep all you want and it still might not go as easily as planned. But Clark’s whispers near my ear set me at ease as I rock back a little more.

“You don’t have to take it all, babe.”

His fingers hold my hips like a vise, and with a deep exhale, I push back onto him until my cheeks slap his skin.

“Ohmygod.” Swallowing hard, I reach for one of Clark’s hands and he threads our fingers together. “Clark...”

He stretches our joined hands up to the mirror, and I flatten my palm against the glass. I crane my neck back towards him, desperate for his lips on mine, and he’s there, kissing me as he moves slowly at first, swallowing my groans.

“Look forward, baby. Watch the crowd.”

Panting, I do as he says and stare out the glass, watching more people who have joined the room since we arrived. The couple that was next to me are now on stage and one man sucks the other off.

Clark moves with more force now, slapping against my thighs and my knees shake as my vision whites out.

“Holy shit...X...”

Clark releases the hand he’d held up on the mirror and grips my hips. He fucks me so hard that I think my head hits the glass. And I beg him to keep going. Even though I had already come so hard, I lost my sight for a moment.

“Come in me.”

“Oh, fuck...”

With a stuttered thrust, he empties inside me, the warm rush an entirely new sensation, and together we stagger back to the loveseat and collapse in a twisted pile of sweaty limbs.

“Best loss of virginity ever.”

Clark laughs softly, turning my head to face him.

“Best anything ever. You’re incredible. This was...I don’t even know how to describe it, but I love you. I’m happy you got what you wanted.”

He kisses me gently, ghosting his lips over mine. Feathering kisses over my eyes and cheeks.

“Was it what you wanted? Did you like it?”

He pulls me onto his lap and tucks the hair that’s fallen out of my bun behind my ears.

“You’re what I want, X. Nothing about you fits in any box I had about love or relationships or even sex. And that’s just the way I like it.”

“I feel like there might be a but in there somewhere.”

“No buts. Just know that even though we share this kinky stuff, sometimes I like to be with you without it.”

“Yeah...I know. Me too. You make me gooey inside, Clark. Like a big ol’ chocolate bar melted in the sun.”

He laughs and kisses me again.

“So...did you make any plans on how to get that plug home?”

“Uh, no. Do you have pockets?”

He raises an eyebrow. “Did you not notice how tight my pants are? There’s no room for that thing in my pockets.” He taps at me to stand up. “I’m sure you’ll think of something.”

And I do.

Because I’m a witch and I know magic.

And Clark leaves the club wearing cargo pants instead.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:40 am

Epilogue

One Year Later

X “That’s not how you do it!”

“Yes, it is! X showed me and I know, Clark. Like this.”

Leaning against the doorframe of the kitchen, I wipe sleep from my eyes as I watch my closest friend and my boyfriend argue in the kitchen. Clark looks as fresh as a daisy while Dave is...flustered.

“What exactly are you two arguing about so loudly?”

Clark beams a smile and walks over to me after sending a glare towards Dave.

“Hey, babe, you’re supposed to be sleeping in today.” He kisses my forehead and pulls me into his arms.

“I would have been if you two weren’t out here making more noise than a pair of elephants.”

“If Clark wouldn’t have barged in, it would’ve been fine. I have it under control.”

Dave most certainly doesn’t. Whatever it is.

I push away from Clark and stand next to Dave. The mess across the counter and

stove is quite fantastic on the scale of disasters.

“What are you trying to make?”

Running my finger through the puddle of red goo, I sniff first, then taste.

“Raspberry?”

“A crumble,” Clark says from behind me. “Your favourite.”

“So, what are you two arguing about?”

“I said you like whole berries on top and Dave said no, you like them all inside.”

The two of them stare back at me with matching expressions. Hoping I choose them and prove them right. Not that they fight over me, but Dave is...well, Dave. He protects what he loves, and I fall into that group. If I agree with Clark, he'll be crushed. But my boyfriend will be equally hurt if I say he's wrong.

So what's a witch to do but lie?

“You're both right. Put all the berries inside, but I like whole ones at the top. One last layer before the final crumble.”

Dave and Charles each lift an eyebrow at me, calling my bluff.

“May I remind you both that you woke me up for this? On my birthday, no less.”

Clark sighs and relents.

“Go ahead, Dave. Sorry I interrupted. I just want his day to be perfect.”

“I’m sorry we made so much noise, X. And I guess you know your birthday dessert now.”

“I can’t wait to try it.”

Dave returns to the mess, and Clark takes my hand to lead me back to our suite. Once the door is closed behind us, he pulls me back to our bed and holds the duvet up for me.

“Get in. It’s too early to be up on your birthday.”

“Are you joining me? It’s kind of cold out and I sleep better with you here.”

He slides under the covers on his side, and I settle next to him. Clark makes the cuddliest of bed partners and I always sleep better when he’s there. After too many years of fitful or no sleep, actually lying in bed sleeping with Clark is something I’ll never tire of.

“Happy birthday, X. Are you excited?”

“I thought you wanted me to go back to sleep?”

He laughs softly and squeezes me closer. “Sorry,” he whispers.

Several moments pass and Clark still hasn’t relaxed, so I push up off his chest to look at him.

“Spill it.”

“What?”

“You’re so keyed up you’re almost vibrating. What is it?”

A smile fills his handsome face, and he kisses me fast.

“Can I give you your birthday present now?” He doesn’t wait for me to reply. Instead, he wiggles away from me and runs to the closet.

Sleep is no longer an option with Clark this excited, and I sit up against the headboard. He turns from the closet with a giant pink gift bag and a small, wrapped box.

“I love the wrapping.”

Clark bounces on the bed and hands me the pink bag first.

“You love pink. Don’t pretend you don’t.”

With a smile, I remove the layer of tissue paper and peek inside.

“Ohmygod. Thank you for giving me this privately.”

Since meeting Clark and finally discovering sex, I learned I still like toys. Especially when Clark uses them on me. My collection was small when he first moved in, but it’s grown exponentially since.

In the bag is one I’ve had my eye on. It’s a locking leather plug harness. Similar to a cock cage but this locks, so I can’t remove the plug unless there’s a key. And what a plug it is. Bigger than anything I’ve tried yet.

“You wanted that one, right? No rush. If you’re not ready—”

“Oh, no. I’m ready.” Swallowing, I stretch over to kiss him. “I love that it has a key,” I whisper.

“Me too.”

Our kisses turn into a make-out session as he stretches over my body, and I lose myself to him like I do every single time. It’s not just sex with Clark. He’s everything. Since finding him, I know I can’t fathom a day without him in my life.

“I have a more serious gift, though.” He trails his lips down my neck before he sits up. Lips puffy from kissing, his throat bobs as he reaches over to hand me the smaller box. “I had this made for you.”

Peeling away the shiny black paper, I find a matte black box. When I remove the lid, my breath rushes out in a giant whoosh.

“Clark...is this...are you?”

“It’s not an engagement ring. Unless you want it to be?”

Taking the ring from the box, I examine the intricate etching of a familiar flower along the band and bite my lip.

“It’s belladonna, and this is gorgeous, Clark.”

“Look inside, babe.”

My eyes fill with tears and Clark removes the ring from my shaking hand. He tilts it to show me the inner engraving that reads, My Bella. Forever yours, Clark .

“I thought when I had my shop that Beautiful Belladonna was all I would need to be happy.” He wipes a tear off my cheek. “Then you appeared and turned it upside down, and I knew there was more I needed. From the moment you took over my magic meeting, you invaded every thought and imprinted on my soul. You’re my match in every way. My beautiful, dirty witch. My bella. You mean so much to me,

X.”

He takes my hand and slides the ring onto my right ring finger.

“I know you don’t exist in the world for us to be married legally. If I could, I’d marry you.”

Sniffing, I wipe at my eyes. “I’d say yes.”

“Thank god. That could have been awkward.”

Laughing softly, I press a kiss to his lips. “I love you. Thank you.”

“It’s my pleasure to make you smile. And to love you, bella. Now let’s go eat raspberry crumble for breakfast.”

Clark

“You can’t build a hotel without the houses first, Dave. That’s not how the game works.”

“But I have the money to buy it!”

He waves the coloured money in the air and X chuckles.

“Dave, it’s a progressive development. You need to ease the area into buildings with houses first. Then expand to hotels after.” X pats his arm and lowers it while Charles grins across the table.

“Buy more properties first, love. Keep the money for that.”

“This game is stupid,” Dave huffs.

If you asked me a year ago how I spent my Saturday nights, my answer wouldn't have included playing Monopoly with a demon, a witch, and an ex-priest.

"I'm already bankrupt, so I'm gonna turn on the hockey game." Pushing away from the table, I kiss X on the head as I walk over to the fridge for a beer.

"I'll get popcorn and join you in a bit, babe. I have a feeling I'm landing on one of Charles's hotels next turn and I can't afford it."

Charles rubs his hands together. "That's right. High roller over here."

Dave glares. "It's a board game, Chuck."

"And you're the worst at gloating when you win!"

"That's true," I offer helpfully as I walk into the living room.

There's more friendly fighting among the three of them and X shows up a few minutes later. He settles next to me on the oversized chair and places a kiss on my cheek.

"You didn't bring popcorn."

"Please, Clark." He snaps his fingers, and a bowl appears on the table next to me while he shakes his head. "It's like you don't even know me sometimes."

"I love it when you use your magic for food, baby." I smack a kiss on his cheek and settle back as we watch the game. Charles and Dave join us shortly after, and for the rest of the evening, we swap stories and I teach them about hockey.

X keeps magically refilling popcorn, which is seriously the best thing ever. We make plans to go to a hockey game together next week. Charles gets on his phone and

purchases tickets with more excitement than I expected.

“I got good seats. We can ogle these guys up close.”

“Is that what you think?” Dave plucks the phone from Charles’s hand and shoves it into his shirt pocket.

“Are you going to be all caveman now because you’re jealous? ”

I’ve lived here long enough to know the game they play, and I turn to X.

“Let’s just go to bed. We know where this is going.”

He nods in agreement, and Charles tips his head as we walk by, acknowledging our departure, but egging Dave on. It’s their thing and I’m not one to judge. My boyfriend likes to watch me jerk off for strangers over the internet. I’m hardly one to cast stones.

We go through our nightly routines and X slides under the covers and wraps himself around me. He rests the hand wearing my ring on top of my chest. I bring it to my lips and kiss his hand before lacing our fingers together.

“Goodnight, bella.”

He kisses my chest in return with a whispered I love you and his breaths quickly even out as he falls asleep.

But I stay awake a little longer, because no dream is better than this reality.

Want to read Dave and Charles' story? You can find it in [My Saintly Demon](#) .

Faustus will have his day. Join my newsletter to stay in the loop so you don't miss his

story.