



Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs

Author: *R Sullins*

Category: Fantasy

Description: A magical murder mystery with a little bit of ex-wife drama, and a whole lot of fated love

Brigette loved the little shop she'd inherited from her grandmother. If you want to find something to help you with your spells or to top off your witchy supplies, her store is the place to go.

She had a great life, even if she missed her grandmother and mom so much it hurt as they traveled around the world on cruises. She definitely didn't need a mate. Why would she want to take the chance on a person who could choose to leave her because they wouldn't feel the same pull a witch did? She was just fine babysitting her grandmother's familiar, Mortimer.

Just. Fine.

And then witches started dying. No, not dying... murdered.

Who could have guessed the mate she didn't want would step into her shop ready to ask her questions about the murders? The tall, dark, and handsome detective wasn't going to get to her. Even if he seemed perfect.

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Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:14 am

Chapter

One

LOGAN

The body at my feet had disgust filling my gut. No, I wasn't nauseous. As a homicide detective of five years, I was long past that stage in my career. I figured anyone who did the job that I did and didn't feel anger at the senseless loss of life should turn in their badge.

I loved my job. It was tedious, required a hell of a lot of leg work, and a fuck-ton of paperwork, but being able to put assholes behind bars and give the grieving families of victims a small sliver of peace made every long workday worth it.

I looked up from the elderly woman who'd several hours ago met with the wrong end of a sharp implement to gaze around the room. The woman's sitting room was tidy, with just a few small knick-knacks on a bookshelf filled with leather-bound tomes that appeared to be almost entirely on the occult. I walked over to take a closer look, careful to step around the forensic technician who was meticulously taking pictures and logging evidence.

Several of the books were of spells. I picked one at random and flipped through the pages, taking in the notes written in the margins with casually elegant handwriting. Glancing at a few of the spells, I noted the remedy for a stuffy nose. Flipping a few more pages, I stopped on one for premature ejaculation and raised an eyebrow.

“Well, that escalated quickly,” I murmured with amusement. I closed the book and carefully slid it back into place.

“What a fucking mess,” my partner for the last five years said with a grumble. I turned to see him popping a stick of peppermint gum into his mouth before being careful to ensure the wrapper made it back into his pocket. “What are we looking at here? Some kind of voodoo witchcraft shit? Just when I think I’ve seen it all.” He let out a heavy sigh. William MacKenzie was a veteran homicide detective that I’d worked with for the last five years. Since I’d known him, I’d watched the stress of the job take over one line at a time until his face, which had already seen too many years on the job, was deeply creased.

I walked over to the wall where pictures hung in mismatched gilded frames. Our victim, Emily Brooks, was in several of them. A much younger version holding a baby in her arms caught my eye. She was smiling brightly for the camera, holding the young child in a way that conveyed how proud she was to show her off to the camera. “Not voodoo,” I said, then turned back to Mac. “Looks like she has a daughter, possibly a granddaughter, depending on the age of the picture.”

Another tired sigh. “I’ll start looking for next of kin.” He gestured down at the victim. “So witchcraft?”

Abandoning the look into the past, I walked to stand next to my partner. The victim was lying in the middle of a circle that looked to have been drawn on the wood floor with what I’d guess was a liquid chalk marker. I’d bet my next paycheck that we’d find it somewhere in the small two bedroom house. Most of the body was covering the five pointed star inside of the circle. Candles had been placed at her feet, head, and below each hand. With the body splayed with the arms extended from her sides, it made an almost perfect cross.

I took out my phone and searched for an app I rarely used.

“What are you looking for?” Mac asked, looking over my arm to see the screen. I found the compass and turned, lining myself up with the victim’s head. Mrs. Emily Brooks was in perfect alignment with the compass, her head at the north point. Circling around the body and stepping around the techs, still logging all the various crystals and herbs lying outside the circle, I verified what I had already guessed to be true.

“North, east, south, and west. Our victim was a sacrifice in a ritual of some kind.” I murmured as I took in the room. I turned off the screen and slid the phone back into my pocket. I watched one of the forensic techs cross themselves before kissing the gold cross that hung around her neck. Turning away, I looked toward the large windows. The curtains spread open wide to allow the sun in. Or, in the case of what we were dealing with at the moment—the moon.

There were still the faint scents of herbs and candle wax under the heavy scent of death. I’d been in more gruesome crime scenes, some where blood had literally dripped down the walls, but no murder was a pretty sight. The one in front of us was one I’d never seen before, though.

“We are done here, detectives.” Shauna, the lead tech, stood up after placing the last bag of evidence they’d collected in the case. The other techs followed suit. “I’ll wait until the body is removed to take some final pictures, but everything has been collected.” Shauna was a no-nonsense woman who was serious about her job and always careful about handling evidence. After the years and the many crime scenes we’d worked together, I had no doubts that she would ensure everything they’d collected would be carefully logged and processed. With a nod, I watched as they filed out of the small house.

“Not that I know anything about magic or rituals, but don’t witches do their hoo-do shit outside? You know? Dance naked under the moon, light candles, drink potions?” Mac scratched the scruff on his chin, which had become more salt than pepper since

we first met.

“Don’t believe everything you see on TV, Mac.” I grinned at him and shook my head. Pointing toward the large windows, I said, “Those curtains are wide open. I would guess that would allow for plenty of moonlight to enter the room. Even then, I’d assume that not every spell needs to be done outside.”

Mac grunted as the coroner came inside to collect the waiting body. While my partner chatted with the coroner, I stepped closer to the window, taking in the small yet carefully tended yard. The plants were lush, and even with the disturbing pall of death filling the house, butterflies flitted from flower to flower. Birds flew in to land on the birdfeeder before flying away. It wouldn’t be long before the feeder ran out, and the flowers began to wither without the tending of the owner. I wondered if Ms. Emily Brooks’s daughter would care or if she would be heartbroken to see what her mother had so carefully tended to begin to fade.

I turned back to see the body being zipped closed inside the heavy vinyl bag. Mac followed the coroner outside, but I paused to give the room a final glance. Someone had murdered an elderly witch in her own home, likely using many of her own supplies. Nothing had been found in any of the other rooms. No signs of struggle were in the house, and the door was locked from the inside. That usually meant she either knew her murderer, or she hadn’t been frightened of them.

With only one full cup of tea, long gone cold, sitting on the table next to an overstuffed armchair, a puffy purple pillow, and a matching throw blanket, I had more questions than answers at the moment. Rarely would someone have a guest over, have tea, and not offer a cup. It could be that the murderer had interrupted Emily as she’d settled in for an evening cup before bed.

I looked at the now empty circle where only a dark red stain remained. “I’ll find your killer, Emily,” I said softly. I passed Shauna as I walked through the front door and

into the bright sunlight. I could hear her take several more photos as I stood on the porch and took in the neighborhood. It was a quiet street, one that was full of well-maintained homes. If I had to guess, most of the residents were younger couples who were at the beginning of their careers and marriages, while the remaining older residents kept watch during the day. It was unlikely anyone had heard or seen anything, but it was my job to ask.

Mac walked up beside me and gestured to the neighborhood. “You take left, I’ll take right. Meet in the middle?”

I nodded. The plan was one that we’d gone with many times, with few variations depending on the surrounding area of a crime scene. More times than not, the neighbors had little to nothing of value to add to the investigation, but all it took was one small nugget of information to make it all worth the many hours of leg work.

I clapped Mac on the shoulder and began to stride toward the first house. “Good luck.”

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:14 am

Chapter

Two

brIDGETTE

The sound of the keys jangling from my hand was accompanied by the sound of my black-heeled boots hitting the pavement as I approached the brightly painted red door of my shop. Holding my keys in one hand, I sipped from the latte I just bought from my favorite cafe down the street. I could feel the shop vibrating with energy as I slotted the key into the lock and smiled. Pushing the door open, the cheerful ring of the bell hanging over the door could immediately be heard throughout the brightly lit space.

Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs had been my grandmother's shop before she passed it on to me a couple of years ago. It was my livelihood and home, and I loved every square inch of the place. As I slipped through the doorway, I ran my hand over the satin-smooth door and felt the wood tremble as I gave it a light caress of thanks.

As a witch, I had my grandmother to thank for my birthright since the gift had skipped my mother entirely. Luckily, Mom wasn't bitter that she hadn't been blessed by the Goddess as Grandmother and I had been. As much as I loved my gift of magic, I wasn't sure that I would have been as accepting as she was. The three of us had lived together my entire life, and Mom had spent as much time with me as I had spent with Grandmother, watching as I learned and grew in knowledge and strength. As I became the witch she would never have a chance to be, she grew in pride. I had a lot to be thankful for when it came to the women in my life.

Now, as I walked through my store, passing the winking crystals and inhaling the fragrant herbs and candles, I had to hold back the sadness that my mother and grandmother—two of the people I loved most—were gone. Not from this earth, but on another cruise around the globe. Sigh.

I stopped in front of the display of skull figurines and turned the one with amethyst florets and emerald vines a little to the right. The skull grinned up at me as I wiped a small bit of glitter from one of the petals above its right eye.

“Have you been up to naughtiness last night, Mildred?” The skull threw me a sassy wink, making me roll my eyes. “Am I going to find the fairies out of place again? The least you could do is put things back after you play with them.” Her gleaming onyx skull rippled in her version of laughter. I booped her lightly on her smooth nose before wiping the stray piece of glitter off. I held my fingertip up to the light, taking in the aquamarine color as it shone brightly under the fluorescent lighting. Squinting my eyes in warning at Mildred, who ignored my glower as usual, I turned on my heel and walked over to the display of fairy statues.

Each of the fairies gave a gentle flutter of their wings in greeting as I passed until I stopped in front of where my favorite troublemaker should have been. “Constance,” I called softly. “Where are you hiding?” A tiny giggle that was more like the sound of crystal glasses meeting together came from behind me. With an exasperated sigh, I walked over and gently picked up the small fairy dressed in a flowing aquamarine gown, the glitter shining from the surface like tiny diamonds. “You need to be more careful.” I brushed a speck of lilac from her chin and knew I would have to clean the sage sticks from her glitter again. “I understand you like taking naps in the sage, Constance, but you know the dragons will throw a fit if you get too close to their territory.”

I placed her back on her shelf, adjusting her so she could see where the dragons were huddled together, protecting their horde of gemstones. I wouldn’t take the stones

away; I had plenty of others to sell from the baskets on the shelves against the wall. It made them happy and satisfied their need to collect. Sometimes, when they acted up in the past, Grandmother would take their treasures away to teach them a lesson, but I'd always felt bad for them as a child. When Grandmother wasn't looking, I would sneak their little stones and trinkets back to see their grins return.

As I walked toward the big glass case near the back where my cash register sat, I glanced around to see if there were any other disturbances. Surprisingly, everything seemed tidy. I was used to the mischief that the shop's inhabitants could get up to, but sometimes, they could still shock me. I set my black leather purse and the coffee I'd been carrying on top of the glass and squinted, tilting my head to the left as I looked at the items inside the case. Something was off, but I couldn't quite place what it was.

As I leaned forward to take a closer look at the display of athames, a soft purr and rubbing of fur distracted me. I looked down at my ankles to see Mortimer, Grandmother's familiar, greeting me.

"Good morning, Mortimer." I squatted, my knees together, and pointed to the side, the only way a lady would ever squat, at least according to my mother. While my grandmother had taught me how to be the strongest witch the family line had ever seen, my mom had insisted on teaching me the grace of being a woman. I learned to play with dirt while gardening with one woman and the art of makeup application from the other.

"The shop seems to have behaved itself last night." Mortimer looked up at me with his bright yellow eyes and let out an aggravated meow. I chuckled as I scratched behind his ears. "I know the fairies can be a little rambunctious. You keep them in line as well as you can." He meowed again, louder, and pawed at me as if he were worked up about something. He was probably wanting his can of food. I was a few minutes late getting in since I'd had a craving for a caramel latte from the coffee shop down the street. I'd had a weird feeling wake me up in the middle of the night, and I

had a rough time falling back to sleep afterward.

With a final scratch under his chin, I stood back up and ran my hand over my short black skirt. I gave the athames another glance before shaking my head.

Walking around the counter, I reached for the frilly apron with the store's logo on the front. The dancing dragonfly surrounded by floating orbs of iridescent colors was the same logo that had been painted on the large glass pane in the front of the shop since I was a little girl. It was still as vibrant as the day it was painted since the spell over the shop would ensure that it would never fade, just like the bright paint on the front door.

Everything about the shop was magical, from the figurines that sometimes threw parties in the dried herbs, to the gemstones that would rearrange themselves by size, color, or just some random order I couldn't figure out. Luckily, the shop window was spelled as well, so any passersby would see only items on display instead of the magic.

The hardest part about my job was selling one of my precious figurines, knowing that once it left the walls of Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs, the magic would dissipate and become ordinary resin, metal, or crystal. While I was happy for the customer who would be bringing such charming beauty into their home, I mourned the loss of a friend.

The bell tinkled over the door, and I glanced up, a smile already curving my lips in greeting, to see the best friend who wasn't related to me walk by Mildred, stop, back up, then stick her tongue out. I shook my head and grinned. Shayla strode up to the glass counter, all swaying hips and gorgeous face. I picked up my cup, taking a sip as I looked her over. She was wearing yoga pants, and I knew the sweaty T-shirt she had on covered a sports bra that likely cost more than my entire outfit. Shayla was one of the most beautiful people I had ever seen. She was also one of the kindest, generous,

and quick-tempered.

“You know, I think I am going to gift Mildred to you for your birthday,” I remarked casually, hiding my smirk behind the cup as Shayla glowered at me.

“Don’t you dare. That miscreant would be throwing ragers in the pantry if she got the chance. I would probably wake up to five pounds of flour on the floor and Corn Flakes crushed into my couch cushions.”

“You don’t even eat Corn Flakes,” I snickered as she collapsed across the top of the glass counter, making Mortimer hiss and hop to the floor. Shayla hissed back as he slunk off to his cat tree in the corner.

Shayla had been my best friend since the fourth grade when I caught sight of a group of little shithead bullies surrounding her during recess. As the tallest kid in our grade, she had been all long arms and longer legs, always preferring to read a book alone instead of playing with everyone else. Even though she was also the brightest and prettiest, it somehow made her a target to be picked on by the insecure jerks.

Someone had taken her book from her and was passing it around in a fucked up game of keep away. I walked straight through the group of bullies. Snatching the book from behind the one holding it, I marched right up to Shayla before they knew I was there. After handing it back to her, I stood there, shielding Shayla even though I was shorter than her by almost a foot. From then on, we were sisters of the heart. With my support, Shayla started sticking up for herself, and we were unofficially adopted by each other’s families.

We couldn’t have been more different. Shayla was dark-skinned, while I was pale as a ghost. Her head was currently shaved bald, while mine was bright red and straight as a ruler. When we were children, I loved the elaborate hairstyles her mother gave her, with the shiny beads and ponytails, while mine refused to stay in a single braid.

Not much has changed since I stepped into my twenties. My hair was still straight, still bright red, though a little darker and less orangey, thank the Goddess, while Shayla decided to shave her head in our senior year of high school. It absolutely suited her beautifully.

“How many miles did you run today?” I reached under the counter and grabbed a bottle of water, setting it on the glass. Shayla threw me a grateful smile as she scooped it up and quickly took several deep swallows after twisting off the cap.

With a gasping breath, she responded, “Five.” After wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, she grinned at me. “Want to come with me tomorrow morning?”

I snorted as I turned around and scanned through my stash of potions before picking up a bottle of orange liquid. I held it out for Shayla. “You know I only run if zombies are chasing me.”

With a laugh, she took the vial from me and uncorked it, then hesitated. “It doesn’t taste like ass, does it?”

I shook my head with a grin. “As if you knew what ass tastes like.”

Shayla shrugged one shoulder. “No, but maybe I wouldn’t mind a little rimming action. It sounded hot in that last romance book I borrowed from you.”

I couldn’t help the laugh that burst from me at her words. Shayla just grinned and drank the potion as if she were downing a shot of tequila. “Oh, my Goddess. I just can’t with you!” I said as I took the vial back, put the cork back in it, and placed it on the shelf I had taken it from to be cleaned and refilled later. I could feel my face grow hot as I remembered the scene she was talking about. Both Shayla and I were virgins, but we read some of the dirtiest, hottest romance books.

Our status wasn't because of any pact, or vow, or any other such nonsense. Shayla was a virgin because she had decided not to complicate her life with relationships while she focused on school as she worked towards her law degree. She was finishing up her undergraduate classes this year and hopefully moving on to postgraduate in the spring. I was so fucking proud of her.

Me, on the other hand, I was still a virgin because men scared the shit out of me. Not that I was afraid one would or could physically harm me. I was a powerful witch and had no doubts that I would be able to protect myself from just about any external harm. No, my fear psychologically stemmed from the relationships that failed for my mother and grandmother.

Both of them had been deeply in love before I was born. The man who had been my grandfather had been Grandmother's fated mate. As soon as she revealed that she was a witch, he left town and never looked back, not knowing that he had left Grandmother pregnant. It was questionable if the knowledge would have changed his mind. All I know is that Grandmother's heart was broken, and she never tried to find another companion, not for love anyway.

My own father passed away shortly before I was born, leaving my mother heartbroken. Without any powers, she wouldn't have known if he was her fated mate or not, but in her heart, he was everything to her. When he died, so did a part of herself. As far as I knew, she'd never even looked for a man to spend the night with.

All that to say, I was scared out of my mind that the same thing would happen to me. It hurt my heart to see my mother so broken, and it angered me that my grandmother's mate could leave her so easily. So I stayed away from men and absolutely never touched them unless I knew for certain that they couldn't possibly be my mate. That didn't mean I couldn't fantasize about some of the things I read in the smutty books Shayla and I passed back and forth.

Palms slapping down on the glass made me jump as Shayla gasped with a laugh. “Holy shit! You’re thinking about it, aren’t you? You want someone to tongue your asshole!”

Just then, the bell over the door rang, causing me to nearly expire where I stood. I croaked out a welcome as my face flamed, and Shayla giggled. I leaned in and hissed. “Will you stop? No! I do not want my asshole licked! Goddess! What is wrong with you?”

She giggled-snorted, trying to control herself but failing miserably. “Never say never! I say anything is worth trying at least once.” She took a deep breath and fanned herself as she finally managed to reign in her laughter. “Whew! I needed that. So, tell me, if it wasn’t the rimming, what made you blush so hard?”

I thought of the commanding way the male lead had taken charge and took the heroine with deep, powerful strokes while he held her still with his fist wrapped around her hair and could feel my face lighting up all over again. I cleared my throat as Shayla hooted with laughter.

“Oh, girl, I really need to know now!”

My customer, who appeared to be in her sixties, walked up, holding a fairy statue in her hands. Her eyes bounced back and forth between me and my friend as she hesitantly approached. I gave the brightest smile I could muster under the circumstances and gestured her forward while using my other hand to give Shayla a hard shove to the side.

“Please, ignore us. My friend here was just stopping by on her way to school.” I glared at my best friend in the whole world. “Right, Shayla?”

She snorted and snatched up her bottle of water, then waved. “Right. See you after

class. Don't forget you need to finish Midnight Master so we can discuss it later!"

I inwardly groaned as Shayla walked out the front door, but not before pointing a finger at Mildred and giving her the stink eye.

"Oh! Are you reading Midnight Master , the new book that just came out? Oh my goodness, I loved that book! The hero was so deliciously hot. It was so good, I asked my husband to reenact some of the spicier love scenes with me."

I was frozen in shock with a strained smile. How did this always happen to me? As the woman described exactly which scene she and her husband tried out, I was torn between high-fiving her while saying, "Woo hoo, get you some, girl!" and being mortified that a stranger was telling me all about her sex life. In detail . In the end, I decided that if I ever did end up with a man, I wanted to be like her when I grew up.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:14 am

Chapter

Three

LOGAN

I was steadily ignoring the stack of folders on my desk as I read over the toxicology report on a case I'd picked up a few weeks ago. At first glance, the case was a typical accidental death.

Robert Gleason had picked up a one-night stand. While in the throes of passion, things had gotten out of hand. Instead of squeezing the side of his partner's throat like any well-respecting dominant in bed would while fucking a partner who enjoyed choking, good old Rob had pressed down on her windpipe, cutting off all oxygen and ultimately crushing her windpipe.

I didn't know if fear had made him do the right thing, or maybe his guilt, but he called the police to report what had happened. At the time, he'd been told to sit tight while an investigation had been conducted. But now, sitting with the folder in front of me, the tox screen revealed traces of Rohypnol in the victim's blood, taking the seemingly innocent accident of a man who'd used poor judgment into a whole other type of crime. It seemed Rob was not just an idiot. He was also a rapist.

With disgust, I closed the file, making a note to hand it over to the Drug Enforcement Task Force. With any luck, Robert Gleason would spill his guts, revealing his dealer, and hopefully, it would help get one more drug pusher off the streets.

I blinked down at the new folder that just landed on top of the closed Gleason file before glancing up to see Mac standing next to my desk.

“Medical Examiner’s report,” he gestured at the file as I reached to open it. “Our victim died of a wound to her heart. Looks like a wickedly sharp, thin blade. Right between the ribs. I know there weren’t any weapons found at the scene, so it goes to say the murderer took it with them.”

There was a 5x7 color photo sitting on top of a typed report that hadn’t been there the last time I opened the file. I took a good look at the wound in the picture. It was small and narrow, with a hint of bruising around the edges, indicating that the victim was still alive when the weapon struck. “No signs of ligature marks around the wrists or ankles,” I murmured as I flipped to the next photo, which was of the full body of the victim. “She wasn’t restrained. How did the murderer manage to keep her perfectly still while they performed the ceremony?”

I flipped through the photographs until I found the one I was looking for. The pentacle she’d been found in the center of had been drawn with chalk, the outline crisply lined with no signs of smudging from a struggle. Even where the body had been laying over the lines barely disturbed the precise lines. Without a toxicology report, it would be difficult to say, but I was leaning more toward magic than drugs to incapacitate. Whoever had murdered the elderly woman was a powerful witch.

As Mac settled into his own desk, causing the chair that was probably older than I was to creak ominously, I reached for my phone. I needed to know which of the witches in town would have the ability to magically hold another. “Hey, Mac?” I asked as I reached for the buttons on the phone receiver. “You talked to the daughter. Did she happen to mention how powerful of a witch her mom was?”

Mac scratched at the bristles on his chin and squinted at me. “I can’t say that it was something that came up when I talked to her.” I nodded and punched in the phone

number. It was a quick call, and I had to make sure to give my apologies for the hit and run phone call while promising to show up for dinner sometime soon.

“What’s up with the grim expression?” Mac asked, eyeing me as I set the phone back down. I shook my head as I looked at the short list of names. “It looks like there are maybe five witches in the immediate area that would be powerful enough magically to hold down our victim, Mrs. Brooks. One of those five is away on a cruise.”

“So we have four suspects? That certainly narrows it down. The case should be open and closed for us. However, I don’t know how we can get magical evidence. How is that supposed to be proven in a court of law?”

“Well, there’s that. But that’s the least of our worries. I was told that there is no way the witches in this town would do to Mrs. Brooks what was done.”

I picked the ballpoint pen up from my desktop and sat back in my chair. I spun the pen around in my fingers as I thought of my next move. Mac was right in that it would be hell trying to get any kind of proof when it came to magic ability. I would have to go with my gut and what I knew. I wasn’t the District Attorney. If they were smart, they’d pull in every aspect of the occult they could find to set some kind of validity to what we were going to be accusing the murderer of.

Though there were several kinds of paranormal entities that lived among normal humans, few were aware of that fact. The truth that most people were blissfully unaware of was that witches were one of the least shocking of the paranormals. Luckily for my case, it would also be the easiest to get someone to believe enough to convict. Regardless, I would need to provide proof that someone physically held a knife and stabbed it through the victim’s heart. It didn’t matter how he or she managed to get Mrs. Brooks to hold still.

I sat up and set the pen down before closing the file. “I’m going to go visit the people

on this list and get a feel for them. I doubt they are involved, but it's best to be sure. Maybe, if we're lucky, one of them will have additional information they can share." I shrugged on my leather jacket and then stuffed the sticky note with the names on it in the pocket. "By the way, the tox report came back for the Gleason case. Might want to take a look at it and pass it on to the drug guys. We need to get a warrant for Bobby Boy's arrest."

Mac's bushy eyebrows shot up at my words, and he was already standing and reaching for the file as I strode away.

I pulled my motorcycle over to the curb outside the only occult shop in Gainsburg. From the outside, it looked charming and even quirky. It was the perfect tourist stop, and I was sure it had plenty of items inside that would keep the locals returning throughout the year when the tourists weren't around.

I swung my leg over the seat and set my helmet down. As I stood on the curb, taking in the bright red door, I made sure my badge was clipped to my belt. My resource told me that the woman who owned Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs was young and had recently inherited the store. Her grandmother, the previous owner, retired to see the world with the young woman's mother. I frowned at the thought of the two older women leaving her alone and wondered if she had anyone else to rely on. If she were ever in danger or even ill, would there be someone she could call? It didn't sit right with me. Young women were often easy targets for criminals.

I waited on the curb as a woman passed by pushing a stroller on the sidewalk, then swiftly strode to the bright red door, turned the handle, and walked in to the sound of a bell jingling above the door. A soft, melodic voice called from the back of the store, letting me know she'd be right out and to have a look around. I took in the sound of the voice, assuming it was Bridgette Waters, the young owner. The same woman, I was told, was the most powerful witch in the city or any other nearby city.

A lot could be determined from the sound of one's voice, whether they are old or young, a smoker of three packs a day, or even if they are stressed or happy. What you don't consider is how such a simple thing like a voice could affect you. As a seasoned detective, not much was able to get to me, but something about the woman had electricity buzzing under my skin.

I stood there at the door, doing my best to ignore the sensation, and took in the store from where I was standing. There were the things I had expected from a witch's shop. Crystals lined one wall in a colorful array with small placards describing each one and how a person could benefit from them. There were herbs on a round table in the middle, along with bundles of sage. Abalone shells were strategically placed with a short glass vase full of feathers to choose from.

What made the whole shop inviting, however, were the whimsical statues of fairies posing with wolves, dragons standing or lying on hordes of shining gems, mushrooms in brightly colorful patterns, and dragonfly windchimes hanging at the end of a display aisle. I noticed along the back wall an entire selection of tea cups with loose teas to choose from. As I inhaled deeply, I imagined it was those teas that gave the shop the inviting aroma.

Movement out of the corner of my eye had me looking back to the shelf in front of me, but there was nothing but a display of grinning skulls. Some were cream and covered in porcelain butterflies. Others were black with shining gems arranged around the grinning teeth and empty eye sockets. But I didn't see anything that would have made any movement.

The sound of heels clicking against the tiled floor turned my attention to the back corner, and I began to walk that way, pausing briefly to take one more look at the skulls before shaking my head at myself. For a moment there, I had the feeling I was being watched, but there was nothing but those empty eye sockets.

As soon as my gaze landed on the beautiful woman, the world stood still. While I froze in place and rocked to my core, I had to fight my body for control.

My instinctual reaction was to reach for her, to make her mine in every way a man could. Starting with those bright red lips. She was stunning. Her hair was a deep red, bright but not coppery the way red hair typically was. I knew nothing about hair dye other than my ex-wife used to visit the salon every few weeks to maintain her preferred color. I hadn't cared what color she'd chosen to wear. If it made her happy, I would pay for her appointments. Where I drew the line at keeping her happy was allowing her to fuck around with other men.

But this woman, with her deep red hair, I never wanted to change. Perhaps it was due to her magic. Maybe it was just damn good genes. Whatever it was, I wanted to wrap my hands in the strands as I held her still for a deep kiss that would leave us both breathless.

I cleared my throat as I did my best to make my cock behave. I hadn't lost control of my dick since eighth-grade gym class when I'd popped a boner in front of the whole fourth period. I couldn't believe that I had to work so hard for that control with just one glimpse of the woman.

She was smiling, but as soon as she looked up at me, that changed in an instant. She was holding a steaming cup but quickly set it down on the glass counter. Her moss green eyes flared wide as she watched me stride forward. Then, she stumbled slightly to the side.

"Are you alright, miss?" I asked as I took in the rest of her. I couldn't see much with the counter in the way, but from what was visible, she was short, the top of her head only coming to perhaps my shoulder, and was petite, with a narrow waist and breasts that were hidden behind a green blouse and a black apron emblazoned with the store's name. The logo was a dragonfly that looked like it was chasing brightly

glowing orbs. Those breasts looked as if they'd fill my hands quite nicely.

Get your fucking head back on track. I chastised myself harshly. I'd seen many beautiful women. In fact, I had been married to one for three years until she'd decided I wasn't around enough and she had needs, leading her to fuck another guy. But never had I felt such a visceral reaction to a woman before.

“What? Um, yes. I'm fine. Sorry. I just got a little light-headed there for a moment.” She shook her hands in front of her and inhaled deeply before pasting that bright smile back on her cupid's bow lips again. I had to hold back a grin. She was flustered, and it was adorable. “How can I help you, sir?”

I tapped a finger to my badge, drawing her eye to the gold emblem. Her eyes stayed glued to the gold shield for an extra long second, and I had to fight my body's reaction while wondering if she was checking out my dick. “Bridgette Waters? I'm Detective Logan Storm. I am working on a case and wondered if I could have a word with you.”

She jerked her eyes back to mine with a slight jolt. “Oh, yes, I'm Bridgette. Of course!” she said as she reached down for her teacup and lifted it to her lips with both hands. It wasn't obvious, but there was the slightest tremor in her fingers. She lightly blew on it before taking a delicate sip. I watched with fascination the way her bright red lipstick didn't even leave a trace of pigment behind. “How can I help you, Detective Storm?”

“I hate to bring bad news to your place of business. There was an elderly woman who was murdered recently. Perhaps you knew her? Emily Brooks?”

Bridgette gasped, and her teacup met the glass counter with a sharp clink. “Oh my goddess! Poor Mrs. Brooks! What happened? How can I help?”

“Did you know her well?” I asked, eyeing her reactions carefully, taking in everything the way I had been trained to do. Bridgette looked concerned, but she didn’t look guilty. Though she could be an extraordinary actress, my gut told me this woman had absolutely nothing to do with the murder.

“No, I didn’t. But my grandmother knew her. Oh, poor Grandmother. She’s going to be devastated.”

The bell over the door rang cheerily, announcing a new customer had arrived. I glanced over my shoulder to see two young women entering, giggling and talking quietly to each other, pointing out different items on the shelves. Turning back to Bridgette, I made a spur of the moment decision. I pulled my wallet out of my back pocket and withdrew a business card. Setting it on the counter, I reached over toward the cash register and grabbed one of the pens sitting in a glass jar, choosing the least ornate one I saw.

“This is my personal cell number,” I said as I wrote on the back of the card. “There are some things I won’t be able to discuss about the case, but if you are willing, I could use some... expertise with some aspects. Things only a witch would have the answers to.”

I noticed her fingers were still a little shaky as she reached for the card I slid towards her. “You want my help.” She said it with a bit of confusion lacing her tone, with an undercurrent of something that sounded interestingly like disappointment. “Because I’m a witch.”

I inclined my head. “As I said, there are some things I won’t be able to share, but if you agree to help with some knowledge about things like ceremonies and rituals, it could help greatly.” I eyed her with a hint of challenge. “If you have that sort of knowledge. If not, perhaps you could point me in the direction of someone who does?”

I bit back my grin as her back straightened and her chin lifted. “Of course, I know about rituals and ceremonies. I’d be happy to answer your questions and help in any way that I can. When did you want to have this discussion?” I’d pegged her correctly; Bridgette had a competitive streak, it seemed.

“How about tonight? We can have a bite to eat, and you can tell me everything you know.”

I watched as she bit her lip and hesitated, seeming to be struggling internally. She looked up at me through her lashes as she pretended to study the card. “Tonight? I think I can do that,” she finally acquiesced.

I pushed away from the counter and tapped the glass once. “Great. Give me a call once you close up for the night. I’ll pick you up.”

Her head nodded, but she didn’t look back at my face, leaving me with a need to demand those gorgeous mossy green eyes to lock with mine again. “Okay, Detective. Take care.”

Before I turned to leave, I watched as she slipped my business card into her apron pocket, and then she turned toward the two young women who were perusing the collection of gemstones and rocks along the opposite wall. As I pulled open the door, I heard her greet them with the same bright, melodic tone she’d called out to me when I first arrived and felt the same punch to the gut I’d had then.

I didn’t know Bridgette Waters yet, but I would. Our entire interaction was brief, hardly more than an introduction, but I’d felt the pull to her before I’d even seen her beautiful face. As a cop and now a homicide detective, I had learned to rely on my gut instincts. They saved me from some incredibly dangerous situations, or guided me to find much needed evidence in order to close a case. I wasn’t about to ignore the insistent twisting now. Something was telling me that the witch would mean a whole

fuck of a lot to me.

But more than that, I believe she felt the same exact thing I had.

Page 4

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Chapter

Four

brIDGETTE

I couldn't have counted how many times I pulled that business card out of my pocket just to stare at the name printed there in black ink. Detective Logan Storm. It was a sexy name, fit for the sexy-as-sin detective.

Our whole initial meeting was full of mixed emotions swinging from holy shit; that man is hot to, of course, he only wants to ask me questions because I'm a witch. What would a sexy older detective want to do with me? I mean, he wasn't that much older than me, at least not more than eight to ten years. It was a reasonable age gap. The worst part of meeting him and having all those emotions flooding me at once was the overriding one screaming at me to get away from him.

As I stood at the register fingering the edges of the business card that was nowhere near as stiff and crisp as it was when Detective Storm had handed it to me, the bell over the door rang. I jerked my head up, caught off guard. The greeting died on my lips as I watched Shayla stride in with her middle finger up and waving in Mildred's general location. I just shook my head and slipped the card back into my pocket after giving it one last glance.

"Hey, girl," Shayla called out as she approached. She was wearing one of her Boss Bitch outfits, as she is fond of referring to the pantsuit. It made her already long, lithe body look even more streamlined while showing off her femininity to perfection. My

best friend could have been on the runways in Milan.

“Hey, Shay.” I knew my returning smile was weak at best. It was most definitely forced. I started fiddling with the cup of pens next to the register and decided it had been too long since I’d cleaned them. While I reached for a disinfectant wipe under the counter, I saw Shayla’s eyebrows draw together as she watched me.

“Okay, what happened? Do I need to tit punch someone?”

My face brightened as I picked up the first pen and rubbed the wipe over the surface. “You’re the best friend in the whole world.” I shook my head as I grabbed a sparkly purple ballpoint with a matching puffball attached to the cap. It was cute and fun, but germ city. “I blinked down at the pen and then slowly raised my head to look at my best friend. I could feel the first tear track down my cheek as I finally told her my greatest fear. “I think I met my fated mate today.”

It took Shayla a solid five seconds as she stared at me in shock before she burst into action. “Oh shit. Oh fuck. Oh shit. Tell me everything.” She tossed her purse on the glass and rounded the counter. I fell into her arms as the dam finally broke on my emotions.

Through my sniffles, I relayed the meeting with Logan Storm.

“He isn’t even a little ugly?”

I shook my head ruefully. “No”

“Does he have good hair?”

“Great hair,” I pouted.

“What color eyes does he have?”

“Gray !” I wailed to the ceiling.

“Oh, damn,” Shayla breathed as she took in my words. Then I felt her fingers brush against mine as she took the purple puff ball pen away from me. I blinked back my tears and looked down to see the destruction I’d caused. Shayla tossed the pen in the garbage can on the floor and started wiping up all the little sparkly strands I had been pulling out of the puffball. “So your mate is hot, has great hair, fantastic eyes, and is a detective. Did he seem like a nice guy? Was he rude or pushy? Did he make you feel uncomfortable in any way?”

I was already shaking my head before she’d completed the question. “We didn’t speak that long, but I never felt any fear or trepidation being alone with a stranger. I did get the impression that he has an alpha-type personality.” I glanced up at Shayla with hopeful eyes. “Alphas are jerks, right? They are bossy and dominant, always trying to make demands? You know I don’t take demands well.”

Shayla cocked her head as she studied me. “Being an alpha male isn’t synonymous with being an asshole. You like him.”

I felt my cheeks flame. My movements felt jerky as I snatched another pen from the cup and reached for another disinfectant wipe. “I don’t even know him.”

Her tone was soft and gentle, an attempt at soothing me as she watched my every movement. “But you want to. I know you’re scared, Bridge. After what happened with your grandmother and then losing your father, you don’t want a fated mate. I understand, and I love you. It’s because I love you and want to see you happy that I’m going to tell you to get over your shit.”

I jerked my head up and stared at my best friend in shock. With wide eyes and my

mouth hanging open, I spluttered, unable to form a coherent sentence. Finally, I firmed my chin, lifting it in my best impression of a haughty queen. “I beg your finest pardon.”

Shayla sighed. “Sweetie, your sperm donor sucked ass, okay? He was a grade-A douchebag, but if I remember right, your mom said she couldn’t be certain if he was her fated mate because she wasn’t a witch. She fell in love with him on sight, but that isn’t exclusive to fated mates. Ordinary people everywhere fall into love—or lust—at first sight, all the time. Sometimes their relationships work, sometimes they don’t.”

I could feel another tear tracking down my cheek as I took in her words. “The women in my family are cursed, Shay. I don’t want to feel that betrayal. I’ve seen the sadness in their eyes when they talk about the men they lost. They would rather be alone for the rest of their lives than take another chance on a man. I decided long ago that I would skip the heartache and never allow my mate into my life to begin with.”

“I know you did, Bridge. But excuse me when I say this with all the love in my heart for you. You can be hard-headed, stubborn, and hold a grudge. I’m not saying those are all bad things; Karma knows we all love a good grudge, but, my friend, you could also be missing out on the best thing that ever happened to you. You won’t ever know until you put yourself out there and try .”

I sniffed again, half in indignation, half in resignation. “I’m not stubborn.”

Shayla just looked at me, exasperation written all over her gorgeous features. “You went on a hunger strike for three days when your mom wouldn’t let you dye your hair black.”

I waved my hand dismissively. “I was a kid.”

“Honey, you were seventeen. That was only five years ago. When she finally gave in,

you hated the color because it washed you out, making you look like a corpse. It's a good thing she only bought you the temporary dye."

I tilted my chin up. "My hair, my choice."

"True, but sometimes you have to weigh the advice you're given before putting your foot down and making a decision that could potentially cause you harm. Bridge, I want to see you happy. Maybe you're right, and this fated mate will break your heart and leave you lonely for the rest of your life. But you've already decided to be lonely. Would it really be so bad if you had a short time of bliss? And what if there is no curse and that bliss turns into seventy years? You believe in the Fates and Karma and the Goddess. Shouldn't you give Her a chance that she has something wonderful planned for you?"

My chin dropped to my chest as I took in her words. It was the worst thing to throw away a gift from the Goddess. Even as I thought it, my heart sped up at the thought of giving in and seeing if the detective truly was my fated mate.

"What's his name?" Shayla asked quietly. I closed my eyes and reached into my apron pocket to withdraw the card. I knew she would immediately see the wear on the card and know how often I'd handled it throughout the day. I placed it softly down on the glass and then slid it over with one finger. A low whistle came from my best friend. "Logan Storm. Wow. Even his name sounds hot." Yeah, it did. I let out a groan.

"So what's going on? Are you supposed to call him for something?" She let out a gasp and leaned forward, her eyes bright. "Are you a suspect?"

I laughed and shook my head. "No. But he asked me if I could help him understand rituals and ceremonies. He said he couldn't tell me anything about the case, but there are things he doesn't know about witchcraft and needs expert help."

“So are you supposed to call him?”

I took the card back and flipped it over, showing her where he’d written his personal number on the back. “He told me to call him tonight after I close the shop and we would have dinner while we talked.”

Shayla’s gasp was loud and dramatic. “You have a date with your fated mate! Why didn’t you lead with that?” she demanded.

I shook my head. “It’s not a date. It’s dinner to discuss witchy things.”

“And he couldn’t have asked his questions here, in the store, during business hours?” She gave me an are you that dense look. “Girl.”

“Look, I agreed to help him. But I don’t think I can go further than that. Not right now. Maybe never. I don’t even know if he has a girlfriend or a wife already. Maybe he has a string of girlfriends, or,” I wrinkled my nose, “one night stands. After I get to know him, I’ll think about the future and if I want to give him a chance.” I gave Shayla an imploring look, one that I hoped masked some of my fear. “Please, just let it go. For now.”

With a huff, Shayla finally conceded, nodding her head before giving me a bright smile. “Okay, I’ll stop pushing on one condition.”

I eyed her warily. As stubborn as she claimed I was, my best friend was just as bad, if not worse, than I was when it came to digging in her heels. It was why she was going to be a great lawyer. She wouldn’t quit until she won. “What’s that?”

“If you get too far into your head and start running scared, you talk to me. Or better yet—him. You are smart, brave, beautiful, and a badass witch. You don’t run. Ever . Hear me?”

I swallowed hard at her words, knowing that it was going to be a hard promise to make. I'd done nothing but run scared since I was old enough to understand what fated mates were and how they had hurt the women in my life. I closed my eyes while taking in a deep breath. When I opened them again, it was to see Shayla with an understanding expression but determined eyes. I nodded.

"Okay. I'll talk it out first before running."

She gripped my hand in hers, giving it a tight squeeze, letting me know she was with me in this. "Good. Though you do have questionable taste in art."

I laughed, the comment breaking the tension, allowing me to relax my shoulders. "You know you secretly love Mildred."

"Hell no. She's a fucking menace. Though I do like Frank." We both looked up at the corner where the crow statue was perched near the ceiling on a shelf made just for him. He watched over the store and always let me know when the others got into too much mayhem. He'd been a fixture since Grandmother opened the shop years ago and was the unofficial mascot of Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs.

"Now, call your detective and tell him you're closing, then go freshen up." She eyed me critically. "I don't know how you can still look amazing after working all day."

We walked to the front of the store, where I turned the sign around to close. Then, I leaned in to squeeze her in a big hug. "Are you kidding? You never look less than ready for a runway, even after you've been exercising for an hour."

Shayla winked at me. "Okay, we are just badass women who are beautiful and know our worth. Just like our mamas taught us." She started to walk out the door but stopped before I could swing it shut. "Call me after your dinner. I don't care how late it is." She gave me a dead-eye stare, showing me how serious she was, and I knew I'd

be in trouble if I didn't call.

"Yes, ma'am. I promise to call. Love you!"

"Love you too, girl. Have fun!"

I locked the door, giving one last wave through the glass, and then sighed. Looking around the shop, I felt lost. I was going to have to pull myself together and face my greatest fear. I looked at Mildred, who was grinning at me while giving a little shimmy.

"It's only dinner. Basically, it's a business meeting. I can do this."

Mildred's wink reminded me an awful lot of Shayla's, who I was sure would not be pleased at the comparison. I headed toward the back of the room, where the doorway led to the stairs of my small apartment while untying the apron I was wearing. I hung it on a hook next to the wooden table where I did much of my potion work, then paused. Reaching into the pocket, I slid the business card back out.

Mortimer meowed at my feet, rubbing against my leg, knowing he was about to get a plate of his favorite canned food once we got upstairs. I bent down to scratch behind his ears as I pulled my cell phone from my pocket. I would go to dinner, but I was driving myself. After dialing the number written in bold, masculine handwriting, I drew in a fortifying breath as I waited for the call to connect.

Chapter

Five

brIDGETTE

I sat with my hands nervously twisting in my lap as I glanced around the restaurant. It was a place that everyone in Gainsburg had been to at least a time or two in their life. While the locally owned steakhouse wasn't as popular as some of the larger chain restaurants in nearby towns, it was a favorite to celebrate milestones, including birthdays and anniversaries. It made me nervous as hell, knowing that we were being watched curiously.

Honestly, it was probably just my imagination. The town was small, but it wasn't that small. I was letting my nerves run away with me. In a conscious effort to pull my own head out of my ass, I gave my non-date a tight smile and reached for the glass of ice water in front of my linen roll of silverware.

“So,” I began after a tiny sip in an effort to not make a fool of myself by choking on an ice cube or—Goddess forbid—spilling the whole glass down my front. “What kind of questions did you need help with?”

The slight smirk that couldn't be hidden behind his own glass of water had my back locking into place, my chin rising, and my eyes narrowing dangerously. He knew I was nervous, the fucker. Then, his gaze lifted, leaving my face, and I watched in silent fascination as the beautiful curve to his lips smoothed into an impassive, polite expression as the server made an appearance at his side. She bent over the table,

placing our drinks down, along with a basket of rolls.

I thought her lean was a little excessive, but when I tried to glance slyly at Detective Storm to see if he had noticed the woman's lovely assets, it was to see his eyes on me instead of the cleavage on display, that smirk a hint at the edges. When it dropped back into the polite glance at the waitress as she handed him a personal cup of honey butter for the rolls, I had to exercise all my self control to not visibly roll my eyes.

I'd read about those kinds of interactions in romance books but figured it was just for added drama. Women didn't really flirt with handsome men while they were on dates with other women, right? But yet, there I sat on my non-date, even though she didn't know that, and watched as the pretty brunette did all but place his napkin in his lap or write her name and number on his hand.

"I'm sorry, what?" I blinked as Logan held the small cup of butter toward me.

"Our server thought you might want some extra butter, babe."

I darted a glance toward the woman, who I had been certain brought that butter specifically for Logan, just to see her scowling down at the cup. I thought about refusing out of spite but figured that would just make the whole situation even more awkward, and damn, did I really like butter on my rolls. So, hesitantly, I reached out for the butter, careful not to let our fingers brush even the tiniest bit.

I did my best to ignore the tiny flutter in my belly at hearing the man call me by a pet name. Never had I expected to hear an endearment directed at me by a man. Even though I tried to remind myself that he was merely putting on a show, it still did things to me. Things I would rather not think about with the man in question sitting directly across from me and looking way too smug for someone who didn't even know me.

When his smirk grew into a smile, and a crease appeared on his left cheek, I felt that flip in my gut again and looked away quickly. I wasn't going to let this man get under my skin. Maybe he was my mate, and perhaps he wouldn't murder my heart, leaving it broken and bleeding at his feet, but I had my pride. And, yes, I was just as stubborn as my best friend had accused me of.

Before I could even reach for a roll, Logan was already sliding a small plate over to me with not one but two beautifully browned rolls sitting prettily on it.

"Thank you," I said softly, the manners my mother had drilled into me winning out over the grumpiness I was desperately trying to hold onto as a shield.

Logan cleared his throat as he plucked another roll from the basket, tore a small piece from it, and dipped it in the extra butter cup. "What can you tell me about rituals?"

I paused before taking a bite of my honey butter slathered bread. "That's a very vague question about a very broad subject. Could you be more specific?"

I watched as he chewed, then the way his throat shifted as he swallowed. I felt my cheeks warm at what I had never considered the intimate act of watching a man eat before and tore my eyes away to glance down at the menu, quickly deciding on a pasta dish.

"You are already aware I can't go into specifics, but I'll tell you what I can. Perhaps asking questions that you can confirm might be easier?" I glanced back at him to see him sitting there with one eyebrow raised in question. Damn, if that didn't look hot, too. After my nod of acceptance, he continued. "Are all rituals performed within a pentacle?"

I thought about his question for a second before shaking my head. "The majority, I suppose. Some only involve the use of candles or herbs. Something simple, like

imbuing a potion with magic wouldn't need a pentacle. If someone were to want a stronger or more sure result from what they are attempting to do, then yes."

He looked thoughtful as he held me with his smoky eyes. "What about moonlight or ensuring they are performing the ritual with the four corners?"

"Well, if the person who is doing the spell or ritual is serious about the results, or it is an advanced spell, then yes. The more advanced the spell, the more effort the witch has to put into it. Candles, herbs, alignment with the corners, it all connects you to the Goddess and the energy of the Earth."

"Have you ever used all these elements to perform a ritual?"

I grinned and tilted my head, studying the detective. "Why, sir, am I a suspect?"

His returning grin had the same effect on me as it had the first time I saw it. "Where were you four nights ago?"

I couldn't help the small burst of laughter. "Four nights ago, I was doing exactly the same thing as every night of my life. I read a book while lying in bed, then was asleep by ten o'clock. I'm a pretty boring creature of habit, I'm afraid."

"No man to keep you company?"

I shook my head, looking back at my half eaten roll, embarrassed for some reason I couldn't fathom. "No."

"Never?" he pushed, making me look up at him from under my lashes. His expression was serious, with an intensity that took me by surprise. I could sense he was curious about me before, even highly attracted, but until that moment, I hadn't realized how much. He seemed exceptionally interested in whatever answer I would give him.

The moment was interrupted by the waitress returning with our drinks. “Are you ready to order, sir?” Again, her entire focus was on Logan, and again, I studied him as inconspicuously as possible to see if he would finally give in to her flirting.

“Are you ready, Bridgette?”

The pleasure of having him focus on me instead warmed my insides. I looked up at the server with a grin. “I’ll have the shrimp pasta, please.”

The waitress gave a sharp nod. “And you, sir?”

“I’ll have the same.”

We both handed over our menus, Logan giving a slight nod of thanks without taking his eyes off me. I cleared my throat after the woman left again.

“What else can I help you with? About your case?”

Taking the hint, Logan didn’t question me further about my personal life. Instead, he asked something I hadn’t expected.

“Is there a spell that would hold someone immobile?”

I stared at him for a moment. Questions began filling my head, questions I knew I couldn’t ask and that he couldn’t answer without telling me details. “Certainly. However, it is something that witches aren’t likely to do since it takes away someone’s free will. ‘Harm none’ is an aspect of our craft that we take very seriously.”

“What about moving a heavy object?”

“Again, certainly. That is a spell most witches learn at a young age, along with lighting a candle without a match or calling on the other elements. Few witches are proficient in all elements, but most can do the most basic spells with fire or water. Some are more in tune with the Earth, and that gives them a greater affinity with plants.”

“A strong witch, or a witch with strong magic, can do these things easily?”

“Yes, someone with a greater gift of magic than, say, your average witch could easily hold someone in place or even move the person while keeping them immobile.”

“How many witches in the area would you say have that kind of power?”

I sat back in my chair and wiped my fingers on my cloth napkin. “In this area? Very few, I would say. There are several witches in town, of course, but only a few come to mind.”

“You being one of them?” Instead of sounding accusatory, he simply looked... proud? It was interesting that he would look that way toward a woman he just met.

“Actually, yes.” I shrugged. “Myself, my grandmother, a couple of others. But as I said, I was in bed four nights ago. My grandmother is on a cruise somewhere in the Bahamas... I think. And the other two women in town? They are sweet and kind natured. I couldn’t picture either one of them committing something as heinous as murder.”

While we took each other in, our plates were set in front of us, startling me.

“Enjoy. If there is anything else I can do for you, let me know.” Then, the waitress was gone, leaving us alone in our bubble again. The food smelled incredible, making my mouth water, and I immediately picked up my fork, ready to dive into the

decadent dish. Neither one of us spoke for several long minutes as we began eating. For a brief moment I was concerned about looking greedy or unladylike but I dismissed the thought quickly. I was hungry, and the dish looked divine. If the man couldn't handle a woman with an appetite, then that was a him problem.

“So,” I said between bites, wanting to break up some of the silence. “How long have you been a homicide detective?”

He wiped his mouth with his napkin and took a drink from his glass. “After I graduated from college, I went straight into the police academy. I had to work as a patrol officer for a while before I earned enough experience to become a detective. I also had to wait for a spot to open it. It's a small town. Unfortunately, you usually have to wait for someone to retire.”

“Do you enjoy it?” I could admit I was fascinated. And it wasn't only just listening to his deep voice that made my belly feel warm. I was finding I enjoyed learning about him.

Logan gave me a long stare with an expression that was difficult to read. “It's always been my dream. I never wanted to do or explore anything else,” he paused and trailed his eyes over my face, “until now.”

I swallowed hard at his intense stare and darted my eyes back down to my plate. Needing to break the tension that suddenly formed between us, I picked up my glass of water and took a sip. “This sure is delicious.” Then, I rolled my eyes at myself.

I didn't bother looking up, but I could hear the humor in his tone when he replied, “I'm sure it is.” I had the distinct impression he wasn't speaking of the water or the pasta dish. I wasn't going to look up to see if I was right, though.

Once a good three-quarters of my plate was consumed, I set down my fork. I was

stuffed to near explosion, but it just tasted too good to stop. I took a look around the restaurant. I could only see a few other tables with the way the layout was set up, but I loved people watching. When I glanced toward the entrance, two women caught my eye. One had a short blonde bob, while the other had pretty chestnut colored hair. It wasn't their appearance that kept me riveted, though. It was the way the brunette looked stricken, with her gaze fixed on Logan, and the other woman rubbing her shoulder as if to offer comfort.

As I took them in, I noticed the brunette placed a hand over her abdomen as if she were going to be sick. It took me a moment to realize that the blonde was glaring daggers at me. The sight took me by surprise, and a feeling of dread washed over me. Without looking at Detective Storm, I pushed back my chair, placed the cloth napkin on the table, and mumbled something along the lines of needing to use the restroom. Without waiting for a response, I turned on my heel and walked quickly to the ladies' room.

After pushing open the door, I went straight to the sink and turned on the cold water as my mind whirled. Logan had asked me if I was seeing anyone, but was he? Who was the brunette to him?

As I contemplated the whole situation, the door squeaked as it was pushed open behind me. I ignored the woman who entered, not looking up as I washed my hands, letting the cold water run over my wrists, letting it help me cool down.

"You have some nerve."

The harsh tone said from directly behind me had me jerking my head up to see the blonde from the entrance giving me a deadly glare through her reflection in the mirror. I calmly turned the water off and shook the excess water off my hands before stepping over to the towel dispenser.

“What? No excuses from the homewrecker?”

I took a deep breath, counted to three, and then let it out slowly before lifting my chin higher. I turned around to face the woman who had a good five inches of height over my short self. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. Please excuse me.”

I tried to step around the woman, but she smoothly sidestepped, blocking my only way out of the situation. “Oh, no, sweetheart,” she sneered derisively. “You aren’t getting away with it that easily. How long have you been seeing Logan Storm?”

I tilted my head as I put on an air of calm serenity, all while my heart thudded out a rapid tempo inside my chest. “I just met the detective today. He asked me for help with a case he was working on. Don’t worry, he means nothing to me, and I won’t be seeing him after this evening.”

Her scoff was impressive as she placed her hands on her generous hips. “You expect me to believe that?”

I simply shook my head. “I couldn’t care less what you believe. Please step aside so I can leave. I apologize for any upset seeing me with the detective caused your friend. She truly has nothing to be concerned about.”

After a prolonged stare down, the woman finally huffed. “Logan and Kristy have been together for years. I suggest staying away from married men in the future.”

I simply inclined my head as something inside my chest fractured. After another few seconds, the blonde finally stepped aside. I strode from the bathroom with my head held high, and as soon as I made it to the table, I took my purse from where it had been hanging on the back of my chair. I pretended to ignore the way Logan’s smile fell into a frown as he watched. I slipped the strap over my shoulder, and his straight, dark eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“I’m sorry. Something has come up, and I need to leave. Thank you for the lovely dinner, Detective Storm. Good luck with your case.”

Without waiting around to see his reaction to my abrupt departure from our non-date, I turned and made my way to the front door. My mother would have been proud of the way I held my shoulders back and my spine straight. I didn’t bother looking left or right, not wanting to see if either of the two women were watching the fallout from their little ambush in the restroom.

As soon as I made it home, I went straight to the freezer. I took my ice cream, spoon, and phone into the small bedroom and set them on the nightstand before stripping out of my clothes. I was so thankful I hadn’t bothered to change out of my work clothes. If I’d dressed up for the jerk, I might have actually cried.

After crawling into bed, I pulled the lid off the rocky road ice cream and dug in, taking the first bite to calm my nerves. Sighing, I finally picked up my phone and brought up Shayla’s number before hitting the dial button. It was time to spill my woes to the sister of my heart.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:14 am

Chapter

Six

LOGAN

I sat in stunned silence as the woman of my dreams walked away from me. Even as she left the restaurant, I had to admire her. She was fucking beautiful with the class and poise of a queen. I turned to look toward the restroom, wondering what the fuck had just happened. We were having a great time. Even though I could see she had been nervous when we'd first sat down, she was easy to talk to. I couldn't help but want to know more about her, to find out what made her happy or sad, to find out her favorite things so I could shower her with them daily. We had a connection, one I felt growing by the minute as we enjoyed our time together. But something had changed when she walked out of the restroom.

It took less than a second to figure out why when I saw Marlene strolling out of the back. If the blonde disaster was here, then my ex-wife wasn't far. It didn't take being a detective to figure out that Marlene had everything to do with Bridgette's sudden desire to get as far away from me as possible.

I stood up while grabbing my wallet from my back pocket. I didn't take my eyes off my ex's best friend as I tossed enough money on the table to cover our meal, plus a generous tip. I stuffed the wallet back into my pocket and stalked over to the woman who'd been a thorn in my side since the moment I began dating Kristy.

The woman had never liked me and was always in Kristy's ear about how I wasn't

good enough for her. When I became a detective and more of my time was spent at work, hunting down killers, trying to help ease the minds of the family members who'd lost loved ones, Marlene had been suggesting to Kristy that I was out fucking everything with a skirt. I'd never so much as considered cheating on my wife; I just wasn't made that way. My wife should have known that I was committed to her. Instead, she'd allowed that snake to poison our marriage, and she herself decided it was okay to fall onto another dick. Her excuse had been that I was never there for her. That she had needs I didn't fulfill.

As soon as I suspected there was something wrong in our marriage, I stopped fucking her and instead started watching closely, keeping track of what she was doing. For some stupid fucking reason, Kristy thought that cheating on a man whose actual job was detective work was smart. I spent several months waiting, gathering evidence so when it was time to serve her papers, there wasn't a judge in town who would grant her more than she had walked into the marriage with. Unfortunately for her, that meant she'd leave with only the clothes in her closet and her grandmother's crystal. Because I didn't want anything that belonged to her, including her BMW, and the payment that went along with it, I walked out of a three year marriage with my clothes, my gun collection, the leather couch, and the television. Letting her take all the remaining things we'd bought together to make a home was little price to pay to get shot of the cheating liar.

My only regret was letting her keep the dog we'd picked out together. She'd cried and wailed that I wanted to take her baby away from her, even though I was the one who'd done all the training and taken her for walks before and after work. I hated letting Samantha go, but there'd been so much pressure from our families and friends telling me I was being overly harsh for taking everything away from a remorseful Kristy. As if she weren't still seeing her lover and was practically living with him.

It was possible I still harbored a small bit of resentment six months after the divorce. It wasn't that I missed her; any love I once had for Kristy shriveled up and died as

soon as I saw her in the arms of another man. No, my resentment had more to do with being made a fool of. I wasn't the kind of man who accepted being made a cuck. I expected as much loyalty and devotion as I put into the marriage. So, yeah, I was a bit bitter. I hadn't spoken to Kristy since the day I walked out of the courtroom, breathing easier and feeling lighter than I had in months.

"Marlene," I all but growled her name, making her stop in her tracks and staring up at me with wide eyes before she quickly masked her trepidation with her usual haughtiness. "What the fuck did you say to her?"

"Say to who, Detective Dick? Your little floozy? Is she the one you've been cheating on your wife with all this time? I always knew you were a dog, and now you're finally showing the rest of the world."

I grit my teeth. "That woman is innocent and doesn't deserve your special brand of venom. She is helping me with a case, nothing more. I am tempted to arrest you for obstruction of justice, even if the charge gets thrown out. It might do you some good to sit your meddling ass in a jail cell."

Marlene lifted her chin while her eyes flashed with hatred. I never knew what I had done to piss her off so thoroughly from the moment we'd met. There were times I wondered if she was jealous that I took Kristy away from her. The more Kristy and I spent together, the more resentful Marlene seemed to be towards me.

"I'll let everyone know that their precious dick -tective is a low down dirty cheater who never loved his wife."

I shook my head, honestly surprised that she'd only spread that exact story to their inner circle so far. There was no getting through to the woman; I would get more out of beating my head against a wall. "I mean it, Marlene. Stay away from Bridgette."

“Logan?” The sound of the soft voice behind me had me clenching my fists in frustration. I should have just left instead of confronting Marlene. I knew Kristy had to be lingering somewhere nearby.

I slowly turned around and took in the delicate features of my ex-wife. There was no denying how beautiful she was. From the moment I saw her, I had been drawn in. She was brought up to be a southern belle: soft spoken, poised, classy. She was the type of woman who wore pearls to the grocery store, never a hair out of place in public. It took me too long to realize that it was all an act.

“We have nothing to say to each other.” I turned back to look at Marlene, wanting her to see the seriousness written on my expression. “If I find out that you looked up Bridgette and approached her for any reason, I will have her file charges of harassment against you. Stay away from her.”

Marlene crossed her arms and jutted out her hip. “You hear that, Kristy? He doesn’t want me to approach his little whore.”

There was no getting through to the woman. “And we are done here. Remember what I said, Marlene.”

As I tried to walk away, Kristy reached out and grabbed onto my arm. “Wait! I’ve been trying to get a hold of you, Logan. I?—”

“I know you have. I’ve been ignoring your calls and texts. If I wanted to hear what you have to say, I would have responded. So, unless you want to talk about Sam?” At her slow shake of the head, I nodded once. Ignoring the hurt that flashed in her eyes and the big fat tear that started to roll down one cheek, I pulled my arm away and walked to the door, not bothering to look back, not even when Marlene called me an asshole.

My jaw was aching from how hard I was grinding my molars by the time I climbed into the cab of my truck. I sat there for a long minute, letting the engine idle as I debated on heading straight to Bridgette's shop, but I ended up changing my mind before I'd fully settled on the idea. Instead, I went home to my apartment with a slight detour. My place wasn't far from the shop, but I would have driven past regardless, just to ensure Bridgette got home safely. As I paused at the curb in front of the red door, I could see gently glowing lights inside the shop, but looking up, there were lights on upstairs and a figure moving beyond the closed curtains. After letting out a relieved breath that Bridgette was home safe, I continued on my way.

As soon as I walked into my apartment, I tossed the keys on the kitchen counter and walked to the refrigerator. I pulled out a bottle of beer, and after pulling the top off and tossing it into the recycling can, I stood leaning against the sink and took a long pull from the bottle. I was still fuming inside after what had happened at the restaurant. Even though nearly all our conversation had centered on the case, we'd been having a pleasant evening until Marlene decided to interfere.

I sighed and looked around the small apartment. After the divorce, I was thankful that we hadn't bought a house together yet. We had been planning on it and even searching, but Kristy hadn't found the one she wanted. Then, after finding out about her infidelity, I kept putting off the search, knowing that there was no way I'd be able to stay with her after what she'd done. I glanced around the small and drab living space and wondered what kind of house Bridgette might be interested in.

Was I jumping the gun and believing in a future that was unlikely? I didn't think so. There was something there, something that I hadn't experienced when I met Kristy. When we'd first started dating, I thought she was beautiful and enjoyed her company, but I had never had the same gut feeling that I had been experiencing since walking into Bridgette's shop. Since hearing her voice, before I even saw her, I had felt like I was hit with a sledgehammer to the sternum. My mother had taught me to believe in the Fates and to listen when they spoke to you. Well, I was listening.

Bridgette may have run from the situation, but I didn't blame her for that. I still had no idea what exactly had been said to her, though I could easily guess. For her, leaving made sense. Standing there now, draining the last of my beer, I decided that I wasn't going to let her put distance between us. I would give her the night, but I wasn't going to let misunderstandings sit and fester.

I had already spent six years on a woman who was a mistake. I could admit that it was a shitty thing to say, but it was my reality. Kristy and I were never meant to be together. What we had wasn't love. It had been lust at the beginning and companionship in the middle. After being cheated on, all I felt was bitterness. I wished her well, but I wanted nothing to do with her in my life any more.

I walked to my couch, swiping up the stack of case files I'd brought home with me from the station. After settling in, I picked up the remote and turned on the television, stopping on a movie I'd seen a dozen times before. Looking through the folders, I pulled the one from the other night to the top, wanting to go over the crime scene again, hoping to use some of the information Bridgette told me about ceremonies and rituals. I needed to get justice for the victim. I just needed to find a motive, a murder weapon, and a killer.

Chapter

Seven

brIDGETTE

After a sleepless night spent tossing and turning, I stumbled down the stairs to the back room of the shop, nearly breaking an ankle in the process. I'd decided it was going to be a casual day, going with a pair of jeans that did something miraculous to my ass and a simple blouse. It was my heels that nearly murdered me walking down the stairs. But they were undeniably beautiful, covered with tiny plum colored rhinestones that matched my blouse, turning a simple outfit into something glamorous. I suppose even my casual days were a little on the fancy side, but it made me happy.

After covering the dark circles from lack of sleep under my eyes with some concealer, I kept my makeup light, only swiping on a bit of mascara and finishing up with some lip gloss. My mother would be horrified at my lack of face paint, but I just couldn't dredge up the energy for anything more.

I blew on my hot coffee before taking a small sip as I walked through the doorway and into the store that was brightly lit from the morning sun. At first glance, I didn't see anything too out of place. The fairies all seemed to be arranged mostly in their usual positions. There were a couple of dragons resting on the rocks, but that was all I could see amiss.

"Good morning everyone!" I called out as cheerfully as I could manage, which, sadly,

wasn't a lot.

Mortimer jumped onto the counter, startling me and making me jerk back. Luckily, when my coffee splashed, it ended up hitting the floor and missed my clothing entirely.

“What the heck! Good morning to you, too, fluff ball,” I muttered as I double checked myself for coffee stains. His meow was louder than normal. “Are you mad I went out last night?” I shook my head. “Get over it, buddy. I’m allowed to have a social life, too. I’m not old yet. Though your owner has always had a much more lively social life than I’ve ever had.”

I went into the back for a few paper towels to clean up the small spill, the whole time listening to Mortimer meow almost urgently. When I came back into the front of the shop, it was to see him pacing back and forth, almost in agitation.

“What’s into you this morning, Mortimer?” I squatted down and started wiping up the spilled coffee. “You’re acting stranger than normal this morning. Are you missing Grandmother?”

I stood back up, ready to toss the used paper towels into the trash, when something caught my eye. I’d just wiped up coffee, but there was something else on the paper towel I hadn’t expected. A small bit of dark brown, almost like rust, was on the paper. I didn’t remember dropping anything recently.

I bent back down to look for any more of the mysterious substance, but the area was clean. I shrugged. Whatever it was, there was only a tiny bit. I dropped the dirty paper towels in the wastebasket and grabbed my apron off the hook, pulling it over my head and tying it behind my back. I picked up my cup of coffee and sipped it as I walked toward the door.

“Good morning, Mildred. You look lovely today.” I noticed a smudge of what looked like lipstick on one bony cheek. “Well, that’s new,” I muttered as I used my thumb to wipe it off. “You know what, Mildred? I don’t even want to know.”

I turned and flipped the sign over to OPEN and unlocked the door before taking a longer stroll around the shop. Not much seemed out of place, and my earlier assessment looked correct. I moved the dragons back onto their shelves, but after a brief hesitation, I placed a few stones around them. I liked the way it looked and hummed in satisfaction. The dragons shimmied in delight, making me smile.

I glanced up at Frank, the crow, to see he had an eagle-eyed watch on the whole place. There was something different about his positioning, though I couldn’t quite figure out what it was. Maybe he just decided to move? I gave a mental shrug, and after offering him a wave, I headed back to the register. I needed to brew up a few of my most popular potions. One would think the luck or prosperity potions would be the most popular, but they weren’t. The ones that I sold out of most often were the success and mental clarity potions, often purchased by college students. It made my heart happy to know that I was providing a tool for helping others succeed.

I was almost back to the register when I heard the bell over the door ring. I turned, expecting Shayla since she usually stopped in either after a run or before heading to school. The grin I had for her faltered when I saw a tall, sexy detective striding towards me instead.

“Detective Storm. What can I do for you this morning?” I lifted my chin and turned, walking the rest of the way to the counter. I needed the extra moment to fortify my defenses after seeing him. Just that quickly, the fluttering began in my belly, and my heart rate picked up speed. I didn’t know if I would easily forget the man, but I was determined to keep a professional distance. I absolutely didn’t want to involve myself with someone who was already involved in another relationship, mate or not.

When I stepped around the corner and finally looked up, it was to see him already across from me, his gray eyes a darker shade than the last time I'd seen him. He had a look of determination, and his square jaw was set. I swallowed, knowing that I would have to stand my ground against him. I had a feeling that when the man became determined about anything, he didn't back down easily.

"I'm sorry you were accosted by my ex-wife's best friend last night. She shouldn't have done that. I warned her to stay away from you in the future. Knowing Marlene, she probably won't listen, so I want you to tell me if it happens again."

I blinked up at Logan as I took in his words. "Uh, that's a lot of information to unpack. You were married?" I didn't know why, but the thought of him being in a serious relationship with someone else, one that led to marriage, living together, sleeping in the same bed every night, had my heart clenching. Without realizing it, I had lifted my hand and rubbed my chest to ease the pain there. Logan glanced down and watched me, his eyes going soft at what he saw. I quickly dropped my hand.

"It's fine. She didn't really say anything to me."

"Liar." His tone was soft as he took me in, his eyes traveling over my face, likely taking in the signs of my sleepless night. "You have nothing to worry about. Things have been over between Kristy and me for a long time. Longer than even the amount of time we've been divorced."

I cleared my throat, but the tightness there made it hard to swallow. My tone was husky from the emotions raging through me. "Really, it's no big deal." I shrugged one shoulder and turned to tidy the pens in the cup holder by the register, just to have something else to focus on. "I'm sorry your marriage didn't work out."

"Do you lie a lot when you're nervous?"

I gasped and jerked my head up. “I’m not nervous,” I declared and narrowed my eyes. “That was a very rude thing to say.”

Logan tilted his head, a slight grin tugging at his lips. “Was it?”

I gave a sharp nod. “It was. You don’t accuse a lady of such things.”

His grin widened. “I’ll keep that in mind. Go out with me again. Tomorrow night. I want to take you on a real date.”

I was already shaking my head before he’d even finished speaking and began stepping back. “That’s not a good idea, Detective?—”

Logan reached out his hand and placed it over the top of mine before I could pull away. My gasp was loud and immediate. The electricity that lit up my entire nervous system was like being hit with a bolt of lightning. I jerked away from his hand and stumbled backward, my back hitting the wall as I took in deep lungfuls of air.

Before I could come to terms with Logan Storm, who was indeed my fated mate, he was around the counter and running his hands over me. He tilted up my chin and took in my shocked expression.

“What is it? Are you hurt? What happened?”

I shook my head, my denial weak at best. “It’s nothing. I’m fine, just a bit of static electricity.”

“That wasn’t static. It felt like a thousand volts of electricity went through every cell in my body. Tell me you didn’t get hurt.”

“I—I promise, I’m not hurt.” I took in his features, the same as he was taking in

mine. “Did you really feel it, too?”

He just tightened his jaw while scanning me again, looking for any visible signs of damage. I could have told him he’d find none. Outwardly, I was perfectly fine, though I was sure I probably looked shaken from the shock of it all, but inside, it was a different story.

This exact thing, this confirmed fated match, was precisely why I was so careful not to touch Logan. I had never been too concerned in the past if I randomly brushed against a man since I had been assured by my grandmother that I would have a gut feeling when I first met the man who was destined for me. The confirmation would come when we touched, and the mate bond would solidify when we repeated the binding words to each other. Grandmother had never gotten that far before her mate got scared and ran away; otherwise, it would have been excruciating to live without the person the fates had made specifically for you.

I made a distressed sound in my throat before quickly covering it with a cough. I turned away, nervously adjusting the pens again.

“You’re hiding something from me. Something that scares you.”

I took in his soft words, said in a tone so patient and understanding that I nearly lost the struggle against the tight hold I had on my emotions at that moment. I had to squeeze my eyes closed so tight that bright flashes of light danced behind my eyelids just to keep from crying.

“It’s okay, Bridgette. You can keep your secrets. For now. I just want to know if you will give me—us—a chance. Will you have dinner with me tomorrow night? A complete do-over, one that has nothing to do with witchcraft, murder, or any cases I may be working on. Just you and me, good conversation and food. What do you say?”

I slowly relaxed my muscles, letting the tension ease out. It was too late to go back at this point. I already knew he was my mate. The cat was well and truly out of the bag. I had the option to kick him out of my life before he hurt me, destroying my heart forever. Or, I could take a chance. I thought of what Shayla had said about the Goddess and accepting her gift. I let a slow breath out through my lips before turning to face Logan Storm.

“Yes.”

Logan looked at me, his expression completely unreadable as he took me in. Finally, he gave a firm nod of his chin and backed away. “Good. Tomorrow. I will pick you up here at seven. Is that enough time for you to lock up and be ready to go?”

I agreed, reluctance and trepidation still running rampant through my system, but there was a new emotion that was starting to make itself known—excitement. Logan turned to walk away but paused at the door to my shop.

“Bridgette?”

I couldn’t help the strange, breathy sound that came out of me as I jerked my head up from where I had been pretending I wasn’t watching him leave. “Yes?”

“No take

backs.” His wink before turning and walking out the door nearly turned me into a puddle of melted Bridgette. The man was lethal with his confident swagger, and his looks were just the cherry on top. He was the kind of man that other men subconsciously moved over for when they saw him coming. His presence was just so commanding without trying. Honestly, I wasn’t even sure what I was supposed to do with a man like that.

The chiming of the bell had me jerking my head back toward the door. I realized that I had been staring blankly at nothing for so long I had lost track of time. When I recognized it was actually Shayla, I let out a relieved breath of air. I knew my smile was forced, but when she saw it, hers immediately shifted into a fierce scowl.

“What the fuck is wrong?”

I shook my head, then promptly burst into tears. Before I could do more than cover my face with my hands, she had me in her arms and was smoothing my hair down while speaking quiet nonsense to me. It felt so much like the way my mother would do it when I was upset; I just cried harder. So many emotions were bombarding me all at once I didn’t even know which way was up. I had missed my mother and grandmother since they left, but never as much as I did in that moment.

“Girl, if you don’t tell me who fucked with you, I swear to the Gods...”

I hiccuped and laughed at her words. Leave it to Shayla to soothe and threaten all in the same breath. I pulled back and gave her a wobbly smile as I swiped the tears away from my cheeks. “No one fucked with me, I swear. Not really. Not unless you count Fate.”

Shayla stood back and stared at me with her brows drawn. “Fate? Do you mean your mate? Is this about the detective? After what you told me last night, I don’t know where to go with this, Bridge. You’re going to have to help me out here. Do I go beat him up, or do I give him pointers on how to get past your walls?”

I blinked up at her. “Uh, neither?”

“Well, is he your fated mate? Is he seeing someone else? What is it?” Her hands went to her hips, and she started tapping the toe of her running shoe as she waited impatiently for me to elaborate.

“He touched me,” was all I could manage through my tight throat as I thought about everything that had happened in the last half hour.

“That motherfucker. Did you tell him to stop? Did you break his hands?” She started shaking her head and flexing her fists as if preparing for a fight. “Doesn’t matter. I’m gonna go find his ass and break his pretty face.”

I quickly grabbed her fists and held her still before she could storm out of the shop and hunt Logan down. “Calm down, killer. I didn’t mean he touched me inappropriately. Do you remember what we told you about fated mates and how we know for sure?”

Shayla looked only fractionally calmed down as she took in my words. “Yeah. You have to touch, and then you... ohhh.”

“Yeah, oh. Logan touched my hand after asking me on a date. A real one. Everything took me by surprise so fast that I almost had a panic attack. Logan calmed me down. He also knew I was lying about it when I told him that my reaction was just due to static electricity.”

Shayla’s grin grew as I spoke until she was practically vibrating where she stood. “Oh my goodness! It’s finally happening! You have a mate, and he wants to go on a date with you? Like a real one?”

I nodded ruefully, unable to get excited the way she was. “Yes, a real date. He told me that his ex is nothing but an ex, and he doesn’t even talk to her.”

Shayla sobered as she took in my expression, and then she pulled me back into another fierce hug. “I know you’re scared, Bridge. But we talked about this before we knew he was your mate for real. You need to trust the Fates, and you need to give your heart a chance. And always remember that I will have your back. Sisters before

misters and all that shit. I will be here for you. But, sweetie, don't throw away happiness before you even feel it."

I blinked back fresh tears as I stared up at my best friend. She was right. I had her. I also had my mother and grandmother, even if they were practically a world away.

"I'm scared," I whispered as I thought about what the future could be like. It could be dark and lonely after having my heart broken. But it could also be beautiful and full of light, happiness, and a family that we create. "But I think," I drew in a deep breath before letting it out slowly. "I think I'm excited, too."

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:14 am

Chapter

Eight

LOGAN

The last two days, Mac and I spent going over the magic murder case, as we've taken to calling it. With the information Bridgette supplied, we were able to look at it from different angles, but we were no closer to finding out why it had happened, let alone who had done it.

We were back on the street where it had happened and were once again going door to door, questioning neighbors who hadn't answered the first time we had come through. It turned out that the elderly witch was known to most and loved by all who did know her.

It seemed it wasn't unusual to see flickering lights from her house at night, though many said she was more prone to do her spells or incantations outside under the moonlight. It appeared that she had been open with her neighbors about what and who she was, and none of them were bothered by it. Honestly, it was refreshing to see so many people accepting of someone who was different by societal standards.

I had another look through her spell books, paying close attention to the ones that seemed to be used most often, as indicated by the bookmarks and notes written on the page. Emily Brooks had been fond of remedies for various common illnesses that ranged from a runny nose to stomach upset. She also used an incantation for gardening, improving her yields of fruits and vegetables, which, according to the

neighbors, she generously shared the abundance of often.

“I don’t think we are going to get anything more from the neighbors,” Mac said as we climbed inside his SUV. He slammed the door shut and revved the engine. “It seems the old lady was practically a saint with how much she shared with the neighbors. When she wasn’t helping them with the common cold, she was filling their kitchens. Who would want to murder the woman, Storm?”

I was just as frustrated as he was. So far, we had little to go on. I pulled out the names Bridgette had given me and pointed to the first of the four names on the shortlist. “According to Bridgette, only someone with strong magical power would be able to bind a person with an incantation and move them without using physical strength. We go talk to Hillary Grimes next.”

Mac glanced over, taking a look at the address I had looked up and written down next to the name. “Only four people?”

I grunted. It wasn’t enough, but it was a start. “Two. One of them is currently on a cruise somewhere in the South Atlantic.”

“Who’s the third?” Mac asked as he pulled up to a stop sign and turned on his blinker.

I sighed and rubbed at the ache that was building at my temples. “Bridgette.”

Mac let out a low whistle. “Are you certain she’s not a suspect?”

“I’d place my badge on it. The woman may be the strongest witch in the town, but she isn’t capable of killing someone.” Mac eyed me but didn’t say anything until I huffed. “Say it.”

“I don’t know, man. You just met her. How do you know she’s not guilty? Sometimes, it’s the sweet, quiet ones who are the most deadly. Have you seen that movie about the woman who married all those men? She was beautiful and charming but was deadly with an untraceable poison. Add magic to that; she’d be unstoppable.”

I snorted. “You don’t know her, Mac. No one could fake that kind of surprise when I talked to her. She was devastated to learn of Emily Brook’s death. Plus, she’s willing to help as much as she’s able to.”

“Are you thinking of bringing her in on a more official basis to help with the case? We could use an expert advisor on something like this. It’s a fucked up situation. It’s too soon to call in the FBI, though I’m sure they probably have experience with witches and murder.”

“Actually, I was going to ask her when we have dinner tonight before I approach the Captain. If she agrees, I plan to talk to him tomorrow. The sooner we can get more straightforward answers from Bridgette, the better. I was only able to get general knowledge from her the other night before Marlene and Kristy showed up.”

Mac pulled up to a small clapboard house painted a cheery, eggshell blue. It had garden beds framing the front walk and surrounded the porch. I would bet a year’s salary that her magic was responsible for the lush flowers overflowing their beds. He turned to me with a disbelieving look on his craggy face.

“What the hell?”

I grunted. “Yeah, that about sums it up.”

“What did Kristy want after all this time?”

“Apparently, she wants to talk to me. I’ve gotten a few texts from her over the last

couple of weeks but have been ignoring them since I have nothing to say to her. Unless she wants to give me Sam, I just want to forget I knew her. Marlene just wanted to cause trouble, of course. She's the one who sent Bridgette running."

"How did you handle it with your girl?" Mac opened his door, and I followed suit, shutting the door firmly while taking a look at the surrounding houses. It was like most of the residential streets in our small town. Most of the houses were on the smaller side but well-kept.

I thought about what Mac had asked and felt my chest grow warm. My girl. It felt right. After the almost meltdown that Bridgette had gone through when we'd touched, I was certain that the thought of us being together scared her, while at the same time, she felt the connection just as strongly as I did. I needed to find out what her demons were and somehow convince her that I was worth taking a chance on for more than just a date.

When I joined Mac on the sidewalk, I watched him pop a stick of gum into his mouth. "I just told her I wanted a do over, a real date that had nothing to do with murder or ex wives." I'd basically begged her for a chance. I wasn't sure what I would have done had she turned me down. Probably show up every day with flowers or some shit until I finally wore her down. Some women were worth the effort, and I knew down to my bones that Bridgette was worth everything.

"Well, good luck, Storm. You know Bobbi Jo will want to invite her over for Sunday brunch. The sooner, the better. Hell, she's going to blow a fucking gasket if I don't tell her right away that you have a new woman. She'll be happy for you, but she'll want to check her out for herself. She swears that she knew Kristy wasn't right for you the first time she spoke with her."

Mac and Bobbi Jo were good people with good instincts. It didn't surprise me that his wife wanted to assess my girl and give her a stamp of approval. Even though I didn't

need her validation, it felt good knowing that Bobbi Jo wouldn't hesitate. All it would take was one minute with Bridgette, and she would adopt her as another daughter.

"Tell Bobbi Jo that I will arrange it soon."

"Good man," Mac murmured as he rang the bell.

Soon, footsteps could be heard coming towards the door, and without first asking for the identities of who was at her home, the door was swung open wide. A beautiful woman who was in her forties, according to the report I'd pulled up on her, but looked closer to thirty, stood at the threshold smiling widely, showing off her brilliant white teeth with just the slightest gap between the front ones.

"Hello, gentleman. What can I help you with?"

"Miss Hillary Grimes?" I asked as I pulled my badge off my jeans to show her while Mac did the same. "My name is Detective Storm, and this is my partner, Detective MacKenzie. Do you have a few minutes?"

Her smile dimmed just the smallest amount before she forced it back into place. Her eyes immediately grew worried. "Oh. Yes. Yes, of course." She held the door open wider and gestured with a dark-skinned hand that was covered in several jeweled rings. "We can sit in the living room. Would you like something to drink? I have freshly made sun tea that is sweetened. With sugar, of course." Mac and I exchanged a glance. The woman was nervous, but it wasn't the type of nervous someone who was guilty of a crime would be.

"No, ma'am. I'm good. We won't take up much of your time." I settled into the small loveseat she'd gestured to as Mac did the same, murmuring his refusal as he hiked up the knees of his slacks and squeezed in next to me. Miss Grimes took a seat across from us in a comfortable-looking armchair. I glanced around the room, which was

decorated in light pastel colors. It looked soft and feminine. It also showed many signs of her being a witch, with spellbooks in a tall, thin bookcase, along with crystals scattered around the room on various surfaces.

“Well now, I don’t get many visits from such fine looking gentlemen such as yourselves. I’m assuming you’re here because of Emily Brooks?”

“You knew Mrs. Brooks?” Mac asked as he pulled a small notebook from the pocket on his shirt and flipped it open.

Miss Grimes’ smile dimmed and her eyes grew glassy as she looked out the window behind us. “Oh, yes. The witch community is close here in Gainsburg. Even if we aren’t close, we know of each other. I was very sad to hear of her passing.”

“Do you know of anyone who might have wished Emily Brooks harm?” I asked as I took her in carefully, searching for any signs that she might have been hiding something, but I saw none. Hillary Grimes shook her head.

“No, never. She was a kind, sweet woman. She liked to talk about her daughter and granddaughter. I don’t recall hearing anyone say a disparaging word about her. The witches in this town have a long history. A long time ago there might have been someone who’d do this, but not now. Not here. The witch’s council strictly monitors behavior, magic ability and power strength to prevent witches from trying to harm others. That, and it just goes against our core beliefs.”

“If I may, Miss Grimes,” I began, only to have the woman wave a hand.

“Please, call me Hillary.”

I inclined my head. “Hillary. Just as a formality, can you tell us where you were on the night of the fourth?”

She graciously nodded. "I understand. I was actually assisting with the birth of a child that night. I am a certified doula, and my client went into labor earlier that day. She had a long, grueling labor that lasted until close to noon on the fifth." She smiled broadly, showing how much she truly enjoyed her profession. "It was a little boy."

"That's excellent news. Congratulations to the new parents." Mac grinned and closed his notepad after jotting down the information to verify later. After tucking the notepad back into the shirt pocket along with his pen, he slapped his hands down on his thighs and stood to his feet. "Well, I believe that's all the questions we have for you at this time."

I stood up next, reached into my pocket for a business card, and handed it over. "If you can think of anything that could help us find justice for Mrs. Brooks, please give us a call."

Hillary stood up and then followed us to the door. "I will be sure to do that."

Mac opened the door and stepped outside. As I followed behind him, I paused. "Be sure to check your visitors before opening the door next time."

Hillary chuckled as she gripped the door handle. "Oh, dear Detective. I already knew who was coming to my door."

I eyed her for a moment as she smiled up at me. Why didn't I doubt that she had been expecting us? "One last question," I began. "Who would you say had the strongest magical talent in Gainsburg?"

Hillary's smile turned into a broad grin. "Why, that is easy. Twenty years ago, I would have said Suzanne Waters, but now I would say it's your Bridgette," she said with a knowing look.

Mac chuckled and slapped me on the shoulder. “Well, now, isn’t that something?” He turned and walked past the array of blooming flowers toward the SUV as I stood in the warm sunlight.

“Thank you for your time, Hillary. Please don’t take your safety for granted.”

Hillary Grimes suddenly became serious as her eyes grew somber. “I will be on my guard, Detective Storm. Please take care of our sweet Bridgette. She deserves all the love you are willing to give, and I can see you will have a lot. She also has a big heart, one that must be prodded open gently yet firmly. But the best things in life are always worth the effort. Don’t you agree?”

The woman had a perceptiveness that most would have difficulty coming to terms with. I couldn’t help but wonder what it was like for her to have so much knowledge about those she came in contact with.

“I do,” I murmured. Then I gave her another nod and turned to join Mac.

Page 9

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Chapter

Nine

brIDGETTE

Shayla and I were leaning over the counter, enjoying a cup of tea as we watched a group of four girls who looked to be in middle school browse through the shop, giggling as they moved around. There was a lot of pointing and whispering among each other.

“I remember those days,” I murmured as I blew on my tea.

Shayla groaned. “Oh man. Remember when we went to the discount store after school? The things we would find there. Hours of pure entertainment.”

As they ‘oohed’ and ‘ahhed’ over the gemstone collection, I watched as one of the girls picked up one of the prettier pieces of amethyst and slipped it into her pocket.

“Oh, that’s bold,” Shayla muttered as she inhaled the fragrant tea. I hummed my agreement. A second later, I felt a tingling under my skin as the shop’s wards activated. The amethyst reappeared on the shelf, and I grinned as the girl looked down at it, confused.

She patted her pocket, then darted a startled look my way. I gave her a little wave, allowing pretty purple sparks to dance across my fingertips. Her eyes grew wide as she realized she had been caught in the act. Immediately, she turned and started

whispering frantically to her friends. She began to drag one of them by the arm while the others complained loudly. Eventually, she won the battle, and as they headed for the door, I called out to them.

“Bye, ladies! Come back soon!”

Once the door closed behind them, Shayla let out a snort. “I love it when you do that.”

I sighed, then straightened up and turned to lean my back against the glass case. “I just hoped she learned her lesson. I’d hate for her to try her five-finger discount in another store and ruin her future.”

“I have no doubt that she learned something today,” Shayla laughed. She straightened up next to me and nudged my shoulder with her arm. “So, tonight’s the big night, huh? What are you going to wear?”

My heart sped up the way it did every time I thought about my date tonight, but I ignored it the way I had been all day. I glanced down at my clothes and grimaced, thinking about what my mother would have to say. “This, I suppose.”

Shyla took in my black jeans and lace top. “It’s nice enough, but I’m surprised you would be so... casual. What gives? Wait! You’re not trying to do the minimal effort thing in order to turn him off, are you?”

I eyed my friend speculatively. “Do you think that would work?”

All I got was a perturbed look and a “Girl” in a get real tone. With a sigh, I pulled the phone out of my pocket, opened it up to the text message Logan had sent me as I had been getting ready for the day, and handed it over.

“Are you serious? He actually told you to wear jeans and to braid your hair. Is this some kind of sex kink?”

It was my turn to snort, then I couldn't help but glance over my shoulder to make sure my mom wasn't around to hear me, even knowing good and well that she wasn't, but old habits died hard. “No, I think he wants to take me out on his motorcycle. He was riding one the first time he showed up at the shop.”

“Oh. I don't know if I'm disappointed or not. It doesn't mean that he's not kinky in other ways, though, right?”

“Shayla!” I laughed and gave her a shove that barely moved her. “What's with you lately?”

“Well, one of us should be enjoying a little something. Kink is healthy as long as you're both consenting adults.”

“Well, you could be getting something if you stopped playing hard to get with your professor,” I said slyly, hiding my grin behind the rim of my cup. I watched the tip of her ears darken, the only sign she ever gave away that she was embarrassed about something. I gasped. “What happened? Tell me now before I shock you!” I held out my hand and let the sparks dance on my fingertips again.

“Nothing happened. Today I got a B on one of my exams. I was so pissed! Then I saw that he wrote a note telling me to see him after class.”

She was practically mumbling into her tea, and I was getting impatient, so I zapped her on the arm. “And?”

“Ouch, bitch! That hurt!” She rubbed her arm but didn't continue, so I reached out again in warning. “Okay, okay! Damn impatient witches. When I met with him, he

told me I could get extra credit to make up for the B by helping him in his office a couple days a week.”

I almost choked on my own spit when I inhaled another gasp. “What does he want you to do?” I lowered my voice to a whisper. “Does he want sexual favors?”

Her ears got dark again as she shook her head. “No. I think he wants me to organize his files or something.”

“Do you think he just wants to spend more time with you until the semester is over? You won’t be in his class anymore, right?”

“Nope. No more Professor Hotty after this semester.”

I squealed in excitement. “I bet that’s what it is! He wants to spend time with you the only way he can. I bet that as soon as he’s no longer your professor, he makes his move.” I watched her closely, then narrowed my eyes. “And you do too. Did he say as much?”

“Yes and no. He may have alluded to it.”

“I know we have joked about it a lot, but do you want that?” I wanted my friend to be happy. She had been so focused on her academics and wanting to become a lawyer that she hadn’t so much as flirted with a guy or girl since middle school. I knew she had a crush on her professor, but I wouldn’t allow him to take advantage of her if she wasn’t a willing participant.

It took her a long minute to speak as she seemed to be carefully mulling over her words. Finally, she said, “I think I really do.”

“Good. Then I am happy for you and will stand by any decision you make. And if he

fucks up, you have a witch for a best friend who won't hesitate to give him warts or something to make him look hideous."

Shayla laughed. "You don't believe in harming others, remember?"

I nodded. That was true. I stood by the law that to cause harm, bad karma would return to the person threefold. It had been taught to me by my grandmother since I first learned how to light a candle with my magic. It didn't necessarily mean that the exact thing would happen to the caster, but negative energy was harmful in such a way that it could affect the mind, body, and spirit. "True. But I could make hair grow on his butt, or make his dick shrink."

She laughed even harder, nearly spilling what was left of her tea. "Isn't that the same thing?"

I shrugged. "I'll think about it. I'm sure there's something. Maybe I could curse his pillow to always be warm and lumpy."

Shayla was nearly doubled over in laughter when Mortimer jumped onto the counter and started yowling angrily.

"What the hell, dude," Shayla said, as she held her chest and took deep breaths. "What's your problem?"

I scooped him up and scratched behind his ears with one hand as I carried him over to his cat tower in the corner. "I have no idea what's gotten into him lately. The last few days, he's been acting agitated. Almost like something is pissing him off. I can't figure out what it is, though."

I opened the container of treats and shook out a few for him. He yowled, but then started munching with his yellow eyes narrowed at me. "I wish I knew what you were

trying to say, buddy. If Grandmother were here, she'd know." I sighed, then turned to walk toward the front door. It was time to close the shop for the day. Most days, I would stay open a little longer just for something to do, unless I was just too tired or hungry. But Logan would be coming to pick me up in about an hour, and I still needed to freshen my makeup and braid my hair.

Shayla picked up her bag and slung it over her shoulder. "I'm going to head out so you can get ready for your date." She walked over to where I was flipping the sign around to close. "Call me when you get home. Unless you aren't alone. Then call me in the morning and tell me all about it." She wiggled her eyebrows at me, making me blush. She pulled me into a hug, squeezing me extra tight. "Have fun on your date and enjoy the ride."

I shoved her away as she giggled at the double meaning of her own words. "Yeah, yeah. Go home and think about all the rides you'll be taking once this semester is over. Love you!"

"Love you too, Bridge!"

I locked the door behind her and took a look around the shop. Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs, was brightly lit from the late afternoon sun shining through the window, making the gemstones around the open space glitter brilliantly. It was beautiful. It made my heart happy being in the space with all my fantasy figurines and witchy items. I thought about how one day I might be able to pass it on to my own daughter, if I ever had one, and that made me think about Logan again.

With my heart racing in anticipation, I slowly walked through the shop, adjusting things here and there, humming to myself, doing my best to calm my emotions. I knew it was perfectly natural to be nervous about a first date, but this wasn't just my first date; it was my first date with my fated mate. After tonight, nothing in my world would ever be the same again. Good or bad, I was facing the future. All I could do

was my part to make it the best future possible.

I took off my apron and hung it on the hook before flipping off the lights. Low, ambient light would continue to filter through the shop, but anyone looking in would see that it was closed. It didn't take away from the wonder or beauty. If anything, it added to the mysterious possibilities that could be found inside.

I climbed the stairs to the small apartment above and opened the door to my private quarters. There was a kitchen that was one step above being termed a kitchenette, with a bistro sized table against the far wall. Just past the kitchen was my sitting area. I made it as homey and inviting as possible with bright jeweled tones and several decorative pillows. There was always a throw blanket tossed over the settee waiting for me when I settled down with a book. I didn't own a TV, not because I didn't enjoy binge watching shows on one of the many streaming services, but because it would have taken up more space than I would have liked.

One thing about my small apartment that I was grateful for was that the bedroom was completely separate from the rest of the space. I could close the world out and hide under a blanket if I needed or just wanted to. With the dark purple blackout curtains on the window, I often did just that. I had to get up early to open the shop on most days, so when I was closed on Sundays and Mondays, I liked to sleep in as much as possible. At least when I didn't decide to open out of pure boredom.

I walked to the closet that I wished was bigger and dug through it until my hand landed on cool, smooth leather. If I were going to be riding on the back of Logan's motorcycle at night in the mountains of Tennessee, I would be wearing a leather jacket for warmth.

I tossed the jacket on the bed and went into the bathroom to take a good look at my face. I hadn't worn much makeup today, going with the bare minimum that wouldn't get me in too much trouble with my mother. I decided that a touch up with mascara

and a little smoky eyeshadow would be needed, along with some lip stain that wouldn't rub off when we had dinner.

Once I had completed that task, I picked up my brush and started smoothing out any tangles in my hair. With how straight it was, there were usually few snarls to worry about. Then I quickly began to plait it into a French braid. Once I had it secured with a hair tie, I heard my phone ding right before I heard a knock at the back door below.

Slipping my phone out of my pocket, I checked the time before opening the screen to see a text from Logan.

Logan: I'm out back

Me: I'll be right out. Just give me five minutes

I tossed the phone back down and looked at the heels I was still wearing and thought about how impractical they would be on a motorcycle. I didn't have a lot of flat shoes, but I did have a pair of low heeled black leather calf boots that would match the jacket I'd picked out.

I quickly pulled on some socks, slipped my feet into the boots, and zipped them up. Then I picked up the jacket and pulled it on, taking a long look at myself in the mirror. As I stared at my reflection, I forced myself to breathe slowly and deeply. I looked good. Not like the usual version of myself, but still really good. Kind of edgier, I supposed, with all the leather. It was a look I could get used to.

I shook out my hands, letting go of the tension that had been building in my muscles as the anticipation had grown over the last few hours. I grabbed a small cross-body bag that was hanging on a hook in the closet and dropped my phone, keys, and wallet inside before zipping it up and sliding it over my head. With one last glance in the mirror, I headed to the door.

It was time.

Chapter

Ten

brIDGETTE

I held my breath as I exited through the back door of the shop. My fingers had a slight tremble that I hoped wasn't noticeable as I pulled the keys back out of my purse. Before I could turn to lock the door, Logan was in front of me, seeming even larger as I stood there without my usual heels on.

I watched him as he looked at me, his gaze running over my face, his expression difficult to read. His jaw was firm as if he were clenching his teeth.

"Is there something wrong?" I asked warily as I started feeling more self-conscious by the second. I lifted my hand to smooth back my hair, but Logan took it gently in his much larger one.

"There's not a damn thing wrong, Bridgette. I'm just having an argument with myself."

I tilted my head as I eyed him, trying to ignore the way my belly warmed at the feel of his thumb sliding over the top of my hand in a soft caress. "What kind of argument?" I whispered as I realized that what I was seeing in his eyes was heat.

"Part of me wants to get you on my bike so we can start our first date. The other part of me wants to toss you over my shoulder and take you right back upstairs to your

apartment.”

I swallowed hard, unable to think of anything clever to say. “I think it may be a little too soon for that.”

Logan nodded slowly. “It is. I promised you a first date, and that’s what you’re going to get.” He slid the keys out of my other hand and quickly locked the door, then handed them back to me. He watched as I zipped them back into my purse, then took my hand to guide me over to his waiting motorcycle. It was beautiful, all gleaming black paint and shining chrome. I knew nothing about motorcycles, but his seemed big, almost scary looking for all its beauty.

Logan pulled a helmet off the seat and lifted it above my head before carefully sliding it on. I stood there, unable to tear my eyes away from the dark stubble that covered his firm jawline as he concentrated on adjusting the chin strap. Once he was finally satisfied that I was safe and secure, he gave me a devilish grin, and I just knew that whatever came out of his mouth next was going to be trouble.

“I may not be taking you upstairs, but I can be satisfied knowing you’ll be having your sexy little body pressed up against me.” He took my hand with a wink as I blushed crimson under the helmet. I let him guide me to sit on the back. I held myself perched stiffly as I watched him swing his long leg over the seat and straddle the motorcycle as if it were made for him.

He reached back and grasped my thigh firmly and tugged until I was flush against him with a gasp. After he patted my thigh, he reached for his own helmet that was hanging from one of the handlebars. He paused before turning toward me.

“Just hold on tight and lean with me,” he said loud enough to hear through the helmet. “I promise, I’ll never let anything hurt you. By the way, it was six.”

I shook my head in confusion and asked as he slid his helmet on and quickly snapped the buckle. “Six what?”

“Six minutes.” Then he turned the key and the bike started up with a menacing growl. Without thinking it through, I wrapped my arms tightly around his middle. I could barely hear him over the sound of the engine, but couldn’t stop the smile that curved my lips when he said, “It was worth the wait.”

After those words, he kicked the stand up, and we were moving quicker than I had anticipated. We were already leaving the small alley where the back door to Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs was located and turning onto the main street.

Businesses passed quickly in a blur of light as we headed out of Gainsburg. Once the lights became scarcer, I stopped paying attention to where we were going and began to enjoy the darkness as early evening descended. I knew that in the hills, it would get darker and colder much quicker than in town, and was thankful for the warmth of my leather jacket.

I’d never been on the back of a motorcycle before, but was understanding the appeal the longer we rode. Very few cars passed us, and it was almost like being in our own little world as we flew down the curvy highway. As a witch, I loved everything about nature. It rejuvenated something deep within my soul. Being on the back of Logan’s motorcycle felt like I was flying. I had never felt so free in my life.

I laid my head on the back of his shoulder and watched the world rush past with a smile on my face. It wasn’t until what could have been minutes or hours that he began to slow down, and I recognized where we were. I hadn’t been to the isolated bar before, had only driven past on my way to the larger town beyond, but it had seemed interesting in its rundown appearance. Almost as if it had the charm of an old man who would sit in his rocking chair by the fire, whittling wood as he told one of the many stories he was holding on to.

I straightened up as Logan rolled slowly through the gravel parking lot and came to a stop near the front door. I felt him pat my leg again and quickly surmised that he was asking me to hop off. After swinging my leg over the back seat and being careful to avoid the hot exhaust pipe when he'd yelled out a warning over the engine, I stood there on shaky legs, wondering if that was how a newborn deer felt when it stood for the first time.

My fingers were almost numb as I fiddled with the clasp of the helmet. Before I could figure it out, Logan had the bike turned off and was reaching out to help before he'd taken his own off. When I slid the helmet over my head, I used one hand to smooth down my hair and watched in fascination as Logan pulled off his own and flung his head back, instantly looking perfectly put together.

"Did you like it?" I could see the uncertainty he was trying to hide, but he didn't have to worry. I let my smile break out over my face and flung my arms around him.

"It was wonderful!" I pulled back and grinned up at him. "I loved it. Thank you for taking me."

The expression on his face softened as he took in my happiness. I could have moved. I clearly saw the intention as well as the chance he was offering me to pull away. Instead, I leaned forward, for once our heights were nearly equal, as he still sat on his Harley. The kiss was gentle, soft, and sweet, just a meeting of our lips, but it was a kiss I'd remember for the rest of my life.

When he pulled away slowly, I stepped back to allow him space to stand up and placed a trembling hand over my abdomen where the warmth and fluttering of butterflies had taken flight at my first kiss. As I ran my tongue over my bottom lip, I watched Logan's eyes grow darker, hungrier. Somehow, I knew that if I let him have control over my body, it would be the best decision I'd ever made.

Logan reached out and took my hand in his and laced our fingers together. “I’m going to need you to behave, little witch.”

I gave him an indignant glare as he tugged my hand and began pulling me toward the dark brown door. I could hear music coming from inside that sounded like classic rock. “I beg your pardon?”

He chuckled as he gripped the handle and glanced down at me with a wink. “One of us has to keep our heads, or I’ll end up making creative use of my motorcycle seat. I don’t think my Captain would appreciate one of his Detectives arrested for lewd conduct.”

Something about his teasing put me at ease. It was nice to know that I affected the man as much as he affected me. When the door opened wide, the music grew louder, and the sounds of laughter floated forward to greet us. Several heads turned in our direction, and shouts of greetings could be heard coming from all directions.

“I take it you come here often?” I asked wryly as he lifted his other hand to wave back. He guided us to an empty table against the wall as I took in the rustic decor. Everything was wood from the unpainted walls, to the long bar set along the opposite wall. It was a classic motorcycle bar, not that I’d had anything to really go off of other than romance books, but it had a friendly vibe. I loved it.

“Hey, Storm! Would you like your usual?” A beautiful, busty brunette with a bright blue streak of color coming from one side of her head to curve down over one side of her generous assets walked over carrying a round plastic tray.

“Charlene, I’d like you to meet Bridgette. Bridgette, this is Charlene. Her dad owns the place.”

Charlene held her hand out to me, tucking the tray under one arm. She had a beautiful

smile with straight white teeth and dimples in both cheeks. I could tell she had quite a bit of Native American in her as her light brown eyes lit up with happiness. I loved her aura and immediately knew she was good people.

“Hi, Bridgette! It’s so good to meet you. The two of you look amazing together.”

I blushed as I took her hand. As our palms connected, I could sense that she wasn’t a witch like I was, but she had a connection to the Earth just the same. She was clearly comfortable with that connection and used her intuition wisely. “Thank you. It’s nice to meet you too, Charlene.” She gave me a wink, and I knew she’d sensed me as well.

“What do you want to drink, sugar? We have lots of beer and bourbon, but I make sure my pops keeps a few bottles for the ladies, too.”

I looked around as I thought about it and finally shrugged. “I’ll take a bottle of Bud Light.”

Charlene grinned. “Gotcha. And for you, Storm? One bottle since you’re on your bike and carrying precious cargo?”

Logan squeezed my hand and smiled down at the waitress. “You got it, Char.”

Once Charlene turned around to head to the bar, Logan pulled out a chair and waited for me to take a seat before he sat down opposite me.

“I like this place,” I offered as I took another look around. There were three pool tables in the back with only one currently occupied. “So, do you?”

“Do I what?” he asked as he leaned forward, one forearm on the table in front of him, giving me all of his attention.

“Do you come here often?” I flushed as I realized it sounded like a pickup line, and he laughed.

“Not as often as I’d like. Once or twice a month, usually when I’m not weighed down with a heavy caseload.” He looked up as our drinks were placed onto the table in front of us, and we both thanked Charlene, who was immediately flagged over to another table. “I used to work here when I was seventeen to help pay for the motorcycle my mom didn’t want me to get.”

I raised one eyebrow. “You worked in a bar at the age of seventeen?”

Logan picked up his bottle and took a drink, then shook his head as he placed it back down. “Not exactly in the bar. I was a dishwasher in the back. I wasn’t allowed out front or anywhere liquor was stored or served.”

I nodded. “That makes more sense. I’m guessing they serve food here, then?” I asked, my stomach rumbling at the thought of food, reminding me that I had been too nervous all day to eat lunch.

“The best burgers and fries in the whole state of Tennessee.”

“Oh really? You’re telling me that I’ve lived this close to the best burgers and never even knew it?” I gasped.

Logan grinned. “You doubt me now, but just wait until you taste them.”

I hummed with skepticism, but was excited to give it a try. I was always on the hunt for the perfect burger. Too many places just fell short and were a complete disappointment. “So are we going to order these amazing burgers?”

“Don’t worry, they will be out shortly.” Logan took a swallow from his beer, and I

did the same, trying not to fidget under his intense scrutiny. “Tell me about yourself, Bridgette.”

I cleared my throat and then sat back in the surprisingly comfortable chair. “Well, you know I’m a witch. I am also the single daughter of a single mother, who is the daughter of a single mother... who is the daughter of a single mother.”

Logan’s expression grew pensive as he stared at me. “Is that why you were so hesitant when you realized that we are mates?”

I wasn’t sure if my jaw made a sound when it dropped in shock, since a loud buzzing filled my head at his question. “How?” I swallowed thickly, then tried again. “How did you know you were my mate? You’re not...”

“A witch?” He shook his head and reached for my hands, which were gripping each other so hard that my knuckles were turning white. He smoothed his thumb over them, immediately having a calming effect on my nerves. “No, I’m not. But my mother is.”

Before I could do more than gasp, plates were set down on the edge of the table. Logan pulled his hands back, leaving room for Charlene to slide the burgers in front of us. “Here you go. I’m sure he has already convinced you that these are the best you’ll ever eat. But if you want something else, I’m happy to put in an order for you.” I glanced up at her with a forced smile.

“No, no, this looks great. I’m excited to try it. Thank you.”

“Thanks, Char. I appreciate it.”

She glanced between us and took in the scene with a raised eyebrow before pulling a bottle of ketchup from her apron pocket, along with two sets of rolled eating utensils.

“Okay, friends. Enjoy.” She paused before leaving, then spoke to Logan, her tone serious. “I swear to the Gods, Storm. If you run this one off, I will never forgive you.”

He gave her a confident smile. “No worries, Char. I just told her who my mom is. It came as a little bit of a surprise, I think.”

Charlene glanced back at me, then shook her head. “Men are so dense sometimes.” Then she walked away, still grumbling to herself.

“She’s nice,” I said while stifling a laugh.

“Yeah, she is. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner. It never came up, but I should have said something.” He looked genuinely apologetic.

“I just don’t know what to say. I mean, I guess it makes sense. You never batted an eyelash at my shop or what I am. Most people don’t believe in witches or think we are something we aren’t. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been asked if I worship the devil.” I picked up the roll of silverware and opened it to get to the knife. I began cutting the deliciously smelling burger in half. “What I don’t understand is why you didn’t go to your mother for information about your case. Why me?”

I picked up my burger as I eyed him suspiciously and took a small bite. An explosion of flavor hit my tongue, and I closed my eyes and moaned in pure, rapturous delight.

“Good?”

I just nodded my head eagerly, ignoring the wry tone that came from the man across from me. I took an even bigger bite and didn’t even care when I felt juice from the meat roll down my chin. It was too good. So good it should have been illegal.

When I could finally concentrate on more than just the hamburger I was devouring, I finally glanced up to see Logan sitting there with his own burger nearly gone, but with his eyes glued to my face. I had the impression that the look of heated hunger he was wearing had nothing to do with his meal.

With red cheeks, I carefully set what remained of my burger onto my plate, and with the grace a queen would envy, I smoothed out my napkin and dabbed at my chin. A glass of ice water appeared in front of me, and I glanced up to see a tall man who looked too much like Charlene to be anyone but her father.

“You must be the witch my daughter was telling me about.” He was handsome with longer dark hair that had streaks of silver threaded through his full head of hair. He looked as if he could single handedly clear out a rowdy bar with his firm muscles showing under the dark T-shirt he wore.

I held out my hand. “That’s me. Are you the one who cooked this delicious food?”

He grinned, showing one chipped tooth that didn’t take away from his appeal one single bit. He took my hand in his much larger, calloused one. “That’s me. I take it you enjoyed it?”

“You’re lucky more people don’t know about your food. You’d have a line of cars waiting up and down the highway. You’d be trapped behind your grill without a break and never breathe fresh air again.”

He threw back his head and laughed, making all the heads in the bar turn to look. When he finally slowed to only chuckles, he slapped Logan on the back. “My girl’s right. This one’s a keeper, Storm. Don’t fuck it up.”

Logan smiled at me when he answered. “Don’t plan on it.”

Chapter

Eleven

LOGAN

“S o,” she asked as she picked up her glass of water and took a dainty sip. “You were explaining about your mother.”

I nodded, pushing my nearly empty plate away so I could rest my arms on the table. “There are two reasons why I didn’t ask my mother for help. The first is because though she is a witch, she doesn’t have much training. My grandma wasn’t a witch and was a bit bitter that the line had skipped her. She shunned the rest of the family, taking off as soon as she could, so my mom never met them. Most of my mom’s life, her training came from books she hid so her own mother wouldn’t get upset. I don’t know if her power is a result of that, but she doesn’t seem to have much.”

Bridgette frowned. “I could help her learn more if she is willing. My own mother didn’t get the gift. I’m thankful she was never bitter the way your grandmother was. She encouraged my learning. Instead, since she couldn’t teach me herself, she made up for it by teaching me what she did know. My grandmother taught me magic, and my mother taught me how to be a proper southern lady.” Her laughter was soft and lit up her beautiful face. “She would have had a fit if she saw me digging into that burger the way I did. So, what’s the second reason?”

I picked up my beer bottle and downed the last of the dregs before I spoke. “Even if my mom was the most knowledgeable witch in the state, I still would have asked you

instead. The moment I heard your voice, something inside me came to life.”

I saw more than heard her quiet intake of air. “The mate call is a powerful thing. I felt it too.”

“But you’re scared.” I stated it as fact because even now, it was unmistakable. There were two parts to Bridgette. One was open and ready for the idea of a mate. The other half wanted to run far away from me and never look back. I was going to do everything within my capabilities to convince her I was safe to trust.

Bridgette nodded, and my brave girl didn’t break eye contact when she started to speak. “My grandmother had a mate, of course. They had a whirlwind romance, the way mates often do. The pull towards each other is so strong that most are unable to resist.” She eyed me knowingly, and I nodded my understanding. “When she told him about two weeks later, when they finally came up for air, that she was a witch, well, he freaked. He called her terrible names and accused her first of lying, then he accused her of being a devil worshipper,” she shrugged one shoulder as if it weren’t a big deal, even though I could read the hurt in her eyes for the pain her grandmother had gone through. “You know, the usual insults and accusations. When she tried to explain that they were mates, a gift of fate by the Goddess, he laughed in her face. Then he packed all his stuff and left town. She never saw him again. She realized she was pregnant with my mother about a week later.”

Rage burned in my gut at what the man had done, not only to her grandmother, who must have been heartbroken and devastated, but at the aftereffects that led to his granddaughter being scared to love. “I’m sorry that happened to her. Do you have his information? I could look him up. Find out where he’s been and what he’s been doing all this time.” I wouldn’t contact him. The fucker didn’t deserve to know this gorgeous woman in front of me.

Bridgette was already shaking her head before I finished asking. “No. Grandmother

made it clear years ago that he'd missed out on a wonderful life with what could have been his family. He doesn't get to pick up the pieces after all these years. And she has no desire to know what he had been up to after he left her pregnant and broken."

"Good," I grunted. "And your mother? What happened with her and your father?"

Her face fell, and she broke eye contact, choosing to look down at her lap instead. "Since my mother isn't a witch, it's very likely that they weren't actually mates. But he died before I was born."

"Fuck. Babe, I am so fucking sorry."

She looked back up, and even though she didn't let a tear fall, her eyes were glassy with a sheen of moisture. Whatever had happened was enough to devastate this beautiful woman. "He cheated on my mom. That's how he died. While my mother was in the early stages of labor, she called his work to let him know that she needed him to come home right away. They told her that he wasn't there, that he hadn't been there all day. My mother was confused and worried, wondering if he'd gotten in an accident on the way to work. She started calling all the hospitals, trying to find him. Eventually, she did, but he hadn't been in a car accident. Instead of going to work, he was with another woman in a hotel room. The woman's husband broke down the door and discovered them together in bed. He shot them both. When my mother finally found him, he was already in the morgue. The authorities had been trying to figure out who his next of kin was." Bridgette shook her head. "I guess she saved them the trouble. From what I understand, the woman he had been having an affair with was pregnant too. I don't know if I would have had a brother or sister. She very well could have been carrying her own husband's baby, but it's knowledge that died with her."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, then she pasted a big smile on her face and held out her hands. "So, you see why I'm fucked up? No woman in my family

has been able to keep a man. We're all destined to fall madly in love then face heartbreak." She dropped her hands back in her lap and looked away from me, staring across the bar. I could tell she was already starting to build that wall again. The one I had been able to pull down carefully, brick by brick, was rebuilding faster than a storm rolls into the Tennessee hills.

I leaned forward and spoke softly, hoping that my words would be enough to stop her from pulling away. "You have a right to be scared, but, babe, I'm right here. I'm not those men, and I swear to you that I won't run, and I sure as fuck don't cheat. I despise cheaters. You already know I was married. The moment I found out that she was fucking some other dick, I made my exit plan. I'd never do that to you, little witch." I waited until she glanced back my way, then held out my hand. I held my breath until she hesitantly reached out and placed her hand in mine. I immediately locked our fingers together and gave her a gentle squeeze.

"I'm. Right. Here." I reiterated and was able to take a full breath when she slowly nodded. "Good. Now, tell me, what do your mother and grandmother have to say about you finding your mate?" I was taking a chance with my question. There was a good possibility that they had been damaged emotionally by their personal experiences and warned Bridgette away from her own mate, but my intuition told me that they wanted her to be happy.

Bridgette's smile was a little wobbly when she looked at me. "My mother told me not to run from Fate. And my grandmother told me it would be throwing the Goddess's gift back at her."

"So you're telling me that your family is already on my side."

Her soft laughter was sweet music to my ears. "You would take it that way."

"Is there any other way to take it?" I gave her a wink and watched as her cheeks

turned a rosy hue. I glanced over her shoulder to see that two of the pool tables were empty. “Have you ever played pool before?”

Bridgette blinked at the sudden change in topic. “Uh, no. Is it fun?”

I stood up and walked around the table to help Bridgette out of her seat. “I think so. It takes skill and a good eye for math.”

“Math? Are you serious?” She scrunched up her nose, and I had the strongest urge to bend down and kiss it.

“Yep. Geometry. Lines, angles, corners. Then there’s the science. Velocity and kinetic energy are when the balls collide. Or,” I grinned down at her when we stopped in front of the rack of cue sticks, “you can just line up your shot and hope for the best.”

She looked unsure as she took in the table and the balls resting in the rack. “Okay.”

I chuckled at her hesitation. “Let’s give it a few whacks. If you hate it, we’ll never play again, deal?”

“Deal,” she nodded.

“Great. Let’s start by taking off our jackets so we can maneuver. Your jacket is sexy, but you won’t be able to reach where you need to set up your shots while in it.” I helped her take off her purse and jacket, then hung them on a hook along with mine on the wall next to us.

We selected our pool cues, then I started the game with a break since Bridgette was still unsure. “Alright, you see how there are balls with stripes and balls that are solid? Your goal is to get all of the solids into the pockets since I just sank a stripe. We’re

going to keep the game simple. Play until you don't sink a ball or you sink the cue ball. No calling pockets. When you get more comfortable, we can make it more challenging later."

"If I like it."

I looked down at her to see her arms crossed, but there was a glint of competitiveness in her eyes. "Right, if you enjoy it and want to play again." I handed her the cue stick and guided her into the correct position. After showing her how to hold her left hand to steady her aim, I backed off and watched. As expected for anyone who was just getting started, she didn't get very far. I picked up the cue ball and set it back into place. "You did well. I've seen others scrape the table or knock the cue ball clear onto the floor. You'll get the hang of it before you know it. Now give it another whack."

I watched as Bridgette studied the balls and all their positions, all while biting her lower lip in concentration. I saw her glance over at the other table to watch the two older men who had probably been playing since they were teenagers. She adjusted her stance, then in a smooth motion she pulled back her arm and hit the cue ball. I watched as it spun wildly, bounced off the edge of the seven, then careened into the four that was sitting an inch away from the side pocket.

Bridgette squealed in excitement. "I did it!"

I couldn't help but reach out and take her face in my hands and kiss her. It was another press of the lips and nothing more. I knew that if I let it become more, I wouldn't have the willpower to stop until I had devoured every inch of her. "You did great, little witch."

She grinned up at me, then bounced on her toes. "Does that mean I can do it again?"

I threw back my head and laughed before leaning back down for another brief kiss.

“Yeah, babe, you get to go again.”

We went back and forth a few times, shooting the ball when it was our turn. I was becoming really impressed at how quickly Bridgette had picked up the game. She was down to her last ball after having sunk the previous two back to back when I noticed her lips moving. She pulled back the cue and hit the ball. Just as the cue ball was about to glance off the side of the two ball, it veered over just enough to send the two at an angle and directly into the corner pocket.

I couldn't help it. I started laughing so hard I had to put my hands on my knees to brace myself. When I could finally catch my breath, I straightened up and wiped under my eyes with my thumbs. Bridgette stood there leaning against the pool table. How someone could look two parts smug and sheepish at the same time, I would never know, but somehow my little witch pulled it off.

“A spell? Really, little witch?” I shook my head and reached for her waist, then tugged her into my chest. “You just couldn't help yourself, huh?”

Bridgette shrugged in my hold, then wrapped her arms around my back and looked up at me with a grin. “What do you expect when you're playing against a magical genius?” She pulled one hand back and wiggled her fingers. Tiny sparks lit up around her fingertips, then quickly vanished. “It was just a little bit of air to nudge the balls where I wanted them to go,” she laughed. “I promise I won't do it again. I was just waiting to see how long it took you to notice, Mr. Detective.”

“I'll have to remember she has tricks,” I shook my head, still grinning. “The real question I have for you is, did you enjoy the game?” I raised a brow and waited, already knowing the answer. I could see she enjoyed the challenge, and before she started cheating, she had already gotten much better.

“Okay, I can admit it. Pool is fun. I wouldn't mind playing again sometime.”

“Good.” I leaned down and kissed the top of her head. “Are you ready to go? It’s going to be a lot colder out there on the road than it was riding in.”

Bridgette carried her cue stick over to the rack on the wall and slid it into place. “Okay, but only if I can say goodbye to Charlene first.”

I snorted. “As if she’d let you leave without a goodbye.” If I had guessed correctly, Charlene would have already had her number ready to pass on to my girl. I grabbed her jacket and helped her into it, before pulling my own on. I waited for Bridgette to slip her purse over her head, then took her hand in mine. I was finding it quickly becoming one of my favorite things.

Chapter

Twelve

LOGAN

I came to a stop in the alley and turned off the engine. We both sat for a few seconds as the echo of the motorcycle faded into nothingness. Nothing could be heard except our breathing and the faint tick of cooling metal. Finally, Bridgette broke the silence as she slid from the back of the bike.

“Thank you so much. I hadn’t expected to have so much fun.” She fumbled with the helmet I had just bought her yesterday.

“Here, let me,” I said as I swung my leg over and turned to her, reaching for the release button under her chin. I set the helmet on the seat, then took off my own before hanging it on the handlebars. “Are you cold?” I asked even as I reached for her hands and rubbed them between my gloved ones. “I forgot to tell you to bring gloves. I’m sorry.”

“I’m okay. It was just a little chilly.” Bridgette tipped her head back to look at me. I wanted nothing more in that second than to taste her lips, to kiss her until we were both breathless. I cleared my throat in an effort to rein in the strong impulse to do just that. I promised myself that I wouldn’t push her. I knew I had to take our relationship slowly, even though the pull to her was overwhelming. “I really did enjoy our night,” she whispered.

“So did I. Thank you for saying yes.” I let go of her hands. The step back I took was nearly impossible. I wasn’t sure if the brief flash of hurt I saw was real or imagined. Bridgette looked down and opened her purse, fishing out her keyring.

“Okay, I’m going to...” She pointed her thumb over her shoulder towards the door. She turned away without finishing her statement, and my gut ached with the loss. I didn’t know how I would be able to handle walking away from her. I always considered myself a man with strong self-discipline, but I was rapidly losing the fight. I stood there with my fists clenched tightly at my sides.

I watched as Bridgette unlocked the door, then dropped the key back into her purse. She twisted the knob and pushed it open. “Okay, well, have a good night, Logan,” she said softly. “Drive safe.”

Before walking through the doorway, Bridgette turned back to look at me one last time. There was no mistaking the hurt when I took in her beautiful face, though she was doing her best to hide it with a smile. As soon as she started to turn to head inside, her smile fell, and it was the last straw. Every last bit of self-control and promise to take our relationship slowly vanished in a heartbeat.

“Fuck it.” I took two long steps until I reached her and called her name. “Bridgette.”

She turned back to me, her eyes lighting up with hope. Without another word, I cupped her face in my gloved hands and kissed her with every bit of longing I had for her. When she let out a small gasp, I took advantage of her parted lips. I swept inside, tasting her flavor, licking along her tongue. Her moan of pleasure had my already rock hard cock ache with need for my little witch, my mate.

In one swift movement, I reached down and gripped her ass, lifting her against me. Without instruction, Bridgette wrapped her thighs around my hips while tangling her fingers in my hair. In an instant, she was the one doing the devouring. I let her get her

fill of our kiss as I walked us inside the dark entryway and kicked the door shut behind us. I paused to fumble with the lock, ensuring the door was secured before tearing my mouth from hers to look around. As I searched for the stairs that would lead to her loft apartment, Bridgette's mouth began to wander, sliding along my chin and down to my neck.

Once I located the stairs, I took them two at a time, letting my own moan loose as the movement caused her to grind against my cock. "Fuck. You're killing me here, sweetheart. Where's your room?" All I could think about was getting her on a flat surface. Any surface would do, and one day I would take advantage of all the flat spaces in both her apartment and mine, but I wasn't going to fuck her for the first time on the floor.

Bridgette waved a hand in the general direction of where I spotted an open door. I strode that way, and through the haze of lust, I located her bed, vaguely taking in the deep purple comforter and sapphire blue pillows. I laid her down, then quickly tugged off my gloves, discarding them somewhere on the floor. I crawled over her body as her chest rose and fell with her heavy breaths.

I placed my hands next to her head and held myself there, not touching her anywhere but where our legs were joined. "Bridgette, I need you to listen to me, little witch. Are you with me?" Her breathless, "Uh huh," as she looked up at me with her pale green eyes had me grinding my cock into her soft belly.

"I need to know that you want this as much as I do. I want to give you time if you need it."

She swallowed hard and gave a jerky nod as she blinked up at me. "I do."

I stared intently at her, letting her see my seriousness. "Be sure, little witch. Once I slide inside you, there will never be any going back. You'll be mine forever." The sly

little smile she gave me had me pausing as I waited for her answer.

“No, Logan Storm, you’ll be mine . I was an only child. I keep what’s mine, and I never learned to share.”

I couldn’t hold in my breathless chuckle. “It’s a good thing we’re on the same page, then. Now,” I leaned up and scanned her from head to toe. “Help me get your sexy as fuck clothes off.”

We both slid off the bed, already shimmying out of our jackets, tossing them onto the floor in a discarded heap of matching black leather. After taking far too long to get our boots off, we tore off our socks, then reached for the buttons on our jeans. She watched me with hooded eyes as I left my jeans undone and instead reached behind my head for the neck of my shirt. As I started to pull, her hands stilled.

“Uh uh, little witch. You stop, I stop. Get those pants off. But leave your panties on. I want the pleasure of stripping them off you myself.”

She flushed scarlet, but did as I said, sliding the denim down her shapely thighs until they pooled around her ankles. I waited for her to kick them off, but she tsked me.

“Oh, Detective. I may have been an only child, but I still know how to play fair. Have you forgotten the rules already? You stop, I stop. Remember?”

“Right,” I grunted, pulling off my Henley, letting it drop to the floor. When my fingers went to the zipper of my jeans, she licked her lips. “Kick them off,” I demanded.

“Shit. Right. Focus,” she reminded herself under her breath, making me grin. As her jeans went onto the growing pile of discarded items, I reached into my back pocket, withdrawing my wallet. I had stashed a condom there yesterday, not expecting to get

so far in our budding relationship, but knowing that it was better to be prepared. I tossed the condom onto the bed, giving her a wink when she looked up at me after watching it land.

Without a word, Bridgette took the bottom of her shirt with both hands and began lifting it. Her belly was pale and smooth with what looked like dots of freckles that I wanted to trace with my tongue. Swallowing a groan, I slid the zipper over the erection that was pressing insistently against the confines of my jeans and let out a sigh of relief when it finally had the space it desperately needed.

Bridgette dropped her shirt and stood in front of me wearing nothing but a pair of lacy blue panties and a matching bra. I could see her rosy nipples peeking through the lace and my cock gave an appreciative jerk. I quickly shoved my jeans down my thighs and kicked them off, debating on removing my black boxer briefs right then, or waiting. I didn't know how she would react to the size of my cock.

"Let me see." With my thumbs hesitating in the waistband of my boxers, I gave Bridgette a look that she must have interpreted correctly because she nodded. "Let me see," she repeated. I reached into my boxers and gave myself a long stroke, rolling my head on my neck at the feeling of relief I got from the simple touch. I was so worked up, I wasn't sure how long I would last. It had been nearly a year since I slept with my ex, since I hadn't been interested in finding anyone after she cheated on me.

I released my shaft and withdrew my hand. As I watched her closely, I pulled my boxers down, making sure to pull the waistband over my head as I went. Her tiny gasp had it jerking again. Without it being held back, my cock slapped against my lower stomach, leaving a small smear of precome where it rested.

Bridgette shook her head and then turned around. I stood there, waiting to see if she was going to put a halt to the rest of the evening. She walked over to the tall dresser by the door and picked up a small vial of purple, shimmering liquid. As I watched,

she pulled the cork from the bottle with her teeth and spit it out onto the floor. In one swift movement, she downed it like a shot of tequila and grimaced slightly.

I raised one eyebrow. "Care to explain?"

She gestured with the hand that wasn't holding the empty vial and wave in the general direction of my dick. "I assume you realize that you're above average. I mean, I have nothing to base that on other than a few videos and pictures, but that beast you've got between your legs looks like it could do some damage to a girl's hooah. I'm just taking a little precautionary painkiller. Good thing I'm a witch, right?" She finished off her nervous ramble with a small laugh.

I kicked my boxers off and walked toward her until we were standing toe to toe. "I promise that I won't hurt you, little witch. We were meant for each other, remember?"

Her head was tilted all the way back as she stared up at me with wide eyes. "Yeah. I remember."

"Good," I breathed out. Then I picked her up until her lips were even with mine. "You're so fucking beautiful. I can't wait until I've claimed every delectable inch of your body. These sexy freckles? I'm going to find every single one of them with my tongue." I nipped at the one on her shoulder, then soothed the sting with my tongue as her breathing increased. "I'm going to find out if your pussy tastes as good as your lips." I nipped her bottom lip next then swiped my tongue over it before sucking it into my mouth. "And when I finally slide into your cunt, I'm going to claim you in a way that will leave no doubt in your mind that I am yours just as much as you're mine." I pressed a hard kiss to her lips, briefly swiping my tongue into her mouth before pulling back to look into her dilated mossy green eyes. "Does that sound good to you, little witch?"

Bridgette's breath hitched, and she swallowed as she nodded weakly. "Yeah. That sounds good." Then she leaned forward, erasing the inch of space that was between us and nipped my lip right back. "So get on with it, detective."

I grinned at the sting she left behind. "Yes, ma'am."

I carried her over to the bed and tossed her down. She bounced once with a short squeal as she landed. Before she could lift her head, I parted her legs as I pulled her to the edge and knelt on the ground. I gently pulled the lacy panties down her legs and off her ankles, unable to tear my eyes away from the pussy that Fate had granted me.

She was a beautiful woman, with womanly curves and a soft, gently rounded belly. Her cunt was covered in neatly trimmed, dark red hair. There wasn't a single inch of her that I didn't want to lick, suck or bite, but I needed to taste her more than I needed my next breath. Without any further thought, I leaned in and, using the flat of my tongue, licked up from her opening until I reached her clit. I couldn't have stopped the rumble from my chest if I tried, as I grunted out the only word that swam through my brain over and over. "Mine!"

Using my thumbs, I parted her labia and nearly groaned again at the sweetest sight. "Mine," I growled again, unable to hold back my words of claiming. "All fucking mine." Then I dove back in, not planning on stopping until I had tasted every inch of her and made her scream.

Sliding up from her opening, I latched my lips around her clit, sucking while rubbing my tongue rapidly against it. I gently ran my index finger around her opening, sliding just the first inch into her. As her thighs began to shake uncontrollably, I glanced up her beautiful body, kicking myself that I hadn't gotten around to divesting her of that lacy blue bra. She had her head thrown back and was wailing up to the ceiling. I gave a deep pull with my mouth, careful not to suck too hard, and watched as she detonated, falling apart before my eyes with a scream. It was one of the most erotic

sights I'd ever witnessed.

I was torn between coaxing another orgasm from her and sliding up her writhing body so I could thrust deep inside of her. In the end, my cock won out. After slowing my movements to gentle licks, she collapsed as her orgasm faded. I slowly withdrew, then crawled up her body, snatching the condom from where it was in danger of falling over the edge of the bed. Hooking my arm around her waist, I hauled her further up the bed. Once we were settled, I looked down, seeing her dazed expression, and felt the ridiculous urge to beat my chest like an overgrown gorilla. I did that! I made my woman scream!

I tore open one end of the condom with my teeth and spit the wrapper to the side. After quickly sliding the protection into place, I paused, waiting until I had her full attention. "Are you ready for me, little witch? This is where you tell me to stop. We can wait to go any further. I will be happy just to hold you in my arms as you sleep."

I thought I heard my witch growl in her throat as she shifted her hips until I was notched at her entrance. "You're not going anywhere, Detective. Now fuck me before I turn you into a frog!"

Chapter

Thirteen

LOGAN

I 'd never laughed before as I made love to a woman, but there was a first time for everything. As slowly as my overexcited cock would allow, I pressed forward, stopping to breathe as the intense pleasure washed over me with every inch. "Are you okay?" I grunted as I fought to gain another inch.

"Are you all the way in yet?" she whined and shifted her hips, making me groan and close my eyes.

I didn't even have to look. "Not yet."

"What the fuck, Logan!"

My shoulders shook as I buried my face against her neck. Everything about the woman did it for me. Her humor, her fierceness, that she hid behind her charm. I raised my head and gazed down at her, smiling at her frowning face. "I'm going to push the rest of the way in. Are you ready?"

Her little growl, "No!" was accompanied by her widening her legs as she lifted them and wrapped her calves around my waist. "Just do it!"

Instead of plunging deep inside her like she expected me to, I leaned into her, taking

her lips with a kiss. As we tangled our tongues together, she sighed into my mouth, her whole body relaxing under me. As she lifted her hands from the death grip she'd been holding onto my shoulders and tangled them in my hair, I gave her a silent apology.

With one final thrust of my hips, I seated myself fully inside of her. With our bodies pressed so close together, I would have sworn our hearts beat to the same rhythm. Bridgette only grunted as her eyes popped open. Instead of the accusatory glance I was expecting, she wore a look of wonder.

"Oh. I'm so full!" she breathed out against my lips.

"I'm going to move now."

"Yes, please!"

"So polite," I grinned, then couldn't help but kiss her again as I slowly withdrew. Once I was almost entirely out of her snug channel, I plunged back inside until our hips were flush. "Again?" I asked her, my own voice sounding breathless. She nodded her head emphatically, shifting her hands back to my shoulders.

Without another word, I withdrew and paused only briefly before thrusting in hard. Then I did it again. And again. Slow withdrawals followed by slamming back inside. Over and over, I took her as we both lost our breaths. Her cries echoed around the room, mingling with my grunts.

"You're mine, little witch. My mate. My woman. Mine! Say it!" I demanded. I didn't know where the words were coming from. I had never felt so possessive over a woman before. But I knew that there was something very different about the one I held. My witch was my mate. But more than that, I knew without a doubt, she would be my everything. "Say you're mine!"

“I’m yours! Oh, goddess. Logan!”

“That’s right. You’re mine, Bridgette. And I’m yours. Today.” I thrust hard. “Tomorrow.” I withdrew then slid my hand down to her ass to grip tight there as I slammed back into her. “Forever.”

“Yes!” Bridgette threw her head back on a scream, and I took advantage, sliding my tongue over her throat, tasting the sweat on her dewy skin. I licked over to her ear and bit down just hard enough to make it sting. “Now come for me, little witch.”

I pounded into her, feeling her walls flutter and clench around my aching cock. I knew I wouldn’t be able to hold off much longer. I released my hold on her ass, and slid my hand between our bodies until I found her clit. Holding it between my knuckles, I squeezed. “Come for me, now!”

Watching Bridgette fall apart while I ate her pussy was a beautiful sight, but watching her scream and writhe while coming on my pounding cock was fucking amazing. I hadn’t even come yet, and I couldn’t wait to see it again.

I threw my own head back as the base of my spine tingled, shooting sparks of electricity through my entire body as my cock swelled impossibly bigger. Then, finally, I allowed myself to release. As I felt jet after jet of come shoot out of my aching cock, I wished for the first time that I wasn’t using protection. The thought of filling Bridgette with my seed had another spurt leaving me.

Breathlessly, I collapsed, making sure I didn’t crush her smaller body, and rolled us until she was sprawled across my chest, her legs straddling my hips. Somehow, we were still joined, and I had the brief thought that I needed to take care of the condom, but as both of us gained our breaths back, our breathing returning to normal, we both fell asleep.

A quick movement jolted me awake, my hand immediately shooting out to my nightstand for the gun I always kept there. Coming up empty, I looked around the room in confusion, seeing bright colors on the walls and wondering why I had slept with the lights on. Bridgette scrambled out of my arms, making the whole night come back to me.

“What’s going on?” I asked, noting the alarmed expression. “What’s wrong?”

I sat up and watched as she snagged a long, silky robe off the back of her bedroom door and jumped off the bed. Reaching down, I grabbed my jeans with one hand and struggled into them while reaching for the pistol I kept in my jacket pocket. With a curse, I ripped the condom off that had leaked all over my dick. Without anywhere else to put it at the moment, I shoved it into my pocket and ran out the door.

Before I could make it down the stairs, Bridgette was already in the shop, flipping the lights on. I came to a sliding stop beside her, my gun at the ready. “What’s wrong? Where’s the danger?” I barked out, surveilling the room, immediately confused because nothing seemed out of the ordinary except her large black cat blinking at me with round yellow eyes from the top of the glass case where the cash register sat. It let out a long, loud meow that had me wincing.

Bridgette turned to look at me, then did a double take when she saw my weapon. “Where did that come from?”

I just looked at her. “Babe.”

She waved a hand in the air. “Never mind. My, I guess you would call it an internal alarm, went off and woke me up. It’s the wards. Something happened to make the wards activate.” She looked around again, then back up at me and shrugged one shoulder, causing her silky red robe to slide, revealing her creamy, smooth skin dotted with a few cinnamon colored freckles. It reminded me that I hadn’t done what

I'd promised yet and licked every freckle on her body. I mentally shook my head so I could focus.

"So this internal alarm went off, waking you up, and you thought running into the shop barefoot and weaponless was a good idea?"

Bridegette narrowed her eyes at me, then held out a hand that suddenly held an orb of what looked like blue flames inside of it. "I'm never unarmed, Detective." I could do nothing but grunt because she did have a point. The woman was likely more capable of protecting herself than I could ever be.

"Fine. But you have me now, so let me help you, okay?" I waited until she gave a grudging nod of agreement, then looked back around the store, taking in everything. Wait. "Is that a fairy hanging from the light fixture?"

I stared in what I imagine looked like dumbstruck confusion as a pink and purple fairy that I remembered glancing at the other day seemed to be gripping onto the metal pole of the chandelier type light that hung over Bridgette's display of gemstones and rocks.

"What. The. Fuck." I looked down at Bridgette, then back up at the fairy. "How did she get up there?"

"Flew, would be my guess," she said nonchalantly as she reached over and picked the still yowling cat off the counter and walked him over to the cat tree in the corner before dropping him down with a scratch behind the ear. "Hush, Mortimer. I can barely hear myself think," I chastised. "Sometimes the fairies like to pretend they are pole dancers and put on a show for the dragons. Most of the time, the dragons don't care, though. They are only interested in finding all the best, shiniest stones to add to their collections. I hate having to take their hordes away from them, but if I let them, they'd keep them all, then I'd have nothing left to sell."

I shook my head, wondering if I'd woken up in a new reality where inanimate objects could fly and apparently get into mischief. I started walking toward the front door to check the lock when a loud caw pierced the silence. I swung around, my gun back in place as I searched for the cause of the sound.

"Careful!" Bridgette scolded me as she walked past me and ran a hand over the door frame. "You'll scare Frank."

I closed my eyes and shook my head. Taking a deep breath, I counted to three before giving in and turning to my new mate. "Explain."

"First, put your gun away. There's no danger here, or I would have sensed it. I don't know why the wards woke me up, but whatever it was, it's over."

With a frustrated growl, I lowered my pistol to my side. I wasn't going to shove it into my jeans. That was a good way to shoot your cock off. I liked my cock. "Little witch..."

"Okay, okay. Keep your pants on." She looked down at my jeans that were barely hanging on with just the zipper up and unbuttoned. She licked her lips. "Or maybe don't?" She looked back up at me with a half smile and a hopeful gleam in her eyes. My cock twitched behind my zipper. Nope.

"Focus. What's going on here, Bridgette? Your shop comes alive at night? Is this like that toy movie where when the humans leave the room they talk and shit?"

She laughed, then turned to face the majority of the shop. "Kinda in a way. Isn't it amazing?"

I grunted. It actually was, but I still needed answers. "Okay, but how?"

“Well,” she began as she walked through, moving figurines back to their places on the shelves and occasionally wiping glitter off random items. “I’m a witch who owns a witchy shop. A little spark of my magic is imbued in most of the stuff you see. Since I believe in magic, it allows them to move, dance, play... get into mischief.” She turned to face the large glass window with the store’s name and logo painted on it. “No one can see it from the outside. Not unless they are magic users too. A demon might be able to see, if they are a magic wielding demon. But vampires can’t. At least, I don’t think so. I haven’t seen many vampires to ask them.”

“Wait,” I shook my head, then decided that talking about vampires and demons could wait for another time. “What happens when they are bought by someone? Do they move around the house when their new owner is sleeping?” My mind whirled at the possibilities.

Bridgette frowned, and her eyes turned sad. “No. Once they leave, my magic is withdrawn, and they become nothing but plaster and resin again. Unless someone with magic can imbue them, they are just objects. They aren’t really alive right now. I don’t know how to explain it, other than to say they are animated.”

“Fascinating,” I murmured as I looked around and caught a black skull grinning at me. “If you wanted to leave a spark of your magic inside, could you?”

She nodded with a small smile. “I could. But that would be irresponsible. Who knows what would happen? Though I have been telling my friend Shayla that she should take Mildred home with her.” She pointed at the black skull that clattered her teeth together in what I could only guess was its version of laughter. “They have a love/hate relationship.”

Together, we walked back toward the counter where the cat was once again meowing loudly and pacing back and forth, his tail twitching in agitation. Bridgette shook her head and walked past him instead of trying to place him back onto his tower.

“Honestly, I have no idea what has gotten into him lately. I wish Grandmother were here so she could ask him what’s up.” She flicked the switch, and the shop lights turned off, leaving only a few accent lights still softly glowing.

“Your grandmother can talk to cats?” After finding out about dancing fairies and hoarding dragons, I didn’t know why a lady who could talk to cats was the hardest to believe.

Bridgette laughed as we started walking back up the stairs. “Not all cats. Though that would be interesting, I’d think. And exhausting. No, Mortimer is her familiar, so they can communicate telepathically.”

“You don’t have a familiar?” She shook her head.

“No. I haven’t found mine yet. When a witch finds their familiar, they form a bond. Almost like a mate bond, I guess. The witch will give the familiar a spark of her magic, and in return, the familiar lives as long as the witch does. Their bond is unbreakable, and the loyalty to each other is truly remarkable.”

“Why didn’t your grandmother take her cat with her?”

“She wanted to. She even found a few cruises that would allow animals. But in the end, she couldn’t do that to Mortimer. Leaving him locked in a tiny cabin for months would have been torture for him.”

Bridgette took her robe off, leaving her in nothing but her lacy bra and freckles. I could see a few slight bruises on her skin where I’d been a little rough with her, and between her thighs was red where my stubble had irritated her skin. My dick grew instantly, knowing that I had claimed her by loving her body so thoroughly. I wanted to do it again and find all the places I’d missed. Starting with her breasts.

I tugged off my jeans and gave myself a long stroke with my fist. “Come here,” I growled before grabbing her hand and pulling her into me. As soon as her body crashed into mine, I lifted her by her thighs and grunted my approval when she immediately wrapped those strong legs around my waist.

I took her mouth with a hungry kiss and walked over to the bed, where I leaned over until her back was against the mattress. I reached under her back and unsnapped her bra before tugging it off her arms and tossing it away. “Finally,” I breathed and leaned back far enough that I could get a good view of her rosy tipped nipples. Without hesitation, I swooped down and took one breast in my mouth, sucking long and hard, careful not to hurt her, but showing her how good it could feel.

I felt my leaking cock at the entrance of her cunt, feeling how drenched she was as she let out gasps of pleasure. I switched to her other breast, not wanting to leave it lonely. I thrust against her wetness and groaned at how good it felt, and remembered at that moment that I didn’t have any more condoms with me.

“Fuck. I want inside you so bad it hurts.”

Her voice was raspy when she spoke. “Do it. I want you, too.”

I closed my eyes and rested my forehead on her chest while taking deep, calming breaths. “I only brought one condom.” I couldn’t stop myself from giving another small thrust, feeling my aching cock slide through her folds.

“Maybe you could pull out?” She suggested a groan.

I’d never taken chances before. Not with anyone, but as I felt the heat of her cunt against my cock and opened my eyes to see the nipples I’d just sucked, darkened to an even redder shade of pink, I gave up.

Pulling back my hips as far as her tight grip on me would allow, I felt my cock make connection with her entrance. Then, without any further hesitation, I pressed forward. The feeling of being inside a woman without a single barrier between us was a type of magic all on its own.

I felt almost drunk on my little witch as I took her roughly again, pounding into her depths as if I could imprint my soul onto hers.

In the end, when she started screaming my name, it was nearly impossible to withdraw from her tight grip. It was certainly a close call as my cock hardened painfully and began to shoot just as I started to pull out and painted her belly as we again collapsed into each other and fell into an exhausted sleep.

Chapter

Fourteen

brIDGETTE

The sound of a phone ringing woke me up. Knowing that it couldn't have been mine based on the tone, I rolled over to see Logan reaching over the side of the bed. I admired the play of muscles in his back, and when I saw the bright red stripes near his shoulders, I blushed as I remembered how those scratch marks got there.

Logan finally found his phone and rolled back onto the bed, the sheet low on his hips from his actions. It was easy to see the outline of his thick cock not quite hidden by the purple fabric. I was thankful for the potion I took last night. Though my muscles were a bit sore, I didn't feel any pain.

"Yeah, I'll be there in twenty," Logan said, catching my attention. As he hung up the call, he dropped the phone by his side. Then I found myself being hauled back against him, where I braced myself against his chest before I face planted there instead.

"Going somewhere?" I asked, trying to keep my tone neutral. I didn't want to sound needy, or Goddess forbid, hurt.

He stared at my face for a long minute as I tried to look unbothered. His eyes grew soft, then he placed a gentle kiss on my lips. "I had to wait until last night to take you out because Mac and I take turns being on call. I didn't want to take the chance that I would have to leave you in the middle of our first date. Unfortunately, we both get

called during the day.”

“So you have to leave for a case?” I asked, feeling somewhat appeased by the man leaving just hours after he’d taken my first everything.

“Yeah, babe. I have a case.” He ran his thumb over my cheek, then he placed another closed mouth kiss on my lips. “Can I see you again tonight? I can bring dinner, and we can watch a movie?”

“I’d like that,” I whispered as I took in his handsome face, noting that he looked relaxed. His gray eyes were a paler shade than the darker, stormier one I’d seen last night as he fucked me into the mattress.

“Good,” he whispered back. Then he slapped my ass with the palm of his hand. “I’ve got to go. I’ve got about five minutes to get out the door in order to make it across town.”

He slid out from under me and rolled out of bed with the grace of a panther. I tugged the sheet up to my chest and hugged the pillow he’d used, surreptitiously sniffing it and liking that my things had his scent on them.

I watched as he quickly dressed. He sat down on the bed by my hips and pulled his socks and boots on. I scrunched up my nose as I watched, knowing how much it must suck to have to wear the same clothes from the day before.

“You should bring a bag with you tonight.”

He looked at me over his shoulder as he tied his motorcycle boots. “Yeah?” he asked with a grin.

“Yeah,” I said with a slight shrug. “That way, you have a change of clothes. Maybe a

toothbrush.” He laughed as he stood and turned to face me, leaning down with his hands braced against the mattress.

“Noted. Fresh breath tomorrow morning.”

“Um hmmm,” I hummed as I stared up at my mate.

“Later, little witch.”

“Later, Detective Storm.”

With a wink, a quick kiss, and a reminder to lock the door, he was gone, and I closed my eyes, falling back into a deep sleep.

“Thanks, Eileen!” I called out, stuffing a dollar bill into the tip jar. I brought my hot cup of white peppermint mocha coffee to my nose and inhaled. “Oh, my Goddess, that smells so good!” I groaned.

“Better than sex,” Shayla agreed as we sat down in our usual comfortable armchairs in the corner at the cafe down the street from Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs.

At my silence, Shayla looked up at me, immediately seeing my flushed cheeks, and squealed.

“Shhh!” I waved at her frantically, noting all the eyes that had turned in our direction. I gave old Mrs. Boone a small smile and a wave of apology. I brought the cup up to my lips, hoping that Shayla would let it go for now, but I should have known there was no way in hell she would.

She leaned into my personal bubble to whisper fiercely. “Girl, if you don’t tell me everything right this second, I’m going to call up my momma right here and now and

tell her that you were the one who dug up her favorite tulips when we were ten.”

My horrified gasp was probably louder than her squeal had been. “You wouldn’t!”

“You bet my sweet momma’s petunias I would. And I will if you don’t come clean, I’m pressing call .” Shayla held up her phone, a picture of her mother already on the screen, and her finger hovering over the call button.

“That’s just harsh,” I pouted as I grumbled. “I was planning on telling you. I just didn’t want it to be in public. Geez. So impatient.”

“Well, we are here, so get to spilling. Confession is good for the soul. Or so I hear.” We both snickered, but then she nudged me. “Seriously, bestie. Is everything okay? Was it... consensual.”

I turned quickly in my chair so I could face her better and grabbed her hand. “Oh, Shayla, no! Nothing like that, I swear. Everything was better than I could have ever imagined.”

She let out a relieved sigh and smiled. “Okay, Bridge. Why don’t you start from the beginning? And don’t leave any of the juicy stuff out,” she warned.

I laughed, and we both took small sips of our coffees. “Okay. So, Logan showed up. On time, I might add.”

“Nice. Already a point for Mr. Detective,” she nodded.

“With his motorcycle.”

“Oh. Now I’m jealous. Was it scary-fun, or just scary?”

“It was amazing. I felt like I was flying. You know how I love being in nature. It was like nothing else. Zipping past all the trees while the moon was rising. I loved it. He took me to a bar. Remember that small, rundown looking place down the highway?” I waited for her nod and the expected nose scrunch. “It’s actually really nice inside. And kinda cozy. The owners are good people. I think the owner’s daughter has a touch of magic in her. Anyway, the food was fabulous. You should really go there with us sometime and try the burger. Truly the best one I’ve had. And you know I’ve been looking.” At her impatient raised eyebrow, I giggled. “Right. So he taught me how to play pool, which was more fun than I expected. Then we rode back to the shop. I thought he was just going to leave, to be honest. I couldn’t tell what he was thinking. He has this really great blank face. I think it’s probably because of his job.”

“Okay, I know I told you to spill everything, but I’m growing old here waiting for the good stuff. Come on!”

“Hey, you asked!” I protested, then hid my grin behind my paper coffee cup as her glare turned glacial. “Fine,” I huffed with a laugh. “Just when I thought he was going to leave, and I got all sad but tried not to show it, he kissed me. Then he carried me up the stairs and we did it.”

“Did... what?”

“It ,” I stressed. “We did it. We got undressed, he ate me out, then he fucked me until I couldn’t feel my legs.” I sat back and sighed. “It was amazing. Truly fantastic. Odes could be written. Songs, sung in the honor of my glorious orgasms.”

Shayla’s laughter had started gaining attention again, so I shushed her. When she was finally under control, she whispered. “Was it really that good?”

I nodded. “It really was. Worth the wait, hun. I promise.”

“So was he well endowed or average. With orgasms the way you described, I can’t imagine he was smaller than average.”

My face turned hotter than the sun, and I was sure my cheeks matched the color of my hair. “Umm, bigger?”

She gasped. “How big?”

“Honestly? I’m not exactly certain. When I saw it, I freaked out just a little bit. I went straight to the pain relief potions on my dresser as a precaution. It may not have been as big as I first thought.”

Shayla held out her hands, palms facing each other. “This long?”

I tilted my head and studied the width, and thought back to what I remembered, and reached out. I pulled her wrists apart until the distance was about what I thought it would have been.

Shayla looked down at the space between her hands before using one of them to fan herself. “Oh, sweet tea and lemonade. When the Goddess decides to bless you, she doesn’t hold back, does she?” She looked down at my lap with her eyes squinted. “How’s your girly bits this morning? You seemed to be walking okay.”

I laughed and gave her a shove. “I’m fine. I got the feeling back in my legs somewhere in the middle of the night,” I snickered.

“When this semester is over and Hotty Professor stops playing hard to get, I’m going to need one of those potions. I’ve seen the outline of that thing he’s packing.”

I smiled. “Absolutely. So things are going well there?”

Shayla shrugged. “He stares at me a lot. Honestly, the man doesn’t seem to get any work done while I’m in his office. All he does is follow me with his eyes.”

“Are you still filing?”

She shook her head and took a swallow of the cooling coffee. “He had me start working on his bookshelves. He wants them all rearranged by type of law and then by author or publication.”

“Umm, are these floor to ceiling bookshelves?”

“What do you mean? They are tall enough that there is a sliding ladder. It’s kind of cool, actually. I want to slide on it like that scene from Beauty and the Beast when Belle is singing in the library.”

“Girl, he’s totally watching your peachy ass climbing up and down that ladder.”

A smug grin spread across her face. “You think so?”

I snorted. “Yeah, Shay. I do.”

Just then, the bell over the door rang as a new customer walked in. I didn’t bother looking, but Shayla froze, her eyes going wide. I turned to see what had her freaking out, to see a tall, incredibly handsome black man standing just inside the cafe. He had close cropped hair on his head, along with a very neatly trimmed beard cut close to his skin. He was wearing a white button down shirt with the sleeves rolled to his elbows, navy blue slacks, and brown loafers. He looked nothing like the stuffy professor I had expected. He looked deliciously hot. And his dark golden eyes were laser focused on my best friend.

As I was taking him in, he began to walk over. “Miss Shayla. Lovely seeing you

here.”

“Professor King. I wasn’t expecting to see you today. This is my best friend, Bridgette. She owns Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs down the street.”

He barely spared me a nod in acknowledgement, and I had to stifle a giggle at how obvious the two were while trying to pretend they weren’t already half in love with each other. I stood up, smoothly dodging the hand Shayla tried to use to no doubt pull me back to her side.

I held out my hand. “It’s nice to meet you, Professor King. I’ve heard so much about you. I’m not sure if you know that Shayla and I have been friends since we could walk.”

He finally looked at me and gave me a smirk, showing off straight white teeth that would make any dentist cream their pants. “Is that so?”

I nodded as he took my hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Yep. And since you know I own the best occult store in town, you should also know I’m a witch.” I leaned in a little closer and mock whispered. “A powerful one.”

I held contact for a prolonged moment without letting go of his hand. It took him a few seconds to notice how hot his hand was getting, but when he did, instead of jerking out of my hold, he simply gritted his teeth and inclined his head. “Noted.”

I gave him my best and brightest smile, letting the heat dissipate before pulling my hand away. “Wonderful.” I turned back toward Shayla and gave her an apologetic smile, but she didn’t look upset. Instead, I could see how grateful she was, knowing I would always be there for her. “Call me later. Love you!”

I turned to leave, ready to toss my empty cup on the way out, when the professor

stopped me. “I only have good intentions.” He paused. “But, just so you know, Bridgette, no one will stand in my way when it’s time.”

I tilted my head as I took in his serious expression. Then I inclined my head the same way he had. “Noted.”

I gave a wave to Eileen behind the counter as I left and walked down the sidewalk toward my shop and home, knowing all the while that my best friend was in good hands.

Chapter

Fifteen

LOGAN

I was already in a piss poor mood after having to leave a beautiful, warm, naked woman alone in bed, but when I pulled up on my motorcycle to a familiar house with overflowing flower beds framing the walkway to the door, I let out a vicious curse. It didn't take much imagination to figure out why Mac and I had been called to the home of a witch.

Mac walked up beside me looking as pissed as I was. "Fucking shit."

"Yeah, that about covers it," I agreed as I swung my leg over the seat. I wanted to throw my helmet to the ground, but instead, hung it carefully over the handlebars.

Together we walked up the same path we had taken only a few short days before, only instead of a beautiful woman full of life to greet us, it was a rookie cop looking a little green around the gills. He swallowed, then looked over his shoulder.

"The victim was found about an hour ago by one of her neighbors. They have a standing date for tea in the mornings. When the victim didn't answer the door, the neighbor used the key she was given by the victim to let herself in. She called right away. Said she didn't touch anything."

Mac and I both glanced over to a woman who was crying, holding a cloth

handkerchief to her face as she talked to another uniformed police officer. Simone Donaldson, the other witch on the list I had from Bridgette.

“We know who she is.” I turned back to the rookie. Thanks, man. Crime Scene techs already doing their thing?”

He nodded and swallowed again. “Yeah. They’re inside processing now.”

I slapped him on the shoulder. “Good. Drop your report off on my desk later.”

Mac gave him a nod as we stepped through the open doorway. Taking in the scene was like having a flashback. Everything was practically identical to the one we’d dealt with just a week ago. Candles that had melted down to nothing surrounded the unmistakable symbol of a pentagram. The scent of herbs and wax permeated the small room that had been cleared of furniture. A glance down the hall showed where the small loveseat and chair had gone.

“That’s two, Storm.”

I grunted. “Yep.”

“Her name was on that list you got from your witch.”

My eye twitched at the implications. “Yep,” I growled.

“Are you going to bring her in on this? Because I don’t know about you, but I still have no idea what the fuck we are dealing with here.”

I hadn’t gotten around to asking Bridgette if she was willing to act as a civilian expert on the case yet, but knowing her, she wouldn’t say no. I just didn’t know if I wanted her so close to a murder case that could potentially put her in the crosshairs of a serial

killer. If she weren't already there.

"I know. I will talk to her today and get the Captain's go ahead." I looked out the window to see the other woman standing in the sun. Her shoulders were shaking as someone stood beside her with their arm around her shoulders. "We need to talk to Simone Donaldson."

After talking to Hillary Grimes the other day, we had paid a very similar visit to Mrs. Donaldson. She lived just a few houses down, an easy stroll to visit for morning coffee. It made sense since they had so much in common. The only difference between Mrs. Donaldson and the other two women who had been murdered was that she had a husband and children. It gave me a spark of hope that just because she was on the list of strongest witches, that she wouldn't be a victim. Maybe, just maybe, the list was just a coincidence, and Hillary Grimes wasn't murdered for her strength in magic.

I closed my eyes, knowing in my gut that I was wrong. There was something that the women on the list had that the murderer wanted. I just didn't know what that was yet. But I would. Bridgette's life was on the line. I had just met her, and I already knew that I didn't want to face a day when she was no longer in this world.

Instead of punching the wall in rage fueled by fear, I took in a deep lungful of air. "Let's get this over with." I walked further into the room and did what I was trained to do. I looked for clues to what might be inside of a killer's mind.

"I just don't know who would have hurt Hillary. She's always been so kind to everyone!" Simone Donaldson sniffled into her second handkerchief. The first one had been discarded when we sat down in her living room several houses down from the Grimes cottage.

"No enemies? No ex-boyfriends or lovers? What about any estranged family

members who might have some kind of grudge against Miss Grimes?” Mac rubbed at his chin, the stubble making scratching noises against his fingertips. We both knew that none of those possibilities were likely, but just like searching the house for any missed clues, we had to do our job and ask all the questions.

“No. None of those things.” She looked between the two of us as she leaned into a short, slightly balding man sitting beside her. “You know she is a witch.” She closed her eyes and sucked in a shaky breath. “Was. She was a witch. You think this has to do with that. Don’t you?” She put her palm out toward us, stopping any reply before one could be made. “Please don’t lie to me. It’s one gift that I have. I can feel it when someone is lying,” she patted her chest, “in here.”

I cleared my throat and glanced at Mac, then back at Mrs. Donaldson. “We have reason to believe that the person who murdered both Mrs. Brooks and Miss Grimes is the same person. I hate to make you remember what you saw this morning, Mrs. Donaldson, but did you recognize the symbol drawn on the floor? Did that mean anything to you?”

She shuddered and dabbed at her eyes with the cloth. “It all happened so fast. At first, I thought Hillary had fallen and hurt herself when I walked in and she was just lying there on the floor. It took a second for the blood to register. As soon as I realized she was dead, I’m ashamed to say I just screamed and ran out of there like my skirt was on fire.” She shook her head. “I have a vague memory of seeing candles and chalk. I can say with certainty that there were signs of a ritual having been performed. Unfortunately, that’s all I could tell you.”

I nodded, not really expecting more. Anyone being faced with a dead body for the first time would have a hard time focusing on anything but the trauma done to the body. Unfortunately, Mrs. Donaldson would be seeing her friend lying there in her dreams for a long time to come.

“Mrs. Donaldson, I know we asked you this last time, but I need to ask you again. Can you think of anyone at all in the area who would want to murder witches?”

She sobbed into her handkerchief. “I, my Goddess! I’m a possible victim, aren’t I? I need to call the rest of my coven and warn them that there’s a witch killer on the loose. Oh, stars! What am I going to do?”

“Mrs. Donaldson,” I snapped as gently as I could, trying to pull her back from the edge of hysteria. “It’s good to be cautious, but I’d advise not to start a panic until we know for certain what is happening. Now, can you help us out so we can find this person? Do you know anyone who might dislike witches? Maybe someone has spoken openly about magic users?”

She patted her chest in an attempt to calm herself. “Umm, no. I can’t say I have. Most people don’t know that witches even exist. I think I told you this before, but most of us try to keep it that way. Very few witches tell outsiders about our abilities. I think the Salem Witch Trials and witch burnings from centuries past have mostly taught us that humans can’t be trusted.”

“Right.” We had come to another dead end. I needed to talk to Bridgette. I had a feeling that if we were going to find any useful answers, it would have to be through the knowledge she held. “One last question. I understand that Miss Grimes was a pretty powerful witch. Can you think of anyone who would be able to overpower her?”

Mrs. Donaldson blinked at me, then grimaced. “I can tell you there are two of us who might have been able to subdue Hillary. Me... and Bridgette Waters. Other than the two of us,” she shook her head. “Sorry.”

I glanced over at Mac, who shut his notebook. We both stood up and reached out a hand to shake Mrs. Donaldson’s. Her husband stood as well and placed a hand on his

wife's shoulder, giving it a soft pat. "I'm going to see the detectives out, dear. I'll be right back." She nodded and dabbed at her eyes, suddenly appearing exhausted from the entire ordeal.

As we stepped out onto the porch, Mr. Donaldson followed us out and closed the door softly behind him. "Please tell me if my wife is in danger."

I had expected the question, so I wasn't surprised in the least. "At this time, we can't say with any certainty if there are any other witches being targeted. We are working as quickly as we can to find out who did this and why. But," I paused as I stared at the man, "if it were my wife, I would take the threat seriously."

He nodded. "It's been a while since Simone has visited her sister. Maybe she could do that sometime soon."

"I think if nothing else, it might help her heal a little from the trauma she experienced today," Mac said from beside me.

Mr. Donaldson nodded again. "Right. Good call. Thank you, gentlemen. Please find this madman quickly!"

"As soon as we can, that I can promise you," I said, then Mac and I walked away to head back down the street toward our vehicles. "I'm going to swing by Bridgette's on my way into the station so I can ask her if she's willing to help with this case." And I needed my eyes on her just to verify that she was alive and well.

"Alright. I'll go straight to the station. Do you want me to talk to the Captain?"

"He's going to want a briefing on the case. Might as well tell him we don't have shit. Maybe he'll be more open to bringing in an expert witch," I replied as I grabbed the helmet from my bike. "See you in thirty," I called out, then prepared to take off.

The bell rang over the door as I pushed it open. I didn't see Bridgette right away, so I assumed she was in the back room and headed that direction. I noticed the large black cat staring at me from the counter with his eerie yellow eyes, and stopped when I reached the counter.

As I stood there trying to figure out what about him was raising questions, he meowed loudly, then turned in a circle. He stuck out one large paw and then scraped his nails against the glass. "Meow !"

"Hey, buddy, Bridgette isn't going to appreciate you putting scratches all over her counter."

"Meow !"

"It's spelled to prevent damage. The whole shop is. The red door hasn't had to be repainted since the day the first coat of paint was brushed on it." Bridgette stepped through the doorway to the back room and smiled up at me. "I wasn't expecting you until tonight. Everything okay?"

I strode over to her and reached out with one arm to snag her around the waist. Yanking her into my chest just hard enough that she collided with a small "oof", I took her lips with mine. Once we were both low on oxygen, I pulled back. "That's how we say hello." I nipped her bottom lip. "Hey, babe."

Bridgette was flushed when she answered with a breathy, "Hey."

"Listen, I can't stay. I have to get to the station for a meeting with my Captain. But I have to ask you something very important. I need you to think about it seriously, but I hate to say it, we will need an answer quickly."

"Logan, you're scaring me," Bridgette studied my face with furrowed brows. "What

is going on?”

“There was another witch murdered last night. Mac and I aren’t finding anything that will help figure this out. We are completely out of our element here, and we need help.” I took her cheeks in my palms as her concern switched to distress. “We need your help. If you are willing. You know about the things we don’t. You can help us with the magical aspect.”

She was already nodding before I finished speaking. “Yes, of course I’ll help. I’ll do anything I can.”

“Babe, listen. It’s not that easy. I won’t just be asking you vague questions. You’ll have to look at crime scene photos so you can better understand what the killer is trying to do.”

She briefly closed her eyes and shuddered, but opened them again and stared up at me with her soft, moss colored eyes. “I’ll help, Logan.”

I leaned in and kissed her softly. “It won’t be easy. Seeing that kind of thing,” I shook my head. “It’s hard. Knowing it’s real can cause someone trauma. I hate even suggesting it to you.”

Bridgette stood on her tiptoes and kissed me back. When she dropped back to her feet, she lifted her hand, placed it on my chest, and rubbed softly there. “I know, Logan. I appreciate your concern for me. I want to stop this person before another witch is killed. I’ll help. And if I have trouble sleeping, I’ll have you to hold me.”

“Yes,” I pulled her into my chest where she lay her head as she wrapped her arms around my waist. “You’ll always have me.”

Chapter

Sixteen

brIDGETTE

I 'd never been in a police station before. Honestly, it was a bit disappointing. I had expected to see cops running around, hauling criminals behind them in handcuffs, and filling out paperwork while phones rang off the hook. Instead, when we stepped off the elevator, all I saw were rows of desks that were half empty. The desks that had someone sitting there, the person looked bored as they filled out paperwork. At least that part of my expectation was real.

“Over here,” Logan said as he led me by the hand toward the back wall, where there was an office with windows overlooking the rest of the room and the door standing open. The few men and women working at their desks glanced up and called out greetings as we passed, most of them eyeing me as if I were an anomaly.

Logan knocked on the open door and called out. “Hey, Captain. I’ve brought Bridgette Waters.” He gently tugged me forward and gestured to one of the two chairs sitting in front of the large desk covered in multiple folders.

The Captain was a large man with an even larger, imposing presence. Judging his height from where he was sitting, I would have placed him somewhere near six and a half feet tall with a full head of dark hair and a liberal dusting of gray at his temples. He was handsome, probably of Latin descent, and I couldn’t help but wonder if he was married and how I could introduce him to my mother if he was single. It had

been far too long since my mother had attempted dating anyone. Maybe it was spending the last two nights with my mate, but I couldn't help but want everyone to be happy with a partner. If they were so inclined to have a partner, that was.

After Logan had asked me to help with the case, he had gone to the office, telling me he still needed to approve it first through his boss. Later that evening, just as I finished closing up the shop for the night, he'd knocked on the door, a bag of delicious smelling food in hand. We'd had a simple evening together, talking about our childhoods while letting a movie play in the background as we ate. After he'd carried me through my small living room and into the bedroom, he'd stripped me bare. Then I learned how fun it could be to save water by showering with a friend. Ten out of ten. Highly recommend.

"Miss Waters." The Captain stood up and leaned over his desk to take my hand in a firm handshake that made my finger look like toothpicks. Maybe not quite that small, but I bet he could have snapped them as easily as toothpicks. "I understand you are knowledgeable in the occult." He sat back down and folded his hands in front of him over the folders on his desk.

"Yes, sir. I was trained as early as I can remember by my grandmother."

He stared me dead in the eyes, and I didn't dare blink or look away. "I'm going to be honest with you, Miss Waters. I don't believe in witchcraft. But I believe that you believe in it, and so does this killer. So if any insight you might be able to provide helps find this asshole and are able to put the fucker away, well, I'm willing to keep an open mind."

"I understand, sir. But, just saying, just because you don't believe in something doesn't mean it's not real." I felt Logan rest his hand on my shoulder. I wasn't sure if it was in support or a quiet warning to shut up.

He sat back, still eyeing me, and picked up a cup of coffee that was sitting to the side of his desk. “You’re correct, of course. But there is no proof of magic. If there were, it would be all over social media. Kids these days film every damn thing. Ghosts, witches, magic. It doesn’t exist.” He took a sip of his coffee, then grimaced. “Damn it. I let it grow cold. I swear I can never drink a full cup of hot coffee anymore.”

I stuck out my hand. “Sir, if I may?” He looked at me in confusion, then back at his cold coffee. With a shrug, he handed it over. I held it between both of my hands. “I 100% understand what you are saying. There’s just one thing to think about, though. Witches have been condemned since the beginning of history. Burnings, hangings, drownings. Even the suggestion that a woman might use witchcraft to help her flowers grow in the early colonial days was enough to have her hanged. If a woman looked at a child wrong or denied a man’s affections, she was accused of being a witch and put to death, even if she was completely human. In fact, the majority of the deaths that have occurred over the many years of our existence weren’t witches at all. Witches know how to keep our secrets, especially after watching our sisters die for just being alive.” I held out the steaming cup of coffee and waited until he took it with a blank face, not revealing his feelings about what I’d said or what he was seeing. The man had earned his position as a leader, and I could sense that he was a very good one. “If you like, I could make you a charm that you can set your cup on. It will keep your coffee fresh and hot all day.”

The Captain took a sip, then he closed his eyes and shook his head. “Okay. It’s not often I have to rethink my stance on a matter. But you have given me reason to.” He set his cup down and stood up. Logan gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze, so I did the same. As we stood facing each other with his large wooden desk separating us, I wasn’t surprised to see him towering over me. I definitely needed to ask Logan about his relationship status. “Thank you for agreeing to help my detectives work on their case.”

We shook hands again, but he didn’t let go right away. Still holding on, he eyed me.

“You’re not intimidated by me at all, are you?”

I tilted my head and sensed Logan’s growing agitation beside me. “I respect your position, sir. But, no offense, men don’t intimidate me.” I allowed a small jolt of electricity to flow through the palm of my hand and watched with a little too much satisfaction as his glacier facade cracked with the smallest grimace. Logan stepped forward and placed a hand on my waist, and I nearly rolled my eyes at the blatant display of ownership.

“Captain,” he said with a heavy dose of warning that likely would have ended up getting him reprimanded at any other time.

The Captain dropped my hand after another long second, then a smile spread across his face, turning him from stoically handsome to charmingly gorgeous. “Are you married?” I blurted out. I could hear Logan curse a “what the fuck” under his breath as he yanked, pulling me closer against him. “My mother is single,” I said, somewhat embarrassed at my outburst, and tilted my head back to give Logan an apologetic smile.

“Does she look like you?” The Captain asked, still smiling, showing all his perfectly aligned white teeth.

Logan definitely growled since I could feel his chest vibrating against my back. “Actually, yes. But she has blue eyes. Other than that, we could pass for sisters. She’s out of town right now, but I believe she’ll be back next month.”

“Bring her with you next time. Now, go catch me a killer.” With a wink, he sat back down and picked up his coffee again, taking a large swallow. Then he opened up the file in front of him, effectively dismissing us.

Logan took my hand again and started leading me from the office, pulling me much

quicker than he had on the way in. We walked toward another office along the wall that looked much smaller and only had one window overlooking the larger central space. As soon as he yanked me through the doorway, he kicked the door shut and had me pressed against the wood in the space of a heartbeat.

“You’re mine!”

Logan’s mouth was devouring mine before I could laugh. Even though I found the situation humorous, my knees went weak, and only his strong but gentle grip around the back of my neck, where he held me firmly, kept me standing upright. I was gasping, gulping in breaths of much needed oxygen, when he finally wrenched his lips from mine.

It took some effort, but when I blinked my eyes open and took in his still fierce expression, I grinned. “He’s old enough to be my father.”

“I don’t give a fuck if he’s old enough to be your grandfather; you don’t ask another man if he’s single!”

I reached out and ran my hand soothingly up and down his chest to calm his jealousy. “Logan,” I began, doing my best to keep a straight face at his ridiculousness. “I thought he was a nice man.” Biting my lip, I ignored the rumble from his chest and the snarl he wasn’t holding back. “My mother has been alone for a long time. I thought she could use a man with his kind of aura.”

“You shouldn’t be looking at any man’s aura but mine, little witch,” he said as he bent down to nip at my bottom lip. I’d noticed he liked doing that for some reason.

I slipped my arm around the back of his neck and raised onto my tiptoes to whisper into his ear, giving it a tiny flick of my tongue as I did so. “Don’t worry, Detective. Yours is the only aura I want.”

A knock on the door had us pulling apart, though Logan kept his eyes locked with mine, a promise of what he would be doing to me later once we were alone written there. I stepped back from the door so he could open it, and an older man with a heavily lined face filled with kindness looked toward me as soon as I came into view.

“Hey there, Bridgette. I’ve heard a lot about you. My wife wants to extend an invitation to dinner soon if you can make it.”

I took his hand with a smile and gave it a shake. “You must be Mac. I’ve heard about you as well.”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a pack of gum, offering it to me, and when I declined, he took a piece for himself. “Are you two ready?”

I glanced up at Logan to see his slight frown. “I’m ready,” I said. Logan gave a sharp nod, and we followed Mac out of the office that I assumed was Logan’s, and we walked into another office a door down. There was just a table, but there were two folders sitting there, both of them closed, and I knew without having to be told that I wouldn’t like what I would see inside.

Logan led me to a seat and took the one beside me while Mac took one across from us. He pulled out a notepad and a pen, ready to take notes.

“I want you to take your time. What you see isn’t going to be easy. It’s not like photos you see online. These are not edited or censored. It’s okay if you decide you can’t handle the brutality. It can be shocking.” As Mac sat there telling me these things, I could see the sincerity and compassion. These men needed my help, but they weren’t going to force me to face it.

“I understand, Mac. I appreciate the warning and the concern. It’s okay. Like I told your Captain, I am willing to help. If having to see photos of a murder is what I have

to do in order to put this person behind bars, I will do it.” I squared back my shoulders. “I think I’m ready.”

“Alright, Bridgette. The first folder is Mrs. Brooks. We would like for you to tell us anything you can about the room she’s in. We don’t know about witchcraft, so we don’t know what the killer was trying to do. If you can answer anything pertaining to that, it can help.”

I took a breath and let it out as I stared down at the folder he slid in front of me. Logan placed his hand on my thigh and gave it a squeeze, offering his support. “Alright, let’s do this,” I said.

I may have been a little too confident in my ability to handle seeing the crime scene photos. As soon as I opened the folder, the first picture on top was a large print of a woman I recognized, but she didn’t look the same. Death had changed her appearance, making her ashen. Her empty eyes were open and staring into the distance at nothing. After seeing her blank stare, I took a shaky breath and forced myself to look further.

There was blood. So much blood.

I slammed my eyes shut and lifted my chin as I took deep breaths through my nose. Instead of shutting the image out, I could see it behind my eyelids. All that blood pooled around her body. That poor woman lying there in her white nightgown, which had become stained a dark red.

A bottle of water was shoved into my hand, and I could hear Logan talking into my ear. It took several seconds before I could make out the words he was saying through the buzzing in my head.

“Slow breaths, little witch. Nice and slow. That’s it. Breathe with me. In and out.

Good girl.” I nodded my head, letting him know I was listening. As my breathing calmed, so did my heart rate. I lifted my shaky hand, bringing the bottle of water to my lips. “Small sips. That’s my girl.”

His soothing voice helped, along with the cold water, until I could finally open my eyes again. I felt his thumbs swipe over my cheeks, and I glanced down at them to see the wetness there. I hadn’t even realized I had been crying.

I looked up into Logan’s concerned face. “I’m so sorry,” I whispered.

“Don’t be sorry. I should have known better than to ask you to do this.”

I shook my head, seeing that he was beating himself up over the situation. “No. I told you I was willing. It’s not your fault.” I looked down at the table to see the folder once again closed and both of the case files resting in front of Mac. He looked just as apologetic as Logan sounded. “Please, stop beating yourselves up. It was just a shock.” I shook my head again. “I know what to expect now.”

I held out a hand but Mac hesitated just as Logan barked out “No!”

I turned a glare his way, then aimed it at Mac for good measure. “I can do this.”

I waited until, finally, both men seemed to grudgingly give in. I took one last fortifying breath, then opened the folder again.

Chapter

Seventeen

brIDGETTE

The sight wasn't much easier the second time I looked at the photo of Emily Brooks lying there. I couldn't imagine it ever being easy. But I know if I wanted to help find her justice and to stop anyone else from being murdered by the killer, I needed to find my inner strength.

I forced my eyes to ignore the blood and focused on the rest of the room, seeing what I hadn't seen the first time when I had been so caught off guard. I took in the melted candles and the stones. I noticed the drawing that she was lying on and remembered the questions that Logan had asked me on our first night having dinner together. His questions made more sense, and I understood why he was asking them.

"This was definitely a ritual. I can't make out the individual symbols in this photo." I picked up the glossy page and noticed the one underneath it. The following picture was of the same scene, just from another angle. I moved that one aside to see more photos stacked.

One by one, I laid the pictures out in front of me on the table. I pointed to one that was a close up of the drawings. "This is a symbol that has to do with power." I bit my lip. "I need my grandmother's books. She probably has something in them that has to do with ritualistic symbols."

Mac leaned forward, his pen in hand. “So you’re saying these drawings mean something?”

I nodded. “Yes. When a ritual is performed, there is a reason. A specific reason. If I wanted my garden to grow better, I would focus all my energy on that, and only that.” I pointed to the stones placed near the hands and feet. “Different stones have different properties. They help focus your energy.” I pointed to the candles. “Candles are ceremonial. You light certain colors for specific reasons as well.”

I sat back as I took in the pictures laid out in front of me. “The person who did this was focusing on power. They used the candles to pray to a deity or creature for help.”

“I’m sorry, did you say creature?” Logan asked from beside me. “Like a demon?”

I shook my head. “Demons aren’t like you think. They are simply another race from another plane of existence. Another realm. You don’t pray to demons, and you can’t summon one to do things for you. The movies have that all wrong. No, not a demon. But there are creatures that are similar to gods, but without the power of a god, whom you can call on. It’s hard to explain.”

“Alright. So, who was this person praying to or calling on?” Mac asked as he scratched at his chin.

“I have no idea. If I had my grandmother’s books, I could maybe find out what some of these symbols mean.” I looked up at Logan. “Is that allowed?”

He shrugged. “I don’t see why not.” He looked back at the first photo with the body being displayed in the center of a pentagram and pointed to it. “I checked at the time and noted that each point of her body was facing a specific direction. Her head was facing north, her feet south, her hands east and west.”

I nodded as I took in his words. “That doesn’t surprise me. The person performing the ritual would want to be precise.” I forced myself to look at the blood. “Is that a stab wound?” I asked while swallowing back the bile that threatened. I reached over and picked up the water bottle again for another sip of the cool water.

Logan eyed me, but at the slight shake of my head he sighed then looked back at the picture. “The coroner reported a slim, sharp, double sided blade was used. A single thrust that bypassed the ribs perfectly. Mrs. Brooks died instantly.”

“Well,” I blew out a breath. “That’s something at least. From what you describe, it sounds like an athame was used. Which, of course, makes perfect sense.”

“Why does it make sense, and what is an athame?” Mac asked.

“An athame is in nearly every witch’s... kit. Rituals, ceremonies, they all require the use of an athame, even if you just use it to call on the four corners.” I pointed at the woman’s head, feet, and hands in turn. “A witch gets her energy from nature. The Earth is one giant ball of nature and therefore energy. The moon is directly related to the Earth and without it’s gravitational pull, the energy wouldn’t be the same. That’s why the rituals that need the strongest amount of energy to perform correctly are done at night when the moon is out.” I looked between the men. “I’m assuming the murder was done at night. Probably around midnight?” They both nodded in the affirmative.

I sat back and took another drink. I took in every picture again, trying to see if anything stood out that would help.

“I can’t tell you who did it, and I can’t tell you who they called on without knowing what the symbols mean. What I can tell you based on this one,” I pointed to the symbol for power, “is that their goal was to steal her magic. She was a sacrifice for power.” I looked at the men again. “I don’t have to tell you that this kind of sacrifice is forbidden. ‘Harm none’ does not mean murder one of your own.”

“Are you saying,” Logan asked as he took my hand and laced our fingers together. “That the person who did this murdered one of the strongest witches in town to steal her magical power? And they’ve already done it again?”

I slowly nodded my head as icy cold dread ran down my spine. “Yes.”

“They are getting stronger?”

“If their ritual worked,” I whispered.

“I have to ask,” Mac began, making Logan and me turn in his direction. “How powerful would someone have to be to perform something like this in the first place?”

I looked back down at the pictures and remembered Logan’s questions from the other night, asking me if someone could bind someone from moving, or move them without touching. I’d told him then it would take someone strong in magic. There were no scuff marks in the chalk, indicating that the body had been slid across the floor. There didn’t appear to be any indication of struggle since she wasn’t bound in place with ropes.

“Pretty powerful,” I murmured.

I reached over and flipped the other folder open to see similar pictures, only the victim was of someone I had known a little better than Mrs. Brooks. “Oh, Hillary,” I sobbed. I wiped at my eyes furiously and glared up at Logan. “She was on the list I gave you.”

“She was. We spoke to both her and Simone Donaldson last week. She was a lovely woman.”

“She was sweet and kind. She didn’t have any children, but she treated all the young witches like a big sister.” I closed my eyes. “She probably knew it was going to happen. Did she say anything to you when you talked to her?” I opened my eyes and turned back to Logan expectantly.

He stared at me intently, an emotion I couldn’t read hiding there in his eyes. “She told me that all the best things in life are worth the effort.”

I nodded and looked down at my hands. “Mrs. Donaldson is going to need protection. Oh my Goddess, Grandmother!” I squeezed my eyes closed and reopened them to see Logan staring at me knowingly. “I’ve never been so thankful that she is gone right now!”

“I’m not letting you out of my sight,” he warned, and I didn’t know why I was surprised that he had already jumped into protective mode so quickly.

“I’m stronger than them, Logan. This monster won’t be able to take me so easily.”

“I don’t care.”

“I’ll be ready. I am prepared and know what to do.”

“I don’t care!” His fist slammed down onto the table, and I stared down at it unblinking. “If this person is stealing magic, they could very well be stronger than you by now,” he fumed. “Would you be able to keep them from binding you? Can you stop them from stabbing you through the heart if they are stronger?”

I stared at him with my chin raised. “I’m stronger.”

“How can you say that?” he yelled “This person was already strong enough to hold two magically gifted women and steal their power without a single struggle. How can

you say you're stronger?"

I leaned in until we were practically nose to nose. "I. Am. Stronger."

I sat back and didn't say out loud what was running through my head while knowing that my mate was scared for my life. If he knew, he wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

I wanted the killer to come after me.

Mac stood up and gathered the pictures together, sliding them back into the folder. Then he closed both case files. "You have been a lot of help, Bridgette."

I stood up as well while Logan sat in his seat, clenching and unclenching his fists. "I wish I could do more," I admitted. "It doesn't help when we don't have a name."

"No, but we are several steps closer. Knowing a motive always helps."

I shook his offered hand and heard Logan finally stand up behind me. "I'm glad. But I will keep doing research on my end. I'm not sure if finding out what those symbols are will make any difference, but I won't stop looking."

I turned to leave but paused at the door. "Tell your wife I would love to meet her and have dinner. She's welcome in my shop any time."

I walked out of the door and past the desks that seemed to have more men and women working at them than there had been when I'd first arrived. I smiled at the ones who made eye contact and noticed that a couple of the men looked behind me and lost their smiles completely, sitting down and pretending to be engrossed in their work.

When I made it to the elevator, Logan's hand reached out and pushed the call button.

“I’ll walk you down.”

I settled my back against his hard chest and sighed at the warmth that seeped through our clothes. I hadn’t realized how chilled I had become while looking at those pictures. Neither one of us spoke as we entered the elevator. Logan pushed the button for the ground floor, and we both settled into the back of the lift. After a couple of stops where some people both uniformed and plain clothed exited or entered, the doors opened in the lobby.

We walked past the guard at the front and stopped outside, inhaling the fresh air. Logan threaded our fingers together as he walked with me toward the parking lot.

“Where are you parked?”

I pointed at the bright red Mustang that had been a graduation gift from my mother. “I’m right there.”

Logan grinned as he took in the car, then looked at me. “I have to say, that’s not what I expected you to drive, little witch.”

I shrugged and grinned back. “What can I say? I’m a sucker for muscles.”

I watched as his grin faded and seriousness took its place. He backed me against my car, placing both hands on either side of me, effectively caging me in. “I shouldn’t have yelled at you.”

I cupped his jaw and lifted on my toes so I could kiss the underside of his jaw. “You shouldn’t have. But I understand. If I were in your shoes, I would be upset too.”

He closed his eyes and then rested his forehead against mine. “I want this to work between us, Bridgette. I want many years with you. I want to grow old with you and

watch our grandchildren playing in our yard.”

I swallowed back the lump that formed in my throat at his words. “I want that too, Logan.” I waited until he opened his eyes again and smiled softly. “Please have faith in me, okay? I understand that you’re scared. I’m scared, too. But I know that I’ll be okay.”

“I want to believe you, little witch. But this person has already killed two people. I believe that they are working their way up to you. When they have stolen enough magic from the others, you will be their main target.”

I nodded because he was right. I was sure that was precisely what was happening, and my heart broke for those who had already lost their lives in the name of greed. I wasn’t sure how many would die before the killer was ready to come after me, but I was certain there would be at least one more. “I believe you’re right. I will be careful, I promise. But promise me that you will keep watch on Mrs. Donaldson?”

“We will. She already has a plainclothes officer stationed outside her house. We will do everything within our power to protect her.”

I blew out a relieved breath. “Good. Should I expect you tonight?”

“I’ll be by your side every night. Make some space in your room for some of my things, little witch. I’m moving in.”

I blinked once, then blinked again. “Moving in?”

He looked at me as if I were dense. “Do you honestly think that I will protect one woman and not the most important one to me?”

My heart fluttered at his words, and I cleared my throat. “I’ll, uh, I’ll clear out a

drawer for you.”

He grinned, then kissed the tip of my nose. “Good. I’ll see you tonight. I’ll bring dinner. Tacos sound good to you?”

“Tacos always sound good.”

He gripped my chin and gave me a swift but thorough kiss before backing away. “Stay safe, little witch.”

I waved, then slid inside the car. The man did things to my insides that should have been illegal. I didn’t know how my heart was going to survive a lifetime with the man without exploding from happiness. I only hoped it wasn’t too good to be true.

Chapter

Eighteen

LOGAN

When I arrived at the shop, it was to see Bridgette engrossed in a book. She had a few others stacked beside her on the counter, and she barely looked up when the bell rang above the door. After locking the door and turning the sign to CLOSED, I glanced around, not knowing what I was looking for. Maybe I expected to see some of the fairies dancing around, I didn't know, but it wouldn't have surprised me.

Shaking my head, I walked up to the counter with a duffle bag slung over my shoulder. I let it drop to the floor with a thud, grinning when Bridgette jumped.

“Hey, babe. Reading anything good?”

Before she could answer, I reached around her waist, planting a hand on her back, and yanked her into me. She crashed into me with a laugh. “Hello there, Detective.” Then she raised up on her toes and kissed me. It was deep and slow, taking her time, showing that she missed our time apart as much as I did. When she pulled back, her expression looked almost dazed. I knew the feeling.

I saw her look down at my hands, then at the floor, before looking back up at me. “Where are my tacos?”

I scooted the books she had been reading to the side, then picked her up, setting her

down on the counter so we were a little closer in height. "I'm having them delivered. Should be here in about thirty minutes." I glanced around. "Do you need to clean up before we head upstairs?"

She grinned at me. "I'm a witch. Did you forget already?"

I tilted my head as I studied her. "Let me guess. You have a spell for that?"

"Close. The whole shop is spelled. The floors stay clean. The windows are always clear. The shelves are always dusted. My grandmother did it years ago. It's kind of nice. I still have to rearrange some things that get out of place, but actual cleaning? Nope."

"That does sound nice," I grinned back. "What about dishes? Vacuuming? Laundry?"

She sighed and pouted. "My mother insisted that I learn to care for myself and my home properly. She forbade me from using magic to complete my chores."

"You still do everything by hand as an adult?" I asked skeptically. I couldn't imagine anyone doing mundane chores when they had the ability to skip it all with little more than a snap of their fingers. Well, I assumed she snapped. I was certain she didn't wriggle her nose.

She looked sheepish. "Are you going to tell my mother on me if I say no?"

I chuckled and kissed her forehead. "Never."

"Good," she said with a grin. "I'd have to rethink this whole mate thing and turn you into a frog or something if you turned snitch on me. Now let me down so I can show you which drawer I emptied for you. I had to rearrange my sock drawer by the way," she pouted, the hint of a grin teasing her lips, letting me know she wasn't nearly as

irritated by losing drawer space as she was letting on.

I stepped back and picked up the duffle bag. “I am deeply honored.”

She sniffed and lifted her chin, doing an excellent impression of a haughty princess. “As well you should be.” She slid the apron she was wearing over her head, then scooped up the books she’d been reading. As we walked into the back room through the doorway, she turned the lights off, then hung the apron on a hook where a few others already waited.

She led the way up the stairs, where the door was closed. When she opened it, a blur of black sped past, running down the stairs and only sparing a disgruntled meow as he passed.

“He seems angry. Do you usually lock him up here during the day?”

She set the books down on the small coffee table. “No. But he wouldn’t stop making a fuss, pacing and yowling. I had to bring him up here so he would stop freaking out so much.” She shook her head. “I wish I knew what his problem was.”

“Maybe he misses your grandmother?”

She frowned and headed into the bedroom. “Maybe.”

I stepped in behind her, and she flashed me a smile before sliding a drawer open, revealing the emptiness. “All for you. Don’t ask for more, though,” she warned. “This place is hardly big enough for just me.”

I dropped the duffle on the floor. “I wouldn’t dream of it,” I lied. Eventually, our lives would be so intertwined that she wouldn’t be able to tell where her things ended and mine began. Instead of unpacking the duffle, I stalked toward her and watched as

she suddenly became aware of my movement and began to back away. There was nowhere to go with the bed behind her, though.

As the backs of her knees hit the edge of the mattress, she tipped backward with a yelp. I took full advantage of her situation and dove on top of her until I had her caged in underneath me. I kissed her lips briefly, then her cheek, making my way down her jaw and to her collarbone. By the time I was pulling the neck of her shirt to the side to gain access to her shoulder and chest, she was panting as if she'd been running laps.

“Do we have time before the tacos get here?”

I glanced at the clock on her nightstand and cursed. I placed one last lick and kiss on the top swell of her breast, and mourned the fact that I hadn't even made it to the best part. “No,” I groaned. “We're picking up where I left off, little witch,” I said as I climbed off her. I reached for her hands, pulling her to her feet beside me.

“I hope so,” she grumbled.

“Tacos or my tongue?” I offered, unsure which one I currently preferred, even as my stomach rumbled. I hadn't had a chance to eat lunch, and I was starving.

She seemed to be thinking about it pretty hard, but then I heard her stomach growl as well. I laughed, then tugged on her hand, leading her back into the living area. “I promise to give you my tongue just as soon as we fill our stomachs.”

Right on time, I heard a knock on the back door leading to the alley. “Fine. I guess I can eat tacos first.” She dropped down onto her loveseat as I headed for the stairs. After paying the delivery guy with a hefty tip, I carried the bags back to the stairs and paused, seeing the cat pacing back and forth, his tail twitching with agitation. Shaking my head I took the stairs two at a time to see Bridgette had brought out two plates and

a stack of napkins, along with two bottles of beer.

Together, we spread out the tacos, figuring out who would take which ones, then settled back to watch a movie while we ate. We'd both had our fill, so I stood up to gather our mess.

"I'll help," Bridgette said, picking up the plates.

I put the last two tacos in her refrigerator while she washed the plates, setting them to dry in the dish drainer. I threw the bottles in the recycling bin and leaned against the counter with my arms crossed, watching her wipe down the counter.

"You're so fucking beautiful."

She glanced over her shoulder with a smile, then turned to me after drying her hands. Bridgette reached out for my hand, and I didn't hesitate to give it to her.

"Come on," she said. "There's something I want to try."

Intrigued, I followed her into the bedroom after turning off the lights in the living room as we passed.

"Have a seat," she pointed to the edge of the bed. I raised one eyebrow, waiting to see what she had in mind.

"Are you going to put on a show for me?" I asked as I sat where she indicated and looked her over from head to toe. One thing I'd noticed about Bridgette right away was that she was never in public without looking completely put together. She was currently wearing a skirt with ruffles along the knee-length hem and a top that hugged her curves, which was tied at her waist. She had kicked off her heels as soon as we arrived upstairs, so she was barefoot. "Your pink toenails are adorably sexy, by the

way.”

I followed the same path back up her body, then watched as she finished tying her hair up in a messy bun on top of her head. “Thanks. I noticed you still haven’t unpacked yet.”

“I’ll do it tomorrow. Now come here so I can show you how sexy I think the rest of you is,” I said huskily.

“Not this time, Detective.” My breath caught as she dropped to her knees in front of me and slid her palms up my thighs. “I told you, there’s something I want to try.”

“Bridgette—” I started, desperately wanting to feel her hot little mouth swallowing around my cock, but also needing to taste her on my tongue.

“Don’t tell me I don’t have to,” she interrupted. “I really, really want to. And I think you’re going to really, really enjoy this.”

Her nimble little fingers undid my belt and had the button of my slacks popped open before I could argue any further. The heaviness of my cock had the zipper sliding down before she even had a chance to lay a finger on it.

“Wait,” I demanded as my little witch reached for the waistband of my boxer briefs. I reached over for one of the throw pillows that were resting by the headboard. “Stand up.” As soon as she complied, I tossed the pillow onto the floor. “I don’t want you hurting your knees.”

Bridgette knelt back down and beamed up at me. “That’s so sweet.” Then, with my assistance, both my boxers and my slacks were shifted down to my thighs.

Her hands were soft and warm as they wrapped around my length. The way she eyed

my cock as if she were fascinated and turned on had a drop of precome oozing from the tip. Before it could roll down the side of the head, Bridgette leaned forward and licked. Closing her eyes, she took in my taste and hummed. Then, before I could fully brace myself, she opened wide and took me into her hot mouth.

I had to bite my lip to keep from groaning. When she bobbed her head, sliding her tongue over the shaft, then swirled over the tip, I had to clench my fists into the bedding to keep from bucking my hips. But when her mouth suddenly got hot nearly to the point of pain, then shot straight to cold as if I had just been dunked into a vat of ice water, I shouted and reached for her head.

Gripping the bun that she'd made on the top of her head, I pulled her off my cock. She stared at me with wide, innocent eyes, though she couldn't hide the wariness at my reaction. "What the fuck was that?" I demanded.

She dropped her eyes and shrugged one shoulder. "I told you. I wanted to try something."

"Do it again," I demanded.

She jerked her eyes back up to mine, then I watched as the worry drained away and a grin took over her stunning face. "Can I try something else?" She asked as she leaned back in, taking another lick of the precome that had started leaking steadily.

"Little witch, you can do any fucking thing that you want. Just don't stop," I begged.

With a hum, she held out one hand, and I watched in fascination as sparks danced along the tips of her fingers. Then she gave me a saucy wink as her mouth started to grow cold again. I couldn't take my eyes off her as she slid her icy tongue over the head and down the shaft. I had forgotten about her sparking fingertips until she reached for my balls and lightly stroked, making it feel like I was being shocked at

dozens of points by static electricity.

I was so confused. I couldn't tell if I loved it or hated it, but I was about to come harder than I ever had in my whole fucking life. I hadn't even busted a nut yet, but I was already about to beg her to start all over again. I supposed that meant I loved the fuck out of what she was doing to me.

I tugged lightly on her messy bun and gritted my teeth as the cold faded into scorching heat again. "I'm going to fucking come." It took every ounce of my self control to not shout expletives until everyone within a mile radius called in a noise complaint.

Bridgette pulled her mouth off with a pop and slid her hand up from my balls and gripped my throbbing dick with her electrified hand. All the tiny sparks of electricity zapping my cock was just too fucking much. No matter how much I wanted to hold back, to give her more warning, to try to stave it off so I could finish inside her, I was fucking done.

"Do it," she whispered eagerly, then immediately covered the tip of my cock with her mouth. The ice cold sensation paired with the electric zaps sent me over the edge.

I was reasonably certain I had died for several seconds. It certainly felt like my soul left my body as I pumped rope after rope of hot come into my mate's mouth. My throat felt raw when I got sensation back into my legs, and I was able to see again.

"Fuck," I whispered hoarsely and dropped onto my back, my arms splayed wide. I must have fallen asleep because I blinked my eyes open to see Bridgette tugging my slacks down my legs. I noticed groggily that my shirt had already been removed, and she had tossed the extra decorative pillows to the floor. The only thing stopping her from going to bed was my body sprawled across the middle.

“Hang on,” I slurred. “I can help.” I attempted to stand up, but my knees were too weak to hold my weight.

“Don’t worry about it,” she hummed, seemingly quite content to take care of me as if I were a newborn baby. “Just lie back,” she coaxed, gesturing. I had no choice but to do what she said. My head hit the pillow, and my whole body relaxed as she covered me with the blanket.

I was too exhausted to be embarrassed. I was too weak to protest. But as my body still hummed from the aftershocks of what she’d done to me, I couldn’t help but anticipate the next time.

Chapter

Nineteen

brIDGETTE

I woke up on the verge of screaming. Without thought, I reached out and gripped Logan's hair, my fingers clenching tightly to the dark strands. It took a moment for my sleepy brain to comprehend what was happening to make my body feel so fucking good.

Logan's head was between my legs, doing things with his tongue that I wouldn't even be able to describe. It felt so amazing that it only took him mere seconds to have me writhing and shaking. Before the scream could die down around the room, Logan was already up, covering my body with his own. He easily slid inside me, making all the nerve endings light up from the friction.

"Good morning," I whispered, my voice husky from sleep and all the screaming I just did.

He grinned down at me. "Good morning, little witch."

I gasped as he rotated his hips and hit something inside me that I hadn't known existed.

"Oh yes, do that again," I demanded on a groan. Without hesitation, Logan did it again. And then again, and then again. He kept rolling his hips as he thrust inside me,

making sure his cock brushed against the sensitive spot that was sending me into orbit. I hadn't known what the big deal was about sex. I thought the hype was way overblown. But ever since Logan and I had become intimate, I quickly learned exactly what the big deal was.

Logan buried his face into my neck and shuddered. "You feel so fucking good, Bridgette." He pulled back to stare into my eyes, and as he gazed down at me, it was almost as if he could see into my soul. "I'll never get enough of you," he rasped.

After several more thrusts, he groaned deep in his throat, and I could feel him expand inside of me, triggering my own release. I mourned the loss of him as he withdrew, and then I felt the wet heat hit my skin as he released on my belly. With a heaving chest, Logan rolled to my side.

"I want to wake up like that every morning," I said, only half joking. If I actually did get that kind of wake-up call every day, I was reasonably certain I would lose all feeling in my legs—permanently.

"I'm sure that could be arranged," he chuckled.

We both lay on our backs side-by-side as we caught our breath. Once his chest had stopped heaving, Logan sat up. "Stay where you are. I'll be right back." I didn't have the energy to tell him I had no intentions of moving. He slid off the bed, and I summoned enough strength to turn my head, watching him as he sauntered into the bathroom. I couldn't help but admire his back as the muscles there rippled and flexed. Yeah, I could definitely get used to seeing this every morning. The water turned on and ran for a few minutes before he came back with a warm washcloth. I felt my cheeks grow hot as he cleaned the mess he'd made all over my belly.

"I'm going to go make you a cup of coffee." He looked down at me, the way I was starfished out on the bed, and chuckled. "You're adorable, do you know that?" He

placed his fist on the bed beside me and brushed his lips over mine in a gentle kiss. “All right, be right back,” he said.

I could hear moving around in the kitchen, and I must’ve dozed off again because the next thing I knew, he was placing a cup of coffee down on my nightstand.

“Here, you relax. Drink your coffee. I’m going to jump in the shower really quickly.”

I blinked up at him. “Do you need to go to work today?”

He shook his head. “I just need to grab my files. I want to go over the case again. I’d like to see if there’s anything that pops out at me. I also have other cases I’m working on as well that I need to check up on.”

I watched as he dug through his duffel bag. He pulled out a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and then carried them into the bathroom. I sat up and picked up my cup of coffee, and as I took a sip, I heard his phone ding on the nightstand. My eyes were immediately drawn in that direction. I couldn’t help but see the text that popped up with the name Kristy. I frowned as I read.

Kristy: You’re right. I’m sure Sammy would love to see you. We’re going to be at our favorite park if you want to see her. Be there in about 30 minutes.

I glanced at the bathroom and was just able to make out the shower from my position on the bed. I couldn’t help but wonder who Sammy was. I knew they didn’t have any children together, so maybe it was a niece? I shook my head and told myself not to overthink it.

A few minutes later, Logan reappeared, rubbing the towel on his head, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. I never thought a man could look so delicious just out of the shower. Even though he was already clean, I was half tempted to ask him to come

back to bed.

“You got a text,” I said nonchalantly.

“Oh yeah?” he asked, and he picked up his phone. I watched as his eyes lit up as he read the message. I glanced away quickly as he turned to look at me, not wanting him to think I was spying or being suspicious. “I’m going to go ahead and run to my apartment and grab those files. I’ll be back in an hour or so, okay?”

I looked up at him, searching for anything on his face, but he gave nothing away. I didn’t know if he was hiding it from me, or maybe he thought it wasn’t significant enough to tell me. I just gave him a small smile and said, “Okay, Detective. I’ll see you soon then.”

He leaned down and placed a soft kiss on my lips. I could smell the mint from his toothpaste, and it reminded me that I needed to get up and get myself ready for the day.

“All right, little witch, I’ll see you soon.” With a wink, he picked up his shoes and pulled a pair of socks from his bag before walking out of the bedroom. I heard him rustle around in the living room a little bit, then his footsteps as they went down the stairs.

I jumped out of bed, ran into the bathroom, brushed my teeth as quickly as I could, then ran a brush through my hair. I looked at my reflection in the mirror and decided I was good enough. Going back into the bedroom, I threw on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt of my own and slipped on a pair of sandals. I heard his motorcycle engine rev outside and knew he was about to pull away, so I rushed to grab my keys.

I ran down the stairs just as the sound of his motorcycle began to fade. I opened the back door into the alley and watched as he turned left onto Main Street. I let the door

close behind me and ran down the alley to the end, then looked down the street and watched as Logan stayed on Main Street. There was only one park in town going in that direction, so I knew exactly where he was heading.

Taking my time, I told myself that I was just going to walk to the coffee shop to pick up a muffin. I tried not to let my jealousy cloud my judgment as I walked straight past the coffee shop and headed to the park that was another few blocks down, but I could absolutely admit that I was letting my curiosity get the better of me.

Within just a few minutes, I could see the park up ahead. I didn't want to hide my actions like I was doing something wrong, but I also didn't want to interrupt whatever it was that Logan and Kristy were doing. I desperately needed to see for myself who Sammy was, so I crossed the road to enter the park. I found a bench to sit down on near the entrance.

It didn't take long for me to figure out precisely who Sammy was and what Logan was doing. I watched him pull back his arm and throw a tennis ball. The bright orange coat of a golden retriever ruffled in the breeze as she raced across the grass to retrieve the ball. I watched with a smile on my face as Sammy slid past the ball with her tongue hanging out. Then, she quickly changed directions. As she ran back toward the ball, she scooped it up in her mouth without stopping and made a beeline straight for Logan.

When I glanced back at him, it was clear to see the love he had for this dog. I sat for a few minutes longer, watching as Logan threw the ball several more times. In between each throw, he knelt on the ground and gave her scratches behind the ears and pets on her tummy when she'd roll over. As Kristy stood back with her arms crossed over her chest, Sammy ate up the attention, and the bond was visible even as far away as I sat. It made me dislike Kristy a little bit more, knowing that she was keeping this dog from Logan.

I stood up to leave, having found all the information I needed. I gave them one last glance, then Logan turned his head and smiled directly at me. At that moment, as our gazes connected across the park, I knew that he'd known I was there all along. Of course he did, I thought to myself ruefully. My mate was a detective; what else did I expect from him? I smiled back, gave him a small wave, then turned around to leave.

The next time I came up to the coffee shop, I stopped, heading inside. The bell rang over the door as I entered, and I took a deep breath of the delicious scent of coffee brewing along with the baked goods that were stored behind the glass cabinets.

"Hey, Bridgette. Would you like your usual?" the barista greeted me as I walked up to the counter.

"No coffee for me, thanks. I already had a cup, and I don't want the jitters today." I smiled back. "But I would love some of your chocolate chip muffins."

"All right, coming right up!"

I placed the cash down on the counter and waited, knowing that it wouldn't take long. Within the next minute, she had my muffins bagged and ready for me. I took the paper bag from her and waved off my change. "Keep it. I'll see you on Monday," I called out as I walked toward the door.

My stomach was rumbling by the time I reached the shop and unlocked the red door after sliding my hand over the glossy surface. I locked the door behind me since I wasn't going to open the shop that day. I stood there for a moment and took a look around. Seeing the usual suspects in places that they shouldn't have been, I shook my head but decided to leave it alone for the moment.

"Hey, Mildred," I called as I passed, then walked up to the register. No matter how much I considered it or searched around, I had yet to figure out why the wards had

gone off the other night. It didn't make any sense to me since no one had broken in, and it didn't look like anything had been taken out. But the raging curiosity just wasn't leaving me alone. Shaking my head with the same confusion I'd had since that night, I walked past the sleeping familiar on his cat tower and through to the back room, then up the stairs to my empty apartment.

I grabbed a napkin from the kitchen and then sat down on the couch. Reaching into the bag I placed on the coffee table, I pulled out one of the muffins, took a big bite, and moaned at the delicious, sweet goodness. I eyed the stack of books that were sitting on the coffee table in front of me, next to the pastry bag. I had gone through most of them the day before. Though I confirmed that the symbol I had believed meant power was, in fact, the correct symbol, I had not found anything about the other symbols, including which god the killer had been making the sacrifice to. Honestly, it didn't even matter which god it would've been since the outcome was the same. The killer was stealing power from the witches, taking all their magic to make themselves stronger. But we really needed to know who was doing it and then figure out how to stop them.

As I finished my muffin, I got lost in the pages of the book that I was reading. Footsteps coming up the stairs had me looking up.

"Hey," I said quietly and then frowned. "How did you get in the back door?"

He gave me a chastising look. "You didn't lock it."

I cringed and cocked my head to study him. He looked relaxed. "I'm sorry I spied on you."

He shook his head. "Don't be. I should've said where I was going." He came to sit next to me on the couch. I noticed that he had a messenger bag with him and realized that was likely how he carried his folders while he was on his bike. He set the leather

bag down, and I pointed out the white paper bag full of muffins.

“I got breakfast.”

“Great, I’m starved,” he replied and pulled out a muffin. He began peeling the paper away. “We got Sammy a year ago, right before I found out that she was cheating on me. In the divorce, she cried to the judge. She said that she needed Samantha. She said that it was going to be hard losing her husband and that taking her dog as well would be too much for her to cope with. I don’t know why, but the judge decided to let her keep our dog. Even though she was considered ours, Samantha was really my dog. I had done all the training. All the caring for her. I fed her, walked her, and played with her. Kristy somehow decided that keeping my dog would be the best way to hurt me. She wasn’t wrong.” He took a big bite of his muffin. “This is really good.”

I nodded. All the food at the coffee shop was absolutely delicious. “She’s trying to get your attention, you know?” I said softly.

He nodded as he swallowed. “I know. I don’t know if she will ever give Sammy back, but it was nice spending time with her today,” he said sadly.

I nodded. “I understand that.”

He looked at me as he pulled the stack of folders out of his messenger bag. “You have questions?” I shook my head and then paused and nodded. “I know you do,” he smiled.

I sighed. “I don’t want to be that person. I have no reason to be jealous. I know that you have a history that came before me, and you owe me no explanations.”

“Maybe not, little witch,” he reached for my hand and held it, giving it a little

squeeze of reassurance. “But I’m willing to give them to you if you just ask.”

I looked down at my lap, not seeing the book that was resting there, and blinked my eyes a couple of times. Moisture had grown there without me realizing it. In a soft voice, I asked, “Do you still love her?”

I felt him gently take my chin and turn my head to face him. He swiped his thumb over my cheek. “I don’t,” he said decisively. “Whatever feelings I once had for that woman, she killed the moment she cheated. You have absolutely nothing to worry about when it comes to Kristy. I can’t force you to believe me,” he said as he studied my face. “What I’m telling you—what I need you to understand—is that when I commit to a person, I commit wholeheartedly. I don’t believe in cheating. You know as well as I do that faith is a powerful thing. You were given to me by fate, the gods, whatever the case might be, you’re mine, Bridgette.”

I nodded my head as a single tear broke through my lashes and rolled down my cheek. “And you’re mine?” I asked.

Leaning forward until his breath ghosted over my lips. "Abso-fucking-lutely." And then he kissed me hard and deep. When he broke the kiss, he rested his forehead against mine. “I’ll do better with communication. But I need you to do better with trusting me. Okay?”

I nodded in agreement. A languid feeling had swept over me at his kiss and his declaration. I could genuinely say that I was not worried about Kristy or him returning to her. I could sense that Logan was not a liar, that he wouldn’t lie about something so important.

He sat back, opened the top folder, and started scanning the contents, and I went back to the book. There were several potions my grandmother had written down that I wanted to try out.

Chapter

Twenty

brIDGETTE

It was Monday morning, and I was grinding herbs into a powder that I would later boil and strain to make some new potions. I was lost in my thoughts of the weekend as I worked. Logan and I had spent the entire weekend together. Luckily, he hadn't been called out for any new cases. It was nice just being together. Both of us were doing our own thing side by side as he studied his cases, and I read through my grandmother's magic books. When we weren't working, we were just relaxing on the couch together, watching movies.

We made dinner together Saturday night, and that was a whole new experience for me. As we boiled our pasta, we joked around, laughing and teasing each other. It felt good to have someone to spend time with who wasn't a family member or my best friend. Not that I didn't love having their company, but it was a different type. One that I could definitely get used to.

I heard the bell ring in front of the store and called out a greeting. I sat down the pestle I was using to grind the herbs in the mortar, then flexed my fingers that had begun cramping up. I quickly washed my hands and dried them with a towel. I walked into the front of the store to see the woman who had accosted me two weeks ago while I was at the first dinner with Logan. She was looking at Mildred, holding her with a grimace on her face. Then she sat Mildred back down with a heavy thunk on the shelf, making me frown. I already didn't like the woman, but she didn't need

to treat my friends that way.

I watched as she continued around the shop, occasionally picking things up before setting them back down again. She didn't look like she was enjoying herself the way a customer usually would as they perused the shelves. Logan had told me that if she bothered me, I should let him know, but I figured I could handle her myself. Plus, I was really curious about what she had to say.

I stood at the cash register and just waited to see what she was planning. It didn't take her long to make her way to the back of the shop where I was standing. As she looked up at me, she feigned surprise. The woman would not be winning any Oscars for her performance.

"Oh! I didn't know you worked here," she said.

I just cocked my head as I looked at her and gave her my best customer service smile.

"Yep! That's me. I work here. Is there anything I can help you with? Marlene, isn't it? Are you looking for something in particular? Maybe a gift? Perhaps you want to do a spell of your own?" That same grimness she'd shown at the sight of my favorite skull figurine came on her face at my words. Inside, I was laughing. Obviously, the woman was not into witchcraft.

"Oh. I've just seen the shop every time I pass by on the street, and decided I would stop in for once. It's..." She stopped and looked around before bringing her gaze back to mine. "Interesting," she finished lamely.

"I like to think so," I chirped brightly. "It's the only occult shop in town."

"Yeah," she said with a slight shudder she couldn't hide. "Occult. So are you like a witch or something?" she blurted.

“Or something,” I replied. “I have potions if you need one. Do you need a success potion? Maybe a concentration potion? Those are popular with students. Maybe you need one for your or someone else’s health?”

“You have health potions?” Marlene asked, her eyebrows raising.

“If you’re getting a cold, a health potion will knock it right out. Better than echinacea, although I do use some of that in my potion.”

She lifted a hand to her throat. “My throat has been a little scratchy recently.”

I looked behind me at the shelf against the wall where I kept all the potions and plucked a lime green potion up. “This will be the one you’re looking for, then,” I said. “Would you like me to bag it up for you?”

Marlene looked suspiciously at the small glass vial with a cork in it. “Umm, sure,” she mumbled and looked around again as if she was lost for what to say or do next. “Yeah, sure. How do I take the potion? What, exactly, do I do with it?” she asked as I put it in a small bag and handed it over.

I gave her a smile and said, “Pop the cork and chug it back like a shot of tequila.”

“Do I need to take it with food?” she asked.

I smiled. “You can take it with or without food. In the morning or at night, whatever you prefer. It has a delicious flavor. Tastes a little like mint,” I told her.

“Okay.” She looked dubious as she glanced down at the paper bag with the pretty purple tissue sticking out of it. “How much do I owe you?”

I waved a hand. “It’s on the house,” I told her with a bright smile. “See how you like

it and come back for more if you do. Tell your friends.” Inside, I was saying, ‘Please, don’t tell your friends! I don’t need Kristy in the store!’ But I was doing my best impression of customer service of the year. I kept waiting for her to finally say what the reason was that she’d come into my store to begin with. And, finally, she didn’t disappoint.

“You know, Kristy and Logan were college sweethearts.”

“Oh?” I asked and just folded my hands together on the glass, waiting for her to continue.

“She’s pregnant!” she blurted out.

I inhaled sharply as I took in what she’d just said. I thought back to the way she had touched her belly the night I saw her standing in the restaurant with her friend. Her action made sense now. But the way she looked at Logan as if he had betrayed her made me wonder about this woman’s intentions in telling me.

“Congratulations to Kristy,” I said, doing my best to sound unaffected by the news. “How far along is she? Does she have morning sickness? I have a potion for that, too.” I turned around to find the morning sickness elixir.

Kristy’s friend snapped at my flustered rambling. “No. She doesn’t have morning sickness. She’s six months along.”

My hand froze mid-reach as I stared blankly at the blue potion. I dropped my hand and slowly turned around as my mind raced. Six months . They have been divorced for six months.

“Yeah,” she said. Marlene crossed her arms and lifted her chin as a smug expression came over her face.

Six months.

“Okay,” I said slowly. “That has to do with me because...” I trailed off. I was concentrating on controlling my breathing. The last thing I wanted was for the vile woman to get satisfaction from seeing that anything she said or did affected me.

She shrugged. “Nothing, really. Especially if you step back and let her and Logan work things out.”

“Oh, should I?” I asked as I cocked my head to stare her down. “Isn’t that up to Logan?”

“How is he supposed to try to work things out with her when he’s got you stringing him along?” she demanded, her tone sharp and accusing.

“Stringing him along?” I asked. “Really? In what way am I stringing him along?” Inside, my blood was beginning to boil. I looked the woman over. She was very lovely with her pretty blonde hair and heart-shaped face. It was a real shame that her attitude royally sucked. I understood standing up for your friends. What she was doing here, though, was interfering in a situation that genuinely didn’t concern her. Plus, she was drawing conclusions about me that she had no business even speculating on.

She had no right to interfere with Logan and me in our relationship. She was trying to push me out of the picture, and I even understood what she was doing at the shop. Her goal all along had been to make me doubt Logan. But it wasn’t going to work—not this time.

“Look,” I said slowly. “If there’s anybody interfering, it’s you, Marlene. If Kristy wants Logan back, then that is between her and Logan. I’m not going to answer for him. No. What you’re trying to do here,” I waved a finger back and forth between the

two of us, “isn’t going to work.”

She straightened her shoulders and looked down her nose at me. The revulsion was evident on her face. “You have nothing to offer Logan.”

“Really?” I asked. “And Kristy does?”

“As I said, they were college sweethearts. They were in love for a very long time.”

I placed my hands on the glass counter and leaned forward. “Kristy has a strange way of showing her love. If there’s one thing that I could promise, it’s that I would not cheat on the man that I love. Now, please leave.”

I stared her down with narrowed eyes and watched as her hand tightened into a fist on the small paper bag that held the potion. “I just thought you should know that if Logan had been around more, then Kristy wouldn’t have had a reason to cheat. He works so much and left her lonely on so many nights.”

I just smiled at her. “Isn’t that what every cheater says to excuse their actions?”

Marlene glared at me so hard that I was actually impressed. If she had any tiny amount of magic, I would probably have been nothing but a pile of smoldering ash on the floor. With a growl, she spun on her heel and stomped to the door, but I noticed she still took my potion with her. I could tell she was about to slam the door closed behind her, but with a little wave of my finger, I used air magic to cushion the door frame. I grinned, knowing that she was unable to make the satisfying crash that she had hoped for.

As soon as she was gone and I could no longer see her through the window, I sagged against the glass. I squeezed my eyes shut and took several deep breaths in an attempt to get my heart rate back under control. I had done everything I could to keep any

weakness from showing while being confronted by Marlene, and I wasn't one hundred percent positive that I had managed.

I opened my eyes and blinked several times, waiting for my vision to clear. Once I could see clearly, I noticed I was staring down at the shelf of athames inside the glass case. With a huff, I pushed back from the counter and walked into the back room, looking for my polishing cloths and the compound I used to clean the metal.

I brought all the materials with me back into the front and set them down on the glass, then slid the door open underneath to pull all the athames out. It had been a while since I'd taken the time to clean them properly. Athames needed respect. They were an important tool for any witch, and even though the ones for sale weren't owned by me personally, I had been taught to always treat them carefully.

As I was finishing up the first of the four athames, the bell over the door rang, and I barely withheld a grimace at the thought that Marlene might have returned. Or worse—Kristy. When I glanced up, I sighed with relief to see Logan striding through the shop looking like sex personified in his black slacks and a white button-up shirt rolled to his elbows.

“Hey,” I called out with a genuine smile. “You’re here.”

“So I am,” he grinned back, then leaned over the glass counter to give me a fast but scorching hot kiss. I took in a much needed ragged breath. Every time the man touched me, it turned my knees to jelly. But when he had his mouth on any part of my body, I forgot how to breathe.

He looked down at the blades set in a row across the towel I had spread out to keep the athames from sitting on the glass and let out a low whistle. “Those are some wickedly sharp blades, little witch.”

I picked up the fanciest one and handed it over to him. It was covered in deep red gemstones, some larger than others, but all of them glowing almost eerily. “These are athames. Remember when I told you that was likely your murder weapon if a witch was making a sacrifice?”

He hummed as he tested the sharpness of the thin, narrow blade with his thumbnail. “It’s certainly sharp enough to kill.” He held the athame up and turned it under the bright lights of the shop overhead. “Is it just me, or does it seem like the gemstones are glowing?” He squinted his eyes and tilted it again. “And full of liquid?”

I shook my head. “It’s not just you. This one is fairly new to Oohs, Ahhs, and Orbs. Sometimes we get donations or offers to buy items like this from family members who don’t know what to do with them after a relative has passed. Not everyone has magical blood, so though the previous owner practised witchcraft, they weren’t actually a witch. When that happens, the family just wants to get rid of them. I think my grandmother picked that one up from an estate sale, though.”

I leaned over so I could watch as Logan turned the blade over, examining the handle closely. “It’s funny. I could have sworn when she bought it a couple of months ago that those stones were rubies.” I shrugged. “I guess they are actually garnets with how dark red they are.”

I glanced at the time on the register and was surprised to see that it was already past six o’clock. I hadn’t seen Shayla all day and wondered if the hotty professor was keeping her busy. I decided I was done cleaning for the moment and would finish tomorrow, so I started placing the athames back into their shelf. Logan handed me the one he’d been studying, and I smiled at him gratefully.

“Want to head upstairs and grab some leftover pasta from the fridge?” I asked as I wiped my hands off on the towel.

“You had me at head upstairs ,” he grinned, making me flush at the suggestiveness. “I already locked the front door,” he said as he walked around the counter. When he got to me, he bent down, and I lifted my chin, expecting another kiss. Instead, I found myself being hauled over his shoulder. As I squealed out a shocked laugh from the sudden move, he smacked my ass then rubbed the sting away.

He took the stairs two at a time. I noticed he was careful not to jostle my ribs with his shoulder and warmed at the thoughtfulness. “The door is closed?” he asked. When he opened it, an angry Mortimer yowled and ran through the open doorway as if his tail were on fire.

I sighed. “I had to lock him up again. When I brought out the athames, he started acting crazy and wouldn’t stop clawing at the counter.” For the hundredth time, I wished I knew what his problem was.

Logan stopped and slid me off his shoulder, and I found myself sitting on the island that separated the kitchen from the small living room. I spread my legs wider in an invitation that he immediately took advantage of. He cupped my cheeks with gentle hands, then breathed against my lips.

“You have no idea how much I missed you today. After spending all weekend together, I crave just being near you.” He brushed his lips over mine. “I don’t ever want to leave your side. I am already so addicted to your touch,” he ran his nose down my neck and over my collarbone. “Your scent.” He licked a path down until his mouth was hovering over the swell of my breast and gently bit me there. “Your taste.” He licked the sting away, and by the time he was tugging my shirt to the side and pulling the cup to my bra down to expose my aching nipple, I was panting as my belly clenched in anticipation.

“Please, Logan. I need you,” I whispered huskily.

“You have me, sweet little witch. Always.”

Chapter

Twenty-One

LOGAN

I smiled as I watched Bridgette at her workstation in the back of her shop.

She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Beyond her outward beauty, though, was an inner light that showed so brightly that I was in awe every time I looked at her. I still felt as if I didn't deserve her.

My gaze traveled down her body, taking in the woman who regularly stole my breath with her innate sexuality. I didn't think she knew how sexy and alluring she was.

I watched as her long red hair caressed her shoulders, making my fingertips twitch, wanting to be there, trailing over her soft skin just so I could see the goosebumps dot her skin. I loved it when her breath caught whenever I touched her, tasted her, and breathed her in.

I thought I was in love once. Finding this incredible woman who had been designed especially for me by Fate taught me, though, that I hadn't known the meaning of the word.

In such a short time, my heart had fallen, landing directly at her adorable little feet. Words were inadequate to describe the depth of the feelings I had for her. The only reason I hadn't said those three little words yet was because I was hesitant to frighten

her.

I knew Bridgette was still struggling with our mating. She'd had terrible examples of men before I came along. The way she'd followed me to see where I had gone the day I went to visit Samantha made my heart ache. Not because she didn't trust me. I knew I had fucked up that situation. I should have been more open with her. No, I was sad because it meant that she was still struggling with accepting me. When she'd asked if I still loved my ex, it was all I could do not to drop to my knees and beg her to see what was in my heart.

My little witch glanced over her shoulder at me again from where I was watching at the stairs. I tipped back my bottle of beer, set the empty bottle on the step beside me, and stood up, unable to resist the temptation of her seductive little smile.

"Oh no, Detective. No more distractions!" she laughed as she saw my intentions clearly on my face. I ignored her protests and stalked toward her, determined to steal another kiss. I watched as she spun around to face me, her palms up as if to ward me off. "The last time you interrupted, it took an hour, and I had to start over again from scratch," she pouted.

"Only a kiss," I lied, having no intention of stopping until I'd wrung at least one orgasm from her sexy little body.

"Liar," she replied, her voice husky and her pupils dilating as she followed my every movement.

Her body jerked when I was only a few steps away. When her eyes widened in alarm, I froze in my tracks. "Bridgette?" Her arms jerked up, held straight out from her sides. "What the fuck is happening?" I demanded as I watched terror sweep over her face, turning her soft green eyes dark.

“Logan?” she choked out. As my name left her lips, bright red dots appeared on her cream-colored blouse, the color seeping into the fabric and spreading quickly. In my confusion, it took me several heartbeats to figure out what I was seeing. Horror consumed me as dark blood began to seep from an invisible wound on her chest.

“Fuck,” I choked out and darted forward, needing to stop what was happening but not knowing how. “Bridgette!” I bellowed in rage as I tried to get to her, but it felt as if I were walking through wet cement. No matter how much effort I put into reaching her, I was barely making progress. My mate and the love of my life was bleeding out only a few steps from me. I felt hopeless and enraged and more terrified than I had ever felt in my entire life. “Bridgette!”

As I struggled to get closer, to stop the invisible monster from taking her away from me, I watched, helpless, as the light that always shone so brightly began to dim in her eyes.

“Logan,” she mouthed, the words inaudible over the pounding of my heart. “Don’t let me go,” she pleaded.

“Bridgette!” I bellowed again. “Don’t you fucking leave me! Don’t you fucking dare!”

Her lashes fluttered as her eyelids slowly closed. The invisible hold on my mate released, and Bridgette’s knees bent. Her body crumpled, sagging to the floor as if she were a doll that had been dropped once done being played with.

“No!” I felt hot, angry tears fill my eyes. They obscured my vision, and I could no longer clearly see her. As I wiped them away frantically, a loud, disembodied laughter rang out around the room.

A scream filled the room, and I jolted upright in bed, my heart racing from a

combination of the dream and the unexpected sound. I glanced over to see Bridgette already sitting up and panting heavily.

“Logan!” she cried and flung herself into my arms. “Mrs. Donaldson! You have to call her now. Right now! Please call Mrs. Donaldson,” she sobbed.

I held her close, not wanting to let her go. The dream I’d just had and the reality of the moment had crossed over into one waking nightmare. I’d just watched the woman I loved die and was incapable of doing anything to stop it.

“Please, Logan!”

I shook my head, trying to clear the images of the dream from my mind, knowing that I would never be able to forget. “Okay, little witch. I’ll call right now.”

With her still wrapped tightly in my hold, I reached with one hand over to the nightstand where my phone rested. I searched quickly through the contacts until I found the one for the officer who was currently stationed outside the Donaldson residence.

“Officer Moody here,” came the voice of the young police officer. He sounded alert, and though I was relieved, I wasted no time getting to the point.

“Officer Moody. This is Detective Storm. I need you to check on Mrs. Donaldson. Do not return to your vehicle until you have visibly checked on her welfare,” I demanded brusquely.

“Yes, sir.”

I ended the call, knowing that he would call back as soon as he had checked in. I turned to look down at Bridgette, who was weeping in my arms, her cheek pressed

against my chest.

“Shh,” I soothed, running my rough hand over her arm. “They are checking on her now. Okay?”

Bridgette nodded, then abruptly stopped before shaking her head. “It’s too late,” she whispered hoarsely. “It’s too late.” She swallowed and then looked up at me, her lashes sticking together with her tears, and her eyes red.

Even distraught, she was still beautiful. I brushed back the hair that was sticking to her cheeks. I clenched my jaw, believing her. Somehow, the killer had struck again, and my little witch had sensed it from across town.

“I’m sorry, little witch.”

Her lip trembled, and a large tear fell down her cheek. “I was dreaming,” she began. “You and I were downstairs. I was making potions.” She stopped and swallowed as my heart started racing again. “You were walking toward me, teasing me. Or I was teasing you, I don’t know. Then something, some entity, arrived. You froze in place, and I couldn’t reach for you, no matter how hard I tried.” A sob escaped from her as my chest grew tight. “The wards in the shop woke me up again,” she whispered. “And I knew...”

“Shh,” I said again. “You’re alright. I’m here, and you are alive.” At the moment, I wasn’t sure if I was trying to soothe her or myself. Hearing her tell me that we’d shared the same dream was somehow more terrifying than the dream itself had been.

My phone rang next to my leg, where I had dropped it after the call, making both of us startle. She looked at me expectantly, hope shining in her eyes as I answered.

“Detective Storm.” I listened briefly as I stared down into my mate’s face, watching

as the hope died and the tears welled one more time. “Thank you, Officer Moody. I will be there in about twenty minutes. Call the crime scene techs and Detective MacKenzie.”

I clicked off the call and set my phone down with a heavy sigh. I turned to face Bridgette again and reached out to hold both her upper arms. “Listen to me,” I demanded, and waited for my girl to look at me. When she brought those reddened eyes back to mine, I wanted to tear the world apart until I found the monster who had killed a woman tonight and broken the spirit of my sweet girl. “You do not blame yourself. You couldn’t have prevented her death.”

As she broke eye contact to look down at her lap, I wanted to howl at the moon in frustration. “Don’t,” I demanded as I gave her a slight shake to get her attention. “Look at me, Bridgette! You are not to blame. I swear, I will find out who is doing this and put a stop to it. Do you hear me!”

She nodded her head slowly, but we both knew that my determination was less to do with finding a killer who had already taken the lives of three innocent witches and more to do with the fear that my mate was next on the list.

Bridgette collapsed in my arms with a sob, and I held her close. I whispered promises into her hair until she pulled away and wiped her eyes with the backs of her hands. “You need to go,” she whispered. “Tomorrow we’ll go over all the pictures and figure out what we have been missing. I know there’s something there that I haven’t caught yet.”

“Okay, little witch,” I said gently. “Try to get some more sleep. We will talk about the case in the morning.” I kissed her forehead and helped her lie back down. She reached for my pillow and hugged it to her chest, and let out a heavy sigh.

“Stay safe, Logan.”

I walked over to the dresser where my clothing was stored and pulled out a pair of jeans and a long sleeved Henley to wear under my leather jacket. It was going to be a cold ride in the middle of the night on my bike.

I took one last look at Bridgette, who looked small and alone in the bed we had been sharing for over a week, and my heart ached to climb back in and hold her close. With a sigh, I turned away and carried my clothes down the stairs to get dressed in the dark. I had a murder scene to get to. The sooner I solved the case, the sooner my mate would be safe.

I was at the Donaldson residence in less time than it should have taken me. As I was walking up the path to the front door, I saw headlights and turned to look. Mac's familiar black SUV pulled to the curb next to my motorcycle and cut the engine before opening the door to step out. His expression was as grim as I felt.

"Hey," he called, already popping a piece of gum into his mouth. "Mind telling me how you knew to check on our victim?" He stepped up beside me and clapped me on the shoulder. "How's Bridgette?"

I ran a hand through my hair and had the fleeting thought that I needed to make time for a haircut. "Not good. She sensed it, I guess. She woke up crying and begged me to check on Mrs. Donaldson."

"Fuck," he muttered. "That's rough."

"Yeah," I replied and looked toward the open door. Together we walked up to the porch and walked inside the warm, inviting family home. The Donaldsons were in their forties and had two grown children. Luckily, both were away at college and hadn't been in the house.

When I stepped into the living room, I took in the carnage. The blood was still fresh,

and the room smelled of the candles that were still burning, slowly melting into the carpet. The scent of blood was easy to recognize over the candle wax, though. Loud sobs could be heard from the direction of the kitchen, where I guessed Officer Moody had taken Mr. Donaldson to keep him away from the crime scene as well as to spare him from having to stare at the dead body of his wife.

The scene was identical to the previous two. All the furniture had been moved aside to make room for the killer to work their magic. The circle was drawn with what I would bet was chalk, the same as before. Bundles of herbs were placed in strategic locations along with the same type of stones. I had the brief thought that all of the items used for the gruesome ritual could have come from Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs, and Bridgette might have never realized the things were missing.

“Has Bridgette checked her inventory to see if any of this shit came from her shop?” Mac asked me as he looked around, just as I was.

I blew out a breath and ran my hand through my hair again, yanking on the strands. “I had the same thought. It’s a possibility that the killer has been in to buy this fucking shit. They could have been face to face with her and she never fucking knew.”

“Hey,” Mac said, walking over and placing a hand on my shoulder. “She’s safe at home, right?” I grunted in confirmation. “Then try not to stress out. We’ll have her look first thing in the morning. She can check receipts. If the killer did purchase their stuff from Bridgette’s shop, hopefully, they paid with a card, and we can track them down.

I didn’t think for a second it was going to be that easy, but agreed. I scanned over the body and looked for anything that was different from the other murders. Every single thing seemed to be identical down to the position of the body.

Movement at the door caught my attention, and I straightened. I lifted my arm to

shake the head tech's hand. "Sorry it's so late." I received a grunt and a nod, not expecting anything more. The crime techs were known for their quiet, antisocial demeanors.

Mac and I stood back, watching the techs work and listening to the mournful tears of a man who I expected had lost his soulmate. I crossed my arms and looked out the window, the dim rays of a first-quarter moon shining through the glass.

"Detectives," one of the techs called out. "I found something."

Chapter

Twenty-Two

LOGAN

I stood in front of my Captain's desk, my hands folded behind my back and my jaw set in a firm line. Every so often my eyes would land on the evidence bag sitting on his desk and my blood would start boiling all over again.

"She's done, Storm!"

I eyed the man whom I'd respected for the last several years and gritted my teeth. "She's the only help I have on this case, Captain."

I watched as he sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I get what you're saying, but her DNA was found at the scene of a murder, Storm. She's off the case."

I wanted to punch the wall as I clenched my fists at my sides and let my eyes drop back to the evidence bag again. "She wasn't there, sir."

"I don't give a fuck if she was there or not!" he shouted as his fist slammed down on the wooden desktop. "I've had the Commissioner up my ass for the last two weeks and haven't been able to tell him fuck all about this investigation. Now my lead Detective's girlfriend's DNA was at the latest scene of fucking murder. What do you think he will have to say? You're damn lucky I'm not pulling you off the case as well. If I didn't know you better, I'd say you were thinking with your fucking cock

instead of that brain of yours.”

I gritted my teeth. “I’ve never let my cock get in the way of anything. Sir ,” I ground out.

“And that’s the only reason you’re still active on this investigation, Storm.” He pointed his finger at me and narrowed his eyes. “She doesn’t help you. You don’t talk to her about it. You don’t casually mention details or anything regarding this case at all. Do you hear me, Storm? She’s officially in the dark, or you will be joining her there while your badge rots in my desk drawer. Have I made myself understood?”

“Crystal,” I growled.

“Good. Now get the fuck out of my office and catch me a goddamn killer!”

I looked back at the evidence bag that had a long strand of dark red hair that could be no one else’s but Bridgette’s. I wanted to burn the fucking thing, to forget that it existed. How the fuck the killer managed to get my mate’s hair and then plant it in the hand of Mrs. Donaldson was a mystery that I desperately wanted to solve. With one last nod to the Captain, I turned on my heel and stalked out of his office.

I walked past the center of the room where officers and detectives were milling about or pretending to work. I wasn’t stupid. I knew the reason why there were so many more bodies standing around was because they’d heard the news that one of our own had a girlfriend who was associated with a murder case. The stupid fucks were placing bets on whether or not Bridgette was a goddamn serial killer.

I heard a snicker and jerked my head around to see who the fuck thought that my life was a fucking joke. Nothing about this situation was funny. While these idiots were thinking that it was hilarious that a homicide detective was fucking a serial killer they failed to see that Bridgette wasn’t a fucking suspect. No. The fucking killer basically

painted a bullseye on her forehead. And now my Captain thought it was wise to cut her out of the investigation altogether, all because his boss said so.

No one was looking at me when I turned on my heel, all pretending to be working. I turned in a circle. All I could do was glare in warning. I needed one motherfucker to challenge me so I could let some of the frustration out that was building inside me. I felt like a pressure valve that was ready to explode.

After shooting one last snarl at a beat cop who had no business being on this floor, I turned back, heading in the direction I had been going. I slammed into the men's restroom, not caring that the door hit the wall so hard that bits of plaster rained down from the place the door handle had impacted.

I turned on the tap and splashed cold water on my face. As I was drying the water droplets off with a paper towel, I felt my phone buzz with an incoming text. I tossed the damp towel in the garbage and reached into my pocket, withdrawing my phone. I growled when I saw another text from Kristy. The woman had been texting and trying to call for the last several weeks, and I had ignored every single one of them. I usually didn't even bother to look at them before I deleted whatever bullshit she tried to spew. I shoved my finger over the delete button when what she had written caught my eye.

Kristy: Please, Logan! I really need to talk to you!

I snorted and deleted the text, but another popped up as soon as the first had disappeared.

Kristy: I'm pregnant. I really need you.

I froze for a moment as I stared down at the words. While we had been married, the topic of having a baby had only come up a few times. Once, while we were dating,

Kristy had mentioned that she wanted a lot of kids. Since I wasn't opposed to the idea, I had agreed that when the time came to start a family, I would be on board. I loved kids and would love to have my own.

The next time it was brought up was by Kristy's mom, asking when we were going to start a family. I got the impression that Kristy had put her up to it with the way they kept giving each other looks. The question had come from left field, since Kristy had never given me any inclination that she was ready to start a family yet. It was when my mother-in-law started telling me that, as a father, I needed to be home more often and present in our future children's lives, that I began to understand.

Kristy had told me she was proud of my job and enjoyed being a cop's wife. But she had never been supportive when it mattered. If I were called out in the middle of the night, she would give me the silent treatment the next day. If I had to miss dinner or work longer hours because of a case, she would rage at me for choosing work over her.

When Kristy's mom had brought up children and expressed her displeasure at me not being around enough, I'd set down my fork and thanked her for a lovely meal before excusing myself from the table.

Kristy followed me out to my truck, demanding to know where I was going. I told her that she should get a ride home from her mother. I had a case I was working on. Was it a shitty thing to do? Yeah. I could look back and say that I hadn't done the right thing that night. When I got home later, Kristy was waiting for me in bed, wide awake.

"Where have you been?" she demanded as she tossed her phone on the nightstand. I could tell she was gearing up for a fight, likely had been since I drove off.

I let out a heavy sigh as I shrugged out of my shirt and tossed it into the clothes

hamper. “Can we not do this right now, Kris? I’m exhausted. We found the body of a missing girl tonight, and I had to tell her parents.”

“Are you serious right now?” she screeched, making me want to poke my eardrums out with a pencil. “You care more about a dead little girl than having your own child? What about me? Am I never going to have a child because you are too busy taking care of everyone else’s dead children?”

I looked at my wife as she stared up at me from our marriage bed. She had promised to support my career. She had told me that she was proud of what I’d accomplished so quickly since I’d chosen to become a homicide detective. Instead, she was giving me shit for being good at what I did.

“Kristy,” I started, choosing my words carefully, but knowing deep inside my gut that it wouldn’t matter what I said to the woman. Kristy had chosen her path that night and was steadily hiking up it. “The two have nothing to do with each other. To say that about a young girl who went through what she did,” I shook my head, wanting to tell her it was insensitive and heartless, but knew it would end in the worst fight of our lives. “It’s my job, Kristy. Someone has to give the victims justice. That little girl’s parents need answers so they can lay her to rest.”

Instead of raging, Kristy’s lip started trembling as her big brown eyes filled with tears. “But why does it have to be you, Logan? I miss you! I want to start the family we talked about. Remember? You said you wanted a big family? We need to start now before it’s too late!”

I shook my head at the way Kristy had the ability to rewrite history when it suited her. “Kris, we aren’t that old. There’s still plenty of time. But,” I cut in before she could get worked up again, “if you are ready, all you had to do was talk to me. Having your mother ambush me the way she did tonight was not the way.”

She had the grace to look abashed for all of three seconds before jutting her chin out. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. My mom didn’t ambush you. She was simply asking about grandchildren, the way all older women do. She’s worried that she’ll be too old to play with them by the time you’re ready to settle down.”

“Settle down? Kris, honey, we are already ‘settled down’, that’s what marriage is. If you want kids, then we can start trying.” I figured that at that point, there was no sense in waiting. Agreeing to have a child to end an argument wasn’t something I wanted to do, ever, but I liked kids and knew they would be welcome no matter what.

Her face lit up, and she crawled out from under the blanket, her lacy pink nightie showing off all her generous assets. “Are you going to quit your job so you can be home more?”

I snorted, unable to stop my reaction, which was the very worst thing I could have done. “Why would I do that? I love my job and I’m damn good at it. I can be a dad and still find killers, Kristy. Those two things are not mutually exclusive.”

“Logan—”

“I said no, Kristy.”

Her eyes narrowed as she sat back on her heels. “What did you just say to me, Logan Storm?”

I let out a heavy sigh and ran my hand through my hair, tugging on the ends in frustration. “Kristy, you’re not going to bully me into quitting the force.”

“I had no intention of making you quit the force. There are jobs you can do that will bring you home every night. With your seniority, you could work daytime hours as a beat cop again.”

“Not only no, but fuck no. Not happening. End of discussion.” Instead of continuing to argue, I stalked into the bathroom, frustrated as hell that my wife was trying to manipulate me. As I closed the door behind me, I heard something heavy hit the door.

“You’re going to regret this, Logan!” Kristy screamed a few more insults as I stood there with my hands braced against the door and my head hanging down as I stared at the floor. It was only a few weeks later that I found out she was in the middle of a hot affair with some guy. I immediately began gathering evidence and prepared my escape from the marriage.

Staring down at the text message of her telling me she was pregnant and needed me, a disbelieving chuckle escaped at her audacity. I could only guess what she was thinking. I hadn’t kept up with her life since we split, hadn’t cared what she’d done or who she was with. She’d made her bed, and I was happy to let her lie in it. The problem was that Kristy thought she could manipulate me into giving her what she wanted, always had. Before, if it wasn’t a big deal, I would give in without argument. Since she was no longer my problem, I couldn’t give less of a fuck that she was pregnant, nor did I care who’s child it was.

The one thing I knew was that I wasn’t the father since I hadn’t fucked her since before the night of the fight. After that night, Kristy thought that she could give me the cold shoulder and that freezing me out would make me give in to her demands. All she’d accomplished was driving a wedge between us so big that a semi could drive through it while dumping piles of divorce decrees in the abyss.

I decided that continuing to ignore the woman was the best call, and even went to her contact information so I could block her once and for all. Honestly, I should have done it months ago. As I scrolled down to the bottom of her contact information, my phone rang and I let out a curse, thinking that it was Kristy again, but grinned when I saw it wasn’t my ex at all.

“Hey, little witch.”

“Hey, Detective.” Bridgette sounded tired, and I doubted that she got much sleep after I left her in the middle of the night. “I was thinking about something. The murder case. Something had been bugging me about it and I-”

I closed my eyes at what I had to do until I could fix the fucking mess my Captain had put me in. “Sorry, Bridgette. I have to stop you there. I can’t talk to you about the case anymore. I’m under orders to keep you out of it completely.”

“Wait. Are you serious, Logan?” she asked, her tone full of incredulity. I grimaced.

“Yeah, I’m sorry, little witch. I was threatened to be pulled off the case, too, if I shared any details with you about it.” I hated every word and wanted nothing more than to pull them back. I knew Bridgette was vital to the investigation. She had information about things that I didn’t know. Her knowledge was indispensable and vital to the case. “Listen, I’m going to do what I can to get my Captain to change his mind, okay? Until then, hold on. Tell me later.”

Her voice was quiet as she responded, and I hated it. “Okay, Detective. I understand.”

I yanked at my hair, then ran a hand through it. “I have to go. I will see you in a few hours. Be safe for me. Okay?”

“Okay, Logan. See you soon.”

I stood there staring down at the black screen of my phone after she hung up. Then, I pulled back my fist and hit the wall.

Chapter

Twenty-Three

brIDGETTE

I stared down at my phone after hanging up. I didn't have a clue why I was suddenly dismissed from being used as a knowledgeable expert on the investigation, and I didn't know if Logan was even allowed to explain it to me. A part of me was furious. Another witch was just killed; now wasn't the time to be playing bureaucratic games. But the larger side of me was sad.

I looked back out the window at the dark skies and heavy clouds that were threatening rain. I had been staring at the sky in the same way just a few minutes ago, wondering what in the hell I was missing. I had been turning over all the clues and knew we were missing some vital parts when it finally hit me.

Each murder had been during the phases of the moon. The first one was on the night of the third-quarter moon. The second was during the new moon. Last night was the first-quarter moon phase. If what I believed was true, then the final murder and the most important one would be during the full moon.

I opened my phone and looked down at the app I had been studying before calling Logan. The moon was going to be full in six nights from now. We had six days to figure out the bullshit and stop anyone else from dying. I knew in my gut that I was the next witch in line to be killed. I squeezed my hand tightly around my phone as anger bubbled inside me. Let them come. I was more than capable of stopping

whoever it was. I'd be damned if anymore witches had to die to appease a power hungry monster. They wanted my magic? Well, come and get it then.

I'd be waiting.

I walked down the stairs and straight through the shop to the front door. I flipped the sign over to OPEN and unlocked it. Turning around, I surveyed Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs, seeing the place with a critical eye. I loved my store, the same way my grandmother had before me. It was my birthright, my destiny, and one day, it would be my legacy.

Glancing around, I noticed nothing out of place for the first time that I could remember. Sending out a small wave of magic, I essentially checked the pulse of the shop. Everything was as it should be on the surface, so I dug deeper. There, under the usual thrum of magic, was tension. And an almost palpable fear.

I walked over and picked up Mildred, feeling a slight tremble coming from her in my hands.

"Sweet Mildred," I murmured and glanced around at everyone else before looking up into the corner to see my beautiful guardian crow huddled watchfully on his shelf. "You have nothing to fear," I called out. "I will protect everything in this shop. I swear this to you." I looked back down at Mildred to see her shiver in my hands. I stroked a finger down one of the amethysts that decorated her skull. "I see," I said sadly. "You aren't worried about yourselves." I gently set her back onto her place in front of the door so she could see everyone as they came and went.

I walked around the shop, sliding my fingers along the shelves, caressing my figurines as I did. "I promise, I will be safe. Please do not worry. I'm a Waters witch. I come from a long line of badass women." I paused as I circled back around to Mildred and touched her cold cheek, smiling at the shimmy of excitement under my

fingertip. “The Waters’ have always been the most powerful witches in the area since we moved here more than two hundred years ago, and I carry the most magic that the family line has ever seen.” I leaned forward and kissed the black cheek. “So don’t worry.”

I turned around and strode to the counter, ready to start the day. I pushed away all thoughts of Logan and decreed that I was no longer a part of the investigation. Reaching inside the glass case, I withdrew the athames from the day before and set them gently onto the counter. I gathered my materials and lost myself in the consuming task of polishing every inch of metal and stone.

I saved the newest athame for last. I picked up the sharp instrument and held it to the light, turning it back and forth, watching as the light picked up the facets of the stones. I was more sure than ever that they were garnets. The dark red of the stones looked so much like spilled blood. Garnets were known for the heart, blood, and passion. Some people have referred to them as blood red, and it was easy to see why. What I should not be seeing, though, was the effect of spilled blood swirling inside the stones.

I shook my head at my fancifulness, sure that it was simply a trick of the lighting along with the way the facets were cut. I picked up the bottle of polish that I had concocted myself a couple of years ago and applied a small amount to the cloth. Carefully and meticulously, I rubbed in small circles, careful to reach every groove of the ornate metal.

“I need to call the estate manager,” I murmured to myself. I wanted to find out more about the witch the athame had come from. It was so unusual for a full blooded witch to not have a relative to pass their instruments to. The witch would have at least had the basics to go along with the athame, like a pestle and mortar, possibly a cauldron. They would definitely have had a set of spell books.

While lost in thought, Mortimer startled me by jumping onto the counter. He let out a hiss that I had never heard from him before. It was loud and vicious, one a cat would aim at something they either truly hated, or were terrified of. Before I could do anything other than stare in disbelief at his out of character behavior, he swiped out one large black paw. Instinct had me jumping back, not wanting his murder mittens to maim my hand.

In all the mayhem, my hand clenched tightly around the thin blade. With a hiss of my own, I dropped the dagger to the floor. “Fuck!” I cried out, holding my bleeding hand to my chest and staring down at the athame. “Mortimer! Stop it! I swear I’m going to send you to Grandmother in a crate with no holes if you don’t stop this nonsense.” I shoved him off the counter, and he ran to his tower in the corner with an angry growl. I shook my head at him as he glared at me and began licking his paw.

Worried that one of the garnets might have been chipped or worse, I bent down to pick up the athame. I held it carefully in both hands and inspected it for damage under the light. I didn’t see any chips or breaks, but a drop of my blood caught my eye.

“Damn. Now I’m going to have to start all over again. I hope you’re happy, Mortimer.” I picked up the cloth I’d been using, but as I moved to clean off the blood, I watched as the droplet began moving. In fascination, I stared while it slid up the edge of the blade. When it reached the hilt, it seemed to slide under the metal, somehow being absorbed into the athame itself.

“What the fuck.” As I held the athame, it began to heat in my hands until I dropped it onto the counter with a sharp crash of metal to glass. “What the actual fuck,” I repeated in disbelief.

A voice that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere all at once echoed eerily around me. “Oh, child,” it said, sounding raspy, as if it hadn’t spoken in a long time.

“ You’re the one I seek. And I will get two Waters witches for the price of one. How sweet.”

“Who the hell are you?” I demanded, looking around quickly, but bringing my gaze right back to the athame, not wanting to take my eyes off of it for long.

“ Don’t worry, child. I will come for you soon. But you have already figured that out, haven’t you?”

“Who. Are. You?” I ground out, my fingers itching to release a spell as soon as I had the witch in sight. Unfortunately, there was no answer, and no one appeared. I lightly brushed a fingertip to the metal blade, but it was once again cool to the touch. I quickly used the cleaning cloth and picked up the athame. After wrapping the fabric tightly around the entire athame, I tucked it back into the glass case, then I sealed it with magic.

Once I was satisfied that the athame was temporarily contained, I brought my bleeding hand to my chest. Then I slowly turned to face my grandmother’s familiar. I pointed one finger at him. “You knew. All this time, you knew .” I looked around the shop in bewilderment. Then I looked back at Mortimer who was busy licking his nutsack. Gross. “You were trying to warn me, weren’t you?” Other than a disgruntled growl, he ignored me, continuing to do what cats do. “Damn it, Mortimer! You’re a fucking familiar! Surely you could have done something other than growl and hiss and yowl!”

I stomped into the back room and turned on the tap to clean the wound. I grumbled under my breath about unhinged cats that needed to learn how to communicate better, the whole time. Once the blood was rinsed away, I grabbed a clean towel to dry my hand with and stomped back into the front, glaring at the cat tower as I passed. Mortimer had moved on to napping in his favorite spot, sprawled on his back as if he were trying to soak up the nonexistent sunrays.

I snatched a healing potion off the shelf and tore the cork out with my teeth, then spit it into the small trash can under the register. As I chugged back the potion, I looked down at the wound on my hand. It was a thin slice, and that blade had been sharper than expected. Most athames didn't need to be kept sharp enough to slice through fucking bone.

The wound was deeper at the edge of my palm as it sliced diagonally through my hand. As I stood there waiting for it to heal, my heart began to speed up as nothing happened. Blood was oozing from the wound, and I would need to rinse it again soon before the blood started to drip onto the floor.

"This can't be happening right now," I muttered to myself as I willed the cut to mend itself. My potions never failed. The blood continued to well up in my palm as I waited, sheer disbelief making me stare at my hand that was still not healed. I watched as if in slow motion as bright red blood rolled over the edge of my palm and down the side of my hand. It made a small splat as it hit the glass.

I stared down at the drop of blood in a near trance, hardly understanding what was happening. In all my life, I had expected to heal from virtually any injury almost instantly. First, it was Grandmother's potions, then, when she'd taught me, it was my own that took away the pain and hurt. I didn't usually bother with minor cuts like a papercut, but I absolutely did not hesitate to heal myself when I broke a toe on the stupid kitchen chair a couple of years ago. But scraped knees were always carefully tended to with a wipe down, a potion, and a cookie as I grew up. Never, ever had a potion failed to heal the largest hurts.

I blinked my eyes, realizing that I had been staring so long they had gone out of focus. My blood was still there, a second drop joining the first. The athame, wrapped in the cloth, was directly underneath the bright red, and that was when I realized something I should have picked up on the moment the voice spoke.

Not only was the athame the murder weapon, it had also been spelled. Anything it cut would remain an open wound. I didn't know if any wound could heal from the damage it caused. I cursed out loud, realizing that I was in deep shit.

Then I froze as I remembered what else the voice of the killer had said.

Chapter

Twenty-Four

brIDGETTE

T wo Waters witches.

No, no, no, no, no. It couldn't be. I stumbled over to the stairs and sank down onto the bottom step.

No, no, no, no.

I dropped my head between my knees. My breathing had become so erratic that the tip of my nose was starting to tingle. I understood I was hyperventilating, so I began to take deep breaths, but it didn't seem to be helping.

Logan and I had just started our relationship. What would he do with this information? Would he think I was trying to trap him? Would I lose him already? That was what happened with my grandmother, and in a way, that's what happened with my mother.

I tried to think of my last menstrual cycle, but my mind was just too jumbled, and I couldn't think of when I was supposed to start again.

"Breathe. Just breathe ," I told myself. What was I going to do? What was Logan going to say?

I opened my eyes and saw the small, colorful area rug spread across the wooden floor in front of me. Clumsily, I stood to my feet. I wavered for a second and had to reach out to hold onto the stair railing to keep from falling back on my ass. Once I'd caught my balance, and after taking another deep breath, I took a step forward. Another shaking step brought my feet to the edge of the rug.

Bending down, I gripped the edge of the rug and tossed it to the side. There, on the floor, previously hidden, was my chalk circle. I glanced around as if in a daze, thinking about what I needed. My eyes settled on the shelf that held candles in various colors.

Quickly, I walked over, picked up a black candle, and returned to the pentagram that was drawn on the floor. Carefully, so I didn't smudge the lines, I knelt and placed the candle in the center of the circle. Waving a finger, I lit the candle with a small spark of blue flame.

Closing my eyes, I thought of my grandmother, and I chanted the communication spell. It was only a few seconds later, but when I heard my grandmother's voice, I nearly collapsed in relief, even though it wasn't her. The spell I was using was similar to leaving a voicemail message, and hers was the mailbox greeting. It still felt so good to hear her voice. I needed it more than I could ever have imagined.

My mind raced with what to say. I didn't want to worry them, even if I desperately needed some advice.

"Hello, Grandmother. Mother. I hope your trip is going well. I can't wait to see all the pictures that you've taken and hear all the stories about your adventures. Everything is good here." I wince at the blatant lie. "But when you can, return my call, please? There's just something I need to talk to you about. It's not an emergency! Don't worry, everything's fine," I lied again. "I love you both! Blessed be."

With those final words, I blew out the black candle and hung my head. No matter what I said, they were gonna worry. Depending on where they were and what they were doing, it could take hours before they actually received my message. I supposed that would give me enough time to think about what I would actually say back.

I heard the bell ding in the front of the shop, and my head shot up in surprise. I hadn't even thought about the shop being open the whole time. I stumbled into the front room, bracing my hand on the doorway. Just as I was about to call out a greeting, I saw who had come into my store.

"Oh hell no," I muttered under my breath.

Kristy stood in front of the door while taking a quick look around the shop. As soon as she noticed where I was standing, she lifted her chin in the air and squared her shoulders. With her hand braced over her belly, she strode forward, the very appearance of confidence and grace. I stepped forward, placing myself behind the glass counter, needing the separation between the two of us.

"No," I said firmly. "We're not doing this. You can leave now." I pointed toward the red door.

Kristy ignored my demand. Instead, she continued her confident stride until she was directly in front of me. I absolutely loathed that I needed to lift my chin up to make eye contact with her.

"We need to talk," her tone was just as firm as mine had been.

"No, I really don't think we do," I replied.

"Marlene told me that she came in here, and you two had a nice little chat."

I hoped she couldn't tell that the confident grin I'd plastered on my face was strained as hell. "Did she like the potion I gave her? She seemed concerned about a scratchy throat. I do hope she is feeling better."

Kristy waved her hand as if her friend being sick was irrelevant. "I'm not here to talk about that."

I lifted one eyebrow at her imperious tone and waited for her to continue, and I wasn't disappointed. "I did a little digging on you."

"Is that so?" I said. "I'm sure Logan would be extremely interested to hear that you are digging into my life when he specifically told you to stay away."

Again, she ignored my words and continued despite the threat. "I found out that you grew up without a father." I inhaled sharply. How dare she? "It must have been difficult for you," she said in mock sympathy. She glanced down at her belly, my eyes involuntarily following hers. Then she looked back up at me with a soft smile on her face. "It's a boy, you know."

"Congratulations," I choked out.

"Logan would make a great father, don't you think? He always told me that he would love to have children with me."

The words had a pain shooting through my heart as I thought of the news I just received. "I'm sure he would," I replied quietly.

"For someone who grew up without a father, I'm sure you understand."

"Understand what?" I asked, having a sinking feeling settle in my gut.

“Why, that my son needs his father,” she said as if it were obvious.

I closed my eyes briefly, not wanting to believe what she was saying and not wanting her to see my pain. At the moment, I didn’t know what was true and what wasn’t. The truth was that they had divorced right around the time that her child was conceived, but Logan had told me that they stopped being in a real relationship about six months before they actually divorced. He couldn’t possibly be the father of her baby, could he?

“I think you should leave now,” I said quietly, reopening my eyes and giving her a pointed stare. I wasn’t interested in what she had come to say any longer and just wanted her to leave. I’d taken too many blows already since I’d woken up in the middle of the night. I wasn’t sure how much I could take.

Kristy squared her shoulders. “Women shouldn’t be pitting themselves against each other,” she said. “This is a serious situation that you could resolve with a bit of dignity and grace.”

I couldn’t help the snort that escaped. Kristy and her minion had been harassing me since the first night that they had seen me with Logan. I wasn’t pitting myself against anybody. But I damn sure wasn’t going to take their attacks lightly.

I leaned forward to get closer and to make sure that she heard my words and took them to heart. “Kristy,” I said slowly. “I don’t control Logan. If Logan wants to be with you, that is Logan’s choice, not mine. If you’re asking me to break up with him because of your condition, well, you’re more delusional than I thought you were.”

Her eyes narrowed dangerously at my words. As I stood there, she leaned in as well. “Little girl,” she started, “Logan was mine years before you were even ready to start shaving your legs. He will always be mine. A love like ours can’t be destroyed by a little mistake. He will eventually get over being mad at me, and we will go back to

being happy again.

I snapped at her because the comment was beyond ridiculous. First of all, I wasn't that young, and second of all, witches didn't need to shave their legs. There were spells for that. "No matter what you say, Kristy, my answer remains. If you want Logan back, you talk to Logan. Now," I repeated, pointing my finger toward the entrance to Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs. "For the last time, leave my shop."

She straightened back up and lifted a hand to smooth down her dark hair, which was already sleek and shiny. "You know," she began in a softer tone. "Logan didn't seem all that upset today when I talked to him about the baby. We'll just see who wins in the end. Won't we?"

Then, she turned around and walked away before I could form a reply. I wasn't worried, or at least I shouldn't have been. But knowing that I couldn't tell Logan the news that I was pregnant and that she already had was a new problem I hadn't anticipated.

I looked down at my hand, just then realizing that it was stinging fiercely, and uncurled my fist. My hand was still bleeding, and my fingernails had been digging into the wound. I thought of the threat that was looming over my head. I couldn't tell Logan about the baby. Not yet. If he knew, he would be too protective to allow me to do what I needed.

My mind turned to the way that she'd said she had spoken to Logan that morning. I thought of the possibility that he might leave because he would think he was doing the right thing if he went back to her, even if it was just for the sake of the baby she was carrying. Even though I had no intention of breaking up with him, there was a good possibility that I had already lost.

I looked down into the glass case where the athame rested, wrapped in a cloth. I knew

what I had to do.

I turned to head into the back of the shop. I needed to locate some bandages and apply some salve to my wound.

Chapter

Twenty-Five

LOGAN

I was sitting at my desk, going over paperwork and staring at files. My anger still hadn't cooled since the meeting with my Captain that morning. I was tired, and my stomach was gnawing at me after having nothing in it but stale police department coffee. I rubbed at my temples, a headache beginning to throb painfully there.

A knock sounded at the open door to my office, and I glanced up to see a uniformed officer standing there holding a package. "Detective Storm. This came for you a few minutes ago downstairs. It was dropped off via courier." I waved him in, and he set down the package on the desktop in front of me. I waved him off with thanks, and he walked out with a quick nod.

The package was wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. It wasn't large, perhaps about 12 inches long and just a few inches wide. Curious, I pulled on the string and pulled back the paper to reveal a slim, plain white box. Lifting the lid, it took me a few seconds as I blinked down at what I was seeing to realize what it was. The small dagger was what Bridgette had said was an athame, and I recognized it as the same one that had been inside the glass case of her shop. She'd been cleaning all of them when I showed up last night. I noticed a piece of paper underneath the gleaming metal. I carefully withdrew it and unfolded it to reveal a note with only a few words on it.

This is your murder weapon.

I closed my eyes and blew out a breath. It was probably what Bridgette was trying to call me about earlier when I had to tell her that she was no longer allowed to be a part of my investigation.

“Fuck,” I snarled as I stared down at the metal blade. The dark red stones glittered up at me ominously. The fact that she had the murder weapon all along wasn’t going to help her case if anybody found out about it. I couldn’t find myself doubting her words. If Bridgette thought the athame to be the murder weapon, then I believed her. It was also becoming clearer why her hair had been found at the scene of the murder. A strand must have been caught on one of the stones or the metal.

“ Fuck ,” I repeated.

I stood to my feet and picked up the brown paper and twin before folding them together and stuffing them into my pocket along with the note. I placed the lid back onto the box. After picking the box and my phone up, I strode out of my office. On my way to the elevator, I dialed Mac.

“Hey, Mac. Something just came up. Can you meet me at the lead crime scene’s office?”

“I would say that the probability that this is the murder weapon is greater than 90%.” I watched as Shauna turned the weapon over in her hands. She’d already taken several measurements and compared them to the notes from the coroner’s report. “I’m assuming you need me to log this into the evidence report for the witch case?”

Internally, I grimaced. I was going against policy, but knowing that the entire investigation was of supernatural origin and would never make it to a human court, I bit back my hesitation. “If you don’t mind. Thanks, Shauna.”

She gave a brisk nod as she turned back to her computer and began typing. “Do you want to share with me how you got your hands on it?” she asked as she turned to look over her shoulder at me with one eyebrow raised.

“It was dropped off by courier just a few minutes ago,” I admitted.

“And you immediately thought that it might be the weapon?” she pushed.

“Shauna,” I began, “you know I am meticulous in my investigations. I knew the details of what to look for in a weapon. I don’t know where it had been hiding all this time, but since it fell into my lap by some mysterious means, I didn’t hesitate to have it tested and logged.”

“Mysterious,” Shauna hummed. “Righty. Okay then. I will log it, then send it in for residue testing. It might be a few weeks before we find out if there is any DNA remaining that can be used later for court.”

“You know we appreciate you, Shauna,” Mac said, clapping a hand on my shoulder. “We’ll get out of your hair so you can get back to it. “Tell your wife that we said hello. She should be due soon, right?”

Shauna turned in her chair, and her usual no-nonsense demeanor that made her a great team lead faded into a soft smile. “The baby is due in two more weeks. Carrie Anne is ready to explode with equal parts impatience and excitement.”

Mac chuckled. “As if you aren’t the same.”

“Oh, I am worse,” she laughed. “Alright, you boys have already taken up way too much of my valuable time. Get the hell out of here.” I gave her a wink and a nod of thanks.

Once we walked back out into the gloomy day, I turned to Mac. “I can’t say where I got it from, so don’t ask.”

He nodded knowingly. “Alright, man. You know I trust you with my life.”

“I appreciate it.” I stuck my hand out for a shake but was pulled into a half-hug, half back slap.

“I don’t suppose this case is going to be closed with a murderer behind bars?”

I shook my head slowly. “There is too much paranormal at play. My guess is that the killer will strike again soon.” I looked down at the ground and wished with every part of me that the next victim wouldn’t have to be the one to end things. Bridgette was adamant that she could handle whatever came her way. I’d only seen small examples of her magic so far, but I trusted the woman. I just hoped the killer hadn’t become so powerful with their stolen magic that my little witch would be outmatched. I looked back up at Mac, who seemed to know the turmoil I was going through. “I have to believe that they will be defeated. I couldn’t say what the showdown would produce. If I can use cuffs on them, I will.”

“That’s all I can ask for. Take care of Bridgette, Storm,” he urged.

“With everything I am,” I swore back to my partner. “I’m going to head to the shop. I don’t like letting her out of my eyesight, and I haven’t seen her since midnight.”

I walked into Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs, not hesitating in the slightest to lock the door and turn the CLOSED sign over. It was late enough in the day. I was sure Bridgette was just as tired as I was.

I strode through the shop until I was standing in front of my woman, who was looking up at me with an expression I couldn’t quite decipher, but it made me think

she was anxious about something. Cupping her cheeks, I leaned in and took her lips in a hungry kiss. I may have been starved for some warm food, but I was ravenous for the taste of my mate.

As my tongue swept over hers in an erotic dance that I was eager to replicate with more intimate parts of our bodies, Bridgette's sweet little moans had my blood rushing to my cock so fast I nearly became light headed. I pulled back, taking her full bottom lip between my teeth, then licking the soft flesh there.

I rested my forehead against hers and looked into her beautiful mossy green eyes. "I'm so sorry."

She smiled softly, a hint of sadness hidden in the depths of her eyes. "No. You don't have to be sorry. You can't control everything, Detective," she teased quietly.

I shook my head. "Still?—"

The sound of my phone dinged in my pocket, alerting me to a text. I gave Bridette an apologetic frown, but she just smiled and waved toward my phone. "You better get that. It might be important."

With a frustrated sigh, I withdrew my phone and opened my texts, then nearly growled when I saw it wasn't from work at all.

Kristy: Can we have dinner at our favorite restaurant? I'll make reservations.

Before I could delete it, reply with "fuck no", or finally block my ex permanently from my phone and my life, Bridgette was pulling away. I dropped my phone on the counter, uncaring at the moment if it broke into a million pieces. "Where the fuck are you going, little witch?" I demanded as I gripped onto her hand.

Bridgette looked as if she were fighting back tears, and I could have strangled Kristy with my bare hands for hurting my mate. She may not have intentionally tried to hurt her, but she knew sending a text like that would raise questions if my girlfriend saw it.

“Logan,” she began softly, “maybe you should hear Kristy out.” I watched as she turned her head to stare through the window out into the street that was quickly turning dark. She winced and swallowed hard. “She needs you right now.” Her words sounded concerned, even while the pain couldn’t quite be hidden in her eyes.

“You know about the baby,” I said, barely biting back the curse that wanted to explode from me. Even after the threat of incarceration if they didn’t leave Bridgette alone, somehow Kristy and her minion still managed to get to my softhearted woman.

Bridgette turned to look up at me, her eyes shining brightly. She brought a hand up to cup my jaw. “I do. I can understand why she is trying so hard. It must be a scary time for her...” she paused, and I trailed my gaze over her face as she appeared to be in pain, “being a single expectant mother. You and Kristy have a past, Logan. You used to love her for a long time. Maybe it’s time to give her another chance. For the baby’s sake?”

All I could do was blink down at my mate in confusion. Didn’t she know how much she meant to me? The Fates had brought us together because we were perfect together. “What the fuck are you saying, Bridgette?” I demanded. “Help me understand why you would want to throw what we have away.”

Bridgette bit her lip and dropped her hand from my face. She appeared to be struggling with an internal war, and I finally began to panic as I watched every wall that I had torn down two weeks ago, rebuild brick by brick. Fuck, little witch, don’t do this. I begged silently.

“Bridgette,” I grabbed her hand, which was just touching me, and brought it to my chest so she could feel my heart pounding. “I swear to you, there is no reason for you to give up on us. Kristy has meant nothing to me for a very long time. I feel bad for her, but that is as deep as my feelings go. That is not my baby, and I refuse to take responsibility for it.”

“Logan,” she began as she stared at her hand covering my heart, no doubt feeling the racing heartbeat there as my chest rose and fell with the breaths I was having trouble regulating. “I—” She blinked before turning away again.

At the loss of her eyes on me, I felt my world begin to crumble. I was immediately drawn back into the dream where I watched her die, and how it felt to know I was losing her forever. My chest ached with a pain so strong I nearly doubled over with it.

“Is it my job?” I rasped. I cleared my throat, but the grittiness didn’t go away. “I will quit for you, little witch.”

Bridgette whipped her head around in surprise. “What? No! Never. I would never want you to change who you are for me, Logan. I know how much you love your job. Why would I ever want to take that from you?” she demanded with tears swimming in her eyes.

I swept my gaze over her beautiful face and realized that she needed more from me than I had given her. She had pushed aside a lifetime of fear and reservations to try for me. What my mate needed most of all, more than my promises or my presence, was all of me.

“But I love you more, little witch.”

Her indrawn breath was sharp as she stared up at me, searching my face for something only she could identify. “Logan...”

I placed my fingertip over her lips to silence her, needing her to hear what I had to say first before she tore my heart out of my chest. “From the moment I saw you, I felt a connection. Every single second I’ve spent with you since has done nothing but strengthen that to the point that I wouldn’t want to live without you. I would literally die to save you, Bridgette. If you were to leave me now, tomorrow, weeks from now, that isn’t going to change. If anything, my obsession with you will only grow worse as I get to know every part of you even more. I look forward to it, because I know I will only find more things to love about you.”

I swept my thumbs over her cheeks, wiping away the tears that fell as she stared up at me with hope in her eyes.

“You really feel that way about me?” she choked out after a long minute.

“Little witch,” I rasped, “I feel more for you than I could possibly put into words. Can’t you feel it here?” I asked as I brought her hand back to my chest.

She shook her head slowly and blinked away more tears. She pulled her hand away from my chest, and before I could tug it back, she placed our hands on her own chest. “I feel it here.”

I dropped my forehead to rest against hers, the relief so overwhelming that my knees threatened to collapse underneath me. “Thank fuck,” I breathed.

“Logan,” she said softly. “Can you take me to bed now?”

“Fuck, yes, I can. I will do anything for you, little witch.”

Chapter

Twenty-Six

brIDGETTE

Logan didn't haul me over his shoulder the way I had expected him to. Instead, he swept me up in his arms and carried me bridal style. I couldn't help but feel like some kind of medieval damsel being carried away by her strong and mighty warlord. I giggled at the thought.

"Something funny, little witch?" Logan glanced down at me as he took the stairs two at a time.

"I was just thinking that I feel like a dainty maiden in the strong arms of her mighty warlord, who is about to do very dangerous things to her." I laughed as he tossed me on the bed, then didn't hesitate to yank my skirt from my body.

"Well then," he said with a husky purr in a pretty good imitation of a Scottish accent. "Be prepared to have your maidenly sensibilities completely scandalized."

With those words that had my belly flipping in anticipation, Logan brought his hands to my blouse and yanked until the fabric ripped in half down the center. I gasped as I glanced down, seeing his big hands running up my stomach to cover my breasts completely.

"That was one of my favorites," I moaned as he pinched my nipples roughly, then

yanked my bra down to bare my breasts.

“I’ll buy you a hundred more,” he promised before latching onto one nipple and sucking deep. My back bowed as the sensations zipped through me in a line straight to my clit. His other hand toyed with my other nipple before he switched positions, paying attention to both breasts equally. I couldn’t keep still as I writhed on the bed, needing more, needing to touch him.

After our heart wrenching conversation downstairs, I thought that we both needed the closeness, the connection, to seal our confessions with our bodies. My mate loved me. It was a dream that was too good for my little girl’s heart to believe. I wanted it more than anything. For once in my life, I decided to let go of my fears, to trust in the Fates, and in my mate. I had a future I could look forward to, with Logan and our growing family.

I cried out as Logan’s hand drifted down my belly and found the heat of my center. With one large finger, he plunged into my depths, making me want more. Always more. I scrambled with my good hand to get his shirt up and over his broad, muscular back, needing the connection of skin to skin.

Logan removed his finger from my channel and brought it to his lips, sucking it into his mouth. Even after all the things we had done to each other, seeing him enjoy my taste still brought a rush of heat to my cheeks. He chuckled as he saw the flush rising. Lifting his torso from mine, Logan reached behind his head and had his shirt up and discarded before I could blink.

With admiration for his stunning physique, I ran my hands over his shoulders and pecs, loving the hard feel of his muscles, the dips and valleys of his abs as they flexed with every movement. “Have I told you how much I love your body?” I breathed out, unable to tear my gaze from him.

In a heartbeat, I was flipped over and suddenly found myself astride Logan's hips. "Babe, there is no way you could possibly love my body more than I love yours," he replied with a grin, right before he leaned up to take my breast back into his mouth.

I threw my head back on a moan at the incredible sensation and ground my pelvis into his, only then realizing that he hadn't taken his pants off yet. With a frustrated sound deep in my throat, I reached between us and unsnapped his slacks before ripping the zipper down. I had to raise up on my knees to shimmy down his pants and boxers, ignoring the twinge of pain in my wounded hand.

Logan took advantage of my distraction to unhook my bra, then he put me out of my frustrated misery by lifting his hips and helping to push his pants down as far as he could reach. At that point, we both gave up on removing any more clothing. With his pants around his knees and his shoes still on, I rose up again and gripped his cock tightly in my good hand.

"Little witch, if you don't get that snug little pussy wrapped around my cock?—"

I sank down in one swift movement and cried out at the sudden intrusion. "Oh. My. Goddess," I breathed out as our hips met and held. Logan was a big man all over, and it hadn't been very long since I'd lost my virginity to him. It was still a tight fit, and I probably should have taken it a little bit slower.

"Bridgette, babe. Are you alright?" Logan asked, his hands cupping my cheeks. I blinked open my eyes to see him staring up at me with concern. I smiled down at him when I realized that the expression I'd had trouble identifying in the past was love.

"I am wonderful. You're so big, but it feels so good."

Logan closed his eyes and groaned. "Ahh, little witch. You can't say things like that and expect me to maintain control."

I lifted my hips until just the tip of him remained inside me. Then I dropped back down, hard. I threw back my head and let out a cry of pleased pain. Before I could do it again, Logan's hands gripped my hips in a bruising hold that was likely to leave bruises by morning.

Suddenly, I was no longer in control. I may have been on top, but Logan set the pace. Over and over, I was lifted effortlessly, and all I could do was hold on to his bulging biceps as I enjoyed every second.

Logan's hips rose to meet every drop with a thrust that sent his cock into the deepest depths of my channel as he pummeled me from the inside. The pleasure outweighed the pain until all I felt was wave after wave of electric ecstasy.

Before I could take in what was happening, Logan had me on my back with one knee pressed up against my chest. With a grunt that made my stomach flip in the best way possible, Logan proceeded to thrust into me, pumping his hips at a rapid pace. I could feel the pleasure build to a crescendo that I found myself scared of; it was so intense.

"Fuck. You feel so fucking good. I will never get enough of you."

"Logan!" I cried out, digging my fingernails into his shoulders. "It's too much!"

"No," he snarled down into my face. "It's not enough. Feel me, little witch. Feel what I do to you. Feel how much I love you."

"Logan," I sobbed, my heart unable to take the flood of emotions at his words.

"I would die for you. I will never let you go."

"I love you, too!" I blurted, the words refusing to be held back. "I love you!" I screamed as the dam broke and the intense pleasure swept me away into an orgasm so

powerful that stars burst in front of my eyes.

“That’s it, love. Take me. Take everything I am, because I’m yours. Always,” Logan growled. With his teeth bared, he thrust harder than ever before, and I could feel his cock growing impossibly thicker inside of me. “My mate. Mine!” he roared. With those final words, he let go, his hot release throbbing inside me as it filled me to overflowing. Each pulse was like another electric shock, triggering a second orgasm nearly as intense as the first.

Panting and sweaty, Logan rolled us so we were lying on our sides facing each other. His hand held my leg firmly over his hip, keeping us locked firmly in place. He stared intently into my eyes, saying without words everything my heart needed to hear, and I cried.

Bursting into tears, I buried my face into his chest and wrapped my arms as tightly around him as I could. He’d done the impossible. He’d melted my heart and broken down every single wall I’d erected painstakingly over the years.

“I love you,” I choked out again. “I really do, Logan. I’m scared of how much I feel.”

“I know you do, little witch,” he said softly into my hair. “You always have. You just weren’t ready to admit it until now.”

He was right. He was always right.

“I haven’t told you something important, Logan,” I whispered.

I felt him stiffen slightly before tightening his arms as if he were afraid I was going to disappear. “What is it, Bridgette?”

I cleared my throat, but knew that there would be no better time than that moment.

“There are words to say,” I paused, carefully thinking about what I was explaining. There was no going back once I told him. “Words that would bond us together, forever.”

Logan slowly loosened his hold, then slid out of me to sit up on the bed as I lay there, hardly daring to breathe. When I didn’t move to join him, he turned me, then lifted until I was sitting across his lap. He tenderly brushed the hair from my eyes and examined my face carefully. “What words?” he finally asked, his voice husky and his eyes soft.

“They must not ever be taken lightly,” I began with a warning. “They are like a ritual, a vow. Much more serious than any wedding vows. Those can be broken.” I looked down, realizing what I’d said. Logan knew better than anyone what it was like to divorce.

I felt his fingertips brush the underside of my chin as he nudged my chin up gently. “What words, little witch?”

“They are binding words that will start the joining of our souls. It can never be undone. Some witches will take years before they finally say them...”

“Bridgette,” Logan demanded softly and waited until I looked back up at him. “Tell me what to say.”

My eyes swam with tears as I gazed at his handsome face. His gray eyes were so serious, so loving, I could feel my heart beating rapidly in my chest at how much emotion filled me, knowing that he wasn’t even remotely hesitating.

I lifted one hand and held it palm out and waited for him to do the same. I linked our fingers together as a symbol of the way our souls would soon be entwined. I recited the vows I had learned as a young child.

Yesterday,

Tomorrow,

Forever.

I vow to be yours

Until there is no moon.

Yesterday,

Tomorrow,

Forever,

You vow to be mine

Until there are no stars.

Yesterday,

Tomorrow,

Forever.

We are now one.

May the Goddess bless us.

So mote it be.

To my surprise, Logan repeated the words immediately, exactly as I had said them to him. As soon as the last word left his lips, a warmth began to emanate from where our hands were joined and spread rapidly down my arm, to my chest, and then flowed through the rest of my body.

I breathed out, as a sense of peace and the rightness of the moment overtook me. I rested my forehead against his as we both just breathed. Logan brought our still joined hands to his lips and kissed my knuckles as I looked into his eyes.

“I love you,” he told me in a whisper, and I mouthed the words back, knowing deep in my heart that the words were true. Both his and mine.

Eventually, we unwound ourselves from each other’s embrace, and Logan left to the bathroom to fetch a warm washcloth to clean us up. When he was done, he climbed back onto the bed and pulled the covers to our chins then tugged me back into his arms where I rested my cheek against his chest.

“We’re always going to have this?” I asked softly into the dark room.

“Forever,” he replied before kissing my forehead.

“Okay,” I mumbled, and let sleep overtake me.

Chapter

Twenty-Seven

LOGAN

I didn't think anything could have wiped away the glow of happiness I had been feeling since the night before, when I'd finally broken through to my little witch. But there I stood, back in front of my Captain's desk as he glowered up at me.

"Where the fuck did this weapon come from, Detective Storm?" he demanded, letting me know exactly why he had bellowed my name across the station floor the moment I walked through the elevator doors.

"It was brought to my desk by a uniformed officer," I replied, giving nothing away with my stare and stoic demeanor.

His fist hit the desktop, making the evidence bag that held the athame jump. "I know that Officer Mendez brought it to you. What I want to know is who sent it."

I gave him a dry look. "There wasn't a name attached to the package... sir."

For a long moment, he simply stared at me, then he ran a hand over his face. When he spoke again, he sounded more tired than I had ever heard him. "I need answers, Storm. I have brass breathing down my neck. Three homicides in our small town in three weeks is more than anyone wants to have. We have a serial killer on the loose with very few leads, and the one big break that falls into your lap, you can't even find

words for. What am I supposed to do with this?"

I ground my jaw, unable to give him the answers he wanted. At my silence, his face hardened into a fierce scowl. "I understand this case is unusual, and with your girlfriend involved, it places you in a tough situation. I don't believe that Bridgette Waters is a suspect, but I do believe that she is involved in this fucking mess up to her eyeballs. If you are protecting her, and in doing so are compromising the integrity of this case, I won't have any options left." He stared me down, likely hoping that the force of his glare would be enough to break me. "I'm going to ask you one more time, Detective Storm. Where did this weapon come from?"

"It was brought in by an unknown courier, wrapped in a brown paper that could have been purchased at any craft store from here to California. It had no name attached to it. I can't give you a name that I don't have, Captain," I gritted out.

With a heavy sigh, he sat back in his leather chair, making it creak with the movement, and scrutinized me. "I like you, Storm. You remind me a lot of myself when I was doing your job. You go after your cases, investigating them without letting up like a junkyard dog with a big meaty bone." He ran his hand over his face again, and I felt for the man, knowing I had placed him in a difficult situation. "I'm going to need your badge and service weapon," he grumbled.

Even though I had expected it, the words came like a blow to my sternum. Without an outward show of how much it broke me to do so, I pulled my shield from my belt and laid it on the Captain's desk. Then I withdrew my weapon from the holster under my arm. Pulling back the slide, I ensured there were no bullets resting in the chamber, then I ejected the magazine. Placing the two pieces on the desk next to the badge I had so tirelessly worked for, I straightened up, waiting to be dismissed.

"This isn't forever, Storm. You are the best homicide detective this department has seen in twenty years. I will do my best to see you reinstated within a week. Do you

hear me?”

I looked at the Captain and gave a jerk of my head, acknowledging his words. I stepped back, ready to turn and exit the office, knowing I had files that needed to be handed over to Mac, along with any notes that I hadn't filled in yet.

“One more thing, Detective.” The words had me halting my retreat, wondering if I'd ever hear that title come attached to my name again. “This case... it won't ever be solved, will it.”

I stared at the man that I admired before giving him the only answer I could. With a slow shake of my head, I gave him the truth. “This case, sir, is supernatural. It's impossible to solve it with human means. Will the killer be brought to justice? Yes. But they will never make it into a jail cell or into a judge's court to pay for their crimes. What you need is a special department that can investigate the paranormal. I don't know how that would work, but that's the only way a detective can do their due diligence without being fired for it.”

The Captain stared at me from his reclined position, and I could see the wheels spinning in his head. With a sharp nod of his own, he finally dismissed me, and I stalked out of the office to head to my own.

When I stepped into my office, I came to a stop, seeing Mac standing there with his hands in his pockets, already chewing on a piece of gum.

“So he did it,” he said gruffly.

I grunted, then stepped around to the desk, where I began gathering files.

“It's bullshit.”

I grunted again. “It is what it is.”

“Look, I will talk to him. There has to be some way out of this. He can’t just pull you off the case when you’ve done nothing wrong.”

“But I have,” I said. I thought of Bridgette and what I was doing to protect her. What I wouldn’t hesitate to do over and over again. She would always come first. “It’s the only way.”

Mac looked at me, his intelligent brown eyes searing into me knowingly. “Alright, Storm. I hope you know what you’re doing.”

I straightened the stack of folders and held them out, waiting for him to take them hesitantly. “I do.”

He brought the folders under his arm.

“I’ll call you once I get any new information on our cases.”

I shook my head. “Don’t do anything that will get yourself in trouble. There are a few notes that I needed to add to a couple of the files. I’ll send you an email. We’ll keep everything above board. I need you on this, Mac. I need you to make sure that our cases can’t be brought under scrutiny by the DA.”

I watched as his face fell and he nodded reluctantly. “Alright, man. I’ll do what you say. But I refuse to be given a new partner. You’ll be back soon.”

I nodded, not knowing if what he said was the truth. “Okay. Take care, Mac.”

I started to head for the door, not needing anything further from my desk that held nothing more than department issued supplies, but he stopped me with a hand on my

arm. “Stop that. Fuck,” he growled and I smiled. I couldn’t remember Mac ever losing his temper in all the years I’d worked with him. “You don’t do that shit. We are friends, and this fuckery doesn’t end that. I expect you to call me so we can hang out like usual. Bring your girl, we’ll crack some beers. But do not act like our friendship is over.”

I reached out a hand, and when he grabbed it, I was the one to pull him into me. With a couple of hard slaps on the back, I told him that we were good. He was right, this situation was tough on me, but the man had been there for me since I’d walked into my position, too eager, and barely under control. I had been ready to run instead of walk, wanting to find every bad guy to throw behind bars until he’d pulled on my reins and taught me the fine art of patience. With him as my mentor, I’d learned how to meticulously comb through evidence until a solid case had been built without cutting corners. Our cases were known for being ironclad, and the murderers we put behind bars stayed there.

“I’ll see you soon,” I said as I pulled back. “Tell the old lady I said hello, and I look forward to some apple cobbler soon.”

“She’ll hold you to that,” he called out as I headed through the door. I crossed the floor, ignoring the stares from the onlookers, and walked straight to the elevator. After pushing the button, I slipped my hands into my pockets and waited for the doors to slide open.

When I stepped onto the elevator, I allowed myself to turn around and take one last look at the department I’d worked my entire career to make it to. I vowed that I would return one day. After my woman was safe and the witch killer was dead, I would return. I just hoped the Captain took my words to heart. The department needed a special investigations team to work on the supernatural crimes that happened around town. It had been ignored for too long, but now that eyes had been opened, perhaps they would finally build that team.

When the doors closed, I closed my eyes and dropped my head. It was bittersweet. I'd lost my job, hopefully only temporarily, but I still had my woman. We were stronger than ever, and I knew that nothing could tear us apart.

As soon as the doors opened, I strode out with my head held high. I wouldn't allow any of the fuckers to look at me as if I were defeated. It was a dog eat dog world in the Police Department with every Tom, Dick, and Harry vying for the jobs that rarely came open. There were many who would love to see me crash and burn. Fuck them all. I would return.

I walked to my motorcycle and started it with a roar. Placing my helmet on my head, I revved the engine before tearing out of the precinct parking lot in a cloud of dust and the stench of burning rubber. I only had one place I felt like going, one face I wanted to see. Turning down Main Street, I made my way to Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs.

Chapter

Twenty-Eight

brIDGETTE

I was humming as I looked out the window and smiled at the brilliant sunlight streaming through the trees across the way. It looked like it was going to be a beautiful day. I stepped into the closet and chose a pretty dress that was one of my favorites. It was a flowy fabric with short ruffled sleeves and large red flowers on a white background. It had a wide, matching red belt that accentuated my slim waist. I couldn't help but smile as I ran my hands over my flat abdomen and turned sideways in the mirror. It wouldn't stay flat for long.

I picked out a pair of my favorite red heels and sat on the edge of the bed to slip them on. As I sat there, I glanced over to the pillow that Logan used and couldn't stop myself from hugging it close and inhaling deeply. I could have sat there all day, just enjoying the comfort of being surrounded by his scent, but I forced myself to stand up and head into the bathroom.

I chose to stay light with my makeup. After applying just enough mascara to my nearly invisible lashes, I swiped on some lip gloss. My bandaged hand caught my attention in the reflection, and I frowned as I held it up. It was already beginning to seep blood through the fabric.

Knowing I couldn't delay any longer, I headed downstairs, going straight for the makeshift first aid kit I'd put together the day before after a quick run to the nearest

pharmacy. Logan had wanted to know how I'd gotten hurt after seeing my hand bandaged. Right after that, he'd demanded that I heal myself. All I could do was play it off like it wasn't a big deal.

I awkwardly unwrapped the gauze and avoided looking too closely at the deep cut, then dropped the bandage in the trash can on the floor. Using a craft stick, I dipped one end into the small jar of healing salve that really didn't seem to be doing a damn bit of good, and smeared a dab over the raw cut. Once done, I rewrapped, tucking the end under, then tossed the scraps away.

With that done, I stepped through into the shop and headed straight for the front door. Halfway there, I stopped in my tracks and looked around in awe. Everywhere I glanced, I saw dragons and fairies. It looked like they'd had a full on party. Placing my hand over my heart, I let out a sigh of happiness.

I hadn't noticed how subdued the vibe in the shop had been over the last couple of weeks, but now, looking around at the dragons laying in the piles of gemstones, and the fairies on every shelf but their own, with bits of glitter on the ground, it was clear that the mood had shifted since the athame had been removed. Deep inside, I knew the danger wasn't over, but I was thrilled that my friends could be themselves again.

I began moving around the shelves, collecting fairies, and placing them where they belonged while laughing at some of the locations I'd found them. A hint of iridescent green caught my eye, and I saw one of them up on the shelf, snuggled in with my guardian crow. Frank was puffed up, with his chest out. For all his intense watchfulness, he had a relaxed air about him.

Using air magic, I lifted the fairy and guided her into my hand. "You silly girl," I said as I gently ran a finger over the rim of her shimmering green wing. "It's dangerous to be so high up there. What if you had fallen?"

Her tinkling laughter made me smile, and I placed her on the shelf with the others. Making my way over to the dragons, I paused, seeing how content they looked with their tails wrapped around their chosen piles of colorful stones. “Why don’t I leave you gentlemen where you are today. As long as you promise to stay put and not cause any trouble?”

One of the shimmering black dragons blew out a tiny stream of fire that ended with two perfect circles of white smoke drifting up from his nostrils, making me giggle. “Very nice. I’m impressed.”

I finally turned to go to the door and unlocked it while flipping the sign around. My eyes lit up when I caught sight of Shayla coming down the sidewalk, holding two paper cups from our favorite coffee shop. I held the door open and waited for her to enter through the door to squeal in happiness, and threw my arms around her.

“Hey, friend!” Shayla laughed as she held the cups out to her sides so they wouldn’t become casualties of my over exuberant greeting. She held out one of the cups, and I took it gratefully, immediately inhaling the delicious scent of sweet peppermint and white chocolate mocha.

“Oh, goddess. Have I told you how much I love you lately?” I peeked up at her from over the rim of the cup and glared. “As a matter of fact, no, I haven’t because I haven’t seen you in days. What the fuck, Shayla? Has the hotty professor been keeping you busy?” I demanded, then widened my eyes as the tips of her ears went pink. “Holy shit!”

I grabbed her by the arm and began to drag her through the shop to the register where we always rested and chatted, not caring if I made her spill her coffee all over her power suit. I pointed at her chest. “Spill it, ma’am.”

Shayla blew out a breath and leaned against the glass. “Girl. I don’t even know where

to start. The man is just too much.”

I raised an eyebrow. Doing the math in my head, I thought about how much time she had left until her semester was over and came up with another couple of weeks, give or take. “Have you two actually...”

“Not exactly,” she began. “I’m still working in his office. With the door closed and locked, I might add. The man loves to watch every move I make. But let me tell you—over the last few days I’ve learned he has a filthy, dirty, sexy mouth. The things that man says, Bridge. Half the time, I have to run to the little girl’s room so I can mop up the wetness dripping down my thighs.”

I fanned my face as I pictured what she was saying. “Oh, I bet you are wearing out the batteries of your vibrator every night.”

She turned to face the window. “I do, but not in the way you’re thinking. I’m not allowed to O. He says on the day of my final exam, he wants me to head straight to his office and wait for him. Bent over and pantyless.”

I gasped. “Does he know you’re a virgin?”

She nodded slowly. “He said he would be gentle, but there is no way in hell he can wait to get me in a bed. Months of foreplay, Bridge. Months . Honestly, I don’t think I could wait another minute either.”

“I’m both thrilled and a little scared for you,” I admitted. “The man definitely puts off big dick energy.” I glanced out the window and immediately straightened up. “What the fuck,” I muttered. I slammed my coffee cup down on the glass and took off for the door with Shayla hot on my heels.

“What’s wrong?” she demanded as she watched me head for the street. I barely

looked both ways before marching straight over to the flower shop across the way.
“Who’s that?”

“That’s Logan’s ex-wife,” I muttered angrily.

Kristy was crying, trying to pull her arm from a man who looked like he could have been a banker or a lawyer. He was dressed in a navy blue suit jacket and slacks with brown loafers that probably cost more than the heels I was wearing, and my shoes weren’t cheap. He had a solid grip on Kristy’s arm, and I could tell that it was going to leave a mark.

“Please, Jake. Just let me go,” she begged as she used her free arm to hold onto her baby bump over the bright red dress she was wearing.

“You heard the lady,” I called out as I reached the couple. “Let her go.”

The man barely spared me a glance and scoffed before turning right back to Kristy and hissing at her. “I know you’ve been trying to call your stupid meathead ex-husband.” He did a double take, looking back at me standing there with my hands on my hips with a fierce scowl on my face, and started laughing. “Holy shit. Isn’t this the bitch your ex has been fucking?”

Kristy blinked her teary eyes and glanced at me, a pleading look on her face. I turned back to the man. “It doesn’t matter who the fuck I am or who I’m fucking. Get your greasy hands off of her. Or does your tiny dick grow only when you are mistreating women? She’s fucking pregnant you jackass.”

He sneered down at me and tugged Kristy even harder until she crashed into his side. “Fuck off bitch,” he snarled. “This is between me and my woman. She thinks that she can ditch me with my baby growing in her belly? Never going to happen.” He leaned in close enough that I could smell the stale cigarette smoke on his breath, nearly

making me gag. “Now get lost.”

“I don’t think I will, Jake. You see, I don’t take kindly to women beaters. I doubt the detective that Kristy was married to would be very pleased to know his ex-wife is being mistreated either.”

He let out a deep laugh. “You think he’s going to give a shit when this bitch cheated on him with me? What are you going to do? Call him up and have your man come to the rescue of another woman?”

I smiled wickedly and I heard Shayla mutter “oh shit” from behind me. “Oh, no, sir. I don’t need a man to fight my battles.” I darted my good hand out and gripped the man’s cock to find out he did, indeed, have a tiny dick. I gave Kristy a what the fuck look. “You cheated on Logan’s massive cock for this shrimp dick loser?”

Kristy hiccupped and shrugged her dainty shoulders. “I was being stupid.”

I scoffed, then turned back to the man who had frozen in place while glaring daggers between me and Kristy. “I’m going to give you one chance to let the woman go,” I warned in a low, serious tone that couldn’t be mistaken for anything but deadly.

Instead of making the smart move, he squeezed his fist around her arm, making Kristy cry out in pain. Without hesitating, I allowed the pool of power that had been building in my arm rush out and into his micropenis. In the next heartbeat, he was on the ground, writhing in pain as he cupped his junk.

I bent down, making sure I did so with bent knees pointed to the side like the proper lady my mother taught me to be, and so he couldn’t catch a glimpse of what only Logan had the privilege of seeing. The stench of urine reached my nostrils as I pressed my thumb against his forehead and infused my voice with magic.

“You’re going to forget Kristy exists. From this day forward, you don’t know who she is. Every first of the month, you will send her child support, then promptly forget about her again. You won’t ask to see your child. You will do this for the next eighteen years, even if you don’t know why.” I shoved my thumb harder into his forehead, just because he’d made me mad. “So mote it be.” I released the hold on my magic, then stood up to face Kristy.

“This man won’t ever bother you again.” Kristy was sobbing, her shoulders heaving with her cries, and threw her arms around me.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

I put my arm around her shoulders and turned her in the direction of Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs. “Come on. Let’s get you inside with a nice hot cup of tea.” Shayla quickly joined me on the other side of the woman, wrapping an arm around her waist. Together, the three of us crossed the street.

As we entered the shop, Shayla let go and took off to the back, and as I led Kristy inside, I took her straight to the back and slowly up the stairs as she sniffled. By the time we reached the kitchen, I could see that Shayla already had the electric teapot going with a glass teacup and one of my personal mixtures waiting to be steeped.

I nodded my thanks as we passed and led Kristy to my small living room, where I sat her on the couch. Shayla walked over, grabbed a throw blanket from a chair, and tucked it around Kristy’s legs.

“Here, sweetie,” she crooned. “You look like you could use some warming up.”

Kristy blinked up at the two of us who were hovering over her. “Thank you,” she whispered.

I nodded toward Shayla. “This is my best friend, Shayla. Would you like for me to call someone? Marlene?”

Kristy shook her head, then nodded. I pulled out my phone. “Can I get her number?”

Kristy rattled off Marlene’s number in a shaky voice, and once I hit dial, I walked from the room, heading into the bedroom where I kept some potions. I selected a bright purple vial before plucking up a green one when Marlene answered. I quickly explained the situation before hanging up, not wanting to speak to the woman more than necessary. I may not like seeing women in distress, but that didn’t mean I had to be BFFs with the one who’d been harassing me for zero fucking reasons.

I walked back into the living room to see Shayla handing over the steaming cup of tea and gritted my teeth at the obvious bruises dotting Kristy’s arms. I was certain it wasn’t the first time he’d been rough with her.

I handed her the vials. “The purple one is to calm your nerves. Think of it as valium in a bottle, only it won’t knock you on your ass. The green one is for healing to get rid of the bruises and make the pain go away. Don’t worry,” I assured her as she looked down at the small glass bottles. “They are safe for the baby. I swear it.”

Kristy looked up at me with teary eyes before nodding. One by one, she pulled the corks out of the bottles and chugged them back, making a surprised hum at the flavor. I held out my hand for the corks and vials with a smile. Everyone was so surprised that my potions weren’t nasty. Even other witches who came to me for different reasons were also pleasantly shocked by the flavors.

I sat down on the coffee table in front of her. “Do you want to talk about it?” I asked gently.

All three of us turned to the stairs when heavy footsteps sounded, and I blinked in

surprise when Logan appeared in the doorway.

Chapter

Twenty-Nine

LOGAN

When I walked inside the shop, I was surprised to find Bridgette nowhere to be seen. I've never known her to leave the store unattended before. She had always been close by, even if she was in the back. So when I heard voices coming from upstairs, I grew concerned.

I took the stairs two at a time, then came to a stop when I made it to the doorway. To say I was shocked and a little bit angry to see my ex-wife sitting in my mate's living room would be an understatement.

"What's going on here?" I demanded in a harsh tone. I told those women to leave Bridgette alone. If they think I don't know they haven't stopped harassing her, then they don't give me enough credit. I've known all along, I just wanted to let my little witch deal with it how she saw fit. But coming into her home was going much too far.

Bridgette jumped to her feet and rushed over to me, and I immediately wrapped my arm around her waist and tugged her into me. She blinked up at me with those soft, mossy green eyes. "What are you doing here?" she asked quietly.

I placed a kiss on her lips. "I'll explain later. Can you tell me why you have Kristy sitting on your couch?"

“Well,” she began, suddenly looking a little nervous and making me raise one eyebrow as I waited for the explanation that she seemed to be trying to form. “There was a little altercation out on the street.”

A tall, beautiful black woman snorted at what I assumed was an oversimplification of the matter. She strode forward with her hand out. “You must be Logan,” she said with a brilliant smile. “I’ve heard so much about you. I’m her,” she pointed at Bridgette, “best friend since forever.” She looked down at her phone, then at my girl. “I have to run so I’m not late for school. It’s been wild.” Her face softened as she looked back toward Kristy, who had her head down and was slowly sipping on what looked to be a cup of hot herbal tea. “Take care with her. She’s had a rough morning.” The woman leaned in and gave Bridgette a kiss on her cheek. “Later, girl.”

“Bye, Shayla,” Bridgette replied before turning to look back up at me. “Want to have a seat? I think there are some things that need to be discussed.”

I was tempted to say fuck no . After the other day when Bridgette was ready to back out of our relationship for the sake of Kristy’s baby, I wanted nothing to bring that nonsense back into her head. At her pleading look, I reluctantly nodded. With a small smile, she led me over to the couch.

I shifted the one armchair so I was facing my ex-wife and sat down while Bridgette took a seat next to Kristy, turning her body so she was facing her. Kristy finally glanced up from her tea and gave me what I assumed was supposed to be a smile, but instead resembled more of a grimace.

“Hey, Logan.”

“Kristy,” I replied gruffly. “What’s going on? Why are you here?”

I watched as Bridgette reached over and grabbed Kristy’s hand. My mate was giving

my ex comfort. What the fuck?

“Logan,” Bridgette began, “this morning I saw a man accosting Kristy out in front of the flower shop across the street.”

I jerked my gaze back to Kristy to see her wipe a stray tear from her cheek. I searched for any visible signs of injury, but she appeared to be well. Physically, at least. “Who was it? What happened?”

Kristy’s voice was hesitant and cracked several times as she spoke. “It was Jake. He-he saw my phone this morning. He knew I tried to call you. He got so angry,” she finished on a harsh inhale, but took in a deep breath before letting it back out again slowly. “Bridgette saw and stopped him.”

I glanced sharply back over toward Bridgette and began to search her for any signs of injury. “Did he touch you?” I demanded, ready to go hunt the fucker down and put him in the ground if he so much as said a harsh word to her.

Bridgette looked offended that I would even suggest such a thing. “Of course not,” she scoffed.

Kristy glanced at her and gave her a grateful, watery smile. “She was amazing.” She turned back to me, a face full of regret. “I need to tell you how sorry I am for everything.”

Bridgette looked between us. “Who is Jake?”

Kristy sighed in defeat as her shoulders slumped. “Jake is a defense attorney,” she began, and I leaned back in the chair. It appeared my ex wife was finally going to explain what the fuck had happened a year ago to implode our marriage. “He hated Logan because he could never win a case that he’d been responsible for. The

evidence collected was always too strong. He hated that he couldn't find any loopholes to slip through to get evidence thrown out."

I knew all that. He wasn't the only defense attorney who'd expressed frustration when taking on a client that I'd put behind bars. He just happened to be the one who didn't bother to hide his hatred.

"After the dinner with my mom that one night," she blinked up at me. "You remember when she started pressuring you for," she glanced quickly at Bridgette, then finished lamely, "pressuring you?"

I nodded once. Of course, I remembered. Things had already been rocky between us, but that night seemed to be the catalyst for the destruction of our marriage.

"I ran into Jake the next day. He was so charming, laying it on so thick. I was upset and let him convince me to go to a hotel room. It was stupid. I don't know what I was thinking. I regretted it immediately." I watched as she wiped away another tear. "I never wanted to see him again. I knew I had made a terrible mistake. But then he showed up at our door while you were at work. He had pictures. He must have set up his phone to record or something. I don't know." She shook her head.

"He threatened to tell you if I didn't sleep with him again. So that's how the affair began." She let out a bitter laugh. "I hated every second of it, but didn't want to lose you. Of course, you found out anyway. You're a fucking detective. And I lost you."

I wanted to feel bad for her. It was easy to see she regretted what she'd done. But she'd made all the wrong choices. Kristy is an intelligent woman who knew what the consequences would be for fucking around on a man like me.

"Anyway. As soon as you filed for divorce, I wanted to break things off with him. He kept pushing me back into sleeping with him over and over again. He seemed to get

off more on hurting you than he did fucking me.” She shook her head ruefully. “He never did seem to understand that you weren’t hurt. You were... done.”

She was absolutely correct.

“Eventually, I finally stopped seeing him, even though I knew it was too late for us. The day our divorce was finalized, I was so miserable. I ran into Jake outside the courthouse. Sometimes, when I look back, I think he planned to be there. I allowed him to convince me to sleep with him one more time.”

She looked down and ran a hand gently over her protruding belly that seemed to have doubled in size since the last time I saw her. “That’s when this baby was conceived.”

The bell over the door jingled, and Bridgette stood up quickly. “Shit. I need to lock that door. I’ll be right back.” She let go of Kristy’s hand and ran her fingers over my shoulder as she passed.

“I really am sorry, Logan. I can’t tell you how much. I should never have listened to my mother. None of this would have happened if it weren’t for that night,” she sniffled.

With a sigh, I stood up and walked over to where she was slumped on the couch, looking defeated. Kneeling in front of her, I took one of her hands. “Kristy, look at me.” When she lifted her head, I saw the red rimmed eyes and slightly puffy cheeks she always got whenever she’d cry. For a brief moment, I caught a glimpse of the younger woman I had been enamoured with once upon a time.

“I want you to think back. Back before that night at your mom’s house. Back before the affair and divorce. Sweetheart, we weren’t happy.”

My words had her jerking back and spluttering a denial. “No! No, that’s not true! We

were in love! We were happy.”

I slowly shook my head. “You wanted someone I wasn’t. Someone I could never be for you.”

Shame crossed her features, and she looked away. “I really did love you, Logan.”

I squeezed her hand gently. “I know you did, Kristy. But we both know that it wasn’t meant to be.”

She smiled sadly and nodded. “You’re right. And, I’ve seen the way you look at Bridgette. You never looked at me the way I see you staring at her. She’s your whole world. I’m happy for you. I want you to know that.”

The sounds of two people coming up the stairs had both of us turning to look at the doorway. When Marlene appeared next to Bridgette, looking like an avenging angel, ready to slay all of Kristy’s demons, I bit back a smirk and stood to my feet. Holding out a hand, Bridgette came to me and let me wrap my arms around her.

Kristy jumped to her feet and ran into Marlene, who immediately hugged her close. “Oh, honey. I heard what happened. Are you okay?”

Kristy gave a jerky nod. “I’m fine. I just want to go home and sleep.” She paused, as if thinking about her words. “Oh my god! I don’t have a home anymore! Jake made me move in with him. What am I supposed to do now?”

“What the hell do you mean?” Marlene chided gently. It was the softest tone I thought I’d ever heard from her. “You will come to live with me, of course. You’ve always been welcome at my home. You know that.”

“But you’re allergic to dogs,” Kristy said, then turned to me. “Logan, I should never

have kept Sammy from you. Would you...”

Bridgette pushed forward before I could answer. “He’d love to.”

Kristy smiled and nodded. “Okay. I’ll drop her off along with her things later.”

“That will be great!” Bridgette beamed, and I couldn’t help but hold her closer, so thankful for the beautiful little witch I was blessed with.

Marlene wrapped an arm around Kristy’s shoulders. “Come on, honey. Let’s go get your things and get you moved in.” She stopped at the top of the stairs and looked back at my girl. “Thank you for taking care of her.” She glanced down at Kristy, her expression full of raw, painful longing, until she looked back up, the hard mask she had always worn since I knew her firmly back in place.

Bridgette inclined her head in acknowledgement, and Marlene did the same, a show of mutual respect, though I doubted the women would ever be friends.

As soon as the sound of their footsteps faded, Bridgette tilted her head as she stared at the empty doorway. “Huh. I didn’t see that one coming.”

“Yep,” I replied.

She turned to look at me out of the corner of her eye and squinted. “You knew,” she accused.

I shrugged. “I suspected. Marlene has hated me since the moment we met and has always been by Kristy’s side. She’s always done all she could to stay close to her.”

“That’s so incredibly sad. I couldn’t imagine what it would be like to see the person you love fall in love with someone else. She had to watch her get married. I bet she

was even the maid of honor.”

I nodded. “Maybe things can be different this time around,” I said quietly. With them living together, maybe Kristy will see what she’s been blind to all this time.” I shrugged. “Maybe not. But there’s a chance for them now. It’s up to Marlene to show her.”

I turned to my little witch. “So, do you want to tell me what really happened with Jake today?”

She grinned and shrugged. “I just showed him the error of his ways. I don’t think he’ll be hurting any more women in the future.”

I eyed her suspiciously. “Isn’t there a rule about harming none, or something like that?”

“There is,” Bridgette nodded. “But there’s also a rule about not hurting the innocent. The Goddess doesn’t like it when women and children are hurt. When it’s a pregnant woman, she gets really furious. Sometimes she will use a witch as her hand to deal vengeance.”

“I bet you hated every second of being the tool of vengeance for a Goddess,” I remarked dryly.

“Oh,” she said, all mock seriousness as her eyes twinkled with mischief. “I was so distraught.”

I pulled her in and kissed her forehead with a chuckle. “I just bet, you little troublemaker. What do you want to do now that the drama is over?”

Bridgette bounced on her toes and clapped her hands excitedly. I couldn’t help but let

my eyes drift down to enjoy the sight of her breasts bouncing. What could I say? I was a fucking man. “Can we go get burgers? And you can tell me why you’re here in the middle of the day.”

I grunted. “It will make a scintillating dinner conversation.” I took her hand as I thought of what Mac had said before I’d left the station. “What would you say about having company?”

Chapter

Thirty

brIDGETTE

I could admit I was a bit nervous to be meeting Mac's wife. I'd built her up in my head to be some formidable woman. When Logan asked about having them join us at the bar for dinner, I asked questions, of course. I wanted to know what to expect. All he'd really said was that she'd insisted on meeting me, but that she was a sweet woman and a great cook. Why that simple description would send me into an internal freak out, I had no idea.

Mac and his wife were already at the bar waiting for us when we pulled up in Logan's truck, which I hadn't even known was parked at the shop. I was relieved to see it. I figured that, in my condition, it was probably wise not to ride on a motorcycle. I needed to figure out a way to tell Logan after the mess with the killer was dealt with. Hell, I had a lot of people I needed to tell who were probably going to be livid I hadn't spilled the news immediately.

Logan told me to sit and wait. I decided to graciously sit and wait as he walked around the hood of the large black truck. When he opened the door and offered his hand, I grinned at him.

"Why, thank you, kind sir."

"Cute," he grinned down at me, then gave me a swift kiss on the lips. "Ready?"

I nodded. “Do you think she’ll like me?”

He side-eyed me as we walked up to the door. “Babe, what isn’t there to like?”

I squeezed his hand. “Good answer.”

When we walked inside, Logan received the same treatment as last time, and he waved back while calling out a hello to the crowd. He led us over toward the same table we’d sat at before to see Mac and a pretty brunette with big blue eyes and an even bigger smile waiting for us there with drinks already in hand.

Logan pulled out the chair for me, and I could see Mac’s wife watching closely. Then, she nodded to herself as if in approval as Logan helped me scoot the chair in before taking his own.

Before anyone could begin the introductions, Mac’s wife stuck her hand out across the table. “You must be Bridgette. I’m Bobbi Jo. My real name is Barbara JoAnn, but it’s such a mouthful that everyone except my mother has been calling me Bobbi Jo since I was born.” She said all that without even taking a breath, her sweet southern accent as thick as buttermilk pie. “You’re so pretty! I absolutely adore your hair. Doesn’t she have beautiful hair, Logan Storm?”

She turned her sharp blue eyes to Logan, who was grinning widely. “Her hair is gorgeous, Bobbi Jo.”

She nodded her head again with a small smile playing across her lips.

“Bobbi Jo here has been dying to meet you ever since I told her that Logan found himself a new woman,” Mac interjected.

“I knew right from the start that Kristy girl was no good for Logan.” Bobbi Jo waved

a hand, her wedding ring flashing under the lights.

“Bobbi Jo,” Mac said in warning, though he looked at his wife with an indulgent smile.

“I know, I know. I won’t talk bad about the woman,” she replied, then looked back at me. “What do you think about marriage and babies?”

I choked on a startled laugh and turned to look for Charlene, needing some water while wishing I could ask for something stronger. Bobbi Jo was sweet, I could tell. She was also intense and didn’t mince words. I sighed with relief when I saw Charlene walking over. Grateful for the short reprieve, I smiled up at her.

“Hey, Charlene. It’s good to see you again.”

Her shrewd gaze took me in as she smiled at me. “Bridgette, you look great. Glad you brought Storm back in so soon. Usually, we don’t see him twice in one month.”

“I love the burgers here,” I laughed. “I think I might be forcing him to come in a little more often.”

“Good,” she replied with a wink. “Since I already know what you want, does anyone else want something different?”

Everyone seemed to be of the same mind as me, all ordering their own burger and fries, with Bobbi Jo getting sweet potato fries instead. Just thinking about the food coming up had my mouth watering.

“Be right back, everyone.” Charlene turned to Logan and put her hand on his shoulder in a little pat. “I’ll bring you a beer, yeah?”

“That’d be great. Thanks, Char.”

With a nod, she was gone, and I was left to face the firing squad again. I looked at Bobbi Jo, who was sitting there with an expectant expression. Internally, I sighed, knowing I wouldn’t get out of her interrogation. “I never gave marriage and babies much thought, to be honest,” I admitted. “I, uh,” I glanced at Logan, who gave me a sympathetic smile, but didn’t jump in to help save me. The ass. “Kind of had poor role models of men growing up, so I had pretty much sworn off all men. Until Logan walked in asking me about murder.”

“Oh, my. That’s... I don’t know what that is. How sad,” Bobbi Jo patted her chest. “And now? Are you thinking about it now?”

“Bobbi Jo,” Mac said, that same warning tone in his voice that told me all I needed to know about how often his wife pried into some poor soul’s life in a well meaning manner. “Why don’t we let Storm and Bridgette figure out their own relationship?”

“But, I was just asking a simple question, honey.” She turned back to look at me. “I didn’t offend you, did I, Bridgette? I am so sorry if I pried too hard. It’s a curse. I always want the best for people, you know?”

I reached across the table because I could sense that she really was upsetting herself at the thought of offending me. Taking her hand, I gave it a gentle squeeze. “No, Bobbi Jo, I’m not offended. I understand that you care about Logan and want to make sure that I am a good fit for him. I appreciate that. Maybe one day I’ll tell you my story. Right now, I’ll say that Logan and I are very committed to each other. I plan to stay with him for a long, long time.”

I pulled my hand back as Charlene approached the table with our drinks, and Bobbi Jo sniffled delicately. “That’s so good to hear.”

Charlene was even more perceptive than I had expected her to be. Even knowing that she had incredible instincts based on her connection with the land, she seemed to take one good look at me and figured me out.

After setting down Logan's beer, she placed a glass down in front of me. I wasn't sure what I was looking at when she first slid it over. It was pale yellow on top and red at the bottom of the glass, with several cherries floating in with all the ice. But after taking the first hesitant sip, just in case I was wrong about her intuition, I was delighted to find the refreshing taste of cherries mixed with the light fizz of the ginger ale.

"That looks interesting," Logan had commented after watching me hum in approval.

"Just a little something I thought my new friend here would appreciate," Charlene replied with a wink shot my way.

"Thank you," I mouthed, and she nodded knowingly.

"What is it? That looks delicious," Bobbi Jo said as she took her own sip of wine.

"It's my own concoction," Charlene replied evasively, and I could have jumped up and hugged her. "Your food is about ready. Bobbi Jo, would you like another glass of Moscato?"

She looked down at her glass, which was mostly empty, then shrugged one shoulder.

"Heavens, why not. Thanks, hun," she replied.

"You still good with your beer?" Charlene took in Mac. He asked for one more, then she walked away, yelling at someone to hold their horses when they shouted for another drink from across the bar.

Once we'd gotten our food, the conversation turned less intense as Mac and Bobbi Jo told me stories of their three girls, who were all teenagers and, as Mac swore, the cause of his hair turning gray. We were all sitting there with our table cleared of our empty plates, laughing at a story of their antics, when Logan's phone dinged with an incoming message. We all turned to watch as he pulled it out to check what had been sent.

When he looked up at me with a grin, I got a flutter of butterfly wings in my belly at the reminder of how handsome he was.

"Kristy is ready to bring Samantha to the shop. Are you ready to go?" he asked as he tucked his phone away.

"That's great!" I picked up the glass with what was left of my second drink and sucked on the straw until there was nothing left but ice cubes. "Yes! Let's go. I can't wait to meet her."

We stood together as Mac and Bobbi Jo did the same. "We should be going too. It was so good to meet you, Bridgette," Bobbi Jo stepped forward and pulled me into a big hug. I froze for half a second before wrapping my own arms around her. It felt nice and made me miss my mother terribly. Bobbi Jo may not have been old enough to be my mom, but she radiated motherly vibes. "You are perfect for Logan," she whispered in my ear. "I'm so glad he found you."

Her words brought moisture to my eyes, which I quickly blinked away. "He's the perfect one," I whispered back.

"No, sweetheart. He's a good man, but he needed you more than you'll ever know." With those words echoing in my mind, we said goodbye and promised to get together again soon. There had been no talk of police work or the murders during our conversations. Other than the beginning when Bobbi Jo had been prying for

information, the evening had been lighthearted and fun. It was just what Logan and I had both needed.

When we got back to the shop, I left Logan to wait outside for Kristy and ran upstairs to make room for Sammy. I looked around the small apartment space and sighed. It would have to do. She wasn't a huge dog, but the space just wouldn't do for long. She would need room to play and run around. I looked out the window to see headlights pull up toward the back door. Logan and I would need to have a discussion soon about getting a larger space. From what he'd told me, his own apartment wasn't much bigger than mine.

I rearranged the couch and chair by pushing them over a little to allow for a dog bed to fit by the window. Then I took the throw blankets out of the basket on the floor for something to put her toys in. While I was getting the space ready, Mortimer strolled in, his tail twitching.

"You're going to have a new roommate," I warned. "I need you to be nice to her."

Mortimer sniffed haughtily, then jumped onto the coffee table and sat, his long, fluffy tail wrapping around his feet. Then he just stared at the door as if waiting for a show to start. I rolled my eyes, then turned to the door when I heard footsteps heading towards us.

Samantha walked in, her head moving quickly back and forth, trying to take in everything as she seemed to be smiling with her tongue hanging out. It was probably a grand adventure to her. That, and she was likely extremely happy to be with Logan.

"Oh my Goddess, you're so pretty!" I gushed as she walked into the living room. We both froze when I heard my words echoing in my head, but not from my voice. "Samantha?" I asked hesitantly.

“What’s going on?” Logan asked, holding a large dog pillow and a canvas bag that seemed to be filled with all manner of dog items.

“Mine!” Samantha said in a thrilled tone, then barked.

“Holy shit!” I gasped, then dropped to my knees. Samantha didn’t hesitate. She launched herself into my arms as I laughed, and we both hugged each other as well as a human and a dog could. I looked up at Logan, who was smiling but still looked slightly confused.

“Samantha is my familiar,” I grinned up at my mate, then looked back down at his dog. “I can’t believe it. All these years, I wondered if I’d ever find my familiar, and you belonged to my mate.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Logan chuckled and shook his head, all while looking too smug for his own good. “See, I told you we belonged together. It was Fate.”

“Well, yeah. What else would it be?” I deadpanned.

“Smartass. What does this mean for Samantha?” Logan dropped the pillow on the floor under the window and set the bag down. As he dug out the contents, pulling out dog bowls and a small bag of food, Samantha got up and began to explore while Mortimer watched her with his yellow eyes and feigned disinterest by cleaning his paws.

“It means she will live as long as I do. Familiars that are bonded to their witches join their lifelines together.” I stood to my feet and smiled down at Logan’s dog, my familiar. I grinned as I looked back at Logan. “I guess this makes her more mine than yours,” I teased.

He walked over to me, wrapped an arm around my waist, and pulled me into him. “I

don't care, as long as both of my girls are happy." He kissed me, and we both looked down to see Samantha sitting in front of us, her tail wagging happily as she took us both in.

"Are you my mommy, too? Like mommy Kristy?" she asked.

I stifled a laugh. "I guess you could say that."

"Yay!"

Chapter

Thirty-One

brIDGETTE

With the shower running in the background, I got myself ready. After getting Samantha settled in for the night, we'd gone to the bedroom to get ready for bed. I was dressed in a sheer negligee that I picked up from a local boutique with Shayla's help. If I would have followed her input, I would have been wearing nothing but strings and crotchless panties, but I somehow won the argument, and instead I was wearing the prettiest soft pink nightie that showed off my curves underneath. As I looked at myself in the mirror, I couldn't help but blush at the hint of my rosy nipples peeking through the material, along with the shadow of red hair at the juncture of my thighs.

When the shower turned off, I took a deep breath. It was time to knock Logan on his ass without ending up there myself.

Logan walked out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped low around his waist, and I licked my lips at the delicious sight of his abdominals flexing as he rubbed another towel over his wet hair. I wanted to trace the deep grooves of the vee that ran across and down his hips with my tongue. There was just something about a man with an Adonis belt that did it for me. And the fact that my man had one, well, I was one lucky, lucky girl.

"Whoa," he mouthed silently as he took me in. He was standing there, frozen as if he

could hardly breathe. It sure did give a girl some happy shivers to be looked at as if she were everything he could ever want.

I sauntered over towards him, making sure my hips were swinging just right, the way I had practiced in the mirror. I had a plan of seduction, and I intended to follow through, using every asset I was given by the Goddess and my mother.

I ran a fingertip over his chest, letting the sharp end of my nail graze over one flat brown nipple as I walked around him. My hand drifted over his shoulder, then along the stiff muscles of his back as he held himself rigid, waiting to see what I was going to do next.

“Little witch, what are you doing?” he asked gruffly.

I came back around to stand in front of him again and smiled. “I’m seducing you,” I replied with a wink. “Is it working?”

“Fuck, babe. All you have to do is be in the room and my cock is hard for you. Seeing you like this?” he shook his head and gripped his hard shaft that was tenting the towel and squeezed. “I want inside you more than I want to breathe.”

I pouted up at him as I traced over his abs and down to the edge of the towel that was low enough to show his neatly trimmed pubic hair just above the root of his cock. Running my finger back and forth in a teasing manner, I tilted my head. “Is my big, strong man having trouble staying in control?”

He growled low in his throat, making his chest rumble, and I could feel the dampness coating my thighs. I was going to have a hard time sticking to the plan if he kept acting so fierce and sexy. “Bridgette,” he warned.

“Logan,” I said quietly. “You have been so stressed out these last few days with your

job hanging in the balance. I know you want your badge back, and it has you frustrated. Please. Let me do this for you tonight. Okay?"

He stared down at me, his chest rising and falling with his deep breaths, then finally gave in. "Alright, little witch. But as soon as you're done playing, you're mine to punish for making me wait."

My whole body shivered at his warning tone, sparks of electricity lighting up my nerve endings. At that moment, I wanted nothing more than to lie back and give him his way. But then I shook my head and came back to my senses. I had to stay in control for my plan to work.

I knocked his big hand out of the way and found the edge of the towel as he let out another growl. When I found hot, warm skin, I wrapped my hand around his length and stroked. "Okay, big guy. My turn first, though," I winked.

I took both hands and pulled the towel apart to reveal his heavy cock that was already dark and beginning to leak at the tip. Licking my lips, I considered dropping to my knees right where we stood in the middle of the floor, but I needed him laid out on the bed. His knees wouldn't be able to hold him for long.

I gave him a shove, and I knew I was only able to move him because I'd taken him by surprise. He stumbled back a couple of steps until the backs of his knees hit the edge of the mattress, and he fell, making the bed frame creak ominously with his heavy weight. As soon as he was on his ass, I pushed again until he was on his back, staring up at me.

I finally dropped to my knees in front of him. As he made a grab for me, trying to haul me off the floor and up onto his body, I stopped him instantly. Sparks danced from my fingers as I wrapped them around his girth and stroked, letting the sparks ignite tiny bites of electricity over his swollen flesh.

His groan was immediate, and he stopped pulling on me and instead dug his fingers through my hair, tangling the strands in his fists. “Fuck. Fuck . Don’t fucking stop,” he rasped out.

I had no intention of stopping. Not until he was passed out from pleasure overload. I let my mouth cool to an almost freezing temperature and wrapped my lips around the head of his cock, taking him as far back into my throat as I could. I’d been practicing for days, trying to train myself to relax my throat and jaw. It was a hell of a lot harder than it had been when I’d practiced on the banana, but I had definitely made progress since the last time I had tried.

“Holy fuck, Bridgette,” he gasped as the cold suddenly changed, shifting into warmth, then an intense heat. I swallowed and glided my tongue over the thick, pulsing vein that ran down his shaft. I pulled back, swirling my tongue over the head of his cock, then dipped in to taste the precome he was leaking for me.

Humming at his flavor, I glanced up to see him watching me intensely with hooded eyes, his gray eyes as dark and stormy as the expression on his face as he watched. I knew he was going to attempt to make another grab for me so I sent electricity through my fingers to wrap around his cock and smiled when his head dropped back and his hips bucked.

Over and over, I did my best to drive him insane with pleasure. I switched from hot to cold, back and forth, until he was panting as if he’d just run ten miles. I knew I had tortured him enough and finally swallowed him down to the back of my throat, and hummed.

Logan shouted at the ceiling as he exploded in my mouth. I figured I likely lost several strands of hair as his fists gripped my head, but he was practically comatose by the time I’d swallowed every last drop. I let his still half-hard shaft go and shook my head at how he could still have even that much left in him.

I grinned as he muttered something unintelligible under his breath and waited until his breathing leveled out. Glancing at the time, I saw I only had an hour until the entity arrived and sighed. I slowly climbed to my feet and looked down at the mate I never wanted but now knew I could never live without. He had so quickly come to mean everything to me, and I vowed to protect him until the day I died.

I pulled the blankets over him and bent down to place a soft kiss on his lips. “Sleep well, love. Everything will be better in the morning.”

I walked into the closet and quickly changed into a pair of yoga pants and an oversized T-shirt. I didn’t bother with shoes, but I gathered my hair and tied the mass with a hair tie. I quietly closed the bedroom door and padded over to the window by Samantha’s bed in the living room. I stared out at the large full moon that lit up the night sky.

“Come and get me, bitch,” I whispered fiercely. I turned back to look around the small room. If the murderer followed the same routine as the other murders, it would be right in that very room that they would appear.

Then I sat down to wait.

* * *

Glass breaking in the shop downstairs startled me awake. I sat there blinking as I looked around the living space. Confusion clouded my brain for a long moment as I struggled to shake off what felt like a magically induced haze. My gaze settled on the time, and my brows drew together. It was already five minutes after midnight. Why hadn’t the killer arrived yet?

Another crash had me jumping to my feet to race down the stairs to see what the commotion was. Samantha let out a bark, reminding me that she was there. I stopped

as she pressed against my legs.

“What should we do?” she asked eagerly.

I ran my fingers over her silky fur. “I need you to stay here,” I said urgently. I had a good idea that the killer was down there, and didn’t want to take any chances that Samantha could get hurt. My heart ached in my chest as a part of me knew that Logan was down there and in grave danger. “Please stay up here where it’s safe. I promise everything will be okay.” She didn’t look happy about it, but I could tell she was scared and trying valiantly to hide it. “Good girl,” I praised, and scratched behind her ears before heading downstairs.

My steps were silent against the wood as I listened closely to every sound.

There wasn’t much to hear. Mortimer was doing the kind of growling cats did when they were angry and ready to fight. I had never heard him sound so fierce before. He usually made that sound when he was playing with a stuffed mouse, pretending to hunt and pounce on it. Now, though, that sound wasn’t even remotely playful.

I noticed a breeze wafting up the stairs that grew stronger the closer I got to the bottom until my hair rose and began whipping around as if I were walking into a windstorm. There was also a crackling of electricity that lifted the hairs on my arms. Someone was using a great deal of magic in my shop.

I took a brief moment to close my eyes and breathe deeply, letting the breaths out slowly to center myself and focus on the pool of magic that was gathered inside me. It was there, waiting, shivering with excitement, knowing it was about to be used. My magic was different from the other witches. Where they had affinities in various things like plants and animals or even elements, my magic was a violent storm.

I’d had to learn how to control it and contain it deep within me at a very early age. I

had destroyed more than one room as a toddler when upset. When other toddlers threw temper tantrums, they screamed or threw a toy. When I threw a temper tantrum, I shattered windows and threw furniture. If it wasn't for my grandmother's more defensive skills, she and my mother could have been seriously injured.

Learning to control the intense, violent nature of my magic hadn't been easy. It took years, but by the time I was a teenager, I had learned to become one with it. It no longer controlled me. I controlled it. Together, we worked as a united team and an unstoppable force. For my own safety, no one but my immediate family knew the kind of power I had. If the magic council knew, it was possible I could be deemed a threat to the public or as a potential exposure of our kind. It was safer to keep it a secret than to take the risk of imprisonment for what they would surely declare was for my own good.

With what would equal a sigh of contentment in a human, my magic drew closer to the surface, ready to do my bidding. I opened my eyes, then took the final steps into the shop, finally prepared to face whatever was inside.

At first glance, I saw nothing. Well, nothing other than items whipping through the air as if they had been pulled into a tornado. I couldn't help the anger that bubbled inside that my merchandise was being destroyed. I looked back and forth, trying to see what was responsible, until my gaze landed on the figure pinned against the window.

"Logan," I whispered, my heart aching, while simultaneously, rage filled me. He was stuck, unable to move. There were several small cuts where it looked like some of the objects had hit him as they went flying by. Other than the minor cuts, he looked fine. Angry and ready to rip someone to shreds, but otherwise healthy. That was good. I let go of some of the rage I felt, knowing I would need to keep a clear head to face whatever was causing the chaos around me.

Another growl from Mortimer had me glancing in his direction. He was sitting high on one of the shelves. I would normally have chastised him for being up there, but now he was hunched down against the wind, occasionally batting away an object that flew too close to his small body. I winced. It had to hurt. Things were flying quickly, and when they hit a shelf, it made a loud bang before falling to the floor.

I glanced back at Logan to see his eyes on me. He didn't look happy to see me, but I could also see the worry he felt for me in his gaze. He would soon learn that when it came to the magical world, he would never have to fear.

I lifted my chin, telling him he would just have to get over it. His eyes narrowed but then widened as they shot to something behind me. With one more deep breath to ready myself, I turned slowly, knowing that I was about to face the one responsible. Whoever the witch killer was needed to be ended. And quickly before they destroyed my whole damn shop.

As soon as I saw the figure floating in front of me, I couldn't help my shocked reaction.

“You!”

Chapter

Thirty-Two

brIDGETTE

The infamous witch of Gainsburg floated in front of me. She was incorporeal, which was no huge surprise considering she had been dead for close to two hundred years.

In our town of witches, there were many stories about its history. There was no story more notorious or spoken about, though, than the infamous witch. She'd had a single-minded goal of becoming the most powerful witch the world had ever seen. The story goes that she had grand designs to rule the world, and she had found a way to do it.

Taking another witch's magic was forbidden, always had been. But that hadn't stopped Glenda. She started with her own coven. The first victims had been the weakest, those with affinities with the elements, plants, and animals.

"You killed kind, innocent witches," I growled as I clenched my fists at my side.

She did nothing but grin at my words. She would have been absolutely beautiful if it weren't for the gleam of insanity in her eyes. I knew then that there would be no taking the high road and trying to talk her into giving herself up, even if that had been my plan to begin with. Her crimes were too great, and the reasons she had been sentenced to death hundreds of years before were the same now. She was too significant a threat with her grand schemes of power.

But... “How did you come back?” It was my curiosity that drove the question, but it was also a necessity to ensure she couldn’t do it again. Not now or another two hundred years from now.

She still didn’t speak; instead, she vanished, and I spun around, expecting her to be behind me, but she wasn’t there. No, instead, when I turned back again, she was hovering near my mate, the athame I’d sent by courier to the police precinct for Logan’s evidence pointed directly at his heart.

I prowled forward, moving through the storm of wind and flying merchandise. “I missed the signs.” I inclined my head toward the athame that was far too close to Logan’s chest. “I should have listened to Mortimer from the beginning. I knew he was trying to tell me something, but I waved it off as him being weird.”

I looked over at Mortimer as I passed him, seeing him slap his paw at a tourmaline crystal that got too close. “Sorry, Mortimer.”

He hissed at me before immediately going back to yowling at the dead witch. I was going to have to apologize profusely for quite a while before he forgave me.

“It took until cutting myself on your blade to finally put it together. But I know now what I missed then, Glenda. You killed good witches, sucking their magic from them through your athame.” I rounded the last shelf until I stood just a couple of feet away from her. “You’re pointing a blade at my mate.” I cocked my head and raised an eyebrow. “For that reason alone, I am going to crush every gem in it into dust before I melt the metal down and turn it into a paperweight.”

Her ghostly form snarled and lifted her hand, ready to plunge the athame into Logan’s heart. “I knew I needed more when it came to you,” she hissed down at me. “Your mate here is going to be the leverage I need to finally become all I was intended to be. I’ll take your magic and become more powerful than the world has

ever seen.”

I stared at her, amazed that she thought it would be so easy. “You think I will just, what, lie down and let you kill me for my magic? Then what, Glenda? If I allow you to do that, you’ll destroy my mate and everything else that I love.”

With one long, bony finger, she pointed at a pentagram drawn on the floor that I hadn’t noticed through all the chaos. “You’ll do it because you’re good,” she spat the word out as if it were a curse word. “Good witches don’t let loved ones die in front of their eyes. They allow themselves to be sacrificed to protect others.”

I shook my head. “Perhaps you’re right,” I allowed. “Good people, whether they are witch or human, won’t let another suffer if they could do it for them.”

Glenda looked positively giddy as I strode over to the pentagram she’d explicitly drawn for me, while Logan looked as if he wanted to strangle me. I could easily read in his eyes the demand that I not do what she’d said.

I stepped up to the circle and turned to face her again. “You wanted to know how I was able to return?” Glenda asked conversationally, thinking that she had already won. “It was you. You brought my athame here, in this place.” She looked down at her weapon, the tool that was supposed to aid a witch with their spells and rituals, not an implement of murder. “You let your magic seep into this silly place. You infuse every item with your power.” She grinned widely, too widely for a human, and it looked grotesque. “You bring them to life .”

Well, damn. I could admit that was a massive mistake on my part. I’d have to be more careful in the future. I glanced around to see my figurines that hadn’t been smashed huddling in fright. I would still bring a spark of life to my friends. I would just be a little more discerning going forward.

I took one last look at Logan before turning my eyes away from his. I couldn't look at his face anymore; it would be too distracting because I'd want to comfort him. Instead, I lifted one hand.

My movement froze her solid, even her old-fashioned dress from the era that she'd once been alive in froze mid-flapping in the wind she'd caused. It looked weird, and I couldn't help taking it in. Glenda's face was a frozen mask of shock as her cold, lifeless eyes took me in.

“How does it feel to be helpless, Glenda? How many witches did you take from? How many did you make helpless, draining their power before draining their lives?”

I gestured with my hand, and the athame flew into my palm. It felt angry, just as angry as its owner. Somehow, she had attached herself to the artifact; her soul was bonded with it. “This really explains so much,” I murmured as I looked down at the gleaming blade. The rage pulsing from it was thrumming so much that it was vibrating fiercely in my hand. “No one should have this much power.” I looked back up at Glenda, who was looking quite a bit less sure of herself as she watched me hold her life, her power, and her very soul in my hand.

Terror was suddenly pouring from her, easy to read because I felt the same coming from the blade. “I had been taught to hide my power since it was just so much, you know? I hadn't realized until right now why the council would be so scared of someone who had that much magic. But there's a difference between me and you.”

I looked into her eyes, letting her see my truth. “I knew I was going to be your next victim, Glenda. You wouldn't have been able to resist. But here's a little secret between us girls... You wouldn't have been able to handle what I am.” I smirked at her, probably enjoying her fear a little too much, but knew the Goddess was proud of me and wouldn't mind a little enjoyment. “But, as I said, there is a huge difference between you and me. It's that I don't care about how much I own. All I want to do is

run this store,” I waved my other hand, and immediately, everything stopped moving, the wind and chaos she had caused coming to an abrupt halt. The sound of rushing air silenced, and a calm settled over Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs. Everything that was still hanging in the air swiftly moved back into their proper places. Broken pieces of figurines fit back together seamlessly and joined the others. Within seconds, every bit of destruction she’d caused was reversed, settling the shop back into the quirky chaos I loved.

“And make a home with my mate.” I narrowed my eyes on her. “The one you threatened.”

With that, I was done talking. My magic flowed from me and into the crystals of the athame. It gave her a jolt of power, filling her impossibly full. At first, she was confused, but then that confusion morphed into unadulterated glee. She thought I was giving it to her. What an idiot.

Her happiness quickly turned back into terror as the magic filled her athame to bursting. The crystals didn’t explode, they didn’t shatter and fly apart. Instead, they just crumbled into the dust I had promised. Glenda didn’t have a chance to see the particles fall to the ground, though. As soon as the light winked out of the crystals, she disappeared.

“Damn,” I muttered, “That was kind of anticlimactic.” I stared down at the now dull, cracked, and brittle metal in my hand. With a final wave of power, the metal curled into itself until there was nothing but an ugly ball of tarnished bronze in my now fully healed palm.

“Are you really going to use it as a paperweight?” Logan stood, as naked as I had left him over an hour ago in bed. He had his arms crossed and was looking less than pleased.

I took my time gaining my courage before finally looking up at him, afraid that what he saw would make him run far, far away from me. “Nah, it’s too ugly,” I said, dropping it to the floor with the crystal dust. I stood there, unsure of myself, waiting for his judgment. I didn’t have to wait long.

He strode over to me and wrapped an arm around my waist. In a move he’d done so many other times before, he tugged until I fell into his chest. I immediately took a deep inhale of his spicy scent. “You’re a little badass, you know that?”

I chanced a peek up at his face to see him grinning down at me with pride. “Yeah?”

He kissed the tip of my nose. “I’m so glad to know that you can take care of yourself.” Then he swept me up into his arms and moved straight for the stairs to my apartment. “But I owe you a punishment for using sex to knock me out.”

My grin was wide as he carried me, and I could have sworn Mortimer gave me a saucy wink as we passed. Mildred was definitely chattering happily from her crooked position on the shelf as the crow in the corner fluttered his wings.

Chapter

Thirty-Three

brIDGETTE

The sun was already up and shining through my curtains the next morning as we lay tangled together in the sheets. After Logan carried me to bed, we held each other close, both of us thankful that the nightmare was over. Without any more threats to my safety, Logan was noticeably calmer.

I felt his fingers comb through my sweaty hair as he held me from behind, and smiled to myself. I'd been woken up in the most delicious way possible and couldn't wait to do it again tomorrow.

"I love waking up to you like this," Logan murmured into my ear, echoing my thoughts.

I snuggled deeper into his embrace. "Well, then I guess it's a good thing you'll live a very long time." I bit my lip, waiting for his reaction to the bomb I just dropped.

Logan stilled behind me, I didn't even think he was breathing for a moment. Then he carefully turned me over so he could look down at me. "Can you explain that in a bit more detail, little witch?"

His eyes searched my face as I stared up at him, his expression giving nothing away. "You said your mother doesn't know much about witchcraft or her legacy. Do you

know if your father is her fated mate?"

Logan shook his head and frowned. "I don't think so. They are happy together, but I can't recall them being so in love with my mother that he can't breathe when he looks at her." His gaze ran over my face, and his thumb traced over my cheek as he took in my features.

My own breath hitched at his words, and I had to blink back the sudden moisture that came to my eyes. "Part of being a supernatural race often means longevity," I began. Unlike with vampires and demons, witches aren't immortal. Most don't even live much longer than a normal human lifetime. But, those who have found their fated mates live to 200, sometimes 250 years old."

"Fuck me," he drew in a sharp breath, and I was afraid I'd finally broken him until he spoke his following words. "You're telling me that I get to spend the next two lifetimes with you by my side?"

"Logan," I murmured as I choked back a relieved sob.

"I mean it, little witch. I would have looked for you in the next life, but knowing I don't have to? You just made my day."

I laughed through my tears. "There's more," I warned, and his expression grew serious as he waited for me to continue. "The longer we are together, the more bonded we become. You know my grandmother didn't stay with her fated mate for long, right?" He nodded, so I continued. "After a while, maybe twenty or so years, you'll find our heartbeats begin to sync. That's when our life forces begin to combine. Once that happens, we will be able to know where each other is at all times."

Logan grinned. "I like the way that sounds."

“Well, we might also be able to communicate without words, too.”

“Again,” he said, nipping my bottom lip, “it doesn’t sound bad at all. So why are you hesitating to tell me the rest?”

“Perceptive, Detective. Once our life forces are joined, it’s permanent. If I die, you die.” Just the thought of it made my chest ache. How had he come to mean everything to me so quickly? I knew the draw to a fated mate was powerful, but it really seemed to be extra strong between us. Since the beginning, I couldn’t resist his pull, even with my deep-seated fears. I was able to get past them, far too quickly.

I closed my eyes as I felt a brush of cool air drift over my cheek.

I’ve always had a soft spot for you, my sweet child. For being so pure and kind when you could have abused the magic and power I had bestowed on you has proved your worth. Your reward is a man who loves you with his entire soul. Your openness to my gift has provided you both with all the happiness you could seek in all your lifetimes together.

I opened my eyes again as a tear fell and soaked into my hairline. “What was that?” Logan asked, a look of awe on his face. “It felt like something reached inside me and brushed against my soul.”

“It was the Goddess,” I choked out. “I think she just completed our bond. And I think she just ensured that we will always find each other in every lifetime.”

“I would have found you anyway, little witch. I told you that.”

I laughed and threw my arms around his shoulders and pulled him into me for a long, slow kiss. When I pulled back, I looked into his smoky gray eyes. “I love you, Logan Storm.”

“I love you, too, Bridgette Storm.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Bridgette Storm?”

“Do you think I am going to have a mate and not bond with her in every way possible? You’re marrying me as soon as possible.”

“You’re getting married?!”

I sat up so fast that my head banged into Logan’s chin, making him grunt in pain. “Grandmother!” I gasped.

“Bridgette’s getting married? To whom?” My mother pushed past my grandmother and rushed into the room, coming to an abrupt stop once she caught sight of Logan in bed with me. “Oh, my. Goddess. There’s a man in your bed. Bridgette,” she tore her eyes away from my mate and stared at me with wide eyes a shade darker than my own. “Did you know there’s a man in your bed?”

I had to stifle a laugh while trying not to let the mortification swallow me whole at having the women in my bedroom, knowing I was naked under the covers. “Yes, Mother. I am aware.” I gestured around the room with one sweeping hand movement. “Grandmother, Mother, this is Logan. My fated mate.”

“And you’re getting married,” my mother repeated slowly as if her brain were stuck in a loop. “To a man.”

“Well, yeah,” I snickered, getting too much enjoyment from my usually poised and elegant mother being at a loss for words. “Umm,” I looked back at Logan, whose chest was shaking from the effort not to laugh at the situation. “Perhaps the two of you could wait for me in the living room. Or downstairs. Or maybe at your house?” I winced as I remembered I hadn’t been over to dust or water the plants in a while.

“Maybe downstairs.”

Grandmother narrowed her eyes at me, perceptive as always. “We’ll be waiting in the next room. Then you can tell us what the emergency was.”

They were walking out the bedroom door, my mother turning her head to look back several times as if to convince herself that what she was seeing was really in front of her eyes. “It specifically said there was nothing wrong!” I called out, just to hear a huff come from my grandmother.

I turned to look at Logan and gave him a sheepish grin. “So, that was my mother and grandmother.”

He pulled me into his chest, and I took a brief moment to close my eyes and soak him in. “On a scale from one, to she’s going to turn me into a toad, how worried should I be?”

I laughed and pulled away. “She may look formidable, but that woman is a huge marshmallow inside. She’s going to love that you love me.”

He grunted as he pulled away to stand up. “Good.” Then he pulled me to my feet and smacked my ass. “Hurry up, woman. I have in-laws to impress.”

Rubbing my bottom, I glared over my shoulder but hurried into the closet. I grabbed a shirt and yoga pants, then ran to my dresser for a bra and panties. The last thing I wanted to do was go out there without panties. Then I remembered what we had been doing before they’d arrived and grimaced. Thank the Goddess they hadn’t been thirty minutes earlier.

I went into the bathroom to clean up, and after getting dressed, I ran the brush through my hair and brushed my teeth. Logan was sitting on the side of the bed in a

pair of jeans and a black T-shirt, and I had an internal battle between pulling him back under the covers with me and facing the firing squad in my living room.

“We don’t have all day!” Grandmother called out, making me sigh in defeat.

“Come on, little witch. You defeated a big, bad murderer last night. How bad could it be seeing your grandma?”

I huffed and took his hand. “Just wait,” I grumbled.

My mother was in the kitchen making coffee when we emerged from the bedroom, and Grandmother didn’t waste a second to start her interrogation. She had Mortimer in her lap, who likely had already told all kinds of tales, and was rubbing the top of Samantha’s head.

“Who is this lovely creature leaving hair all over your furniture?”

I walked over, and Samantha left Grandmother’s side to come to me, leaning heavily against me. “The lady is nice, ”she said. I couldn’t help but think that she would say that about nearly anybody. I scratched behind her ears.

“She really is nice. If you look at her with those big puppy dog eyes of yours, she’ll probably give you treats.”

Samantha gasped in my head and started wagging her tail so hard her butt wiggled. “Really? I love treats!”

My grandmother looked up sharply. “That’s your familiar.”

I nodded as I smoothed a hand across Samantha’s head. “Yes. She’s Logan’s dog, though. It was a happy coincidence.”

“I’m so happy for you, darling girl. I know you’ve wanted to find your familiar for so long,” she said with a loving gaze toward Samantha. Then her eyes sharpened as she looked back at me again. “Now tell me what’s wrong.”

Logan brushed a kiss over my cheek. “I need to take Sammy outside. I’ll be right back,” he murmured.

“Traitor,” I mumbled, then gratefully took the cup of coffee from my mother as she walked it over. She stared at Logan with wide eyes as he passed her with a smile, before taking a seat next to Grandmother. I sat down in the chair facing them. “It’s a bit of a long story, but do you remember that athame you bought at the estate sale a couple of months ago?”

“The one I was sent to retrieve and put a binding spell on so it would no longer cause problems?”

I blinked at her, taking in her words. “What?”

“That athame had been lost for over a hundred years. Someone found it about fifty or so years back and thought it might have been valuable. They wanted to sell it, but before they could, the person died. Every other person who owned that athame had terrible luck that resulted in either death or total loss of everything important to them. The council sent me to retrieve it before it could do any more harm.”

I sat back heavily in the chair. “I thought it was supposed to be sold in the shop,” I muttered, wanting to face-palm. Everything was my fault. Son of a bitch.

“Oh dear. Please don’t tell me you brought it into Oohs, Ahhhs, and Orbs,” she pleaded.

“I wish I could,” I sighed.

“And you allowed your power to fill it. Oh, Bridgette.”

“It was the Gainsburg witch,” I said sadly. “I had no idea. She killed three witches in town, trying to gain enough magic to break free. I think the spark of power I allowed was enough to let her out. She was able to break free during the lunar cycle.”

“Last night was the full moon. She came after you, didn’t she?”

I nodded. “Logan first. She was going to use my mate as leverage so I wouldn’t fight her.”

Grandmother snorted. “How’d that work out?”

“Her athame is a ball of metal, and she’s been banished to the ether forever.”

She nodded proudly. “That’s my girl.”

Mother spoke up, interrupting. “Did you say mate ?”

I nodded, smiling proudly. “Logan is my mate. He was one of the detectives in charge of the murders. He came to question me, then he asked me to help with the case.” I looked both of them in the eye, making sure they knew what I was about to say was serious. “We bonded.”

My mother gasped and raised a hand to her mouth as tears filled her eyes. Grandmother smiled softly. “You said the binding vows.”

“We did,” I nodded.

“Good. I’m so proud of you, Bridgette.”

“Is he good to you?” my mother asked gently, hesitantly, and I turned to look at her, my lower lip trembling.

“He loves me.”

She smiled softly. “I can see that, sweet girl. But is he good to you?”

I thought about the way he holds me, how he looks at me, and the way he is always concerned about my well-being. “He makes me smile. He always likes to have a hand on me when we are close, as if he’s reassuring himself I’m there. He offered to quit the job that he loves, which makes him him , because he was worried I wanted to leave him,” I sniffled. “Yeah, he’s good to me.”

“Okay, baby,” Mother said quietly. “That’s really good.”

“Thanks,” I said, giving her a tremulous smile.

Grandmother cleared her throat, and when I turned back to her, her eyes seemed suspiciously red-rimmed. “So, the drama is over, and you vanquished the Gainsburg witch.”

I looked down at my coffee and sighed sadly. “It’s my fault, though. All those witches died because of me.”

“Bridgette,” Grandmother said softly, and waited until I looked back up at her. “You aren’t responsible for the actions of others. You didn’t harm them. Perhaps they wouldn’t have died, perhaps Glenda,” she spat out, “would have found a way anyway. Stop blaming yourself. Besides, it brought your mate to your door. It was Fate, darling. You know how Fate works.”

I nodded, still sad about the deaths and likely always would be. But she was right.

What was meant to happen would, no matter what. Fate had a plan, and it wouldn't be derailed.

“Now, tell me about the baby.”

Logan chose that exact moment to walk through the door, and I didn't know how I hadn't heard him and Sammy coming up the stairs. “Umm...”

“Baby?” Logan asked, his sharp gaze on me. “What baby?”

I smiled sheepishly at him, ignoring my mother's gasp, then threw up my hands and wiggled my fingers. “Surprise!”

LOGAN

I set the ball of metal on the Captain's desk as he sat back in his chair in surprise. I set the folder down next to it and slid it toward him.

"Glenda Southa, born 1792, otherwise known as The Gainsburg Witch. She murdered several of her coven members in an attempt to gain magic and power. She was succeeding until the witch council intervened. She was put to death, but not before she bound her soul to her athame.

"That athame was found around fifty years ago, and subsequently, anyone who owned it was cursed. It recently came into the possession of Suzanne Waters, who was tasked by the council to bind it. Through a series of unfortunate events," I held back my grimace, not caring to throw Bridgette under the bus. I left out any mention of her role in Glenda's managing to escape the athame during her murders. "Glenda used the power of the moon during its cycle to perform rituals in which killing another witch would give her enough magic to become... alive again."

At that point, the Captain reached over and snatched the folder and opened it. I watched as he scanned my written report. When he was done, he sat back and stared at me. "Your woman single-handedly defeated this ghostly witch on her hunt for immortality. And that," he pointed to the dingy ball of metal, "is all that's left of the murder weapon."

I straightened my shoulders. "Yes, sir."

He whistled and ran a hand through his hair. "Were you aware she had this...

ability?”

“I was aware she was the most powerful witch in the area. I didn’t know until last night that she was that powerful. But, I have to say, sir, I’m glad for it. Knowing my woman can’t be harmed is a relief.”

“I imagine it is,” he sighed and reached into his desk drawer. Setting my badge and service weapon on the desk in front of him, he looked back at me. “I was going to call you today. You just saved me the effort. A new task force has been formed. One that is responsible for the strange things that happen around the area. You are in charge of it. This,” he waved at the report and the ruined athame, “shows exactly why you are the right man for the job. It goes without saying that this is a secret task force. It is going to be kept off the books. As far as anyone knows, you are still simply a homicide detective.”

I reached over and picked up my shield, an immense weight lifting off my shoulders as I looked down at it. I felt like I could breathe again as I felt the solidness under my fingertips. “Yes, sir,” I managed to choke out.

“I never doubted you, son. I want you to know that. Taking that badge away from you was one of the worst things I have ever had to do in my career.”

I eyed the Captain and nodded. I believed him. He was bound by red tape and the orders of others, but he had always had my back when it counted in the past. “Thank you, Captain.” I picked up the service weapon and, after sliding the magazine inside, I put it in my pocket until I could put my shoulder holster back on. I felt the disk inside my pocket and withdrew it. “Captain, I have something for you. It’s from Bridgette.”

I handed the disk to him and he studied it. It was wooden, flat, and intricately carved with symbols surrounding the perimeter. It looked like a coaster that would sit on

your coffee table. One that a witch may have designed.

“What is it?” he asked as he turned it over.

“I believe she mentioned coffee,” I said, then turned to leave, but stopped at the doorway. “One more thing,” I said, and watched as he set his cold coffee mug on top of the disk. We both watched as, seconds later, steam began to rise from the mug.

“I’ll be damned,” he muttered.

“There’s someone Bridgette wants you to meet.”

I walked out the door, whistling to myself. I’d done my part; it was up to Bridgette’s mother to secure her own date.

Bridgette

It had been an amazing six months. Logan and I had gotten married at my mother's insistence a week ago. Logan had wanted to do it within a week of them arriving back home, but she'd demanded time to plan a proper wedding. I was happy to let her do her thing. Logan had grumbled the entire time, often complaining about not wanting his daughter to be born without us being properly wed first.

I rubbed my belly, and the bump there was huge, considering the size of my husband. I wasn't looking forward to the birth, but I was glad I wasn't alone. Shayla's baby bump was nearly as big as mine. With her tall, willowy figure and the size of her hotty professor, she was much in the same boat as I was when it came to how little space we had inside to carry our ginormous babies.

Logan and I were on a honeymoon, though we hadn't gone far from home. I'd wanted to travel, but considering I was nearly seven months pregnant, Logan refused to fly anywhere, and he'd absolutely put his foot down about the cruise my grandmother had suggested. We'd all just rolled our eyes at his usual overprotective attitude when it came to me and our growing little girl.

We'd already been to the beach and stayed for a few days. Currently, we were on our way to the mountains where we'd planned to hide out in a cabin all alone for the next week before finally heading back home. I already missed Sammy, and I know Logan did, too.

I walked down the sidewalk, heading toward the restaurant we'd seen as we'd driven through the city we'd stopped in for the night. Logan was just a few feet away from

me, looking suspiciously at a group of men talking outside a nightclub. I could have told him they were demons and that was probably why he felt his internal alarm bells ringing, but I figured I'd wait until we were alone.

“Oh, excuse me!”

I turned back to see a woman a little shorter than I was with the longest, most beautiful silvery blond hair in front of me holding an adorable baby boy. “Oh, my Goddess. I am so sorry. I wasn't looking where I was going,” I cried.

“No! You're okay. I just didn't want you running into the car door,” she smiled warmly. “How far along are you?” she asked, looking down at my belly.

“I'm almost seven months.” I pointed over my shoulder at Logan, who was now speaking with a demon about as tall as he was, with deep black hair so dark it seemed to absorb the shadows around him. I blinked as I felt the power radiating from him as far away as I was standing. The demon kept glancing over, looking at the demon in front of me with her baby. “That's my husband. Do you know the demon he's talking to?” I glanced back over to see Logan and the demon shaking hands, then they both began to walk over.

“That's my mate, Varrek. My name is Juliette.” She held out her hand, which wasn't holding the baby. I shook her hand and almost gasped. I didn't know how she was able to mask so much power so easily. I wondered if she did it on purpose or if it just came naturally. “Wow,” she said. “I knew you were a witch, but you have a lot of magic.”

I laughed and released her hand. “I could say the same about you and your power. I'd like to know how you're able to conceal it so well.”

She frowned. “I didn't know I was.”

Just then, her mate reached us and took the baby from her arms. As he leaned over to kiss Juliette, the baby gurgled happily, and I felt Logan wrap his arm around my waist. “Hey, little witch. You shouldn’t have walked off,” he murmured before kissing my forehead. His free hand went right to my baby bump, which he never could seem to resist touching whenever I was close.

I laughed. “I was five feet away.”

“Too far,” he scowled and pulled me in tighter.

“Juliette,” I said, catching her watching us with a smile. “This is my mate, Logan. Logan, this is Juliette.”

“Nice to meet you,” Juliette said, holding out her hand for a shake. Her mate frowned as she made contact with Logan, and I had to stifle a laugh, because Logan was the same exact way with me. “This is Varrek,” she told me.

As Varrek and I shook hands, I felt Logan tighten his hold on me, but I ignored it as visions flooded my mind.

“He’s in a tower,” I said, staring into Varrek’s deep emerald eyes, my grip tightening on his. “In the Pacific Northwest. He’s against the water. In a large city. Famine needs you. His mate is in danger.”

I released my hold, withdrawing my hand and sagging against Logan as Varrek stared at me, frozen. I imagined that little surprised the demon, but my words seemed to do the trick.

Juliette gasped next to him, and her eyes filled with sudden tears as she reached out to grab her mate’s arm. “Varrek!”

He turned to her, his expression still shocked, but his eyes full of moisture as well.

“We must go.”

She nodded furiously. “I’ll call the others!” Then she turned for the car door, still standing open, and practically dove inside it.

Varrek turned back to me and inclined his head. “Thank you, Bridgette. I have been searching for my brother with no indication of where he could be, until now.”

“I wish I could give you more,” I said.

“You have given me everything,” he denied. He reached his hand into his pocket and withdrew his wallet. Taking a card from it, he held it out to me. I reached out for the card as Logan watched the two of us. Looking down at the thick, black business card, all I saw was the word Brimstone written in red and a phone number. “If you ever need anything, never hesitate to call. Now, please excuse my hasty departure. I must go find my brother.”

“I understand,” I said, gripping the card tightly. “May the Goddess be with you.”

He inclined his head and turned for the car, handing the happily gurgling baby over to Juliette. Then he climbed inside and shut the door. Then, immediately, the car pulled away from the curb and into the flow of traffic.

“What was that all about?” Logan asked as we stared after the car.

“That,” I said softly, “Was Death. One of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.”