



The Trouble With Spells (Cauldrons and Kisses)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: I swear I didn't mean to bind my secret high school crush to me, it just happened.

I made a promise to my family that there would be no spell casting while they were away. It was well known in the Turner household that my spells tended to go a bit, shall we say, wonky. Like turning my ex-boyfriend into a frog when I'd been trying to conjure breakfast in bed. Complete accident, though my sister claimed he was better in frog form. She wasn't wrong. So, for the next two weeks I would look after our family store, hang out with my cat, Hex, and enjoy having the house to myself for once. Peace and quiet and no hinky spell work business.

Then he blew into my store—literally. Michael Endicott the third. Or fourth? Maybe fifth? It didn't matter. What did matter was that I was staring at my high school crush—who clearly did not remember me. Unfortunately, he still made me forget how to form words into a complete sentence. Seems a vengeful one-night stand had placed a bad luck spell on Michael, and he needed help. My help. I mean, what could go wrong? It was just an easy reversal spell. No problem. Only somehow instead of reversing the spell, I managed to bind us together.

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Chapter One

Callum

Flipping the tarot cards, I blinked owlshly at them through the lenses of my glasses, pushing the black frames up my nose. Something I seemed to do about thirty-five times a day. It would be easier if I could just wear my contact lenses, but I had yet to find a pair that was comfortable for more than a couple of hours. So, nerdy glasses for the win.

Glancing down at the cards spread across my bed, I scrunched up my nose, examining them closely.

The Lovers.

Death.

The Fool Card.

And always a fan favorite – the Devil.

Hex, my black cat, mewed at me, swiping one silky paw at a card. Surprisingly, not the Devil card. Nope, Hex never got upset by that one. The Lovers card had him flipping it over with a small huff and snap of his poofy tail.

Yes, I was aware it was a total cliché for a witch to own a black cat. But I thought black cats were beautiful creatures, and the adoption percentage for them was low.

When I had seen Hex's little kitten face as I'd been scrolling the local shelters page three years ago, my heart had instantly fallen in love. I'd even decided to keep the name the shelter had given him.

I mean a witch with a black cat named Hex? You couldn't go wrong. Plus, it was great for business.

Caressing his silky black fur, I turned The Lovers card back over, reading my cards. People often got freaked out when I would do a reading for them when they saw the names of the cards. But they didn't necessarily mean anything bad. Take the death card. It represented change, not your literal death. Even if I saw someone's death in their cards—which almost never happened—I wasn't stupid enough to tell them.

The Fools card told of a new beginning. And while the Devil card could represent revenge, violence, and vehemence, it also could represent something that was predestined and not at all evil.

If I was reading these cards for a paying client, I would tell them that a love interest was going to enter their life, bringing change and a new beginning. That it was destiny and fate, and all that mumbo jumbo woo woo. The nonsense people liked to hear for their sixty bucks. And that usually guaranteed they left a tip and a five star rating on our website.

Since these were my cards I was reading, I just snorted loudly in the silence of my bedroom. Hex blinked his slanted green eyes at me, and I blinked my slightly-upturned-at-the-corners green eyes back at him. 'Cat's eyes' were how most people described the shape of my eyes. They were much more mesmerizing on my sister, where people had been known to use the words gorgeous and piercing when describing them.

On me, they were just weirdly shaped eyes hidden behind thick glasses. Nothing

special to see.

Scooping the cards off my bed, I stacked them neatly on my dresser.

“Well,” I caught Hex’s gaze in the mirror’s reflection, “that was a bunch of bullshit. Love indeed.”

“Callum!”

Daphne’s loud, unladylike bellow made both Hex and me jump. My bedroom door banged open with enough force to send it slamming into the wall and bouncing back, and had Hex scurrying to hide underneath the bed.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!” I scowled fiercely at my sister, who was standing in the doorway, hands on her curvy hips, looking like I had eaten her last chocolate .

Scrunching her nose, Daphne demanded, “Why do you sound like a catholic schoolboy? Carry my suitcase down the stairs.”

Pushing my glasses back up my nose, I huffed, “Rude. Who taught you manners? And what happened to you being an ‘independent woman who didn’t need no man’? Direct quote from you, by the way. Bad grammar and all.”

Daphne waved her hand at me, the sleeves of her blue peasant blouse billowing. “Callum, what’s the point of having a strapping older brother if I can’t make use of you for carrying heavy objects? Know your place. And men are overrated.”

Turning, I glanced behind me, looking for this strapping older brother she spoke of. All I saw was Hex slinking out from the safety of under the bed. Pinching the bridge of my nose, I sighed loudly. “There’s so much wrong with what you just said, I don’t even know where to start.”

Gangly, skinny, awkward. That was how I had been thought of in high school, and not much had changed in the ten years since graduation. No one had ever used the word ‘strapping’ in the same sentence as me. And, I was her younger brother. A fact she no doubt forgot because with each one of her birthdays, she kept subtracting years instead of adding. Apparently, she had subtracted enough to completely change our birth order .

Running fingers through her loose, dark curls, Daphne’s identical green cat eyes sparkled with mischief and she grinned widely. “I know.”

“Let’s start with the fact that you are two years older than me,” I reminded her, brushing past her and grabbing the handle of her suitcase. “Holy Earth Goddess, what the fuck is in here? A dead body?”

Because honestly, with the women in my family, one could never be sure. It was always best to ask.

“Don’t be silly,” she breezed past me down the stairs. “It’s just shoes, books, and some crystals.”

Thumping the suitcase behind me on each step, because it was ridiculously heavy, I inquired, “How many pairs of shoes do you need in the middle of the woods?”

“Callum!” She huffed, exasperated. “I can’t explain shoe logic to you. I’ve tried and you are just a hopeless lost cause. And I refuse to acknowledge that you are younger than me. If you are going to be the first male born into the family, in like...” she appeared to be trying to work out the math, then gave up with a wave of her hand, “ever, you could have the decency to at least be the older brother.”

Depositing her bag outside next to our mom’s minivan, I wheezed noisily. I still wasn’t convinced there wasn’t an actual dead body in it, but it was probably just my

lack of upper body strength that had me huffing and puffing like I'd just tried to run a 5k marathon .

“You’re making my eyes twitch,” I told her, not completely lying, as I took a minute before trying to heft her bag into the back of the vehicle. “Both of them. At the same time.”

Before Daphne could retort with something sure to be sarcastic, our mom and grandmother came around from the side of the house, each carrying their own bags.

“Callum,” my mom, Sarah, said in the tone she used when she was going to say something that might possibly hurt my feelings, “no spells while we're away, okay? You know what happened last time.”

My gran, Abigail, snorted loudly. “Last time? Try every time the boy tries to work a spell.”

“I’m twenty-eight,” I reminded them, crossing my arms over my chest petulantly, and fighting the urge to pout. “Not a boy.”

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Gran hefted her bag into the van before I could take it from her.

“Gran, I was going to get that for you.”

Just because I gave my sister crap about carrying her bag, I had been raised with some manners. And since our dad had passed, I was technically the man of the house. My eighty-year-old grandmother didn’t need to be lugging around suitcases and tossing them around like they weighed next to nothing. At least I knew there wasn’t a dead body in Gran’s bag, by the way she had tossed it in. Though honestly, her bag probably did weigh next to nothing, since she was a sensible packer, unlike my sister.

“You’re a boy to me. Always will be,” she patted my cheek affectionately, and I couldn’t stay pissy with Gran.

“Seriously, Callum,” Mom’s matching eyes were soft as she searched mine. “We’re going to be gone for two weeks, off the grid. No cell phones, so you won’t be able to reach us if something goes...” she paused, searching for just the right word to describe my spell casting, “off-kilter. So, no spells. Please.”

“Yes, yes, I got it,” Mumbling, I shut the door for her once she was settled in the passenger seat. Because no one would dare take Abigail Spencer’s keys from her. Truthfully, people were better off with Gran behind the wheel than Mom, even with Gran’s failing eyesight. “No spells.”

“It’s just, with us gone...”

“What your mom is trying to say is there won’t be anyone here to supervise. Or to undo what you’ve done. And we all know what happened last time you were left home alone, spell casting.” Gran smiled at me, while Mom nodded her dark hair, with only a few strands of gray sprinkled through the rich inky blackness of it.

Rolling my eyes, I defended what had truly been an unfortunate event. “Turning Sean into a frog was a complete accident.”

“We know, sweetie.” Mom nodded, smiling indulgently .

“Was it, though?” Daphne asked, clearly questioning my motives.

Narrowing my eyes, I shot a glare in her direction, only to be met with her wide grinning face from the backseat.

“He was kind of a dick, is all I’m saying.” She shrugged nonchalantly. “No one

blamed you for wanting to turn him into a better version of himself.”

“I didn’t mean to turn him into anything,” I hissed between clenched teeth.

It wasn’t my fault that my magic was, as Mom liked to remind us all, ‘a bit wonky’. My intuition was spot on—when it didn’t pertain to my love life—and I could read a person’s aura better than most witches out there. When it came to reading tarot cards, I was the best in my family. Gran often said I had the second sight, which was a special gift all by itself.

But spell casting?

That was where my powers failed me.

All. The. Time.

In spectacular fashion.

“I was trying to conjure breakfast in bed for us,” I mumbled, digging the toe of my tennis shoe into the gravel of the driveway. The mid-October breeze ruffled my dark hair, and I pushed it out of my eyes.

“Gag,” Daphne made a retching noise. “Why, even? He did not deserve breakfast in bed. I bet he wasn’t even that good of a fu—...kisser,” she amended when Mom spun her head and glared at her.

Rolling my eyes, I scratched the side of my nose with my middle finger, because Mom frowned at us flipping each other off. Daphne was right though; Sean hadn’t been good enough in bed to warrant breakfast. But I had been trying to be romantic, hoping the bad sex was just a one-off, nervous, bad night. My turning him into a frog, and subsequently having to get Mom to change him back—Daphne had refused,

stating he was better as a frog—had pretty much sealed the deal of me never seeing him again to find out.

“All we’re saying,” Gran turned the key, starting the van, “is we won’t be available to help. We need you to look after the shop, and make sure nothing dire happens while we are away.”

“No magic,” I nodded my dark curls, pushing my glasses up. “I got it. The shop will be fine. Go. Enjoy. Run naked and wild beneath the moon with the covens.”

Gran chortled loudly. “Sure you don’t want to come? We could use more warlock energy.”

“There’s not enough eye bleach in the world. Love you. Be good.” I waved my finger at her, raising a brow, because Gran had a wicked gleam of mischief in her eyes.

“Gran, you know naked boobies and vaginas make Callum go screaming the other way like a little schoolgirl. ”

“Daphne, stop tormenting your brother,” Mom chastised, while Gran cackled merrily, and I wondered how this was my life. “No one is running around naked, Callum. And Mara will have all our cell phones, but if something...does happen—and I’m not saying it will!—I left the landline number of the lodge on the fridge.”

“Speak for yourself,” Gran chortled. “I plan to be naked as much as possible!”

Watching as they drove down the street, I shoved my hands into my pockets. I planned to pour another cup of coffee and enjoy the blessed silence of the house, before flipping the sign to The Witch’s Brew, our family-owned occult shop, to Open

.

If I happened to wave my hand over my tepid cup of coffee later that morning, and it happened to burst into flames and shatter all over the counter, no one besides Hex and me needed to know about it.

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Chapter Two

Michael

“Are you seriously kicking me out? Now?”

The cute twink, that I couldn't remember the name of, who was still lounging among the completely destroyed bedsheets in my king-sized bed, sputtered indignantly. From my view in my bathroom mirror I could see him glaring at me. Pale limbs, mussed blond hair, kiss swollen lips, and pretty brown eyes shooting angry daggers at me.

Running a hand through my damp, sandy brown hair, my blue eyes met his furious ones in the reflection. Flashing him a smile, I shrugged. “Technically you don't live here, so it's not considered kicking you out.”

I was stretching the law a bit, but I hadn't become one of Boston's youngest prosecuting attorneys, without twisting the law to my advantage occasionally. It was all about the spin you put on things.

Turning to face him, I leaned my naked ass against the vanity. His eyes ate up the sight of me, even as he tried to hold onto his anger at me politely telling him it was time for him to go.

“Look,” crossing my arms over my wide chest, I stalled for a second trying to remember his name. Brian? Ryan? The music in the club had been loud, fairly pulsating with bass, and the dance floor had been crowded. He was a lot shorter than

my six foot three, and I'd had to bend down to try to hear him. I hadn't heard clearly what he'd said his name was, and I hadn't cared enough to ask a second time. His name hadn't mattered.

It wasn't like I planned to ever see him again. He was a bit of fun, nothing more. A good stress reliever before closing arguments on a huge case I'd been working on for almost a year.

Not that I was overly worried about any of my cases. They didn't call me Golden Boy for nothing. I hadn't lost a case in two years. With my winning streak, it was a given that if I was prosecuting your case, you were going to do serious jail time.

And thanks to my hefty trust fund, I could afford my pricey penthouse condo in downtown Boston, while working for the state doing what I loved. Putting criminals behind bars where they belonged .

He narrowed his eyes at me, not moving from the bed, his arms crossed over his thin chest defiantly. "You don't fucking remember my name, do you?"

"Does it really matter if I do or not?" I flashed him my smile again, knowing it had managed to get me out of a lot of shit my entire life. My mom often said I was born with a golden cloud over my head. Everything just always went my way; it always had.

The petite man swung his legs over the side of the bed with a huff. "I hate guys like you. Sooo fucking arrogant. Pretty boys, always getting what you want with no regard for anyone you might hurt in the process. Selfish asshole." Grabbing his discarded shirt from the floor, he yanked it over his head, muttering words I couldn't hear under his breath.

"We both got what we wanted last night." Leaning against the vanity, I crossed my

ankles and watched him dress with jerky movements. “I got a blow job and you got fucked into the mattress. We both came. It was fun but now I need you to leave. I have to be in court later today.”

Dick. Selfish. Bad luck. Black heart. Mote it be?

I caught a few words he was muttering as he angrily yanked on his clothes.

Mote it be ? What the fuck was he mumbling?

“Cruelty and the pain...caused again...I say this spell...”

He straightened to his full height when he was dressed and pointed a thin finger at me. Now his eyes were filled with an almost malicious intent, which sent an involuntary shiver down my spine. His lips, so pouty and kissable and fucking pretty when they’d been stretched around my dick earlier, were set in a cruel little half smile.

“What the fuck was all that?” My smile vanished, and I scowled at him.

“Oh, nothing to worry your pretty little head over, asshole. Just a little itty-bitty curse.” Holding his head high, he flounced from my bedroom. Following him down the hall, I tried to hide my smirk at his ridiculous, over-the-top behavior.

Giving him a bland look, I said just as dramatically as he was acting, “Really, a curse? Oh no, whatever shall I do?”

I really needed to listen to my best friend, Derek, and stop picking up random guys in clubs. What had happened to the good old days where you picked a guy up, took him home, fucked him senseless, then patted his ass and sent him on his way?

Nowadays, they all wanted a little bit of fun to be the beginnings of “something special”. A few hours fucking did not a relationship make.

Just my luck I had to pick up a guy who fancied himself a witch or something of the sort. Curse, indeed.

Growing up in Salem, Massachusetts, I’d been surrounded by the lore of witches, spells, curses, and all that hocus pocus nonsense my entire life. You couldn’t live in a town famous for witch trials, without having the occult tossed in your face practically on every street corner.

I didn’t believe in any of it; never had.

Frankly, I was a firm non-believer, and I planned to stay that way. I dealt with cold, hard facts every day. Whatever mind fuck this guy thought he was pulling on me, it wasn’t going to work.

He smirked at me, placing a hand on my naked chest, directly over my heart. Leaning in close, he whispered, “Just something to make you a little less...full of yourself.”

“Whatever.” Rolling my eyes, I opened my front door, indicating it was time for him to go. Fucking hell, I didn’t want to have to call Derek to come arrest this guy if he refused to leave. He’d never let me hear the end of it. “Time to go. It was fun, but it’s over. Have a nice life.”

Smirking—yeah, the fucker smirked—he sashayed his hips from side to side, pausing when he was standing in the hallway outside my door.

“May your luck be as black as your heart, dickwad.” Blowing me a kiss, he sauntered to the elevator, pushing the button.

Slamming the door on his grinning face, I sighed loudly, running fingers through my thick hair. “Jesus fucking Christ. Stop trolling for dick in clubs, Michael. One of these days, you’re going to end up on the front page and not for your winning streak. Cray cray. I’d expect that kind of ridiculousness back home, but not in Boston. ”

Straightening the rumpled blankets on my bed, I made sure my alarm was set for six. Five hours sleep, then a run, the gym, and enough time to check in at the office before my first case of the day.

Sighing softly, I settled into bed, my muscles relaxing. At least the blow job and sex had been decent, so it was worth the bit of drama at the end. It had been just what I needed to start my week. My docket was full tomorrow, and I looked forward to making sure a handful of criminals got what they deserved.

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Chapter Three

Michael

“We, the jury, find the defendant, not guilty.”

Wait. What? Not guilty? What?

Surely, I had misheard the jury foreman. There was no way they could find the scumbag sitting at the next table, not guilty. The trial had been a quick one, lasting a week. The jury had been sequestered over the weekend and had come back with a verdict this morning. This should have been an open and shut case, the evidence clearly pointing to the defendant’s guilt.

“What just happened?” Shelby, my second chair, asked incredulously, her eyes wide. “Did they say not guilty? Michael?”

Too stunned to speak, I barely heard the judge, or anything else happening around me in the crowded courtroom. All that registered was my winning streak had just been ended by a group of twelve men and women.

Heart pounding, I assured my client we would appeal on her behalf. At least it wasn’t a murder case, or we’d be screwed with double jeopardy. But the defendant had broken into the victim’s house, held her at knifepoint for hours and terrorized her. Thankfully, he hadn’t sexually assaulted her, but she was still suffering from nightmares and panic attacks.

And these people, this jury, had just let him walk.

What. In. The. Actual. Fuck. Had. Just. Happened?

Escaping the courtroom, and Shelby's questions that I had no answers to, I shouldered the men's room door open and thanked God it was empty. Grasping onto the sink with both hands, I stared at myself in the mirror, breathing hard.

Shell shocked wasn't a good look on me.

Why did I feel close to an anxiety attack? It was one case. I had lost one case. I had tried many. And won them all, a little voice in my brain helpfully reminded me. I didn't like not winning, and neither did my ego.

The twink from last night flashed in my head, and all the mumbling mumbo jumbo he had whispered under his breath. What had he done to me ? Had he really cursed me? Of course, he hadn't. Curses weren't real. This was just a...I wasn't sure what this was, but I didn't like it. Not one little bit .

"Fuck!" I slammed my palms against the porcelain sink hard enough to cause it to shake and rattle.

"Whoa, Counselor!" Detective Derek Adams voice jarred through the pity party I was about to throw myself. "What the hell just happened in there, Michael?"

Blinking my blue eyes at my best friend, I gaped at him, then gasped, "We...lost?"

The word felt weird and foreign on my tongue when I whispered it. It wasn't that I never lost at things...well, honestly, I couldn't remember a time that I had lost at anything. Certainly, when I had been fresh out of law school, I had expected to lose some cases. And then...I just never had.

It was my life on repeat, from elementary school through high school and then college. Everything I tried, I excelled at. Easily. From basketball to football to track. Even my grades were above average, and I had led my high school debate team to victory four years in a row. Even as a freshman.

Life had always come easy to me.

Everything came easy to me.

Losing at anything wasn't in my vocabulary, and I was not handling it well.

Derek clapped me on the back in solidarity. "It happens to most mere mortals, Mikey. I've told you your luck was bound to run out at some point. I'm just not sure what happened with this case. It was fucking airtight, and everything was by the book. This should have been a slam dunk. Your closing was perfection. You gonna appeal?"

Derek washed his hands after he took a leak, staring at me in the mirror, his brow furrowed. His thick, midnight brows made him look menacing when he did that. Which Derek totally could be when he put his mind to it. "Mikey, you look like you've seen a ghost. Don't take it so hard, man. And maybe now you'll be a little more humble."

Giving him side-eye, I tried to straighten my hair where I had mussed it with my fingers, and demanded, "What's that supposed to mean? When am I not humble?"

Derek dried his hands, tossing the towel in the garbage like he was shooting hoops at one of our Tuesday night pick-up games. Straightening my tie for me, he gave me a shit-eating grin. "Look, you know I love you like a brother, right?"

"Riiigghhhtt." I already didn't like where this was going.

“Fuck, don’t sound so skeptical,” Derek sounded annoyed now. “Look, if your best friend can’t tell you the truth, who can?”

“What truth?” I glanced at my watch. My next case was starting in ten minutes. We needed to wrap this—whatever the fuck this was—up. “Tell me what?”

Derek tilted his head, staring hard at me with his dark eyes. Giving a casual shrug, he waved a hand in the air between us. “Sometimes you come across a little cocky, is all. Okay, a lot cocky, honestly.”

My brows rose to meet the perfectly trimmed and styled hair on my forehead. “Cocky?”

“Arrogant.”

Mouth agape, I gasped, “I am not arrogant! Or cocky! I’m a very nice guy!”

The previous night rushed at me, and I stifled my wince. Mostly, I was a nice guy. I just didn’t let people, especially one-hit wonders, sleep over. It was a thing I had. That didn’t make me a bad guy. I didn’t sleep with anyone in my bed. Ever.

“Mikey, you are a nice guy, but those things aren’t exclusive. One doesn’t count the other out. You can be nice and still be a bit arrogant,” Derek told me bluntly, holding the door open so I could pass by him.

“Don’t call me Mikey.” He knew I hated anyone shortening my name. It was hard enough differentiating between my dad, grandpa, and me—all of us named Michael.

“You’ve lived a charmed life, Michael,” he stressed my name, and I rolled my eyes. “You’re one of those people that things just come easily to. You breezed through high school at the top of your class, the top of every sport you tried—”

“How do you know about my high school years?” Because I seldom talked about high school with anyone and knew I had never mentioned much to Derek, if anything .

It was his turn to roll his eyes. “Dude, I’m a fucking detective. Do you really think I’m not going to run a background check on pretty much everyone I meet? Especially someone who was best friend material? Pfft, please. As I was saying, everything you touch is golden. But, and I’m telling you this with all my love as your bestie, you’re cocky as fuck. I mean, I don’t mind it, I’m a cocky fucker too. But sometimes people that don’t know the real you, find it a bit...”

“Cocky,” I finished for him, dryly repeating his earlier words.

“Don’t forget arrogant.” He was grinning now, and I knew he was trying his best to lighten the mood.

“How could I?” I asked on an annoyed breath. “I’ve gotta get to court. I’ve got a full day today.”

“Knock ‘em dead, Counselor.” Derek patted me on the back. “Don’t let one loss get to you. I’m sure the higher ups aren’t ready to rescind your golden boy crown just yet.”

Only it wasn’t just one loss that day. It was every single case I presented before a judge that day. Every single thing had been argued down or met with a wall of opposition. Two cases had even been tossed out of court in the preliminary charges by the judges on minor technicalities I hadn’t seen coming.

Nothing like this had ever happened to me before.

After a phone call from my father, telling me for the four hundredth and fifty-seventh

time that I should have joined his practice, where most cases were tried in a boardroom and not an overcrowded courtroom like civilized gentlemen, I packed my briefcase for the night, more than ready to put this hellish day behind me.

Even my administrative assistant gave me a sad, knowing smile, calling, “Tomorrow will be a better day, Michael. You can’t win them all.”

I knew I hadn’t made any mistakes on any of the cases today. Just to push any doubts from my mind, I planned to go back over everything when I got home tonight. Every single case. Every letter, every word, every document. Deep down, I knew those cases had been airtight. Those criminals shouldn’t have walked out of the courtrooms. They should all have been sitting behind bars, locked up tight.

Derek’s words haunted me as I left the office, not sitting well with me at all. Was I cocky? I liked to call it confidence. I was good at my job, and I knew it. That didn’t make me arrogant or cocky. Did it?

Today’s losses weren’t sitting well with me, though. My entire world felt upside down, and I wasn’t sure how to handle any of it. Had my life been so easy that I couldn’t even deal with one bad day? It seemed so.

I wasn’t sure what that said about me as a person, honestly.

Tomorrow had to be a better day.

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Chapter Four

Michael

Hurrying to my office, I ignored the raised eyebrows and hushed whispers of my coworkers I passed in the hallway. I was late, and in desperate need of a decent cup of coffee. My admin, Maggie, stood from her desk as soon as she saw me through the glass walls, meeting me in the middle of the room.

Ignoring her worried face and practically wringing hands, I said, “I desperately need a cup of coffee. Preferably from that one place. The one Tyler always brings the office coffee from.”

She raised her eyebrows, lowering her voice to almost a whisper, “Michael—”

“I know, I’m late. Couldn’t be helped. It was a hellish night, but I’ll get changed as fast as I can. Thank God I keep extra suits here. I’ll tell you about it when I’m back. I’m already late for my first case.”

“Michael—”

Frowning at the youngish guy I could see through the glass walls of my office, who was seated at my desk, staring at my computer screen, I frowned. “What’s the IT nerd doing?”

He didn’t even look up from my screen, just said, “Virus.”

Rotating my neck from side to side, I let out a relieved sigh as it gave an impressive crack. Dropping my briefcase into one of the vacant chairs in front of my desk, along with my laptop bag, I opened the closet door. Grabbing one of my extra suits I kept at the office, I asked, “Seriously? Fuck. How does that happen? Is my laptop affected?”

Maggie was standing in the doorway that separated our spaces, her eyes wide, face pale. “Michael!” she hissed between clenched teeth.

“What?” Shaking out my suit, I shot her an annoyed look, at the same time the IT guy—I didn’t know his name—said, “I can take a look at it when I’m done here.”

Maggie pursed her lips into a thin line, then motioned for me to follow her back to her desk.

“I need to change,” I told her impatiently, “it’s been a crazy twenty-four hours, but you know Judge Townsend hates people being late to her court. ”

“They want you on the top floor,” she whispered, her eyes darting back to the guy working on my computer.

“What?” All the air left my body with that one word.

Maggie took a deep breath, smoothing her graying auburn hair with one hand. “They want you on the top floor. Harry has called three times asking if you were here yet. I made an excuse. Where have you been? And why are you dressed like that?”

Glancing down at my gray sweats and black hoodie, I shook my head. “My condo building caught on fire last night. This morning? It was late, or early. Whichever way you want to look at it.”

She gasped, her hand flying to her mouth in horror, “Oh my God, are you alright? I

mean, you look okay. But what happened? What about your neighbors? Did the Lees get out?"

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I took a steadying breath, because my world was still reeling from her telling me I was being summoned to the top floor. Where not only my boss worked, but also his boss.

No one ever got summoned to the top floor for good news.

"I'm fine," I assured her, "the Lees are fine. I helped them navigate the stairs." The Lees and I shared the penthouse floor, as it only contained two units. They were a lovely, elderly Chinese couple, who treated me like a second son. "There's a lot of smoke damage, but the fire started in a vacant unit on the first floor. It was contained to the first three floors, and no one was seriously hurt. Some minor smoke inhalation. I spent the rest of the night in a hotel room. I managed to grab my laptop, keys, and wallet before I vacated. Mrs. Lee gave me hell for grabbing them already, so please don't start with me. Why am I being summoned above?"

Maggie was one of the longest working admins in the district attorney's office, and she had the tea on everyone and everything. She kept my office life running incredibly smoothly and was one of few people that was ever a step ahead of me when it came to getting things done.

She shook her head, "I honestly have no clue. But—" she gave me a sympathetic look and my heart fell straight into my stomach.

As if the last twenty-four hours hadn't been bad enough, it felt like I had walked into an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. My scraped hands gave a throb, and I remembered tripping yesterday evening after leaving the office.

My mind had been on the cases of the day, still whirling with all the losses and what

had gone wrong, and I had tripped on the curb. Falling straight into busy Boston traffic. Somehow, all the blaring horns and screeching tires had managed to miss me and I hadn't been hit by any of the cars. I had scraped my palms on the pavement pretty badly, but otherwise I had been unharmed .

Finally making it safely home, I had spent the next several hours pouring over each case from the day, trying to decipher what had gone wrong with them. Then another two hours going over all my notes for today's schedule. I did not want a repeat of yesterday.

I had barely fallen asleep, when the fire alarms in the building had started blaring. Gray smoke had already been seeping under my front door, and the hallway had been hazy with it, but the fire hadn't reached us yet. The advantage of being on the top floor, I supposed.

Thankfully, all the residents had made it safely outside, but the building was off-limits to all of us until it was cleared for our return. The fire captain had said it might be next week before we would be allowed back in to collect any of our belongings. Even then, depending on how things turned out, we might not be able to stay in our homes for a while, as the structure might not be safe.

All of that paled in comparison to Maggie telling me that they were waiting for me on the top floor. I could only guess it was Harry and his boss, Charles, who were waiting on me. But apparently that wasn't where my bad luck was ending as Maggie had tacked on a 'but' to her last sentence.

“What?” I was almost afraid to ask.

She sighed heavily, not quite meeting my gaze. “They had me reassign all your cases.
”

At my sharp inhalation of breath, she hurriedly added, “Just for the next two weeks. The rest of this week and next. But—”

Sinking down on wobbly legs into the chair in front of her desk, I gripped the edge of her desk tightly. “I’m really starting to hate you saying that word.”

She gave me a soft look, her brown eyes glistening with what I hoped weren’t tears. Maggie didn’t cry. Like ever. She was tough as nails, didn’t put up with anyone’s bullshit, especially mine, and she knew the in’s and out’s of this office like I knew how to deliver closing arguments. Pretty damn well. “They told me to be on standby to reassign the week after that.”

“Fuck,” I whispered, my vision going spotty. Raising my head to give her an imploring look, I whispered, “Am I fired?”

“No!” She leaned against her desk, her arms crossed over her chest. “No, this—whatever this is—isn’t being handled like a termination. And they aren’t going to terminate their best prosecuting attorney because of one bad day in court.”

“Every single case, Mags,” my voice was rough and hoarse. “I lost every single case yesterday.”

“Oh, Michael, get over that ego of yours,” she admonished sharply. “Do you think you’re the only lawyer in this office that loses cases? Please,” she rolled her eyes, “Kevin loses more than he wins and he’s still here. Fuck knows why. Taking up space is all he’s good for.” Her desk phone rang, and she eyed it with distaste. Glancing over her shoulder so she could read the caller I.D., she told me, “That’s them. Again. I’m going to tell them you’re on your way up. Go. Stand tall, shoulders back, and remember that you’re Michael Endicott, their golden boy hotshot.”

“Michael,” Harry stood from the seat in front of Charles’ desk, his concerned eyes

taking in my disheveled appearance, “are you alright?”

I probably should have taken the time to change into my suit and make myself look halfway presentable. But since Maggie had picked up the phone and told them I was coming up, I didn’t have the time.

Shaking his hand, I shook my head, waving off his concern. “I’m fine. Rough night.”

Charles nodded, “The fire at your building was on the news. Everyone got out? ”

Harry indicated for me to sit in the only other vacant chair next to his, so I did. “Yes, thankfully. Some minor smoke inhalation, but no other casualties.”

“I’m sure you’re wondering why we asked to see you,” Charles didn’t waste any time getting down to it.

Nodding, I sat up straighter in the chair. “And why you’ve reassigned my cases for the next two weeks?”

“Ah,” Harry sighed, “Maggie told you, then?”

Turning narrowed eyes to him, I asked, “Did you think she wouldn’t? What’s going on? Are you firing me?”

So much for playing it cool.

“Of course not,” Harry hurried to assure me.

“But—” Charles cut in, his bushy white brows frowning as he slid a file folder in front of him and flipped it open.

I was getting really tired of all the ‘buts’ people were throwing my way this morning. They weren’t at all the usual kinds of butts I enjoyed.

Turning my full attention to Charles, I waited for him to continue, wondering what exactly was in that file folder he was perusing, his finger running down the page, looking for something. “It has come to our attention that you routinely clock eighty or more hours in a week.”

“And? That’s about normal for most of us.”

“Kevin clocks about fifty,” Harry said quietly.

“Kevin is an idiot!” I snapped. “He graduated last in his class and failed the bar three times. ”

“Be that as it may,” Charles flipped the folder closed with a snap of his wrist, “Kevin—and most of your colleagues—take time off. You have never taken any time off. We aim to remedy that. You are on leave—paid, of course—for the next two weeks. We will decide together at the end of those two weeks if, perhaps, another week is needed.”

At my stormy expression, Harry jumped back into the conversation, probably trying to do damage control between Charles and me. “We’ve had Maggie reassign your workload for the time being. We just feel, after yesterday, that you might need a bit of a break. A breather. Just some time to clear your head.”

“After yesterday,” I repeated, my lips pursed into a tight line. “So, I’m being punished for yesterday? Your Golden Boy doesn’t deliver one day, and I’m out.”

“No one said anything about you being out,” Charles growled, leaning back in his chair. “Michael, we aren’t firing you. We’re trying to help you. The fact that you

can't see that is your ego getting in your own way. You're quite frankly our best prosecutor. However, I—we—" his gaze fell to Harry, who nodded his agreement, "feel you might be on your way to burning out. And none of us want that to happen. You're too brilliant for that. You're taking a break, Michael, just the rest of this week, and next. More if you need it, but this is non-negotiable. "

Slumping back in the seat, feeling defeated, I asked, "What about the Marcone case? We expect the judge to sign off on the warrants any day now? The cops already shut down two of his factories. We've got two of his top guys locked up now. One of them is bound to turn on him."

Francesco Marcone was becoming one of the top drug dealers in Boston. He was tied to a dozen other crimes, including prostitution, human trafficking, kidnapping, and murder. Unfortunately, no charges had stuck yet, and there had been no solid evidence linking him to anything.

However, I strongly believed where there was enough smoke there was bound to be a fire.

My office, along with various police task forces, including Derek, had been working for months to gather enough evidence to get the necessary warrants to bring him down. Or at least to allow us to search and find something that would lead us somewhere.

It was a huge case, which would likely end up with the Feds being called in, and it had been mine from the beginning. I had been the one to link his name to several drug crimes that had come across my desk. Derek had linked his name to some missing person cases, and when we had put all of our cases together, Francesco's name had been smack in the middle of them all.

There was no way in hell I was sitting on the sidelines for this case .

Harry and Charles exchanged a look between them I couldn't decipher.

"For the time being, we've assigned it to Shelby," Harry held up a hand at the garbled sound I made, "just for the next two weeks, in case anything breaks on it while you're gone. She is well aware it's your case. It's doubtful anything will happen in that time, anyway."

"So, that's it then?" I ran a hand through my hair in agitation. "I'm just supposed to do what for the next two weeks?"

"Enjoy yourself?" Charles said.

"Take a vacation?" Harry suggested, then added, "I had lunch with your dad yesterday. He mentioned he and Jessica haven't seen you in quite a while. Not since Christmas, and you barely stayed for dinner. Maybe go visit your parents. They don't live that far from the city."

Sometimes I forgot Harry and my dad were old college buddies. No wonder my dad had called me yesterday. No doubt they had been gossiping about my unusual losses, which had continued well past their lunch.

Salem would be the last place on my theoretical list of vacation destination spots.

Unless...

Could all of this—all the bad luck—have been caused by my one-night stand? Had the guy actually put a curse on me ?

I didn't believe it, not for a minute, but...there was a part of me, deep down, that was wondering if whatever was happening in my life was possibly caused by something...supernatural.

Yep, it was official, I was losing my fucking mind.

Maybe I did need a vacation. Or a break.

Or someone to break a curse?

Well, Salem was a good place to find someone to do that. There was someone advertising that they were a witch practically on every corner. It was a great tourist attraction.

Was I honestly entertaining the idea of driving to Salem and finding a...what? A witch? A real one? Someone who could undo whatever that angry little twink had done to me?

I didn't believe in witches, but I couldn't deny that my life had been turned upside down and on its head ever since that guy had uttered his complete nonsense of a...spell? A curse? Complete drivel that I was letting fuck with my head?

Was I so cocky I was trying to blame something—anything—on the bad luck that had fallen over me the last couple of days, instead of admitting that I might possibly have been at fault for any of it?

And wasn't that just a kick in the ass. No, I knew I had tried those cases competently and well. I definitely wasn't to blame for the fire. The only thing that I truly knew I was to blame for was my tripping over the curb into traffic. Because my mind had been muddled with the day's events, and trying to figure out where everything had gone off the rails, I hadn't been paying any attention to my surroundings.

The rest of it, though...while I didn't believe in witchcraft, or any of it, there was a small part of me that kept landing back on the quietly chanted words from my hookup. A part of me that felt like I could feel some evil force at work.

It was official. I was losing it.

Which explained why later that day, after stopping to buy some clothes and essentials, my car was pointed North out of Boston and headed for my hometown.

Salem was only about a thirty-minute drive from the city if traffic was light, but it usually ended up taking me about forty-five minutes. It wasn't like I could even get back into my condo anytime soon, I reasoned with myself. I'd rather wallow at my parents' house, in my old bedroom, than a hotel room, at least for a few days. And I hadn't seen them since Christmas, which was almost a year ago.

I couldn't believe I was even entertaining the idea of finding an honest to God witch and breaking whatever curse that little fucker had put on me.

I was never picking up a random twink in a club again, as long as I lived.

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Chapter Five

Callum

Hex flicked his tail at me across the glass top of the display case, annoyed that I wasn't giving him the attention he felt he deserved. Not looking up from the computer screen, I absently reached over to give his soft black fur a pet.

Scanning the appointments, I saw Mrs. Hawthorne was scheduled at five to have her cards read. I liked the older lady; it was always a hoot to read her cards. She usually came in once a week and was always eager to tell me if anything the cards had predicted had come true.

Reading cards came easy to me, and my readings were surprisingly spot on most of the time. We did a fair amount of business with card readings, especially this time of year. October saw Salem filled to the brim with tourists, eager to take any of the numerous ghost walking tours, visit the site of the famous witch trials, and stay in rumored haunted hotels. Even though we were a bit off the main drag, thanks to our online presence, people still managed to find us.

Thunder rumbled outside, and I glanced up just as the pattering of rain against the windowpane started. The wind whistled sharply, and I shivered. Unease skittered across my skin. Something was brewing in the wind. The skies outside had darkened with the oncoming storm, casting gloomy shadows over the store's floor.

Sighing, I flipped on the light next to the computer. We tended to keep the shop lights muted, casting shadows in the corners. It added to the ambiance we were going for,

but it was hell on my faulty eyes, especially when the clouds blocked out the sun.

I'd kill some time between walk-ins and card readings by filling some of our online orders. Our online sales were always good, and when Daphne had started making candles—some spelled and some not—they had become a hit. There was always someone who wanted a good luck charm or a love potion.

If I had time after filling orders and preparing them to ship out, I would do a quick inventory of the floor items. Along with kitschy, witch themed souvenir items, we sold sage, candles, and crystals. We did do some potions, but those were kept in the back, and were only for a few select clientele. I left those things to Gran, Mom, and Daph. No one wanted me trying my hand at any potions. Not with the way my magic tended to...have a mind of its own. Who knew what any potion I made might end up doing.

I knew where my strengths lay and I played to them.

Thunder boomed so loud it felt like the old house shook on its foundation. Hex, none too pleased with the noise, jumped from the counter. With a swish of his fluffy black tail, he disappeared through the opening of the curtain that covered the doorway behind the counter. It separated the main part of the house and our living space from the shop floor.

An hour later, I was printing shipping labels when the shop door opened with a gust of wind so forceful it whipped away from the person who had tugged on it. The bell above it tinkled loudly. Wind, rain, and small bits of debris and leaves flew in, followed by a man who was valiantly trying to pull the glass door closed behind him and block out the ominous weather.

He was tall, with broad shoulders covered by a black hoodie, and tight jeans that hugged his delectable ass to perfection. My mouth watered at the sight of that peach,

and heat flushed through my body. I usually didn't have such a visceral reaction to a man's ass, but this one was grade A prime. His hair, darkened by the rain, was flattened against his skull, and hard to determine its actual color.

His aura drew my eyes in, the blues and violets swirling around his tall frame, like undulating flames wrapping around him. Mixed in with the cool colors there was a splash of warmth, red, and a bit of orange.

Auras could tell you a lot about a person, if you knew how to read them. I had always been able to see auras, for as long as I could remember. They were just a part of a person when I looked at them, like their eye color or hair. It wasn't until I was maybe ten, that I realized and understood that not everyone saw colors surrounding people the way I did. In my family, I was the only one who could see a person's auras.

The blues told me he was a seeker, with a strong imagination, but he could also be critical and a tad snobbish. Violet indicated he had true greatness in him, while also having the ability to be cunning and selfish. The red and orange told me he had strength and a love of life, but that he could be self-indulgent.

What had my brows furrowing and me pushing my glasses up was the tiniest swirl of brownish black weaving its way through the otherwise lovely colors of his aura. Brown usually meant low energy, but black could mean one of two things: depression or death.

There was something familiar about his aura, like I had seen it before, I just couldn't place from where.

The man finally got the door wrestled into submission and firmly closed, dimming the sound of the wind and rain raging outside. He turned, running a hand through his wet hair, brushing it back from his forehead .

And I forgot how to breathe.

My stomach dipped and swirled, and I grabbed onto the counter, my entire body playing haywire with itself.

Michael fucking Endicott, the...third? Fourth? It didn't matter. His family—at least on his mother's side—dated back as far as mine did in Salem, which was a long fucking time.

My high school crush.

At least for the two years before he had graduated. I'd been a sophomore when he and Daphne had been seniors, though they hadn't run in the same circle of friends. Michael was a complete jock. The it guy. The one everyone wanted to be, or at least be around.

Every single time I had passed him in the hallways my body had reacted much the way it was doing now.

He hadn't even known I'd existed then, but oh how I had daydreamed about our eyes meeting, that smile of his lighting up his face, and he would see me. Of course, we would be together happily-ever-after, the perfect couple.

I snorted out loud at my own ridiculous fantasies and hoped he hadn't heard me over the storm outside.

He'd been so fucking beautiful it had hurt to look at him. Sandy brown hair, sparkling blue eyes, a dick-hardening smile. He had been sheer perfection in my adolescent eyes. Good looking and great at every single thing he did. Football? Star quarterback. Basketball? He could land a three pointer every time. Track? That mile didn't even make him winded.

Unlike what happened to my lungs anytime my green eyes landed on him, when I couldn't remember how to properly breathe. Or speak. Or think. Which had been often, because I seemed to always have an uncanny ability to pick Michael out in any crowded hallway, between passing periods. His aura had always drawn my eyes immediately to him.

Michael Endicott had fueled many of my teenage hormone driven dreams—and even a few grown up ones, to be honest.

He had left Salem after graduation, off to Boston and law school. He'd been a prosecuting attorney in the city for the last few years, his smiling face showing up across the front page of the papers more than once. It was the only reason I subscribed to the online editions. I could honestly care less what was happening in Boston, but every once in a while, I would log in and there would be Michael's face staring back at me, blue eyes shining. Announcing another victory, another win, another criminal he had put behind bars.

Pushing my glasses up my nose, I straightened to my full height, which at six-foot-one was only about an inch or two shorter than Michael.

His wide, slightly frantic eyes darted around the shop. Like he wasn't sure how the fuck he had landed in this strange place, filled with all kinds of witchy type things, before he visibly shook himself.

His lips moved silently, and I wondered if he was giving himself a pep talk of some kind, while I waited with bated breath to see what he was going to do next.

And why on earth he was standing in The Witch's Brew.

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Chapter Six

Callum

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, you'd think I'd never had a customer in the shop before.

Get a grip, Callum, just act cool.

Who the fuck was I kidding? I'd never been cool a day in my life.

Words. I should use my words. Ask him if I could help him find something.

Like I did with any other customer who wandered in off the street. I knew how to do this. He was no different than anyone else.

He puts his pants on the same way you do , Gran's voice rang in my head, and I shook her words away.

Because Michael's pants probably cost ten times what mine did, and I didn't think I had ever owned a pair that cradled my ass like his did. If I did, I probably wouldn't be single now.

I opened my mouth, and my tongue just deserted me. Completely forgot how to make words. Nothing—absolutely nothing—not one sound came out of my mouth. Clamping my lips tightly together before I made some kind of undignified sound, we just stared at each other for a full minute. Michael silently saying...a prayer, maybe, and me staring like I had seen a ghost.

Finally, Michael visibly shook himself and took a step closer to where I waited silently behind the counter. Then another and another. His face broke into that smile of his, so bright it was like the sun was shining on me through the gloom of the day.

Words. What were words? Who needed them anyway?

Blinking behind my glasses, I shoved them back up my nose and watched him move closer.

My breath caught in my chest, my pulse pounded so loud I could hear it in my ears, and my palms grew damp.

Then he veered to the left, towards the candles on display.

Uhh, what just happened?

Swallowing hard, I watched as he scanned the row, then picked one up. He sniffed it, wrinkled his nose, and put it back.

Running my damp palms down my jeans, I finally tried to speak. “Can– ”

The word was garbled and so low I barely heard myself. Trying again, I finally managed, “Can I help you find something?”

There. I did it. I spoke to Michael fucking Endicott. And the world hadn’t ended, and I hadn’t died of embarrassment.

I could do this. I was a grown ass man now. So was Michael. Just a mere mortal, nothing more. No need for me to completely forget how to function in his presence.

Looking up from his perusal of the various cutesy witch knick knacks we had, he

smiled slightly. “I’m just looking, thanks.”

Pushing my glasses up further on my nose, I nodded. “Let me know if you have any questions.”

Michael seemed completely out of place, wandering the display aisles. When he reached the last one, which was closest to where my tarot reading area was set up, he took a few seconds to scan the signage hanging on the wall above my table that advertised my rates for the various readings I did.

Finally, when he had looked at just about everything in the store, and then consulted something on his phone, he started towards my counter.

“Uh, hi,” he said, his voice a tad deeper than it had been in school. Deeper and smooth, like the slide of expensive bourbon going down my throat .

Swallowing hard, I pushed aside the image of me down on my knees behind the counter, something else of Michael’s, hot and smooth, sliding down my throat.

That was just a wishful fantasy, and not some kind of vision for the future.

Tugging at the collar of my long-sleeved t-shirt, I wondered why it was so blazing hot in here. Had Gran kicked the furnace up again before they had left? The woman liked to keep the temperature set as high as she could get it.

When I still didn’t say anything—because words once again escaped me—Michael’s smile faltered a little at the corners, and he looked uncomfortable and a slightly unsure of himself.

Taking a good long look at him, I noticed the dark circles forming beneath his eyes, and the slightly...rumpled look of him. Not bad, but not how I always pictured him in

my head.

In school, he was always put together, in the latest styles and fashion. In the papers, he was always in a suit and tie that probably cost more than all of my belongings combined. The casual jeans and hoodie weren't a bad look on him, at all, but I could tell he wasn't at his best.

He looked...troubled.

He ran a hand through his rumpled hair again, mussing it more. It was kinda sexy, the just tumbled out of bed look, and I found myself liking it more than his usual artfully styled look.

Hex being Hex, and a lover of anyone who would give him the slightest bit of attention, chose that moment to jump up on the counter, landing practically under Michael's nose. The poor man startled, letting out a very high pitched, undignified scream. One hand landed over his heart, the other covered his mouth, and he looked as startled as me by the sound he had made.

Hex, who couldn't be bothered to be upset by anything, rolled around on the counter, purring so loud the neighbors probably heard him over the storm. Batting his green eyes up at Michael, the implication that he was to be petted was loud and clear.

"And there's a black cat. Because, of course, there's a black cat," he mumbled.

"His name is Hex," I offered, finally able to string half a sentence together. "He's my familiar."

His eyes widened comically at my lame joke, and his Adam's apple bobbed. "Uh, really?"

“No, of course not. He’s just a rescue.”

He snorted, looking slightly relieved. “Can I pet him?”

“Yeah. He’s never met a stranger.”

Michael reached a tentative hand down and ran it across Hex’s fur. “He’s so soft!”

“Yeah.” My conversation skills could use some work. No wonder I hadn’t had a date in...well, we didn’t need to discuss that right now.

Get it together, Callum!

“Um, so, I was wondering if you sell—” he paused, looking over his shoulder at the empty store like customers had somehow come in without us noticing and would hear him. His hand stopped petting Hex, who unrepentantly batted at his hand with a paw, until Michael started stroking his hand over the soft black fur.

And why was I mesmerized by the motion, wondering what that hand would feel like stroking over my skin? My dick twitched in my jeans, and I was thankful I had left my shirt untucked. Sporting a hard on for a customer was probably bad for business.

When he didn’t continue, I prodded, “If I sell...?”

He turned back to face me and took a shallow breath, then lowered his voice to just slightly above a whisper. “I can’t believe I’m doing this. But then, I can’t believe half the bullshit that has happened the last two days.”

When I just stared at him silently, he must have realized he was basically talking to himself and hadn’t asked me a question yet. “I read on your website you sell spells. Or spelled candles. I saw those, but I didn’t see exactly what I was looking for.”

Scraping my teeth along my bottom lip, I asked, “And what are you looking for? ”

He glanced back over his shoulder, scanning the store again. It was still as empty as it had been when he’d stepped over the threshold. “Are we alone?”

I shrugged, “Just me, Hex, and the ghosts, of course.”

His blue eyes widened comically, and he visibly swallowed. His eyes darted from side to side, like he was looking for a spirit to pop up at him. “Are there ghosts here?”

“Not that I’ve seen and I’ve lived here my entire life.”

His lips quirked, but didn’t break into his trademark smile. “Do you fuck with all your customers.”

“Only the really cute ones.” Where had those words come from? Had I just been possessed? Because what in the actual fuck was I even saying right now? I could feel the heat creeping up my neck to my face. If Gran heard me talking to any customer like that she would smack me on the back of my head.

Possession. It was the only explanation. I had been possessed.

Playing it cool, like I hadn’t just told him I found him cute –what the fuck, Callum!–I stared at him unblinking, ignoring the way my cheeks burned.

Michael stared back at me, and I fought the urge to not squirm under his gaze. His eyes traveled over my face, down my chest, then back up when the counter blocked the rest of me essentially from view. His lips quirked, but his eyes held...interest? Surely not. Not for me.

Wait a minute...was Michael...gay?

In the two years we had shared a school, there had been no indication that he was gay. He'd had the same girlfriend his junior and senior years. Not that that meant anything. But he certainly hadn't been out in high school. Was he bi? A late bloomer?

Whatever his situation, it wasn't my business. Except, yeah, there was definite interest in those pretty eyes of his, I was sure of it. For me.

This day just kept getting weirder and weirder.

"That was wildly inappropriate of me," I finally said by way of an apology. "I'm not even sure why I said it. Can we just forget the last five minutes happened?"

"If my life wasn't an absolute train wreck right now, I would probably tell you I find you cute too and maybe ask you for coffee or something. As it is, I just really need to see if you can help me. Then maybe we can circle back to cute and coffee."

I was back to being tongue-tied and speechless.

And convinced I was having some wild dream, and I was going to wake up completely disappointed, and go back to my boring life. Where Michael Endicott didn't blow into my shop, looking like sex on a stick, tell me I was cute and maybe ask me for coffee.

Yeah, none of that seemed like it would ever happen in my real-life world.

Dreaming for the win .

Okay, back to the problem at hand. "What are you looking for? Or need help with?"

"I think I'm looking for a spell? More specifically, something to break a bad luck spell. That someone might have placed on someone else. If that really happened in

real life. Hypothetically speaking. Because you would have to believe in witchcraft, and I don't. Believe. But maybe I'm starting to? A tiny bit. I can't believe this is my life."

You and me both, dude.

"Look I googled Salem and spells, and The Witch's Brew was at the top of the search bar. And I think I recognized the woman in some of the pictures on the website. Daphne. She was a friend of mine in school."

Scrunching my nose at his lie, I arched one black brow, giving my head a small shake. "No, she wasn't."

His face fell, and he sighed audibly, placing his hands flat on the glass. "Okay, we weren't exactly friends. We were in the same class, and I knew of her." He glanced around the store once more. It was still empty, nothing new for a Tuesday afternoon. His voice dropped back to that sexy whisper of his again, as he leaned close enough to me that I could smell his soap—lemony or something citrus—and his natural musk. "It was rumored she was a witch."

Frowning, I pushed my glasses back up my nose, because Daphne had likely started that rumor herself, knowing her. She'd always thought it was funny to announce to people that she was a witch, just for the responses it would garner. Especially with our family owning an occult shop, though in Salem they were a dime a dozen.

Michael shook his head, the short drying locks of sandy brown ruffling with the movement. "Wait, didn't Daphne have a younger brother? I almost forgot about him. Super skinny kid, with crazy black hair and glasses he was always pushing up his nose—"

Pushing my glasses back up, I stared at him, unblinking. Though my heart did a little

thumpy thump because he had remembered me. Sort of. After a minute or two. Or three. Whatevs. Still counted.

“You’re Daphne’s little brother? I remember you being shorter.”

Yeah, I had been until eleventh grade, when I had sprouted like a tree. But Michael had graduated by that time and had missed my growth spurt.

Michael snapped a finger, “What was your name? Calvin? No that’s not it. Caleb? Ugh, why can’t I remember? Something with a C or a K, I’m sure.”

“Callum,” I helpfully supplied, because ugh, he couldn’t even remember my name. But also, yay, he sort of had known my name, which was more than my high school heart had dreamed of. And I was going to focus on that positive, especially since I had pretty much lived my life thinking Michael Endicott hadn’t known I existed. But he had. In a vague, I-sort-of-remember-you-not-really kind of way. I was still calling it a win.

He nodded, smiling warmly, “Callum. Yes, I remember now. It was a different name, but I thought it was cool. Way better than boring Michael.”

I had no idea how we had taken a turn down whatever road we were on, but I wasn’t about to stop him from talking. The longer he talked, the longer he stayed in the shop, and maybe I’d be able to get my brain to start functioning and stop sounding like a jackass and blurting out things like how cute I found him. I guess with all my blood rushing down to my dick, my brain couldn’t be expected to be anything but a jumbled mess.

I wanted to say something flirty like, “There’s nothing boring about you, Michael.”

Instead, I just stared at him through my glasses, not blinking, not saying a fucking

word.

I was the lamest of the lame. I had zero game. It was truly a miracle I had ever been on any dates and managed to get laid.

“So, is Daphne around, by chance?” He looked around again, like my sister was somehow going to appear out of thin air.

“No.”

“Oh,” he tapped his fingers on the glass counter. “Could you call her?”

“No,” I shook my head, “I can’t. Call her.” And I was back to two- word sentences. Great.

Michael frowned at me, the skin between his eyes scrunching in the most adorable way. “Can I ask why not? Look, Callum, I really need her help. It’s a matter of life and death.”

Hearing my name on his lips had my brain back to the non-functioning level. How did the man make my name sound so sexy?

Wait. Hold up. Go back.

Life and death?

A bit dramatic much? No one was dying here.

Before I could tell him just that—if I could manage to get the words out—the bell above the door tinkled and a group of four women came in from the storm, talking and laughing amongst themselves. Tourists, by the look of them.

“Welcome to The Witch’s Brew,” I called in greeting, and Hex took this as his cue to sit up and look like the regal being he was, slow blinking his green eyes at the newcomers. Who would hopefully ooh and ahh over him, give him pets, and tell him what a handsome boy he was. Probably make some reference to the movie Hocus Pocus while they were at it. “Let me know if there’s anything I can help you find.”

“Oh, we saw your store online, and came in to look at the candles,” one of the ladies called from the candle aisle. They seemed to be on a mission, and I was happy I didn’t need to pay too much attention to them .

“And then last night the lovely young lady who led our walking tour on the witch trials recommended we stop in,” another one added.

I knew they were talking about my friend, Macy, who led a nightly walking tour and regaled the tourists with sights and knowledge about Salem’s famous witch trials. On nights when her sister, Tracy—yeah, their parents had no imagination—couldn’t help her, I would fill in. I was scheduled to help her tonight, in fact.

Their presence silenced Michael, and we once again found ourselves staring silently across the counter at each other. He had the prettiest eyes, a gorgeous cornflower blue. The tiredness shining in them, along with the dark circles beneath them, didn’t diminish how pretty his eyes were. I found myself wanting to caress the crease between them, to somehow ease whatever was troubling him.

He moved out of the way when the ladies brought their purchases to the counter, watching as I rang up their sales. They chatted amongst themselves and to me, and I answered a couple of questions they had about some places I thought they might enjoy seeing. They all gave Hex the praise he deserved, which he and I were both happy about. Anyone who didn’t like cats wasn’t welcome in my shop, a philosophy my mom didn’t adhere to, unfortunately. She thought everyone was welcome, even the cat haters of the world. They were not, and while she was gone, it was my rules .

But the ladies petted Hex dutifully, remarking over his silky fur and pretty eyes. Hex ate up the praise, purring and stretching so they were sure to scratch in all the best spots.

Finally, they took their leave, and the shop fell silent. Michael had spent the last three minutes running frantic fingers through his thick hair, until the now dry brown locks were a mess on his head.

Leaning over the counter at me, there was a bit of frantic energy rolling off him, his eyes wide. Looking down into the case, he went stock still, and slowly asked, “Is that a skull?”

Following his gaze, I nodded. “Yep.” It wasn’t real, just a resin replica to add to the spooky, witchy vibe of the store.

He gulped, “Oh.”

“What’s the issue, Michael? Maybe I can help. Or direct you to someone who can help. Daphne isn’t reachable right now.”

I wasn’t about to tell him she was at a yearly get together with the local covens, up in the wilds of Maine, doing whatever it was they all did when they converged together. Honestly, I’d rather not think about what they got up to.

He chewed on his thumbnail, looking uncertain, a look I had never seen on him in high school. Michael always looked confident. Sure of himself. It had always made me a little envious, because I had never felt like that. Still didn’t most days .

“I made this one-night stand I picked up in the club leave after we were done, and he was super pissed, and I think he put a curse on me.” Michael didn’t pause between words, talking so fast I had trouble keeping up with what he was saying. “And now

really bad things are happening to me, and I feel like I'm losing my mind."

His fingers tugged at his messy hair, pulling slightly on the sandy strands and making some of them stand on end. "My bosses for sure think I'm losing my mind. They've pulled all my cases and made me take a vacation," his fingers left his hair to make air quotes, "and I just want my life back. I saw Daphne's picture on the website, and yeah, we maybe weren't close in school, but I figured she might not think I'm a complete nutjob. And it says you sell spells and spelled candles, and I'm really just grasping at straws here, Callum. But there's a skull in the case and a black cat and..." he waved his arm around, his words wheezy and his chest heaving, "tarot card readings, and witchy...stuff. But it is Salem, so I mean, you know, there's witchy stuff everywhere and I really need help before more bad shit happens. Because I'm pretty sure he put a curse on me!"

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Chapter Seven

Michael

By the time I was done blurting all that out, my chest was heaving like I'd run a marathon. Even to my own ears, I sounded like a crazy person. Bonkers. Lock me up in a padded room and throw away the key. If anyone from my office had heard me spouting all that verbal vomit of lunacy, they'd probably have security escort me out the door.

Callum—and wasn't that a sexy name—blinked slowly at me with his gorgeous green eyes behind those glasses of his, that he kept pushing up his nose every few minutes. Those glasses. Fucking hell, those glasses made me want to do absolutely dirty, dirty things to him. And if I wasn't convinced the next bad thing to happen to me wasn't right around the corner, I might be inclined to show him just how sexy I found guys who wore nerdy, black glasses.

Callum was seriously cute with a capital C.

"That," he said slowly, "was a lot to unpack."

"Tell me about it." At least he hadn't responded by telling me I was a complete nutter and to leave his shop. That had to be a good sign.

Callum came out from behind the counter, his eyes roaming up and down the length of my body, and I shivered slightly in my still slightly damp clothes. Just his gaze running over my body felt like a lover's caress, and goosebumps broke out across my

skin. A fire of want sparked low in my belly, but I ignored it. Now was not the time for me to be focusing on getting my dick wet.

And since when did someone turn me on with just a look?

Callum Turner was pressing all my buttons without even putting any effort into it. Which was strange, because that never happened to me, and he wasn't my usual type. Other than the nerdy glasses, which was a kink I kept to myself.

As his narrowed eyes drifted over the length of me, I was once more struck by how seriously cute Callum was. Had he been this cute in school? I figured I would have noticed if he had been, but truthfully, I hadn't remembered the guy until a few minutes ago. And barely even then .

From the little I did remember of him, he had been a skinny, short, nerdy kid with wild hair that looked like he barely brushed it, and glasses that had hidden his gorgeous eyes. Nothing about him then had even registered on my radar.

Now Callum was tall, maybe only a couple of inches shorter than me, which meant I wouldn't get a neck ache when I bent down to kiss him. Why was I thinking about kissing Callum? Stop it, Michael! Stop it right now! He was lanky, all long, gangly limbs, and legs that went on for miles. His black hair was on the longer side, still a bit wild, and my fingers wondered what it would feel like to touch it. Would it be silky soft?

And those eyes of his. Even the glasses couldn't hide their beauty. Vibrant green, the lids tilted slightly at the corners, surrounded by long, thick lashes. Cat's eyes.

I should have recognized he was related to Daphne as soon as I had walked into The Witch's Brew. They had the same hair and distinct eyes.

Callum did a slow circle completely around me, looking for what I wasn't sure. Feeling like a deer caught in headlights, I stayed completely still, as his heated gaze slid over me.

Standing in front of me, he held up one hand. "May I?"

Not sure what he was asking, all I could do was nod. There was something about Callum that I trusted. The fact that he didn't think I was losing my mind probably helped.

He placed one warm hand on my chest that was still moving up and down way too fast. Heat burned through the thick material of my black hoodie where his hand rested, shooting straight to my dick. After a few seconds, he removed his hand and I immediately missed his warmth. Until he took both of my hands in his, entwining our fingers together.

I wasn't a hand holder. Never had been. But I held onto his hands like they were a lifeline.

He closed his eyes, not moving, and I wondered what he was doing. The only thing that kept me from questioning him was the slim hope that he might be able to help me. Finally, he stepped back, taking his hands with him. He blinked a few times, looking slightly dazed before his vision cleared.

"You're not cursed," he told me softly, holding my gaze and pushing his glasses up with one finger. "It's a spell, nothing more. Not even that strong of one."

"How can you know that?" I whispered, wanting to grab his hands back. Holding Callum's hand had felt...like I had been missing something my entire life and I hadn't even known it.

But I didn't. I kept my hands at my side, where they belonged. Because my need for figuring out what absolute fuckery was wreaking havoc in my life, far outweighed my need for touching Callum.

"Because I can see your aura." His words were softly spoken, like he didn't want to say it too loudly even though we were alone in the shop. He ducked his head, his cheeks pinkening like they had before, and then he stepped back, taking his warmth with him. "And I can see and feel that there's no curse. There's just a pinch," he held his thumb and finger together, "of black on the edges of your aura, which is more than likely due to your own emotions and nothing more. Lots of blues and purples, a bit of red and orange. It's a nice aura actually, very pretty. But there's no curse. Just a teeny tiny spell that honestly, I'm surprised has even worked."

That news, said with assurance and confidence from him, should have made me feel much better than it did. Brows knitted together, I was focused on the other thing he had said. "You can see...colors around people?"

He shrugged, "I can see auras, so yeah. Everyone has an aura. They tell a lot about a person."

"So, when you look at a person, they are just surrounded by different colors? All the time?"

It was oddly fascinating, and I couldn't believe I was starting to buy into any of this. But I was. For the first time in my nearly thirty-one years, I was starting to believe that witches might be real and reside in Salem. Yep, I was definitely losing it .

What was that like for Callum, to always see people surrounded by colors? Was it strange? Distracting? Had he always seen people like that? Even in school? How did he even focus if he saw people surrounded by colors when he looked at them? Or was it something he had just grown used to? I had so many questions.

He moved back to his spot behind the counter, and I wondered for a second if it was his safe zone. And if he had felt any of the things I had felt when he had touched me.

Get your mind back on the problem at hand, Endicott.

Callum stroked a hand down Hex's back, petting the cat. "Pretty much. I've been able to see people's auras my entire life. I thought it was normal for the longest time. I mean, I guess it's not not normal, just different."

Oh, it was definitely not normal, but I wasn't about to tell him that. Not to a guy I found attractive and who also might be able to help me with...whatever this was.

Callum waved a hand dismissively. "I guess I should have said, for my family it's normal."

"So..." I hedged, moving closer to him, "your family?"

It wasn't like I hadn't heard the rumors in school about Daphne being a witch. But rumors of witches ran rampant in the halls. I mean, our mascot had been a witch for fuck's sake. This was Salem. You couldn't turn around without seeing something witch related. I didn't begrudge anyone for cashing in on what our town was famous for, but that didn't mean I believed any of it .

Callum gave me a small grin, and I swear my heart dipped right down to my dick. Because, whoa! That grin did all kinds of things to my insides.

"Mmmm. Well, yeah, we're witches. The real deal. Not like whoever put that spell on you. Definitely not a born witch." He gave another small shrug, running his finger over the display case and not meeting my eyes.

Like he hadn't just announced to the room that he was a witch.

Yes, Salem was famous for our witch trials back in 1692, but that had been a bunch of overzealous people with a mob mentality. Innocent people had died, but I didn't believe witches were actually real.

Never had.

Not really.

Until now.

Witchcraft had always been nonsense. A bunch of coincidences and things that could all be easily explained away with solid facts.

Now a guy I found extremely attractive had just told me he was a witch, without batting an eye, and that the spell on me wasn't that powerful.

And a part of me believed him! Or wanted to believe him. Honestly, I wasn't sure what I even believed anymore. The string of absolute bad luck that had taken over my life since that guy had muttered those words a few nights ago, had me firmly leaning towards the witches-might-actually- fucking-be-real side of life. Callum talking about auras, curses, spells, oh and the little thing of him and his family being witches so casually, was nearly pushing me right over the line.

"You're sure I'm not cursed?" I didn't know why a curse sounded so much worse than a spell. Or why I was even entertaining the idea of either, but I was just going to roll with it. I should probably be walking as quickly as possible for the exit, seeing as Callum had declared himself a witch, but I wasn't. My feet were rooted firmly to the spot.

He shook his head, "You're not cursed. There's a slight trace of a spell. I felt it when I touched you, but it's not that strong. Whoever cast it isn't a natural born witch, and

likely just starting out. Their spell casting isn't that great. Either way, it should be fairly easy for Daphne to break. She's really good at breaking spells. Like the way I can see auras, she can see spells."

My right eye began to twitch, but I ignored it. "I don't know what any of that means."

Callum used his hands to demonstrate, and I found myself strangely transfixed by his long fingers. "All spells have threads, but most people can't see them. Daphne can, which makes it easy for her to...basically unravel them."

Sighing with relief, because that seemed simple enough, I felt some of the tension leave my shoulders. "Okay, great. So where exactly is Daphne? Is she going to be home soon? Can she break this...spell?"

I had almost said curse again, but I was quickly realizing there was some kind of difference between the two, though I really had no clue what.

Curses...spells...hexes...it all seemed like a bunch of hocus pocus nonsense. Until it had happened to me.

"About that," Callum ran a hand through his hair, and pushed his glasses back up his nose. The man really needed to get his glasses adjusted. The way they constantly slid down his nose was ridiculous. But also, his constant pushing them back up was super adorable. "Daphne, our mom, and our Gran are out of town for another week and half, and they can't be reached."

His words had my world crashing down around me, and I felt dizzy. "I need this spell broken now. I can't even believe I'm saying this, because I don't even believe in any of this. The last few days have been hell, absolute hell, and I'm afraid of what could happen if this goes on much longer."

Callum stared at me behind his glasses, then wrinkled his nose. “Tell me what’s happened. Most things can be attributed to mere coincidence and your own mind playing into your fear. This spell is not that strong, I’m telling you. It’s barely there, so I have a hard time believing it’s done anything that drastic. So, let’s talk this out.”

I heaved a sigh of relief, sure that once I explained to Callum all the things that had happened to me the last few days, he would understand that whatever this spell was, it was bad news and much more powerful than he thought it was. “Where do you want me to start?”

He ran a hand over Hex’s fur, stroking the cat but totally focused on me. Again, I was struck with a need to find out what those hands of his would feel like stroking over my skin. “Gran usually says starting at the beginning is the best place to start. So start there.”

“I picked up this guy at a club. We went back to my place, and—” I hesitated, because for some unknown reason I didn’t want Callum to think badly of me. Or that I was the type of person who routinely picked up random people at clubs, took them home, fucked them, then sent them on their way, with no intentions of ever seeing them again. Even if that was exactly what I usually did. “Later, when I asked him to leave, he got mad and started mumbling under his breath and then he said he had cursed me.”

Both Callum’s black brows rose in unison above his pretty green eyes, and the black frames of his glasses. “Yeah, okay, I think there’s a lot missing from that explanation.”

Waving a hand, he motioned for me to continue.

“The next day—yesterday—I lost all my court cases. Every single one of them.”

Callum shrugged, “Lawyers lose cases all the time. I mean, you’ve got a fifty-fifty chance, right? ”

Scowling, I huffed, “I have never lost a case I’ve prosecuted in two years.” Holding up two fingers, I reiterated sharply, “Two years. Even the ones where we were setting up bonds, or preliminary hearings, something went wrong. Two cases were tossed on technicalities that hadn’t been discovered before yesterday.” Almost like they hadn’t been there before yesterday.

Dial back the paranoia, Michael.

“Bound to happen, though. So far, it sounds like you were just having a bad day.” His voice wasn’t unsympathetic, but I could tell he was just trying to placate my feelings.

My shoulders slumped dejectedly. “It’s just never happened to me before. And to lose them all that day...” my voice trailed off and I tried to not sound like a pouty child, who had lost at a game.

“What else you got?”

Searching my memory, so that I didn’t forget one tiny thing, I said, “I tripped on the curb, fell into traffic, and nearly got run over after leaving the office.”

Callum’s green eyes grew wide with concern hearing that. “Were you hurt?”

Holding up my hands, I showed him my still red palms. “Some road rash, but nothing serious.”

Callum looked slightly troubled now, less dismissive, but it was hard for me to read him. He kept his face pretty expressionless, and it was distracting and annoying. I was used to reading people’s faces. Clients, defendants, and most of all, juries. “My

condo building caught on fire last night.”

His eyes widened comically with shock at hearing that, and he straightened from where he’d been leaning against the counter. “Was anyone hurt?”

“Some smoke inhalation, but that was it. My condo got a lot of smoke. The fire started in an empty unit on the first floor. I’m on the penthouse floor and the firefighters were able to contain it before it reached that far.”

Callum rolled his eyes. “Of course you are.”

Not really liking what he was implying, I ignored his slightly sarcastic tone. “I won’t know actual damage for a few days. We’re not allowed back in yet.”

Which was a pain in the ass. Luckily, since I’d grabbed my wallet, I wasn’t without resources, but I really didn’t want to replace my entire wardrobe while I waited for them to let us back inside.

“I’m glad no one was hurt,” Callum’s tone was gentle now. “I’m glad you weren’t hurt. But Michael, all of this is honestly nothing more than just a very bad day.”

“Look I get that this sounds like I’m being paranoid, believe me,” I ran a hand through my hair, something I had been doing a ridiculous amount of lately. “But never in my life have I had this much bad luck at one time. When I got to work this morning, I found all my pending cases for the next two weeks had been reassigned, and I was told I needed to take two weeks off. To clear my head.”

“Michael, look, this is more than likely just nothing more than a run of really, really bad luck,” Callum repeated, and shrugged, “maybe Mercury is in retrograde or something.”

Pursing my lips, I asked, “Is it? Seems like something you would probably know.” Not that I believed in astrology and signs any more than I believed in witches, but at this point I was willing to believe in just about anything to make my life go back to the way it had been. Charmed and filled with good luck

“It wasn’t, no, and before you ask, it wasn’t a full moon either. But none of this means your bad luck has been caused by this spell. Most spells are harmless.”

Panic rose up inside me, like a hand tightening around my throat. How could I tell Callum it was more than just all the extremely bad luck that had my nerves on edge. That it was a feeling, a tickling along my nerve endings, my spine, that told me something bad was happening to me. Or was going to happen to me.

“If it will make you feel better, you can come back when Daphne is home and have her remove the spell,” he told me softly.

A thought occurred to me. “Aren’t you a witch? Why can’t you make this spell go away? You said so yourself, it’s not that strong of one.”

He hesitated for a brief second. “I can’t help you.”

“I’ll pay you,” I blurted, because money wasn’t a problem for me. I’d pay whatever their going rate for spell breaking was. Hell, I’d pay triple even. I wanted this spell, curse, whatever the fuck that little twink had put on me gone from my life.

Callum shook his head, “It’s not that. I just can’t. I can’t do it.”

Shoulders slumping, I sighed dejectedly, feeling defeated. “Okay. I’ll just come back when Daphne is here, I guess. Thanks for your help and not thinking I’m crazy,” I told him, turning and heading for the door.

Thunder boomed overhead, shaking the earth and lightning split the sky outside. Through the glass of the door, I could see the storm suddenly start raging once more, the rain pelting loudly against it and making a pinging sound. Pushing against the wind, I shoved the door open.

“Wait!” Callum’s urgent voice had me turning back to him, the door swishing closed behind me and blocking out the rain.

Callum had come from around the counter, his eyes wide. He stood in the middle of the room, chewing nervously on his bottom lip.

“I’ll...I’ll help you. I’ll break the spell for you.”

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Chapter Eight

Callum

What words were even coming from my mouth right now?

I'll break the spell for you?

Had I lost my ever-loving mind?

Watching Michael walk towards the door to leave, shoulders slumped, looking miserable and honestly slightly scared, one thought filled my mind.

Don't let him go.

My crush on him in high school had consumed more than a healthy amount of my time back then and seeing him now had ignited it once more. Just staring into his blue eyes and handsome face had my stomach dipping down to my toes.

But to offer to reverse the spell for him? I knew better. My spells always, always went wild. Not a single one ever worked the way it was supposed to. And I had promised my family. But...this was a special case, wasn't it? Michael clearly needed help. My help.

Yeah, that sounded good and was exactly how I was going to spin it to my family. Not that I planned for them to ever find out. Nope, I was going to do a simple spell reversal, and Michael would be on his way. Or, not.

Because when I had stood in front of him, and held his hands, searching for the spell, I had seen...something. Usually my visions only came to me when I read cards. But this time, along with the spell, I had seen...our hands. Wound together, clasped tightly, fingers entwined. And I had just known it was a vision of a future yet to come.

That Michael was my future.

If I didn't fuck it up.

So yeah, I was going to man up and ask him for coffee when we were done.

If nothing went wrong with my spell casting.

Which I absolutely wasn't going to be doing, if anyone asked. Nothing to see here, folks, move along. No spell casting going on today.

It was going to be fine.

The spell on Michael truly wasn't a very powerful one. I very much doubted anything that had happened to him was actually caused by the spell—it simply wasn't strong enough. The majority of bad luck spells weren't aimed to cause actual, physical harm to the person unless cast by a witch who was dark. The wannabe witch that had cast the spell on Michael might have been pissed when he did it, but it wasn't strong enough to cause true maliciousness.

Sometimes bad days were just that. Nothing evil, just a string of annoyances. Though the fire at his building was concerning, as was him tripping into traffic, they weren't caused by the spell. I was certain of that.

I could do this. I could break this spell for Michael. All it would take was a simple

reversal spell, and even I should be able to do that.

Probably. Possibly. It would be fine.

Michael looked so relieved when he turned to face me, and I knew in that moment I couldn't take the offer back even if I wanted to. He needed my help. He truly believed the spell was the cause of all the bad things that had happened to him the last day and a half, and if I could make that troubled look in his eyes vanish, I was going to try.

"You will?" His voice was full of relief, and I nodded. Hex meowed loudly at me, his tone telling me he wasn't on board with my plan in the slightest. Yeah, he was as worried as I was about this.

"Yeah, it's a simple reversal spell." I sounded way more confident than I felt, my palms growing sweaty. Taking a steadying breath, I offered him a smile I hoped conveyed my skill.

You have no spell casting skills, Callum, and this is a very, very bad idea.

"Thank you, Callum." The way Michael said my name, low and silky, had goosebumps racing down my spine and all my blood rushing straight towards my dick. "Thank you."

Brushing past him to hide the bulge in my jeans his words had caused, I flipped the open sign to closed, and locked the door, pulling down the shade. We didn't need any tourists witnessing me doing any actual spell casting. Especially if something went awry.

Not that it would. I had every confidence that this time my spell would work. Mostly.

“Let me grab one of Daphne’s candles.” I hurried to the row of Daphne’s spelled candles we sold. Grabbing a green one that was for reversing bad luck, I placed it on the counter and lit it.

Hex arched his back, swiping at my hand that held the lighter with his paw.

“Stop that,” I ordered the cat, moving the candle away from him, before he accidentally flicked his tail in the flame. Or knocked the candle over and set the shop and house on fire. I’d never be able to explain that to my family.

Oh hey, you know how we all agreed it was a bad idea for me to spell cast? Well, this really cute guy came in that I crushed on in high school, and he batted his eyes at me, and my dick got hard, so I said I would help him reverse a tiny little spell he had on him. Before I could even get started, Hex knocked the candle over and poof! Fire! But it happened before I actually did anything, so really, it’s the cat’s fault.

Yeah, that wouldn’t go over well at all.

Turning to Michael, I smiled tentatively. “I need to go look up something in my Gran’s grimoire. I’ll be right back. Make sure Hex doesn’t knock the candle over, please.” Pointing at the cat, I shot him a stern look before hurrying through the curtain and up the stairs to Gran’s room.

Ten minutes later, I returned to find Michael pretty much where I had left him, occupying himself with petting Hex. The cat looked to be in heaven, his purring loud enough I could hear him when I came back into the shop, his earlier displeasure with me replaced by the lavish attention being heaped on him. He was such an attention whore.

“All set.” Standing in front of Michael, I took his hands in mine, feeling a tingle of awareness spread through my body.

He shook his shoulders, his arms wiggling like noodles, but his fingers wrapped around mine with a firm hold. “Should I do anything?”

“Close your eyes.” He did, shutting his intense blue gaze from me. He took a breath, then slowly let it out, trying hard to relax.

My voice was quiet, but steady, as I chanted the spell. With each word, I grew more confident .

“Banish bad fortune and fear, make this spell disappear. Bring good fortune and luck today, only good karma shall stay. Banish all that blocks and binds, conjure thee and make it mine. Return this spell from whence it came, with my power, I mote it be.”

Michael’s eyes fluttered open and we stared at each other for a few seconds, neither saying a word. Finally, he whispered, “Is that it?”

Nodding, I reluctantly dropped my hands from his, breaking our connection. “That’s it.”

He blinked and took a step back. “I don’t feel any different.”

Snorting, I chuckled. “Did you feel different before?”

“Oh, no. I don’t think so,” he shook his head, “I just thought I’d feel...I don’t know...something different. Thank you, Callum. How much do I owe you?”

Waving a hand to dismiss his question, I blew out the candle. “Nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

Surreptitiously casting my eyes over the shop, I looked for anything that might be amiss, but everything seemed normal. Breathing a sigh of relief, I turned to find

Michael watching me with concern.

“Everything okay?” he asked, putting his wallet back into his pocket from where he’d pulled it out.

“Yeah, of course. Why wouldn’t it be?” I tried to sound as normal as possible, while still checking for anything that might be amiss .

He shrugged, “I don’t know, you tell me. You look a little...I’m not sure. Like you’re looking for something.”

“No worries. Thought I saw a mouse,” I lied. “Hex is pretty but he’s not a great mouser. Thinks it’s beneath him.”

Hex batted his paw in my direction, his meow telling me what I could do with my opinion of his mouse hunting skills.

“I guess I’ll be going now,” Michael said each word slowly, and I nodded.

Stop nodding like a lunatic, Callum. He’s going to think you’re a weirdo. Though if the whole witch thing didn’t scare him off, you’re probably good.

“Yeah, okay.” Now would be a good time to ask him about that cup of coffee.

“Okay.” He took a step back, his eyes conflicted.

“Okay.” Say something, Callum. Anything. Do not say okay one more time.

Michael ran a hand through his messy hair. “It was good seeing you again.”

Smiling, I snorted, “You had no clue who I was when you walked in here.”

He laughed, “You’re right, I didn’t.”

“It’s no big deal. I was pretty unremarkable in school. You were way too popular for me to be on your radar. And I was two years behind you. ”

He bit his lower lip, and it was adorable the way he looked almost shy. “I...yeah...if it didn’t revolve around sports, or debate club, it didn’t really register. Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” I moved the candle from one side of the counter to the other for something to do with my hands. “Really, it’s not a big deal. You were pretty wrapped up in your girlfriend back then too.” Wincing, I kept my gaze plastered to the floor, because I hadn’t really meant to go there.

“Well,” he shoved his pockets into the front of his jeans, “I wasn’t out then, and Steph was...understanding. I didn’t come out until my second year of college.”

“I’m gay too,” I blurted.

Michael’s lips tipped up into a sly smile. “Yeah, I figured that when you called me cute.”

Oh, fucking hell, I had forgotten about that embarrassment. “Oh, yeah...and you are too?”

He nodded, grinning now, “I am, yeah.”

Say something clever, Callum! And, I had...absolutely nothing. Why couldn’t I be a natural born flirt like my sister?

Michael shoved his hands in his back pockets, “I guess I should go. I need to at least stop by and see my parents while I’m here. If my mom hears I was in Salem and

didn't come see them, there will be hell to pay."

"Yeah, moms are like that." What was I even saying? I should not be allowed to speak. Ever.

"Do you ever come to Boston?" Michael asked, his voice hopeful.

"Not if I can fucking avoid it."

His face fell, "Oh. Yeah, it's not for everyone."

"Sorry, that was rude of me." Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I was blowing this. Ask him for coffee, Callum! Man the fuck up. Remember your vision? And your reading! The cards predicted a new love would enter your life and here he is. Don't blow this!

Michael shuffled a foot across the tiled floor. "Um...I don't suppose you would want to, maybe, grab dinner or something tonight, would you?"

Shoving my glasses up my nose, I stared at him, my mouth hanging open.

"Oh," I breathed, my chest filling with warmth, "I'd love to, sure."

His smile lit up his face and reached all the way to his eyes. It was the smile I remembered from school, and it still had the power to make my stomach swoop and swirl. "Good then. What time do you close? Is seven good?"

Technically, we closed at nine, but I was closing early because I needed to help Macy tonight. Macy! I'd completely forgotten I had promised to help.

"I can't." Michael's face fell, and I hurriedly explained, "I promised to help my friend, Macy, tonight. She does a guided walking witch tour. I mean, if you don't

mind eating after, you could tag along. Might even learn a thing or two.”

“What time? It might be fun. I’ve never done any of the walking tours of anything here.”

“I need to meet her on Derby Street at seven.”

Excitement raced through my body, and it took everything inside me to not bounce up and down on the balls of my feet. Michael Endicott was taking me to dinner! More than that, he was going on the walking tour with me, then taking me to dinner. Plus, I had actually done a spell and nothing bad had happened. My cards might have been onto something.

Michael took a few steps toward the door, “I’ll pick you up at six-thirty, then.”

“I’m...looking forward to it.” My cheeks were hurting with all the grinning my face was doing, but I couldn’t help myself.

What were the odds my high school crush would walk into our shop, need my help, then ask me on a date? Michael might have been having bad luck, but mine had definitely changed for the better.

“Me too,” he tossed another grin at me over his shoulder, moving towards the door.

And that’s when it happened.

I should have been expecting it.

No spell I ever did worked.

Why had I thought today would be any different?

Michael grabbed his head, cried out in agony and crumpled to the floor.

Chapter Nine

Michael

Pain exploded in my head like I had never felt before. Crying out, my knees buckled, and I landed in a heap on the cold linoleum floor. Grasping my head with my hands, I whimpered, my breaths no more than short pants. Nausea rolled through my stomach, while clammy sweat flooded my body.

The pain was so intense I couldn't think, couldn't see, could barely breathe. It was like the worst migraine I'd ever had times twenty. I didn't know what was happening, but it felt like I was dying.

And then, as quickly as it had dropped me to my knees, it vanished.

"Michael!" Callum's voice surrounded me, flooding me with relief. Warm hands caressed my sweat dampened jaw, before grabbing my hand. Grasping his fingers tightly, I clung to him like a lifeline.

Blinking my eyes open, I stared dully up into his worried green eyes, taking stock of myself. The pain was a dull memory, barely leaving a trace of it in its wake.

Callum's fingers squeezed mine, while his other hand hovered over me like he wasn't sure where or if he should touch me or not. "What happened?"

Shaking my head, I thought better of it, as the movement set off a warning ache and my stomach rose to the back of my throat. Gingerly, I lay where I was, breathing as

deeply as I dared.

“Not sure. Migraine, maybe, times about a hundred.” Resting my free hand against my stomach, I admitted hoarsely, “Still a little queasy from it.”

“Do you think you can stand?” Callum questioned, his voice lowering until he was nearly whispering too. “We’ll get you onto the sofa. Better than this hard floor.”

Pushing up on my elbows, it didn’t escape my notice that he was still holding my hand tightly. The pressure was nice, warm and a bit tingly. I couldn’t deny I liked the feel of Callum’s hand in mine. “Yeah, maybe.”

He gently helped me to my feet and my knees were incredibly weak and wobbly, my entire body feeling shaky. Callum slowly steered us across the shop floor and through the curtained doorway. He deposited me onto a plush, soft sofa, but I hadn’t even registered how we’d gotten here .

Resting my head back against the sofa, I closed my eyes, trying to will my body to stop shaking from the intense pain it had experienced minutes before. Adrenaline had taken over and it wasn’t a pleasant feeling.

“I’ll get you some water and find some ibuprofen or something,” Callum told me, letting go of my hand. Immediately, I felt the loss and wanted to reach out and find his hand. But my need for something to knock out the mild remnants of the lingering headache won out against whatever desire touching Callum brought me.

“Thanks,” whispering, I rubbed at my temples, trying to figure out what had caused whatever the fuck had just happened. Callum moved away, taking his warmth with him.

“Aye!!” Screaming as the pain assaulted me again, I grabbed my head, curling into a

tight ball on the sofa.

“Michael!” Callum’s voice filled my ears like a vacuum, barely there. All I could hear was my heartbeat, thumping loudly and too fast. Pain exploded from every part of my brain, so intense I couldn’t think or see. It consumed me until all I knew was blinding agony, until I thought it was going to explode.

Gentle hands touched mine, covering them, and just like before, the pain vanished almost instantly. Leaving me a panting, shaking, balled up wreck on Callum’s couch. What the ever-loving fuck was happening to me ?

Breathing hard, I squinted, and Callum’s anxious face came into focus in front of me. “What is happening to me?” My voice was raw, ragged.

Callum chewed nervously on his bottom lip and pushed his black frames back up his nose. “Um...I’m not sure.”

He stood, peering down at me with worried eyes, wrinkling his nose. If I hadn’t been trying to breathe normally again, and not freak the fuck out, I would have found his nose scrunching adorable. “I want to try something. Test a theory.”

“Sure,” flopping a weak hand his way, I gave him the ‘do your best’ sign. Honestly, I didn’t have the energy to even move right then, so he could do whatever and I’d probably let it happen.

I watched as he took a backwards step away from me, then another, his eyes never leaving my face. When he got just past the roughly ten-foot mark, my head exploded, ripping an involuntary scream from me. “Stop! Make it stop!”

Much quicker than before, it miraculously did.

Gasping for air, I blinked up at Callum, towering over my prone figure. “Callum?”

“Oh dear.”

Something in his tone had me pushing myself up to a sitting position. Sweat ran down my brow, while tremors raced across my body. “Callum? ”

Wringing his hands, he looked visibly pale and distraught. “Oh dear.”

“Stop saying that and tell me what is happening to me?” My voice came out sharper than I intended, but I never responded well to pain. I was the proverbial bear with a sore paw whenever I was hurt.

He sank down next to me, his thigh resting against mine, his body heat seeping into me. Sagging, I leaned into him, soaking in his heat and the comfort his presence somehow brought me. “I’m sorry, Michael.”

Turning to face him, I stared into his troubled eyes. “What did you do?”

He took a breath, his chest expanding with the force of it, stretching the material of his shirt tightly, before letting it out in a loud whoosh. “I shouldn’t have tried to do a reversal spell. I shouldn’t have tried to do any spell. Spell casting and me, we don’t...mix.”

Taking a minute to sort his words out in my aching head, I finally asked, “What exactly does that mean? And please keep in mind, that until a couple of days ago, I didn’t believe in any of this,” I waved my arm around weakly. “Not witches, spells, curses, hexes...all of it. Any of it. So, talk to me like I have no clue what you mean.”

Because honestly, I really didn’t. I was still trying to wrap my head around the fact that witches were real. That I had a spell placed on me by a pissed off hottie I’d

picked up in a club, and that I was intensely attracted to Callum, who apparently, while a real witch, wasn't the best witch around.

"We should have waited for Daphne," he muttered, running his hands through his thick black hair, and making it go even more wild over his head. "I promised them I wouldn't do any spells."

Well, this—whatever this was—wasn't getting any better.

"You promised them you wouldn't do any spells." Slowly, I repeated his words, like that would make any of this better.

Callum nodded, pushing his glasses up. "I'm not great at spell casting. I never have been. My spells tend to go a bit...off-kilter." He chewed on his thumb nail some more. "My family made me promise that I wouldn't do any spell casting while they are away. But then you sorta blew in, and you were so desperate to have the spell broken. And you didn't even bat an eye when I told you I was a witch, even though you're a complete non-believer."

Holding up one hand weakly to stop him from saying anything else, I tried to stay calm. "You aren't great at spell casting?"

He shook his head, still chewing on his nail.

"But you did it anyway?"

He nodded, this time in an up and down, affirmative motion.

"Something always goes...wrong with your spells? "

A slower nod of his head this time. He pushed his glasses up, peering at me

apprehensively through the lenses.

Running a shaky hand down my face, I silently wondered how my life had gotten to this place in just a couple of days. “Then why did you do it?”

He sighed heavily, sitting back down next to me, his hands gripping his thighs tightly. “I didn’t want you to leave yet, and it was just a simple reversal spell. It should have been super easy. A toddler witch should have been able to reverse it.” Sighing defeatedly, he sank back into the cushions. “I should have known better. I’m the worst witch that ever witched.”

Almost afraid to ask, because there was a whole lot to unpack in Callum’s rambling explanation, I did it anyway. “What do you think happened? With your spell?”

He nibbled on his bottom lip, sitting up straight. Staring me in the eyes, he whispered, “I think instead of reversing the original spell, I somehow bound us together.”

Chapter Ten

Callum

This was bad.

This was so, so bad.

I was ninety-nine percent sure I had somehow bound Michael and me together with my spell. How I had done it, who the fuck knew.

But I knew better than to be spell casting. My family was going to lose their shit when they found out. And there was no way they weren't going to find out. Daphne would need to reverse the damage I had done.

Michael stared at me, his face pale and slightly dewy with sweat, and didn't say one word. Not. One. Just stared at me with cold blue eyes, so different then the warmth they had shone with not even an hour ago.

Trying not to squirm under his blue gaze, I gave him what I hoped was a reassuring smile. From the look of horror that crossed his handsome face, it was not .

“Bound. Us. Together?”

I didn't like the way he said every word separately in his sentence. That did not bode well for the frame of mind he was currently in.

“Um...possibly.” This was so very bad. “I could try to walk across the room again, if you want to make sure. I just...your head...and...um...oh dear. This is bad. Very, very bad.”

Hex, never one to be left out of anything, jumped onto Michael’s lap, startling him for a second before his hand automatically came up to stroke across the soft black fur.

“Please, don’t,” he whimpered, a horrified look crossing his face. “I really don’t think I could handle that,” he touched his temple, “anymore. I’m still trying not to barf on your sofa.”

“I’m so sorry, Michael,” I repeated, wringing my hands together. “I really didn’t mean for this to happen.”

Dejectedly, he slumped back, and I tried not to notice we were shoulder to shoulder and thigh to thigh. “I...believe you.”

Hmmm...that had been super hesitant, so I very strongly doubted he did believe me.

“You’re just trying to be nice.”

He snorted, “Yeah, I am. So...what are our options here? Do we just stay...bound to each other until...when? Daphne gets home? Where is your family, by the way?”

“Oh, they’re up in Maine.” I waved a hand dismissively in the air, “It’s a coven thing.”

“Of course. How silly of me.” Sarcasm dripped from his voice, and I pursed my lips together tightly.

Since he did have a right to be snarky, I would give him a pass this time.

“What time is it?” My phone was still on the counter in the shop.

Michael brought his arm up and squinted at the silver watch on his wrist. “Three.”

Frowning, I told him, “I need to cancel a client’s appointment. I should call Macy, too, and tell her she’s going to have to try to find someone else to help her tonight.”

Michael rolled his head slowly on the back of the sofa. “Why? I mean we’re bound together, not bound to this house, right?”

Fuck, I hoped not.

“Yeah,” I said with more assurance than I felt. On the plus side, I hadn’t turned him into a frog, or any other animal. So, there was that. Probably best not to tell him how some of my past spells had ended up.

“Then there’s really no reason for us not to still go on our date. ”

Frowning, I looked down at my feet, trying to understand what he was saying. “You still want to take me on a date. After this ?” My voice rose an octave, and I pointed between us.

He shrugged, “I mean, why not? You’re not planning to do any more spell casting, though, right?”

“Definitely not.”

“Then we should still go. And you promised your friend.” He heaved himself off the couch, holding out his hand to pull me to my feet. “Reschedule your client and we’ll talk about what our options are with the spell.”

Frowning at him, I said, “You’re being way cooler about this than I thought you would be.”

“Honestly, after everything else that has happened, I’m not even surprised.”

“And you still want to take me on a date?” I didn’t even try to keep the skepticism out of my voice.

He let out a little huff of air and ran a hand through his seriously messed up hair.

“Not sure what it says about me, but yeah, I do.”

“Huh,” I stared up at the ceiling, “weird.”

“Says the witch who can’t cast a spell.”

He had me there.

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Chapter Eleven

Michael

Callum and I were bound together.

Because apparently, he was a terrible witch, who couldn't do spells without dire consequences.

Because that's how my life was going.

But damn, he was cute.

And those eyes of his were stunning.

And I liked it when we held hands.

A small part of me wondered if he had cast a love spell over me, because I couldn't remember ever being as besotted by someone so quickly as I was with Callum.

Even being bound to him, not being able to get more than ten feet apart from each other without my head exploding, didn't upset me as much as it should have.

There were worse people to be bound to.

Crossing my arms over my chest, I stared up at the ceiling of Callum's upstairs bathroom, thinking it could use a fresh coat of paint. The entire bathroom could use a

fresh coat of paint. Updated tile. A new tub. The narrow room was pushing what I would classify as a full-size bathroom, and it was straight out of the nineteen sixties. Pepto pink tile and all.

“Dude, are you going to go or what?” Tapping my foot, I stared straight ahead, out into the hallway that ran the length of the upstairs.

“I’m trying!” Callum hissed, “You’re not looking, are you?”

“Not yet. Want me to hold it for you?” A smirk played on my lips.

“Not helping!”

The wind howled outside, shaking the old house with its force. “So, um...this walking tour thing?”

“What about it?”

Wincing as thunder rumbled loudly, I shook my head. “Is the weather any kind of deterrent? Do we need an umbrella? Not that it would help much,” I mumbled the last part under my breath.

“Oh that,” Callum didn’t sound the least bit concerned. “It will stop in a minute.”

Opening my mouth to ask how he could possibly know that, I decided better of it and clamped my lips together tightly. Moving my neck from side to side, I groaned when it cracked. Damn that felt good. “Hurry up, now I need to go.”

“I can’t help it if I have a shy bladder!” Callum moaned.

“My offer to hold it stands.”

Out of the corner of my eye, in the medicine cabinet mirror, I saw Callum look at me over his shoulder. “Are you just trying to get a look at my dick?”

“Hold it. Look at it,” I shrugged, shifting my weight from one foot to the other, because we’d been at this for ten minutes if not more and I really did need to pee. “Either. Both. Mostly just want you to pee, so I can.”

Another thirty seconds of silence went by, then finally I heard a steady stream hitting the toilet, and Callum let out an audible sigh of relief.

“Finally!”

“This is so embarrassing,” he moaned, putting himself to rights and moving to the sink to wash his hands. Sliding past him, no easy feat in the tiny bathroom, I took care of my own business. “So, I hate to bring this up and cause you further embarrassment, but what’s the plan for when one of us...you know...”

“You know?” He sounded so confused, and I couldn’t help the grin that broke out across my face. Teasing Callum was probably more fun than it should be, but I couldn’t seem to help myself from doing it.

“Number two. ”

Zippering up, I shouldered him from in front of the sink, watching him in the mirror as I washed up. I knew the minute it dawned on him what I meant because his cheeks took on that lovely pink hue they had gotten in the shop.

“Oh, um,” he ran a hand across the nape of his neck, which was almost as pink as his cheeks, “there’s a tiny half bath in the shop, for customers. And so we don’t have to run back up here. It’s small enough that one of us should be able to use it while one of us stays outside at the door.”

As I had quickly discovered when Callum had finally admitted, with red flaming cheeks, that he needed to use the restroom, the Turner house had a total of one full-size bathroom in it. Located upstairs, along with the four bedrooms that took up the second story of the house.

Technically, I could have probably waited in the hallway for Callum to do his business, but it would have been pushing the distance we knew made my head explode into a million pieces of pain, and neither one of us wanted that happening again anytime soon.

“I need to get changed for the tour,” Callum took a couple of steps, waiting to make sure I followed him. Which was cute and sweet. He was very worried about making sure we didn’t do anything to cause me any more pain.

I knew he felt horrible about binding us together and having to wait for Daphne to get home. He’d even offered to try to call the...coven? Witch retreat? I had no real grasp on what it was his family was actually doing and with who, and I was good with that. In the end, I had told him it wasn’t necessary to try to reach his family and have them cut their...trip... short. They would be back the weekend after next, and it wasn’t like I was missing anything in my life while hanging out with Callum.

When I had checked with my condo’s management team, they had informed me we likely wouldn’t be let back into the building until early next week, if then. The fire Marshall was still assessing the damage and determining the cause. Plus there was the whole being banned from my office thing, my cases stripped from me, my hands well and truly slapped.

Okay, that was super dramatic, Michael , I told myself, following Callum into his small but neat bedroom, my eyes glued to his very round ass. You’re just feeling sorry for yourself.

Hex jumped up on the bed, meowing at both of us about something. Callum moved to his small closet and rummaged around, and I took the opportunity to get my first look at his space. The walls were a very pale...moving closer to get a better look, I chuckled. Purple. The walls were purple.

“What?” he asked, and I turned just in time to see him pulling a long-sleeved black shirt over his naked torso.

Well damn, I’d been so busy looking at the paint color on the walls I’d missed the good stuff. But the glimpse I got of Callum’s pale tight skin, with a thin line of dark hair from his navel that disappeared into the waistband of his jeans, had my mouth watering. My dick gave an appreciative twitch too.

“Your walls are purple.” My hungry eyes ran down his body, now fully clothed again, and yeah, I liked what I saw. Callum had a sexy geeky nerd vibe going on. I had a feeling he had no clue just how sexy he was. And when he blushed so prettily—something he did surprisingly often—he was absolutely fucking adorable.

He pushed those glasses of his up his nose—God, those glasses made me want to do dirty, dirty things to him—and frowned. “I like purple. Besides, it’s technically lilac.”

Biting my lip to keep from laughing at his distinction between the two, I busied my hands petting Hex. “My bad. Nice shirt.”

He smoothed the material over his stomach, “Macy’s idea.”

In bold red letters across his chest it read ‘1692...you missed one’. “Her walking tour is called 1692 Witchy Walking Tour. She’ll have a matching one on, and that’s how people who have bought tickets know we’re their tour guides for the night.”

“Huh,” I took a seat on his bed, then leaned back against the headboard. Might as

well see if the bed was comfortable since we were going to need to sleep together. God, I was trying not to think about that. I never slept with people. Not in the true definition of the word. Just thinking of sleeping with someone in my bed made me twitchy. Always had. It's why I never let any of my rando hit-it-and-quit-its stay over. Always asking them politely to leave when we were finished getting off. Okay, maybe not that nicely all the time, but certainly my asking shouldn't have warranted a wannabe placing a spell on me and upturning my entire life. "That's actually a good idea, as well as great marketing."

"Most of the tours do something similar," Callum was saying, standing in front of the mirror on his dresser and fussing with his hair. With his hand he brushed the thick, dark waves to one side, but one errant lock kept falling over his forehead. After a few swipes, he wrinkled his nose at his reflection and gave up.

"You look fine." And he did. He really, really did. His jeans cradled his ass and long legs to perfection. He was long and lanky, but he had some light definition in his muscles. And the very brief look I'd gotten of his torso and stomach had revealed taut skin. His hair was artfully disheveled, a few longer locks tucked behind his ears, giving him a just rolled out of someone's bed vibe.

A dark five o'clock shadow was just starting to bloom over his lower cheeks and jawline, and need shivered across my spine, nearly jolting me from my casual pose across his bed. I wanted to feel that stubble on my body. My thighs. My neck. Against my lips .

He pushed his glasses up, giving me a small smile in the mirror. Then turning, he pointed to the bedroom window. "Told you. Storm's moved out."

Watching his long, graceful finger, I saw that his earlier prediction had come true. The rain had stopped, the thunder and lightning vanished, and even the wind was silent. Shadows cast a gloom over the room despite the storm's passing.

Callum slid his phone in his back pocket, checked his wallet, and was about to say something when my own phone dinged with incoming messages. It had been silent all day—okay, I had turned it off and just turned it back on a few minutes ago—but it still startled me with the volume of notifications that were suddenly vibrating in my hand.

Callum's brows arched over the black frames of his glasses. "You're suddenly very popular."

Waving my phone in my hand, I grimaced. "Because I had it turned off. Do we need to get going?"

He shrugged noncommittally. "We have a few minutes if you need to take care of anything. More if we drive over, though walking is easier. It's only a couple of blocks but trying to park is just..." he shook his head, "not fun."

"Let me make sure there isn't anything I need to deal with right now." It dawned on me then, as I was scanning my emails, notifications, and text messages, that I hadn't missed this. Hadn't missed any of the endless, never-ending buzzing and dinging my phone usually did, all day and night. Hadn't even thought about my phone for hours.

Derek's name in my text caught my attention and I winced. Yeah, I should have at least checked in with him. He was going to give me hell.

Derek: Michael! I just heard about your building! Dude, why didn't you call me? Are you okay?

Derek: Michael, where the fuck are you?

Derek: I'm about to start calling the hospitals.

Derek : Riordan from the 118 said no one was hurt, so I guess you're not dead

somewhere, fucking asshole.

Derek : Michael, I swear to God if you don't answer me...

Derek: Why is some nerd from the geek squad answering your office phone? Where is Maggie?

Derek: Michael, what the fuck IS GOING ON?? Cap just told us all intel on Marcone is to go through Shelby. What. The. Fuck?

Derek: I'm going to kick your ass when I find you.

Callum, seeing my many myriad facial expressions as I read through my best friend's worried messages, frowned at me. "Bad news?"

Sitting up, I shook my head. "Just need to quickly calm my best friend down. I kind of went M.I.A. and he's freaking out. If I don't check in soon, he's liable to put a B.O.L.O. out on me." Fuck, knowing Derek, he might already have.

Callum snickered, "I actually know what that is from N.C.I.S. and Criminal Minds . Be on the lookout, right?"

"Very good. He's a detective, and I wouldn't put it past him." We headed out of Callum's bedroom and down the stairs, Hex following close behind. "I'll call him on the walk over."

Callum locked the shop up, telling the cat we'd be back later, and we headed down the street. It was dusk out, the sun, mostly hidden by clouds, sinking in the sky. A crispness was in the air, just cool enough to need long sleeves, or a hoodie, but winter hadn't arrived just yet. Leaves scattered across yards, a mixture of yellows, oranges, and reds. And on practically every porch, sidewalk, or front lawn there was at least

one carved jack-o-lantern grinning at us.

October in Salem was this town's jam. Spooky season had descended in all its glory.

Pushing the button to call Derek, I breathed in the fresh, cool air, watching as Callum waved at a few people he obviously knew. Reaching for his hand, I entwined our fingers together and found myself surprisingly looking forward to this witchy guided walk he was taking me on.

No, I realized, what I was looking forward to was spending the evening with Callum.

Chapter Twelve

Callum

“Hey Macy, we’re here,” I announced, walking up to a short, curvy woman, who had her back to us, consulting her tablet. She had long, bright pink hair that was secured on top of her head in a messy bun.

She turned, a sunny smile on her cute face. When she saw Michael, her dark brows rose all the way up to her feathery fringe of bangs. She was wearing a shirt that matched mine, only hers was hot pink with black lettering. “Michael fucking Endicott. Callum, you have so much tea to spill.”

“Later,” I muttered, shaking my head. “Michael, this is my best friend, Macy. Macy, Michael, though obviously, she knows who you are.”

Smiling, he took her hand in his, “It’s nice to meet you. I’m sorry if I don’t remember you from school. I’m guessing that’s how you and Callum met?”

She nodded, “He latched on to me in first grade and I haven’t been able to shake him yet.”

“Hey, you’re still here, lady, don’t blame me for your poor life decisions,” I joked with her easily.

“So, Michael,” Macy gave him a heated once over, that I would have to be blind to miss and I didn’t like one little bit, “what brings you to my little witchy walking tour,

and with my bestie?”

Since we had arrived over a half-hour before the start time of the tour, none of the people attending Macy’s tour were there yet. The start spot was a popular restaurant, and people wandered the streets, as well as there being a dozen or more different walking tours that were assembling or in some stage of their tour.

Lowering my voice, I whispered, “I did a thing.”

Macy raised a brow, smirking, “His name is Michael and he’s not a thing.”

Michael raised his hand, the picture of innocence, “I’m not the thing he did. But for the record, I wouldn’t be opposed.”

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I straightened my glasses when they went sideways from the motion and muttered, “I can see introducing you two is going to be a mistake. ”

Macy cackled, unrepentant, and that was part of her charm. “Quick, tell me, before the people converge on us and I have to play the all-knowing goddess of all things witchy.”

“You are super extra tonight.” I was glad I would be leading up the rear of the tour, basically helping check people in, answer any questions before the tour started, and then mainly look out for any stragglers when we moved on to the next stop. It was amazing how many people ended up in the wrong tour at one stop or the other. But with so many different walking tours going on at the same time, it was bound to happen. It was one of the reasons we wore the shirts, as well as good marketing.

“Michael needed help,” whispering, I ducked my head to be closer to her height, so she could hear me better. “The spell kind.”

“Callum, you didn’t!” Macy hissed, well versed on my wonky spell casting.

“Oh, he did,” Michael nodded, and I shot him a glare. He just grinned, not intimidated by my glare at all. Not that anyone ever really was.

Macy gave him a quick once over again, like she hadn’t already clocked every single inch of him and probably had stored his measurements in her head. “Well, I don’t see any extra appendages. No fur or tails. And he looks like the same hottie he was in school.” She licked her lips, “Maybe even better. Nicely matured. So, what’s the prob? ”

“The prob is I tried to break a tiny little bad luck spell someone placed on him, and I ended up binding us together instead.”

Macy blinked rapidly a few times, then cocked her head at Michael.

“It’s true,” he nodded, “we can’t get more than ten feet away from each other or my head explodes.” He made an exploding motion with his hands by his head, “Bam! Instant, blinding pain.”

Turning to give me a sly look, she said, “I mean, there are worse things you could have ended up doing.”

Michael nodded, clearly agreeing with her. “I’m not complaining.”

“So, Michael,” Macy sidled up to him like they were old friends, “what did you do that made someone put a bad luck spell on you?”

His cheeks colored a little and he winced. “I picked up a guy at a club, took him home, and then asked him to leave. You know, after.”

Macy gave me a look, and I shrugged, “Super abridged version, but basically. It’s not a strong spell and not from a born witch. Daphne will unravel it when she’s home. Until then, we’re stuck with each other.”

“Still not complaining.” Michael winked at me. Winked! The way my stomach flipped flopped from that wink was...disconcerting .

A few people started arriving, and Macy pointed her finger at me. “We’ll talk about all of this later. I brought your flowers, by the way. They’re in my bag.” Mouthing Michael is gay? at me, she raised her brows in a silent question.

Shooing her with a wave of my hands, I turned to Michael, “Any questions before we get started?”

“Several,” he was watching the crowd grow and gather around us, Macy checking people in on her tablet efficiently. “First though, flowers? What’s that about.”

“One of our stops is the Witch Trials Memorial. I like to leave flowers on benches there for the victims. It’s just my way of remembering them.”

He frowned, “A lot of innocent people died because of mass hysteria and children’s lies.”

“There’s always been witches in Salem, Michael. From the very beginning.” I told him quietly, not disagreeing with his statement. “Where there’s enough smoke and finger pointing, there’s bound to be a little bit of fire. I’m not saying the people that were executed were witches, because they weren’t. But...just because the lies were aimed at the wrong people, doesn’t mean they were lies.”

He stared at me for a long minute, a strange look on his face. “I never thought of it like that but it makes sense in a way.”

“Salem is still full of witches, Michael,” I chuckled, waving an arm towards all the many storefronts. “ You can’t turn around without bumping into something witchy.”

He opened his mouth to protest, and I cut him off. “Did you honestly think it was all for show, for tourists, to make money? That’s just smart business cashing in on what is right in front of everyone’s noses. Macy is about to get started.”

Macy started her welcoming, well memorized speech, playing up on pointing out that she was a witch (she wasn’t), and introducing me. People always got weirdly more excited when I joined her and she introduced me as witch Callum. Male witches tended to be looked on as an oddity. She then explained once more what the tour would consist of, because even though it was spelled out on the website when people signed up and bought tickets, there was always someone who forgot what they read.

The tour would last about two hours, and we would be stopping at the famed Witch’s House, Howard Street Cemetery, which was noted to be one of the most haunted cemeteries in the town. We’d breeze by the haunted Ropes Mansion, which was used in the filming of the movie Hocus Pocus , and would then have the most time to spend at the Witch Trial Memorial. We would end up back here where we started. There was some grumbling when people realized the Witch’s House was closed to tourists, but Macy told them with a smile what the museum's hours were and where they could buy tickets.

Michael was mostly quiet on the tour, listening to Macy intently, and taking in the sights like he’d never seen them before. It was possible he hadn’t, not really. He had said he had never been that interested in our town’s history, and had likely never bothered to pay any attention to any of the famous sights. A lot of locals tended to avoid the higher traffic tourist spots if they could.

When we got to the Memorial, people milled around, some taking pictures, while others asked questions of Macy.

I placed a flower on one of the benches that had been built inside the perimeters, reading the name inscribed, along with the execution date. Even though I had them all memorized.

“She’s very knowledgeable,” Michael commented, his voice low and quiet.

Moving to the next bench, I placed another flower, and Michael followed, reading each bench as we moved down the line. “She was a history major in college. Did her thesis on the witch trial. She’s probably forgotten more about Salem than I ever knew.”

Michael looked around the memorial, at the handcrafted granite walls that surrounded three sides, at some of the flowers and trinkets that had been placed on the benches by other visitors. “I can’t believe I’ve never been here before. It’s surprisingly peaceful. I feel like I saw a side of Salem I’ve never bothered seeing before. It’s really very interesting.”

“It is peaceful here,” I agreed with him, placing my last flower. “No ghosts or ghouls hiding out. It’s one of my favorite places to come to.”

He took my hand in his now that I had deposited all my flowers, and brushed a stray lock of my hair off my forehead. “Do you think we could maybe take one of the other tours before...before your family returns? I’d like to see some of the other famous sights.”

“We could do that,” I agreed, “if you want.”

The tour was heading out, and I gently prodded a couple who were still meandering around, taking pictures, so we could finish up for the night.

“This concludes the 1692 Witchy Walking Tour.” Macy’s voice was loud and clear at

the front of our group, as we came to a stop in front of Turner's Seafood at Lyceum Hall. These Turners were no relation to me, but the building was rumored to be haunted. Regardless, it had been built on what had at one time been Bridget Bishop's apple orchard, one of the innocent people executed in the famous witch trials. I figured if anyone was going to haunt the place it was probably Bridget, and not the rumored tavern owner.

"Thanks for being with us tonight," Macy continued to engage the crowd, "and please leave us a review if you enjoyed yourself. If anyone would like to book a tarot card reading with Callum, he has his calendar with him, and any tips are appreciated but not expected. I'll be here for fifteen minutes to answer any questions you may have on anything we saw tonight."

A handful of people came over to me, interested in booking readings during their stay in town. Ready with my calendar open on my phone, I booked them in and took down their information.

"Is the food good at Turner's?" One woman asked, as the few stragglers from the restaurant filed out and they locked the doors behind them. Turner's closed at nine, as did more than a handful of restaurants in Salem.

"It is," I nodded, then lowering my voice, I whispered, "it's haunted. If you eat there you might get lucky and catch sight of the ghost." This tour participant had asked endless questions about ghosts and the haunted buildings. I figured she'd love the possibility of being able to see a ghost in person.

The one time my family had eaten there, nothing supernatural had been going on. It had been a very nice, ghost-free evening.

The crowd finally started to disperse, but Macy was still answering questions for a few lingering folks. I collected some tips from a few people heading off to finish their

evenings with a smile and a polite thank you.

Michael had been scrolling his phone the last ten minutes, frowning. Finally, when it was just us, Macy, and the couple who had question after question, he whispered, “I’m starving. What’s the best pizza place in town? That’s open after nine? I forgot how early everything closes here.”

“Georgia’s,” I told him, winking when I caught Macy’s eye and as she patiently answered another question from the couple. “They’re open until ten.”

Nodding, his scrolling stopped as he must have found the listing. “What do you like on your pie? No mushrooms though; I’m allergic. Can’t even do them on your side, sorry.”

“I like sausage.” I said absently, then felt my cheeks heat when he gave me a smirk and realized what I had said. Shaking my head at him, I rolled my eyes. “You know what I mean.”

His smirk turned into a full-blown smile, “I’m aware you like sausage.”

“Just order the pizza,” I instructed, but I couldn’t help but smile with him.

“That’s all you want is sausage?” he questioned, using his thumb to enlarge the toppings menu on his screen. “No olives, onions, pineapple? Please don’t say pineapple.”

“Anchovies,” I told him, my voice serious.

He blinked hard, looking up from his phone with a startled look. “Uh, okay.”

“I like the salty fishiness of them. Especially if you get the ones with the heads still

on, and the eyeballs are dead staring at you as you eat them.” I rubbed my belly, “Delish!”

He blew out a small breath, and I bit the inside of my bottom lip to keep from laughing. “One sausage and anchovy pizza coming up. I’m gonna get pepperoni on half and put yours on the other side, if that’s okay?”

Not able to contain my amusement any longer, I broke into peals of laughter. “You’d better not even order anchovies on my pizza. Just get a sausage and pepperoni, on both sides. I’m a basic witch when it comes to my pizza toppings. But, damn, your face! And points for being on board with ordering that for me.”

Michael shook his head at me, laughing as he put the phone up to his ear. “Dick! I was totally going to get that for you, too. I hope you weren’t expecting me to kiss you after you ate it though.”

The thought of Michael kissing me caused liquid heat to race through my body. What would it feel like to have his lips on mine? His tongue teasing, wanting to be let in? What would he taste like?

Michael’s blue eyes heated when it dawned on him what he had teasingly said. His hot gaze never left mine as he ordered our pizza.

My mind was racing with so many thoughts, while I tried to come up with some flippant, joking response but came up empty .

I wanted Michael to kiss me. Couldn’t hardly believe that I might actually find out what kissing him would be like. Would it live up to all my many, many teenage fantasies? Would it be even better?

“Michael?” A woman’s curious, questioning voice called, “What are you doing

here?”

He jerked at the sound of his name, eyes wide and panicked, his shoulders stiffening. He had his back to the woman, but I was facing him and could see her.

She was approaching us at a rather fast clip, her brow furrowed in confusion. She was of medium height, a bit fluffy with a few extra pounds that didn't detract from her figure at all. Her long blonde hair bounced around her shoulders, and as she got closer, I noticed her cornflower blue eyes. Identical to Michael's.

Widening my own eyes at him, I tried to question him without bringing too much attention to myself.

Between clenched teeth, he whispered, “I'm so sorry about this. Please, no matter what I say, just play along with it.”

Narrowing my eyes at him, I couldn't do anything besides give him a small tilt of my head to indicate my agreement. Though I wondered what he was dragging me into.

Smiling widely, he turned to face the woman. “Mom! What are you doing here?”

Mom ?

Standing up straight, I pushed my glasses up, frantically running a hand over my hair. Trying unsuccessfully to flatten the flyaway strands the evening breeze had kicked up. Apparently, I was about to meet Michael's mom.

Chapter Thirteen

Michael

“Mom! What are you doing here?” Turning to face my mother, blinding smile plastered across my face, I tried not to wince at the asinine question.

My mom tilted her head and gave me a narrow-eyed look. One I had seen far too many times in my life. Usually when I was trying to pull a fast one on her. Not that that was what I was doing now. While I’d had every intention of seeing my parents when I had decided to come home, I hadn’t really factored them into my thoughts after Callum had bound us together with his wayward spell.

“I live here, Michael,” she reminded me slowly, her lips pursed, as she gave me the once over. “You, however, can barely be bothered to show your face for a holiday. Let alone a random Tuesday. ”

This time I couldn’t stop the tiny wince that crossed my face. It was true. Even when I did my obligatory holiday family time, I left shortly after the festivities. There was always work that I needed to do, always multiple cases that needed my attention.

Standing there in front of my mom, who was silently questioning, my mind went completely blank on how to respond to her question. “Uh...um...I...we...”

“It’s my fault,” Callum interrupted my nonsensical sputtering. “We’re...dating. We’re...ah...on a date.”

Watching my mom's eyes grow comically big, I was sure we now wore matching expressions. Swiveling my head to shoot Callum a questioning look, he shrugged. His expression telling me he clearly had just blurted out the first thing he could think of and that I hadn't been doing any better.

Mom blinked a couple of times, several emotions crossing her face at once, none of which I could accurately pinpoint to let me know what she was thinking. She leaned to the side, so she could see past me to where Callum stood behind me. Her matching blue eyes gave him a thorough once over, before she broke into a smile. Holding out her hand, she introduced herself.

"Hello, I'm Jessica Endicott, Michael's mom. It's lovely to meet one of my son's boyfriends," giving me side-eye, she added, "I do believe you are the first one, in fact."

"I'm sure that's not true," I mumbled, knowing it very much was true.

Callum took Mom's hand in his for a quick shake, "Hi, I'm Callum Turner. No relation to the restaurant." He pointed to the storefront we were converging in front of.

"Well, that's disappointing," Mom joked, "I'd love to get some kind of friends and family discount. My friends and I love eating here. In fact, we just came from dinner and were doing some window shopping. I couldn't believe my eyes when I spotted my son." Turning her attention to me, she smirked, "Shouldn't you be in Boston, holed up in your office or something?"

"Wow, Mom," was the best retort I could muster, lame as it was. "I had some vacation time and decided to use it. Callum and I don't get to see a lot of each other, so I decided to surprise him today." Well, that lie just slid off my tongue like butter. If there was a place in hell for people that lied to their moms, I was going there.

Narrowed blue eyes met mine, and we had a little stare off. It was high school all over again, and I fought to not squirm under her all-seeing, all-knowing gaze. “Your dad had lunch with Harry yesterday and he didn’t mention it.”

Trying not to be annoyed that my dad and my boss frequently met for lunch, where I was a topic of conversation, I rolled my eyes. “It was a spur of the moment thing. I was planning to come see you and Dad while I was in town.” Not a complete lie.

“Splendid,” her smile was back, though I could tell she thought something was up and I wasn’t being completely truthful. Because she always knew . My sister, Melody, had the same magical power with her kids too, and I guessed it was a mom thing. “We’ll expect you and Callum for dinner, let’s say Thursday night? We have a new chef and he is simply amazing. I’ll have him prepare one of your favorites.”

Balking, I said, “We might be busy—”

“We’d love to,” Callum cut in, and I swiveled my head to stare at him wide eyed and slack jawed.

Mom clapped her hands in glee, giving me a look like she’d just won some game I hadn’t even known we were playing. “Splendid! Michael’s father will be so surprised and happy to meet you, Callum.” With a pointed look, she turned to me, her eyes shining. “Thursday night, Michael. Seven.”

I guess we were having dinner Thursday with my parents then, because I knew that tone and I wasn’t about to say one more word. Even at thirty years old, I knew when to keep my mouth shut when my mom told me to do something. And Callum had just jumped right in there and been all Of course we can have dinner with you. We’d love to. We are absolutely free.

“Callum, it was lovely meeting you.” She gave him another warm smile. “I’m

looking forward to getting to know you better.”

“It was nice meeting you too, Mrs. Endicott,” Callum politely responded .

Mom waved a hand in the air, “Oh, please, it’s Jessica or Jess. None of that Mrs. Endicott nonsense. We’ll see you boys on Thursday.” She gave me one more thoughtful look, before leaving us standing alone on the street.

The tour attendees had all dispersed, even the ones that had held Macy up. She was patiently waiting to the side, then converged onto Callum when my mom was no longer in sight. Smacking him on his arm, she hissed, “You two are dating? You could have told me the truth instead of coming up with that lame story about a spell gone wrong.”

Callum rubbed his arm, wincing. “Ow! And that wasn’t a story! I did mess up a spell and bind us together. We can’t get more than ten feet apart. I just said that because it was the first thing that popped into my head. It’s... complicated.”

“We’re kind of dating.” Because I had originally asked him out to dinner, even if our plans had changed. I wasn’t sure if tonight technically counted as a first date, but I had enjoyed myself. “This is our first date.”

Callum pushed his glasses up, his green eyes troubled. “I know you said it, about this being a date, I just didn’t think you meant it?”

Shrugging, I nodded. “Why wouldn’t I mean it? I told you I still wanted to take you on a date, despite the whole—” glancing around to see if anyone was close enough to hear us or care, I lowered my voice, “spell thing. I’m counting this as our first date.” Firmly, I nodded my head, “It counts. We’re counting it.”

Macy handed Callum his share of the tips, observing, “You two are weird, yet oddly

cute together. Michael, I hope you weren't too bored during the tour."

Shaking my head, I smiled. "Not at all. It was really interesting and informative. And fun. Makes me wish I had paid attention more in school to our town's history."

She seemed pleased by my praise. "Well, I'm happy you had fun. I'm going home now. Callum, thank you for your help tonight. Text me and let me know how the rest of your date, non-date turns out."

Then we were standing there alone—well, as alone as you could be on a busy Salem street still overrun with tourists—just staring at each other, neither of us speaking. Callum was frowning, a strange look on his face.

Taking his hand, because holding his hand in mine was my new favorite thing, I leaned into him. The need to kiss him was overwhelming, and I wanted to wipe that slightly sad look off his face.

Before our lips could meet, Callum took a step back, holding up a hand to stop me. "Not here. I don't want our first kiss to be in the middle of the street."

He looked down, his cheeks blooming with the soft rose of his easy blush. Peeking up at me through his dark lashes, he smirked, "And I don't put out on the first date, Mr. Endicott, thank you very much. "

Reaching for him, I pulled him flush against me. It didn't slip my notice that all our parts just seemed to slide into all the right places easily. No pokes or prods, just a smooth glide against one another, everything exactly where it should fit. "It's just a kiss, Callum. No one said anything about putting out."

My tone was teasing, and I had been joking, but I realized I also...wasn't. Me, Michael Endicott, king of the one-night stands, and fun fuck boys, didn't want that

from Callum. Don't get me wrong, I totally wanted it from Callum, but for the first time in my life, I wanted more.

For the first time, I wanted all the things. The dating, the soft, teasing jokes that were just between the two of us. The hand holding—fuck yes, ALL the hand holding. The first kiss that we would both remember for the rest of our lives. And one day, I wanted to know what it felt like to slide my hard cock inside of Callum's tight hole. To taste him, feel him, hear the sounds he made when I touched him. See the face he made when he came.

I wanted everything, and more, and I wanted it all with Callum.

The realization startled me. It was a completely new and foreign concept in my life. And it made absolutely no sense. We hadn't even known each other for twenty-four hours. It was the most ludicrous thing to even think about a future with him .

People didn't fall in love this quickly. Did they?

Was that what I was feeling? Was I in love? Surely not. It had just been an extremely stressful couple of days, I was hungry and tired, and Callum had been a steady anchor to hold on to.

Yet, with his body against mine, fitting together like we had been made for each other, him looking up at me through the lenses of his glasses with those green eyes of his, his pink lips softly parted, I knew I was just trying to talk myself into making some sense of the perplexing rabbit hole my mind had gone down.

“Have you bewitched me?” I whispered hoarsely, my eyes fixed on his lips, which were just right there. Looking plump and waiting.

Callum blinked slowly, like a cat, his lips curving up into a close-lipped smile. “I

think we both know what a disaster that would be if I even tried.”

“I want to kiss you.”

“I know,” his tongue poked out and licked his bottom lip enticingly, “but not here. Not like this. I know this sounds silly, but I want it to be...special. Meaningful. I’m not trying to tease you or be difficult.”

He wasn’t. I knew that. I could see it in his eyes, feel it in his body. Didn’t make the need go away, though.

My stomach grumbled loudly, interrupting whatever the hell was happening between us, and we both snickered. “Our pizza awaits. ”

Callum stepped back, out of my arms, and nothing had ever felt more wrong than that did. Grabbing his hand in mine, his fingers instantly grasped mine tightly, giving a short squeeze. “Walk me home?” he inquired, an impish grin teasing his lips.

“As if I could do anything else. This better be good pizza,” I warned him, as we headed in the direction of our waiting dinner. “Though honestly, I’m so hungry it could taste like cardboard and I wouldn’t care.”

“It’s good,” he assured me, swinging our arms with each step we took.

“Callum?”

“Hmmm?” he glanced over, his eyes shining.

“No taking advantage of me tonight,” my smile was mischievous, but I made my tone serious. “Since we’re going to have to share a bed. I’m gonna need you to keep your hands to yourself.”

He cocked one dark brow above the rim of his glasses. “Oh, did I forget to tell you? You’re sleeping on the floor. I told you I don’t put out on the first date.”

“The fuck I am.” There was no way in hell that was happening.

Callum threw his head back, laughing loudly, the sound warming every part of my body, and soon my laughter joined his. My cheeks actually ached from smiling and laughing so much today.

I couldn’t remember ever laughing so much with someone or enjoying their company as much as I had Callum’s.

All the things that filled my life, that I deemed more important than family or having a serious relationship, had faded into the background today. And I hadn’t missed them.

This man—this witch—had me spellbound and this was one spell I didn’t want anyone to break.

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Chapter Fourteen

Callum

Michael freaking Endicott was in my bed!

It was every adolescent, high school fantasy I had ever conjured, come to life.

Had I really told the man he couldn't kiss me?

I was a freaking idiot!

It was like I opened my mouth, and a complete stranger had taken over. Oh no, Michael, you can't kiss me. I want the setting to be absolutely perfect. And it's way too soon for us to lock lips.

Fucking. Idiot.

Huffing out a puff of air, I flipped from my side to my back and stared up at the ceiling in the darkness. The moon was bright tonight, letting in enough light that I could make out the outline of objects in the room.

Once our bellies had been filled with pizza, the events of the day had us both yawning. We'd shared the bathroom, each of us going about our nightly routine, and deciding we would worry about showering tomorrow.

I had watched Michael strip down to his black boxer briefs, biting my lip as his well

defined chest and abs had been on full, delectable display. He had caught me, smirking, but hadn't commented. Instead, he had climbed beneath the sheets of my bed—my bed!—his back against the headboard, arms crossed behind his head, and waited while I had undressed down to my briefs, and gingerly climbed in next to him.

When I had placed my glasses on the nightstand and reached out an arm to turn off the bedside lamp, he had gently caught my chin with his hand and turned me to face him. He had scooted down and lay on his side, propped up by his elbow.

Staring at him with wide eyes, my body had tensed, my breathing speeding up.

“Can you see me?” he indicated my glasses with his head.

Softly smiling, I nodded. “I’m nearsighted, so yeah, I can see you perfectly. Now if you go across the room, I’ll know it’s you, but you’ll be all fuzzy and out of focus.”

We were so close like this, barely any space between our faces, and I could feel the ghost of his warm breath whisper across my skin. Seeing me shiver, he frowned, pulling the blankets over my shoulders.

The tiny act had been so sweet, done without thought, that I hadn't had the heart to tell him I wasn't cold. The exact opposite was true, in fact.

“Good night, Callum,” Michael had whispered, his eyes lingering on my lips. “Thank you for everything today.”

“For binding us together? Not my finest work.” I had teased to break up the unresolved sexual tension that hung over us like a cloud.

He had stared at me for a long time, before whispering, “Actually, yes. I think the binding part was my favorite thing that happened today.”

And with those cryptic words he had rolled over, presenting me with the long, lean line of his smooth back. Turning out the light, I had plunged the room into darkness and waited for sleep to claim me.

I was still waiting.

My mind was whirling with all the events of today, and what it all meant. Not to mention, I was tense as fuck laying next to Michael in the dark, in my bed, both of us nearly naked. My muscles were tight, nervous energy strumming through my veins.

Michael was not what I had expected. Not that I had expected him. But maybe I should have? My cards had said a new love interest would enter my life, and here he was .

Michael was smart, funny, extremely good looking, sexy as sin, and he actually seemed to like me. That last part was what was tripping me up.

On paper, we had nothing, not one thing, in common. I didn't know all that much about Michael's life, but I knew we ran in completely different circles. Always had. And I knew he'd never be happy settling down in Salem. The man had left faster than a speeding train after graduation, and despite being only forty or so minutes away, rarely came back to visit. From what his mom had said, even then, he didn't stay long.

So why would he ever be interested in me? I was too skinny, and nothing exciting to look at. My family owned an occult shop, and oh yeah, we were witches. The real deal kind of witches, not the wannabe kind. We did witchy things, and owned a witchy store, and our business, which paid our bills, revolved around all things witchy. Michael wasn't a believer, or at least he hadn't been. By his own admission, he barely even knew the town's history, beyond the basic knowledge of the famous witch trials.

Had I somehow fucked up and placed an accidental love spell on him? Was that why he was interested in me? Was it nothing more than my wonky witch magic causing all of this? Would Daphne return next week and unravel all the spells, and this little bubble of love...er, lust...er, attraction...that was better, would vanish. Poof, like a puff of smoke, everything would go back to the way it had been, and Michael would look at me and see what I saw in the mirror each morning.

A geeky guy, with glasses that constantly slid down his nose, wild hair that he could never get to do what he wanted, and not a single muscle with any definition.

I hadn't been to college, happy to spend my days in our shop, reading cards and hoping for a tip, content in my house and hometown with my cat.

In a nutshell, I was boring.

And Michael was the exact opposite.

Huffing for about the twentieth time, I turned onto my side, trying not to jostle the mattress as I did. Hex, who had been perfectly happy to take up the space between Michael and me, had gotten annoyed with my tossing and turning minutes ago and fucked off to who knew where, fluffy tail high in the air.

"Oh my God," Michael groaned, wrapping his arms around me from behind, and stilling my restless movements with a heavy, toned thigh over mine. "It's like being in bed with a fish flopping around on the shore."

"Sorry," I whispered, trying not to notice the soft bulge pushing against the crease of my ass. No guy's bulge should fit so perfectly or feel so good. Holding myself stiffly in his arms, as he made me the little spoon, I closed my eyes and tried to will myself to sleep. Where was the freaking sandman when you needed him ?

“Why are you so tense?” Michael demanded, running a hand down my arm, his touch soothing.

“Because I’m in bed with my high school crush and I’m freaking out!”

Had I just said that out loud? Please tell me I had kept that inside my head, where it safely belonged.

“You had a crush on me?” Michael whispered, answering my silent question.

After about ten seconds of silence, I whispered, “Yeah, I did.”

“I...umm,” Michael hedged.

“Didn’t know I existed?” I helpfully supplied.

“Kind of,” he admitted, sounding upset. “I mean, I sorta remembered you.”

“I’m not used to sleeping with anyone,” I said, to change the topic off of unrequited crushes. Sean had been the first guy that had ever slept in my bed, for sleep. But this, what was happening between Michael and me, plus the circumstances that had brought us here, were not the same as Sean and me being cuddly.

Michael’s warm breath ghosted over the shell of my ear, and my entire body shivered. “You think I am? My unwillingness to even let someone sleep in my bed is what got me into this mess in the first place.”

Frowning, I turned my head a little, to try to see his face. “Yeah, so what exactly did happen?” Because the events leading up to his arrival were a bit murky .

Michael was quiet for so long, I finally whispered, “You don’t have to tell me. It’s

not my business.”

He shook his head, and I felt the movement rather than saw it. Then his quiet voice broke the stillness. “Have you ever had a moment where you realized you might not be the person you thought you were?”

Staring at the outline of my dresser in the dark, I tried to decipher what he was asking. “I don’t think so.”

His chest rose and fell against my back, his fingers trailing up and down my arm, and in that moment Michael seemed vulnerable. It dawned on me that I had probably seen a side of Michael today that he didn’t show to many people.

I had gotten to see the real Michael.

Not the high school hotshot, good at everything he did, the guy everyone wanted to be friends with. Not the rising star of a prosecuting attorney who could do no wrong. Not the man who lived in a penthouse condo, and who was out at clubs every night, picking up some stranger to take home and fuck, before sending him on his way.

No, the Michael I had spent the day with had been a little scared, but also funny and sweet. Unguarded.

“All my life I thought I was this nice guy,” his voice was barely above a whisper, “but I don’t think I really was. I don’t think I was a nice guy at all. And I don’t really know what to do with that realization. ”

Turning in his arms brought our faces together, but also our cocks. The slight friction of our dicks rubbing against each other had mine semi-hard in an embarrassing amount of time. Ignoring it for the time being, I stared into Michael’s eyes, the moonlight cutting a swath across his jawline.

“The guy I spent the day with was pretty nice,” I traced a finger over the scrunched up spot furrowed between his brows, trying to smooth it out.

He gave me a shaky half smile that was so not him. Michael was the poster child for swaggering alpha male. He was cool and confident with a James Dean vibe that I had always been envious of. “Where’s this coming from?”

He swallowed hard, and when he tilted his head and a moonbeam caught his eyes, they were glistening. “I think I...I really thought I was this good guy, you know? Like I helped people, and I put the bad guys behind bars, and I was fucking untouchable. And unstoppable. But I think maybe I was just a cocky, arrogant prick who was just lucky. Or maybe spoiled? Because when I lost that first case, it was like someone yanked the rug right out from under me. And I’m ashamed to admit I did not handle it well. At all.”

Not sure what to say to that—did I agree with him or tell him what he wanted to hear to make him feel better?—I just stayed quiet and listened. If Michael wanted—needed—to talk, and he wanted to talk to me, I was going to hear him.

“Derek found me basically having a temper tantrum in the men’s room of the courthouse, and told me that despite what I thought in my own head, I was actually as mortal as everyone else, and sometimes you don’t win.”

“Ouch.” Wincing at his friend’s harsh truth, I knew Macy and I talked to each other the same way. Hell, Daphne and I did, too. Friends who could tell you the God’s honest truth were hard to come by, and good to have.

“And instead of hearing him tell me that people found me arrogant, and that losing one case wasn’t the end of the world as I knew it, I blamed it on a non-existent curse or spell, or whatever. Like I couldn’t even accept responsibility for losing.”

“I never said it didn’t exist,” I pointed out. “It’s very real. Just not that strong, and unless the witch who cast it was into some black magic, it wouldn’t be the cause of all the bad things that had happened to you. I can tell you with certainty that it’s not black magic. Not even a born witch. Just a weekend wannabe with access to the internet.” Grinning and trying to lighten the mood, I added, “Now this binding spell? That’s from a real witch. Top notch spell caster, that guy.”

Michael snort laughed, his arms tightening around me, and pulling us even closer. My cock twitched in my briefs, very interested, but I ignored him. This was definitely not the time .

“I don’t know, I’m not unhappy with the turn of events. There are worse things I can think of than being bound to you, Callum.”

Nodding, I buried my face in the warm skin of his chest, hiding from the emotions his words bubbled up inside me. Taking a deep breath, I basked in the spicy, musky scent that was Michael.

“But even the bad luck spell, or whatever it is, was my own asshole doing. I went to the clubs at least once a week, picked up some faceless, don’t-tell-me-your-name-because-I-don’t-care twink to take back to my place, fuck, and then would tell them they needed to leave. Because I couldn’t deal with sleeping next to any of them. Didn’t want to wake up in the morning and have to face them. For no other reason than I was a selfish asshole who didn’t want to share the covers or spend a restless night trying to get comfortable with a stranger next to me. I’m probably really lucky the worst thing that has ever happened was some pissed off guy put a spell on me to have a bad day.”

“I’m a stranger, and you seem fine sleeping next to me,” I felt the need to point out, because at one point Michael had fallen asleep, his soft, quiet snores breaking up the silence of the room. Until all my restless tossing about had disturbed him.

As far as the other stuff Michael had just confessed, I wasn't sure how to respond. I was stuck in that weird limbo place of wondering if I should try to make him feel better or tell him truthfully what I thought about any of it. Since I liked having his arms around me, and I liked the way our cocks felt anytime one of us moved, causing a slide of friction, and we were literally bound together for almost two weeks, I thought it better to say nothing.

He shook his head, the movement causing a soft sandy colored lock to fall over his forehead. "You don't feel like a stranger, Callum."

Fuck, the way the man said my name melted my insides like hot lava. Most people rushed all the syllables together, and it usually sounded like Cal-um. But when Michael said my name, it was always sexy and drawn out, like he didn't want to rush it.

"I feel like I've known you my entire life," he continued softly, his eyes gleaming in the moonlight, filled with a heat that hadn't been there a minute ago. "I feel like when you look at me, you see me. The real me. The man I could be. That you don't see the successful attorney, or the expensive condo, or the old Salem money I come from. You look at me and you just see Michael. And it feels really, really good."

Palming his cheek, I ran my hand down his jaw, feeling his evening stubble scrape lightly against my skin. Need and desire raced through my body with a force so hard my limbs shook .

"Michael?"

"Yes, Callum?" My dick jerked at my name on his lips, soft, drawn out, and oh so sexy.

"I need you to kiss me now."

His brows rose, a smile tugging at his lips. “Right now?”

“Right fucking now.”

The first touch of his lips on mine wasn’t like I ever imagined a kiss with him would be. In my teenage wet dreams, his lips were strong, a little forceful, demanding.

The reality was a soft brushing of lips over mine, a gentle tease, the barest of caresses that managed to sear my very soul like no kiss had ever done. There was no tongue, no demand for entrance or to be let in. It was just enough for us to each get a taste of what was to come.

He pulled back after a minute, his eyes soft and full of wonder, his smile mischievous.

“I don’t put out on the first date, Mr. Turner,” Michael told me primly. “Go to sleep.”

He turned me in his arms with a quickness and ease that was frankly startling, and once again I found myself the little spoon to his big. Cocooned in the warmth of his arms and legs wrapped tightly around me, his warm breath ghosting the back of my neck as he settled himself, all of our parts fitting perfectly together.

Surprisingly, sleep came quickly, my lips still tingling from the sweetest, yet somehow hottest, first kiss I’d ever had .

The reality of kissing Michael Endicott was so, so much better than anything any of my silly high school fantasies had ever dreamed up.

So. Much. Better.

Chapter Fifteen

Michael

“I can’t believe I’m meeting the parents,” Callum muttered, peering out the passenger window with wide eyes, like this was the first time he’d seen our hometown. “Your parents. Well, your dad, I guess. I’ve never met anyone’s parents before.”

Slowing on the tree lined historic street, I looked for an open parking spot, hopefully not too far down from my parents’ house. Finding one, I expertly parallel parked my BMW, turning the ignition off and facing Callum.

He was nervously chewing on the skin around his thumbnail, and without a second thought I reached over and gently pulled the digit away from his teeth. “It’s going to be fine. You don’t need to be nervous. ”

“I told your mom we were dating,” Callum chewed on his bottom lip nervously, instead of his thumb, “we’ve barely been on one date. We’ve known each other two days, Michael. Two days! We know next to nothing about each other. What if they ask questions? They’re going to ask questions. I feel like I’m about to take a test I didn’t study for.”

Laughing at his panic, I told him, “You’re overthinking this. It’s not that big a deal.”

Callum stared at me, his green eyes big through the lenses of his glasses, not looking the least bit appeased. “It’s your parents, Michael. This is a big deal.”

“It’s not really. We just need to act like we’ve been dating for a while to justify why I’m staying at your place. And why I’m even in Salem.”

Callum still looked unconvinced. Crossing his arms over his chest, he pursed his lips. “How many people have you taken home to meet your parents?”

Licking suddenly dry lips, I rested my head against the headrest and stared up at the roof of the car. “Not counting high school?”

“Counting everyone you’ve ever dated. How many? Give me a rough guesstimate.”

Pretending to think about the answer for a minute, I finally admitted, “They met Stephanie, of course, but since? You’re the first. ”

Stunned silence filled the small space of the car, and the look of horror that washed over Callum’s pale face made me chuckle.

“It’s not that big of a deal.” He mimicked my words. “No wonder your mom acted the way she did. You’ve not introduced them to anyone since high school! She’s probably picking out our wedding china or something already. Gah, no pressure or anything!”

Grabbing his hand in mine, I squeezed his fingers lightly. “Callum, I promise you, it’s going to be fine. We’ll eat, make some idle chit-chat, my dad will harp at me for my life choices of becoming a lowly prosecutor and not working at his firm. Mom will tell him to hush and give him a look that he knows means to leave her baby alone, and then we’ll go home.”

Callum shook his head, “Michael, taking someone to meet your parents is a huge step in the dating process. At least according to my sister. I have no actual first-hand experience with meeting anyone’s parents, and really I’m fine with that. Absolutely

fine. We should just leave now.”

“Well, we wouldn’t even be here if you hadn’t fallen under the spell that is Jessica Endicott,” I reminded him, my tone teasing.

He gasped loudly, “I don’t even know what happened! It was like I couldn’t stop myself and words just fell out of my mouth. I had no control whatsoever.”

“She does that. You aren’t the first person to succumb to her charms, and you won’t be the last.”

“We need to have some kind of plan for when they ask us the normal questions parents ask when their child brings home a significant other. Especially when it’s the first time they have ever brought anyone home.”

“We went to school together, but because you are younger, we didn’t really know each other. We reconnected on Facebook. Started talking, got to know each other, and started dating. The end.”

Callum pursed his lips at me, running a hand through his dark hair. Reaching over, I smoothed the ruffled locks back into submission. “How long have we been dating?”

“Six months.”

He narrowed his green eyes at me, pushing his glasses up. “Do you have an entire backstory for us thought up?”

Holding my thumb and finger together, I smirked, “Little bit.”

He shook his head, not convinced. “We need more.”

“Okay, quick, cats or dogs?”

Callum tilted his head to the side and gave me an incredulous look. “Really? Cats, duh. Though I like dogs too. All animals really. What about you?”

I pretended to think about it for a minute, before replying. “I used to think dogs, but now cats.”

“Is this because Hex is the coolest cat in town?”

“Absolutely, because he is. Favorite color? ”

“Purple.” Yeah, I should have guessed that one.

“Red, but I’m starting to lean towards green.” Giving him a heated look, I stared into his pretty green eyes, loving when his cheeks pinked. “Favorite movie?”

“ Hocus Pocus .”

Rolling my eyes, I muttered, “Why am I not surprised? Callum, we know the basics. Anything else we can fudge or chalk up to having only dated a few months and basically on the weekends, when one of us could get away. Which also explains why I decided to spend time with you, in Salem, on my time off. Please just don’t mention anything about this being forced time off or all my cases being handed off while I’m gone.”

Callum nodded, understanding evident in his eyes, “Of course, I won’t.”

“Now, come on, let’s get this over with.”

We exited my car and Callum hurried over to my side, his eyes peering up and down

the street, for the first time noticing where we were. “Michael, this is Chestnut Street.”

Grabbing his hand and loving the tingling feelings I got each time his fingers tangled with mine, I smiled. “Yes, it is.”

Looking both ways for traffic, because we were parked on the opposite side of the street, I pulled him along with me, very aware that Callum was rubbernecking like a damn tourist. When we stood on the sidewalk in front of the three-story, white colonial that had been in my mom’s family since before the witch trials, I paused. “This is it. Ready?”

Callum looked up with wide eyes. “This is your house?”

“No,” I said slowly, “this is my parents’ house. I have a condo in Boston, remember?”

He rolled his pretty eyes, shoving his glasses up with one finger. “You know what I mean.”

“Just be yourself. My parents will love you. Though, maybe don’t mention you being a witch.”

“Pfft. It’s a great talking point if conversation lags,” he told me seriously.

I snorted. “Try football or something.”

“I know dick-all about that.” He glanced around as we started up the wide steps leading to the full-length porch. “Wait! Did they film part of Hocus Pocus here? In this house?”

He yanked his hand from mine, skipped back down the steps and peered up at the front of the house with narrowed, critical eyes.

Huffing, I stepped towards him. “No! Maybe. I don’t know. I don’t think so. I’ve never seen it, but I’m going with that doesn’t seem like something my parents would say yes to. I think it came out the year I was born, so I’m going to say definitely not.”

Gasping, he took another step backwards, and I grabbed him before he tripped or got too far from me. “Are you trying to make my brain explode?”

“Are you trying to make my brain explode?” There was a shocked expression on his face. “How have you never seen Hocus Pocus ? Why have you never seen Hocus Pocus ? What is wrong with you? It takes place in Salem.”

Shrugging, I pulled him behind me towards the stately front door with the welcoming orange and yellow Fall wreath on it. “I don’t know what to tell you. Seemed like a lot of hype and people making another big deal about something that happened in Salem. Witches aren’t my thing, remember? Never have been.”

Wincing when I realized how that might sound, I turned, pulling him close. Tipping his chin up with my finger, I gently amended, “Until now. Witches weren’t my thing until now. I’m starting to...really like them.”

A smile ghosted across his bowed lips, and I very much wanted to kiss him in that moment. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Breathing the word across his skin, I bent my head and let myself repeat what I had done that first night, lying in bed with him, whispering my secrets in the dark.

Callum’s lips were soft beneath mine, and he opened them to let me in. Unlike our

first kiss, this time I got to taste him. Coffee, mint, and something dark and rich that was all him. It was intoxicating, addictive, and I wanted more of it .

His arms wound around my neck, his fingers curled in my hair, pulling me closer to him, deepening the kiss. A moan rumbled from my throat, a growl of pure need, and my hands roamed down his back to cup his perfect ass, grinding our bodies against each other. Blood rushed from my brain straight to my dick so fast it left me dizzy with it.

This kiss was like nothing I'd ever experienced before, even better than our first kiss had been. I felt it throughout my entire body, clear down to my toes. It was like the sun had come out after years of darkness, and I relished it.

It was a visceral reaction, and I never wanted it to end. I wanted to know Callum, to learn every single thing there was about him. Wanted to explore his long body, find each spot that would make him writhe beneath me. But it was more than that. So much more.

I wanted to know him. It was a need I had never felt for anyone ever.

I wanted to know what made him Callum. Every. Single. Thing. I wanted to know how he looked when turned on, or happy, or mad, even sad.

And I wanted nothing more than to push him against the side of the house and grind my body into his. To feel our cocks rubbing against each other, through the fabrics of our clothes. Wanted to caress every curve, line, and dip of his lean body.

Callum might have admitted he had a crush on me in high school, but I was the one who was crushing now .

A loud, exaggerated clearing of a throat had us springing apart like two teenagers

caught on the front porch past curfew.

“Good evening, Michael,” my dad’s deep voice rumbled, his lips twitching as he fought a smile.

Running a hand through my hair, I swallowed hard, my hand blindly reaching out for Callum’s. I needed something to ground me, because the earth was swaying wildly beneath my feet. My breath sounded loud and ragged in my ears as I desperately sucked in oxygen to my starving lungs.

Sneaking a quick peek at Callum, he wasn’t in any better shape. His glasses were slightly askew, his black hair even more wild than usual where I must have, at some point, ran my fingers through the silky strands. A soft, rosy flush spread across his high cheekbones, and the pupils of his green eyes were wide and blown.

I was going to totally ignore the throbbing, raging hard on I was standing in front of my dad with. Thankfully, my dad’s amused hazel eyes weren’t straying from my face, which felt hot with need, and embarrassment, in equal measure.

Nodding, I muttered, “Hey Dad.”

He went in for a hug, which was awkward as fuck since I tried to keep a good distance between him and the almost painful bulge in my pants. When he pulled away, that damn smirk of his still causing his lips to twist, I turned to Callum.

“Dad, this is Callum Turner, my...boyfriend.” The word felt foreign and unused on my tongue, but also just...right.

Dad stuck his hand towards Callum and they shook. “Callum, good to meet you. Jess filled me in on running into the two of you. Call me Mike, please. Chef is getting dinner on the table. Don’t want to keep your mother waiting,” he rolled his eyes but

there was a soft warmth there, “you know how she is about dinner times.”

Shutting the door behind us and blocking out the cool night air, I nodded. “Oh yeah. I planned for us to be here a bit early, but we—”

“Got a bit sidetracked?” Dad tossed over his shoulder with amusement.

Scowling, I said, “No, we couldn’t find a parking spot.”

Dad grunted, but said nothing, just led us into the well-lit dining room. “Jess, look what I found making out on our front porch.”

Mom stood from her chair, her face beaming with welcome, and a raised brow at my dad tattling on us. “Michael, you were almost late.”

Her voice was joking, but we all knew how serious my mom took prompt dinner times. She expected everyone to be seated, and the first course served at the time she stated.

“Still made it.” I hugged her warmly.

“They were occupied with...parking,” Dad slid into his chair at the opposite end of the table, while my mom greeted Callum with a hug.

“I’m so happy you boys could join us for dinner tonight,” she smiled, taking her seat once again.

Pulling Callum down to sit next to me, I chided, “Like we had a choice in the matter.”

If my parents thought it was strange I insisted he take the seat next to me, instead of across the table, they didn’t say anything.

Mom raised one perfectly manicured brow, “Michael, you always have a choice. Just know actions have consequences.”

“That’s what I was afraid of.”

Callum busied himself with his napkin, his fingers running over the array of utensils laid out next to the plates. The table was set immaculately with all the finery and my grandmother’s China.

“Do you always set the table like this?” Callum whispered to me.

“Naw, she’s just trying to impress you.” Smiling at him, I fought the urge to plant a sweet kiss on his red, swollen lips. He looked nervous and fidgety, and I wanted to reassure him that he belonged here. Next to me. Under the table, I squeezed his hand, my heart leaping when he squeezed back.

“It worked. ”

“Just relax.”

“Easy for you to say.”

“Callum,” Mom interrupted our whispering, and I was positive she had probably heard every word, “we don’t normally use the dining room, but it’s not every day we get to meet a friend of Michael’s.”

“Boyfriend,” my dad corrected, his lips quirking into that barely contained smile he had been holding back since opening the front door. “We don’t get to meet Michael’s boyfriends. You might be the first one, Callum.”

“He is,” Mom agreed, picking up her salad fork as one of the staff—I wasn’t sure of

their name as they were new-placed bowls of greens in front of each of us.

“Knock it off,” waving my fork between both my parents, I gave them the stink eye. They both looked at me with absolute glee, and I rolled my eyes. “Let me apologize for my parents. It’s me they’re taking the piss with.”

“Michael, language.” Mom scolded, though she couldn’t hide the gleam of amusement in her eyes.

Callum smiled, “It’s okay. I like that you can kid with each other. My family is the same way.”

His shoulders relaxed a bit, and he began to eat.

“Do you have a big family, Callum?” Mom asked, sounding innocent, when I knew she was anything but. I really should have expected this. Callum was right; bringing him to dinner with my parents was a big deal .

“And it begins,” I muttered. “She’s going to ask you a million questions. Wait for it.”

Callum chuckled, his earlier worry seeming to have vanished as soon as we stepped over the threshold. “It’s fine. I don’t mind.”

Mom shook her head at me. “Only like fifty. I need to get to know the man who has stolen my son’s heart, now don’t I?”

Callum interrupted our good-natured banter by answering Mom’s question. “It’s just my Gran, Mom, me and my sister.”

“And your father?”

“Mom!”

“What?” She seemed genuinely oblivious to her invasive questions.

Callum chuckled at us. “My dad died my senior year of high school. He was a police officer, and he was killed in the line of duty.”

Mom’s face softened, her eyes full of sympathy. “Oh, I’m so very sorry.”

“Thank you,” Callum looked down at his bowl, his salad half eaten, and I reached for his hand again. He shot me a wavering smile, his green eyes hazy behind his glasses.

“I’m sorry too.”

Shrugging, he brushed it off like it was nothing, but it was clear the subject was still painful. I also felt like a jackass, because Callum had never mentioned his dad before, and I should have asked. I at least should have known before coming to this dinner. But if my parents thought my response to him was odd, that I maybe should have known about his dad before tonight, they let it go.

Dad cleared his throat, quickly changing the subject. “And what is it you do, Callum? Job wise, I mean.”

From the frying pan straight into the fire.

“We own The Witch’s Brew,” he responded, his voice steadier. “Off of Witch Hill Road.”

“Oh!” Mom exclaimed excitedly, “I’ve been there!”

“You have?” Callum and I both asked at the same time.

“I went with your Aunt Marjory when she was visiting last Fall. We bought some wonderful candles there. I’ve been meaning to get back and get some more. There was a lovely young woman working that day. Come to think of it,” Mom gave Callum a long look, “she did resemble you.”

Callum wiped his mouth with his napkin, nodding. “That would be my sister, Daphne. She makes the candles, actually.”

“They’re quite lovely,” Mom gushed. “My sister bought one of the love spelled ones. Hasn’t helped her love life, though.”

“The person needs to have an open heart and be ready to accept love,” Callum offered, “At least that’s how Daphne markets them.”

“Well, regardless,” Mom said, as our empty bowls were cleared away, “they smell wonderful and burn very clean. Mike is always harping about the candle smoke clogging things up.”

“Burns my eyes,” Dad muttered, giving Mom one of his soft smiles that were saved just for her.

“I’ll make sure to come visit your shop soon, Callum,” Mom told him. “I remember seeing a sign for tarot card readings? I’ve always wanted to get my cards read. You would think living in Salem my entire life, I would have by now.” She shrugged.

“Callum does the card readings,” I piped in, my voice proud. “He’s really good at it.”

His green eyes searched mine, as he pushed his glasses up, and I gave him my own soft smile. “What? You are.”

Yesterday, I had set up a small card table close to the checkout counter downstairs

and occupied myself with going through my emails while he had worked. When I'd grown bored, because there was only so much I could do, since I couldn't really work on any of my cases, I had helped him fill some of the online orders. Tourists started coming into the shop in the afternoon and evening, and a few had asked for card readings. Sitting beside him, I had found myself fascinated with the different cards, their meanings, and the easy way he had read them.

I didn't know how much of what he had read would end up coming true for people, but more than a few had gotten excited when he would tell them something and they could relate it to something happening in their life at that moment.

"Oh wonderful!" Mom waited to continue her line of questioning until our plates had all been delivered to us. The fragrant aroma of turkey breast, green beans, and some kind of corn dressing tickled my taste buds. It was a perfect Fall dinner on this October night, and a nostalgic longing washed over me for home. Which was crazy, because I hadn't lived at home since I had left for college. I should really make a point of stopping by and having dinner with my parents more often. It wasn't like Boston was that far.

"This looks amazing," Callum sniffed appreciatively.

"Michael loves turkey, so I asked the chef to prepare it special," Mom gave me a pointed look, "especially since he hasn't bothered to come home for Thanksgiving in years."

"Hey!" I groused, taking a bite of the tender meat and nearly moaning out loud. "I come home for Christmas. And I've told you that Black Friday isn't a real holiday and I have to be in court the next morning."

"Mmm." Clearly, my fly-by Christmas stops weren't cutting it with my mom, who felt October through January first were dedicated to holidays and nothing else.

“I’ll try to do better,” I promised, and was shocked to realize I meant it.

“The guilt tripping is strong with that one,” Dad remarked, taking a sip of his wine .

“Facts,” I grunted, trying the green beans. I hated soggy veggies, but these were sautéed and still crispy, with some kind of tasty seasonings on them.

“Michael, this cranberry corn dressing is your dad’s newest obsession. Let me know if you like it—you too, Callum—and we’ll put it on the Christmas dinner menu. Callum, I do hope you’ll be able to join us for at least dinner that day.”

“Mom,” I whined, “we haven’t made holiday plans yet. And Callum has his own family.”

Callum gave me a wide-eyed look, his lips quirking. Dutifully, he took a bite of the dressing, nodding his head. “It’s good.”

Mom pointed her fork at me. “Michael, the fact that you have introduced us to Callum means something. Now, let’s talk Halloween.”

Groaning, I shoved a forkful of the damn dressing in my mouth, swallowing dutifully. It was good. The pops of cranberry added a nice tart bite to the sweetness of the corn.

“Callum, what are your thoughts on Halloween?”

Huffing, I warned him, “Don’t answer that, it’s a trick question. She’s going to try to rope you into handing out candy, mark my words.”

“Oh, I mean, I like Halloween. We usually are pretty busy at the store that day. Lots of tourists, and the whole witchy vibe thing we have going on. It’s one of our biggest selling days.”

“Good, because she gives out full size candy bars, and hot cider, hot chocolate, the works. Every single person in Salem puts our house on their must stop place, I swear. It’s ridiculous. It’s like a freaking block party or something.”

Callum laughed, “Well, for full size candy bars and hot chocolate, I could be persuaded to rearrange my work schedule.”

“Oh, stop it, Michael,” Mom joked, “I’m not that bad.”

Dad snorted, clearly disagreeing. Swallowing against the tickle in my throat, I took a sip of my water, coughing lightly. My collar suddenly felt tight, and I tugged at it.

“Well, Melody is bringing the kids this year for trick-or-treating. It would be nice if you could stop by and see your niece and nephew, Michael.”

“Oof, Mom, save some of your guilt tripping for another day.” My face tingled and I rubbed my cheek, twitching my nose against a weird itch. Was it hot in here? Heat was crawling up my body. “No need to get it all in on one night.”

Callum, as if sensing something wasn’t right with me, turned in his chair, searching my face. “Are you okay? Your face is really flushed?”

“I—” Gasping, I yanked desperately at my collar. My lips were tingling, and my throat felt like it was rapidly closing up. “Hard to breathe. ”

“Michael?” Mom stood, reaching for me, but I shook my head. My eyes were watering, and nausea rolled over me in a clammy, sweat inducing wave. Wiping my eyes with one hand, I tugged at the buttons of my shirt with my other, needing to get some air. Glancing at my plate of food, I searched it frantically. Because my parents always, always made sure that any new chef knew about my allergy.

“Mushrooms?” I wheezed, trying to stand, but dizziness overwhelmed me and I swayed sideways.

Callum grabbed me by my elbow, helping me stand. I clung to his arms tightly, my fingers digging in.

“What’s happening?” his voice demanded, worry evident.

“There aren’t any in anything,” Mom assured, then yelled in a slightly hysterical voice, “Mike!”

“Epi…” my voice broke, as I gasped for air that I couldn’t get past my swollen throat and tongue. My mind was dizzy with the need to breathe, and I couldn’t think. Panic was quickly setting in, and I tried to tell myself to stay as calm as possible.

Where was my EpiPen? Back in my apartment, still under fire Marshall quarantine, I vaguely remembered. I was so careful about watching the things I ate; I hadn’t even thought about not having one of my pens on me. And this was my parents’ house, where they knew my life-threatening allergy .

“Callum,” Dad ordered, sounding strangely calm and in-charge. “Lay him on the floor, and try to keep him as still as possible. Jess, call 9-1-1.”

There was movement around me, scurrying, but I couldn’t focus on any of it. Callum was gently helping me to the floor, his worried face swimming blurrily before me. His fingers replaced my fumbling ones and he quickly unbuttoned the top button of my shirt.

It didn’t help. I still couldn’t breathe. I could hear myself gasping loudly, my fingers clawing at his arms.

“Move over,” Dad ordered, and then slammed an EpiPen into the muscle of my thigh. “I don’t know if it will work,” he whispered, his voice rough. “I’m not sure how old it is. Found it in the sideboard, but this is an emergency. They say even an outdated one is better than none.”

“It was the stuffing,” Mom cried, falling to her knees beside dad. “The chef said he used dried cranberries, not fresh. I’m so sorry, baby, I had no idea. I thought they were fresh, I thought they were fresh.” She kept repeating it over and over.

“Not...your...” I tried to ease her worry, but my chest hurt, my stomach rolled, and I fucking couldn’t breathe. I hadn’t had an allergic reaction like this since I was a kid, and we’d learned the hard way that I was deathly allergic to mushrooms, in any form.

My eyes were glued to Callum’s as I tried to focus, to stay conscious, to keep fighting to breathe. Understanding dawned in his eyes, and he smoothed my sweaty hair back from my forehead. “Dried fruit have fungi.”

“Yes,” Dad confirmed, “it’s advised he avoid any dried fruits, along with a slew of other foods. You’ll need to know what to avoid, just in case.”

Sirens sounded in the distance, and I’d never been happier to hear them in my life. Though the EpiPen Dad had injected me with had seemed to help a little.

Callum cupped my cheek, his hand squeezing mine. “Hang on, Michael. The paramedics are almost here. You’re going to be fine.”

The next few minutes were a haze of people surrounding me, words coming from all sides. Oxygen, another injection of intramuscular epinephrine, and strangers quizzing my parents on my medical history, and what I had eaten. All I cared about was that I could finally breathe and wasn’t going to die of anaphylactic shock. Closing my eyes, I let my parents deal with all the questions while I concentrated on letting the meds

and oxygen work their magic.

Thankfully, even when the paramedics had shouldered Callum to the side and out of the way, he had stayed close enough that I wasn't bombarded with my brain exploding on top of the allergic reaction.

"I'm riding with him," Callum's voice broached no argument, and my still-beating-too-fast heart nearly jumped out of my chest. Because if they insisted he couldn't ride with me, I didn't think I'd be able to deal with the pain that would explode in my head. Frankly, I hoped to never feel that again as long as I lived.

"There's not enough room," the paramedic argued.

Callum never let go of my hand, as they wheeled the gurney outside to the waiting ambulance. I closed my eyes and blocked out the looky-loos that were lining the streets, the lure of the flashing lights of the ambulance like a siren's call.

"I'm going with him." Callum bit off each word, his voice loud and strong.

I heard the paramedic huff in annoyance and resignation. "Fine. But stay out of the way."

"We'll be right behind you," my dad told us, and I let myself drift, exhausted.

"I'm right here, Michael," Callum whispered, his hand squeezing mine, in a gesture I was getting way too comfortable with. "You're going to be fine."

Blinking my eyes open to slits, I took in his worried green eyes, the way he nibbled on his lower lip. I wanted to reach out and gently ease the skin out from his teeth, but I couldn't get my arms to move.

“They’ll monitor him at the hospital for a few hours,” the paramedic advised Callum, watching a machine of some kind they had hooked me to. “Then likely send him home.”

Callum nodded, but said nothing, his eyes locked onto mine. “We are going to make sure we always have an EpiPen from now on. Always. They will be everywhere. You hear me?”

Smiling a wan smile, I nodded, closing my eyes and whispering, “I hear you.”

Warm lips planted a kiss to the knuckles of the hand that he was clasping tightly. “I don’t want to lose you, Michael. That scared the fuck out of me.”

In that second, it dawned on me that I didn’t want to lose him either. It still made absolutely no sense, Callum and me. We were opposites in every way you could be opposites.

But the way this man was making me feel, as he held onto me tightly, like I was the most precious thing in the world to him?

That was a feeling I didn't want to let go of anytime soon.

Chapter Sixteen

Callum

Nibbling on the ragged skin around my thumb nail, I stared at Michael's sleeping face, not willing to look away for even a second. He looked younger in sleep, his sandy hair a mess, face pale. He was turned towards me on his side in the hospital bed, one hand holding my free one tightly. Just like I couldn't look away from him, I couldn't let go of his hand.

Worry filled me, not just because of his allergic reaction, but for all the potentially life-threatening events that had happened to him since the spell had been placed on him. I hadn't sensed black magic on him—still didn't—and the spell didn't appear strong enough to cause all the havoc and danger it seemed to be causing .

As it was, I was no longer comfortable waiting on my family to return next weekend to break the spell. If we could find the original spell caster, and get him to reverse the spell, I would feel a lot better. Maybe some of the danger surrounding Michael would disappear. There wasn't much to be done about the spell binding us until Daphne got home, but honestly, there were worse things in life than having to have Michael near me twenty-four-seven.

A soft, feminine throat clearing jerked my head up, and I turned to see Jessica standing in the doorway of the emergency room cubicle. She looked pale and worried but offered me a tentative, somewhat shaky, smile. I had no idea how long she'd been standing there, watching us, my mind a million miles away.

“How is he?” she whispered, moving quietly forward to peer down lovingly at her son. She brushed a stray lock of hair from his forehead, and Michael didn’t stir. The events of the last few hours had left him exhausted.

“He’s okay,” I whispered, and if she thought it was strange I didn’t let go of Michael’s hand so she could move closer, she didn’t comment on it. Technically, I didn’t need to still be clinging to him. The chair I was sitting in was close enough to him to not cause him any pain. But I liked touching him, liked the weight and feel of his hand in mine, fingers entangled. “They’re just observing him for a couple of hours, and then going to release him. ”

The emergency room staff had tried unsuccessfully to keep me out of the treatment room when we had arrived. Michael, even in his weakened, still wheezy state, had thrown a truly award-worthy fit, and I had been firm on not leaving him. Since he didn’t have any major trauma, they had finally relented, the nurse ordering me with narrowed eyes to stay out of the way. Making sure to stay close enough to not flare up the pain in his head, I had done just that. Though Michael had firmly grabbed my hand in his and refused to let go the entire time the staff had looked him over.

As long as he didn’t have any adverse reactions to any of the medication and didn’t have a second allergic flare up—which sometimes happened the admitting doctor had explained—we would be going home tonight.

Jessica nodded, her shoulders slumping. “I haven’t been that scared since the first time he had mushrooms and nearly died.”

“This was terrifying, so I can’t imagine going through this with a child.” My heart rate still hadn’t gotten back to normal.

“He was only five. Mike ordered mushrooms on a pizza, deciding the kids were old enough to try something besides the usual cheese and pepperoni.” Her lips quirked

fondly at the memory. “He never tried that again.”

Snorting, I said, “I bet not. Still...”

“Yeah, it’s pretty scary. We’re all usually really careful. But Michael hasn’t lived at home in so long, and the chef is new to us. Poor man feels just awful about this.” She held out a set of car keys to me, and I took them from her with a question in my eyes. “Mike drove Michael’s car here. It’s in the visitor lot, section E. Mike’s in the waiting room. He hates seeing Michael like this. He’s great in a crisis, but after, he needs a minute, especially when one of the kids is involved. It doesn’t matter how old your children get, Callum, they’re always your babies.”

“My mom says the same thing.” I gave her a warm smile, my thumb absently tracing patterns into Michael’s skin.

“I’m glad Michael met you,” she brushed her hand over his hair again, reassuring herself he was going to be okay. “I think you’re just what my son needed. You’ll get him home?”

Nodding, I tried to speak past the well of emotion clogging my throat, but all I managed was a bobbing of my head.

“Tell him we’ll call him tomorrow,” glancing at the clock on the wall, she grimaced. “Later today, I guess now.”

“I’ll take care of him,” I finally managed to say hoarsely, surrounded by all the motherly, caring emotions rolling off the woman. Her aura was sunshine, warmth, and goodness. She was the type of person people would naturally gravitate towards, without even understanding why .

She bent and placed a soft kiss on Michael’s cheek, then did the same to the top of

my hair. “I know you will.”

As her footsteps faded from the room and down the hall, Michael began to stir. Blinking his eyes open, confusion clouded his blue eyes for a few seconds before clearing. Leaning forward in the chair, I squeezed his hand. “Hi.”

“Hi,” his voice was rough, slightly hoarse, and he winced as he swallowed. “Water?”

Reaching for the cup on the tray next to the bed, I held the straw to his lips, missing the warmth of his hand in mine. He took several sips, before indicating he had enough. Looking around the room, he frowned. “How long?”

Returning to my spot on the chair, he held his hand out, wiggling his fingers at me. Smiling, I took his hand back in mine, relishing how right holding his hand felt and how quickly we had both become used to the feeling. “Just a few hours. They’re going to observe you for a bit, and if everything is good, release you.”

He gave a slight nod of his head. “I think I remember that. Some things are a bit hazy.”

“Well, you were a little busy trying to breathe.”

He gave me a weak smile, “So...remember when I said I’m allergic to mushrooms.”

“Yeah, I got that memo. Thanks.” My lips quirked up at the corners. “Let’s not do this again though, huh, if we can avoid it. I meant what I said about having EpiPens, like, everywhere. Your place, office, car, my place—” my voice trailed off as his eyes widened. “I mean, um, not that I’m assuming anything. I mean, when Daphne gets back next weekend, we can go our separate ways, obviously. I wasn’t trying to say—”

“Callum,” the way Michael breathily said my name stopped my rambling in its

tracks.

“Hmm?” I nibbled on the tender skin around my thumbnail some more.

“I like the sound of that. Keeping a pen at your place. Maybe even...more than a pen?” His voice was shy, hopeful, and his pale cheeks flushed a soft pink. His lashes fluttered, and he looked down at our joined hands.

I wasn't sure what was happening between Michael and me, but it felt like a hell of a lot more than just a binding spell between us. And I was here for it. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” His tired blue eyes met mine. “I've never been a boyfriend before, just so you know. I may suck at it. But, with you, I want to give it a try.”

“Me too,” I whispered, “want to try. I've been a boyfriend before, with mixed results. So, I might suck at it too. The problem might have been me.” Doubtful, but I did seem to have a habit of picking not great for me guys.

He chuckled, “So we'll both suck together.” Realizing what he had said, he wagged his brows, “Pun intended. Just promise me one thing?”

Rolling my eyes at his lame joke, I asked, “What's that? ”

“No trying to conjure breakfast in bed. I have no desire to be turned into a frog, or anything else.” I had told him about the Sean debacle over breakfast, along with some other tales of my spell casting misadventures.

Snorting, I agreed. “Deal.”

Turning serious, I ran a hand through my hair. “I've been thinking about all your accidents. Even though it doesn't feel like the spell caused them, I think we should

try to find the original spell caster and see if we can get him to break the spell.”

Michael’s eyes widened, and he pushed himself into a seated position on the bed. “You think I’m right then? That this spell is causing all kinds of bad luck for me?”

Huffing out a breath of air, I shrugged. “Honestly, I’m not sure. Like I’ve said, the spell isn’t that strong, and I’m not sensing any black magic from it. But when you add up all the life-threatening things that have happened since it was cast, it’s hard to look past them all as just coincidences. If we can get it broken before Daphne returns, I think we should try. A lot can happen before my family comes home next weekend, and I don’t want to risk it. I don’t want to risk you.”

“Okay, so I guess a-clubbing we shall go.” He yawned loudly. “Maybe not for a few days though? It’s been a long time since I had to recover from a reaction like this, but I do remember it took a few days. I’m exhausted, sore, slightly queasy, and want to sleep for about a week. ”

“I think we’re good to wait until you’ve recovered fully,” I agreed. “Besides, you should be safe enough at my place. In my bed.” I didn’t tell him I’d be double checking all the wards in the house and shop, just to be on the safe side.

We’d shared my bed the last couple of nights, spooning and sharing nothing more than a few chaste kisses, but tonight had changed everything between us. It had started with the blazing hot kiss on his parents’ front porch and ended with us nearly losing him. There was no way I could miss the flare of heat in Michael’s eyes, even feeling as bad as he did. And he hadn’t missed my meaning.

I wanted Michael Endicott, and he wanted me. It didn’t matter that it was all happening at lightning quick speed.

“I love the sound of that,” he told me huskily, and I leaned forward and brushed my

lips against his. It wasn't an overly passionate kiss like earlier, but one that held the sweet promise of things to come.

“Me too.”

Chapter Seventeen

Michael

Waking up with Callum in my arms was quickly becoming one of my favorite things. The last two days he had kept the shop closed while I had recovered from my allergic reaction. We'd stayed in bed, except for the times one of us had needed the restroom, or we had needed food. Those were the times I wished Callum was able to twitch his nose, or snap his fingers, and make food just appear. But after hearing about the whole turning his ex into a frog incident, I was good with traipsing downstairs to the kitchen, where he planted me firmly in a chair while he fixed us something to eat.

After the hospital had released me, Callum had driven us back to his house, and then bundled me into bed. I'd been so exhausted I hadn't protested. It felt really nice having someone take care of me. Really nice. I had never wanted anyone in my life before, beyond a few close friendships. But never a lover, a partner. Someone to share the little intimacies of everyday life.

Callum made me want all kinds of things I had always turned my nose up at.

And it didn't bother me like I thought it would.

Instead, I was fully embracing it. Enjoying every second I got to spend with him.

We'd spent the last couple of days napping, watching movies and sitcoms, and just learning little things about each other. Like how Callum hated horror movies but loved psychological thrillers. We both loved the same comedies, and neither of us

were into rom-coms. Though he had blushingly admitted to having a thing for Hallmark Christmas movies. I was kind of looking forward to spending a day watching them with him.

Callum Turner was turning me into a complete sap.

He'd even forced me to watch Hocus Pocus , and I had to admit, I liked it. Not as much as Callum seemed to, but he was a pretty die-hard fan. It might take me a couple more watches to be on his level.

Last night I had insisted that he couldn't keep the store closed another day. He had already rearranged enough readings because of me. And I knew there were online orders that were waiting to be packaged and shipped out. The Witch's Brew did a brisk online business, and from what I had seen, they did a fair amount in walk-ins and repeat customers. Salem was rife with tourists year-round, but October especially saw a surge, and they had no trouble finding their way to the shop.

Unlike other mornings, today I let my hands wander over Callum's sleep warmed body. He was snuggled into me, little spoon to my big. My thigh was over his, trapping him, and my nose was buried in the crook of his neck. One hand skimmed up his flat stomach, circling a nipple until it hardened and nubbed.

Callum moaned, his back arching and his plump ass pushing against my morning wood. It fit perfectly into his crease, even through our tight boxer briefs. Pulling him closer to me, I flexed my hips just enough to enjoy the slight friction.

Placing a hot kiss on his neck, I pulled the skin between my teeth and sucked briefly before releasing his pale flesh. Leaning up to see my handiwork, I watched as the spot turned a pretty shade of pink. I didn't think I had done it hard enough to leave a bruise, but I was suddenly overcome with the need to mark him. I wanted everyone to know Callum was mine.

Leaving his neck for the time being, I trailed open mouthed kisses across his shoulder, my fingers playing with his nipples. One then the other, until they were both standing at attention, hard, and begging for my mouth on them. Callum's heart was beating fast beneath my palm, his ass grinding against my hard dick, soft, breathy moans escaping his mouth.

Every sound he made had my dick jerking in my briefs, the tip making a wet patch with my leaking precum. I loved the sounds he made; loved that I caused him to sound like that.

I wasn't sure if he was even fully awake, but when he turned his head for an awkward kiss, I had my answer. Capturing his lips, my tongue demanded entrance, but he pulled back, blinking at me owlshly.

"Morning breath," he mumbled, then added, "what time is it?"

Leaning over his shoulder, I glanced at the alarm clock on the nightstand. "Barely seven. And I don't care about your morning breath."

But to appease him—for now—I pushed him flat on the mattress, leaning over him, and didn't push for another kiss. Without his glasses, his eyes appeared even greener than normal. His hair was untamed on his head, a lock falling over his forehead, his cheeks rosy from sleep. Bending, I sucked one of his hard nipples into my mouth, then teased it with a gentle scrape of my teeth.

Callum's hands buried themselves in my hair, his entire body arching up into me. Air hissed between his teeth. "Michael!"

"Mmmm?" The sound vibrated against his skin, and he jerked against me, his hands tugging on my hair almost painfully. The slight sting traveled straight to my dick, and I grew impossibly hard. Raising my head, I gave him a slow, lazy smile. "Don't like

it?”

He shook his head on the pillow. “I like it too much.”

Licking my lips, I purred huskily, “That sounds like a you problem.”

Bending back to the task at hand, I went back to sucking on his nipples, loving the way he cried my name, until it was a breathless chant, over and over.

After another few minutes, I released the nipple I’d been tormenting and whispered, “I like when you say my name.”

He stilled beneath my touch, and my God, what a stunning picture he made. Black hair mussed, rosy cheeks, glistening green eyes framed by dark lashes, and swollen pink lips. “You do?”

Lips parting slightly in a tiny smile, I nodded. “Yeah. No one has ever...” Voice trailing off, I didn’t finish the sentence. Suddenly ashamed of all the faceless, nameless men that had come before Callum, but more ashamed of the manner in which I had treated them.

Callum was different. So fucking different from anyone I had ever been with, but every single thing about him did it for me.

He reached for me, and I gladly went, leaning over him, our lips nearly touching. “I don’t know what you did to me, Callum Turner, bewitched me or something, but I’m...”

His hands cupped my cheeks, and he stared up into my eyes, the green of his glittering in the early morning light. “You’re what?”

“Falling for you. It should scare me—it’s too fast—but it doesn’t.”

“I promise to catch you.” He tilted his face up and our lips met, morning breath and early protests forgotten. And I got lost in him, in Callum. His lips and taste and tongue. His long, lean limbs and warm tight skin.

Callum made me want things I had never wanted before. Soft morning kisses. My name being whispered in need. Quiet secrets between two lovers. Exploring every single inch of his skin, slowly.

After minutes of shared kisses, roaming hands, and cocks grinding against each other, I tore my mouth from his. We were both breathing hard, panting. “Supplies?”

He turned his head, stretching a hand towards the nightstand. “Drawer. Lubes and condoms.”

Leaning away from him, I gathered the supplies, holding up a thick, bright purple dildo in question.

Callum blushed, then shrugged. “What? A guy has needs.”

Waggling my brows, I waved the dildo at him. “We’re going to explore this at some point. ”

“What’s to explore, Michael?” he laughed, “It’s a dildo. It goes in my ass. Pretty much all there is to it.”

Giving him a slight shrug and a wicked smile, I put it back in the drawer with a, “Or my ass.”

Callum blinked wide green eyes, “Realllly?” He made the word about three syllables.

Tossing the condom and lube on the bed next to him, I arched one brow at him. “Maybe. I’ve always topped but...I’d be up for trying it. With you. Now, where were we?”

Callum spread his limbs across the bed, his muscles loose and relaxed. “I’m all yours.”

Tapping a finger against my lips, I stared down at him. “Hmmm, let’s see. These need to come off.”

Trailing my fingers across the top of his boxer briefs, I teased the head of his cock through the cotton material. Hooking my thumbs in the waistband, I slowly pulled them down his body, then tossed them behind me. Callum’s eyes never stopped watching me, and then he was gloriously naked in front of me.

My mouth watered at the sight of his cock, bobbing towards his belly button. He was long and thick, a pleasant surprise given how thin he was. The head was bright red, a string of precum leaving a sticky trail across the skin of his stomach. As shy and quiet as Callum sometimes came across, he was proving the exact opposite in bed .

I watched with hooded eyes as he took himself in hand, his grip firm and sure. He jacked himself slowly, his thumb caressing the damp head of his cock, his hazy eyes never leaving mine. The tip of his tongue darted out, licking his bottom lip, leaving it pink and shiny.

“I could watch you do that all day.” My voice was rough, and I quickly stripped myself of my own boxers, finally releasing my aching cock from the confines of the tight material. Callum’s eyes flared hot, his pupils dilating even more at the sight of my thick cock standing out proudly from my neatly trimmed dark brown pubes.

Callum’s hand never stopped his lazy stroking, but he held his free hand out to me,

beckoning, and I couldn't deny him.

Spreading his thighs with my hands, I positioned myself between his splayed legs. With a sure hand I covered his, feeling the hot, silky flesh of his cock beneath both our hands. Gently, I moved his hand off his cock, and before the protest could escape his adorably pouting lips, I bent my head and sucked the head of his cock into my mouth.

Callum arched, pushing his dick further into the wet recess of my mouth. His hands gripped my hair tightly, his heels digging into the mattress. "Fuck! Michael! Fuuccckkk!"

Smiling around his cock, because I loved how vocal he was in bed, I swallowed, my lips stretching around his girth. The bitter salty tang of his precum teased my tongue, and I lapped at his slit, over and over, chasing each drop.

I sucked, licked, nibbled, and stroked until the only sounds from Callum were high pitched, panting moans. Each time I felt his balls tighten and draw up, the movement of his hips grow more frantic, his cries growing louder, I backed off. Bringing him to the edge over and over, but never allowing him to fall over the cliff.

"Michael, please, please, please..." his voice trailed off in a needy wail, his head thrashing back and forth on the pillow.

Placing a soft kiss on his hip, I innocently asked, "Michael, please what?"

"Please let me come!"

"Hmmm?" Scraping my teeth across his pointed hipbone, I pretended to think about it. With an evil chuckle, I deftly flipped him onto his stomach, smacking his ass with enough sting to make my own hand tingle. "Not quite yet."

I watched in fascination at the pink palm print that bloomed over his firm ass cheek, the luscious mounds still jiggling from the smack. My dick jerked and twitched at the sight, my balls tingling.

Callum shrieked, then tossed the bottle of lube towards me. “Enough foreplay! Fuck me!”

“Callum Turner, who would have ever guessed you were such a bossy bottom? ”

He spread his legs, pushing his ass up a little in my direction, clearly telling me what he wanted. “Michael, I swear to God, if you don’t get your di–fuuuuccckkkkk!”

Grabbing two handfuls of his ass, I spread his cheeks wide, uncovering his tight pink hole. Swiping my tongue over the wrinkled skin cut off all of Callum’s demands. My glee was short lived as I got lost in the spicy, dark taste of him. Callum was utterly intoxicating. I could eat his ass for hours. Nothing had ever tasted so good.

Callum gripped the pillow tightly, burying his face in it and muffling the incoherent, animal sounds he was making. He writhed beneath my hands and tongue, pushing his ass into my face, demanding more.

There was a part of me that loved just how vocal and demanding he was. Always, I was the one in charge, but there was no doubt in my mind that in reality Callum was the one in charge now. The entire time I had kissed, stroked, and teased his body, he had been telling me exactly where and how he wanted me.

And I found it sexy as fuck.

Just like the man writhing beneath me, pushing his ass into my face until I was surrounded by the very essence of him. Callum was one of the sexiest, most sensual people I had ever met, and I couldn’t get enough of him.

He was humping the bed beneath him, moaning and panting, as my tongue licked over his hole before diving inside .

“Michael...Michael...Michael...” My name falling on his lips became a chant, a siren's song that I never wanted to end. Names had never been important to me before; most times I didn't even bother to learn my partner's name.

But Callum repeating my name had me craving hearing it with an intensity that left me light-headed.

Suddenly, in picture perfect clarity, I could envision a life with Callum. My pulse quickened, but not with the fear I usually felt at the thought of being with anyone for any sort of extended time. No, this feeling washing over me was joy, plain and simple. Euphoria of the highest order.

Maybe Callum had done more with his spell than binding us together. He had surely cast some kind of spell over me. If I was bewitched, I didn't want this spell to be broken.

Callum flipped onto his back and gently cupped my cheek in his hand. Overcome with emotion, I was powerless to do anything beyond turning my face into his palm and nuzzling his soft skin.

“Michael.” My name, whispered softly, was all it took. With that one word, Callum owned my heart.

Kissing his palm, I blinked, pushing away the feelings that were threatening to derail me.

“Make love to me. Now.”

If I thought Callum saying my name had stolen my heart, his softly spoken demand stole my soul. It was official; I well and truly belonged to this man. And I was surprisingly okay with it.

Smiling seductively down at him, as he bent his knees and spread his long legs, feet planted firmly on the mattress, I grappled for the hastily tossed bottle of lube. Because while I might have loosened that sweet, tight hole of his up with my tongue, and he might be demanding I fuck him right now, he still needed some prep before I sank balls deep into him.

Coating my fingers while he watched, an impatient gleam in his eyes, I shook my head. "Prep."

He huffed out an impatient breath. "I'm on it."

His answer caught me by surprise, and I snorted. "Me too, but that's not what I meant and you know it." Giving his pouty lips a gentle kiss, I slid one slicked up finger inside his hot heat. "Impatient witch."

"Mmmmm," Callum hummed, his hole tight around my finger. Adding a second digit had Callum biting his lower lip, his ass quickly finding the rhythm as I slid in and out of him in a slow, unhurried pace. I scissored my fingers, stretching him, until he was once more panting and tossing his head.

"Michael!" he shouted, banging his hands against the mattress in need and frustration. "Now! Need you now!"

My dick was just as needy as Callum by this point, hard, angry and leaking. Quickly donning the condom, I hooked my arms under Callum's legs, teasing his hole with the head of my cock before popping the thick head past the first ring of muscles.

“Yeesssss!” He hissed the word between his teeth, his jaw tightly clenched, the tendons of his neck standing out. “Fuck yes. More. All of you. Need it all!”

His hole was like a vice wrapped around my dick, he was so tight. The heat of him surrounded me like a furnace, and if I didn’t get fully inside him, I was sure I was going to die.

Flexing my hips, I slid another inch inside him, then another, until I was fully seated in him. Nothing had ever felt as good as being inside Callum.

He wrapped his legs around my hips, pulling me closer and freeing my hands. Framing his face, I kissed him deeply, our tongues sliding across one another. No one cared about morning breath, or where tongues had been, too wrapped up in the sensations of skin against skin, of being joined together.

Sliding my hand in his, our fingers wrapped around each other, and I used my other arm to brace myself. Slowly, I slid in and out of him, our fingers clenched together, our eyes locked.

Until Callum’s bucking hips demanded I move faster. Soon I was slamming into him, pushing him across the mattress with the force of my thrusts. Bracing both hands on the mattress, I kept my weight from crushing him, while our bodies bucked against one another .

Callum’s blunt nails scraped down my back, traveling down to my ass. Grabbing two handfuls, he pulled me to him, deftly managing to get me angled in the perfect spot to peg his prostate with each movement.

Head thrashing, he cried, “There! Right there!”

One of his hands released the firm grip on my ass and wrapped around his own cock,

jacking himself in time to my frenzied thrusts. Callum was wanton beneath me, savage and beautiful, as he chased his pleasure. Unrepentant and unashamed as he took what he wanted.

My balls tightened and my spine tingled, and I knew I wasn't going to be able to hold on for much longer. And when Callum's green gaze locked onto mine, and he ordered, "Come with me, Michael," I was lost.

Callum came before me, his body tightening around mine, his ass clamping down on my dick. His mouth opened in a silent cry, while his cum spurted across his stomach and shot all the way up his chest. The sight of him, the feel of his body beneath me, the sheer exquisiteness that made up all the pieces of Callum, made me stop and forget for a second what I was supposed to even be doing. I was enchanted by him.

When he slow blinked at me, his lips curved into a wicked, knowing grin, my brain came back online and my dick remembered what we needed. Callum's devilish smile never left his face, not when I picked up the brutal pace of my hips, as I chased my own orgasm. Not when his hands reached around to grab my ass once more as my hips pumped into him. And not when his fingers trailed down my crease and one slick finger tapped my own hole, before the tip slid in.

"Ahhhh!" The word, sound, garbled nonsense, escaped my lips before I could stop it, and I emptied my balls into his tight hole. Collapsing on top of him to catch my breath, his hands and fingers made lazy trails across the sweaty skin of my back.

Once I had caught my breath, I eased out of him, not missing the grimace that crossed his face. "I hate that part," his lips quivered with a small smile.

Brushing a quick kiss across his lips, I tied off the condom and disposed of it in the trashcan next to the bed.

Stretching out next to Callum, he turned to face me, in much the same way we had stared at each other our first night together. Only this time, instead of being tense and tightly wound, Callum's limbs were relaxed, his features lax. His green eyes looked like they held the answers to all the questions of the world I had ever wondered about. Maybe they did.

"That was..." my voice trailed off, because there honestly wasn't a word I could think of to describe it adequately.

"Amazing? Wonderful? The best sex of your life?" Callum teased, but he was closer to the truth than I wanted to admit .

Wrapping an arm around his naked shoulders, my thumb traced the reddish-purple bruise that was blooming on his skin at the junction of his neck and shoulder. Vaguely I recalled sucking the skin there hard, while my dick had been gliding in and out of him. The sight of my mark on him had my dick giving a half-hearted twitch.

"All of the above," I told him, brushing the wayward, sweaty hair back from his forehead. "All of the above."

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Chapter Eighteen

Callum

Sex with Michael was beyond anything I could have ever imagined in any of my wildest fantasies. It was hands down the best sex of my life. The man touched something deep inside me I hadn't even known existed.

I liked him. A lot. Probably way too much for the short time we had known each other.

It went beyond the great sex, had started well before that. Sure, I'd had a crush on Michael in school, but I hadn't known him. At all. I'd just been captivated by his good looks, his pretty blue eyes, and his gorgeous smile. His outward package had always made my stomach fill with butterflies.

And yes, those butterflies had swooped in again when he had blown into the shop—had it only been a week?—but this was so much more than fluttery feelings.

Hex jumped over Michael, landing with a soft thud and a put out meow between us, startling us both. Michael reached out a hand and stroked the clearly starving feline, offering him solace. "I know, your breakfast is late, isn't it?"

Hex purred and preened beneath his attention, arching his back and stretching, before flopping onto his back and silently demanding belly rubs.

The fact that Michael also liked my cat was another point in his favor.

“I’m surprised he left us alone this long,” I stroked Hex’s black fur, before rubbing under his chin. That gesture amped up his purring, the sound rumbling in the room.

“Well, someone was making a ton of scary noises,” Michael’s lips quirked in amusement, and I playfully swatted his arm.

“I was not!” Heat flushed my cheeks as I remembered some of the sounds that had come from me. Maybe I had. Okay, I undeniably had been making a ton of noise. I was loud in bed and not ashamed one iota about it.

Michael’s brows rose to his hairline. “You so were! You are very vocal, Callum Turner! And quite bossy!”

Shrugging, I grinned. “Sorry not sorry. ”

“Me either,” he told me, still absently petting Hex. “I liked it.” Leaning over the pesky feline that had determinedly planted himself between us, he whispered against my lips, “My bossy bottom.”

“That is not going to be my new nickname,” I told him smartly, scrunching up my nose. Rolling over, I reached for my glasses, groaning when I saw the time. “Ugh, we need to get up. I rescheduled Mrs. Hawthorne’s reading for this morning. She’ll be getting all kinds of antsy if she doesn’t get her cards read soon. I swear that woman doesn’t miss a week. Even though I constantly tell her that she doesn’t need to have her cards read that often. The woman is eighty, what does she think is going to happen in her life that she needs to know about?”

“You’re cute when you ramble,” Michael rolled out of bed, making sure to wait while I followed on his side of the bed. “You should read my cards.”

“What?” His statement caught me off guard. “Really? You want me to?”

He shrugged, grabbing my hand and tugging me across the hall into the bathroom. After he had brushed his teeth while I peed, he turned the shower on to heat up. “Why not?”

Grabbing my toothbrush and the toothpaste, I stared at him in the bathroom mirror’s reflection. “It just didn’t seem like your thing. ”

His blue eyes watched me vigorously brushing my teeth for a few seconds before he responded. “I’m changing my mind on what I believe and don’t believe. Let’s just say I’m more open to a lot of things than I was. Besides, it will be fun.”

Spitting the mouthful of froth into the sink, I frowned. “I guess.”

Hex wandered into the bathroom, which was rapidly filling with steam, and voiced his opinion on still waiting for his delayed breakfast.

“Sorry, dude, your daddy and I need showers,” Michael told him. “Then we’ll all get breakfast.”

Until this morning, each of us had politely waited while the other showered, with turned backs and downturned eyes. This morning I got to step into the tub next to Michael. It took us twice as long to shower, our soapy hands running over each other’s bodies, and stealing kisses every few minutes. Mindful of the time, we both made an effort to keep it PG, or at least PG-13, washing each other but not letting our fingers linger too long on any spot.

I flicked the water from my eyes after rinsing the shampoo from my hair, to find a pair of green cat eyes staring at me. Hex had poked his head around the shower curtain and was watching us with narrowed eyes, silently judging. As if to say, this is what’s holding up my breakfast?

Michael, noticing where my gaze was focused, turned his head to see the cat staring at us. “Creepy. ”

Snorting, I turned off the water. “That’s called judging. And probably plotting our demise for his late breakfast.”

Once dressed, we made our way downstairs, dodging Hex with each step. The cat was determined to try to trip one, or both of us, winding his long body between our legs. When he would get a few steps ahead of us, he would stop and hurry back to make sure we were still following.

“Yes, yes, we’re coming,” I admonished, stepping over him on the last step and shooing the cat in front of me. With Michael’s luck right now, we didn’t need him tripping over Hex, falling, and possibly getting injured. One hospital visit was quite enough.

Once I had the cat nibbling away on his wet food, I reached into the cabinet and pulled out my box of Franken Berry cereal. Pouring milk into my bowl, I questioned Michael’s frowny face. “What’s that face for?”

Digging into my strawberry cereal, I sighed in pleasure, leaning up against the kitchen counter.

“How can you eat that?” He poured himself a cup of coffee, inhaling the rich, dark roast as he sat down at the table. “It’s like all sugar.”

Nodding my agreement, I grinned around the mouthful of pink joy as I chewed. Swallowing, I sat down across from him. “’Tis the season. I look forward to this time of year all year long. It’s only available in the fall. I eat three or four boxes once a year, and then I’m good until the next year.” Waving my spoon at him, I smirked. “Don’t be jealous of my awesome cereal.”

He chuckled, sipping his coffee, which I knew from the past week was usually all he had for breakfast. He'd have some kind of healthy snack mid-morning, before lunch. "Jealous isn't the word I would use. Horrified. Yeah, that fits."

"Well, don't expect me to share," I informed him, "I don't even share with Daphne."

"Oh, baby, that sugar bomb is all yours."

My eyes widened at the endearment that had rolled smoothly off his tongue, and so did his, but neither of us commented on it. Truth be told, I kind of liked him calling me baby. Which was weird, because I had always cringed when I heard other people use it with their partners. But it left a warm feeling low in my belly in its wake, and I suddenly realized what the appeal was.

Michael's phone buzzed, his screen lighting up. Putting it to his ear after hitting accept, he said warmly, "Good morning, Mom."

Finishing my breakfast, I silently listened to his side of the conversation.

"Yes, I'm fine, I told you that...uh huh...yeah, he's right here..." Michael cupped his hand over the phone, saying lowly, "My mom says hi."

"Hi back," I rinsed my bowl, then stuck it in the dishwasher. Hex, having finished his breakfast and once again satisfied with his life, jumped up onto the empty chair next to Michael, licking his paw. No doubt the intelligent kitty was hanging on every word out of Michael's mouth.

"He says hi back, Mom...next week hopefully...I can take more time if I need it but I have cases to get back to...I know you think I work too hard, Mom...I promise I'll come visit more often...with Callum, yes..." He rolled his eyes at me and I grinned at him, then mouthed *Your mom loves me*, and made a heart with my hands over my

chest. He rolled his eyes even harder and put his hand over his mouth to stifle his laughter.

Glancing at the clock, I saw it was five minutes until ten, and I needed to open for the day. Making a gesture on my wrist like I was tapping my non-existent watch, I tilted my head in the general vicinity of the storefront.

“Mom, I need to go,” Michael said, “Callum needs to open the store for the day and I need to check in with the office...I know I’m on leave, but I still...I know...” he let out a long suffering sigh, running a hand through his sandy hair. “I don’t want to practice corporate law...I’ll tell him...love you, too.”

He ended the call with another frustrated sigh. “My mom said to tell you she’s going to make an appointment online to get her cards read.”

“Okay, I told her I’d be happy to do a reading for her. She can just come in anytime. ”

Michael raised a brow at me. “You are not going to do it for free.”

“I didn’t say—” I started to protest, because that had been exactly what I was planning to do, but how had he known that?

“You so were, and I’m telling you no. This is your business, and everyone should pay. Even your boyfriend’s mom.”

Plenty of so-called friends had tried to take advantage on multiple occasions, thinking I should read their cards for free. Daphne had had more than one falling out with friends when they felt she should let them have candles, crystals, or whatever else was on our shelves, for free. I knew he was right, but this was his mom we were talking about. It seemed weird to take her money.

Leaning over him, I told him huskily, “Say that again.”

“Say what? That you shouldn’t be doing readings for free, not even for friends? I’ll say it as many times as you need to hear it. It’s bad business.”

Shaking my head, I grunted, “Nope, not that.”

Understanding dawned in his eyes, and he smirked. “Boyfriend?”

“That’s it, that’s the sexy word.” Pulling me down with a firm hand on the back of my neck, he captured my lips in a possessive kiss .

A loud banging had us both groaning in low key sexual frustration, and we rested our foreheads against each other.

“Mrs. Hawthorne,” I sighed, already missing the warmth of his kiss and his lips on mine.

“That’s one hell of a knock for an octogenarian,” Michael observed.

“You have no idea.” Pushing away from him, I waited while he refilled his coffee. The banging came once more, followed by a sharp, “Callum Turner, do not make me tattle to Abigail on you! Don’t think I haven’t noticed how often that sign has been turned to Closed while she’s been away.”

Shaking my head at her all too real threat to blab to Gran just how many days I hadn’t opened the shop, I asked Michael, “Ready?”

“Pfft, I face down criminals every day. One little old lady is nothing.”

“Oh, I bet that devil card is for my neighbor Mr. Tribedeau,” Mrs. Hawthorne’s blunt

finger nail tapped the devil card I had uncovered sharply. “That man is the devil if I’ve ever met him. Won’t trim that tree of his and the limb hangs over my yard, dropping leaves like singles at a strip club.”

Michael’s snort laugh turned into a muffled half cough when Mrs. Hawthorne’s piercing brown eyes landed on him.

Patiently, I reminded her, “Now you know good and well that card doesn’t represent the actual devil.”

“Well, you know good and well it doesn’t represent anything good,” she retorted right back, causing me to shake my head at her.

“And you know good and well it’s aimed at you and not an outside force. ”

Tarot wasn’t just about what cards were turned over. There were a lot of other factors that came into play when reading someone’s cards, such as the placement of the cards and even which way they were turned up. The woman had been getting her cards read longer than I had been alive, and probably knew each card’s meaning better than I did.

“Someone woke up and chose difficulty this morning,” I snarked, scanning over the rest of the cards. “Moving on.”

“Just tell me if I’m going to win the pie baking contest at the Halloween Fair this year,” she said, a tad impatiently. Her eyes kept straying to Michael with obvious interest.

He was seated next to me, in the little corner section of the store that I had for private readings and had been busily tapping on his phone. However, Mrs. Hawthorne’s crackly voice had brought his nose up from his screen, and he was now staring at the

cards laid out on the table with obvious interest.

Pursing my lips at her, I pushed my glasses up my nose. “You know that’s not how this works.”

She gave a harumph, her stooped shoulders shaking with the effort. “Your grandmother gave better readings.”

Michael sat up straight, his mouth opening, and I just knew he was gearing up to defend me. The thought had a thrill racing through me at his eagerness to come to my rescue, but I held up my hand to stop him. This was a little dance Mrs. Hawthorne and I did weekly .

“Then why are you coming here every week, wasting your money on me?” I sat back and held her gaze, my arms crossed over my chest. “I’m sure I can talk Gran into doing readings just for you.”

Gran had stopped doing readings years ago, when it became apparent that I was much better at deciphering the cards. While she could do basic readings and tell people what the cards meant, I could sense the cards. It was hard to explain, but it was like I could feel the cards and what they meant for the individual I was reading for. Small vibrations rolled off the cards and flowed their energy into my fingertips. Sometimes I even got brief flashes of the person’s life.

When my first handful of customers—under Gran’s watchful eyes—had all returned to rave about how my card readings had all been spot on for something happening in their lives, Gran had taken notice. Mrs. Hawthorne was one of Gran’s oldest friends, so she knew better than anyone about my card reading skills. The woman just liked to give me grief every time she came in.

“Bah,” Mrs. Hawthorne waved her age spotted, wrinkled hand, “you’re way better

looking than Abigail. And I like you don't take any of my bullshit. You dish it right back out to me. Keeps me young," she tapped a card on the table, "wheel of fortune. It's about my pie, isn't it."

I knew why she came most weeks. She was a lonely old lady, who had no family left, and the weekly outing to have her cards read was her social time. Afterwards, she usually took tea with my gran in the kitchen, and the two old friends would chat for hours. Honestly, I enjoyed our interactions more than I let on.

Relaxing, I unfolded my arms. Closing my eyes, I held my hands over the card, feeling the strings of energy in the air wrap around me. A flash of a blue ribbon, and the scent of pumpkins and tantalizing Fall spices filled my nostrils. Blinking my eyes open, I smiled at her. "I see good fortune in your future."

She cackled, clapping her hands and telling Michael with a wink, "That's witch speak for me taking home another blue ribbon."

"I didn't say that," I warned her, with no heat in my voice.

I finished her reading and pocketed the hefty tip she always added onto my usual fee. I had given up a while ago insisting that she didn't need to tip me. Though it was always appreciated from the tourists, it just felt wrong taking it from someone that was a close friend of Gran's. The woman had shushed me with a frown, insisting I take the extra money, adding, "I don't have anyone to leave it to, so I might as well spend it all before I go. If I want to tip a handsome man a twenty, I damn well will."

Yeah, there was no arguing with her and I never won when I did it .

"Now, how long have you two been shacking up?" she inquired, not even a bit ashamed at the personal nature of her question. "Abigail didn't mention you were seeing anyone last time we spoke, Callum. And you snagged yourself an Endicott.

Well done, you.”

Michael couldn’t keep the shock off his face, sputtering, “How do you know who I am?”

“We aren’t shacking up.” I scowled, entering her next appointment in our online calendar and writing her out a reminder card. She always insisted on the little card even though I knew her memory was still sharp as a tack.

“Because I’ve lived here my entire life, boy. I’m well aware of the Endicotts,” she informed him haughtily. “not to be confused with John Endecott, one of the founding families. However, your mother’s people date back as far as the Hawthornes in Salem.” Giving me a sly look, she added, “As well as the Spencers, too.”

Michael nodded, “My mom was a Williams before marrying my dad.”

“She was,” Mrs. Hawthorne nodded, “And Callum’s grandmother, Abigail, was an Osborne, before she married a Spencer. Loads of history standing in this room.”

“Well, we aren’t shacking up, so no need to tattle to Gran when she gets home,” I brought the conversation back around to her earlier question. “I’m just helping Michael out with a problem he’s having. ”

Her shrewd eyes traveled between the two of us, and I fought the urge to not squirm under her watchful look.

“Is it a vampire problem?” She pointed a finger at my neck, “Because someone has been sucking on your neck, Callum Turner.”

She cackled at her own joke, and my hand flew up to my neck where my collar had shifted just enough that the hickey Michael had placed there earlier was just barely

visible.

“Ah, to be young and in love again,” she smiled wistfully, making her way slowly to the door with the help of her cane. Wagging her fingers in the air, she called, “Toodles boys. See you next week, Callum.”

The bell over the door chimed as she exited, leaving us once again alone. Mondays were generally slower in the mornings, though October brought a flurry of tourists who would wander in and out throughout the day.

“She’s...something,” Michael observed, looking slightly shell-shocked by all that was Mrs. Hawthorne.

“She is,” I couldn’t keep the admiration for the older woman out of my voice. “I actually look forward to our weekly readings, though I never tell her that. I don’t want it to go to her head.”

He laughed, “Yeah, I get that. Was that true, what you told her about her pie?”

Sitting back down next to him at the small table, I nodded. “Yeah, probably.”

It was hard to explain to people, and my feelings or visions or whatever they were, combined with my card readings, didn’t always come true. People had the ability to change their futures at any given time, without even knowing they were doing it. Mrs. Hawthorne might decide to change her recipe for whatever reason at the last minute, and that could change the outcome of what I saw.

“And you saw that in the cards?” He seemed genuinely curious, which wasn’t usually how my dating life went. The few men I had dated had either been slightly weirded out by how my family made their living, or just a little too fascinated by it.

“Not exactly. So, I can read the cards, but honestly people can get a deck of tarot and a book and teach themselves how to read cards. Or even from the internet.”

“But you are a witch, so does that help you see things that someone like me—a non-witchy type person—wouldn’t see?”

“Non-witchy?” I teased.

He grinned, “Yeah, you know, us people who aren’t witches.”

“It probably does help, yeah. Born witches tend to be more intuitive of most things. I get...feelings from the cards, I guess you would say. It’s like I can feel the energy from the cards. It wraps around me and...speaks to me? That’s the best way I can describe it. And sometimes I will get flashes of things from a person’s life. Little glimpses of what might be.”

“Are you psychic?” Michael asked, and it was a valid question.

I shrugged. “I don’t know what I am, honestly. I’m not psychic in the way most people think of psychics. The only time it happens is when I read the cards, and no one knows why. But the things I see don’t always come to fruition. Humans change their destinies all the time, every single day, and don’t even know it. Honestly, reading the cards is the only witchy,” I used air quotes around the word, “thing I’m good at. You’ve seen my spell casting skills. Gran thinks it’s because my dad was human and I’m a male. But really, no one knows why some witches have certain skills and some don’t. We all have different strengths in our household.”

He leaned his chin on his hands, eyes bright with real interest. “Like?”

“Daphne can unravel spells, like I told you. Not all witches have the ability to do that. Sure, they can cast a spell, but Daphne can wave her hands over someone and pluck

the essence of a spell away. For instance, if we wanted to stay bound together—not saying we do—she can see the two spells cast on you and only untie the one we would want gone. If that makes sense.”

He nodded, “Yeah, it does. ”

“She’s also a great spell caster,” I continued, “Gran’s strengths are potions.”

His brow furrowed, “There’s a difference between a spell and a potion?”

Idly shuffling the deck, I placed them in front of him, indicating he should cut them. “Yeah. Spells, potions, hexes, curses. They aren’t the same.”

With ease, I laid the cards out in a Celtic cross formation, letting my eyes look over each card as I turned them over.

“And your mom?” Michael asked, his eyes watching the cards I laid out eagerly.

Glancing up from the cards, I smiled, “Mom is what is called a kitchen witch. She can cast spells and make potions, but she mainly does it in, well, the kitchen. Where Daphne can cast a spell just standing next to you, Mom uses herbs and recipes to concoct her spells and potions. Her power is from the actual cooking and baking and the emotions she puts into it. She’s a fantastic cook and baker because of it.”

“This is all...” he paused, searching for the word he wanted, “fascinating, actually. There’s just so much more to it than I ever gave thought to. I guess I just thought all witches were the same, if they were real.”

Turning my attention back to his cards, my brow knitted together as I studied them .

“There’s that pesky devil card,” Michael joked, though I could hear the concern in his

tone. Most people acted the same way when I turned that card over, not understanding its true meaning.

“It actually means change, transformation, and even growth,” I told him, more concerned with a few of the other cards I had turned over. The devil card was never anything to be all that worried over. That wasn’t to say it couldn’t represent something bad, but in most cases, it truly didn’t. “Mrs. Hawthorne knows that. She just likes to blame it on her neighbor when it shows up in her readings. Frankly, I think the two of them are sweet on each other and don’t want to admit it.”

Michael pointed to the Fool’s card. “What’s that about?”

Giving him a sly look, I told him, “It means you are embracing fun and spontaneity, and a new romantic adventure is in your future.”

His lips twitched with amusement, “Are you just making shit up now?”

Putting a hand to my heart, I gasped, “I would never! And no. The cards don’t lie.”

Leaning over, he gave me a tender kiss. “So far, I like what I’m hearing.”

Blowing out a breath, I let my hands hover over the tarot, closing my eyes and blocking out the world around me .

Bright, blinding lights.

Pain.

Fear.

Blinking my eyes open, I found Michael’s blue ones watching me intently.

“What did you see?” he whispered.

Shaking my head to clear it, I tried not to let what I was feeling show on my face. “I’m honestly not sure.”

Pointing to the Five of Cups, I told him, “This indicates leaving someone behind. And this, the Eight of Swords, can mean helplessness and...in some cases, a fatality.”

Michael’s eyes were round in his face, which had paled. “Jesus, maybe don’t tell people that. What does all this mean?”

Ignoring his question, I continued the reading. He was right though; had this reading been for anyone else, I wouldn’t have added the last part about the card’s meaning. I would temper exactly what I said and put the best positive spin on whatever the tarot revealed.

But this was Michael. The man who in a crazy short amount of time had come to mean so many things to me. Whatever his future held, I wanted to be a part of it, good or bad.

“The Knight of Swords can indicate violence and danger in the future, but this one,” I tapped the High Priestess card that was facing up instead of down, “this is telling you to trust your intuition and search your soul. The answers can be found there.”

Michael looked uncomfortable and slightly worried, which was exactly how I was feeling. “Should we be worried? I mean, nothing bad has happened since I’ve been here, with you. Besides the whole mushroom-allergy-almost-dying thing.”

“That was an accident,” I scooped the cards up, because I didn’t want them staring at me another second, “there was no malice in that.”

“I do think it’s even more imperative we try to find the person who cast the spell on you,” I reiterated our plan to do just that. “I want to find out exactly what spell he used, and what his intention was.”

Chapter Nineteen

Michael

Callum's reading had freaked me out, not gonna lie.

The worried look on his face while he had read the cards hadn't helped me to not freak out.

When my condo manager had called later that day to let me know tenants were being allowed back into our units, we had picked an evening that worked best with Callum's schedule to head into the city.

Since he'd had bookings the next couple of days, and needed to catch up on online orders, we'd chosen Thursday. Callum had questioned the odds of finding my spell casting twink in a club on a Thursday night, but I'd just snorted.

"I've seen him there pretty much any day of the week I was," I explained, watching as he flipped the shirts hanging in his closet with a snap of his wrist.

He looked at me over his shoulder, his nose wrinkled adorably. "Who goes out on a Thursday night? Don't people need to work the next day?"

Laughing at him, I idly stroked Hex's back, feeling the rumble of his purr under my hand. "People go out every night of the week. It was a Sunday when he and I hooked up."

Callum stared at me horrified, before turning back to rifling through his closet. “I have nothing to wear to a club. Can’t I just wear a t-shirt or something?”

“No.” Getting up, I gently moved him out of the way, then started my own flicking of the hangars. Stopping on an emerald green, long sleeved dress shirt, I held it out to him. “This one. It’s going to make your eyes pop.”

He pushed his glasses up, reluctantly taking the shirt. “No one can see my eyes through my glasses.”

I gave him an incredulous look. “Do you really think that?”

He shrugged, but didn’t respond.

“Callum, trust me, everyone can see your eyes and they are stunning.” Snorting, I went back to looking for a pair of pants for him to wear. “It’s not like you’re wearing dark sunglasses.” Finding a pair of black jeans, I handed them to him. “We can get changed at my place. I don’t have anything suitable for clubbing here anyway.”

“What time do we need to leave?” he asked from where he had dramatically flopped down on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. It went without saying that the only reason Callum was even entertaining the idea of going out to a club, in Boston, was to try to help me. It was obvious he would rather stay home and do literally anything else.

Bending over him, I kissed his cheek. “Like six or seven. I’d rather avoid some of the evening rush hour if possible.”

“Oh my God, what time are you planning for us to go to this club?”

Biting my lip to hold back my laughter, I leaned up on my elbow to stare down at him. “Nine or ten. Any earlier and there won’t be that many people there. We have a

better chance of finding him if we go later.”

Though, to be honest, I felt the chances of us actually finding the guy were pretty slim. And I was fine if we didn't. Callum's family would be back on Sunday. Another few days wasn't going to make that much difference. Besides, I felt relatively safe tucked away inside the Turner house, bound to Callum. Spending my days with Callum, watching him interact with the customers that came in, even helping him fill the online orders, was occupying my time. I knew it wouldn't satisfy me long-term, the need to practice law lived inside me like a living thing. But for now, the short break from work had been nice .

Surprisingly, I hadn't missed work as much as I thought I would. In fact, I had hardly missed it at all. I would skim my emails daily, but the urge to respond to most of them was sadly lacking.

Derek had been texting me steadily, keeping me updated on anything moving on the Marcone case. He'd let it slip that Shelby wasn't happy about it being assigned to her in my absence. She felt it was way too high profile for her and was doing her level best to stall any warrants from being signed off on until I was back in the office, and she could hand it back to me.

Marcone was dangerous and needed to be taken off the streets and locked away. But Shelby wasn't the lawyer to do that. Honestly, I doubted I would end up being the lawyer to do it either. Marcone's dirty hands were in all the pies; drugs, prostitution, gambling, and suspected human trafficking. If we managed to bring any charges against him that actually stuck, it wouldn't surprise me if the Feds swooped in and took all the credit.

Shaking off thoughts of Francesco Marcone, I focused on Callum's frowning face, pushing back a lock of hair that had flopped onto his forehead. “We don't need to do this,” I told him softly. “We can drive into the city, and I can pick up some clothes,

and we can come back. Maybe have a nice dinner somewhere. But we don't need to go looking for this guy. ”

His green eyes were troubled through the glass of his lenses. “No, I think we really do need to do this. It's just...”

“A feeling?”

He sighed, “Yeah.”

“Okay, but if we don't find him, we just wait until Daphne gets home. Deal?”

Still looking uneasy, he reluctantly agreed, pulling me down for a sweet kiss.

Chuckling softly, I kept a tight hold on Callum's hand as I bypassed the crowd waiting to get into the nightclub I frequented way too often.

His eyes were wide as he took in the scene, almost as wide as they had been when I'd led him into my condo. We'd both been changing, after I had stuffed some clothes in an overnight bag, when I had asked what he thought of my place.

He took a minute to answer, finally landing on, “It's nice. A bit...cold.”

Looking around my modern home, all sleek lines, and grays and blacks, I realized he was right. My place was shiny and expensive, but it lacked something the Turner household had, with their eclectic pieces of furniture and colorful throw blankets tossed everywhere.

“That's a long line,” Callum mumbled, clinging to my hand tightly. He looked sexy in the black jeans and green button up, his hair messily styled, and I didn't miss the appreciative looks that fell his way.

“We’re not standing in it,” I told him, a bit smugly. Nodding at the bouncer, he opened the roped-up area and we passed through, outraged shouts from the crowd behind us erupting. At his stunned expression, I winked, “I have some magic of my own.”

“Mmm,” was all he said as I paid for our covers and pulled him into the main area of the club. It was pretty packed for a Thursday, the dance floor crowded, tables full. But, as I’d explained to Callum, this particular queer club was popular and packed most nights.

“There’s a lot of people in here,” Callum’s hand tightened on mine, and I stopped perusing the dance floor, looking for a familiar face in the crowd .

Turning to him, I pulled him closer, “You want to get a drink? Or we can try to find a table, away from the crowd.”

“A drink would be good,” he nodded.

Callum was three whiskey and cokes in, when I shook my head at the bartender, making a motion with my hand across my throat.

“Wha’s that ‘bout?” Callum slurred, leaning all his body weight against me. Safe to say, I didn’t think he drank hard alcohol very often. Since I was driving, I had stuck to water. I still hadn’t seen a glimpse of my one-night stand.

“That was me cutting you off,” I grinned down at his upturned flushed face. “Trust me, you’ll thank me in the morning.”

“Liquid courage,” he shouted in my ear to be heard over the bass thumping from the DJ booth, even though he was close enough I could hear him just fine. “Still don’t unde’sand why non..no...none of these people don’t wanna stay home.”

“It’s a mystery,” my lips twitched at his serious face.

“I like my house,” he whisper shouted, leaning further into me and losing his balance. Catching him, I hauled him upright. “My house has ev’rything I need. My cat is there! And all...all...the...my things.”

“You,” I tapped the end of his nose with my finger, “are drunk.”

“Not!” He sounded astonished at my observation. “Let’s dance! ”

With that declaration, Callum yanked me towards the dance floor, his arms gyrating wildly, his hips moving...well, his hips were definitely moving in an enticing way. His arms might have been out of control, but his hips knew what they were about.

The song switched to something slow and sultry, and I wrapped him in my arms, his back to my front. Holding his hips with my hands, we swayed sensually together, my groin pressed perfectly against the crease of his ass, encased in his sinfully tight jeans.

One of his arms wrapped around my waist from behind, while the other snaked up behind my neck, pulling me closer. He arched his own neck, offering it to me, and I wasn’t about to say no.

Kissing behind his ear, I placed soft kisses down the column of his neck, sucking gently at the skin just above his collar. I had never been one to deliberately mark any of my sex partners, but seeing Callum with the mark I had left on his neck already this week caused something primal to erupt inside me every time I caught a glimpse of it.

Callum turned, his arms resting on my shoulders, and I pulled him flush against me. Our hard cocks rubbed against each other, and we both gasped. My lips found his in a

hungry kiss, and for a few seconds as I explored his mouth, I forgot we were in the middle of a dance floor.

We were both breathless and panting when the kiss ended. Callum's lips were red and kiss swollen, glistening in the lowlights of the dance floor. His pupils were blown behind his glasses, the green of his eyes barely visible, his cheeks rosy.

Giving me a slow, sexy smirk, he pulled me down until he was close to my ear. "I want to blow you in the bathroom."

Fucking hell! Callum with a couple of drinks in him was wildly uninhibited!

"You are drunk," framing his face with my hands, I spoke slowly and clearly, never losing eye contact with him.

He shook his head, "I'm not that drunk. Not drunk enough I can't give consent, if that's what you're afraid of."

Indeed, he was no longer slurring his words. I didn't know if it was the dancing, me cutting him off, or just something inside his body that he was gifted with, but he didn't look as drunk as before.

"How did you sober up that fast?" I questioned, skeptical.

He shrugged, "Don't know. I thought wouldn't it be fun to give Michael a BJ in the bathroom, knock that off my bucket list, and then I just started feeling less tipsy."

Pulling him after me, off the dance floor, I headed towards the bathroom. Because yeah, I wasn't about to turn down what Callum was offering. Over my shoulder I called, "I want to know more about this bucket list of yours. Later. "

He smirked, holding tightly to my hand, his other hand clasping just above my wrist. Shockingly, there wasn't a line for the bathroom when we got there. Two guys were at the urinals, while the two stalls were empty. Pulling him towards one of the empty stalls, I halted when he tugged on my arm.

“What?”

“Wait.” That sly look was back on his face, his green eyes gleaming mischievously. The last guy was washing his hands, and Callum followed after him as he pulled the door open. There were three or four guys on the other side, getting ready to come in and use the facilities. Callum shut the door in their stunned faces, turning the lock with a loud click.

Angry fists pummeled the door. “Motherfucker! You'd better make it quick!”

“Asshole! Some of us need to go!”

“You've got five minutes before I'm breaking this fucker down!”

Eyes wide, I cocked my head at him, my hands already working on my pants. Pulling my cock free, I smirked, “You heard them. You'd better make this quick.”

He gave me a naughty grin aimed straight at my throbbing cock. “Challenge accepted.”

Callum dropped to his knees in front of me in one fluid move, his hand grasping the base of my cock tightly, his lips parting and swallowing me down to the root .

“Holy fuck!” The shout escaped my mouth before I could stifle it, my eyes nearly crossing at the feeling of my dick being surrounded by the hot wetness of Callum's mouth. One hand hit the wall to steady myself, while my other tangled in his thick

hair, guiding his head.

Not that he needed the guidance. He was doing just fine on his own.

Callum might have zero experience in nightclubs, but he gave head like a fucking pro.

It took him about two seconds to find his bobbing rhythm, his hands grasping both cheeks of my ass and pulling me forward. He sucked and slurped my length, spittle slipping down his chin. His eyes never left mine, and with a shaking hand I reached down and removed his glasses, placing them in the shirt pocket for safe keeping.

Legs spread wide, I fucked into his hungry mouth, moaning when he gagged, his gorgeous eyes tearing up, but he didn't pull back. In fact, he doubled his effort, sucking harder, his tongue running over my slit and the underside of my mushroom head, before he swallowed me down, down, down.

“Fuuuuckkk!”

His throat felt never ending, and then I was shooting straight down it, my hips jerking with uncoordinated movements .

Callum sucked me through my orgasm, his hands clenching and unclenching on my ass, as he swallowed every last drop he wrung out of me.

The pounding on the door intensified, the wood swaying with the force of the fists hitting it. Our five minutes were definitely up, though I didn't think he had gone much over the time limit. I had come shockingly, embarrassing fast.

Hauling him up by his arms, I kissed him deeply, tasting myself mixed with him. His nimble fingers tucked my flaccid cock back in my pants with a grin.

Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out his glasses and placed them gently on his face. “I don’t think we’re going to find what we came looking for, but I don’t even care. Let’s go home.”

“To your place?” he asked, trying in vain to tame his hair from where I had tugged on it.

Entwining our fingers, I gave him another kiss, this one featherlight, barely brushing over his lips. “No, home. Your place.”

Chapter Twenty

Callum

We were walking out of the club, when Michael pulled his phone out of his back pocket, frowning.

“Something wrong?” The cool air made me shiver after the heat of the club.

“Derek has called me a bunch of times,” Michael frowned. “It might be important. Give me a second?”

“Of course.”

He moved us away from the crowd that was still waiting to be allowed in. To give him a bit of privacy, I moved a few steps away, careful to make sure I stayed close enough that I didn’t cause him any pain.

“That guy you’re with is a dick, just so you know.” Spinning around, I stared at the small, colorfully dressed man.

“Excuse me?” My eyes narrowed on him; pretty sure I knew who he was.

“He’s okay in bed, but he’ll toss you out right after he comes. Some fucked up rule about not sleeping with someone or something. Just warning you.”

“You!” At the hissed word, he turned back to face me. “It was you.”

Grabbing him by his elbow I ignored his high-pitched screech. He shook his arm, trying to break out of my grasp. “Let go! Are you nuts?”

Michael hurried over, having heard the commotion. “You! We need to talk to you.”

The other man’s lips turned up in a smirk. “Hello handsome, how’s your luck been?”

We had attracted notice, and I implored Michael with my eyes and a jerk of my head to head down the sidewalk away from the crowd.

“Walk,” my voice was low in the man’s ear, “now.”

He did what I said, not that I gave him much of a choice, my grip holding him fast. When we were away from prying eyes, I let go of him. Pointing my finger, I demanded, “Tell me what spell you used.”

His eyes widened a fraction, flicking between me and then Michael.

“It was nothing, just something to give him a bit of bad luck.” He still had that damn smirk on his face, and I had never wanted to punch anyone as much as I wanted to punch him.

“Break the spell,” I ordered, “now.”

“You break it!” he shot back, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“If I could, I would. Now break it.”

Michael was watching us with wide eyes but had remained silent so far.

“How’d you even know about it?” the man asked, flicking his hair out of his eyes.

“Because I’m a born witch,” I hissed, pointing a finger at him, “unlike you.”

His eyes grew big and for the first time he looked scared. “Look, it was just a bit of harmless fun. I got it on the internet. I use it when someone is being a dick, just to give them a taste of their own medicine. Have a bad day like he made me have.”

“Bad day?” Michael finally said, his teeth clenched tightly. “I lost all my cases! I nearly got hit by a car—several of them—when I tripped and fell into traffic! My condo building caught on fire! Innocent people could have died! What the fuck is wrong with you?”

The man’s face paled, and he shook his head. His voice was trembling when he said, “That wasn’t me! It was supposed to just be a bit of an annoyance. Spilled coffee, maybe your car wouldn’t start. That kind of thing. No one was supposed to get hurt! I’ve done it before and nothing like that has happened!”

“Break. The. Spell,” I bit out.

“I can’t!” he cried. “Only he can!” He pointed at Michael, who looked as shocked as I felt.

“What?” Michael whispered.

The man—I wasn’t inclined to even ask his name—ran a shaking hand through his hair. “You have to break the spell. I can’t do it. It’s part of the spell. At least I think it is. I’m not very good at this stuff, I just dabble.”

“How?” Michael demanded, “Like with true love’s kiss or something?”

“Dude,” the twink snorted, “what the fuck? This isn’t some Disney movie.”

Grabbing Michael's hand, I gave it a squeeze, and the gesture didn't go unnoticed by the other man. "Dude, hate to break it to you, but your boyfriend's been stepping out on you."

"No, he hasn't, Dude . Trust me on that. How does he break the spell?"

He rubbed a hand over the back of his neck, and I could tell he was trying to work out the relationship between Michael and me.

"He has to put someone else before himself." Pointing an accusatory finger at Michael, he muttered, "You're a selfish prick, so good luck ever breaking it."

"I was," Michael agreed, "you're right." Turning to me, he whispered, "We'll just wait for Daphne to get home. It's probably what we should have done in the first place. Can she still...do whatever she does?"

Running my hand down his slightly stubbled jaw, I whispered, "She should be able too, yeah. You're sure you want to wait?"

"I'm sure. Let's go home."

"You," I waved my finger in the twink's face, "stop putting spells on people! You can't just get something from the internet and go around messing with things you know nothing about. And if you don't, I'm going to find you. And you won't like when I do."

He must have taken my threat seriously because he ran down the sidewalk, away from the club, looking back once before disappearing around the corner.

Michael was staring at me, an incredulous look on his face.

“What?” I demanded.

“That was kind of badass.”

Rolling my eyes, I grinned at him. “He irritated me.”

We started walking towards the parking garage where we had left Michael’s car. “Oh, I think we all got that message.”

“Did you reach Derek?”

“No,” Michael shook his head, pulling his keys from his pocket when we were close to the garage. “I tried him a couple times, but I just got his voicemail. I’ll try him from the car and if I don’t get him, I’ll just leave a message.”

Stifling a yawn, I waited while he unlocked my car door. He had made a big deal about opening my car door when we had left Salem. Once he had me tucked in, he walked around the front and got in. Securing his seatbelt, he leaned over and gave me a kiss before he started driving.

Sitting at a red light, he hit the Bluetooth feature on his phone and the sound of ringing came through the car speakers.

“Michael!” A frantic, deep male voice filled the car as the light turned green. “Where are you?”

Michael checked his rearview mirror, frowning. “We’re on our way back to Salem.”

“We? Who is with you?”

“Callum, I told you about him.”

The car's interior was suddenly illuminated with bright light. Turning to look behind us, I was blinded by the car behind us. The driver was so close, all I could see was the other car's intense headlights.

Blinking, I turned to face the front again, mumbling, "Asshole."

"Dude, go around," Michael muttered, and Derek's voice demanded, "What's happening?"

"Nothing," Michael assured him, "just a guy riding my ass."

"Michael, I need your twenty," Derek demanded .

The car behind us backed off, then sped up, getting so close I tensed in my seat, afraid he was going to accidentally hit us. My muscles tensed involuntarily, but it was more than just the guy being a dick.

There was an edge to Derek's voice that caused a chill to race up my spine.

"We're almost to the highway," Michael relayed, keeping his eyes on the car's headlights behind us.

"Michael, Marcone put a hit out on you!" Derek's voice rose, "What street are you on? I'm sending a black and white."

My head spun in Michael's direction, my hands gripping the leather of my car seat. He looked calm, but his grip on the steering wheel was tight. "How sure is your intel?"

"One of our C.I.'s brought it to us," Derek said, "he's reliable. And..."

His voice trailed off, and Michael frowned, “What?”

Turning to look behind us, I was again blinded by the high beams of the car following us, but I couldn’t tell how close the other driver was. But I knew he was too fucking close. He very well could just be an asshole driver, and I was being paranoid, but everything inside me was screaming that danger was all around us.

“Shelby is missing.” Derek’s voice was quiet in the car. “She’s been missing since last night. It looks like they were waiting on her when she got home. ”

Michael’s face visibly paled, his fingers clenching and unclenching on the steering wheel. I felt the car speed up as he put distance between us and the other car. The street was busy, and I was thankful that we weren’t the only ones out tonight.

“Is she...?” Michael swallowed hard, unable to finish his sentence.

“There was blood, but we don’t know yet if it was hers.”

Michael nodded, “Am I getting on the highway, or am I going past the exit? What do you want me to do, Der?”

Whatever Derek said was drowned out by the crunching of metal hitting metal. The impact felt like it came from two sides, the rear of the car and the driver’s side. The force jerked me forward and sideways, my head banging against the windshield hard enough to make me see stars.

The car spun in dizzying circles, until I wasn’t sure which way we were going. Glass shattered, car horns blared, and there was yelling. So much yelling. Me, or Michael, maybe both of us.

Derek’s voice was yelling through the phone, filling the car’s interior, but I couldn’t

make sense of what he was shouting.

Finally, after what felt like way too long, the spinning stopped. Pain sliced through my head, and I blinked to clear my vision. Something wet fell into my eyes and I blinked harder, trying to see .

A hand grabbed my shoulder, frantically pulling on my shirt. “Callum?”

Michael’s voice was low, barely above a whisper, and I rolled my head towards him on the seat. Wincing when pain nearly blinded me.

Blood streamed down the side of his face, and glass sprinkled his hair and shoulders.

“I’m okay,” I whispered, reaching for him.

Gunshots rang out around us, and we both jerked. Pounding feet rushed the car, yelling, and more shots were fired but none sounded like they hit our car. My door was yanked open, and I was dragged out. I felt Michael’s hand on my shirt, grabbing for me, and then it was gone.

Whoever had grabbed me half dragged, half carried me further from Michael. Until I was too far, and his anguished screams reached my ears just before I saw the butt of a handgun racing towards my face, and everything went black.

Chapter Twenty-One

Michael

My head was jerked up painfully by my hair, and I groaned, consciousness slamming into me.

Callum!

Where was he? Was he all right?

The pain in my head wasn't the agonizing pain from being separated by Callum, so he had to be close.

Blinking my eyes open, I flinched at the single bare bulb hanging from the ceiling. I was sitting on a metal hard back chair, my ankles bound together. My hands were also bound behind my back, but when I tried wiggling my fingers, I felt warm flesh. Callum. He must be tied behind me, but there was no movement when I touched his hand again.

There were two strangers standing on either side of me, both armed with handguns pointed at me. What I could see of the room we were being held in was concrete, empty except for the chairs we were bound to. There was a gray metal door directly in front of my line of vision, closed to the outside.

"Boss isn't gonna be happy about the extra baggage we brought," one said to the other.

“Yeah, well, he’d be less happy about witnesses. He was with the lawyer, so he might be involved. Either way, he’s here now. Nothing to be done about it.”

“Who are you?” My voice cracked, and I swallowed against the dryness of my throat. There was something dried on my face. I could feel it when I spoke. It tugged at my skin uncomfortably and I remembered my head had been bleeding.

We’d been hit, from two sides. The car had spun, but we’d been alive. I remembered Callum had been alive. Then he had been pulled from the car, my head had exploded, and that was the last thing I remembered.

“Doesn’t matter who we are,” Goon Two snarled. “You’ll find out when the boss gets here.”

“Marcone?” I groaned, subtly pulling on the bindings on my wrist. There was no give in them, but there was the tiniest bit of movement from Callum’s hand.

The door opened and as if summoned by my saying his name, Francesco Marcone stepped through the door, closing it with a bang behind him. There was no movement from Callum at the noise. Not even a twitch.

Marcone smiled at me, smoothing a hand down his tailored, three-piece suit, then over his impeccably styled hair. “Mr. Endicott, you’re becoming a problem for me.”

“Sorry.” My tone dripped with sarcasm.

“I thought you’d gotten my messages when I was told you had stepped back from working on the case against me,” Marcone informed me, looking at his fingernails and then polishing them against his suit jacket.

“Messages?” I croaked.

He gave me a cold smile, “Yes. The little accident you had on the sidewalk. The fire in your building. Oh, and let’s not forget the jurors that were more than happy to be paid off. Along with a couple of judges. People are so easily swayed by money. You had a very bad day that day, didn’t you?”

Mind racing, I glared at him. “That was you! Not...” I’d been about to say not the spell , and caught myself before I let the words slip out.

He shrugged, “Imagine my...disappointment when I learned you had just taken a couple of weeks’ leave. I decided to just put a hit out on you and get you out of my business, once and for all. When no one could locate you, we had to settle for getting rid of your colleague that stepped in while you were gone. Shame too, pretty girl that one. It was just a stroke of luck that one of my men spotted you tonight at that club.”

Noticing there was another body tied to me for the first time since he stepped in the room, Marcone turned angry eyes on his lackeys. “Who the fuck is that?”

Goon One shrugged, “Don’t know. Was with the lawyer so we brought him along.”

“You said no witnesses.” Goon Two reminded, and was met with Marcone’s piercing gaze.

“Yet you kidnapped a prosecuting attorney and his what? Boyfriend? In plain sight of street cams and tons of witnesses in passing traffic? You shot at those witnesses, who had probably already dialed 9-1-1. What you left was another mess for me to clean up.”

“You need to hire better help,” I observed, running my finger over what I thought was Callum’s palm, but I couldn’t be sure. All I knew was that I was touching him, and his skin was warm, which had to be a good sign. When his pinky finger curled around mine, my heart nearly exploded with relief.

Marcone turned his attention to me, his dark brown eyes narrowed. “What I need is for ambitious attorneys to keep their noses out of my business affairs.”

“What’s the end game here?” I demanded, and Callum’s finger jerked around mine, but that was the only movement from him. “Getting rid of me won’t stop the shit storm coming down the pipe for you. They’ll just replace me with someone else. They already have.” I tried not to think about Shelby’s fate, praying she was being held somewhere too.

“It might not stop it,” Marcone smiled grimly, “but it will send them a message. You and your colleague both turning up dead will give them pause. Maybe get them to look the other way. Not to mention the added bonus of your boyfriend. An innocent bystander. People go nuts when an innocent person winds up in the crosshairs, don’t they?”

“Yes, boss,” Goon One responded, even though I was pretty sure the question was directed at me.

Marcone glared the man into submission. Goon One stepped back, his hands clasped behind his back and was smart enough to keep his mouth shut after that.

“Let Callum go,” I didn’t even try to keep the desperation from my voice. I would beg if I needed to. I would beg for Callum’s life. “He has nothing to do with any of this. He’s innocent. Do what you want to with me, but I’m begging you, let him go.”

Marcone moved closer to me, his face impassive. He stared at me, eyes narrowed, and I didn’t blink as the man assessed me.

The barest of smiles crossed his face, “You love him.”

It wasn’t a question, just a statement that I couldn’t deny.

“I do. ”

As I said the words, the truth of it hit me.

I loved Callum.

I wasn't sure when it had happened, but I was one hundred percent in love with him. It was ridiculously soon—too soon—but it had happened, and I wouldn't change it for anything. Couldn't if I wanted to. Which I didn't.

Marcone bent close to my ear, and I willed myself not to flinch away from him. “And you're going to die together.”

Loud banging erupted around us, echoing off the metal walls. It surrounded us, coming from every direction.

Marcone straightened, turning to his henchmen. “What the fuck is that? Did you not secure the woman?”

“She's secure,” Goon Two nodded, his hands coming up to cover his ears over the clanging booms.

Marcone jerked his head towards the door. “Well, go check it out!”

They scurried out, guns drawn. A minute later, one of them yelled, “Boss! You might want to come check this out!”

Marcone pinched the bridge of his nose, sighing audibly, before following his men, slamming the door behind him.

Callum's pinky tightened around mine, and I turned my head, trying to see him.

“Callum?” I whispered. Doubtful he would be able to hear me over the deafening noise all around us .

Nothing. No response. My heart sped up, fear filling me. Maybe his finger was nothing more than a muscle jerk.

My bindings slipped away, falling to the floor, and I nearly fell out of my chair at the suddenness of my freedom. Breathing hard, I stood, rushing around to where he still sat, head tipped towards his chest, tangled black hair falling forward and covering his face.

Kneeling down, I pulled at the bindings on his ankles. They slid through my fingers onto the cement floor, and I did the same with the bindings on his wrists. Bringing his arms down to his sides, I rubbed his hands, then up to his elbows and down again.

“Baby? Can you hear me?”

He was so still, hadn’t moved at all, and worry flooded my body. He hadn’t acknowledged he was free, or that I was touching him. I had no idea how the bindings had come free, but if I had learned anything the last two weeks it was to no longer question things I couldn’t explain.

Callum finally moved, his head tilting up, and I brushed his hair out of his face. His glasses were askew on his nose, but otherwise miraculously intact. Fixing them tenderly, I looked him over.

There was dried blood on the side of his face, but otherwise he looked unharmed.

His beautiful green eyes were dull though, exhaustion shining from them. He slumped towards me, resting his head against my chest. Rubbing circles on his back, I wondered what our next move should be to get us out of here. Marcone and his men

weren't going to be occupied forever with whatever was happening out there.

"I did it," he whispered, his voice ragged and rough. "It worked. My spells worked."

Realization dawned on me, and I kissed the top of his head. "You did, baby. You broke our restraints. You freed us."

"Not...just...that." He sounded exhausted, on the verge of collapse even.

The noise. The distraction. Had he caused it, or was he controlling it? Whatever magic he had used had taken a physical toll on him.

"Just need...a minute," he mumbled.

I wasn't sure if we had a minute, especially when the clamoring noise abruptly stopped, and eerie silence fell around us.

Glancing around the bare room frantically, I knew there was nowhere for us to hide, no place for us to go.

Running footsteps got closer and I was afraid that what Callum had done had been for naught. Tilting his chin up, I brushed a kiss over his lips. "I love you."

He smiled weakly but there was a light shining from his tired eyes, "I know."

"You heard me tell Marcone?" It wasn't the way I had dreamed the first time I told a romantic partner I loved them would go, but at least I knew he was aware of my feelings. Especially since I didn't know if we were going to make it out of here alive.

"No," he gave me a lopsided smile, "I knew when you broke the spell. The bad luck one that little twat placed on you. I don't think I have the energy to try to break the

binding one right now though.”

“Broke the...” The footsteps were closer now, just outside the door, and I knew we were out of time.

“You begged him to let me go,” Callum swallowed, his green eyes glistening. “You put me before your own life. And I love you too, Michael.”

The doorknob rattled as it turned, and my heart pounded in my ears.

Gunshots rang out, making us both jerk. Grabbing Callum, I dragged him to the floor, covering his body with my own.

“Boston police department!” A voice I didn’t recognize yelled from somewhere outside the door, “Put your hands up, Marcone!”

There were more shots fired, and then the door burst open, hitting the wall with a bang. Lifting my head, my eyes met Derek’s worried ones, his chest covered by a black tactical vest. Relief flooded my body, and I sagged against Callum’s back.

“It’s over, baby,” I whispered, “It’s over.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

Callum

“Yessss,” air hissed sharply between my teeth, as Michael bucked his hips up the same time I sank back down onto his thick cock. Leaning over him, he wrapped one well-muscled arm around my back. His lips sucked my nipple into his mouth the same time his dick hit my prostate straight on and I screamed, the feelings were so intense.

Sex wasn’t exactly on the recovery checklist that the emergency room had given us when we’d been released a couple of hours ago, but needs must. And we both needed this.

Needed to feel close to each other, needed to feel alive.

Needed to solidify those three little words we had said to one another.

My bedroom door banged against the wall, rattling the mirror on my dresser. The mirror I had been watching our reflection in, as I rode Michael’s cock like a prized rodeo bronc rider.

“Holy Mother of God, my eyes!” Daphne screeched, and I yelped, falling right off of Michael’s cock, and nearly off the bed completely. Only his quick grabbing of my arm saved me from landing in an undignified naked heap. His latex covered cock wilted before my eyes, and I grabbed the blanket, pulling it over both of us.

“Is he okay?” My mom’s concerned voice called from the doorway and Michael groaned, tossing the blanket quickly over his head.

“I heard him scream!” Gran’s breathless yell followed a mere few seconds later.

Peeking my head out from the blankets, I glared at my family filling my bedroom doorway.

“What are you doing home?” I demanded, completely put out that they had interrupted my impending orgasm.

“Daphne had a feeling you were in trouble,” Mom told me, crossing her arms over her chest.

Gran poked her head around Mom. Fortunately there wasn’t an inch of Michael uncovered, and only my head poked out. “Isadora had a premonition too, so we came home. We thought you needed us.” She waved a hand under her nose. “Smells like sex in here. He’s fine. ”

My mom’s eagle-eyed gaze landed on the white bandage on my forehead that my hair didn’t quite hide. “He’s not fine, Mom! Callum, what happened?” She moved closer, her hand gently moving my hair so she could get a better look.

“I’m fine, Mom,” moving my head out of her grasp, I gave her what I hoped was a reassuring smile. “Promise. It’s nothing.”

Daphne, having recovered from the sight of walking in on Michael and me, snapped her fingers loudly. “I think the better question is who is he hiding under those blankets.”

Gran snorted, “Oh, that’s the Endicott boy. The one he was all moony over in high

school.”

All our heads swiveled in Gran’s direction, eyes big.

“What?” Gran shrugged.

Narrowing my eyes, I couldn’t believe my family had barged into my room like this and were still standing here . God, we all needed better boundaries. Or just boundaries in general. “How do you know that?”

Gran snorted, “Tilly told me, of course.”

“Mrs. Hawthorne?” I croaked.

“Mom, when did you talk to Tilly?”

“When Callum read her cards this week,” Gran told us nonchalantly. “Monday? Tuesday? Callum, what day did you read her cards? ”

Shaking my head, I plucked at a thread on the blanket. “Monday, I think.”

“Mom?”

“What?” Gran sounded put out.

Mom had her hands planted on her hips, tapping her foot. “We were all supposed to turn our cell phones in when we got there. I saw you turn yours in.”

Gran looked annoyed. “You saw me turn in a cell phone, Sarah. But not my only cell phone. That rule is stupid, and dangerous, and I decided I wasn’t doing it. And I’m eighty, I don’t have to do a damn thing I don’t want to.”

Was I the only one that was wondering why my eighty-year-old Gran had more than one cell phone? Apparently so.

Daphne crept to the other side of my bed, and before I could stop her, she yanked the blankets down to Michael's chest. She probably would have yanked them further, but he grabbed at them with quick hands. There was a brief tug-of-war between them before Michael's brute strength finally prevailed, though Daphne put up a good fight, I'd give her that.

"Michael?" she stared down at him, her mouth a tight line of disapproval.

"Uh, hi," he gave a wave with one hand, while using the other one to keep the blanket firmly in place and covering all his bits. "You're probably wondering what I'm doing here."

"Looked and sounded like you were doing my grandson," Gran chortled, while my mom screeched, "Mom, not helping!"

"Helping what, Sarah?" Gran demanded, "They were doing just fine before we showed up. They don't need our help. Though," she tapped her lip with one blunt fingernail, "I see why Callum was all heart-eyed over this one."

"Out!" I made a shooin' motion at them all. "Get out!"

"So, you don't need me to break that binding spell, then?" Daphne shrugged, moving towards the door.

"Wait!" Michael shouted. "We do. Need it broken. Please."

Mom gave me another one of her Mom looks, and I kept my eyes rooted firmly down at my blanket covered lap.

“Callum?” she said very slowly, “Were you spell casting while we were gone?”

Meeting her eyes, I said, “No?”

Daphne was slowly waving her hands in the air above us, plucking an invisible thread this way and that. “Oh, he so was. I’d recognize one of his messes anywhere.”

“Can we talk about this later?” I mumbled, “Or, like, never?” Then at my sister, I mouthed, Tattletale.

Daphne smirked at me, then wiped her hands together. “All fixed, brother. Though you might want to test it out to make sure.” She batted her lashes, looking innocent, but I knew better.

“You’re not going to be here when we do,” I declared, pointing my finger at her and then to the open doorway. “You just want to see Michael naked.”

“Duh,” she shrugged, then followed Gran, and finally my mom, out the door. “I mean, he’s still hot.”

Michael covered his face with his hands, groaning and repeating, “Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.”

Pulling at one of his hands, I peered down at him. “They’re gone. And, of course, they left the door wide open. Want me to test that the spell is broken? I can shut the door.”

“Ugh, I’m almost afraid to, but yeah,” he moaned. “I’d like to finish what we started but I don’t think I can, knowing your family is downstairs.” He shuddered, “Yeah, nope, not gonna happen. You’re way too loud and I’m already never going to be able to look any of them in the face.”

“Ok, here goes.” Tossing off the blankets, I hurried to the door with no mishaps and without Michael writhing across the bed screaming in agony.

Hex ran across the floor, jumping on the bed, and butting his head against Michael’s chin.

Shutting the door with a loud, purposeful bang that I hoped they all heard downstairs, I turned to see Michael watching me, a huge smile on his face .

“She did it.”

Climbing back into the bed, I tucked myself close to his side. “I never doubted that she wouldn’t be able to. She’s really amazing with spells, but you did not hear me say that.”

“Can we just hide out here for a while?” Michael whispered, his lips brushing over my hair. “After yesterday, I’m not sure I’m ready to be interrogated by your family.”

“We can hide up here for as long as we want,” I assured him, taking his hand and winding our fingers together.

“Forever?” he wondered, and I grinned against his chest.

“Forever sounds wonderful.”

Epilogue

Callum

One Year Later...

Derek grunted as he dropped the moving box at his feet. It landed with a loud thud, and I winced, hoping there wasn't anything valuable or breakable in it.

"Michael," Derek wiped his dusty palms on his denim covered thighs, "I know you're a lawyer, but do you have to have all these law books? They're heavy as fuck. Read a paperback like a normal person. Better yet, buy a Kindle. Fuck, I'll buy you one for Christmas." He straightened, then winced, his hand rubbing his lower back. "I'm too fucking old for this moving nonsense. Tell me again why you didn't hire movers?"

Michael placed the box he'd been carrying down on the floor, but I didn't miss the wince he tried to hide from his friend when he straightened his own back. "I did hire movers. You. I'm paying you with pizza and beer. And a guest room to sleep in so you don't have to drive back to the city tonight. Ingrate."

Grinning at them both, I slid a box over between my legs where I sat on the couch and began unpacking it. The room we were in was going to be Michael's office, and I carefully sat the impressive looking hardback law books on the floor beside me.

So much had happened in the past year I still had to pinch myself some days, so I knew it was all real. My mind drifted over everything that had happened, while I continued to unpack the box.

Michael had been correct about the Marcone case. The Feds had swooped in and whisked Francesco away to await trial in a federal prison. The man had charges against him as long as my arm, but Michael figured they'd end up plea bargaining a ton of them down. Either way, I hoped we never had to see the man again.

Thankfully, his co-worker, Shelby, had been located in the same warehouse they had taken us to, and other than being roughed up a little, she was physically fine. It had shaken her up though and she had resigned shortly after, and frankly, no one blamed her.

Our kidnapping and near-death experience had also unnerved Michael. It had rattled both of us, but it had really caused Michael to rethink some things. Mainly his career, where it was going, and what he wanted for his future.

Seems he wanted me for his future.

My eyes strayed to the spark from the thin silver and amethyst band on my left hand, when the sunlight streaming in from the window hit it. It was still new and strange seeing it there, but every time I did, I couldn't help the huge grin that broke out across my face as I remembered that day.

I loved that Michael had researched and gotten the ring in silver and not white gold, which he had admitted was his first choice. When he realized that witches believed silver to be a symbol of the moon, that it had the ability to repel evil spirits, and was often used in magical spells and could enhance psychic abilities, he had quickly decided to commission the ring in silver.

Michael had proposed a little over a month ago, nearly a year to the day he had walked into my shop. And he'd done it in the middle of the Witch Memorial while I'd been helping Macy with a tour. I'd been placing flowers on the benches, and when I had turned around Michael had been down on one knee, holding out a ring box. There had been more than just our walking tour going on at the time, but most

people's attention had been glued to Michael and me. I'd been so stunned I had nearly sat down on the bench I had just placed a flower on.

I had barely heard anything he had said to me, my heart pounding so wildly in my ears it had drowned out all other sounds. I do remember nodding, my hands over my mouth, and happiness flowing through my body as he slipped the ring on my finger. Pulled me up and into his arms and kissed me within an inch of my life, in front of everyone. Cheers had erupted around us, but I'd only had eyes for the man I loved.

Macy, cheering the loudest, had rushed over, hugging me tight. Declaring that yes, she absolutely would be my Best Person at our wedding, before I had even asked.

He'd surprised me with more than just a proposal that night. Taking my hand, he had led me a few streets over to Washington Square, to a large, newly renovated, Queen Anne Victorian. It was painted light gray with white trim, and he'd tugged me up to the wrap around porch. When he had pulled out a key, I could do nothing more than gawk at him, speechless. Ushering me into the grand foyer, woodwork gleaming around us, I had gazed around me with wide eyes.

"I bought it," Michael stated the obvious, and all I could do was nod and gulp. "I know it's big, probably bigger than we need, but hear me out."

"Oh, I'm listening," I had mumbled, walking slowly through each updated room. The house was stunning, completely modernized, but the previous owners had—thankfully—kept all the original woodwork and built-ins. Everything sparkled around us, and I fell in love with it instantly.

"It's six bedrooms and four and a half baths, with space for my office," he tugged me through the gorgeous kitchen, to a pair of French doors that led to outdoor space. There were already two nice sized garden boxes waiting for next spring. "I thought we could try our hands at planting some veg, or maybe some herbs? I don't know. But there's a two-car garage, and an amazing sunken tub off the master, and..."

Wandering the fenced area, I smiled as he tried to point out all the house's wonderful selling points. "It's beautiful, Michael."

He looked unsure of himself. "I know we should have done this together—house hunting—but my mom sent me this listing from a realtor friend of hers, and I just knew this was our house, Callum. Let me show you the upstairs."

I let him pull me from room to room, until we stood outside the double doors that led to the master bedroom. "Close your eyes," Michael insisted, and I laughed, but did as he asked. He was like a kid on Christmas morning, and this was our package we were unwrapping together. Holding my hand, he guided me into the room. "No peeking!"

"I'm not," I laughed, even though I really wanted to.

"Open them up."

Blinking my eyes to take in the room, my mouth fell open in surprise. "It's purple! "

"It's lilac, thank you very much," Michael corrected me, his tone teasing. "As soon as I saw this room in the pictures, I knew I had to see it. We can change whatever we want, but honestly, they did a fantastic job with this house. Maybe some paint, here or there, that is more to our liking, but—"

Framing his face with my hands, I kissed him soundly, shutting him up. "It's perfect just the way it is."

The house hadn't been the only surprise that night. Michael had turned in his resignation, which had shocked me more than being proposed to and having a house bought for me. While he had drastically cut down his hours in the year we had been dating, spending most weekends in Salem, I knew he loved his job. We had never even discussed him quitting, and he hadn't said anything about being unhappy there.

“I’ve been thinking about it for a while now,” he had explained, sitting on the perfectly made king-sized bed of our new house. Taking a seat next to him, I entwined our fingers together between us.

“Really since meeting you and the Marcone thing.” Which was what we had taken to calling our kidnapping. The Marcone thing sounded better than when we were kidnapped and thought we were going to die.

“And honestly, I was ready for a change. Working those hours just wasn’t what I wanted anymore.” He brought our hands up and kissed the back of my hand. “My time belongs to you. To the life we are building.”

“But—” It all seemed so sudden, and I worried he was making decisions he was going to regret. Michael loved the city, his condo, and despite what he said, I knew he loved working on those high-profile cases, and seeing justice served.

He shook his head. “No buts, Callum, and no regrets. I have been wanting to make changes for months. I hate it when we are apart. I can’t sleep in my condo when you aren’t there.” He snickered derisively, “Which is funny, considering that me not being able to sleep with someone is what led to us meeting. I asked to cut back at work, to not be assigned so many cases, and Harry nodded and then would hand me five more. It’s just not what I want anymore. I love the law, that won’t ever change, and I still want to fight for victims, but in a different way. I’m going to open my own practice, right here in Salem. Actually, I plan to have my office here in the house to see clients. I think I’d like to do family law for a bit, see how that feels. I talked it over with my Dad, and while he’s still a little bummed that I refuse to go into corporate law, he’s happy to have me back home, and practicing what makes me happy.”

Giving him a warm smile, I caressed his cheek. “I think that sounds amazing. I know you’re going to be wonderful. ”

“And, best of all, I managed to sweet talk Maggie into coming with me and being my office manager here. Though there won’t be much to manage, besides me.”

I was startled out of my memories by the slamming of the front door, and Daphne declaring loudly, “I’m here! And I brought the sage!”

Michael’s eyes went wide, and he whispered, “Sage?”

Shrugging, I listened as Daphne wandered the downstairs rooms. “If we stay really quiet, she might not find us.”

Derek snort laughed, then asked, “Who is she and why does she have sage?”

Shaking my head, I muttered, “It’s what she does. And that’s my sister.”

The house didn’t need to be saged—I’d done it two days ago while Michael had been taking care of some last-minute things in Boston—and there weren’t any lingering spirits about.

Well, besides the two chambermaids from the turn of the century, but I rarely saw them, and they weren’t a bother. I had wisely not told Michael that our house—gah, I loved saying that!—was occupied by two ghosts. I loved this house, and while he had come around to all things witchy, I wasn’t sure where he stood on ghosts and really didn’t want to find out. At least not until we had unpacked everything and lived here a while .

I had filed the ghosts under things he really didn’t need to know about. Like when Jessica would stop by the shop to have me read her cards and I wouldn’t charge her. That definitely went in the Michael-doesn’t-need-to-know file.

But Daph was gonna do what Daph did, so we were now getting a second house saging.

Derek wrinkled his nose as the scent of burning sage drifted into the room. Neither Michael nor I missed how Derek's brown eyes lit up with blatant interest as my sister pranced into the room, black waves of hair bouncing around her shoulders.

Daphne stopped short at the sight of Derek, cocking her head to one side, and giving him a top-to-bottom look that was slightly disturbing.

"Please stop eye fucking our friend," I ordered, frowning. "It's super rude."

Finally tearing her eyes from Derek, she tossed her hair over one shoulder. "No one likes a cock blocker, Callum."

Derek, poor fool that he was, looked absolutely besotted with my sister. Michael ran one hand down his face, speechless. Though after a year, he really shouldn't be surprised by anything Daphne said or did.

Putting the still burning sage in her stone smudge bowl, Daphne deposited it on Michael's ridiculously expensive desk. Then to all our complete surprise—and horror—she grabbed Derek by the front of his dirty, sweaty t-shirt, pulled him flush to her, and kissed the man senseless .

Stepping back from the stunned detective, she waved her hand over him then ran the same hand down his chest.

"Hi, I'm Daphne. Callum's much wiser, younger sister. And who might you be?" She purred, holding her hand in the air in front of him, like she was expecting him to take it, bow, and kiss the top of it.

Michael made a what-the-fuck face at me, his hands flopping wildly in the air in front of him.

"Older sister," I corrected her dryly, rolling my eyes at Derek. "She is my older

sister.”

Daphne shook her head, dropping her voice to a stage whisper, “Callum can’t do math. Don’t listen to him.”

“Daphne,” I said slowly, narrowing my eyes at her when I felt what she had done, “remove it.”

She pouted prettily, while Derek grasped her hand lightly in his and introduced himself. “I’m Derek. Michael’s best friend.”

“Daph–” I warned her, pointing my finger, “remove it now.”

Derek looked confused, his eyes traveling from Michael, to Daphne, to me, and back to my slyly smiling sister. “Remove what? What’s going on?”

“Ummm,” Michael hedged, looking at me for help.

“You’re no fun, Callum,” Daphne pouted prettily. “Besides, he needs it.”

“Remove. It. Now. ”

“No!” She stamped her foot, and I pinched the bridge of my nose, causing my glasses to go slightly askew.

“Don’t make me call Mom,” I warned, “because you know I will.”

“Oh my God, Callum, you are such a little tattletale!”

“Learned from the best. If you don’t remove it, I will,” I warned her, and she snort laughed.

“As if you could.”

“My...I can so!” I huffed.

Michael winced, “Baby, I love you, but please don’t. You’re better, but things still go a bit...” he glanced at Derek whose head was swiveling so fast keeping up with the conversation he very well might end up with whiplash, “sideways. And this is Derek. He’s like a brother to me, so maybe just...don’t.”

“Nothing has gone sideways,” I assured him, knowing that wasn’t quite the whole truth. My spell casting was better, but some days...well, we just wouldn’t talk about that.

Michael made a face. “Is that why I spent an ungodly amount of time on the internet trying to find a replacement for your favorite mug when you...” he pressed his lips together, choosing his words carefully, “dropped it...because it was hot. Not to mention poor Hex’s singed tail. From you dropping it.”

Oof, he just had to remind me of that. Yeah, I may have been lazy the other morning when my coffee had grown cold and waved my hand over it to warm it back up. Flames had shot up a foot high, my favorite mug had shattered, coffee had gone all over me, the counter, and somehow the fur on the tip of Hex’s tail had been a little worse for wear.

Derek was starting to look suitably concerned. “Seriously, what’s going on?”

Daphne beamed at him, “You mean besides you getting the best kiss of your life?” She ran her hand down his chest then back up, petting him.

“Please stop petting my friend,” Michael begged.

Derek—poor dumb bewitched man—gazed at my sister with cartoon heart eyes. “If this

is how people say hello in Salem, I'm going to visit all the time. But I need to know what Callum is going on about."

Daphne sighed dramatically, tilting her head, and batting her lashes up at him. Gah, if I never had to watch my sister flirt again that would be great. "Oh nothing. Just a teeny tiny protection spell. I need to keep you safe before our first date."

Derek looked alarmed, "A what now?"

Daph shrugged, "It's really nothing. It will just keep you safe. You can pick me up next Friday at seven."

"Michael?" Derek finally broke out from whatever trance, or pheromones, my sister was putting out in the world, sounding properly worried.

"Callum?" Michael questioned me, his facial expression saying all the words he wasn't .

"Oh, just tell him," Daphne huffed, "it's Salem for fucks sake. Half this town's population are witches. He's going to find out eventually."

Derek blinked, his face going pale, and he whispered, "Witches?"

"Um, well, you see..." Michael hedged, and Daphne rolled her eyes.

"Yes, I'm a witch." Daphne looked over at me, "And so is Callum. And our mom and Gran. It's not that big a thing."

"Michael?" Derek looked like he needed to sit down.

Michael nodded, "You'll get used to it."

“I’d be more concerned about the two ghosts you have hanging out in the foyer,” Daph tossed out nonchalantly, and I winced.

“Ghosts!” Michael and Derek yelled at the same time.

Glaring at my sister, I hissed, “Why are you the way you are?”

“Sorry!” she fluttered her hands at me and hissed, “I figured he knew.”

Hurrying to Michael, I slid onto his lap, twining my arms around his neck and smiling prettily. Pushing my glasses up my nose, I tried batting my lashes, since it seemed to always work for Daphne.

“We have ghosts,” he whispered, not looking at all impressed with my eyelash fluttering. Since it was making it hard for me to see him, I just gave up on it .

“Not scary ones. Besides, they won’t mess with you, when you have a big bad witch in the house.”

He looked horrified. “Daphne’s moving in?”

I swatted his chest playfully, and he snickered, pulling me closer to him. Kissing me, he whispered, “I love you, witch.”

“Mmmm,” resting my head on his shoulder, I smiled, content. “I love you too, mere mortal.”

“Michael,” Derek cut into our private, swoony moment, “we need to talk. Witches? What the fuck? And ghosts? Seriously? Are you guys just fucking with me?”

“Come along,” Daphne tugged him by his t-shirt, pulling him behind her from the room, “let’s leave the lovebirds alone. I can answer all your witchy related

questions.”

Raising my head to watch them leave the room, I sighed loudly. “Poor Derek doesn’t stand a chance against my sister, does he?”

Michael placed a hot kiss on my neck, just under my ear, and my whole body shook. Because every time the man touched me, it was like it was the very first time.

“About as much of a chance as I had against you.”

The End