

JARICA JAMES
JENÉE ROBINSON

KNOT
CURSED

KNOT CURSED

A HALLOWEEN OMEGaverse
STANDALONE

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TRIGGER WARNING

Please keep in mind that while this is a light and cozy Halloween read, there is some violence to a side character witnessed by our FMC .

The romance and the rest of the plot is meant to be light-hearted and fun.

We hope you enjoy Prue's story!

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Prue

“Miss Prudence Ever.” High Magistrate Barlow practically sighed my name, pinching the bridge of his nose with the weariness of a man reconsidering every life choice that had brought him to this very moment with me.

Even though it wasn’t our first.

“Would you care to explain why there are currently twelve chickens in the lobby?”

“Thirty-two,” I corrected automatically before slamming a hand over my mouth. I’d counted them myself, though, and they deserved the full truth.

Three pairs of eyes blinked at me incredulously.

I sighed before launching into the explanation that was more frantic word vomit than coherent. “I found an old spellbook, and it asked for a bird feather. So, I went outside to find one, assuming it was just a random bird. It appears it was a chicken, and that was a bad choice.”

I gestured wildly at the single chicken that had walked in with me for emphasis.

“What was the purpose of this particular experiment?” Magistrate Leon asked, sounding at least amused at my latest mishap.

“I’ll admit, this one was a long shot, and no harm, no foul... well, a few fowls, but you know that’s not what I mean,” I stammered out.

“Have we not asked you to stop this madness?” High Magistrate Barlow demanded. “Need I remind you of the incident that led you here?”

“The incident that I did *not* cause,” I countered, refusing to back down.

Not that the council had ever cared about inconvenient details like facts.

If a curse so much as sneezed in our general direction, we got hauled in to face judgment. Fairness was more of a suggestion with them. They looked at the evidence, made their decisions, and stamped CURSED on your file before going back home to their life they got to keep control of.

And just like that, your entire future belonged to a room full of people who thought chickens in the lobby were my biggest offense.

At least they've forgotten about the time my latest experiment latched onto the closest thing to me at the time. It just happened to be a box from an old estate sale. No one found it amusing when an antique doll ran around town following people.

It was the kind that you pull a string on its back and it says 'mama.' That was quite unsettling to say the least as it kept saying it over and over.

I could still hear its little porcelain feet stomping on the pavement as it bolted through the streets. That thought sent a shiver down my spine.

"How can you say that you're innocent when there are a dozen chickens in my building?" He finally finished the rant, crossing his arms and glaring at me. He already decided I was guilty no matter what I said.

"I believe the lady has corrected us on that amount," Magistrate Leon pointed out with a laugh.

"I'm glad that you find this amusing," High Magistrate Barlow growled.

"We were planning to call you in for a meeting today, anyway," Magistrate Lorcan said, urging them to focus back on the matter at hand. "In an attempt to stop these experiments of yours, we have found a curse expert. Maybe having a second party available at your disposal is a good idea."

What could I even say to that? They were the decision makers here and my job was to appear repentant.

The truth was, I wasn't about to share my experimentations with anyone. There was a reason they were called experiments. It's not like I took the safe and cautious routes. I found obscure spellbooks, the kind they put in restricted sections.

My quest for finding a cure was the entire reason I opened an antique shop. I bought boxes left over from estate sales, and any antiques I could get my hands on.

I managed to find a few cursed objects, and a handful of spellbooks over the years. Not enough to cure anything, unfortunately, but enough to keep my obsession alive and my best friend concerned.

If they were bringing somebody from the School of Magistrates, I couldn't let them see the things I'd found. Not only would they put a swift stop to it, I'd likely get thrown in jail.

The magistrates were academics at heart, and assholes through and through. I had yet to meet one that didn't have a dry, condescending air to them.

Magistrate Leon had a semblance of humor but he also didn't speak up about the accusations against me.

Not that I could share those thoughts out loud.

So, instead, I did my part by smiling and nodding until they finally let me out with another warning. Just another paper to add to my ever-growing file.

The lobby had descended into chaos while I was gone. There were shouts, clucks, and feathers flying everywhere.

"Are you going to handle these chickens?" the secretary asked, her voice high-pitched and frantic as she stood on top of her desk. It looked like the chickens were organizing at this point, circling around it as if she had food up there with her.

"Nope," I said as I walked past, the chickens not even turning to look my way. "In fact, High Magistrate Barlow said he was going to clean up this mess. There's thirty-two of them, by the way. You might want to keep an eye out."

Then I was pushing open the front door, not bothering to look back.

I let out a breath as the afternoon sun hit me. I tilted my face up. Even with an autumn chill in the air it was the perfect day.

"Yet another slap on the wrist?" my best friend's sarcastic voice echoed out, her lips tilted up into a teasing grin and there was a little witch hat headband on her head. She was perched on the bench in front waiting for the verdict.

If there was anyone who knew the full extent of my crazy, it was Blake. My curse was still listed as 'unidentified' in the records. I just called it pure fucking chaos. There was no rhyme or reason to it. If something strange, inconvenient, or wildly embarrassing could happen, it usually found me first.

On the other hand, Blake's curse was one I'd never want. She heard people's thoughts. Not the polite, filtered ones people actually said out loud, but the random nonsense bouncing around in their heads. Half-finished

grocery lists. Song lyrics. Existential crises. Weird questions about whether raccoons had knees.

To her, it sounded like everyone was talking. Which meant she had a tendency to answer things she absolutely shouldn't have heard in the first place. And one time she was able to get in a magister's head. That is what got her sent here.

Most people steered clear of us. Apparently, accidentally releasing chaos and occasionally answering intrusive thoughts made us difficult to socialize with.

So, naturally, we became best friends.

Honestly, who else was going to put up with us?

"So, what happened?" she demanded, hungry for the details.

"I may or may not have released thirty-two chickens in there."

"Released?" she questioned, her eyebrows rising.

I collapsed onto the bench she was waiting on, shoving my dark hair out of my eyes as I looked at her.

"So, this experiment was supposed to calm errant magic. It required a bird feather. I guess I found a chicken feather that blew in from one of the farms or something, and it seemed like it worked."

"Oh, sure," she said. "Until..."

Blake dragged out the word, waiting for the response, her hand motioning for me to continue.

"I thought it was a one-and-done situation. I was walking down the street, heading for my shop... and I hiccuped."

"You hiccupped?" she said, her voice dry.

"A single hiccup, then boom, *chicken*. Well, *chickens*, to be exact. One was on Main Street, and then I hiccupped again and three more flew out of the void. Apparently, there was havoc at the grocery store. I got called in here because the magistrate was already in town. Otherwise, I think this would've been swept under the rug."

"Gross. Why are they in town?" She wrinkled her nose at the mention of the magistrate. They weren't exactly a favorite among the people of Moonlight Grove.

They were the reason we were here, after all.

"Something about me causing too much trouble over the years, so they're sending in a curse expert. He's supposed to be moving to town soon."

“They’re throwing an un-cursed person among all these cursed people?” she asked.

She tucked a strand of platinum hair behind her ear that had escaped the headband and waited for me to continue.

“When he saw the chickens, Mayor Wilder forced me to go in, but then I had a hiccup attack in the lobby because I was nervous.”

“No,” she gasped, eyes wide with delight. “Tell me it was pure chaos.”

“Does thirty-two chickens being loose in the lobby and infiltrating the ventilation system of City Hall sound like chaos?”

“It absol—”

We turned to see the doors burst open, a magical breeze shoos the chickens outside. It seemed High Magistrate Barlow didn’t like the fact that I’d told the secretary he was cleaning it up.

“Not our problem,” she said quickly, grabbing my wrist and pulling me away from the building and toward the center of town.

We had shops side by side, and we were going to be long gone by the time they got done dealing with the chickens.



“I HAVE A BOX FOR YOU, DEAR.” I was manning the desk when a call came in from Old Sally Johnson, who lived on the outskirts of town almost all the way on the border. Her kids were helping her clean out her house and she wanted me to come and collect her useless junk. “The kids wanted to have a yard sale, but I’d rather you come and get it.

I wasn’t about to turn down a box of odds and ends. That was one of the best ways to find these old spell books.

“Can I come after five?” I asked. I’d already lost a few hours this morning with the chicken fiasco and meeting with the Magistrate.

“Of course, dear,” she answered. “Anything you can’t sell, will you donate for me?”

“You got it, Mrs. Johnson. I’ll see you after five,” I told her before texting Blake.

There was no telling what kind of collection she would have waiting for me. I’d need backup either way. I never knew when my curse would rear its

ugly head. She was better at telling people no than I was.

One time, I went to collect donations and came back with a six-foot-tall purple dinosaur. To this day, I wasn't entirely sure how. I used him to store hats and jewelry, and the town had collectively named him Barney. He'd become something of a mascot. Children hugged him. Teenagers took selfies with him. Mrs. Holloway knitted him scarves every winter.

We absolutely did not need another Barney.

If Blake had gone with me, there was no way that thing would have come back to the shop in the first place.

I just started a fresh spreadsheet to log inventory from the Johnson place when the bell over the door chimed.

"Welcome to Restless Relics, can I help you find something?" I called from the antique desk I used for paperwork.

"Just looking," a deep, timbered voice answered. I was a little startled by the voice I didn't recognize. Moonlit Grove wasn't exactly big enough for mysterious baritone voices to go unnoticed. New voices also meant new curses, and my shop had enough trouble staying in one piece with me around.

"If you need any help, just let me know," I called out, trying to peek around the shelves and see him.

All I got was a grunt in reply.

I went back to my spreadsheet when another hiccup struck. My eyes frantically scanned the room, sighing in relief when a chicken didn't materialize.

At least not here.

I thought I was in the clear, until a girly shriek came from the direction the customer was in. It was so loud that I was moving before I could process it.

"Are you okay?" I yelled as I moved through the cluttered shop, trying to locate him.

As I rounded the corner, I found a tall, dark, and handsome stranger standing in the middle of the aisle with a chicken on his head.

Not near his head.

On it.

The bird looked pleased with itself and I was horrified. I guess the hiccup wasn't innocent after all.

“Umm, there’s a chicken in your hair,” I said, pointing at the chicken who let out a little squawk.

He didn’t move.

"Umm, can I help you with that?" I asked, pointing at the chicken who was now pecking his hair.

“Yes,” he said, holding unnaturally still.

I was doing my best not to scare the bird, but she saw me coming and started flapping her wings frantically. She must have taken some hair with her from the groan of pain before she flew at me. I lost my footing and fell right into the stranger while she landed safely on a cabinet above us.

My cheeks burned with humiliation. What had I done in my past lives to deserve this?

The handsome stranger toppled over with me. My hands were braced on his rock-hard abs as he landed on his back, barely missing the shelves on either side of us.

“I’m so sorry,” I muttered, trying to get off of him by scrambling backwards, my hands drifting lower than I intended.

"That's not the chicken," he smirked.

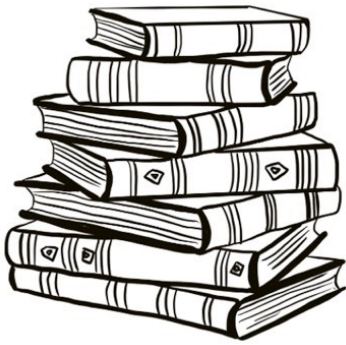
"Fuck my life," I sighed, completely mortified now.

“What’s with the chicken?”

“Free chicken with purchase. Today only, supplies are limited,” I muttered as I climbed to my feet.

He was smiling now. As if women launched by poultry fell into his lap every day.

“Then today is my lucky day.”



Rook

The gorgeous, little witch sprawled across my lap was definitely my mate. Her scent was missing but I didn't need it to recognize what was mine.

My alpha was ecstatic at this turn of events and thinking up ways to keep her right here in our lap, but I was mostly trying not to laugh.

The magistrate made it clear this little witch wasn't going to stop looking for a cure to her curse. Every attempt so far had ended in chaos and even I had heard about the latest chicken mess. They needed me here to keep her grounded and hopefully have less disasters.

I eyed the bird glaring down at us and I found myself speaking before I could consider the consequences.

"Who needs a dog when you get a free chicken?" I mused as I reached for the bird, putting out a bit of soothing magic to lure it into a sense of calm. The chicken relaxed and went willingly into my hold.

"It was mostly a joke," she admitted, stuttering through the words. "You don't have to take it. I'll figure out something."

"Nope, an offer was made and I accepted. She's mine now," I said with a grin. "I'll also take this cabinet. She seems to like it."

"Oh?" she perked up at that, eyeing the antique chest I was gesturing to. The price tag was steep, but came with receipts outlining the history and origins. She clearly did her work.

Though, I was a bit surprised she was running an antique shop if she had proficiency in alchemical chemistry.

Her file was answer enough.

Prudence Ever was adamant she was innocent and something was wrong with the ingredients, but no one believed her. Eyewitness accounts mentioned her cauldron producing a strange glow before the explosion. There was little left in the aftermath to find real answers and the High Council did not hesitate to quarantine a curse when it popped up.

Her file read like a list of increasingly creative insurance claims which only solidified their choice to send her.

Tack on the recent events and it was even more insane. Exploding potions, a flock of chickens, stalking dolls, talking ants and spiders, and dancing teddy bears to name a few.

There had to be a pattern. Curses always had patterns. That was how you found the cure. But what pattern was there in a list of strange events like this?

My mind had attached to the puzzle this woman was and I knew I couldn't let it go. I should introduce myself and tell her why I was here but the magistrate I spoke with told me she'd be reluctant.

Not to mention I had a chicken to wrangle.

The magistrate gave me a house on the edge of town. It was reserved for guests of the High Council, but no one was using it. Too many feared Moonlit Grove and everything it stood for.

For me this town was a well of possibilities. I'd dedicated my life to studying curses, their origins, and their cure.

It may not have saved my brother, but I could save others, and that had to be enough for me.

The work was certainly not boring and if the chicken in my arms was indication of anything, I was not going to find boredom in Moonlit Grove, either. I'd been in town less than an hour. Apparently, that was enough time to acquire a mate and a chicken.

"Do you have someone that delivers furniture?" I questioned. She was untying the string on the tag hanging from the cabinet and nodded.

"I do. I'll call him for an estimate if you give me one moment," she said with a quick, still-flustered smile. It was adorable.

Not for the first time I wondered what her scent was like. I bet it was something sweet and spicy like her personality.

With the bird in one arm, I pulled out the phone and dialed the magistrate. The flustered secretary answered on the first ring, the echoing of chickens in the background making me smile.

“Hello, this is Rook Sinclair. I arrived in town and encountered a chicken. I’d like all of the chickens that are loose to be gathered and delivered to my house in town. I’m heading for the hardware store for fencing.”

“Charge it to the magistrate,” she said quickly. “They already have a budget for curse cleanup and this counts. I’ll get right on this, sir.”

I tucked the phone away before joining her in the front. She said a quick goodbye into the phone before putting it down and offering a tight, still mortified, smile.

“He just finished a delivery and is on his way to us now,” she promised. “I work his fee into pricing, so it’s included.”

“Thank you, Miss....?” I trailed off, waiting for her to fill in the blank.

“Prue,” she said, solidifying that she was the woman I was going to be working with. “And you are?”

“Rook Sinclair,” I said with a flourish, balancing a sleepy chicken in one arm. “Curse expert, collector of degrees, and, apparently, owner of poultry.”

Her eyes widened, before narrowing. She knew exactly why I was here and wasn’t having it.

“It was a pleasure doing business with you, Mr. Sinclair,” she said as she took my offered card and swiped it, waiting for it to go through before continuing. “But I have no interest in a partnership.”

With that, she rushed outside to meet the delivery driver. She could run all she wanted but it was inevitable.

We were tied together, she just didn’t know it yet.

I glanced down at the chicken in my arms and tried out a few names.

“Henrietta?” Another peck. “Ouch, okay. Cluck Norris?”

Each new and increasingly ridiculous name earned me more chicken violence.

“What about Eggatha?” I asked, as I anticipated another pinch of pain from her annoyance. This time she simply blinked and ruffled her feathers. “Oh, a winner? Just wait until you meet all your friends soon. You’ll have to help me name them as well.”

She looked oddly pleased, which only had me questioning my sanity. There was no way this chicken was truly understanding me.

If she remained a chicken at all. Who knows what surprises a curse-tainted chicken could bring.

Did I look like an insane person talking to a chicken in an antiques shop? Oh, absolutely. But I'd accepted that some level of insanity would be my life now.

I had no choice but to stand here and wait for Prue to come back so I could give her my address. She'd left it behind in her haste to get away from me.

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Time stretched on long enough I was as restless as the chicken. I started to walk around the shop, taking in the eclectic mix of antiques. Near the back, by a long stretch of cabinets, I found a set of curtains.

Everything in me told me this was a bad idea, but curiosity had always been my downfall. So, with one glance at the chicken in a plea for her cooperation, I pushed past them.

My eyes immediately fell on a tall armoire that had a bright orange sticker on it.

Cursed Objects: Handle with Care

Why would the mayor allow her to have these here? With her curse this was not just a liability waiting to happen, but could be downright catastrophic.

Was this a secret? I had a feeling I'd find out soon enough. The little witch was bound to find me here and give me an earful for going where I shouldn't.

As if on cue, Prue's voice echoed out. "Rook?"

Eggatha clucked in my arms.

"Back here," I answered. "Behind the curtains."

"That's storage and employees only, you're not supposed to be back there," she said as she stepped through them, immediately putting her hands on her flared hips and glaring at me.

She was downright adorable when she was mad. A little vein on her forehead bulged as she glared at me.

My little witch was a bit territorial.

"Afraid someone will touch your cursed objects?" I asked, point blank, watching for her reaction.

Her face was stony and gave no indication she had a secret, and likely banned, collection of objects more cursed than she was.

"I own an antique shop. What comes in the boxes donated to me is out of my control, Mr. Sinclair. Now, this is an off-limits location, can you please follow me back to the counter so I can get the final details?"

"Sure, sorry," I relented. "Eggatha and I were just browsing."

Prue turned to walk away before freezing and turning around, her dark hair fanning out as she spun on me. "Did you say Eggatha?"

I let out a laugh that had the chicken squawking again. "Yes. I was trying out names and that's what she decided on."

Her laughter was surprisingly light despite the fact we were still standing in her restricted storage room.

"You can talk to chickens?"

"That's a negative. I started listing them off for her and she pecked my hand until we landed on Eggatha," I answered, holding up the chicken and hand with the bright red marks.

"It would be more impressive if you could talk to them," she snorted. At least she wasn't glaring at me anymore.

"Ross said he's free right now, if you're heading back to your place," she explained as she turned on her heel and led the pair of us to the counter.

"If he can just set it on the porch, I can do the rest when I get back. I walked here and there is no way that I'll beat him there," I said as I gave her the address.

"You walked from there to the middle of town? That's a mile or two. I would be dead on the side of the road if I tried that," she said with a chuckle. Despite all the chaos surrounding this little witch, she found humor where she could. I respected that.

"Not big on cardio?" I teased, ready for yet another reaction. This little witch thought she had her expressions under lock and key but it was all on display for me. Even as she kept distance between us every step of the way I could tell without trying what was on her mind.

Something about Prue Ever was demanding I pay attention. Now that I was, I couldn't seem to look away.

“Not in the least,” she laughed. “And sometimes it’s my curse I’m being careful with. Today is one of those days.”

Her eyes flickered down to the chicken and back up to me. I could see her regret but also a hint of determination. This little vixen wasn’t sorry in the least.

I didn’t generally gravitate to people this way, but I knew that I wanted to know more about her, to help with her curse and give her a real life again.

More than that, my alpha and I both agreed that Prue Ever would be ours.

I pulled out a business card with my contact info and offered it to the witch with a smirk to show I held no fear of her curse.

"If you ever want to take a stroll, call or text me. I’m not afraid of your curse, Prue."

"Do we get to take Eggatha?" she asked as she pocketed the card, her gorgeous smile back on her face.

"I'll have to go to the local pet shop and get her a little collar and leash. I'm pretty good at transmutation, perhaps I can make one work for her," I laughed, already picturing that disaster. Chickens were as stubborn as they come. I doubted very much she'd walk on a leash for me. "You'll be far too distracted to worry about a curse."

"Oh my goodness, that would be so cute," Prue squealed as she reached over to ruffle the feathers on Eggatha's head. My new pet chicken accepted it with a little, soft cluck. We were growing on her already. "You may need more than one, there's a lot of stray chickens in town today.."

"I'll be the Henfather," I joked, then cringed a little at my pun. It was truly awful.

She blinked at me for a second before a snort of laughter escaped her. It quickly morphed into full laughter that I couldn't resist.

"That was bad. I'll just see myself out," I groaned, turning away but she wasn't leaving it at that.

"Oh no, you've already committed to the name. Good luck with your chicken, Henfather."



Prue

“Did I really just say that?” I groaned as I watched the infuriatingly handsome alpha walk out of my shop. The scent of parchment, campfire smoke, and cinnamon hit me as he moved away, carried in by the breeze as he walked outside.

My body tensed as I took in a deep breath, realization and horror washing over me in tandem.

He didn’t just smell nice, he was my scent-match. *My mate.*

The man that was here to study us like experiments. An alpha who had a solid ten years on me.

What the hell, universe?!

My omega urged me to run after him and tell him what we were to each other, even if he couldn’t scent me. After years of being side-eyed and dismissed from everyone I knew, I didn’t know if I could trust this man that had no curse.

Being rejected by a scent-match wasn’t on my agenda today.

Maybe judging him prematurely wasn’t fair. Not only had he taken the chicken but he’d bought something. I shouldn’t be anything but grateful if not for the fact he was here to keep me in line.

It was likely a way for the magistrate to regulate what I was doing in my shop. He already found my restricted storage area and breezed past my wards.

Yet, here I was, omega practically purring already at his smiles and teasing smirks. Melting at his scent. Fuck, I was in trouble.

Ross walked in to save me from my internal struggle.

“Hey there, Prue. Where is it?” I snagged the paper I’d written his address on and walked to the front.

“Back here,” I said, leading him to the chest then holding out the slip of paper. He took it and whistled.

“They got someone out in that old, fancy house? Wasn’t that for the bigwigs and their equally high and mighty friends?”

“He’s, apparently, a curse expert,” I said, shying away from sharing the real reason he was here in town.

Me.

“Ah, I wonder if he’s in town for the bazaar. The Halloween Bazaar is in what... a week?”

“Five days,” I said, because I’d absolutely been counting down the days until it was here. Random merchants weren’t allowed in town. Every delivery was regulated. Even our moving boxes were inspected thoroughly.

The only time I got in real lots that could include ingredients or possibly cursed objects to practice on were smuggled in when I took little day trips.

There was no way the Mayor didn’t know about them. I had a feeling he kept it hidden from the Magistrate in hopes that I’d actually have success one day. So far, I’d created problems he feigned ignorance to.

Ross said his goodbyes as he took the furniture out to his truck. My focus was still on the unexpected curse expert.

I had my doubts that Rook Sinclair would turn the same sort of blind eye to my shenanigans. He seemed almost excited at the prospect of working on the curses. That might be something I could use to my advantage.

For now, I was starving and it was way past lunchtime. I put the closed for lunch sign up on the door before leaving the shop.

The streets were fairly empty. Despite everyone trying to pretend life was normal here, only half of Moonlit Grove’s citizens had accepted their fate and embraced this town. Most of them worked here on Main Street. It was decorated with an array of orange, black, green, and purple decor. Pumpkins lined the sidewalks, small, magical candles inside—which didn’t go out or dwindle—burning bright.

The windows had twinkle lights and spiderwebs. Every inch of our town was slowly transforming into a spooky wonderland. On instinct I glanced over at the library. Every year the librarian dressed up the gargoyles

out front. Last year the pair of them prowled around the lot in matching tutus. Her accidental transfiguration curse came in handy sometimes.

I had a feeling the lions weren't accidental. She just liked the companionship.

The pizza shop down the block was empty after the lunch rush. I walked in and sent a ping to Blake for my location.

My phone rang before I could even tuck it away.

"Pizza? Say less. I'm on my way," she said quickly. I could already hear her keys jingling and her voice going breathless as she rushed my way. "I have some gossip."

"My favorite kind of lunch break," I grinned, already feeling better. "Let me grab our usual."

"Add breadsticks! Oh! And some mozzarella sticks!"

"On it," I promised as I ended the call and tucked my phone away.

A bored teen was working at the register, he was shifting on his feet as arcs of power filtered back and forth between his hands. He perked up as I walked in, the magic falling away. It was slow enough I had a feeling he was just happy for a reprieve from the silence.

"Welcome to The Witch's Oven," he said, his voice cracking and he looked a bit nervous like he might zap me by accident. I couldn't imagine being forced to raise a family in this town. At least not in its current state. But he was one of us, so I could see why he was here.

Maybe if the magistrate's beloved curse expert could actually do something for us, we could live normal lives.

Once I put in our order and took our number, I picked out our favorite table. It sat right in front of the window where we could chat, gossip, and watch people. The three biggest joys in my life at the moment.

My fingers drummed on the table as I waited for food and Blake. Thankfully, she was quick, the door bell chime ringing out before she swept in. She gave the boy behind the counter a wink, likely hearing an errant thought again. And sparkles ignited the napkins he was unpacking to refill at the tables. He ran to the sink behind him and put out the small blaze. None of this fazed Blake as she scanned the room for me.

Then her eyes locked on me and she rushed over. The mischievous grin on her face told me she was bursting with gossip.

My best friend sat down across from me and glanced around before she finally let it out.

"You know the Vances, right?" she started in a hushed whisper. For my bestie it was more of a quiet yell.

I couldn't contain the eye roll before answering her, "Who doesn't know them?"

"Duh," she answered and facepalmed herself. "Anyway, their daughter ran off with the Starville son. They even got married at the courthouse yesterday. I heard that she's pregnant to boot." Her eyes were dancing with the joy that good gossip brought her. Especially when her curse often gave her the juiciest bits. At least she didn't go blabbing to the world. Just me.

"Aww, young love," I teased, then tilted my head as previous gossip came back to me. "Wait... wasn't she supposed to marry the Mayor's son?"

Blake nodded eagerly as the food was delivered to our table. She picked up a mozzarella stick and dunked it into the marinara sauce.

"Can I get some ranch, please?" I asked the waitress with a smile. She nodded yes and ran off.

"I can't wait to see how all that plays out," I said as I placed a piece of pizza on my plate.

"Drama in a small town makes being sent here worth it," she added as she grabbed a breadstick this time. "I should start a gossip column or something for the paper."

"It really is. As long as we aren't in the middle of it," I reminded her as I took a drink and waited on that ranch.

"You can have this one," Blake pointed to the dish in front of her. "We're best friends, I don't know why we can't share?"

"With my curse, it's better safe than sorry," I said, relieved as the waitress rushed over and put my own in front of me. Sometimes magic simply bursts out of me, taking out everything in its path. Usually I felt when those hit but I couldn't ever be too cautious.

"Do ya'll need anything else?" the waitress asked. We both shook our heads no and she gave a quick smile. "Just give me a holler if you do."

"She's new. From some mid-western or southern state? I don't remember her," I mused as we watched her.

"Yeah, I heard she turned her ex into a talking cat or something. Whatever she did, no one has been able to change him back. She was sent here with the cat as her punishment," she answered.

"Oh, a talking cat might be fun," I giggled.

"Not if he was your ex," Blake reminded me as she took another bite. "Especially since he could still talk back."

"But then you're cursed with cleaning up after your ex forever. That's just plain evil to put on someone," I said.

"Speaking of curses, how has your day been? Any more chickens?"

"One more... and speaking of which, the curse expert is already here in town," I admitted with a sigh. I didn't mention he was handsome and infuriating.

"What? You're just now telling me?" she asked, dipping her breadstick a little too hard, splashing sauce over the table. She huffed at herself and cleaned it up. I certainly wouldn't judge a little mess. I'd been there plenty of times before.

"I was processing," I answered honestly. I didn't know what to think about all of this and the embarrassing mess I was in now.

"Spill," she ordered. "I can tell you're holding back. Sharing is caring, remember?"

I had picked up my pizza and dunked it into the ranch and went to take a bite when the cheese slipped off the crust, down the front of my shirt and ended in my lap.

"Shit," I muttered. There was no way that all the napkins in the world could clean this up.

Blake had just taken a drink and soda came out her nose as she started to laugh at my misfortune. Of course, the bell over the door dinged right at that moment and in walked Rook Sinclair. The Henfather, himself.

I was starting to think he was the bane of my existence. Even if he smelled like sin.

Blake eyed me curiously as I sank down in my chair, swiping furiously at my clothes and table as if that would fix this whole mess.

As my embarrassment and anxiety rose, I could feel magic buzzing at my fingertips.

Fuck, I had to run. Fast.

"Sorry, Blake. I can feel it coming," I hissed as I rushed right past Rook and out the front door, my feet carrying me as fast as they could go. Tears burned at my eyes and I struggled to calm myself.

I didn't stop until I was in the woods that lined the edge of town. My chest ached from exertion and my hands were shaking violently. I collapsed to the moss and let out a sob, the trees around me letting out a collective

crack, branches and pine needles raining down in a loud rush as my magic burst out of me all at once.

Thank the gods I made it in time.

“Prue?”

“You shouldn’t have followed me,” I said, glancing over to see Rook walking toward me, hands up like I was a cornered animal and would dart off at any second.

There was no salvaging this moment. I already had a littering of pine needles around me, in my hair, and dirt and moss staining my already pizza-coated clothes.

“Prue,” he said as he dropped to his knees next to me. His hand hovered between us as if he was unsure I’d let him touch me. The sad omega inside of me wanted to take the reassurance this alpha was offering, to crawl into his embrace and let him lie to me and say this would all be okay.

The logical side of my brain knew being in a pack was dangerous. It wouldn’t be fair, or safe, for me to let him get close.

Especially someone without a curse.

His scent rolled off of him, stronger than before as his alpha reacted to a pathetic omega. Parchment, campfire, and cinnamon hit me stronger than ever and I wanted to give in and curl into his lap, accept the comfort he was willing to provide, curse be damned.

“I’m not afraid of you or your curse, Prue,” he promised gently. “It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not,” I said, standing up and throwing my hands wide. “I just took out a whole ring of trees, Mr. Sinclair.”

“Rook,” he corrected, not the least bit startled by my outburst.

“Then I hiccup out a whole fucking slew of chickens and have to go before the magistrate... again. They tell me you are coming,” I rush ahead, gesturing at him before pacing again. “Then I go to lunch and my pizza flies all over me. I was starving, too, thanks to my fucked-up morning. Then you walked in and I got nervous all over again and then I took out the trees.”

I finished ranting and stopped. The pine needles and leaves around me did not, swirling in a tornado that had my hair flying around my face.

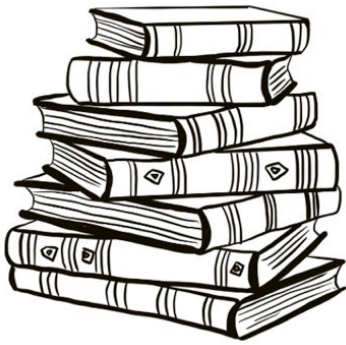
A frustrated screech tore out of me, primal and raw and full of fury. The tornado burst away from me as if my scream directed it, pelting an unfazed Rook who simply closed his eyes and took it.

The clearing was eerily silent after my outburst. Rook simply spit out a leaf, brushed off his shirt and pants, and raised an eyebrow.

“So... I make you nervous, little witch?” Then that devilish smile was back.

What the actual fuck?

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Rook

Prue swallowed hard, a tiny shiver running through her. I wanted to believe it was because I was that charming.

Unfortunately, I knew better.

My aura had slipped free without permission, curling around her before I could stop it. I should've been horrified that I'd just used magic on the woman I was trying to convince not to run screaming in the opposite direction.

Instead, all I could think was that my alpha had already decided she belonged under our protection. He wanted this little witch safe and didn't flinch at the magical release we'd just witnessed.

She didn't trust me yet. I was sent by the magistrate to observe and possibly help her. For them it was to keep her in line, for both of us it was hopefully a way to find a cure. Or at least a way to give them a normal life.

For her. For my brother who would be moving to town any day. For all of the people sent here and forced to live their lives as prisoners.

Afraid to use too much of my magic to calm her, I forced back my influence so I wasn't overwhelming her. I watched as her pulse slowed and her breathing returned back to normal.

"You don't make me nervous. My curse does," she clarified. "It hurts people if I'm not careful. Hell, I barely know what it does. Sometimes, it's a magical burst, other days, things just go wrong like luck isn't on my side. Plus, you saw the chickens." The words fell unconsciously from her lips in a single burst before she slammed a hand over her mouth.

I let out a little chuckle and held out a hand towards her. Prue would learn that I could be her safe place and my words weren't empty promises.

She eyed me cautiously, her omega wanting her to give in, but her mind reluctant.

Something I hope eased with time.

"If something happens to you, then it's on you," she warned as she finally slipped her hand into mine.

"You already hiccuped a chicken onto my head. What's the worst you can do?" I asked as I led her back towards the pizza place.

She didn't bother to answer, just gave me a side eye. I knew damn well it could get worse. Yet, I had no intention of turning away now. My alpha purred softly next to her. It was low enough to soothe but not draw attention, and I hoped it helped fight off any lingering cursed magic that was hanging around.

We walked quietly for a few minutes before I let my curiosity win.

"Do you usually feel your curse before it strikes?"

The magistrate brought me in to help her, and now that I knew she was mine, I had even more motivation to succeed. From what I could tell this was an extreme case. What I just witnessed looked more like something that was done to her.

I still couldn't wrap my head around how this sweet and considerate woman could have lived with this awful curse for these past few years. She literally ran out of the town before the effects could cause any destruction on the town. It was, clearly, not intentional. From the sounds of it, the curse didn't make a lot of sense as it struck from different angles.

I've seen far worse outcomes from people who could care less.

"The chickens weren't my curse, actually. It was a miscalculated spell," she admitted a bit sheepishly. "I can't rule out my curse affecting it, but it wasn't something that happened on its own. The magical bursts feel different. It's like a hum under my skin and an unnatural magic that takes over. I take it as a warning to move or face accusations. Or worse... someone getting hurt."

That made so much more sense. I'd never seen a curse quite so nonsensical as randomly hiccuping and making chickens appear. I'd have to ask more about that spell later. For now, this was more pressing.

"Does that happen often?" I questioned.

"Depends on the day, really," Prue answered honestly. It didn't even take my aura anymore to reassure her I wasn't here to hurt her. That she could trust me with her words.

"Let's go back and get you some food," I offered gently as I pulled off my dress shirt and handed it to her. "Put this on. It's going to be a little big, but it's clean. Maybe just tie it up or something."

"Why are you being so nice to me?" she asked bluntly. I was a little taken aback by her words.

"Why wouldn't I be?" I countered stopping her in her tracks.

"You're not like us. Our families and friends cut us off and never looked back. We're isolated here with the magistrate looking over us. Most of the outside world thinks we're beneath them." The pain and honesty in her voice made my blood boil. "Don't get me wrong. This town is home for me now. It's also isolated and we have only half of the rights we deserve."

"Well, you're in luck. You have the best curse expert on the case. Once we reverse this, do you think you'll stay here?" I asked.

She considered my question, even though I could tell she was more than a little skeptical about my abilities. I couldn't blame her. Most curses weren't thought to be reversible.

I disagreed. My life's work proved my theory correct. I'd cured more than one curse and kept my brother's at bay for years.

"I haven't thought about it. Even though I've been trying to break the curse, a part of me was afraid to think about it too hard. That and I've been too busy with the shop," she explained as we started walking again.

"Well, you'd better start." My voice rang with confidence. This time she didn't roll her eyes or call me a liar, she just busied herself buttoning up the shirt I lent her, tying it at the bottom. My alpha rumbled a little at the sight and she rolled her eyes.

Just then her stomach growled and that got a laugh from both of us.

Prue play hit me and said, "I told you I was hungry. My lunch was abandoned."

A red-headed woman rushed towards us with a to go box in hand. She was yelling out to Prue as she somehow managed to stay upright on her heels. She stopped just short of dumping the food all over my little witch and smiled brightly at my omega.

"I had them pack it up. Did you even get a bite in?" she questioned.

"My shirt got more of the pizza than I did," Prue answered with a frown. I loved that she didn't hesitate to open it up and take a huge bite. It was likely cold but she looked happy as she chewed it.

"And who is this?" her friend eyed me.

I held out a hand and introduced myself, "Rook Sinclair, curse expert extraordinaire."

She giggled as she shook it. "I'm Blake. Cute, cursed, and Prue's best friend."

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I've been called in to help Prue here, so you'll be seeing more of me around town."

Blake muttered something that sounded like, "You bet I'd like to see more." but it was too low for me to register.

"Shut up," Prue hissed at her best friend, looking completely mortified.

I pretended not to hear them. Unfortunately, her best friend bringing her lunch meant I wasn't quite as useful as I had been a few minutes ago. I'd had visions of bringing her back inside and being the dashing knight in shining armor.

"So, Mr. Big Shot Curse Expert, are you going to the bazaar?" Blake asked as she sized me up. Normally I'd eat up the attention, but now I only had eyes for my little witch.

"The bazaar?" I questioned. "I haven't heard anything about it, but I've only been in town a day."

"Just because we're cursed doesn't mean we don't like shopping," Prue teased. "The town goes all out for these events. A few times a year we have several magistrate-approved merchants that come in. Some try to sneak in cursed objects as well, so you have to be careful what you buy. For the most part it's just fun little trinkets, clothes, and things like that. It's a good time, though. They make a whole festival out of it."

"I take it you'll be going?" I asked, not trying to be rude to Blake, but mostly talking to Prue.

"Of course, I am," she said, those pretty, light purple eyes focused on me. They were captivating and I couldn't help but wonder if her curse affected them or her magic. I'd never seen anyone with that color before. "I've been looking for a certain list of items. I always hope that they'll have them on hand. Surely, the gods have to take pity on me at some point, right? Plus, Blake and I have our own stall to sell our wares."

The fact she could muster any hope after the shit she'd been through showed the witch's tenacity. She had humor, a pinch of sarcasm, and was smart as a whip. She was, honestly, everything I could have hoped for in an omega.

If only I could scent her properly.

“What items might those be?” She had my curiosity piqued again. Maybe this was where I’d find myself being useful to her. I wasn’t used to chasing down omegas, especially ones at least five years younger, but I was hooked.

“As much as I’d love to sit and listen to all this,” Blake said, holding her hands up, “ignorance is bliss when it comes to these experiments. I’m off to work. Too-da-loo, witches.”

She gave a little finger wave before heading off, leaving me and my omega alone.

“You really care that much about helping me?” Prue questioned. “What did they offer you?”

“I’m a curse expert, remember?” I said, exasperated. “I’m going to need you to stop thinking the worst of me. There was obviously compensation, they *hired* me on to help, but I’m still genuinely here with good intentions. You aren’t the only one I want to help here.”

“Who else?” It wasn’t harsh, just open and curious. I liked that she didn’t hold back with me.

“My brother,” I admitted. “He’s being sent here. I tried for years to keep him off their radar but he was tired of hiding.”

The familiar pang of regret hit me.

“Sorry, that must have been hard,” she said gently.

“It is, but I’m here to help both of you. To figure out how to give everyone back to a normal life,” I said, trying to put conviction in my tone so she’d believe me. It was killing me that she thought I was untrustworthy.

She glanced away and let out a breath. “Old habits die hard. I’m used to doing this alone. Some help might be kind of nice. Maybe I can avoid any side-effects next time.”

“Why don’t you show me what you’ve done so far? Maybe I can offer some insight. It’s okay to take a leap of faith sometimes.”

“Okay,” she said, nodding along as if the vigorous head movement would give her the courage to start walking again.

“I’d also love to know more about your curse.” I figured I may as well put it all out there. She seemed to appreciate my honesty.

“You know what...” she said. I could see the exact moment something shifted in her eyes. She’d made up her mind. “Fine.”

She turned on her heel and strode down the road, taking her pizza out of the box and biting it with fervor. As she chewed on the greasy pizza with

resolve in her eyes, I didn't think I'd seen anything quite so perfect.

She was chaos incarnate and I was desperate for a life full of adventure and spontaneity. This was a perfect match.

I followed her into the antique shop. She paused long enough to flip the sign to 'closed' before leading me back to the room I'd wandered into earlier.

"This is just one of my work areas. I try not to experiment with anything bigger in the center of town," she explained, looking excited instead of nervous now. Even if she had an antique store this girl was made for alchemy and research. I could sense it.

"So, where *do* you experiment?" My grin had her chuckling. She had to be questioning my sanity by now.

"You know that clearing I ran to?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. "There's a little cabin out there. Nobody claimed it, so I kind of turned it into a lab."

"So, why are we in your backup lab instead of there?"

"I can't give away all my secrets already, can I?" she teased. It was nice to see her personality coming out again after her outburst earlier. The little witch had regained some of her confidence.

She dug around on the desk for a moment before pulling out a folded sheet of paper and handing it over.

"These are the things I need."

I slowly scanned the list of ingredients, letting out a low whistle. Each item was more rare than the last.

"None of this is going to be easy to find."

"Now you know my pain," she said with a huff. "I can only gather what they'll allow me to ship in. I can only find the herbs if I can forage them around here. Otherwise I have to sneak out—"

She cut herself off, looking up at me with wide eyes.

I couldn't help but grin.

"Oh, little witch... have you been up to no good?"

"Are you just now realizing that? The chickens didn't give it away?" she shot back. I couldn't tell if she was flirting now, but I hoped she was.

"You're going to have to stop blaming everything on the chickens. It seems you were living a life of crime long before them."

"You caught me," she said as she glanced around, pride shining in her expression. "I think, at some point over the years, I realized people were

going to think what they wanted no matter what I did. So, I decided to stop giving a fuck. If I can find a cure for this awful curse, and maybe some of my friends' curses, too, then all the sneaking around and deceit will be worth it."

"It's a noble cause," I said, my words genuine. I respected the hell out of this witch for fighting back against the circumstances she'd found herself in.

No one asked to be cursed, and I'd seen enough to know she had nothing but good intentions.

"And now," I said with a smile, "you have a secret weapon."

"What's that?" she asked, skeptical again.

Oh, little witch. You aren't the only one with a plan and no fucks to give.

"Me."

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Prue

A bad feeling settled in my bones as I stepped out of my house. The sky was blue, sun shining, but the sense of foreboding was impossible to ignore.

Despite the heaviness in the air, I had no choice but to head to class, so I ignored it.

That was my first mistake. I knew better than to disregard my intuition.

My alchemical chemistry final exam was today and nothing would stop me from getting there. My entire degree and future rested on this moment.

The mile long walk to campus should have been normal and familiar, but my dread only grew worse with each step I took.

There was something big about to happen but I hadn't seen any signs of what was to come.

Yet.

The walk was quiet. Not many people were milling around our college town this time of day. I was just grateful not to have to exchange pleasantries every other step.

I stopped at the crosswalk and checked my watch. A smile tipped my lips when I saw I somehow managed to get to town with extra time. That meant I had time to stop for a brew.

Maybe it's the exact pick-me-up that I need to get out of this gloomy mood.

The bell on the door chimed as I entered Midnight Drip. A few of the faces glanced in my direction, but not one of them said a hello, so neither did I.

Just being inside the shop eased my nerves a little. I glanced around, desperate to cling to things that were familiar and ignore my gut.

Antique tea sets lined the walls, along with old tea tins. This place was a collector's dream.

The girl behind the counter greeted me with a bright smile as I walked up. She was a short, red-haired girl with a fair complexion; not a strand out of place in her ponytail. The kind of put-together I'd never achieve.

"Hello and welcome to Midnight Drip, I'm Jan, what can I get for you?" she asked, all while still smiling.

That had to be exhausting. I did my best to return a grin before answering.

"Hello, can I get The Book Lover's Spell, please?"

"Oh, that's my absolute favorite," she squealed as she typed it in and gave me the total.

I swiped my card and she told me that it would be a few moments. I gave her a nod in thanks and headed towards a free table in the corner.

My mood was one that I knew was best kept to myself today and the less people I interacted with before test time, the better.

A few people I've seen around campus popped in but they ignored me as per usual, it used to bug me but I've been a loner most of my life and self isolated.

Once an outcast, always an outcast, I guess.

"Pure, Puree, Prue?" a different voice called out. I lifted my head to see a different barista at the end of the counter, holding a cup and looking confused.

Did they seriously think that my name was Puree? That was a new one, even for me.

I quietly headed to pick up my drink and the guy behind the counter started to apologize for butchering my name, but I held up a hand to stop him.

"Don't even worry about it, it happens all the time," I lied easily. There was no point in making him feel worse. It wasn't a name that someone heard all the time.

"Thanks," he muttered and got back to work.

There were a few patrons blocking my exit, so I stepped back to the table I was previously at and took a seat. I still had time but I'd be cutting it close if they stayed too long.

I raised the cup to my lips and the first sip was incredibly sweet and just what I needed. The spelled coffee mixes were one of the best ways to start a school day... or any day, really.

The angst down deep eased a little bit as I drank my coffee. When time ran out, I stood quickly. There was no avoiding it now.

I made sure that my backpack was secured and trudged toward the little crowd.

"Excuse me," I said and no one moved. I said it a little louder this time and got a few glares as they moved aside, like it was my problem that they had to move. Why would you stand in front of the exit?

Ignoring them, I hurried down the sidewalk to campus. I couldn't let anything stall me now, I waited too long trying to avoid people.

Why did I always do that? I decided then and there that I had to stop inconveniencing myself for others.

When I finally walked over the threshold into class, only the teacher was there.

Was my watch wrong?

"You're the first one to arrive, please head to your desk and I'll get your supplies ready. Prue, you are not to start until I tell you to, do not touch anything, either," he told me firmly. Professor Sandford had always been a strict professor, but at least he was fair.

Time needed to speed up, I couldn't keep going on with this heavy foreboding on my heart.

I pulled out my notes and started to go over them. A little review couldn't hurt, right?

Professor Sandford placed my tubes and compounds in front of me with a final look of warning. I didn't dare touch it and returned to what I was doing.

The shuffle of feet pulled me from papers minutes later and to no surprise, it was Regina and her clones trailing her. I pretended not to notice and got back to my work. They walked straight to my table and knocked over a vial. The glass sprayed the floor and Regina yelled out in pain.

"Prue, why did you have to cut me?" she wailed, causing the professor to run over. Her face was twisted in fake agony, but her eyes were a dead giveaway that it was all an act. They were as lifeless as ever.

"Is this true? You broke this tube just to assault Miss Red?" he asked me, stunned by my supposed actions.

“You said not to touch, so I listened. Miss Red didn’t know the rules, apparently, and did it to herself,” I answered, not looking up from the notes.

“Why would I do it to myself?” she whined.

“Why would I do anything to you? I’m studying for this exam like you should be,” I said evenly. My voice sounded so calm and reasonable that Professor Sandford looked conflicted.

Finally, he muttered a healing spell. Her skin mended together, leaving nothing behind, before he did the same to the vial and returned it to my table.

“Get to your seats and keep your hands to yourself,” he told the others before turning and walking back to the front of the room. “We will give the others a couple minutes. If they aren’t here by then, we start.”

I placed my notes back in my bag and folded my hands in my lap. It was a long few minutes of silence, but not peace. Regina and her crew were staring daggers at me in sneaking glances from a few rows away. I rolled my eyes and ignored them. They were just mad he didn’t immediately side with her.

“I’ve given them enough time, please turn your papers over and complete the assigned potions there. Once you have completed it, please call me over and I’ll inspect yours one at a time. Begin now,” he said as he set a timer.

Professor Sandford had set the instructions for a luck potion on my desk and I almost smiled. I could brew this in my sleep.

I took a second to inhale and exhale, pushing away all the negativity and focusing on what I knew. First, I took stock of the inventory he placed on my desk. I made a mental note of the missing ingredients before heading for the storage cupboard.

Several other students were ahead of me, frantically pilfering the supplies, but I didn’t care. I was confident and fell into the groove of doing what I was good at.

This was where I thrived. Potion-making had always come easy for me.

I glanced at the clock and let out a breath of relief. This was record time, even for me.

With my missing ingredient in hand, I sat down, freezing as I lifted the golden powder. The coloring looked off.

Just enough to notice.

It was from the professor, though... there couldn't be anything wrong with it. Everything was regulated meticulously here.

That feeling of dread pulsed in my veins, warning me to stop as I added it. I should have listened.

That was my second mistake today.

An angry, purple cloud swirled out of my cauldron and filled the air. I raised my hand to call for the Professor before a blast sent me flying backwards.

My head hit the wall with a thud before darkness swept over me.

I woke with a jolt, nearly tumbling out of my bed and staring around. Then sagged in relief as I took in my room here in Moonlit Grove.

Fuck. That dream needed to stop at some point. Not only was I exiled to a cursed town, now I'm forced to relive the worst day of my life at least once a month.

My alarm blared a moment later and I stifled a scream. For a brief second, I seriously considered smothering it with a pillow and pretending opening my shop was optional.

Unfortunately, it wasn't. Even in a cursed town we had to pay our bills. You'd think the magistrate would provide what we need here but nope, we were forced here and expected to keep up with what we needed. The most they did was send supplies to those too dangerous to work in town.

I'd spent far too much of the night replaying my conversation with Rook. Every time I convinced myself the self-proclaimed curse expert couldn't possibly help me, I'd remember the certainty in his voice and start wondering all over again.

Hope was a dangerous thing. I learned that lesson years ago.

With a groan, I silenced the alarm and dragged myself through my usual morning routine before heading for the shop.

Halfway down Main Street, my phone chimed with Blake's custom ringtone. Digging through the bottomless pit I lovingly referred to as my tote bag, I finally fished it out before she could decide I was ignoring her. It was times like these I cursed using charms to make life easier. Bag expansions were all fun and games until you needed something in a hurry.

BLAKE

Coffee??

How did she always know exactly what I needed?

PRUE

Are you sure you can't read minds from far away?

BLAKE

Nah, but how handy would that be? Meet you in front of your shop at ten.

PRUE

Thanks. See you soon.

After sending the message, I called Mrs. Johnson. Between the chickens, the magistrate, and accidentally giving one away, I'd completely forgotten about picking up her estate boxes yesterday.

Thankfully, she wasn't upset. Living in Moonlit Grove meant she'd almost certainly heard about the latest incident before I'd even remembered to apologize.

We ended the call and I tucked my phone back into my tote and stepped outside. The Halloween decor had slipped out of town center and now decorated most homes. I made a mental note to put something together later.

Maybe I'd even rope Rook into helping. He had un-cursed magic after all.

Movement to my right caught my attention. The house had been abandoned for years now. I figured they talked most people out of living next to me just in case.

Someone was talking to the town guards, a moving truck parked out front. I could see twitching ears on his head and a tail that swished angrily behind him. I'd never seen a shifter in half-shifted form, but if that was his curse he was certainly in the right place.

I stood on my porch and watched like a gawking neighbor. As if he sensed me watching, his gaze snapped to mine with a glare. My chest flared with embarrassment and I booked it down the drive and headed toward town at double the speed.

The crisp, autumn air was a welcome change after the brutal summer we'd had. My mind drifted away from the neighbor and back to the upcoming bazaar, mentally sorting through everything I wanted to take for my booth.

The bazaar wasn't just the best place to hunt for impossible-to-find ingredients. It was also my yearly excuse to get rid of antiques that had

overstayed their welcome. We got a few out of town buyers and setting up my own booth was a good way to earn a few extra bucks. My oddities were almost as fascinating to them as the cursed residents of our town.

There was only so much I could sell to our locals. They came in for jewelry and unique house decor, but not things like cursed dolls and old portraits that followed you with their eyes.

Maybe Barney could finally convince someone to adopt a matching dinosaur lamp.

Around me, Moonlit Grove buzzed with the same idea. Mrs. Holloway was trimming her hedges while loudly arguing with them. Mr. Peters was washing his truck for what had to be the third time that week. Someone, or some curse, kept covering it with something new every day. From the smell of it, today was maple syrup.

The shops were also taking their storefront decor to the next level. The usual cliché had shifted into gothic and spooky and I loved it. The change was a welcome one to break up the monotony of moonlit grove.

An older couple sipping coffee on their porch waved as I passed. I smiled and waved back, then promptly tripped over absolutely nothing.

I pinwheeled my arms, somehow caught myself before face-planting into the sidewalk, and kept walking as though I'd meant to do that.

Behind me, I heard amused chuckles. At least they were laughing with me.

My pride had packed its bags years ago. At some point you simply had to laugh at your clumsiness and move on with your day. I wasn't the only one in this town making a fool of themselves on the daily.

I reached my shop just as Blake pulled into the parking spot out front, holding my coffee out like the hero she was.

Before I could accept it, a streak of very pale skin shot across the street. Both of us froze.

"Were those... butt cheeks?" Blake asked incredulously, mouth gaping.

"I think that was the mayor," I answered slowly, rubbing my eyes like that would reverse what I'd just witnessed. "Was he... naked?"

As if summoned by the question, two town enforcers came sprinting around the corner, both completely out of breath.

"Did either of you see the mayor?" one managed between gasps.

I pointed in the direction he'd disappeared.

"He ran that way. But... more importantly, was he *naked*?"

“That he was.” The other enforcer looked at me suspiciously. “Did you cast anything this morning?”

They didn’t always jump to conclusions like that. But, after yesterday’s chickens and explosion, I couldn’t really blame them.

“Why would I want to make the mayor streak through downtown? And no, I haven’t even had my coffee yet.” I accepted the cup from Blake with a grateful sigh and took a sip. “Coffee first. Then fuck around and find out.”

Blake snorted. They looked less than amused at my sarcasm.

“Not everything in this town is her fault,” she said with an eye roll. “We’re all cursed, remember?”

I could’ve hugged her. It was still hard to believe I had someone firmly in my corner at all times. The guards shared a look and Blake narrowed her eyes.

“Are you two going to let him traumatize the rest of Main Street?” I asked, pointing again before she could land herself in confinement. “Because here he comes.”

Sure enough, the mayor sprinted past us in the opposite direction, looking no less naked than before. Something about his face was off, as if he were in some sort of trance.

The enforcers exchanged a look before taking off after him. I watched them disappear, shaking my head.

“...You know,” I muttered, “it’s pretty fucked up that this isn’t even the weirdest thing that’s happened this week.”

“Prue?”

I turned to find Rook standing a few feet behind me. He looked from me to the fleeing mayor, then back again.

“No,” I said immediately. “It wasn’t me this time.”

“I didn’t say—”

“There is absolutely no reason I’d make the mayor streak through town. I didn’t want to see him naked before today, and I definitely don’t want to see him naked twice.”

Without waiting for his response, I unlocked the shop and headed straight inside.

Rook followed right on my heels. He was persistent, I’d give him that.

“What are you looking for?” he asked as I rummaged beneath the bathroom sink.

“Bleach,” I answered.

“Bleach?”

“To burn that image out of my mind.”

He barked out a laugh but didn’t ask any more questions. I was only joking about the bleach, anyway.

I snagged the journal I was looking for and went to the front desk, ignoring the alpha while I looked for the Mayor’s page. My pen flew across the paper as I recorded the incident this morning. Then Mr. Johnson’s latest car curse.

“What is that?” Rook asked, snatching it as I went to tuck it away from prying eyes.

“A log of all the curses in town along with incidents. Curses can be complicated and take many forms.”

He started to move closer but a loud explosion in town had my entire shop shaking like we were experiencing an earthquake.

Rook’s eyes lit up as he ran out the door. “This town is so exciting.”

He could go investigate. I was good where I was.

Now that the shaking stopped I spent time fixing my shelves and displays, making sure no breakables were in danger of bursting against the polished floors.

Only when I was satisfied did I step outside. Blake was running past me, her outfit from earlier fitting tighter, somehow.

“Wait...” I said, eyes wide as I watched my friend do more cardio in five seconds than she’d done in our time as friends.

“Was that me?!” Blake shrieked as she ran down the sidewalk. “What the fuck is going on?”

“At least you aren’t naked,” I offered, unsure of what else I could even say in a moment like this.

Just as she was moving back, the fake-Blake transformed into Mr. Johnson, sponge still dripping with syrup.

The sound of boots hitting pavement had everyone looking down the street. Just for a moment, fake Mr. Johnson’s eyes locked on me. My head tilted between the buildings and I stepped aside.

“My shed is unlocked, just lock it behind you while you calm down,” I hissed as he passed me. There was no reason for me to help this cursed man, but I could practically feel the anxiety wafting off of him.

I couldn’t just do nothing. Sometimes we had to stick together against the magistrate and this was my version of a middle finger today.

“What?” Blake asked, turning to look at me.

“I said they need to calm down. We’re all cursed, stuff like this is going to happen,” I muttered.

“Can it not happen with my face, though?” She shuddered dramatically as a new wave of enforcers walked through.

“Everyone, back inside!” they bellowed. Most listened, turning and heading in. Blake gave me a look that said we’d absolutely be discussing this whole incident over dinner, before heading back to her shop.

I closed the door behind me and grabbed a duster. My eyes were glued to the street outside the front windows as I pretended to dust every surface. The enforcers filtered through the streets.

There were only about six of them but they were well-practiced at clearing the streets. No one lingered now and they finally gave up and headed back to the Magistrate building.

Good riddance.

I stopped in the break room for a bottle of water and a small vial of relaxation potion. Anxiety was an old friend of mine and I kept a few on hand for when I truly needed it.

Whoever owned the shop before me liked privacy. My back yard was surrounded by a privacy fence, a gate I rarely locked, and a storage shed that came in handy. Maybe sending a frantic cursed person to hide out there wasn’t the smartest, but it felt like the right thing to do.

I’d learned to trust my instincts and today they were screaming that I needed to save this man? Woman?

I flipped the lock on the gate to keep out anyone who might wander in before moving closer to the shed. It was silent inside and I knocked softly.

“It’s me, can you unlock it now? I have something that might help calm you down,” I hissed.

It was silent for a moment, as if the person was debating on trusting me, before a shuffling of footsteps and the lock clicking.

A face peered out at me. The man was a bit wild eyed, but heaps more calm than he had been. His hair was blonde now, short on the sides and the top was messy and sticking up from this morning’s antics, I assumed. Wide, mossy-green eyes stared back at me as if bracing for my reaction. I kept my face a neutral mask as I held up the bottles.

“I have water and an anxiety potion. It’s out of my own personal stash, so it’s safe,” I offered, setting them on a stack of bins next to me before

taking a few steps back to give him space.

He moved carefully, eyes never leaving me as he grabbed both. There was no hesitation as he uncorked the vial and upended the entire thing in his mouth. I was about half his size, so I knew it would be good enough to take the edge off, but maybe not drown it completely.

I couldn't help but study the beta. He had soft brown hair that had a slight wave. It was short but still just enough to run your fingers through. His eyes were a light brown and still a bit too-wide. I wasn't usually a mustache kind of omega, but this man was made for one.

"Thanks," he rasped out before sinking to the floor and letting his head fall back against the shelf. "Fuck this curse."

"Is changing appearances your curse?" I questioned, unable to stop myself.

"I'm a shapeshifter," he said. "My curse is that it can change rapidly and at random. I was just walking down the sidewalk past the Mayor's house this morning and it hit. I guess he was in the shower and now the whole town knows what he looks like naked."

"Yeah, thanks for that," I groaned playfully.

He snorted. "It wasn't a picnic for me, either, but thanks for saving my ass. I panicked and tried to run home, but then the enforcers were out and I just... hit a flashback."

Almost everyone here had some sort of curse horror story. I knew better than to ask for details, so I just offered him a reassuring smile.

"We've all had our moments. Mine was yesterday with the chickens."

He barked out a laugh. "That was you? Damn. They were *pissed*."

"Someone collected them. It's fine," I said as I sat at the doorway, keeping the distance between us. "I'm Prue, by the way."

"Merrick," he offered. His hand drifted over his face before giving me a look. "And this is my actual face this time."

"Good to know," I said, gesturing to the water. "That was a lot of exercise. Drink up."

He did as I commanded. The potion had clearly taken full effect. His eyes weren't as wide and his muscles had loosened. He was almost slumped against the shelf now as he looked around.

"Are you new to town?" My question had him shaking his head.

"No, and you might have seen me and just not known it. I'm rarely able to be myself," he admitted with a sigh. "The worst part is I cursed myself."

“What?” I asked, confused. No one could actually curse themselves.

“My dad was not a good man. He forced my mom to have me and carry his family line. Apparently, he did that to a lot of women in some fucked-up power play. When people found out, they hated me. Hell, I hated myself. Then one day, I thought I’d give anything to be someone else.”

“I’m so sorry, that’s awful,” I said gently. “But curses don’t usually start with the power of suggestion. I’d guess your dad used some sort of charm and it affected you in conception.”

“That actually makes a lot of sense,” he said, blinking up at me. I think the poor guy just needed to hear this wasn’t his fault.

The magistrate didn’t send people here for no reason. Hell, even low-level curses didn’t end up in our town.

He belonged here like everyone else.

“Come on, let’s go inside and we can order some lunch. It’s on me,” I said. “You can hang out of sight if you want. I’ve got a set of old furniture in the break room, so there’s plenty of comfy chairs and an old TV.”

“Sold,” he said, forcing himself to his feet. “I need to get me some of that potion. I don’t think I’ve felt this good in a long time.”

“I’ll write down the details for you,” I promised, holding the door open. He went to walk past me and I was hit with a wave of his sweet scent. Like my favorite candy. Sweet honey, a splash of vanilla, and buttery caramel.

Candy corn.

It was strong enough to make us both freeze. I wasn’t used to that reaction. My scent had been muted for years, my doctors assumed due to stress and it simply never came back.

“We’re mates,” he breathed out, eyes wide with hope.

“You can scent me?”

“Yes?” he drew his answer out into a question.

Something had shifted between meeting Rook, yesterday’s magical outburst, and now.

“Usually, people can’t. It’s been muted but something triggered it again,” I said, worried this might be a curse at play. I made a mental note to ask Merrick later. He couldn’t scent me like I could him. He’d had no reaction to it at all.

While I was freaking out, my omega happily perked up again at finding another mate.

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Merrick

When I woke up this morning, I didn't realize I would be running down the Main Street of our little cursed town, in the Mayor's birthday suit. Nor that I would meet my mate.

She was a sweet omega that helped me without a second thought. I wasn't used to that level of kindness.

Now, here I was, in my own skin, wishing I wouldn't have to leave her side. Her smiles were as addictive as her caramel apple scent.

"Here, let's get you something to eat," she said gently as she set me up in the break room of her antique shop. There was a shabby table and dusty couches. The whole room was a mismatched sitting room that could use a solid cleaning.

She flicked on a TV, an episode of *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* popping up.

"I'm a sucker for old sitcoms," she admitted with a chuckle as the noise filled the quiet between us.

"Works for me," I managed to say. It was hard to speak around her, the old worries creeping in as I waited for my curse to strike.

The little witch walked out of the room before returning a while later with two to-go boxes in hand. I recognized the logo of The Greasy Phantom on the lid and my stomach rumbled. I didn't have time to eat this morning before disaster struck.

She slid a box over to me and grabbed a stack of napkins.

"Don't worry too much. I've had my fair share of run-ins with the magistrate. In a town full of curses, we black sheep need to stick together,"

she reassured me easily. She seemed to be sincere and I wasn't sure what to do with that.

It was easy to see that she had her own struggles here. I hated that she also had a rough time, but was thankful that someone knew how I felt.

God, I was pathetic. Such simple reassurances and I was melting into a puddle, desperate to have a connection.

"It's funny how strict they are here. I was sent here for my curse and you're going to jail me because I was running naked with the Mayor's skin on? Do they really think that it was *my* choice? There's no way that I would wish that on anyone," I told her as I picked at the fries on the plate. Shame burned in my chest. I hated this curse that affected my natural abilities. Shifting was my birthright, yet the curse made me resent it.

"They're insane, I try not to let them get to me," she said gently. "They like to look here first because they know damn well I'll never stop experimenting to find a cure to these damn curses."

"They don't make you stop?" I asked. With how harsh the magistrate was, I was surprised.

"I mean... they tried. But what are they going to do to me other than throw me in jail? Which they are reluctant to do since that's not even safe from my curse if it strikes."

"What is your curse?" She had my full attention now.

She shrugged. "It's hard to pin down. Magical outbursts, bad luck, hiccuping chickens." Her eyes flickered away as she searched for a subject change. "Oh, I forgot to grab the condiments. Are you a ketchup person?"

"I am, but I hate tomatoes," I confessed as she moved to the mini fridge on the counter.

"We're two peas in a pod." She beamed at me. It was really nice that someone finally saw me for me.

Prue gave us both a generous helping of ketchup before she returned it to the fridge and sat back down. We ate without speaking, just watching the show and enjoying the moment of reprieve.

When the next episode started, Prue stood up and started to tidy the trash from lunch. As she moved closer, I reached out to touch her but pulled my hand back before our skin met. It wasn't even a conscious thought. The draw to her was something that was hard to ignore. The need to be closer to her was a natural instinct.

“I’ve got this, you’ve done so much for me already,” I said quickly, offering what I hoped was a reassuring smile. “I’m sure there are more important things that need your attention.”

“Thank you,” she said right as the front bell chimed. “You’re welcome to stay here as long as you want or need to, and not just today. I better go check on that customer.”

“I may take you up on that offer,” I said before she headed out of the room. I glanced up at the clock on the wall. It had been over an hour since I shifted and being that I was inside city limits that had to be a record.

Was it my little omega soothing the curse or just the potion that she had given me? Either way, I needed to repay her kindness. And possibly buy several more bottles of that potion.

I picked up then settled in for another episode while I thought it over.

When the credits started again, I decided that I was going to clean up her little break area. It wasn’t in disrepair, just needed a little TLC and dusting.

I peeked out of the door and heard Prue talking with a customer in the front. Their voices were a little distant, so I opened the door across the hall in hopes of finding a utility room.

Jackpot. It was stacked with cleaning supplies.

I busied myself with a deep clean, losing myself in the process. I was wringing out the mop when my body went rigid. A familiar pain washed over me as my mind and body fought against the curse.

It was never pleasant. My bones ached, muscles tensed, every cell fought what should have been second nature.

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I gritted my teeth, trying not to let the scream building in my throat burst free. The transformation only took seconds but to me, it was an eternity of agony every time.

Prue walked into the room in the midst of the shift. Instead of looking at me like a circus sideshow freak, her face displayed amazement and worry.

“Merrick, are you okay?” she asked, her hand hovering between us like she was hesitant to move any closer.

My mate was afraid to touch me. That was a punch in the gut.

“Aren’t you afraid of me?” I countered, getting ready to run if she said yes. I was used to the rejection but I knew if I heard it from her it would be different. I’d be devastated.

“What? No. You had a look of pain on your face as you shifted. I didn’t want to cause you more harm,” she said, taking a step towards me. The lack of hesitation now sent a pang through my heart. This was a new feeling for me.

“Could you make that face again? I want to remember it,” I teased, trying to lighten the mood. As far as first encounters went, this one was a semi-disaster.

She snorted out a laugh as footsteps approached.

“Well, this is strange,” a deep voice said from behind Prue. “Why does he have my face?”

“I have more than that,” I said with an eyebrow wiggle in Prue’s direction.

She laughed as she understood what I meant and the man gave her a questioning look.

“Shapeshifting curse,” she stated simply.

“Wow, I’m handsome, aren’t I?” the man said as he moved in close enough to touch her. She didn’t flinch away and the familiarity between them had me curious just who he was to her. When she turned, he froze, nostrils flaring. “You smell incredible, Prue.”

“Good try, Rook. But, I think I like his face better,” she teased, giving me a wink while deflecting. Rook seemed stunned but shook it off quickly as if he were picking his battles at the moment.

I chuckled at her words. Just having her smile turned toward me had the familiar wave of magic melting away. Transitioning back was always less painful, at least.

“Ah, I see I have competition.”

Prue rolled her eyes. “Shut up, Rook.” Then her eyes were back on me, softening slightly. “He’s a curse expert and is helping me find a way to break curses.”

“They can be broken?” The hope that rushed through me had them both giving me a pitying look.

“I’m not sure, but I’ll be damned if I just sit here and take this sentence,” she all but growled. Her fire lit something in me, something I’d been missing for a while.

“Are you the one the magistrate is searching for out there?” Rook asked, eyes lighting up. “So, it wasn’t the Mayor?”

“Unfortunately not,” I admitted. “Just walking past his house had me shifting.”

“They’re painful for him, too,” Prue tacked on with a frown. “Maybe we can look into that?”

“Will do,” Rook said, pulling a notebook out of his front pocket before jotting a note down. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have something to attend to at home. If either of you need me, I’m at this address.”

He wrote something on the paper, split it in two, and gave us each a slip. His scrawling handwriting showcased an address across town.

Not the side of town I was from.

We both tucked it away before he gave her a wink and headed out the door, leaving us alone again.

“Will they be looking for you?” she asked when the door clicked shut. “At your house, I mean.”

“Probably,” I admitted. “This isn’t my first time shifting unwillingly, or the first time I’ve been spotted.”

“Then you can come back to my place. We’re mates, so I’m going to trust you. Actually, I’ll close up early,” she offered. “I’m curious to do some research on your curse. Though, I will have to warn you that staying with me has its own warning labels. My curse can be disastrous.”

“I’ll take my chances,” I said quickly.

If my presence calmed her like hers did to me, then we’d be just fine.



☾ Dorian

My ears twitched as I walked down the road to the grocery store. I was in dire need of supplies now that the rest of the moving was handled.

Piercing stares lanced through me every step of the way. You'd think that with everyone here being cursed they'd find something better to do than stare at me.

My mood was volatile today. Maybe it was knowing my brother would be far too close to me, studying me like I was some fucked-up experiment.

I'd never forgive the witch that did this to me. Not that I knew who they were. It was a misplaced spell during a full moon. One minute, I was joining my first pack run, the next, I was locked in wolf form. It took two months to shift back, and I never lost my wolfish features. I was a human with wolf ears, glowing eyes, a bushy tail, and instincts that liked to take over.

"Ah, there you are!" Rook's jovial voice cut through my memories and I bit back a growl.

"I'm shopping, Rook. I don't need help." He chuckled at my harsh words and clapped me on the shoulder.

It wasn't fair but I resented him a little for his lack of shifter abilities. Our mom was a witch, his dad a fae, mine a shifter.

A shifter who didn't know how to talk to me. I was a kid, he should have helped, but Rook was the only one who stuck around.

Yet, here I was shoving him away.

Again.

"You could have moved in with me," he drew out as he grabbed his own shopping cart. Great, now he'd be here the whole time.

My wolf liked it, perking up at the sense of pack he always brought. Wolves weren't meant to be solitary. I was a walking contradiction.

"I could have, but I wanted my own place. Mine's by the woods and has some solid renovation work to take on. Both things I need."

"How are the neighbors?" he mused. The way he said it was searching and smug, as if he already knew the sexy little witch next door had my wolf panting and wagging his tail like a domesticated dog.

"Only one, and she keeps to herself like a good neighbor," I rumbled as I pushed ahead, throwing random fruits and vegetables in my cart to appease my human side. My wolf would demand meat when I got further in. Clinging to my human nature was the only real defense I had.

"Hmm," he offered, chuckling to himself. I didn't care enough to pry whatever he was smug about from him. "So, the town is having a big event tomorrow. A Halloween Bazaar with a bunch of vendors. Would you like to come with me and a few others?"

I gave him a look and he shrugged. "I'll never stop offering."

His voice was genuine and I hated myself and this curse a little more for not being able to be the brother Rook deserved. He was a good man.

I was barely a man.

Or at least that's how I've felt most days. My wolf side seemed to be in charge of me more and more. I was hoping this move was just what I needed to find my center and maybe Rook would find a potion or something to help.

He was great at his job but my curse wasn't one in the usual textbooks. At least not any that I've borrowed from his home library.

"What's for dinner? I could grill out some steaks," he offered as we stopped at the meat counter.

"It has been a while since I've had cooked beef," I answered, finally throwing him a bone, so to speak. "I've got the sides covered, meet you at my place?"

"You're on." Rook smiled at me.

I gave him a small one back and left him there to get the rest of my food. My wolf was itching to come out the more I spent time in town. While I didn't have full control, there were a few times that I could keep him at bay.

But only for so long and the change was coming. Fast.

There was a little bit of a line and only one cashier that was older than dirt. My foot bounced as I waited my turn and I was second guessing my life choices at the moment.

"I've got this," Rook said, coming up to stand beside me. The cashier looked up and smiled at him. Great, my brother was eye candy for the elderly.

"Want some cash?" I asked, even though I was ready to bolt. My wolf wanted out and there was no way that I was going to stay for this awkward exchange when it was my turn.

"Nah, get out of here." He smiled and took over my cart, winking at the old lady, getting a giggle from her. She barely noticed as I slipped away.

I didn't hesitate to power walk to the exit, dodging a mother and her kids as they came into the store, the little boy pointing at my twitching ears.

When I was over halfway towards the field on the south side of the store, I was already in mid-shift. The change no longer hurt, it was almost freeing but just as my paws were about to hit dirt, a familiar scent stopped me in my tracks. It was faint, almost nonexistent, but my nose picked it up.

Caramel, tart green apples, and a hint of omega sweetness to round it out. My shift finally finished, my wolf taking over.

'*Mate?*' he rumbled in my head. I couldn't deny that he was right. The scent hit me right in the chest, my entire world shifting to focus on locating that delicious scent.

There were only two people walking close by. The woman hummed a tune that sounded like "Zombie," by the Cranberries and the man next to her bobbed his head along. There was something familiar about her.

I stalked behind them as they walked, trying to figure out what to do. My wolf wanted to scoop her up and run away to our house. Or maybe take her to the woods and show her our wolf.

Wait... I know that witch.

Was it my neighbor? The one that kept to herself? She was the popular talk of the town after her latest chicken fiasco, so it wasn't hard to miss her.

Until now, we'd had a yard between us. Now that I was closing the space between us, her scent was getting stronger.

I had been in my head a lot since the move and getting the place fixed up but missing something this important, my head must have been up my ass. How did we not realize and try to talk to her before now?

My wolf's excitement had the shift coming on faster. I was forced to veer away and give into the magic taking over.

Once the shift was complete, I crept into the woods to keep an eye on them on the way home. I wasn't going to let anything happen to her now that I knew she was mine.

I was on high alert, so when the humming stopped for a second as she tripped on seemingly nothing, I was already starting to bolt to her. Her companion caught her before I could burst from my forest cover. I breathed a little easier that she was in good hands.

Even if I was a bit jealous they weren't my own.

A growl echoed out of me at the thought of her in danger. She froze, then picked up her pace, looking around for the source of the menacing sound.

Great, now I've scared her. There was no way that I could get close to her now.

I stayed in the shadows and tracked them until I knew that they were safely home before heading for my back door. The doggy door pushed open and I ignored the indignity of the situation.

My paws tracked mud through the room I'd have to clean later but for now, I curled up on the couch, once again wishing I could control this part of myself.

As the full moon approached, I knew there was no stopping it. My curse was driven by the moon and I was destined to forever fight for my humanity.

I must have drifted off because I was woken up as the front door slammed open and Rook stomped his way in. My brother was anything but subtle.

"Hey, I'm going to start the grill. I've got your groceries here, too," he said as he sat them down, unaffected by my current shifted state. "Not that there's much here, brother. We might need to talk about your lack of survival skills."

I let out a huff and he chuckled. The sound of him putting things away and opening up my back door filled the air. Stretching out my limbs, I tried to shift back, imagining my human form and willing my body to let me have it back.

Frustration always made it worse but my annoyance grew every second I couldn't seem to shift back. How could I protect a mate like this?

My wolf protested in my head, his indignation making the fur on my back stand up.

“If you don’t shift back, dear brother, I’m going to come snuggle you,” Rook warned as he pulled out the steak and at least five seasonings. One thing my brother had going for him was his cooking skills. Most days, I was too lazy to do much other than sear the steak and eat it.

Or eat it raw. My wolf perked up at that but my brother was approaching with that look on his face.

“I see you chose snuggles,” he cooed. My wolf was all for it. He was pack to him. I was vehemently against it and snapped at him in warning. He bopped me on the nose and curled his arms around me as if this was the most natural thing in the world. “What has your fur in a twist, brother?”

Thoughts of my mate flickered through my mind. I breathed in instinctively, shocked I could recall that scent so well that it was as if she were in the room with us.

The scent seemed to pull me from my wolf and the next thing I knew I was naked and curled into a ball as my brother attempted to hug me.

“Gah,” he protested, jumping back and giving me a look. “Snuggling you like this isn’t the same.”

“Don’t snuggle me at all, you freak,” I ground out, heading for the stairs and up to my room. Knowing it was useless to put on a full outfit on a night like this I simply grabbed a pair of gym shorts and called it a night.

Rook was, thankfully, outside when I got back downstairs and I busied myself preparing baked potatoes and a salad since he insisted on something green every time.

“Don’t worry, yours is rare. Just on the ‘safe for human consumption’ side of rare,” Rook said as he walked back in. His steak had more char to it like usual. Another difference between us.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him about scenting my mate. But for some reason, I bit into my steak instead of spilling secrets I didn’t know if I was capable of pursuing.



Prue

It had been several days since Merrick wound up in my shed. Now, he followed me to and from work. He was quiet and hard to read, but his presence was refreshing.

I hadn't realized just how alone I felt up to this point. Blake was amazing, but what I wanted was companionship. Both Merrick and Rook wanted that with me. They didn't fear what my curse might do.

Merrick prepared our mugs of coffee while I flipped pancakes in the pan. It was so casual and domestic. For the first time in my life I felt like something fell into place and I finally belonged somewhere.

"The bazaar is today. Did you decide if you're coming with me?" I asked. We'd discussed it a few times but he had been a little cagey about it. I couldn't blame him. Being around that many people might cause him to flip appearances. After seeing the pain etched on his face I wasn't eager to watch that again.

"Maybe," he sighed. "I want to go, witchling, but I'm just worried I'll ruin it for everyone else."

My chest flooded with warmth at the nickname. "Come. We're all cursed. Hiding away changes nothing and you deserve to have a life no matter what happens. A bonus is, everyone at the Bazaar will be clothed."

He barked out a laugh. I'd heard the sound a few times and I loved it. His voice had a husky edge, but was serene.

He moved closer, handing over my favorite mug. Between the scent of coffee and his sweet candy corn, I was in heaven.

"Then, I guess I'll go."

Relief rushed through me. I was getting used to having him around already and I hated the idea of him avoiding everyday life. I didn't want him to experience the isolation I'd endured for too long.

I reached into a cabinet and pulled out a potion. The same one I gave him that day in the shed.

"You found another?"

"I stopped by yesterday and had her make a strong batch. It should help," I said. "Just take it before we leave. Rook should be on his way soon."

I left him with his potion and walked across the room to the hall mirror. Just as I was adjusting my favorite corset, a knock on the door echoed out.

I glanced back at Merrick. "Could you grab that?" I needed to fix my boobs and didn't want either man to take that as an invitation to help.

At least not yet.

Rook and Merrick exchanged pleasantries in the foyer and by the time they came back, I was searching for my purse. I swear things disappeared around here or moved on their own. I'd have to ask Merrick if he noticed that later.

Another aspect of my curse, perhaps?

"You're going out there in that?" Rook growled a little.

At first, I was about to give him a piece of my mind but then I saw the lust that filled his eyes and I smirked at him instead.

"It's my lucky corset," I shrugged, feigning innocence. It was revealing, but not far enough to leave it behind. I looked sexy as hell and I was owning it. Especially now that he could scent me, too.

The next day, I'd caught him breathing me in, but he hadn't said anything yet. Instead, he turned up his flirting even more and tested just how close I'd let him get.

"Yeah, I can see why," he frowned but came over and pushed a rogue strand of hair behind my ear. "I'm not so insecure that I'll try and tell you how to dress but I will voice my disdain."

"Noted, and I appreciate your candor and I will do the same to you. Like when you roll up the sleeves on your button up and show off your forearms like that," I said, placing my hand on his arm. "Do you know how sexy that is, or are you just a tease?"

He winked at me before answering, "You think that's sexy? I was just getting the fabric out of my way."

"Mmhmm, that's what I'd say about my corset." I grinned and there was a cough behind me.

"Umm, sorry to break this up but if we are going, can we get moving? My confidence is fading with each passing minute," Merrick stated. He was a bit anxious but he didn't look at all uncomfortable with our exchange.

"Of course, sorry," I said, my cheeks flushed red.

"No need to apologize, I can always just go to the shop and rearrange all that junk from the Johnsons we got," he offered up.

I liked the way he said 'we.' It had been a short amount of time but he'd found peace among my antiques.

"What? No, we're all three headed to the bazaar to see what they have this year. Blake and I share a space and it's already set up, so she'll cover for me until we're done," I reminded him as I held out a hand for him.

"Are you sure you want me to go? What if I shift?" he hesitated before linking his fingers with mine.

"Then we embrace it. My curse was something that I tried to hide when I first got here and that was worse for everyone around me. Once I decided not to let it define me, I was able to start living a semi-normal life. At least as normal as we cursed, can," I explained, giving his hand a little reassuring squeeze.

"Plus, I can take notes and research your condition more when I'm present for the change," Rook added.

"Ahh, look at you two having a moment," I teased as I moved past an annoyed Rook and pulled Merrick along with me.

"What's the big deal with this bazaar?" Merrick asked as he fell into step beside me on my left.

"It's a tourist draw, bringing much needed cash flow to our town for a week. It's one of the times that the borders are weakest and don't discourage fresh faces from coming in. With all of the jinxed people here, the magistrate limits exposure to outsiders, so we go all out to keep them coming back or more," I explained.

"And Halloween time is the best time for that?" Rook questioned on my right, taking my free hand.

"It is. Some of the more strange occurrences can be justified because of Halloween," I answered.

"I never thought of that," Merrick commented as we reached the end of the drive.

Just then I hiccuped. Rook and I both stopped in our tracks and searched the area for a chicken. I breathed a sigh of relief when I didn't spy one close.

Then I heard it. A cluck from my left. I looked up in horror to find a chicken sitting on the window sill of my reclusive new neighbor's house. Just as I stepped forward, it fell in.

"Sounds like the neighbor's problem now," Rook said quickly, picking up the pace and dragging us away with him. He was fighting off laughter but he was right. There wasn't much I could do about it now.

Plus, I'd waited months for this bazaar. I wasn't missing it for a rogue chicken.

The sounds of lively music and the scent of food had me picking my pace up. This was one of the few nights of the year where we got to experience life and be free. It brought new life and fresh faces to our cursed little town.

"Oh, wow," Merrick breathed out, just as enthralled as I was by the giant tent that spread out over the booths, keeping the sun from beaming down on us all. The magistrate had enchanted fans blowing air in and keeping the temperature pleasant.

That only had the scents swirling around us more. Thankfully, the food and herbs drowned out the mixed natural scents of the crowd.

"Where do we start?" Rook asked, glancing around.

"Over there," I said, already spotting my favorite trader. Oscar traveled most of the year and bought and traded his trinkets in a constant cycle.

"There's my favorite cursed witch," he called out when I approached. His long, white hair hung down in waves, tucked under a pointed hat. Every outfit was eccentric and colorful and stood out stark against his too-pale skin.

"Hey, Oscar. Tell me you have something good for me this year," I said with a wide smile. He returned it with a flash of fangs.

"Don't I always?" he laughed, waving his hand at the stocked tables surrounding him. I dove right into browsing through the items laid out.

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The first table was full of bottles in all shapes and sizes, liquids or dried herbs tucked inside. I carefully read through each one and picked up several. Oscar took them from my hands each time I did, starting a pile up at his cash box.

I could feel my mates watching over me but neither had stepped closer as I browsed. When I picked up a bottle to find the exact rare herb I needed, I nearly screamed. Thankfully, I kept my mouth shut as Oscar took it with a wink.

He always said he had exactly what his customers needed, but I never thought he'd find this. Rook stepped closer as if he could already read my body language. He brushed his hand along my lower back before finally looking at what Oscar had on hand.

With shaking hands I moved on to the other tables. These were more odds and ends, random trinkets and baubles.

Then I saw it.

Right there on the table was a small hand mirror. It was a pretty polished gold, the intricate designs adorning the outside inlaid with sparkling stones. Even the glass was gleaming and something urged me forward.

The mirror was in my hands before I could even make a conscious thought.

"I thought that might jump out at you," Oscar mused, a knowing grin on his face. "Is that all for you, little witch?"

"Yes," I said, forcibly tearing my eyes away to focus on the alpha who was taking the mirror from my hands.

"Are you alright?" Merrick asked. I hadn't even heard him move closer.

I nodded my head and shook off the strange feeling long enough to pay Oscar for my finds. Now that it was wrapped in paper and tucked away in a bag, my head cleared.

Maybe buying what was obviously a cursed object was a bad idea, but I couldn't make myself leave it behind.

For better or worse, this mirror was mine.

With the goodies paid for and bagged up, we headed to check on Blake. We'd already been gone a while and I knew the booths would only get more crazy as the morning dragged on.

After a few years of working the bazaar together, we figured out that keeping a bin under the table for our finds was more convenient than running back and forth to our shop or houses.

When we packed up for the night, we could simply grab what we wanted and take it home then.

Blake had a smile on her face as we approached, but couldn't say anything as she showed a few customers around the table, answering questions and bargaining prices.

I tucked my treasures away, though I was reluctant to part with my mirror. That strange feeling of needing it in my hands hadn't faded away completely.

When the customers moved onto the next booth, Blake sat down next to me. "So, did you find everything you needed?"

"I think so. And a few extras," I admitted with a chuckle.

"Like always. Last year, we had to lug back two bins worth of goods," she reminded me. "I have an extra in my car."

"I tried to hold back this time," I said with a huff, but she wasn't having it.

"There's no way you made it all the way through. Go, have fun, I'll be good here," she said, giving me that bestie look that promised she'd want all the details later.

"Are you sure?"

She gave me a thumbs up. "Just bring me back some Goblin Knots with a Phantom Fizz, please."

I swear they loved gimmicky names on the food this time of year, even though they sold it by their actual names the rest of the year. Who didn't love a little whimsy in their lives?

"You got it," I said, giving her a quick hug before walking back out where the guys were waiting. I held out my hands and they took it without hesitation.

"Where to next?" Rook asked. "You're the expert."

"It changes every year. Let's just walk around and we can stop if you guys spot something you want to check out," I offered.

We walked for another hour but nothing really caught our eyes. By that time, I was starving and changed direction right for the food vendors. I could smell the spices and sweets halfway across the bazaar.

"Wow, they really stick to the Halloween theme, don't they?" Rook commented as we stood in the middle, taking in each truck and booth with wide eyes. "'Hexed honey apples,' Ghost fluff?' Where do they come up with these things?"

"We do love a good theme around here. Plus, some of it is for the kids. The fun names and packaging get them to beg their parents for it and they sell twice as much. Even the teens get into it. The vampire punch is one of the biggest," I explained as I pointed everything out.

The sad truth was we didn't always have a lot to celebrate here, so we went all out for the holidays and celebrations. Plus, the kids didn't usually choose to be here. They weren't the cursed ones, just their parents. They deserved a glimpse of normalcy, too.

"What's your favorite? Anything that you suggest?" Merrick asked. He was doing a lot better than I thought he would. His form stayed his own. I wasn't sure if he even realized, but I wasn't about to point it out.

"Harvest spirals with vampire blood are in the top five and I'll be getting one and not sharing. Sorry, but I will enjoy every bite," I smiled at him. "We can each get one."

"What is that?" he asked, looking disgusted.

"A funnel cake with strawberry sauce," I laughed as his face lit up. Even the grumpiest of people couldn't resist the draw of a good fair.

"Do they come with other toppings?" he asked.

"Oh, yeah. Chocolate, churro style, the works. And for a drink, Witch's Brew is always a hit. Then, for savory, the Goblin Knots. Which are just garlic knots," I answered, tacking on the explanation at the end.

"No protein?" Rook asked with an eyebrow raise. Clearly, the alpha didn't approve.

"I mean, they do have that but most of them just use their boring names. Where's the fun in that?" I said.

"Well, I'm all for carbs, but I have to have some kind of protein. I'd rather not throw up on our first pack outing," Rook laughed.

"Is he always such a killjoy?" Merrick stage-whispered as he browsed the menu.

"Just sensible," Rook shot back in a haughty voice. I swear they were already acting like siblings.

"Don't you two start. We're here to have fun," I reminded them as we moved forward in the still growing line.

"This food truck is definitely popular," Merrick said. I glanced at the other lines that were significantly shorter. It was never intentional, but I liked to think it was our little town's silent fuck-you to the outside world. We supported our own, first.

"What can I say? We locals are definitely loyal. Plus, their menu is the best. I do try to spread some of the love to the others, too, though," I admitted.

"It's smart, giving the locals a better boost," Rook agreed. He might not be cursed, but I had a feeling soon he'd be part of that category.

As excited as I was for this day out with my two guys, my mind kept going back to the mirror that was tucked in the bin with Blake.

At least, until someone screamed across the way and all the locals scrambled to grab onto poor Mr. Webb as he floated into the air.



Prue

"What should we do to help?" Rook questioned as he walked towards the commotion.

"Get a drink? There is nothing that we can do for him. Mr. Webb will come down in about thirty to forty-five minutes. That's why he's here. The cursed are used to the unusual, this is nothing new for us, he couldn't stay with the normies," I answered.

Merrick shrugged and stated, "Better to have the eyes on him tonight."

"Are you feeling a change coming on?" I asked, moving closer to him. "We can head back if so."

"What? No." He tensed a little next to me. "Just glad not to be the center of the chaos for once."

"I feel that," I agreed. After the chickens and the moment in the clearing, this has been the longest stretch of calm. "but let's not overthink anything. Maybe we should grab the drinks and take stuff back to Blake. She's probably starving."

I knew that she told me to enjoy my night but I'd feel guilty if I didn't get her treats back to her soon.

Rook was still watching Mr. Webb. But most of the others had gone on with the bazaar as if nothing had happened.

"Come on, Rook. He will be fine," I promised and pulled him towards the *Potion and Pour* stall. "They have the most festive drinks here and you'll be sorry if you missed them. Angela and her crew go all out for this festival. I heard that they are trying to get a brick and mortar here in town. I'm all for it, but I don't have any sway with the town elders."

"I bet I can help with that," Rook smiled at me. "I'm all for expanding small towns. They are a dying breed, cursed or not."

I beamed at him, "That would be amazing, just no other antique stores."

"Of course not. Can't put my best girl out of business," he said. The words were genuine enough I blushed.

"Do you two want me to leave so you can get a room already?" Merrick asked. It was playful, so I knew he wasn't upset.

His words had us both laughing. We had somehow transitioned from cautious to flirty. Not that I was complaining. Rook smelled like mine... just like Merrick.

"If we get a room, you're invited, too," I smirked at him.

There was a blush that filled his cheeks, "Wh..what?"

The stammer was cute but I didn't want to push him over the edge and have him shifting uncontrollably and ruin the night.

"Let's grab that drink," I said, shifting the conversation.

"Yes, make mine a double," Merrick agreed breathlessly. I wished for a moment I could know what he was thinking. Was I too much for him? Was he truly interested?

"Grab me one of whatever you're having, I want to get some of those cheese fries," Rook said, releasing my hand.

"I'll take some of those, too, please," I called after him.

"Too bad they didn't have a spooky name for the fries," Merrick joked. He was trying to lighten the mood and I latched onto it.

"Right? There are limits to everything," I agreed. "I guess you could start thinking of names for next year. They would pay you in haunted gold sticks?"

Merrick laughed at that.

"That was terrible wasn't it?" I cringed at my own words.

"Not the best, but a good start," he teased, relaxing even further. He was leaning closer now as if it was pure instinct. The beta was sweet and I liked that I had a calming effect on him.

Or maybe it was the potion.

Either way, I was claiming credit.

Rook approached just as we moved up to next in line to order with three orders of bacon cheese fries. "Did I miss anything?"

"Just Prue embarrassing herself trying to name the cheese fries," Merrick said.

"You didn't have a better suggestion," I reminded him with a huff, but I couldn't stop smiling long enough to make it believable.

"She's not wrong," he agreed.

The couple in front of us paid and moved to the side to wait for their drinks.

"What can I get for you three?" a cute, purple-haired teen in a witchy costume asked.

"Any favorites?" I asked Rook before turning to Merrick. They both just shrugged and looked a bit lost at the themed drink menu.

"Sorry about that, they are new in town," I explained, "we will take three Phantom Fizz's, a vampire punch, and a fog juice. Please."

"You got it," she smiled and totaled it up and I paid before stepping to the side. "We will have it out to you soon."

Rook leaned in close, his nose skimming over my neck and making me shudder. "Your scent is back."

"I noticed," I admitted as liquid heat spread through me. I liked his touch far more than I cared to admit. Flirting was safe. This was... so much more. "It was muted with the stress of getting sent here and finding a cure, I think."

He hummed. "Does that mean we broke it for you, little witch?"

"You don't need a bigger ego, Rook."

"Does this mean you're mine, Prue?" he asked. This time, the teasing had drained away. He was asking me point blank if we were scent-matches. I couldn't lie to him.

"Yes, but that doesn't mean I'm diving head first into anything," I warned. I'd learned long ago you couldn't trust anyone. If it went deeper than our relationship was now, then I knew I'd run.

Merrick stepped closer as the crowd pushed in around us and I was hit with the combination of their scents. Rook's parchment, campfire, and cinnamon mixed with Merrick's sweet honey, creamy vanilla, and caramel. It was like a Halloween night reading a book, enjoying a sweet treat.

Then something else joined the mix and had me freezing. The change in me was stark enough Rook moved around me, balancing the fries and staring down at me with concern.

"What is it? Did I push too far?"

"No," I said, eyes scanning around us but no one was looking back to indicate they noticed the life-altering moment, either.

“What is it, witchling?” Merrick’s scent spiked with a bitter edge and I reached for him and squeezed his hand, calming it instantly.

“I’m fine... someone’s scent just hit me. Not yours.”

“Oh?” Rook perked up at that and glanced around. Merrick frowned but didn’t protest. No sane beta or alpha would deny an omega her scent-matches.

Adding another curse to the mix might be a problem but how could I hold that against anyone?

“Is it gone?” Rook asked. “I don’t see anyone close enough that might be pack.”

“Do I feel like pack?” Merrick asked. Rook looked over at him and grinned, nodding his head to confirm.

“Yes, you do. My alpha is protective over you. We’ve got that sibling energy going on,” he said with a chuckle. Merrick huffed out a laugh but even I could see how pleased he was by Rook’s words. I gave Rook a grateful look before glancing around again.

“Get the drinks.” I said the words quickly before surging forward and following my nose. It wasn’t easy. The bazaar was packed with an overwhelming amount of scents and the aroma of food and treats.

But that same scent was lingering and strong, potent enough to stand out amongst the rest. Caramelized pecans, buttery pastry, sweet maple syrup, and that undeniable alpha spice. The scent was getting stronger as I ducked between two booths and toward the trees that outlined the fairgrounds.

A figure darted into the woods, the wind carrying that scent right back to me. There was a flash of dark fur before the woods swallowed him whole.

I stood there for a second watching the tree line in hopes he’d come back. The shifter must not have realized that I was here and the sinking feeling that filled my stomach was completely uncalled for.

It wasn’t a rejection.

Right?

Merrick found me a few minutes later. His scent announced him as the soft ground hid his quiet footsteps. He stepped up next to me and followed my gaze.

“What is it?”

“Who,” I corrected. “A shifter. They’re definitely my match but I don’t think they noticed me.”

“I’m not surprised in this crowd,” he reassured me. “He’ll find you. It’s a small town.”

“It is,” I agreed, even as I knew the crowd had nothing to do with it. Maybe he had the same curse insecurities I did. If my mates hadn’t crashed into my life the way they did I might have done the same.

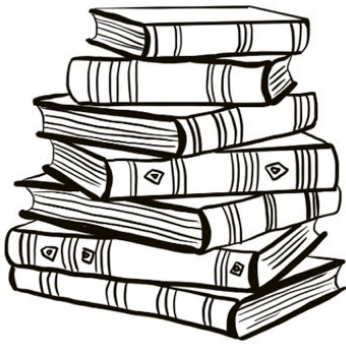
Except... I just stalked him out here. Maybe my omega was closer to the surface than I realized.

“Come on, let’s go eat before it’s cold. Rook’s dropping Blake’s things off to her and snagging us a seat.”

I let him lead me back inside. My gaze went back to the woods one last time and I swear I saw a flash of glowing eyes before they were gone again.

Maybe he did know and was just shy?

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Rook

My alpha was content that Prue finally claimed me out loud. Especially in front of the entire town.

This bazaar was interesting for sure, there were so many cursed in one place and it didn't faze anyone when something wacky happened.

Well, other than that Webb guy. I think that someone flying would always startle people.

On my way to hand Blake her treats, my attention caught on a group of kids standing around watching as a teen changed her hair at will until it all fell out and that scared them enough to scream and run off. The teen girl giggled as it started to grow back. I had a feeling that was one curse that she used to amuse herself.

An alpha was juggling nearby on a small stand, everyone watching as the balls transformed in shape, color, and texture. Then all at once they fell and clonked him in the head. My heart stopped and I started to move forward before he stood up and grinned, ready to go again. It was strange that they played into their curses even though they were hurt by them.

I greeted Prue's best friend with a smile and goodies. Her face lit up and she only had eyes for the food.

"Oh my goddess, you are a lifesaver. I have to pee. Like my eyeballs are floating."

"That was not a visual that I needed right now," I joked as I set her food and drink down. "Go, I'll man the stand and tell everyone that you will be right back."

"Thank you," she said from over her shoulder as she ran off towards the port-a-potties at a full sprint.

Man, she must have really had to go to enter those things.

No one bothered to approach me as I waited. I even had a smile on my face but I kept getting those curious 'newcomer' looks from everyone instead.

Even being away from my omega for a little bit of time was driving me crazy. Merrick had her so that was the only reason I'd done this. Mainly because I knew damn well Prue would kick our asses for not feeding her bestie.

The first customers to approach were two older women. They were eyeing me more than what was on the table. I wasn't sure if it was more of that curiosity of a new face or something else.

I cleared my throat and put on a charming smile. "Can I help you lovely ladies with anything?"

"Your phone number?" the one on the left said. She'd gone out with curlers in her hair and a net keeping them in place.

"Umm, I'm sorry. That's not on the table and I have a mate," I replied quickly, trying not to keep eye contact with her for too long.

"Can't blame me for trying, can ya?" she smiled and her friend elbowed her.

"Stop it, you're making him turn red," the one in the floral moo-moo told her before turning to me. "Don't mind her, she's harmless."

"Elise and Ruth, leave this poor man alone. Prue will send you a cursed artifact if you don't," Blake warned as she rushed back over, giving them the stink eye. They were completely unrepentant now as they finally started browsing their antiques.

"She wouldn't really do that, would she?" I asked Blake. She just shrugged as she took a big sip of her Phantom Fizz.

Once she swallowed it, she looked back up at me. "Go back to Prue. She needs a night out. That omega is all work and curses, fun is much needed."

I gave her a little salute and headed back towards my mate.

When I arrived at the little bunch of tables, Prue was there feeding Merrick a fry. A smile tipped up my lips as I pulled out my phone and snapped a picture. That was definitely a *Kodak* moment.

Prue spotted me and waved for me to join them again. A growl echoed out and I recognized it immediately.

My brother.

He was in his wolf form. I was just relieved he was out here not hiding himself away in his house.

Dorian let out a huff and I took that as acknowledgment or a wolfish greeting. I didn't hesitate any longer before going to my omega.

"What took you so long?" Prue asked as I took the seat across from them.

"Blake needed a bathroom break and I got hit on by two hotties," I smiled at her.

There was a glint of jealousy in her eyes when her phone lit up and whatever was on the screen had her laughing.

"Those hotties are in their seventies and you're trying to make me envious of them?" she demanded, her humor shining right through any attempt at seeming genuinely offended.

"That floral moo-moo was kind of hot," I shrugged, eyeing her playfully. "We could get you a matching one."

Prue play hit my hand on the table, "If that's what turns you on, I know where she gets them."

"Get one for Merrick, too," I told her as I picked up a fork and took a bite of my fries.

It was too easy to joke around with her. Merrick didn't join in yet but I figured if we gave our shapeshifter enough time he'd warm up and be just as snarky as the rest of us.

It was too easy to joke around with her. Merrick didn't join in yet but I figured if we gave our shapeshifter enough time he'd warm up and be just as snarky as the rest of us.

"So, I take it from the lack of a new face at our table you didn't find anything?" I asked as I snagged a fry and bit down. It was the perfect mix of savory and salty.

She frowned and glanced around. "It's still lingering and I thought I spotted a shifter disappearing into the woods, but he seems reluctant."

At her words I choked on the bite I just took, coughing hard enough Merrick smacked me on the back a few times. She slid over a drink and I took a large pull to calm myself.

"You good?"

"Yeah," I said, not wanting to freak her out yet. But it sounded an awful lot like my little brother might just be the mate she was scenting. Unless this town had multiple shifters out casing the woods.

Fuck, this just got a whole lot more complicated. My brother was mostly a recluse. If I got him to even get close to her it would be a miracle.

As the evening wore on I tried to stay focused on my pack but it was almost a relief when I walked her home. Then walked right next door to ask my brother what the hell was going on.

He stalked in the back door the moment I pushed in the front. He was still in wolf form and I stared down at him until a chicken followed him in. Guess that one that jumped in the window had decided to stay.

“She’s your mate, too, isn’t she? The witch next door. And since when do wolves have chicken shadows?”

He changed in the blink of an eye, his fangs still showing, ears and tail twitching in annoyance, but the rest of him was human.

And far too naked.

“Put some clothes on, brother,” I said as I shielded my eyes. He let out a scoff that was still half-animal.

“What the fuck do you mean, ‘too?’ Fuck this thing was in the house and has been annoying me since,” he demanded instead. I let my hand drop and stared at him.

“You’re an intelligent alpha, Dorian. You know exactly what that means and I think it’s sweet you finally have a friend.”

He let out another growl, his glowing, blue eyes flashing with annoyance. The alpha was always a bit grumpy after a shift and I was used to it.

I ignored him and went to the kitchen, putting the kettle on the stove and pulling out the looseleaf tea. There was something methodical and calming about brewing it this way. I rummaged around his drawers until I found the tea diffusers, filling both, and hooking them to our mugs.

He fumed silently as I worked. When the kettle screamed I poured the hot water in and let it steep, finally turning and sliding a mug across the island toward my brother. I could only stay a little while, I needed to check on my chickens.

So far, they hadn’t changed but I was still waiting for something to happen. Materialized animals, made from a potion-gone-wrong, surely couldn’t last.

“Have you called Mom lately?” He gave me a look as he blew on the hot tea before taking a sip. “I’ll take that as a no.”

“I’m not calling. They wanted me gone, Rook. Family doesn’t throw you away because of something you can’t fucking control.”

“No, they don’t,” I sighed, knowing he was right. I was always attempting to keep our family together against all odds but it felt like I was always the only one.

I craved a big family. Cookouts and parties full of laughter and warmth. Instead, I got stiff dinners and cold interactions.

Not with Prue. My alpha rumbled in agreement.

She was different. So was Merrick for that matter.

Maybe they were exactly what I needed. Hell, maybe this town was as well.

Only time would tell.

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Prue

It was the first time since having Merrick and Rook in my life that I was alone this early in the evening. Merrick was exhausted after being around people all day and Rook had almost run off the moment I mentioned the shifter.

Walking all day had my feet aching and I spent far longer in the shower than I usually did. Once I was covered in a soft pajama set I went straight for my nest.

The dark-purple, velvet covered walls and array of blankets and pillows in various jewel shades always soothed me. I sank down and picked up my plush bat, hugging it to my chest as I snuggled in.

My life had been chaos for years. Now, it had taken another turn. It always felt like it was spiraling out of control but somehow, with them, it felt more manageable.

Yet, I was alone right now.

My omega hated it.

As I reached for the remote to my projector my hand caught on the mirror I'd brought in to study earlier. The pull I felt to it was startling. Especially since all it showed me was my own reflection.

Maybe my intuition was wrong, but I knew the moment I laid eyes on the mirror it was meant for me. I set it aside on the bed and sent a message to Blake. She was the real hero of the day. Letting me enjoy the bazaar this year with the guys and her taking on our booth alone was incredible.

PRUE

Who is the most amazing friend in the world?

I typed the words out with a smile on my lips.

BLAKE

Oh goddess, what do you want now? :)

PRUE

Am I that needy?

BLAKE

Everyday since I've known you.

PRUE

I was just going to thank you for today. It's been a long time since my curse wasn't at the front of my mind. Thank you for letting me enjoy the bazaar with the guys.

BLAKE

Did you get lucky? I can tell you've been needing some dick in your life for a while. :)

I rolled my eyes at that but also laughed. She wasn't wrong, but thanks to my ill-fated curse I'd never tried to get close to a guy since. With all the chaos in my life, I didn't need to drag a partner into it.

Just a reminder of that cursed day sent a shiver down my spine. The screams, the smoke... all of it blamed on me.

I shoved those memories down before they could surface, refusing to let them take hold.

PRUE

Not just one ;). No, not really. Sorry to disappoint you but we all went our separate ways. Why else do you think I'd annoy you at this hour?

BLAKE

You almost had me. I would have climbed them both like a tree if I were you. Hold on for dear life and never let them go.

PRUE

We need to get you a pack stat.

BLAKE

Some of us aren't as lucky. For now, I'll just have to live vicariously through you.

PRUE

As long as you don't touch. :p

BLAKE

You take all the fun out of everything.

PRUE

Killjoy 101, class starts at 9 am on Monday.

BLAKE

Class of one?

PRUE

Get some sleep, but thank you again.

BLAKE

Next year it's all you.

PRUE

Deal, I'll sucker my pack into helping. Eye candy will be good for business too.

BLAKE

You tell me to get sleep and mention eye candy? Evil, you are pure evil.

PRUE

cackles in villain laughter but chokes on own spit

BLAKE

I just shot water out of my nose, witch. How dare you make me laugh at the same time as I take a drink.

PRUE

Just living up to the evil you claim I am. Go to bed after you clean up the water.

BLAKE

Get out of your head. Night.

I clicked the button to put my phone to sleep and set it on the night stand. Sighing, I crawled back to lean on my pillows and do my best to shut off my brain. Too much had happened in the last few days and I was a little upset that the mirror seemed normal.

Half of me wanted to text Merrick. He did a lot of peopling and I was worried he overdid it. But then again, I didn't want to push him too much,

either. I needed rest but I decided that I was going to look over the mirror one more time.

I was moving before I realized it, my fingers wrapping around the mirror's handle and moving it closer to my face to inspect it. There was no hum or glow. It wasn't even warm under my fingertips.

"Reveal your secrets to me," I whispered closely to my reflection.

Nothing. So much for the hunch that this was magic or cursed.

Just when I was about to give up, an eerie, purple light swirled under the mirror's glass and the metal grew hot to the touch. A yelp escaped me as I dropped it.

I was right!

A smile crept over my lips and I picked it up to see what it was about to show me.

At first, it simply swirled, the vibrant light luring me in until it felt like I couldn't look away. Not that I planned to try. This new mystery had me tied in.

It wasn't until someone called my name that I truly tried to yank my eyes away. I opened my mouth but no sound came out.

I was completely and utterly under the mirror's spell.

"The chickens morphed. I need to show you!" A thunder of footsteps echoed out as Rook made his way upstairs to me.

Panic swelled in my chest and I managed to lift a hand, reaching for my alpha in a desperate attempt.

His skin touched mine as if he knew exactly what I wanted. "What's going on?"

The image shifted then, the swirls of purple magic fading into a living room. It was sparse, but rugged. Clean enough to be cared for.

A handsome alpha stood in the living room looking confused. He had wolf ears that matched his dark hair, glowing, blue eyes, a mouthful of fangs, and a tail that was flickering back and forth with unease.

"Dorian?" Rook's confused voice was cut off as the alpha jolted back then gripped his chest. His eyes were wide as he looked up, then the mirror went dark. "Dorian!"

"Wait, you know this man?" I gasped as the mirror finally let me go. I was rushing after him, barefoot and barely clothed.

"My brother. He's your neighbor," he said over his shoulder, though he didn't stop running. I hated being left behind. My magic hummed under my

skin. I wasn't sure if it was the mirror's effects or determination, but a burst of speed had me catching up to him as he tore across the spacious yard. My feet were sliding on the cold, wet grass.

The house was silent as we burst through the door. Rook kicked it in barely missing a beat and I was right on his heels.

"Dorian!"

"What?" an annoyed voice called out, a little rough around the edges, before the man in the mirror stepped around the corner. His eyebrows rose as he took in the sight of Rook and I standing in his doorway, chests heaving, eyes likely wild.

"I saw you die," I blurted out, only making his eyebrows disappear into his fluffy hair.

"Excuse me?"

I started pacing as I explained. "I found a mirror at the bazaar today. I was looking into it when Rook came over and it started to light up and show me a vision. Someone shot you. Rook burst in and saw it, too, and then we rushed over."

My pacing came to a halt as he stepped forward and I was hit with his scent. Sugared pecans, maple, and rich buttery pastry.

"It was you," I said on a whisper, eyes tracking over him. "At the drink shop. I scented you and you ran."

"I'm not good in crowds," he said with a shrug. He didn't deny it, either.

"Wait, you're matches?" Rook asked. I nodded my head as the shifter's eyes flickered past us then he was moving faster than should be possible. One second, I was standing there and the next, a big wolf knocked both of us down as a bullet whizzed overhead.

Rook reached out and dragged me and him around the corner as the wolf burst through the door, snarling and eyes more vibrant than before.

"No," I breathed out, terrified that he'd get hurt. Another shot had me jolting in Rook's arms. He held me tighter but didn't reassure me. I could feel his heart thudding against my ear.

On the third shot, Rook came back to his senses and pulled out his phone, dialing the emergency line.

"Gunshots," he said, before giving Dorian's address. When he hung up he looked down, eyes wide. "Don't mention the mirror yet."

"Okay," I said, putting my trust in the alpha. I was too terrified to give that story again anyway.

The padding of paws cut off anything else I was going to say and I threw myself out of Rook's arms, ready to check on the wolf. He moved closer, muzzle nudging me as if checking if I was okay.

"I'm fine. Did you get shot? Are you alright?" My hands were frantically roaming over his fur and he let out a huff that I took to mean he was fine. My cheeks burned as I realized what I was doing. "Fuck. Sorry."

"Can you grab her a shirt before the guards get here? I don't want anyone else looking at her in these shorts," he said, rushing upstairs. He was back in record time holding a dark green hoodie. He tugged it over my head and I breathed in the potent scent of my latest scent-match.

We didn't have to wait long before several guards were at the door. I looked up in time to recognize a few faces. Simon, one of the day guards, looked right at me.

"I should have known we'd find you here."

"She wasn't the one shooting," Rook growled, making Simon take a step back and raise his hands.



Dorian

Just this once, as I shifted back, my self control held. If it hadn't then that lawman would have had his neck ripped out for that comment.

The silver from the wound to my shoulder stung but nothing was more important than her.

My mate.

"What do you mean by that? This is a town of curses, of course there's going to be trouble. Someone shot at us and the first thing in your brain is that she's the one responsible for this mess," I growled.

Prue placed her small hand on my forearm and a sense of warmth spread through me.

"Deputy Simon, I would appreciate it if you were to do your job, not just throw around accusations," a shorter, rounder man said as he barely inched his belly in the door frame.

Too many donuts, that's my guess.

As he stepped up closer, there were a few sprinkles on his uniform shirt and I had to stifle a laugh. I was right.

"Sheriff Dave, it's Prue. She was the one that set the chickens on the town," he started. As if chickens equated to violence and attempted murder of multiple citizens. One of which was the woman he accused.

The sheriff held up a hand and stopped him from speaking, "She may be the center of some of the more... interesting issues in this town, but they're all sent here for a reason. In fact, I'd be careful about crossing her, Prue's curse has no rhyme or reason."

When he finished, the sheriff gave Prue a wink. My alpha didn't like that but she let out a soft laugh of relief.

"I apologize for my deputy. Now, Prue. Can you tell me what happened here?" he asked my mate.

I let out a growl that turned into a cough and my face went red with embarrassment.

"Hair ball?" Prue asked me with a smirk.

"We almost died and you're making a joke?" Rook asked her in disbelief. Though he was more amused and exasperated than anything.

"Can we get back to the matter at hand?" the deputy questioned before she could answer.

"This is really your fault for trying to blame Prue," I reminded him. "Maybe let us talk and you'll find out the details and do an actual investigation."

"Right, right. Simon, head outside and help with the collection samples," the sheriff told him.

He cursed under his breath but headed for the still open door.

"So, I'd normally talk to you one by one but you two Alphas haven't taken an eye off of her. Mates, I'm guessing?" Sheriff Dave asked.

Rook said yes and I attempted a growl again. No cough this time. I'd tell the world Prue was mine.

"We were in the living room and someone shot at us. No warning at all. That's all that happened. There was no warning or dispute beforehand."

"That was straight to the point, huh?" Dave asked.

"No reason to lie," Prue said with a shrug. "It all went by so fast but yes. Shot at and that was all. No other sounds or a rant like a villain would do. You know spilling their plan to the hero because they think that they have the upper hand and they lose it? So, I'm not sure what else you want to know."

The sheriff's eyes glazed over a little at the explanation, but I thought it was perfect.

Dave shook his head and his eyes cleared, "Okay, we are going to have to comb this house. Do you have somewhere to stay?"

"Great... homeless again," I muttered under my breath.

"You can stay with me," Rook and Prue said in unison.

"Wow, not even a hesitation," Dave murmured. "Wish I had family like that in my life."

"You good, Sheriff?" I questioned, arching a brow.

"Huh? Fine. Misspoke," he said, waving it off.

I didn't have time to respond when someone from outside yelled, "Get down!"

Rook and I bumped heads as we dove for Prue again, both of us covering her body with ours.

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Once we got the all clear, Rook and I both stayed there for a moment too long.

"I appreciate that you two would take a bullet for me, but can you get off? I can't breathe. Plus, we don't know each other that well," she said with a light laugh and a wheeze.

"Oh, sorry," we mumbled at the same time and got up, both holding out a hand for her at the same time.

"You two are scary alike, aren't you?" she asked as she took our hands in hers. I didn't bother to point out that her hands were shaking.

She was scared and that made me want to go feral and hunt down whoever it was shooting at us.

"Once they leave I'm going to sniff around," I said as Dave went off to check what had caused the second wave. Even though we'd crawled off of her, we stayed low, unsure if it was over.

The cops ignored us as they milled in and out. Everyone's movements were frantic and concise as they combed over every inch of my house and the yard. Dave hovered near the doorway, barking orders. Every ounce of the funny, endearing sheriff was gone, replaced by the man who'd earned his badge.

No more shots echoed out and after an hour of scouring the property, the sheriff finally approached again.

"We have no leads but we're leaving officers stationed outside. I don't think it's safe for you to return home tonight, and Prue, I know you're next door, so I suggest both of you go to Rook's place. It's Magistrate property and puts you across town."

Prue frowned but didn't argue. I preferred my house here next to the forest but right now, I was eager to catch the scent.

Rook helped my little mate pack while I threw together a bag of my own. My wolf was antsy to be free and I was fighting the shift with everything I had.

The guard made sure to escort us the entire way, putting on a performance for the town. Between chasing the shapeshifter through town, the curses going awry on the regular, and now shots fired, they needed to prove they were keeping us safe.

We all knew it went deeper than being protected by guards. This whole town was a ticking time bomb of curses. You put this much bad luck in one place; it was bound to backfire soon enough.

The back of my pickup was loaded with bags from Prue's place. Mine was a single duffel. I didn't require much especially when I spent most nights and days in wolf form.

Being around my mate and following her to keep her safe was the most stable I'd felt in far too long. She balanced me by just being near and I couldn't help but wonder if bonding would do more than any counter-curse could.

"Let's get this inside then you can sneak around back," Rook said. "Just be careful, brother."

"I will," I promised as I snagged a box and followed him, freezing right beside Prue as I glanced inside the enclosure that took up half of his yard. "What the fuck?"

"Why are they so big now, henfather?" Prue asked as the monstrous chickens pecked about in his yard.

"I'm not really sure. They slowly doubled in size about once a week," he admitted. "I had to hire a green witch to come grow fresh grass and clover in the yard for them. They're bottomless pits."

"Wait, so we don't know how big they'll get?" I asked. They were already twice the size of a turkey.

"No," Rook mused, looking at them affectionately. "But they're honestly wonderful pets. Now, let's set up inside before some asshole with a gun chases us down."

He led us inside. My brother was always an 'organized chaos' kind of person. His house now reflected that. Nearly every inch of his shelves and walls had some sort of bauble or strange art that somehow fit together.

The tables and desk were loaded with books about curses. His collection had already been huge, now it was out of hand. It wasn't just me he was hellbent on saving. It was our mate, as well.

"Oh, wow," Prue said, dropping the box and heading for the large dining table. Her delicate fingers skimmed over the titles one by one.

"Feel free to browse, we'll grab your things," Rook said, kissing her temple before following me to the door.

"Oh, and someone should get the beta over here. I think it's best if we stick together now," I admitted. "If someone is after one of us or all of us, we need to keep an eye out."

"He's already on his way," she said, giving me a grateful smile. "Thanks for thinking of him."

I nodded once then followed my brother out.

Two more trips and the foyer was full of bags and boxes. I, however, slipped outside and shifted, ready to find the scent of whoever stalked our mate.

If the magistrate couldn't protect us, I sure as hell would.

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Prue

I was in a magister's house. Rook might not be one of the main magisters but he held the same status. With everything happening I hadn't given it much thought, but standing in his fancy foyer the insecurities crept in.

As they carried in boxes I did the best I could to control my emotions. The last thing I needed was an explosion in here. That on top of the giant chickens... I was screwed.

This was a disaster waiting to happen.

There was too much in my head and I needed something else to focus on. Rook walked in and dropped his boxes by the door before walking over and pulling me into a hug.

Just his scent alone had my omega calming like magic.

"We only have a few more boxes. Can you pop some popcorn and pick a movie? I thought that we'd all have a slumber party or even build a fort?" he asked with a hopeful smile.

"That sounds amazing, actually," I agreed easily, returning the smile before asking for the way to the kitchen.

"Just down that hall on the left. I'm going to grab the rest and I'll be back to help you. The popcorn is in the cabinet under the microwave. Just don't drop any kernels, There's a reason I don't air pop anymore," he winked at me.

The chickens, they had to be the reason and I was the reason for them. Somehow, he'd taken an errant curse and had turned them into pets.

"Got it," I called to him as I headed down the hall.

The state of this house was immaculate. There wasn't a single speck of dust in sight or anything out of place. Even his shelves weren't cluttered

like mine. I couldn't help but cringe a little at the fact he'd seen the state of my house. I wasn't a slob but I left spider webs in the corners and told myself that they were just early decorations even if it was April.

The kitchen was even nicer than the rest of the house. The fridge was hidden by the cabinets, the appliances gleaming stainless steel and high end. Rook had only been a few weeks which meant the magistrate didn't hold back on funding the renovations.

Is this where our tax money really went? This town was amazing, but it was our blood, sweat, and tears that made it amazing. There were plenty of repairs to be had and not enough funds according to the magistrate.

Funny how that worked.

Magic bubbled along my fingertips and I took a few breaths to swallow down my annoyance. When the spark went away I focused back on the task at hand.

As expected, the popcorn was right where he said it was, along with every popcorn salt flavor and topping imaginable. Did I just stumble onto Rook's guilty pleasure?

"Too many options?" His smooth voice asked from right behind me.

"Shit," I almost shrieked as I jumped up and almost hit him in the face with the bag I had just grabbed. "After the night we had, you think that was wise?"

He was still laughing when I finished my question, "Maybe not, but it made me laugh."

"What if it activated my curse? How would we explain that to the magistrate?" I asked, still half-upset that he scared me.

Rook placed a hand on my shoulder and was about to speak when there was a knock on the door.

"Merrick?" I asked, hopefully.

"Unless it's my brother. He is a fast runner," he said as he left me standing in the kitchen.

I unwrapped the package and made sure that I placed it in the microwave on the right side. Nothing was relaxing about the scent of burnt popcorn. That shit lingers for hours.

Just as I closed the door and pressed the popcorn button there was a cough behind me. I bit back a smile as I turned to take in my beta. His big frame was filling the doorway and, like usual, his eyes were cast down. We had to break him of that.

He was allowed to take up space, especially in this town.

The moment I laid eyes on him I was moving. I rushed over and threw my arms around him for a moment before pulling back and giving him a once over.

“Rook gave me the rundown, I should be the one checking on you,” he mumbled and pulled me back to him. “Why would someone shoot at you?”

“Did you see the giant chickens in the backyard?” I jokingly asked in a sad attempt to change the subject.

“That was you?” he questioned, this time pulling back to look me in the eyes. The tension had bled out of his shoulders at least.

“In my defense, they were normal sized to start with,” I answered before we both started to crack up.

“And good thing, too. She sneezed one into existence on my head. A turkey-sized one would have hurt my neck,” Rook added as he walked in.

“Oh, you’re anything but boring, aren’t you?” Merrick asked me, his eyes still dancing with laughter.

“You like it,” I teased. He leaned down and gave me a sweet kiss, his smile adorable and lopsided as he pulled away.

“I do.”

“So, you saw something in the mirror?” Merrick asked as the microwave beeped. I pulled the popcorn out before answering as Rook gathered the salt and toppings.

“Yes,” I admitted. “Rook stopped by just as I was freaking out. He recognized my neighbor since they’re brothers and we rushed over right before the gunfire started.”

Merrick’s eyes widened. “So, the mirror predicts death?”

“I’m not sure,” I admitted. “With everything happening I didn’t look again.”

Then I realized that wasn’t all that happened.

“Oh, and Dorian, my neighbor?” I hedged.

“Yeah?” Merrick asked slowly, his eyebrows bunching in confusion.

“He’s my mate, too.”

“Oh,” Merrick said, eyes flickering to Rook then back to me. “Is he nice?”

“Yes,” I said as Rook snorted and said a definitive, “no.”

My beta pulled me closer again and shook his head. “I’m going to just assume this is sibling rivalry.”

Rook ignored him and put in another bag of popcorn. “We’re setting up in the living room tonight. After the gunshots my alpha will feel better having us all together.”

“Aw, did you worry about me?” Merrick teased.

Rook gave him a look that held no hints of humor. “Of course, I did. Someone is after my pack and I need you *all* safe.”

Merrick swallowed hard. Before the moment could get any heavier I took Merrick’s hand and pulled him into the living room.

“Help me make a fort.”

He didn’t even question me as I led him to the living room. Rook had a stack of blankets waiting and they were all saturated in my alpha’s scent. I took a second to breathe it in before passing a few to Merrick.

Even at around six foot tall, he couldn’t quite reach to attach it to the chandelier. I let the magic come to my fingers, a single controlled amount, before lifting it over the hooked metal at the edges, giving us a canopy effect.

“Wait...” he said, turning slowly. “You can do magic?”

I raised an eyebrow. “Witch, remember?”

A wave of sadness hit me. For once, I couldn’t just push it away. Maybe it was having my pack so close or the insanity of our night, but the emotions hit harder.

“You never use magic,” he pointed out gently.

“My affinity is alchemy. My curse struck during our final in alchemical chemistry... it took out an entire building even though I did everything right,” I explained, not meeting his gaze. “Everyone assumed it was me but something was off with my ingredients. I tried to say something but no one would listen and when I woke up, I was sent here. My family cut me off. No friends reached out.”

Merrick pulled me into his arms under our canopy and held me there, his fingers stroking up and down my back. He didn’t interrupt, just waited as I got it off my chest.

“My general magic isn’t phenomenal, but I could do basic spells and magic. But I’ve been too afraid to use it. I’ve essentially been living as a human and avoiding setting off my magical outbursts at all costs.”

“Our curses putting us at war with our powers has to be the worst part,” he agreed. “But you’re safe to practice with us. Maybe hiding it with such ferocity makes it harder to control.”

"I've been able to hold my form longer," Dorian offered. I looked up to see both Rook and Dorian waiting.

"Dorian, this is Merrick. Merrick, Dorian," I introduced them.

They gave each other a quick hello and an awkward, little wave.

"I've been able to do the same," Merrick said. "I haven't shifted form in two days. I've never gone longer than a few hours during the day."

"Maybe there's something to do with packs and curses," Rook said, pulling a tiny memo pad from his pocket and jotting a note. "I need to look through the books I got last week but all that can wait. Did you find anything, brother?"

"No," Dorian admitted on a growl, his fangs flashing in his frustration. "There wasn't a scent outside of the cops and us."

"Whoever it was covered their tracks," I said. "That doesn't bode well."

My brain started whirling with tracking spells or scent spells that I could try to get some hints or anything, but then a thunderous cluck rattled not only the windows, but my mind.

"What the fuck was that?" Dorian asked, glancing around to see if it was in the house.

"Chicken?" I said meekly, letting Merrick shift me behind him.

"They already grew this week, how did they make that sound?" Rook questioned. He was far too amused by the gravity of the situation.

"Those things out back are chickens?" Dorian asked, a bewildered expression on his face.

"What did you think they were?" Merrick inquired, equal parts amused and wary.

"Turkeys or small ostriches? Freaked me out a little, so I just rushed in," Dorian explained. "That and my wolf wanted to eat them."

Rook stifled a laugh as I elbowed him in the ribs.

"What? Even in my wolf form those things were huge," he kept going.

I moved beside Dorian and patted his hand, "Don't worry, sweetie, I'll protect you."

"Oh, so these two can make fun of me?" Dorian asked, pointing at his brother and Merrick.

Rook had a hand over his chest, trying to act innocent and asked, "What? Me?"

"How'd I get lumped in with him? I just wanted to know what you thought they were. I didn't mean anything by it. I vote we have Rook go

check on his pets," Merrick said, holding up a hand in the air.

Rook rolled his eyes. "They were a product of Prue's magic, why can't she help?"

"Because, I'm the head fort maker. How can it be built without me?" I smirked at him.

He started to argue but closed his mouth again and Rook said, "Fine, but if you hear screams of terror, you three better avenge me."

I glanced at Dorian and questioned, "Is he always this dramatic?"

He nodded and said, "More-so."

With that Rook squared his shoulders and disappeared outside.

"Do you think we should go with him?" Merrick asked with genuine concern. That cluck sounded as if they'd grown to the size of a bear now.

"I say we wait for the screams," Dorian said with a wolfish grin. The sibling rivalry was going strong.

"Why don't you go help him, Dorian?" I told him, more than asking. "Merrick and I've got this handled. You're a strong alpha. Protect us."

"Who's going to save me if I need it?" Dorian asked under his breath as he followed the trail that his brother took.

"Did you just want to get me alone?" Merrick questioned as he took a step towards me.

"Yes," I said, moving to the fort. "You're the only one that seemed interested in helping me finish this thing."

"Oh," he sighed out as he trailed behind me.

We layered the blankets with and without magic, turning the fancy living room into a witchy omega's dream. Between the layers of soft and silky fabrics, and the vibrant colors, it looked inviting. We pinned back the entrance enough we could snuggle in and still see the giant TV he had.

Then we moved on to the inside. Now that I'd used a bit of magic it was like I couldn't stop. The familiar warmth of it coursing through my veins was something I didn't know how much I missed.

Or how much I needed it.

Witches were meant to surround themselves with magic. To enchant and charm their way through life. Otherwise, we were no different than the humans.

I knew an enchantment that could make the inside of the fort larger so we could accommodate the alphas.

Magic thrummed in me and I raised my hands, but paused and turned to my beta.

"Can you please hide behind that doorframe?" I asked Merrick, not wanting to hurt him if the spell went array.

He didn't move, "There's no reason to hide. I trust you and your magic knows me."

"Now is not the time to get all sweet on me. I'm serious," I told him, trying to look stern while simultaneously melting at his words. Before him and Rook, and now Dorian, no one had trusted me with anything magical.

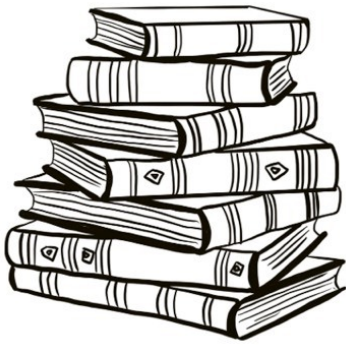
"It's just the truth," he said back, inching closer until I could feel his warmth against my back.

"Are you buttering me up so you can sit next to me in here?" I teased. He gave me a look that told me he absolutely knew that I was deflecting again. I really had to stop that. They had proven more than once I could trust them yet I was running away at every turn.

Still, here they were, patient as ever.

"I'm sorry, I promise I'm not trying to pull aw—" My words cut off at the sound of two sets of high-pitched screams echoing out from the backyard.

Merrick and I shared a wide-eyed look before bolting out of our fort and into the night.



Rook

“Hey, guys, what’s all this ruckus about?” I called out as I pushed open the enclosure I’d had built. I’d even hired a local teen to come check their feed and water twice a day. They were living the high life right now and here they were... ruining our evening.

“Did you figure it out?” Dorian’s deep, rumbling voice startled me enough that I jumped. He let out a soft chuckle but gently pushed me forward. “Go. Something’s off. I smell magic in the air.”

“You can smell magic?” I questioned, stopping in my tracks and turned to my brother.

“Wolf. Remember?” His sarcasm was truly unmatched.

A sound in the enclosure had us both turning and pulling up our fists, ready to defend our pack if things should turn. It was so dark that I huffed and clicked my fingers, a light forming in the air above us. Illusions and glamour may be my main magic, but fae could at least do elemental magic as well. Something I had over my brother.

Though, he could probably see in the dark.

“What the fuck is that?” I whispered in horror as my light illuminated what had made that awful sound. Instead of the nearly forty chickens that I’d been feeding there was a single chicken. It was no longer the size of a turkey but had grown into a grizzly of a chicken, each footstep sending up plumes of dirt.

“Magic,” Dorian frowned. “Something weird is going on in this town.”

“That’s like saying there’s sick people in a hospital, brother. This town is full of cursed and these chickens formed after a botched potion,” I

pointed out.

“Is it friendly?” he countered, ignoring my sarcasm.

“Time to find out,” I hissed back as I stood and walked a little closer. “Hey there, big girl. Are you hungry?”

“Cluck.” The loud response had me flinching again but I tried to keep a smile on my face. “Cluck. Cluck.”

That one sounded angry. Before I could say anything else it started to move, rushing forward. Both Dorian and I screamed and ran toward the house.

“Fuck!” Dorian howled as it caught his tail. I flashed a bolt of lightning at the ground beside it in hopes of startling it but the chicken was determined.

“Get it away from the house!” I yelled back, rushing past the door and toward the road. At least out here we’d have the guards to run backup.

“What happened?” Prue’s voice shrieked. The chicken let out another cluck, giving up chasing us to follow the omega and beta who just stepped outside.

“Go inside!” Dorian commanded. She started to argue but Merrick dragged her in just as the chicken charged again.

My only thought was to protect Prue. I didn’t want a feather hurt on my chickens, but priorities, right?

I changed directions towards the grumpy chicken to cut it off before it reached anyone else. I stopped right in front of her and planted my legs wide and my arms up.

“Take one more step towards anyone and we will have chicken strips for dinner,” I warned her and I meant it. Grabbing my brother’s tail was one thing but she wasn’t hurting anyone on my watch.

Henrietta, or who I assumed was Henrietta seeing as how they’d formed into one giant chicken, cocked her head towards me as if she was giving that a thought for a moment before she plowed right over me.

I hit the ground with a hard thud and I didn’t know what hurt more, my pride or my ass. Dorian growled out a warning. He was now standing on all fours. For a wolf, he was large, but Henrietta was three times his size right now. He tried to block her path as she grew even more before our eyes.

What the fuck was going on? This wasn’t a curse variant, this was a new curse or spell introduced tonight.

Could it have anything to do with the attack?

Jumping up, I stood my ground. I didn't bother to wipe the grass or anything before I moved next to him, helping my brother stand our ground in front of Prue and her beta.

"I don't think she took your warning seriously," he remarked as he shifted back so we were shoulder to shoulder, even if more hair lined his arms and chin than before.

"Now is not the time," I ground out with a side eye.

Prue yelled from behind us, her voice frantic, "I need one of her feathers!"

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Oh, no, was she going to attempt a spell under pressure? Henrietta was a product of one when she was calm, but my gut told me to trust her.

"Dorian, wave that tail at her," I ordered, without looking away from the chicken. "I'll pluck the feather."

"Why am I always the bait?" he groaned. At least he shifted on his feet, ready to run. "On three?"

I gave him a small nod in understanding before he started the count down. Henrietta was still eyeing his tail as it wagged back and forth.

This was either a great idea or stupid but Dorian and I would do anything for our omega.

"One, two...three," my brother said and we both moved. He turned tail at her and I moved to the left side to get the feather. There was a loose one on the ground but this was the only way that we knew it was hers.

"Hurry up, brother," Dorian called out urgently.

What did he think I was doing back here?

The rear end of a giant chicken was the last place I thought I'd be tonight.

At least life was never dull in Moonlit Grove.

Henrietta was finally still enough for a moment that I was able to grab one of her tail feathers. It backfired on me as I pulled it free. She let out a

loud squawk, then the next thing I knew she threw me on her back and was taking me for a tour of the back yard.

"Ride that chicken!" Dorian yelled out as he burst into laughter.

"I'll kill you in your sleep!" I yelled back as I clung to the feathers on her back for dear life. The view might have been nice if I wasn't afraid she would throw me against a boulder for my audacity.

Even though he was still laughing, my brother jumped in front of her in his full wolf form. That made her stop hard. The action had me tumbling off her back but I didn't come out empty handed. Now, I had two feathers in my closed fist.

Dorian still had the chicken's attention, so Prue jumped off the porch and ran towards me. Her dark hair trailed behind her and her magic was at the ready, giving her skin a glow that I wished I could appreciate more. Unfortunately, our situation was a bit too frantic for that.

Still laying on my back from the fall, I held up my palm to reveal my prize for that effort.

"Are you okay?" she asked, looking me over quickly.

"Chicken first," I reminded her with a crooked grin.

"Right," she said as she closed her eyes and started to concentrate on the task at hand.

Merrick had followed her and was standing guard as I peeled myself off the ground. If Henrietta thought that I was going to forget this, she was wrong. Dorian still had her attention but he was getting close to being cornered as she inched closer.

"No rush, Prue, but if you're going to do something, please do it now," I told her in an urgent tone.

A second after my words left my lips, her eyes flashed open and a golden light sparked to life in her hands, consuming the feathers. Prue was muttering something under her breath before the beam headed for the chicken. Henrietta started to shrink back to her normal size, though only a handful of chickens were scattered around her now. I wasn't sure what that meant for the missing twenty chickens or so, but I'd call this a major win.

Once Prue stopped chanting, the beam dimmed and she slumped into Merrick's arms.

"Take her inside, please. I need to lock these naughty girls in their coop and check on the bait," I told him.

"On it," he said, picking up her legs with his free hand and scooped her into his arms before carrying her back inside.

There would still be time for a movie. It was the perfect excuse to get our omega to rest.

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Prue

After the incident with Henrietta growing into a bear-sized chicken, things had calmed down. She, and a few others, were the only ones left. Something I chalked up to the price of magic.

I, however, had used my powers more than once in a few days and nothing catastrophic happened. It was impossible to tell what that meant.

All of us had been more grounded since finding each other and I had a feeling once we bonded fully it would be even better.

We might always be cursed, and I was finding my peace in that. This town was a part of me now and it was where we met. It meant our lives would always be a bit chaotic, but maybe if we kept it under control we could venture outside the boundaries again.

Travel. See the magical world.

I quickly shoved the thoughts away as I pulled on the sweater I'd chosen today. It was a dark burgundy and I paired it with a cute black, gray, and burgundy plaid skirt and black stockings.

With a swipe of black lipstick and some quick makeup, I was ready for another day.

Merrick was coming to work with me today after hitting the library. It had been too long since we'd done curse research and I was more determined than ever to get back to it.

Before I could leave the room I'd claimed at Rook's, something stopped me. Just a brush of magic against mine.

Beckoning.

It took a second to realize it was the mirror. Again. My heart hammered in my chest as I walked back to see what it would show this time.

The antique mirror was laying face down on the dresser where I left it. I reached for it, then froze. This wasn't something I should face alone.

"Is anyone here?!" I yelled out. A mixed thundering of footsteps filled the house before all three men stood behind me.

"What's wrong?" Rook asked.

"The mirror. It's beckoning me again but if it shows something, I want more eyes on it," I explained in a rush before finally letting my fingers curl around the metal handle.

It instantly warmed against my skin. Its magic teased mine now that I'd let it be more present.

Then I turned it over. Our faces reflected back before it swirled away, showing an older man sitting on a park bench. He was staring back at us like he could see us standing here, his eyes going wide and face turning white before he clutched his chest.

"Fuck, do we even have a park?" Rook asked, looking at me. I'd lived here the longest and was already moving.

"Yes, it's like a two minute run from here. Come on," I said over my shoulder as I burst out of the room and flew down the stairs. They kept pace with me as we ran through town.

If we drew stares along the way I didn't bother to notice for once. Instead I reached the entrance to Grove Park. It was wide enough to have a playground, a pool for summer, and a large winding path with plenty of nature. That's where the benches were.

We rushed down the path, eyes peeled for the man we'd seen. This wasn't something we could simply call authorities about. If we did they'd take my mirror. That thought didn't settle well with me.

After looping the park twice we never saw him. My heart sank knowing something was going to happen and we couldn't do anything about it.

"Maybe he'll show up later? We can take turns checking out the park," Merrick suggested.

"Yeah," I said on a sigh. "I need to open up the shop, but if anyone sees that man then call the rest of us."

"Do we have a group text?" Dorian asked. Rook pulled out his phone and tapped at the screen before all of our phones dinged.

"We do now."

It didn't feel right just walking away but we couldn't spend our entire lives chasing down whatever was going to show on the mirror. We'd go

crazy and never get a chance to actually live on our terms.

But something told me that wasn't the last of the mirror.

"Come on, let's go open up," Merrick said as he laced his fingers with mine and pulled me gently toward Main Street.

"Have a good day. I need to check in at the Magistrate," Rook said, kissing me before stalking off.

"What about you?" I asked Dorian.

"Coming with you," he said easily. "No job yet and I don't want to leave you after the shooting incident."

Thank god. I had no desire to walk away from at least one alpha, either. Between the shooting, the giant chicken, and this, I was a mess.

After running around the park searching for that man, I needed a shower. I'd never used the shower that I added in the back of the store. I put it in just in case I had any potion disasters. In my cabin, I had made that mistake when there was no running water and I was purple for a week.

"Merrick, can you and Dorian handle the front for a few? I need to clean up. I'm not usually one to jog," I explained as I logged into the front desk computer.

"Yeah, I can show him how to use the software when we check out our first customer, one just walked in," he answered as he gestured to an older gentleman who was already browsing through the store. His attention was currently on an old umbrella stand filled with canes.

When he turned to the side, my breath caught. Dorian sensed the change immediately and moved to my side.

"What is it, mate?" he asked, tail flicking angrily behind us, brushing against the back of my thighs.

"That's him, the one from the mirror," I whispered, but it sounded more like a warning. Surely whatever was going to happen wouldn't happen in my shop.

"So, what you saw this time is in the future?" Merrick asked as he eyed the man. At least the gentleman didn't notice our attention on him. "Now we know that the mirror can show the present and future, at least. I'm betting on the past, too."

What he left unsaid was that I wasn't in control. We couldn't prevent everything I saw.

"Do you want us to keep an eye on him?" Dorian asked.

"What are we going to do? Walk a chicken in the park? Or is Rook going to walk you in wolf form?" I half laughed.

He arched an eyebrow, "That would be a sight, wouldn't it? But I don't think I want anything to do with those chickens for a while. Unless it's to fry them."

"Yeah, I had a dream that Henrietta had eaten my leg and was coming back for more," Merrick said with a shiver at that memory.

"I'll figure something out," Dorian promised. "I'm pretty good at tracking." He wiggled his ears for emphasis and I let out a laugh that helped drain the tension. If I let everything the mirror showed me stress me out I'd never know peace.

"Just don't do anything that stupid. The magistrate and guards will be keeping an eye on us. Especially me. I never wanted to be famous but here I am killing it," I teased.

He winked at me. "I'll behave. Go shower."

"Yeah, we got this," Merrick promised, motioning for me to go.

"Fine, but it's in the back right corner of the warehouse if you need me," I said as I headed in that direction.

My mind wandered to the old man in the shop and why the mirror would show me his death. Was it trying to warn me so I could save him? There were too many possibilities and I was losing my mind.

In an attempt to clear my head, I turned on my music app so I could enjoy my shower. Thank god I'd remembered to stock it, too.

My Halloween station was on and I blared "Werewolves of London" as the water heated up and I undressed. I got in and let the hot water just run down my back as I started my solo performance singing along with the song. This was just what I needed right now. No worries, no curses, just music and peace.

I grabbed the shampoo bottle to use as a microphone and just at the height of the song, a hand grabbed me. I spun around, squirting shampoo everywhere and tangling in the curtain as I went. Whoever the hand belonged to was now trapped under my naked body and the curtain as I hit the ground hard.

Pain radiated over my hip and I scramble up, slipping on the shampoo and going head first to the ground for a second time. There was an "oof" under me and I rolled my eyes, a bit offended they were acting like I was crushing them.

"Who are you and what do you want?" I asked, not getting up.

"Merrick. Let me go, I'm drowning," he said, sputtering.

"This is your fault, really. You should have knocked," I huffed, pulling the towels on the bars down to stand on and soak up some of the liquid.

"I did knock. You were singing at the top of your lungs and didn't hear me," he said as I got some of my weight off him so he could sit up, still half tangled.

"Well, I didn't think that you'd need me right now. I've only been in there a few minutes," I reminded him.

"Yeah, well we had another customer come in and ask about delivery. That is not something that I know about," he said, getting to his feet and turning around to give me privacy.

"Okay, if they can give me ten minutes I'll be out. Or if they can't wait, then get a name and number and I'll call them. I can't go out there like this," I said, still using the shower curtain to hide myself. "And now I have to get this curtain back up."

"Will do, I can tell them that you're in the middle of a project and can't get away right now," he said before he carefully slipped out of the door and closed it behind himself.

My cheeks were burning and I shook my head. That was one way to end a shower.

After our morning and now this, I was more than ready for the day to end so we could have a quiet night at the pack house.



Dorian

The need to shift was clawing at my skin. Usually, it just took over at random times, especially when I didn't want it to. For some reason, this time was different. I didn't have to wonder why, either. It had everything to do with my little mate.

But if I didn't shift soon I knew it would only get worse. I'd fidgeted through dinner and now was pacing out back.

Rook could sense something was wrong, but I didn't want him to solve my problems for me. He took things on himself far too much.

My place was perfectly nestled against the forest. I chose it for a reason. Now we were at this magistrate-tainted house in the middle of a neighborhood.

Though, I had to admit, it was starting to grow on me as time went on. That had more to do with Prue than getting used to it.

"Hey, is everything okay?" My little mate's voice drew my attention. My initial reaction was to tell her not to worry about it, that I was fine, but for some reason I couldn't bring myself to do that.

She didn't deserve to be lied to. And after the hectic morning and a busy day, maybe she'd even want to join me.

"I'm alright," I reassured her quickly. "I just... I'm feeling the full moon."

"Me, too," she admitted as she glanced up at the sky. It wasn't the best view from here thanks to the magistrate building in the distance, but we could still see it. "I know that we don't shift like you. But witches' magic is attuned to the moon as well. I haven't given into that side of myself for so long, but I'd like to."

“Do you want to come to the forest with me, little mate?” I found myself asking before I could stop myself.

The last thing I wanted to deal with was rejection, but I had a feeling that’s not what was going to happen.

“Yes, actually. That sounds amazing,” she said, perking up. “Do you mind if I get some of my moon water jars? We can take them to the forest with us.”

“Of course,” I reassured her, but then a frown took over her face. “What’s wrong?”

My wolf was demanding I reach out for her, fix whatever had caused that look.

“All my jars are at my old place,” she said with a frustrated growl. It seemed that I wasn’t the only one getting frustrated with the sudden change in scenery.

“We can stop by,” I offered but she shook her head.

“It’s too far and I’m not ready to go back.”

“Well, does anybody in town sell them? Maybe it’s time for some new ones,” I suggested. “A fresh start. Isn’t that what this is all about?”

A smile crept back onto her face, and she nodded. “It’s late, but I know just the place.”

She sent a text off to the others and got ready. She came back downstairs wearing a black fitted dress with long sleeves that flared at the ends and violet tights that almost matched her eyes, and her trusty pair of combat boots.

She looked adorable.

I followed her down to Main Street. Despite the danger we’d encountered that led us to our new home, she seemed fully confident in my ability to keep her safe. I, however, stayed vigilant. My entire being was focused on the world around us, making sure whoever was behind any of the strange occurrences in town stayed far away from my mate.

Prue led me to a black-brick building at the end of Main Street, just before the park. Everything else was closed around it, but the neons in the windows were burning bright.

“What is this place?” I asked as she drew me to a stop. The sign really didn’t give anything away.

“This is Valerie’s place. She’s a vampire who specializes in skincare and natural products. She’s got an amazing nose for scents, and honestly, there’s

a reason vampires look ageless.”

I gave her a deadpan look. “You mean because they literally don’t age?”

“Oh, please.” She rolled her eyes. “I mean, sure, they have a little of the undead vibe on their side, but you know most of that is made up anyway. Everyone ages, even if they age slower than others.”

“I still am not putting together why a skincare expert is going to help us with moon water jars.”

“Just trust me, okay?” she said, leading me inside.

“Hey, Valerie,” she called out to the vampire behind the counter. The omega’s hair was short and choppy and black as night, her skin pale, but even I could admit that it was flawless. Her blood-red lips tipped into a smile at the sight of Prue.

“My favorite witch,” she greeted. “Oh, and a handsome new companion.”

“This is my mate, Dorian,” Prue said with full confidence.

I swear, my chest puffed up in pride. I loved that she was publicly claiming me as hers.

“We have a little problem.”

“Something I can help with?” Valerie questioned, all business now.

“I’m sure you heard about the shooting in town.”

“Yes,” she said, eyes wide. “I’m not sure why any of us would need a weapon.”

“Silver bullets,” I said.

Understanding dawned in the vampire’s eyes, and her mouth dropped open. “Are you kidding me? Here in Moonlit Grove? We have enough stacked against us. None of us would do it. Do you think it was one of the guards?”

Honestly, I wouldn’t put it past them, though I didn’t say that out loud. I didn’t trust anyone who worked for the magistrate except for Rook.

“I’m not sure, but tonight my sexy wolf here needs to shift, and I need some new jars for moon water. You wouldn’t happen to have any extra empty jars you would be willing to sell me?”

“Actually, I have a ton over in the clearance section. I just had an overstock and hadn’t found a use for them yet. I bet there’s a couple that you would love.”

“I knew we came to the right place.” Prue beamed as she dragged me over to the corner that Valerie pointed out.

There were jars and containers in every shape and size. My little mate's eyes locked in on a moon-shaped bottle that had a black screw-on lid.

I took it from her hand so she didn't have to hold it, and she chose three others. One had intricate detailing in the glass. Another held a purple tint. The last one had a spiderweb design painted onto it with shimmering silver.

I was starting to sense a pattern here.

Valerie even offered to fill them for us, which my mate took her up on since we were here.

I pulled out my card to pay before Prue could. She started to argue, but I didn't give her the chance. She may push back against it, but her omega liked being taken care of. I could tell from that pleased, little smile she gave, even when she tried to hide it.

Stubborn little witch.

Instead of making our way back to Rook's, I led her through town to my favorite spot in the forest. I'd circled the forest that surrounded Moonlit Grove more than once. I could only go so far out thanks to the damn barriers, but there was plenty of ground to cover.

My ears were twitching in anticipation, and I could feel the shift pulsing at the edges of my psyche, but it didn't take over. My wolf seemed more than eager to please our mate.

It wasn't that I had better control now than I had in all my life. It was that she grounded me in a way nothing ever had before. Our magic seemed to anchor each other.

She had done magic for the first time in years to stop Henrietta's rampage. I hadn't witnessed it firsthand, but after she'd gone to bed that night, Merrick had given us the rundown. Rook was ecstatic and ran to his books, determined that this was a breakthrough. I was just happy to see my mate embracing her magic.

I knew what it felt like to be at war with your own birthright. To be fair, Merrick likely shared the same sentiment.

Rook was the only one of us untouched by the curses.

As soon as we were within the tree line, my ears twitched and my tail flickered excitedly. Prue sensed the change, her eyes taking me in with a smile on her black-painted lips.

She wasn't laughing at me like others had done. With the way her cheeks turned pink, I think she liked it.

They had truly chosen a good mate for me.

We didn't stop walking until we reached the clearing. The moonlight above us gave enough light to see our surroundings.

The forest here was beautiful, even more tonight with beams of silver light filtering through the trees, illuminating the forest. This was one of my favorite times of day, and sharing it with my mate just felt right.

"It's beautiful out here," she breathed out excitedly.

She set her little jars on top of a flat boulder before throwing her arms out and spinning around slowly, her face tipped up to the moonlight.

She was a goddess, ethereal as the light danced across her skin. I could almost see the magic filtering into her skin and charging her magic. Everything about her was glowing now.

I couldn't stop the change if I tried. My wolf was so eager to meet our mate that I shifted on the spot, my body contorting until fur was everywhere and I was on four paws.

I trotted closer to Prue, and she seemed to sense that I was coming. She stopped spinning, her arms falling to her sides, but that peaceful smile didn't leave her face. In fact, it only widened as I approached.

She crouched down, and I nuzzled against her.

Her laughter was beautiful, and my wolf preened under the attention as her fingers dug into our fur, scratching.

"You are perfect in this form. I can see what a ferocious beast you are. It's nice to have a mate that can protect me."

My wolf liked that.

"But you're also perfectly adorable. I really like your ears, and I'm kind of glad that I get to see them more than just in this form," she admitted quietly, like it was a secret.

As if to punctuate her point, she scratched at my ears for a moment before letting her butt hit the ground.

She laid out under the moonlight, and I couldn't help but curl up at her side, her fingers still deep in my fur, the warmth of her hand radiating through my body.

I hadn't really realized how much I needed her touch until this moment. My wolf was more content than I'd ever felt.

Not since the curse.

But she wasn't shying away from it. She was embracing it, finding the good in it. I was far too stubborn to see myself.

Maybe I would never change, and this would be my form forever. Never just a man or a beast but a strange mix of both. Right now, I couldn't find it in me to be angry about that anymore. Not when this little witch liked my ears and my wolf and embraced every part of me.

I shifted back now. My clothes were already shredded but I didn't overthink it as I laid myself over her.

"I'm sorry. I'm not magically charmed to keep my clothing," I admitted sheepishly. "But I'd really like to kiss you."

"You don't need my permission, mate," she whispered back, her voice holding a raspy edge that told me she wanted it as badly as I did.

I leaned down slowly, my body pressing into her before our lips connected. Her caramel apple swirled around us, and her lips were just as sweet as I imagined.

She was soft and responsive under me. My wolf was hungry for her, nipping at her lips but being careful not to hurt her with our teeth. One hand rested on her neck, holding her close.

It felt so good to have our mate in our arms.

Not sure how far she was comfortable taking this, I rolled over, laying out just like she was, our fingers interconnected as we stared up at the moon.

"This is the first time I've felt like a witch in a long time," she admitted. "I've missed the moon."

"I avoided it. Being in my wolf always felt like a curse, but right now, I feel like he's actually a part of me."

"Exactly," she said. "Maybe it's time to embrace who we are now, Dorian."



Prue

“I’ve decided tonight is an official girls’ night. Cancel your plans!” Blake called out as she pushed into the shop just before closing.

“Would it count as night if it’s only three?” I teased as I shut down the register. Saturdays were always slow in Moonlit Grove and I was ready to leave.

“Yes, because we’ll be partying into the night,” she sang out, doing a little dance. “Tell your lover boys we’ll be safe.”

“Dorian will probably stalk you anyway,” Merrick pointed out as he put away the box of inventory he was inspecting.

“We do love a man who protects his woman,” Blake said. “As long as he doesn’t interfere with a good night.”

“Go. I’ll close down here. Just call the alphas first. I’m not listening to them whine all night about not being informed.

“Are we doing the usual?” I asked, glancing at her with my hands poised on my phone. She grinned and nodded.

“Dessert roulette?” she said, raising an eyebrow.

The adorable kitchen witch that ran the little cafe was an incredible baker. He also had a curse to infuse his food with whatever emotion he was feeling in that moment.

Sometimes you took a bite of an incredible muffin and felt euphoria, others sad, it could be anything.

“Yes. I have some things to catch you up on, too,” I grinned as I typed out a quick text. Dorian’s response was immediate.

DORIAN

Don't worry, you'll be safe.

It was a promise. Just like Merrick predicted he'd be stalking us all night. That was fine as long as they still trusted that I needed these nights. Keeping my friendship with Blake was a non-negotiable.

She hooked her arm with mine and I tucked the phone away, letting her regale me about her day while we walked the two blocks to *Sweet Indulgences*. It was busy, but sometimes that was the best to not be overheard.

Leander was behind the counter and waved at us as we entered. "Sit anywhere, ladies. We'll be around shortly!"

A bored vampire walked up to greet us as soon as we settled in. She didn't even speak, just held her pen poised and raised a manicured brow.

"We need two of the lattes of the day, and the six-piece variety dessert," Blake said easily, not even having to ask. We used to do this once a week and even though it had only been a few in between, I was starting to miss this.

"So, spill," she demanded as she rested her chin on her hands. My bestie was all ears and ready for details.

"So, I have three mates now," I said. "And something's been happening..."

She leaned in, completely invested now. "Do tell."

"Remember that mirror I found at the Bazaar? He said it was in his special wares and I couldn't seem to pass it up. Well... it showed me Dorian's death. That's how I found out I had a third mate."

"Honestly, what a solid story to tell. You'd kill it with 'two truths and a lie,'" she snorted. "So, he obviously didn't die so maybe it's wrong?"

"There were gunshots. I think the fact Rook happened to see it and recognize him saved his life. So, it could have been his death if I didn't see it," I pointed out. "I've seen another, an older man having a heart attack. We recognized the park but he wasn't there."

"Oh no," she said, hand over her mouth.

"He walked into my shop. It wasn't happening yet," I said.

"Maybe it shows you possible outcomes?" she wondered. "Have you tried to use it with purpose?"

“No. It only wakes up when it shows me something,” I explained then tilted my head as I considered it. “I haven’t tried anything more but it’s dormant every other time I’ve held or inspected it.”

“Oh, wow,” she said.

The waitress dropped off our order, halting the conversation. The plates were loaded with six different desserts. She didn’t give us a description but that only made it more fun. I slid a huge hunk of chocolate cake my way while Blake snagged some sort of cake that looked like a mango.

"That looks interesting," I told her, pointing at the orange-green cake now in front of her.

"You want to try it first?" she asked with an arched brow.

"Only if you try mine, but we have to do our best not to let the other know the side effects," I reminded her.

"You just want to steer the conversation from the mirror," she teased as her fork plunged into the fudge cake.

I pursed my lips together and shrugged at her, "Maybe. It's time to get out of our heads for a bit. I didn't want to forget to tell you."

"I get it. I need this, too. I've been getting weird vibes from a new mind here in town. Like I'm being watched," she admitted as she raised the fork to her lips.

She moaned as the cake landed on her tongue as soon as she swallowed, she said, "Oh, goddess, that was better than sex."

I raised a brow at her, "I think you haven't had good sex."

"It has been a while," she laughed.

"Not your fault, it's hard to find your mates when you are confined to a small town. I just got lucky," I reassured her before getting serious. She couldn't just say she had a stalker and shift past it. "Tell me more about being watched."

"Maybe not watched, I don't know. It's just a weird feeling I get at times. No words or emotions. Now stop stalling and try mine," she ordered and pointed at the mango on her plate.

"We are coming back to this tomorrow," I told her as I cut a little piece with my fork so I could try it.

Once it made it in my mouth, I let out a sigh of content before I burped and bubbles formed. This was new.

There was a questioning look on Blake's face before she broke out in a fit of giggles. That was something normal.

Another burped escaped as well as colorful bubbles this time, even a few that were shaped like hearts and stars.

"Damn you, I'm just glad that these aren't hiccups," I laughed, pointing at my best friend.

"Bubbles are better than more chickens, huh?" she questioned, still giggling.

I took a bite of my chocolate cake and the bubbles stopped and I was the one in a fit of giggles.

"Your turn for the bubbles," I told Blake. "Then we pick another one."

There was a strawberry cheesecake that was calling to me from the plate in the middle of the table.

"Got your eye on another sweet?" she asked.

"How'd you guess?" I countered with unavoidable giggles.

With one last giggle, she let out the loudest burp in the quiet cafe and a carved pumpkin formed from the bubbles.

"Impressive," I commented and stabbed the cheesecake, getting a strawberry for good measure.

Once I placed it in my mouth, I was taken back to my childhood and playing hide and seek with my brother. A tear ran down my cheek as the scene played on for just a few minutes.

"Prue, why are you crying?" Blake asked, wiping the tears with a cloth napkin.

"It's not me, it was the cheesecake. I didn't realize the chef was going through heartbreak," I told her with a huff before taking another bite of the chocolate cake. I'd rather giggle to death than cry in public.

"What did you see?" she asked.

"My brother and I playing as children," I answered quietly. Her lips formed a surprised O and she didn't press more. She knew that my family was a sore spot in my heart.

"So, no cheesecake for me," she said, burping as a broken heart bubble appeared. That one felt more like a party trick than an emotion.

"What? I tried it, now it's your turn," I teased.

"You know that I'm an ugly crier, that's just plain mean," she said, picking up a cookie instead.

"Who isn't?" I reminded her. "How's that cookie?"

"Salty," she answered as she spit out the bite in her mouth. "I think that he mixed up the sugar and salt."

Her demeanor shifted and anger replaced the disgust on her face and she smashed her plate, dessert and all on the floor.

"Shit," I muttered. Either we needed to get out of here before she threw more things or another bite of one of the others we've tried.

"Forget the cookie. "Here, finish my cake," I offered a bit on my fork towards her.

Blake swatted the fork away and threw her water cup at the waitress.

Okay, out of here it was.

"Can you put all of this on my tab and I'll come back tomorrow?" I asked as I pulled Blake from her chair.

The waitress nodded and started to clean up Blake's mess with a sigh. It wasn't her first today, I'd bet.

"I'd toss the cookies," I warned her from over my shoulder before we made it across the threshold and into the cool night air.

"Why'd we leave?" Blake asked as she raised a hand to her head as if it was aching.

"I couldn't cover anymore damage if we stayed. The cookies were full of anger and I couldn't get you to eat the cake. So, it was simpler to head out," I explained. "Next time, we will take them to go."

"Oh, a moonlight picnic. I like that idea," she smiled at me. "Man, my head hurts. Walk me home?"

There was a little growl from behind me.

"Come out, Dorian, you can escort us," I called out to my hiding alpha.

He trotted out in his full wolf form, stopping next to me as Blake shrieked.

"Oh, my goodness, what a cute puppy!" she exclaimed and ran a finger through his hair.

"Um, that he is, but this is one of my mates. Can you not pet him?" I asked, swallowing down my omega's growl. I knew she didn't mean anything by it but, apparently, my inner omega was ready to fight.

"Fuck, I'm sorry. But he is so cute and you know I love animals," she defended, taking a healthy step away.

"I know but this is different and I don't want to have to take you to the hospital for a wolf bite," I joked to lighten the mood as Dorian rubbed against my leg a little to calm me.

"Fine," she sulked, "next time I'll keep my hands to myself. Does he have any shifter friends?"

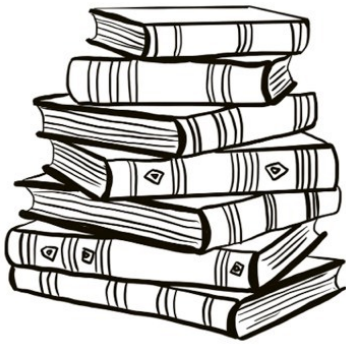
The hopefulness in her tone had me laughing but I promised to ask him later for her. He trotted alongside us as we dropped her off at home then headed for Rook's place.

It was impossible to call it home still. There was that magistrate edge to it that felt out of place and I wondered if we'd be allowed to make a few... adjustments.

As we stepped up to the back door Dorian shifted again. I was going to have to get used to his nakedness before too long but I still squeaked and rushed upstairs.

"I'm going to work on some potions!

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Rook

“What’s going on in here, little witch?”

I found my mate tucked away in one of the rooms upstairs where I kept most of my potion ingredients and journals. She threw me a smile over her shoulder, but her eyes mainly stayed on the work she was doing.

She’d moved some of her equipment over to our house during the move. We’d been so busy with everything, she hadn’t had as much time to focus on breaking the curse.

“Potion making is supposed to be my specialty,” she said with a sigh. “Now that I’ve been testing my magic a bit more, I thought it couldn’t hurt to give this a shot. I’ve been playing it safe since I arrived.”

“And now you’re done playing it safe?” I asked, curious what her answer would be.

Watching Prue flourish has been one of my favorite things.

“No,” she said firmly. “Dorian and I talked about it yesterday. I think for a long time I’ve been fighting the eventuality that I’d be stuck here, but just being close to you guys and forming this pack has already helped me be a little more in tune with my magic. What if I could find something to dampen our curses and we could get our lives back? We’d have to be magistrate approved, but with someone on our side that has an in with the magistrate...” She looked at me pointedly.

“Maybe you actually get a chance to have a little more freedom,” I concluded.

She nodded. "Exactly. It's not that I want to leave Moonlit Grove. I love this town, and honestly, even if my curse is broken, I don't know that I'd want to leave all the other cursed to just suffer."

I moved closer to her, resting my head on her shoulder while I studied what she was working on, placing a soft kiss against her skin.

"And I love that about you. You're so kindhearted. My career path was much more selfish. I chose this because of my brother."

"Which is also a noble thing to do," she said firmly, not letting me shy away from that. "I love how much you look out for him. Dorian is not the kind of alpha to ask for help. I can tell that already."

I snorted at her words.

That was the understatement of the century. Dorian, frankly, wouldn't ask for help no matter the cost. He may if it came to our girl, but that was only because he was already in love with this little witch.

"I support you no matter what. Wherever you go, I go," I said firmly.

That finally got her to stop working. She put down the beaker she was holding and turned to me.

"Do you mean that? Even if I stay cursed for the rest of my life?"

"Then what an interesting life it will be."

She studied me for a moment longer, as if testing if she believed what I was saying.

"I know that I seemed reluctant at first," she said softly. "I think that I took it to heart more than I care to admit that my mom, my dad, my brother all dropped me the moment I was sent here."

"Were you close before then?" I questioned softly. She was talking now, giving me a piece of her, and I wasn't going to waste this opportunity. My little witch was slow to trust, and the fact that she was trusting me with this meant the world to me.

But if the charred edges to her caramel apple scent meant anything, this story didn't even start well.

"No," she admitted. "My brother was younger, and when he was born, it was like I ceased to exist. I could no longer do anything right. Everything he did, I was blamed for." She trailed off, shaking her head. "I thought it would get better as we got older, but I think that their treatment of me sort of rubbed off on him. We never really got a chance to be siblings."

"I'm sorry," I said. I meant it, too. My parents weren't great but I always had Dorian. As gruff as he may be.

I could tell how much their actions hurt her, and I hated it. She deserved better than her awful family gave her.

“What are your parents like?” she asked.

There was a dash of hope in her voice, and I hated to be the one to ruin it.

“My parents are complicated,” I admitted reluctantly. “They weren’t unkind to us, but they also never really came to terms with Dorian’s situation.”

“It wasn’t even his fault, and yet he was treated like something was wrong with him,” she finished for me, knowing exactly how that felt.

I nodded and gave a shrug. “We don’t really communicate much except through the occasional text, but that’s about as far as it goes.”

“Sounds like their loss,” Prue said with an indignant huff on our behalf.

“I couldn’t agree more, little witch,” I said as I studied the work table again. “What are we working on here?”

She let out a breath and refocused her attention on the table in front of her. She pulled a book closer and tapped it.

“I’m always just grasping at straws with my curse. I can’t test anything out on any others,” she explained quickly. Something I knew without her having to tell me.

“But it’s always hard to pinpoint exactly what to call my curse because there’s not a lot of rhyme or reason to it. Chaos is the best I can do, but really, bursts of magic are the issue. So, I’m finding cures for those versus the curse as a whole. I found one that’s supposed to channel your magic. It essentially gives you more control over your powers. It could apply to all three of us if it works.”

“So, with the pack bonds, it should be even easier?” I guessed.

“Exactly,” she nodded along. “It will give me a chance to use my magic without being afraid that it’s going to burst out of me.”

“You haven’t exactly had magic outbursts lately,” I pointed out.

“Not in a while,” she agreed. “After that day in the clearing, I found Merrick and Dorian, too. Now that we’ve all gotten closer, I think it’s centered me enough to be in control.”

“Maybe we should practice more before going big. Have you looked into doing simple potions, not just ones based on the curse?”

She opened her mouth to speak, then closed it, looking at me stunned.

“No,” she admitted.

“Maybe do a simple energizing potion,” I suggested. It was one of the basics. “I have all the ingredients here. Do you need a potion book?”

She shook her head. “No, I nearly graduated with my degree in alchemical chemistry.”

I remembered her story well enough, so I simply waved her on. “Then show me what you’ve got, little witch.”

I could see the excitement bubbling on her face as she gathered the ingredients and tested the heat on the cauldron. There was no doubting herself as she worked. She was in her element and it was amazing to see.

Then she faltered.

Just as she was about to add the final ingredient, she looked at me.

“I’m trying this on myself. I don’t trust anyone else to try it. My potions go wrong. Even when I do everything right.”

I shook my head, not letting her stop. “You told me that story. The strange ingredient was *not* your fault. You should’ve never been charged for that.”

“Technically, I wasn’t. I was sent here because of the curse, not because of the accident.” Okay, she had me there.

“They were one and the same,” I argued. “Quit doubting yourself.”

She finally dropped the last few bits into the cauldron. It changed from a strange green color to a bright electric blue, the exact shade it should be.

She carefully placed a bottle under the spigot and poured the potion into two bottles.

Before she could say a word, I snatched the second one and downed it.

She gasped, horrified, as she watched and waited for some sort of reaction. When I didn’t sprout a second head she picked up the remaining potion and drank it.

I took stock of my body. Energy crackled through me the way that it should.

This one was right. I started to open my mouth to tease her when the energy shifted. It was subtle, but there. Something was brewing in my stomach and coursing through me now. It was warm and alluring and strange.

“Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, no,” she muttered over and over. Her hand was on her stomach, and I had a feeling she was experiencing the same strange side effect that I was now. “I told you that something always goes wrong.”

I wasn't about to show her that I agreed, but something was definitely wrong.

"It's going to be fine," I promised.

The side effects hit Prue first. I don't know if it was because she was smaller than I was, but something sparked in her eyes before she blurted out her next words.

"I've been holding back because I've been afraid you guys were going to hurt me, but I really do trust you. I was also the one who accidentally put salt in your coffee. Dorian just took the flak."

She smacked a hand over her mouth as the words spilled out of her.

"Oh, God. It turned into a truth serum. How the fuck does that happen?" she gasped out as her hand fell away.

"Well, we don't know that," I started. Then the same urge to speak hit me, and the words were falling from my lips.

"I had a dirty dream about you last night, and I haven't been able to stop thinking about it since."

Her cheeks turned pink, and she burst out a laugh. "Was it at least a good one?"

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My eyes darkened, and I smirked at her. "So good. I'm still hearing those sexy, little moans I teased from you."

"I want you to stop holding back." She looked horrified as the words fell free from her lips without her consent. "I wanted all of you so bad, but I get in my own way too much, and I need you guys to do something about it before I combust."

"I secretly want to be your first. I'm a possessive man at heart, Prue."

The bubbling sensation started to fade already, and from the looks of Prue sagging into the chair next to her worktable, I had a feeling she was also realizing that.

“Do you trust the magistrate?” This time the question turned serious. Was this something she feared and was holding back because of it?

“No. Anyone that trusts the government implicitly is a fool. They will always do what’s best for them and their image and not for the people. I think this town is obvious evidence of that.”

“Why do you stay then?” she questioned.

“For him. For you. For all the cursed people I’ve dealt with over the years and couldn’t save.”

“I hate them,” Prue said, shaking her head. “I tried to tell them the truth, and just like everyone else in my life, they were too quick to blame me and sweep it under the rug. No real investigation.”

“I’ve seen that a time or two myself. But I fight through because someone has to be on the people’s side. The sensation had faded completely now. “I think it’s over. No more truths from those pretty lips of yours.”

“The same lips you’ve been dreaming about?” she challenged.

“You say the word, Prudence Ever, and I’ll be yours. But once you give in, there’s no going back.”

It took her a second to work up the courage, but I was a patient man. I waited until those words were out in the open.

“I want you, Rook Sinclair. Take me.”

There was no hesitation as I stepped forward, pulling her into my arms. My lips slanted over hers in a searing kiss. It was every bit as possessive as I felt right now. This was the moment I’d been dying for. I’d found my way past her defenses.

There might have been truth serum involved, but maybe that’s exactly what we needed. A little truth and communication.

I swept Prue into my arms and she tightened her legs around my waist as I carried her down the hall to her nest. She’d put it together when she moved in but hadn’t invited us in. I froze outside the door.

“Are you going to let me in your nest, omega?”

“Yes,” she broke the kiss long enough to answer.

I pushed through the door and breathed in. It already smelled like her but needed a whole lot more of her pack scents in here. I’d establish mine here and now.

Prue, let out the sweetest whimpers as I devoured her, my hands kneading her ass where I held her to my chest.

She wiggled against me and I dropped to my knees before laying her out on the mattress. My body pressed into her as I hovered over her. I wasn't done kissing her yet.

But my little witch decided she had waited long enough. Her hands frantically gripped my shirt and tugged it free, tossing it aside.

She broke the kiss and moved her focus lower. I took the opportunity to taste her pale skin, nipping my way down her neck as she wiggled lower until she could reach my belt.

I found a particularly sensitive spot just over her scent gland that had her moaning and freezing in place. Those adorable whimpers only made me want to give her even more.

We didn't have to rush. We'd established where we stood and if we spent the next week just like this I'd be a happy alpha.

I ran my hands up her hip as I sucked hard on her skin, marking her in the only way I could for now. Soon enough, she'd wear my bite.

My fingers hooked in her shirt and I pulled it off, exposing her purple bra. My girl had her favorite color scheme and stuck with it. I unclasped the back and let it fall free, tossing it aside and groaning as I took in the sight of her splayed out on the nest. Her hair was haloed around her and her lip was caught between her teeth.

"You are gorgeous, Prue Ever," I said against her lips before kissing her again, content to tease and taste her for hours.

She had other ideas. Her fingers were already working my buckle free and unbuttoning my pants before shoving them down. My boxers went with them and I kicked them away.

"Stop trying to be gentle with me," she growled as she nipped at my lip.

"I was only trying to be a gentleman," I shot back, earning another glare from my gorgeous omega.

She held my gaze as she shoved me off her and shimmied out of her pants. My gaze roamed over her as I rested on my back, soaking in the sight of my omega.

My little witch was perfect. Her body was lean but strong. The swell of her breasts had my mouth watering and her nipples were already peaked, begging me for attention.

I ran my fingers over the flare of her hips as my gaze moved lower to the small patch of hair between her legs. Her pussy was already dripping for her alpha.

I didn't realize I was purring in satisfaction until she chuckled.

"Do you like what you see, alpha?"

"I'm not sure, I might need a closer look," I demanded, gripping her hips and pulling her over me so she was straddling my shoulders. She was shocked and started to protest as I pulled her closer to my mouth.

"Sit on my face, omega," I demanded, not quite a bark, but firm enough to show her that I was serious.

"Rook. No," she protested again, looking uncertain. That wouldn't do.

"Yes," I growled before leaning up and sliding my tongue through her slick to prove my point.

She finally stopped resisting me and let me move her into place so she was fully seated on my face.

Then I feasted.

She was warm and perfect, that sweet, sticky caramel apple scent as delicious as she tasted. I was so gone for this girl it wasn't even funny.

I warned her that this was it for me. The moment she let me in there was no going back.

"Rook," she moaned out my name as she started to move, rocking her hips over my face as she sought out the pleasure I was giving her.

I speared my tongue into her, fucking her furiously, curling it slightly with each downstroke to tease her, wishing it was my knot locked insider her now. Soon, but I wanted to make her feel good first.

Then I was sliding my tongue over her clit before sucking hard. She cried out and I soothed her with gentle strokes, setting a rhythm that had her sliding her hips against me furiously as she fought to find that release.

Her thighs started to shake and I knew she was close. I went back to teasing her clit, my movements demanding and unrelenting until she gave in.

Prue cried out and her body tensed as slick gushed over my tongue and face, marking me with her scent. Fuck, my alpha was happy. The primal side of my brain was already gloating and I had no intention of washing her off of me before I went around her other mates, showing them exactly who she'd claimed first.

I continued to tease her with my tongue, but she scrambled away, shaking her head and letting out soft whimpers.

"I'm way too sensitive, alpha. You have to stop." I let her move lower but I wasn't done with her yet.

“You’re in control here, little witch. But now I want you to take my cock in your hand and stroke it. Then you’re going to line me up with that perfect pussy and sink down on me. I want to feel you surrounding me.”

She locked those violet eyes on mine. They were a darker purple than ever before as she followed my instructions beautifully. She shifted down my body, lifting up until she was sitting just behind my cock. She made a show of stroking me, her warm hands nearly sending me over the edge already. Her warm heat was seated against my knot and balls and if she didn’t take me soon we were going to be in trouble.

“Take me now, omega,” I growled.

She leaned up and lined the head of my cock up at her entrance before slowly sinking down. She didn’t stop until she hit my knot. Then she pulled up and sank down again, more forceful this time, making sure that she had my knot.

I groaned as her tight pussy gripped me, locking us together. She was hot and wet around me and the moment she started to move, I was already swelling.

She braced her hands on my chest, nails biting into my flesh, as she threw her head back and rode me. Her lips were parted in a silent scream as she shivered. I knew she was sensitive and with her knowing just how to move, letting her instincts and body guide her, it wouldn’t be long before she shattered again.

I’d get to watch her break for me this time. And when I’d fucked her to the point of exhaustion, I’d let her rest. Then the moment she opened those pretty violet eyes, I’d make her come all over again.



Prue

PRUE

Girl, did you find a sexy boyfriend in town and decide to ignore me?

PRUE

Coffee before work today?

It was my fifth text to my best friend and there had only been crickets since. Something strange settled in my gut and I realized that she'd been feeling someone watching her, had a headache, and now she wasn't answering.

That feeling became a full-blown urge to move and something on my dresser started clinking.

The mirror.

It was hitting the small trinket bowl I had up there as it danced around like a phone on vibrate. I snatched it up and ran through the house.

"I need you!" I took the stairs two at a time until I was sliding across the foyer. Merrick caught me and brought me to a halt.

"What's wrong?" he asked as Dorian burst through the back door. Naked again. Rook wasn't here, apparently, but that was fine. I flipped the mirror and let it do the talking.

"No!" Blake screamed, her cries echoing out of the mirror as she held out her hands to brace against something.

"Oh my god," I sobbed, forcing myself to watch for any clue as to where she'd be. If she was at home sleeping off a cursed dessert hangover I was wrapping her in a bubble.

“Come on, let’s go,” Merrick said, pulling me downstairs and out of the front door. I dropped the mirror but right now all I could think about was her.

That was all I needed to take the lead, sprinting down the road to Blake’s little cottage. The windows were dark when we got there and I wrenched open the front door, trying not to overthink about the fact it should have been locked.

“Blake!” I screamed as I checked each room, my panic only growing when my bestie was nowhere to be found.

She had to be here.

Dorian was barking orders into his phone, likely alerting Rook. I tucked away the mirror refusing to let them take the one thing that might just tell me where she was at.

By the time I checked the house twice over, the guards were filing in. Dorian guided me over to the side before shifting. This time I don’t think it was voluntary.

“Why are you even here?” one of the guards asked as Merrick reached us. He’d been catching up Rook but they all surrounded me as the guard’s harsh voice rose. “You seem to always be in the middle.”

“She’s my best friend, didn’t feel well last night, and is now not answering texts she always answers,” I said around my tears, glaring at the asshole. “Of course, I’d come.”

“Go home then,” he said, dismissing me. “We’ll take it from here.”

Dorian’s growl had him freezing mid-step and turning around. Rook crossed his arms and stood in front of both of them.

“I’m magistrate. Will you be speaking to me the same way?”

The guard’s face paled significantly as he sputtered out some half-assed explanation. “I’m sorry, it just seems suspicious.”

“You’re not dismissing this one,” I protested as I stepped closer to Rook, breathing in his scent to calm my frantic heartbeat. “She would never leave without her things. Her phone is still in there on the charger.”

“Forced entry in the back,” someone called out from inside and I lost it then, sobbing hard enough the others had to catch me.

While I was having solo time with Rook, someone had taken my bestie. I had never felt so scared in my entire life.

“Dorian?” Rook asked, looking at him. He put his nose to the ground then trotted past the guards as he did his own investigation. I clung to

Merrick as we waited for the verdict.

When Dorian came back and shifted, he frowned. "It smells just like her. Someone forced their way in but the absence of scent is the same as it was at our place."

"So, they're connected?" Merrick questioned, taken aback. "How does that make any sense?"

The guards phones started buzzing before a robotic voice came through. "Available units to Moonlit Park. There's been an attack."

They didn't pay attention to us as most of the guards rushed off. I was moving before anyone could stop me, heading for the park. Horror washed over me as I saw the same old man on the ground.

He was alive, thank the gods, but could barely form words. What the hell was happening in this town?

My men stood behind me and just their presence alone helped calm me enough to think.

"Woah, that's the man that the mirror showed us," Rook said as he realized what was happening.

"He's alive, which means we saw a future event. We might still have time," Merrick said as gently as possible. But how could you really reassure someone that saw their best friend be attacked?

Dorian pulled me into his side. "We will find her and the bastard that took her."

I gave a gentle nod, but my heart was still heavy.

"Well, we aren't going to get any help here. Let's consult the mirror and see if we can get some more details to where Blake is," Rook offered, guiding the group away from the park.

That was a good idea. Even if I didn't want to see Blake hurt again. I would do it for her. Always. I would do anything for the person who became my family when I truly needed it.

"We need to head to my cabin in the woods. I have a scrying crystal and map there. I want to try and see if I have any luck," I piped in.

"Cabin?" Dorian asked, confused. I glanced around to make sure no one was listening before answering him.

"Not all of my cursed objects and antiques are shipped in. Sometimes, I have to sneak out. The cabin was standing before this cursed town and I sort of... took it over. It's where I started my experiments and planned my excursions beyond the town's borders."

Dorian chuckled. "Of course. I should have known."

"I like seeing you lean into your witchy side. There's a new light in your eyes," Merrick said with a soft smile.

He wasn't wrong. I even felt more connected to my powers. I was so worried about being cursed and finding a cure, that I never let myself enjoy my true nature.

"Divide and conquer? Dorian and I can grab the mirror and meet you at the cabin?" Rook asked.

Dorian growled at the idea of leaving me without an alpha. I think that was his new favorite phrase.

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"Easy there, we need to cover more ground and I'll need your nose as a guide. The mirror doesn't tell us when the events are. Besides, that nose of yours may come in handy if Prue does find a location. She can call us," Rook tried to convince his brother.

"Let's make sure that he is okay first. Rook, can you use your pull to get info on his care?" I asked. "I'll feel better once I see him loaded into the ambulance."

Just as the words left my lips the vehicle pulled up with the lights and sirens on at full blast.

"That was spooky," Dorian commented.

"I have that effect on people," I smirked with a shrug.

As soon as the gentleman was on the stretcher, I gave the go ahead for us to move.

"Merrick, you're with me," I said, looping an arm with his. He let out a shudder of pleasure at my touch and I wanted to pull him closer.

"How are we getting to the cabin?" he asked as I pulled him in the opposite direction of the park.

"Walking. The fresh air helps me think. If that's okay with you?" I asked.

"Yes, it's nice to see the town when I'm not running naked from the cops," he admitted.

"At least it wasn't your skin," I offered up, letting a hint of jealousy leak into the words. "I'm the only one allowed to see that side of you now."

He gave me a heated look before it faded back to frustration.

"It wasn't the best feeling. I never knew when I'd shift back. Being in other people's skin was bad enough. Then the random naked ones were so much worse. It felt violating on so many levels... for both of us."

"Yeah, I wouldn't want the whole town to see me in my birthday suit. Though, maybe they would like me more if they did," I teased.

"Does most of the town act mean to you?" he asked, genuinely confused. I couldn't blame him. No one should really stand out in a town full of curses. But his curse found a way, and so did mine at times. That doesn't go unnoticed.

"Some of the old timers are and any of the legal teams. It was rough when I moved here, especially losing my family. Curing my curse became an obsession and it didn't always end well. Then I found Blake and that changed it all. I stopped caring about them and built my life with her. I have to get her back," I explained, trying to sound indifferent but the truth was it still hurt. No one liked to be an outsider. Especially not here.

I was in my head enough that I stumbled on a crack in the sidewalk. It would have had me falling on my face but Merrick caught me just an inch before I made contact. My eyes went wide as I studied the cement in front of me.

"There was a ladybug in our path," I joked as Merrick stood me back up. My cheeks burned with embarrassment.

"Is that why you almost fell? So you didn't crush it, witchling?" he asked as I wobbled a little on my feet. At least he found my clumsiness and humor endearing.

"Nope, just pointing it out. I tripped on that crack." He snorted as I guided him into the treeline and away from dangerous sidewalks.

With my stress I could feel my magic burning a little brighter and was terrified it would end badly for Moonlit Grove.

We were quiet as we navigated through the forest. It was the edge of town, a barrier of sorts, and they didn't exactly encourage us to travel out here. Which meant, no real paths.

As we walked I ran my hand over the branches and leaves to make sure my wolf could follow us easily since they didn't know the way.

I spotted a few of my markers that guided the way. A stack of rocks in a small tower, the tree I carved an arrow into low enough you had to know it was there to see it, and the little creek.

We hopped across the creek using the flat stones, and finally we neared the cabin that I'd covered in vines. He looked confused when we stopped until I brushed them aside to reveal a wooden door.

The cabin was fairly small but I'd gutted nearly everything but the bathroom and a single bed. The rest of the tables and chairs held books and equipment. Even though I hadn't been here in a few months it was still fairly clean. The vine barrier really helped with that.

"Wow," he said as he took it in. I flicked my hand at the lanterns that hung overhead and they flared to life, filling the dark space with light.

"And you worried about a ladybug when there are probably a million spiders in here?" he teased. I snorted out a laugh as I picked up the experiment notes I'd used last time I was here, running my fingers over the lines.

"This was the chicken experiment," I said as I jotted a note about the outcome. Including the fact they'd changed in size.

"Let's not try that again. We're trying not to draw attention to ourselves," he said.

We both froze as a branch snapped outside. He pulled me close until I heard Rook's voice.

"Why are we stopping here?" When no answer came I assumed Dorian was in wolf form. I couldn't resist as I held a finger to my lips before tiptoeing to the door. We'd left it open, so all I had to do was burst out of the vines.

Dorian watched on, unamused. He likely heard me.

Rook, however, let out a scream and accidentally threw the mirror. My eyes widened in horror and I lunged after it. When it was clear I was going to miss, Dorian took over, snatching it by the handle in his fangs and stopping next to me.

"Good save," I groaned out, the wind was knocked out of me as I collided with the forest floor. Rook picked me back up, placing me on my feet, and I took the mirror from Dorian.

He shifted back and my eyes dipped lower without thought before I forced myself to look away. Now was not the time to think about how big my alpha was.

“This is impressive, little witch,” Rook said as he took in everything I had, then picked up my experiment notes. He flipped through but didn’t say anything as I sat down on one of the empty chairs.

“Let’s try this out,” I said, drawing them closer. The mirror was cold and dormant in my hands.

“Maybe think about Blake and put your intentions into it,” Dorian said in a hushed tone. We barely breathed as the tension of the moment rose.

I didn’t think about not being able to do this, I focused on my best friend. Her presence, her scent, anything that would paint the picture in my mind.

“Show me Blake,” I demanded of the mirror as I held it in front of me. The guys stayed behind me so they could watch as the mirror swirled to life. At first all I could see was a swirling fog.

Then her screams echoed out.

A male’s rough voice growled out a warning. “Keep quiet or I’ll kill you early.”

“Fuck you!” she screamed out. I was both proud and terrified at her defiance. A face appeared on the mirror, contorted by fury but I recognized the man staring back.

“My brother has her.”



Prue

Tripp? Why was he here in Moonlit Grove? I hadn't seen him since my sentencing. That smug look on his face as I was taken from the only home I'd known and thrown here was forever burned in my memory..

"Brother?" Dorian asked, after shifting back.

I almost asked him to keep the ears and tail but now wasn't the time for indulgence. We have to keep focus on Blake and getting her out of his evil clutches.

"Yes. He and my parents never once defended me at my trial. They were glad to be rid of me. So, I don't understand why he is behind all of this," I explained as I dug through drawers. I searched for the map and crystal I had put up for safekeeping but now I couldn't remember where.

"Can we help you look for something?" Rook asked, noticing the panic growing on my face.

"Sure, it's a folded map and a purple scrying crystal. They should be together in one of these drawers," I answered without stopping.

I heard them rustling around and I didn't breathe easier until Merrick spoke up.

"I think I found them," he called out as he tugged a bundle from a drawer across the room.

On fast feet, I rushed across the little cabin and snatched the items from his hands. I planted a quick kiss on his cheek and muttered a thank you as I laid out the map on the small table in the center of the room.

"If I knew that was the reward, I would have searched faster," Rook sighed under his breath. Ever the dramatic one.

"Do you need something of Blake's?" Dorian asked. "I could run and get it."

"I don't think I do. She's my best friend and I think that connection is strong enough. Let me try and if we don't get something, I'll send you to her place. I want you three here to steady me, please," I said, almost pleading with them.

"Nothing is going to get us to leave, unless you order it," Rook stated, matter-of-fact. My alpha was as steady as they come when it mattered.

"Thank you. Can you each stand on a side of the table and focus on Blake? I know that you don't know her well yet, but I need all the energy on her, not me," I said.

The three of them moved without a second thought and closed their eyes. I could hear them mumble Blake's name quietly before I did the same.

I held the crystal over our little town, starting over her shop. We knew that she wasn't there but I hoped that we were wrong. The crystal swung back and forth without falling.

"Okay, that's a no," I breathed out before moving it slowly over the rest of the map. Trusting my magic to find her, I closed my eyes to focus on my best friend. Her smile, her laugh, and her sunshine in a dim town.

Once I felt the chain start circling in my palm, hope rose in my soul, but I didn't dare open an eye yet.

"It's stopped," Merrick said out loud right as I felt the sway come to a quick halt.

I peeked an eye open and he was right. We all leaned a little closer to see where it had landed.

It was at the old train yard, across town. It had been boarded up for all the years I'd been here. The one place that we wouldn't have thought to search.

"Do any of you know about this place?" Rook asked.

"Nothing more than it was abandoned before I moved here," I explained. "A few locals call it haunted but we've never seen anything. In fact, they patrol over there all the time."

"I'm still new in town, my wolf and I haven't scouted it out yet," Dorian said, his ears already sprouting as he considered it.

"I've been through there hiding. Some homeless people and a lot of blind corners," Merrick admitted.

"Dorian?" Rook started to question.

"On it," he said as the tail appeared and he headed out the door, already starting to shift.

"You're sending him alone?" I asked, alarmed now. That was not a good plan.

"He'll stay in the shadows and report back," he promised. "Until then... need to tell the magistrate."

"Is that a good idea?" I asked, stunned that he'd even trust them to handle this. "They've never been on our side."

"No, they haven't," he agreed. "But they also know damn well a missing cursed omega doesn't look good."

"True," I admitted reluctantly. "But if this is my brother, I'd like to face it first. You're by my side. I'll be safe."

"I don't want you anywhere near that psycho," Merrick finally chimed in, stopping Rook and I from descending into a full argument.

"Me, either, but what choice do I have? He took her because of me. He shot at Dorian also because of me if I had to guess."

"That doesn't make sense now, but why would he go to these lengths?"

I sat down heavily. "With him, it's hard to tell. Sometimes, he'd get pissed off because I 'gave him a bad name' other times he'd blame me for not solving his problems. My parents worshipped the ground he walked on and I doubt that's changed. So, in his mind, he found a reason and this is his revenge. He's always been a bit... unsettling. With my parents not there to stop him, who knows what he's done."

Merrick pulled me into his lap, his nose nuzzling into my hair as his sweet candy corn scent surrounded me. This time his beta calm couldn't touch me. Not when every time I closed my eyes I pictured Blake's terrified face and heard her screams.

Dorian was gone for nearly an hour before he came back. I heard him rustling outside then he ducked under the vines. He shifted back, but he was agitated, his ears and tail visible still. Both were twitching with unease.

"What did you find?" I demanded, hopping off of Merrick and rushing over.

"He's there," he said, his voice grim. "She's alive, I don't know if I'd say 'safe' but from what I could hear echoing out he was ranting about you."

"Me?" I asked, not surprised, but a little confused on what I could have done to make him this angry.

“You, apparently, have ruined his life and reputation by being cursed. He thinks if he kills you he’ll be free of it,” Dorian summarized on a growl. He was livid and honestly my brother was lucky to still be alive.

“See, we need reinforcements,” Rook pointed out. “At least let me get a few guards on board.”

“No,” I said firmly. “If you do, you’re ruining any chance we have at finding real answers.”

He sighed and ran a hand over his face.

“We should move. She’s not safe,” Dorian said before turning to me. “And you, my dear witch, are going to stick by your mates.”

“Let me go in first. I can pretend to be you,” Merrick said. He closed his eyes and his form rippled before shifting into an identical copy of me.

“You’ve never looked better, beta,” Rook teased but I shook my head.

“Absolutely not. I’d never forgive myself if he hurt you.”

They all gave me a look. I knew what they were conveying. That I was willing to let myself get hurt which they’d hate just the same.

“Let’s move,” I said instead, rushing out of the room.

“We have to stop at my car,” Rook suggested. I didn’t question why as he led us through the forest and back out onto familiar streets. It was quiet this time of evening and we didn’t get any strange looks as we rushed by the few lingering outside of businesses.

When we got to Rook’s place, he pulled open the trunk and lifted the bottom of the trunk to show the compartment that should hold a tire.

Instead it held an arsenal. Small, glass darts with different colored liquids pre-loaded into them. A few guns, a fucking sword, an assortment of daggers, and the dart gun itself.

“Whoa,” Merrick said, choosing a dagger for himself. Rook didn’t complain as he strapped on several harnesses and loaded his body with weapons. Dorian didn’t bother, mostly because he was a weapon already in wolf form.

My stomach churned at the thought of them going in there with me, but I was far too terrified to attempt it alone.

He snagged a separate harness and grabbed two daggers. One was sheathed and he tucked it into my boot before securing the harness under my shirt, leaving the handle between my breasts where I could easily pull it free.

He closed the trunk when everyone was satisfied with their picks. We shared one look that said everything we couldn't put into words yet.

That we were glad we found each other, no matter what happened. That we had each others' backs even if it turned ugly. I'd never felt closer to anyone outside of Blake, and once this was said and done, I was more than ready to officially make them my pack.

Bites and all.

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Dorian

Was my dorky, uptight brother really a secret badass? Since when did he have a mini stockpile of weapons in the trunk?

It was hot as hell to watch my mate study the weapons, test their weight, and strap them to her body. Though, I was going to make damn sure she didn't have to use them.

They were ready for a war and I just needed to shift when we got there. I'd be weapon enough.

Every cell of my being wanted to lock Prue up in that cabin and take on her brother without her. But having my mate hate us would be far worse.

"Are you sure we can't talk you out of going?" I asked with a hopeful smile.

The death stare that she answered with was more than enough confirmation.

"Just checking," I reassured her with a defeated sigh. "We would never keep you from doing anything that you wanted. I just know that the three of us couldn't bear it if something happened to you, either."

Her expression changed just a little, telling me that she meant business.

"Can't blame a guy for trying," Rook offered up with a faint smile.

"I know and I'm being stubborn, but there is no way in hell that I will let fear rule my life," she told the three of us. Her determination was strong but so were her survival skills. I'd have to focus on that.

"If my evil brother kidnapped my best friend, I'd want to confront him, too," Merrick commented.

“Not helping, bro,” I chided. He shrugged, completely unrepentant. He was sometimes a little too blunt for his own good.

“Come on, get in. We are wasting time here debating this. Blake is waiting,” Rook stated as he climbed in the passenger seat.

“I’ll meet you there,” I told them. Running in my wolf form would help me relieve some of the tension that was building in my system.

“Be careful,” Prue called after me.

I turned and winked at her as the shift took over. My limbs and teeth lengthened as my fur sprouted over my skin. Ever since I was cursed, I hated shifting, but since finding my mate I’ve regained control. Shifting on my terms was freeing.

My paws padded on the dirt with ease, even the rock here and there didn’t slow me down. I was one with my wolf and we agreed that we would do what we had to keep our mate safe.

My brother and Merrick were in the back of my mind as well, but Prue was my main concern.

When I reached the outskirts of the train depot, Rook’s car was slowly rolling into the yard with the lights off. I couldn’t believe that I beat them, but this wasn’t the right time to rub it in his face.

I stayed in the treeline until I heard my brother call out.

“Dorian, you here?” Rook whispered once he stepped out onto the loose gravel. Most of this area had been overtaken by nature. Another way to deter curious townsfolk from checking it out.

I stayed in my wolf form and walked to Prue’s side.

She ran a hand over my back absentmindedly and I reminded myself that I was in wolf form and that was normal. Prue wasn’t doing this to be cruel, but I’d been there before. My tension was so high it was letting old insecurities creep out and I shoved them back where they belonged.

“Ready?” Merrick in his Prue form asked. It was weird hearing his voice come from her mouth.

“I will never get used to that,” Rook said with a shudder, glancing from Prue to fake Prue and back.

“I’m as ready as I can be. I’ll go in first and stay out of sight. If you hear me say ‘cheese pizza’ come in,” she explained.

“‘Cheese pizza?’” Merrick asked and raised one of his fake Prue eyebrows. It was uncanny to see her look dry and aloof like Merrick could pull off.

“What? I’m not going to try and fit pineapple into a sentence,” she answered as she blew out an anxious breath.

“Are we really going to stand around here and discuss safe words?” Rook asked.

There was a scream from Blake in the distance and that snapped us all back to reality.

“Dorian, lead us,” Rook ordered.

If he says good dog when I do, I’m going to bite his ass. I snorted at him, but headed off in the direction where the screams came from.

There were dim lights coming through the cracks of the boarded windows and I heard a male voice getting louder with each word. He was losing it just like I’d explained earlier. I just hoped he kept his hands to himself.

Her name echoed out from his ranting at least every few words and that had the hair on the back of my neck rising. The hate he had for his sister was visceral.

Now that I knew her, I couldn’t imagine anyone knowing her and feeling that way.

Prue let out a breath before she took the first step into the building. I followed right behind her. The lobby was empty and musty. Tendrils of moonlight showed a billowing of dust particles hovering in the air.

The old chairs were collapsed and some clearly had been gnawed at by wildlife. Large cobwebs stretched from every corner and coated the ceiling. I could hear the skittering of tiny paws but wasn’t about to tell the others. Even my wolf ignored the hunt in favor of keeping tabs on our surroundings.

The barriers had been pulled down over the ticket desk but I knew he wasn’t behind there now. He was further in the building, his voice just distant enough to know we hadn’t found him quite yet.

Something crashed against the wall and Merrick moved ahead, keeping ‘Prue’ at the front of our procession while she pulled a hood over her head just behind him.

“Tripp? Are you here?” she called and the rest of us ducked into an open doorway as the one at the end of the hall creaked open.

A man stepped out with a wide smile on his face. His hair was dark like Prue’s but his eyes were cold and hollow, the only light in them was downright unsettling. His hair was long and shaggy, dirt hanging in the oily

locks. There were sharp angles to his face and gaunt cheeks that truly set them apart. Aside from eye color and hair color, there weren't many similarities in the two.

Likely because this sibling was a true psychopath. One with magic, which made it far worse.

"Finally, you realized it's me?" he asked with a flourish and a crooked grin. With the dark clothes and gaudy rings and potion bottle strapped to his belt, he was really going for the demented wizard look.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked, not moving a muscle. He didn't notice it wasn't 'Prue's' mouth moving asking the question. He was too busy looking behind him to take in his handiwork.

"Well, I've always had a flair for the dramatic. I had to make an entrance, didn't I?" he laughed a little too loudly.

"A phone call would have worked just as well," she stated. "I'm not that hard to find. Not to mention, no one seemed eager to keep in contact."

"What fun would that be? How about I show you what your friend and I have been up to?" He questioned, waving her in. I didn't like how eager he was to get her alone.

Rook waved his hand, hiding the true Prue from sight so she would stay invisible as they passed into the room.

"If you hurt her, I swear I will kill you," Prue started before he cut her off quickly with a clicking of his tongue.

"Now, now, sister dear. Not in front of our guest. Manners, remember?" Tripp giggled like they were kids at their family table.

What the fuck was wrong with this guy?

Prue was cursed but her brother was just downright insane.



PRUE

I felt it the moment Rook put a glamour on me. A warmth spread over me like someone poured something on my head and it dripped down until it

coated my entire body. One glance down at my invisible arm told me I was moving undetected now.

Tripp let out another low chuckle like this was all big fun. He'd fucking lost it. I always knew he had an insane ego and a bit of a sadistic side, but as I looked around at his torture chamber I nearly puked.

Blake was shackled to the wall, the chains short enough she couldn't sit. Her body was covered in dirt and her clothes caked in grime, but she was alive.

The moment I stepped inside she let out a little sob but he turned to her and held up a hand, stopping it immediately. The way he stared told me he was threatening her silently.

When he turned back to us I snuck Blake's way, my fingers tapping her nose gently before I whispered in her ear.

"It's me. Shh." She jolted but he didn't notice as his fingers ran over his weapons. Merrick stood by the door, tense, but watching. I could feel the other two just beyond the door.

"He plans to kill you, Prue," Blake hissed. "He's mad that you've ruined his life with your curse. He lost out on a big pack once they heard about the sentencing."

My chest tightened at her words. He wanted to kill me for something I couldn't help. Something that I now couldn't stop wondering was something he did to me in the first place.

"I'm freeing you, keep your arms up then when you can, fucking run," I breathed out as quietly as possible.

I released one arm and gently laid the chains behind her. Blake played along, keeping her arm up. He was back to ranting now and I worked on the next. Then I was moving back to Merrick.

"Did you curse me, Tripp?"

He froze as my words landed, his hand curling around a pointed instrument of some kind. When he spun back around his eyes had bled to black and his expression was full of fury.

"Yes, of fucking course, I did! You were this perfect little princess for our parents. The smart one, the one who was incredible at magic. Everything was so fucking easy for you while I was an afterthought!"

His version of our childhood was so twisted that I couldn't help but laugh.

“You’re kidding, right? I was the one always blamed for your mistakes. Always expected to fix things,” I ground out.

He stepped forward, gesturing with the tool. “Because you were the responsible one! I was always the one they were hard on. And look how this treated me. Cursed you with chaos magic to make your life hell and you instead made mine worse!”

“I’m cursed and was sent here, but your life was worse?!” I demanded, now not caring that I was yelling.

He growled again. “I had a pack. One that would have given me the money and respect I deserved. Until you fucked up your final. Now I can’t get a pack or get a real job that isn’t tainted before they give me a shot.”

“Because of your doing!” I argued again, unable to stop myself. How could he not see that everything he was angry about was his doing.

“Don’t worry, I have a plan,” he said, personality switching from angry to proud of himself. “I’m going to kill you here. Blame your magic. Then I’ll come out the other side, the distraught brother who is a victim and wishes things could have been different. I was just trying to help and nearly died in the process.”

The fake pout at the end for emphasis had my eyes rolling. I knew damn well this wasn’t going to play out like he planned.

“I have no use for her,” he tagged on, pointing at Blake. “But she was such pretty bait. Led you right to me like I knew it would. Especially since I missed my shot at your wolf. I even made sure that merchant sold you the mirror. Gave you a way to track me.”

He swept his arms out to his side as if showing off all his hard work he’d done to get me here with him.

I felt the air shift around me as the other two joined us. The chain shifted, and Blake was suddenly gone now, too. Another breeze and the quick padding of bare feet echoed out and I knew she had escaped, my chest loosening enough to breathe normally for a moment.

Then chaos hit.

My brother muttered one word and out of nowhere there were thirteen of him filling the room. If he hadn’t cursed me, would my magic have also obeyed that easily? It had been too long since it listened to my intent... which was how we got monstrous chickens.

The illusion fell as Rook was distracted, showing both me and Merrick. My brother was so deluded by his fantasy he didn’t notice the changes in

the room or me pulling my magic forward, forming a weapon in my hand. Unfortunately my curse had other plans, but at least it was something I could still use.

“You can’t escape your fate Prue,” the mini army of my brother said in unison. Their words thundered in my ears.

“You forget. I have something you don’t,” I replied as I inched towards the original.

“If you say ‘family’ I’m going to throw up,” he said in disgust, a sneer on his lips now. “Our parents tried to push that stupid idea on me and you see how that turned out. So, spare me.”

I raised the weapon of choice up and said, “No, this brick.”

Sometimes you had to use what you had. I could use a fucking chicken right about now, too.

As he turned around to face me, I slammed it into his face, clipping his chin. Tripp let out a cry of pain. The copies did the same but at that moment my pack had attacked as well. Dorian tore at the other forms while Rook tried to put himself between us but I was too close and more copies pulled him into their arms, dragging him out of sight as they closed in around him. Merrick tried to swing but one muttered spell had him flying into the wall, the sickening crack making my blood run cold.

I wanted to run to them but I couldn’t take my eyes off of my brother. If he was strong enough to control that many clones of himself while also monologuing like a movie villain, then I didn’t trust giving him my back.

My nerves were so haywire that a burst of magic hit the room, making my brother and his clones stumble. He let out a snort when that was all that happened. Little did he know it was still mostly pooled in my chest, waiting to strike.

“You can’t win, sister. Your magic has gone rogue, unlike mine that obeys,” Tripp said as he held his chin. Even when he was hurting he was still a raging asshole.

He started to chant another spell with his eyes locked on Rook, but I lunged forward, slamming the brick into his face again before he could finish. This time I aimed for his cheek.

Could I kill my brother? I didn’t think so, but if he didn’t stop threatening my pack and Blake, I wasn’t going to stand aside and let that happen.

“You did all of this to hurt me and still act like I'm the problem?” I asked as I held up the brick to threaten him. “Reverse it. Now.”

My words had him throwing his head back and laughing harder than ever, despite the pain of my blows and a promise for more.

“Even if I wanted to, there is no cure. Well, other than death,” he taunted me, blood dripping from the cut on his cheek into his mouth. He smiled at me with red tinted teeth. “Though, that can be arranged. I could use someone to experiment new spells on.”

“I don't believe you, What did you add to the potion?” I questioned as I watched him for any change in his breathing. I could always tell when he was lying.

I ignored the rest of his taunts. That wouldn't be happening.

Tripp backed away from me a few steps and taunted me in a sing-song voice, “I'll never tell.”

Then one of his copies grabbed me from behind, pulling my arms behind my back. That action forced the brick to fall on his toe. He yelped in pain but didn't release me.

“I don't need a primitive weapon to kill you,” Tripp growled as he took advantage of my situation and hit me hard in the stomach. The breath in my lungs released in a whoosh.

“Fuck you,” I cursed him, putting every ounce of venom into my tone I could manage. He hit me again before I recovered and then grabbed the brick I had used on him.

“Let's see how much you like it,” he said as he raised it higher. I braced for the impact but just before he struck, wolf fangs sunk into his wrist, snapping it in a single bite. Darkness swept around us. I knew it was Rook's doing since I could see.

Tripp and his look-alikes all stumbled around, fury taking over their faces, twisting them into something bordering monstrous.

Even as they stumbled in the darkness, the forms never flickered. He, clearly, wasn't paying attention now. What the hell was this magic?

Tripp screamed in pain as Dorian snapped his maw down on his leg this time. His wrist was already hanging uselessly, now he was falling to the ground. As he bellowed out his rage and pain, more copies appeared. I wanted to smack myself for not letting Rook call in reinforcements.

My curse chose that moment to make itself known. It started to bubble under my skin, a telltale sign it was going to release.

“Pack, cover, now!” I ordered as the golden magic formed on my fingers tips.

I curled my fists and held onto it the best I could, keeping it at bay until Rook pulled Merrick and Dorian out of sight, the dense fog going with them.

“Look, even they don’t want anything to do with a fuck-up like you,” he bellowed out, his laughter bordering psychotic now as pain and fury mixed with his normal personality.

He thought that he was winning and we were trying to escape. This time, instead of pushing it away, I welcomed the release of power that was pent up inside and focused it all on Tripp and his copies. I forced my hands toward them, magic bursting free in a bright arc of lightning.

It hit the clones in a burst of electrified magic, their forms disintegrating on contact. Somehow, my brother was still on his feet. His wounds were pouring blood and his smile was insane.

How did it not hurt him more?!

“Tsk, tsk, can’t you see by now, magic can’t hurt me?” he asked with a smirk.

“I do,” I smiled as if this wasn’t a shock. Letting him see any amount of weakness would be a mistake. My pack was right outside and would be here in a second.

Now that my magic had calmed, I let my gaze take in the room, spotting a wooden beam above his head. I let a strand of focused magic wrap around it, holding the other end in my palm. I could feel the thread hot and ready in my hand.

“But there are workarounds to everything,” I pointed out. His eyebrows furrowed as I yanked hard on the magic. For once, my powers obeyed as I pulled on the golden thread with everything I had. The shock on his face was priceless before he was buried under the weight of it.

From his groans of pain, he was still alive. That just meant he’d have to face his crimes and I was more than happy to watch that play out.

With the loud thud and shower of plaster, my guys ran back in to check me over. Finally, the late and great Moonlit Grove magistrate guards burst in, guns and magic at the ready.

“Glad that we handled this for you,” Rook sneered. “You can do the clean up.”

The guard in charge looked from the four of us to the litter of identical bodies on the ground along with my brother trapped under the ceiling beam, just his feet poking out like the wicked witch. “What happened here?”

“Oh, you know, just the evil brother gets thwarted. Just another day in Moonlit Grove,” I commented and I could tell that my guys were holding back their laughter. The fact their dark humor was shining through told me I’d made the right choice in packs.

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Prue

“Stop looking at me like that,” Blake groaned. My bestie was a fighter, but she looked rough. Her red hair was covered in grime still, bruises bloomed along her face and arms, especially where the shackles hit.

She promised she was okay, just in pain. It felt like decades he had her, but he was mainly interested in telling her how awful I was, not hurting her. The only reason she looked beat up was how hard she fought when he took her.

Something she was quite proud of.

My bestie was feisty as hell.

“I’m sorry,” I said for what felt like the hundredth time. But I couldn’t help it. Tripp was my brother and he was after me. She was just a means to get me to him at the station.

“They’re letting me go today,” she promised, sounding fully confident. “Nothing is broken, this will heal, and your asshole of a brother is in magistrate custody. Word on the street is that they are livid he got past their guard and spells.”

“I can’t believe he admitted to cursing me,” I whispered.

“I’m sorry. This is exactly why you wanted nothing to do with them. We’re family enough,” she said as she gave my hand a squeeze.

Before we could say anything else the doctor was sweeping back in, file in hand. “It looks like your bloodwork and x-rays are showing you’re in fairly good condition. The IVs have cleared up the dehydration, and with some rest and relaxation you should be back to yourself in a few weeks.”

“Thank fuck,” Blake groaned, being a good little patient as he checked her vitals until he was satisfied.

“I want to see you in two weeks,” he said firmly. “For now, my nurse is working on your discharge paperwork.”

“You’re coming back with us,” I told her, crossing my arms and doing my best to look authoritative.

She wrinkled her nose at me. “No offense, but absolutely not. You have a pack and I want my own bed. He’s gone and I have a charged phone. It’ll be okay.”

“Fine,” I sighed. “But one call and I’m there.”

“I’ll call if I need you. For now, I just need my prescription and my own bed.”

In forty-five minutes, I was able to give her that. She had electrolytes and water by her bedside, her meds were taken, and she was all tucked in.

My pack was waiting outside. Dorian and Rook in particular had been hovering like crazy. But I couldn’t help but go up to my beta. He’d been unusually quiet after the doctor checked him out.

“You okay?”

“You’re asking me?” he asked, looking at me like I was crazy. “You’re the one who had her whole life torn apart and her best friend taken.”

“We’ve all been in this and you got hurt,” I argued, hating that they were also affected.

“I’m fine,” he promised, giving me a soft kiss. Merrick and I had taken things slow but I hoped he’d be up for changing that soon.

Merrick wrapped his hand in mine and pulled me towards my alphas.

“I’m thinking about a night in, movies, and junk food,” Dorian said as we stopped in front of them.

“Can we do it at my house? I long for my bed. But with all of you with me,” I quickly explained. “I’ve missed my place.”

“Of course, stream horror movies and binge on pizza and ice cream,” Dorian added.

“What about a mix of horror and cozy Halloween? I need some cheesy rom coms or a few classics to mix it up after this last fiasco,” I admitted on a sigh.

“Whatever our witchling wants, she gets,” Merrick agreed.

“You know if you spoil me, I’m going to expect it,” I reminded them, loving that they all stared at me indulgently. We were as close as a pack

could get after all this... at least until we bond and go through a heat together.

“We’re a pack that pampers our girl, no ifs, ands or buts,” Rook added with a wink. “We love to make you smile, little witch.”

“Well, I’ll do my best but there are three of you...” I started, suddenly a bit nervous about what that really meant. How could I give them each equal attention? If I had to get it down to an even, perfect split every time it would be more stress than anything.

“And we will do our best not to get jealous. We don’t want you stressing on it,” Dorian said definitively. “Now, let’s split up and you two get the pizza and we’ll get the ice cream.”

“Rook, remember, no chickens in the house. We will see you soon,” I said as I gave a quick kiss to Rook then Dorian before I gave the pair a quick kiss on the cheek before pulling my shapeshifter off towards the pizza place.

The pizza shop was packed but we fought our way to the counter to order.

The kid that was always working smiled as he got out his pen and pad waiting for me to tell him what we wanted.

“I need two Pies Have Eyes and one Jack O’ Lantern and can I add on a Toxic Sludge Mac?” I asked.

“On it, for here or to go?” he asked, still writing the order down.

“What all did you get? I can’t say that I’ve ever had a Pies Have Eyes or whatever else you said,” Merrick said, looking more than a little suspicious.

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“It’s just a Halloween play on names. They do it every year. Pies Have Eyes is mozzarella and black olives and the other is pumpkin shaped with pepperoni and black olives. The pasta is just green mac and cheese. Are those okay with you?” I asked, I hadn’t thought to see what he wanted before just ordering like usual.

“Stop overthinking it,” Merrick said, pulling me closer to him. “I’m not a picky eater. I just wanted to know that it wasn’t eel guts or real pumpkin.”

That made me laugh as I looked up at him. “I’m not used to ordering for all of us yet, but I will work on learning all the likes and dislikes you three have.”

“Still overthinking it,” he pointed out gently. “This is all new for all of us. Now that your brother is out of our hair we can actually take the time to get used to being a pack without watching over our shoulders and worrying about you being safe.”

“I’m just glad that none of you got hurt,” I said quietly, my stomach churning at the mere thought. Blake was just as bad, I couldn’t imagine having more worry and guilt on my shoulders.

“We’re glad that you didn’t, either. Who knew we’d go through so much in so little time,” he said, shaking his head.

“I mean we are in a town of cursed supernaturals, so it’s not unreasonable that we have. I just hate that I was the reason that you were in danger. None of you signed up for that.”

Just before he could speak, my name was called. “Prue, your order’s up.”

“What did you want to say?” I asked as I took his hand in mine and pulled him alongside me.

“Just forget it, let’s get back to the house,” he answered, shrinking in on himself.

“Oh no, you’re going to tell me,” I smiled and kissed him on the cheek.

He gave me a faint smile but I knew that he was the one thinking too much right now.

Merrick took the bags in his free hand and I grabbed the boxed pasta.

“Ready?” I questioned and he gave me a little nod.

We pushed our way to the door, and the light breeze hit us. I shivered a little, just because it had been overly warm in the pizza place.

“Are you afraid that our life will be boring now? We still have our curses to research,” I reminded him.

“Maybe, I’m not the best at all that stuff. It’s hard to concentrate when you shift forms at random,” he told me as he kicked a rock that was on the sidewalk. It hit the mailbox that was on the corner and flew back at his leg. He tried to dodge it but the grunt he let out told me all I needed to know.

“You okay?” I asked, much more gentle this time. It was clear my mate was struggling and I wanted to make sure he knew he could trust me with his vulnerable side.

“Yeah, just not sure where to go from here,” he answered honestly. “I shift less but I still live in fear it will happen a lot. I’ve never really found my place in Moonlit Grove.”

“You are always welcome to work at my place, you never have to ask,” I said. “It would give us more time together and maybe I could sleep in once in a while if you were up to opening it for me.”

“We can alternate days,” he suggested, perking up a bit. “I’ve got a good head for numbers and organization.”

“Perfect. Because I don’t,” I admitted. “Most of the time I put them in any free space I can find. It’s pretty cluttered in there and I’ve been meaning to put more effort into fixing that. Instead, I’ve been researching curses. But... from what my brother said, that’s useless now.”

“Not useless. He didn’t know everything,” Merrick said firmly, refusing to believe that. “Any curse can be broken, we just have to find out how.”

“In the meantime, it’s time for us to embrace who we are now, with our curses and flaws,” I said pointedly. A reminder to both of us.

“Agreed,” he said, relaxing enough for me to change the subject to something lighter. We all needed sleep and time to be a pack.

“Any movies that you want to watch? I know when we get back to my place, our place,” I corrected myself, “Rook and Dorian will be all Alpha and try to control the remote. So, I want to get your suggestions now.”

“Our place,’ huh? I like the sound of that,” he smiled to himself, losing the rest of the tension. “I didn’t really watch much TV growing up. Halloween was out of the question in my house. Anything that *you* think that I should watch?”

“There are so many great ones, *Practical Magic* is a favorite of mine. *Hocus Pocus* or for TV shows, there’s *Charmed*,” I blurted out and he laughed.

“What? You asked.”

“I did but from the sound of it they all have a theme, witchling,” he pointed out.

“Well, I may be a little biased,” I said before sending up a spark of magic in the air. My magic responded on instinct this time, doing exactly as I intended. Even with the chaos, that was a little easier than before.

“Any of the three are fine,” Merrick said just as a horn honked behind us. We startled before turning around to find Rook and Dorian pulling up next to us. Rook stuck his head out of the passenger window, grinning at us. Every single one of us was lighter now.

“Get in, losers, we’re going home before the ice cream can melt. You two walk too slow,” Rook teased. His hands went out to take our load from us.

“Fine, but I get the first say in what we watch,” I called out and shot a wink at Merrick. I was going to make sure we watched all three movies before I fell asleep in a junk food coma so they could enjoy my favorites with me.

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Merrick

Sometimes, it felt like I was falling behind the alphas. Their personalities were so dominant. It wasn't necessarily jealousy. I just felt like I needed to make sure Prue knew that I felt the same as they did. That I could take care of her, too.

Before the incident with her brother, most of our solo time was spent bent over books about curses and experimenting with potion blends that never really worked.

Now, I spent my days at her shop. In just a week we've turned around most of the disarray and had dedicated shelves and some rhyme and reason to it all. She loved it and we all liked having someone nearby.

I loved those moments with her. They were quiet and comfortable. But I wanted something different, something more intimate. Not just companionship.

If I wanted to take her out it had to be something romantic and thoughtful. A date that would make her see me in a different light.

I was so nervous as I thought over what to pick that I could feel my form flickering. No one else was around this time, at least.

Until about the fifth anxious circle around the living room when I was suddenly on all fours, fur spreading all over my body.

I tried to curse, but the only thing that came out was a little wolfy whine.

Great.

Dorian must be home now. He was absolutely going to give me shit for this, too.

The alpha himself walked in with his usual half-shifted form, ears twitching and tail flicking back and forth behind him.

He came to a stop in front of me, an instant smile spread across his face, fangs poking out in his signature wolfy grin.

"Well, I don't usually see myself from this view. It's kind of interesting. I'm an impressive wolf." His chest puffed out a little as he admired his own shifter form.

I tried to roll my eyes, but I doubted it was effective.

"What has you so nervous?" he questioned, not letting me get off that easily. Because, of course, these alphas could never let anything go.

My wolf form chuffed, and I padded away, trying to put distance between me and him.

"Hey," he said, coming forward and reaching down.

He rested a hand on my neck and I froze on the spot, turning to look back at him. His eyes were imploring me to trust him.

I didn't really know how. I had yet to trust any of them outside of Prue. It wasn't their fault, I just didn't trust easily. But if we were going to be a real pack I needed to give him a shot.

I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths. His hand stroked my neck in a calming manner. A wolf equivalent of a reassuring pat on the back. In this form it felt soothing, not like I wanted to crawl out of my ever-changing skin at human contact. Prue had been the only one to really touch me.

I had to admit there were some merits to being a wolf.

Just as I was getting used to it, I was suddenly on two feet. Dorian's hand lifted off before I could shudder against the touch as I stood up.

"There we go," Dorian said as he stepped back. "As much as I liked being able to see myself in that form, you can't talk. So, what's going on?"

"I'm feeling a little behind," I admitted.

"Behind?" he asked, trying to decipher what I wasn't telling him.

"It's nothing," I said, trying to brush it off, but he stopped me.

"Stop hiding from it. Just tell me." It wasn't a bark, but it was an order. I wasn't an omega that was easy to influence, but at the same time, I found myself wanting to give in to him.

"I feel like I don't have an easy time commanding our omega's attention," I admitted reluctantly.

"Merrick." Dorian was not dismissing me, he was trying to reassure me.

“I know that we can be a lot sometimes,” he admitted, apologetic, “but don’t let that stop you from getting in there. If you’ve got a date idea, take her on it. If you just want some alone time, let us know. We’ll respect it. You’re just as much a part of this pack as we are.”

“I’m trying to remember that. But the first time I’m considering a date and this happens,” I gesture down at my body.

“At least you get to keep your clothes,” he noted drily. I huffed out a laugh and shook my head. But this alpha wasn’t done with me yet. “She would hate to know she’s the source of you erratically shapeshifting.”

I let out a breath. “My shapeshifting is my curse. It’ll never be her fault.”

“Perhaps not this time, but you are nervous about taking her out,” he reasoned.

“I’m just not very good at this. I don’t have experience.”

“Neither did I,” he admitted. “Most women don’t want a man with ears and a tail. But I took a chance and let her in and she surprised me. Last time I needed to shift, I took her on a midnight run. I let my defenses down. It’s hard, but gods, it’s worth it. She would never hurt you, Merrick. It’s okay to trust her.”

“I do trust her,” I said firmly.

He nodded, accepting that answer. “Alright. Then tell me, what is your idea? Where are you taking our girl to win her over?”

“That’s the problem. Where am I going to take her in town that she hasn’t already been? She’s been here for six years.”

“She has,” he confirmed. “So, get creative.”

The alpha wasn’t letting me back down.

“I’m a shapeshifter. I don’t have magic or powers other than shifting like this. There’s no special place to take her or magical thing I can do to make our night fun.”

“Who told you that? Can you use the powers when you’re shapeshifting?”

I opened my mouth to tell him no, but in truth, maybe I could. I’d never really tried. It was always so erratic that I just focused on turning back.

I shrugged. “I don’t know,” I admitted.

“Turn back into me,” he demanded.

I blew out a breath. “It’s been so long since I’ve purposely tried to shapeshift. I was too busy trying not to.”

He just stared until I gave in. Gods, these alphas were a pain in the ass.

Knowing arguing was useless, I closed my eyes and imagined Dorian in his wolf form. Remembered how it felt to be that wolf.

It wasn't hard. That was the first time I'd felt quite so in control.

Then I was on four paws.

"There it is!" Dorian cheered.

It startled me enough that the magic flickered, and I almost turned back to myself.

"Concentrate." Another command. He exuded dominance. It was insane that anyone was brave enough to dismiss him.

"You can do this, Merrick." His strong, steady voice had me refocusing, and the wolf form strengthened again.

"There it is. I want you to try to use some wolf powers." I looked up at him and cocked my head to the side in confusion. He laughed and shrugged. "Okay, maybe we don't get cool, flashy powers, but we've got some strength. Wait."

He jogged outside and came back again with a small log, just thick enough that I wouldn't be able to break it on my own if I tried. I was skeptical, but he just held it out with full, unwavering confidence.

In a moment of frustration, I lunged forward, jaw snapping on the log. Just like that, it broke in two.

Dorian grinned like he'd won something real here. I swear this wolf was insufferable. But even I couldn't shake the camaraderie that was growing between us.

He leaned down and cleaned up the fragments that were left behind and tossed them out the door before returning to me, arms crossed as he assessed the situation.

"Do you have to be nearby? Can you try Rook, for instance?"

I thought of the alpha. His charm. How he smirked at all of us like he was always in on some sort of joke.

Then I was on two feet again. I looked over at Dorian, eyebrow raised.

"Wow. I don't think I've ever seen my brother not looking cocky as fuck. It's kind of unsettling."

I made an attempt at looking confident, and he burst out laughing loud enough that he was doubled over, clutching his stomach.

"Oh my gods, that's too fucking priceless. The trouble we could get up to if you were only a little bit of an asshole. Unfortunately for us, our beta is

too good for that.”

My chest warmed. It was such an offhanded comment, but honestly, it meant the world to me. For a guy that had always gone unnoticed for who he was at the core, this alpha had just given me a compliment to my character. To the man under the changing forms.

“Try an enchantment.” He loved to give orders. But now, I didn’t bristle at it.

“Like what?” Despite being in Rook’s body, I could never quite take their voice. Dorian tried and failed to hold back his laughter at my voice coming out of Rook.

“That’s trippy as fuck,” he said. “Maybe imagine fire dancing in your palm. Fae can do simple enchantments.”

I held out my hand, or Rook’s hand rather, and imagined a small flame. The warmth of it against my palm. The way the flame danced, chasing away shadows.

With a warm burst, fire formed in my palm just as I pictured it. Me being startled meant that it flared larger and erratic, nearly singing my eyebrows in the process.

“Go back to yourself again,” Dorian demanded, as if he could see that I was getting nervous. I imagined Rook’s form falling away, and suddenly, I was myself again. I held out my arms to be sure and yup, there were my familiar freckles and a scar on my left forearm.

“Holy shit,” I breathed out. “It worked.”

“Have you never done that before?” he questioned gently.

All I could do was shake my head in disbelief. “As far as shapeshifting went, I was always the late bloomer. Then one day, while my father was lecturing me about not trying hard enough, I turned into him. He didn’t appreciate it much. Called me a smart ass,” I admitted, shaking my head at the memory.

That was the first time my father said that he’d never been so disappointed in me. It wasn’t the last.

I sighed and shook off that feeling of inadequacy, because the truth was, maybe if someone had believed in me even once, maybe I would’ve been able to do it myself.

“Now that you know, you have an arsenal of magic at your fingertips. That’s powerful as hell, Merrick. I had confidence in you protecting our mate before, but now, I do even more,” he said with full confidence. “You

could channel my wolf and tear anyone that would harm her apart. Channel Rook and throw molten fire. The possibilities are endless. You could weaponize curses.”

“I’m not trying for world domination,” I snorted.

“No,” he agreed easily. “Now tell me what you’re going to do for our Omega.”

“I was thinking maybe a moonlight picnic.”

“Oh, I know the perfect spot,” he said. “I can take you out there and help you set it up. Although, you should probably call whatever restaurant you’re catering from now. Make sure you can get an order ready, unless you plan to cook for yourself.”

It wasn’t that I couldn’t cook. I just didn’t really enjoy it.

A midnight picnic meant we didn’t have a ton of options in town, but we had a few. Not every supernatural was a daylight supernatural, which meant some of the businesses in town opened up at the end of the day.

“Okay,” I said, pulling out my phone, deciding which restaurant to pick. Prue always talked about this Italian restaurant that was owned by a vampire. They may be garlic-averse, but they used every other spice in their repertoire, and it was supposed to be phenomenal.

I stepped away from Dorian long enough to put in an order to pick up at eleven forty-five, just enough time to get it and my girl out to the clearing.

Once I had that ready, I gathered everything I needed to set up a cozy, little nest under the stars.

Dorian turned out to be more of an asset than I realized. He helped me stake out some large branches to set up a makeshift tent, draping the blanket over it before creating a cozy, little nest inside. The entrance opened just enough that you could still see the stars overhead.

“I wish I had some kind of lights,” I admitted as I realized just how dark it would get out here. Prue and I didn’t exactly have night vision.

“Here,” he said, pulling out his phone.

He clicked the button, and it was on speaker, ringing loudly in the quiet forest before Rook’s voice came through.

“Rook, Merrick and I are experimenting with some of his magic. Do you have any lantern enchantments that you know?”

“Actually, yes,” Rook said, not questioning any of this at all. “Picture those old-school hanging lanterns, the kind with metal handles and glass

encasements. I sort of just imagine holding it in my hand, and it appears. It's come in handy a time or two."

"Thanks," Dorian said, explaining nothing before hanging up. Then he looked at me. "Now do what he said."

Instead of those camping lanterns, I pictured the beautiful garden lanterns that glow softly and had intricate designs over the glass. It felt more romantic.

Nothing happened, and he rolled his eyes.

"You have to be Rook to be able to use it," he reminded me.

This time, channeling Rook didn't take much. When I was a few inches taller, I tried again. This time the lantern appeared, swinging in my hand.

The first one was a little wonky. That's why I tossed it among the soft grass, and tried again.

Dorian was unrelenting, pointing out new places to put them, encouraging me every step of the way.

I'd never quite felt like our pack was a family until now.

Dorian was like an older brother, guiding me, refusing to let me hide away from the hard moments.

"The trees need something," he mused. "Think you can make some lanterns on the bushes?"

I had a feeling this was more about testing my new skill rather than the lanterns themselves, but I indulged him. This time I pictured lanterns hanging on thin chains, swinging from the limbs.

They were glowing with magic, so I didn't need to worry about causing a forest fire.

Then again, curses are involved. You never know.

"This is perfect. She's going to love it," he promised. "Now tell me you invited our girl."

I looked over at him in horror, and his eyes widened before I burst out into laughter.

"Of course, I invited her," I said. "She already agreed to the date. I texted her after I ordered the food."

He scoffed. "You got me there, beta. Come on. Time for you to go get dressed up. You've got a woman to woo."



Prue

Merrick's hand was warm in mine as he led me out into the woods. It was the same spot that Dorian had shown me in the moonlight that night, and I wondered if he had any bearing on what was going to happen.

A soft gasp escaped me as we entered the clearing.

They'd transformed it into something truly magical. This felt like something out of a fairytale. A tent was set up with colorful sheets and blankets. The fabric parted to create a big open doorway, revealing a nest inside that spilled out of the doorway.

He had food from my favorite restaurant in one hand, the other still clutched in mine as he pulled me towards the tent.

"You did all this?" I asked.

"I may have had a little help," he admitted. "Dorian is oddly good at pep talks, and he managed to help me realize that I can shapeshift without being forced into it. I even practiced some magic, hence all the lanterns."

They were hanging from the trees, resting against the trunks, surrounding the tent and blankets. They added such a whimsical touch.

It warmed my heart to know that my alphas were taking the beta under their wings, giving him confidence and helping him come to terms with his magic.

"You should've seen his face when I accidentally turned into his wolf," Merrick laughed.

I rolled my eyes. "Knowing Dorian, he was probably fascinated by the sight of himself."

“You would be correct,” Merrick deadpanned. “Then I turned into Rook to enchant all these lanterns. Then Dorian and I built the nest and tent with our hands. No magic necessary.”

“Oh, wow,” I breathed out. “Color me impressed.”

“Me, too,” he admitted with a soft smile as he admired the space with me.

“I needed this,” I admitted. After getting Blake back, things had been quiet. It was just hard to stop looking over my shoulder, expecting him to show up again.

Merrick gave my hand a squeeze, knowing without me having to tell him why it had been so hard. I’d struggled for a long time with the fact my family was so cold. Now, the reality was, I didn’t need or want them in my life.

In fact, I hoped he ended up in the magistrate jail as soon as possible.

“That’s exactly what I thought,” he said. “And I wanted time with my omega.”

I bit back a smile as Merrick led me to the tent. We settled onto the pile of blankets and I snuggled in, taking the takeout container he handed over.

“You’re definitely working hard to win me over, beta,” I teased. “You know I can’t resist amazing carbs.”

He chuckled. “I did, in fact, know that about you.”

“You won’t even miss the garlic in the pasta, I promise. All the herbs are fresh, and they’re amazing cooks.”

Now I was the one nervously rambling. The lights around us danced happily as he leaned in close, calming me. It was silly to feel so nervous around him. We’d been close for weeks. Spent every day together.

But tonight felt different.

I looked at the lantern sitting in front of us as I set my food aside. It almost looked like fireflies dancing inside as it flickered in the dark, chasing away the shadows.

“Even if life gets hectic we have to take moments like this for us. That’s what makes our pack strong and keeps the curses in check,” he said. “And I just want you to know, even if we never find a cure... you mean the world to me, witchling. Nothing could ever change that.”

“Even if I bring nothing but trouble?” I asked, with a hint of vulnerability coming out. It was still hard to shake that what my brother did was not my fault.

Merrick laughed as if that idea was impossible. "I'm not sure if you've noticed, but we're all cursed here," he teased.

I huffed out a laugh, but he had me there. Every one of us had something going on that we wished we could change. Except maybe Rook but he was working just as hard to make sure our curses didn't win.

I placed a kiss on my beta's cheek.

He blushed furiously, and the lantern started flickering erratically. It was my turn to laugh, watching as the lantern seemed to respond to his mood.

"The lanterns are emotion detectors," I pointed out with a giggle.

He groaned. "They weren't supposed to be. I guess even when I'm doing Rook's magic, my curse has to get involved."

"I think it's time for us to accept that our curses are part of us," I mused. "We chose each other. No curse is going to stop that."

"You're right," he said, and the lights' flickering slowed down, turning into that happy, warm glow again.

"Thank you," I said, "for doing all this for me."

"You deserve all the nice things," he countered. "And I wanted to make sure that you felt as loved as you are."

"You love me?" I questioned quietly.

He looked at me like I was crazy, but I wanted to hear him say it.

"I do," he promised, his voice steady and calm. "I love you, Prue. And I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

I couldn't stop myself from pulling him closer. The food was quickly forgotten as I slanted my lips over his, claiming the beta in a searing kiss.

He let out a soft moan as I pulled him closer, deepening the kiss all over again.

Merrick shifted me over his legs so I was straddling his lap. I rocked my hips forward, sliding over the bulge in his jeans. We both moaned at the friction, breathing heavily.

I moved my kiss lower, sucking on the side of his neck. "When I go into heat, I'm going to bite you right here," I husked out.

"I'm yours the moment you want to claim me," he promised eagerly, pulling me back to his lips for another toe-curling kiss.

"I need you," I pleaded, my fingers fumbling at the button of his jeans. He reached between us to help me, unsnapping them easily before lifting his hips so he could shimmy them down.

“This is not what I planned tonight,” he promised, but I wasn’t listening. I didn’t care at the moment if he wanted to keep it sweet. If he was on board, then I wanted this. *Needed* it.

My lips found his again as I slid my underwear aside, guiding him into my entrance.

“Fuck,” he breathed out my name like he was in physical pain.

“I’ve got you,” I promised my beta as I sank down on his cock, taking him all the way in one slow movement. We clung to each other for a moment as that frantic edge faded away, replaced by something warmer and softer that was more our style.

Neither one of us moved as my body adjusted around him. We made out, both of us relaxing into it until I had to move again.

I rocked my hips forward before he took over, hands tightening on my hips as he fucked me on him, lifting me off and slamming me down. We were so hungry for each other that every movement was desperate. It was near impossible to not bite him here and now, to make him mine forever.

The lanterns around us flared bright, illuminating the night into something that resembled day. I ignored it as I pulled off his shirt. He did the same to my dress, tossing the clothing aside. He even went as far as tearing my underwear free so we were completely unrestricted.

I shivered as a cool breeze blew past, caressing our heated flesh. But he pulled me closer, his warmth warding off the chill.

He let me take the lead again as I fucked myself on him, slow and lazy as he claimed one peaked nipple in his mouth, his free hand kneading my other breast. He moaned as if I tasted delicious and damn if my perfume didn’t surround us in response.

The more he teased me, the more frantic my movements were until I was bouncing on his cock and holding his mouth to my breast. Ripples of pleasure rumbled through me as my body clenched around him.

He finally broke away from my chest and moved back to my lips, kissing me as his fingers slid between us, teasing over my clit.

My head fall back as I fucked him, body unraveling completely for this sweet, attentive beta. He made me feel so safe and loved that I couldn’t help but soak in every second with him.

With one last tease of his fingers, I came, his name falling from my lips as I shattered.

Merrick groaned, his hips snapping up one last time before he was filling me with his cum. My omega let out a shiver of satisfaction, loving the feeling of being so thoroughly claimed.

I rested my head against his shoulder, hugging him to me as our breathing and bodies calmed. I ached perfectly, and this was the most calm I'd felt in days.

"I'd ask how you liked it, but I think the lanterns told on you," I teased. He let out a raspy chuckle as he held me closer.

"It was the best night of my life, omega," he promised. "At least until you finally claim me as yours."

"You're already mine," I said as I placed a kiss on his neck. I didn't move again until it was too cold to stay there any longer. I managed to climb off of him, already missing him even though he was right next to me.

We both got dressed and he pulled a blanket around me.

"Good thing I like cold pasta," I said as I snagged my forgotten container and dug into the alfredo with extra parmesan on top, just the way I liked it.

My beta paid attention.

The lanterns were back to glowing that warm light and the stars danced above us. I was so content and warm inside that the dangers we've been facing lately seemed so far away. I didn't think about the mirror or the way my brother was trying to ruin my life.

He was right. I'd go crazy if I didn't live in these moments with my men. Soak in every second we spent together.

I'd spent years obsessing over fixing my curse but I was slowly realizing that maybe life with my curse wasn't the end of the world. It was a part of me and my magic now. It wasn't the life I pictured as a kid, but it was mine and I was ready to own it.

For now, I was more than happy to soak in the feeling of being loved and cared for. If we lost sight of what really mattered then that was letting the curses, my brother, and the magistrate all win.

I refused to let anyone take this from me now.

"So, tell me more about shapeshifting," I urged, eager to know everything.

He took a bite first before speaking. "Dorian asked if I ever tried to use magic or the powers of the shape that I was taking on. After hearing how you two had spoken and accepted your quirks and curses, I wanted to try.

Clearly, it worked. It might be small, but for me, it's huge." We looked around at the lanterns. From the way they were glowing bright and steady now, I knew he was proud. As he should be.

It was funny that I could read the beta so well I knew which emotions were shining in the lantern light.

"I haven't practiced a lot with it, but I took on Dorian's form and was able to snap a log. With Rook I made all this and conjured the flames."

"That's amazing, Merrick," I said, genuinely impressed he'd achieved so much on the first try. "Imagine what you can accomplish with some practice, too."

"True," he said. "But I also want to be able to protect you as myself. I think I'm going to see about having someone train me to fight. Maybe Dorian or Rook... or someone in town. Just in case we ever face someone like your brother again."

"I hate that it's come to this," I said, blinking furiously as tears threatened to drop. He swiped a stray one away.

"Even if he wasn't in the picture, a mate should know how to protect his omega."

He said it as if this was no big deal, but it was everything. No one had ever tried to stand up to my family. I had been forced to accept that my brother was simply the one who mattered to my parents. I only mattered in regards to what they could use me for.

With my pack, the three most incredible men I'd ever met, I knew where I stood. They didn't care about what I could do for them. They just wanted to be healthy, safe, and happy.

Simply being around me made me all of those things.

We'd figure out the rest, together.



Prue

HALLOWEEN NIGHT

My fingers ran over the cold metal of the mirror's handle before I curled my hand around it and picked it up. I let my magic dance over my skin and into the mirror, focusing on the future.

Nothing. Simply my reflection.

With my brother's magic locked down the mirror was simply... a mirror.

Unable to look at it anymore I put it inside the drawer of my vanity and shoved it all the way to the back. I couldn't seem to get rid of it but obsessing about it was over and done with.

I had a pack to focus on. In that past week we'd spent our days going about normal life. Dorian found a job with the city working in the forest while Rook kept up pretenses at the magistrate.

Merrick and I worked in my shop. He'd overhauled nearly every system I had in place. It was no longer cluttered, but organized and easy to navigate. Nearly every repeat customer I had was raving about it. I was trying not to take offense at that.

Our nights were spent cooking together in the kitchen and eating and just getting to know each other. The brothers told stories about growing up together, Merrick always manned the music so we would sing along as we cooked.

The henfather still tended the now-normal-sized chickens. Right now they were charmed to look like tiny dinosaurs, but the witch over at the feed

store promised it was temporary.

Halloween had finally descended on Moonlit Grove. Every house and business was decorated with every flavor of holiday flare. Mine and Dorian's houses both had big spider webs and charmed spiders that scurried over them.

"Prue! He's back!" Merrick called up to me. I finished the final swipe of black eyeliner on my cheeks and adjusted my cat ears before heading down to join them. It was early evening so we were kicking off Halloween night with Jack-O-Lanterns before the big Halloween Bash in town.

The magistrate was uneasy, but after the embarrassment of letting my brother do what he had, they had little choice. There might be an influx of guards, but the local meeting hall was being transformed into one big party.

"Hey, witchling," Merrick greeted, eyes dancing with humor as he took in my appearance. "No more Sabrina for you, Salem."

I was just impressed he got the costume reference. I didn't exactly choose the sassy black cat from the old 90s show, but a nod to all familiars.

"You better get ready," I reminded him. He waved me off, though.

"No worries, that's for after. I wouldn't be able to move as easily to make our pumpkins," he said, keeping it vague even now.

"Have your secrets, beta," I scoffed playfully. It was truly killing me trying to guess what he chose as his costume.

Especially after we all vetoed Rook's pack costume idea. I was absolutely not going as a Smurf this year.

My luck I'd remain blue for years to come. This curse might be a bit more tame lately, but no less chaotic when it did strike.

My phone rang, cutting off our conversation. When I saw Blake's face on the screen I answered quickly.

"Hey, kitty cat," she sang out. My bestie was still smiling even after the week she'd had. I was just glad to see the bruising fading. Thank the gods for modern medical magic.

"Looking good, scarecrow," I shot back, taking in her adorable floppy burlap hat and overalls. She had painted on freckles and a black nose. Her red hair was short and flared out, completing the look.

"Thanks," she said, setting the phone down and stepping back to show the patchwork on her overalls and the flare of hay glued to the ends of her shirt and cuffs of her pants. It was honestly adorable on her. "I have a good feeling about tonight."

“Good, because this town deserves some good,” I said, latching onto her optimism. “Are we meeting outside the meeting hall at seven?”

“Yes,” she said. “I was just making sure you were still coming and not hiding away with that new pack of yours.”

“Never,” I said as I waved a hand in the air to dismiss it. “It’s Halloween. We never hide on nights like this.”

Our magic was always stronger this time of year and I knew it was at least going to be an exciting gathering.

“Prue! Time for pumpkins!” Rook called out as he poked his head inside. I said a hasty goodbye to Blake and rushed toward him.

“Did you pick out big ones?!” Excitement bubbled through me. It wasn’t just the magic in the air today, but I truly loved all things Halloween.

“Of course,” he said, taking my hand and pulling me out to the yard where they’d set up some tables and laid out a plastic cloth to keep them from being covered in pumpkin guts.

The pumpkins themselves were at least three times the size I expected and I grinned, already planning a cute toothy grin and wide eyes for mine.

Merrick was sitting next to one, his tongue poking out a little as he focused on the pumpkin carving. Dorian was wiping dirt from the others and smiled up at me. For a grumpy wolf, he smiled a lot these days. Teasing came easier with him lately and I loved seeing him open up. Even Rook looked at him with shock and happiness from time to time, soaking in his brother’s unfiltered joy.

This pack had really changed us all.

Merrick put on music as we all got to work. The scent of raw pumpkin filled the air as we each worked on ours, starting a new tradition as a pack. Dorian insisted we place them between the two houses, displaying them for the town to see.

By the time we finished and the alphas carried them to their spot, the sun was starting to set. It was perfect timing because all three of the guys still had to get ready.

“Alright, little mate. You’re up,” Dorian grinned, standing beside me with his arms crossed, waiting for me to do my thing.

I took a breath and pulled my magic forward. It responded easily, just a trick of warmth since that was all I needed. Then I cast a simple light spell in each one, lighting them up from the inside.

It wasn't as bright as they'd be once the sun fully set, but already they were flickering cheerfully. For a brief moment I imagined a few tiny pumpkins sitting around them. A future with the pack I didn't expect but loved all the same.

It was soon, but I knew it was true the moment I considered it. They'd put their lives on the line for mine, stuck by me every step of the way, and most importantly, saw *me* under the curse.

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Dorian

The town officials had gone all out for this Halloween party. The kids had already gone trick-or-treating around town and in the magistrate building. It was honestly the first time I'd seen them actually do something kind for the people in this cursed town.

Now, it was time for the adults to have fun.

Live music was playing on the patio outside and inside was a huge buffet of themed treats and an array of cocktails and potions.

"This is amazing," Prue said excitedly. "But does anyone else feel magic in the air?"

She glared before any of us could give her some sort of sarcastic retort because there was *always* magic in the air in this town.

"Shut up, it's different. A bit like a magical blanket in the room." She glanced around for the source.

"It's a magic neutralizer. A failsafe for them putting us all in one place," Rook admitted. "I heard some of the magistrate talking about it."

"There's always a catch," Prue muttered but shrugged it off. "I'd rather nothing ruin this night. We deserve to have nice things in life, too. Especially since we can't leave."

"None of that tonight," Merrick said firmly.

"Plus, the party is finally here," Blake announced as she danced her way between us. She had makeup on to hide her bruises and just looked happy to be here. It was nice to see her feeling better. It was hard to shake the image of someone we cared about chained to a dirty wall and at a psychopath's mercy. "Come on. Let's dance!"

She tugged Prue to the patio and they both jumped right into the crush of dancing bodies, jumping and dancing their way through the rock songs as we watched on.

Our mate was finally free. She smiled more now, even her mood was lighter. I think talking to her brother had given her real closure. She finally realized they were never family and nothing was her fault.

She'd done the same for me. I always walked around with a bit of a shadow hanging over me and now my little mate had chased them away. It was hard not to love life with a mate like her. I wanted to claim her and I had a feeling she was nearly ready.

The music shifted and Prue came over to drag Merrick into the crowd this time while Blake danced with an alpha I didn't know. She looked relaxed but I kept an eye on them anyway. She was family, now.

"He's starting to open up now," Rook noted. "I think you really helped him out."

"Sometimes we just need someone in our corner. Most of us here aren't used to us." I paused and gave him a look. "And some of us are just too blind to see that someone is."

Rook's shocked look had me huffing, but he looked like I just told him Christmas was coming twice this year.

"Don't make it weird," I grumbled.

Prue thankfully danced back our way, a light sheen of sweat on her skin now. "I'm dying of thirst. Let's grab food and drinks now."

Blake was still with the alpha but Prue just gave my hand a reassuring squeeze and pulled me with her back inside.

The lights were lower now and candles and floating lanterns cast a warm, inviting glow over the room. They'd stretched out spiderwebs and had giant carved pumpkins, too.

"I'm still not over how much they did for this," Prue said as she snagged a passing cocktail that was smoking. She sipped it and let out a pleased, little hum. Making her happy was something I was quickly growing addicted to. I wanted to spend our lives making her smile as much as possible, even if we were stuck here.

"So, I heard a rumor," Rook said, glancing around to make sure this conversation stayed between us. Merrick leaned in, closing the gap between us all. "That a couple in town bonded and their curses calmed. Just like yours."

“Wow,” Prue said. “And we haven’t even bonded yet.”

“Which means,” Rook continued. Dragging the damn story out just to drive us crazy. He always had a flair for the dramatic. “That the magistrate is meeting soon to discuss letting them out. I hear there was pushback from the outside, so they had no choice but to consider it...”

Rook trailed off, letting the words settle between us.

“That means... that they could possibly leave?”

Rook nodded. “Not set in stone, but now that the outside Magistrate is stepping in, it’s a possibility. I think your brother’s attack has raised a few questions about leadership. I’m going to switch my research to focusing on this new development, but I think this means we’ll have real freedom.”

Prue was quiet now. She looked so conflicted that I couldn’t resist pulling my little mate closer.

“What’s wrong, witchling?” Merrick asked. He stepped closer to run his finger over the spot between her eyes that was wrinkled.

“What if I don’t want to leave? Permanently, I mean. I’d love to travel and see the world and find new cursed objects and antiques... but this is my home now. Blake is here. My home and business is here.”

“Then we stay,” Rook said. “No one will kick you out. Even if they let some of the people move away they’ll have check ins at the very least. But, as a whole, the magistrate isn’t big on imprisoning people for no reason. The curse department of the magistrate has just been a bit... corrupt, as of late.”

“Understatement,” Prue muttered. “Now this party feels like a bit of an apology.”

“Prue! Our song!” Blake called out as she poked her head inside. The first lines of Witchy Woman started and Prue let the conversation drop as she gave us a grin and ran out to join her best friend on the patio.

I snagged a plate and loaded it down with finger foods so our girl could eat if she got hungry after dancing.

By the time I joined them, Rook and Merrick had snagged us a table. Rook disappeared when I came out, walking out with another two plates when I finished.

“Figured that way there’s enough for all of us, not just our mate,” he teased. My cheeks warmed at realizing I’d definitely had a one-track mind. I was barely used to taking care of one person, let alone a pack.

Seeing my face fall, Rook reached over and clapped me on the shoulder.

“I love that you think of her. I’m the caretaking sort who sees the pack as a whole, too. Merrick is the force that calms and brings reason in. We all have our strengths.”

“I’m learning that,” I said as I relaxed and looked over to the dance floor where the two omegas were twirling around together, hands up, and grinning like fools

Gods, my little mate was gorgeous. My entire world shifted the moment I’d scented her. Then again when I realized just how incredible she was. If this little witch could fight through her curse and keep such a kind heart then I could push past my own self-pity and find a way to embrace who I was now.

Even Merrick and Rook had changed. My brother was more fulfilled having a pack around him. He always deserved a family that saw and appreciated his efforts and I was grateful he found that with our pack.

Merrick needed someone to see him in the sea of faces he wore. A pack that embraced that and could show him that he could breathe and embrace the shifting.

As the song ended she moved back toward us, her skin flushed from the exertion and she plopped right down in Rook’s lap and snagged a nacho from the plate I’d chosen. My wolf flushed with pride as we watched her eat then snag more.

She turned to say something when two guards came up, faces grim.

“Prudence Ever. Come with us.”



Prue

“This is ridiculous,” I muttered to the person sitting next to me. He didn’t even bother to look over at me, his back was perfectly straight and stiff, his eyes dead ahead.

The fact that I was sitting at the Magistrate yet again, even though I had nothing to do with whatever they would accuse me of, was driving me crazy. One minute, I was at the Halloween party, the next, I was being hauled in here like we had no rights.

Then again, I always said this was a pretty, little prison.

Sure, I was responsible for a few chickens and other small mishaps in town... but so were a dozen others. Daily.

This town was cursed.

They hadn’t even told me why I was here. Dorian had threatened to come in with me, but I demanded that he stay outside. The last thing we needed was a cursed wolf losing his mind at the magistrate.

Rook tried to throw his weight around and Merrick even argued, but it was useless. One minute, we were dancing and having a snack, then next, I was being dragged into the magistrate with no explanation.

They’d be waiting outside when I got out of whatever bullshit meeting was waiting for me.

Honestly, I loved that I had someone on my side no matter what. I wasn’t used to having people around to make sure I was doing alright. My own family believed all the lies the magistrate formulated about me.

The moment they accused me, my family ended it then and there. Disowned their own daughter they’d raised for years.

I pushed the memories away. They always popped up any time I was facing off with the magistrate. It was just frustrating that life could feel so easy and good with my pack and then someone did something that put me right back in the hot seat.

I wanted to scream.

"Prudence Ever?" the receptionist called out, her eyes narrowed on me as I looked up.

Oh, yeah. She definitely remembered the chickens. And the fact I left her there on top of her desk as I ran out.

I couldn't really blame her for that one.

Offering her a neutral smile, I stood and followed her to the back. This was a walk I knew well. I'd stood in front of the same magisters far too many times since I'd come to this town.

It was impressive how synchronized their disappointed looks could get.

"What have you been messing with this time?" the head magistrate demanded as he looked down at me.

I threw up my hands in frustration. "You know I'm the first to admit when I've been up to something. This time, I haven't. I found a pack and I've been getting to know them. My magic has been halfway stable," I protested. "Tonight, I was just enjoying the party."

"She has been very good about owning her more... unfortunate experiments," Magistrate Leon supplied with a hint of humor that High Magistrate Barlow did not appreciate. It wasn't like she was defending me, simply giving the facts.

"I don't even know why I'm here," I admitted. "If you're going to accuse me of something, at least let me know *why*."

Most of the magisters glared at me as I crossed my arms. I'd take the flack if it was earned. This time it wasn't.

"Don't play with us, little girl," one of the magisters who rarely spoke up bit out.

They were pissed. Well, so was I now.

"I don't believe I've given you a single reason to disrespect me like this," I said, eyes narrowing. I didn't want to say something I'd regret but I also wasn't going to sit here and take them being assholes.

"There has been what we can only assume is a curse going around," Magister Leon explained. "A heat curse."

Her words had the anger morphing into pure confusion.

“A heat curse?” I asked, not even sure what that could mean. “My magic is chaos, not heat-inducing.”

One of the older magisters cleared his throat but not one of them explained further, leaving me to fill in the blanks.

“Well, it wasn’t me,” I pointed out. Why they could never just spit out what they wanted to say was beyond me.

When they didn’t say another word I filled the silence, my voice hard and controlled.

“Did you do a single bit of investigating to see if I was even around the omegas in question? I know I’m an easy target, but you’re here to *protect* us. Not accuse someone because it’s the easy route. This whole situation feels lazy to me.”

It might have been a few words too far but I didn’t give a single fuck anymore. They couldn’t bring me in every time something went awry. They knew what they signed up for with this job.

Tonight, I’d been focused on my pack and feeling like I had a handle on my life for once. My curse was behaving, my magic had been strong and controlled, and then this happened.

“No,” Magistrate Lorcan admitted.

“Of course, you haven’t,” I muttered, more to myself than them. I was trying not to say another smartass comment that would end up with me thrown in a dungeon somewhere.

“You can hardly blame us for assuming, seeing as how you’re the only one who consistently can find herself before us!” High Magister Barlow boomed, quieting the murmurs between the others.

He definitely didn’t like being accused of not doing his job properly, but if the shoe fit that wasn’t really my problem.

I, clearly, wasn’t the only one who saw it, either. From Rook’s words earlier it sounded like they were having some major oversight issues and now, apparently, a heat curse to keep under control.

“You’re dismissed for now, just know we’ll be keeping an eye on you.”

I held back an eye roll, but my mouth finally couldn’t hold back its snark any longer.

“I look forward to you finding out you were wrong. Can’t wait for our next meeting. You do seem obsessed with me.”

Then I turned and walked away. Someone laughed, but I doubted the others found me very funny.

Good.

I wasn't trying to be.

Moonlit Grove was home. I loved it here and all its quiriness. But they were crazy if they thought we weren't going to look for a way out of our curses. We deserved freedom.

This town was a prison in its own way.

Before I could walk past the receptionist, she stopped me with a smug, little smirk on her face.

"Excuse me, but you're going to have to leave a few more details for us. The magistrate wants to ensure we can get a hold of you when more of this outbreak arises as we *all* know it will."

I didn't even bother to defend myself to this assistant who knew nothing about me. Instead, I gave her a bored look and stared long enough to make her uncomfortable. She huffed then handed over a fresh contact info sheet. Probably just to annoy me because it wasn't like they couldn't walk by my shop and find me at any point during the day. They also had my address.

I shifted uncomfortably as my pen scrolled across the paper. Each word I added, the temperature in the room seemed to rise. My skin was starting to feel too hot and my head throbbed painfully.

Even as I suffered through the information, I kept my eyes on the paper, not giving her the satisfaction of knowing I was stressed.

Or whatever was going on.

As I finished the paper my head gave a painful throb and a familiar ache formed in my abdomen. Then my perfume exploded in the room. The cloud of pure omega pheromones had everyone turning toward me in horror.

The heat curse. Fuck.

"I'm leaving," I said frantically as slick started to drip down my thighs. Someone here was responsible. Coming to the magistrate building clearly infected me with the exact curse they were accusing me of spreading. But it couldn't be my problem now.

Leaving was my only choice.

I burst out of the front doors, desperate for fresh air.

"Dorian!" I screamed out, not bothering to look around to see if anyone realized what was happening. All I wanted was to go home. "Rook! Merrick!"

"I'm here," Dorian said as he ran up the path to meet me. His voice was a rough growl and at the panic in my voice he was starting to sprout hair

along his arms and cheeks. His tail flickered anxiously behind him, fangs poking out of his mouth so he couldn't quite close his mouth all the way.

"The magistrate accused me of spreading a curse. Apparently, it's a heat curse," I explained frantically, sweat was starting to drip down my skin. His nostrils flared before I even finished speaking.

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"You're going into heat." It wasn't a question.

Before I could say another word, I was thrown over his shoulder and he was running straight through town. I didn't take long to get back to my place.

"Merrick!" he yelled out as soon as we walked back in. Then lowered his voice for me. "I sent him back here just in case and Rook is talking to his bosses, trying to get answers. I'll get them both."

"What's going on?" Merrick asked before he got closer and froze. Even though he was a beta I watched his nostrils flare and he looked up in shock.

"Heat curse," I explained as quickly as I could then groaned as the first wave of pain hit me.

My traitorous body was already desperate for a knot.

"Please help. It hurts," I begged, my voice laced in a whine. My head was swimming and my entire body was trying to curl in on itself to avoid the pain it knew was going to get worse.

"Get her up to the nest. I'm going to get my brother," Dorian said urgently. Fur was starting to sprout along his arms as he fought to keep control. I could tell that it wasn't easy on him to walk away from me once I was on my feet. Dorian's instincts were strong on a good day, now they were downright lethal. The dominance in his voice alone sent a shiver of anticipation through me.

We'd still been getting to know each other for the past few weeks. I planned to spend more time with all of my mates one on one before my normal heat. This was not what I asked for.

“Come on, witchling,” Merrick said gently. His voice was so soothing that I relaxed into his side as he pulled me close and led me up the stairs.

I groaned as the cramps started again. This wasn’t just a heat. It was a heat on speed. Everything was amplified. Nothing should’ve started this quickly and I was frustrated. There was no time to properly nest or ease into it and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

As soon as he sat me down outside the nest, I grabbed his shirt, practically ripping it off of him in my haste. He complied easily, giving me exactly what I asked for. Merrick never would deny me, especially not in a moment like this.

“I don’t have a knot.” His voice was downright apologetic.

“Merrick, I don’t care. You’re enough, I promise,” I practically growled. My fingers desperately tore at his clothes.

There was no more reservation as Merrick struggled out of his clothes as quickly as possible. I stole those as well, stashing them into the empty crevices of the nest, filling it with my mates’ scents. When I was satisfied I set my sights back on Merrick, pulling him against me. My kisses were frantic and hungry as I devoured his mouth. My hips rocked against his as the ache grew stronger.

Everything felt wrong. My clothes were too itchy and rough, my sensitive skin desperate for only their skin against mine. Nothing else.

“I’ve got you, omega,” he promised, guiding me back to the nest and laying me down. My legs fell open in invitation, my scent perfuming in the air along with the intense, musky sweetness of my slick. Even his scent was strong in response and I breathed it in. Between his honey, vanilla, and caramel scent mixing with my caramel apple scent, we fit together perfectly. Sweet, tart, and cozy. My omega practically sighed in relief along with me.

My beta, who was usually shy, did not hesitate to fall between my legs. He buried his face between my thighs, licking a slow stripe through my pussy. He moaned at the taste of my slick before his tongue pierced into me, nose brushing against me as he tongue fucked me as deep as he could go.

He was demanding, his tongue forceful and his teeth sharp enough to sting. Then he’d tease his tongue around my clit with just enough pressure to send me bucking off the mattress.

I had no idea it would be like this with Merrick but the beta was full of surprises.

He devoured me as I desperately rocked against his face, demanding more of what my omega needed.

Merrick didn't relent, forcing me to take every single bit of pleasure he gave me. Not letting me hide away from it. His hands pinned me down to the soft mattress of the nest as he fucked me with his tongue until I was screaming and falling apart on him, slick gushed over his face. He slowed down as I came down from the orgasm, cleaning the slick with slow, languid strokes that sent shivers through me.

I needed more and I didn't want to be teased any longer at the same time. When the ache started again I scrambled forward and flipped to my stomach, pressing my face into the mattress and wiggling my ass in invitation.

My knees parted, giving him a full view of my glistening pussy, demanding that he fuck me now. I had a feeling in any other circumstance he'd be sweet and take it slow, but that was ripped away from us now.

I needed him too damn much for gentleness.

"Please, Merrick. I need you."

He settled behind me and let his hands trail over my skin.

"You're so hot," he said. Even his touch felt icy cold against my overheated skin. I shivered again and shifted back, rubbing against him to urge him to take me.

I needed relief.

The protest died on my tongue as Merrick finally slid into me. He pulled back slowly before snapping his hips forward. My fingers slid under my body, teasing through the slick before circling my clit, desperate for another orgasm. I'd never felt so desperate for anyone in my life.

"I've got you," Merrick breathed out as he slid out again then slammed his hips against my ass, fucking me just like I needed.

His hands gripped at my hips, holding me up so he could take me deeper, every furious thrust of his hips stretching me perfectly.

The sound of skin slapping skin filled the air and my scent was so strong that it clouded the room, making him and I both desperate.

I needed this so badly that I was rocking my hips backward, seeking every inch he had. Merrick didn't have a knot to lock us in place so that gave him the freedom to fuck me even harder.

My omega was loving it.

"Merrick," My voice came out hoarse and desperate.

“Do you need more, witchling?” he asked, already picking up the pace. But that wasn’t what I was after, now.

“Bite me.”

He made a pained noise, pausing for a moment until I protested, slamming back into him.

“Bite me,” I growled.

“But I’m not an alpha,” he protested for the second time tonight. I shook my head and turned to look at him over my shoulder.

“I’m well aware of who and what you are, Merrick. Bite me. Now.”

For one long second, I thought he might not give in. That this was too much for the beta who, clearly, didn’t think he’d be enough for me.

That hesitation quickly melted into hunger as my words sank in.

“Make yourself come again,” he ordered in a sharp tone. I fucked myself on my fingers frantically as I waited for him to strike. He fucked me harder and faster, picking me up off the mattress to hit even deeper now.

My pussy clamped around him as I came undone and he struck, teeth sinking into my shoulder, marking me as his.

I let out a cry as my orgasm hit harder than ever, my body quaking around him. My sweet beta groaned out my name as he came with me, unable to resist.

My omega started purring in satisfaction as my body still shuddered with aftershocks.

As my beta licked over the wound, two more scents joined the room. But I wasn’t done with Merrick yet.

When he leaned over me, wrapping his arms around me, and placing soft kisses on my neck, I struck, claiming him on his forearm and breathing in his sweet scent.

He groaned as his cock pulsed again, filling me and marking me from the inside out.

The bond flared to life, a mixture of our pleasure and pure satisfaction.

This made everything worth it. He was mine the moment I saw him, but now I would always know where we stood.

I’ll never be alone again.

“I’d be hurt if that wasn’t so fucking hot,” Rook teased.

I looked over to see both of my alphas watching me. Dorian was licking his lips, fangs sharp and ears twitching. Rook just smiled in satisfaction, happy to see his omega happy.

As Merrick pulled out of me I flipped over onto my back, legs spread wide, letting the cum drip out of me. Both of their attention shifted to my pussy.

Now it was just a matter of *who* was going to move first.

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Dorian

My omega knew exactly what she was doing to me. Her lips were tipped into that pretty, little smile. Her violet eyes were dazed as they danced between the two of us, but I wasn't waiting for my brother to make his move.

My wolf made it for me.

I let out a rumbling growl as I lunged forward, practically jumping onto my little mate, desperate to taste her, to breathe her in, to feel her. She smelled perfect before, but now her scent was potent in the air.

Prue's skin was searing hot under my fingertips as I ran them over her skin, leaving goosebumps in their wake. I'd never felt so in tune with my alpha and my wolf at the same time. My wolf was fierce, my alpha protective, and right now we were all feral for this omega laid out before us.

Fuck, she was gorgeous. Her skin was flushed a pretty pink and her eyes were tracking every move, begging silently for me to touch her. She was so damn needy for my knot and that did something to me.

I'd never felt like anyone would accept my beast that was forever forced to be a part of me, but she did. My perfect mate never shied away from me.

I wanted to give her everything she was pleading for but we needed consent.

"What do you need, mate? I need words." All she could do was moan. The heat had already taken her. She fought through, her eyes cleared just enough that they locked onto mine.

"You," she managed to say the words. "Everything."

She already had everything from me. I was hers. Body, mind, soul, wolf, man, every contrasting piece of me. I'd known it from the first time I

saw her. I just fell harder when her scent hit me and she turned that snarky mouth my way.

Anyone that could embrace their curse in the way she had, and worked their ass off to try to find a cure, was incredible. I admired her.

When I realized I wasn't just defective, but cursed, I was livid. Angry at the world and too young to have a real sense of danger.

She had fought back, not just fought the world.

"Please, alpha. I need you," she whimpered, her legs spreading further so I was hit with another burst of her heat-laced scent. There was no resisting her now.

I shifted over her, kissing her before moving down her neck. My tongue lapped at her skin, teasing and tasting my omega. She was salty and enticing, and I wanted more the moment I tasted her.

I licked and sucked and nipped at her flesh as I moved down lower to where she needed me. She may not have asked for my tongue, but she was going to get it.

I was going to devour this omega. Make sure she was nice and relaxed before I pushed my knot inside her. I wasn't just a man, I was a wolf. My knot was intense and I knew if she wasn't ready it could hurt her... something I'd never do.

Even with the beta relaxing her body, she'd need to be very slick and very desperate.

If I was a better man, I'd let my brother go first, but now that she was in my reach, I could never back away.

Before she could question it, I splayed my hands over her thighs, pressing her open for me before I slid my tongue through her slick. It was like molten sugar on my tongue, and I growled in approval. I never knew anyone could taste like this, could be this sexy and could make me burn like this. My cock was aching and I was losing my mind already and we were just getting started.

There would never be another omega for me. She was it.

Wolves mated for life and we'd both chosen this omega, just as much as fate had.

For one brief, startling moment, reality sank in. I had to warn her. She deserved to know what was coming.

"I won't be able to be gentle for you, omega. This is going to be rough and my knot will make you feel like you're splitting in two if you don't

relax for me,” I warned. She whimpered and fresh slick coated my tongue. Her hands gripped my hair, pulling tight enough to draw pain.

That move was answer enough. I should have known that Prue didn’t need me to be soft and gentle. She just needed me as I was.

She was made to take me.

Now that my mate had reassured me, I couldn’t resist her. I drove back in headfirst, licking and teasing her swollen pussy, following her cries and whimpers as she told me without words exactly what she needed. I was rock hard, my knot already swelling.

Her hands continued to hold me there against her pussy and I was happy to stay there, drinking her in and making her come over and over again.

She was so needy that it didn’t take her long to give me her first orgasm, her fingers tightening in my hair, slick flooding my tongue, her body clenching around my head as she shattered.

“Give me your knot, wolf,” she demanded. A hint of her usual sass was coming out loud and clear.

“Not a chance, omega. I want at least two more before I give you that,” I warned.

“Then let’s see it, alpha,” she taunted. It seemed she was teetering between lucid and the heat fog. She wasn’t quite as lost to it as we expected.

“Oh, I plan to, mate,” I shot back before I nipped my way up her body again then claimed her sassy mouth. She didn’t cringe at the taste of herself on my tongue. My dirty girl liked every bit of the slick that I’d cleaned off of her. Her fingers wrapped around my cock, stroking me furiously as we kissed.

My own hand slid down her body, finding her clit and drawing another release out of her. I stayed true to my word, not giving in until she came on my fingers two more times.

“I’m going to fuck you and claim you, little mate,” I promised. Her violet eyes stayed locked on mine as I licked the sweet slick coating my skin. Her chest was heaving, and a soft whimper escaped. She was loving this nearly as much as I was.

She was close enough that she let her hands slowly roam up my chest and tease over my wolf ears. A shiver ran through me at the touch. It was intimate and they were sensitive, making my cock twitch.

Once I cleaned off my fingers I fisted my cock, teasing the blunt head through her slick, making sure it was good and wet. She shuddered and writhed as it pressed against her clit.

“Yes,” she breathed out, fingers raking down my chest as she braced against the sensation. I waited until her body had relaxed into the mattress before easing into her tight pussy.

Fuck. She was so hot and tight that I had to bite my lip hard enough to draw blood so I didn’t lose control. I couldn’t rut her. I could already feel it pulling at the edges of my vision, turning red as it pulsed violently. Every sense was flooded by this sexy, little omega underneath me.

When I reached resistance, I pulled out then eased in again, rocking into her gently as I pushed her further each time.

“You’re taking me so good, little mate. Relax. You were made to take this knot,” I urged. She preened under the praise as the heat pulled her under again, her omega the one in control again.

I pulled back and thrust forward one last time, filling her completely. She had taken everything but the knot now and it felt like there was no space left. But I knew better.

Again I pressed forward, pushing her into the mattress. It was unrelenting as she cried out under me but it wasn’t all pain. My fingers found her clit, adding pleasure so she wouldn’t fight it.

“Alpha,” she whimpered. “It’s not going to—” Her protests turned into a scream as it finally slipped into place, locking into her perfect cunt like I knew it would.

My own moans were as desperate as hers as she surrounded me. She was so fucking tight I was ready to lose my mind as I fucked her in shallow, but forceful thrusts.

I fucked my knot deeper, my movements forceful and rough just like I’d promised. She was giving it back just as much, her hips meeting mine with each thrust.

My teeth were aching with the urge to bite her. To claim her.

She was going to wear my bite mark for the whole damn world to see that she was mine.

Knowing I couldn’t hold on much longer I slid my fingers over her clit, demanding that she break for me one final time. She fought it this time, made me work for it, my wolf growing frustrated but my alpha as determined as ever.

Her pussy clenched around my knot, pulsing and teasing it until I couldn't help but follow. I came on a roar and let my eyes dance over her pretty neck, deciding where to mark her.

I knew my bite wouldn't look the same. It was part wolf claim, part alpha bond.

Her orgasm ebbed on, her pussy clenching around me so tight it felt like she was milking my knot until I gave her every ounce of my cum.

That filled me with a primal satisfaction. My wolf pushed me again, deciding for us where to bite. My teeth pierced her delicate neck, just enough to mark her. Even he was careful with our girl.

She let out a strangled cry that was part pain, part satisfaction, and pure bliss.

The bond flared to life between us. Even with the heat blissing her out I could feel her there. The hunger that burned at the base of it all. The adoration and happiness that was both warm and inviting. I wouldn't call it love quite yet, but I knew we'd get there eventually.

She was mine and I let her feel just how much I meant that. How much I wanted her.

But our bond was only half-complete and her omega was not happy about that. She tried to pull away but I stopped her on a groan. The movement tugged painfully at my knot.

"Do you want more, little mate?" I demanded. She whimpered as I started to fuck her again, finally able to be gentle now that the rut had been satisfied.

She turned around and glared at me, her teeth baring in a threat I was eager to accept.

I had a feeling the moment she was free she would take what she wanted and I didn't care if she bit me outside of sex. I didn't need the pleasure to endure the pain. I'd embrace it, knowing that my omega had chosen me just like I'd chosen her.

Prue's movements were slower now, she was exhausted by the multiple orgasms and bites she'd taken.

My knot wasn't done with her yet and she needed it, never quite giving into exhaustion as she let me fuck her.

Her final orgasm was slow and lazy, building subtly until it struck. Her moan broke off into a sob as she shattered for me so beautifully, the bond

wide open and showing me every ounce of vulnerability that she usually tucked away.

I could see every part of my omega now. The strength she clung to. The kindness that radiated out of her in every interaction. The frustration at the world for treating her this way. There was also a hint of insecurity that all of us cursed held close to our chest.

One day with the help of Rock and Merrick, I hoped we'd find a way out of this cursed place.

Until then, I'd remind her every day how perfect she was. Make her feel sexy and beautiful.

Rook would praise her intelligence and give her the pushback she needed to challenge her intellectually.

And Merrick would be there to keep her soft and sweet.

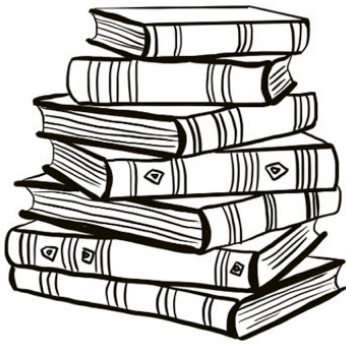
She might not realize just yet how much my life now centered around her, but she'd feel it the moment she claimed me back.

When I came again, my knot finally started to deflate. She was able to pull away enough to flip around. Her violet eyes flashed with hunger before she lunged, biting me right against my collarbone.

The bond strengthened further, giving her an equal view into my soul. It was such an intense moment, two lives tying together for the first time, showcasing everything that we'd always hidden from everyone else.

We could never hide from each other again.

I'd never known what it was like to truly let someone in until now and I found myself hungry for more of it. I wanted to give her every piece of me and hold all of her jagged pieces in return.



Rook

I liked watching the beta take my omega more than I realized. My cock was throbbing, but that was likely due to her overwhelming, perfect scent. I stroked myself as she latched eyes on us, then came on a cry.

They were bonded now.

Merrick rolled away and Dorian lunged for her before I even realized what was happening. I knew he would never hurt her but I hoped to the gods he'd make sure he took her slow. His wolf knot was nothing to joke about.

The beta pulled on boxers and walked away as soon as Dorian started to fuck Prue. I stood for a minute longer, watching her look so relaxed and happy. It didn't matter who gave her that look as long as she had it.

She deserved peace.

I slipped away, unashamed of my nakedness. It seemed silly to pull on clothes when I knew my omega would need me soon enough.

"It felt like they needed a minute," I said as I joined him in the kitchen. He turned around then smacked a hand over his eyes. "May as well get used to it, beta. You're going to see a whole lot of us over the next week."

"What the hell even happened at the magistrate?" he demanded, forgetting about his modesty. "She said her heat wasn't due for a few months. Then something about a heat curse?"

"I gathered that someone in town is accidentally sending omegas into heat, no matter when their last one hit. Just like Prue."

"They called her into the magistrate over it," Dorian said. "That has to be why she went in."

“It was,” I confirmed. “Despite my protests, they thought she had to be the one since no new curses have shown up since Dorian came to town.”

“Love that it happened right under the magistrate’s noses. They deserve to be humbled a bit. Can’t blame her when she’s now in a full-blown heat in there,” he bit out as he started to pull things out of the fridge.

Thank god, we had just gone grocery shopping and had supplies here.

“If we need anything more, we can add it to the list. She’s got a list on the fridge and I’ll order it up between rounds,” I offered.

Merrick braced his hands on the counter and lowered his head. “I can’t help but feel like this is all wrong. She deserves to be in control of her body. I know she wants us and she wants us to help her through the heat, but now two of us have claimed her, you’ll be claiming her soon enough, and there’s no going back now. It feels like we rushed through it.”

“There was never any going back for any of us,” I said with a shrug. He glared at me but I didn’t give in. “Tell me I’m wrong.”

The beta stared at me. I could see the fight within his eyes, but it slowly faded away, and he sagged against the counter.

“I never want to be away from her again, but I didn’t want to do it like this,” he admitted in defeat.

“We will have plenty more heats to make it up to her,” I promised. “Right now, she chose us and she needs us to get her through this. More courting can happen afterward.”

“You’re right,” he conceded. From the way his entire body untensed, I think he might’ve just needed someone to tell him that for him to give in.

“Come on, I’ll help you get things ready,” I said gently. I could hear the shower attached to the nest and master bedroom turn on. My brother could act tough all he wanted, but his animal side didn’t outweigh the fact he was a good man. He was taking care of our omega like any good alpha.

“She needs you,” Merrick said abruptly. I turned and looked at him, confused how he got to that conclusion, but a second later my name was cried out through the halls. Her voice was full of pain and I dropped everything to run to her.

Dorian was still there holding her in the shower, but he looked relieved when I walked in.

“Her omega only wants you now,” he said quickly.

“I’ve got you, little witch,” I promised as I stepped into the open shower with them. This was exactly why I didn’t bother with clothes.

Dorian released her to me, stepping into the spray and cleaning himself quickly before leaving. He closed the door behind him.

Now it was just me and my omega.

Her eyes were completely glazed over and I was supporting her fully in my arms. She was so light and I loved the way she was clinging to me. It was hardly a hardship.

I kept one arm around her as I used the other to start washing her the best I could. My omega had other things in mind. She stole kisses as I washed her, nails raking over my skin.

When that didn't work her fingers wrapped around my cock, stroking it.

I had always prided myself on being a strong, controlled alpha. But right now, this omega was testing my limits.

Even out of her mind with heat, Prue was a bit of a brat. I fucking loved it.

"Such a greedy, little omega," I teased, nipping at her ear as I washed the last of her conditioner from her hair.

"Yes," she breathed out, stroking me faster but I removed her hand and turned off the water before guiding her out of the stall. I laid out her towel on the toilet lid before guiding her to sit down. She wasn't happy as I dried her and twisted her hair into loose braids.

Prue smirked and slid to her knees, her lips wrapping around my cock and her fingers teasing over my knot.

She let out sexy, little whimpers as she sucked my cock. Her eyes were molten purple as she watched my reaction.

"You're so good for me," I groaned as I watched her slide up and down my cock. She smiled, eyes drifting closed, as she let her omega take over again.

I braced one hand in her hair and the other on the counter as I held myself back from thrusting down her pretty, little throat.

Fuck, she felt so good. My body was quaking already. I've been needing to come for hours as I listened to my packmates claim her.

"You better stop if you don't want me to come down your throat," I warned her.

She just moaned in response, sucking harder as her hips rocked against nothing. She swallowed around me. The way her throat constricted around my hard cock had me coming hard, her name falling from my lips as I spilled down her throat.

Prue groaned happily as she continued to suck me dry.

Fuck, she was perfect.

I eased out of her mouth when I couldn't take it anymore. My thumb swiped over her chin where my cum had escaped. She sucked my thumb into her mouth, her tongue swirling around it, teasing me as she licked it clean.

"Such a good omega. That means I can take my time with you now," I said, pulling my omega into my arms and carrying her back to the nest.

Someone had come in and changed the sheets. They smelled less like pack now, but fresh. Until we were done with them at least.

She didn't protest as I laid her out for me. My omega was gorgeous as she watched me. Her violet eyes were burning for me, her body perfect and rosy from the heat. Slick was already dripping from her sweet pussy and I didn't want to wait any longer.

The entire world faded when my mouth was on her, kissing her hard before leaving a trail of kisses down her neck over her collarbone. Every thought faded until she was once again at the center. Every sound and sigh was mine to claim.

She whimpered as I pulled one peaked nipple into my mouth. I teased my teeth over her, noting how much she arched into it. Then I soothed it with my tongue. My other hand kneaded her other breast while I gave this one attention, making sure she had a constant wave of sensation to soothe her heat.

Her scent swelled in the room as I worked her up. I breathed her in as I switched to the other, giving her equal attention.

My cock was already aching again as she wrapped her scent around me, holding me close. She truly did own me now.

Then she shoved me lower. I chuckled as my nose trailed down her abdomen, breathing in her scent in greedy lungfuls. Her legs were spread wide already and she hooked her hands under her knees, fully presenting for me.

Her pussy was swollen and with heat coating every inch of it she looked so fucking perfect.

"Do you need to come, little witch?"

"Yesss," she moaned out her answer. "Please, alpha."

Who was I to argue with that?

I sucked hard on her clit as I pushed two fingers inside of her. Then three. Despite having a knot and being fucked twice, it didn't take her body long to fall apart for me. Slick gushed around my fingers, coating them in her scent.

My alpha couldn't take anymore. I needed her. Now.

I wanted to watch her face as I fucked her so I simply settled between her legs and lined myself up. She moaned as I pushed inside of her. Thanks to Dorian's knot stretching her, she took mine perfectly. My knot locked into place and started to swell.

There was nothing sweet or slow about how I fucked my little witch. Now that I'd taken my time learning every inch of her beautiful body, I was ready to watch her fall apart on my cock. I needed to feel her come around me more than I needed air to breathe.

"Fuck, you're so perfect. You feel so good, omega," I praised as my hands dug into her hips, holding her steady as I slammed into her over and over again. Her lips parted on a silent cry, her nails scratching down my chest as I fucked her furiously.

I was relentless in my desperation to claim her. She came without me doing anything other than fucking her. Her body clenched around my cock, squeezing me. Thanks to already coming down her throat once, I held back.

She pulled me down over her until I was pressing against her, my weight-bearing down on her just enough to feel me there.

I expected her to kiss me, but instead, she latched her teeth onto my flesh, biting down hard enough to claim. Half of the bond pulled me in, her pleasure slamming into me hard enough my body followed her over, crying out my mate's name as my cum filled that sweet pussy. Her own body pulsed around me, shattering again for her alpha.

It was my turn to claim now. As she came hard, I laid my claim, teeth sinking into her neck, marking her as mine.

Both of our releases combined into an intensity I'd never experienced before. I couldn't tell what was mine or hers. The pleasure coursed back-and-forth endlessly as we fell apart.

I gently stroked my tongue over the bite mark before I pulled away, sealing it and cleaning it, soothing the pain. Then I rolled us over so she was laying on my chest.

She hummed happily as my fingers teased over her skin in gentle, soothing strokes.

“You did so good for us, omega. I promise we’ve got you through this,” I whispered.

“I know,” she slurred before her breathing evened out and sleep claimed her.

I was wired now. The bond went quiet as she slipped into sleep, but I could still feel her presence in my chest. It was like she had filled a hollow part of me that I didn’t know existed. She was such a bright light, even though she couldn’t see it herself all the time.

Her life hadn’t been easy, but I vowed from here on out it would be. We’d all make sure of it.

We were a pack now. A bonded pack that I wouldn’t hesitate to register with the courts and the magistrate.

No one would be able to tear us apart.

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Epilogue

HALLOWEEN NIGHT

FOUR YEARS LATER

Our two little boys were running through the magistrate lobby, collecting candy from the magisters and workers handing it out, and wearing out Rook.

Now that they'd shifted the roles a bit and replaced our old magistrates, life here had improved. My mate had a huge role in that.

I no longer felt like a prisoner in this town. Especially after we discovered a scent-matched bond was a cure of sorts. We all still had our moments but they were manageable now. That meant we could come and go.

Those who had to stay weren't intimidated by town guards. We were now like any other small town... just with a bit more excitement. You could see traces of the curses every day but they were a part of life here that we embraced.

It was a town I was proud to raise my boys in.

We weren't sure what traits they'd taken on from us quite yet. It was impossible to tell who their fathers were at just two and three. So far, we'd had a few magical outbursts, but nothing we couldn't handle.

Untrained kids with magic and cursed supernaturals had a lot in common and Moonlit Grove was a safe place for that to happen.

Bastian and Alaric ran up to us, eyes wide and excited, buckets nearly overflowing. We'd already spent two hours in town and finished here.

"Are we going home now?" Alaric asked, his eyes darting between us and his candy bucket. He was ready to take inventory of his haul.

"Yes," I promised. "Auntie Blake is meeting us there then we'll be back early."

Blake offered to let us go first, then trade places halfway through the party so she could enjoy it after.

I wasn't turning down an offer like that.

"Come on, little pumpkins," I said as I led our pack back outside.

The walk back was magical. It was a crisp autumn day, everyone was decorated and had gone all out this year.

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"We could always celebrate after bedtime the way we do every year," Dorian mused as he gave me a wolfish grin.

My cursed heat had resulted in Alaric, but we'd ended Halloween night in my nest every year since. That wasn't the sort of tradition I was willing to break.

I'd already picked out my best lingerie and was happy to text Blake we were skipping this year if we decided to enjoy our evening a bit earlier.

The next two hours were a whirlwind of chaos and giggles as the kids ran around until the sugar crash hit.

Rook stepped up behind me as I was peeking into their shared room to make sure they were finally asleep.

"They're out?"

"Mm-hm," I hummed quietly as I leaned into my mate.

"How do you feel about canceling and staying in this year?" he teased, nipping at my ear to make his intentions clear.

I wasn't sure how I got so lucky that I balanced my curse, embraced my magic, found a pack, and started a family. But now that I had them all, I

certainly wasn't letting go.

"I say... catch me if you can."

Then I tugged my dress over my head and tossed it aside to reveal the lacy number I'd picked out for the occasion. Then I was running through the halls of our packhouse, ready to be caught and get lost in my pack for the rest of the night.

And for every Halloween to come.



For more omegaverse by Jarica and Jenée check out the contemporary, spicy and sweet, small town world, here: [Truth or Pack](#)

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ABOUT JENÉE ROBINSON

Jenée Robinson has been married for over 20 years now, has three ornery girls, and lives on a cattle farm.

Writing has always been one of her loves and she's excited to see where it takes her.

She has completed several books, short stories, and has more releasing soon. She is busy writing more, as well as more novellas and books.

Other than writing, she loves reading and photography.

She's a Harry Potter Nerd and loves the show Supernatural and Captain America.

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