



AS  
ABOVE  
SO  
BELOW

DANA ISALY

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BELOW

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# DEDICATION

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THOSE  
WHO STEP ON OTHERS TO GET A FEW  
INCHES TALLER.



# EPIGRAPH

"KARMA IS EXTREMELY EFFICIENT IF ONE IS  
EXTREMELY PATIENT."  
—EFRAT CYBULKEWICZ



# TRIGGER WARNINGS

THIS BOOK IS INTENDED ONLY FOR THOSE OVER THE AGE OF ADULTHOOD. BELOW IS A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF CONTENT YOU MAY FIND TRIGGERING OR DIFFICULT TO READ.

DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE, ATTEMPTED SUICIDE, SELF HARM, DRUG USE, ALCOHOL USE, SEXUAL SITUATIONS AND GRAPHIC SEXUAL CONTENT, DUBIOUS CONSENT DURING SEX, GORE, MURDER, AND BULLYING.

THERE IS ALWAYS HELP. IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS SUFFERING WITH DEPRESSION AND/OR SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, HELP IS AVAILABLE.

IN THE U.S. DIAL 988. LANGUAGES: ENGLISH & SPANISH  
IN CANADA DIAL 211 OR 1-833-456-4566  
IN THE UK, DIAL 116 123  
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WICKED GAME BY URSINE VULPINE, ANNACA

SEASON OF THE WITCH BY LANA DEL RAY

LILITH BY ELLISE

DEVIL I KNOW BY ALLIE X

YOU DON'T OWN ME BY LESLEY GORE

WATER WITCH BY THE SECRET SISTERS,

BRANDI CARLILE

THE DEVIL BY BANKS

HOW VILLAINS ARE MADE BY MADALEN DUKE

SEE YOU BLEED BY RAMSEY

CULT LEADER BY CUTE WHORE

SATAN AND ST. PAUL BY JOHN FULLBRIGHT

HOTEL BY MONTELL FISH

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BELOW

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# TO CLEANSE YOUR HOME: ✨



*What you need:*

*A sage bundle*

*A fire safe bowl such as a seashell or ceramic bowl*

*A fire source*

*Feather to fan smoke (optional)*

*Instructions:*

- *Light your sage at the very tips at a 45 degree angle. Once ignited, blow out the flames and let the leaves smolder for a moment.*
- *Use smooth movements and waft the smoke around your home. Make sure you get all the corners, inside of your cabinets, and into your windows.*
- *Once you are done, if you would like to leave the sage smoldering, make sure you leave it where you can see it in the fire safe bowl.*
- *Alternatively, you can run it under water to put it out and then let the bundle dry before storing.*



# PROLOGUE:

## BRANWEN

20 YEARS OLD

THE SLEEP PARALYSIS IS BACK. It's been weeks since I've seen him — my demon. But I know it's him when the room gets warmer, and yet my limbs won't move. I look around, my eyes the only thing not frozen in place.

And then I spot him. A black, inky spot in the corner, just far enough away that I can't see him clearly. But I know it's him like I know my mother's footsteps coming up the stairs. He's been around for almost half a decade now, watching, listening, and waiting. Waiting for what, I'm not sure. But I can sense there's something he wants.

"Hi," I say in my mind, trying to get his attention. He never reacts, never acts like he can hear me, but I speak to him silently nonetheless. "I spent all day with the girls today," I tell him. "We practiced spells, and I tried to help them gain some power, wield their magic in a way that might help them get stronger."

Silence.

"Jadia has the most beautiful spells," I continue in my head. He's heard all about my best friends, but I keep him up to date on everything we do together. "She weaves them like poetry, but her magic barely responds. Same with Mags and Lilly. It's like their magic isn't listening. I don't know what to do. I meet with them almost daily to help them. We spend almost every waking moment together. Granted, not all of it is used for practicing."

I smile, thinking about the intense gossip session we had today.

“Do you remember me talking about Kegan?” I ask him, carrying on my one-sided discussion. “Everyone is throwing themselves at him lately. It’s like he woke up having grown a few inches and gained a couple muscles, and suddenly, he’s the talk of the entire coven. And if you aren’t friends with Kegan, you don’t exist.” I laugh to myself. “I guess he is your stereotypical beauty,” I admit. “Blond hair, blue eyes. A lot of people wonder what there is not to like.”

I pause before continuing, hoping that mentioning another guy in his presence will maybe garner a reaction. I don’t think I’m ready to admit to myself why I’m so desperate for a reaction. But nothing happens. I exhale and continue.

“But there’s just something that feels off to me. I’m not sure what it is, but the way he seeks me out in a crowd...I should be flattered, right? That’s what the girls say. They’re always eager to catch his attention when he’s around, giving him compliments and hanging on his every word. They encourage me to pursue him, but I’m not interested. I’m not really interested in anyone.”

My mind wanders a bit, thinking about who I could be interested in. My eyes find my demon in the corner, still as stone but still watching. Always watching. Why doesn’t he ever talk to me? Or at least nod his head, wiggle a finger, *breathe*.

I take as deep of a breath as my body will allow.

“Anyway,” I tell him, moving on to the next bit of gossip I learned today. “Mags has told me that she has a crush. There’s this warlock that works at the pier doing something I can’t remember. He’s a bit older than her...quite a bit older, but I’m not judging. And I’m definitely going to the pier with Lilly and Jadia tomorrow morning to scope him out. Mags will probably kill us, but we can’t help ourselves. He sounds hot as hell, and I have to get my eyes on him!” I laugh.

I look over at my demon again to make sure he’s still there, my ever-watchful therapist and confidant. He’s not moved a muscle, his yellow, glowing eyes blinking every once in a while. I wonder if he sometimes gets tired of listening to me drone on and on about my friends. Although he may not even be real. This could all just be a dream. But it feels too real to dismiss, and I wonder if he’ll ever move, speak, or just give me some sort of sign.

“Are you real?” I ask him suddenly, waiting for a response I know won’t come. I’ve asked him this countless times. He never answers. Not even a tilt of the head or two blinks for yes and one for no. He’s just frozen in time over there in the corner of my room, hiding in the shadows.

“Nothing much else happened today,” I move on. “When I came home from hanging out with the girls all day, Asha clung to me like glue. She’s growing up so quickly. I was hoping that she may want to hang out with me and my friends, but she never asks. She never even seems to be interested.”

I mentally shrug.

“I asked her once if she wanted to. She’s fourteen now, plenty old enough to just hang out with us around town. And soon, she’s really going to start coming into whatever powers she has. It would be beneficial for her to work with us and practice her spells with us. She’s going to need to learn what her style is, what she was gifted with, and how it all works. I’m personally hoping she’s going to be just as strong as I am. I don’t like being the only one in the coven that has a full range.”

My demon begins to shrink away into the darkness, like he’s being called home. And I feel my eyelids get heavy. He’s leaving, and it’s pushing me back into sleep, just like it always does when he abandons me.

“Don’t go,” I beg him, the overwhelming feeling of sadness creeping into my core. I never like this part. I look forward to falling asleep every night, knowing he may show up and stay a while. It’s sad to think that my best friend is a make-believe demon. But I hate waking up with only vague memories of the shadow against the wall.

I think he pauses for a second, but I can’t quite tell. It’s so dark in here, with only the waning moon as light.

“Can you let me see you?” I ask him. “Can you let me move so that I can come closer?” I’ve also asked him this a few too many times to be dignified. I sound like a starving beggar. But I can’t help it. I don’t like mysteries. I *have* to know if he’s real or just a figment of my dreams.

He slinks further back into the darkness, and my eyelids sink even further shut.

“See you tomorrow, at least?” I ask as a last-ditch effort. “Please?”

No answer comes, but he disappears completely, and I’m pulled fiercely back into sleep.

# RULE NUMBER ONE:



*The energy you put out into the  
world will return threefold.  
Be careful what you wish for.*



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# CHAPTER 1

## BRANWEN

7 YEARS LATER...

MY MOTHER'S fingers dance through my hair at lightning speed, braiding and tying. She pulls pieces of the blue-grey hair out of my face, pinning it back so that my paint is on display. I watch her in the mirror as she whispers spells of protection and weaves them into my hair.

Tonight is the ritual. The one that will allow me to become the youngest High Priestess in our coven's history. At the ripe age of twenty-seven, I am the most powerful witch in our community. Which, to be fair, may not be saying much as the rest of our people are struggling. For the past decade, the witches and warlocks haven't been able to come into their powers, and no one has been able to figure out why.

And yet, something about tonight isn't sitting right with me. I should be excited, but there's a heavy cloud hanging over my head, weighing me down and draining my energy. I lift a palm and snap my fingers, bringing a spark of flame to light. It hovers for a moment before it flickers out, shooting a puff of black smoke into the air and soot out to my fingertips.

Well, that's not good.

I meet my mother's eyes in the mirror, and we stare at each other for a moment before she doubles down on her spell whispering. Grabbing the black kohl from the stand in front of me, I watch my reflection as I add to the ritual paint that has already been wiped across my face. It covers my

eyes, going all the way across my temples to my hairline and down to my cheekbones, where it drips over my cheeks. It stretches up my forehead in an eruption, leaving hardly any empty skin.

I draw lines from my bottom lip over my chin and down my neck to the hollow of my throat with my thumb. I do this three times, silently calling on the fates with each stroke to protect me tonight. Asha walks into the room as I finish, sitting in front of me and grabbing the pot of white ash. She dips a small brush in a bowl of water and then into the ash before drawing lines and symbols over the black on my face.

“There’s a heaviness in the air,” she whispers.

“Ack!” our mother says as she waves her hands in the air. “Do not speak it! You will manifest it!”

Asha’s lips turn up in a smirk once Mother finishes and leaves the room.

“I feel it too,” I tell her. “I haven’t heard from anyone all day, not even the girls, and I’ve chosen to be part of the council. They should have at least checked in, right? And Kegan hasn’t spoken to me for days.”

“It’s probably the jealousy.” She finishes her line work and sits everything down behind her. “Or they’re plotting against you.”

“Manifesting!” I tease her, doing quite the impression of our mother if I do say so myself.

“Get your robes on,” she says as she stands to leave. She grabs my shoulders and kisses my forehead, her lips coming away black. “I’m so proud to be your little sister.”

I smile at her for a moment, and once she leaves, I begin to strip. The ritual takes place in front of our entire community, and I wear nothing but heavy velvet robes. Pulling on the soft fabric, I lift the hood up over my ornate hair, making sure it shadows most of my face.

Mother makes sure everything is in place before she follows me out of the house. The heaviness only increases once the cold September air hits me. The robe does little to protect my naked body from the breeze, and soon, I feel myself start to shiver.

I could easily make myself more comfortable, conjuring a simple warmth charm, but my anxiety begs me to leave it alone. That little voice in the back of my mind won’t shut up. And when I look up into the night sky, I see why. One, two, three, four, five, six. Six crows fly overhead.

“One for sorrow, two for mirth. Three for a funeral, four for birth. Five for heaven, six for hell,” I murmur.

“Branwen,” my mother scolds, grabbing my arm and pulling me close to her side. “You are manifesting!”

“I didn’t manifest that, Mother. Six crows just flew overhead. At nighttime. Something is wrong.”

“Did you see those crows?” Asha asks, out of breath from running to catch up with us.

“Shh!” Mother shushes her. And if looks could kill, Asha would have gone up in flames. Mother is panicked as well. She can talk all she wants about manifesting this and that, but I know her well enough to see that she’s nervous.

Asha comes up to my other side and links her arm through my own. She’s fully dressed, looking like the little goth kid that never grew up. Her heavy boots clomp on the ground, and her alabaster skin sticks out harshly from the holes in her jeans.

My arms are bare to the wind, and the body heat from my mother and sister isn’t doing much to keep me warm. I’m incredibly anxious, barely able to breathe as we get closer to the open field. I can see the firelight glowing in the distance, beckoning us to the ritual. My bare feet are wet with dew, and my toes sink into the soft dirt with each step.

This should ground me. The entire experience of being bare to the elements is supposed to connect me with nature and prepare me for the role I’m about to take on. But if anything, it’s making everything worse. My senses are heightened in the worst way, and I feel incredibly overstimulated.

I can hear everything. The bats clicking as they speak to each other, the bonfire crackling, and the whispers of the people around it. As we get closer, Asha’s grip on my arm gets tighter.

“You’re going to fix us, right? You’re going to make sure we can all use our powers again?” Her voice is small and reminds me that even though she’s twenty, she’s still young. And she’s stuck in the nightmare of barely being able to use her power just like everyone else in the coven.

“I’m going to try,” I promise her.

That’s all I can promise. I understand why they want me to lead, but that doesn’t mean I understand how to fix things. It just means that I have a lot more power that I don’t know how to utilize.

When the clearing comes into sight, all eyes land on us. The instant smiles seem to ease a bit of the tension that I was feeling. Everyone seems genuinely happy to see us. My friends are all gathered at the back, sipping on drinks and clothed in their ceremonial robes as well. I wave over to them, and they come running, surrounding me with the scent of sweet almond and patchouli.

“Are you naked under there?” Mags teases, pulling on the robe around my throat to try and get a look.

“Careful, Mags,” Jadia laughs. “You’re going to get more than you bargained for under those robes.” She wags her eyebrows at me, and I just roll my eyes.

“You look like you’re going to battle,” Lilly says, reaching under my hood to play with a stray lock of hair.

“Who knows?” Asha chimes in, making her presence known. “Maybe she is.”

She eyes them all cautiously. She’s never liked them, always telling me I’m too trusting when it comes to the people in the coven. She thinks they only hang around to use me and my power, but I’m happy to help people when I can. I like feeling useful, and giving a boost in power to those who need it is the least I can do.

“Branwen?” Kegan says, coming up behind me and tossing an arm around my shoulders. I immediately don’t like the energy that’s pouring off him in waves. It’s like every single negative thing I’ve felt tonight has culminated here, in his presence. “How’s my girl?”

“It’s been days since *your girl* has heard from you,” I snap at him, his negativity seeping into my bones like poison.

He takes a step back, his arm slinking from my shoulders. He clears his throat.

“We need to talk,” he says, pulling me gently away from my sister and my friends. I lock eyes with Asha.

“Go. I’ll find Mother and see you after the ritual.”

I nod and let Kegan pull me away. He takes me around the bonfire, which is roaring and crackling and sending sparks flying into the night sky above us. We walk over to the edge of the clearing where the tall grass begins. I watch it sway slowly in the breeze.

“You look fierce,” he tells me, a small smile on his lips. Kegan has grown into the quintessential handsome man. He’s tall, muscular, with

white-blond hair and dark blue eyes. Everyone in the coven, warlock and witch alike, gives him all the attention he so desperately needs to survive.

And there's a small part of me that's ashamed I do the same. But when he looks at me, gives me the attention that everyone else wants, it makes my body heat with something akin to...pride? Maybe?

"You have to be fierce if you're going to lead."

"Indeed you do." He reaches out, taking hold of the same lock of hair that Lilly played with a few minutes ago.

Out of the corner of my eye, I can see the elders climbing up onto the makeshift stage we have set for special rituals such as this.

"What did you need to discuss?" I ask him. "They're almost ready for me."

"You're planning on asking those three to be part of your counsel, yes?" he asks, his voice low and conspiratorial as he nods his head back toward my friends.

"My friends? Yes. Why?"

"There's been rumblings...rumors, Branwen." He sounds urgent and yet somehow completely levelheaded. "They're saying you plan to treat people unfairly. They assume you will only favor those who you consider a friend." My stomach drops.

"I consider everyone a friend," I whisper back, panicking. If he's saying it, it has to be true. Maybe this is what I've been feeling all evening.

"I've tried to use my sway here, Branwen, but I only have so much pull amongst the people. I've gotten you this far, but you're going to have to settle the people's fears and get them on your side."

"Wait," I interrupt him, a bit dazed by what he's just said. "What do you mean you got me this far?"

Our eyes meet just as the elders call for everyone's attention. Pain flares through my chest, and I'm not sure if I'm angry that he thinks I couldn't make it this far on my own or if I'm upset because maybe what he's saying is the truth. Have all of these people just been following me around because he's told them to? Do they like me because of him and not because of me?

"I have to go," I whisper, trying to keep my voice from breaking.

I'm about to go up in front of our entire coven, naked and vulnerable. And now also with a broken spirit. As I turn to go, I swear I see the slightest grin take over his face. But our time is up, and I can't be bothered to give Kegan any more of it.

I take a deep breath and walk straight for the stage.

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# THE MEANINGS OF COLOR CANDLES:



*White - Spirituality, peace, higher self, purity*

*Black - Banishing, against negativity, protection, binding*

*Brown - Home protection, animals, stability, family, material goods*

*Red - Vital energy, strength, passion, courage, lust*

*Pink - Romantic lover, emotional healing, friendship, caring, self-love*

*Orange - Business, success, justice, opportunity, celebration, ambition*

*Yellow - Intelligence, learning, reason, focus, memory, joy, comfort, hope*

*Green - Nature, physical healing, money, abundance, fertility*

*Blue - Communication, traveling, inspiration, calm, creativity, forgiveness*

*Purple - Influence, psychic abilities, wisdom, authority, hidden knowledge*

*Silver - Intuition, dreams, femininity, the moon*

*Gold - Wealthy, masculinity, luck, happiness, power, the sun*

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# CHAPTER 2

## BRANWEN

I CAN FEEL everyone's eyes on me as I make my way up front, the hem of my robes brushing against my bare feet. The gazes of my coven burn my skin like fire, and I find it hard to breathe as they all give me smiles of encouragement.

And yet, if what Kegan said was true, this is all a deception. Everything about what these people — my coven — have said to me for too long has all been a lie. Will they let me ascend? Will they let me try and make all of this right?

I'd give them all every ounce of my power if it would help them thrive. I would live powerless if it meant that my little sister could finally feel what it's like to wield real magic.

"Happy Mabon," the Grand Elder announces to everyone once I've made my way to the center of the platform. They answer back in unison. "Tonight on this Autumn Equinox when day and night are the same, we anoint a new High Priestess as we honor the life and death of our previous."

It's been almost seven months since Edith passed, leaving us without leadership since. We've been relying heavily on the elders in the meantime, with some people coming to me individually for more personal things. I've been counting down the days until Mabon, eager to take on the role and help more people where I can.

“Before we can begin tonight’s ritual, we will now call upon the elements to help us connect to Hecate and her divine power and guidance to see us through.”

He moves to the North side of the platform, the old, warped wood creaking underneath his footsteps. Untying the green velvet bag from his neck, he tosses dirt in the air as he calls upon the Earth of the North.

“The Earth is nurturing and strong, faithful and firm. We call upon you here, hopeful you will guide us.”

The musky scent of a forest floor fills my lungs as the old candle in that corner is lit with magic.

Another elder moves to the East, concentrating with deep breaths as she calls upon the Air of the East.

“The Air is the soul and breath of life, wise and connected to our minds. We call upon you here, hopeful you will guide us.”

A breeze kicks up the skirt of my robes, flowing underneath to run up my legs and around my torso before moving through my hair under my hood. The candle is lit.

Another moves to the South as he pulls a red bag from his neck and rubs soot between his palms as he calls on the Fire of the South.

“The Fire both creates and destroys, healing and harming. We call upon you here, hopeful you will guide us.”

The chill I’ve felt all night is replaced with a sweltering heat, and I close my eyes against it and curl my toes into the deck until I can breathe again. The candle is lit.

And finally, the last elder makes her way over to the West, cradling a small jar of water from the sea to call upon the Water of the West.

“Water is cleansing and purifying, filled with passion and emotion. We call upon you here, hopeful you will guide us.”

For a brief moment, it rains, showering the entire coven with its soothing chill. The candle is lit.

They each now turn to face the center of the circle they have created but remain near their designated candles.

“And to call upon the Spirit, we invite Branwen Harrow into the circle.”

Shaking off the nerves that are trying to take over, I pull back my hood, letting the light from the bonfire illuminate the markings on my face. I hear small gasps and whispers as my dark eyes take in the people around me. Next, I untie each knot holding my robes together. As they fall to the

ground, I step out of them, completely naked, bare to my coven and the elements.

My skin is covered in goose bumps, and my pierced nipples are pebbled. My hair tickles my shoulders and back as it hangs down to my waist in braided curls. Witches are not a shy people. We believe in the divinity of sex and the power we gain from it. And so having this many people see my naked form isn't what has my nerves shot. It's the fact that because I am naked, I am exposed and unprotected.

Calmly walking across the rough wood, I step into the middle of their circle. Instantly, my power is amplified. I can feel it like when you scoot across carpet with socks. It electrifies my entire body, forcing the hair on my arms to stand on end. It feels like everything is falling into place, and I can't help but smile when I face the coven in front of the Spirit candle and hold my arms out to the side.

"The Spirit is what gives us life, allowing us to have a bridge between the physical and the spiritual realm. We call upon you here, hopeful you will guide us. Hecate, we call upon you here, hopeful you will guide us."

I barely have to think of the idea of a flame before the candle roars to life, sending a burst of energy up my spine and into my chest. My head swims, and I lose all the feeling in my legs. Suddenly, I'm falling to the ground, my body not entirely mine. When I open my eyes, I realize I'm not inside myself anymore.

I look around and see my body lying on the floor at my feet, the elders rushing to my side as some try to shake me awake.

"Branwen." My head snaps toward the voice.

"Hecate," I whisper in awe.

Her main form is facing me, and she is dressed in the same robes I was wearing just a few moments ago. Her long black hair falls over her chest, and her eyes glow white from under her hood. Behind her, her other two forms hover like shadows, barely visible even in the moonlight.

"You called upon me," she says.

"I did."

"And why is that?"

"For the ritual," I answer her.

"Ah, but there was more in your heart you were asking for, Branwen." She pauses, and I remain silent, not sure what to say in the presence of my

Mother Goddess. She smiles down at me before continuing. "Did you know that your name means both darkness and purity?"

I nod.

"Many think you cannot be both, but you need the dark to be able to see the light, and the light to be able to see in the dark." All of her forms turn to look at the coven. Everyone is whispering, staring at my ashen form on the floor. My eyes find Kegan as he watches my lifeless body with confusion. "You will be tested, Branwen," she continues, turning her forms back to face me. "And it will not be pleasant."

I want to know what she means, how I will be tested, and what I will need to do to come out of it. But the more pressing question on my mind isn't about myself. It's about the coven's powers and why we can't seem to reach our full potential.

"And the coven?" I ask her. "Will you help me solve this issue? I need guidance to find the answers they seek."

She smiles, and it is terrifying.

"Suffering is good for the soul, Branwen. Be brave. Remember, sometimes to reach the light, we must manipulate the darkness."

She reaches out to me, and as her hand makes contact with my chest, I'm shoved violently back into my body. I sit up, coughing, and squint as I blink against the glow of the firelight.

"Where did you go? Who spoke to you, child?" one of the elders asks.

"It was Hecate." My voice is rough and barely comes out above a whisper.

"Elders!" I recognize Kegan's voice and look over to find him pushing his way to the front of the crowd. He hoists himself up onto the stage and breaks the circle we've created. I feel the energy get sucked out of me immediately. He wasn't invited, and therefore, the connection of the elements has been broken.

"What has possessed you to interrupt this ritual?" the Grand Elder shouts, standing to his full height as Kegan approaches us.

Just when I think he's going to address me, to make sure that I'm okay, he smiles down at me and then turns toward the crowd.

"I can't let this go on any longer!" he announces to everyone. "We are all here to celebrate this girl, and yet none of you know a thing about who she really is!"

My stomach drops, and my body goes cold. What is he doing?

“I’ve spent a lot of time with Branwen over the years, as I’m sure you all know. But I had no clue who I was dealing with. She was kind to my face, kind to *all* of your faces! But when our backs are turned, family, she is nothing but a witch using her dark powers to drain all of ours.”

“What?” My voice comes out as a squeak, but no one pays me any attention.

“I found this,” he cries out as he holds up an antique glass jar with black wax sealing the lid. “It is filled with rat’s teeth and rusted nails. And carved into the wood of her closet floor where she kept it hidden was a spell. A spell that binds all of our powers...*to her.*”

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# RULE NUMBER TWO:



*When you point a finger, three point  
back at you.*



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# CHAPTER 3

## BRANWEN

“WHAT?”

I wanted the question to come out louder, but I think I’m too shocked to project my voice. Suddenly, I remember I’m naked. I throw my hands over my breasts and cross my legs. I’m not naked in front of friends and family anymore; I’m naked in front of a ton of people who are staring at me like I’ve wronged them in the worst way possible.

Which, if I had actually done this, I would deserve. I’m being accused of something I didn’t do, but already I’m not sure how I’m going to prove it. The only thing I can think of is to take them all to my house and prove to them I didn’t do it.

And why is he alleging that I did? I’ve never done anything to Kegan to make him mad enough to do something like this. I thought we were friends.

I start to shiver, and one of the elders lays my robe over my body. I quickly cover myself up, slipping my arms through the soft fabric and quickly conjuring a spell to make it warm. My mouth is dry as I struggle to stand up on wobbly knees. My throat closes and aches, my eyes watering as I try to swallow and look for my mother in the crowd.

Our eyes lock, and hers are filled with fear. Asha, who is standing next to her, looks murderous. If she was at full power, she would light the entire

stage on fire with that look. And she would make sure Kegan went down with it.

“Branwen, as the Grand Elder, I demand you to answer to this.”

His voice is deep and booms across the entire field. Everyone is silent, waiting for my response. They’re waiting for me to shut this down. But I don’t know what to tell them other than it’s not true. I scan the crowd, looking for just one friendly face. Surely the girls will stand with me and back me up.

But they’re nowhere to be found. I search the entire field, making eye contact with almost everyone to try and find them, but they’ve just... disappeared.

“Branwen,” the Grand Elder says with a warning voice.

“She shouldn’t have to answer for anything!” Asha shouts from the crowd. There are whispers and gasps as she pushes herself to the forefront. “This is a ridiculous claim, and anyone that knows Branwen knows that she would never do something like this.”

I glance over to Kegan out of the corner of my eye and see him smirking down at her as she gets up in his face.

He’s going to take her down next. I can see the wheels turning behind those dead eyes.

“It isn’t true,” I answer.

“Can you prove it?” Kegan asks. When we look at each other, all the pretense has fallen. He’s no longer faking it, trying to be my friend and gain my trust. Those eyes are filled with nothing but malice.

He lifts the jar to his face and inhales the scent of magic. His nose turns up.

“It even smells like your magic. Acrid and sour.”

“She shouldn’t have to prove anything! You’re the one that brought up the accusation. You should be the one to provide the proof!” Asha stands at the bottom of the stage, staring up into Kegan’s face.

“Is this not proof enough, little one?” He crouches down, but she doesn’t back up. “Is this bottled black magic that I found in your home not enough evidence?” He holds the jar up in front of Asha’s face, but she looks unimpressed.

“That proves *nothing*,” she grinds out.

“The only thing I can do is take you to my home,” I tell all of them, refusing to address Kegan himself.

“We must also consider that Asha may be involved,” Kegan says as he stands to his full height and walks slowly over to the Grand Elder.

“Excuse me?” she shouts.

“Do *not* drag my sister into this,” I warn him, letting my power roll through my body and off my skin in waves. It’s small, but he takes a step back when it reaches him. I count it as a win.

“We will accompany you to your home,” the Grand Elder says. “There, we will look at the evidence Kegan says is there, and we will make a decision from there.”

I want to breathe a sigh of relief that they’re at least going to hear me out. But there’s that feeling still in the air that is telling me not to drop my guard. Something is very, very wrong.

“But I must say, Branwen...” He trails off and gets closer to Kegan, close enough to smell the jar. “It does seem to have your scent.”

I ignore him, knowing that he’s too old to even have a sense of smell anymore. And even if he did, how the fuck would he know the intimate scent of my magic. You’d only be able to pick up on that if you were around a person often like Kegan was to me.

When I jump off the platform, Asha takes me in her arms, holding me close like she’s protecting me when it should be the other way around.

“What the fuck is going on?” she asks me in a hushed voice.

“I don’t know. Where are the girls?” I ask her.

“Haven’t seen them since everything began. Snakes in the fucking grass.”

“Language,” my mother hisses as she comes up behind us. “What is happening, Branwen?”

Her hands hold my face, and she stares deep into my soul. Over time, as we age, our powers fade. At one time, my mother had a full range of power. But now that her body begins to age, so does her magic. Still, she tries to force an answer out of me. I feel her magic probe and prod at my spirit.

“You did not do this?”

“I did not,” I assure her.

“Thank the Gods.” She breathes a sigh of relief like she actually believed I did for a moment.

“You thought I did?” I ask her, outraged that my own mother could think so low of me.

“I am your mother, and I would love you no matter what. But I had to ask.”

“They’re never going to believe you,” Asha says. “If we get back to the house and there’s a spell carved into your closet floor...you’re fucked.”

“Again, Asha. Please. Language.” Mother squeezes the bridge of her nose.

“There’s nothing there,” I tell her. “It’ll be fine. I don’t know what Kegan’s motivation is here, but I’m not going to let him win.”

Asha and I link arms and begin to follow the elders back to our house. Along the way, Jadia catches up with us. She looks frantic and afraid, her black hair sticking to the sweat on her face. She takes me into her arms, throwing them around my neck and suffocating me. Lilly and Mags come up behind her.

“I’ve been looking for you!” Jadia says, falling into step next to us while we walk home.

“I didn’t see any of you at the ritual.” Asha’s gaze is an accusation in itself, but none of them seem to notice.

“The elders told us to wait off to the side until we were called forward. We were all just in the line of trees.”

“What happened up there? When you passed out?” Lilly asks. “Did someone speak to you?”

“Hecate,” I answer her.

“You saw Hecate?” Mags’ voice sounds more nervous than the other two. And I’m not sure what else I’m picking up on, but something isn’t right here.

“Did she say anything about what was about to happen?” Jadia asks.

“You know I didn’t do this....right?”

I look at each one of them, trying to get the true answer from their faces, but they’re unreadable. I may have magic, but that doesn’t mean I’m able to read minds. And even if I could, even in a situation like this, it’s considered one of the highest offenses a witch or warlock can commit. Our thoughts are our own, and we are very protective of our freedom to keep our spells and the way we think to ourselves.

“Of course we don’t think you did this,” Lilly says as she looks at the other two. “Right?”

“I could never think this of you, Branwen. None of us could,” Mags chimes in. “We’re here for you. We aren’t going to let anything happen to

you, okay?”

I kiss Jadia on her cheek and try to calm my nerves. Kegan and all of the elders walk in front of us. There are some people who follow, but most people stay back or disperse and go home to their families. It's not like we're going to let everyone inside our house anyway, even if they could fit.

“Why do you think Kegan did this?” Lilly asks, breaking the tense silence.

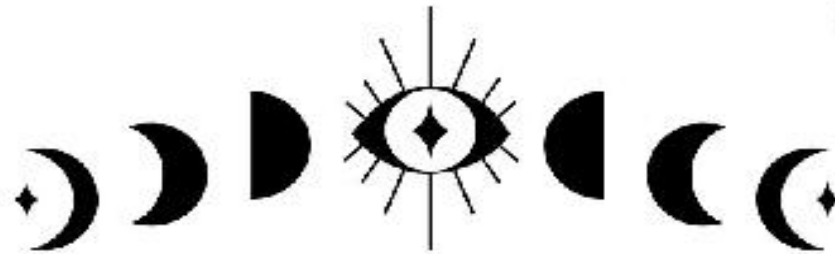
I sigh and look at the back of his form. I'd light him on fire if I could get away with it.

“I don't know,” I tell her. “I really don't know.”

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# CHAPTER 4

## BRANWEN

OUR HOUSE finally comes into view, and when it does, Kegan glances back, his eyes landing immediately on me. I can tell even in the low light that he's smiling. It turns my stomach, and it threatens to heave.

I'm starting to fear they may actually find something in there.

But they can't...right?

The house is a two-story Victorian, painted black so many years ago that the paint is chipped, showing the white wooden paneling underneath. Mother keeps all the curtains open, letting the candles in the window guide us back like an orange-and-yellow beacon. The porch wraps all the way around the house, and once we get to the front door, we pause.

"Cecily," the Grand Elder says, gesturing to my mother to open the door for everyone.

There's a decent number of people that followed us here, and I'm not sure how comfortable I am letting them all into the house. I don't even want Kegan stepping foot inside anymore. But how else is he going to show us where this supposed spell is?

Mother catches my eye and knows exactly what I'm thinking.

If this goes wrong, the fewer witnesses, the better.

"It will only be us and the boy," the Grand Elder assures us, although he sounds incredibly bored with this already.

I don't know why, but even in this situation, the fact that he just called Kegan *the boy* makes me snort. Kegan knows it too, looking at me like he's trying to stab me with a million little daggers.

"We have your back, Branwen," Jadia says, pulling me in for a hug.

Mags joins. "We know he's lying. And they'll see that when they get upstairs."

With Lilly joining in, I can barely breathe beneath the three of them.

"Stay strong, Branwen," she whispers, kissing me fiercely on the cheek.

There are about twenty people standing in our front yard. People I grew up with, friends that I consider my family, and people I pass every day on the street. These are people I work with and for and exchange laughter and light. But now they're looking at me like I had an ulterior motive the entire time. Like I was using them to climb to the top.

Maybe they just wanted a reason to hate me. And Kegan handed it to them on a silver platter.

My mother reluctantly opens the door, and Kegan is off, leading the way in through the front foyer and up the creaky staircase that twists up to the second level. My bedroom is on the back end of the house, and he takes us all straight to it.

The air is crackling with energy, and I cling to Asha's arm like a lifeline. My fingernails make little moons in her skin, but she doesn't flinch; she just holds tighter to me. Neither one of us wants to say it out loud, but we're both thinking it.

They're going to find a spell in there.

I stand in the doorway and watch as everyone gathers in my room. It's small, smaller than the rest of the rooms in the house. But I like how cozy it is. And since it looks out into the forest, I always felt like I could call more easily on the elements. And the moon always shines so brightly on the back of the house. I was willing to give up a queen bed for the way the room felt to me.

Kegan swings the door open and violently pushes back all my clothing. What is with the fucking theatrics with this man? Some fall off the rack and crumple to the ground in a heap of black. I don't venture out much into color. When everything seems to be out of his way, he takes a step away and points to the back corner.

It's dark; there's no light in my closet. It's not a walk-in, just your normal old house tiny closet that barely fits a hanger. The Grand Elder leans into the darkness and then slowly gets to his knees to get a better look.

Asha, still standing next to me, breathes heavily and wipes her sweaty palms on her clothes. The sweat on my brow is making the makeup run into my eyes. They burn, and I try to carefully wipe the tears and sweat away without making a mess of my hands.

"Branwen Harrow," his voice booms through the room.

I go ice-cold.

I look over to Kegan, and he still has the same smug smile on his mouth. I hold back. I want to make him feel pain. I want to strangle him while I watch the life fade from his eyes. I want to burn his corpse and toss it in an unmarked grave.

He's framed me.

"Can you explain this?" the Grand Elder asks as the rest of them push in to look at what I assume is a spell carved into the floor of my closet.

Asha starts to cry, and my mother just sits down on my bed. Her eyes are empty, staring out of the window and refusing to look at any of us. The other three finally move out of the way so that I can get a look.

Sure enough, there on the floor is a rudimentary spell carved into the old hardwood.

*Drain. Bind. Harness.*

*Powers them to powers me.*

*Drain. Bind. Harness.*

*Magic them to magic me.*

"That is not my handwriting." I turn to face everyone, my heart beating wildly. Their eyes make my skin flush. "Nor is it a spell I would use. It is incredibly primitive and nothing like what I would normally cast. The only similarity is the repetitive nature."

Kegan scoffs.

"It smells of her. You can't miss the stench of smoke and cloves." He turns his nose up at me. Once upon a time, he told me that I smelled like Samhain, smoky and sweet. Clearly, he's been playing me for longer than I care to admit.

"It's in my closet," I say with a cold voice, turning to address him. "And not only does it smell of me, but that scent is covering something else up."

I grab the jar from his hand and inspect it, sniffing the glass. But it's been handled so many times now I can't get a clear scent or feeling. It's muddled, but there's something else there. Something dark and acrid.

"The evidence is overwhelming, Branwen," one of the female elders whispers.

Beatrice, or Bea as we all call her, was my fourth grade English teacher. Her hair is grey now, her skin wrinkled. But her eyes are the same pale blue that they were when I was a child. But back then, they held nothing but kindness for me. Now they're hardened and hostile.

"So easily convinced," I choke out. I swallow against the thickness in my throat. "I did *not* do this."

"Can you prove you did not?" Bea asks. "Because from where we are standing, it looks like you did. The spell, while I admit is childish, does bear a resemblance to your others that I've seen while you were in school."

"And who's to say she didn't write it when she was a kid? Didn't our problems start when we were teenagers?" Kegan chimes in.

"True," the Grand Elder agrees. "Branwen, if you cannot supply any evidence to the contrary of what Mr. Usoro is saying, you will be punished for this."

I hear my mother gasp for breath. When I look over to her, I find her holding back sobs on my bed. She still won't look over to me, not even as I start to cry myself. The tears slip down over my cheeks and fall heavily onto the robe I'm wearing. Asha comes up behind me and wraps an arm around my torso.

"You punish her, you punish me."

"No," I say firmly, pushing her away. "Leave Asha out of this."

She tries to argue, but the elders all hold their hands up at the same time, signaling for everyone in the room to be silent. Kegan's eyes are roaming over my body; I can feel them like a physical touch, and I recoil from it. I want to disappear in on myself. My fate is already sealed. I feel it in my bones.

This is the test. This is what Hecate was warning me of.

Without so much as a trial, they are finding me guilty. The lacking evidence, in their eyes, is enough to damn me to whatever punishment they see fit. So I stand there, silently begging Asha to keep her mouth shut and let me bear this myself. The last thing I want is for her to be guilty by association.

“Mr. Usoro.” The Grand Elder gestures. “The jar.”

Kegan hands it over.

“You may leave now. You are no longer needed for this.”

The second Kegan leaves this house, I know he’ll start spinning tales, telling everyone his version of the story. Everything will be amplified, and I’ll be shamed by everyone in the village before I can even speak my peace.

He’s had the advantage of speaking first and speaking loud.

I’ve lost my voice.

“In all my years,” Bea says, her fingers hovering over her mouth like she might be sick, “this is the worst crime I think I’ve ever heard of being committed. You stole all the power for yourself, Branwen. How could you?”

“She didn’t!” Asha cries out. “How are you all so gullible as to believe this with so little evidence brought against her? Is it because he’s a man? Is it because you are all threatened by her?”

“Hush!” My mother’s voice is harsh in the small room. “Asha, you will let your sister hear her punishment for her crimes.”

I scoff and choke out more tears. Any hope I may have had is gone. If my own mother is turning me away, leaving me out in the cold to answer for something I didn’t do, it’s done. If she doesn’t believe me, no one will.

“You are to be stripped of your powers,” the Grand Elder declares. My heart shrivels, and I clutch at my stomach. My life is magic. It’s who I am. To have all of that taken away...I’ll cease to exist. “And you are to be cast out from this coven by daybreak.”

“What?” Asha shouts.

“I’m...” I pause and swallow, trying to find my voice. “I’m being kicked out of my coven?”

“It’s no longer your coven, Branwen. This is no longer your community, your home, your place of refuge. You are no longer welcome in a place you so willfully destroyed.”

He walks toward me, grabbing the onyx pendant he keeps hanging around his neck, then places it on my heart with his palm. The other three lay their hands on my arms and shoulders. His other hand holds the back of my head.

“Take a deep breath. This will hurt.”

I barely get a full breath before a lightning bolt strikes down my entire body. My muscles tense, and I feel every ounce of magic flow out of my body and into the stone.

*I am hollow.*

I sink to the floor, heaving the contents of my stomach onto the rug. They step away from my crumpled body.

“She will be gone by the morning,” one of them says. I’m too far gone to know who. The room is spinning, and my hearing is muffled. There’s a vile taste in my mouth as my entire body breaks out in a cold sweat. “Or else you will all be stripped and cast out. Do you understand?”

“We do,” my mother whispers.

Asha’s pained cries are the last thing I hear before I let the darkness pull me under.

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# MONEY JAR SPELL



## *What you'll need:*

Jar

Bay Leaf

Cinnamon

Money

Fools Gold

Cayenne Pepper

Sage or incense

Optional: Green candle

## *Instructions:*

*Burn sage or incense into the jar to cleanse with intention.*

*Add your bay leaf, cinnamon, money, fool's gold, and cayenne pepper to the jar while focusing on what you want to get from this spell jar.*

*Close the lid and store.*

*If you have a green candle, seal the jar with green wax before storing.*



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# CHAPTER 5

## BRANWEN

A FEW WEEKS LATER...



MY STOMACH IS BURNING, and every muscle in my body is languid and warm despite the cold. I take a deep draw on my cigarette and relish the way it stings my throat the entire way down. I can almost feel the nicotine and the alcohol mixing together, brewing a storm that might finally take me out.

A girl can only hope.

The man standing in front of me watches the way my cheeks hollow with interest. He's okay-looking. His eyes and hair are a dull brown, and he has cliché biker tattoos that run down his arms in thick black lines. And I think I'll like the way his scruff feels against the inside of my thighs.

He takes a step forward, and his hands roam over my hips and around to my lower back so that he can pull me closer to him. I hold the cigarette away from my body so that I don't burn him and press against him when his hands grab my ass. He's nothing if not forward, my flavor of the night.

"Your place or mine?" he asks.

I take another drag, finishing the cigarette before I stomp it out on the wet pavement. I never take them back to mine. Not because it's a shit hole or because it's all the way on the other side of town, but because I don't want anyone knowing where I live. I even have taxis drop me off a few blocks away.

Ever since I was kicked out of my coven community, I've been living in the motel, barely having enough money to eat after putting most of my paycheck right back into the bar, cigarettes, and drugs...so many drugs.

"Yours," I tell him. "But I need to use the ladies' room first."

He grins, and his fingertips dig painfully into my ass. It's the first time I've felt anything all day, and for a moment, it dulls the heartache.

"Don't take too long, puddin'," he growls.

*Don't like that.*

Inside, I'm cringing. But it's already so late I don't feel like ditching him to try my hand with another man or worse...go home alone to the deafening silence.

"I won't," I assure him, smiling before I give him a soft kiss on the cheek.

I slip out of his grasp and stumble as I try to figure out which way I need to go to get back inside. Callum spots me when I practically fall into the hallway. He grabs my arm to help me remain upright, and I lean into his fresh scent. It's much nicer than that of the guy I've chosen for the night. But Callum is my boss, and I refuse to go there.

I may have lost my way in life, but not so much that I'll risk fucking my way out of a job that I desperately need.

"You alright, Wren?" His voice is full of concern, and I think I might throw up.

"Fine," I grit out. I swallow the excess saliva in my mouth, trying to talk myself back down. "Just fine."

"Your shift ended hours ago. I thought you had gone home."

I shake my head.

"About to leave," I tell him, slowly pulling away from his grasp. The scent of his laundry detergent is mixing with the stale smell of the bar, making my gag reflex kick into high gear.

"Good," he says, rubbing my back gently. "I'm worried about you, Wren. You know you can always talk to me..." His voice drifts off and mixes into that of the music pounding from the main area of the bar while I run through the door of the women's.

As I push open the first stall, my stomach heaves before I can even get the door shut behind me. I kneel on the dirty floor, not caring that I'm probably sitting in piss and dirt. My jeans will act as a barrier between me and the filth anyway.

Once my stomach finally calms down, I fall back onto my ass and pull some toilet paper from the dispenser to clean my mouth. The evidence of everything I've done wrong tonight gets flushed away in an instant.

I dig into my pocket and find the little bag of Molly. Popping one pill, I lean my head back on the cool metal divider and wait for the effects to kick in. I can't face the rest of the night without it. I stretch my legs out in front of me and take a few deep breaths.

Being left alone with my thoughts is never a good thing lately. Ever since the incident back home, I've had dangerous thoughts leech into my brain. They whisper things that don't quite sound like me.

I've listened to them a few times.

Taking my lit cigarette and putting it out on my forearm, using the box cutter at work to slice into my thigh, or taking too many pills until I roll over and vomit every one of them up before I slip into sleep.

Each time, the relief is fleeting, passing swiftly into the void before spitting me back into this suffering.

I run my hands through my knotted hair and wipe under my eyes. Tears have started to fall, and I didn't even realize — too far gone to care anymore. I miss my friends, my sister, my mother. I want to pick up a phone and call them, speak to them...ask them if they really believe Kegan.

Do they? Do they believe everything he said about me? Or are they just too scared to speak out against him? In their shoes, I'd like to think I would have stood up against him. But I'm not so sure I could have. I've never considered myself very brave. And he has always had everyone in the palm of his hand.

I swallow the tears that want to come. Those are for later as I try to fall asleep. I sigh and use the walls and the toilet to help me stand. My legs are still like jelly, and my body has broken out in a fit of chills. The Molly needs to kick in soon, or I won't make it through the rest of the night.

And I've been gone too long, I need to get back outside, or my pick of the evening will have left me behind for someone else. Pushing my body to move, I make it to the bathroom door when the drugs finally kick in.

The goose bumps fade away, and my headache clears. I'm able to put a smile on my face more easily now as I confidently walk down the hallway and through the back door. Just in time as well because my date has started

to cozy up to another girl. But when he sees me, he grins and comes to meet me.

“I thought you’d changed your mind, pretty girl.”

The drugs have even made the vodka on his breath smell sweet. I lean into it.

“Never. Ready to take me for a ride?” I kiss his mouth.

“Hell yes, baby girl.”

He drives an old pickup truck, and I climb in through the driver’s side while he takes in the view of my ass. He smacks it hard, and I can’t help the little moan that escapes me. I’ve never been into pain in the bedroom, but it’s the only thing that makes me feel present anymore. So I welcome every grip that’s too strong, every slap that stings too much, and every hand that wraps around my throat just a *little* too tightly.

I don’t even make it halfway to his apartment before I’ve crawled across the bench seat and unbuttoned his pants. He’s already hard, and his breath is coming in fast pants as I lick the tip. He isn’t the biggest I’ve been with, but he’ll do. He should be able to hit the spots I need him to if I can work him into the right positions.

“So big,” I coo at him.

He gathers my hair at the nape of my neck with one hand and pulls hard, making my eyes water.

Sweet, sweet relief.

“Good. I like it when a girl chokes on it.”

The dangerous tone of his voice should scare me, but it doesn’t. It excites me. Maybe I’ve bitten off more than I can chew this time. Maybe this time I’ll be fucked until I can’t breathe or beaten until I’m bloody.

I swallow him, gagging when it touches the back of my throat. I make a show of it too, drooling down onto his boxers and coughing until he lets me up for air.

“That’s it, my little slut.” He pushes me back down, and I work him with vigor.

Within a few minutes of my throat tightening around his mediocre dick, he comes, thrusting deep into my mouth while I swallow every bit of him down. At least now he should last a little bit longer when we get to his place.

“That was hot,” he says, smiling over at me while I clean myself up a bit. His personality has switched back to the cool and collected guy that I

met at the bar. That's disappointing. It was all just for show.

And when we finally get to his place, I realize this was not worth my time. He pumps inside of me with hurried, shallow thrusts. He pulls tightly on my hair and smacks my ass, giving me some relief from the onslaught of my thoughts. But other than that, he's just another person with a dick he doesn't know how to use. His dirty talk is the only thing mean about him. And even then, when I turn around to look at him, I can see he doesn't mean a single word of it.

So I reach between my legs and play with my clit, hoping I can get myself off. The drugs are still making my body feel light and fluffy, and I think I could probably concentrate and come like this. But a few seconds after I begin, his hips stutter, and he finishes with a shout. His sweaty body rolls off mine, and before he can get the wrong idea, I'm standing and searching for my clothes.

"You aren't staying?" he asks, tossing the soiled condom on the floor and rolling on his side to watch me move around the room. "I thought we could have seconds later." He wags his eyebrows.

"I have stuff to do early in the morning," I tell him, smiling to lessen the blow. "Thanks for the ride though." I wink and walk out of his bedroom as I search for my boots.

I hear him roll out of bed and follow me through his place. He leans against the wall as I tie the laces.

"Well, that was easy," he says, laughing a bit to himself.

"Always am," I tell him. "Nice to meet you, Andrew."

"It's Jesse."

I make a face. *Oops*. "Nice to meet you, Jesse."

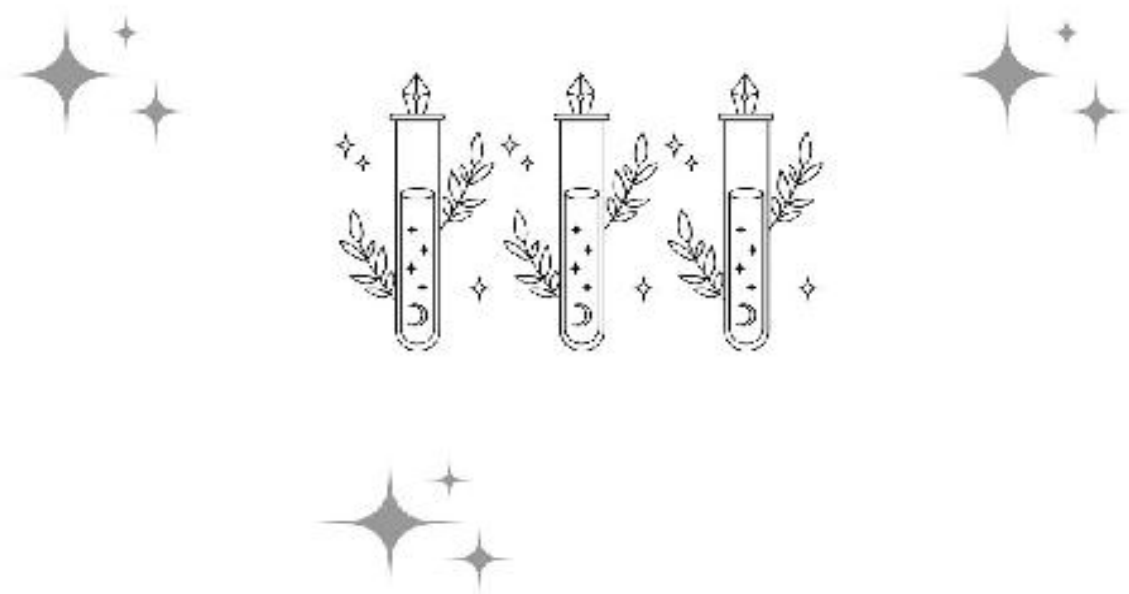
And with that, I'm gone.

I could call a taxi, but I think the walk will be better. It should only take me a couple of hours, and I like the way the cold air feels on my face. Maybe by the time I get home, I'll be tired enough to fall asleep without the tears.

# RULE NUMBER THREE:



*Live and let live.  
Fairly take and fairly give.*



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# CHAPTER 6

## BRANWEN

WHEN I FINALLY STUMBLE HOME, it takes me five tries to get the key in the lock. Once it finally clicks and turns, the door falls open and I fly through it, landing hard on my hands and knees. The old linoleum smacks against my skin, and without the numbing of the alcohol in my system, I feel every bit of it.

I cry out and kick the door shut from where I'm still kneeling on the floor before flopping down on my belly. The tears come hard and fast, soaking my face and forcing my whole body to shake. My lungs ache with the effort to breathe, and my throat is raw from the brutal noises coming out of me.

Hecate has abandoned me, as have the other Gods. In the first week of being pushed out, I prayed to them multiple times a day, begging them to help me. I spoke into the void, hoping that someone would answer. But no one ever did.

They left me alone.

So alone.

I am alone.

I try saying it out loud.

"I am alone."

My voice cracks, and the sobs take over again. Why won't it just end? I scream and kick the old wooden table that's next to me, sending Asha's letters flying. She's written to me every day since I left. And I haven't opened a single one.

I don't want a play-by-play of what's happening. I don't want to know who has turned against me or what lies Kegan has been spinning. I don't want to know the nasty things people have come up with about me. And clearly, the issue has been fixed. If Asha can find me with her magic and send me letters, her powers are much stronger than when I left her.

I know I should read them...or at least write back to Asha. She was a mess when I left that morning, clinging to me and fighting our mother. She wanted to come with me, to help me, but I didn't want that. I wanted her to stay where she's safe, around people like herself, and not become an outcast like her sister.

Living outside of our community is tough. I am used to how the humans work. Our little village on the seaside is a tourist attraction. We get most of our money from eclectic shops, great seafood, and fishing trips. But little to none actually end up settling in the town. While they enjoy visiting, humans are never eager to settle among witches and warlocks. They may not know we exist, but they can feel that there's something different about the area — something they don't want to be around for long periods of time.

Which is why I know I will never belong here. I will never be loved or fit in among these people. They love us at first, swooning when they feel that magnetic pull we tend to have. But when they get too close, what they perceive as evil starts to seep through, and they notice the difference between us and them.

Rolling up onto my side, I collect the letters and file them back into a couple of thick stacks. With some effort, I stand up and lay them neatly back on the table. I'll read them one day. Maybe. My fingertips run over my sister's handwriting, and I feel the loss of my magic all over again.

My body is a hollow shell. My heartbeat echoes and reverberates against my rib cage constantly, like the dripping of a faucet. Without my magic, I am nothing. I have no purpose.

If I was gone, would anyone even notice? Would anyone care? Would anyone care that they were the reason behind it? What would happen? Would they take responsibility, knowing that it was because of the way they treated me, or would they shrug it off? Would my friends finally admit that

maybe they didn't actually believe what Kegan said? Would they realize that maybe I was innocent after all?

Is that what it takes? Suicide? To make people listen? Because I want people to listen. I want them all to realize how deeply they've cut me, how much they've ripped me apart from the inside out. I want them to know that their betrayal has pushed me this far. I want them to feel guilty, to feel horrified for what they've done.

I want them to feel what I've felt. I want them to know that *their* words and *their* actions and *their* fucking betrayal caused something catastrophic to happen to someone else. I want them to live with that guilt day in and day out for the rest of their fucking pitiful, useless lives.

I grab the half-full bottle of vodka from the counter and kick off my boots before falling back onto the squeaky bed. I tip the bottle back, draining too much of it in one go. It burns the entire way down, and I fight the reflex to cough before capping it and tossing it to the side.

Tears roll silently over my temples and into my hair. I barely register that I'm crying anymore. It happens so often that I've forgotten what it's like to feel anything but sadness. I wait for the liquor to take over and make me numb. It's slow, only warming my stomach at first. But soon it spreads through my body like a slow fire until even the tips of my toes and fingers are numb with it.

I sigh.

Numbness.

This is what I crave.

I shimmy out of my shirt and pants, throwing them out of my way as I roll over onto my belly. The sheets smell and haven't been washed since I moved in, and I don't plan on doing it anytime soon. What's the point? I'm barely able to force myself to wash my clothes and my body. The effort it would take to clean up the room itself would almost kill me.

"Please," I whisper into the sheets. "Please just make it stop. Make it go away."

A sob jerks through me.

"Help me," I beg whoever is listening. "Help me."

The despair I feel is all-encompassing. It stays with me, following me like a heavy shadow everywhere I go. No matter what drugs I do, how much alcohol I drink, or how I pray, it hangs around me and drains every ounce of life I have left.

After a while, I slip in and out of sleep. On the edge of a nightmare, I see something hovering close to the end of my bed. Eventually, my scary little demon comes into focus.

“Make it stop,” I say to him. The words are in my mind, but so is he. I know he hears me. “Take me with you.”

His head notches to the side in a jerking movement, and his tail flicks behind him. That’s new. He’s never...paid attention to me before. He’s never acknowledged me.

My body doesn’t move as he climbs onto the edge of my bed. He perches there like a gargoyle, staring at me from just a couple of feet away. He’s clearer this time than he has been before. I can see the designs that are etched into his burnt-red skin, and his eyes glow a golden yellow.

He’s naked as well, the defined notches in his abs making my eyes graze lower and lower, below the bit of hair that trails below his belly button. Before I can get any further, I force my eyes to look upward instead, taking in the black hair that sticks up in all directions, like he just woke up and rolled out of bed.

There are two small horns that jut out just above his forehead. His cheekbones are sharp and accent two defined hollow cheeks and full lips. But those eyes. Those eyes are what triggers that small sense inside of me that knows I should be afraid. The way they glow and shift is otherworldly and sets alarm bells off in my brain.

His eyes narrow for a second as he assesses me and, I’m assuming, my thoughts.

“Please,” I beg him again. I can feel the desperation even in the way my mind-voice comes across.

And even though it’s just a dream, I can feel the small seed of hope blossoming. Maybe he’ll save me. Maybe I won’t have to be sad anymore. Maybe I won’t have to dread waking up every time I fall asleep. That hope spreads to my chest, tickling my ribs and hardening my nipples. I sigh as the sensation moves further down, heating me from the inside out. My clit pulses, and I fight so hard to squeeze my thighs together.

I need relief.

“I’m begging you,” I whimper.

He smiles, exposing his pointed teeth, and leans closer. I swear something moves around my thigh, and I can feel the sweltering heat coming off him. It dries out my eyes, and even though I want to blink, I

can't do more than breathe in this moment. Every part of me is stiff as a brick.

But before I can say anything else, he slinks off the bed and disappears into the far corner of the room. His heat disappears with him, leaving my body shivering and desperate for touch. I can blink again, and the moment my eyes close, I'm sucked back into sleep.

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# THE ELEMENT OF WATER:



*Season: Fall*

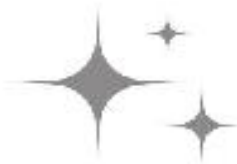
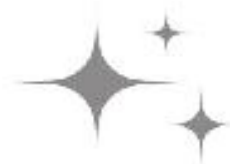
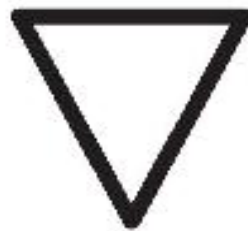
*Time of day: Evening*

*Trait: Slowness & temperance*

*Feeling: Imagination*

*Animals: All fish, dolphins, whales, etc*

*Color: Blue*



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# CHAPTER 7

## BRANWEN

WHEN I WAKE UP, I'm still groggy and half-asleep. My body is slowly collapsing in on itself from the constant assault from the alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes. It doesn't help that I'm barely eating. I'm sure I've lost weight in the past few weeks.

I walk over to the one window in the entire room and pull the blackout blinds closed before crawling back into bed. I'm off for the next two days, which means all of my time will be spent here in this bed. I roll over and close my eyes, praying that the pounding in my head will go away.

I must eventually fall back asleep because I see a shadow in the corner, and my body is frozen. Seeing him used to terrify me. When it first started happening, I was just starting to really come into my powers. And I thought I had accidentally summoned a demon or something.

But he never did anything other than stand there and look at me. After the first night, I started getting accustomed to my nighttime visitor. His presence became a comfort, and I found I wouldn't sleep as well on the nights he didn't visit.

Sometimes he would show up closer to the bed or even on the corner of it. But he never got closer than that until last night, when he acknowledged me. It shocked me when he did because I've never been shy with him, but

he would always remain stoic. Every time he would show up, I would hold full one-sided conversations with him.

As a teen, they were silly conversations, just me telling him about my day or the new spell I had learned. Sometimes I would tell him about a new crush I had at school or complain about something Asha had done.

But once I was in my twenties and I knew what my future held for me as the most powerful in the coven, my conversations with him became deeper and a bit worried. He was like my therapist. I would unload all of my anxieties onto him, and he would just stand there and listen. And every morning, I would wake up feeling better for getting everything off my chest.

I never told my mother, or even Asha, about him. He was my dirty little secret. I didn't want to share him with anyone. And I guess part of me was always worried that there was something wrong with me to constantly have this sleep paralysis demon lurking in the shadows of my room. It felt too real to be a dream, and I was worried that if I told anyone, they would take him away.

Now, he steps out the corner in jerky movements, like he's moving in and out of this world and his. He's naked...again. Was he always naked? I don't remember him being naked until last night. Maybe I wasn't ever paying attention.

When he makes it over to my bed, his movements become smoother, and the bed dips as he crawls up next to me. His lips are smirking, and his eyes are blazing with that yellow fire. I can feel his warmth seep into my bones, loosening my muscles as it spreads across me like a blanket. It's soothing, and all of my pain melts away.

"Take me with you," I beg him in my mind.

He shakes his head, answering me for the first time ever.

I whimper, feeling the tears slip from my eyelashes and roll onto the pillow beneath me. I don't feel pain, but I know it's there. Deep-rooted, emotional agony. It's always there, and I can't escape it, even when he's here taking all of the symptoms away.

My heart is still broken. My soul is still withering away. Every fucking second of my existence is pain. I want it to end so badly that it's all I dream of when he isn't here. And when I'm awake, I daydream about it. The thought of not existing anymore is the only thing that brings me any sort of relief.

“Why?” I ask.

He cocks his head, and his tail flicks like a cat’s. He sees me eyeing it and smiles wide, his sharp teeth glistening against his red skin. His tail whips around him and curls around my calf. It’s hot, burning my flesh in the most delicious way.

*Pain. Pain. Pain.*

I suck in air through my teeth as it skirts higher, wrapping around my knee and caressing the inside of my thigh. This is the second time he’s ever touched me. He’s solid. He’s there. He’s real. He’s really fucking here, in this room. And he always has been.

And he has heard every little thing I’ve ever told him.

Embarrassment sweeps through my body, hotter than him. I can feel my cheeks flush with it, but the way he’s looking at me tells me there’s nothing to be embarrassed by. Because he’s looking at me like he wants to eat me whole.

His tongue flicks out as he licks his lips. It’s forked right down the center, and suddenly, my mind is whirling with the possibilities of what that tongue could do to my body. My breathing picks up, and he watches me with fascination.

I’m frozen on my back, my legs slightly spread and my arms at my side. I’m still in my bra and panties, and I’m also ashamed that I haven’t showered in days, let alone washed my clothing. But he doesn’t seem to notice. He’s too concerned with the way my body is reacting to his. I can tell he’s intrigued, if not surprised, that I’m not afraid of him.

“Higher,” I whisper to him on an exhale.

His eyes fly to mine when I speak. It was only a whisper, all I could manage with my stiff tongue. But it still came out. And I think it’s the first time he’s ever heard me speak outside of my mind.

His tail moves higher, the very tip glancing across my slit. Even through the cotton fabric of my panties, I can feel his heat. It scorches me, and I gasp, my back arching just slightly when he presses harder against me.

The higher he pushes my pleasure, the more control I have over my body. My fingers twitch, and I lick my lips. He likes that. His eyes watch the movement of my tongue just like I had watched his a moment ago.

The tip of his tail makes small circles around my clit. I know I have to be soaked. My nipples are hard with desire, and that familiar tingling

feeling begins to spread though my stomach and chest. Heat, as hot as his skin, flows through my blood.

No part of his body is touching mine except for his tail, and being watched like this is something I've never experienced. I'm completely at his mercy, and he's taking advantage of it, playing me like his favorite toy.

I take him in as well, letting my eyes drift to where they wouldn't yesterday. I am not disappointed. He's so big, hard and dripping as he watches my pleasure skate higher and higher. His dick throbs every time I pant for him. The precum drips from his thick head and collects on the sheets below.

I'm desperate to touch him, to taste him, but my body won't let me move that much. My whole hand twitches as I try to force it over toward him, but that's all I can manage. He smirks down at me as he hears the thoughts rolling through my head. He knows what I want, and yet he won't give it to me.

I groan in frustration, but before I can try again, he's pushed the fabric to the side and let his tail slide inside of me. Like an arrow to a bullseye, he finds that sweet spot inside of me, pressing against it while he watches me try to writhe around.

A short laugh escapes him, and it's the first time I've heard anything resembling a voice from him. It's gruff and deep, and I want to bottle it so that I can hear it whenever I like. It's like a spell that takes you home.

Stars fly behind my eyelids as I squeeze them shut. I come, wishing I was able to have his name on my lips as I do. It's powerful, causing my muscles to spasm and my toes to curl. It's a fucking spiritual experience as his tail continues to push me further and further into the void. He refuses to stop, and I feel myself on the edge of blackness.

At the last moment, he slips free of me, and through the haze of pleasure, I open my eyes and watch as he inspects his tail. It's wet with my release, and he brings it slowly to his nose, smelling my scent.

Gods, that's hot.

But then that forked tongue of his darts out and licks it. He sucks it into his mouth, and the sexiest moan comes from his chest, mixed with a growl of gratification. I'm irrationally jealous that he gets to taste me and I've not even been able to touch him yet.

Hearing my thoughts, he leans over me, careful to not touch me. Close up like this, I can see all the markings on his flesh are more like scars. His

pupils are little slits but expand as he breathes in deeply, savoring my scent. His head dips further, and I feel the slightest brush of his nose against my neck.

“Take me with you,” I beg him again, this time in my head. I’m desperate for it. I would rather be anywhere than here.

He pulls away, shaking his head again as he climbs off my bed. I cry out for him, begging him to take me or stay. But he doesn’t pay me any mind. He slinks back into his corner, his movements choppy again as he slips back into his world.

He abandons me again, leaving me feeling wet and cold. But once he disappears fully, my eyes immediately close, and I’m sucked back into sleep.

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# HOW TO MAKE MOON WATER:



*Get a clean jar and smudge it with sage or incense. Setting  
the intention.*

*Fill the jar with clean, filtered, spring, mineral, or distilled  
water*

*Place the jar in the moonlight (on a windowsill or outside)  
Pick up your water before the dawn*



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# CHAPTER 8

## BRANWEN

I *GASP* when I wake up, like I've been hit with a bucket of ice water. I sit up and look around the motel room, searching for the demon that was so real last night. But my head throbs, and I fall back down onto my back.

My stomach is threatening to heave again, but I will it to calm down. There's nothing in there at this point anyway; I'd just be dry heaving. After a few minutes, I roll over, almost falling out of bed to get to the kitchenette for some water. I sip it, knowing that if I drink too much too quickly that it'll just come right back up.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Asha's letters on the table. I glance at the time: 5:37. But it's Monday, so I don't have to get ready for work. Maybe today is the day I should read them. I swallow against the thickness forming in my throat and walk over to them.

Even without my magic, I feel her getting angrier with each letter. The handwriting is scrawled faster on her later ones, scratchy with a heavier hand. I sigh and pick one up with the earliest date. It's not a good sign that her magic is strong enough to find me...and so quickly.

Well, not a good sign for me. Great for Asha and the rest of the coven.

Her first letter arrived the day after I found myself here. I'm glad her powers are growing; she's barely ever been able to summon a flame, let

alone track a whole person. But it means that others' powers are probably growing as well, further reinforcing Kegan's claims against me.

The questions continue to pop into my mind, rattling around in there and giving me a headache. Too many questions I don't know the answers to. There has to be a reason why he would do this, but I can't figure it out.

And why would everyone turn on me with him? Are they that afraid of him? Are they just so loyal to him that they can't see sense? Why wouldn't anyone come to me, ask me the questions they so desperately wanted answers for?

People are too quick to hate. Too quick to jump into bed with whoever is on top so that they might also climb the ladder. Maybe some actually believed him, but the ones that were my friends...I can't stop asking myself why.

The paper separates easily, and I carefully pull out the lined letter. I'm struck with a pang of homesickness. I miss the community that I called home for my entire life. They were there when I took my first steps, when I tried new spells and failed miserably, and when my powers first started showing. That coven of mine was always there.

*Mother won't let me leave*, her first letter starts out.

*I've tried, but she's spelled the house. I can't leave. Not that I want to be able to leave to be with the people in this so-called community. What community? If this was a loving, accepting community, they would've stood up for you. They would've realized that you've done far more for them than Kegan has ever done. All he's ever done for any of us is pretend to give us his favor.*

*And even then, what the fuck is that? His favor? What does that look like? I'll tell you what it looks like. It's him pretending to like us while he uses us to gain popularity. We all handed it to him on a silver platter.*

*Something is wrong, Branwen. The moment you left, power like I have never felt started seeping into me...into everyone. It's like it's been completely restored. And all this does is feed his ego. I swear to the Gods I can see it around him like an aura. He walks around the village like a God amongst men.*

She finishes the letter, promising me she's going to stand her ground, fighting for me to return. I wipe the tears away and dig through the piles to find the next one, and then the next one after that. I consume them like a starving man, too hungry to pause for breath.

*They all stop talking when I enter a room, but they don't realize that I could hear them before I actually made myself known. Calling you every type of name under the sun. They insult your intelligence, call you a whore for using Kegan the way you did, and worst of all, they act like they never liked you to begin with. Like they were always on his side and never yours. Like you never even existed to them.*

*And in another...*

*I purposely bumped into Kegan this morning. I tried to hold a conversation with him, asking him why he did what he did. But he refuses to even look at me, let alone answer real questions. I was dragged away by Mother, kicking and screaming at him. I would've cursed him if I knew any black magic. Do you know any? Anything you could maybe write down and send my way? I'm feeling a bit vengeful these days.*

*And another...*

*Your saintly throuple were talking shit about you last night. I've never heard such horrible things come out of their mouths, and to know it's all about you...my heart breaks for you, Branwen. Every day I watch these people who you considered family destroy your name, stomping it into the ground and spitting on it for good measure.*

*They're saying they're glad you were stripped of your powers. They're hoping that you never come back, that you're banished to walk among the humans, empty and hollow, for the rest of your life. Many of them are saying you don't deserve to know what it's like to be in a community like this anymore, that you never did. It's shocking how quickly they've all turned on you, Branwen. It isn't right.*

*And I know what you're probably thinking. That they were scared, that if they didn't jump on board with everyone else, that they'd be cast out just like you. Or worse in their minds, that Kegan wouldn't show them favor or he'd drag them down with you. But that's no excuse. It's no excuse to turn on those you love just because you're scared.*

*Maybe if those people would've stood up for you, he wouldn't have won. And then no one would be hurt except him.*

*Cowards. All of them.*

*I sit that letter down, taking a few deep breaths to calm my raging emotions. I haven't felt this much in weeks. My body is alive with it, shaking with the adrenaline.*

*Branwen, answer me! Let me know that you're alive! This is unfair for me and Mother. I know you're hurting, I can feel your pain all the way over here. But you cannot just give up and waste away. You have to fight for yourself because no one else will.*

"You have to fight for yourself because no one else will," I repeat out loud.

I can feel all of the emotions tangling up inside of me, twisting painfully into anger and desperation. Maybe I do have to fight for myself. Maybe giving up isn't the answer here. Letting him get away with what he did to me isn't right, and waiting for karma to do all the work clearly isn't working in my favor.

She's a slow bitch.

And I'm tired of waiting.

I toss the last letter back onto the table and make my way to the little bathroom at the back of the room. Cranking the water as high up as it will go, I wait for it to heat up as I look myself over. I strip free of my underwear and bra and run my hands over my form.

I'm still chubby; my stomach and thighs still have a few rolls and are peppered with cellulite. But I've definitely lost weight. My face is thinner, and my boobs are smaller. The curve of my waist is more defined. There are purple moons under my eyes, and my cheeks are hollow from malnutrition. Even my skin looks pasty but a bit yellow at the same time.

My hair is ratty, even though I've been braiding it, and my dark roots are poking out at the top. Without my magic to keep up the color, it's faded to a washed-out grey. Once the mirror is completely covered in steam, I step into the scalding water, letting the burn wake me up.

The shallow bathtub doesn't drain properly, and the water fills up to my ankles before slowly receding again. I'm ashamed of just how dirty that water was before it flowed down the drain. I've really let myself go in these past weeks as the depression took hold of me. I can't even remember the last time I brushed my teeth.

When I wash between my thighs, I can feel the wetness still there from last night, and everything comes flooding back. My fingers drift between my folds, quickly finding my clit as I remember how good his tail felt as it played with my body.

I sigh and finish washing myself instead of taking my time. There will be time to figure all of that out later. For now, I need to get out of here and

start trying to figure my life out.

Once I'm clean and dressed, I pull on my boots and tie my damp hair into a braid over my shoulder. I grab a bottle of water and shove my lighter in my pocket. The girl at the front desk looks wholly unimpressed that I'm interrupting whatever it is she's doing.

"Where's the closest park?" I ask her.

She looks at me and then looks outside.

"All the parks close at sundown."

It's late; the sun set over an hour ago.

"That's not what I asked."

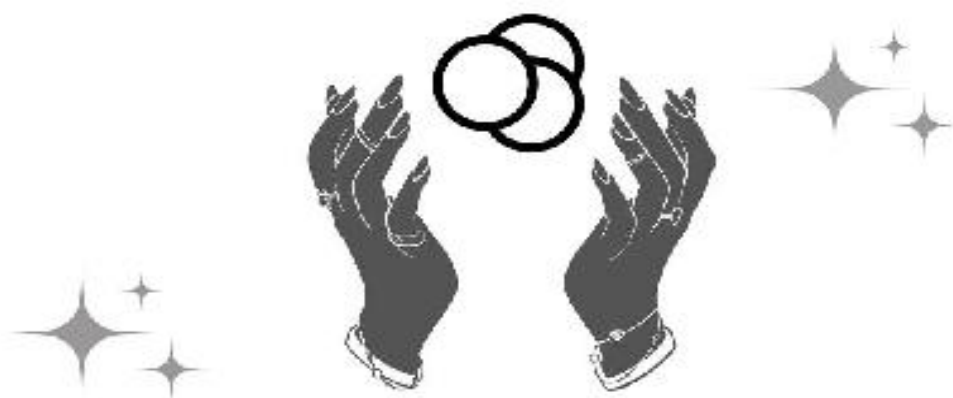
She scoffs.

"Heritage Park is about a mile that way," she says, gesturing down the road. "Don't come whining to me when you're mugged!" she yells after me as the door closes behind me.

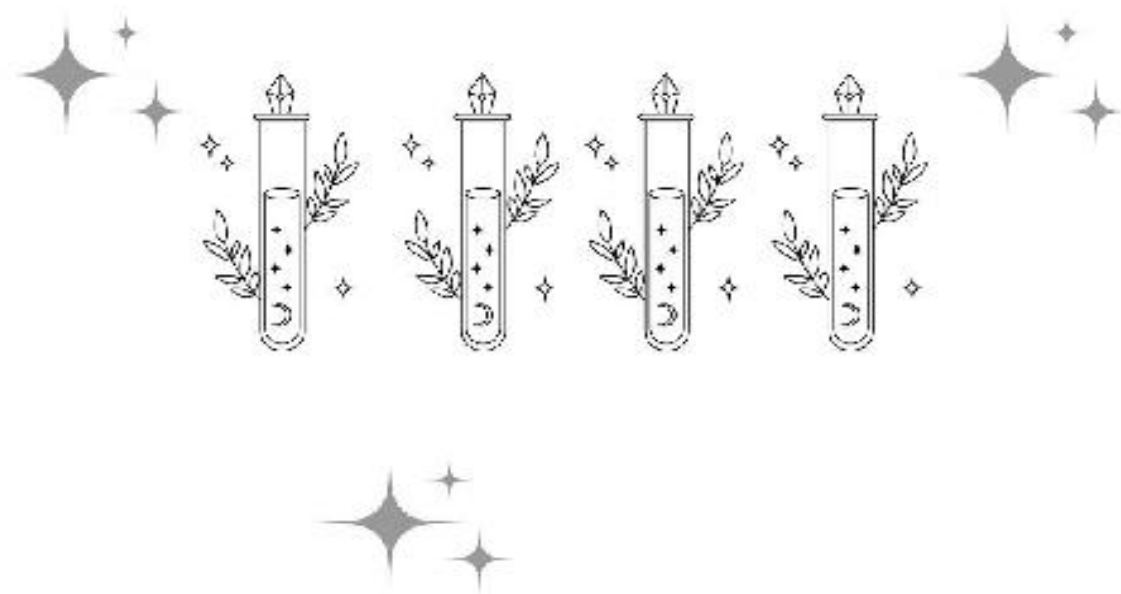
I may not have my magic anymore, but that doesn't mean the earth doesn't. All the power you could ever want is in Hecate. It's in the dirt and the air around us.

It's time I used it.

# RULE NUMBER FOUR:



*Cast the circle thrice about to keep  
the wicked spirits out.*



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# CHAPTER 9

## BRANWEN

CASTING a circle by myself when I had powers was a challenge, but doing it without them? Nearly impossible. I'm just going to have to hope that my intentions are enough. Once I make it to the park, I walk through until I find an area with thick trees. I walk into them, trying to make sure I'm hidden enough that no one walking past can see me.

Finding a good enough spot, I start with the North, digging up the earth and sinking my fingers into the dirt. I chant the calling under my breath. Next, I move directly to my right, taking deep breaths and blowing out hard to summon the Air of the East, chanting the call once I'm finished.

Spinning around to the South, I pull the lighter out of my pocket and light it, chanting as I stare at the flame. I don't feel or smell anything yet, but I keep going. I can't give up just yet. Finally, I move to the West, dumping out some of the water from the bottle I brought with me.

And last is Spirit. The one I know will be the most difficult. With a broken soul, it's going to be difficult to make the Spirit listen. After the rough treatment I've given my body for the last few weeks, it might not respect me enough to come.

Once I'm finished casting the circle, I just have to hope that all five elements are here, that they heard me and obeyed the power that I called upon. Without my own magic, I can't sense anything. It's painful, knowing

that I may never experience it again. But I swallow back the tears and keep going. I have to get to Hecate.

I cross my legs and try to ground myself as I call out to her.

“Please,” I beg under my breath. “Please, come to me. Let me finish this circle and speak to Hecate.” I feel like a sinner at church, begging to be heard and forgiven. “I know you see everything that happens, and I know you told me I would be tested, but this is too much, Hecate.”

“I can’t do this any longer,” I tell her. “No one should ever have to endure what I’m going through. I’ve had friends I considered family turn their backs on me and say awful things. They act as if they don’t know me at all, agreeing with everything that Kegan has said. These are people I grew up with! People that I loved and looked after! People that I shared my powers with!”

“They used me, Hecate,” I continue. “They fucking used me and then dumped me to the side when favor no longer shone on me. They abandoned me.” I cough and sob, my chest aching. “I’m all alone. I have no friends, no community, no coven. I know they say it doesn’t matter what people think of you and that it only matters what is between you and your Gods. But this matters to me. My reputation *matters* to me.”

“He stripped me of everything, and for what? What was the reason? Was I getting too much attention for his liking? Was he annoyed that he couldn’t be the leader of the coven? I did *not* do what he said I did, Hecate. And I know you know that I didn’t. I know you tried to warn me. But how was I supposed to know that everyone around me was just looking for a reason to hate me? They were just looking for a reason to give up on me and move on to the next person with the power?”

I scream in frustration.

“I trusted these people! I trusted them with my secrets, my power, and my love, and the first chance they got, they ran in the opposite fucking direction. Doesn’t anyone have any sense of fucking loyalty anymore? Asha is the only one that stood by me, believed me, and never backed down! Fuck all of these weak-minded, cowardly people. They follow the herd like sheep to the slaughter.”

My entire body is shaking with anger and frustration. I’m blind to anything but the rage inside of me. I’ve never experienced hatred and fury like this before. It’s all-consuming, eating you up from the inside out until there’s nothing left but it to keep you alive. I lean forward and bash my fist

into the soft ground over and over again, screaming as I let out every single ounce of hurt I have.

I start ripping up chunks of grass and scraping my fingers through the mud. I don't even really realize what I'm doing; I just need to cause harm to something, hurt something, *feel* something. I don't even realize I'm crying until I suddenly can't breathe. I force myself to suck down air, and it comes in ragged gasps.

"You abandoned me!" I scream at her. "You left me when I had *nothing*! You let them use and use and use me before chewing me up and spitting me out! You let them! You let them do this to me. You let them!"

I cry out and gasp as I fall to the ground. The body is violently convulsing, and as Hecate refuses to speak back, to show her face or give any comfort, I feel myself giving up. I feel whatever was left of my soul crack completely in half, dissipating into dust.

I have no hope.

"I may have done some things in my life that I'm not proud of," I tell whoever may be listening. "I have said mean things about people and vented to my friends and family about other witches and warlocks when I was angry or upset. I have had hatred in my heart for others when there was no reason for it other than pride and envy."

"I understand that I have not been a saint. But I would challenge anyone to prove that they have not said mean things about people in their lifetime. Have they never vented? Have they never been angry or jealous? Does that mean that we all deserve to be stripped of our powers and cast out on the whims of a man who is powerful solely because he is captivating?"

The silence is deafening. My questions go unanswered.

If I thought I was alone before, it's nothing to how I'm feeling now. Not only did my coven abandon me, but now my mother Goddess has.

As I lie there, too tired to speak anymore, I stare at the sky through the trees and listen to the wildlife scutter and chirp around me. It begins to rain, and even then, I continue to lie there and let it soak me as it falls from the branches and leaves above me. It feels like a sign, like the earth weeps with me.

I roll over and stand on weak legs. I brush my hands off on my jeans and try to pat the rest off from my clothes. I'm not sure where I go from here. This was a last-ditch effort to gain some sort of footing in this world. Am I doomed to walk with the humans alone for the rest of my life?

I won't make it.  
My body won't survive it.  
I'll be crushed under the weight of normality.

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# THE ELEMENT OF AIR:



*Season: Spring*

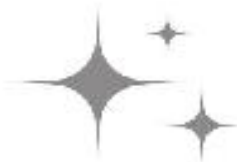
*Time of day: Morning*

*Trait: cheerfulness*

*Feeling: hearing*

*Animals: all birds and insects*

*Color: white and light blue*



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# CHAPTER 10

## THE DEMON



SHE IS VERY ANGRY, my little witch. And in so much pain. I can taste it in the air. She never used to taste metallic. She always had an autumn taste about her...like sweet oranges and spicy cloves. Even her magic smelled like a bonfire or those simmer pots her mother always put on the stove.

Hecate is too busy being all high-and-mighty to listen to my poor girl. She wants her to learn the lesson on her own, but I'm not so noble. I am more than willing to give her what she seeks. But I'm going to do it on my terms.

I follow her back to the shitty motel she's been staying in, watching her viciously wipe at her eyes and try to hold in her cries. She's broken. Utterly and fully broken right down the center. Ever since she left her little community, she's been drowning her sorrows in the only way humans have: alcohol and drugs.

Disgusting vices — they change everything about her. She sleeps with the weakest of men and women and then stumbles home only to pass out and do it all over again the next day. The substances knock her out so hard at night that she doesn't even see me anymore.

When she finally did the other night, I couldn't help but get closer than I ever have. I'm drawn to her, always have been. From the moment her

powers kicked in, I could smell them, feel them tugging on me like an iron chain.

Every night, it brought me to her room, where I would sit and watch and listen. I would watch her dreams and listen to her thoughts. She would tell me all about her mundane day and the people that existed within it. It was the most any of the humans I haunted had ever spoken to me. And I became addicted. I was addicted to everything about her, from her stupid little stories to the way she'd wake herself up with a loud grunt of a snore.

She sniffs and wipes her nose on her jacket. She's absolutely drenched from the rain, and I can tell she's cold. Being caught out in a storm in October is not the best of luck. But nothing could've stopped her from doing it. She was bound and determined to try and get Hecate to listen to her.

And damn did she sure try. She put all of herself into that little ritual, but Hecate did nothing but watch from a distance, a sad look on her face. She may be *the* Goddess for those witches, but she sure lets them do their own thing. She likes to play the mother figure role, the helper, the guide... I roll my eyes.

All she did to help Branwen was warn her something was coming. Why do all the Gods have to be so fucking cryptic. Just spell it the fuck out for people. If you're going to help a mortal, help them.

She curses at her door as she tries to get the key in the lock. It takes her four tries this time. I pat her on the back. *Good girl. Getting better.*

But once the door is open and we're both inside, I can tell something is wrong. The energy is off. Something or someone has been in here. The entire place is crawling with malice. She sees it before I do, a new letter on the little table to the right. And it isn't Asha's handwriting. I've come to know that loopy swirl over the past three weeks.

This is different.

Branwen runs her hands over the writing, and a chill breaks out over her skin, and she trembles. She knows who it is.

Fucking *Kegan*.

"Kegan," she says out loud. Her voice shakes on the word. "How did he find me?"

She tears it open, and I stay standing just behind her, looking over her shoulder as she reads through it. His handwriting is like that of an eight-

year-old child. Which, to be fair, isn't that surprising seeing as his emotional maturity never really made it much past that age either.

*Ah, my dearest Branwen. How does this letter find you? Well, I hope? You may be wondering why it is I'm reaching out, but I wanted to let you know that I'm very much aware of your sister's grassroots effort. She really thinks she can get enough people on your side to overthrow the ruling of our elders.*

*I'm writing to let you know that she cannot and most certainly will not be successful. And if my assumptions are correct in that you are aware of what she's doing and are not only letting it happen but are encouraging it... I would stop if I were you.*

*You think what I did to you a few weeks ago was bad? You've seen nothing. You have no idea what I'm capable of, Branwen. Do you know what people say about you now? That you're a traitor and a liar. They say your magic is toxic, that you are the most vile witch they've ever known.*

*They whisper about you to their friends, spreading rumors that have nothing to do with the ones I started. They say you used everyone around you to get what you want before trampling all over them.*

*And my favorite? They call you a slut, Branwen. They all tell stories about how many witches and warlocks you've fucked and sucked. They say you're into dark deeds and blood magic. People say they've seen you feed and your eyes turn black with power. They've watched as you've used their own blood against them for the binding ritual, stealing their powers and strengthening your own.*

*And through all of this, I am the savior. I am the light at the end of the tunnel. I am the one they turn to when they need a shoulder to cry on or a friend they can trust. They lift me up daily, praising me for outing you and standing up for myself. They tell me what a good warlock I am. They give me gifts and pay me to bless their homes.*

*It's over for you, Branwen. Give it up. Stay in that little hovel. These people, this coven, is mine now. I protected them against you, and I will continue to do so. You will never be allowed back in this community. I would burn this place to the ground with all the people in it before I ever let you back in.*

*And your sister would be the first to go.*

*Blessed be, sweet girl.*

*-Kegan*

My skin is on fire by the time I get to the end. Literally, on fire. I am smoking and sizzling behind her as she just stands and stares at the letter. I will roast him on a spit. I will roast him, feed him to my minions, and then bring him back to life after they shit him out just to do it all over again.

And then within seconds, her thoughts come through like the clearest broadcast.

She's done.

I watch as she digs through all the drawers in her little kitchenette. Finally, she finds what she's looking for: a can opener. My witch is nothing if not resourceful. Next, she pulls out a can of spaghetti from the cupboard. With sure fingers and absolutely no tears, she opens the lid. Testing it on her thumb, it's sharp enough. No knives are supplied in motel rooms, I guess. Work with what you have.

She rinses it off in the sink, although I'm not sure why. That little bit of spaghetti sauce isn't going to be a bother where she's planning to go. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Hecate in all three forms hovering in the corner, watching. She knows what's coming and has arrived just in time to deal out Branwen's fate.

Branwen grabs her last bottle of vodka from the counter and brings it with her over to the bed. She slinks down onto the floor, kicks off her boots, and unbuttons her jeans. Taking a few swigs of the alcohol, she lets a few tears escape.

The despair is almost too much for me to handle. She is drowning in it to the point it's making it hard for me to breathe. There is no hope in her. Her body is a shell, an empty void of nothing but pain.

"I'm so sorry, Asha," she says out loud, trying her hardest to project her thoughts and emotions all the way over to her sister.

I sit down next to her and put my hand on her leg, trying to give her any amount of my warmth that I can. But I can't reach her in this world. If I could, I would. It has to wait until she's fading, and then I can help her.

Hecate moves over to sit beside her as well, and we both watch as Branwen lifts the sharp lid to the inside of her forearm. She pauses, and I can feel her determination falter. But only for a second. She counts to three and lets the metal slice through her skin.

Crying out, she drops the lid and covers the vertical gash in her arm with her hand. But nothing is going to stop that bleeding now. She's cut

herself from her wrist to her damn elbow. It's open, jagged, and flowing freely.

Her blood is unlike anything I've ever smelled, and my mouth waters at the thought of tasting it. But when I lock eyes with Hecate, the shining silver string she's holding moves my thoughts elsewhere.

Branwen's soul. Her fateline.

It's beautiful, shimmering like starlight and too fucking pure for me to muddle. Too bad I'm a selfish demon. I'm taking it.

"You wish to have this?" Hecate asks me before I can reach for it.

Branwen is going pale, falling further down onto the floor as the blood leaks from her arm.

"You may be a Goddess, Hecate, but you are no match for me or my father. He raised quite the aggressive little demon. You can give me the fateline, or I will take it by force," I warn her, my voice a deep growl. "Or I can call Lucifer and let him deal with this himself."

She rolls her eyes and lets a smile drift across her face.

"I am not going to fight you, Rothschild. This was all part of Branwen's fate." She looks down at my witch lovingly, stroking her hair. "Take care of her."

With that, she hands me the platinum fateline, and without waiting for her to leave, I begin threading it with mine. My ugly black soul twists around hers to form a whole new line.

"Help me," Branwen whispers from the floor next to me. "Please, just take me." A sob shakes her body, and her eyes dull. She's numb and fading away. She's reaching out for something, anything to grasp onto. She's desperate for someone to save her.

"I know you wanted a savior. But a demon is what you got, witch."

Her heavy-lidded eyes search out for my face. When she finds it, she smiles.

"My demon," she whimpers, trying to lift her hand out to me.

I smile down at her.

"That's right. Pray to me."

# NEW MOON MANIFESTING



*To release:*

*Take a bath or shower and let your worries fade away.*

*Set your space:*

*Light a candle and set up any crystals, feathers, flowers, or herbs.*

*Ground yourself:*

*Meditate or breathe deeply for five to ten minutes.*

*Connect yourself:*

*Call in the powers of the moon and earth to protect and bless*

*Manifest:*

*Write down your intentions. Fold and store them in a safe place with a crystal for the entire moon cycle.*

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# CHAPTER 11

## BRANWEN

MY DEMON HOLDS me upright as literal flames lick at my skin. My muscles are seized in pain, and I dig my fingers into his skin as I try to breathe through the pain. Is this death? Everything feels too bright, too loud, too harsh. I'm struggling to breathe. But I look up into his burning yellow eyes and pray.

"Please. Please make it stop." My voice cracks with pain as I clutch his chest. "Please, take me with you."

Maybe that's what he's doing. Maybe that's why it burns.

Suddenly, I'm being lifted onto his lap, my body flailing like a rag doll as he has me straddle him. He pushes my head down onto his shoulder and holds me there, shushing me as he rocks me back and forth like a child.

This is the first kind touch I've had in so long. It releases wave upon wave of emotional trauma that I've been holding in. His hands run up and down my back, cooling the areas where the flames have scorched. I cry into the crook of his neck, bawling like a child to their parent. And the entire time, he just holds me through the pain — both emotional and physical.

"I have to take you Under," he tells me. His voice is smooth like honey but rough like gravel at the same time. I never want him to stop. "Branwen," he says, trying to get my attention through the haze of agony. "Take a deep breath."

He lifts my head and helps me take a few deep breaths. He instructs me to keep doing that as he pulls me tighter against him. And then there's blackness. He's falling backward, and I'm falling with him. My stomach loops and flips before he lands solidly on his feet.

I cling to him, my legs wrapped around his waist and my arms around his neck. He has an arm around my hips and a hand on the back of my neck. My eyes are squeezed shut, ready for the pain to start all over again, but it doesn't. Even his touch doesn't feel as hot anymore.

And then I realize I am very naked. The flames have burned every stitch of clothing from my body. My cunt sits on his abs, and my naked breasts push into his chest. Cautiously, I blink my eyes open a few times, letting them adjust to the dim light of wherever we are. He walks us through what looks like a very grand living room, down a wide hallway, and into a bedroom. Everything is black stone and grey walls. There is no color.

Not even on him, I realize.

He sits me down on the edge of a bed and slowly pulls away as he kneels between my legs. I'm struck by just how beautiful he is. He was handsome in his original form, but now...he's a God. His skin is smooth and pale like marble. His hair is thick and black and falls around his horns and down into his brown eyes. Those cheekbones are still sharp as knives, accentuating his hollow cheeks and strong jaw.

He ignores my ogling and instead stares at my arm. When I look down, I see that it's healed, but left is a rough, jagged scar covered in blood that has yet to dry.

"All this blood for little ol' me?" he asks, leaning down to run his nose just above my scar.

He inhales, and instead of burning alive from the outside, it's moved to my blood. And when he runs his tongue from my wrist to the bend in my arm, I moan. He licks his lips, savoring the taste of me before looking up and meeting my eyes. His pupils are blown, encompassing almost his entire iris.

"You spoil me, witch."

He licks me again and again, cleaning every drop of blood from my arm with his tongue. It's wrong but erotic, and I can't help the lust-fueled moans and whimpers that escape my throat as he does it.

I'm incredibly wet by the time he finishes, not caring where we are or who he actually is. In my eyes, he's my demon, and I've known him for

years. I've spoken to him and watched him for over a decade. He's my confidant, my best friend, and the only one that seems to have stuck by me besides Asha.

He stands up and leans over me, putting his hands on either side of my hips. His mouth is just a few inches from mine, and I beg him to kiss me. My mind is screaming for him to close the gap and give me what I need.

"It doesn't have to be a secret anymore, Princess. I want to hear you say it out loud."

I should probably be embarrassed that he can still hear what I'm thinking, that I don't even know his name, where we are, or if I'm alive or dead. But I'm not. I feel emboldened.

"Kiss me," I command him.

Years of only watching him stand in the corner, never able to touch him or hear his voice, has made me hungry for him. I reach up and grab his neck with one hand and one of his horns with the other. He growls, his upper lip curling as I pull him closer.

"I said kiss me," I whisper against his lips.

He attacks my mouth, ravaging it with his tongue as he crawls over my body. I taste my blood on his tongue as it explores my mouth. He lifts me back further onto the bed, and I let out a little squeal of delight as I feel his hips press between my own, his thick cock resting against my aching pussy.

He abandons my lips and moves his mouth down my jaw and over my throat, those sharp teeth scratching my heated skin. When he takes a nipple between his lips, my back arches, and I clutch the sheets at my side.

"Your body purrs for me," he murmurs as he moves lower and lower. He kisses across my stomach and nibbles my hips. "You've lost weight, treating your body so horribly the past few weeks." He looks up at me, and I meet his eyes, self-conscious of the way my skinnier body still has the marks of a bigger one. "I've been watching you."

I nod.

"We're going to fix that," he continues. "You will want for nothing." He kisses below my belly button. "No one will ever hurt you again." He kisses just above where I want him. "Or I'll burn them alive."

He closes his mouth over my clit, sucking it in, and holds my hips down with his arms. I watch him while he devours me, eats me like I'm the only thing that can give him nourishment. His eyes lock onto mine, and he

smiles as he pushes my body higher and higher. That forked tongue works magic on my clit, teasing it from both sides and flicking it faster and faster.

It's hard to breathe with the pleasure rocketing through my veins. My chest aches and my stomach clenches. This is what I've wanted. This is what I've needed. Someone who needs me just as much as I need them. My hands find those horns that curve backward, and I use them as leverage to pull him closer, move him where I want him.

"That's right, witch," he growls against me. "Use me." His tail wraps around my ankle, keeping me anchored to the bed as the orgasm crashes through me. I feel like I'm floating, absolutely fucking flying while he just grins and watches me struggle.

"You taste like my favorite sin."

"Which is?"

He grins. "Lust."

He kisses his way up my body, his eyes never leaving mine. There's something powerful in the way he looks at me.

"What's your name?" I ask him when we're finally face-to-face.

"You want to know my name?" he asks, tilting his head to the side like a curious puppy. "I kind of like just being called your demon." He kisses me, and I taste myself on his tongue.

"I'll just start moaning any name that comes to mind, then," I tease him. I start moaning any male name I can think of. "Oh, Tyler. Oh, James. Right there, Stephen, yes!"

He grabs my throat, his eyes stormy as the energy in the room changes. I'm still smiling up at him because I know my demon will never hurt me. And I find this side of him kind of sexy. He moves his hips, and his chest rumbles with barely contained anger. The head of his cock lines up with my slick cunt.

I lift my hips to help him start to slide inside.

"My name is the only one on your lips while your taste is on mine." He forces the full length of his cock inside of me, causing me to gasp and my eyes to roll back. He's thick and long, stretching me more than anyone ever has. "You can call me Roth, witch. Now, scream it as you come around my cock."

*Roth. Roth. Roth.*

It's on repeat in my mind as he forces pleasure on my body. Every spot he touches sends a thrill up my spine. I've never felt anything so right in my

life, like everything I've ever experienced has led me right to this spot, right into Roth's arms.

"Out. Loud." His voice is full of command that I'm eager to obey.

"Roth," I moan as he pulls out and thrusts back in.

He grabs my jaw. "Again."

"Roth, please."

His tail curls around his body and sweeps across my clit. Heat begins to build again as he fucks me like he owns me.

"Again."

"Roth."

"Again."

"Roth!"

"That's right." He moans as I come, my pussy squeezing his cock. "I make you feel like this. Only me. You're mine."

He leans over me and bites the soft spot of my neck, breaking the skin and taking my pleasure even higher with the mixture of pain. When he pulls away, his lips are covered in my blood, and his hips speed up.

"Say it, witch. Say you're mine."

"I'm yours, Roth." I whimper. "I'm all yours. Always have been." I wrap my legs around his hips, and my heels dig into the soft flesh of his ass. I drag my nails down his back, and when he comes, he kisses me.

I swallow his groans and lick the blood from his teeth. I feel him come inside of me, his seed scorching as it fills me up.

He pulls away, still holding my jaw as he licks over the wound and all the way up my face to my temple.

"Good girl."

# THE ELEMENT OF FIRE:



*Season: Summer*

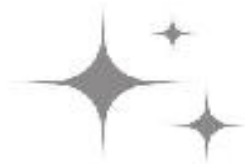
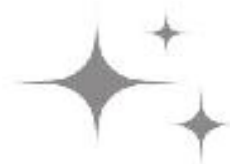
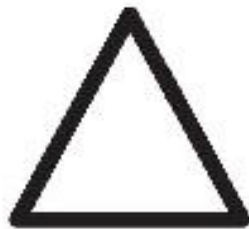
*Time of day: Midday*

*Trait: resolutness*

*Feeling: vision*

*Animals: Lion, salamander, phoenix, hyena*

*Color: red, yellow, and orange*



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# CHAPTER 12

## ROTH



I ROLL OUT OF BED, leaving her to sleep, and make my way out to the living area. I can hear my brother coming from a mile away. His attitude is leaking into my house like rot.

“You could have at least put some clothes on,” he says to me as he lets himself in.

“Why would I do that? I’m just going back to bed after you bore me with whatever issue it is you have.” I pour myself a glass of whiskey and recline on the sofa. “Well?” I ask him while he just stands and stares off in the direction of my bedroom. “What do you want, Cain?”

He takes a deep breath. We have the same father, but of course, not the same mother. Lucifer tends to get around. Cain has long white hair and eyes such a pale blue they may as well be grey. It’s always been a joke that maybe his mother was an angel. Father has never confirmed nor denied that, so it always leaves us to wonder.

“What you have done is against the rules,” he says.

“And what rules are those?” The whiskey goes down smoothly but doesn’t do a whole lot to dull the irritation Cain has brought with him. I swear he never knows how to keep his feelings to himself.

“You know the rules. You don’t fuck with the Fates, Roth. Father is going to be pissed that he has to deal with them.” He groans and plops

himself down opposite me.

Even though he's my younger brother, he's always thought he needed to take care of me and make sure I'm not getting into trouble. But I've never been one to listen to anybody. I like to make my own decisions — make my own mistakes.

"Father dearest isn't going to have to deal with any of the Fates. Hecate handed me the fateline like a gift. I didn't steal it."

"You planned to," he shoots back.

"But I didn't!" I smile at him and down the rest of my drink.

"What are you planning to do with her?"

"Do with her?" I ask, laughing at his wording. "She's not a toy."

"You sure are playing with her like one."

I'm across the room in an instant, grabbing his head and twisting it sharply, killing him instantly. Unfortunately, we're immortal, so he'll pop back into his body in a few minutes. I won't let him or any of my family talk about her like that. Like what I did or not, she's mine now. Which makes her a Princess of Hell. They will treat her as such.

"Fucking ow, you little shit," Cain growls when his neck snaps back into place.

"I've had my eye on her ever since her scent first called to me all those years ago. She was mine from the first time I laid eyes on her, even though back then I didn't quite know that yet." I pour another glass of whiskey and stare off into the wasteland that is Hell through the floor-to-ceiling windows. I almost feel bad for bringing her to such a place.

"I knew it was going to end badly when you started visiting her every night," Cain sighs. "You were an addict."

"You have no idea," I tell him, falling back down onto the couch with a sigh. "The way she smells, the way her body sings to me, the way she tastes..." I drift off, thinking about that first time I got to taste her on my tail. I knew there was no going back for me at that moment. Signed. Sealed. She was mine.

"Does she know?" he asks, bringing me out of my memory. I look at him. "What you've done to her, Roth. Does she know she's immortal?"

I can sense her stirring in the bedroom. Her magic is coming back, thanks to Hecate finally stepping in, and she's going to wake up soon with the force of it. It'll be interesting to see what happens now that I've...put some demon in her.

“Haven’t had the time,” I tell him.

“Because you were too busy fucking her into a coma?” He grins as he says it. There may be a lot that Cain and I disagree on, but indulging in sins was never one of them.

“Partially. And baptism by fire is never a fun event to go through, is it? My poor witch was in a lot of pain until I took it away by bringing her here.”

She’s awake now, our braided fatelines allowing me to sense her like she’s right next to me. Her magic is growing, and she’s playing and testing, seeing just how far she can push herself. The sense of wonder in her heart fills my own with joy. She’s going to come looking for me soon.

“I’ll leave you,” Cain says, standing to leave. “It was stupid what you did, Roth. Demons can’t just go up top and start claiming people. It’ll upset the natural order of things.”

“No one is going up top to steal anyone,” I tell him. “I was the first, and I’ll be the last. It was in my fateline to have her. Who am I to deny the old hags?”

“Keep telling yourself that,” he says as Branwen opens the bedroom door and walks out into the hallway. He slips out through the front door, and he retreats as she advances. “And bring her to dinner tonight. I know we’d all love to meet her.”

The door clicks shut, and I turn to face my witch.

She’s still completely naked, comfortable in herself as she walks over to me. Making a show of just how her power has come back to her, she waves her hands over her hair, coloring it back to her favorite color, blueish grey. Next, she covers herself in a short silk robe, black and silver, just like us. She snaps her fingers, and the fireplace roars to life, smacking me in the face with its heat before she straddles my lap.

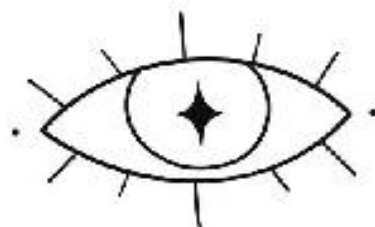
“You have some explaining to do, my little demon.” Her voice is like the richest fucking wine, and I can’t get enough of it.

“Little?” I ask, raising an eyebrow as I grow hard beneath her. I grab her ass and force her hips to roll against mine.

She laughs, and I drink it in.

“Tell me what happened when I tried to kill myself, Roth. Tell me how I have my magic back. Tell me how I’m alive.”

# RULE NUMBER FIVE:



*Soft of eye and light of touch, speak  
little and listen much.*



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# CHAPTER 13

## BRANWEN

HE HUMS, and his fingertips dig into my flesh through the soft silk I made for myself. Gods, he's handsome. I reach up and run my hands through his dark hair, tugging on those cute little horns he has on top of his head.

"Cute? Little?" he asks, still able to read my thoughts. Not sure how I feel about that little detail.

"How am I alive, *demon*?"

He smirks at me before leaning forward to kiss along my collarbone.

"You're alive because I couldn't stand to see you dead." His breath skates across my neck as he moves up my throat. "You're alive, witch, because you aren't done yet."

"That answers why but not how." I move so that he can get better access to the sensitive spots on the side of my neck and behind my ear.

He pulls away, his eyes searching mine.

"I took your fateline from Hecate."

My eyebrows pull together, and I look at him in a silent question. Of course, I've heard of fatelines. I know they're said to tether us to this world and keep us on track. They're put there by the Gods to keep us going in the right direction. But I've never heard of anyone being able to change them... let alone *touch* them.

“You ran that sharp metal right up your arm,” he says quietly, taking my forearm and running his fingers up the jagged scar. “And I sat next to you, watching the entire thing happen. I was never able to reach you while you were conscious, so I couldn’t do anything. And then, Miss Hecate showed up.”

He chuckles humorlessly.

“I know you witches put a lot of stock in her, but I must say that I am not all that impressed. She’s too hands-off for my liking.”

“Obviously not that hands-off if she gave you my fateline to save me.”

He grunts. “I was prepared to take it by force, but she handed it over.” He smiles up at me. “It was a beautiful thing, shining and shimmering silver. It caught light that wasn’t even there to catch. I’m almost sorry I had to merge it with my own black, scarred-looking line. But it had to be done.”

“What does that mean, Roth? That you merged it with your own?”

“I made you a hybrid. And—” He pauses, looking off to the side for a moment. “Maybe I’ve made myself one? I’m not sure. Maybe you can teach me some spells later.” He wags his eyebrows and squeezes my ass.

“Roth!” I cry out through the laughter as he continues to squeeze my hips and my sides. I’m too ticklish for this. “Stop it!” My magic grabs hold of his hands and pushes them down, flattening them on the couch.

“Oh,” he drawls. “I think I like this. Want to be in charge, witch?”

“As much fun as that sounds, *demon*, this conversation isn’t done. You said you made me a hybrid. That means I’m half demon?”

“It means you’re immortal,” he answers as he tries to test my strength by tugging at his arms. He doesn’t budge. I was strong when I had my powers before, but it was nothing to how much power I can feel buzzing inside my body now.

“Immortal,” I say, tasting the word on my tongue. “I like that.”

“I bet you do.” His voice is dripping with sex, and he’s still half-hard between us. “My revenge-hungry little witch. Can you feel all that power inside of you now?”

I close my eyes, letting it thrum inside of me. It’s been too long since I’ve felt anything but empty. Now it moves through me. It’s like being able to feel the circulation of your blood. There’s energy sweeping through me, tickling my fingers and toes and making me light-headed when I concentrate. It’s everywhere, radiating off my skin and kicking against my chest.

When I open my eyes, he's looking at me like he wants to eat me... again. Nothing has ever felt so right as the demon sitting beneath me now does. Everything about the way he looks at me to the way he touches me makes my heart sing. Like we were meant to be here. Maybe it's our muddled fatelines, or maybe it's just because I've waited for him for so long.

Whatever it is, I don't care. I love it. I want more of it. I want it forever.

"All that power," he says, licking his lips and looking me up and down. "It's really doing it for me."

"So what happens now?" I ask, ignoring the way his eyes are practically licking me. "I stay here? Wherever *here* is? Where are we?"

He laughs.

"You're in the Under," he says. "The Underworld. Hell. Niflheim. Duat. Naraka. So many words for it through so many millennia and religions. Basically, you're in the place where everyone goes when they die."

I look around. It doesn't look like a place where bad people go. Everything in his home is modern. There are tall ceilings and comfortable furniture. There's art on all the walls and enough liquor to last someone through the end times.

Granted, the view could use some work. Through the floor-to-ceiling windows to my left is a barren landscape. It's just rolling fields with mountains very far off in the distance. Everything is grey, and there's no life to be found. Even the sky is overcast without a sun or a moon. It just barely glows behind clouds the colors of gravel.

"There is no color," I say aloud.

"Color is a luxury afforded to the living and the good."

"Are you not alive?" I ask him, leaning forward and releasing his hands.

He immediately touches me, like he can't get enough. They run up my thighs and over my hips, parting the robe as he goes. When he reaches the knot, he slowly unties it before pushing the soft fabric from my shoulders.

"You feel alive," I say before my lips brush across his. "There's definitely blood flowing through these veins." My hand encircles his cock, stroking him from root to tip as he grows fully in my palm.

He groans, letting his head fall back against the couch.

"Are you not good?" I ask against his mouth as I continue to work him between us. His breath comes in strained huffs, and the muscles in his chest

and abs are constricting with each caress. “Because you seemed pretty good at what you were doing earlier.”

I move from his lap, settling between his thighs on my knees. He growls when he looks down at me, his eyes glowing that eerie yellow. His hands tangle in my hair and guide me toward him. I taste him for the first time, my lips wrapping around just the head of him. He tastes even better than I expected. Sweet and smoky at the same time.

“If I’m alive, it’s only because you need me,” he says with a moan. His grip tightens on my hair. “And if I’m good, it’s only for you.”

He hisses through his teeth as I take him into the back of my throat and use my hand to palm and roll his balls. The tips of my fingers push and play near his back entrance, testing the waters. Some men like it, others don’t. But my demon seems to enjoy it.

“You got to taste me,” I tell him as I come up for air. “Let me taste you.” I lick the sensitive spot under the tip. “Come for me, demon.”

“Fuck,” he groans as I swallow him deep, my nose touching the hair at his base. He twitches inside of me, and then his balls tighten as he empties himself into my throat. I moan as I take it all, letting it slide over my tongue.

I tease him, sucking him even after he’s done, and watch him writhe around from oversensitivity. His face is scrunched, and it feels like he might pull out chunks of my hair. But after being so numb for so long, any amount of touch he gives me is something I relish.

He isn’t hurting me. He’s nourishing me.

He’s finally had enough when he grabs me and pulls me up onto his body. The robe falls to the floor, and we’re lying skin to skin. He’s warm, warmer than any human or warlock, but it’s comforting to me. The fire in his blood I think calls to mine and is like a comforting lullaby.

“Everything you felt,” he whispers, kissing my hair. “All of that pain, Branwen, was warranted. All of the anger and the sadness and the hopelessness...it was justified.”

I look up at him, letting the tears well up and fall over my cheeks.

“What he did to you...” He trails off and can’t get the words out. But I feel the frustration coming off of him, and it tugs at my heart. “I will delight in watching you set fire to his life. And when he joins the Underworld? He’ll be placed in the most hellish of rings where we can visit and watch him suffer any time we want.”

The idea of revenge on Kegan fills my soul with a new fire.

“Or you can stay down here. I will never force you to do anything you don’t want to do. And I will never force you to do anything that could put you in harm’s way. You may be immortal, but you are not immune to pain — emotional or physical.”

“No,” I tell him. “I can’t hide. I need to expose him for the useless piece of shit he is.”

“And we will,” he assures me as his fingers weave through my hair. “But first,” he sighs. “We have dinner with Lucifer.”

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# FOR A TRANQUIL HOME:



*What you'll need:*

*A jar*

*Sage or incense*

*Pink salt*

*Lavender*

*Rice*

*Rosemary*

*Chamomile*

*White candle (optional)*

*Instructions:*

*Cleanse/smudge your jar with the sage or incense.*

*Add the ingredients in order: Pink salt, lavender, rice, rosemary, and  
chamomile*

*Close the jar lid and store in the heart of your home.*

*If you have a white candle, you can seal it with white wax before  
storing.*

# CHAPTER 14

## ROTH



SHE'S GOING to fit right in. I had a lot of dresses brought in for her today, and all of them were varying degrees of what I thought she might like to wear. And my witch comes walking out in the sexiest outfit I think I've ever seen her in.

If we had the time, I'd rip it off her. But the last thing I should probably do is give daddy dearest another reason to be pissed off.

"You're looking at me like you want to eat me," she says as she slinks up to my side, running her hands around my waist.

Her dress is black and has slits over both legs going all the way up to her hips. And even though her top has a sheer overlay, the cut is low and shows off those perfect breasts, the piercings in her nipples poking out through the fabric.

"If I had the time, witch, I would," I tell her, gathering her hair and pushing it back over her shoulders. She still has a little mark on her neck from where I bit her, and that sign of possession has my cock growing in my pants. "But you are still missing a couple things."

She gives me a curious look as I walk over to the counter and pick up the two things I had made especially for her.

"The first — and most important — is your crown." She snorts when she sees it, her hand flying to her mouth. Her embarrassment and her

feelings of unimportance roll off her in waves. Even if I couldn't hear everything that's going on inside that beautiful mind of hers, it would be clear that she lacks self-confidence after everything that's happened.

"It's beautiful," she says, running her fingers over the rough black-and-silver stones.

"I had it made custom for you. That silver color is the closest we could get to how your fateline looks. And the black, while it's not as stunning, is the color of mine. And I wanted you to always carry a bit of me with you."

"I can't wear this," she says as she takes a step back.

"You're mine," I tell her, closing the gap between us. "Which means you're a Princess of Hell. And therefore, you can, indeed, wear this."

She looks up at mine, which sits comfortably over my horns. It's much older, crafted back when I was still in my mother's womb. But it's much more simple than hers, just a plain gold thing that sits atop me like a hellish halo.

"Why is mine so much more extravagant? I'm going to stand out." She takes another step back, but I advance on her. We do this little dance until she's grinning and her back is pressed against the cool stone wall.

"It's more extravagant because you deserve something that matches you. Now, shut the fuck up and let me put it on you."

She raises her eyebrow at my tone but allows me to set it on top of her braided hair. It fits her perfectly and makes her look even more the part than before. I, for one, can't wait to watch her set the world on fire while she wears it. And then watch her as she climbs on top of me with only it on as she comes apart on my cock.

"Focus," she singsongs as she grabs my jaw. "I may not be able to read your thoughts like you can, but I can still see those thoughts written all over your face."

I growl at her playfully and then go to my knees at her feet and show her the final gift. It's a knife made out of the sharpest material in the Underworld and sharp enough to kill even a demon...for a few minutes anyway.

"Always keep this on you," I tell her. "Most will steer clear of you once they know who you are. And I don't doubt that your magic is enough to take on even me." I pause as I lift her leg and wink at her. The smallest blush forms across her soft white skin, and *fuck*, I really need to get this over with because my cock is throbbing. Her skin is so soft, and as I run my

fingers over her shins and above the knee, I can't help but notice the little hitch in her breath.

"Did you engineer this so that I would always need to have my thighs on display?"

I laugh softly as I settle the strap and knife tightly against her thigh.

"It'll fit over pants as well," I tell her. "But I do like seeing all of this soft flesh out in the open." I kiss the top of her thigh. "So easy to taste." I kiss further inside. "So ready for the taking." My teeth scrape against her skin until my nose reaches the apex of her thighs.

Her scent is strong. She's so ready and willing for me, my little witch. She was worth the wait. Worth all of those years when I was forced to sit in the shadows of her room and hear all about her so-called friends, crushes, and power without being able to lift a single finger to help her or warn her. I wish I could have saved her from the pain she experienced.

But watching her burn down everyone in her path will be fun as well.

"Unless you're going to finish what you've just started," she says with a warning tone, "we should probably leave for dinner, no?"

I look up at her, and her hazel eyes are blazing...literally. That demon fire is having its effects. Those eyes follow me as I stand, towering over her and closing my body closer over her against the wall behind her. I blink and let my own fire come out. She smiles up at me, the slightest hint of a dimple showing in her right cheek.

I take her jaw in my hand gently, rubbing my thumb over her bottom lip. She moves quickly, taking the tip between her teeth and biting down playfully. I smile and lean forward to kiss her. I'll never get enough of the way she tastes and smells. The scent of her magic surrounds us as her tongue sweeps across mine.

I have waited for too long to feel her, to have her in my grasp instead of ten feet away from me in a bed, frozen and unable to move. Being in her mind but not being able to touch her was torture.

Her little moans and whimpers fill my ears, and they beg me for more. I grind my hips against her own and swallow her. I don't give a fuck about her lipstick smearing all over her face and mine. She's a witch — she can fix it. I'm more concerned about making those moans louder, turning them into my name instead of wordless sounds.

"Roth," she says, her voice breathy and full of heat. "We need to go." She gives me a small laugh and tries to shove me away.

I growl deep in my chest.

“Yes, big and scary demon,” she teases. “I get it. Trust me, I want you to fuck me up against this wall just as much as you want to do it. But I refuse to be more than fashionably late.”

“I will finish this later,” I promise her, my voice deep and commanding.

“I should hope so,” she answers, wiping the lipstick from under her lips with her thumb. It comes away bloodred, and she rolls her eyes. “You couldn’t have attacked me before I worked so hard on my face?”

“Perks of being a witch. Snap those pretty little fingers and fix it.”

I kiss her one last time and then escort her from my home into the labyrinth of corridors. All of our homes are connected with these passages. Mine, all of my siblings, and Father’s. Some go underground, and others climb high over the mountains behind us. We live in the center of the Underworld with nothing but wasteland to surround us before you reach the Soul Lands.

Dante was relatively close with how he described it. So many rings with so many different punishments. And yet to leave out what it’s actually like for those who don’t fuck up in the land of the living was a bit annoying.

The Underworld isn’t only gutting and slicing and burning. We also keep those souls who deserve an afterlife of peace and contentment. They get the best fields of flowers to frolic in for the rest of their lives until they decide to reincarnate as a butterfly or something. Whatever good people want to come back as.

I personally would want to come back as someone who climbs the ladder, rules and dominates over his people. But no one seems to want that responsibility. Whatever. That isn’t my domain. My place is next to my father, putting those who deserve it into whatever ring I see fit.

“Father’s place is up on the mountain,” I tell her, taking her in the direction of his residence.

“The mountain I saw off in the distance?” she asks.

“This whole place is built into, around, and underneath a mountain,” I explain. “The mountains you saw are the border between this world and the next. The damned souls burn beyond the ones you saw. But we must climb this one to reach Lucifer.”

She eyes the winding steps as we come up on them.

“You’ve been around for how long *and* have access to a certain type of magic and haven’t installed a better way to get up there than stairs?”

Couldn't even put in an elevator?"

I laugh at the scared look on her face.

"Unfortunately, Lucifer is a stickler for tradition. Ever heard of the stairway to heaven?" I ask her.

She nods.

"Welcome to the stairway to Hell."

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# THE ELEMENT OF EARTH:



*Season: Winter*

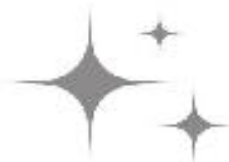
*Time of day: Night*

*Trait: Confidence*

*Feeling: Tactile*

*Animals: Mole, wolf, and bear*

*Color: Black, grey, and green*



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# CHAPTER 15

## BRANWEN

WE ARE ON A CONSTANT INCLINE, and I am too out of shape for any of this. It's like doing a stair-stepper challenge on steroids. At one point, I even debate asking Roth to carry me since he doesn't seem to be struggling at all. But every time I think about it, I look over at him only to find him staring at me with those dark eyes full of promises.

If I let him pick me up, we'd never make it to dinner. And even though I'm not sure why, this feels important. To be fair, it is the literal King of the Underworld. I get it. He's an important God. But whatever I'm feeling is separate from all of that pomp and circumstance. This is heavy. And it matters to Roth as well, even though he doesn't show it.

I glance over at him again out of the corner of my eye. He looks good... really good. That golden crown sits comfortably on top of his mess of black hair that has been pushed back out of his face. His suit is black on black on black, showing off just how pale the rest of his body is.

And that smear of red lipstick across his lips...I smile. He wouldn't let me remove it. He wanted a reminder of what's to come later.

"Why is your form different down here compared to how I saw you up top?" I ask him, out of breath and panting in between the words.

"Prefer the red, scarred skin and yellow, glowing eyes, Princess?" he asks, that smirk coming back in full force to wet my nonexistent panties.

“I’m definitely not against it,” I tell him.

“Good.” He nods and smiles, concentrating on the path of never-ending stairs while he talks. He isn’t even out of breath. “I have more control over myself down here. It’s my domain. It’s where I was born. But I was born in flame, and no matter how much I look it down here, I’m not human. So when I leave, this normal shell leaves as well. The scars are still there under this facade.”

“Now that we’re merged and you’re kind of a warlock, will that change? Will you have more control over yourself back in that realm?” I ask.

“Oh, stop just thinking about it and let me carry you, you stubborn thing.” He stops me and sweeps me off my feet, carrying me up the stairs like a child. My very tired legs and lungs thank him for it.

“To answer your question,” he continues, “I guess we’ll see when we get up there. I’m the first that’s dared steal someone away, let alone fuck with the fatelines. I have a feeling Father will have something to say about that,” he mumbles.

“Oh, is that what this is? A slap on the wrist for my demon?”

He leans forward and kisses me on the cheek before placing me back down onto the ground. It’s finally leveled out, and we’re standing in a dark concrete hallway. To our right is a heavy wooden door with iron braces and torches with blazing fire on either side.

“We’re about to find out.” He winks and straightens his jacket before knocking. The bangs echo down either side of us, and when the door swings open, Roth wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me closer.

The man standing on the other side of the door looks too normal to be Lucifer. But he has to be. No one else I’ve ever met exudes that kind of raw power. His pores are leaking with it. And the way he looks down his nose at Roth turns my stomach into a pit of anger. I’ve never felt so protective over someone who most certainly doesn’t need it.

Sure, I have big-sister feelings toward Asha, not wanting to let her get hurt or exposed to any of the pain that our world can cause. I’ve felt that way since she was born. But this? This is wildly different.

I feel the magic flare to life as his black, soulless eyes pivot in my direction. He sniffs, and Roth’s hand clenches my side. It does nothing to calm my temper. If this was anyone else looking at my demon in that way, I think I would’ve already laid them out flat on their ass.

It could be that our fatelines are intertwined, making feelings and emotions towards him stronger. It could be that he's been in my life so long now that I consider him mine to have and protect. Or it could just be that over the years, I've grown pretty damn fond of my little demon. And over the past couple of nights, that fondness has grown into something a little more as he claimed my body and saved me from my own mind.

No matter what it is, he's mine. And no one is going to treat him the way his father clearly wants to.

"Father." Roth finally speaks, and Lucifer's eyes reluctantly leave me to look at his son. "I'd like you to meet Branwen," he says, nodding in my direction. "Our new Princess of Hell."

Lucifer clears his throat.

"Where are my manners," he asks himself, a smile gracing his sharp face. "Branwen. How lovely to meet you. Please, won't you both come in?"

Roth leads the way, pushing me quickly past his father before switching sides so that he's between us. Lucifer shuts the door and turns around, digging a handkerchief out of his breast pocket and handing it to Roth.

"I think you forgot to clean up, son." His face may not hold the same disdain as earlier, but his tone of voice definitely does.

Roth takes the bright white cloth with a smile, happily using the clean piece of linen to wipe the smear of red lipstick from his mouth. It's barely moving, refusing not to stain his chin and upper lip. So instead of drawing this out even longer, angering his father further, I use my newly restored magic and wipe it off myself.

"Done," I say, handing the ruined cloth back to his father. Could I have cleaned it? Yes. Did I? No. Out of spite, I did not.

He sighs and shoves the soiled handkerchief back into his pocket.

"Your brothers and sisters are in the dining hall," he says to Roth. "Go join them, and I will be with you soon."

We start to walk off.

"And Roth? We will discuss this later on this evening."

"Okay, you did not properly prepare me for....*that!*" I whisper at him when Lucifer is far enough out of earshot.

"I didn't want to worry you." He squeezes me and kisses the side of my head. "Plus, he's far more bark than bite, I promise."

"Ah, the golden child and his witchling bride!" someone shouts as we enter the room.

*Bride.*

Somehow that word feels far heavier than *mine* or *Princess*.

“Yes, yes,” Roth says, taking a bow in front of everyone. “I know I was missed.”

I step in behind him and look around. To say the dining room is massive would be an understatement. It’s four of my house put together with the longest table I’ve ever seen in my life. There are five women on one side and four men on the other. He has nine siblings. Lucifer’s been busy...

“Let me introduce the newest member of our family,” Roth says, taking my hand in his and gesturing toward the people in the room. “Branwen, my brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters, my Branwen.”

“Hi, everyone,” I say quietly, a little overwhelmed by meeting so many faces all at once. Learning names is going to be a nightmare.

Roth ushers me down the few steps into the room, escorting me to the far end of the table I pray to Hecate isn’t where Lucifer sits during these.

“It’s not,” Roth whispers in my ear. I smile, loving that he can hear me in situations like this.

Everything moves in a blur after we’re seated. They tell me their names, and I catch and remember maybe half of them.

Cain. Amon. Náli. Ravana. Hel. Lilin.

“Don’t worry about keeping all of their names in your head,” Roth whispers to me as the doors open and Lucifer walks in. Everyone has gone quiet out of what seems like fear or respect, except for Roth. “You’ll barely see them. And they’re all so conceited they’ll remind you of their name each time you meet.”

“Roth,” Lucifer booms from the other side of the table.

He kisses me before turning his attention to the end of the table.

“Father?” he asks.

“Are you finished whispering like a child in a classroom? I have something to discuss with the lot of you.”

Roth gestures and leans back in his chair, the epitome of calm, cool, and collected. His thighs stretch the material of his pants, and I have to stop myself from sitting on that very inviting lap. Roth’s hand finds my bare thigh and gives it a squeeze.

“As you know, you and I will have a conversation later in regards to what you’ve done.” His eyes slide quickly to me and back to Roth. “But I would like to let all of my children know that this will be the one and only

time this happens. We do not fuck with fate. We do not fuck with fatelines. And we most certainly do *not* mix our fatelines with witches.”

Roth turns to me and rolls his eyes, giving me a confident smile.

“And there will be no more gallivanting up top.” His words turn the contents of my stomach to cement. My entire body goes cold.

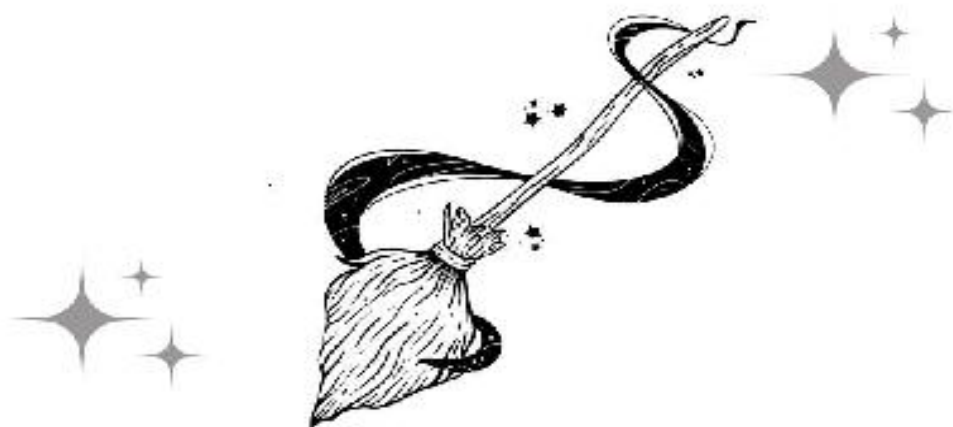
I will not be stuck down here.

“It causes too many issues and possibilities for...” He trails off and gives me a look, his eyes lingering on the crown atop my head. “Crossbreeding.”

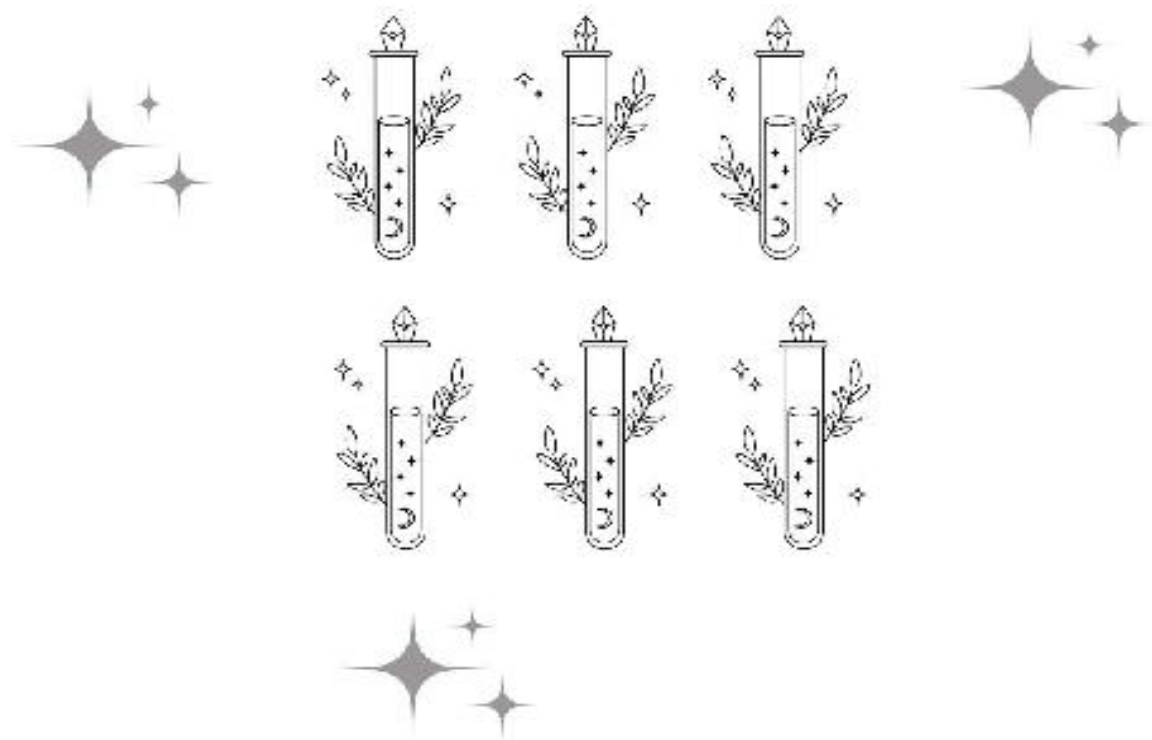
Roth’s cool demeanor has taken a turn. While he hasn’t moved, the energy coming off him has. I know he can hear my thoughts, but I can’t hear his. So I don’t know if he’s angry with me for the outrage I feel or angry with his father for essentially grounding them all like teenagers.

“And there is no room for negotiation.” He clears his throat and opens his napkin, shaking it out before placing it on his lap. “Now, let’s eat.”

# RULE NUMBER SIX:



*Always keep your broomstick dry.*



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# CHAPTER 16

## BRANWEN

WE WALK BACK to his house in silence. I know he can hear the thoughts racing through my head, but that means he also knows not to talk to me right now. It was all I could do to get through the rest of that weird-as-hell dinner. One place I never thought I'd be was eating a family dinner with Lucifer and his children.

But I do know one thing: I'm not going to be stuck down here as some sort of twisted version of Persephone. I'm not going to disappear without a word to Asha or my mother. I'm not going to disappear without a trace and leave those fucking traitors to think they got away with what they did.

"Your mind is a lovely mess of rage," he purrs as we step back into his home.

I whip around on him, all of that rage flowing freely out of my body in the form of magic. It throws him across the room and up against a wall. I hold out my hand and suspend him a few inches off the ground while I storm over to him.

"Well, this is hot," he says with a wicked grin on his face.

It just infuriates me further.

"I am not some prize to be kept on a pedestal," I growl as my hand wraps around his throat. He smirks down at me, his eyes licking up and down my body. "I will not be kept down here against my will and bred like

some bitch in heat. My sister and mother need to know where I am. And Kegan needs to pay for what he's done to me."

"Did I say I was going to keep you here against your will?" he asks. "Do you really think I could be capable of that? Do you not know me at all?"

"Your father did a little more than insinuate it. Crossbreeding I think was mentioned after he told everyone there would be no more gallivanting up top." I take a deep breath. "And, no, Roth. I do not know you, and you do not know me. You watched me from the corner of my room for years. But we have never spoken. You do not know me. And I do not know you."

He licks his lips, and I can't help but follow the movement. I may be pissed, but that doesn't stop me from noticing him. I lose my focus, and he drops to the ground, quickly using it to his advantage to spin us around so that I'm the one being pushed up against the wall.

The air is knocked out of my lungs, and he leans in, pressing his entire body against mine as he runs the tip of his nose up my throat and over my cheek. His breath is hot on my ear as he speaks.

"While I would love to shove my cock so deep inside of that perfect little pussy of yours and fill you up with so much cum you're dripping me for days, I would never use you like a bitch in heat, witch." He bites and sucks on my ear. "When I breed you, it'll be because you beg me for it."

My cunt is throbbing with need, and with each breath, his chest rubs against my hard nipples. His free hand has gone to my ass, squeezing it hard so that our hips are flush. He smells like fresh tobacco and bourbon, and it makes me a little dizzy as I drink it up.

"And I do know you, witch. I know you better than even your sister. I know every little thought that passes through your mind. I know your likes and dislikes, your happiness and your pain. I know that which you don't want anyone else to know. I listened to you for years, drinking in every little ounce of information you were willing to give me like a sponge."

His voice is booming all around us, bouncing off the walls as his anger builds. His eyes flash yellow, and his skin begins to turn red. His tail thrashes wildly behind him until it takes hold of my wrist, squeezing it hard and searing my skin.

"And you think I was only there at night?" he asks. "I was there every minute of every day. I missed nothing. I was there when that boy Gideon kissed you under the pier. I was there when you taught Asha her first spell. I

was there when you ate nothing but blueberry pancakes every morning for three months and your mother thought you were pregnant. I was there for every fight with your friends, every milestone of your magic progressing, and every time someone else got to *touch* you.”

I feel like I’m going to cry. My guardian angel in the form of a demon. My spirit guide. My ever-watchful protector. He was always there. He must’ve seen everything. Every night, I thought he’d abandoned me, but I just couldn’t see him. My heart beats so fast I think it might fly out of my chest.

“Do you know how many times I wanted to rip through that stupid barrier and throw you over my shoulder, dragging you down here with me? I could only ever reach you while you were sleeping or unconscious. The rest of the time, I was doomed to watch from afar. Looking but never touching.

“So yes, Branwen. I know you. And maybe you don’t think you know me, but I know there was a part of you that could feel me even when you thought I wasn’t there. And you should know that after sticking by your side for over a decade that I can be trusted to continue that tradition.”

“I can’t stay down here, Roth,” I tell him, my watery eyes searching his for any understanding. “I can’t just stay down here and let them all get away with what they did to me.”

“I don’t want you to.” He kisses me softly, and I melt even further into him. My demon. “I want to take you back to that coven and watch as you take everyone down. Nothing about that has changed just because Lucifer has made a careless declaration.”

I look into those dark eyes, noting how sincere he looks. I reach up and run my fingertips over the rough bone of his horns, toying with the points for a moment before holding his face between my palms. I reach up on my tiptoes and kiss him, forcing his lips to part for mine. Our tongues mingle, and he sighs into me. He’s hard between us, his dick pressing firmly into my stomach.

His hands roam across the plains of my curves, and his thumbs brush against my piercings. I moan into his mouth and he picks me up, my legs immediately wrapping around his waist as he pushes me into the wall.

“Tell me what you’ll do to them.” He bites my lower lip until I bleed. He sucks it into his mouth, feeding from that small wound while I grind

against him until he reaches between us to push my skirt out of the way while I work on undoing his pants.

“Tell me,” he commands again.

“I’ll show them what true power looks like,” I tell him as the tip of his dick teases my entrance, pressing against my clit as I speak. “I’ll take their powers from them just as they did to me.”

He slides easily inside of me, filling me up with a tortuously slow thrust. I feel myself stretch around every inch until he’s fully seated inside of me.

“Keep going, witch,” he says with a grunt. “Tell me how a Princess of Hell will punish those who hurt her.”

“I will watch the light fade from their eyes as they feel the hollowness I felt.”

He pulls out and thrusts in with force, his pelvis grinding against my clit to make sparks fly into my vision.

“I will burn their businesses to the ground, watching as they lose their only source of happiness and life.”

He thrusts again and again, pushing my pleasure to new heights. His breath comes in quick puffs as his fingers dig into the soft flesh of my thighs and ass. Sweat drips from his forehead with the effort, and I lean forward to lick it from his temple. He groans and picks up his speed.

“I will take everything from them and laugh as they beg at my feet for mercy.”

“Yes,” he hisses.

“And I will save Kegan for last. Letting him watch everything falling down around him, wondering when it will be his turn.”

My toes curl, and my nails dig into the back of his neck as my orgasm builds.

“And when he cries and begs on his knees, I will watch as I force him to confess everything he did to me in front of the entire coven. I will watch as he cries like the small, pathetic child he is. I will watch as everyone around him loses faith in him. I will watch with joy as everyone turns their back on him. I will strip him of every ounce of pathetic power he has and then press my dagger to his throat while he begs for his life.”

A few more thrusts and I’m coming, My head bangs on the wall behind me, but I barely register the pain.

“Fuck!” Roth shouts, coming shortly after.

“And I will watch you do it all,” he says, kissing every inch of skin he can get his mouth on. “I will stand behind you and cheer you on while you get every ounce of revenge you deserve, Princess.”

“When?” I ask, still clutching to him like a life preserver.

“Just say the word and we’ll go.” He brushes my hair from my face. “All the devils in the Underworld can’t stop me from giving you what you want. Say the word and we go.”

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# CRYSTALS THAT ARE SAFE TO USE IN WATER



*(always do your research before adding crystals to water spells,  
some will disintegrate over time)*

Agate  
Amber  
Amethyst  
Aventurine  
Citrine  
Clear Quartz  
Jasper  
Moonstone  
Rose Quartz  
Smokey Quartz

# CHAPTER 17

## ROTH



“WHAT A LOVELY SURPRISE,” I say as I open the door and find my father standing on the other side. “A little late for a family visit, isn’t it?”

“I told you we’d be having a discussion, did I not?” he asks as he steps inside without my permission. I guess being the ruler of everything, you tend to not understand common courtesy.

“Come on in,” I say sarcastically.

“Thank you.” He’s completely oblivious. “Where is your new bride?” he asks as he looks around the living area.

“Taking a bath.”

“Perfect. This conversation will be easier with fewer people involved.”

“Goody,” I say without humor as I pour both of us a bourbon. “What can I help you with, Father?” I ask him as we both take a seat near the fireplace.

“I’m here to discuss with you why you decided to fuck with the fateline of a witch.” He takes a sip of his drink and stares into the fire, refusing to look at me.

“Well, I think we both know why —”

He holds his hand up to cut me off.

“Save me the true love, fated mates bullshit. I think we both know that it’s a bunch of nonsense.”

My eye twitches.

"I think Hecate would disagree."

He scoffs. "And what does it matter what she thinks?"

"She handed me the fateline, Father," I tell him, leaning forward after setting my glass on the table next to me. "Branwen was dying, and neither of us could stand to see it. She said it was in our fate anyway to come together like this."

"Fate." He spits out the word. "I've been around too long to believe in fate."

"Then why do we try our hardest not to piss off the old hags?"

"Because they hold our lives in their hands. They have the power to snip them whenever they so please. And we will cease to exist." He downs the rest of his drink.

"They wouldn't cut an immortal's line."

"You don't know that." He stands and helps himself to another drink. Millenia has done wonders for his tolerance. Would hate to see his liver though. "I've seen them do it before, and I'm not willing to see if they'd do it again. Especially not with myself or any of my spawn."

I chuckle humorlessly.

"Lovely that you think so highly of us," I mumble.

"Speaking of spawn," he continues. "Are you planning on having any?" He refuses to look at me, just continues staring into the fire like he's bored. It infuriates me.

"Loads," I tell him. "Hordes. I hope to keep her in a constant state of pregnancy, popping little witchling demons out one after the other. But don't worry, I'll make sure our firstborn is named after you out of respect."

He finally looks at me. And it seems as if he's actually trying to decipher if I'm being serious or not. His dark eyes are cold and calculating as they assess me. He must decide I'm not being serious because he shrugs it off.

"Keep in mind, dear child, that we don't know what crossbreeding does. Especially between demons, who are born immortal, and witches, who are not."

I tip my glass toward him in acknowledgment and then down the rest of it. I'm going to need a refill if he's going to be staying much longer. He's draining the absolute life out of me.

“You’re the first one of my children to settle down with someone,” he says. “And I would like to think that you’ve made a well-thought-out choice. But it worries me, Rothschild. Do you even know her? Does she even know what it means to be bound to you for eternity? Because that’s what it is for us. This is not a witch binding herself with a warlock. This is not a mortal life you have chosen for her.”

“I know her,” I tell him, my anger mounting. “And she knows what I am. I have loved her since I first laid eyes on her. I knew she would be mine no matter what.”

“No matter the cost to her,” he says, a smirk appearing across his lips.

“I saved her life.”

“Did she want it to be saved? Most people commit suicide because they no longer wish to be among the living.”

“And she is not,” I volley back. “Technically, we’re not *alive*. Just existing.” He’s so fucking cocky. I want to throw him across the room like Branwen did to me earlier. But harder. And more than once.

“I was in her head,” I continue, pressing my finger to my temple for emphasis. “I have lived in her head for a decade. I know what she’s thinking before she even thinks it. I know what she wants and what she needs before even she knows. You sure are some father. Not even bothering to have true faith in me.”

He looks over at me, his eyebrows raised like he dares me to continue. Little does he know I don’t have to be dared. I already planned to continue my little rant.

“You don’t give a damn about any of us unless we’re doing something to benefit you. We’re your duty to the realm, things to be passed around if need be or to rule if ever something should happen to you. We do your dirty work so that you don’t have to. When was the last time you even went to the first ring? Last year? A decade ago? You sit in your tower and take no interest in us whatsoever until we do things you don’t agree with.”

“You’ll stop now if you value your head,” he says calmly.

I go to speak again. I have more to say, and nothing is going to get me to stop now that I’m on a roll.

“Roth, I’m warning you. Stop if you value *her* head.” He casually points in the direction of my room, and I hold my jaw together so tightly I think I crack some of my teeth. “Thank you. Now, back to the matter at hand. I came here to make sure we were clear on the fact that you two are not to

leave. I'm sure she is very tempted to go wreak havoc on those who have wronged her. And who can blame her, honestly."

He grins and looks back down the hall in her direction.

"I'm sure she'd look good doing it. She's an attractive little witch, isn't she?"

A warning growl reverberates through my chest. He wants me to stay quiet, I will. But I won't let him cross a boundary without a fight.

"Heel, boy," he teases. "I won't go anywhere near her. I have enough spawn and enough barren women to keep me entertained." He stands and adjusts his jacket. "Neither of you will leave the realm. You will both stay here and live happy lives until everyone she seeks revenge on is dead. Then, and only then, will we revisit the subject."

I remain seated until he reaches the door. As he's about to leave, I stand and speak.

"You should be careful how you speak to us."

"Is that a threat?" he asks, humor in his voice.

"It's not. It's a fact. You have ten children, all as powerful as you, with new and different ideas and morals to your own. Piss them off and you're outnumbered."

"Thank you for the heads-up, son. As always, it was a pleasure speaking with you."

With that, he leaves. I breathe a sigh of relief that it's over and let the tension fall out of my shoulders. I may not fear him, but dealing with him is a stress I could do without. I'm really going to have to get creative to get Branwen back to her coven. Or I'm going to have to ask my brothers and sisters for help.

Cain is *not* going to like that.

I walk over to the windows and stare out into the black abyss that is my view. The mountains in the distance are backlit by the fires blazing behind them. I wonder if what I did was the right thing. I was too caught up in the moment. Maybe I wasn't thinking clearly. Maybe I should've let Branwen fade away like she had chosen.

I mentally shake myself. No. I know Branwen. I know she didn't want to give up. I knew she still had more to accomplish. And even though she's not my favorite, Hecate said it was always in our fate for everything to happen the way it did. Saving her was what needed to happen.

With Hecate returning her powers and my fateline giving her new life, Branwen is finally able to take Kegan down. But what happens after that is up in the air. It's for her to decide.

That will be her choice. I won't make her stay here with me if she doesn't want to. If she chooses to stay with her sister and her mother for the rest of their lives, I will let her go. I will not be the person my father insinuated that I am. Our fatelines may be bound, but that doesn't mean our bodies are.

"You are thinking very, very hard," she says, walking up behind me and wrapping her arms around my center. I didn't even realize she was out of the bath, let alone dressed and making her way out to me. My father really did a number on my brain.

"I was." I smile when I turn around and am greeted by a fresh-faced witch. "How was your bath?"

"Delicious. I'm exhausted."

I push her still-wet hair out of her face and kiss her gently.

"My father visited while you were bathing," I tell her.

"Ah, that's where the stench of misery is coming from." She rolls her eyes, and I can't help but laugh.

"He came to warn me about making little demon babies with you." I wag my eyebrows, making her laugh. "And to reiterate that we are not to leave this realm. I'm thinking we may have to ask for help from my brothers and sisters. At least some of them anyway. We're going to need a little bit of a distraction. Keep him off my scent."

"Or your lack thereof while we're up top."

I nod.

"Exactly."

# VIRTUES YOU SHOULD ALWAYS HOLD AS A WITCH:



*Mirth*  
*Reverence*  
*Honor*  
*Humility*  
*Strength*  
*Beauty*  
*Power*  
*Compassion*



# CHAPTER 18

## BRANWEN

“I REALLY, really don’t want to be here,” Roth complains as we get ready to knock on Cain’s door.

I roll my eyes.

“You’re the one who said he would be our best bet. You’re the closest with him out of everyone. So really, this is your own fault.”

He gives me a look, and then Cain is opening the door. He’s tall, like really tall. His white hair is long, and parts of it are braided back out of his face. His eyes are an eerie blue. They’re so pale they’re almost translucent. He does look a bit like Roth with the high cheekbones and, of course, the horns. But where Roth is dark, Cain is light.

“What a lovely surprise!” He smiles at me and grabs both of my hands, lifting them to his mouth for a quick kiss before ushering me inside, completely ignoring Roth.

“Lovely to see you too, brother,” Roth says, following us in.

Cain’s place is just as big as Roth’s and just as grey. The layout is almost entirely the same, and it makes me wonder if they even had a choice in decorating.

“Decorating isn’t really something we worry about,” Roth murmurs into my ear before giving my temple a kiss.

“The girls have much better taste,” Cain agrees. “Speaking of, Ravana will be over soon, along with Amon.”

“They’re the ones you trust the most?” I ask him.

“I trust all of my brothers and sisters to keep secrets from our father. It’s what we’re best at. But I don’t think they all need to hear the nitty-gritty to carry out their jobs, and I definitely don’t want them all taking up space in my house.” He smiles at me, and I laugh at his frankness.

For demons, they’re not very frightening.

“A whiskey for Roth, I’m sure,” he says, pouring Roth a drink. “But what does Branwen drink?” he asks, glancing my way.

“I think I’m off alcohol for a while,” I tell him, the thought of drinking making my stomach turn a little.

“Water?” he asks.

“That would be great, thank you.”

Roth gestures for me to sit in one of the chairs near the windows. They overlook the same vast and barren landscape framed by mountains that look like they’re on fire. I don’t see any animals or plants. Just endless dirt.

“We’re here, we’re here!” one of the sisters shouts as they both walk inside without knocking. They’re all smiles and hugs as they see Cain moving around in the kitchen.

“About time,” Roth teases them from where he sits next to me.

“Amon takes forever to get ready,” Ravana says, rolling her eyes as she makes her way over to us.

“Oh, that’s rich coming from you,” Amon calls out from the kitchen. “When I got to your house, you were still straightening that mane of yours!”

“Looks good though, right?” Ravana asks me, smiling when I awkwardly nod.

I feel incredibly out of place here. I’m wary of trusting anyone. Too many people have been nice to my face and mean behind my back for me to take anyone at face value. The ability to trust literally anyone is gone.

Roth must sense my unease because instead of just holding my hand, he puts his arm around my shoulders and pulls me closer so that our bodies are flush. Ravana sits on the ottoman and pulls it up in front of me.

Leaning forward to rest her arms on her knees, she looks at me, her eyes softening.

“Want to walk us through it?” she asks.

“I am all ears,” Amon says as she plops down in a round, cushioned chair.

Cain hands me a glass of water and then takes a seat as well. I look around at all of them, worried that I’m not going to make it through this. I’d like to think that I’m strong enough to say the words out loud, but I really haven’t yet. And I’m worried that once I do, everything I say is going to sound ridiculous.

What if when I speak out loud and stand up for myself, it sounds like I’m the one that’s lying.

“It’s not going to sound like you’re lying because you aren’t, Branwen,” Roth reassures me.

I take a sip of water and a deep breath before looking at all of them. I’m just going to start from the beginning.

“I was friends with someone in my coven who was pretty popular. I guess we just kind of gravitated towards each other. Everyone tended to look to me for advice with their magic and their spells. I was the one with the broadest range of power, and there didn’t seem to be anything hindering my magic like it was everyone else’s. I could tell them all of my tips and tricks, and for some reason, it just wouldn’t work for them like it did for me.”

“And with Kegan, people gravitated towards him because he was charming. He was good-looking, he was great with everyone in the coven, and he always had this way of making people feel safe and wanted and loved. I never had any reason to not trust him or his actions. No one did. Asha, my sister, was the only one that ever questioned him.”

“That just makes the betrayal cut even deeper,” Amon commiserates.

“His charm is obviously the reason that most people followed him blindly,” I continue.

“Well, that,” Cain chimes in, “and their jealousy towards you.”

“There was no reason to be jealous of me,” I tell him.

“Doesn’t mean people weren’t,” Ravana says. “It’s human nature to be jealous of people that have something we want. Trust me, demons are very familiar with this emotion. Hells, I’m jealous of you and Roth right now.”

“Ew, you’re my sister,” Roth says, making a face.

“Ew, don’t be gross,” she mocks back.

“I tried my hardest to always be there when they needed me. I shared everything I could with anyone that would ask. Do you know how much

fucking work it is to constantly drain yourself to lift up others?" I ask them.

"Barking up the wrong tree there, love," Cain says, smirking into his drink. "Demons don't tend to do the whole 'lifting up' thing. We're more about the tearing-them-down life."

"Which is exactly why we're coming to you," Roth interjects. "Branwen deserves to get revenge on this asshole."

"Agreed," Amon almost purrs, leaning up in her chair, suddenly very interested in the conversation. "What are we doing? Dragging his entrails out to be stomped on by the beasts? Shrinking his already tiny dick and balls while we laugh at his panicked cries? Slice him from top to tail with dull blades?"

"We aren't doing anything," Roth tells her. "Branwen is taking the lead on this, and we're going to play backup."

"Fair," Ravana agrees. "She's the one he hurt. She gets to be the one to bring him to his knees."

"So what exactly are we doing as backup players?" Cain asks.

"Samhain is right around the corner," I tell him. "And Roth says it should be easier to slip out of here when the veil between worlds is so thin. We're just going to need you guys to make sure Lucifer doesn't realize we're gone."

"And," Roth interjects, "we need someone to come up top with us. Because Branwen needs her sister and mother out of the area before shit goes down, and I refuse to leave her side."

I look up at him and smile, feeling incredibly supported and protected by my little demon. He's the only one I can have any sort of faith in besides Asha and my mother. He's the one that's giving me the gift of revenge. He's the one that's risking a lot to take me back home where I can see this through.

"Oh, well, unfortunately, that's definitely going to be me," Cain says.

"No —" Roth starts, but Amon interrupts him.

"It really does need to be Cain," she says, grinning. "Lucifer loves his baby girls. If we all plan a little girls' night with him, it will definitely distract him for long enough."

"You don't touch her sister," Roth says, giving Cain a look.

"Uh, yeah," I say, a little confused. "Asha is one hundred percent off-limits. She's barely in her twenties, and you're like...what? A thousand?"

Cain looks immediately appalled while Roth and his sisters throw their heads back in laughter.

“A thousand?” Cain shouts in outrage.

“What?” I ask, looking around at all of them. “You’re demons! Aren’t you all as old as time?”

“No, no,” Roth says, trying to tamp down his laughter. “The rule gets passed around a lot. Lucifer hasn’t always been the one in charge. He came around a couple thousand years ago and has had us throughout his rule. Cain is the youngest. When were you born again, Cain?”

“1852, thank you very much,” he says, turning his nose up at all of us.

“Okay, well, still. Off-limits. Understood?” I ask him, raising my eyebrow with a look that I hope conveys just how serious I am.

“Who am I to disobey the order of a Princess?”

“Good. So Samhain it is.”

“Samhain it is,” Roth answers.

# YES OR NO TAROT



*Shuffle the deck as you ask your question. If a card flies as you shuffle, use that one. If no cards fly, pull one card from the top or the bottom of the deck using your intuition.*

*If you receive:*

*Wands: The answer is yes, but you will have to work for it.*

*Cups: The answer is that whatever it is will come to you naturally.*

*Pentacles: The answer is that whatever you desire will come with a price.*

*Swords: The answer is a resounding NO*

*Major Arcana cards: The answer is good luck.*



# CHAPTER 19

## BRANWEN

WHEN WE FINALLY GET BACK TO Roth's home, it's quite late. But after not taking care of myself for weeks on end, I've been taking every chance I get to eat anything he offers me and soak in his massive tub.

"Are you hungry?" he asks, kissing me as he helps strip off each piece of clothing until I'm standing there naked in front of him. The bath runs hot water behind us, the steam filling the room.

"Starving. Are you going to feed me?"

"Anything you like, witch."

I hum and run my hands under the soft material of his shirt before lifting it up and over his head.

"There's definitely something you could feed me," I tease as I unbutton his pants and pull them down over his thighs with a quick tug. His cock bobs free, and he steps out of his jeans with a dangerous smile on his lips.

He grabs my hair and yanks my head back, forcing me to look up at him. My hands find his cock, and I squeeze and stroke while he pants and watches me. My scalp stings, but it's only heightening the heat building deep in my belly. I lick my lips, and his eyes lock onto the movement.

"On your knees," he commands with a growl.

"As you wish." I smile up at him, never breaking eye contact as I slowly get to my knees. He's right at face level like this, and I move my gaze to the

tip of his dick as I work him hard with my hands.

“Taste me.”

I open my mouth, sticking my tongue out to make a show of placing his cock on it. I swirl around the tip and suck his head past my lips. The smoky flavor of him spreads across my tongue as I take him further into my mouth. He hisses and urges me on, pushing my head further down onto his dick. My lips stretch, and I try not to gag when he hits the back of my throat. I moan as I begin to work my mouth up and down his shaft, looking up to watch him as I do.

There’s nothing sexier than knowing you’re the cause of someone’s intense pleasure. The way his hair falls into his face. The flush that spreads up his chest and neck. The way his lips are slightly parted as he sighs with pleasure. That forked tongue sweeps out to wet his lips, and his tail wraps around his body and slithers around the back of my neck, holding me close to him as he fucks my face.

His abs ripple with the effort, and my nails dig into the front of his thighs. I can feel the drool running down my chin, and my eyes are watering. I know I’m making a mess of it, but I also happen to know that’s just how he likes it.

“That’s right, Princess. You know just what I like, don’t you? My sweet little witch, down on her knees for a demon.” I moan again, making sure it’s loud enough that he can feel the vibrations down to his fucking toes. His eyes roll back for a moment, and his head drops. “Fuck,” he swears, his grip tightening.

Suddenly, the tub is overflowing, and water is splashing over the sides and around my knees on the floor. He breaks apart from me, swearing as I laugh and wipe my chin.

“Got a little carried away,” I say, still on my knees as I watch him drain the water to a more acceptable level.

“Who could blame me?” He reaches down to plug the drain back in and then steps back over in front of me. He’s still hard and throbbing, and I reach out for a lick while his hand gently caresses my cheek. “Look at you. You’re no witch, Branwen. You’re a Goddess.”

He bends over and scoops me up. I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him while he carries me into the bath. He sinks slowly, letting the hot water lap at our bodies. He turns me so that my back is leaning against his chest, and he begins to wet my hair.

“You spell your hair this color?” he asks as he massages my scalp.

“Mhm,” I moan, leaning into his touch.

“What’s your natural hair color? I’ve only ever seen you with this.”

“Boring old brown,” I tell him as I run my hands through my hair to show him. As I do, the color changes from its normal blue grey to a dark, chestnut brown. “I never liked the way it looked, and too many other girls in the coven had the same old boring hair. So one day when I was like fourteen, I think, I just decided it needed to be changed. I actually wanted it to be a bright blue,” I tell him, laughing at the memory.

“But I was just starting to learn how to do spells like that, and something went wrong. It turned out this faded color, but I thought it looked pretty good anyway.” I pause, running my hands through my hair again to change it back.

“And you didn’t want anyone to know you’d fucked it up?”

“Yeah, that too,” I admit. We both laugh.

He rinses my hair and then begins to rub my muscles. His hands slip easily over my skin and smell like honey and oats. The soaps he brought in for me are fantastic, and I can’t wait to try them all. He works diligently on my neck and shoulders, moving down my arms and spine. Everything loosens up as he works his own brand of magic on my body.

His hands slip lower, moving with slow and steady purpose. He massages my hips and my thighs, working his way closer and closer to where I want him but never close enough.

“Can I see you in your true form?”

His hands stop moving, and I can feel his entire body go tense behind me.

“You want the red skin and scars?” he asks, his voice hushed. “The yellow glowing eyes?”

“Of course I do,” I tell him, leaning my head back on his shoulder and meeting his eyes. “You think I care about a few scars? Look at mine.” I hold up my arm and then spread my legs and force his fingertips to run over the horizontal scar tissue on my inner thighs. “If I cared about scars, I’d be a hypocrite. And a liar.”

His features slowly change, his skin turning from white to pink to that fiery red. The scars break out across his body, and his eyes begin to glow. I guide his fingertips higher, right to where I want them. He pushes past my

folds and slips easily inside of me, all the while staring into my soul with those fucking eyes.

My mouth drops open, and I whimper as the heel of his hand presses against my clit. And that tail. That fucking tail moves between my legs and presses against my ass, pushing just enough that I can feel it.

It excites me, and I reach up to grab onto his horns as his mouth descends onto mine. I relax as his fingers pump in and out of me, and his tail slips through. On instinct, I tense up, but he reassures me. His free hand rubs my breasts, and his fingers inside of me slow and curl. The pleasure begins to coil like a snake ready to strike.

“That’s it, Branwen,” he murmurs in between kisses, his lips never leaving mine. “Trust me. Relax for me.”

His tail begins to move, and it’s an odd feeling but not a bad one. I’ve never experienced anything back there before, but it’s causing my entire body to tingle. His fingers and tail fuck me in tandem, and I’m so close to coming, so close I can fucking taste it.

I squeeze my eyes shut and hold my breath, waiting for it to flood my body with pleasure. A few more thrusts inside of me, and he squeezes my nipple, twirling the little bar there enough to hurt. That does it. I don’t even make a sound. I can’t. I can’t even breathe through it.

It takes my entire body by storm, and I bite down on his bottom lip, breaking the skin. His blood flows into my mouth, and I suck at the iron taste of it until he gently pulls away. His fingers and tail slide free of me, and his hand grasps my jaw.

“Breathe, baby. Breathe.”

I suck in gulps of air, my body finally relaxing and falling limp against his. It takes a moment for my mind to return to my body and feeling to return to my limbs. I wiggle my fingers and toes and then look up at him and laugh.

“Well...that was explosive.”

He laughs and hugs me tightly against him, picking up where he left off in his massage.

“And we’re only getting started. Think you have any more in you?”

I roll over, causing more water to splash out of the bath, and crawl up his chest until my breasts are leaning against his and we are eye to eye. I kiss him once, quickly, and then pull back to take him in in all his red glory.

My finger runs across his flayed skin from his temple, over his cheekbone, and down to his chin.

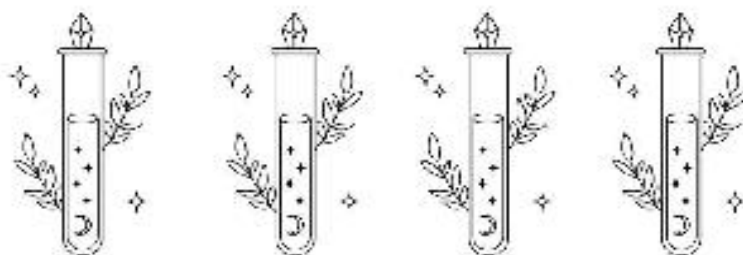
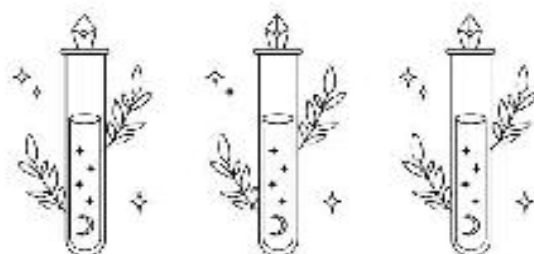
“Guess we’ll find out.”

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# RULE NUMBER SEVEN:



*Don't ever let your enemies cross  
your threshold.*



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# CHAPTER 20

## ROTH



I PICK her up out of the water, and she squeals as she wraps her legs around my waist. I like being able to show my true self in front of her and not worry about scaring her away. If anything, this version seems to turn her on even more. Maybe she wants the demon that used to haunt her bedside.

I smack her ass, and she yelps, the water making her flesh sting.

“Go lie on the bed,” I tell her as I place her on her feet.

She bites her lip but begins to slowly walk backward, eyeing my naked form as she obeys. My tail flicks, and her gaze follows. She’s stopped in the doorway, like she’s testing me. I cock my head to the side and narrow my eyes, daring her to continue to push me.

Her smile holds a lot of promises.

“Go lie on the bed, *witch*,” I growl at her, accentuating each word with a step in her direction.

“Or what?” she asks, a playful tone to her voice.

“Or I’ll make you.”

“Well, that sounds promising.”

Just when I think she’s going to test me further, she takes a few steps back and then turns to walk to the bedroom. I follow her as she moves slowly through the hallway. She turns around, looking over her shoulder to make sure I’m still there before slipping into the bedroom.

Making a show of climbing onto the bed, her hips sway, and her tits brush against the soft fabric of the blankets. The scars and cuts on her thighs stand out an angry pink and red against the rest of her pale skin. And I find myself wanting to lick and kiss each one until they're completely healed, and there's no doubt in her mind that I want every single inch of her.

"Get under the covers," I tell her.

She looks at me, her eyes questioning. But she does as I say anyway, laying her head on the pillow and pulling the covers up over her body. As she gets comfortable, I move around the room until I'm submerged completely in a shadowed corner.

I hear her breathing pick up, and her thoughts are wild. They're scattered and excited, wondering what it is I'm going to do next. But she's wet between her legs, her clit throbbing with the anticipation of touch.

"Are you going to do anything or just hide in the shadows?"

Without warning her, I paralyze her, just like I would do when she was asleep each night that I would come visit her.

"Ohh," I hear her say in her mind. "This is what we're doing?"

I may not be a warlock, but as a demon, I have power. And entering people's minds to control their bodies is one of them. I roll and crack my neck before slowly stepping out of the shadows, just far enough for her to see the outline of my body.

Her heart rate kicks up, and her breaths become shallow. I take my time getting over to her. I want her to wait. I like feeling her anticipation build to an almost unbearable height. Her magic is swirling around her even now, searching for me in the darkness. God, she smells fantastic. How anyone could ever dislike that autumn scent is beyond me.

I run my hand over the foot of the bed before slowly, very slowly, pulling the covers off her frozen form. They slide over her nipples, making her gasp at the sensation. They move over her stomach and hips, exposing her cunt as I continue to tug them off her.

There are so many fantasies running around in her mind. So many times she's thought of this, wondered what it would be like to be taken by me when she couldn't move — couldn't say no.

"Bend your knees," I command her. "Spread those thighs for me."

Her body obeys without her permission, exposing her sweet pussy to my eyes. I crawl onto the edge of the bed, and her eyes are wide, watching

my every movement. There's a little spark of fear in there, and I feed off it.

"This is what you wanted, right?" I ask her, my voice low as I move closer, the tip of my nose running across her skin from her ankle to her knee. "To be watched and touched. To be at my mercy." I bite her inner thigh, just hard enough to make her groan. "To not know what my next move is."

My hands grip her ass and then run over the smooth, soft curves of her skin and belly as my mouth hovers just above her slit. She's glistening wet for me, her clit swollen and needy for touch. I blow cool air gently across it, and even though her muscles are frozen, I feel them tense just slightly from the sensation.

"To not be able to say no," I continue.

Using my tongue, I slowly lap at her wetness. Both sides of my tongue surround her clit, and I flick and swirl around it while she begs me for more in her mind. Her desperation for it makes her thoughts muddled, but it's clear enough. The teasing is driving her insane.

"Grab my horns."

Her arms move, her hands gripping onto my horns with force. I groan into her slit, and the vibrations push her pleasure even higher. I want to take her just to the edge like this. So I push her closer and closer. My tongue moves everywhere she wants it while my fingers toy with the little silver bars in her nipples.

Pained little whimpers escape her throat, and I know she's close, but I keep teasing and teasing. She loves the way I can twist and move my tongue around that swollen little clit of hers. And I love the way she tastes and the way her wetness coats my chin.

"Please, please," she begs in her mind, desperate for me to end it and let her come. But just when her body is there, ready to release, I command her to stop.

"No," I say with force, lifting my head from between her thighs and shaking her hands from my horns. Her body listens, but her mind is a mess of confusion and pain. She was so, so close. Her eyebrows pull together, and if looks could kill, those eyes would send me right back to the hellfire I came from.

I smile, showing her my teeth as I climb up her body. My cock is heavy and hard for her, begging to be inside that tight cunt.

“Kiss me,” I say, hovering just over her face. “Taste yourself on my tongue, Princess.”

She doesn’t hesitate. Her head lifts from the pillow, and her mouth seizes mine. I open for her, letting her tongue explore my mouth and see just how good she tastes.

“Dirty little witch,” I say as I break the kiss, my voice a low rumble. The head of my cock lines up with her cunt, teasing her as it barely slips in and out. “What would your coven say?” I ask. “Letting a demon fuck you raw.” As the words leave my mouth, I enter her with one swift thrust.

Her mouth drops open, and her eyes roll back in her head. The sweetest blush warms her chest and face as she acclimates to my size.

“And you like it, don’t you? My Princess is a slut for this cock, isn’t she?” I slide out and thrust back in, letting her feel the full length of me as she stretches around my girth. “Show me,” I tell her, moving in and out of her again as her eyes meet mine. “Fuck your demon.”

I lift the paralysis and let her take control. Within seconds, she’s on top of me, my dick seated fully inside of her as she grinds against me.

“Arms up here,” she says, using her powers to force my hands onto the headboard. I grip it hard, feeling the thick metal bend under my fingers.

She shakes her hair off her shoulders and then leans back, supporting herself on my thighs as she begins to bounce on top of me. Her tits and stomach jiggle as she moves, showing me just how well she can take me.

“Fuck, Branwen. You look so fucking beautiful.”

“Am I hurting you like this?” she asks, breathless from the exertion.

“Fuck, no. Go harder, Princess. Give me everything you have. I told you to fuck me, so fuck me.”

It’s like a switch flips inside of her, freeing her from whatever it was that was holding her back. Her body moves harder and faster, her pussy squeezing around my cock with every thrust. I’m obsessed with the way her body moves. From her thighs to her stomach to her breasts and arms. My own personal goddess, fated to me and only me.

“Mine,” I growl, fighting against her spell to lift my arms from the headboard. I need to feel her, grab her, dig into the soft rolls of her hips.

She laughs as she watches me struggle against her, unable to move from where I’ve been told to stay. Leaning forward, she kisses me before moving and spinning around. She takes my cock in her hand and lines us up before sinking back down on top of me.

“Spank me,” she demands.

My arms are free, and my hands immediately land on her ass, leaving red handprints in their wake. She bounces on top of me, her ass shaking as I spank it and grab onto it. I spread her apart, and she leans over a bit further, giving me a better view.

“You take me so well, Princess,” I praise her. “Are you going to show me how well you come on this cock?”

She swears under her breath, and I spank her again, harder this time.

“Answer me, witch. Are you going to come on your demon’s cock?”

“Yes,” she says, her voice breathy and full of need.

I’m close as well, my balls tightening with the pleasure that spreads up my spine. My abs flex with the effort to hold out until she’s finished. But the noises of our bodies moving together and her moans are driving me into madness.

I spank her again, groaning when her flesh turns a bright pink. With some effort, I push my tail between us, seeking out her clit to get her there.

“Oh, fuck,” she moans when I find it. “Keep doing that.”

I smile and grab onto her hips, lifting her so that I can fuck her from underneath. Within moments, she’s screaming out my name as she comes, her inner walls fluttering around my dick. I can’t hold out any longer, and I finish as well, filling her up with my seed until I see it begin to leak out of her.

I squeeze her ass and use my thumbs to spread her apart again. I want to watch us mix together. She falls forward, her body too tired to hold herself up any longer. My dick slips free, glistening with both of our releases.

We’re both breathing heavily as we lie there and try to catch our breath. I massage her legs and watch my cum continue to leak out and run down over her clit. I like this view.

“Hungry,” she groans from the foot of the bed.

“Alright,” I laugh. “Let’s get cleaned up and get something to eat, then.”

“Too tired,” she says. “Probably best I chill here and you bring me a feast.”

I roll out from underneath her and kiss her smiling lips.

“That works as well. Let me get something to clean you up, and then I’ll go make all your favorites. We can eat ourselves into a food coma. Might help us take our minds off what’s right around the corner.”

“Back to reality,” she sighs.

“Back to reality,” I agree. “No other way to settle the score than to face your demons, Princess.”

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# SPELL TIMES



*Dawn: Spells for study, business, employment, healing and travel.  
Perform rituals of purification and to bless new beginnings.*

*Morning: Spells of fertility, good luck, intuition, and justice.*

*Noon: Spells of strength, courage, protection, success, opportunity,  
and money issues.*

*Sunset: Spells for release, letting go of illness, heartbreak and  
failure. Banish pain and negativity.*

*Night: Spells to enhance self-development, awareness, divination,  
love, and peace.*

*Midnight: Spells of creativity, spirit work, liminal spaces, and  
shadow work.*



# CHAPTER 21

## BRANWEN

THE NEXT TWO weeks pass pretty uneventfully. I join them for two more family dinners and spend a lot of time with Roth's brothers and sisters and even more time with Roth. It's interesting to go from only seeing him sporadically at night to never leaving his side.

I'm not sure if it's the fatelines talking or the trauma bonding, but he feels like home. A home where I don't have to worry if he's using me, or talking shit about me behind my back, or only here because he wants the attention of helping someone who needs it.

He treats me the way I know I deserve to be treated. He gives me advice but lets me make my own decisions. I cry...a lot. And he's always there, ready to hold me, scream with me, or just listen to me complain and vent to him. I know I get to see them all again, make them pay for what they've done to me, but that doesn't make what they did okay.

And it definitely doesn't make the trauma I experienced go away. I face it every day and every night. I think about Asha's letters all the time. And to know that all of those people are saying such horrible things about me every day is something I haven't come to terms with yet. It's a constant trigger, setting off my anxiety at the worst times.

But there are times that I also feel guilty. I know I left Asha behind, wondering where I went. I wonder a lot if she can sense that I'm safe or if

Roth bringing me Under makes her sense that I'm...gone. If she was tuned into me, the last thing she would've felt or seen was me slicing my arm open and hoping I never had to wake up again.

It feels selfish to be enjoying myself with demons and multiple orgasms while people who actually give a shit about me may think I'm dead. But tomorrow is Samhain. And I know the entire coven will be gathered together for the rituals and parties. It's one of the biggest nights of the year for us when we can celebrate with our friends and family, remembering those who we've lost.

It's the perfect time to remind them of the person they've hurt.

"Do you have a plan?" Cain asks, bringing me out of my thoughts.

I look over to him. "Not really," I say. "All I know is that I want them to see what they've done to me. I want them to know the pain they've caused. And I want them to experience it for themselves."

"Everything comes back threefold," Roth says. "Isn't that what you witches say when you try to discourage others from black magic?"

"I'm not sure how much I believe in karma anymore," I say with a sigh. "Or maybe I still believe in it; I just think it's taking too long for my liking. So I'll just do it myself."

"I like her," Cain says to Roth, winking at me when I roll my eyes. "Is your sister just as feisty?"

I narrow my eyes at him.

"I wouldn't push her on that subject," Roth says, laughing as he sits down next to me. "Hecate restored her powers, remember? She could beat your ass."

"Hot." Cain locks eyes with me as he sips on his whiskey. I flick my wrist and send it flying up into his face, the alcohol splashing up his nose, into his eyes, and all over his nice clothes.

Roth starts laughing at Cain's shocked face, and I can't hold it in either. I'm giggling like an idiot while Cain just sits there and looks from me to his ruined shirt and back.

"While this is frustrating," he says, wiping his face as he stands to clean himself up, "I hope you have more up your sleeve than simple party tricks."

"I could freeze the blood in your veins if you prefer?" I ask him. "Or shrivel your penis? Close your airway? Set everything you love on fire?"

Roth practically purrs as he leans into me, kissing me on the side of my head before whispering in my ear.

“Keep that up and I will fuck you right here and now on this couch, barely giving Cain enough time to get out before I have you stripped bare.”

I can feel the blush take over my entire body as his breath caresses my ear. I hear Cain mutter under his breath about how disgusting we are from the kitchen as he tries to mop at his shirt.

Turning toward Roth, I kiss him quickly on the lips.

“Save it for later, demon.”

I stand up and walk over to join Cain at the kitchen sink. I lean my hip against the counter and watch him scrunch his shirt with paper towels.

“I guess the least I could do is clean you up after I made the mess?” I ask him with a smirk.

“Kinky,” he says, a smirk playing on his lips as well. “Didn’t know Roth was into sharing.”

“Gross.” I scrunch my nose.

“I am most certainly not!” Roth calls out from the couch.

“Promise you’ll keep your hands off my sister, Cain.” I give him a look, my arms crossed.

“I don’t think that’s a promise I can keep if I’m to keep her safe.” He turns to me, tossing the soiled towels into the sink. Crossing his arms and mimicking my stance, he raises a white eyebrow in my direction.

“You know what I mean,” I groan.

“I’m a very literal person,” he counters.

“You’re like the damn Djinn.” I sigh in frustration. “You will only touch her if she needs protecting or saving. No unsavory touches. No unsavory comments. No nothing that is not in regards to keeping her safe.”

“You are no fun.”

“She’s plenty of fun when she likes you,” Roth pipes in, making Cain laugh.

“I bet she is.”

“Cain,” I say, pulling his attention back to me. “Promise me.” I hold out my pinky finger.

He eyes it and hums.

“I take my pinky promises very seriously.”

“Fine,” he groans. “No touching of the sister.”

“No touching *except* to protect her.”

“Yes, yes,” he agrees, wrapping his little finger around mine. We lean forward and kiss our own thumbs to seal the deal.

“So I’ll meet you here tomorrow once the sun sets up there, yes?” he asks, looking back and forth between us.

“Preferably a little before so that you’re on time,” Roth grumbles. “You’ve never been one for being punctual.”

“I’ll aim to be early just for my sweet Branwen.” He smiles at me and then gestures to his shirt. “The cleaning service you offered? This is my favorite shirt, after all.”

I roll my eyes and wave my hand, making it look like nothing happened.

“Why do witches get all the fun powers?” he asks, walking past me to leave.

“Because demons would abuse it,” I tell him.

Both he and Roth laugh.

“Fair point. See you tomorrow.”

He leaves, and I walk back over to Roth. I lie down, letting my head rest on his thighs while I look up at him. He’s in his more humanlike form right now, and he has a little stubble growing on his face. When I reach up and touch it with my fingers, he grabs them and gives them a kiss.

“You’re anxious.”

“When am I not anymore?” I ask him.

“There’s a lot on your shoulders right now,” he says. “Tomorrow is huge for you. If you weren’t at least a little worried, I’d be concerned.”

“And what happens after?” I ask him.

“What do you mean?”

“What happens once I do what I need to do? What will Asha and Mother do? What will we do? What happens with you and me?”

He takes a moment to gather his thoughts, staring out into the plains while playing with my hair. I wish I could hear his thoughts like he can hear mine. I want to know what’s going on in that brain.

“I think it depends on how you feel once it’s done,” he finally says. “You’re immortal now, which means your sister and mother will grow old while you watch them. You can stay with them, leading a new coven into better times. If there are those whom you don’t wish any harm on, they could help rebuild the community with your family.”

“As far as us,” he continues, “it can be whatever you want. I’m leaving that in your hands. Because I don’t want anything but your happiness, Branwen. I saved you that evening because I knew you weren’t done. A

moment of weakness shouldn't keep someone from fulfilling their purpose."

"I want to know what you want though," I tell him, my voice urging him on. "I want to know what you want with me. Not what my options are."

"I want you here," he says, his voice quiet. He smiles down at me when our eyes meet. "I always will want you here, with me, by my side. I'm selfish enough to admit that but not so much as to demand it from you."

"The choice is mine, then," I say, trying to tamp down the quickness of my heartbeat. He wants me *here*. Do I want to stay here? Do I want to leave Asha behind for a new life? Could I? Would I be happy here?

"It's not something you need to decide now," he says, a little humor in his voice as he listens to my rushing thoughts. "You have plenty of time."

"We have until tomorrow," I counter.

"We have all the time in the world, Branwen." He kisses my hand again. "We're immortal."

# WHAT TO INCLUDE ON YOUR ALTAR



*Amulets and Pendulums*

*Mortar and Pestle*

*Candles*

*Jars and Bottles*

*Athame*

*Bells*

*Book of Shadows*

*Chalice*

*Wands*

*Herbs*

*Crystals*

*A Cauldron*



# CHAPTER 22

## BRANWEN

I WIPE my sweaty palms on the soft fabric of the dress I've chosen. Jeans probably would've been a more practical choice, but I wanted to really look good the first time any of these assholes saw me. So Ravana helped me pick it out and even took the time to do my hair before she went to entertain Lucifer for the evening.

I pick up the black paint I had Roth get for me and begin to cover my face in it. On the night of the ritual, I was painted like I was going to war. Little did I know I actually was. This time, I'm going in prepared.

"Spirit Guides, I call you to my side," I whisper as my fingers run across the plane of my face. I'm not even sure if they're listening anymore. Will they come to the aid of a witch who is no longer fully following the faith? Will they come help me even though my fateline is now not just my own?

"My protectors and my spirit, guide me to cut the cords of negativity around my neck," I continue. "Cleanse and purify. Help me embody that which will set things right and expose those who have wronged me."

I pick up the little pot of white ash and begin to paint protection symbols in the black. It runs down over my cheeks and drips onto my chest. I stare at myself in the mirror until my image distorts and my eyes begin to water.

“Tonight is the night,” I tell myself. “You do this so that you no longer have to live with the hurt they caused you. You do this so that you can expose Kegan for the fucking liar he is. And you do this to expose everyone that took his side.”

Roth walks into the bathroom and stands behind me, meeting my eyes in the mirror.

“I remember you doing this on the night of the Mabon ritual,” he says, gesturing to the designs on my face. “Do they have any special meaning?”

I clear my throat and gather myself.

“This one here is for channeling my power,” I say, pointing to the one in the middle of my forehead. “These are to help me see.” I point to the ones scattered across my cheekbones like freckles. “And these are for protection,” I tell him as I point out the designs covering my throat.

‘Are you ready?’ he asks, his hands resting firmly on my shoulders.

I blow out a deep breath.

“As I’ll ever be.”

“Cain is here, and the girls are with Lucifer. If we’re going to go, now is the time.”

I smile at him. My stomach is turning, the nerves bouncing around in there like popping popcorn. But even louder is my soul calling on me to do this. I’ve gone through enough pain and suffering at the hands of others. I’ve always been someone who avoided confrontation, never wanting to upset someone else just because I was uncomfortable. But I’m not that person anymore.

You make me uncomfortable, I’ll make you uncomfortable.

“Let’s do it.”

He takes my arm as we walk out to the main room to meet Cain. I’ve only ever traveled between realms once, and I was almost dead when it happened. So I really have no clue how we’re getting out of here.

“What do I need to do?” I ask them.

“Just hold on to me,” Roth says, taking me in his arms and holding me tightly against him. “I’ll teach you how to do this one day, but I’d prefer you end up in the right spot instead of on the other side of the country.”

“Um, yeah. Same,” I say, suddenly far more nervous than I was before.

“Don’t worry, Princess,” Cain says. “Roth has been doing this since he was a kid.”

“Which has been how long, by the way?” I ask him, realizing I’ve never actually asked how old he is.

“A while,” he says, shrugging it off. “Ready?” he asks, looking over to Cain. “Remember where we’re going?”

“Got it locked in,” Cain says, pointing at his temple.

“And you’re ready to help us out once we get there?” he asks me.

I nod. They’re going to be very red and very invisible when we get there, and the only thing we’ve figured out can fix that is me. Since I’m connected to Roth now, I can manipulate whatever it is that keeps him the way he looks now. What he calls *normal*.

I personally love the red version, but I agree that it might cause less of a stir if they both look more like us. So we tried to see if my magic was strong enough to control both the way he and Cain looked. We aren’t sure if it’s just because I’m part demon now or if it’s because my magic is just that much stronger.

But it works. And that’s all that matters.

“Take a deep breath, witch,” Roth whispers in my ear. I barely get my lungs full before we’re falling. Fast. My stomach flips out from under me, and I grip onto Roth for all I’m worth. My eyes squeeze shut, and the wind whips past us so quickly I can’t get a breath in or out.

Just when I think I’m about to pass out, we land hard on the ground. My knees buckle, but Roth keeps me upright and pressed against him. I take a moment to let my body settle before I open my eyes. But when I do, I feel the tears threaten to fall.

We’re outside my house, its windows lit up with yellow and orange flames. It’s decorated for Autumn with large pumpkins and squash of every color on the porch. I can hear Asha’s music playing inside, and I wonder if she’s planning on going to any of the parties. Probably not. If I had to guess, she’s blasting music and dancing around in her room in her pj’s.

“Let’s get them,” Roth says, nudging me gently toward the front porch. Last time I walked up these stairs, I was walking into something that would end up changing my life forever. It replays in my head like an old videotape, fuzzy and out of focus.

Underneath our feet, the old wooden steps creak and moan. And by the time I’m at the front door, Asha is there, out of breath and white as a ghost. She stares at me through the screen door, neither of us moving...just looking.

Cain clears his throat, and it breaks the spell. Asha swings open the door with so much force it almost whacks me in the face. She jumps on me, wrapping her entire body around mine like a koala.

“Hi,” I choke out.

“Hi?” she squeals, getting back on her feet. “I thought you had died!” she whisper yells. “Where have you been? I haven’t felt a single thing from you for weeks. I thought you had killed yourself!”

“Well, that’s a long story,” I begin but am quickly cut off by Cain walking forward.

“Asha?” he asks, his eyes lit up like a cartoon as he looks at her. Nope. Don’t like that. I start to explain who — and what — they are, but Asha doesn’t seem fazed at all.

“And you are?” she asks, crossing her arms and looking his form up and down.

“My name is Cain and —”

“Good for you, Cain,” Asha says, cutting him off and effectively shutting him up. Roth snickers behind me, and Asha gives him an evil look as well before turning back to me. “Where have you been, Branwen?”

“I promise you that I will tell you everything,” I tell her as I grab her shoulder. “But right now, I want to get you and Mother out of here. I’m here to deliver karma.”

She smiles wide, and her eyes take on a dangerous look. I can feel her magic from here, and the more riled up she gets, the stronger it smells. She’s developed a lot since I’ve left, and I regret missing so much of it.

“I am *not* leaving. I want to help you.” Her voice is strong and full of finality.

“You are,” I tell her. “Because I’m going to do some things I would prefer my little sister not to see or participate in. And Mother is too old now to help. Truth be told, Asha, neither of your magic would even touch on the amount I have thanks to Hecate and Roth. I was strong before, but now? I’m untouchable.”

I think she can sense it because instead of fighting me, she sighs and takes in the men behind me.

“That one’s Roth, I’m guessing?” she asks, nodding in his direction.

“Yes.” I smile.

“I don’t have to go with either of them, do I?”

I cringe. “Well, Roth is staying with me. Trust me, I’ve tried to convince him I can do it alone, but the man is stubborn.”

“And in love,” Cain mutters under his breath.

I look over my shoulder at him and make a gesture zipping my lips. He tries to talk again, but his lips remain shut. His eyes bulge, and Roth laughs relentlessly at him as Cain tries to tear his lips apart.

“But you are going with that idiot,” I tell her. “Asha, please don’t fight me on this. I know you want to. If I was in your shoes, I would fight me too. But I need you to be out of here where you can’t be implemented. I need you to be safe so that I can do what I need to do without my concentration slipping because I’m worried about you. Okay? Promise me you and Mother will go with Cain and wait until it’s safe to come back.”

She looks at all of us for a moment, deciding on what level of pain in the ass she’s going to be today.

“Fine. I’ll go get her.”

“Asha,” I say, grabbing her arm before she goes inside to get our mother. “Is there a party somewhere I could find everyone?”

She smiles. “Yeah. Kegan is throwing one...in the field.”

“Thanks.” I hug her again, and then she disappears inside.

“Okay, that was actually a whole lot easier than I thought it was going to be,” I tell them once she’s out of sight. Cain gives me a look, and I laugh but unzip his lips so that he can speak again.

“Rude,” he says, massaging them.

“Remember our pinky promise?” I ask him.

“I remember the damn pinky promise,” he grumbles.

“Good. Keep them safe, Cain. Roth and I will meet you at the cove when we’re finished here.”

He makes a salute, and then I grab Roth’s arm and begin the walk into town. I don’t want to hang around and let Mother try to talk me out of it or have Asha try her hand at convincing me to let her stay again. I’m going to trust that Cain won’t fuck this up.

I’m going to trust that *I* won’t fuck this up.

Once we get out to the end of the driveway, I roll and crack my neck, shaking my arms and hands out to my sides.

“Ready to begin?” Roth asks, his eyes glowing with excitement. He bounces up and down on his toes as we continue to walk towards the town center, his tail flicking frantically behind him.

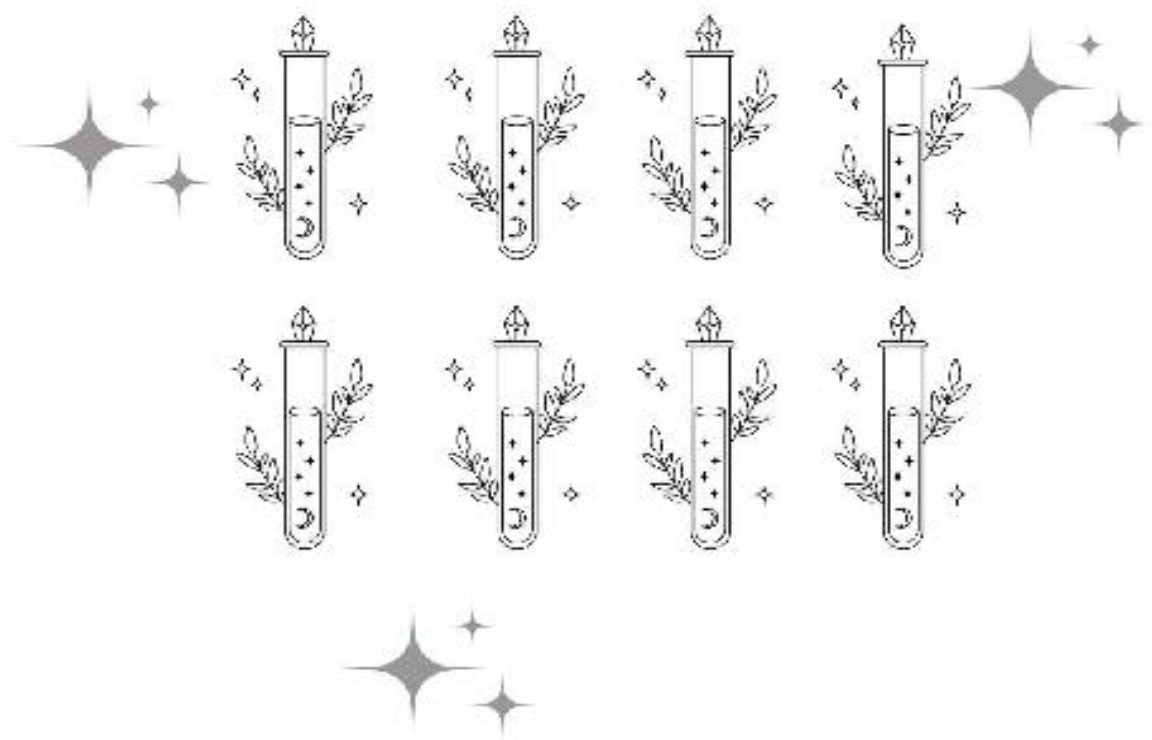
I smile at him and take his hand.  
“Let’s have some fun.”

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# RULE NUMBER EIGHT:



*When misfortune is around, wear  
the blue star on your brow.*



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# CHAPTER 23

## BRANWEN

THERE ARE a lot of people in this community that didn't stand up for me, but they also didn't stand up for him either. Roth would say that it doesn't matter, that if they weren't firmly on my side, they deserve punishment. But I can't bring myself to take it that far. What I'm about to do tonight is as much as I'm willing to do.

So I ignore those who ignore us. None of the people out and about are people I care about anyway. And it's late, so the streets are relatively empty. But once we make it into the center of town, I start to lose some of the restraint I've had.

The first thing I come across that triggers my anger is Jadia's little electric shop on Main. It's her pride and joy. She worked hard on it, building it up from absolutely nothing. When we first toured it, it was just a hollow shell of a place with nothing inside but four walls and a few shelves.

And if I'm honest, I think Jadia's betrayal hurt the most. We were friends first, our parents pushing us together for playdates when we were still too young to go to school. We grew up together, wearing each other's clothes and writing in each other's Book of Shadows. I spoke to her every day. Told her all my secrets. Vented to her when I needed a shoulder to cry on or let my anger out.

“She let him ruin my life,” I tell Roth as I stand in front of the little shop. The windows are decorated for Samhain, and the displays in the windows are filled with everything that could catch a human’s eye.

“So ruin hers,” he answers, his shoulders shrugging with nonchalance.

I take a few steps forward, my chin wobbling as I hold my hand out toward the little shop. My power is there, begging to be released. It’s almost like it has a mind of its own. Like it knows these people hurt us and we’re here to set it right.

“Burn.”

The entire shop ignites, the windows blowing out from the force of the explosion. Every shard of glass misses both me and Roth as I make sure we’re protected. I watch it burn for a moment, the heat licking at my flesh. I’m entirely too close, but the fire doesn’t burn me like it should.

“That’s the demon in you,” Roth says, walking up behind me. “Fire is your friend now.”

“Good to know,” I say. “Let’s carry on.”

I know the next place I want to go, and it’s right down the street. It won’t take too long to find what I’m looking for, and it’s still on the way to where Kegan will be. I don’t even know if my powers are still inside that little pendant the Grand Elder used to strip them that night. But if there’s anything left in there, it’s mine, and I want it back.

“Are we going to set their little place on fire as well?” Roth asks excitedly.

I look over at him and smile. He looks so excited, like this is the first time he’s been let out without a leash. Wrapping his arm around my shoulders, he pulls me close and kisses the top of my head. We walk like that for a while until the building comes into view. I know the pendant will be in there, hidden away and locked up somewhere.

“I can feel it,” I say once we get closer. “My magic is still in there.”

“So then whose magic do you have right now?”

I’d like to know that as well.

“Maybe Hecate just gave me new magic?”

The lock is easy to pick without a single hex on it to deter anyone. For the leaders of the community, they really were playing it fast and loose with our supposed secrets. I push the door open and let my magic lead the way. I can feel it calling out to me, like there’s an actual voice speaking to me.

“Back here,” I tell Roth, taking off to the back of the building, through their workplace kitchen, and down a dark hallway. I light the way, making it a little bit easier to see as we make our way through.

The door I want to go through is locked, but once again, easy to break into. I don’t even bother with the lock. Instead, I just use my powers to push through the damn thing. And inside, on a shelf in the corner, is the pendant the Grand Elder used to store my power.

Roth watches me as I crack the little case open and hold it in my palm. With the skin-on-skin contact, the magic knows me. It begins to seep into me, spreading through my limbs like lava. It feels like going home and having the best hug you can imagine from the person you love the most.

Hecate may have taken the hollowness away with whatever power she gave me, but nothing could compare to this. I break down in tears and stumble into Roth’s arms. He holds me tight as my magic flows back into my body, spreading light where there was previously only darkness. All the shadows have been chased away, and I finally feel whole again.

“Well, that was worth the pit stop,” he says, pushing my hair out of my face to look at me. “I can feel the change in you. You were powerful before, but...wow, Branwen. You’re vibrating with it.”

I laugh and choke back the tears. I don’t have time to sit here and relish this new feeling. My magic is at full volume, and I need to make other people listen. I put the chain around my neck, letting the pendant rest in the center of my chest. I know there’s nothing left in it now; it’s all come back to me, but I want to keep it close. Just in case.

“Let’s go,” I tell him, reaching up on my tiptoes to kiss him. “I’m ready to take back what is mine.”

Roth sets the fire this time, running his fingers along the walls and tables and chairs, each going up in flame as he touches them. I watch him through the windows from outside, taking in just how good he looks surrounded by fire. He looks one hundred percent demon in there, and I’m pretty damn happy to call him mine.

After he’s done, we walk in contented silence, making our way through the rest of the town and out into the fields that surround it. Put it in greyscale and it would look almost identical to the view from Roth’s home. Trade the trees for mountains and the stars for clouds.

“You know, about what Cain said earlier,” he says quietly.

"I know. I was probably a little too hard on him," I admit. "I know he's just trying to push my buttons with Asha, but I feel very protective of her. And I didn't bring him up here to steal her away." I laugh. "Not that I think he could after seeing she's immune to whatever charm he thinks he has."

Roth laughs quietly and a bit awkwardly.

"Yeah, um," he mumbles. "That's not exactly what I meant." He rubs the back of his head. I watch him for a second, wondering what the hell he's talking about. I've never seen him look so unsure of himself.

And then it hits me.

"Oh," I breathe.

"Yeah. That. I just wanted to kind of clear the air, but obviously, there was no air to clear. If I had just kept my mouth shut, you wouldn't have even remembered."

"I would've eventually remembered," I assure him, giving him a smile. "I've had a lot going on, you know?"

"I know you've not known me the way I've known you," he says. "I've known you since you were sixteen. I got to listen to all of your stories when you couldn't hear any of mine. I watched your powers grow, and I watched you become the woman you are today. There was a lot of time for me there where I got to know you, but you couldn't get to know me."

"I don't think that matters much," I tell him. "I know that you kept coming back, even when you didn't have to. You listened to my boring stories every night about what was going on in my life. You brought me a certain level of comfort every night and probably during the day too. I just didn't know why I was feeling that way. You know, I always dreaded you leaving. Every night when you left, I would fall *right* back to sleep. Like, immediately. I hated it."

"I know," he laughs softly. "I could feel that little bit of panic each time I slipped back Under."

"I owe you a lot, actually. Not only for saving my life when you took my fateline, but you kept me sane, gave me comfort and someone to talk to each night." I squeeze his hand. "There's a lot you did for me over the years, and I never took it for granted. And...you're the whole reason that I'm here."

I push in closer, wrapping an arm around his waist.

"Couldn't let you die like that," he says. "No one deserves to go out with a spaghetti can lid in a dirty motel room." He shivers and makes a

noise.

“Too soon,” I tell him through laughter. “Too fucking soon, demon.”

“Speaking of demons, do you think Cain is keeping your pinky promise?”

“He better be,” I tell him with a growl. “Or I’ll unleash all this new power right up his asshole.”

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# HERBS FOR SAMHAIN



## ***Mugwort:***

*Powers - Strength, dreamwork, protection, healing, astral projection,  
and psychic powers*



## ***Myrrh:***

*Powers - Cleaning, protection, spirituality, healing, and divination*



## ***Yarrow:***

*Powers - Courage, love, psychic powers, friendships, and emotional  
healing*



## ***Wormwood:***

*Powers - Love, calling spirits, protection, and psychic powers*

## ***Rosemary:***

*Powers - Protection, lust, love, healing, mental powers, sleep, and  
protection*





# CHAPTER 24

## ASHA



MOTHER REFUSED TO COME. And by the time I got back out, Branwen had already left. There was a lot of discussion between Cain and me about whether or not we should force her, but I decided against it. Ultimately, our mother is an adult. And if she wants to stay there in case Branwen needs her, I'm not going to stop her.

I also didn't want to hear her complain and yell at me every time I accidentally manifested something.

"Where are we going?" I ask him as we rush through the streets. I can barely keep up with his stride. I'm by no means short, but this dude is tall. One step for him is like three of mine.

"The cove," he answers brusquely.

He's also not the most friendly now that he's away from his brother.

"So what does your brother want from my sister? How do they know each other?" I'm panting between each word, jogging to keep up.

"That's definitely going to be a discussion for you and Branwen to have."

"You are an absolute joy to be around. Has anyone ever told you that?" He scoffs but smiles, his pale eyes appraising me from their corners.

"You ever heard of sleep paralysis?" he asks.

“Yeah, the thing where you’re awake but you’re kind of not at the same time, right? And you can sometimes see scary shit or feel like something is lying on you.”

“Exactly.” His voice is like velvet. “That’s how they know each other. But you didn’t hear that from me,” he sings.

“What? What do you mean?”

He sighs like he’s frustrated. I haven’t picked up on what he’s trying to say yet, but he’s barely given me any information. He just keeps talking in circles, being intentionally vague.

“My brother was your sister’s sleep paralysis demon. He would come visit her most nights and stand in the corner like some creepy stalker and listen to her tell him all about her day.” He groans. “Boring. I can’t imagine doing that, even for someone I was interested in. To just stand there in the darkness every night only to hear run-of-the-mill coming-of-age stories? No, thank you.”

“She would’ve told me,” I counter, my confusion blatant in my tone. Branwen would’ve told me if something like that was happening. We didn’t have secrets from each other. “For how long?”

“I don’t know,” he drawls. “Years. I only discovered it for myself a few years ago.”

I don’t really know what to say to that. I didn’t think Branwen and I had secrets from each other, but this has thrown me. Was she scared I would judge her or worry that maybe she’d done something wrong? I mean, I guess I probably would’ve. But that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t have still loved her.

“And I am plenty amounts of fun,” he announces, bringing me out of my thoughts.

“What?”

“I am fun! You told me I wasn’t fun. But I promise I normally am. Your sister just has me under a very strict pinky promise.” I snort, but he looks over at me, serious as a heart attack. “Don’t tell her I said this, but I’m a little afraid of her.”

I laugh out loud then, stopping in the street to double over.

He groans and turns around, walking back towards me.

“Come on, then, little Harrow. I promised I’d get you out of here before the destruction starts.” He goes to grab my arm but stops, yanking it back

like I've burned him. He wipes his hands on his pants and looks around like he's been caught doing something he shouldn't.

"What happens if I don't?" I ask, taking a step backward, testing him. I smile at the angry look on his face. He isn't bad-looking, actually. His eyes, while a bit creepy, are still a beautiful color. And I find myself loving the color of his hair and the way he has it braided in places to keep it out of his face. Even the way his eyebrows draw together in anger is kind of cute.

"I have explicit instructions to get you out of here and keep you safe. If that means throwing your ass over my shoulder and carrying you to the cove, so be it." He advances on me, towering over me with his height.

"You wouldn't dare," I growl up at him.

"Want to try me?" He's smirking, those full lips turned up to reveal a single dimple on his left side. It distracts me.

But then there's an explosion behind him, a fireball explodes into the air for a moment, and he whips around to look at it. I don't know what comes over me, but I decide I do want to test him. So while he's distracted, I take off in the direction of the fire, thinking it's probably Branwen, and maybe she does need my help after all.

I barely get twenty feet from him before I hear his footsteps behind me and then feel his arms around me. Holy fuck, they're hot. They scorch my skin through my clothes. He pulls my entire body against him, his hard form squeezing the life out of mine.

He tsks in my ear.

"Little Harrow," he sighs. "As much as I like a good chase, we don't really have time for one tonight."

He spins me around as I fight him, but it's like wrestling with a slab of stone. He hoists me up and throws me over his shoulder, my face smacking against his ass as I flail. I slap and punch against his thighs, but all he does is laugh, infuriating me further.

"I can walk!" I shout at him.

"Yes, you are a fully grown adult. I would expect that."

"You are a giant prick!" I shout at him, giving up and lying limp.

"I do have one of those, but I wouldn't call it *giant*. I've had no complaints though."

I can hear the humor in his voice, and it just makes me want to slap that sly little smile off his face. I don't think I like this demon. And if Roth is

anything similar, I'm shocked Branwen puts up with it. They're infuriating. I shimmy a bit, trying to lessen the burning of his body against my own.

"How are you so hot?" I ask him.

"Both of my parents are pretty good-looking and, well, you see, little Harrow, when two people love each other very much—"

"Shut up!" I punch his ass. "I mean your body temperature. It's burning me even through our clothes." I wiggle some more, trying to get relief from the heat. "It's very uncomfortable."

"If I put you down, do you promise to keep walking and ignore the second fire that just appeared on the horizon?"

I sigh.

"Fine. I promise. Just put me down."

"Alright, then."

He flips me up and over, sitting me carefully on my feet as he smiles down at me. I will not pay attention to his good looks. I will not. No way. Not going there. He's an asshole. A sarcastic, infuriating asshole.

"So tell me, how does it feel to have your full power now? Is it everything you could have ever wanted?"

"It's a lot," I answer him honestly. He's slowed his steps, letting us both walk at my pace instead of his. "Branwen had over a decade to come to terms with her power as it grew with each passing year. Certain things would happen to her slowly, over time. But mine hit like a freight train." I laugh. "Knocked me on my ass, if I'm being honest."

"Your mother didn't help you through it? Teach you how to use it without becoming overwhelmed?"

I snort. "She tried, but her own power was never like this. And it's faded over time. I needed Branwen."

He hums next to me, holding his hands behind his back as he walks next to me.

"Witches are a weak race," he says matter-of-factly.

"Excuse me?"

"You are born with this power, yes? But it doesn't come around enough for you to do anything of consequence with it until you hit puberty, or really even a bit later. As compared to us demons who are gifted with it from birth and use it from the time we are able to walk." He shrugs. "Just an observation."

“Well, you can shove that observation right up your ass, demon,” I spit at him.

I open my mouth to continue, but he cuts me off, holding a finger to his lips. He shushes me.

“Did you just *shush* me?” I cry out, ready to punch him again.

He pushes me to the side, and I almost trip over the curb of the sidewalk. But he just keeps shoving me until my back makes contact with one of the buildings. It knocks a bit of air out of my lungs, and like he has a sixth sense for when I’m about to chew his ass out, he covers my mouth with his hand.

I groan, his flesh burning mine again. But that’s when I see them: the elders. All four of them, along with a handful of other older members of the coven, are running down into the streets — right in the direction of the fires.

I snort against Cain’s hand, realizing Branwen must’ve set their little sanctuary on fire. Cain turns toward me, giving me a look to stay quiet as he pushes his entire body against mine, effectively hiding me from the group of people passing us.

And before I can do anything about it, he’s kissing me. His mouth covers mine, and his hands move to my hair, holding me in place. I gasp in shock, and he takes the opportunity to move his tongue over mine.

I’m so shocked that I just stand there and let him. My lips move, mimicking what he’s doing. My traitorous hands go to his hips, and my fingers wrap around the loops in his pants, tugging him closer as he eats me whole.

Once everyone has passed us, he pulls away, smiling as he wipes his lower lip with his thumb. I’m out of breath, panting against the brick wall while he just stands there with a look that’s smug as sin. So instead of letting him get away with it, I rear back and slap him with all my might. His head spins to the side for a moment before turning back to look at me. His smile is even bigger.

“Worth it.”

I go to slap him again, but he grabs my wrist in midair, holding me back from making contact again.

“As fun as that was, I think one slap is enough for today.” He kisses my palm and then drops it. “Let’s go. We’re running out of time.”

I watch him walk away for a second, debating on running again. But I'm torn. I bite my tingling lips and groan. Pushing off the wall, I jog to catch up and then walk by his side, our steps hurried to get us out before anything else happens.

"Branwen is going to kill you for that," I mumble.

"Probably," he says with a shrug. "But lucky for us demons, we just come right back after a few moments rest."

"She'll make it hurt," I tell him.

"I sure hope so."

I sigh and keep walking.

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# CRYSTAL USES



*Health: Amethyst, Aqua Aura, Aventurine, and Bloodstone*

*Love: Rose Quartz, Amber, Garnet, and Moonstone*

*Courage: Carnelian, Aquamarine, Ruby, and Beryl*

*Luck: Celestine, Citrine, Clear Quartz, and Fluorite*

*Money: Pyrite, Green Jade, Selenite, and Emerald*

*Wisdom: Amazonite, Green Amethyst, Lapis Lazuli, and Larimar*



# CHAPTER 25

## BRANWEN

WALKING into the clearing is like walking into a flashback. There are people everywhere, and they're all laughing and smiling, dancing around the raging bonfire they've all made. Spirits are high, and I can sense the difference in the magic. It's palpable the closer we get.

"So, what's the plan, my love?" Roth whispers in my ear.

"I want to make sure Kegan is here, along with the girls. And then, I'm sealing the place off until I'm done with them." I start walking off in that direction, but he grabs my arm, pulling me back into him.

He kisses me. Hard. He forces my mouth open so that our tongues can dance over each other's. His hands grab my face and jaw, his fingertips digging into my flesh as he absolutely devours every bit of me. It takes my breath away, and I hold on to him for balance, my body melting into his as he kisses me stupid.

"I was too gentle with you earlier," he says, his mouth still hovering over mine. "I was too concerned about not making you feel pressured or trapped. It's been my number one concern the entire time I've had you. I want what happens after this to be your choice."

"I know," I say, holding his hands that are still firmly on my face.

He sighs.

“But I would be remiss if I didn’t tell you just how badly I want to keep you. Cain was right. In whatever way a demon can, I love you. And I want you to choose me.” His hands slide down around my throat and squeeze. “I need you to choose me.”

We stare at each other for a moment before his hands fall from my neck, and he takes a deep breath. My mind is racing, and I’m at a loss for what to say. What do I say to that?

“But we can decide that later,” he says, his smile returning. “Right now, I’m looking forward to seeing you in action. Let’s go deliver some karma.” He winks at me, and it eases the tension, allowing me to focus on what I need to.

We stay on the edge of the open area, making sure that we can’t really be seen by anyone. I spot the girls first, all sitting together and laughing with one another. The anger starts to boil again, making my heart beat hard in my chest.

And after another moment of walking around, I see Kegan. He’s walking through the crowd, talking to a few people here and there. But he’s moving with purpose toward the stage where he humiliated me just over a month ago. He’s going to make a speech.

Perfect.

“I’m going to wait until he’s up there to do anything,” I tell Roth. “But while we wait, it’s time to make sure no one can leave.”

“What do you need me to do?” he asks.

“I need rocks. Any kind of stone will do. With all the rituals done here, they shouldn’t be too hard to find.”

“How many?”

“Five.”

We get to work, walking a little further away from the party to search for stones. It doesn’t take us long, and once I have what I need, we begin to make the circle. With each rock that I toss on the ground, I bind it to the magic. I whisper the spell with each one I place, setting the barrier up in case there are some who don’t want to stay for the show.

Just as I’m about to finish, Kegan begins his speech. Everyone hushes and turns their full attention toward him. The way he commands a room is sickening. They all look at him like lost puppies looking for guidance.

I set the final stone, and the circle is finally closed. And so I slowly show myself, stepping out of the darkness and making my way through the

crowd. Roth hangs behind, staying just on the edge of the circle in case I need anything.

The witches and warlocks move out of my way, jumping back from me like they're scared to catch something if they touch me. There are whispers and gasps from all around, and Kegan, being so self-absorbed, doesn't even notice until I'm right under his nose.

I can see the anger flare across his face once he sees me. But I just smile up at him and then walk around to the side where I can easily step up onto the platform. More gasps from his captive audience.

"You were banished," he says, turning away from his adoring fans to face me.

"Don't worry," I tell him before turning to the crowd. "I'm only here for the show!" I cry out, opening my arms and smiling at them all.

"What show?" he grinds out.

"Oh, the one you're the star of, Kegan dear. I also need Lilly, Mags, and Jadia to head up to the stage? If you'd be so kind?"

I can still see them out there, looking at each other like they aren't sure if they should move. They're probably assuming I don't know if they're actually there or not. Or maybe they're wondering if they could make a run for it and avoid the whole thing.

"Don't even try it, girls," I singsong in their direction, locking eyes with each one of them. "I guess I should let you all know now that this entire area is spelled. No one can leave until I say so."

"Listen here, bitch," Kegan growls, advancing on me.

I look over my shoulder at him and make the same gesture I did with Cain, closing his lips and molding them together so that he can't speak. His hands fly to his mouth, and his eyes almost bug out of his skull. He looks terrified, and it feeds the shadowy parts of my soul.

"Kneel," I command.

He kneels against his will, my magic taking over his body just like Roth used to do to me.

"Good boy," I coo, walking over to pat the top of his head. "Stay here while the grown-ups have a chat." I look back out into the crowd, and the girls are still firmly seated at their little table. "Girls!" I yell out at them. "Please don't make me use force!"

After a moment's hesitation, they obey, slowly getting to their feet and walking in my direction. Everyone parts for them, but no one tries to leave.

I should've known that no one would want to miss this. This entire coven is filled with gossip and people waiting to step on those who have fallen.

Lilly, Mags, and Jadia all step up onto the stage but stay standing on the edge, looking at me with caution as they wait for what's to happen next.

I smile at them, making it look as happy and genuine as possible.

"Are you not excited to see me?" I ask them. "Last time I saw you three, you were all pledging your allegiance to me. Saying you would defend me, stick by my side, and love me no matter what. Why do you just stand there looking like scolded children? Surely you're happy that I'm back?"

Jadia rushes forward, a sigh of relief coming from her lungs as she wraps her arms around me. I hug her back until she pulls away, tears in her eyes.

"Chin up, darling," I tell her, tapping her chin with my knuckle. "You'll discover you have far worse things to cry about than a lost friendship."

Her eyebrows pull together.

"What?" she asks, confused. "I'm so happy to see you, Branwen." She tries to smile through her tears, but it just comes off as fake, twisting my gut.

"Too bad our other friends don't seem as excited," I say with a pout, addressing the other two. "Join us. Kneel," I command them, their bodies automatically behaving and walking over to me.

"So, I guess we should get started!" I cheer, clapping my hands together as everyone watches me for what's next to come. "I think I'd like to start with you three. Saving Kegan for last just seems fitting."

"What are you doing, Branwen?" Mags asks, her voice filled with nerves.

"Good question! I'm here because I want you to feel how I felt. I want you to experience everything I've gone through in the past weeks. I want each of you to feel the sting of betrayal, that sharp feeling of loss, and the hollowness that comes with losing every little ounce of your magic."

My face must be a sight to behold as I explain because they've all gone white as ghosts. And I'm not sure who it is — maybe it's all of them — but there's magic trying to knock me down and fight back. But it's like trying to throw a feather at a brick wall. If anything, it just tickles.

"Stop that," I growl at them. "Nothing you throw at me will be enough to stop me. You thought I was powerful then?" I laugh. "It's *nothing* compared to what I have in my arsenal now, pretty girls."

They all start crying.

“Don’t do this,” Lilly begs. “I just got my magic. Please don’t take it, Branwen. I’m so sorry!”

“We should have never turned our backs on you,” Mags agrees. “Please, Branwen. Have some heart.”

“I don’t have a heart. You all cut it out of me.” I play with a piece of Mags’ hair. “I was not your villain. But now I am.”

“Don’t do this. Please,” Lilly tries again.

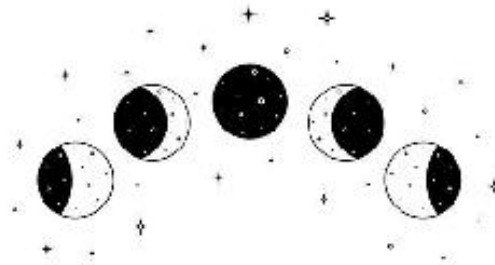
“Did you really think I wouldn’t find out, Lilly? Did you really think I wouldn’t hear about all the nasty things you said about me? Because I heard all about them. I heard all the nasty names that fell out of your ugly mouth. I heard all about how you got your magic and decided to follow Kegan like a God amongst men.

“I heard all of it,” I tell them. “You abandoned me. You let them strip my powers without a second thought. You saw the writing on the floor and ran scared. Did you ever think?” I ask, addressing the rest of the crowd as well. “Did any of you ever think that maybe if you had stood up for what you thought was right that we would’ve been the majority?

“Instead, you let the blond hair and blue eyes win you over. You’re weak. Pathetic. Sheep. You left one of your own out in the cold without any remorse because the word of one man outweighed your sense.” I tap my temple and then turn back to the girls. “I was good to you. I helped you. I was there when you needed me. And that’s how you decided to repay me.”

“And if that’s how you repay kindness,” I tell them, squatting so that I’m at eye level. “Then your karma is going to be a bitch.”

# MOON PHASES



*New Moon: New beginnings*

*Waning Crescent: Surrender, Rest and restore*

*Last Quarter: Breakdown, Transitions*

*Waning Gibbous: Release and receive, Harvest*

*Full Moon: Peak Energy, Blessings, Celebration*

*Waxing Gibbous: Patience, Edit and Refine*

*First Quarter: Momentum, Calling, Action*

*Waxing Crescent: Fresh energy, Declaration*



# CHAPTER 26

## BRANWEN

“YOU KNOW what I think would be fun?” I ask the girls, looking at them one by one. “If we all decided to tell each other what we really think. Because I know if you were harboring those feelings towards me...” I trail off and laugh, standing up to face the crowd. “They must be feeling some type of way towards each other, right?”

Everyone is silent, just watching to see what I’m going to do next. And honestly, what I’m about to do is something that should never be done, no matter the offense. But when I turn and lock eyes with Roth behind the platform, his eyes glow and his smile widens. He agrees. If I do this though, there’s no going back. I may have been banished before, but this will guarantee that I can never return.

I shake my arms and legs and roll my neck, gearing up to try something I’ve never done. But I know I can do it. I have Hecate backing me, Roth by my side, and my magic back stronger than ever.

“This will not be pleasant.”

Lilly’s eyes widen as my magic crawls out of my body and across the old wooden floor of the stage. We can both feel the energy as it seeps and slithers. It pools around her knees and then crawls up her body, caressing her and tickling. I can hear her breathing from here: short, shallow, and fast. She’s terrified. Her fear is oozing from her like a leaky faucet.

“No,” she whispers as she can feel it wrap around her neck and crawl up into her hair.

“Yes.” I smile and close my eyes, breathing deeply as my magic continues to seek out what I want.

It moves over her ear and into her mind, giving me access to all of her thoughts, feelings, and memories. There are so many to sift through, and her panic isn’t helping. It’s an unorganized filing cabinet, papers stuck where they shouldn’t be.

But finally, I find what I’m looking for. I grab hold of it and open my eyes. Lilly’s are glazed over, and tears fall down her face. She knows what’s coming. She can feel what I’ve found and knows what I’m going to do with it.

“Tell them,” I command her.

Her eyes close, and sobs escape her throat, but she turns toward Mags and Jadia.

“Don’t worry,” Mags says. “No matter what, we’re here, okay? No matter what you say, we will still be your friends.”

“I wouldn’t listen to them if I were you, Lilly,” I tell her. “They promised me the same things. Tell them.”

“Mags,” Lilly whispers. “I’m so sorry.”

“Get on with it. I don’t have all night, and I still have Kegan to deal with.”

He grunts from where he’s kneeling.

“I slept with Ezra.” Lilly’s voice cracks on his name, and I smile when I look over and see Mags white as a sheet. I think she might pass out or throw up. Maybe both. Ezra, the guy from the pier that Mags dated for years. I squeal with delight and let go of her mind, my magic flowing out of her just as quickly as it entered. She falls to the ground and passes out.

“Don’t worry, she’s fine!” I say to the crowd behind us. They’re whispering the stories they’ll weave already. They can’t wait to get home and tell everyone what happened here.

I turn to Mags. She’s staring at Lilly lying on the ground, her face twisted in anger and hate. I can taste those sour emotions from here.

“So much for staying friends, am I right?” I ask her.

“You’re such a piece of shit,” Jadia spits at me.

My neck almost cracks with how quickly I turn to look at her.

“Pot, meet kettle,” I sneer. “You were my best friend. You were second only to Asha. And yet you discarded me like trash on the side of the road.”

“I was afraid!” she shouts at me. “I was afraid to be cast out just like you if I stood by you! Do you know how terrified we all were? How could we know whether or not to believe you wrote that spell? How do you think it looked?”

“How do I think it looked? How do I think it looked?” I scoff. “I think it looked like I needed my friends and family to come to my side. I think it looked like I was framed. I think it looked like I needed the people who used me for my entire life to speak up for me when I had no voice. And what did you do, Jadia, hm? What did you do?”

She’s silent, refusing to look at me as the tears keep coming. They disgust me.

“I’ll tell you what you did. Not only did you remain silent and let me take the fall for something that I did not do, you doubled down. You talked shit about me daily. You called me names, spread lies, and basked in the attention it got you. Quick question, Jadia. Did you ever get picked?”

“What?”

“Did he ever pick you? Did Kegan ever give you the attention you so clearly craved and needed? Did he lift you up and put you on a pedestal for all to see and aspire to be? Did he?”

She doesn’t answer, and her eyes drop to the floor.

“That’s what I thought.”

“Are you going to enter my mind now?” she asks. “Going to make me say my darkest secrets in front of everyone?”

I smile down at her.

“No, Jadia. You see, you helped destroy my life. You helped ruin my reputation. So you know what I did to you? I took away your livelihood.”

Her eyes go wide. “No,” she whispers. “You didn’t.”

“Oh, but I did!” I tell her with a smile. “Hurts to know that something you dreamed of, something you worked so hard for for so long, is gone. Doesn’t it?”

She cries and cries and cries. It bores me.

“Mags,” I say, turning my attention toward her. She’s still white as a sheet. “Your turn.”

She doesn’t even look at me, just keeps staring out into the crowd at nothing, completely zoned out. My magic does the same to her that it did to

Lilly, moving around her body like a snake until it finds its target.

Her mind is less scattered, more easily manageable and organized. I'm not too sure what I'm looking for, but I take my time sifting around. So much gossip. So many horrible thoughts and things said about so many people in town. I could make her say them out loud, having the entire town turn on her and whisper behind *her* back. Who knew my friends were such assholes?

I mean, sure, we all liked to gossip. We all liked to vent when we were angry and upset or jealous and hurt, but this is a whole other level. Mags has thoughts in here that I never would've imagined could even cross her mind.

But there it is. When I see it, I stumble back, the wind knocked out of me as I digest what I found. I blink a few times, my throat closing in on itself. I want to cry, but I refuse. I refuse to give any of these people any more of myself.

I look to Roth, and he gives me a silent nod, encouraging me to keep going. So I take a breath and gather myself.

"Say it."

Mags flinches.

"Say. It."

She sighs. "I helped him."

Jadia turns to look at her, her eyes wide with shock.

"Louder," I order her.

"I helped him!" she shouts this time, making it loud enough for everyone to hear, even over the roaring of the bonfire. Her words roll out across the crowd and are followed by gasps once they figure out just who she's talking about.

"Mags," Jadia whispers. "How could you?"

"Shut up," I tell her, zipping her lips just like Kegan. I don't want to hear it.

"He told me I would get all of my power if I helped him," she starts to explain. Her words fall out of her mouth as quickly as she thinks them. No filter. "I'm sorry, Branwen, but I wanted to be able to fully be myself. Everyone deserves to know what it feels like to not be stunted. Everyone deserves their magic."

I smile at her and pull my magic from her mind. She falls to the ground and lies next to Lilly, passed out and blessedly quiet. I stand there for a

moment, letting everything sink in. My fingertips play with the dagger on my thigh. I pull it out and twist the end of it on my finger. The smallest pebble of blood comes to the surface.

“Are you going to kill us?” Jadia asks, her voice full of false bravado. She may sound confident, but she’s anything but. And everyone can smell it on her.

“That would be too easy,” I tell her. “No, I don’t want your miserable little lives to end. I want you to wallow in them. I want you to feel the hollowness I felt. The sadness. The hopelessness.” I pull the pendant from around my neck and watch it shimmer in the firelight.

“No,” I say, thinking it over. “I think I’ll just take your magic instead.”

Her eyes go wide as she watches me place the pendant on Lilly’s back. It’s such a simple thing, to take someone’s magic from their body. You’d think it would be difficult, but no. Flesh is just a weak thing. It gives it over without a fight.

Lilly’s magic flows into the pendant, and so does Mags’ when I move to her. It’s sad that I won’t get to see their faces when they wake up and realize they’ll never practice anymore. But at least I’ll get to see Jadia’s. I wave my hand in front of her mouth, letting her speak in case she has any final words she’d like to say to me.

“No!” she screams.

How groundbreaking.

Her body jerks as she tries to fight the hold I have over her muscles. But she and her power are too weak. There’s nothing she can do. A mediocre witch cannot fight what I have inside of me.

I squat down and hold the dagger to her throat.

“Be a dear and make this easier on yourself,” I whisper. “Take a deep breath — this is going to hurt.” I echo the words of the Grand Elder that night in my room. And without warning, I pull her magic from her body.

She screams, a bloodcurdling sound that could honestly wake the dead. She fights every second of it, holding on to any little bit of it she can. But it’s no use. Within seconds, it’s gone. Stripped from her body and mingling with the others in my pretty little pendant.

I step away from her as she hurls up the contents of her stomach and then passes out, landing face-first into it.

“Gross.” I scrunch my nose and walk all the way over to Kegan.

The people in the crowd are disgusted now. Many of them want to leave before this gets any worse. I can hear them conspiring, trying to figure out if and how they could break the spell I cast around the entire field.

“Don’t try,” I call out to them over my shoulder. “It won’t work. Besides, we only have one left.”

I smile down at Kegan’s wide eyes. Saving him for last was such a good idea. I toss the dagger up, letting it spin in the air before catching it and holding it out to the tip of his nose. He pants and sweats, wondering what I have in store for him.

“Three down, one to go.”

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# WHEN NOT TO CAST A SPELL



*When casting a spell would interfere with free  
will*

*When there is a simple solution that doesn't  
require magic*

*When you aren't sure what you really want to  
achieve*

*When there is the possibility of causing harm to  
yourself or to others*



# CHAPTER 27

## BRANWEN

“STRIP.”

His eyebrows pull together.

“I said, strip,” I order him again. “I was naked in front of everyone when you ruined my life. I think it is only fair that you get the same treatment. As above, so below, what you reap is what you sow, and all that good shit.” I pause and watch as his body obeys me and begins to take off all his clothes.

“You know what you do always comes back threefold,” I tell him in this one-sided conversation we have going. “So this really isn’t going to be good for you.”

When he’s finally naked, I have him stand and move to the very center of the stage. I want everyone to be able to see and hear what is about to happen.

“The one question I had throughout this entire thing, Kegan, is why. I asked myself that question multiple times a day. Why, why, why?” I circle around him like a hawk circling its prey. “Why did you do it?”

I wave my hand, and his mouth drops open. He sucks in deep breaths and then snarls in my direction. Actually fucking snarls like a wild animal. How I or anyone could have ever been attracted to him is beyond me. He’s a disgusting excuse for a warlock.

“Explain it,” I command him.

“Because I wanted to be on top!” he shouts, his face red and angry. “This matriarchal bullshit is backward. Always a High Priestess and never a High Priest.”

“High Priests don’t exist,” I say, laughing at him.

“Exactly,” he growls. “The highest a man can ascend is a Grand Elder. And that takes fucking ages. I knew the only way to get out on top was to prove that a powerful woman couldn’t be trusted.”

“Gods, Kegan. Do you really hate women so much?”

“The spell was easy enough,” he continues. “Even as a teenager. All I had to do was offer up a little blood sacrifice, toy with some dark magic, and poof!” he laughs. “Done. Everyone’s powers were halted, and yours would grow.”

“Why her?” someone shouts from the crowd.

“Yeah, good question,” I agree. “Why me?”

He scoffs and rolls his eyes. “It didn’t matter *who* it was, Branwen. You were just the first girl that came to mind.”

“Wow, talk about making a girl feel special.”

I sigh and walk around him. I thought maybe he’d be a little ashamed once I made him expose himself to the entire coven. Any normal person would hate having to be branded a liar while standing naked in front of their friends and family.

“Did you know,” I say as I drag the tip of the dagger across his flesh. It’s sharp enough that even at this light of a touch, it makes him bleed. “In the Middle Ages, witches used to cut off penises and keep them as pets?”

I let the tip of the dagger rest at the base of his pathetic dick.

“It would really be a shame to let that tradition die, wouldn’t it?”

His eyes and pupils widen. He’s terrified. Gods, I can smell it on him. There’s so much adrenaline running through his veins that his body shakes involuntarily.

I step closer, so close that I can feel the heat from his body. I look up at him and smile.

“Beg.”

“Don’t. Please don’t, Branwen.”

“You can do better than that,” I sneer. “I said *beg*.”

“Please don’t cut off my penis, Branwen. I’m so sorry. I’m so fucking sorry for what I did, okay? I will never do anything like it again. Cast me

out! Take my magic! Do whatever else you want to me, just please don't cut it off!"

"Oh, Kegan. I don't have to banish you. The people behind me will do that for me. You just admitted to everyone that you lied to them, cast a spell on their powers, and then tricked them into worshiping you like some God. You really think it would have to be me that throws you out on your ass?" I cackle.

He looks around at the people behind me, and I think it finally settles in what's happened. The shock has worn off, and he recognizes that he's just outed himself to most of his coven. Everyone behind me that stands in that crowd was following him blindly, doing whatever he said and praising him for whatever he did.

But now that's ruined. The illusion is shattered. And he did it to himself.

"Yeah, well, they're not going to keep you around either," he hisses. "You went into their minds, went into mine! You can't do that. Even though you're innocent in what I accused you of, they'll never take you back, bitch."

"Naughty boy," I growl, taking hold of his limp dick. "Learn some manners."

Using my dagger, I slice it off with one clean stroke. He screams and falls to the floor at my feet. He clutches his groin and gags in pain. Blood seeps through his fingers and drops onto the wood below. I wonder if it'll kill him.

He looks up at me and then spits at my feet, almost hitting the hem of my skirts with it. He reaches out with one hand to try and grab me. He's far too weak to attack me, so I'm not sure why he's trying, but I've had enough. I'm tired, I have a bloody dick in my hand, and I'm ready to make sure that Asha is safe.

I'm ready to go home.

I throw the dagger down at his hand, effectively pinning it to the ground as it sinks deep into the warped floor of the platform. He screams, and the people watching groan. I hear a couple of people lose their lunches.

Turning to face them, I hold out my arms and drop the dick as I take a bow.

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, am I right?" I laugh as I rise and look out into the sea of faces. "I don't want to stay here," I tell them. "I

don't want your forgiveness for what I've done up here, and I certainly don't seek your approval or your love. I did at one point, but honestly, you can all get fucked.

"You turned your backs on me when I needed you most, and you're all lucky you didn't wind up on stage with them. Go home," I say as I lift the circle around them. They start to scatter. "Go home and learn to think for yourselves! Be fucking better!"

And then, blinding pain cuts through my back. I struggle to breathe as I fall to the ground and watch Kegan fall beside me. I cough, and blood sprays out of my mouth, the iron taste overwhelming me.

"Ow," I moan.

I blink, and then there's Roth, walking across the stage in all his glory as my magic fades. Red skin and scars on display, his tail flicking and eyes glowing. My guardian demon.

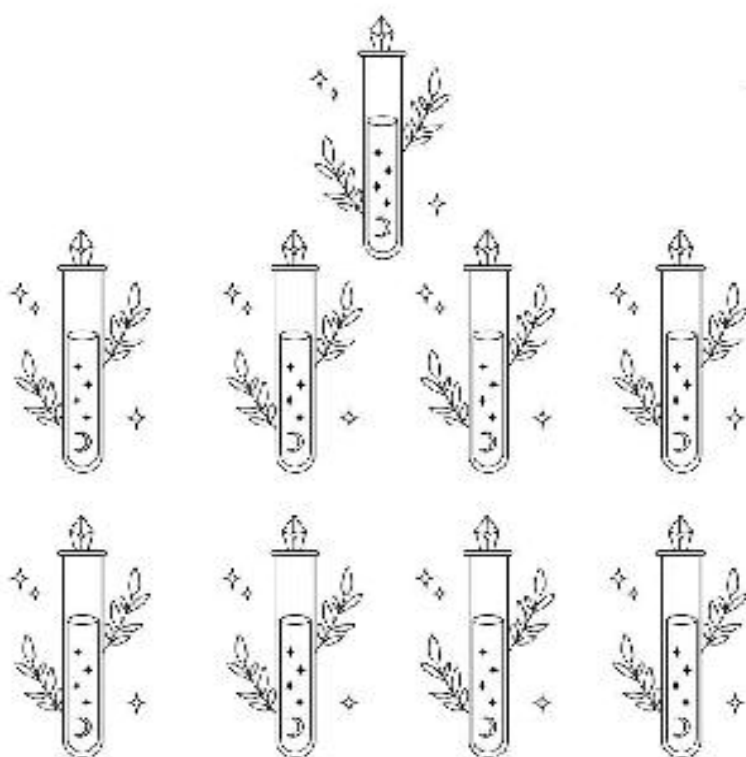
"I'll take it from here," he says, pulling the knife from my back. He kisses my forehead. "See you in a few minutes, beautiful."

I smile and close my eyes.

# RULE NUMBER NINE:



*Karma's a bitch.*



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# CHAPTER 28

## ROTH



OH, they have all fucked with the wrong witch.

I was mesmerized by her, watching her pace the stage, covered in blood and addressing everyone who had hurt her. She was riding on a high, and I couldn't get enough. I didn't see Kegan moving until it was too late.

So instead, I kiss her before she slips into death and pull the dagger from her back. Everyone screams when they see me, including Kegan. I've never heard such a pathetic noise come from a grown man. I'm not sure how they can see me if her magic left with her death. Maybe it's because she's immortal and I'm still tied to her in some way. But I'm not going to worry about that now. I have business to take care of.

I crouch down and hold the blade against his throat.

"You know, she really was going to let you live," I tell him. "She has a heart of gold, my witch."

"Who the fuck are you?" he asks, his voice trembling as he tries to scoot away from me.

"I'm your reckoning, warlock." I smile. "And don't worry. You haven't seen the last of me. I'll make sure of it." I lean closer and whisper in his ear. "See you in Hell."

I slice his throat, the gash clean but deep, nearly severing his pretty head from his body. Everyone else runs away, screaming and crying. Witches are

so dramatic.

“Come on, then, Princess,” I say with a grunt, scooping her up into my arms and tossing her limp body over my shoulder. “We have a town to burn down.”

I’m not sure how long it’ll take her to come back. The first couple of times I died, it took me a while. And she’s not a full demon, so I expect her to be out for a while. I laugh to myself when I think about how Asha and their mother are probably reacting to Cain right now.

I felt Branwen’s cloak of magic leave my body the second she got stabbed. So I know it happened to Cain too, exposing his true form to two women who have never seen anything like it before.

Carrying Branwen to the edge of the clearing, I set fire to it. I watch it for a moment, the flames spreading across the grass and over to the place where she was first shamed and betrayed. I watch it burn with glee. These assholes don’t deserve the air they breathe, let alone a nice place to call home. Not after what they did to my witch.

I smack her ass softly. “Let’s go. Places to be, homes to burn.”

I don’t care who I’m hurting or how badly. All I want to see is this little picturesque village on the seaside become ash at the touch of my hand. And that’s exactly what I do. Each house we pass goes up in flames, burning from the grass at the sidewalk to the tippy top of their roofs. Some come screaming from inside; others stay dark and silent.

When we get to the center of town, we’re met with who I assume are the elders and a handful of people that stand at their backs. They all gathered here, waiting for us to come in from the fields. I laugh and halt a stone’s throw away from them.

Goodness, they really do think they can stop me.

“Enough!” one of the women shouts. “You’ve done enough damage! You’ve destroyed homes, taking away the shelter of innocent children!”

“No one is innocent. Haven’t you ever heard of original sin?” I smile at them, but they don’t find me funny, which I think is kind of rude. They could at least *pretend* so as to not hurt my feelings. I pout. “Not a single laugh at that one?”

“Go home, demon.” That one is the Grand Elder. I recognize him from the night Branwen got her powers taken away. “Take your dead, and let us rebuild.”

“She’s not dead,” I tell them, my voice filled with annoyance. “But I’m not leaving until you have to rebuild everything,” I growl. “So get out of my way and let me turn the rest of your little town into a bonfire.”

The fires from earlier are still going but somehow contained to only the buildings we set them in. Fucking witches and their little tricks.

I feel their magic reach out to me. They’re sending me a warning, letting me know that they still have their fully restored power and they aren’t afraid to use it. Little do they know, some of Branwen’s magic is shared with me and my own strengths I have as a demon.

“Alright,” I sigh. “Enough is enough.”

Squeezing my hand into a fist, I snap the Grand Elder’s neck. He falls to the ground in a heap of useless man meat as those around him scream and start to scatter.

I move my free arm from right to left in a violent motion, sending them flying through the street and into the buildings to my left. I’ve never tried to control so many people at once, but it seems to be going okay so far.

Blanketing my own power over their forms as a whole, I paralyze them, just as I used to do with Branwen all those nights I visited. I wait a moment to see if it’s actually going to work, and when it seems to, I go on my merry way. Building after building goes up in flames. I’m kind enough to leave the ones they’re lying against alone, but nothing else is spared.

And as I walk out of the town, it lights my way to the cove, the orange flames licking the sky like a giant fireball. I kind of regret not killing everyone, but if anyone is going to make that choice, it’s going to be Branwen.

Halfway to the cove, she starts to stir. I pull her down off my shoulder and cradle her as I sit down on the soft sand. Her muscles twitch as she works herself back to life, and when her eyes start blinking, relief washes through me.

I felt relatively confident that she would come back to me, but this is uncharted territory. There was always a chance she was gone for good.

“Hi.” She takes a deep breath, and her head lolls to the side. “Ow.”

“Yeah, not a nice way to go. Stabbing hurts like a bitch.”

“What happened after I blacked out?”

“I lost my temper,” I tell her. “Killed Kegan. Set the town on fire.”

I shrug and she laughs softly.

“Good.” She smiles up at me, her eyes struggling to stay open. Dying takes it out of you until you start getting used to it. I want to get her back to mine, where she can rest and recuperate.

If that’s what she wants.

“Guess you’re stuck with me, huh?” she asks.

“Only if you want to be.” I gently move her hair from her face, tucking the little strands behind her ears. Her ritual makeup has run a little, but she still looks like a queen. A queen that has fought and won a battle.

“How could I leave the man I love?”

I kiss her hard, just as I had done before letting her walk into battle. I can’t stop cheering in my head that I get to keep her. She isn’t going anywhere.

“How far away are we?” she asks when I finally let her go.

“Not far. I’ve been carrying you for a while. We should be there in a few more minutes.”

“What am I going to tell Asha?” she asks, her voice full of worry. I can hear those thoughts running around in her head again, letting others get in the way of her happiness. She’s always putting others first, and I think it’s time she takes her own happiness a little more seriously.

“I know that you want to protect her. And, regrettably, there’s nothing really for her to go back to at this point. I pretty much wiped out the entire town, minus your family home and the ones surrounding it. But I want you to make the choice for you and not for her.”

“I’m staying with you,” she says firmly. “But we have to figure out something for them as well. If they want to move and start over or...” She trails off and looks up at me. I know what she’s thinking immediately.

“Or they could come with us?” I say for her.

“They could, right?”

I sigh.

“They could,” I hedge. “But we’re going to have to face Lucifer because there’s no way we can smuggle two more witches down there and think he won’t notice. And he is a bitch to work with when he’s pissed.”

She nods and rolls off my lap, standing up and testing the strength of her legs. She’s recovered pretty quickly for her first death.

“Alright, then. We’ll deal with that when we have to. For now, let’s go and make sure Cain is still alive. I’m not convinced that Asha wouldn’t have killed him when he suddenly turned all red and scary.”

I stand up and take her in my arms again, holding her close to make sure she's real, that she really came back to me. Her form is solid, and her mind is stable. Her heartbeat echoes in her chest in time with my own.

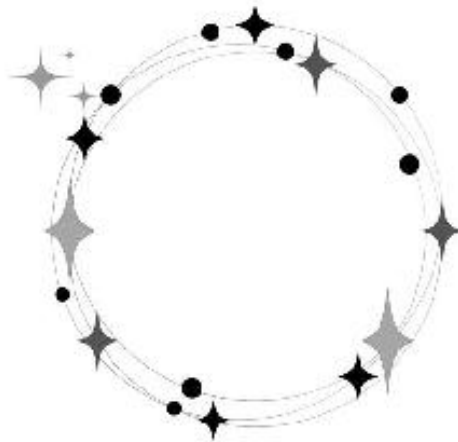
"I love you, witch."

She laughs and pulls away to kiss me hard on the lips.

"I love you too, my little demon."

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# HOW TO PROPERLY CLOSE A CIRCLE



*Thank all of the elements and spirits you have called upon.*

*Blow out each candle with intention.*

*Meditate and ground yourself for five to ten minutes.*

*Slowly come back to your space.*



# EPILOGUE

## BRANWEN

THE FOLLOWING WEEK

MOTHER DECIDED TO STAY BEHIND. We have family on the other side of the sea, and she decided to spend the rest of her days with them. She felt guilty for not standing up for me, fighting for me when I needed it. And while I forgave her and had a long discussion with her about how I would keep her closer and protect her when we went Under, she declined, wanting to live out the rest of her days with her sisters.

So now it's just Asha and me left to stick together down here. Lucifer hasn't come to speak with us yet, but we know it's coming. And what that means for Asha, we aren't sure. But I'll do whatever it takes to keep her with me and keep her safe.

"Ugh! You drive me insane!" she shouts at Cain in the kitchen. He just laughs, which infuriates her further. "Just give me the damn pan, Cain!"

"Go sit down, little Harrow. I'm cooking. You're observing."

Roth looks over at me from where he sits and raises his eyebrows, trying to hide his smile. I give him the look of death and tell him to knock it off in my mind. He's bound and determined to get Cain and Asha together, but I refuse. And Asha can barely stand the guy anyway.

"Stop calling me little," she growls, her magic shaking the house.

"Enough," I groan. "I'm tired of replacing all the breakables in this house just because you're egging her on, Cain!"

Just then, Ravana bursts through the door and announces her presence in the form of a very poorly sung song. Asha laughs and is immediately distracted from her fight with Cain. He just smiles and watches her go over and dance with Ravana.

"I thought I would take Asha over to my place for a girls' night?" Ravana asks. "Figured it's been a while since you two may have been alone."

"Oh, ew, gross," Asha groans. "Going to get my stuff right now."

"Who's going to eat all this food I made?" Cain asks in outrage.

"We will," Roth tells him, walking over to taste the chicken pasta he made.

"Fine," Cain complains, throwing the towel that was slung over his shoulder onto the counter. "Eat my hard work! I don't mind!" He mumbles under his breath as he turns everything off and arranges it nicely on the counter for us. He may be a sarcastic asshole most of the time, but underneath all that hardness is a pretty nice guy.

He leaves, and shortly after, Ravana takes Asha over to her place. I feel like a mother hen, worried to have her out of my sight. I don't like not knowing if she's okay.

"Ravana won't let anything happen to her." Roth has snuck up behind me, wrapping his arms around my shoulders and pulling back into his solid body.

I immediately melt. It has been too long. I can already feel he's hard behind me where my ass rolls against him. I wish I was able to change into something sexier, having been lying around in these sweats all day. But he doesn't seem to mind.

With my magic, I reach out and lock the door, making sure no one can get back in. I definitely don't need Asha running back in here to grab something and see her sister getting fucked ten ways to Sunday.

"I think I'd like to bend you over this couch," he whispers into my ear before spinning us around and pushing me over the back of it. I grab onto the pillows and rub my ass against his cock, which is already hard and straining against his pants. His fingers run over the fabric of my shirt as they move down my back.

When he gets to my waist, he yanks the sweats from my body, the fabric ripping and burning my skin as he tugs on them until they fall to the floor in shreds. I'm not wearing any panties, so I'm on full display for him, ass up

and already wet for him. I feel his fingers run up the back of my thighs before his thumbs spread me wide open.

“Always so wet for me, little witch.”

It’s been too long since he’s been able to touch me that my entire body is on fire for him. I need him like a plant needs water. My pussy clenches around nothing but air, waiting and begging for him to fill us up.

“Please, just fuck me,” I beg him.

“As the Princess wishes,” he says before I hear him pull his own pants down. The head of his cock lines up with my slit, and he teases me by massaging my clit. As he moves, I push back, forcing him inside of me. I couldn’t wait any longer.

I sigh as he fills me up so perfectly, stretching me wide when he bottoms out, his balls slapping against my clit. From this angle, his cock rubs a glorious spot inside of me, already making my toes curl. I bite down on a pillow and groan. Nothing feels better than this.

“Fuck,” he swears as I squeeze him. “Careful, witch. You’ll make me finish far too soon.”

I laugh and move my hips, teasing him in just the way he likes. I know all the little moves that push him over the edge.

“Brat.” He spanks my ass, but it only makes me squeeze him harder.

“We have all night,” I tell him, pulling myself off and then pushing back on him. “We both need this.” I move, pulling off and pushing back on again. “I’ll fuck myself if I need to,” I tease.

That’s all the go-ahead he needs. He grips my hips hard and fucks me into the couch, the furniture moving with the force of it. The noises coming from both of us mix with the wet sounds from our sex, building my orgasm higher and higher. Pleasure fills every pore of my body as I let myself go and enjoy everything he’s giving me.

I get lost in us. In the way we move and the way we sound. He knows every button to push and what rhythm I like the most. I’m more comfortable with him than I’ve ever been with anyone else. I can tell him what I like and where I want it without any fear of judgment. And with him inside my mind at all times, he knows what to do even when I can’t speak, lost in the way he’s pushing me toward the edge.

I push up onto my tiptoes, forcing him into a different angle. And when his tail reaches between us to stroke my clit, I scream my release into the cushions of the couch.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he chants as his hips stutter, and I feel him come inside of me. Our sweaty bodies fall over the couch as we both become too tired to hold ourselves up. He leaks out between my thighs, and I love the way it makes me feel completely owned by him.

“That was too fast,” he groans, throwing his arm over his face

“Like I said, we have all night,” I say with a smile, kissing his soft lips as he lies there panting. I nip at his bottom lip. “So let’s eat some of that amazing pasta your brother made and then make sure we use every single minute of this night alone.”

He purrs low in his chest and spanks me hard on the ass, grabbing and jiggling it with his palm.

“I like the way you think, witch.”

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are so many people that I feel I need to acknowledge for this one. Firstly, I want to thank my readers. There are so many of you that interact with me daily, keeping me sane, and keeping me around.

As so many of you know, this past Spring was hard. And I almost didn't make it out. So much of what I felt went into this book, and I feel like I need to acknowledge that if it weren't for you, I would not be here.

Suicide is a tough subject. When you've always struggled with your mental health, it becomes something that kind of hangs around. The idea of it, anyway. And it's always hovering, waiting to strike. It's ugly and clingy and whispers all sorts of horrible things. Living with that hanging over your head when you're on meds and in therapy is hard enough. But when life decides to fuck you over and take everything away, suicide can win.

And I don't wish that feeling on anyone. Any of the emotions that I wrote in this book are things I hope none of you ever have to feel. But if you have or if you do, I hope you know that I'm happy you're here. And I'm happy that you made it through or are making it through. A lot of the time, the depression tells you there's nothing on the other side of whatever it is you're going through. That's just not true.

It's hard. It's an uphill fucking battle that you have to constantly fight against. Sometimes, even after you think you're healed, it smacks you across your face like it never left shouting, "Surprise bitch!" But never let it win. Because if you let it win, you let whatever it is you're fighting win. And you are not that person. You do not let that horrible thing win. You look it in the face and you tell it to fuck off every minute of every day until it starts to fade into the background.

If you need to reach out, there's always help. Please utilize the free hotlines if you feel you need to. That's what they're there for. Never be ashamed to admit you need help.

I also need to acknowledge Tori, Cady, and Sandra. Tori does my formatting. Cady does my covers. And Sandra does my edits. I wouldn't still be here if it weren't for you three, either. Because you chose to listen to me, believe in me, and be kind above all else, I'm still here. I'm still writing. You three women are beautiful from the inside out and I can never thank you enough for continuing to work with me.

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Christopher. Oh, Christopher. How you have changed my fucking life. You show up every day, bringing your A-game. You are the love of my life. Thank you for always being there when I need you. Thank you for getting me through the Spring, the health issues, and Callie's passing. Thank you for pushing me when I need it and encouraging me to rest when I won't let myself. Thank you for telling me I need to start getting small coffees because I never finish the large ones. Can't wait to marry you, bro.

And that's it. That's all I have in me. This book was therapy and I'm terrified to put it out in the world but that's what it's about, right? You have to learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

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# ✧ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ✧

Dana Isaly is a writer of dark romance, paranormal romance, and has also been known to dabble in poetry (it was a phase in college, leave her alone).

She was born in the midwest, and has lived in England and California, but now resides (begrudgingly) in Alabama with her partner and her two pitbulls. She is a lover of floppy paperbacks, coffee, and rainy days. Dana is probably the only person in the writing community that is actually a morning person.

She swears too much, is way too comfortable in her Facebook group, and believes that love is love.

You can find her on Instagram (@author.danaisaly), join her Facebook group (Dana's Tribe of Horny Humans), or follow her on TikTok (@author.disaly)

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