

PANDORA
KENTUCKY



TRIXIE'S
TREAT

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR
DARLENE TALLMAN

TRIXIE'S TREAT

DARLENE TALLMAN



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DEDICATION

To my beloved family members who have/had October birthdays - my dad, my brother, and my two oldest grandsons are all October babies.

Not only that, but a year ago is when I was introduced to the real Smudge, Pudge, and Bruiser by their feral momma! While only the two girls eventually became spoiled house cats, I still see and feed Bruiser regularly.

XOXOXO

Darlene/Grandma Darlene

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Vera Quinn, for inviting me into this unique world! I definitely stressed way too much about it, I'm sure, but hopefully, folks enjoy what I did in my part of Pandora, Kentucky!

XOXOX

Darlene

BLURB

Trixie's lived in Pandora her whole life and knows the town shuts down on Halloween. So when she sees a black panther at her front door fending off some of the things that go bump in the night, she has no other choice but to help him. Will her niceness earn her a treat... or a trick?

Mysterious things happen in Pandora, Kentucky. The town appears to be a small out of the way place to relax and unwind. Population under 600 people. Down home friendliness. There's one day a year that the town shuts down before dark and doesn't open back up until daybreak the next day.

Halloween night.

The words trick or treat have a darker meaning in Pandora. Do you have a good soul and treat people with kindness or is your soul damned to hell for your life of sins and bad choices? In Pandora on Halloween night if you wander the streets, you could come face to face with your future of things to come, good or bad. Enter our Pandora box of delights or chills.

Each book is written by different authors with their own story to tell. Each Pandora will be different. Come join us for your first Halloween treats.

****Suitable for ages 18+ due to adult situations, content and language****

PROLOGUE



TRIXIE, AGE 5

“MAMA, I met a new kid today at school,” I said as we walked home.

Our town was on the small size, so Mama came and picked me up every day after school. We’d walk home and sometimes, we’d stop off in the woods near our house so she could pick the flowers, herbs, and even mushrooms and things like that that she needed to make the poultices and potions the townspeople bought from her. She was a witch, and so was her mother, my grandmother, and her mother before her. I was as well, but I had yet to come into my full powers. Still, I paid attention to everything my mother and grandmother did, and was learning some of the simpler things so I’d be ready.

The hardest part for me was reading the family’s grimoires, because the spells had strange words and since I was just learning how to read, I couldn’t pronounce them correctly. I still remember the day my grandmother was having me recite a spell and instead of the result my grandmother was expecting, we had a live chicken running around the room! Once my mother and grandmother stopped laughing, it was caught and that’s how we ended up having a chicken coop, which produced enough eggs that we sold them as well.

“Oh, really? What’s his name? Where does he live? Did they just move to town?” Mama questioned as we veered off the sidewalk and onto the path that would take us to where Mama and Grandma grew the plants they used.

“I think so. He was introduced by Mrs. Becker, who said he and his family were new here. She let me show him around, Mama!” I excitedly replied. “He’s very nice. He’s got dark hair, but his eyes are what I like best about him.”

“Why’s that, Trixie bug?” she asked as she bent down to start sifting through the dirt. “Aha! It’s finally ready to cultivate. Mrs. Jones will be happy, she’s been in a lot of pain lately, and she says the only thing that helps is the salve I make for her.”

“I’m glad you can help her, Mama,” I said. “She always makes sure to have my favorite cookies made when we go visit!”

Mama smiled at me as she placed the plant in her basket and moved on to the next area. I saw she was picking some mushrooms, and wrinkled my nose. I thought they were slimy and kind of ugly, but Mama said they had a lot of important properties, whatever those were, so even if I thought that, they were very useful.

“Yes, I’ve noticed that,” Mama teased. “Now, tell me what this little boy’s name is and what you like about his eyes.”

“His name is Tristan, and he has bright green eyes that have flecks of gold around the black part!” I exclaimed.

Mama stood up and looked closely at me. A worried look briefly appeared on her face, but instead of saying anything, she just smiled. “He sounds nice, pumpkin.”

I smiled back and nodded. “He really is. I showed him around, and even though he made a few friends, he played with me at recess. I think he’s going to be a good friend, Mama.”

“Perhaps, little love, perhaps. Only time will tell.”

Since both Mama and Grandma were able to see things that were going to happen in the future, I thought maybe she knew something about Tristan she wasn’t telling me, but she didn’t say I couldn’t play with him, so I pushed that thought far away.

“I got a one hundred on my spelling test, Mama,” I told her as she continued to pick plants and leaves. I knew when we got

home, she'd carefully wash everything before putting it in its appropriate place.

She was very disciplined about that, and so was Grandma. They told me all the time that in order for us to continue to do good, we had to make sure we put our supplies in the right spot. Otherwise, we could cause a 'calamitous disaster' and even though I wasn't sure what it meant, I figured it was bad because they were so emphatic about it. It was ingrained in me that it was an important part of my heritage, so I watched closely when we were taking care of the plants once we got home. I wanted to be as good as they were someday, and I knew this was one way I would be.

"That's good, Trixie," she praised. "Let's go home and see what Grandma's cooking up for dinner."

"Yay! I'm hungry, Mama," I replied.

She laughed before saying, "Trixie, you're always hungry, but you're a growing girl."

Trixie, age 8

"I might have to go away," Tristan said as we ate lunch.

Ever since he moved to Pandora, we'd been as thick as thieves, as Mama liked to say. He was very protective of me for some reason, even though we were little kids, but I secretly liked it. He was my best friend; we told each other almost everything. The only reason I didn't tell him I was a witch was because Mama said outsiders didn't always understand our powers. Since I was still waiting for mine to fully appear, I kept the secret. But I knew he had one too. While he never said anything, I suspected he was a shifter. We had several shifter families in town, and their eyes were a lot like Tristan's were, shaped a little bit differently, like a cat's eyes, only his were green and theirs were gold with the brown flecks. It didn't matter to me, though, if he changed into a cat. I liked cats a lot and even had several; Pudge, Smudge, and Bruiser were siblings I found one day while we were playing.

Mama let me bring them home with the instruction that I was fully responsible for their care. I did chores around the house to earn an allowance, and used that to take them to the vet so they could get their shots and be fixed. Mama and Grandma put their food and cat litter on the grocery list, though, because they said it was enough that I was showing ‘appropriate responsibility’ by taking the three kitties in.

“Why? I don’t want you to go anywhere, Tris,” I replied. “I would be very sad because you’re my best friend in the whole wide world!”

I had girl friends, of course, but a lot of them were very silly. They giggled whenever the boys were around, and acted like they weren’t smart. I would never do that; Mama taught me to always be myself because people were either going to like me or they weren’t so I should never change who I was to suit other people. Since Mama was so smart, I listened to her and took her advice. I still played with them from time to time, but I mostly spent time with Tristan.

“I hope it doesn’t happen, but I might not have a choice,” he warned. “It... it has to do with Halloween,” he whispered.

My eyes grew wide. *Everyone* knew things got strange on Halloween night. Last year, something happened with the Clemons family and when I went to school the next day, I heard that they left overnight. Mama said we had to stay inside on Halloween once it got dark, that there were things better left alone. She always put out a big bowl on the porch with various potions she and Grandma had made, and in the morning, it would be empty but there’d be a small charm left. Mama would then use the charm in one of her spells.

“I don’t want it to happen either!” I exclaimed. “Do... do you want me to tell my mama? Maybe she and my grandma can help.”

“No, I don’t think that would be a good idea, Trixie. My... my family... um, they’re not good people,” he whispered while looking around to make sure we weren’t overheard. “Sometimes, I don’t think I belong with them,” he admitted.

I reached out and squeezed his hand. “If you change your mind about me asking my mama, let me know, okay? Because you’re my friend and friends help each other, like our teachers always say.”

He grinned at me then pulled out some snacks from his backpack. “Let’s have a snack,” he suggested.

Trixie, age 10

“Nothing’s the same anymore, Mama,” I stated as I kicked a rock out of my way. We were walking home from school even though I had told her I was old enough to walk alone now. “With Tristan gone, I’m lonely all the time.”

A lot of my girlfriends from before had started chasing boys, which I was definitely not interested in. Suddenly, I was on the outside looking in and it hurt my feelings. I wasn’t included in the games at recess, and I suspected many of them were laughing at me behind my back now. Not that I could change what someone else thought or said about me, but it still didn’t feel very good.

“Life changes, sometimes, Trixie. I know you miss your friend, and wish I had been able to find out more about what happened to him,” Mama replied. “Now, let’s gather these few things quickly, because tonight’s Halloween and you know the rules.”

I nodded because I was more than aware of them when it came to this particular day of the year. School was let out around lunch time, and everyone scurried home to make sure they would be inside by the time darkness fell in our little town. I still didn’t fully understand *why* we had to do this, but both Mama and Grandma explained that when I was a little older, they’d explain what they knew. In the meantime, I knew they’d be busy reinforcing the protection wards around our property. Since I didn’t want them to delay what they had to do because of me, I helped her dig up several plants, as well as some mushrooms, then we headed home.

TRIXIE, AGE 15

“You’re only a few years from getting the rest of your powers,” Mama said as I stood in front of the full-length mirror while she adjusted my dress.

I was going to the Harvest Festival dance and even though I was going by myself, she wanted to make sure I looked my absolute best.

“I know, Mama,” I replied. “I love my dress,” I said, twirling this way and that to catch the flickers of color that showed up.

This year’s dance, we were to dress up, so in keeping with the fact I was a witch, she and my grandma had sewn a beautiful, floor-length gown that somewhat resembled what many thought a witch might wear. It was black, with sequins, and had an overlay of lace. I felt beautiful as she had me step out of my dress, then sat me down to work on my hair.

“That means that some of them have started showing themselves, and you need to be very careful,” she warned as she gathered my long curls up on my head with an impossible amount of bobby pins. “What you do have right now is a bit... unstable, and any spike in your emotions could set them off. I don’t want you accidentally changing a classmate into a snake or something like that, do you understand?”

I giggled at the thought, because well, some of the boys in my class were little better than snakes, but at the serious expression on her face, I nodded. “I do, Mama,” I said. “Although you have to admit that Bobby Baker would be perfect as one.”

Her laughter grew while I giggled; he was a horrid boy who was mean to every single girl in my class, me included. He played awful pranks on all of us, yet never managed to get caught. I wished I was able to put him in his place sometimes, and often dreamed of using a simple spell to teach him a lesson, but it was as if Mama could read my mind because she had basically just told me to behave myself.

“I suspect someday, Bobby Baker will meet his match, but it’s not my sweet Trixie,” she murmured. “Now, how about we go

eat something before you get dressed for the dance?” she asked.

“Okay, Mama. I wish Tristan was here, he would go with me since we were best friends,” I replied.

“Things aren’t always as they seem, Trixie. Best you remember that, okay?”

TRIXIE, AGE 21

“I’m going to miss you, Mama,” I whispered, as a tear slowly rolled down my face.

I still didn’t understand what happened, not exactly. She and Grandma had gone out of town unexpectedly and on their way back, the two of them were broadsided by a huge truck that ran a red light. In the blink of an eye, I lost both of them, less than two years after I came into my powers.

Just like that, I was all alone except for my three cats. They were older now, too, but still all three were faithful companions.

I clutched the basket to my side as I continued to gather the herbs I needed since potions and salves still needed to be made, even though my heart was shattered into a million pieces. Halloween was just around the corner, and I had work to get done.

CHAPTER I



Trixie

“SHIT, SHIT, SHIT,” I mutter as I hurry along the path toward my house. The day had gotten away from me while I was gathering items from the woods, and suddenly, it was later than I needed it to be for Halloween.

“Come on, move your legs, Trix,” I coax myself, seeing the sky continue to darken. “The last thing you need is to be caught outside by the unseen.”

A tremor of fear runs through me as memories of past Halloweens and the stories that emerged afterward flash through my head. Most families who had lived in Pandora for generations were well-aware of what kind of things went bump in the night, but the occasional stranger managed to get stuck overnight and those usually didn’t end well.

Seeing the path to my back door ahead, I breathe out a sigh of relief. While the menacing shadows continue to emerge from the woods near the front of the house, I know I’ll make it. Maybe with only a few seconds to spare, but it would be enough, at least.

Once I’m inside, I quickly utter a protection spell to ward my property and house against anything that wishes me harm. I smile remembering how my grandma was so patient the first year I did it on my own. Even when the outside darkness had all but consumed the town, she didn’t take over and do it

herself. No, she had me do it again until it snapped into place, for lack of a better phrase.

The bowl that we've put out for as long as I can remember is already on the front porch, full of the potions and charms the unseen take every year. I have no idea what they do with them, but suspect since some people end up getting treated, they probably use what I provide. It makes no difference to me as long as I'm left alone.

I place my basket of herbs and plants in the kitchen then head to my room to change into something more appropriate to stand guard as much as possible over the town once again.

As I pull out comfortable clothes, my mind drifts back to a conversation I had with my mother a year or so after I had gained my full powers.



“Mama, why does the town shut down on Halloween?” I asked as I helped her package the sachet bags with potions she and Grandma had made.

“A long time ago, around the time the town itself was founded, the townspeople noticed some strange things happening on Halloween. There were people who showed up who didn't live here, and they would go around trying to get help. If someone helped them, they were treated with something they always desired. But others wouldn't help, they'd treat the outsider with derision or contempt, and those people would get tricked. Those tricks would involve that family disappearing never to be seen again. Several paranormal researchers found out that just on the outskirts of town is a portal from the underworld. Since they couldn't close it, a decision was made to protect the townspeople by closing the businesses down early enough that everyone could be indoors where they'd stay safe.

“The problems arose when strangers found their way into town, not knowing of the stories or that their very lives were in danger if they didn’t respond appropriately to the unseen,” Mama replied.

“Why do we call them ‘the unseen’?” I questioned, as I piled the bags into the bowl we’d leave out on our front porch later in the day, just before sunset.

“Because until they take their physical shapes, all that are seen are dark shadows. Depending on who they’re approaching, they’ll appear as a person, maybe an animal, but until then, they’re more like wispy shadows. Why all the questions?”

“I think... I think that’s what must have happened to Tristan, Mama,” I whispered, my mind on my best friend who disappeared one Halloween never to be seen again. “He said one time that his family wasn’t a good one. What if they did something to the unseen and that’s why he left? How is that fair? He was just a little boy!”

“Trixie, if he was truly a good soul, then at some point, he’ll be able to break free from them. Don’t ask how I know this, it’s more of a gut feeling, but something like that won’t happen until everything’s lined up just right. Now, are you ready to put the bowl out? Grandma and I have work to do tonight, and this year, you’ll be helping.”



“Maybe it’ll happen this year,” I murmur as I toss my dirty clothes into the hamper. Glancing around my room, I decide now’s as good a time as any to start working, so I head downstairs to gather the things I’ll need.

You see, my family’s been one of the town’s protectors ever since the unseen showed up. Year after year, our spells,

charms, and potions, are used to place hedges around those who are unable to protect themselves; usually, the infirm, the elderly, the children. One of the reasons I was running late today is because I came across a little girl who had gotten separated from her family. By the time I found them, then went and gathered what I'd need for tonight, I was nearly too late.

Sitting in my dark living room, I can hear the voices of the unseen as they approach my porch. While I have various protective wards and spells around my home and property, I allow them access to the porch so they can get the items I've made for them in the hopes that maybe this year, they'll be satisfied and not head further into town to cause havoc.

I shudder when I hear one of them hiss, "You will do as we say this year."

Who are they referring to? How is someone able to go against what they dictate? I suddenly wish my mother was still alive; I suspect she'd be able to figure out what they are talking about.

"I will do what I feel I must," the unknown male voice retorts, causing a shiver to course down my spine.

I feel as though I *know* that voice, yet that's not likely since I'm still single without a prospect in sight at the ripe old age of thirty. It's not like I haven't dated, because I have, but my path is one that not many can walk with me. If I follow in my mother's footsteps, there'll be a man who'll pass through long enough to leave me with my own daughter to raise.

"Is it bad that I want more, Mama?" I whisper, my lips barely moving so the unseen don't hear me. "I want to love and be loved. Not just for a night, but for a lifetime."

Sadly, I don't hear an audible answer, nor do I get a sudden burst of clarity about what the voices outside were talking about. Instead, I find myself shoving it to the back of my mind when I hear audible thumps coming from my front porch, followed by angry yet pain-filled hisses.

CHAPTER 2



TRISTAN

FOR THE PAST two plus decades, thanks to my so-called family, I've been in Hell. Not just figuratively, but literally. That Halloween so many years ago, the unseen came and my family, being the assholes they are, caused us to 'disappear' from Pandora and go into servitude to them.

Because I was just a kid, I had no choice but to go along with them and it's been a horrible experience, especially since I'm a shifter. Since we only 'come out' once a year, I've only been able to shift on Halloween.

As a shifter, that restriction has been hard to abide by; once we hit puberty and are capable of changing into our animal form, we tend to shift frequently. However, for three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, I'm forced to be in my human form. It's been horrific, plus the fact that in reality, I shouldn't even be a part of the nightmare that descends on Pandora every year, and I'm about to snap.

Apparently, the year before we were taken, my father mocked then later hurt one of the unseen who was masquerading as an elderly woman who'd gotten lost. Instead of helping her and possibly earning a treat, he had shoved her down, then nearly run her over in his haste to get home. When he arrived, he shared what he'd done with my mother, who immediately made plans for us to move.

Only... every avenue she tried was blocked, and even though I was a kid, I tended to listen whenever someone spoke about the things that happened in Pandora, so I knew our time was limited. Actually, I thought *their* time was limited, but when they arrived the following year, there was nowhere for me to go so I got stuck coming along.

Many of the unseen are former residents of Pandora who made the mistake of behaving badly, but there are a few who were unfortunately in town during Halloween who found themselves residents.

I've tried for years to figure out a way to break the bond they have on me, since I should've never been a part of it all, but come up empty.

Until this year.

As we came through the portal and I shifted, I was immediately overcome by the most magical scent, and I knew my fated mate was nearby. While I secretly hoped it was my friend, Trixie, from years before, I wasn't going to hold my breath. She probably moved away, although a memory crossed my mind when I thought that, so as we began our trek toward town, I allowed my thoughts to wander a bit.



“So, you’ve lived here your whole life?” I asked as we began pulling out our lunches.

Ever since we’d moved to Pandora, Trixie had been by my side. Even though she was a girl, we had a lot of fun at school. We studied together, were on the same team during recess when the teacher would force us to play a game, and talked about everything and anything.

“Yeah,” she replied. “I tried to figure it out once when Mama said our family had always been here, but all the great greats

really confused me. So, I think we've been here since the town was created or something."

"Are you going trick or treating?" I questioned.

We had gotten into town too late the year before for me to go, but I was looking forward to wearing a costume and getting candy. Then, I could share it with Trixie, who really liked Milky Way candy bars. I had been saving my allowance, and any change I found, so I could buy a bag to share with her during recess, too.

"We don't do that in Pandora," she whispered, looking around. "But we have a huge party at school and fill up our candy buckets, so it's okay."

"Why don't you trick or treat in Pandora?"

I was genuinely curious because I'd never heard of such a thing. In fact, while I was kind of glad I could just get my bucket filled at school, it wasn't really the same from my perspective.

She leaned in while gazing to make sure no one was paying attention to us. "Because... because of the unseen," she muttered close to my ear. "Hasn't anyone told you about them?"

Now my curiosity was really roused. "The unseen? Who are they?"

"No one really knows, Tris," she replied, biting into her sandwich. "But Mama said they come from someplace else, and they go around to see who will help them or something. If they're treated badly, the person who did it ends up disappearing, but if they get helped, that person gets whatever is their most secret desire. I don't really understand, though."

By the time she finished explaining, she was talking so low if I wasn't a shifter, I wouldn't have been able to hear her. I couldn't shift yet, but had the eyesight and hearing already, which came in handy sometimes when I was trying to find out stuff, especially at home. I shrugged because I didn't understand what she meant either, and unfortunately, since we

weren't longtime residents, I didn't think I'd be able to ask my parents.

"So, no trick or treating," I mused, before I bit into my own sandwich. "Eww, bologna," I muttered. "Why do they fix me bologna, Trix? I hate it!"

"Here, you can have my peanut butter and jelly, I like bologna," Trixie quickly said, handing me her sandwich. "I promise, I don't have any germs."

I laughed because ever since we'd met and become friends, we'd shared our food, our drinks, even our hats. I wasn't worried that she had cooties, like some of the boys claimed girls had; Trixie wasn't like that.



I bet she's still here, I muse as I stalk along with the crowd. But she probably has a family and shit by now.

My panther doesn't like that thought and howls out his displeasure, earning me a censorious look from the self-proclaimed leader. Earlier, we'd had a meeting of sorts and I was told what my 'job' for the night was. Since I didn't agree with it, I planned to do what I could to thwart their nefarious plans.

Their goal this year was to take over Pandora completely so we wouldn't have to live in Hell. We would be able to freely move around every day of the year while the actual residents were bound to us, and *they* went through the portal. I didn't like it; I knew most of the residents of this small, quaint town were good people. How did I know this? Well, the past few years, the only ones we were able to trick into bondage were outsiders. The rest of the residents put out various things for us.

Their plan included ‘capturing the witch’ who had managed to keep the townspeople safe for the past decade or so. I wasn’t in agreement with that, so *my* plan was to stay around the witch’s property and protect her. Since the scent of jasmine surrounded the area near her house, I was sure she was my fated mate.

And what the leaders of the unseen weren’t aware of was I’d do *anything* to protect her, even at the cost of my own life.

CHAPTER 3



TRIXIE

“Now I *really* wish Mama was still here because I don’t know what to do,” I mutter, hearing the horrific sounds coming from the front of my house.

Someone was being hurt and I knew I had to do something to help them. I just wasn’t sure what that ‘something’ was going to be.

“Activate a cloaking spell, Trixie,” Mama’s voice whispered. *“Then help whoever is being hurt.”*

“Thanks, Mama,” I reply, already standing and heading toward my front door.

Once there, I quickly utter an incantation I’ve been using for more years than I can remember and when I hear, “Where the fuck did he go?” I unlock then open my front door to see a giant black panther lying in front of my door.

He’s obviously injured, yet I can tell he isn’t going to stop trying to keep the unseen from getting into my home.

My sanctuary.

Yeah, not happening. I may not fully understand or grasp what they are, but from what I’ve gleaned over the years, they’re no match against my powers which are now at full strength.

Keeping an eye on them, I somehow manage to drag the injured cat into my foyer, before I lock my front door again, then utter another spell that will temporarily confuse them.

At least I hope it does; I have someone to help right now and whether or not they're an animal or a human, that's what I'm going to do.



Leaving the beautiful beast in my foyer, I hurry toward the back of the house to gather what I'll need so I can help it. As I systematically add various salves in the basket, I think about how the animal's black fur gleams so much, it's almost as if they're a deep, dark blue instead of black. Shaking my head at my fanciful thoughts, I pull down a deep bowl and fill it with warm, soapy water, then take a stack of clean cloths and toss them in my basket. It's going to be a bit of a struggle, but I manage to get everything in hand then make my way to the front of my home once again.

Seeing that the panther hasn't moved so much as an inch, I quickly place everything next to it, then crouch down to do a careful examination so I know where he's injured. Granted, I'm taking a guess that it's a 'he' instead of a 'she', but it feels right, so I go with it.

Taking one of the cloths, I dip it into the bowl of water, wring it out, then carefully begin cleaning the cat where my fingers have shown he's injured. Deep gashes score his body, making me wince each time the rag makes contact.

"I'm sorry, I don't mean to hurt you," I murmur, each time I hit a wound. By the time I've replenished the water twice and gotten another stack of clean rags to use, tears are steadily dripping down my face.

Each rag is soaked in blood, and I worry that no matter my abilities as a healer, it might not be enough. As I work on him, alternately speaking healing and vitality over him in the various spells I chant, I apply the salves that are imbued with the herbs and plants that have medicinal value.

“Even mushrooms,” I think while shuddering.

All these years later and I still have an issue with them, but I use them regardless because Mama was correct. They have so many wonderful qualities, it would be remiss of me *not* to use them.

I finally sit back on my calves, convinced I’ve done everything I know how to do in order to give the big cat the best chance possible to heal. Instinctively, I know he’s a shifter, and from my knowledge, they heal best in their animal form. Still, I briefly wonder who it is and if it’s someone I know. Although, in reality, if it’s someone from town, they’ve never indicated that I had caught their interest. Shrugging, I gather everything up and head to the kitchen to dispose of the trash and get myself cleaned up.

“I think if I dribble some broth down his throat, it’ll help too,” I muse out loud while washing my hands.

Deciding that’s as good of an idea as anything, I pull the items out of the refrigerator, then start tossing it into my soup pot to simmer for a little while. It won’t take long for the flavors to meld together, especially since I added a spell over that pot years ago. Since I refuse to use a microwave, I had to come up with something to speed things along.

Loud purring greets me as I reenter the front room and glance at the foyer. I can’t help the giggles that burst out of me seeing Smudge, Pudge, and Bruiser strategically laying next to the big cat. Each is stretched out so that he’s mostly surrounded by my purring cats.

“They say purrs are good medicine too,” I state out loud as I make my way to the front door so I can peer outside. I see that several of the unseen are still nearby and wonder if it’s me they want or the giant panther who I pulled into my home. Shrugging, I make the decision that they’ll get neither one of us.

Not this Halloween, anyway.

CHAPTER 4



TRISTAN

THE LAST BLOW I took is what knocked me out, but despite my best efforts, I haven't been able to swim out of the abyss and back into the land of the living, which concerns me. I *should've* been able to shift back to my human form, at least, so the fact that I'm unconscious, lost in a darkness I've never seen before, is concerning.

Was I hurt so badly that I'm dying? Just as I found my mate? Surely, the gods wouldn't be so cruel, especially since I should've never been with the unseen.

Loud purring rumbles through me but I instinctively know it's not me; there are three distinct beasts surrounding me and lending not only their body heat to warm my chilled body, but also their own unique healing properties.

There are those who might scoff at that fact, but it's been proven that a cat's purr has the ability to do many things, including heal whatever's damaged. I just hope my own shifter qualities kick in so that whatever the unseen did to me isn't fatal. Because it would be a crying shame to miss out on meeting my fated mate.

Once again, as the darkness beckons, I allow myself to be pulled back into the abyss. Maybe when I wake up again, I'll be somewhat healed and can figure out where to go from here.



“Smudge, you need to move a bit,” a sweet, melodious voice says. I hear a grouchy meow and grin even though it’s inside, but then feel the warmth that was right at my neck and throat shift slightly down. “Good girl. Thank you for listening.”

A soft hand cups my muzzle and I hear, “Drink this, it’ll help.” A warm, flavorful broth slides into my mouth and down my throat, sending warmth coursing through me.

Over and over again, the liquid is spooned into my mouth, with the woman crouched next to me crooning the whole time while the cats surrounding me snuggle closer, their purrs increasing in intensity and loudness.

There’s something familiar about the woman, but it’s just out of my reach. Hopefully, when I’ve healed, it’ll come to me.

I allow the darkness to descend once again, knowing that I’ve begun to heal from the damage that was inflicted on me. A soft body nuzzling into my chest has me smiling inside.

CHAPTER 5



TRIXIE

“WHY ARE they hanging around outside the boundaries?” I ask out loud as I peer through the blinds covering my windows. “What on earth could they want with me? For generations, we’ve put out potions, charms, and whatnot to appease the unseen. They’ve always taken it before, and it’s gone again this year. Only... they’re not leaving like they normally do.”

“It’s because of me,” a raspy, deep voice replies, nearly scaring me to death.

Turning, I see that where once the large panther was sprawled out on my floor, there’s now a very naked, muscular, handsome man. Thankfully, he’s not exposed since I covered him with a throw from the couch. I bite back a giggle when I see that my three kitties are still surrounding him and not only that, but he’s now petting Smudge.

“You’ll have a new best friend with her,” I reply, nodding at Smudge. “She’s an attention hog, much more so than her sister and brother.”

“Thank you for saving me,” he says, his emerald eyes pinning me to the spot. I watch his expression change to one of confusion as he tilts his head, his gaze never leaving mine. “Trix?” he finally whispers. “Is... is it really you?”

“Tristan?” I reply, joy overwhelming me at seeing my childhood friend once again. “But how? Where have you been? I’ve missed you so much!”

He sits up, gathering the throw around him so his lower half is covered, causing me to blush. I may have been sheltered but I read a lot, and also have seen quite a few movies in my time. He's got a body that a lot of women would swoon over; all lean, lithe muscles, which is probably due to him being a shifter. But he also has just the right amount of chest hair; not too much so he's super fuzzy, and not too little so he looks like a prepubescent boy. Once he's sitting, I watch as Smudge crawls into his lap, purring like the little hussy she is as she nudges his hand for him to pet her.

"Remember when I told you I might have to go away?" he asks.

"Is that what happened?" I question, sitting down on the couch so my legs don't collapse beneath me.

"So, the year before we were taken, my father mocked then later hurt one of the unseen who was masquerading as an elderly woman who'd gotten lost. Instead of helping her and possibly earning a treat, he shoved her down, then nearly ran her over in his haste to get home. When he arrived, he shared what he'd done with my mother, who immediately made plans for us to move. Only... every avenue she tried was blocked, and even though I was a kid, I tended to listen whenever someone spoke about the things that happened in Pandora, so I knew our time was limited. Actually, I thought *their* time was limited, but when they arrived the following year, there was nowhere for me to go so I got stuck going with them."

"What? That's not what's supposed to happen!" I exclaim. At his look, I continue. "Mama and Grandma told me they only take those who are wicked. Tris, you were just a kid and didn't have a mean bone in your body! I mean, you were protective of me, but you never did anything to anyone that didn't deserve it."

"Ever since then, I've been trying to figure out how to break their bond so I can return to the land of the living," he admits.

"So, what happened tonight to cause the fight on my porch?" I question. "They've never hovered like they're doing tonight,

which is concerning because I know I've done nothing to warrant their attention."

"Two things happened, Trix," he replies. "The first thing is, I scented my fated mate when we arrived in town."

"Really?" Disappointment courses through me at his words. Somehow, in the recesses of my mind, I had always thought he and I would end up together so hearing him say he found his fated mate is devastating.

"Yes." His voice is softer, gentler, as he stares at me without saying anything else.

"Who is it?" I finally ask, unable to bear the silence any longer.

"You."

"How can you be so sure? I mean, we haven't seen each other since we were eight!" I exclaim.

"Because my favorite scent of all time is wafting from you, Trixie," he explains. "The moment we came through the portal tonight, I smelled jasmine. It doesn't matter that we haven't seen each other in over two decades. You're my fated mate, Trix."

While he's talking, I watch my kitties curl around him. I can hear their purrs but what really has me shocked is I can *hear* his rumbling purr in response. Shaking my head to clear the thoughts swarming around, I look at him and ask, "How does that work?"

His grin has desire shooting through me, something I've read about but never experienced myself. When he stands to his feet, I shut my eyes, not wanting him to see what his actions have done.

As he stalks toward me, the throw now secure around his waist, I can see the intent in his eyes and instead of being scared, I welcome it. I know how the women in my past have had their children, but I always prayed that I would have a forever kind of love, not just a one-night stand.

When he reaches me, he holds out his hands which I clasp in mine. He pulls me up so we're practically touching, then leans in and runs his nose along mine. Sinking into him, I feel his hands place mine at his waist before he cups my face with his. Staring into my eyes, he whispers, "We make love, Trix."

Waves of desire have my core throbbing as my body moves impossibly closer to him. As his head lowers, he says, "I've been waiting a lifetime for you."

Firm lips touch mine, coaxing a response out of me. As the kiss deepens, I lose myself in him. His touch, his scent, his everything. When I feel his tongue swipe across my bottom lip, I willingly open myself to him and soon, the only sound that can be heard are my soft moans as he dominates my mouth. Just as I feel that my lungs are about to explode from lack of oxygen, he pulls back, leaning his forehead against mine.

"It was everything I ever dreamed it could be," he murmurs.

"What was?" I manage to ask, even though I'm still trying to regulate my breathing.

"My first kiss," he admits.

"It was mine too," I reply.

CHAPTER 6



TRISTAN

“I THINK we’ve waited long enough, don’t you?” I question.

“Yes. But um, I probably won’t be that good,” she says, her cheeks reddening at the admission.

“We’ll figure it out together,” I reply, smirking at her. “What? I’m trapped in Hell for the majority of the year and trust me, it’s no picnic, Trix. Besides, my panther wouldn’t have let me do anything since he’s been waiting to find you.”

“Okay, as long as you know what you’re getting yourself into,” she warns, grinning at me as she takes my hand and leads me further into the house.

As kids, we didn’t see each other outside of school or school-sanctioned activities, so I always wondered about the home she lived in. I had heard the rumors that she and her family were witches; tonight’s meeting before we entered the town cemented the fact that she was one. Yet instinctively, I knew she wasn’t into dark magic like some of the residents of Hell. No, her pure light shone brightly around her, which is one of the reasons they wanted her.

But there was no way I would allow them to touch my mate, to corrupt her. She was mine.

Her room is obviously her sanctuary, with a large king-size sleigh bed front and center, with matching nightstands and two dressers on an opposite wall. I can tell she’s nervous; I am as well since all of this is a first for me too.

When we stop next to the bed, I see her swallow and know she's frightened. "It's going to be okay, Trixie. Like I said, we're in this together. Uh, there's one thing I need to tell you, though. It's about finalizing the mate bond."

"Okay, what is it, Tris?"

"I'll have to bite you," I admit. "When... when I'm about to climax."

Her eyes grow wide then she grins. "Well, I guess we better get on with it because suddenly, I feel an urgency that has nothing to do with what we're about to do."

"So do I," I reply.

I help her undress and am stunned into silence when I see the beauty standing before me. Her blonde hair has darkened over the years into a honey color with streaks of white blonde that I know don't come from a beauty shop. She's average height, definitely shorter than I am, and her breasts and hips are well-proportioned. Suddenly, I can see her belly full of the child we'll make, and I instinctively know that it'll be a little girl.

"You're beautiful, Trix," I murmur, my gaze never leaving her as I toss the throw I had wrapped around me to the floor. My cock is jutting up, a drop of precum at the tip, as she looks her fill, her cheeks growing pinker the longer she looks. "See something you like?" I ask, smirking at her as I reach out to pick her up and place her on the bed before joining her.

"Maybe," she teases, reaching out to touch my chest. "You're so warm."

"It's because I'm a shifter. You'll never have to worry again about the power going out and being cold," I reply.

"Between you, Smudge, Pudge, and Bruiser, I'll probably be boiling." She giggles at the thought, and I join in, happy that the years apart haven't lessened the connection we had as kids.

As I smooth her hair back, I ask, "Are you nervous?"

"Surprisingly no, although I'm worried I won't be any good."

At her admission, I throw my head back and laugh before I admit, "Same, Trix. Same."

"Kiss me, Tris, so we can figure out what the fuss is all about."

"Your wish is my command, Trix."

Kissing her feels like coming home and from the sounds she's making, I think she feels the same. As my hands roam over her delectable body, I can feel the precum steadily leaking from my dick. Pulling away from her lips to catch a breath, I lean down and capture a nipple in my mouth.

As I lick, suck, and gently bite, switching back and forth between breasts, her hands are moving across my body. When her hand grabs my dick, I groan and pull away. "Trixie, I'm too close to the proverbial edge for you to be doing that," I warn.

She giggles then surprises the fuck out of me when she spreads her legs. "I want to feel you inside me, Tristan. Please?"

"But you're not ready and I haven't done all I want to do," I retort.

"Later, please?" she whispers, winding her arms across my shoulders.

Instead of pouncing like I want to, my hand moves to the apex of her thighs. When I feel the heat, I glance up to see her smiling at me. As my thumb strokes through her folds, I realize she's more than ready for me and even though I want to taste her, to bring her to an orgasm with my tongue, the sense of impending doom has me notching the head of my dick at her entrance.

"I don't want to hurt you," I whisper as I slowly enter what I'll refer to as paradise for the rest of my days. Wet, warm, tight, her sheath welcomes me as though her body knows we were meant for each other.

"You won't," she replies, leaning up to kiss the underside of my jaw.

As I slowly thrust inside to allow her to get used to me, I come to her hymen and know it's going to hurt. I might not have had sex before, but I've seen and heard enough to know she's going to feel pain.

"Just do it," she encourages. "I know it might hurt but I need you to fill me, Tristan."

CHAPTER 7



TRIXIE

I CAN SEE the indecision on his face; he doesn't want to hurt me. So, I take that decision away from him and thrust my hips upward until he's fully buried inside of me. The tiny bite of pain I feel quickly fades as desire races through me. "I'm good, Tris, please, please move," I plead, writhing beneath him.

He kisses me as he begins to thrust inside of me, sparking shards of pleasure that soon has me chasing my release. Soon, the only sounds in my room are of our sweat-coated skin slapping together as we chase nirvana. When his hand slides between us and he starts lightly stroking my clit, I detonate, screaming out his name.

Several thrusts later, he stills and as I feel his release coating my pulsing channel, he leans in and bites me where my shoulder and neck meet. Another orgasm courses through me as I feel something snap inside of me. Instinctively, I know it's the mate bond and I wonder how that's going to affect me in the future, but shrug it off.

If what I know about shifters is true, then there's a possibility I might be able to shift as well. Regardless, I sense deep inside that together, we're a formidable pair, which could be why the unseen wanted me.

Winding my arms around his shoulders, I bring his head down for a kiss as I ride out the waves of pleasure that are still

coursing through my body.



After a pleasurable shower, I give Tristan a pair of sweats that are way too short. Not only that, but they also highlight his impressive bulge and I immediately decide that when we're alone, he's only going to wear sweats.

"Come on, let's see if we can figure out what's going on outside," he says, taking my hand in his.

As we make our way back to the living room, stopping only to grab some bottles of water, I notice that all three cats are at the windows, their fur puffed out. Not only that, but they're hissing and growling, something I've never seen them do.

"What's going on?" I ask, rushing over to the three of them. "They've never acted like this!"

I watch in awe as he strips the sweats off then shifts to his panther. Instead of the broken, beaten beast I helped earlier, he stands proudly, his dark black fur gleaming in the light. He stalks over to the three kitties and suddenly, they're docile once again, although they never stop looking through the window.

"Is your home warded against the unseen?" he asks.

Shocked, I realize I'm hearing him in my head but then it dawns on me. Since he shifted, he can't communicate normally.

"Yes, Tristan, it's warded except for the path they use to take the potions and charms I leave outside," I reply. "What are you going to do?" I question.

All I want to do is run my hands through his luxurious pelt, so I decide to give in to my desire and soon, he's purring so loudly that Smudge turns to look at him and meow.

“I think she’s jealous of the attention you’re giving me,” he teases. He rumbles something and Smudge jumps from her perch on the back of the couch and runs over to him, rubbing along his legs as he leans down and nuzzles her with his muzzle.

“She’s such an attention whore,” I tease. “Do you... do you want me to open the door?”

“Yes, and I want you alongside me.”

“Are you sure? That doesn’t sound like a smart thing to do.”

“I’m positive. Come, mate, let’s tell them how shit’s going to go from now on.”

CHAPTER 8



TRISTAN

WHEN I'M in my shifter form, I'm practically immortal. Couple that with the fact that I'm now mated to a powerful witch, and I feel as though what's about to happen will not be easy, but it will occur.

"While I want to see you shift because I suspect your pelt is going to be unique, right now, I need you in your human form," I tell her. *"I'll relay what I want you to say, okay?"*

"Whatever we need to do. You know what I'd like? I'd enjoy it if the kids in Pandora were able to trick or treat."

"Then that's one of the things we're going to ask for," I reply.

Before she can open the door, I hear Akuma, our self-professed leader yell, "Bring us the witch!"

Yeah, that's not fucking happening. I've seen what the witches in Hell endure and there's no way one hair on Trixie's head is ever going to be harmed. She does too much good for the people in Pandora, and most of them have no damn clue.

"I'll go out first, Trix," I say. *"Go ahead, open the door, but be ready for anything. Kitties, stay inside,"* I command. I hear meows of agreement and grin, which in my shifter form looks more like a snarl, but whatever it takes, right?

As she opens the door, I see Akuma and several other lower-level demons standing somewhat close together and I realize the area Trixie gives them is small. When I emerge onto the

porch with Trixie standing in the doorway behind me, I see the malicious grin on Akuma's face.

Suddenly, it changes, and he screams so loudly the leaves in the trees move. "What have you done?" he bellows. "You've ruined our plans!"

I quickly communicate to Trixie what I want to say and watch as she steps through to stand beside me, her hand resting on my shoulders.

"He's my fated mate, Hell spawn," she spits out. "Your nefarious plan would never work on me as I will *never* be involved with blood magic. Your time in Pandora is limited."

"We can still accomplish our plans," Akuma says, a sneer twisting his face even more than normal.

"I don't think so," Trixie advises before murmuring a few words while waving her hands in the air. "Times are changing and we're going to be the ones to do it."

I watch in astonishment as Akuma and the other demons are forced to the road in front of the house. Apparently, she revoked their permission to be on her property.

"We've owned this town for *centuries*," Akuma states. "Centuries!"

"Well, guess what? Your ownership is being revised," Trixie advises.

"How so?" Akuma now looks suspiciously between the two of us. "Wait, you've *mated*? No! That isn't possible. You were near death, Tristan."

Deciding enough is enough, I shift into my human form, uncaring that I'm standing there naked in front of Trixie as well as the demons huddled on the road, glaring at the two of us. I can feel the three kitties adding their minimal powers which I guess they've acquired living with Trixie.

"Enough!" I shout. "Akuma, you never had the right to take me. I was a child, an innocent one at that, which means I

should've been left behind. My so-called bondage is over as I've been mated to another innocent."

"No!" Akuma screams, obviously distraught at my words. I don't particularly care how it makes him feel, he should've never taken me. All the years I've lost, when I could've been with Trixie thrum through me, and I sneer at his obvious discontent.

"Looks like you lose, asshole," I retort. "Now, instead of taking Pandora over, you'll need to know the changes that are going to be made."

"That's not possible," Akuma mutters. He's now talking to himself and pacing, but I know deep inside that I'm correct.

I was never meant to be part of the unseen, a resident of Hell. Every year I was forced through the portal into Pandora, I did what I could to prevent too much havoc from occurring.

"It is possible because I found my fated mate," I inform him. "Now, moving forward, in the years to follow, you will not appear until ten at night and will be gone by daybreak. The other thing is, you cannot take innocents when you trick someone who has wronged you or another of the group. Trust me, you don't want to cross us. Together, we're formidable, and we'll use everything we have to prevent you from terrorizing this town any longer. Your days of causing utter chaos and ruining lives is over."

"Then I guess we better do what we have to do tonight," Akuma retorts. "Let's see you protect everyone now."

With that, he and the others vanish, and I know they're about to cause utter chaos within the small, close-knit community.

Not on our watch.

"Come on, mate, we have work to do," I say, turning to go back into the house.

CHAPTER 9



TRIXIE

I WATCH in amazement as Tristan paces, mumbling to himself. Suddenly, he stops and asks, “Are you able to shift?”

“I don’t know,” I admit.

A sensation inside has me looking at him in shock. It feels as though something’s trying to claw its way out of my body. Tristan, who hasn’t taken his eyes off of me suddenly says, “What you’re feeling is your panther wanting to be let out.”

“How do you know that?” I question, still in shock at everything that’s happened since I walked into my house.

“Because you have the same look I got the first time I shifted. Okay, unless you want what you’re wearing to shred into a million pieces, I suggest you strip down to nothing before it happens.”

A deep blush covers my face and upper body as I remove my clothes. It doesn’t matter that he’s seen me naked, touched me intimately, or even bathed me during our shower. Once I’m standing before him as naked as the day I was born, I see his eyes flare with desire, but know we don’t have time for what he wants to do now.

“We don’t have time right now, can I get a raincheck?” I question, grinning at him. I might be embarrassed about being naked in front of him, but I can’t deny the desire storming through me right now.

“Yeah, Trix, I’ll definitely cash that in later,” he huskily replies. I glance down and see the prominent bulge he’s making no attempt to hide, and my grin grows wider.

“So, how do I shift?” I ask when he continues to stare at me. If we don’t do this soon, I’ll be jumping him in the middle of my living room.

“Just relax and let your panther come forward,” he says.

Well, that sounds simple enough, but I’m still unsure if it’s going to work. Taking a deep breath, I can feel my panther just waiting so send a mental ‘pspsps’ to coax her out. Since I’m unsure what to expect, when I see fur start covering my arms then my hands turn into paws, I’m positive my look of shock when I look at Tristan has him wanting to laugh his ass off. Within seconds, I’m no longer standing but on all fours as my three cats run over to investigate.

I open my mouth to say something only a deep rumbling growl comes out, causing Tristan to double up laughing. When I glare at him, he tries to get himself under control but fails miserably, especially once I pounce on him and begin nuzzling wherever I can. One thing I do remember from our childhood is how ticklish he was, and it appears he still is if his actions are any indication.

“Do you think you can work any magic in your panther form?” he finally asks once he’s calmed down. Of course, that might have to do with me and three cats sprawled all over him, who knows?

I shrug which dislodges Pudge, who stomps off, grumbling the whole way. She’s such a little diva, but I adore her silly personality so much.

“*I can try, Tris,*” I tell him through our bond.

“Give it a try, Trixie. Because it would be better if we were in our shifter forms, we can move faster than them. But if you can’t, we’ll figure something out. By the way, you’re absolutely beautiful in your panther form, sweetheart. I’ve heard of a genetic mutation that allows for some panthers to be

nearly white, and it seems you have that trait because your pelt is the same color as your hair, but you've got whitish streaks interspersed throughout."

I nod, preening inside at his comments. I'm not a vain person, but knowing the man I'm with thinks I'm beautiful in both forms is an ego booster for sure. I concentrate on a simple spell and watch as Smudge and Bruiser vanish in front of us. Well, they appear to, anyhow, which has me chuffing out a laugh, panther-style, when Tristan's eyes grow wide.

"I can feel them, but can't see them anymore," he says. "Guess that means you can. Okay, here's what I'm thinking. I'll shift as well, then we'll see about going house to house so you can put a warding spell on them to protect the occupants. You can do that, can't you?"

My chuff this time is one of indignation. Of course, I can do that, I could probably do it from here, but I know he hasn't been allowed to be in his panther form since last year, so I'll gladly run with him.

"Let's go, Tris, before they manage to destroy Pandora," I state.

He quickly shifts and I hear his laughter in my head when he looks at the *closed* front door. Moving closer, I use a teleportation spell and we find ourselves closer to town. I'm pretty sure the houses that are near my home have already been approached, so I'll take care of them after we're done here.

As we move around each house, I utter the appropriate spell while Tristan keeps watch for the unseen. I can feel them getting closer, which is slightly frightening until I remember what my abilities are and how protective Tristan is of me.

"They're almost here, Trix," he warns, rubbing up against me.

"Just a few more minutes and everyone will be safe," I promise.

It's one of the biggest spells I've ever attempted, but since time is of the essence, I did the cluster of homes under one

ward instead of each home individually like I started out doing. We may be small, with less than one thousand residents, but there are a lot of houses.

“There they are! Get them!” Akuma screams.

Leaning into Tristan, I chant the invisibility spell that I used earlier to get him into my house. When the demons yell out obscenities because we disappeared before their eyes, I grin inside, knowing that we’ve thwarted them for the time being.

“Did you get them all?” he asks.

“Yes, I think everyone is covered until morning unless they choose to leave their house or end up in Pandora for one reason or another,” I reply.

“Then let’s go home,” he says.

“Gladly.”

I wait until we’re out of harm’s way before I release us from the spell. Hearing the demons scream in anger, I chuff as I run alongside Tristan.

My mate.

My forever.

CHAPTER 10



TRISTAN

ONCE WE REACH HER HOUSE, we both shift before heading inside. She's blushing again, which has me grinning.

"You're beautiful with or without clothes, Trix," I tell her, pulling her into my arms once the door is closed and locked behind us. "And you're fucking gorgeous in your panther form."

She lowers her head in embarrassment which simply won't do for me. Using one hand, I raise her chin so she's forced to look at me and continue. "I mean it, Trixie. Believe it or not, even before I knew you were my fated mate, I never forgot about you. The way we always got along, we never argued or fussed about anything. I think that says good things about us, don't you?"

"Yeah, it does," she slowly admits. "I'm just... well, we were a household of women, Tris, so I'm not used to seeing a naked man."

My panther growls before I can stop him, causing her eyes to widen in shock. "The only naked man you'll be seeing is me. Well, and any boys we might be fortunate enough to have, of course."

"You want babies with me?" she asks.

Leaning in, I kiss her pouty lips. "Absolutely," I whisper. "As many as you'll give me, sweetheart."

“This is unheard of in my family,” she murmurs. “No one ever stays.”

“Because they weren’t fated mates, Trix. We’re connected for as long as we draw breath in our bodies. Now, I’m kind of hungry, but I think we should clean up so we’re ready for whatever they want to try next.”

She doesn’t answer; instead, she takes my hand and leads me back into her bedroom then the en suite.

“I thought a bath might be better?” she questions while looking at me.

Grinning, I nod. “Means you can ride me,” I state, laughing out loud at the expression her face.

“Tristan!”

“What? We’re mates. We can do anything we want and that mark on your neck says it’s okay.”

She shakes her head, letting out a small laugh as she starts the water in the huge soaker tub. Once she’s satisfied with the temperature, she pushes the plug in so the tub will fill, then adds some bath salts.

“They’re not girly girl scented,” she teases. “But with it being my first-ever shift, I’m a little sore.”

Instead of replying, I open cabinet doors until I find two fluffy towels since the ones we used earlier after our shower are still damp. Setting them on the double vanity, I slowly approach her until we’re practically nose to nose.

“I wouldn’t care if they were, Trix,” I murmur against her lips. When she starts to reply, I capture her mouth with mine, pouring all my feelings into the kiss until she’s clutching my biceps as she leans into me. When I pull back I say, “I love you, Trixie. I loved you when we were kids, and it was definitely an innocent kind of thing, but now, as an adult, my love has matured into something I always dreamed about but didn’t think I’d ever get.”

“I... I love you too, Tristan. I’ve missed you since you left, and tonight is more than I ever expected. Is it... is it because of the mate bond we share?”

I shrug because I honestly don’t know. Nor do I particularly care. “I have no clue, sweetheart. I think, if I hadn’t been taken, we’d have started dating in high school or whenever your mother allowed it, and when my panther let me know you were my mate, it would’ve happened a long time ago.”

“Guess we’ve got a lot to make up for then,” she muses, rubbing her breasts against my chest. “I can’t tell you how good that feels,” she says as we get into the tub.

She’s nestled against my chest, my hard dick between us as she sighs in contentment. “Feel good, Trix?” I ask, grabbing the washcloth that’s sitting on the tub ledge and getting it wet.

“Gods, yes,” she replies.

“Lean up a little bit and I’ll wash your back,” I tell her, pouring some of her body wash on the cloth. She moans as I carefully swipe the washcloth down her back, which is killing my self-control. “What about your hair?” I murmur, my voice husky with need. She had pulled it up into one of those bun things so it didn’t get wet, but I want to have my hand in her tresses.

“We washed it earlier, remember?” she teases, looking back at me.

“Oh, that’s right,” I reply, smirking at her as she turns so she’s straddling my legs. “Didn’t get a chance to rinse you off, sweetheart,” I warn as she leans in to kiss me.

“We’ll get to that,” she promises right before she kisses me.

Long moments pass as our mouths and tongues mimic what we’re about to do. By the time she pulls back, I’m breathless and based on how she’s breathing, she is as well.

“Gotta get the front too,” I inform her. Her beautiful eyes watch my every move as I slowly, lovingly wash her front.

Her nipples are erect and turgid, begging for me to suck them, only they're covered in bubbles. When she leans back, I can't help the groan at seeing her pretty pink pussy peeking out from beneath the water. Even though we're in the tub, I can tell she's slick with need. Once again, I won't get to taste her, but right now, my dick doesn't care. I watch as she takes the faucet, which is one that is handheld, turns on the water, then quickly rinses herself off.

"There, all done," she announces after turning off the water and returning the faucet. "Now, where were we?" she asks.

"Right here," I reply, cupping her breasts together so her nipples nearly touch. As she moans out in pleasure, I continue my assault on her nipples. Licking, biting, sucking as I plump them and stroke the nipple not currently in my mouth until they're both red and puffy.

Gripping her hips, I raise her above me then moan as she slowly slides down my throbbing dick. "Fuck, that feels so damn good."

"Yeah," she whispers before she raises herself once again.

It takes a few seconds but soon, she's got a rhythm going which has water sloshing over the side of the tub. Not that either one of us cares since I'm using my hands to heighten her pleasure, lightly pinching her nipples before stroking along her back to grip her heart-shaped ass in my hands. When I feel the unmistakable tightening in my back, I reach around and find her clit, which is distended and swollen.

It only takes a few strokes before she's keening out my name, slamming herself down onto my dick as though her life depends on it. "Trixie!" I bellow as I thrust upward then still, my cum coating her insides once again.

As she slumps in my arms, completely sated, I whisper, "Love you, mate."

"Love you too."

CHAPTER II



TRIXIE

“WHAT ARE you in the mood for food-wise?” I ask once we’ve cleaned up the bathroom and gotten dressed.

“Something quick. I think I want to sit out on the porch so we can observe what Akuma is up to,” he says.

“We can do quick. How about an omelet?”

“As long as you don’t put mushrooms in it, that’s fine,” he replies.

I can’t help my expression which has him laughing as we enter the kitchen. Three meows startle me until I realize it’s past time for them to eat. As I walk over to where I keep their wet food, all three wind themselves between my legs, with Smudge vocally telling me how upset she is that they haven’t eaten yet.

“Listen, babies, y’all have dry food available all day,” I say as I grab two cans of wet food and quickly get them opened up and on the plate that Tristan hands me from the drying rack. “Here, now calm your little tushies, Mama is kind of busy tonight.”

Tristan bursts out laughing at me, causing me to roll my eyes. Instead of answering, I gather what I need from the fridge to put together two omelets and once I have them going, I get the bread out of the breadbox and set it up in the toaster.

“As far as mushrooms go, I may have to use them in certain potions and salves, but I’ll never willingly ingest the disgusting things,” I say as I pour both of us a glass of orange juice. “Do you want coffee as well? I don’t drink it, but I have one of those machines where you can brew an individual cup.”

“Juice is fine, Trix. I need to tell you something, though.”

“What’s that?” I ask, flipping the omelet pan so the other side can cook. Best invention ever made as far as I’m concerned because when I had to use a spatula, I always ended up with a mess.

“You’re carrying our baby,” he replies, looking at me.

Stopping in my tracks, I examine how I’m feeling inside. I use some of my magic and can see a tiny speck nestled in my womb, my panther curled protectively around it. “How is that possible?” I whisper, almost to myself.

“Well, you see, when a man and a woman have sex, there’s a possibility...” he starts.

“I don’t mean that, I know how babies are made, Tris,” I retort, my hands now on my hips as he smirks at me. “I want to know how it’s possible that *you* know, especially since it seems to have happened tonight!”

“Because your scent has another layer of sage and rosemary, sweetheart. That’s the baby’s scent, and from what I can tell, she’s going to be very powerful.”

“That doesn’t surprise me, seeing as she’s half-witch and half-shifter,” I reply, plating our food.

“It means we’ll need to be very careful if Akuma returns. He’s a power-hungry asshole, and if he can scent her, he’ll do whatever he can to take you from me.”

“You won’t let that happen,” I confidently tell him.



It doesn't take long to eat and soon, we're sitting on the comfortable rockers on my front porch. I've sent out feelers to make sure my protection spells are holding up and so far, so good.

Meanwhile, Tristan has shifted once again to prowl around the perimeter of our home. Surprisingly, and I guess it's from the mate bond, I know exactly where he's at, even when he's not in sight.

"Mama, I sure wish you were here right now," I whisper to the wind. "He came back and he's mine."

"I don't have to be there to know, pumpkin. Your grandmother saw it in the stars. We just couldn't tell you because it all has to play out the way it was written," Mama replies from somewhere beyond the veil.

She doesn't do it often, but I'm not shocked that she's 'around' tonight since it's Halloween. The time of year when the veil between the living and the dead is almost non-existent, which is why so many people believe in ghosts.

"We have a baby coming, too," I tell her since Tristan isn't back yet.

"Be safe, my sweet girl. Your grandma and I will do what we can from behind the veil, but tonight's not over yet. Stay ready and on guard," she warns.

"Okay, Mama, we will."

When Tristan returns, I tell him what my mother communicated, which seems to agitate him. "This is not good, Trixie," he states. "I know you've expended a tremendous amount of energy tonight protecting the town like you did. What if... what if you run out when you need it the most?"

I'm already shaking my head in denial. "That won't happen, Tris. There's no limit on my magic. It's infinite. The only thing that would derail any of my spells is if I used my spells for evil, which isn't going to happen. Even when I removed the unseen from my property, I didn't hurt them. I simply revoked permission."

He sinks into the chair beside me, once again dressed in sweats. Taking his hand in mine, I kiss his palm while I chant another spell over him. It's one of strength, power, and protection, because I can feel the danger looming once again.

CHAPTER 12



TRISTAN

I FEEL power surge through me from the spell she just placed over me and know she's doing whatever she can to give us the best shot at surviving tonight. Sinking further into the comfortable rocker, I lace our fingers together and squeeze.

When she looks at me, I say, "Thank you, mate. Nowhere in my dreams did I ever anticipate someone like you, but I have to thank the gods that they knew what I needed most."

"And what's that?" she asks.

"A beautiful woman with untold powers to walk alongside me in this journey we call life," I reply, leaning over to kiss her.

"Oh, isn't that sweet," Akuma mocks from the road. He tries to come closer, and sparks fly at his feet. "Dammit, we need the witch!" he roars.

"No, you don't because your reign of terror is at an end, Akuma," I reply. "No more will you keep a town bound in fear on a night that's supposed to be fun for children. You can have your fun later in the night, as long as you remember the new rules."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he mocks. "Can't show up before ten at night, gotta be gone at daybreak. No more *innocents*," he spits out. "How will we ever get our quota?"

"Don't really give a fuck, to be honest. In fact, did Lucifer know you took me all those years ago?"

The fear that crosses his face almost has me laughing. From the look of things, it seems as though Lucifer wasn't aware I was in his domain. Memories assail me of times when I was hidden in another area, or gagged so I wouldn't speak. Anger flares when I realize he and his minions were keeping me from being discovered by Lucifer.

"I wonder if I can invite him here?" Trixie muses, invoking a sharp pain of fear.

"No, I don't think that'll be necessary," a deep, dark voice intones.

Without being told, I know who has appeared in front of us based on Akuma's reaction as he stammers out, "L-l-lucifer, my liege, I didn't expect to see you out and about."

"I'm always around, Akuma, and it's presumptuous of you to think you'd be aware of my schedule as far as my comings and goings," Lucifer retorts.

Right now, I'm fascinated; I know as kids the pictures we're shown of him, but before me is a well-dressed man. Dark, crisp blue jeans, black long-sleeve button-up shirt, black boots. His hair is neatly combed, although it's definitely longer than society deems appropriate for a male. At first glance, no one would know he was otherworldly. Until they looked into his eyes, that is; black pools with the fire of Hell burning inside them. Trixie squeezing my hand has me focusing back into the situation at hand.

"My apologies, my liege," Akuma replies, now on his knees in the road, as are the rest of the minions.

"Tell me, did you take an innocent twenty-two years ago?" Lucifer asks.

"Y-y-yes, but... but it was because we were taking his parents. He would've been by himself," Akuma says.

"And you thought to hide him under my nose all this time?" At Akuma's shocked look, Lucifer continues. "*Nothing* goes on in my domain without me knowing about it. I knew the

second an innocent crossed into our plane, and have been working on fixing your fuck-up for years now.”

He turns and walks up to the porch, so I suspect whatever spells Trix has uttered are no use against his power until he says, “Thank you for lowering them for me, child.”

“You’re welcome, Uncle Luci,” Trixie replies.

Uncle Luci? What on earth?

Lucifer sighs then says, “You know I hate it when you call me that, now your young man has a ton of questions that need to be answered.”

Trixie’s giggle has me shaking my head. “Trix?”

“Tristan, meet my uncle, Lucifer. Uncle Luci, meet my mate, Tristan,” she singsongs.

Lucifer sighs once again before holding out his hand. Since tonight’s been one for the record books, I don’t think twice before shaking his hand, even when an unknown power is forced into me. With wide eyes, I look at him only to see him barely shake his head. Alrighty then, he wants me to keep quiet for the time being.

“I knew twenty-two years ago that you’d been taken in error,” Lucifer says, turning to glare at Akuma. “Unfortunately, that event set off others that had to play out before I could get you back where you belong. My niece is a good choice, she’s powerful enough in her own right to keep you and your future children safe, but what I just gave you will help as well.”

“And what was that?” I ask.

“A little bit of hellfire that you can use when you’re in your animal form,” he replies. “It’ll incinerate them on the spot, so use it wisely.”

“Uncle Luci, I didn’t mean the new rules for the unseen,” Trixie whispers.

“Yes, you did, but I happen to agree with them,” he says.

“You do?” she asks.

“Yes, child, I do. I think children should have fun on this night. All over the world, they’re out trick or treating, not hidden behind the walls of their houses. I think we’ll get the truly evil ones coming later, but that’s just me,” he states, shrugging.

“Can I ask a question?” I inquire.

“You want to know how your mate is related to me,” Lucifer says.

“Well, yeah, I mean, she’s everything that’s good, and you rule over Hell,” I sputter.

“All who are witches are related to me because of their powers. However, some branches of the family are imbued with good while others aren’t. So, you won’t have to worry after your long lives that you’ll be back with me. No, your destination is elsewhere,” he tells me.

“Huh. Well, I have no clue what to say in response,” I reply. “I’m happy that Trixie’s mine, I never forgot about her.”

Lucifer merely smirks at me before he teleports himself back to the road and in front of Akuma. While I don’t hear what he whispers over them, the hairs on my arm are raised and my panther wants me to shift so we can protect Trixie. It’s only her hand on my arm that stays me as we watch the demons disintegrate before our eyes.

“Holy crow,” Trixie murmurs.

Holy crow is right because between one blink and the next, Lucifer as well as the residue of the demons are gone. Vanished.

CHAPTER 13



TRIXIE

I KNOW AS SOON AS Tristan turns us toward the front door that I'm about to be hit with a barrage of questions. Hopefully, he'll understand that I can't control who my relatives are any more than he can. I don't say anything as I watch him close and lock the door, before he walks so he's in front of me.

"Nothing to say, Trix?" he asks.

"What do you want me to say? Just because I'm a witch doesn't mean I have any say so over who my relatives are, Tris. In fact, outside of tonight, I think the last time I saw him was at Mama's and Grandma's funeral. He was in the back and never approached me, but I knew he was there."

"How many hours are left until dawn?" he questions, pacing around the living room.

"Three or so," I reply after looking at my clock then figuring out when sunrise begins. "Do you think there'll be any other issues?"

"No, I think your *uncle* took care of the unseen for tonight."

"He was really upset," I say, moving to the kitchen to make some tea.

"How were you able to figure that out?" he asks.

"Because he gave you some hellfire. Tris, he seldom gifts anyone with that because it's so powerful. You have to be

careful if you use it,” I warn, turning the stove on after filling my favorite kettle.

“Hopefully, I never have to use it, Trix. It sounds like it’s something to use as a last resort.”

“Pretty much. Do you want tea as well or something stronger?” I question.

“Definitely something stronger,” he teases. “But I’ll grab it, sweetheart. We’ve got a few more hours to get through tonight.”

My shoulders drop because I’m tired, today’s been rather crazy all the way around the block, and all I want to do is curl up with my mate and my kitties for a nice, long snooze.



“Rest, Trix,” he says, covering me up with another throw from the couch. “I’m just going to sit outside and keep an eye on things.”

“Are you sure? I just want a little nap,” I reply.

“Positive. It’s my job to take care of and protect you anyhow,” he teases.

“Whatever,” I mutter as my three kitties crawl into my lap, purring. “Okay, babies, let’s take a tiny snooze. You’ll wake me up if there’s an issue, right, Tris?”

“Absolutely,” he replies, leaning in and kissing my forehead.



I wake up hearing the growls of my cats as they pace in front of the window. But it's the growl of my mate that has me jumping to my feet and opening the front door to see utter chaos.

"What in the world?" I murmur.

"Apparently, these are the ones left that weren't with Akuma," Tris says. *"They're angry because they were told to capture the witch, aka you, and since we're mated, that's not going to happen now."*

"And because of that they're going to destroy everything they can?"

Small fires dance along the road; it's actually kind of wild to look at because all along the borders where I have the protection wards set in place, the flames dance but don't come closer. However, the field across from my home is on fire, as is the house that sits in the center.

"Yeah, sweetheart, that's their goal since they've been thwarted," he replies.

"Well, that simply isn't going to happen," I retort.

Raising my hands, I begin chanting, growing louder in order to ensure the rain I'm calling down arrives and targets specific spots. When the fires start going out, causing steamy fog to billow up, I glance at Tristan to see he's steadily pacing around the front of our home.

"Stay up there, sweetheart. I don't trust them at all," he says.

"You shouldn't," Uncle Luci intones, standing on the porch next to me. "They're rogue demons and yes, before you ask, we have them in Hell. They've managed to get close to the dark mages and witches somehow. This is a clusterfuck, Trixie. Now do you understand the reasoning behind giving your mate some hellfire?"

"Tristan, you may need to use it," I warn. "Uncle Luci, tell me what I need to do. I won't let them hurt this town."

“Reinforce your protection wards while Tristan patrols. I’ll do what I’m able to, child,” he replies, stepping down from my porch.

“Be careful, Tris,” I whisper.

“I’ve got something worth coming home for, Trixie. You just stay there and do what you can. We’ve got this,” he replies.

I can’t help the giggle that escapes hearing him say that he and my uncle, the ruler of Hell, ‘got this’ because from where I’m standing, it looks as though Armageddon has begun.



I’m exhausted as the sun begins to crest overhead, but despite the rogue demons’ best efforts, the town of Pandora is still standing. As Tristan prowls toward me, still in his shifter form, a slight smile crosses my lips. He’s got ashes covering his glorious pelt, and my uncle doesn’t look much better.

“What happened?” I ask.

“Your mate had a few false starts using the hellfire,” my uncle retorts, smirking when Tristan growls at him.

“Are you... do you want to come in and get cleaned up?” I inquire.

“No, child. There’s too much good inside your home and tonight’s been challenging enough. As you told Akuma earlier, changes will be made moving forward with regard to when they can come through the portal. I can’t have people thinking we take innocents, it would ruin my reputation,” he replies. “You might want to start thinking of a name for your daughter.”

“What... how...,” I stammer.

“I have my ways,” he says before snapping his fingers and disappearing.

“Bye, Uncle Luci. Thank you for your help,” I call out.

When a small bush on the outside of my protection ward bursts into flame, I can’t stop laughing. He heard me, and that’s all that matters.

“Come on, Tris, let’s get you cleaned up.”

CHAPTER 14



TRISTAN

ONCE INSIDE, I shift which causes a practical avalanche of ashy soot to drop to the floor. “Sorry, Trix,” I mumble, exhaustion evident in my tone.

“Not an issue,” she replies, waving her hands while her lips move.

I can’t help the chuckle that bursts through when I see the floor is once again spotless. “You’re better than one of those moving floor thingies,” I tell her as we head toward the bathroom.

“You mean those robots? Yeah, I’ll never have one of them as long as I can still utter an incantation,” she teases. “Once that happens, well, I guess it’s a possibility.”

I step into the shower stall that she turned on and groan out loud when the hot water hits my aching muscles.

“Why are you so sore, Tris?”

“Because your uncle thought I’d be best served by being up in the trees as we moved through town rounding up the rogues. Why, I have no clue, because they might have been demons, but they were dumber than rocks.”

“So, you had to climb?” she questions, running a washcloth across his broad back.

“Over and over again,” I grumble. “It’s been years since I was able to climb a tree, Trixie, *years*. All this time, on the one day

I was allowed to shift, I spent it on the ground, not zipping across trees.”

“What about the hellfire?” she asks. “What happened with that?”

I sigh, dropping my head in embarrassment. I can still hear Lucifer’s laughter ringing in my head. “Well, what happened was this, he wanted me to start some bushes on fire because it would draw the rogue demons out. Only... I ended up starting a backyard shed on fire which he had to put out. All while the homeowners were staring through the windows, horrified. Yeah, I need to practice with it some more,” I mumble.

“He wouldn’t have let anything happen to you. I’m one of his favorites,” she says, moving to stand in front of me.

Once again, I let her wash me, too tired to lift my arms. “How do you know that?”

“Because he’s told me any time I’ve seen him. Secretly, I think it’s because our home is so close to a portal so he wanted to ensure my family before me would keep a watch over the town on Halloween. We’ve done what we could, of course, but obviously, the year they took you my mother and grandmother weren’t successful.”

I reach out to pull her into my arms, doing what I can to ignore the deep ache, because she needs to understand it wasn’t her fault. “Trixie, sweetheart, it wasn’t your fault. It was my so-called family’s for their actions. I was unfortunately dragged along for their ride.”

“I love you, Tris, and if it’s in my power, I’m going to protect you and the family we build,” she says before kissing me.

“I love you too, Trix, but it’s my responsibility to take care of you and our family,” I say once we’ve separated from our kiss.

“We’ll have to agree to disagree then. Are you finished?” she asks, stepping out of the shower stall.

I slowly follow her, each step feeling as though my muscles are being pinched. The ache and pain are enough that I

seriously want to cry. Instead, I suck it back and grab the towel she's holding out to me. "Thanks, sweetheart," I say while slowly drying off.

"Go lay on the bed on your stomach," she instructs. At my raised brow, she giggles. "Uh, not for what you're thinking, Tris. Going to grab some salves that'll help with the pain you're feeling in your muscles."

As I flop onto the bed, I murmur, "I think you're a saint."

Her tinkling laugh surrounds me as she climbs onto the bed and opens up a jar of salve. I'm unsure what she's got in it, but I drift off to sleep while her hands are massaging the salve deep into my sore muscles.



Sometime later that morning, the enticing smell of cooked bacon wakes me up. When I realize I'm starving thanks to all the energy I expended the night before, I get out of bed and walk into the bathroom to take care of my morning bladder.

As I slip into the sweats it dawns on me, I'll need to get more clothes. There's no fucking way I can meander around in only sweatpants. Snickering, I follow my nose to the kitchen where I find my mate with her arms buried in a huge bowl, flour dusting her cheek.

"What are you doing?" I ask as I pour myself some juice then take the plate that's sitting on the top of the stove over to the table.

"Starting on new charms and potions, of course," she says. "How did you sleep?"

I stop and think about what she just asked and shrug. "Actually, it's the best night of sleep I've had in my life. Well,

maybe ‘night’ isn’t accurate since I’ve only been sleeping for a few hours, but it was definitely restful.”

“Good, good, and actually, you’ve been sleeping for a straight twenty-four hours, Tris,” she replies.

“What? How is that possible?”

She shrugs before she says, “I honestly don’t know. Maybe because you returned from Hell or perhaps it’s everything you and Uncle Luci did that night. I was getting worried, which is why I decided to start all of this.”

I sit back in my chair and realize that *all* of the soreness is gone, but I’m starving. “Well, guess that explains why I’m so damn hungry.”

“Maybe so, Tris. There’s more where that came from, just let me know and I’ll get it for you.”

“So, your uncle said we needed to start thinking up little girl names,” I say.

“The first-born is always a girl since they’ll take on the bulk of the family powers. But any other children we might have will also get their share because trust me, there’s plenty enough to go around. The only thing I don’t know is how it’ll work with them being half-shifter.”

“Sounds like we’re in for some fun in our future, huh?” I ask.

“Yeah, but as long as we’re together, it’s going to be just fine,” she says, flopping into my arms and kissing me.

“I agree, Trix,” I whisper against her lips. “Here’s to our future.”

EPILOGUE



TRIXIE,

FIVE YEARS IN THE FUTURE

“COME ON, you two, it shouldn’t take this long to get ready,” I call out. “You’re going to miss all the fun,” I coax.

“Mama, Daddy says the fun starts when we get there and not one minute before,” my sassy little girl replies.

Crouching, I give her the once-over and smile. “You look beautiful, Anastasia,” I say. “And you’re sure your daddy was okay being the beast?”

“Yes! I’m Belle and Daddy is the Beast,” she shrieks excitedly.

When Tristan walks through into the living room, I suck in a deep breath. He’s dressed in a replica of what the live-action Beast wore, and seeing him looking so delicious has me wishing the night’s festivities were already over. Because he’s a panther, we had to add a lion’s mane, along with strategic makeup so the humans at the party wouldn’t realize he had partially shifted so he could give his daughter her deepest desire.

“You look fantastic,” I whisper, reaching up to hug him. “One of these days, maybe she’ll want us both to be in our shifter form or something,” I muse. Granted, I’m decked out in a ‘witch’ costume as the one who turned the prince into a beast, but it’s not the same.

He chuffs out a laugh and I hear, *“I’ll see what I can start reading to her, so she considers doing that.”*

“She has you wrapped,” I tell him, gathering my large bag which I have stuffed with potions and charms to give out at the block party, before we start trick-or-treating.

“You both have me wrapped,” he retorts.

“Perhaps. Now, where is Anastasia?” I call out, since she ran out of the room before Tristan came in. “We can’t go without our Belle, right, Daddy?”

He roars and I hear her giggles as she runs back into the living room, Smudge, Pudge, and Bruiser right behind her. I’m guessing they’re immortal too, because they’re far older than most cats live, yet they still act like they’re kittens. I won’t complain; they’ve been faithful companions for so long I wouldn’t know what to do without them by my side.

“Come along now,” I say, opening the front door.

There’s a huge cauldron now in place full of a variety of candies in case we don’t get back before kids start trick or treating. I hope we do; every year since the last one the unseen were allowed to come at dark has been an absolute joy. Some of the little ones are dressed in scary costumes, while others are not. When Anastasia was too little to go, the three of us would dress up while Tristan and I gave out candy. He couldn’t believe we never ran out until I reminded him of my abilities.

“We have to hurry, Mama. I know we have to eat food before we can go get candy, but I like seeing everybody else’s costumes,” Anastasia says as she skips between me and Tris.

“Don’t worry, lovebug, I think it’s more like a buffet than an actual block party. It’s a way for all of us grown-ups to make sure you kids eat real food, not just sugary candy.”

She giggles as Tristan looks at me over her head. When he glances down at my middle, I smile and wink.

“Something to tell me, mate?” he asks.

“Maybe?” I tease.

Hopefully I’ve done what I can to mask my scent but based on his tone, he already knows what I want to wait to tell him until later. As if he realized it himself, he nods and continues heading toward where one of our neighbors set up a taco bar of sorts. I know I said it was a block party, but at the same time, it’s not. When the residents of Pandora realized after the first two years that things had changed, it wasn’t long before the neighborhoods opted to do something like what we did so that the children who were living here could hit every available house.

“Let’s get your plate fixed,” I say to Anastasia. “The sooner the three of us eat, the sooner you can trick or treat, okay?”

“Okay, Mama. Mama? Uncle Luci says it’s a boy this time. What does that mean?”

I roll my eyes at my uncle’s interference. He comes topside far too often to see Anastasia, something I need to discuss with him the next time I actually *see* him.

“It means your uncle is sticking his nose in where it doesn’t belong. Again,” I retort, knowing he’s around and listening. I confirm that fact when the bush across the street bursts into flames before quickly going out. Shaking my head, I continue. “As soon as I talk to your daddy, we’ll tell you, okay?”

“Okay, Mama. I need to go see Penny and Maggie, Mama. They want to walk with us as we trick or treat. Is that okay?”

Since Penny and Maggie’s parents just had surgery, I have no problem bringing them with us. “That’s fine, sweetheart. I’ll make sure their parents know, okay?”

“Awesome! Penny, Maggie, guess what? You’re both coming with us!” Anastasia screams as she runs toward her friends, her plate nearly toppling over in her haste.



“I think she had fun,” I whisper as we look down at our sleeping daughter. Somehow, we made it to all the houses participating, although by the end, the Beast had to carry Belle because she was worn out, and ended up falling asleep in his arms as I gave out candy at our home once I took her friends home.

“Each year gets better around here,” he replies, pulling me into his arms while walking me backward out of the room.

“It really does,” I reply. “Are you tired? Do you want to go to bed?”

“I want to know what you’ve been unsuccessfully hiding from me, Trix,” he states.

I’m a bit out of my element right now, especially since no one in my family line has ever had more than one child. Of course, none of them had a mate or husband either for that matter, so I’m in uncharted waters right now.

Taking his hand, I lead him to our room and laugh when I see my three cats already asleep on their cat tree. Once the door is closed, I slip into bed and wait for him to get in on the other side before I pounce.

Leaning over, my hair surrounding us in a cocoon, I whisper against his lips, “We’re going to have another baby, and apparently, this time it’s going to be a boy.”

TRISTAN

I knew she was expecting again; this time, her scent changed to a sandalwood and bergamot-laced jasmine. However, hearing her say it, has me momentarily speechless. “You’re sure?” I finally ask, my hands roaming her body to see if I can detect any outward changes yet.

“Positive, my love. Don’t act like you didn’t already know,” she teases. “Remember the day you came in and asked why I was working with sandalwood? I’ve never worked with sandalwood and hearing you say that made me take a test.”

“Five years ago, when I came through the portal, I had no fucking clue my whole life was about to change so irrevocably,” I state. “Not only did our mate bond break the bondage I was under with the unseen, but because Akuma overstepped when it came to me, your uncle enforced the changes you made. Since then, the town of Pandora has managed to thrive, even though we haven’t really added any residents.”

“Children. We’ve got more children now, Tris, and I don’t think it’s any coincidence that we do. I think my uncle and maybe even my mother and grandmother did something to keep many from being born knowing the town was bound the way it was.”

“Yes, kids. And now we’re adding another one. I can’t wait, sweetheart,” I tell her as I snuggle against her. Some of my favorite memories are of her pregnancy hormones and how they had her horny all the time. “Wait... how are we going to handle when you’re jonesing for my dick?” I ask, causing her to smack me as she starts giggling.

“We’re going to put our sweet, precocious, little girl in Pre-K,” she says. “That way, she gets the socialization she needs, while you’re able to put out the fire your child creates in me.”

“Whatever it takes, I’m yours. Now and forever, Trixie.”

“Same, Tristan. I thank the gods you are my fated mate.”

“As do I. Now, should we sleep or what?” I ask. “You know even though she was zonked out, she’ll be up before the sun rises.”

“As much as I want to have my way with you, I’m tired. So, raincheck?”

“Yeah, sweetheart. Love you,” I whisper as I kiss her temple. She’s already slipped into sleep, leaving me alone with my

thoughts.

“I don’t know how you managed it, but thank you,” I murmur to the gods. “She’s everything I always wanted and needed, but didn’t expect would happen because of my circumstances. Now, I have her, a beautiful little girl, and a son on the way.”

Drifting off to sleep, I hear her uncle’s voice loud and clear when he says, “You’re welcome.”

The end...if you enjoy paranormal reads, turn the page to read the prologue of “The Enforcer”!

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The Enforcer - Zephyr Hills Phantoms MC - A Mayhem Maker Novel

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Published by: Darlene Tallman

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The Enforcer is a shifter MC; there may be situations, language, and adult content that may make you uncomfortable. It is intended for mature audiences and as such, recommended for ages 18+ for the above-captioned reasons.

BLURB

Tressa Powers hasn't had an easy life. She's learned to keep to herself. Growing up, books were her escape. When she finally purchased an e-reader, she found a whole new world— indie authors. Tressa gets the chance to attend a book signing where many of her favorite authors will be. Real-life bikers will also be in attendance. She decides to splurge on a VIP ticket to the event instead of a general admission one since it will come with a swag bag.

While traveling to the hotel she'll be staying at, she gets a flat tire. A tall, tattooed biker stops to help her change the tire. Even though she doesn't get a good look at the man, she feels a sense of longing. Something she's never experienced before. Pushing the sensation aside, she vows to enjoy her once-in-lifetime dream. Tressa doesn't expect to see him again or be in a position so many of her favorite heroines find themselves in.

Enroute to the clubhouse, Chaos spots a vehicle on the side of the road. From what he can see, it's a female trying to change the tire. His mother's teachings return to him causing him to stop and offer her help. Because of the gear he wears while riding, Chaos isn't able to catch her scent. Once he's finished helping her, he continues on his way. At the clubhouse, he's told the club was invited to a book signing so the attendees can get a taste of what a real biker looks like. Zephyr Hills Phantoms MC are shifters; something that's a well-kept secret among the humans. Regardless, he's one of the members who is attending. While walking through the venue, he catches a whiff of something positively delicious. Following the scent of lilac, he comes across the woman he helped earlier. His wolf clearly says, "Mate."

When he watches a horrible club, the Bastions MC, corral his mate into a nondescript van, everyone in the vicinity will find out how he got his road name because he goes berserk.

****Suitable for ages 18+ due to adult themes, language, and situations****

PROLOGUE

“TRESSA, you’re always in the way,” my stepmother yelled.

“I’m sorry, Nancy,” I replied as I hurried to grab my homework and stuff it in my backpack.

“Once you’ve cleaned up your mess, get the table set. Your father is bringing home guests tonight, so you’ll eat in your room.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said. Putting my backpack in my room, I came back out, washed my hands, then took the plates she had on the counter and carefully set the table. The last time I did it wrong, she slapped my hands with a wooden spoon, so I’m trying my best to make sure everything is just right. She does that a lot, though, especially when my daddy isn’t around. He never sees the bruises or marks she leaves behind, and I’m afraid to tell him what happens when he’s away from home because I don’t want him to be sad. As I place the silverware on the cloth napkins she laid out for me, I wonder again why I can’t live with my aunt. She’s my mother’s sister and I know she loves me, unlike the woman my dad married less than a year after my mom died.

After the table is set, complete with glasses for water and candles in the middle, I head to the kitchen and grab the bowl of macaroni and cheese sitting on the counter for me, then go to my room, grateful that I went to the library today and got two new books. With my homework done, at least I’ll have something to do before it’s time to go to bed. Not that anyone will check on me tonight since they’re having guests. It’ll be

up to me to take a bath and make sure I have everything laid out for school tomorrow. But that's nothing unusual for me these days. I'm just happy I can escape, even if only for a little while, in the land of make believe.



“Tressa, now that you’re eighteen, it’s time you got out on your own,” Nancy stated, standing over me with her hands on her hips. “You’ve got a job so it shouldn’t be difficult to find your own place.”

I looked at her in horror. “Where am I going to find someplace to live with what I make?” I worked at the local bookstore, and while the money was good enough to ensure I could buy the clothes and things I needed, there was no way I’d be able to afford to live on my own. I also wondered if my father agreed with her, although I suspected he didn’t have a clue. It was all likely her idea, and she would present it to him as though *I* decided to move out. Of course, living under her roof had been hell, so even though this was going to be difficult for me, I’d figure it out so I could finally get peace in my life.

“I’m sure you’ll come up with something,” she replied, her lip curled in disdain. “You’ve been a drain on the house long enough, don’t you think?”

I don’t bother answering her. Instead, I stand and head to my room to see if I can find someplace else to live. Surely someone will have a room to rent, right?



“Tressa, I think you should go,” my friend and roommate, Nicole, said. “You’ve been designing covers for a lot of the authors who will be there, plus you proofread as well. Why not go and meet them? This signing is going to be huge, and with it being called MMM, you know you’ll be able to get all the pretties we both like to read!”

“I don’t know, Nini. I mean, you know how shy I am.”

“Which is exactly why you should do it!” she exclaimed. “When will you get another chance to do something like this?”

I really lucked out when I answered Nicole’s ad for a female roommate. Despite my shyness, we quickly became friends, and it was her encouragement that had me taking a graphic design course at the local college. Shortly after, I found the indie community, and not too long ago, I began designing covers for some of the authors I had read.

Ah, the worlds I’ve lived in through my books. Strong, handsome, capable men who loved and cherished their women. While I loved everything I read, my favorites were the motorcycle club romances. Seeing that so many of my favorite authors were going to be at MMM in Lake Conroe, Texas, I decided to live a little and buy myself a ticket.

“Do you want to come with me?” I asked.

“Girl, you know I’d love to, but I can’t get the time off of work. But I can get you set up in a hotel nearby using my friends and family discount to help you save some money.”

CHARACTER LIST

Fox - President

Sly - VP

Chaos - Enforcer

Stealth - SAA

Popeye - Secretary/IT

Ledger - Treasurer

Ogre - Road Captain

Lobo - Patch

Bolt - Patch

Attila - Patch

Prospect

Prospect

Teeny - club girl

Becca - club girl

Renda - club girl

And, of course, any author friends whose names show up in
this book!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a transplanted Yankee, moving from upstate New York when I was a teenager. I'm a mom of four and grandma of nine who has found a love of traveling that I never knew existed! I live with the brat-cat pack (all rescues) as well as my dog, Bosco, 'deep in the heart of Texas', as I plot and plan who will get to "talk" next!

Find me on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/darlenetallmanauthor>

Darlene's Dolls (my reader's group):

<https://shorturl.at/fhpES>

DARLENE'S BOOKS

The Black Tuxedos MC

1. Reese - The Black Tuxedos MC
2. Nick - The Black Tuxedos MC
3. Matt - The Black Tuxedos MC

Poseidon's Warriors MC

1. Poseidon's Lady
2. Trident's Queen
3. Loki's Angel
4. Brooks' Bride
5. Atlas' World
6. The Warriors' Hearts (novella)
7. Kaya's King
8. Chelsea's Knight
9. Orion's Universe
10. Glacier's Thaw

Zephyr Hills Phantoms MC (Mayhem Makers)

The Enforcer

The SAA

Writing in the Rogue Enforcers World

Paxton: A Rogue Enforcers Novel

Esmerelda: A Rogue Enforcers Novel

Charisma: A Rogue Enforcers Novella (with Liberty Parker)

Writing in the Royal Bastards MC world (Roanoke, VA chapter)

Brick's House

A Very Merry Brick-mas

Banshee's Lament

Jingles' Belle - releasing 12/23

Writing in the Pandora, KY world

Trixie's Treat

Standalones

Bountiful Harvest

His Firefly

His Christmas Pixie

Her Kinsman-Redeemer

Operation Valentine

His Forever

Forgiveness

Christmas With Dixie

Our Last First Kiss

Draegon: The Falder Clan - Book One

Scars of the Soul

Hale's Song

Mountain Ink: Mountain Mermaids Sapphire Lake

Knox's Jewel: A Dark Leopards MC Novella

Desire: A Savage Wilde Novel

Contraryed: A Heels, Rhymes & Nursery Crimes short story

Sashy's Salvation

Search & Find

Little Red's

What I Like About Sunday

Starting Over With You

Rebel Guardians MC (with Liberty Parker)

1. Braxton

2. Hatchet

3. Chief

4. Smokey & Bandit

5. Law

6. Capone

7. A Twisted Kind of Love

Rebel Guardians Next Generation (with Liberty Parker)

1. Talon & Claree

2. Jaxson & Ralynn

3. Maxum & Lily

New Beginnings (with Liberty Parker)

1. Reclaiming Maysen

2. Reviving Luca

3. Restoring Tig

Where Are They Now? RGMC updates on original 7 couples (with Liberty Parker)

1. Braxton

2. Hatchet

3. Chief

Nelson Brothers (with Liberty Parker)

1. Seeking Our Revenge
2. Seeking Our Forever
3. Seeking Our Destiny

Rebellious Christmas (A Christmas Novella) (with Liberty Parker)

Nelson Brothers Ghost Team Series (with Liberty Parker)

1. Alpha
2. Bravo

Old Ladies Club (with Kayce Kyle, Erin Osborne and Liberty Parker)

1. Old Ladies Club - Wild Kings MC
2. The Old Ladies Club - Soul Shifterz MC
3. Old Ladies Club - Rebel Guardians MC
4. Old Ladies Club - Rage Ryders MC

Raven Hills Coven (with Liberty Parker)

1. Rise of the Raven
2. Whimsical
3. Enchantment
4. Prophecy Revealed

Tattered and Torn MC (with Erin Osborne)

1. Letters from Home/War (novella)
2. Letters Between Us (novella)
3. Letters of Healing (novella)
4. Letters from Mom (novella)
5. Letters to Heaven (novella)
6. Letters with Love (novella)
7. Letters from Nanny (novella)
8. Letters of Wisdom (novella)

9. Band of Letters - all 8 novellas in one volume

10. Her Keeper

11. Her One

12. Her Absolution

The Camelot Kitties and the BCP (with Cheryl Hullett)

The Camelot Kitties and the BCP in The Big Move

The Camelot Kitties and the BCP in Things That Go Bump in
the Night

The Camelot Kitties and the BCP in Where is You, Santa
Paws? (releasing 12/23)

The Mischief Kitties (with Cherry Shephard)

The Mischief Kitties in Bampires & Ghosts & New Friends,
Oh My!

The Mischief Kitties in the Great Glitter Caper

The Mischief Kitties in You Can't Take Our Chicken