

*Emblems
&
Curses*

Holiday Series: Book Thirteen

JISA DEAN

Cauldrons & Curses

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By:

Jisa Dean

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Look for the star...

Nova

I've traveled to this small town to find the Stone Island Witch, but I soon discover that she's gone. What I find in her place is a hot mayor, her son, and decades of folklore and bedtime stories. Then, the feel-good story I was sent to town to write takes a dark turn when the bodies of young women who look just like me start popping up in the forests and creeks around the area. Is someone angry at me for writing my story on the witch, or did I bring this nightmare with me? Can I trust the one man who might be able to save me or is he the monster lurking in the shadows ready to make this Halloween a very dark one that I won't come back from? Oh, did I mention I only have two weeks to come up with all the answers or the whole town will suffer because of it. No pressure, right? I'm going to need a whole lot more than luck to make this Halloween a sweet treat instead of a horror story.

Nathanial

I have magic in my blood. But nothing I foresaw could have prepared me for the sexy little reporter who came to my town to find my mother. What she gets instead is me... I'm the witch of our island now. And I have to find a way to use what and who I am to save Nova because something tells me that if anything happens to her... I'll follow. No matter whether either of us likes it or not, we're connected - entwined destinies that can't be broken apart. But how far am I willing to go to keep my soulmate safe and how far will I take this overwhelming need to protect her? As far as I need to because she's my other half... I just have to find a way to show her, so she'll stay.

Black cats and ancient evil, spells and curses, that's right it's Halloween, everyone! And if you are looking for a witchin' good romance for the holiday season here it is! Nate and Nova are hotter than a bubbling cauldron and their love will have you believing in magic. But is it enough to conquer the darkness coming their way? You bet your broomsticks it is! So, hold on to your potion and settle down with Cauldrons and Curses, the new Holiday Series stand-alone. It's a guaranteed Happy Ending that will leave you haunted in all the right ways!

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Chapter One

Nova

I'm out in the middle of bumfucked nowhere with a temperamental car, a suitcase, and a pissed-off attitude. I just passed a penitentiary about a mile back, it's dark and oh yeah...it's Friday the thirteenth. The only thing I don't have is the dark and stormy night god damn it. Right as I think it, I hear a peal of thunder overhead and the sky lights up with a fork of lightning bright enough to blind me.

That's it...I'm cursed. It's official. I'm not sure what I did to whoever it is that cursed me, but it must have been something really bad because, damn, this has been nothing but a nightmare since I opened my eyes this morning.

I woke up late even though I thought I set not only the alarm to wake up but also several backup alarms...and none of them went off. When I finally got to work I found my boss waiting for me. My heart sank as he looked me up and down with that sneer on his face. I was aware he hated me for a myriad of different reasons, not the least being the fact I turned him down when he asked me out, I just didn't know how badly or how deeply he felt it. That is until he opened his mouth.

“We need a feel-good piece for this Halloween. There's a town about a day's drive from here that claims to have a witch

who can control everything from the weather to the bloody economy. Go there, find the witch, write the article, and don't come back until you have something good for the paper or else, you're fired."

"What? Wait..."

He basically hands me a sticky note with the general direction of the town on it before turning and walking away. He neglected to tell me it was on a fucking island, and the only way to even get to the town is to go on the ferry. And now I have thirty minutes to make it to the damned boat before I have to spend the night in my car. Something I desperately do not want to do considering how close to the penitentiary I am. It would just be my luck a freakin' prison riot will break out and I will be easy prey for the inmates who escape.

I go just a little faster even though it is so dark I can't see much outside the beam of my piece of shit headlights. I barely make it and then have the horrifying experience of trying to drive my car onto the boat. This isn't a modern three-tiered ferry. The cars are not underneath anything and they barely have a place to sit and wait while you're on it. There are just two other cars on the boat, and one belongs to a couple that could care less if other people are around them. The other passenger is a surely-looking older man who keeps looking over at me and mumbling curse words under his breath.

I spend the hour-long trip playing games on my phone and fighting the urge to vomit. I didn't have time to take the motion sick pills I have in my purse before I got on, damn it. By the time I come off the fucking ferry I'm sick, sad, and so very tired I can barely hold my head up. I need to find the little inn I booked a room in and hit a bed to sleep away the rest of this day.

I spend half an hour searching for this inn only to get turned around and lost. By the time I realize I am heading into the less inhabited part of the island, I've gone deep into the forest that was on one side of the map I printed out. I had to use it because my phone died. I used the last bit of battery playing games on the boat like an idiot.

When my car sputters to a stop and won't start again no matter how hard I turn the key, all I can do is lay my head on the wheel and try not to cry. I'm so fucked. I guess I should be glad the escaped prisoners from my imaginary demise can't swim over to the island and kill me. No, instead of escaped convicts I am far more likely to die at the hands...er, paws of a bear or wild cat.

I take a deep breath and try to get my bearings. Maybe a good cry is exactly what I need but, for right now, I need to keep my head. I can wait to have my crying jag once I'm settled in at the inn. I pull myself together and take a fortifying breath as I reach for the door. Before I can open it, however, a feeling comes over me and stops me. I peer at the shadows standing around the sides of the road and fight with my imagination.

There is nothing here. I'm being too much of a ninny and spooking myself. I'm getting all caught up in the creepiness of the woods and the dark...and the day. But even as I talk to myself, I see something moving in the woods up ahead. Something white and almost gauzy looking. It almost looks like...a woman. It's so quick though and over before I can even be sure. It has to be my imagination. Right?

But when I turn my gaze back to the side of the road, a shadow moves in the darkness, and it looks like it is coming right towards me. My heart thumps so hard I can feel it in my temples, and it looks like the bears and prisoners are going to both take a back seat to whatever boogie man is coming for

me now. I should have told Justin to get fucked when he told me I had to do this. I should have been looking for another job months ago. I should have written a last will and testament before I left so my sister could get my NSYNC collection before our mom tosses everything after I'm dead.

A flash of lightning slices through the sky and backlights the silhouette of something large and tall standing across the road. By the time another bolt offers any illumination - the thing, which is fucking huge, is gone from the other side of the road. It's now just outside my car window!

All I can do is scream and hope someone on this god-forsaken island hears me before it's too late! It might already be too late considering how close the thing is to my car. And how big it looked from across the fucking road. I came to do a story for Halloween, now I'm going to be the story when they find my dead mangled corpse. At least this day will finally be over.

Chapter Two

Nova

When there is a knock on my window, I can't stop myself from jumping and yelling out in fear again as everything I'm scared of takes shape in form the of ... a very...hot man?

“Sorry to scare you.” Okay, this man is more model than monster - even if he is huge. “I was just wanted to find out if you needed any help.”

Oh, sweet cheese and crackers. I take a moment to say a prayer of thanks as I cautiously open the door to step out. Hopefully, I'm not stepping out into the arms of a serial killer. I'm smart enough to know they look like everyone else so you can't necessarily tell.

It takes me a couple of seconds to realize he's got a flashlight in his hand. Would a killer use a flashlight? It's not very atmospheric. The lightning does a better job of shifting the mood toward creepy and scary.

“I...um, I can't get my car started.” Way to play the dumb first victim, loser. Can you be any more of a ninny?

It's just, the man standing in front of me has the most beautiful eyes. If he's a killer I might just not mind being a victim...no, seriously please don't be a serial killer. My luck is already bad enough, I do not need to add victim to my long list of shitty jobs and extensive bad luck.

"You're new here, aren't you?"

I hesitate, wondering what the right thing to say is. Will it make me easier to kill and get rid of if I tell him yes? Should I try to slip back into the car?

He isn't put off by my lack of social graces and a smile breaks across his face and he holds his hand out for me to take. "I'm Nathaniel Magnus -the town mayor."

The sense of relief that comes over me is immense. Surely the mayor won't kill me. It would be bad for tourism. My knees actually go weak...from being saved not because the mayor is such a hottie. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. "Yes, I'm...I got turned around looking for the inn."

"Come on, I'll give you a ride there." It's only after he tells me that he'll give me a ride that I notice his truck sitting on the opposite side of the road.

I'm naturally curious and ask a shit-ton of questions. It's kinda my job after all. So, the questions filling my head aren't necessarily because this man comes off as untrustworthy or hinkey. Was he here the entire time? Did he just happen upon me because he's...what? Driving home? Going to visit a girlfriend? Did he see the thing in the woods?

A crack of thunder causes me to jump a mile high and fight the urge to run to this man for comfort and safety. I

automatically hate the feeling. I don't like being the dumb bimbo who has to depend on someone to get by. I want to be the smart last girl, the one who survives. Not that life is a scary movie or anything. But if it was, I already have something going for me to that end...

“Let's get out of this storm. They can be pretty rough on the island at times.”

Right. Don't stand out in the middle of a thunderstorm or the killer won't have to do the job of getting rid of you. He takes me by the elbow and walks with me across the road. I would normally bristle at the movement, but he doesn't do it in a high-handed way or as a demeaning gesture. Instead, it's more of a helping hand. One I don't so much mind given the circumstances.

Once inside the cab of his truck, the attraction I feel towards the hot mayor only get stronger. The man smells amazing. I wonder what cologne he wears. It has the scent of something sandlewoody and musky and...really fucking good.

“So what brings you to our island, Ms...?”

Oh shit. I never told this man my name. It's like I've never been around people and don't know how to act. “Oh, I'm...my name is Nova. Nova Newman.”

I hold out my hand for him to shake but he just looks at me with an odd expression on his face. I'm about to put my hand down and give an awkward laugh when he finally reaches out to take my hand...again since he already technically shook my hand when he introduced himself. Maybe that is why he is looking at me like I might have a hidden agenda for wanting to touch him. Or maybe he's used to women throwing themselves at him and wanting to touch him at every opportunity.

When our hands touch an odd static electric shock goes through me, and the air in the cab gets thick and heavy like right before a storm. It's like a storm is brewing inside the cab with us. Can he feel it too or is it just me?

Probably not since he gives me this half smile and takes his hand from mine. I reprimand myself to stop being weird and letting the night get to me. "I, um, came to the island to find someone."

"Yeah? Maybe I can help you out. I'm acquainted with just about everyone on the island."

"Well...really it's kind of embarrassing. You see, I'm a reporter for the Daily Centennial and my boss sent me here to write an article on this witch the whole island thinks takes care of them. I guess since you're the mayor you know all about it, huh?"

"I've heard of it a couple of times." I wait for him to tell me he knows the person I'm speaking about, but he doesn't say anything else. Or offer the name of the said witch.

"Anyway, it's not breaking news or anything. I basically got sent here as punishment."

"Punishment for what?"

Stepped in it there, didn't I?

"Me and my boss had a difference of opinion." He shoots me a side look like he can tell there's more to it than what I'm

telling him. “He thought I should sleep with him, and I disagreed. Loudly. And quite vocally.”

Yeah, it doesn’t sound any better now than it did the first time I explained it to my sister. “Anyway, here I am. Witch hunting?” I say the last as more of a question than an actual statement. Is that what I’m doing? Witch hunting? I have to find a better job.

“Um, is my car going to be alright back there?”

“Oh yeah, I’ll send someone to take it to the town garage for you.”

“Oh, um, thank you?” Why would he do that for me? “Oh shit! I forgot my suitcase.”

“I’ll drop that off at the Inn when Howard comes to pick up the car.”

Well, doesn’t he just have an answer for everything. “Did you see something in the woods before you came and scared the he... um, helped me?”

He takes his eyes off the road for just a few seconds, turning those stunning electric blue jewels my way. I wish it wasn’t to give me a look that says he clearly thinks I’m unhinged. Before I can say anything else he’s pulling up to the curb beside a huge Victorian house that looks more like a home than an actual inn. Not that I’m very experienced since I usually don’t freakin’ travel.

“We’re here.” He doesn’t really have to tell me since an ornate sign outside proclaims it to be the Witch of the Sea Inn.

It's not on the main road but set back closer to the residential areas but still just a street away from everything downtown.

“Thanks for the ride. And the...everything else.”

“No problem. But I will give you a word of warning. If you're going to ask the townspeople about their witch, you should be prepared for some pushback from some of the people here. They can be...protective of their witch.”

“I'm not trying to burn her. I just want to talk to her.”

He gives me a lopsided grin, “Just trying to be helpful, Nova.”

With him saying my name like that, my stomach flutters and my heart thuds a little harder. I offer him a smile before telling him bye and all but run into the inn. The first person I met from town, and I not only made a bad impression but also made a fool of myself when he tried to offer me nothing but help. This day can't get any worse. Hopefully, by the time I open my eyes tomorrow, all of this will be like a bad dream, and I'll be back home by midnight. But with the way my luck is going, I'm not going to hold my breath.

Chapter Three

Nate

After I dropped Nova off at the Inn I headed back home right away. Is it a coincidence that her name is Nova or is it a sign? I spent a good part of the rest of the night trying to figure it out and came up with nothing.

The town takes all its history to heart with Halloween being a big time of year for everybody. The whole island pulls out all the charm and hospitality they can muster with parades, haunted history tours, and a huge trick-or-treat walk where all the businesses and most of the houses hand out candy to the kids. I wasn't lying when I told Nova the people take special pride in their witch and the history entwined with the legends and stories.

I finally catch an hour or so's worth of sleep before I'm up and heading to the diner. I plan to get the little star's car fixed and her off this island before she finds out my dirty little secret. But as soon as I step into The Pink Cauldron, she's turning from where she is talking to Ruth and I can tell I'm too late.

“You!” Her eyes narrow and she's heading towards me.
“You're the witch!”

Damn! I was hoping it would take her a little longer before she realized. I shrug my shoulder and give her a self-deprecating smirk.

“Why didn’t you say anything last night?”

“Last night?” I shoot a narrow-eyed glare at Ruth who loves gossip better than anything. “You’ve already met our sexy mayor and witch of the island?”

“Well, I didn’t know he was the witch I was looking for?”

Is that question as loaded as it feels like it is to me?

“How did the two of you meet? She just got into town mere hours ago.”

“Yes, I’m aware of how long it’s been since she came to the island, Ruth.” I turn back to a pissed-off Nova. “I didn’t intentionally mislead you.”

“Yes, you did. That is exactly what you did! You had ample time to tell me when we were driving in your truck and instead, you just let me prattle on looking like an idiot.”

“You didn’t ask me if I was the witch. Or even if I could show you who the witch was. You were too caught up in finding your female witch.”

Her eyes widen and she raises her chin in a stubborn tilt, “Would you have told me if I had asked? Or would you have continued to lie?”

“I didn’t lie. There was no lie.” I don’t know why I look over to Ruth like I’m trying to convince her too. “I’m not exactly hiding it. You could have asked anyone, and they would have pointed you towards me.”

“Bull crap, you come off...” her sentence drifts off as the lights overhead flicker so badly all eyes are drawn up. That same sense of magic hanging in the air that rushed into the cab when we touched last night comes back and causes me to wonder about the woman standing in front of me yet again.

Before I can ask some questions of my own, the Sheriff comes through the door and walks right to me. “Nate, I’m going to need you to come with me.”

Normally hearing a police officer say that would be a good indicator that your day is going to be fucked dead up. But for me, it could simply mean they need my help calming some stray animal down or helping with the weather so a ‘crime scene’ doesn’t get all messed up. And by crime scene I mean someone stealing something from Old Ed’s farm or something else small and petty.

“Something happened in the woods.” He turns away from Ruth and talks lower than he normally would.

The way he says it makes me wonder if it’s something a little more serious than we normally deal with. The Sheriff is putting off some vibes that tell me this is way more. Something is badly wrong. And why is he taking such an interest in Nova? Why am I upset he’s looking at her like he is?

“I’ll be right there, Don.”

Just another perk of being me, you can pick up on people's feelings and to a certain extent manipulate them. You can influence the weather, cause the crops to grow faster and bigger, and even run a whole town. What you can't do is shake a small noisy reporter named Nova.

“Can I come?”

“I don't think...”

“If your town has nothing to hide surely you won't mind if I tag along. I mean you have to take me to my car anyway.”

I can already tell this is not going to be a good idea. “Fine. Come on.”

We follow Don to the place where all the police on the island are gathered and flashing lights splash against the dark wood of the trees. Dawn has finally crept up over the edge of the woods and offers some light, enough that we can see this is the same place Nova's car broke down last night. It's still sitting by the road but now yellow tape circles the area all around it.

I go to shake Don's hand. “Don, you want to tell me what is going on.”

But Don isn't looking at me anymore. Instead, he has his eyes firmly on Nova. Again. A barbaric sense of ownership goes through me, and I fight it down. I am not that man. I would never think of a woman as mine, but something about Nova has me no better than a dog in heat, wanting to mark her as my own. I stand back and take a good look at Don. He's not a bad-looking man...but he's not the witch she's looking for.

I pinch the bridge of my nose. Where the fuck did that thought come from? I need more sleep. I need...to get this woman off my island.

“Is this your car, ma’am?” What kind of fucked up question is that? It’s not even a good pick-up line.

Nova looks at me with uncertainty in her eyes before answering, “Yes. I...”

Don cuts her off, “So this IS your car?”

What the hell?

“Yes.”

“How did you get to town?”

“I brought her.” Don’s about to piss me off. “I happened upon her last night when she broke down. What’s this all about, Don?”

His eyes finally come back to mine. It’s then that I realize Don’s not looking at Nova in a romantic way. He’s not seeing her the way I am. Instead, he’s...scared.

“There’s been a murder, Nate.”

Chapter Four

Nova

Murder. I should be upset. I realize that. I should be sad someone's life has been snuffed out and a monster is still free. But I'm a reporter. The word murder isn't going to hit the same way it does with a normal person.

"Murder...here?" I hear the disbelief in 'Nate's' voice. He didn't bother telling me he was the island witch and he didn't tell me most everyone calls him Nate instead of Nathaniel either. "Who? Not Jenny."

Jenny. Who's Jenny? Is that his girlfriend?

"Don't tell me Aaron finally lost his temper that badly?"

The Sheriff shakes his head, "No Nate. It's not Jenny."

"Who then?"

"If I had to guess, it's a tourist. But the damnable thing is..." The Sheriff looks over at me again. "When we ran the plates for this car, we thought it belonged to the victim."

Why is my car so interesting to this guy? Nate said I could leave it and he would take care of it.

“You thought...? Even after you ran my plates. I assume my driver’s license picture popped up since the car is registered to me.” Why would they think...?

“Nate...the girl looks just like your new friend here.”

Both men turn to look at me. The reality of the situation hits me. Someone was murdered where my car broke down...and she looks just like me.

“How, um, did she...?”

“It looks like she was strangled with a silk rope, but we won’t know for sure until we get her bod...get her back to the coroner and he performs an autopsy.”

Just then the body zipped in a big black bag is being carried out of the woods. The very presence of the bag has the entire area going a little quieter and a sense of melancholy falls upon everybody. Even though the sun is well above the horizon and rays of it spear through the trees it somehow gets just a shade...grayer somehow.

“Can I...?” Nate asks and waits for the Sheriff to nod his consent. They both walk over to where the body has been placed on a gurney.

I follow not wanting to miss anything. I wait for Nate to unzip the bag before I push my way up beside him so I can take a look too. And all the air rushes out of me. The body of the woman lying inside the bag really does look a lot like me.

Enough so that I find myself edging closer to Nate in an instinctual search for warmth and life.

We have the same dark hair, the same coloring, and our build is the same. Given the fact that this is where my car broke down last night and we're both visitors to the island, I can't help but feel...connected to this woman. It could easily have been me lying here instead of her.

Then what she is wearing sinks in. It's wet from the rain that drenched everything late into the night and a little dirty, but I can still tell what the gown is supposed to look like in better situations. I gasped and covered my mouth immediately, hoping the two men didn't hear it.

I saw...I saw this woman last night. Or at least I think I did. The flash of white in the woods just before Nate scared the shit out of me by being all lurky and scary. Then another thought zips through my head like a runaway bus bearing down on a group of nuns carrying pug puppies crossing the road to get to young school children. Nate was out in the woods with me. He could have killed this girl, started back for his truck, and found me.

But that doesn't feel like the right scenario. It doesn't seem...rational to think he came from just strangling a girl to death and then found me. One, I'm not sure how long it takes to strangle the life out of a living creature, but it seems like it would take a minute. Two, he didn't have a scratch on him when he showed up at my window. And why not kill me too? It's not like anyone would miss me for weeks and weeks. And I saw the flash of white right before Nate scared me to death, not giving him enough time to catch her, kill her, and wrap back around.

But that still doesn't mean I didn't see this woman right before she was killed. It doesn't mean someone close by would not like a loose end like me running around if I said anything about what I saw. And who the hell can I trust? I don't know a goddamned person on this island. Hell, for all I know Nate could still be involved. He could have a partner and was trying to get rid of me so they could finish the woman off.

“So, you're saying you...found Ms. Newman out here, Nate?”

“How did you know my name?” I ask the Sheriff in an accusing tone. Everyone looks suspicious suddenly.

“Tags.” He says it so matter-of-factly that I feel stupid now for not remembering that shit would show up on a search. “And the two of you didn't see anything?”

Me and Nate look at one another, and the knowledge that both of us were close when this woman was breathing her last begins to slowly sink in. That fact is even more unsettling than anything else about all of this. To think while both of us were talking, meeting for the first time, a woman was being murdered just yards away is...terrifying really.

“It...was dark and the storm had just started. Lightning and thunder. I could barely hear him when he spoke, and he was standing right in front of me.”

“I saw her headlights die or I wouldn't have known she was there and would have driven right by her.”

“And there were no other cars, no other vehicles at all, anywhere around?”

“I literally saw no one from the time I left my house to the time I got her back to the inn. Except for her, of course.”

“What about on your way back?”

Nate shakes his head. “Nothing.”

“I don’t mean to alarm you or cause you to worry ma’am, but if I were you...I wouldn’t be taking any walks alone in the woods.” The Sheriff gives me a look full of concern and sadness before looking over at Nate.

“Nate, I’d keep a close eye on my friend, if I were you. This is probably a domestic violence situation between romantic partners, but I wouldn’t feel right if I didn’t at least warn you. Not with the way she looks and how your car was so close.”

Something passes between the Sheriff and Nate that leaves me wondering...do they know something about this murder that they aren’t telling me? Could it lead to me getting myself killed?

Chapter Five

Nate

I take one last look at the woman lying dead in front of me. Death is never easy but when it's hurried along by means other than natural ones it makes it even worse. It leaves stains behind that can mark the entire area if left uncleaned. One of the easiest ways to offer cleansing in this situation... find out who did this and bring them to justice.

She really does look a lot like the woman standing by my side - Nova. The hair is the same, with Nova's being a little shorter than the dead woman's, and the age looks to be a close match. But the thing that really reaches out and grabs me are the eyes. Nova's are more green than this woman's, full of intelligence and life. Nova's eyes are bright and searching instead of dead and protruding from her ashen face.

When I think of how close she came to being in the bag instead of this unidentified woman my heart speeds up and a hollow ache forms in my stomach. I really need to find a way to get this woman off my island. It's the only way I can be sure she'll stay safe.

"You've found your witch," I walk her back to my truck and help her inside after we wrap things up with Don. But I don't just walk away, "Now go home and write your story. I'm sure

the whole twist of it being me will make for good reading. I can drop you off at the dock so you can be on the next ferry and have an Uber waiting on you on the other side. Your car will be shipped to you of course, when the mechanic has it fixed.”

“I’m not leaving.”

Damn!

She gives me a look that clearly says I’m going to have my work cut out for me trying to accomplish my goal. “I don’t have anything. I was sent here to get a good story about an entire island dependent on their witch. I haven’t even started, I mean there are the interviews with other people, the background and lore, and an interview with said witch. I’m not going anywhere, mister.”

“God damn it, you heard what Don said. You saw what that woman looked like. The safest thing for you is to get back on that damned ferry and pretend you never even heard of this place.”

She sits staring at me for a long silent moment before looking away finally. When she turns back it’s with a resigned look. I prepare myself for winning with dignity and being mindful not to gloat.

“You’re right. I did hear ‘Don’,” she makes air quotes with her fingers when she says his name reminding me of how familiar I am with the people around me, “and Don said it’s probably a murder caused by domestic violence between romantic partners. So, I am perfectly safe since I have no romantic interest on the island and don’t plan to have one. So, I’m staying.”

She grabs the door and shuts it leaving me standing outside my own truck wondering how this argument turned to shit on my end so quickly.

I go around and slide in the driver's seat. There's nothing else left but to take her back to town. "You are the most... stubborn creature..."

"I'm a Taurus, we're all very persistent." She says it like it's common knowledge and I shouldn't be surprised at all.

"It's called stubborn. You're fucking stubborn." Even though I mutter it under my breath she can still hear it if the look she shoots me is any indication.

"You must be a Pisces. You got this whole otherworldly-stand-offish thing going for you and you always have to be right."

I roll my eyes and focus on the road. There is literally no way in hell I am telling her she's right. "You want an interview with the witch, you want to know the history, and find out what other people think about all this?" She nods, so certain in her plans. "Then let's make a stop at the library and get this over with. If we're fast, we can have you on the last ferry back tonight."

"Why do you want me off this island so badly?"

Instead of answering her, I pull into the library parking lot and hop out. As soon as we walk in, I can tell something isn't right. I'm proven right when Annabeth, the only librarian on the island, comes rushing over to us.

“Ms. Nova? Have you come to find out about the history of our town?” She takes Nova by the arm and steers her away from me.

How the hell did Annabeth know Nova’s name and why she is here? And why is she treating her like she’s fucking visiting royalty? I narrow my eyes at the two women as they lower their heads closer together and walk into a little room off the central room of the library. The room is full of historical records and old books containing all manner of stories and legends.

“Ours is a lustrous history full of the best kind of misfits and outcasts.”

Lustrous? Not sure I’ve ever heard that one said in relation to my family lineage.

“Did you know Deliverance Magnus came to this island in 1692 to establish a safe place for those that didn’t necessarily agree with the Puritans that landed in America at the time? She was the first woman to involve herself in politics.”

My head comes up and I look over at the door where Annabeth’s voice is floating out. What is she...first lady in politics? What does that even mean? I step in the doorway and find her holding a copy of the painting hanging in my house of my fifteen times over great-grandmother and grandfather.

“Who is that?” Nova points to the man standing beside Deliverance.

“Oh, that is her husband, Nathaniel Magnus.”

Nova looks up at me, “You were named after your great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather.”

I give Annabeth a look telling her to cut the shit and stop whatever she thinks she’s doing. She either doesn’t see it or she ignores it. I’m guessing the second choice if I just had to give an answer.

“He was her protector, her guardian. And quite a looker if you ask me. Good looks run in the Magnus bloodline.” I can’t help but let out a tiny growl of frustration at how hard Annabeth is pushing this whole thing. “They came to the island when Deliverance was heavy with child.”

“Nooo.” That’s not how the story goes.

“He saved her and their unborn baby by bringing them here and Deliverance made sure they were safe and sound tucked away on their little island paradise. Soon others followed.”

“She wasn’t pregnant when she left the mainland. She got that way shortly after they came here, Annabeth.”

“Sure, that’s why their baby was born eight months later. Temperance Magnus.” She tells Nova.

“She never married?”

“No, Temperance’s husband took her last name.” Nova lifts her eyebrows in a surprised look before scribbling in the little notebook she’s pulled out at some point during Annabeth’s story.

“Why don’t you just get to my grandmother and mother instead of going over the entire family lineage?”

“To truly understand the power of the Magnus family you have to understand how interconnected they are to this island, to the people that live here, Nate.”

“Has there ever been another male witch or is Nate the first?” I roll my eyes at Nova’s question.

“No. Nate is our first.” That’s not entirely true but Annabeth doesn’t need to know ALL the details of my family’s past.

“If there’s nothing else, I’ll mosey on over to city hall and check-in.”

“Oh, no worries, Nate. We will take very good care of your Nova.” See, shit like that is why I’m shooting these looks at Annabeth and wondering yet again...how the hell do I get this woman off my island and get my life back the way it was before all of this...chaos she brought with her took over?

Chapter Six

Nova

I spent the day with Annabeth and Ruth. They've introduced me to several people in town and I've actually found myself very entertained. I even forgot for a little while why I was on the island, especially when they took me to one of the many farms that offer a fair-like atmosphere with their pumpkin patches, pie contests, and corn mazes. The whole island goes big for Halloween.

When I get back to my room, it takes a call from my boss to remind me why I am here. The conversation has my whole mood changing and I go to bed looking for work with other newspapers. Surely, I can find a newspaper other than the Centennial to write for. It's after midnight when a knock comes that jerks me from my sleep.

When the knock comes again, I stumble out of bed and open it without really looking to find out who it is first. When I pull the door back, Nate is standing in front of me in a soft-looking sweater and a pair of jeans that should not look that good on a person without it being a crime. It also looks like he hasn't been asleep once tonight. The only sign of distress showing is the fact his hair is all ruffled and looks like he might have been raking his hands through it repeatedly.

His eyes do the same thing mine are doing, only to me. I can imagine what a hot mess I must look like standing in my night clothes. And I do not look like I have my shit together. I don't look like I just stepped out of a fashion magazine's photoshoot for fall. Instead, my hair is a crazy tangled mess, I have sleepy eyes that squint in the light coming from the hallway and I'm sure I look like I was doing exactly what I was...sleeping like the dead.

Nate gives me a cocked eyebrow like he might be asking me a question without actually having to ask it. It's late and I don't have the mental fortitude to play games with him. If he wants to ask me something...

“Do you open the door like this to everybody who knocks?”

My face melts into a frown. I do when I've only had a few hours' sleep. Why is he so pissy? I'm the one who got woke up. It takes me a minute to realize what it means that I am in my nightgown. A nightgown that isn't very thick and has been well-loved, so much so you can practically see through it.

“Shit.” I turn around to grab the robe I have thrown over the back of a chair close by the door. As I'm tying the belt, I finally break down and ask, “Can I help you with something?”

Or is this just torture for staying when you wanted me to go? I think it, but I don't say it. I still need my interview with him. The fact he wants me to leave rankles. It miffs me bad.

“There's been another one.”

It takes me longer than it should to follow him. Another one? Another witch? Another male who held the title of witch of the island before he did? When it finally hits me, my eyes

widen and I burst into a flurry of movement. There's been another murder?

“Oh shit! Where? Is it another girl? Another tourist?”

I'm jerking clothes out of drawers and getting ready when he puts his hand on my arm. I'm thankful he stopped me before I just dressed right in front of him in my rush to get all the details and go out to where the body was. However, I can do without the physical contact as it makes that weird electric thing happen all up and down my arm.

“She looks just like you. I think it's time for you to le...”

I put my hand on his chest to move him backward and out of my room, “I'll be down in ten minutes...,” I rethink, “five, five minutes.”

“To leave the island?”

“What? No. So you can take me to the crime scene.” Like I would leave now. Not when I may have just found the very thing I need to snag a job at another paper. Why is the man so damned hell-bent on me leaving? I understand we might have gotten off to a bad start but is that really the reason he wants me gone? Or is Nate Magnus hiding something, something much bigger than being a witch? Am I being cautious or rushing right into the waiting arms of something much worse, much darker, than any witch? Am I rushing into a final confrontation with a madman?

Chapter Seven

Nova

It takes us almost all day to go over everything. Nate was right, the second dead woman looked just like the first minus the color of her eyes. She was a tourist too. The sheriff was the person who called Nate to tell him about the newest murder and sent him to check on me. Other than the time we spent in the truck on the way over, I've not seen much of Nate.

I followed the Sheriff for the most part, and then talked to the medical examiner by phone since they sent the bodies to the mainland coroner. I am headed back to the Sheriff's Department when Nate pulls up beside me in his truck.

“Have you eaten today? At all?”

I have to stop and think about his question. I don't think I have.

He must be able to tell, “Want to go to the diner with me and grab a bite to eat?”

“Are you ready to give me an interview?”

He rolls his eyes but leans over to open the door on the passenger side for me. “Sure.”

Once I’m inside and buckled he tells me he has a quick stop to make before we go to dinner. “I have to stop at my house and grab some papers so I can make sure this town meeting happens as soon as possible. Do you mind?”

“Not at all.” He and the Sheriff decided on a town meeting for tomorrow night to inform everyone of what was going on and what steps were being taken to solve the two murders. The Sheriff is still reluctant to call it a serial killer for now, but it sure feels that way with the victims all looking the same and both of them being found in the woods with silk cords around their necks.

“I’m shocked you’re still on this whole witch thing since you have the murders to write about now.”

“I have a commitment to keep. He gets one final story from me before I tell him to kiss my ass and move on.”

We go farther and farther from the town until there are no more lights illuminating the road and the setting sun is well hidden by the trees.

“You live a long way from the town.”

“Yeah. The town really popped up after my family established their home here. It didn’t really grow into what it is now until well in the 1800’s. Not much has changed since then though. The storefronts may have new facades and some of the people might have died off leaving their spots to family but it’s still kind of the same as it was way back in 1892.”

“Wow. That’s amazing that you all have been able to keep that sense of history and being a small town alive through so much.”

“Yeah, well in case you couldn’t tell, most of the people here just love tradition.”

He pulls up a long driveway that winds back and forth gaining altitude the farther we go. Finally, we come to a gate that automatically swings open for us. I frown a little as we drive through. I didn’t see him hit anything to make the gate open. Maybe it is on a motion sensor but then it really would defeat the purpose of having the gate at all, wouldn’t it?

Just as I’m trying to figure the whole gate thing out, a tall house made of wood and stone rises up out of the forest. It looks like something that should be in a fairy tale and not the real world, like a cottage on steroids.

“THIS is your home.”

“Yeah, home sweet home.”

He pulls up to the front of a cobbled driveway. He’s by my door before I realize it because all my focus is on the house. It has to be four stories high, with some walls covered in ivy and what looks to be late-blooming roses. Who has roses at this time of year?

“Come on, I’ll introduce you to Brian and he can show you around while I grab the things I need.”

“Brian? Whose Brian?”

Before I have my answer, the door opens, and out steps a tidy little man in a gray suit.

“Brian takes care of the place for me. Hell, I guess he takes care of me too.”

“I’m his butler, ma’am.”

“You have a butler?” A big ass house, power over the whole island, and a butler. “Are you rich or something?”

“Mr. Magnus does own most of the island and has a share in over half the businesses that operate here as well as several holdings on the mainland. He also has businesses in several other states.” Wow. I’m actually speechless. “He would make a very good husband as he is successful at whatever he focuses on, Ms. Newman.”

“Brian!”

He shoots Nate an unapologetic look, “Ruth called, sir.”

Nate shakes his head and starts speaking, “I don’t necessarily have a butler. I have a friend who happens to be a butler.”

“And yet I’m paid every week. I worked for his grandmother when she was getting on in years.”

“If you’ll excuse me.” Nate jogs up the winding front stairs. “I’ll be back soon.”

“Would you like to look around?”

Yes, but I'm afraid there isn't going to be enough time to see everything this house has to offer. Still, I take Brian up on his offer and he shows me around. When Brian gets distracted by something other than me, my natural curiosity has me going further and further away, opening every door to find out what is in the next room and the room after that.

I open one door after another until a feeling rushes over me and I walk even further down the hall, this time not opening door after door. It's like something is calling me, pulling me, to a small door at the end of the hall on the third floor. I lay my hand on the knob and a cold breeze causes me to shiver. I turn the knob and push the door open and peer inside.

And find a nursery. A white crib sits against one of the walls while the others are covered in fairy tale settings. This isn't like normal fairy tale sketches put on baby walls. The pictures are old ones and have such deep rich color that the paintings look more like they came out of an ancient tome instead of something a child would have anywhere close to them.

The crib has an ornate tree on the side of it at the back, the branches and roots reaching out and twining along the edge and down so that most of the baby bed is covered in carvings of ivy and vine. It's like something out of a fairy tale itself. I put my hand out just needing to touch it when something dark and small rushes out and comes straight at me.

My mind is so wrapped up in the fairy tale quality of the room -the whole house really- that my first thought is elf or maybe house troll. But when the thing comes flying at my face and I catch it I quickly realize this creature is firmly rooted in reality. In my hands is an enormous ball of fluff and fur in the

darkest of blacks with the biggest wide blue eyes I have ever seen...on a cat!

“Where did you come from, pretty kitty? Where did you come from?”

“I see you’ve found Shadow.”

At the sound of Brian’s voice, I jump and let out a little yelp that has the kitty pouncing out of my arms and running from the room.

“I...I’m sorry. I...”

“You’ve found the nursery.”

“I...does Nate have a baby?” This room looks ready for a baby. It looks like it’s in use, ready for a sleeping babe to be laid down soon.

Does Nate have a family no one is talking about? And why would everyone be talking about him looking for a wife if he already has a...baby momma?

“No, ma’am. The master is entirely alone. This is the room given to all the Magnus babies. At one time even Nate was in here.”

“But...it looks...like it’s just been used.”

“It’s the house ma’am. It shows you what it wants you to see.”

“What?” I turn and find all the furniture in the room draped in Holland cloth. Instead of a low, soft light coming from the corner of the room from a lamp perfect for reading bedtime stories to a little one, there is only darkness and shadows. “What the hell?”

“Come.” He leads me out of the room. “There is nothing I would love more than to know someone is here to take my place once I’m gone to love and care for Nate. He needs someone soft enough to hold him when things become too hard and strong enough to keep the town at bay when he’s had too much of their needs and demands.”

“So...Nate is looking for love?”

“He’s ready for just the right woman to come find him and fill the house with babies and light again.”

A thought takes shape in my mind. It nestles inside all during the meal at the Pink Cauldron when people come up and tell me how great Nate is and what a good catch he will make for some woman. And once I hit my room I go straight for my computer and write my piece on the Stone Island witch. It’s perfect. By the time I sit back and reread what I’ve written I am satisfied this is the article I will send my boss.

I go into the ensuite bathroom and celebrate with a long, warm bath. Sweet-smelling bath salt goes a long way in soothing my frayed nerves over what happened in the nursery. I’m sure I let my imagination get the best of me and I dreamed up the whole image of the nursery in use. Surely that’s what happened. I lean my head back along the rim of the big ornate tub and think about all of the things that have happened in the past two days. It’s damned hard to believe that it’s just been three days since I first met Nate, first came to the island, and

had the world's worst Friday the thirteenth. Would it have felt like touching Nate if I had gotten to touch the crib? What is the weird electric shock that happens when we touch? Does it happen to him too, or is it just me?

I step out of the bath and dry off but don't put my nightgown on just yet. Instead, I air dry as I step towards the bed and ready myself for the conversation I am going to have with the douche that sent me here. My hip hits the edge of my computer, and it blinks on. Instead of letting my body dry naturally I spin and throw clothes on not even caring that my blouse is sticking to me or that the skirt I put on doesn't match it.

My temper has never been as riled, never been so close to becoming a murderous rage as it is now. I am furious. Hurt and furious. And if I somehow stumbled upon the person doing all the killing right now, they wouldn't have a problem with the person any longer. It would be me committing murder. No, running into a killer is not what is scaring me right now. Because anyone who gets between me and that coward of a witch is fair game. What has me scared is how mad I am and the fact hurting someone doesn't sound like a horrible idea to me. That's the only scary thing haunting me right now.

Chapter Eight

Nate

I feel her coming. I can tell when she comes through the gate. The fact it opens for her is something I will think about later, especially since it only opens to the people who are supposed to be here. Only to family. For now, I work on keeping my emotions in check and remaining centered. She doesn't knock. She just barges right in. Another surprising thing since the house is very much like the gate.

Even Brian can't slow her down. "Ma'am?"

"Don't you ma'am me. Where is he?"

"Mr. Magnus is in the library ma'am."

"Show me." I brace myself for the coming confrontation. I can't help but feel...moody, antsy about all that has happened on my island since Nova has come here.

When she comes in all she sees is me sitting in my home, in front of the fire, reading a book. Relaxed, calm, and focused on control. Because that is what this situation needs from me. Control.

“You! You...son of a bitch! You sorry asshole! You deleted my work! Don’t try to deny it!”

Color stains her cheeks painting them pink and her eyes flash with fire. Fury looks good on her. It looks a lot like how I imagine she would look after the right man got a hold of her and treated her to a night of passionate lovemaking. I shut that shit down fast. I cannot think of Nova like that.

“Don’t even try to deny that you did it!”

“I’m not.”

“You li...what?” Some of the anger dies down with the onset of confusion.

I set the book down and stand to my full height in front of her, “I’m not denying that I came into your room...,”

“While I was in a bath!” she interrupts, all indignant.

“Which smelled delicious by the way.” I interrupt her this time. What the hell is wrong with me?

She blushes and flounders around searching for her mad.

“And deleted your little ‘piece’.” There it is. Glad I could help her find the anger again. “The last thing I want is for tons of women coming to the island thinking this is the fucking “Bachelor: Halloween Edition.”

I notice how her shirt is sticking to her skin leaving it almost transparent. I look closer and notice her hair still wet from her bath.

“How did you get here?” Her car is still in the repair shop. The question is enough to throw her off kilter.

“I had Angela from the Inn bring me.” A small part of me buried deep is pleased it wasn’t a male bringing her here. If I can tell the color of her bra through the damned blouse then so can anyone else who looks at her. And that doesn’t even begin to include the swell of her breasts over the black lace. “What does that have to do with anything?”

I ignore her question and circle her. Yes, a part of me wanted to look for other signs she was in a rush to get to me but I pushed that part down and told myself it was so I could intimidate this little reporter to leave my island. She’s in much too much danger to stay.

“What possessed you to even think I was looking for a... what did you call it? A ‘baby momma’?”

She raises her chin and moves with me so her back is never fully turned to me. Smart little thing, being able to recognize when she’s being hunted. But not smart enough to leave.

“Everyone in town. Brian. He made it sound like you might need a little...help. A boost.”

“I do not need help attracting a mate.” Apparently, I need help sending one away.

“Everyone on this island would disagree and with your stand-offish demeanor I can understand why...”

I grab her and pull her into me. Our bodies bump against one another and the odd little current that has been vibrating constantly between us every time we are together sparks. Somewhere overhead thunder rumbles across the sky in a long loud peal. Before I can stop myself, my mouth is crashing down on hers as all hell breaks loose over us. Not only is nature taking a chance to chatter about us being together but every light in the house flashes bright and then goes out until we are standing in nothing but black.

Several of the smaller lights explode and I’m not certain but I think the fire in the hearth rises and grows stronger. Somewhere in the distance, I hear Brian.

“I’ve got it, Sir. I’ve got it.”

But none of that matters as a sense of power rises inside of me until I feel almost consumed by it. My hand sinks in her still-wet hair as tendrils of the soft, sweet-smelling locks wrap around my fingers entrapping me, keeping me bound to her. Both of her hands rise to touch my chest and, even though I am in a sweater, I feel them like they’ve burned into my bare skin.

My other hand drops to her hip so I can keep her just as imprisoned as I am. It takes me a few seconds of probing before I gain her trust enough that she lets me in, my tongue rushing for hers and all her hidden secrets. The power that flashed through me with such force I thought it would break me subsides and eases until the only thing I feel is the beating of our hearts and the soft glide of her tongue over mine.

I tilt her head just enough that I have better access to all the wonders she is allowing me to plunder. The feel and taste of her could easily become addictive. Even her tiny size is a tantalizing detail that leaves my mind firmly thinking of putting her in my bed and keeping her safe there. Skin so soft it shouldn't be touched meets my hand when I slip my fingers under the edge of her shirt to play with the skin right underneath.

My hands ache to go higher, to touch more, to take what I know belongs to me and only to me. I pull her closer to me to satisfy that urge to take and touch. Never have I felt this need to dominate and at the same time protect. Never have I been controlled by something even I can not control. And Nova doesn't just kiss me back. She gives me everything, her body going pliant and turning even softer. The spark that's been flashing back and forth between the two of us ignites and causes a real fear it will burn both of us down. Best to hold tight to one another until we know for sure we can make it through the fire rising up inside of us.

The thing that finally pulls us apart is the lights turning back on. Her arms have entwined themselves around my neck and I've lifted her off the floor so I can take better tastes. It's only when the lights flash on that we separate and look at one another for a long, pregnant moment. Her lips are swollen where mine have taken hers, her eyes are big and confused at what just happened and her chest is rising and falling with each breath. I have to look away before I throw her over my shoulder and take her to my bed.

She doesn't say a word, only turns to flee. I prepare myself to let her go, to make myself let her go. She's already across the room when she reaches out for the doorknob and that spark that courses through our bodies when we are too close jumps and rushes through the air. She starts to speak when she wraps her fingers around the cool metal and for a moment it feels like my own are the ones closing around it.

Before I can figure out what is going on, her head goes back and her eyes roll to the back of her head. I'm on her before she can hit the floor but instead of stopping whatever is happening, Nova takes me with her. Pulling me into a world not quite steady and not our own. One of shared visions and souls.

Chapter Nine

“Go! Get out of here!” The woman turns with shocked eyes at the man rushing into her house.

“Nathanial? What...? What are you doing here?”

The sound of wagon wheels crunching on the rocks outside has him spinning around to look at the very door he just rushed through. “Oh God! We’re too late!”

The woman’s emotions aren’t secret. She doesn’t try to hide the fact the sound from outside has her heart racing and fear curling inside her chest as if it were a live creature - a snake squeezing the life from her. They’ve come for her.

“Put this on and don’t speak! Don’t say a word! Not one sound!” He puts his coat on over her body and then drapes a cloak over that so that she is all but concealed beneath the cloth.

“Nathanial, what is going on?”

“They are coming for you. The only hope you have of not being burned at the stake is to do what I tell you to do.”

Men come through the door as fear rises until it all but chokes the breath from everyone in the room. She recognizes every one of them. Men who came for her help, men who asked her father for her hand before he passed away, men who looked at her with inappropriate thoughts in their eyes. Now all they projected was hate and death. An overwhelming sense of evil cloaks the air making it harder and harder to breathe.

“Nathanial! What are you doing here?”

Nova

The world slowly comes back into focus and the spinning sensation passes. I forcefully uncurl my fingers from the handle and step away from it.

“W...what the hell was that?” My voice doesn’t sound very strong when I speak. Honestly, I sound like I might be about to break down. I might already have, given what I thought I just saw.

“We should...”

I turn in his arms that are still around me and start to panic a little, “What did you do to me? Why? Why can I...I could see and you...you could see... You could see, right?”

“Yes. We...we should go downstairs.”

“What? Why would we want to go downstairs?”

He takes me by the arm and starts walking me through the house. “Come. Everything will be explained there...I hope.”

“You hope? You...mean you never...that never happened before?”

He shakes his head causing my anxiety to ramp up. It didn't help that my own fear was amplified by the woman's fear of that...vision. It still lingers in my mind. The sense of terror remains clogging my throat and waiting to rise up at the first opportunity. I tried to tamp it down and tell myself what happened didn't really.

He helps me down the stairs leading to a huge wine cellar and walks to the very back of the room. He pulls out a bottle and the door swings open leading to somewhere even further down.

“Careful. Sometimes the steps can be a bit slippery.”

He goes first and helps me when the stone steps grow worn down. Someone must have come down here a lot to make the steps so worn. By the time we get to the bottom, he opens another large stone door and leads me through to a balcony that has yet more steps. These aren't stone though. The whole atmosphere changes from cave-like to more like a magical library with lights all around the stone walls and books everywhere. In the center is a ceremonial ring that occupies a large area of the floor. On the other side is a stone fireplace. Brian is bent over lighting a fire there when we come down the stairs.

I spin around to take everything in.

“What is this place?”

The ceiling is high and covered in sparkly geodes making it seem like you are under the stars instead of underground. Magic practically hangs in the air here.

“This is the Magnus ceremonial chamber, ma’am. First used by Deliverance herself.” He turns to speak to Nate. “I’ve pulled the book, Sir. And your grandmother’s journal as well.”

“Thank you, Brian.”

“Will someone please tell me what is going on?”

Nate looks up from a large desk he went behind to start reading a very large, very old-looking book. “I don’t know. I don’t know what just happened, okay? That’s why we’re down here. So I can try to find the answer.”

The entire time, Brian is looking through the tons and tons of books in the stone bookcases lining the room. Nate goes back to flipping pages leaving me utterly useless and lost. I finally give up on a quick answer and flop in one of the chairs on the side of the room well away from the circle in the center. It...feels strong, forceful almost. You can almost feel that a lot of magic went on in that circle over the years.

As I sit doing nothing and feeling useless, I start looking at some of the books. Some have titles but most don’t. There are all sorts of different shapes, sizes, and colors on the binding. One of them sticks out to me like an object that doesn’t belong, my eyes keep coming back to it. I turn and reach up, slipping it out of the space it inhabits.

I probably shouldn't be touching this. It is most certainly old and was handed down through Nate's family line. I place the book on my lap and run my fingers along the leather cover. It has the image of a tree with branches and roots going both up and down. The image reminds me of the one etched on the back of the crib I saw in the nursery.

And as soon as I take my hand away the book flips itself open and starts flipping through pages, freaking me the hell out in the process. "Nate!"

I sense his gaze on me but don't dare look away from the book in my lap. His chair scrapes on the stone floor as he comes to me even as the pages keep flipping almost violently until it comes to rest on a page halfway through the book. I wait a heartbeat to find out if it is going to do it again and when it doesn't, I chance a glimpse up at Nate.

He doesn't take it out of my lap but instead comes to stand by my side, propping his hip on the edge of my armrest so he can look at the book with me. "How did you...? Why did you pick this book?"

"I...it..." I close my eyes knowing I am going to have to tell him about finding the nursery and the crib. I look from Nate to Brian before I explain what happened. Once I tell him, I flip the book closed while holding the place the book chose with my hand. He runs his fingers over the cover much the same way I did.

"The same image. Open it. Let's read what they wanted us to find."

I open the book and move my hand so he can read the tight elaborate script. "Two become one..."

I don't recognize any of the words when I try to follow along with him. "What language is it written in? I don't recognize it."

"It's mostly English and Latin but some of it is written in an ancient language, the language witches use."

"They have their own language?"

"Hmm, see this..." he points to a symbol in the middle of a word, "this is an 's' and this one right here is a 't'."

He looks up for a second like he's trying to piece something together. "A star. She's talking about a star...wait." He rushes to the desk and comes back in a matter of seconds. It should not change the temperature next to me, but it does. When he goes, the air feels colder. "My grandmother talks about a star."

He looks from one book to the other and then back again. He sits back with a faraway look in his eyes like he's trying to mentally put the puzzle pieces together. I want to give him time but at the same time I need answers, or I might go crazy. Surely there is a simple reason this happened. Something put on the door to make us both hallucinate, group delusion, something in the wood being burnt in the fireplace, maybe.

"Okay...I'm not sure how to even start..." he rubs his forehead, "backwards and work forwards or the opposite."

I wait, not saying a word.

"My mother died when I was a teenager. My grandmother raised me. She would tell me stories. Stories about the past and

where we came from. Stories about the future and what was to come. My ancestor could see things before they happened, and she would write them down - in the book you found.”

“Deliverance?”

He nods. “She wrote about how evil wasn’t something that just popped out of nowhere. It could be called, beckoned to a place, or a person. The human heart is where it starts, and it grows and grows until it consumes everything around it. It can fester and rot everything it touches. And it can become contagious, infecting everyone like some virus.”

Why is he telling me this?

“It’s what caused the witch hunts all those years ago. What drove those men we saw in the vision to break in and try to kill my ancestor.”

“But why could WE see them? See your ancestor? Deliverance I assume?”

“Because...we share our power with the person who is meant to be our mate.”

Chapter Ten

Nate

I can't keep putting it off any longer. I have to come clean. I have to tell her. "You."

She looks at me like I might have lost my mind. And I would love to give her time to come to terms with all of this. It's hard for me and I've lived with this stuff all my life. "You might want to sit for the next part."

"I...I'm confused about...everything and I don't want to sit. I want to get the hell out of here."

My temper flares, "Yeah, well I tried to send you away, didn't I? And you didn't want to leave then? You wanted to just stay and do this stupid story." She visibly swallows at my less-than-subtle reminder. She all but falls in the chair and I hold to my anger. "You aren't leaving now that the whole damned town is depending on you to save them."

"What?!"

Now how the hell am I going to tell her the rest? It only gets more unbelievable from here. "The star that Deliverance and my grandmother wrote about...it's you."

I'm saying that a lot it seems. It's her. It's all I can hear in my head. Repeated over and over again.

"I...I don't understand."

I stand and walk to the bookshelf giving her my back. "Evil's come to Stone Island, the kind of evil that first chased Deliverance here. And the only person who can do anything about it, is you, Nova."

"That...how can that be? I'm not a witch. I don't know anything about this...I don't...I don't understand any of this."

"Come on, Nova." I turn and use my gaze to pin her down. "It's in your very name. Nova. A star that borrows power from another star causing a large bright flash of energy and light."

"What does that have to do with saving the town? What does any of this have to do with me?"

"Because a male can't save the town." I bend down in front of her so we are eye level, "It has to be a woman. It has to be a star that gets her power from her mate. It has to be you."

She's quiet for so long that when she does move it's easy for her to push me back far enough she can not only stand but run.

"This...whatever this is, is not me. It's not." She's up the stairs before I can catch up.

She doesn't stop at the top of them either. She's halfway to the door before I finally catch her. "Brian can take you back to

the inn.”

“And then to the dock.”

“The ferry doesn’t run this late at night. Looks like you’re stuck here for at least one more night. I would...I would really like it if you stayed.”

“Why? Because you need me to save your town? Because you finally found a use for me? You were so ready to shove me aside, wanted nothing more than to have me ‘off your island’ that you would have bent over backwards if it would have convinced me to leave. But now...now, just because of something someone wrote in a book years and years ago you suddenly can’t live without me. You suddenly see me as something other than an annoyance, not because of who I am. No, it’s all because of what you think is written in those books.”

She pulls her arm from my hold, and I let her go not wanting her to feel even more trapped than I’m sure she already does.

“No, thank you, Mr. Magnus. I don’t want to mean something to you just because someone told you I was supposed to.”

There’s a hurt in her eyes that she doesn’t have to explain for me to be able to define it. She doesn’t understand any of this. She doesn’t understand that it isn’t because of some damned book, that I felt drawn to her from the very beginning. That even before I realized she existed something compelled me to go to her on that road that night. Something made me go out in the storm that night and I am sure it’s because our souls are so entwined that one cannot live without the other. I must have sensed the danger close by and was drawn to go find her.

She doesn't understand that doesn't happen for just anyone. It can only happen when the two are soulmates - meant to be.

Before she walks out the door with Brian, I call out to her, "Nova. Be safe." You hold my heart and soul in your hands and don't even realize it.

She pauses only long enough for me to tell her before she turns and rushes for the car parked in the driveway where Brian is already standing. After she's gone, I sit in the library and watch the flames dance in the hearth. I could have handled that better. I could have told her a thousand different ways other than the way I did.

I should have been able to tell who -and what- she was to me that night. A part of me did know. It's why I felt the need to get her off the island...to keep her safe. It was there when we touched when we shook hands for the first time. That electric zing that flows through me was a dead giveaway.

I start plotting and planning ways to make her stay now that I understand she's the one. But I need her to stay for longer than just a couple more days. I need her to stay forever. Hell, the entire town is already in love with her. They've all been trying to make me see what they already did. I can ask any of them for help. In fact, I might just do that. Something real big and public so she can be sure it's not just something I believe I should feel. That this thing between us is not just meant to be, but something I very much want.

Brian comes through and notices me sitting in the dark save for the blaze of the fire. He comes into the room and over to where I am sulking. "She's back at the inn, Sir."

I nod and wave him to the other chair but the look on his face has me looking up wondering what is wrong. "What is it,

Brian?”

“Sir, your...nose is bleeding.” I feel it trickle down the top of my lip even as he says it. Then an intense pain flashes through my head causing me to double over and grab it.

I breathe through the pain and stand quickly, my heart in my throat, “Nova. Somethings wrong with Nova.” I recognize it like I recognize the very beat of my heart. I let my little star go and now it might be too late to keep her by my side. We might not have a forever all because I let her walk away.

Chapter Eleven

Nova

I thank Brian profusely for bringing me back to the inn. Once I'm in my room, I start throwing clothes into my suitcase and collecting my toiletries from the bathroom. My boss calls but I ignore it and keep packing. The man can go to hell. This whole story can fuck right off.

I'm so embarrassed. So confused. Nate kissed me. But he didn't want to. I take a moment to stand up and angry-wipe the tears from my cheeks. I might not understand a lot about love and...and intimacy but I do know I'm not okay with settling for less than real love.

And I damn sure don't want to be the thing someone settles for either. I sit on the bed beside my bag and try to get myself under control when a knock has me jumping and rushing to hide the evidence that I've been upset.

I pull the door open and stick my head out but there's nobody there. I shut the door but before I can make my way back to the bed another knock comes. What the hell? No one is on the other side again. When it happens a third time, I'm pissed and make my way down to the living room to find out if Angie, the owner, can help me figure out who else might be in the inn and trying to prank me. I'm in no mood.

I'm thinking about the night ahead and how in the world I'm going to get through it when hands land in the middle of my back. A quick shove sends me off balance. I'm too close to the top of the stairs to have any hope of not going down the ornate staircase. For a matter of seconds, it feels like everything stops and hangs in the air as I look at the stairs laid out in front of me and feel the presence behind me. And all I can think about is Nate.

In my head all I can hear is my own voice yelling out Nate's name as the steps rise up to meet me and I tumble down them. The sound of Nate's name echoes through my head until I hit the bottom and blackness surrounds me like the ocean closing in over the head of a drowning person. The dark takes me down until nothing else matters but the sweet oblivion that's too powerful for me to fight against.

My next conscious memory is being lifted from the floor, everyone is so loud, and my head is banging so hard I don't dare open my eyes. And then I feel it, just a light pressure on my lips. I would freak out, since you know, I've been thrown down the stairs by someone so it would be a little freaky if it were that person who was trying to kiss me but I don't have to wonder.

I recognize whose lips are pressed to mine, whose breath is fanning out over my wet lips teasing and enticing. "Nova..."

I know that voice. It's the person I called out to when I thought I was going to die. And now he's here, kissing me and offering me comfort. Not asking for anything in return. I moan into his mouth. The mouth that was on me right before everything went all wonky and weird. But this time, not one weird thing - no weird storms, no electric spark, no popped light bulbs. Just the soft touch of his mouth to mine.

I sink into the feeling and the safety he's offering me. Our mouths meld together, and our tongues touch and spar back and forth until my body starts heating up. Liquid fire settles in my lower stomach and my body turns heavy, my breasts tightening and tingling like they are calling out for his touch, and he does not disappoint. His hand cups one of my breasts causing me to gasp around his tongue and arch into his touch.

I never realized a touch could feel so good, so freeing even while it wraps invisible tendrils around my soul holding me to him. Heat infuses my body until I can't catch my breath without pulling my mouth away from his. He takes the opportunity to explore, skimming his mouth down the column of my throat before running his hands down my body and back up again. I can't help but pull him closer and raise my legs to wrap around him. His palm travels over my hip before he wraps his arms around me and we're rolling, my world turns upside down as he uses his hold on my hips to move me over the swell of his cock.

My head drops back as sensations and emotions rush through so powerful I can hear the thumping of my heart beating. The throbbing goes through my whole body until it ends...in my head. "Nova, wake up!"

My eyes flash open and I wish to God I had taken things slower. Thousands of tiny points of pain hit my brain all at the same time. And I have a reason for the throbbing...and it isn't romantic in nature. I gasp before letting a deep-seated moan of pain leave my body. My hands reach out to try to grab for my head only to be restrained at first. Then my vision clears and I notice Nate sleeping beside me, his head on the bed but he's sitting in a chair.

His eyes flash open and stare at me with an intensity that makes me very aware of what I was...dreaming about.

Confusion sets in and I realize both of us are breathing like we...like the dream I was having might not have been a dream. But I'm still dressed and Nate isn't under me. I try to move my hand again and realize the reason I can't lift it is because Nate has them wrapped in his.

"Wh...what, um, happened? What's..." I'm forever confused where he is concerned.

"Did we just...did you dream...?"

A hot blush hits my face and I groan at his question before jerking my hands from his and covering my face. Oh my fucking God! I think we were both...at the same time.

"I would really like the bed to open up and swallow me whole right now."

"Seems like power isn't the only thing we can share. No, no. Don't touch." He stops me from touching my head on one side. "It's gonna be sore for quite some time."

"I...I think I was pushed down the stairs." I realize it sounds stupid but it's not like I'm in any shape to make stunning revelations right now.

"When I got there, Angie was holding you with your head in her lap."

"Is she alright?"

He nods. "She chased whoever it was away. She keeps a gun in her knitting box by her chair in the parlor."

I relax a little knowing someone else wasn't hurt. Then I realize the bed I'm lying in isn't the one I've been sleeping in at the inn. "Where, um, am I?"

"My house."

Before I can ask another question the Sheriff comes in. Nate stands but doesn't leave my side. "Don."

He nods at Nate acknowledging his greeting, "I have Angie sitting with a sketch artist working on a composite drawing of the man she saw standing over you. She didn't get a great look but it's better than nothing. You didn't happen to get a look at him did you?"

I shake my head but have to stop because it makes it hurt more. I bring my hand back to try to stop it from ringing so badly but not on the side Nate told me not to touch. "Before you said it was a 'he', I didn't even know that much."

"Can you tell us what happened?"

"I...I was...packing. To leave the island and someone kept knocking on my door but when I opened it no one was in the hallway. The third time I was fed up and decided to go down to talk to Angie about it. I was at the top when," I close my eyes and try to put myself back in that moment, "I heard heavy footsteps rush towards me and then he pushed me, right in the middle of my back. I didn't have time to think or try to turn around or reach out. I was just falling."

"And that's when you felt it?" Don looks to Nate, so I do too. Nate nods.

“Felt it? Felt what?”

“You...screamed for me when you were falling and I... heard it.”

That doesn't make any sense. To hear it he would have to be at the inn, right? “Heard it? How did you hear me call your name when you were...?”

“His nose bled too.” Don supplies the information even though Nate looks like he might not want to tell me.

“His nose bled?” I look up at Nate. “Why would your nose bleed...?”

“The moment you took a tumble down the stairs?” Nate finishes my thought for me.

“Because the two of you are destined mates.” I jump a little at the cheery voice of Annabeth. What is she doing here? And right behind her is Ruth.

“Destiny. Tied to each other the way all Magnus couples have been since Deliverance and Nathaniel.”

Chapter Twelve

Nate

“It’s...a thing that happens. Probably a curse.” I frown and look away.

“It’s a blessing. And one that kept Deliverance alive and safe until Nathaniel could take her to a safer place.” Annabeth contradicts me quickly. “Our island.”

Nova looks back and forth from one person to the next, finally settling her eyes on mine. “What does it mean?”

“It means, what you feel I feel. If you’re hurt, I’m hurt. It’s one of the reasons my mom didn’t live very long after my dad passed. We’re...connected.”

“You...felt me fall?”

“I felt the aftermath of the fall. I could sense you were in danger. I could hear you call for me.”

She looks up at me from under her thick lashes, some could mistake it for being coy but I realize it’s embarrassment. “So...the dream...”

“I drifted off for a while and we...shared...” She looks everywhere but me now.

“Shared?” Annabeth speaks up and moves closer to the two of us wanting to find out what we are talking about. “You two can share dreams? That’s not in any of the books.”

I fight the urge to roll my eyes at her. We need all the help we can get because of how little time we have left. Whoever this guy is, he’s already tried to attack Nova once and I doubt that is going to be the last time.

“So...what’s our game plan here? How are we going to keep everyone safe and stop him from hurting anyone else?” Don is the one who asks the hard questions everyone else has been dancing around. “I put men out in the forest and this son of a bitch shows up at the inn. How am I supposed to predict where he’s going to hit next?”

“I have Annabeth and Ruth reading through all of the historical material and once Nova and I get some rest we’ll check in with my grandmother and Deliverance’s journals.”

“I’ll have Angie’s drawing to show you all once we all meet back here later. Until then, I would check on her every hour or so just to make sure she doesn’t have a full-blown concussion.”

“I’ll make sure she’s taken care of, Don. Thank you for all your help. Thank all of you for everything.”

“We’re very happy to help, Nate. What with all you’ve done for the town and those that live in it. It’s nice to have a way to

give you some help back.” Annabeth comes over to pat both my shoulder and Nova’s hand.

I can almost feel the weight of exhaustion pressing down on me. I realize it’s not my own, that it’s coming from Nova.

“I...think I should...head back to the inn. I’m tired and...”

“You’re not going back to the inn. You’re not going anywhere.”

She closes her eyes slowly, “Please, Nate. I don’t really feel like arguing. My head...”

She reaches up but I reach out for her hand before she can touch it. I tilt her chin up using my free hand so she has no choice but to look at me. “No argument. You are staying here.” I swipe my thumb over a spot on her cheek that has a small bruise on it because of her tumble. “I let you go once. I’m not doing it again.”

Our eyes meet and hold. There’s a lot being said right now between the two of us without a word passing between our lips.

“Uh, guys...I hate to interrupt whatever is going on here but I really need to get back out there and help patrol the woods again.” I finally take my eyes off Nova so I can bid farewell to Don.

“Brian, can you show everyone out?”

Don looks back once the two women have already wished Nova well and promise to come visit her soon. “Glad you woke up, ma’am.”

“Please call me Nova, Sheriff.”

Don gives her a small smile, “You can call me Don. Everyone on the island does.”

We wait until everyone clears the room before either one of us says anything. Once the door is shut, I can feel the change in energy. I can’t say I didn’t know this would be how it went.

“I can’t stay here with you.”

“You can, you will, argument over.” I cut her response off by scooping her up in my arms and walking towards the door.

“Where are we going?”

“When we got to the inn, I had all of your bags and suitcases brought here.” She waits for me to answer her question with a raised eyebrow, not at all persuaded to drop the issue. “They put them in my room which is where we’re going.”

Her eyes widen, “What? No, Nate. I can’t. I need to go back to the inn and...”

“The only place you are going is back to bed.” My bed.

I take one of the many staircases up to the third floor and walk down the hall to my room. The door is already open and

the lights are on inside. This room has always been one of my favorites, even when I was a kid. There's a warm feeling that sinks into your soul when you enter. I don't know if that's because we do a lot of work to make sure this room is our sanctuary or if it has more to do with this being Deliverance's room and she's the one not letting anything but positive come through these doors.

The room is round, set in one of the many turrets of the house. The bed is against one wall and takes up quite a bit of the room since it is massive. On the opposite side is a fireplace and two overstuffed chairs. All the windows in the room look out over the ocean below and all of them have window seats just waiting for someone to come curl up in them with a good book.

My contribution is the many plants hanging and placed throughout the room. With the stone etching behind the bed, the whole room feels more like a little cave than an actual room in a house. The bed in the middle takes on the shape of the room with a cushioned circular space to sit in front of it instead of a footboard. It's the etching that catches Nova's attention.

“Oh my gosh, that's...that's the same image on the baby crib I saw in the nursery. And the one on the front of Deliverance's journal.”

“It's the tree of life.” I sit her down on the edge of the bed so she can wiggle close enough to the stone to touch it, her fingers tracing over the branches and down the trunk to the roots beneath. “It is very important to my family. It represents above, with the branches reaching high and below, with the roots planted firmly in the ground. No one is truly lost to you if you believe in the tree of life. They're simply on a higher branch. One day your limb will grow, and you will be with them again, but we are all connected to one another.”

I take her hand and show her by tracing the tree with her,
“The past and the present and the future, the dead and the
living and those yet to be. All together.”

“Oh wow!” She’s not looking at the tree any longer but at
me. And then the world is tilting again, going out of my
control, sweeping us up into the past, and dropping us where
we are needed most.

Chapter Thirteen

“Pretend you are one of us.”

That fine edge of fear that could cut at any moment hangs heavy over our heads like the sharp blade of an executioner’s axe. “I don’t know how. What...?”

“No time.”

“Nathaniel Goodman! Come out! We know you are harboring the witch. It is time to come out and pay for your sins. Confess! Tell the world how the harlot seduced you and forsake the devil’s whore.”

Once again Nathaniel is wrapping me in as many layers of clothing as he can before throwing the door open to the lit torches of the people on his lawn. The one banging on the door, the preacher Reverend Amos Good backs up a little bit when Nathaniel steps out. He is a big man but even Nathaniel can’t take on the whole town.

“I know not what you are talking about, Amos. There is no woman here. Only my sister’s teenage son sent to me for lifting too many skirts in his own town.”

I keep my head down and try to adopt the image of a teenage boy. Half the time I hold my breath and pray. This isn’t

just about me anymore. Now I have something more to live for. Nathaniel.

“This...boy is staying with you?”

He nods.

“Tell us boy, and be mindful God can always tell liars from those who speak the truth, is your uncle harboring a female in his home?” I take a deep breath and recall the glamor spell I learned from my grandmother, one of the easier spells to work. It draws energy from others and shows them what they want to see, but the image can be manipulated by a very crafty witch to show what the wearer wants them to see as well.

“My uncle harbors no female. One of the many reasons my mum sent me to his home, sir.”

He pushes the hood back to take a better look at my face. I look at the man and hold the image of the youth in my head, taken straight from the image I’ve gotten from Nathaniel’s mind.

The man looks with squinted eyes before turning his back on us.

“You are welcome to come in if you want. It is cold and the night is dark, Amos. Stay a spell with us.”

“No. I know she is close. I can sense her. I won’t stop until I’ve hunted her down and watched her burn before my very eyes.”

He moves back into the inky night and the others follow behind. Beside me, I sense Nathaniel exhaling deeply for the first time since we heard the bootsteps of the Reverend on the stone steps outside the house.

He turns to me once we are safely locked behind the closed door. "How did you do that? You looked just like..."

"I'll tell you later. Now I think it's best if we both ready ourselves to leave. That is...if you're sure."

He pulls me into his arms, our bodies brush against one another and the heat he always seems to give off sinks into my cold lonely soul. "I have never been more sure of anything in my life, my love. You are my witch, my love, my life. And one day you will be my wife."

His mouth drops to mine in a kiss sealed with a promise of a future not shaken by the uncertainty of what is to come but steady and true in the love we share with each other.

Nova

When we finally come back it's not as passive observers but as an echo of the past. Nate's mouth is on mine and our tongues are twining around one another. His hand is still over mine and mine is still touching the stone tree behind his bed, but our mouths have taken on the actions of Deliverance and Nathaniel.

When we draw back from one another the first thing I'm aware of is how quiet it is, how absolutely still everything is. His hand stays where it cups my cheek as he looks at me with

the brightest blue eyes I have ever seen. His thumb runs across my bottom lip slowly before he takes his hand away.

I try to lighten the mood by giving a little chuckle, “Gee, I hope that doesn’t happen every time I touch something in your house. It could start getting really awkward.”

Not that the kiss we just shared wasn’t the very definition of the word. He gives me a soft half-smile. “I don’t know. I find I’m not hating the outcome so much when it means you end up in my arms.”

Chapter Fourteen

Nate

She blushes and looks away from me. I place my finger under her chin to bring her face back up so I can look at her cheeks tinted a sexy pink. I reach behind her and pull the blankets back on the bed.

“I would love to find out what else we could touch and where it might take us,” she widens her eyes and runs her tongue over her bottom lip before trapping it in between her teeth, “but you need rest and I want to make sure you’re alright before we get into anything to...strenuous.”

“But...I thought people with concussions weren’t supposed to sleep.” Her face reddens again. “Not that I want to...I mean, it’s not that I don’t want to, either. I...I’m going to shut up now because anything I say is not going to come out right.”

I cup her face in my hands making sure not to touch the bandage on her forehead and bring my lips to hers in a light kiss. “Tonight is for rest.”

I pull up one of the chairs that sits in front of the fireplace and plop into it.

“What are you doing?”

“Sitting,” I say matter-of-factly, even though I understand what she is asking. Looking at the tiredness in her eyes I decide to tell her without her having to ask again. “I have to stay close to monitor your concussion, so unless you want me to crawl in there with you...”

“But...you’re just going to sit in the chair all night long?”

“Well, what’s left of the night. And after for as long as you need to rest.” The sun will be up soon, but I don’t want her to focus on that. I want her to rest. She needs to rest.

“Sorry.”

I move her chin up so she can take a good look at my face, “Never be sorry.”

It’s my job to care for her. I know that deep in my soul. I feel it with every fiber of my being. I don’t want her to be sorry for needing me. I watch as her eyes close for longer and longer periods of time until she’s finally asleep. I set an alarm so I could be sure to wake her if I fell asleep.

I spend the rest of the night watching her as she rests, as she moves in my bed. I try to fight off the need I feel for her, the urge I have to get closer to her, to touch her. Her body sliding against the silk sheets is a constant temptation for me. I want. For the first time in my life, I want something so hard, so deeply, I can taste it. But like I told her before she slipped into sleep, she needs rest more than anything. There will be time. Time to show her what it means to be soulmates, what it will be like when someone like me loves her, and what being together feels like.

I wake her a few times before finally dozing myself. In the late morning, I finally slip away to shower before I come back to check on her again. When I come out, she's sitting up in bed. Her eyes move over me like the soft brush of fingertips, and I have to fight back a shiver as I think of her running her nails across my skin.

I didn't put a shirt on because I thought I would have time to grab one before she woke up so now her eyes land on me and the room heats up several degrees as that electrical aura that surrounds us sparks and pops. She doesn't look like she needs rest now. She looks like she might be yearning for the same thing I am.

“Ready to eat?”

Her eyes widen and come to mine. “You mean... breakfast? Right?”

I give her a half-cocked smile before moving closer to her. Yeah, breakfast. That's exactly what I meant. Only I was thinking of making her my breakfast. “Come on, sweetheart. Let's get you downstairs before I do something not so nice.”

I scoop her up. Her arms go around my neck as her warmth settles against me. By the time I have her down the stairs and in the kitchen, my control has been severely tested. As soon as I have her little ass situated on a bar stool at the island, I'm turning her so I can put my mouth on hers. It shocks her enough that she gasps allowing me into her sweetness.

I pull from her only long enough to whisper in her ear, “You have no idea what's coming.”

I pull back to look down into her eyes, at the shock and heat there, before taking her mouth again. This time I let some of the possessiveness I try to hold back seep out. My hands sink into her hair so I can control the tilt of her head as I take the kiss even deeper until we're not just kissing but sharing the same air with one another.

“Not in the kitchen.” Brian’s voice breaks over us like a bucket of cold water and when I finally pull away from Nova to give him a go-to-hell stare all he does is shrug, “It’s where we eat for goodness sakes.”

I bite down on my cheek to keep from saying anything about that. I do plan to have Nova in the kitchen laid out like an expensive dessert, meant to be savored and lingered over. But that’s for another time. I go around the island and make her a plate piled with food. She’s going to need all of her energy for later.

Chapter Fifteen

Nova

At some point, Nate puts on a sweater of cobalt blue that just looks like it would be so soft, and thank God he did. I wouldn't be able to concentrate on eating if he hadn't. That kiss... was unlike any we'd shared before. There was a new element of it that was shocking...and utterly erotic. There was just something about it that left me weak-kneed and wanting more, wanting to find out where it would lead, what he meant about what was coming. The words could have been a threat, but something tells me there wasn't anything but promise in the rawness of his kiss, the boldness of his touch, the possessiveness in his arms as they wrapped around me to pull me closer.

By the time we're done, I think I have myself under control only to lose it again when he lifts me out of my chair again and carries me away. "You do realize there's nothing wrong with my legs."

"Yeah, but you could be dizzy."

"But I'm not." My words do no good. He's not putting me down until he gets me to the destination he's picked out for me.

He takes us to a room right off the kitchen. The whole place has plants everywhere. And when he takes us to the very middle of the room, the floor is a little koi pond in the shape of a tear drop or leaf. I can't help but gasp and try to wiggle my way down so I can take a better look.

“Oh, my goodness, what is this? It's beautiful?”

“It's the conservatory.”

“Conservatory?”

“Some of the plants here are...not the safest while others are only used for medicinal purposes. And some are here because they are pretty, and I like looking at beautiful things.” His intent stare on me brings a blush to my face as he sits me in a large, cushioned chair.

He wastes no time handing me something as he sits me down. “What...what is this?”

In my hands resting on my lap is the book I was drawn to yesterday.

“You're going to help look for a spell or an incantation to send this fucker back to hell where he came from.”

“But...I can't read...” before I can finish, he is handing me a piece of paper with the witch's alphabet written in bold, strong script on it.

So, I spend most of the day going over the pages of beautifully scrawled words and translating the ones I don't

know into letters I can understand, using my phone to translate the Latin ones. The whole book is a bit journal and a bit instruction manual talking about Deliverance and her life here with the man she loved. Some things I don't understand while some make perfect sense to me. The whole electric surge that happens when me and Nate touch is fairly common among the people in his family. The sharing of power also happens but much less frequently than the electric thing.

A lot of it gives me comfort knowing that others have been where I am, in the same situation and feeling the same things. At lunch, Nate comes in.

“How's it going?”

“Not bad, really. A lot better than I thought it would. Did you know you can manipulate the weather? It's the first thing young witches learn. That and the glamour we saw Deliverance use in the vision we had.” I look up at him as he closes a door off to one side and flips a lock. “Of course, you know. I just...find it really interesting.”

“Anything on the evil we're dealing with yet?”

“She talks about it off and on but nothing about getting rid of it yet.”

“You're very beautiful when you find something interesting.” He walks closer to the chair I am sitting in. “You're very beautiful period. But when you find something intriguing your eyes light up and your cheeks have this hint of pink across them that is very appealing.”

“Oh, um, thank you.” It comes out almost as a question more than an actual thanks. As he gets closer the beat of my

heart starts hammering faster until he's standing in front of me and looking down into my eyes. His fingers brush against the side of my cheek and over my jaw, before using his hand to tilt my head even further back.

“Remember what I told you?”

“About not knowing what's about to happen?” I don't understand why I feel like I must whisper but I do.

“No,” he runs his thumb along my lower lip, “about not ever letting you go again.”

“Oh,” I remember. My breath comes quicker and quicker. He bends over until our lips are only a breath apart. My eyes drift closed, and I wait for his mouth to come down on mine. But instead, he's picking me up and sitting back down with me in his lap. He positions my legs on either side of his until I'm sitting with my legs spread wide.

My hands go to where my skirt is riding up so I can hold it down. The last thing I want is for Brian to come in while I am spread so wide. Nate takes my hands in his and holds them close to my breasts. With his free hand, he trails his fingertips along my inner thigh.

“You know, I realized as soon as we met on that dark road that you were mine.”

I try to keep up with what he is saying but it is hard when he's doing things with his fingers.

“I felt this shock, this electricity course through me as soon as I laid eyes on you, and when we touched...it felt like

holding live wire. I wanted you to go, to get off this island so you wouldn't have to deal with all this curse bullshit, all the worry about what it means to be fated to be with me." His fingers move higher and higher. "Now, I realize...you will only ever be safe if I keep you close to me. Only safe if I keep you within arms' reach."

His fingers brush against the soft skin just below my panties causing me to gasp and pull back out of sheer instinct. But there's nowhere to go, his broad chest is right behind me, his arms around me, his hand holding both of mine captive. "N... Nate, what are you...doing?"

"Giving you reasons to want to stay with me."

Before I can decode the meaning of his words his fingertips are skimming over the gusset of my panties. My breath stills and my heart is beating so loudly it's all I can hear. He does it again and again until my hips are dancing to move away from his touch...or are they trying to make him move closer to me? A moan falls from my lips without me meaning for it to causing me to doubt which way my body is trying to go - farther away or closer to his touch.

He gives a soft hum as he nuzzles into my neck. "So soft." I jerk as his fingers swipe at me again but this time skin to skin. He must have moved my panties to the side. "So wet."

"O...oh my God! Nate?"

"See," his breath moves the fine hairs along my temple as he keeps up the soft petting, "I've never touched anything so soft and warm. Never felt anything quite like what I have my hands on now."

That sense of electricity goes through me at an amplified level as his fingers home in on the bundle of nerves at the top of my pussy as he uses his fingers to spread me apart. “Nate! Nate...what...?”

I have no choice but to let my head fall back on his shoulder as he plays with the tightening bud and nibbles at my ear and neck. I squirm on his lap and try to close my legs only to find that he’s trapped them open with his own.

Everything in me seems to be narrowing, focusing, on that one spot. My breasts grow heavy and tight, the nipples hardening painfully until everything throughout my body feels too tight, the touch too much to take. A whimper slips from my lips as Nate weaves a magic spell around me that has nothing at all to do with him being a witch.

He lets my trapped hands go so he can cup one of my breasts in his palm causing me to again gasp out. He runs his thumb over the tip while still playing with my clit. So many points of pleasure cause my body to tighten painfully until I’m crying out for Nate to do something about it. “Nate, please.”

“Give me your mouth.” He says the words even as he licks up the column of my neck.

“Oh my God!” I turn my head blindly. He captures my mouth with his and plunges his tongue over mine. I moan but it’s not out loud, his mouth prevents it from coming out. I should be glad because I’m sure I’m being loud as fuck but I can’t help it.

My body tightens even more with the addition of his tongue until I can’t take it any longer. My body arches as it starts to convulse. His fingers dip further back so that they are at my entrance while he still uses his thumb to play and tease my clit.

One of the wandering digits sinks into me just enough that I have something to pulse around.

I cum so hard everything goes black, and I can hear the bulbs in the room pop as I slump back against Nate. He slowly takes his finger from my still-quivering entrance and brings it to his mouth. I watch as his eyes close and his lips close around his fingers.

“Oh shit! That...cannot be...true...”

“W...what...?” I started to ask him what couldn’t be true but then he was moving us. He quickly stands and places me on the chair as he hits his knees in front of me. “Nate?”

What is he doing? What can’t be true? He’s got me so relaxed I can’t seem to find the energy to move, even when I know he can see all of me. It doesn’t take me long to find out what he is about to do. Not long at all.

Chapter Sixteen

Nate

A witch can tell a lot about a person once they've gotten close to them. I give her no time to object as I take her ankle in one hand and jerk her panties to the side once more. She's wet from the orgasm she just gave me. I run my nose against the seam of her pussy before using my tongue to spread both sides of her puffy lips.

“Oh my God! Nate!”

I place my whole mouth over her sex and use my tongue to lick the release from her. Once I've got her on my tongue, I find I don't want to stop. She might just have a problem here. A witch who won't leave her pussy alone. Her hands come down to sink into my hair and pull at my sweater. I wonder if she's aware she's not pushing me away but pulling me closer to her. Does she realize that she's rocking her hips up off the cushion so she can keep my mouth on her?

She whimpers and arches her back. I love how she cries out and calls my name. I love how vocal she is when she's close to cumming for me. I love how she shows me she is enjoying this as much as I am. And I love the new information I am finding out about my little star.

I rear back from eating her sweetness, “You’re innocent, aren’t you?”

“W...what?” She looks at me with unfocused eyes, breathing deeply.

“I can taste it on you. I can tell.” I hum to show her how tasty she is. “So fucking sweet! And never touched.”

“You...you can tell I...I’m...,” her eyes seem to be better focused now and she’s looking at me with a combination of surprise and mortification.

“I can! I fucking can taste it! Never happened before! It’s so sweet. Like a tasty treat.” I all but growl as I dive back down and start eating and licking and sucking her soft, sweet pussy. I might not be thinking well enough to make full sentences, but it doesn’t matter. She understands I know she’s never had a man between her legs, she’s never allowed anyone to get close to her. Anyone...but me!

“Nate! Nate! It...I...oh God! Nate!” Her body bows up off the chair as her heels dig into my back where they hang over my shoulders and she keeps crying out my name.

I slip my finger in her but keep it shallow, so I don’t hurt her. She’s not ready for that yet, but soon...soon she will be completely mine. My wife, my star, my world. Soon she will be everything to me. She’s already close to being that now.

I send her into a hard climax as I chase the taste of her all over her lower body. I tip her and even take a swipe at the little star behind her sweet little pussy causing her to cry out louder than before and shake into another release. Oh, I am loving the fact Nova is so responsive. We are going to have so much fun

with each other over the years. So many memories we have to make together, and it all starts now.

I finally take my mouth away from her as her body continues to tremble and shake while I hold her tight to me. I nuzzle into her as strands of her hair catch and stick to my face where I'm still damp from her release. She's all around me. The feel of her, the taste of her, the smell of her all surround me until I'm fumbling for my belt and all but tearing her panties from her.

And then I heard the knock. I look at Nova under me, limp and complacent, ready to take me. But the knock turns insistent. And Brain yells through the door.

"Far be it for me to stop you two, but the Sheriff is here, and he says it is urgent, Sir."

Urgent. It better fucking be a life-threatening situation. I pull back at the same time I call out. "Give me a minute."

"Yes, sir. He will be in the library whenever you are ready."

"Come on, sweetheart. We probably need to find out what the Sheriff has to say."

I help her sit up and straighten her clothes before I pick her back up and carry her through the house, being very careful to keep her skirt tucked around her since she's not wearing panties now. They were too torn for her to put them back on. They're in my pocket, a reminder I have to find this asshole whose hurting women who look just like her so I can get started with my happy ever after.

Chapter Seventeen

Nova

“We have an idea who it is. Who the murderer is.” Sheriff Don speaks as soon as we come through the door. He doesn’t act like it’s odd that Nate should be carrying me around or that my cheeks are on fire because of what me and Nate just did in the conservatory.

Nate settles me in before straightening and giving his attention to Don. Even though he is looking at Don I don’t think his full attention is centered there. There’s a small flutter in the back of my mind, throughout my being, that tells me some of his attention is on me - always on me.

Don hands over the artist’s rendition of the man who pushed me. I find it odd he doesn’t hand it to Nate first, but I soon understand why he hands it to me. It would seem something other than my bad luck has followed me to Stone Island.

“Oh my God! That...that’s my boss. Justin Amos.” I reach out and automatically find Nate’s hand right there for me. “Amos...that was the first name of the man who tried to attack Deliverance, Nate. Why? Why didn’t I put that together before now?”

“To be fair, you had just taken a tumble down a flight of stairs, sweetheart. And the vision did just happen last night.”

“He...he’s the reason I’m here. He sent me to do the report.”

“My deputies found evidence he’s been here the entire time. They found camp equipment and an area where he started a campfire.” Fear courses through me as a very familiar face is put on the spirit of evil that has been chasing me all over this island.

“I...I turned him down. Told him I wouldn’t, um, sleep with him.”

Don raises his eyes to me from writing the name in his notebook, “That would explain why he’s been killing women that look like you. Maybe he became obsessed with having you. In any form he could.”

A shiver works its way through my body as my stomach lurches violently at the implications. Nate comes closer to wrap his arms around me.

“Now that we have a name and a face, I’ll hand out posters to all the shops and inns and to everyone on the island. If he’s still on the island, we’ll find him.”

“Am I the reason all those women died? Because I told him no?”

“Hell no! He’s the one responsible for that. Not you!”

“Nate’s right, Nova. You didn’t kill those women - your boss did that and were it not you that he obsessed over, it would have been another woman.”

Brian walks him out, leaving us in a heavy silence. Nate’s hand rubs my back in a show of comfort, but I still can’t get over the feeling of being responsible for the deaths of those women, who died just because they looked like me.

As if reading my mind, Nate comes to stand in front of me and tips my head up with his fingertip, “You are not responsible for the deaths of those women. You could not have known this would happen, any of it. You didn’t find those women, you didn’t provoke fear in them, and you didn’t take their lives.” Moisture gathers at the corner of my eyes. “You are a sweet, wonderful woman full of light and compassion. If anything, you are going to save others because you will stop this man and protect everyone on the island...with me.”

No pressure. Just save an entire fucking island full of people from imminent death and sorrow. All while trying to learn a new language and finding the answers written in a three hundred-plus-year-old journal that has more pages than War and Peace. I’m so going to shit the bed on this one.

“Come on, sweetheart. You need rest.”

“No...I need to go back to the journal to figure out if I can find a way to...”

He scoops me putting an end to the argument. “We didn’t get a great deal of sleep last night; Don has men watching the woods and everyone in town is looking for your boss. Right now, the best thing you can do for the cause is rest.”

He takes us back up the same stairs we came down this morning. When we come in, he uses his foot to kick the door closed behind us. “You’re taking me back to your bedroom again, aren’t you?”

“Yes. My bed in my room. And this...,” he lays me down on the bed, “is my woman. In my bed.”

Instead of sitting back or going to the chair like he did last night, he crawls up on the bed with me. When he comes over the top of me, I finally ask the question hanging heavy in my mind. “What about after? After all of this is over and you don’t need me to save the island any longer? After we catch Justin and we’re not in the same situation as we are now?”

He looks down at me with a furrow between his eyebrows and a frown on his lips. “You think I’m drawn to you because I need you to stop this from happening? That the only reason I want you is because of all of this?”

“I’m just asking...what’s going to happen after?”

“Nova, the men in my family only fall in love once, we only have one soulmate.”

His words do nothing to clear up or answer the things poking at my mind, “So...it’s all fated. You have no choice in the matter? No say?”

He surprises me by throwing his head back and laughing. “There’s always a choice to be made, even when things are ‘fated’. I was drawn to you before I understood what you were or who you were. I was attracted to you from the beginning when you were sitting in your car muttering to yourself about

how bad your luck was and whether bears, serial killers, or escaped prisoners were going to be the first to kill you.”

I gasp, “You know about that.”

“It endeared you to me right from the start. How can I not be attracted to the funny, sarcastic, smart, strong woman who wasn’t afraid to take on the world all for a story?”

I can’t help but smile at the way he speaks about the first time we met. “I found you pretty hot right off too. That light blue/gray sweater you were wearing was...you looked good in it. Better than good really.”

I drop my eyes and play with the front of his sweater as I make my confession.

“You thought I was hot, didn’t you?”

I can’t help but smile as I give him a small nod. He tips my face up before bringing his lips to mine. And it’s like a wildfire igniting. Both of us wrap around one another, my arms around his neck, my legs around his waist, the kiss takes us deeper and deeper.

Before I can stop myself, I’m pulling at his sweater as he’s running his hands up under my shirt. Once both of us are topless we go back to kissing. I gasp at the feeling of him against me, bare chest to bare chest. One of his big hands comes up to cup my breast and play with my hardened nipple causing me to gasp again. This time he’s there to take the air I give and give me his as our tongues mingle and spare with one another.

That warm feeling settles in my tummy again but this time I understand what it means. This time I realize I'm getting closer and closer to finding release at the touch of Nate's hand. I have to pull my mouth from his so I can gasp for breath since he seems to keep taking mine with his hands and mouth. His lips roam down over the column of my throat and down to the top of my breasts before he takes one of the stiff peaks in his mouth and causes my whole body to arch into his waiting touch.

He switches from one to another before kissing lower. His lips drag over the soft flesh of my belly and down past my navel to the bare mound above the cleft of my pussy. And then his mouth is on me again creating the same magic he did when we were in the conservatory earlier.

“Oh! Oh my God, Nate! It...it feels so good!”

His tongue runs up the middle of me before really focusing on the bundle of nerves at the top. His hands slide back up my body so they can play once more with my breasts which have grown sensitive and heavy ever since our mouths have connected. My hands sink into his hair as he works his tongue over me and I feel like my whole body is taking flight, like everything but me and Nate falls away - all the worry, all the concern and fear - so we can fly free. The magic of his mouth is taking over so he is all I know, all I feel, all I want or need.

Chapter Eighteen

Nate

Her feet sink into the mattress as she pushes her pussy up into my mouth trying to get closer to me. I take the opportunity to pull her skirt down her legs just briefly taking my mouth from her. When I do, I am rewarded with an image that will be imprinted on my mind forever - the sight of Nova laid bare for me for the first time. There's so much innocence and sensuality in everything she does and she's always beautiful but now, like this, she is breathtaking.

And all mine.

I go back to eating her sweet juicy pussy, giving her as much pleasure as she will allow me to give her. The tips of her nails dig into my scalp and her legs tense as she comes closer to finding her release with the help of my tongue. I slip my finger inside of her enough that I can test how much I'll need to work her to ensure she's not going to be hurt when we finally come together. She cries out and arches her back off the bed as her body tightens right before her sweet little pussy spasms around the tip of my finger and her flavor becomes even sweeter.

“Oh, I...,” she relaxes back on the bed, but I don't stop and instead start cleaning her with my tongue.

It doesn't take long before I am building her back up to another fast release and finally, I am able to slide two fingers inside her tight opening. I turn my fingers so I can work them against the bundle of nerves found inside of her.

“Oh my God!” She shouts it out as her thighs start to shake and tremble and the muscles surrounding her entrance flutter around my fingers. “Oh, Nate!”

She reaches her hands out to grab for the covers before she cums for me hard. Her body milks my fingers in deep pulses that have my dick aching to replace the lucky digits. This time when she relaxes enough I can slip my fingers free, I don't hesitate to make quick work of my slacks. I have no intention of actually taking her all the way tonight but that doesn't mean I can't mark her.

But once I'm free, the control shifts to her as her hands come up to touch my aching cock. Once she wraps her little hands around the shaft all I can do is utter soft pleas for her to keep doing it and deep grunts and growls when she does. I wrap my hand around hers and teach her how to stroke me until my balls are so tight against my body that they feel like they are up in my throat.

She's the one who starts sliding her little pussy up and down my aching dick. She's the one who starts mimicking the motions of sex even though I know she's never been like this before with anyone. It's natural and we start feeding off one another, she picking up images from my mind and me picking up thoughts and feelings from hers.

“Nate...I...oh I'm going to cum again.” Her pussy tightens up and her motions grow jerky and uncoordinated. “Nate...I need...I need you.”

I don't have to ask how she needs me. I can pick the images out of her mind, the ones where she is full of me when she finally finds her release. I sit back to put distance between us and use my fingers when she follows me up. She's crawling in my lap before I can stop her. Her little body lowers on my stiff cock as my body starts to shake with the effort to keep from cumming.

I catch her before she can do something foolish like impaling herself on me in one painful plunge, the cheeks of her ass in my hands as I help lower her so she can take just the barest hint of the tip. Surely that wouldn't hurt her too much. Surely we can both cum quickly and I can lay her back down on the bed without me going all the way inside of her.

But it doesn't go the way I want it to. The tip of my cock spreads her lips apart as I rub the tip of my cock against her wetness. When the liquid heat of her travels down my shaft in little rivulets my control, and my arms, start to shake. Nova catches her breath on the sensation before rocking her body so the head of my dick sinks into all that soft, warm, wet heaven.

“Oh shit! Oh my...Nova, honey...you have to...”

Before I can say another word, she pushes down and takes the full head of my cock inside her hot little body. My dick twitches before I release a load of baby batter in her unprotected channel. We probably should have talked about what Nova wanted to do when it came time for me to cum but I can't stop and I can't hold the surge of seed back when her body tightens up even more.

“Oh...Nate, mmm. I like the feel of you in me.” She brings her lips to mine. “I want more.”

She slides further down until her innocence stops any further progression. It's way past time for me to take control back. I move so I can pull her off my dick but Nova wraps her arm around my neck and takes the opportunity to jerk her hips fast and sharp so her body goes down as mine comes up.

She goes still, frozen, when my cock breaks through her barrier and her pussy grows even warmer and wetter as my dick keeps filling her little body until she can't take anymore. This time I'm the one wrapping my arms around her so I can hold her still and check on her.

"Nova," My voice comes out as little more than a growl, "are you alright, sweetheart?"

She bites down on her lip before giving me a little sound mixed between a whimper and a moan. "It...It feels like...you are so far...so far inside of me. Oh, Nate. You...I...feel so full."

I take her mouth with my own and drop one of my hands down to start playing with her clit again so she will loosen up enough I can slide out of her without causing her any more pain. "That's because you are full, sweetheart. You're stuffed full...of me. That feeling is me filling you up."

"Oh God," She lets out a sexy whine before involuntary moving her hips causing me to lose my breath.

"Nova, sweetheart, you...have to be still." Or I'm going to cum again.

She whimpers again but this time her thighs squeeze together, and she moves her body on top of mine, "It feels

better when I do this though. It feels sooo good when I move like this.”

She starts really rocking back and forth until all I can do is grab her hip and hold on, my balls tightening up with release again.

“Oh God, Nate, did you just get even bigger?”

I bite back a moan as I try to focus on what Nova needs, “I...yes, I’m about to cum so, sweetheart, we have to...”

She does the opposite of what I need her to do and speeds up. “Nate! Nate, I want to feel it!”

What?

“Let me feel it, Nate. Let me feel you come.”

Oh shit! With her begging for it, there is no hope of me staving off the climax working its way down my back and through my balls up to my shaft. I wrap my arms around her to hold her even closer as both of us find the right rhythm, together. I lick up the peak of her breast before placing my mouth over the hard little pebble and drawing it into my mouth. It causes Nova to cry out and arch back freely offering me her body as her pussy tightens around me and she starts milking my cock. I don’t hold back but rather set the pace for both of us as I rock my hips deep so I can go further inside of her.

At the moment I let go, her body floods around mine as she pulses around my cock and I spill inside of her. By the time both of us come back to ourselves we’re holding each other up

and breathing like we just ran a marathon. I move us so we are at least on our side lying down so when we drift off we will be a little more comfortable.

My eyes drift closed as I snuggle into the warmth I've been looking for all my life, as I snuggle into the arms of my wife, my life partner, my soul mate.

Chapter Nineteen

Nova

My phone buzzing and vibrating pierce the fog of sleep that I've been wrapped up in. I blink to bring my eyes into better focus and look around to find the screen lighting up the darkened room. I scoot out from under Nate's arm and pad over to find out who is sending me messages. When the name pops up again to let me know I now have two new texts, my heart starts thudding hard and my stomach drops like I'm on a roller coaster.

Justin.

I press my thumb to the identification sensor while questions tumble through my mind. Does he realize I know who he is? Does he know I am well aware that he is here and tried to kill me? As I open the phone I find that he does indeed know both of those things.

As soon as I'm done reading the messages I hurry to dress. Before I walk out of the door, I pause to look back at the man sleeping on the bed. Can I keep him safe? Can I keep him from being harmed during all of this? Am I strong enough to stop Justin before someone else is hurt?

I blow him a kiss even as my heart breaks and I go outside to meet with Justin. He says he has another woman, that he won't kill her if I just come to him, and not to tell anyone else that he's contacted me. I leave the safety of the house and walk down to the tree line. I understand how stupid it is to go into the woods with no help, nobody to look out for me, but I can't let another woman die because of me. It takes me a couple of minutes to make it to the clearing but when I step into the ring of grass with the moon shining down on me a vision hits me hard.

I try to fight it off. I shake my head hoping that does the trick but nothing is going to stop the vision from coming. Not even a murderer.

“There's no need to hurt another. I'm here now. You have what you want.”

“Hello Nova! You whore!”

The past and the present bleed together as an image of a pilgrim and the image of Justin steps out of the woods around the clearing. The two images are almost overlaid on top of each other.

“You...have what you want. No one else needs to be hurt.” My words echo those of Deliverance.

“Stupid woman! Did you really think I wouldn't get what I wanted? I'm Justin Amos. I'll always get what I want.”

He raises a gun and points right at me.

Take him to the cliff. Take him to the cliff and call the lightning.

I shake my head again trying to quieten the voice. Justin notices something is going on with me.

“What’s wrong with you? Are you on drugs?”

I start backing up, getting ready to run. “I’m just a little confused. You didn’t shoot the other women. Why shoot me, Amos?”

“I don’t plan to shoot you, Nova. I plan to keep you until I tire of you and then choke the life out of you slowly until there’s nothing left of your evilness to tempt me any longer.”

“You do realize I’ll never go with you willingly. You’ll have to use the gun.”

“Not if I threaten your lover, little Nova. Then you’ll come willingly, won’t you?”

I don’t say a word. He’s not wrong. I would go with him anywhere to keep Nate safe.

“Jezabel! Harlot! You belong to me!”

I back up even further and turn to run through the trees. Leading Justin even further away from Nate. Overhead the sky splits in two as lightning flashes across the sky making the whole area flash from night to day and back again in a split second. As I run, visions flash through my mind like the

lightning over me. Snapshots of another time when a woman just like me ran to keep the love of her life safe.

Images of Deliverance running through the woods with rain pouring down on her, feeling her heart thump and her fear try to eat her alive as Amos stomps through the forest behind her crowd my mind. She falls and so do I, slipping in the mud as pellets of rain fall down making my run even more perilous.

*Use the lightning! Focus on seeing it, harness the power!
Use the lightning!*

My heart is in my throat making it hard to drag in enough air to keep running but I do. Until I come to the hill, bare of any trees and probably the highest point on the island.

Go to the top, child.

An image of Deliverance shimmers in the space between the raindrops causing her to waiver in front of me. I start climbing up the hill, slipping every so often but never stopping. Once at the top, I stop before I run off the edge which falls far, far below to the crashing ocean.

I spin to look at Amos/Justin coming up the hill. I square my shoulders and work on catching my breath through my fear and panic. He comes to stand in front of me with hate and rage filled eyes.

“Fuck strangling you! I’ll just go ahead and shoot you, Satan’s bitch!”

He raises the gun and out of nowhere, Nate steps out of the dark and right in front of me. Just as the gun goes off!

“No!”

As soon as the bullet hits Nate, I feel it slice through me as if it had struck me. Energy crackles all around us making my hair stand on end and catch in the blowing wind. My fear turns to something more as I gather electricity from all around me. Justin takes on a wild, crazed look as he points the gun again but not at me.

“No!”

Picture it, Nova, and it will be.

Beside me, Nate reaches up and takes my hand connecting me even more solidly to Deliverance. I let the electricity flow through me using the power me and Nate make between us and focus it all toward Justin. I watch as a long streak of lightning cuts through the air...and hits Justin in the chest. I see the look of fear and panic now in his eyes as the lightning courses through his body, charring his skin and singeing his hair. His eyes bulge and I close my own, not wanting to see the outcome of what lightning can do to a human body.

After the heat from the lightning dissipates I drop to my knees and focus on Nate.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” We both draw back in surprise as we both nearly shout the question to one another at the same time.

His hands run over my body checking me as I place mine over the wound in the fleshy part of his shoulder. Our mouths

find one another and meld together in a kiss that would make the lightning jealous of the heat we produce.

“What the hell...?” The night comes alive with strobing lights and the sound of sirens echoing off the trees and stone. We look over at where Don is standing close to the burnt body of Justin. “Is this...?”

We both nod.

“How?”

“Nova,” Nate answers him this time but looking at me. “How did you know to do that?”

“Deliverance showed me. I saw her, could hear her, as clearly as if she were Don. She told me where to go and how to use the power we make between us. I couldn’t have done it without you. Without you sharing your magic.”

“She woke me and told me to go to you when you left the room. And don’t you ever do something like that again.” He pulls me in tight as rain streams down our faces and our eyes speak for us.

“I love you, Nate.”

“I love you too, my star. Marry me? Make me the partner you take with you through life?”

“Yes!”

“Yes?”

“Yes, yes, yes. I’ll marry you. I’ll stay on Stone Island with you and help watch over the town and love you for the rest of my days...my sexy witch.”

“I may be the witch but it’s you who put a spell on me the moment I laid eyes on you. You bewitched my heart, and it will never be my own again.”

We pull one another close and share a deep, slow kiss as we seal our pact made of love and hope even as the EMTs are trying to determine out how badly Nate has been hurt. I look up for a second at the shimmering image of a dark-haired woman standing at the edge of the woods looking at both of us. Her smile is the same one as the woman painted in the portrait hanging in Nate’s house. Her eyes twinkle as she looks at me and Nate holding tight to one another and then gives me a saucy wink before slowly fading in the rain and mist.

“Did I just...? You know what, I’m not asking questions. I saw a man killed because he was hit by lightning tonight. I’m not questioning a damn thing.” Dan plops his hat back on his head and keeps shaking his head. “And by the way, Nova... welcome to Stone Island.”

I can’t fight the smile pulling at my lips as I meet Nate’s eyes. He doesn’t have to ask who was standing watching us in the rain. We both know who it was and that she will always be with us when her family needs her just like our family will always be here when the island needs us. An ever-enduring circle of life explained best by the branches and roots of a tree standing proud and continuous as life carries on.

Epilogue I

Two Weeks Later

Halloween Night

Nova

I'm so excited! It's finally Halloween on Stone Island and everyone is out and about. I'm already working on having a big party at Magnus House next year. I watch as a group of kids run through the street that's been closed to traffic on their way to the petting zoo that's been set up in several of the stores' parking lots. Another group of children rushes to the apple bobbing station where Ruth is setting up another barrel of apples for more children to enjoy.

Even though the weather is on the cooler side it seems everyone has come out. And in the middle of it all is my Nate. Handsome, confident, and dressed in a sweater and blue jeans. No one makes a sweater look sexier than Nate Magnus. I make my way over to where he is talking with Don. He sees me coming and stops speaking, holding his hands out for me to take.

“Here’s my sweet woman now.” He pulls me into him and I come willingly, lifting my face for a much-anticipated kiss.

“Hello, Mr. Magnus.” I wrap my arms around him.

“Hello soon-to-be-Mrs. Magnus.”

Don makes a small noise halfway between a fake gag and a chuckle, “You two are a walking romance novel.”

“Oh Don, one day you’ll find your Mrs. Sheriff and then we’ll get to make fun of how crazy for her you are.” I give the Sheriff a wink and he grimaces.

“Do not be putting that curse on me, Nova. I ain’t got time for romance.”

I notice a crowd gathering and wonder if they are here to see my man make some magic. Sometimes on Halloween, he’ll do quick little flashes of magic to make the town happy. But then a familiar face catches my eye in the crowd.

“Mom?” She waves before making her way over to us.
“What are you doing here?”

“Well, I came for the celebration, of course.”

“The Halloween celebration?” I didn’t think my mother knew about how big Stone Island did Halloween. Then another face takes all my attention away from Mom. “Dani? Danielle is that you? That’s my sister, Nate!”

Danielle comes running over pulling me into a tight hug. By the time I turn to look at Nate everyone in town has gathered around us. “Nate?” “Nova Christine Newman, will you marry me?”

I’m still a little lost. I thought I already agreed to marry him. He gave me a ring and everything. “I will.”

“Tonight?”

“What?!”

It slowly starts to sink in. He’s brought my mom and sister here so we can get married. Now. I look around at all the smiling faces and my heart melts a little. This island...it’s adopted me, taken me, and made me one of its own. All in the space of a couple of weeks. Annabeth and Ruth hold up a bouquet and veil when I look over at them, showing me they are more than ready to help.

“Yes. Yes, I’ll marry you tonight. Here. Among our family and friends, the people that care about us the most. I would love to say ‘I do’ right here and now.”

Nate pulls me in tight for a hug and heart-melting kiss before yelling out, “Places everybody! Let’s have ourselves a wedding!”

We have a beautiful wedding and reception while the children of the island run and play and shout out “Trick or Treat! Trick or Treat!”

I came to the island in search of a witch. I didn’t believe in magic or the unexplained. And I found not just my witch but

my place in the world. So, is magic real? If you ask me it is. I see it every day in the face of the man I love, in the smiling portrait of Deliverance and Nathaniel, in the town made from the love of a man and a woman long, long ago. I'm a believer and I hope everyone gets the chance to find their own little bit of magic because without it the world is a very dark place and I have found I prefer the light of a love even time can't kill or dim.

Epilogue II

One Year Later

Halloween

Nate

One year ago I married the love of my life in front of the entire island and now we're taking our newborn baby out to celebrate her first Halloween. And she is not having it. Her little legs kick up a storm and putting this cat costume on her is a lot like putting a wig on a pig.

“Dee, come on now. Just let me...put...the...yes! I got her arms in!”

Behind me, my wife giggles and waits for me to finish. I'm dressing the baby so Nova can finish up one more chapter before we leave for the celebrations. She's almost finished with the latest book in her mystery series. She started writing mystery stories soon after we got married and the first one is flying off the shelves. It's set on our very own little island and several people from town show up in the series -much to their delight.

Downstairs we hear Brian answer the door after the bell alerts us Dani has arrived. She moved here about four months after we married. She says she just fell in love with the people and scenery, but I think Don might have a bigger part to do with her move than anything else.

“Hello lovebirds! Please don’t be doing anything inappropriate. I’m just here to help get the baby ready.”

I speak before my wife can, “Dani! We’re in the nursery. Come help put the other arm in this cat costume.”

The two sisters hug before Dani comes over to kiss and play with the baby. Dee totally betrays our father/daughter bond and lets her aunt slip her into the damned cat costume without a fuss. Damn it. Before we have a chance to gather everything together to set off Brian is blocking the door.

“What is it, old man? What’s wrong?”

“I have an announcement and I had to wait until you two were in the same room.” Somehow I don’t think he’s talking about me and Nova but rather Nova and Dani. “I’m getting married.”

“Oh my God! Brian that’s wonderful...” he holds his hand up when Nova goes to hug him, “Wait there’s something you need to know. It might change your want to hug me.”

“Brian, nothing will make us change our feelings towards you. Nothing.” My wife ignores his caution and goes to offer him a quick squeeze.

“It’s to your mother.”

“What?!” Dani shouts it out so loud the baby starts crying thinking something is wrong. I take our small bundle from Dani and calm her down. “You mean our mother. The mother that lives in the city.”

“Oh no, Brian! Are you leaving?” Leave it to my wife to care more about not seeing Brian than anything else.

“No! Marge is moving here. I wanted you two to know because...well, I want your blessing before we go through with the wedding.” He turns to Dani with hope in his eyes. “I want you to understand, I will make sure she is treated like a queen. She will never know a day of...”

Dani pulls him off balance and in for a hug. “Oh shut up already...Dad. Of course you have our blessing.”

“Did you know about this, Nate?” My wife looks at me with questioning eyes.

“Not a bit.” I look over at Brian who is smiling like an idiot. “Is this the woman you’ve been talking to online? I did know he’s been chatting with a woman over Skype. I just wasn’t aware it was your mom.”

We all make our way to the festivities with people stopping us every now and then to shake our hands and talk to us about this or that. The island has a whole new vibe about it, one of renewal and growth.

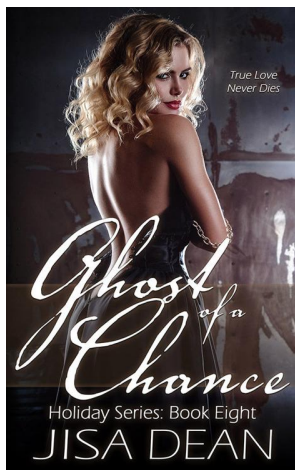
“Look Annabeth, here they come. And look at little Deliverance. Isn’t she just a little doll?” Ruth and Annabeth come rushing over to us and take the baby from my arms.

They are the only people who call Dee by her full name. We named her after the woman who helped keep our love -and us- alive. We might not have seen Deliverance after that night on the cliffs overlooking the ocean, but we feel her presence every day. It's in the soft wind that blows through our island's trees, the gentle call of the beautiful blues of the water surrounding the land, the smile of our baby girl, and in the magic that permeates every part of our lives on this little stone island out in the middle of the ocean.

I was right when I told Nova that I might be the witch she came looking for, but it was her who truly brought the magic alive and bewitched me with her love. My lucky star...my Nova!

The End!

* * *



Thank you so much for reading, I really hope you enjoyed it! If you have been around for longer than a breath mint then you know that Halloween is my favorite time of year. If you love the season as much as I do then don't forget some of my other Halloween themed stories like [*Ghost of a Chance*](#).

Makenzie Higgins just bought a house. One of those big Southern Victorian houses that come with the starter pack for every haunting ever documented. But she doesn't mind. She loves the place, she loves the artwork and craftsmanship that go into a place like that. She loves the secret little nooks and crannies that hide all sorts of treasures. And she loves the painting of the former owner that hangs in the library...she loves it so much she's starting to think something is seriously wrong with her because she's been dreaming about him doing hot, forbidden things to her that only a lover is supposed to do. But what happens when she realizes her dreams aren't just dreams...they're real and so is the ghost of the owner!

Can Mac keep her ghost lover or will the boundary between them be just too much for them to overcome? Oh yeah! Because even death won't stop an alpha male from claiming the woman he loves! And it's sure not going to keep him from protecting her from a hidden danger that lurks just beyond!

*So I did it! I've gone and wrote a ghost romance with a hot spook who knows what he wants even in the afterlife. Mainly because Mr. Dean said it couldn't be done but also because I might have an invisible man fetish that I never knew about. So grab your bucket of sweets, sit close to the fire, and fall in love with a hauntingly beautiful love story that will leave you up all night but for all the right reasons! This is book eight of *The Holiday Series* and it will guarantee that you have something sweet after all those celebrations are over.*

Continue reading for a first look at my next book, *Demon*
(*Sons of Chaos: Book Five*)

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Demon

Sons of Chaos: Book Five

By:

Jisa Dean

Demon

Sons of Chaos: Book Five

Because nothing is scarier than people.

Eden

I've always been the good girl, my dad's little angel, and even though I hate it, I can't deny it's true. I'm straight out of one of those princess fairytales. I even have an evil stepmother. She despises me. I never really knew how much until she set things in motion so I'll be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now, I have an escaped convict trying to murder me, my father's life is in danger, and the only person I can trust is a man straight out of Hell itself. Can I even trust a prisoner named Demon or have I just bought myself a one-way ticket to heartbreak and more? And what does he mean when he says I'm his little angel and he's going to be my Daddy from now on? Is this going to be the worst Halloween ever or the start of something heavenly?

Demon

I'm just trying to live my life and get by. That's all you can do when you're the biggest monster in a prison full of the vilest kinds of people. And then a little angel comes knocking at my door. When something as sweet and innocent as her gets stuck in the worst kind of situation possible I realize she's going to need the monster I am to help her escape her demons. Only I'm one Demon she's never going to shake. Once I have a taste of Eden, I have no plans to give her back to the father who couldn't keep her safe to begin with. The people coming after Eden will learn no steel bars, no fiery pit, not even a prison riot will keep me from the paradise Eden is carrying around just for me. And I have the entire Sons of Chaos to make sure my little piece of Heaven is kept safe this Halloween.

Holy Candy Buckets, if you're looking for just the right bad boy to make your Halloween more spicy than sweet Demon has you covered. He's ready to set the mood and fight off all the scary things that go bump in the night. Are you ready to treat yourself to a steamy Halloween romance that will leave you asking for ice in the apple-bobbing barrel? Let the Sons of Chaos serve you a sweet treat with Eden and Demon, book number five in the Sons of Chaos series.

Also by Jisa Dean:

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The Within Series

The Animal Within

The Monster Inside

The Human Between

The Peace Within

Rule of the Animals

The Hospital Series

Urgent Care

Code Blue
Under New Management

Stand-alones

Stocking Stuffer

Blind Love

All The Trimmings

Bewitched

In His Custody

Last Snow of the Season

Melt for Me

Burn for Me

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The Black Star Series

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Black Site

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The Taboo Series

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Lucky Charm

Sweet Treats

Hard Candy

Sisters' Island

Something Borrowed

Something Blue

Something Old

Something New

Something More

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Sons of Chaos

Poe

Pyro

Odin

Jinx

Coming Soon!

Demon (*Sons of Chaos: Book Five*)
Camp Dire (*Holiday Series: Book Fifteen*)



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