

## CHAPTER 1: IN WHICH NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INFIDELITY

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"If you don't do this spell, Charlotte is going to die!" Leo said looming over her.

"You think I don't know that!?" she irritably replied, "I told you, I can't do it – it requires 'passion acquired in a lover's arms' and I. Don't. Have. That!"

"Are you seriously going to stand there and state that after seventeen years of life, you've never once been kissed?" Leo stated derisively, "This isn't the time to play the shy and retiring maiden – so stop the shenanigans and DO THE SPELL!" he shouted invading her personal space. He was quite intimidating when he wanted to be; towering eight inches over her own not insubstantial height. The grey eyes that seemed simultaneously cold as slate yet hot with piercing contempt saw right through her soul- a sight which clearly did nothing for him. The look in his eyes almost caused her to quail but she rallied, stiffening her spine. She was made of stronger stuff than that. After all, she was descended from Abramelin the Mage on her mother's side. Her father's people traced their roots to Mekatilili, female leader of a proud African people and renowned sorceress. She could hold her own against this overindulged, pretentious basketball star type idiot. Okay, maybe not idiot, but he was undeniably overindulged. An abundance of sporting talent, a six foot four slender muscular frame, jet black hair that fell about his face like it was windblown ('blow-dried more like', she thought with a sneer) and the hypnotic eyes that led him to believe he was God's gift to the universe. She, for one, wasn't buying whatever he was selling. She wasn't one to be taken in by the superficial.

Once this point was settled in her mind, she drew herself up to her full height and opened her mouth to tell him to get out of her room, because this was a clear case of trespassing. Too late, he got there before her. With an impatient sound deep in his throat, he swooped down and kissed her lips.

Leo was scared, and when he was scared he became extremely irritable. Charlotte was lying as if dead in her living room and here he was forced to interact with this...weird chick who may or may not be a witch, in order to have the only chance there seemed to be to save her. He had to save Charlotte, there was no choice about that; the alternative could not be considered...So, much as he found this strange girl faintly repugnant in a 'you are completely not my type' kind of way – he would just have to grit his teeth, and get this done.

He only meant to kiss her long enough for her to work up enough passion for the spell. After all, he had yet to meet the girl who could resist him, and this was a matter of life and death. Charlotte tended to act now and ask questions later – if at all; one could say she had poor impulse control. It came from being a privileged and overindulged child, used to getting pretty much anything she desired, from her absentee parents. She was the girl every other girl envied- curly golden locks, aquamarine eyes and dimpled smile- and knew it. It was natural then that when she saw the strange lights that looked like Aurora Borealis, shining over the pool that had materialised as if by magic, at the bottom of her garden; that she had to see if she could touch them... When she tried to though, the strange pretty lights caught her hand, and pulled her into the pool, whence none but Mya's magic could retrieve her. But although Mya had managed to perform a spell that got Charlotte out of the pool, she could not stop her life force from slowing fading without the recasting spell – this she learned when Leo drove her home to consult her grimoires...and that required her to draw energy from passion's embrace.

Mya was a virgin though, and the alteration of that state was a challenge for a number of reasons. First there was the mystique of magic that surrounded her, coupled with her chocolate complexion so rare in this rural backwater. Added to that, the fact that she lived with her grandmother in what was practically a shack in the woods; and seemed to share her wardrobe. All this tended to repel the local male population, even had she made any effort to be noticed. Before she was invited by Charlotte to hobnob with her royal circle, she had no friends to speak of. And here was the king to Charlotte's queen, with his lips on hers! Since her mouth was already open, his tongue found ready access and gently explored heretofore-unplundered depths. Their sensitive tips met in tentative greeting, and conducted that ancient mating dance that is as old as love.

Her lips are so soft. He wasn't expecting that; almost unconsciously, his lips pressed down on hers. Now their tongues were intertwined, it was difficult to know whose tongue was whose.

She felt dizzy with shock and dismay, like all the blood had left her head; she leaned into him to keep some sort of balance and her breast pressed against his chest.

Bigger than they look...was his incoherent thought as his hands rose of their own accord and circled her surprisingly tiny waist. Apparently underneath all the grandma sweaters was the body of a seventeen-year-old girl. 'A hot seventeen year old girl' The blood in his body was pooling a little lower than his head as he sank his teeth gently into her lower lip, pulling it into his mouth and sucking with lips gone suddenly hot. "I want her! " He thought with surprise.' how did that happen?"This is crazy' was her last coherent thought before she was surrounded by madness. She felt a sudden draft across her chest and realized that her dress was unbuttoned all the way down to the waist and Leo's hands were everywhere – touching, caressing, squeezing, and pinching. Her nipples were painfully erect and seemed to cry out for his mouth without bothering to consult her. As if he heard their silent cry, his lips moved from hers and fastened themselves on her left breast. She felt dizzy and confused, as she pressed his head tight to her breast. She tried to control her breathing but it was impossible, and she was gasping like there was not enough oxygen in the whole world for a fortifying breath. Leo was making a low growling sound deep in his throat like a cat purring over a succulent piece of meat. Suddenly he picked her up and threw her onto her bed. A few seconds later, she was divested of her dress and the covering that her embarrassingly huge granny panties had afforded her vagina was replaced by his hot mouth. She froze in shock at the action and the sensation. She was torn between wanting to push him away, and wanting to pull him even deeper into her. She compromised by moaning out loud. Oblivious to her internal battles, Leo was absorbed in the sensations of touch and smell and taste that were opening up to him. He wanted...he couldn't put into words what it was that he wanted, but he wanted it now. His erection was so hard it hurt him, but he had enough coherence to want her wet and ready, because once he was in, there was no turning back, no slowing down, definitely no stopping. He licked the liquid that dripped from the lips of her vagina and knew that she wanted him too, but he was big, and he was hard and she had said she'd never been with a man...

But of course she must be lying; who stayed a virgin that long these days? Honestly. He was willing to bet she had strange weirdo witch ritual sex all the damn time. Unzipping his fly with sudden impatience, he nudged her legs apart. He thrust into her as far as he could go...which wasn't very far, her entrance was so tight. He lay over her, wrapping her legs around him to widen her entrance and pushed himself in deeper. She gasped in his ear, and he didn't know what the sound signified but he was long past the point where he could stop. One more time through the breach...and he was all the way in; the feel of her tight around him, gripping him in her wetness and her warmth was almost more than he could stand. He felt control of his body slipping from him; and almost came. This shocked him so much that he came almost all the way

back to himself – never, not even during his first time, had he ever come too fast. He froze into stillness to give himself time to get it together, and to give her time to get used to his size, and then slowly, very slowly, he began to move. The world seemed to spin and he thought he could actually see colours swirl in the air. His vision blurred and he let out a groan that seemed to come from inside his soul. He thrust at her a little faster and she seemed to give as good as she got. She was making little gasping sounds that alone were sure to have him spilling his seed like a novice and he tried not to listen. Sensation overwhelmed him. Sound, touch, heat, wetness, colour, need, urgency; a jumbled kaleidoscope that swirled around him so that he was almost blind and deaf to anything that wasn't her, that wasn't him, that wasn't them joined in the eternal mating dance united in desire and lust and need so that he didn't know where she ended; and he begun.

She.

He had no name for her. He had no name for himself. In a moment that lasted an eternity, none of these mattered – then the world exploded and all thought was extinguished in a shooting flame of release.

He came to still lying over her and lifted his head to look down at her. Her eyes were closed and she was breathing really hard. He was still inside her and slid out and off her; feeling a strange reluctance that he didn't care to examine. He lay beside her on his back staring up at the ceiling and waited for her to say something.

Mya's brain was going like lfmeccggjthejlmcdfjlflseflk; completely fried.

What just happened?

How did it happen?

What the hell am I to do now?

Was he still here or had he gone?

She opened one eye into a slit and peeped but she really didn't need to. She could feel him there beside her, silent and still.

Is he dead? He had seemed to collapse there at the end; maybe he'd had a heart attack.

She didn't know whether she wished he had or not. All the time nowwhatnowwhatnowwhat, kept circling inside her brain, the words segueing together like some mantra that could possibly give her a solution to this impossible situation she found herself in. The beloved boyfriend of her one and only friend lay naked beside her after indulging in what she was pretty sure were acts of a sexual nature with her. She wished he would move, or speak or leave...something. But he just lay there like someone had hit him over the head with a poleaxe! She sat up cautiously, waiting or hoping for a reaction she didn't know which. Either way, she was disappointed – he continued to lie there with his eyes closed. She got to her feet and tip toed out of the room and into the bathroom, shutting the door gently behind her. She leaned on it and let out a breath. 'Wow, what was that?' She thought. She walked to the mirror and examined herself in it. Her brown eyes stared right back at her through the mirror. They tended to change hue depending on her mood and now they were the colour of well-aged brandy. She looked herself over and thought that she still rather looked the same. Not like the world had ended or anything...Her hair was still short, curly and braided into a ponytail then tied in a huge afro. She'd seen the look on one of the starlets in the movie 'Shaft' and liked it so much that she decided to adopt it. Never mind that it was like thirty years out of date; the style suited her head and she liked the African-

ness of it. People avoided her because she was different, so she might as well own it, embrace it, and commit to it. The Afro added at least another inch to her height and framed her oval face, making her cheekbones more prominent. Her shoulders were rather broad for a girl, anchoring her breasts. These stood erect with the tips pointed up like a pair of attentive puppies with their noses in the air, eagerly awaiting a bone. She would have smiled at the analogy if she wasn't so shell shocked and her eyes continued their inspection. Her torso tapered off to a tiny waist, the result of mostly living on vegetables that she grew in her garden. Her unblemished chocolate complexion was also a result of her lifestyle in spite of the challenges of adolescence. She followed her long legs all the way down to her size ten feet – long, slender and elegant; like her father's they said, though she'd never met him. He had died before her birth, according to her grandmother, but she would not tell her how. His death was shrouded in mystery. 'Looks like I'm still all here...or not – I think we're possibly less the virginity...' she thought, turning away from dark thoughts. She went to the sink and rubbed herself clean then put on her father's old bathrobe that hung behind the door. She was a witch and there was a spell to be done – a life to be saved. Everything else would have to wait.

## CHAPTER 2: IN WHICH A LIFE IS SAVED

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When she walked out of the bathroom which was across the hall from her room, she copped a peek to see whether Leo had stirred. He was standing in the middle of the room, fully dressed to his black alligator skin boots. Leo's family was in the alligator business – hunting them, raising them, and selling their various components; skin, meat or teeth-whatever anyone wanted. So when he wasn't wowing the school courtside crowds with his basketball skills, he was at his uncle's farm, learning the family business, or else canoodling with his girlfriend Charlotte in one of her various family properties and hosting exclusive parties for the 'in' crowd at her lake house. His life was pretty much set the way that he liked it; or so it seemed.

'Do you have what you need now?' he asked her, his voice slightly huskier than usual. She was startled out of her thoughts by his words. She wasn't really sure that all this was happening or he was simply a figment of her imagination. Although God knows, if she was going to imagine herself in passionate embrace with anyone, his name wouldn't top her list. Arrogant, insensitive, alligator-killing son of a...gun, she thought resentfully. 'Y-yes. I have what I need.' She replied and turned abruptly away heading for the stairs to the attic where she kept her herbs, and the cauldron sat waiting in the fireplace. Sensation was still shooting through her body in disconcerting aftershocks, and there was something wet running down her legs that she didn't want to think about too much. She could feel her legs wanting to shake with reaction but she would not let them. At the same time, she had to set her mind to the spell, and try to keep it on the business at hand. He was following her up the stairs. Sigh. Why couldn't he just go!? She opened the little attic room and crossed straight to the herb drawer. The only way through this was through it, and she would just have to pull herself together and function! She pulled the herbs she needed together and then looked at the fireplace where a fire immediately sprang into being; burning merrily like it had been at it for hours. The water that was in the cauldron began to bubble and she shredded the herbs into it, keeping her mind strictly away from the figure standing silent and still across the room, watching her with eyes that betrayed nothing of what he was thinking. She would not let him unnerve her.

When the last herbs had been added to the cauldron, the concoction was giving off a pleasant smell that reminded her of grassy meadows on a hot summer day and ice cream sundaes eaten on the porch with Grandpa George before he died. She closed her eyes and let herself relive the moment Leo's lips had touched hers in her bedroom downstairs and said the spell that would transform the concoction before her into the life-giving elixir that Charlotte needed to survive. She wondered if the tumult in her soul would affect the recasting spell but even before she opened her eyes, she knew the spell had worked because the liquid had turned the colour of a glorious sunset and its bright colours were reflected behind her closed eyelids. Leo made a sound, and she opened her eyes and looked at him straight in the eye for the first time since his lips had touched hers. His eyes were wide with shock and awe and she realised that he had probably never seen magic performed in front of him in his life. A part of her felt a little smug and pleased that she'd managed to impress him – but it was a tiny part really, not even worth mentioning. To his credit, he returned her look steadily and for a minute that seemed to last forever, neither spoke. 'Did it work?' he asked at last, his voice still a little huskier than it had been when he'd been busy accusing her of not wanting to completely heal Charlotte of whatever was the matter with her, and letting her know what an ungrateful, incompetent bitch she was as

well as being completely useless if the one time that Charlotte needed her, she claimed not to have the skill to help.

'Yes, it worked. She needs to take a spoonful every hour, on the hour, for five days. She must not miss a dose or else she could suffer a relapse from which I cannot save her'. She was decanting the mixture into a flask as she spoke, which she then handed to him, face averted in apparent preoccupation with the residue at the bottom of her cauldron.

'I'll keep some on hand in case you need more but what I've given you should be more than sufficient', she continued briskly as she wiped down the spotless surface where she'd gathered her herbs together, so she had a reason to avoid looking at him. There was silence behind her, she dared not turn to see why, and then he spoke;

'Thank you...Mya.' He said, and she heard his footsteps as he left the room. It was the first time he had ever said her name. Just because Charlotte had chosen to co-opt Mya into her inner circle didn't mean that the inner circle was happy to have her. She was an anomaly they did not understand; her clothes tended toward long dresses that buttoned at the front and had no discernible shape, topped with thick woolen sweaters of uncertain pattern and finish. Her jewelery was outlandish consisting of animal bone and bizarre looking stones; to make matters worse there were birds' feathers poking out of an amulet around her neck and that was topped off with the big hair and feet...she simply did not fit. The girls tended to be catty and the guys to ignore her. Before Charlotte's accident today, Leo had acted like she didn't exist, and when he couldn't do that, they traded polite insults or engaged in increasingly nasty sarcastic banter. Charlotte enjoyed their antagonism, certainly their exchanges never failed to entertain. And if Charlotte was all about anything, it was the entertainment.

Their history made what just happened even more incomprehensible to Mya. She sank into the nearest chair to just breathe and her treacherous mind tentatively turned toward the memory that was waiting eagerly in the wings to claim her.

In a heartbeat, she was back in her room, very irritated at Leo's assumptions and preparing to acquaint him with the sharp side of her tongue. She'd just opened her mouth to do so, when his invaded hers. Invasion was the right word, she'd never had anyone's tongue in her mouth before...it felt extremely strange. Her whole body had frozen with the shock of it and then his hands were touching her in places she'd never been touched by a man before and she was at a loss of what to do. It didn't even occur to her to resist, the whole experience was so alien to her that she did not know how to react. The next thing she knew, he was between her legs – hot and throbbing and urgent and something like fear gripped her. She felt her spirit temporarily leaving her body; she knew she left because she was somewhere up on the ceiling looking down at her naked body and his. Her eyes were scrunched shut, he had spread her legs wide, and he was on top of her; with that throbbing hot rod of pain about to enter her. She hadn't even been entirely sure what was happening and then he thrust into her, and she was back in her body, under him, feeling him stretch her to beyond her limits. He grabbed her legs and wrapped them around his waist and pushed further into her. She felt plundered; conquered by the alien thing that was taking over her without so much as a by your leave. Her body was a confusion of sensation. Pain? Yes there was that, but not as much as she thought there'd be, in fact even as she thought it, it was fading away. He was frozen still inside her, and she did not know why but it stopped the pain. Then he moved, and other sensations were added to the pain. Electric shock type sensations, almost pleasurable although she thought she must be mistaken about that. She found her body responding to his rhythm, going with it, and finally glorying in it and in spite of herself she gave in to the sensation. It grew, and grew like a helium balloon that is blown and blown and blown into a bigger and bigger bubble, until it bursts with sound and fury. Except the

bursting of this balloon was not the end but the beginning of new sensation. She felt like she had when her spirit left her body, except that she could still feel her body around her trembling with the force of whatever shook her. He made a sound like his heart was being forced through his chest and she felt something cold and wet flood her insides. The sensation seemed to ignite her again so that her inner muscles spasmed, closing tightly about his shaft like they wanted to milk him dry. She might have made a sound, she didn't know. She did know that she had never felt it's like in her life. Her heart was drumming in her chest like it wanted to run out and escape and there was no strength in her limbs. So much tumult in her head, and in the room...silence.

She came back to herself thinking, 'Is that what love is like? Being ready to violate someone else for her?' while staring pensively at the scene no one but she could see.

## CHAPTER 3: IN WHICH MUCH IS EXPLAINED

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Leo walked to his car with his head spinning. He unlocked and opened the door, placing the flask Mya had given him securely in the cup holder next to the seat. He put his seat belt on and placed the key in the ignition, all without conscious thought, then sat with his hands on the wheel, staring ahead at nothing.

'What just happened?' he asked himself in confusion. One minute he was at his intimidating best, attempting to force the witch to perform the magic that would heal his ticket out of this life, the next, he was making mad passionate love to the woman!

'No. Not making love. Having sex. It was just sex...mad, passionate sex; but just sex all the same. In fact, it was barely sex- more like an assignment.' He nodded to himself in affirmation. 'Besides, I did it for Charlotte. The witch needed the passion for the spell, and I provided it...someone had to do it, and I was there. 'With that firmly settled in his mind, he turned on the ignition and headed toward the Le Carre mansion where Charlotte lay hovering between life and death, waiting for her prince to save her. And when he'd done that, then she could save him right back. Just like in *Pretty Woman*... He smiled grimly as he thought this and dismissed Mya from his mind. His future lay in front of him, not behind. "Was she alright though?" He couldn't quite stop himself from thinking...she'd looked a little shell-shocked when he left, definitely trying to act calmer than she was. It looked like what she'd said was true; if she wasn't a virgin, she was definitely virgin-adjacent. Or maybe she was just naturally tight; who knew with witches? They had their spells and things, they could make you believe anything if they wanted... Why was he still thinking about her?! Charlotte, Charlotte, Charlotte; his future wife if he had anything to say about it. His ticket out of this one-horse town. Not that he didn't love her, of course he did. She was hot property, she was rich, she was beautiful, and she was the most popular girl in school. What was not to love? But if she died today that was it; back to square one. He pressed his foot down on the accelerator and went faster. Ten minutes later, he was at her gates. The guards saw him coming and let the gates up without stopping him. They knew what was at stake, and it wasn't worth their lives to impede him. His best friend Miles was waiting at the Mansion doors; pacing up and down in anxiety. He barely waited for Leo to get out of the car before asking, "Did you get it?" "Yeah. I got it" Leo replied, streaking past him on his way to the living room, where Charlotte's still body lay on the divan.

"Thank God", he heard Miles murmur behind him. Ahead of him in the room were a number of people, milling about anxiously. There was Teddy the Bear, otherwise known as 'the bodyguard' who towered over everyone around him and who managed to top Leo's own 6'4" by a good four inches. Tina the Barbie doll sat close to the divan, wringing her hands anxiously – she was Charlotte's bestie; in her own words. Next to Tina stood her boyfriend Aaron, staring off into space in indifferent boredom and smoking a joint. At the far corner was David, brother of Aaron and rival in his affections for Tina. He leaned against one of the huge marble pillars that dotted the parlour, shooting envious glances at his brother from time to time. The other girl in the room was Ashley- dark-haired and pale; she was there because Miles was there. Hopefully one day he would notice her...Leo sank to his knees as he reached the divan in three huge steps. He uncorked the flask and pried Charlotte's mouth open. It was hard to keep her mouth open and manipulate the flask... "Help me!" he threw over his shoulder at whoever was there, and immediately Miles leaned down and held Charlotte's mouth open for him. He measured a spoonful of the liquid and carefully decanted it into her mouth. With Miles' help, he lifted her head slightly so she wouldn't choke, while massaging her neck muscles so that she could swallow. When they were sure she'd got it all down, they lay her head back down on the pillow



and waited...and waited. Nothing seemed to happen for a long time and Leo began to wonder if Mya had given them a dud, then...Charlotte opened her blue eyes, and stared around her at everyone in the room. "W-what happened?" she whispered painfully before suddenly shooting upright and projectile vomiting all over Leo's black Levis and Tina's Jimmy Choos. The vomit was black with slime interspersed with unidentified chunks. Leo froze in shock while Tina screamed in revulsion, but then Charlotte heaved again and they both quickly jumped out of the way. Apparently nothing was left to come up and so she dry heaved herself into exhaustion and then lay back down. Teddy the Bear ran for some water for her to drink and David hurried forward with his hankie proffered so that Tina could wipe her shoes. Since no such solicitude was shown him, Leo took off to the nearest bathroom to affect what repairs he could. Everyone else, meaning Miles, exclaimed in relief that Charlotte was better and the room relaxed. When Leo returned, slightly damp but feeling a little cleaner, if with a slight whiff of vomitus about him; Charlotte smiled and held out her hand to him. He did his best to smile back, and taking her hand in his, looked her straight in the eye, and said sincerely; "I'm so glad you're better." She smiled weakly at him and pulled slightly at his hands so he could come closer. He approached the divan and sat on the edge still holding her hand in his. "Miles tells me you saved my life," she whispered huskily, eyes shining with adoration at him. He smiled modestly back, shaking his head in dismissal of his heroics and thought wryly to himself that that just might be the first time saving a life could legitimately be used as an excuse for infidelity.

"I know you'd have done the same for me" he replied smiling into her eyes. "Now you need to rest, shall I take you upstairs?"

"I'll take her", Teddy the Bear said, just like Leo knew he would. He bent down and picked her up in his arms like she was a doll. Leo let go of her hand, mouthing, "I'll see you later" to her as Teddy bore her off. Returning the little wave she gave him, he turned away from her, his mind immediately moving on to other things. Or rather, continuing the thought that had occurred earlier.

'Speaking of infidelity...' he thought, his mind returning to his last glimpse of Mya, frozen in surprise because he had said her name. What was to be done about that situation? Was she likely to talk? Maybe tell Charlotte what had happened between them?

'Unlikely' he thought derisively. First, she didn't have the guts; and second, Charlotte would ostracise her if she knew that she'd had sex with her boyfriend. And Charlotte was her only friend, so no. She wouldn't risk it. But should he go over there maybe, make sure of it? Talk to her, so that they both knew what the deal was?

"So what happened over at the witch's?" A voice asked in his ear, startling him out of his reverie, "How did you get her to do the spell?" He turned around to look at Miles and opened his mouth to lie to him, and then found that he couldn't do it. "Not here". He murmured, grabbing Miles by the arm and dragging him out to his car, "Let's go". They got in his car and drove, Leo concentrating on the road until they had put several miles between them and the mansion. He drove to their favourite spot, an abandoned cabin in the woods where they came as boys to play cowboys and Indians and dream about pirate ships and fools' gold; a spot where they came now to hang out, drink beer and smoke cigarettes and dream about leaving this town in their rear view.

"Well?!" Miles demanded, "You're making me antsy; what's the big secret? Did she turn into a hag or something? Or did you sell her your soul for the cure?" Leo could see that he was only half-joking. The anxiety in his eyes was real. He sighed aloud, looking out into the twilight. "I slept with her." He said resignedly.

“WHAT!!” Miles practically screamed in his ear, “Have you lost. Your. Mind??”

“Don’t scream at me”, Leo said, wincing at the noise. Miles continued to stare bug-eyed at him, opening, and closing his mouth like a landed fish so Leo decided to take pity on him and tell him the whole story.

“...so you see, I had no choice” he concluded at the end of his tale – which did not include the part where he had never wanted a woman more or exactly how fan-fucking-tastic that orgasm had been.

“You had no choice” Miles repeated in a disbelieving whisper, “the spell required that you fuck her?”

“Well, technically no... It just required passion but I didn’t think that that was the time to be taking any chances okay? I wanted to make sure she had enough. I mean, Charlotte was dying!”

“Yeah she was”, Miles agreed after a pause, “Are you going to tell her though?”

“Are you out of your mind?” Leo asked him in disbelief, “For what, why, why would I do that?” he asked a bit incoherently.

“You’re probably right, but if she finds out...” Leo said.

“She won’t” Leo replied promptly and decided that yes, he would pay Mya a return visit; just to be sure.

## CHAPTER 4: IN WHICH THERE IS MUCH DENIAL

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Mya was out in her garden, pottering about with her plants and letting their energy infuse her with life and joy again. It had been a difficult two days. She'd heard that Charlotte was awake now, and even making short trips out of bed, but she had not yet gone to pay her a visit. She knew she must do it soon, or else Charlotte would wonder why she hadn't when practically everyone else in the town had. Mya also supposedly owed her a debt of gratitude for being included in Charlotte's inner circle and from a purely medical point of view, she must want to see how well her elixir worked...Right?

Wrong.

Charlotte would know by now that passion was needed to make the spell work, and she knew that Mya was a virgin because she'd asked her who she'd been with sexually and Mya had (foolishly in hindsight) told her the truth. So she would probably be curious as to where the passion came from, and knowing her nature, wouldn't rest until she'd pried every last detail out of Mya's reluctant bosom. Considering that she was still in two minds whether 'The Incident' (as she called it in her mind) had actually occurred or whether it was a particularly realistic hallucination, complete with side effects such as aching muscles, unidentified discharges and a guilty conscience, she was just not ready to discuss it with anyone. Particularly not the culprit's girlfriend.

Speaking of the culprit, he seemed to be walking toward her right this minute. Perhaps the hallucination continued or else she was losing her mind. She hoped that that was it, though she knew that losing your mind is not as easy as people make it out to be. 'Hi.' The hallucination said, 'can we talk?' She considered just ignoring it and hoping it would go away, but when she looked at what she could see of him, which was simply a black silhouette because he was standing in the sun, he looked pretty solid so she decided to treat him like it...he was real. She stood up and wiped her hands on her skirt, then turned and headed for the porch. He followed behind her, close enough that she could feel the warmth of his body, yet far enough away so he didn't step on her heels.

She sat down on the porch swing and he stopped a few feet away, leaning on the porch frame. "Is your grandmother here?" he asked.

"No." She said, and then wished she hadn't said anything. Why was he asking her that?

"I need to speak to you in private" he said, like he'd read her mind. If he had, that increased the likelihood that he was a hallucination because real-life, Mundane, Egotistical Leo was definitely no mind reader. And what would Real-Life, Mundane, Egotistical Leo have to speak to her about anyway. The chances of this being a hallucination were climbing by the minute! But why was she hallucinating about him of all people?

"So speak" she said boldly, now that she was fairly certain he wasn't real. Leo sighed deeply. This is a bit awkward, he thought. "Can we maybe go inside?" he asked her, "Have a drink? It's rather hot." Okay, the hallucination wanted a drink; she could play along. She stood up and led the way into the house, crossed over to the fridge and poured some cabbage juice into two glasses. She'd just juiced it this morning so it was fresh. She handed him his glass, which he took with no problems, considering he wasn't real, and sat down on the sofa. It was an old sofa with mismatched pillows, but extremely comfortable for all that. He sat down next to her and took a sip of juice...then promptly spat it out. "What the hell is this?" he asked with a frown.

“Cabbage juice”, she replied coldly, “you did say you wanted a drink?” He opened his mouth to retort then remembered that he was supposed to be softening her up so she would do what he wanted. So he forced himself to smile painfully and take a sip. Urgh! It tasted like snail slime or something equally revolting.

Mya watched him forced down the juice while trying to look like he didn't want to spit it out all over her threadbare Aubusson rug; and came to the conclusion that it really was a hallucination. The real Leo would never bother to pretend politeness with her, unless there was something in it for him.

That thought stopped her in her tracks. What did he want? She put down her glass of cabbage juice and waited. “Do you plan on telling Charlotte what happened here the other day?” he asked abruptly.

‘Aha’, she thought, ‘here we go’.

“Well, she's likely to ask me, and keep asking me, until I tell her.” She replied. There was a silence that she hesitated to call loaded. He stared into his cabbage juice like it contained the answers to all of life's questions. She wished he would say something. This situation was getting way beyond uncomfortable. “So. What you're saying is you're planning on telling Charlotte that you fucked her boyfriend?” he demanded in a voice that wanted to be threatening but was struggling not to be. Why did she get the feeling she was being set up for something here?

“No, I'm not planning on telling her that we may have...engaged in some sexual activity” she said quickly and a tad breathlessly, “but you know as well as I do, how persistent she can be when she wants something.”

“I do know.” He replied, “What I don't know is what your intentions are right now. You know that however you choose to play this, you come out covered in shit right?” She folded her arms, eyeballed him and then demanded, “Leo. What. The hell. Do You. Want?!” “Now that,” he replied, “is the right question.”

Leo walked quickly to his car, and got in driving off like he was pursued by demons. He did not look back. “Shit” he whispered to himself, “shitshitshit. WhathaveIdonenow?? Shit!”

‘Okay’, he thought, ‘Plan. I need a plan’. Breathe. Breathe. Calm down, all is not lost. The little lecture made him feel a little better, as well as the deep breaths and he thought back to the scene he'd left. “You will say nothing about what happened between us, okay?” he had told her with the approximation of a smile, “We'll just forget it ever happened”.

“Right” she'd replied with an ironic smile that was more in her eyes than her mouth, “Nothing happened. Are you leaving now?” she asked, standing up. He stared at her, not sure whether she was serious or not. She stared right back at him, her eyes, and demeanour betraying nothing. Her hands hung loose at her side, and she stood up straight just staring at him with that irony in the back of her eyes like he was nothing but an amusing bit of entertainment that had run its course. Kind of like the way he looked at girls when he was through with them. ‘Can't have that’ he remembered himself thinking, though why he should care, he couldn't quite say. The next thing he knew, he had covered the two steps of distance that separated them, and his lips were on hers. She froze with surprise and he took advantage of it to insert his tongue in her mouth. He was kissing her in earnest and it was a while before he realised she was struggling in his arms.

‘Trying to get away!’ he thought in surprise, and held her tighter; kissed her harder. She was trying to free her lips, say something to him, but he was done talking. For some reason, he was

most mightily aroused! He picked her up and carried her to her shabby sofa, laying her down on it all the while kissing her. He lay down over her and increased the pressure on her mouth. He could feel her weakening, opening her mouth wider; in spite of herself. His hand brushed her breast, and felt her nipple harden. He wanted; needed, to see her naked. Now! He tore at the buttons on her faded print dress and her body was exposed to the waist. Only then did he lift his mouth from hers, to fasten it on her left breast. His hand worked one breast while his mouth worked the other; and she was making noises that sounded like mewling and he could feel her breathing hard. He didn't know what emotion she was feeling, and couldn't spare the brain cells to wonder. All the blood had left his head anyway; oxygen to his brain was in short supply. Apart from a buzzing that was making him dizzy, not much in the way of thinking was going on up there; let alone conjecture as to what Mya might be feeling. She was merely the Object of his Desire; a desire he needed to satisfy forthwith or die in the attempt. He tore desperately at his flies freeing his massively engorged penis and in one motion; he had pushed her skirts out of the way, spread her legs, and inserted himself in her without the bother of removing her underwear. She made a noise halfway between a scream and a moan and he wanted to follow her example but he was too busy pounding her into the sofa. His breath came like the bellows and sweat was pouring down his face. The room was silent except for the wetly slapping sound of flesh on flesh. In addition to Leo's harsh breathing and Mya's occasional moaning. As he felt his climax approaching like a murderous beast bearing down on him with intent, he came to a slight awareness that he wasn't alone in this and whispered, "Oh God, I'm coming" in her ear, moments before his seed shot out of him like a bullet from a gun and he felt something like an explosion in his mind – a nuclear bomb had gone off and destroyed every nerve and synapse in its path; leaving him nerveless and weak. He collapsed on the sofa then fell to the floor, breathing hard and trying to pull the scattered bits of himself together. After a moment, she sat up on the sofa, looking down at him as she pulled her clothes together. Then standing up, she stepped over him and headed for the hallway and possibly the bath. She did not say a word to him or acknowledge his presence in any way. He heard her feet climb the stairs, and a door close.

He zipped his flies and straightened his clothes. Then he stood up and lit out of there like a bat out of hell.

## CHAPTER 5: IN WHICH DENIAL CANNOT BE SUSTAINED

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It had been two weeks since he'd seen her last. He had barely been able to draw breath in that time, waiting for the axe to fall. Waiting for her to do something about what had happened in her living room maybe by telling Charlotte about it, or, or... something. But he hadn't seen or heard a word from her. He wanted to go and see her; first to make sure she was okay, then to find out what was going on in her head; but was terrified of going near her. Clearly he couldn't trust himself and he couldn't understand it. She was hardly his type; she wore grandma outfits, barely groomed herself, and was apparently a witch. Seriously, she could not be less like his type. His type was blonde, had blue eyes, and belonged to a family that was rich as Croesus. That was his type. So the huge afro, the chocolate skin, mango breasts, long, long...long elegant legs...He lost his train of thought. This had been happening to him a lot lately and he was at a loss to explain why. He stood up abruptly, picking up the house phone to call Miles. Operation Distract needed to be put into effect. He'd see what Miles was up to; maybe they could go shoot some hoops at the school gym or get a beer if Jon would agree to sell them some. Being underage blew, but Jon was cool people – as long as no overzealous law-abiding citizens were around. Before he could hit the speed dial though, it rang. Charlotte.

He stared at her name for a while, wondering whether to answer or not. It had been like this for the past fortnight. Dread filled his insides like molten lead every time he saw her name. He hadn't had the courage to pick up yet, but this time, he took in a deep breath, and answered. "Hi." He said, feeling that his voice was a little too high.

"Hey Stranger" her sultry tones purred down the line, "Where you been?" "Was this some sort of play? He wondered. If she hadn't heard from Mya, still she should be mad at him for being AWOL for two weeks...Just go with it? Or fess up?" "I've missed you babe" he said, in a better approximation of his usual gravelly tones, "it's been a while".

"I noticed" she said, in slightly sharper tone, "Where have you been?" He took a deep breath, all the time wondering what to say. "This isn't a conversation that should be had on the phone, where are you now?" He asked on the exhale, stalling for time.

"I'm at Freddie's, you coming?"

"Give me five minutes" he said, instantly hanging up. 'Shit.' He thought, 'now what?'

'Now you go to her, and you do what you do best... spin'. A voice that he wasn't sure was his answered him.

'Right. So, step one,' he thought, 'how do I look?' He went to his room and examined himself in the mirror. Navy blue shirt that brought out the grey in his eyes, his trademark black levis that showed the length of his legs to perfection, ending in 'bad boy' alligator skin boots that just added a few more inches to the length of his legs. Jet-black hair artfully mussed, falling in an elegant sweep over his eye. 'Perfect'. He thought with a self-satisfied side smile.

"Okay" he said to himself, "let's do this".

☐Freddie's was packed with young people, enjoying the last days of summer break before the new school year began. The whole gang was present; Aaron and David sitting on either side of Tina the Barbie who was opposite Ashley; which meant that Miles was near, though Leo couldn't see him. Teddy Bear leaning anxiously to the side, his large head bent to listen to whatever she

was saying – Charlotte. A vision in brown and gold. He smiled as she turned and saw him. Teddy turned too, but he didn't smile. "Leo" she said in that sultry voice, pronouncing his name in the Italian way that made it something exotic and foreign.

"Hi." He replied not looking at anyone else, "Can we talk?"

"Of course", she said standing up. Her dark brown denim skirt stopped just short of being patently indecent, hugging her hourglass figure like an ardent lover. Her golden top didn't leave much more to the imagination. It was cut low over her luscious breasts and the gold of her top blended well with her light tan, making her look naked at first glance. She accentuated the look with gold sandals that emphasised the delicate turn of her ankle and gold jewellery graced her wrists, ears, and neck. All this topped by long blonde wavy hair left loose to cascade down her back. She looked...expensive. He was treated to the full frontal view as she sashayed toward him, her hips gently swaying from side to side. He was quite sure the walk was in slow motion in her mind. They had so much in common -Leo and Charlotte- almost like they were made for each other. In the dictionary, under narcissism, was a photo of the pair of them, perfect smiles in place. "Shall we go?" she asked as she drew level with him.

"Yes. Let's." He replied looking into those blue eyes that reflected his face so perfectly, "Your place?" She made no reply but moved forward toward the parking. Teddy Bear looked like he wanted to protest but what could he say? Leo gave Ashley a look, asking with his eyes for her to pass his regards to Miles and let him know where they'd gone. Miles would know to call him up in an hour or two with 'an emergency'. She inclined her head slightly to let him know she understood. Ashley was good people; it was a real pity Miles had no real interest...But he couldn't think about that right now, he was on the clock.

Charlotte was standing by the passenger door of his black jeep. He had acquired it at a bargain because it had been 'beyond salvage' in an accident. His uncle Jamie- who was actually his mother's on again, off again boyfriend -and he had worked evenings and weekends fixing it up in Jamie's auto garage. Now it was the most beautiful car in town. He went over and opened the passenger door for her then got in and drove off. There wasn't much conversation between them as they drove and he used the time to think up a strategy.

The guards let them in without hindrance and they drove straight to the side door that led off the patio. He helped her out and led her inside. The room was empty apart from a solitary maid laying hors de oeuvres on the table. Service was efficient at the Le Carré manor; the staff was well trained. The maid finished laying out the dishes and left the room. As soon as she did, Leo turned Charlotte toward him and kissed her. 'The best defence is a good offence' was his decided strategy. He deepened the kiss, running his hands down her body with amorous intent. He waited for the madness that had overcome him with Mya to take over him now, but although he was aroused, he was also very much in control.

He mentally frowned at this puzzle and stowed it away for future examination. "Babe? It's been too long - I have missed you" he whispered as he kissed her face all over. She let him kiss her, and touch her but did not reciprocate. After a minute, she pushed away from him.

"Leo," she asked, unaccustomed steel in those blue eyes", what are you doing?"

"What am I doing?" he asked in surprise, "Clearly I'm doing something wrong if you don't recognise kissing" he said, leaning toward her again. But she pushed him away, giving him a look that he could not mistake. He sighed deeply and walked away from her to sit on the sofa.

“Okay babe, let’s talk” he said; resignation in his voice and stance, “You wanted to know where I’ve been for the past two weeks right?” She moved toward him and sat on the love seat next to him, “Yes” she replied, looking him in the eye. “Well, just remember you asked for it, okay?” he told her with a warning look in his eye.

“Leo, you’re scaring me. Just tell me already!” she snapped.

“Okay! It’s like this. You were lying on your deathbed, and the only thing that could revive you was a spell –“

“I know all that” she interrupted“, what’s that got to do with anything?”

“If you let me finish, “he said impatiently, “I will tell you.”

“Okay, sorry. Continue.” She said contritely.

“So you were lying over there, “he pointed at the divan, “at death’s door, and this spell needed to be done. But your girlfriend Mya said she couldn’t do it because of some proviso which said she needed passion from a lover to perform it. And we all know no-one’s ever looked twice at that girl and here was this vital ingredient missing...something had to be done – or you would die”, he trailed off, staring into the distance. She gave him thirty seconds to contemplate her premature death before saying;

“Go on.”

“Well... I was at a loss for what to do you know?” he said catching her eye for a second before looking back into the middle distance.

“If there was someone at least who was interested in her, I might have...persuaded them to kiss her, but there was no-one. So I had to resort to some drastic measures. “He broke off, looking at her as if assessing her ability to hear what these measures were.

“Tell me!” she demanded breathlessly, torn between fascination and fear.

“Okay! So there was no way that she could do the spell without the passion, and she had kind of gave up. So I grabbed her grandmother who was asleep in the other room, put a knife to her throat, and told her to hypnotise that retarded dude from the graveyard to make love to her...or I would slit her grandmother’s throat.” He said in one go, barely stopping to draw a breath; like saying it fast would lessen the horror of what he was saying. Charlotte was certainly looking horrified...horrified, fascinated, and impressed. She always was one for drama .

“You did, WHAT?!” She asked her eyes wide as saucers.

“I’m not proud of what I did” he said, his eyes on the carpet”, but I had to do something fast and it was the only thing that came to mind.”

“So you threatened an old woman...to save my life?” she whispered.

“Like I said, I’m not proud of it.” He replied, eyes still on the carpet.

“But...what does that have to do with where you were these last two weeks?”

‘God, she was a persistent little bitch’

“I was scared. I thought she would come and tell you what happened and you would hate me. I haven’t wanted to face you, see the horror in your eyes...I’ve been a coward I know. A coward



and a bastard and I don't deserve you." He said with a shaking and broken voice. There was silence in the room. He wanted to look up and see what she was doing but that would ruin the effect so he kept his eyes on the carpet and waited, rubbing his eyes a bit; just for added drama. She stood up and moved from the loveseat to the sofa and her slender fingers came into view as they touched his arm. He took a deep breath of relief, which he quickly turned into a sob. Her other hand went around his shoulder as she laid her head on it. His hand crept out and touched her fingers gently and she immediately encircled his hand with hers. 'Checkmate' he thought.

"That would explain why she hasn't been to see me," Charlotte said suddenly, "I wondered".

"Well, I imagine she would rather not run into me. And to be honest, I'd rather not run into her either..." he replied quickly.

"Well, you'll have to you know? School starts in two weeks."

"Yeah" he said.

'Shit, that's right' he thought. 'School does start in two weeks. I gotta see her before then...the sooner the better. The thought of seeing her again made the blood run faster in his veins and he decided to bite the bullet that very day. Now if Miles would just call so he could get out of here...

But she was caressing his hand in a way that he knew only too well. Her hand moved slowly caressing his back, until it reached the waistband of his jeans, and she pulled up his shirt so she could touch his bare back. Her breathing was deep and slow as she pressed her breasts against his arm. She began to unbutton his shirt and when she'd loosened it sufficiently, she pulled it over him and threw it on the carpet. He turned to her, cradling her butt cheeks in his hands, and kissed her lips. She moaned softly pressing her luscious breasts closer, and then moved away so she could take her top off. She was back again, her breath panting in his ear. He moved his hands up her tanned legs as he placed butterfly kisses on her neck. She was beautiful and aroused and he should have been raring to go, but nothing was happening for him. Heart rate; slow. Blood pressure: normal. Penis: flaccid...'God, what was happening to him?!' When it was Mya, he barely had to touch her to be ravening with lust. At the thought of her, his penis gave a twitch. His mind went back to that day on her sofa, the orgasm he had had. Suddenly he was hot and ready; he picked Charlotte up and turned her over so her ass was in the air. Pausing to slip on a condom he proceeded to ram himself inside her -eyes closed - pounding into her as tan legs were replaced by chocolate in his mind and long blond hair became short, curly, and black...

'I have to see her' He thought as they lay on the carpet afterwards.

"Mmm... That was incredible", she whispered into his chest, sounding satisfied and replete, "Looks like absence definitely made the heart grow fonder", he heard the smile in her voice.

"Mmmphm..." he replied absentmindedly. How fast could he get out of here? Charlotte lay against his chest, body heavy with sleep after that intensely passionate session he'd just put her through. Yet although they lay so closely intertwined, their minds were distant as the stars. Charlotte was falling asleep; she couldn't believe how passionate Leo had been. The sex had been beyond amazing. Obviously almost losing her had stirred him to greater passion than ever...Leo meanwhile was feeling...deflated. He had just had the most incredible sex with his girlfriend. The only problem was that he hadn't been fucking her. He'd been fucking a tall, slender, crazy- looking black witch with the strangest habits this town had ever seen. Bad enough that she was a witch; that wasn't the worst. The worst was that she was poorer than a church mouse and wore faded floral print grandma dresses circa 1969! How could he want her? Correction, how could he want her over this glorious golden vision lying at his side, who was his

for the taking? His mind must be magnifying the chemistry that had occurred between them because she was definitely forbidden fruit – forbidden in every way; socially, financially... did he mention financially? Still he had to see her again, just to prove to himself that it wasn't as bad as he thought it was.

Leo Devereux was the only child of Jade Evans. His father had ran off when he was eight years old, leaving his wife and child at the mercy of Jade's brother, Gregory. As uncles went, he wasn't bad people, but he definitely made you work for your dinner. Leo was put to work on his alligator farm right away and Uncle Greg paid him by allowing them to live rent-free in the tiny apartment above the shop in town, where he sold his alligator derivatives. He had no sons of his own, and his daughter Sheila, was grown up and married to an out-of-towner. So Leo was being groomed to take over the family business. But he had far loftier ambitions than wrestling with alligators for the rest of his life. Seeing as he had no independent income, his best bet, the way that he saw it; was to marry it. Enter Charlotte and her crush on Francis Bacon High School's basketball sensation. Certainly Leo could have any girl he wanted, and did – but the one he needed was Charlotte. He'd been cultivating her for two and a half years now, and he had her just where he wanted her. He wasn't letting some random feelings get in the way of that.

But he still had to see her; and soon.

## CHAPTER 6: IN WHICH A CONFESSION IS MADE

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He stood outside her gate, staring at the dilapidated house. There were shingles missing from the roof, and a window on the east side had been broken and covered over with cardboard. The garden though was well tended, and was still a riot of colour this late in summer.

‘So are you just going to stand there admiring the scenery or are you going in?’ he asked himself grimly.

‘Stand here?’ he answered himself snarkily. He sighed in resignation. You knew things were really bad when you stood about in witches’ gateways having sarcastic conversations with yourself...Seeing as there was no further excuse for delay, Leo swung the tiny gate open and stepped into the path that led to her patio. His foot had no sooner touched the ground than a pain exploded in his head. It felt like someone had hit him really hard on the back of the head with a baseball bat. He sank silently to the ground, in too much agony even to cry out.

He wondered if he was having a stroke, but figured he should be unconscious by now if he was. His vision was blurry but he rolled over on the ground to try to see if anyone was around so he could ask for help. There was a figure on the porch, standing and seemingly staring at him. The figure was holding something that looked like a shotgun! He blinked a few times to clear his vision, but the pain was still blinding. “What the hell do you want?” Mya asked. He recognised her voice and knew that it was her on the porch.

“Help...me” he tried to say, but he could hardly form the words. She was coming toward him, still pointing the shotgun-looking thing at him. Here he was, dying on her footpath and she was threatening him with a firearm? As she came nearer, the pain in his head intensified and, thankfully, he blacked out.

He came to lying on the grass at the other side of the road from her gate. She was leaning on her gatepost, gun still in hand, and still pointed at him. He sat up cautiously, trying not to make any sudden moves. The look on her face told him that if he so much as twitched...he was dead meat. “W-What happened?” he asked her for lack of anyone else who seemed to know.

“I spelled my gate,” she calmly said “To hit you with a concussion spell if ever you came back”.

“So....that stroke thing I just went through, you did that?” he said getting up.

“Yes” she replied, raising the shotgun to stay level with his face.

“That is some serious magic” he cautiously took a step toward her to see if he could walk, “How did I get to this side of the road?” She quickly took a step back, moving behind her gate, “I dragged you there. If you try to step across the gateway it will hit you again” she said quickly.

He put up both hands and smiled, “I come in peace”. “Well go come somewhere else, no-one is interested here”, she replied.

“Witty” his smile widened as he took another step closer, “but I’m serious. I just came to talk. What happened the other day was totally out of line”

“Out of line?” she whispered, disbelief written all over her face. Her mouth was hanging open and she stared at him like she couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“It was wrong, totally wrong. What do you want me to say?” he asked in tones of injured resignation, “I got a little carried away, and things got out of hand. But I’m here to make amends so tell me; what can I do?” She continued to stare at him like he was a particular unlikely extraterrestrial that had wandered across her path. He wondered if he dared take a step closer or if he was risking having his ear blown off. He took another cautious step forward with no ominous movement on the trigger finger, though the shotgun stayed level with his face and so did her light brown eyes. “I’m sorry Mya” he said in his most contrite voice, “look, how about I repair that window for you? The one covered in cardboard?”

“Oh” she said in that dangerous sounding whisper “, take virginity, repair window. Sounds fair”.

“Look-“he begun before being interrupted.

“In fact, no. Take virginity, come back, force self on girl, then repair her window. Sounds very fair” she said, her voice getting louder with each word, “ Very, very, very fair!” she shouted, “ Isn’t it?” the voice went back to that whisper.

“Do you know how to use that thing?” he pointed with his chin at the shotgun She looked momentarily confused like she didn’t know what he was on about. “Because I think you should put it down. That might be best” he said in the most placating tone he could find.

“And why should I care what you think?” she asked, voice abruptly calm and cold and eyes suddenly almost as grey-looking as his own in their fury. Her fingers tightened on the weapon. He was afraid if he didn’t find a way to defuse the situation, someone was going to get hurt. And he was not about that life. She had said that if he stepped over the gateway, his head would explode again. But the barrel of the shotgun was long and he did not need to step over the gate to reach it...there was a reason his nickname was ‘Bolt’; he had the fastest reflexes of anyone he had ever seen, met or heard of. Before she knew what had happened, he stepped forward, grabbed the gun barrel, pulled the gun out of her hand, and threw it behind him. It happened so fast she was still standing there, hands frozen in position, holding thin air when he turned back around to her. Her expression was priceless; he almost wished he had a camera.

“Now” he said in tones of satisfaction, “Let’s start this again shall we?”

## CHAPTER 7: IN WHICH THE CRAZINESS BEGINS

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There was a buzzing going on in Mya's head. She couldn't believe that Leo had the nerve to show up on her door again! Seriously, if he wasn't careful she would strangle him with her bare hands. He'd gotten rid of her grandfather's shotgun (She'd forgotten about those lightning fast reflexes...her grandmother would kill her if the gun was lost!) but she could totally hit him with another concussion spell, and then strangle him when he was down. No, she didn't want to kill him while he was unconscious; maybe she would use a paralysis spell instead. That way, he could watch while she murdered him. While these crazy thoughts were going through her head, she watched him walk toward her until he reached just outside her gate. The buzzing in her ears hadn't stopped, but she could see that he was talking. He seemed to be doing some more fake apologising by the way his face was arranged to look contrite.

Now? Should she do it now? She was still pondering on when exactly she should strangle him to death when she realised he was calling her name...repeatedly. "MYA!" He practically shouted in her ear. She started back frowning and rubbing her ear, "Why are you shouting?" she asked with a frown. "You had the thousand yard stare", he said, waving his hands placatingly, "you looked like you were planning something that was going to be painful for me".

"You're not wrong there..." she mumbled, not expecting him to hear. He laughed softly which maddened her and she surprised herself by shouting, "Don't you laugh!"

He promptly wiped the lingering smile from his face, which for some reason annoyed her even more. "Mya", he said softly, "there is nothing I can say to make up for what I did to you. All I can say is I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Please let me do what I can to make it up to you. Let me be your slave for two weeks. Please?"

"I don't..." she started to say then it hit her what he was saying...slave? Hmmm, this might have possibilities. "What I meant to say is, when you say, 'slave', what exactly do you mean?" He smiled again, but she ignored it and waited to hear what he would say. "Mya, 'slave' could mean just about anything you want it to" "She didn't really care for his tone, or the look in his eye, but she ignored it in favour of asking, "So, if I tell you to run after me for the next two weeks, scattering petals in my path, you would do that?" "Yes." He said, but in a tone which suggested he wasn't expecting to be asked to do any such thing. The way his eyes held hers, with the memory of the last time they were alone together shining out of them...She turned away and asked, "Well, I can think about it right? Get back to you?" "Of course Mya, anything you want" he said, and turned away to leave. Almost nine months they'd hung out together and he'd said her name more times in the last half hour than he ever had in all the time they'd known each other. She snorted as she turned back to the house. Well, if he thought he could charm her into forgetting what he did...he was in for the shock of his life! She went up the porch, but turned to reactivate the concussion spell just in case he came back. She'd used his sperm to personalise it – she hadn't been sure it would work as well as blood but it was all she had and she wasn't leaving herself unprotected in case he came back for another round. If the concussion spell hadn't stopped him, she had put a trip jinx on the top stair so he would trip, fall, and bang his head hopefully on all five steps going down the stoop. If that hadn't worked, the door was spelled so that only she and her grandmother could open it. She wasn't taking any chances. She wasn't ready to become Leo's...sex thing mistress or whatever. She knew that people thought she was some kind of deranged, half-wit type person, just because she lived with her grandmother, practised magic and didn't keep up with the latest trends in Teen Vogue. That didn't mean that she was willing to let anyone take advantage of her, especially not Mr. Fancy Pants Bolt. He was

about to find out just who he was messing with. 'The shotgun! ', She turned around and shot down the steps and across to the tall grass that grew on the other side of the road to search for it. Luckily it was lying in plain sight and didn't look damaged at all. Not that it was functional – it was about as old as her grandmother and had belonged to Grandpa George who fought in the Second World War. She picked it up and ran back into the house. Being outside the protective barrier she'd put up for herself scared her a little – 'what if he is lurking nearby?' and she realised that she was just a little bit traumatised by the events that had happened in the last three weeks or so. Leo, specifically, was freaking her out more than she cared to admit. She'd been trying like hell not to think about what had gone down in her living room a fortnight ago. She didn't understand why it had happened, whether it was something she'd said or done that had made him jump on her like that. She'd tried to resist, she thought, but he was strong; and maybe she hadn't fought hard enough. Maybe he thought she wanted him to jump on her? – The way he'd looked at her today when she'd asked him about the petal thing – clearly he assumed she had feelings for him. But did she? Was he seeing something that was there and she was just in too much denial to see? As far as she knew, the answer to that question was a huge No. But still, the questions went round and round in her head. But even though he thought she had feelings, did that give him the right to make use of her body like it was an appliance? And what was she to do about it anyway?

Mya cut off this line of inquiry as futile and she thought about a programme she had once seen where people overcome their fears by confronting them. So that one girl who was terrified of chameleons was put in a tank filled with them. It was supposed to cure her of her phobia. So maybe that is what she should do – saturate herself with the presence of Mr. Fancy Pants Bolt until he didn't unnerve her anymore. And while she was at it, maybe she could get some payback...

## CHAPTER 8: IN WHICH PAYBACK IS A WITCH

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“Hello”

“Hi. Can I help you?”

“I’m calling for Leo Devereux. May I speak to him?”

“Speaking, who is this?”

“M-Mya.” There was silence on the line, and Mya wondered if he’d hung up or something. “Hello?”

“I’m listening” he said, his voice cautious.

“I want to take you up on your offer...i-if it still stands that is”. He didn’t say anything, and she wondered what the dickens was going on in his head right now. She hesitated to say, ‘hello?’ again, but was too shy to continue without some sort of encouragement. The silence stretched uncomfortably. “Leo?” she said tentatively.

“Yes?” his gravelly voice replied intimately in her ear. She sighed and bit the bullet, “Soo, when can you start?” “That’s up to you Mya, just say when.”

“Now?”

“Okay. I’m on my way” and he hung up. She stood staring at the telephone. She didn’t know why but she had walked down to the phone box at the corner to call. It was like she was even afraid to let his voice in her house...she hung up slowly and stepped out of the box. Her heart was going at a rate that she was sure was not healthy for the long-term well-being of her body – but she didn’t know how to slow it down. She walked slowly down the road to her house, wondering how she had got to this place. She’d been going along, minding her own business; weeding her garden, doing her schoolwork, keeping under the radar, when all of a sudden she’d walked past the ‘popular’ table at school and Charlotte had called out to her, complimenting her dress and wanting to know if it was vintage designer...first of all, she’d been very surprised that Charlotte even knew what her name was and secondly, she’d been sure she was being made fun of.

Then Charlotte had invited her to sit next to her at the table, and had made a point of talking to her throughout the meal. Leo had been there, and his friend Miles. There was the blonde girl, Tina who was always flanked by ‘the brothers Grey’ as she thought of them- Aaron and David. She wasn’t sure what the deal was with them...ménage a trois? Ashley - the dark girl- was quite friendly when she bothered to tear her attention away from Miles for a minute, though he hardly seemed to know she was alive. Teddy the bear was the sweetest of them all, always nice to Mya, even before Charlotte had condescended to notice her.

Leo had ignored her the whole time, keeping his eyes on his plate. He’d started as he meant to go on until recently that is, blind to her except when he was making snide remarks about her intentions, her looks, or her clothes. She had for the most part tried to ignore him, not only because he clearly didn’t like her, but because he might as well have been wearing a sign that glowed ‘OFF LIMITS’ the way Charlotte behaved around him. She tended to make her displeasure clear when anyone of the female persuasion spoke to him about anything Charlotte did not find strictly necessary. And that seemed to cover just about anything from ‘pass the salt’ to ‘you look good’. If Tina wasn’t constantly surrounded by Grey, she would definitely have been

expelled from the group for being overfriendly with Leo. The fact that Leo clearly couldn't stand Mya was one reason she probably lasted so long.

Still, it was a strain for her to keep up with Charlotte. The constant preoccupation with clothes, looks, and men was wearing for Mya. She had absolutely no interest in all three, and would really rather have been pottering quietly in her garden. She couldn't find the words to say so politely though, so she found herself ensconced in Charlotte's room of an evening trying to look interested in the earnest discussion going on between Charlotte and Tina about whether the pink shirt or green would go better with her new black jeans that she'd bought to match Leo's.

Then the pool had appeared, from where and why Mya didn't know...but now she stopped to think of it, it was a bit strange for a magic pool to just materialise like that. It had disappeared as soon as Charlotte was recovered from it too – almost like it had simply appeared so that Charlotte could fall into it, and be rescued...by Mya? Well, that seemed like an awful lot of trouble for a magic pool to go to. And why would it anyway? Perhaps she should ask her grandmother if she knew anything about the appearance of magic pools...Although she tended to be out of it most of the time these days. She was getting on for eighty...

She turned away from these depressing thoughts to find that she'd reached her door without noticing, so lost in her musings was she. She took a deep breath and turned her thoughts to what lay ahead. She didn't know what Leo was expecting when he came, but she was pretty sure he was in for a surprise...Leo drove up to her house, coming to an abrupt halt at her gate. Was that spell still active? He wasn't about to risk having his head split open again so he hooted and waited for her to come out. Before she'd attacked him with her magic, he would have thought she'd summoned him here for another taste of Leo – 'girls did seem to be entirely forgiving of anything he did to them after all, no matter how callous he was' - but now, he wasn't so sure...unless she was into some sort of dominatrix shit. Hmmm... He wasn't exactly averse. In fact, the evidence that she had a spine kind of piqued his interest. He'd gotten used to thinking of her as Charlotte's doormat - but apparently there was some spunk to her. No pun intended...

She came down the stairs in a woolly sweater (in this heat?) that was kind of ragged around the edges. Her leopard print (really? so five years ago) dress was faded in places and reached like, her ankles. It did however; hug her figure in all the right places so he wasn't complaining too much. Maybe it was the best she had – but the sweater would have to go.

She came up to the gate and unlatched it. He leaned out of the window of the jeep to speak to her. "Hi" he smiled in greeting

"Hi." She replied expression quite blank, and definitely no answering smile.

"Err, so is it safe?" he asked, smile flickering a bit.

"Safe?" she asked brow furrowing in puzzlement.

"For me to come in... you know, the spell?" he reminded her.

"Oh!" she said, furrow clearing, "Right" she raised her right hand, forefinger pointed upwards like she was about to flag off a race, she flicked it downwards and whispered something that sounded like, 'Finit'. He raised his brow in inquiry as to whether he was cleared to come in, and she gestured a welcome with her hand. He parked the car and alighted, wondering how Emily Post would recommend they conduct themselves in this situation. He stood still and waited to take his cue from her. She walked past him and into the house, and after a moment's hesitation he followed.



There was a small foyer that led off to one side into the living room and the other, to a closed door. He avoided looking at the shaggy sofa where he had...lost control, last time. She was standing in the middle of the room, surrounded by many pillows that were strewn hither and thither on the threadbare carpet. Her arms were folded and her expression was businesslike. It was a little confusing because the surroundings could be construed as quite romantic with the pillows on the carpet, but her expression said this was a transaction. "I need you to remove a stain for me." Her voice spoke so softly he didn't know if he'd heard right. 'A stain?!' "Excuse me?" he said, thoroughly perplexed.

"I. Need. You. To. Remove. A. Stain." She repeated, "Did I stutter?"

"I don't understand you" he replied, completely flummoxed.

"That you do not", she replied, heavy irony in her voice, "You left a stain the last time you were here, on my sofa. I need you to remove it." The blood suffused his face and he felt hotter than he had ever felt in his life. He followed the direction her finger was pointing with his eyes and saw the slight discolouration on the sofa that she was talking about. "I have soap and water, there is the kitchen; you will find a bucket there and a brush. I'll be in the garden if you need anything" she said before turning and walking out the door. He watched her walk away in bemusement then turned and stared at the sofa. He came closer to examine the stain – it could be...but then again, it could be anything. The sofa was clearly very old. Her meaning had not escaped him though. Wipe the stain from the sofa; wipe away the memory that it ever happened. Clearly, she was mad at him.

☑She wanted to peep back into the living room to see what he was doing, but she couldn't think how to do it without him seeing her. She went out and tried to weed the Kale garden which was the nearest to the house, but she was too distracted. She felt dizzy like she was anaemic and there was a buzzing in her ears. Her stomach had cramped and her knees were just the slightest bit shaky. There was an air of unreality that suffused this whole situation, and she had trouble believing that she'd really left him in her living room, cleaning up after himself – albeit two weeks later...what was he thinking? Did he get the message or not?

She flung down her awl and crept back up the stairs. She opened the back door cautiously, trying not to make a sound. She listened, trying to gauge what was happening in the living room, but sofa cleaning wasn't exactly a loud job. She dropped onto her hands and knees and crawled cautiously across the foyer until she was just next to the door to the living room. Should she peep? But what if he saw her? It would completely undermine the majesty of her walkout earlier. But she really wanted to know what was going on in that room! She was busily pondering what to do, as she crouched down near the door when she noticed a pair of black alligator skin boots right under her nose..."Boo" someone said from above her. She screamed and reared backward, landing hard on her behind. Leo was staring down at her, biting his lip really hard she could see; probably to stop himself laughing. "Are you alright?" he asked, voice shaking in what she was definitely sure was suppressed laughter. She frowned up at him then bent her knees in order to get up. His hand appeared in her field of vision, clearly offering to help her up. She ignored it and attempted to stand up with as much dignity as she could muster under the circumstances. She thanked God for her chocolate complexion which did not show her blushes but her face felt so hot she was sure she could cook her lunch on it, no problem.

"What were you doing down there? Have you lost something?" He asked, affecting to look around on the floor for something. Her face got even hotter, and she decided the best defense was a good offence.

“What were you doing lurking about the foyer?” she demanded in a belligerent tone, “You’re supposed to be cleaning!”

“I was”, he replied quite calmly, “but I heard sounds like shuffling and I thought some animal might have got in, so I thought I’d check “This did not help her state of embarrassment one bit and she wanted to run out of the room screaming; maybe lock herself in her room for the rest of her life and become a hysteric. She considered for a second carrying out the first part of this seemingly brilliant plan, but rallied and took a deep breath instead. She didn’t know how to get out of this but she hoped something would occur to her before too long. To her surprise, he saved her the trouble. “Would you do me a favour and come watch while I clean? I’m not sure I’m doing it right – this really isn’t my area of expertise...” his voice trailed away as he turned away from her and back into the living room, giving her a chance to compose herself. She took another deep breath and stepped into the living room after him.

“W-what” she cleared her throat before continuing“, what seems to be the problem?”

“Well, your sofa is clearly well-preserved and I don’t want to cause damage by inadvertently bleaching a patch onto it, but I can’t really tell if I am or not.” She looked into his eyes to see if he was making fun of her, or her sofa; but his eyes were guileless as a stormy sky just before it releases a light rain. He looked sincere...which caused her to narrow her eyes in suspicion. What was he up to? “Tell you what, why don’t you sit over there and watch me, and if I’m doing something wrong, you can tell me” he said before she could gather her thoughts. Before she knew what was happening, he was leading her to a chair and helping her into it. Then he crossed the room and knelt by the bucket, taking up the brush and applying it to the spot on the sofa with every appearance of earnest industry. She was bemused, and more than a little confused. Her hands clenched in instinctive reaction to the cleaning – wanting to go over and take the brush from him and clean the seat herself. She was not used to sitting and watching while others worked. It felt...wrong, somehow. But this was his punishment; she must let him do it. And do it he was, it seemed, with no complaints or snotty asides. Was it opposite day? What the hell was happening??

## CHAPTER 9: IN WHICH MIND GAMES ARE PLAYD

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Leo could almost take pity on her, she looked so confused sitting there with her hands clasped tightly in her lap and an anxious expression in her admittedly beautiful face. Well, she wasn't ugly...but no need for anyone to get excited. Big ever-changing-in-hue brown eyes, those prominent cheekbones tapering down to a mouth that wanted to be sensual but was hindered by her tendency to bite her lower lip into submission; it was a symmetrical face with classic features. Of course they added up to a beautiful face – it did not mean anything that he had noticed. He turned to her, and opened his mouth, not knowing what would emerge. "Where's your grandmother?" he asked, in a tone that strove for light curiosity but ended up sounding merely exasperated. She narrowed her eyes at him suspiciously; he noticed that they became almost black, "Why?" she asked. "Well, I've been here three times and haven't really seen her. I just wondered..." he replied, managing this time to sound casual about it. She seemed to think about his answer like she was searching for loopholes or hidden implications.

"She went to New Orleans" she replied finally", for the festival."

"Festival?" he asked, intrigued. He put down his brush and sat on the floor facing her.

"The Feast of the Dead" she replied

"The feast...of the dead?" he asked tentatively

"Yes" she replied without embellishment.

"You mean like Toussaint?" he asked, accenting it correctly in French.

"Yes" she said in surprise that he knew that name.

"But...isn't that like, on Halloween?" he asked, trying to get her to speak in more than one syllable.

"It is." She replied. He raised his eyebrows at her, and kept silence so she would be forced to fill it. After a minute of staring, she sighed and said, "My grandpa George is buried in the family crypt in New Orleans. Every year, my grandmother and...other friends gather to celebrate the day of his death which was 17th of August, 1980. They prepare immortelles for his grave, burn candles and tell stories to remember him. It is a ceremony that starts on the day of his death and concludes on Toussaint or the All Saints Day as the Christians call it. This year is special because it's the ten year anniversary of his death."

This little speech brought up so many questions for him; he didn't know where to start... "By friends, you mean other witches?" he asked her, wondering if she would answer. She did not generally talk about her witchyness. If it hadn't been for The Charlotte Incident, he probably wouldn't have believed the stories.

"Witches, warlocks, other family members..." she replied with a shrug.

"So why didn't you go?" he countered

"I do go. I attend the Feast of the Dead. But we can't both go and reside in New Orleans for two months; someone has to tend the garden..." she replied. Encouraged by her relative garrulousness, he said, "I thought your family was buried in the graveyard beyond the trees

over yonder”“My grandmother’s line is buried there. My grandfather’s family has a crypt in New Orleans” she replied.

“And why-“he began

“Why couldn’t we just bury him here?” she interrupted him impatiently,” A witch or warlock’s bloodline holds power and this power is consolidated in the place where that line is buried. A living member of that line can access that power if they are in need of it. That is why. “He opened his mouth, wondering which question of the dozens clogging his brain he should ask next, and wondering why she was being so forthcoming about it anyway. “So where will you be buried?” he asked.

“A witch follows the maternal line; therefore I will be buried here.” She replied.

“Christians! You said ‘the Christians call it’; aren’t you a Christian?” he asked, trying to keep accusation out of his voice. While he was quite willing to acknowledge that this was witch country, and a lot of ‘alternative’ beliefs were held by the populace, they did also tend to fill the pews on any given Sunday...himself included – black though his soul might be.

“I believe in God” was her short reply. He reckoned it was time to change the subject anyway, this line of inquiry not really being commensurate with his objectives. Though he was finding that there was a lot about her that was extremely interesting. The woolen sweater though...still had to go. “Would you come take a look?” he asked gesturing at the sofa, “have I done it right?” She stood up with no hesitation and came toward him. The conversation seemed to have relaxed her a little. All to the good... he wanted her relaxed. She reached his side and looked down at the sofa. “Well?” he asked

“I...its fine” she replied.

“You don’t seem sure”, he said persistent. He stood up and moved nearer to her. She did not seem to notice.

“I’m sure” she said, turning toward him, and starting slightly when she realized how close he was. She took two quick steps back and her feet hit the sofa, causing her to sit abruptly.

“Are you alright?” he asked, taking a step closer to her.

“Yes!” she exclaimed, standing up quickly and moving away from him. Hmm...she was scared. Of him. Interesting. What did she think he would do? Or was it her own reaction she was afraid of? He took a step toward her, just to see what she would do. She turned quickly, moving toward the kitchen area and put the counter between them. “Do you want something to drink?” she asked a bit breathlessly, he thought.

“Oh, some of that green slime you gave me last time would be great”, he told her. She turned sharply, ready with some retort but saw that he was joking and smiled reluctantly instead. “It’s an acquired taste I guess” she murmured. She had a very nice smile; he mentally slapped himself for noticing it.

“As am I,” he countered, “So I’m not really in a position to judge “This statement got him an extremely intense stare and he could see the wheels turning behind her eyes, trying to figure out his game. ‘Knock yourself out sweetheart’ he thought with a smile.

“Why are you smiling?” she asked in open suspicion – her eyes really did turn black...

“No reason”, he placidly replied, “just waiting to hear what my next job is.”

Considering that she hadn't expected him to finish this one, finding a 'next job' for him had not occurred to her. She fumbled for a minute then inspiration hit. "Well, you said it yourself...the window needs mending" she triumphantly exclaimed.

"I don't suppose you have any window glass laying about do you?" he asked, leaning his elbows on the counter and placing his face in his hands.

"Err, no we don't" she replied.

"Putty knife? Putty? Gloves?" he asked, pausing for her headshake after each question, "Okay, well; this calls for a visit to my uncle's."

"Your uncle?" she asked, brow raised in inquiry, "what's he have to do with my window?"

"He has everything you need to fix it. Shall we?" he asked gesturing toward the door.

"Shall we, what?" she asked in puzzlement.

"Go. Shall we go?" he replied patiently.

"Go where?" she asked, completely lost. He sighed in exasperation, "Aren't you like, a straight 'A' student?" "Yes, but that doesn't make me clairvoyant. Where do you want us to go?" she replied speaking slowly so he could keep up.

"To my uncle's house, to get supplies, to repair the window", he replied just as slowly so she could keep up. She gave him a look before saying, "I don't have money for supplies. Why don't we just forget the window and-" she began, meaning to dismiss him from her life. "No one asked you for money; you asked me to repair the window and I'm gonna do it. But I need equipment and tools, and my uncle has them. So are you coming?" he interrupted firmly.

"Do I have to?" she asked, shoulders slumping in defeat.

"Yes." He replied shortly

"Why?" she countered

"Because. I want you to." He replied.

"Why" she answered

"How old are you? Five?" he asked exasperated, "get your ass in the car; we're going". She was tempted to ask 'why' again but saw it was an exercise in futility. So she got in the car with bad grace and waited for him to start the engine. He got in, throwing a random smile her way that made her frown with suspicion. But all he did was start the engine and reverse down the driveway.

It felt strangely intimate being alone in a car with him, sitting in the front seat next to him like they were...friends or something. She felt curiously shy, which was ridiculous considering the things they had done together. The thought of that made her blush, and he looked at her a bit strangely. She wondered why because he surely couldn't see how flushed her face was, seeing as how she was dark-skinned. But maybe she was looking embarrassed! She thought frantically, trying to make her face as blank as possible. "Everything alright?" he asked, looking closely at her.

"Of course" she replied briskly in order to distract him from her discomfiture, "shouldn't you be watching the road?" He snorted briefly, "what, against the bumper to bumper traffic you mean?"

they were barreling along a dusty road that barely qualified as such – it was more like a nature trail flanked on both sides by the forest that bordered the land on which she lived with her grandmother. She looked outside the window and didn't reply. Leo's uncle lived near the swamp, where the alligators gathered. This dusty road was the back route to his alligator farm and not many knew about it, nor bothered to use it especially since it was not kind to shock absorbers. She wondered why Leo would risk his car on this road – everyone knew how much he loved it. Maybe he didn't want anyone to see them together.

Yes. That's must be it- he was ashamed of being seen with her...so why did he make her come? All these assumptions and suppositions were giving her a serious headache so she closed her eyes and shut down her mind. Whatever... She was sleeping...he saw as he glanced over at her, which was remarkable considering how bumpy this ride was turning out to be. It had been a while since he had used this route – he hadn't known it had gotten so bad. He sighed; I guess that's what he got for ignoring what they said about short cuts...

*How could she sleep!?*

She looked rather beautiful with her eyes closed; lashes brushing her prominent cheekbones. Her eyes looked slightly slanted when they were closed, like she had some Chinese blood or something – and her lashes were really long!

He realized he was staring and looked resolutely back at the road- not a moment too soon because a fox was just making its leisurely way across the road and he was about to run into it. He braked hard, flinging his hand out to prevent Mya's head from hitting the dash. His hand brushed her breasts and she drew back rather quickly. "Sorry" he said apologetically, "looks like I really should have been watching the road"

"No problem" she said with a strained smile. Did she sound a little breathless? The fox had disappeared, so he re-started the engine and drove on.

His uncle's farm was a hive of activity when they drew up into the driveway. His aunt Leyla was taking a delivery of raw meat from the slaughterhouse. They saved any meat that had gone bad or didn't meet the standards for human consumption for the alligator farm. Decomposed flesh was an alligator staple and luckily, not too difficult to obtain. The Evans' didn't feed all the alligators they traded in, just the ones they had domiciled on the farm. These were usually those alligators that were injured and therefore being looked after or those born on the farm. Their eventual fate was always going to be shoes or bags; exotic jewelery fashioned from teeth, and sometimes, voodoo rituals. Uncle Greg also did a brisk trade in local tourism as well as holding alligator hunting expeditions for those who would pay for such things. The farm ran to fifteen acres that spanned the length of the local swamp. The farmhouse was an old wooden building circa 1865 and had been built as a manor house when sugar cane was still grown in the area, farmed by slave labour. The slaves were gone, but some sugar cane remained, the bagasse produced was used to power the farm's energy needs and Aunt Leyla processed her own sugar. The Evans' believed in self-sufficiency. "Hey Aunt Ley!" Leo shouted as he alighted from the car and swung round to open Mya's door. He ignored the surprise on her face at his gesture and introduced her to his aunt;

"Aunt Ley, this is Mya. Mya, Aunt Ley."

"Hello" Aunt Ley replied looking curiously at her, "You're Matia's granddaughter aren't you? Matia Andrewes?"

“Yes.” Mya replied looking unsurprised that his aunt knew who she was. Well, they were the only black family in town, and witches to boot. Besides, they were kind of neighbours, Leo supposed, seeing as there were no other dwellings between the Andrewes’ and Evans’ residences.

“I know your grandmother very well”, Aunt Leyla said, “She’s helped me out now and then.” Considering the one and only spell Leo had ever seen done, his curiosity was heightened by this statement. What could she possibly have needed help with? “What kind of help did you need, aunt Ley?” he was asking before he realised he’d decided to do so.

“That’s none of your concern Curious George, now what are y’all doing here?” she asked. Aunt Ley was a child of the south and her accent tended to thicken in the presence of emotion.

‘Hmmm’ Leo thought, ‘to be continued’.

“We need some supplies from your store Auntie,” he said, “May we?”

“My store is your store Leo, you know that” she replied, turning to supervise her rotted meat storage.

“Thanks aunt”, Leo answered, kissing her cheek before heading off. Mya followed meekly behind, reverting to the shrinking violet Leo was used to. Which was the real Mya he wondered?

They collected the supplies and headed back to her place. Mya showed a basic understanding of the identity of tools and equipment and Leo wondered why she hadn’t repaired the window herself since she seemed to know her way around the procedures. He debated on whether it was worth the aggravation to ask her, but decided it wasn’t. She was still shooting suspicious glances at him, and answering in monosyllables to any conversational overtures he made; so better not. Was she uncomfortable around people or just schizophrenic? She was like two completely different people when they were alone, and when they were around other people.

## CHAPTER 10: IN WHICH THINGS ARE FIGURED OUT

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Mya watched Leo spread putty along the window frame, carefully patting it down so it could stick and anchor the glass in place. If she was being very honest with herself, which she wished she wasn't, she really had to admit that he was a major piece of eye candy. To add coals to Newcastle, he'd taken his shirt off so as not to mess it up.

'Too bad he's such a jerk' she thought. Not that he'd been that today; in fact, he was being suspiciously nice to her, and she didn't know why. It was making her more nervous than if he was his usual snotty self. Still, nervous or not, she couldn't help lurking around the corner to peep at him as he worked. The punch line was taking too long, if this new Leo was some sort of elaborate practical joke.

Shaking herself, she resolutely turned away and marched off to the attic where the grimoires were kept. She had come across a spell to assist the growth of sunflowers in the absence of sunlight when flipping through it some time back and had been meaning to go back and have a proper look. This seemed like the perfect time – perhaps it would keep her mind off the boy in her backroom who alternately confused, excited, and scared her to death.

The secret to selection of the best sunflower seeds lies in their colour. To the naked eye, there seems no difference between one seed and another but seen under the light of a full moon through the purple mist of a boiling elixir of Echinacea Pururea and Honeywort, the difference is apparent. When the full moon has reached its zenith, the difference in colour of powerful sunflower seeds and the weak ones shows a different hue between them. Plant the next-“Hey”, a deep voice interrupted her reading from the doorway. She jumped about a foot, and the grimoire flew across the room and almost fell in the hearth. Luckily the fire was out. She put a shaking hand over her chest because her heart rate seemed to have doubled and screamed at him, “Don't do that!” “Do what”, he asked in a rather mild tone, all things considered...

“Sneak up on me like that. God! You almost gave me a heart attack” she exclaimed, still quite disconcerted by his abrupt appearance.

“Sorry,” he said, not sounding, or looking, sorry at all, “I just wanted to tell you that the window is fixed.”

“Oh. Well, thank you.” She said, her voice trailing away uncertainly... ‘now what?’ he didn't say anything, just stood there looking at her, making her extremely uncomfortable.

“Erm, well you can go now”, she told him – hoping to break the stare.

“What are you doing?” he asked her, shifting his gaze to the grimoire and ignoring her statement.

“Who me? Err nothing, just...reading” she replied a bit flustered. He walked over to the grimoire and picked it up; studying the page it was open at. She made a V with her hands and snapped them closed and the grimoire snapped shut in his hands, making him drop it in startlement and turn around to stare at her in surprise. “Sorry. For witches only.” She told him with a shrug and a half-smile.

“I...see” he murmured, staring at her with speculation in his eyes. She did not like the look one bit; it did not seem like it was a good look for her. He broke eye contact and looked around him. There was a lot to see. She guessed that the contents of her attic were not standard for many



homes. There was the huge cauldron that sat in the hearth, waiting. One entire wall was a bookshelf holding hundreds of books, from family records to grimoires to stories of magic, mystery, and monsters. They were the culmination of centuries of collection from antecedents spanning from Abramelin the Mage in the 15th century right down to her grandmother Matia. From the ceiling hung various herbs that were most efficacious when dried; the window in the roof providing enough light for the plants. And on the opposing wall were drawers containing all types of herbs from fresh flowers kept in containers of water, to dried herbals kept in pouches to leaves, twigs, and mineral elements such as copper, manganese, and zinc. There were also the occasional animal parts such as bat wings, crocodile teeth and the long bones of big cats. In the corner was a miniature fridge where perishables such as the entrails and livers of toads were kept. The feathers of various animals resided in a glass cabinet, from the black feathers of a rooster and crow to the completely white pelt of a snowy owl. It was a strange room to be sure, not really designed to excite empathy in the average breast. She watched him as he looked around the room, waiting for revulsion, or fear or disgust. What she saw instead was curiosity, maybe even fascination. He moved over to the drawer with the bones and touched the crocodile teeth. "Did you get these from my uncle?"

"No... Those are crocodile teeth, not alligator; they came from the West Indies."

"What do you use them for?" he asked

"Oh, this and that" she replied vaguely.

"Another witch's only secret is it?" he asked, with a slight twinkle in his eye.

"Well, to be quite honest, I'm not sure what they're used for" she said rather sheepishly, "I haven't practised for long enough to know what even half these things are used for."

"Hence the reading?" he asked

"Well, that and I really wanted to know how to grow sunflowers" she said with another side smile.

"So why not use a horticulture book? Why a grimoire?" he asked

"Well, 'curious George'," she said with a smile, "it's because I'm growing it for magical purposes and I need them to grow to a particular size and yield a certain amount of oil." He hooked the stool that usually stood near the hearth and plunked onto it, "What do you do with the particular size and yield of sunflower oil?" he asked, settling in for what looked like a long natter. "It's an ingredient in many salves and creams", she said while heading out the door, "Coffee?" she asked him on her way out.

"Sure!" he called, not following her. She turned back and peered round the door at him. He was still sitting on the stool, looking around. "We could maybe go have it downstairs?" she said, eyebrows raised. He looked round at her startled, "Oh. Yeah sure. Whatever you say" he said, standing up to follow her.

## CHAPTER 11: IN WHICH A CHANGE OCCURS

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“Hello, Evangeline here, how can I help you?”

“Hi Tata Evangeline, can I speak to Grammy please?”

“Mya, petite amie! How are you doing?”

“I’m good, how are you?”

“Great! The preparations are going really good. Will we be seeing you soon?”

“I’ll be down in October. Is Grammy close?”

“Yes, let me get her”. That peculiar silence that accompanied a hanging phone assailed her ears. She sighed resignedly, thinking that Tata Evangeline was a sweetheart but she talked too much and was rather scatterbrained. She’d probably forget to tell her grandmother that she had a phone call. Mya really needed to speak to her; not only did she need a friendly ear to help her work through everything that had happened recently but she also needed to find out about magic pools. There was something strange about that whole business and she wanted...

A loud honking startled her out of her thoughts. She pulled the phone cord as far as it would go so she could peep out of the living room windows that faced the front garden. Leo’s car was at the gate, and it was he who was hooting. She stared at it until she realised the flies were gathering outside her open mouth. Then she hung up the silent phone and went outside to see what he wanted. “Hi!” he shouted from the car, “is it safe?”

“Safe?” she called back, puzzled.

“For me to come in” he said.

“What do you want?” she asked, arms folded and legs akimbo. His brow furrowed as he said, “I thought I was your slave for the next two weeks?”

Her brows rose in surprise and she opened her mouth to say something, and then discovered that she had nothing to say. “It’s safe” she stated before turning around and walking back into the house. She wondered if she should try to call her grandmother again, but figured she would call back. If she got the message. Besides, she couldn’t exactly talk to her grandmother with one of the main subjects of the conversation hanging on every word. She couldn’t quite believe he came back after yesterday. Not that it had been so bad – in fact, she would have gone so far as to call it fun. A little embarrassing being caught spying on him, but he’d been cool about it, and they’d gone on that ride and she’d met his aunt...He’d seen her attic and not run away screaming. And afterwards they’d sat talking on the bar counter in the kitchen until their coffees were stone cold. The conversation had somehow managed to flow so easily and she’d hardly noticed the passing time. He was easy to talk to, when he wasn’t being a dick. But just because she’d enjoyed herself, didn’t mean he had, and she hadn’t assumed that he’d had the same kind of time she did. But here he was, back again. What, to make of it? The door slammed behind her and she whirled around to look at him. “So, what’s on the schedule today?” he asked.

“The roof’s leaking if you wanna try your hand at that” she replied, expecting him to turn around and leave.

“Okay, you got a ladder?” he asked

“Umm, yeah I think so. Not sure about how stable it is – we haven’t used it in a while. You might be better off free climbing over the porch. “He snorted and murmured, “Good thing I’m a tall guy then...” before heading out to the back porch. He examined the structure of the house from the wooden frame that surrounded the veranda to the pipe that snaked up the side of the house up to the roof. If he stretched his hand out to its full length, he could just touch the tip of the ceiling. It wouldn’t take much to pull himself up. She watched bemused as he climbed athletically up the porch frame then up the pipe and over the roof. He really was quite graceful; she had to give him that. His heavy footsteps tramped across the roof above her and it occurred to her that she hadn’t told him where the leak was. She wondered whether she should try shouting up at him or leave him to figure it out. With a mental shrug she decided to go try her grandmother again.

The phone rang and rang and she wondered if they’d all left the house. Just as she was about to give up, someone picked up. “Hello”, a male voice answered this time.

“Hello, may I speak with Matia please?” she asked in a whisper.

“Just one minute, I’ll get her for you.”

“Thank you” she said. She tapped her foot impatiently, keeping an ear out for a bump that would tell her that Leo was back on the ground. “Hello”, her grandmother’s voice came down the line.

“Hi Grammy. How are you?” she replied with relief.

“What’s wrong honey?” her grandmother asked. She laughed shakily thinking fondly that she could never fool her grandmother. “I hardly know where to start” she replied a smile in her voice.

“Well, like the rabbit said in Alice in Wonderland, start at the beginning, go on till you reach the end, and then stop.” So she did. She told her grandmother everything. Considering that she felt like she had lived three lifetimes in the last three weeks, it didn’t take that long. Just talking about the whole thing gave her such relief that she didn’t really mind if her grandmother had anything useful to tell her about it all or not. “First honey, about the pool – you are probably right about that; this is the first pool I have ever heard about that appeared without being conjured by someone. Unless...was there a witch in the vicinity, or a warlock?”

“Not that I know of Grammy”, she replied

“We need to find out more about it. I’ll ask around here and get back to you. About this boy though...I’m not sure what is going on. You say he practically jumped you – twice. And now he’s repairing the roof? What do you think you are up to Mya?” her grandmother’s tone was concerned.

“I don’t think I’m up to anything. I was trying to help a friend, and next thing I know, I’m on the bed with her boyfriend on top of me. I don’t know what is going on Grammy. He kept coming back, and I just wanted to feel like I was in control of my life again. I wanted to feel safe again. “Mya told her.

“And do you?” she asked Mya was silent for a while and then said, “Sometimes...”

Leo did not mean to eavesdrop; he’d come back into the house to collect some tools and find out where exactly the leaks were and heard her talking. He hesitated in the doorway, wondering who she was talking to and then heard his name. She was telling someone about what had

happened between them. He heard the name 'Grammy' and realised she was talking to her grandmother. He couldn't believe she was sparing no detail in telling her what happened. Wasn't the woman like 95? This seemed like a good way to give her a stroke if you asked him; not that anybody was...

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