



eBooks are *not* transferable. They cannot be sold, shared or given away as it is an infringement on the copyright of this work.

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.

Samhain Publishing, Ltd.
512 Forest Lake Drive
Warner Robins, Georgia 31093

Every Witch Way But Dead
Copyright © 2007 by B. Ella Donna

Cover by Anne Cain

ISBN: 1-59998-464-4

www.samhainpublishing.com

All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First **Samhain Publishing, Ltd.** electronic publication: April 2007

Every Witch Way But Dead

B. Ella Donna

Dedication

This book is dedicated with much love to two of the strongest and most courageous women I know; my mother, words cannot convey the love and admiration I hold for you and my sister, MaryAnn; I wish with all my heart you were here. I know you are in spirit.

To my father, you taught me the greatest lesson, find out what it is you love to do and figure out a way to make a living doing it.
Last, but not least, my husband and children,
for their patience, I love and thank them.
To infinity and beyond.

Chapter One

Citronella ~ Cymbopogon nardus, from which oil of citronella is derived. It is used in perfumes and soaps as well as an insect repellent. The plant, with bluish green, lemon-scented leaves, is cultivated in Java and Sri Lanka. ~ From Angelica Kane's Workshop on Herbs.

Like a restless spirit roaming the landscape, fog drifted in, abandoning the dark waters behind. A buoy moaned in the distance, shattering the silence. The first slice of the new moon dangled in the inky sky. It was a time for magickal conjuring.

The only light in his dank apartment came from black candles as they cast peculiar shadows upon a collage of photos tacked to the otherwise dreary walls. All were of a striking woman with sparkling peridot eyes. For a moment, the man in the darkness seductively traced the outline of her face with his finger.

I loved you, but you chose the wrong man.

Like Narcissus mesmerized by his reflection in a pool of water, he stared at the manic blue eyes in the mirror. A day's worth of stubble obscured his lightly tanned skin. Sandy curls softened the hard lines of his face. Classically handsome, some would say.

Candlelight flickered and fitfully divided the shadows in his sparse dwelling. The night revealed nothing and only the sliver of the crescent moon peered down.

As the flame lit the remaining candle, his mind played over the last time he'd seen her. He cursed as the fire licked his finger, snapping his attention back to the present. In his tortured psyche, the burnt skin was her fault.

“Smitten, battered, haunted, torn. I stab at thee as if a thorn. Suffer now! I will not wait. With this pin, I seal your fate. Pins so sharp you can’t abate. I strike at thee with utmost hate. Smitten, battered, haunted, torn. I curse you now, your pain is born.”

In the center of his room lay a small doll. A lock of her blonde hair twisted around the miniature toy, bound with a thick black ribbon. He breathed in her essence. Thoughts of her consumed him. He picked up the poppet and stroked its face.

You will never find anyone who loves you as much as I do.

Tiny crystals of perspiration framed his angelic face and glimmered in the candlelight. Silver metal caught the flames as they danced. He lifted his ritual knife higher in the air and continued his chant.

“Smitten, battered, haunted, torn. I stab at thee as if a thorn. With this pin, your fate is sealed. Your deepest fears are now revealed. Smitten, battered, haunted, torn. I curse you now, your pain is born!”

He brought the knife down and sliced the palm of his hand. He made a fist and squeezed. Blood dripped from his clenched hand onto the doll, staining its hair and face, streaking down like tears from its dead eyes.

Tenderly, he massaged the blood over the silken plastic, felt himself stiffen—*not yet, not yet*—took a deep breath and focused once more on his bloody task.

Her face looked back at him, if only in his mind, as he stroked the knotted hair.

Oh, how I loved you.

An image of her plump, moist lips and slender neck filled his mind. His gaze trailed down to a full bosom that strained against the fabric of her lacy top. She reached out for him. She wanted him. He knew that much, but she could not admit it to herself. He set her down and ran his hands over her most intimate places.

You will be mine.

No longer was it a doll.

In his fantasy, the poppet was her.

The woman who'd captivated him, woven her spell around him and who'd left without a word. The mere thought of her sent him reeling. He had to take her. His lust commanded it.

"Smitten, battered, haunted, torn. I stab at thee as if a thorn. Suffer now I will not wait. With this pin, I seal your fate. Pins so sharp you can't abate. I strike at thee with utmost hate." The crazed thoughts that plagued his tormented soul caused his hands to tremble while he pierced the doll with thick pins aimed straight at its heart.

He clenched his jaw with fierce emotion, swaying back and forth. He raised his arms upward continuing, "Smitten, battered, haunted, torn. I curse you now. Your pain is born! Smitten, battered, haunted, torn. My love for you has turned to scorn. All those around that you hold dear, will know no peace, but only fear!"

His muscular arm slashed the knife across the throat of the poppet. Desire carried his craving to overflowing as he and the spell reached their climax. He shuddered. The night wind blew through his windows, leaving him in isolation and darkness.

* * *

In the predawn light after a night of fitful sleep, I'd finally succumbed to quiet slumber. Upon awakening, I grabbed my dream journal and jotted the images and feelings that were still clear in my memory. This had become a ritual of mine since my teenage years, writing in a daytime diary and nighttime journal. This was my latest entry.

In the distance, a sharp wedge of silver glittered before me, piercing the shadows. Was it the moon?

I struggled to catch my breath, but the air was thick and fetid. Stranded in a murky fog, I groped for anything to keep from free-falling. I reached forward, but my hands lashed out at empty space.

My throat tightened. It was so cold. Where was I and why couldn't I breathe? I plunged into the deluge of darkness. My mouth opened to

scream, but there was only silence. Waves of fear rolled over me. I was dragged down by the undercurrents and into the void.

Flashes appeared from out of the abyss, popping like a frenzied photographer's camera. A creamy white specter materialized before me then evaporated in a cloud of crimson blood. The edge of a blade wavered in the mist then retreated.

My eyes adjusted to the dark, but I saw nothing. Nevertheless, I sensed a presence. I worked my way into the deepest recesses of my unconscious, hoping to find a clue, a key that would unlock this mysterious scenario. There was only darkness and a cold chasm. I had lost my way.

The last notation bothered me most of all. This is not a nightmare and I cannot wake up...

* * *

"It happened again, Jon," I announced to my husband while dining *al fresco*. Regret washed over me the moment I opened my mouth. I shouldn't have brought this up, not now. Not so soon after the last bout with nightmares.

"Bad dream or vision?" Jon asked.

I drew a star in the condensation on my wine glass. "It felt like a precognitive dream, something yet to come." I looked across our deck to the bay. It was so peaceful.

"When? Recently?"

"After you left for work this morning. I finally fell back to sleep and—" I let the rest of the sentence fade away like mist on the water. I could feel his penetrating gaze. It was an unasked for gift of mine.

He sounded patronizing when he finally spoke—another gift I had. It was like having perfect pitch. Only I heard the subtle undertones of what people really meant when they spoke.

"I know it's happening more frequently, Angelica. I heard you crying out in your sleep the other night. You didn't remember, so I didn't push the issue. I didn't want to upset you. You seem really on edge lately."

"It's these visions, or nightmares, whatever they are. They're different than the others I've had. They're more ominous."

He probed his plate and picked out the olives. He speared one onto his fork and fed it to me. "Exactly what do you mean by ominous?"

"Like, 'something wicked this way comes' ominous." You see, I'm a psychic. When I spoke to Jon about the world of the unseen, it was perfectly normal.

We ate our herb grilled chicken and baby greens in silence. The unasked questions flitted around in the early evening air like fireflies on a hot summer night. When we finished, he asked, "D'you want to talk about what happened? You have any clue what these nightmares—or visions—mean?" He glanced over at me while I finished my wine.

"Refill, please." I held out my glass to him. "I'm not really sure what the visions could mean. I'm going to have Marisa do a tarot spread for me. Maybe she'll get some information from the cards. I can't be objective enough."

Jon poured more wine into my glass. "I find it interesting you think Marisa can be objective. She's like your sister, for God's sake," Jon said, shaking his head as he cleared the plates off the table.

I moved over to a lounge chair and rested my head on the overstuffed pillows. Running my hand through my hair, I examined the ends, assessing how many were split.

"What do you think I should do?" I asked. "I don't really have all that many options, you know." Truth be told, I hadn't been totally honest with my husband. There was more to it than just nightmares. I was scared, but now was not the time to discuss my fears.

My husband stretched his six-foot-plus frame in the warm night air. "This is your area of expertise, James. I'll stick to building homes."

James was one of his nicknames for me. Jon dubbed me James after seeing the famed psychic James Van Praagh on television years ago. It

really stuck after my husband saw an episode of *Ghost Whisperer*. He also calls my breasts the Charmed Ones, but that's another story.

"Either Risa or Oudia'll be able to clarify thing—I hope," I said, referring to my friends.

He sounded sincere when he said, "I'm sorry I can't be more helpful."

"I am, too. Anyway, they'll be more than happy to dive into their cauldron of spells and magick. I'm sure they'll conjure up an answer." I sighed.

"Your friends'll manage somehow, of that I have no doubt," Jon agreed.

I stared long and hard at my husband before I spoke, knowing I was about to open an old can of slimy worms.

"I wish you'd take what I do more seriously." There, I said it.

"I do take it seriously, I just don't understand it. I haven't had the experiences you have. I didn't see ghosts when I was a kid. I was busy being a kid."

"What's *that* supposed to mean?" I countered, taking my own defensive stance.

"You were always more responsible than me, and you know it."

"Why? Because I didn't have an affair?" I hadn't intended for that to slip out—or had I?

With a reddened face, he blew out a gust of air. "You're never going to let me live that down, are you?"

"I guess not. You wouldn't, either, if it were done to you. That's my point, though. You always make sure there's a certain amount of distance between us. You've never let me get totally close to you and you certainly don't try to involve yourself in things that're important to me," I rallied back at him. "You had that affair to create a distance."

"What about the shop? I built that old barn over for you and your business." Just the way he said "your business" clued me in to cut my losses and end this conversation. I knew he'd wished I'd stayed home instead of opening my shop, Sacred Treasures, with Marisa. My eldest

boys, Steven and Danny, were out of high school, and Amber, our daughter, was old enough to watch over Jake, who was already ten going on thirty. The timing was perfect.

He sounded agitated now as he volleyed back. "And I wish you'd stop talking to your friend Ivy. You're beginning to sound like a psychologist."

I drained my glass. "You're right, Jon. Forget it." There was no point dredging up this tired, worn out argument. "I'm sorry I brought it up. I promised I wouldn't and I did. I apologize."

He smiled at his small victory. Now I was patronizing him. "So you don't think these are the same as the premonitions you had last year?"

"Definitely not. Besides, I don't think there're any lost local children. Not that I'm aware of," I mused, referring to the lost little boy Marisa and I had located last fall.

There'd been a variety of reactions to the "Psychic Detectives of Sacred Treasures", as the local paper dubbed us last autumn.

"Just when the publicity has simmered down, it's going to flare up again." Jon smiled, teasing me. His stubble scraped my skin as he gave me a tender peck on my cheek. "And I'm the one who's sorry. I know I've screwed up in the past."

I bit my tongue and simply nodded. Whenever I thought of his affair, the anger flared like it had happened yesterday.

"If anything comes of these visions, it'll be good for your business," he conceded, "but the guys at work are starting to call me Darren. You sure you can't wiggle that cute freckled nose?" Jon was a big fan of *Bewitched*, too, thanks to Nic at Night.

"Sorry, Derwood." I smiled. "I'm not going to borrow trouble—I'll see what Marisa comes up with," I said, valiantly trying to sound upbeat. My husband just looked at me and groaned as he headed inside.

But the premonitions plagued me. I could only imagine what these sadistic impressions meant, and my imagination could be quite elaborate. Never before had I experienced anything quite like these preternatural visions, and they chilled me to my very core.

Learning to trust my intuition was a hard lesson for me. Having my circle sisters around for support afforded me the luxury to begin to believe. I only hoped the sense of foreboding was my own insecurities and not what my gut was telling me. Karma. Dark and demanding its due.

I followed Jon inside and retired to the upstairs master bathroom, turning on the peaceful sounds of Celtic harp music on my CD player. My nighttime ritual included lighting a stick of sandalwood incense along with a dozen pink candles then slowly settling into the soothing waters of a relaxing bubble bath.

I piled my hair high atop my head like a soft swirl ice cream cone. The hot water melted away the tensions of the past few days as I sank deeper into the comfort of the herb-infused bath. The warmth of the water invited me in. I descended deeper and let go of the day's stresses. Slowly I breathed. Each deep breath filled my lungs with nourishing *prana*. I allowed the music to take me away. My eyes closed as I drifted farther and farther to a distant place where it was peaceful and quiet. I nestled in a place where time did not exist.

A magic carpet of gossamer clouds whisked me away. I melted into the sensations, swaddled in the cocoon of the mellifluous harps of *Celtic Pleasure*. Specks of color danced across the inner screen of my mind.

They were random at first, then focused on one area, the center of my forehead. My third eye. It was there I placed my attention while waiting for any guidance that might come from my spirits or higher self. Serenity embraced me as I listened for the messages.

My quietude was short lived.

Hot, searing pain penetrated my throat. The muscles of my shoulders and neck constricted slowly, like a snake would, applying slight pressure with every breath. I tried to dislodge the pair of invisible hands that clutched around my throat. The rosy lights faded to an agonizing darkness and the warmth that had enveloped me turned frosty.

Wrenched into a vortex of disturbing energies, I cried out. But all attempts to scream were futile. My heart raced. A thousand demon

drummers pounded out their rhythm inside my skull. I noticed another presence with me. I struggled to see, but couldn't penetrate the veil of energy. I gagged. I attempted to call out to it. I strained to listen, but there were no sounds except my own gurgling. My efforts were in vain and panic overtook me.

I was determined to find out what was happening, but I was helpless. That in and of itself angered me, thrusting me forward in my quest to solve this mysterious and malevolent vision.

The knife.

The blood.

The pain.

The specter flashed in front of me once more, obscuring my vision. A violent strobe burst and the outline of a woman's form appeared from the vapors.

Knife, blood, pain.

The energies pulled me down. I heard a voice pleading, *Help her! No one can hear me. Please, you're my only hope!* My body shook in the water, although the temperature was warm, even hot.

Darkness, then blinding light.

Knife, blood, unbearable pain. It flashed like an old black and white movie with only the vibrant scarlet bleeding through. Then complete obscurity.

"Angelica!" Jon yelled as he held me up in the water. My eyes rolled back and I fought to reach him. Something restrained me. A voice, a soft moaning, pleaded with me.

Don't...go—I beg of you. The voice appealed to my emotional side. The energy felt feminine, soft and yielding, opposed to demanding and masculine.

She appeared yet again. Her hands seemed to reach beyond the veil and pull me back. My body writhed from the ache that emanated from my neck.

A circle of black candles flashed before me and warmth spread through my entire body. The soreness subsided and feelings of arousal permeated my being. I ached, needing a release. The sensation encompassed me. In the back of my mind, words resonated to a song or a chant of some kind.

I reached for my husband, running my hand down the length of his torso.

I kneeled, slithered up the breadth of him and wrapped my arms around him. I felt his desire gradually awaken. “Mmm,” I moaned. He lifted me out of the tub. My entire focus was on satisfying my lust. My lips hungrily met his. I purred in his ear, “Take me to bed.”

I stood on the ceramic floor while Jon forced some cool water between my lips.

“Are you all right? You sounded like you were choking.”

“Thanks, honey. I’m fine now, really. I must have dozed and had a bad dream or something. I think I swallowed some bath water, that’s what I was choking on. Come on, I’m cold, take me to bed,” I said as I stood pressing my wet body against his, shivering. Gently, he carried me to our bed.

“You’re on fire, Angie—here, get under the covers,” he whispered, laying me down. “Are you sure you’re all right, sweetheart?”

“I must have been thinking of what we talked about before—the affair—and I probably dozed off and had a bad dream. Come on, get under the covers and keep me warm.”

He obliged, sliding between the sheets. My hands skimmed over to his growing arousal. I wrapped my legs around him and slipped him into me.

He moaned. I thrust my hips against him and closed my eyes. All I saw were black candles lit in a circle. “I want you so badly,” I whispered into my husband’s ear, nibbling playfully as we twisted among the sheets. Oddly, I felt I was in two places simultaneously. One familiar, the other foreign.

Jon suddenly stopped and looked me right in the eyes. “What’s gotten into you?”

“You!” I smiled, rolling on top, slowly writhing back and forth. My hair tumbled down and tickled his flesh, brushing his torso.

“I do love you.” He sighed. “After all these years, you must know that.”

I looked into his eyes and nodded. “I love you, too.” My body shook from the journey into the ethers. My skin tingled with every caress, each sensation a delight. Repeatedly I climaxed, wanting more and never quite satiated. Jon rolled me onto my back, attempting to keep up with my desire.

“Don’t stop—I want more,” I moaned longingly, my libido taking on a life of its own. Logic escaped me, and my only thought focused on the explosive orgasm that took over my body.

“Baby, I can’t hold on any longer.”

“No—not yet,” I pleaded. My nails bit into his flesh.

A phantom flash of a silver blade struck down as we both reached our pleasure points. My breath stuck in my throat, my body arched upward toward my husband.

We were breathless, tangled among the linens.

Chapter Two

Malachite is one of the few stones that can be used to clear and activate all the charkas. Because of the high copper content of the stone, it has a strong, pulsing electromagnetic field. It cleanses the aura by absorbing negative energy, thus balancing the wearer and protecting her from any negativity. Malachite helps find a balanced path with the ego and the Higher Will, removing blockages and inspiring us with ideas to help bring those goals to life. ~ Marisa Arrucci's Gem Power workshop.

Minutes later I heard the phone jingle from my nightstand. I checked the caller ID and, as I thought, saw my Haitian friend's number displayed.

"What happened? Are you okay? I went to go lie down and couldn't stop thinking about you. Usually that means somethin's up. Am I right?" Ouida's heavily accented voice sounded strained.

"Yeah, you could say that. Strange visions again," I answered.

"Are you over it now? You want to talk about it, sister? I feel you're in for some trouble. The spirits are restless," she said.

"I'm fine—really. Tired, but fine. And confused, I'll talk to you about it tomorrow. Okay?"

"You get a good night's rest. I got a feelin' this isn't going to be over for a while, *peu une*. I want to hear all about it tomorrow."

"You feel it, too?" I asked, watching Jon go through his nightly ritual of putting his cell phone in its charger and downing a handful of vitamins. My throat tightened while he swallowed them without any water.

"I feel somethin'. Keep yourself protected."

"We have to talk tomorrow. Good night, Oui." With that, I hung up the phone.

Jon asked, "Do you want anything? Something a little stronger than water? Some wine maybe? You stay here and relax. I'll get it."

"I'd love a cup of my Cozy Nights tea." I settled into my down pillows and turned on our bedroom television. Seinfeld was on. Good, I could use a laugh.

What started out as a premonition had ended in a most unusual way and I still couldn't figure it out. I shivered, thinking about this latest foray into the unknown. The images still haunted me.

"Are you okay?" Jon asked.

"I'm fine. Really. Why?"

"You were just—insatiable."

"You're not complaining, are you?" I laughed, a little confused myself.

"No way. I'll go get your tea." He smiled, turning to head out the door.

"Come over here and kiss me first." I sighed.

* * *

The following night, my circle sisters and I decided to meet at my home. I needed opinions.

"We should consult the *loa*," Ouida said.

"*Loa*?" Kara asked.

Takara was her given name and she was the newest member of our circle. She was an Asian beauty with penetrating, jet black eyes and raven hair. Kara had a black belt in Aikido and taught at the *dojo* down the road from Sacred Treasures. She attended our healing circles and recently became interested in our other circle. The magickal circle.

"The *loa* are the intermediaries between the spirit's world and us. They're like the saints of the Catholic religion. I could do another ritual at home, Angie, if you like," Ouida offered. Her tea-colored skin was

splashed with freckles and she had the warmest smile I'd ever seen. "We should try to get to the bottom of these visions. From what you've said, sister, they are nothin' like the prior premonitions."

"No—not at all. These are something out of a—a Wes Craven movie." I shuddered at the thought of them.

"Oh, shit! That bad? I'll use the *I Ching* and see what I get," Kara added.

I smiled. One by one, my spiritual sisters offered to help with their very special gifts. My circle friends. Marisa, Ouida, Ivy, Kara, Heena and I were as tight as any family. Closer, in fact, than many, and together we observed the turning of the wheel of the year. Yes, my friends and I lit bonfires and danced under the radiant moon.

We were hip witches of the North Shore and we celebrated the seasons, among many other things. With the exception of Ivy. She was a Hampton gal.

Living in the northeast, we counted our blessings. Having the four seasons to honor and enjoy were but one blessing. Smooth sand and a stone altar provided by nature made the surroundings perfect for our full moon rituals and Sabbat celebrations.

"The Runes for me," Ivy chimed in. She settled into an oversized wicker chair on my back deck which overlooked Long Island Sound. Ivy's salt and pepper braids hung past her shoulders and her clear blue eyes saw more than she'd ever confess. At fifty-five years young, she was our wise woman, the crone of our little group. One could easily imagine her wandering the misty moors of the Emerald Isle.

"I don't know what I can offer." Heena sighed, stretching like a streamlined feline. She reminded me of a Siamese cat. Her gorgeous blue-green, almond-shaped eyes offset her caramel-color skin. "I've been so very busy lately." She tried to muffle a yawn.

I felt quite pleased to have everyone together. "I'm just so glad you're free, Heena. I know with your schedule and Ouida's, it's not always easy."

“No, it’s not. We added another physician to our practice. We’re now officially known as North Shore Pediatrics.”

“That’s great, congratulations,” Marisa said.

“Oh! I didn’t tell you—I’m on days in the ER. I’m still the charge nurse, but two days a week now,” Ouida announced.

“Finally, that’s good news, Oui. So, no further visions, Angie?” Ivy asked while pouring a glass of stress release tea. A combination of valerian, chamomile, lemon balm and grapefruit mint added to its soporific effect.

“Just what I’d told you about last night. It was so eerie.” I’d left out the sexual aspect of the experience from the night before.

“Oh, Angie, not to change the subject,” Marisa said, “but Ronnie Graile had called wanting to set up an appointment for a Reiki treatment and some shopping with you. She sounded a bit frazzled. I guess the new CD’s almost finished and she’s stressing about its success.” Ronnie was our mutual friend and a member of the band Arthur’s Graile.

Marisa took a broccoli floret and dipped it into dill sauce. “She didn’t sound like her normal bubbly self. She did say she and Marc are moving, but she didn’t say when or why. Only that they’ll be your new neighbors, Heena. They’re moving to your gated community.”

It had been one of life’s fortuitous synchronicities when Marc Arthur met Veronica Graile—two people who could literally say they made beautiful music together.

“Don’t forget we’ve got their concert coming up soon,” I reminded my friend.

“Oh, they must have bought that Tudor home a few doors down from me.” Heena reached for some chips. “Yes, she mentioned it was a Tudor. It’s perfect for them. It looks like a castle.”

We sat outside under the stars, sipping an assortment of beverages, from stress relief tea to May wine. A ruckus erupted in the form of my youngest son while I poured myself another glass of the fruity elixir.

“What are you doing, Jake?” my fifteen year-old daughter, Amber, asked. She came outside to sit with us, wearing a look of malcontent.

Occasionally glancing at her younger brother while grabbing a handful of pretzels, she listened in on our gabfest.

"I'm scoping out the firefly situation." Jake tried catching the lightning bugs in a glass jar with Marisa's son, Will.

I watched my only daughter mope and sigh with the desperation that often accompanied teenagers.

"What's wrong, Pookie?" I asked, using her nickname. She turned a delicate shade of ruby.

"Amber has a boyfriend," Jake teased.

My usually levelheaded daughter shot an angry look at her brother. "Shut up, you toad."

"Ouch!" Jake threw his empty pickle jar in the air and shook his hand.

"Hey, you two. Knock it off," I scolded.

Jake looked at his sister with widened eyes, then he picked up the jar and continued his quest for fireflies. Something wasn't right, but for tonight I didn't want to think about anything that required too many brain cells.

Still, I was in mommy mode. "What's this about a guy?" I asked.

Amber slowly released a sigh. "It's nothing, Mom. Just a friend of Michele's brother."

"Michele's brother is twenty-four, isn't he?" I asked, feigning a calmness that disguised pure panic.

"Yes, and don't worry, he's like ten years older than me." She moaned, "But he's mad cute."

"Don't get any ideas, Pookie," I said in that tone a woman acquires at the birth of her first-born and which, like a fine wine, improves with time.

"How old were you when Dad came along?"

May Day! May Day! Direct hit! She knew right where to strike, reminding me of what I'd done as a teenager. How do they do that?

“Okay, point made.” I sighed. “I was a year older than you, and your father was *not* ten years older than me.”

“Whatever,” she moaned.

Marisa playfully threw a chip at Amber. “Ah-hem. Well now—we’re all in agreement to devote our energies to abundance and protection this full moon? An abundance of all good things. Health, wealth and love?” Marisa asked, refocusing our attention and diffusing the rising tension between Amber and me. I did not want my daughter to follow in my footsteps, unable to enjoy her youth. I wanted so much more for her.

“You want to join us, Amber?” I asked hopefully. I periodically tried to include my fledgling, but she rebuffed me every time. She kept glaring at her brother. Her aura flared in spots around her power center, her third chakra. My wine glass was in her line of sight while she watched Jake catch and release night creatures.

“No thanks, Mom. Maybe next time.” As predicted, she turned me down, again.

I sipped my wine. It had lost its chill, making the sweet woodruff’s flavor stand out. “Ivy, can you throw a few cubes in here? Wow, it got warm fast.” I lifted my wine glass and Ivy dropped in a large cube. “I guess summer’s here early. The nights are so balmy.”

“One day, Amber, you and my daughter, Andrea, are going to join us in a ritual. I know you two will absolutely love it,” Marisa teased. Her citrine eyes sparkled in the firelight.

The others nodded, giving their individual opinions about how much Amber would enjoy it. The magick, the self-empowerment, the sisterhood. My daughter shrugged and headed back inside.

Ivy stood, taking the pie cutter in hand. “Nice try, Momma,” she teased, slicing her mouth-watering fruit torte. We munched on the various snacks that adorned my glass tabletop. Marisa brought bags of pita chips and whole-wheat honey pretzels from The Healthy Harvest. I cut up fresh vegetables and served them with a scrumptious homemade dip.

Candles cast their resplendence on the table, and around the railing of my deck, tiki torches blazed. The water languidly splashed along the beach as nighttime fishing boats cruised by, along with Captain Jack's party boat.

With my eldest twin boys home for a change, I sighed deeply, relaxed inside, knowing all my children were home. With my two sons grown, these times of us being under the same roof were too few and far between for my liking.

Soon everyone made their exits, hugging and laughing like schoolgirls. Marisa was the last to leave. She lived the closest, right down the road. Will ran off ahead of her, giving us a minute to talk.

"Did I tell you I'm seeing a new client at the shop? Her name's Sally. I think you were out to lunch when she came in the other day," Marisa said. "There's something familiar about her. She could pass for your younger sister, if you had one. I think her boyfriend's using her as a punching bag, though. It looked like she was covering up a bruise on her cheek. Right under her left eye. I was about to ask her about it, but she left. She said she was in a hurry. Sweet girl," she added as she stifled a yawn. "Clogged root, heart and throat chakras, but we're working on that. I only did a twenty minute session on her for the first time."

"If anyone can help her, you can. So, what's your take on these visions?" I asked, somewhat apprehensively.

"I think it's safe to say we're in for something big," Marisa answered. "I promise I'll try to do your reading tonight, but I'm a bit pooped."

"I'll tell you one thing—they're freakin' me out!" I pulled my crocheted poncho tighter around my shoulders.

"Don't stress over them, we can't do anything about it now. See you in the morning, baby cakes." Marisa waved and disappeared down the road.

* * *

Sleep arrived and whisked me away on moonbeams and fairy dust. Another presence prowled in the cloudless night, born of nightmares, tall and muscular with wisps of curls caressing his shadowed face. He called to me. Not by name, but he knew me. Knew my essence. He entered my dreamtime.

Power emanated from every pore of his towering physique. His eyes were a blue not of this world. A vampire's eyes. Cold and calculating. Ready to suck the life force out of anyone who stood in his way. Black candles surrounded him.

For some unknown reason, I went to him. I sensed the feelings of familiarity were mutual. Abruptly I was transported to another scenario, a time and place beyond this one. A desert landscape loomed before me.

The air lacked humidity. My mouth was parched. I looked down at my skin, which now appeared a few shades darker than normal. Bedecked with rich, gold jewelry, my hands were slender, and I wore robes of the finest silk. Pools of water lay beyond me. I gazed down at my reflection. Black eyes stared back and waves of ebony hair swirled around my bare shoulders.

Emotions bombarded my psyche, sadness engulfed me and tears flowed down my cheeks.

Separation.

Despair.

And love. I felt him close to me, the man with whom I was destined to be. But at the same time, he eluded me. Thoughts of betrayal assaulted my mind. I tried to think of his name, but the scene faded to black. I tossed and turned in the heat of the night.

I stood in front of the faceless figure once more, with nothing but a shawl wrapped around me. He tugged at the wrap and allowed it to drop to the ground. His finger lightly traced the line of my jaw and down my neck and lingered by my breast, teasing. I knew this was the same man from the desert. A soft moan escaped my lips.

That's when the arousal began.

Right before the knife slashed my throat and a river of blood spurted out of the gaping wound.

Chapter Three

Rhodonite ~ This calm, warming stone is said to bring tranquility and insight to our Cosmic Purpose. It gives assurance, encourages generosity of spirit and helps to balance relationships. It aids in understanding new concepts at a heart level. It helps us to open up and share our inner talents with an open heart. ~ From Angelica Kane's class on Gem Power.

He lit the candles and incense and flipped the cards over slowly in the traditional Celtic Cross spread. Three of Swords, Ten of Swords, the Devil, the Tower, and there again, the High Priestess alongside the Queen of Cups. *Damn, that witch.* She'd connected her energy to his. He felt her presence the night of the new moon. The energy felt familiar somehow, and that could only mean he'd known her before.

His lifelong obsessive-compulsive behavior was in full swing since he'd stopped taking his meds. He couldn't afford to be distracted from the task at hand. Time flew by too quickly to explore a past life connection with this woman. The one who'd appeared in the papers last fall. The Kane woman.

Besides, no woman would treat him the way Veronica Graile had and get away with it. The first order of business—discourage the witch from snooping around in his affairs. That meant stronger protection spells were needed. Perhaps another visit with the witch. It couldn't hurt. Not that he cared if it did. She'd never remember him anyway, now that he'd perfected the glamour spell.

He could come into view in the blink of an eye, then be gone as quickly. Nobody would remember a single detail about his appearance. The power within him grew stronger than ever and he'd been able to

sustain the glamour for longer periods. His arousals were longer-lasting, too. Becoming overwhelming. He would need to find the release he desperately sought. Soon.

It would all culminate around the feast of Litha, Midsummer. The time when the earth's energy peaked. He would have his revenge, and no one would get in his way. Especially not that witch, Angelica Kane.

* * *

"Join us for some dinner, I'm barbequing! Come a little early. I need to discuss something with you before the concert tonight," I sang into the receiver, leaving a short message on Marisa's answering machine. I'd decided to tell my friend about the sexual visions and the flashes of past life memories.

Dripping from a delightfully relaxing soak in our newly installed hot tub, I made my way upstairs to get ready, armed with a glass of Pinot Noir.

I entered my bedroom and looked myself over, happy with the reflection in the mirror. Not too shabby for a woman in her mid-thirties. With a flurry of soft bangs to frame my oval face, my hair was silky straight—after a few passes with the hot iron. It was frizz free, the color of wheat and down to my waist. My skin had a kissed-by-the-sun glow, thanks to a few hours of sunbathing.

My toe rings clinked on the oak stairs as I made my way down into the kitchen, where a four-paneled bay window allowed the serene view of Long Island Sound. The calm waters glistened with the summer sun's honeyed rays.

Barefoot, with a pristine French manicure on my little piggies, I stood staring into the refrigerator and began retrieving the ingredients to marinate the steaks. Aromatic garlic herb bread baked in my brand new bread machine, and the kitchen smelled divine. The phone rang, shattering my domestic bliss.

I checked the caller ID before picking up. It was my son. “Hey, Danny, how’s things?”

“Hey, Mom. There’s some girl here who needs to see Aunt Marisa. She says it’s really important.”

“What’s her name?” I sighed heavily into the phone. No one was going to ruin my night. It’d been a while since we’d gone out, all four of us. Plus the added bonus of seeing our good friends, Marc and Veronica Arthur, perform made the night especially momentous. I didn’t want to deal with shop business, at least for one night.

“Sally. She said her name’s Sally.”

“Is she still there?” I asked.

“Yeah—you wanna talk to her?”

“Sure, put her on.”

The voice on the other end sounded child-like. “Hello.”

“Hi, Sally. It’s Angie, Marisa’s partner. Can I help you? Is everything all right?”

“Um—not really, I was hoping to talk with Marisa. I hate to bother you guys on your day off.” Panic riddled her voice.

The flood gates split opened and she sobbed on the other end of the phone. Over and over she apologized for bothering me. Her voice caught in her throat. “It’s complicated. Can I have Marisa’s number? I know she was about to ask me about something personal at our first session and I chickened out and left. But I *really* need to talk to her.”

“I see. Do you have a piece of paper and a p—”

She blurted out her story. “He hit me. Again!” she exclaimed. “He threatened me, too,” she cried out. “He broke my door down last night—the police came and I filed charges. Oh, God! Then he called me and threatened that I’d better drop the charges. I can’t get to court until Monday. I have to file for a restraining order.”

I could hear she was having trouble breathing. “Okay, calm down a minute, Sally, who threatened you? You know what? Let me give you my address and you can come on over, all right? I’ll call Marisa and she’ll

meet us here. I'm on Harbor Lane—do you know where that is? Off of Route 26A. Twenty-four Harbor Lane. Let Danny write down my cell number in case you get lost.”

Sally whimpered on the other end, barely audible. I hung up the phone with Danny after asking him to give Sally my cell number and called Marisa again.

She answered the phone this time, full of verve, all excited about the concert, no doubt. I hated to pop her balloon with this news, but I saw no other option. I recounted the story Sally told me.

“She sounds a mess,” I said, pouring a bit more wine into my glass. “Bring your clothes and get dressed here.”

“Is Will behaving? Damn where is that new lipstick,” Marisa asked. I could hear her rifling through her cosmetic drawer.

“I borrowed it, remember? Will’s already upstairs with Jake. Tell Rich to meet you here and we’ll have dinner. I’ll ask Danny to cook up burgers later for the kids.”

“Okay, keep the lipstick, I bought a different shade.” Marisa tersely mumbled a few off-handed remarks and hung up.

Within ten minutes, she sat in my Tuscany inspired and newly renovated kitchen. Donned in her tee shirt and jeans, she poured herself a glass of mellow red *vino*. Luna and Midnight, my feline familiars, weaved in and out of her legs, demanding her attention. Cody, our little Husky, jealously barked in the penned-off area by the side of the house. “What’s this other thing you wanted to talk about?” Marisa asked. “You mentioned it on my answering machine?”

The bread machine chimed along with the front door. I shrugged. “I’ll tell you later.”

Marisa headed to the door and let Sally in.

“Shit! Oh-my-gods! Sally! What happened?” Marisa put her arm around the petite, fragile blonde and led Sally into the sunny kitchen.

"Come in, Sally," I said. "This is the hub of my domain. My place of hearth and home." I tried to lighten the mood. I guided her to one of the cushioned stools. "Here, take a glass of wine." I handed her the glass and she sat.

She smiled and clumsily sipped her wine, taking off her oversized sunglasses. Tracks of newly shed tears streaked down her raw and puffy face. A gash sat under her right eye, the skin pulled together with a butterfly bandage. She was a mess.

"It was worse last night," she said, dabbing her eyes with a tissue.

"What's going on?" Marisa demanded. But she knew exactly what had occurred. She'd been in an abusive relationship years ago, before she met and married Rich. One never forgets the horror and fear that accompanies it. She reached for Sally's hand and held it.

"Do you have a safe place to stay?" she asked, her tone softening.

"Yes, my brother found out last night. He packed my bags and brought me to his place. He's a fireman and friends with a lot of the local cops. I guess they told him. I'm glad." She sipped more of the wine. I could tell it steadied her nerves, causing her hands to shake less.

"You want to tell us what happened?" I asked.

"I—I'd been seeing Paul for three months off and on, along with this other guy Cliff who I've known for about a year."

"Paul is the one who beat you?" Marisa asked.

"Yes." She took a deep breath. "With Paul, it was the type of relationship that, whenever he wanted to get together, we did. It had to be on his terms. He was fun for a while, in the beginning. He could be so charming. But like I said, only when he was in the mood." She paused once more, taking another sip of liquid courage. "He could be a prince, but then there was this other side that's recently shown itself. I've been trying to break it off with him for weeks now. He just won't let go. It's either feast or famine." She sighed.

Sally finished her wine and gazed out at the ocean. "I'm young. I don't want to be tied down. Not yet, anyway." She looked helplessly at Marisa and me. "But then Paul threatens to hurt himself and I feel bad for him.

He lost his job recently and—and then he saw me with my friend, Cliff. Paul was livid.” She became quiet. “I think when Paul saw us together, he went over the edge. He was in the parking lot of my apartment, waiting for me. He saw Cliff and me leave for breakfast one morning—early. Cliff had spent the night. I guess it’s my fault. I let Paul believe maybe there was a chance. I shouldn’t have.” Her eyes filled again with tears.

“Hey, whatever you did, you don’t deserve this,” Marisa insisted. “It’s a trick, Sally, he’s not going to hurt himself. Besides, you’re young and you can see as many guys as you like. It’s okay when men have a lot of girlfriends, but when women do—oh—it gets me so angry!”

I whispered, “Okay, Ms. Women’s Rights, calm down.”

Sally continued. “Last night I’d done some ritual work with a friend and Paul tracked me down afterwards. He had a knife. He threatened to kill himself, that he would cut his wrists.” She sobbed, her shoulders shaking. “I told him I was with a girlfriend, but he found out I was with a guy. That’s when he beat me.”

I handed her more tissues. “For him to even say he’s going to kill himself is a lie, it’s a ploy. He wants to manipulate you. Sally, you must stay away from him at all costs. Do you understand? Do you see? He threatens to cut himself and instead beats the shit out of you,” I said. “Did you tell your brother about the knife?”

I cringed at the mention of the knife. Images of my premonitions rushed to the forefront of my mind.

“No—I didn’t want him to think I was a sucker or something. Besides he’s got a bad temper,” she answered, head down and shoulders slumped. “Big brother, you know?”

“Yeah, I know.” Having a big brother of my own in southern California, I knew how protective one could be. “But he loves you and should know how serious this guy is. Stay away from him, Sal.” I glanced at the clock. It was five-thirty.

“Yeah, he’s seriously sick,” Marisa huffed.

Sally walked over to the sink and placed her empty wine glass in it. “I was wondering, Marisa, if I could come for a healing Monday. I know you guys are normally closed.”

Marisa smiled. “Well, you’re in luck—our summer hours are recently extended, so we only get Sunday off.”

I took the bread out of the machine and covered it with fresh linen. “Why don’t you stay and have supper with us?” I asked. “We have the concert later, but you can stay for a bite to eat.”

“Oh, yeah—the concert. I have tickets, too. I was supposed to go with Cliff, but he can’t make it.” She fought back the tears, wiping them away as a few snuck down her ivory skin.

“A little fresh cover-up and some powder, no one will notice,” I offered. “I would tell him, Sal, he should know. It seems this guy—Paul? It sounds like he’s a loose cannon. Whoever you’re involved with should be aware of that.”

Marisa took out five plates and began to set the old oak table in my dining room, which was right off the kitchen, making an L shape.

“Yeah, you’re right. Cliff especially tends to be overprotective.”

The late afternoon light beamed through the multi-colored sun catchers that stuck to the french doors. They were dazzling in addition to being functional, keeping the sparrows from colliding into the glass windows like little kamikazes. Too bad people didn’t come with warning signs. It would be easier to spot them with a sun catcher plastered on their forehead, declaring “abuser”. And Sally reminded me of a defenseless, tiny sparrow.

“I don’t want to impose, Angelica. Really—I think you’re right. I’m going to go to my brother’s and try to call Cliff and see if his plans changed,” she whispered, sounding very defeated.

I hoped for her sake that Cliff was a stand-by-your-lady kind of guy. I had the feeling he was, although I really didn’t know him. But my instincts led me to believe he was loyal. Perhaps even to a fault.

“Thanks for the wine and your advice.” She tried to smile, but her lip pinched in pain. “Maybe I’ll see you at the concert.”

The three of us walked to Sally's car, a midnight blue Explorer a few years older than mine and in excellent condition. The air was heavy with the scent of lilacs that bloomed along my driveway. I breathed in the floral aromas.

Sally gave us thumbs up as she got behind the wheel. "Soon it will be summer—time for a new me. No more being a doormat, I'm done," she exclaimed. "Tomorrow, in fact! Wow, time flies."

"That's the spirit, Sal," I said.

"I'll see you Monday." Marisa waved as Sally slowly pulled out of the driveway.

"Poor girl, did you notice her aura?" I asked, waving.

"How could I not? Very muddy." Marisa sighed as we headed inside.

* * *

We had VIP tickets and one of the perks included special valet parking, thank the Goddess. I had on my Jimmy Choo shoes, which had a heel, something I'm not used to wearing. My feet were already protesting against the torture chamber I'd strapped them into.

People looked over at us as we made our way to our third row, center seats. I felt like we were celebrities. This wasn't Jon's or Rich's, our husbands', preferred music, but they were good sports about it. They favored the strictly rock 'n' roll Marc Arthur, the icon from the acclaimed Irish rock band, Prism. Jon thought we were going to see another Yanni, whom I adore. The guys were in for a surprise.

Nestled in our seats under a canopy of crystalline stars, Marisa and I speculated on what I'd been silently mulling over in the car. Both of us had been uncharacteristically quiet, each drifting along on our own stream of wild imaginings concerning Sally's dilemma.

"I think Sally is the one your disembodied voice is warning you about," she declared, touching up her lipstick.

I nodded absently. We listened to the woman on stage singing. She was oblivious to the audience below looking for their seats, meeting up with friends, chatting away.

“You really think it could be Sally? I’m just surprised I didn’t get any impressions when she was at the house.” We clapped as the Gothic-looking woman on stage finished her song. She then declared how indebted she was to open for such talented musicians and hawked her CD on sale outside at the merchandise booth. Her voice had a grainy, raspy quality to it. I liked it. I decided to check out her CD on a bathroom break.

“It’s one thing seeing spirits, it’s entirely different playing a serious, knock-you-on-your-ass game of charades with them.” I grabbed my shawl and wrapped it across my back. “I don’t think it’s her. It’s got to be someone I already know.”

“When she comes in for her treatment Monday I’ll see if I get any vibes.”

We clapped again as the warm-up singer disappeared behind the thick curtains. Marisa pulled out a small carafe of wine from her large, velvet tote. Along with the wine, she grabbed four plastic cups.

“Merlot, good choice.” Jon laughed, pulling out a bottle of Shiraz from my bottomless pit of a handbag.

We sipped our wine as we watched the band’s crew spring onto the stage with all the quickness of elves on Christmas Eve. They changed microphones and brought out a variety of backdrops, wheeled drums and bongos along with other percussion instruments. Working precisely and with intensity, they carried chimes, bell lyres, timbales and, of course, a gong.

Twilight fell, a magical time when day unfolded into night. The lights dimmed and the effect of a thousand candles set the milieu for our musical excursion. You could feel the excitement throbbing in the air.

The theater was thrust into a jet-black void. A solitary beacon rained down and in the center stood Ronnie Graile, a bewitching beauty swathed in white. Her lustrous tresses of tawny hair tumbled past her

shoulders in a cloud of ringlets. A gardenia sat delicately behind her left ear. With measured fluidity, she lifted the microphone to her plum-shaded lips.

“Darkness falls upon my heart—memories fade away,” she began to sing.

The crowd went wild as her husband of four years joined her on the stage, plucking at the strings of his Martin acoustic guitar. Yin and Yang, he in black against her snowy form.

“Promises made another day—why must we be apart...”

From behind Ronnie, three young beauties emerged, Becky, Diane and Karen. Her back-up singers joined them, adding wistful harmonies to her heart-wrenching lyrics. The crowd roared and the percussionists picked up the tempo. The lights changed from the dim illusion of candles to streaks and flashes of white. Our very own lightning storm played out up close.

People leapt out of their seats and clapped along with the merry minstrels. The air pulsed with magick. It was palpable, electric and as tangible as the night sky and the tranquil waters upon which the stage floated.

The rest of the band joined in. The violin wailed against the melodies of the keyboards. The pace quickened and Ronnie danced to the beat, her tambourine in hand, twitching out the rhythm. Her hair swirled around her. Layers of the gauzy fabric of her skirts enclosed her in veils of white.

Stage lights flashed in reds and gold. She beamed, a brilliant star on stage whose refulgence dimmed the sun itself. Her sisters in song kept the melodies going higher and higher. Then, stillness.

The audience went wild with applause, hoots and whistles.

Like a river, the band flowed flawlessly into another song. The ladies on stage put floral wreaths in their hair, wrapped themselves in silken shawls and danced a sultry jig.

Ronnie took the microphone and the next set of lyrics began.

“The woods were dark on the night when the veil grows thin...”

They met in a circle, dancing the new year in...

Bonfires light up the darkened hills, as we honor those who have gone.

With you in my heart, I know that I must go on..."

Fans tossed roses upon the stage as she sang a ballad of love and loss, called "Samhain", verbally tugging at everyone's heartstrings with her tender vocals and chaste countenance. Her face was inscribed with the personal pain this ballad reflected. The song must have held a special place in her heart. Tears escaped her eyes, visible on the large screens that stood on either side of the stage.

For the next two hours it went on, a vacation of sorts, taken to another time and place, of gypsies and star crossed lovers, of Camelot and wizards. The crowd cried out, "Merlin's Lament!" Everyone wanted to hear the instrumental written by Marc Arthur. Like the gracious host he was, he obliged with the tune, a heavier rock piece and one the crowd ate up then wanted more. With his customary display of dramatic bravura, Marc played on.

When the set ended, Ronnie announced, "This next song is a new one Marc and I recorded just last month for our new album. The album will be out next week." She winked at her husband. "We hope." She smiled, taking a rose from the ground and inhaling its sweet aroma. "It's called 'Gypsies' Road'."

"Under the star-cast velvet skies..."

She travels this road...

Too often paved with lies...

This time she journeyed all alone...

The cold autumn winds, chilled her to the bone..."

"They're so great live," Marisa said, pouring more wine.

"Yes, it's nice for a change to go to a concert and have the artist sound like her albums," I agreed. "I mean CDs."

The stage had been meticulously surrounded with flowers and backdrops of castle walls, sconces and bonfires in the distance. They truly captured the flavor of days gone by. The entire band wore authentic

gypsy garb. At the end of the song, the band played music from Marc's days with Prism, which our husbands thoroughly enjoyed. Marc picked up his Fender guitar and wailed, bringing the crowd to a fever pitch. Ronnie's voice transformed from ethereal and angelic to a gritty hard rock without any apparent effort at all.

"Come dance with me, under the stars...

And we'll drink a toast to those near and far..."

The audience stood, hands held out as if toasting a glass of champagne. A machine began cranking out tiny bubbles from behind the frenetic drummer. Everyone went wild, shouting the lyrics. "Cheers!"

Immediately they went into the finale, "The Lady of the Lake".

"I love this song!" I exclaimed, jumping to my feet. We sang along, slightly off key while reaching the crescendo.

Ronnie sang, *"Between the mists—parts the veil—all hail..."*

She held out the microphone to the audience and we sang in response.

"The Lady of the Lake!"

On the lyrics went and around Ronnie whirled, an apparition in white. She seemed to be looking off to the side, a bit preoccupied with something off stage. Not missing a beat, she kept singing. She caught her husband's eye and held out her hand as if to signal something. He nodded in the direction of one of the back-up singers.

The crowd seemed oblivious, lost in the melody. The tiny hairs on the back of my neck bristled, the flesh on my arms started to chill even though the temperature was a balmy seventy-four degrees.

"The Lady of the Lake!" the crowd roared. From behind Veronica and her husband, one of their singers came forward. Ronnie gave a diminutive nod to her, hardly perceptible. The dark-haired beauty, Diane, held a two-foot sword in her hand.

That's when I began to feel incredibly lightheaded. A humming began in my ears, sounding like a mosquito. I realized it was in my head, not outside of it. It grew louder in an instant, to the point of distraction.

I'd been standing and clapping along with the audience. All at once, I felt my life force being sapped by an imperceptible, voracious vampire.

I was caught in the vortex of this mysterious energy. I tried to get my husband's attention, but I couldn't move. Stuck in the grip of this nameless force, I watched in shock. My visions, bit by bit, became all too real.

Diane clutched the short sword in her hand. She raised it above her head and stood by Ronnie's microphone, representing the Lady of the Lake. My head spun uncontrollably, nausea gripped my stomach with malevolent, bony fingers. Diane pressed down upon a foot pedal to release the special effects mist, the sword in her hand held high.

I heard myself shout. "N-no!" Time stood still.

Another voice in my head blared, "*Help her!*" Sparks flew as tiny flames shot out from the base of the microphone and foot pedal.

Diane's face and body were petrified, her eyes opened wide. Her body trembled with the electricity that surged through her.

It took a few seconds, but felt like an eternity. Abruptly there was smoke and horrified gasps, then more sparks. Security teams descended in a wave of black shirts, like a fog that lingered in dark corners, searching for a storm.

The electrical surge caused the stadium lights to flicker and lose power for a few moments. Diane's lifeless form lay on the theater floor, the color of despair.

Screams filled the air. Becky and Karen tried to rush over to their partner. The security teams and bodyguards blocked their path, then led them away and backstage. Marc whisked Ronnie to their dressing room. The look on his face registered awareness that it could have been his wife on the ground. It should have been. After all, she was the Lady of the Lake.

Marisa gasped. "This was their new finale, they'd just added it to the show. Ronnie told me tonight would be the first time they'd be performing it. Before the European tour began," she explained in a horrified whisper.

That was the last thing I remembered hearing.

* * *

Voices phased in and out.

“Wake up! Angie, are you okay?”

Faces slowly materialized from the indigo depth. The power came back and lit the area. Marisa, Jon and Rich stared down at me. I shivered uncontrollably and fell back into unconsciousness.

It’s not your fault, I heard another voice say. In the background, there was...what? Sobbing?

What happened? I heard myself ask.

You saved my daughter.

Your daughter? What is going on?

I came to you. To ask for your help. No one else heard my pleas, but you did.

A lot of good it did, I thought.

Another voice rose from the wailing. *It was meant to be,* it lamented. I barely made out the spirits of two female apparitions gracefully floating upward. Then there was nothing.

* * *

The stench of ammonia filled my nose and I bolted upright, waving away the source of the offending odor. My husband looked down at me, half-smiling, half terrified. “Are you all right, sweetheart? Can you talk?”

I nodded. “I’m okay.”

I glanced around and tried to gain my bearings. Okay, I was still in my seat, still in the theater. An EMT had used smelling salts to bring me back to consciousness.

Much of the crowd was gone and police clustered on stage taking pictures. Crime scene investigators milled around collecting evidence, and detectives questioned the security teams of both the band and the theater. Someone with a jacket that had “Coroner” on the back walked toward the lifeless singer. I felt nauseous.

Tears welled in my eyes and trickled down my cheeks. I realized I’d witnessed the departure of a soul from this plane of existence to the next. I was heading for overload. It was all so surreal. *This can’t be happening*, I kept thinking. I sobbed uncontrollably.

I peered around and saw the police and that poor girl’s unresponsive body on the stage. This was the real deal. No nightmare this time. Was this my vision come to pass?

“Can someone get some water?” Jon called out.

Marisa went into her purse and pulled out a small bottle of Kabala water. She smirked, shrugging. “I ordered a case—I was curious.”

I gratefully drank it. Whether it had mystical powers or not, I felt better after drinking it.

Rich asked, “Can you walk? They want to clear this place out.”

I reached down, slipped off my sandals, then slowly stood.

“Let’s go,” I said.

We made our way to the exits and stopped to give our names to the officers at the gate. Rich went to get the car. I leaned on Jon. Intermittently, tears escaped my eyes. I was in shock. My body quivered.

Once I got inside the car, the smell of new leather calmed my frazzled nerves with its nouveau aromatherapy. “I saw her spirit,” I finally said.

Jon sat next to me and wiped away renegade tears that slid down my face.

From the front seat, Marisa turned to look at us. “Who? Diane?” She handed me a tissue.

“Yeah, Diane,” I said, as if speaking her name held some mystical power that would make it all a nightmare and not gruesome reality. “How long was I unconscious?”

"Altogether? About thirty minutes, give or take. You were fading in and out for a while there. At least a half an hour went by before you really woke up," Jon reported as Rich drove through the parking lot and onto the highway.

"Did Ronnie lose her mom?" I asked my friend. I fought back the dizziness that threatened to engulf me once more.

"Mmm... Yes, about two years ago, I think. Why?" Marisa asked.

I stared out of the window, lost in thought. "It had to be her." I sighed.

"You want to talk about it?" my husband asked, holding me close to him.

"The visions—this was what the visions must have been about. I saw the sword...except in the premonition it looked like a knife to me, and then the suffocating. Like I couldn't breathe." More tears fell. "I should have known," I said angrily. "I felt something was...off. Damn!"

"How? How could you? If you went any deeper into that vision, who knows if you would have ever returned?" Jon hugged me tight against him. "From what you and Marisa have said, you can't be too careful. These aren't the candy-coated visions of finding kittens and little lost boys."

I'd asked the question I'd been wondering about most of my life. "Then why get them if I can't help? I don't get it. Why?"

"This is all fairly new to you. Yes, you've had experiences before, but these seem much more intense. Besides, how do you know you didn't help?" Jon calmly asked.

"He's right," Marisa added. "These are much more powerful insights you're receiving now than, say, even five years ago. Don't go into the blame-game, baby cakes. Everything happens for a reason."

"Easy for you to say," I huffed.

"No, not really," Marisa sadly concluded.

* * *

He plowed his way into the poorly lit room, kicked the debris out into the hall and slammed the door. He felt for his lighter on an end table, next to a large wax skull. Methodically, he lit the black candles once again. Tossing crumbled papers from under the bed, he finally found his leather-bound journal of spells. Some he'd found on the Internet and others he'd written himself. He flipped through the earmarked pages until he came upon the one he sought.

From the back of the notebook, he took out her picture. It was of *them*. The man she'd left him for, and her. He gripped his ritual knife in one hand, the picture in the other and carved a heart on each of the lover's chest.

"With this knife, I stab your heart, soon your love so near will part." He lit the incense sitting in a brazier and encircled the photo with the smoke as he spoke. "With this knife I stab your mind, soon insanity is all you'll find."

He walked the circle, his pace tempered, raising the energy with each pass.

His blue eyes never left her face.

* * *

A low moan disturbed my sleep. The events of the evening played repeatedly in my head. I couldn't erase the image of Diane from my mind. That poor woman, her family must be devastated.

I got out of bed, turned the air conditioner to a cooler setting and poured myself a glass of water. I felt unusually warm. I made my way over to the window, pushed back the sheer curtains and stared at the night sky. I found the big dipper and watched the stars slowly turn to lambent flames. A cloud of dense energy surrounded me, pulling my thoughts awry.

* * *

His hunger for her grew with each ritual he performed, and this was no different.

Her green eyes looked back at him while he rocked over the photo. He waved the incense round and round, encircling him. "With this knife I stab your heart, soon your love so near will part." He repeated those words. "With this knife I stab your heart, soon my love, we'll never part."

The room grew hot with passion. The energy raised from the spell-work was forceful as thoughts of sex and death mingled together. He reached the apex and soon would need to find relief.

* * *

I was lost in the beauty of the flames, and the heat consumed me. The ache I'd experienced a few days before returned. I laid in bed, staring at the ceiling, listening to words of a ritual just outside the periphery of my consciousness. I tried to make out the rhyme, but couldn't.

Tossing and turning, I wrapped my arms around my husband, nuzzling closer. My hips moved rhythmically against him and I caressed him, softly moaning as my own passions heightened. His did as well.

"Mmm, you're frisky tonight," he murmured, turning over.

"I need you, Jon."

"I'm beat, sweetheart." He sighed, but his body responded otherwise.

My skin was tortured and only his touch could quell the rising crest of desire. I was lost in another time and all my mind wanted was to satisfy the flesh. I rolled him on his back and climbed on top.

"Now, now. Isn't that so much better?" I whispered, rocking back and forth.

"Oh, yeah," Jon agreed.

"Soon my love—we'll never part—" I muttered over and over, faster as I drove him deeper inside me.

I was entranced and no longer in my bedroom. In the darkness, I noticed a circle of candles around me. Jon cupped my breasts, but a stranger's hands touched them.

I closed my eyes and found myself back in the candlelit room. The man's face I gazed at melted from my fair-haired husband's to an exotic, dark-complexioned lover. I tried to bring my consciousness back to the present, but my body betrayed me. I wanted only to be satisfied.

"I need you, Jamila." The stranger sighed.

I sensed the tortured desire that raged within him. Timing his moment of climax, my phantom lover called out my name, only it wasn't...

"Jamila!"

"With this knife, soon my love, *Khaldun*," I moaned, but Jon couldn't hear me. He was lost in his own passion and release.

Chapter Four

Hessonite, or the cinnamon stone, provides courage and faith. It is a form of garnet and bestows bravery and confidence in self, providing the wearer with assurance. It also aids in travel to the etheric realms. It is a particularly good stone for those dedicated to service. ~ From Angelica Kane's class on Gem Power.

The following morning Ouida called, curious about what had transpired at the concert. I learned early on that my circle friends also acted as a phone tree. A super information highway.

"I don't understand, Oui, it's the weirdest thing. I'm getting what I think are past life memories. And at the most...inappropriate times," I said into my cell phone.

I could imagine her one arched eyebrow as she asked, "What do you mean?"

"When Jon and I are...you know," I whispered.

I was pretty certain both eyebrows were raised now. "Oh, that could be a problem—but not as unusual as you might think," she said.

"It's happened to you?"

"Yes, you see, your chakras are open and..."

There was a gentle knock on my door. "I'm sorry, Oui, I gotta go. One of my kids is at the bedroom door. I'll talk to you later about this." My friend and I ended our conversation.

In walked my daughter with a tray of bacon and eggs, toast, coffee and orange juice. She placed the tray on a snack table beside my bed. A huge sunflower tucked into a bud vase occupied the corner of the serving

tray. I patted the comforter, motioning for Amber to sit with me on my bed.

“Happy Solstice, Mom,” Amber said. Her brown eyes searched mine. “Dad told me what happened at the concert. Are you okay?”

I smiled for the first time since yesterday. “I am now,” I answered, giving her a great big hug. “Stay and eat with me?”

My daughter picked at a piece of bacon in silence. Normally, I could read Amber like a book, but I tried not to invade her private space. Talk about walking a fine line—finding a diary would be child’s play for me.

“So...how’s your friend?” I asked.

She played coy. “What friend? Michele?”

“No, the guy. The one you see over at her house.” I looked into my daughter’s eyes.

“He’s fine. I guess.”

I deduced her game plan was act dumb. I played along. “What’s his name?” I asked, trying not to dig too far and hit a nerve. I wanted her to be able to talk to me.

“Lance.”

I smiled. “Ah, like Lancelot. He cute?”

“Yeah.” She finally smiled. “Don’t worry, Mom, he only comes to see Nick, Michele’s brother. I’ve only talked to him twice.”

Our conversations as of late were more along the lines of a chess match. “I’m not worried. I trust you, Pookie.” Her aura told another story, but I held back.

“I’m going over there in a little while, okay?” *Check.*

“Sure.” *Checkmate!* She won this time.

With that, she was gone.

After having children, I could shower in record time. After children, you learn to do a lot of things in record time. I was especially adept at wiggling into a floral sundress in less than ten seconds. I slid on my Birkenstock sandals and joined my husband outside. The weather was

warm, the sky cloudless. It was unreal to me, even now, the difference a day makes. Just like the song says.

Especially the way fate steps in, changing what could have been to what is. How such a vibrant young woman was alive one moment and gone the next... I raised the subject of last night's ordeal.

"It's scary to think that our good friend Veronica Arthur was probably the intended target," I said. "It must have been her mom who'd been coming to me in the vision. I just didn't know it at the time. She, the spirit, said she was grateful her daughter was spared. I guess Ronnie was supposed to be holding the sword on stage and not Diane. It would make sense, after all. I mean, she is the lead singer."

Before we could continue the discussion, an unmarked police car pulled into our driveway. One of the detectives from the theater stepped out and walked up the steps of our front deck.

He directed his gaze at Jon as he approached us. "Good morning. I'm Detective Sean Bennette. I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions about last night."

"Sure thing, Detective. There's not much to tell, though," my husband answered.

"It's just a few routine questions." The detective made his way onto the porch, and Jon pulled out a chair for him to sit. He declined, preferring to stand, although he appeared worn-out.

When he finally looked in my direction, there was a sense of immediate recognition on a level deep inside. Bright blue eyes unlike those I'd ever seen revealed he felt it, too, but his face swiftly displayed a visage of business. He proceeded with the questions.

"The Arthurs tell me both you and the Arruccis were given VIP passes for the concert. That would give you backstage access, correct?" He looked almost uncomfortable. His demeanor shifted rapidly from when he'd first arrived. It was my psychic observer at work. The detective went from obvious confidence to almost awkwardness.

"I suppose it would, but we didn't get backstage. We were going to after the show," Jon said.

"Mrs. Kane?" he asked, looking at me directly then casting his gaze downward.

"Yes," I answered, trying to catch his glance.

"You're friendly with the Arthurs?" He busied himself with his notes. He appeared uncomfortable with me holding his gaze.

"Yes, I am. Mostly with Veronica, but yes. We met at my shop and we've been friends ever since," I continued, not looking away.

"Were you friendly with the deceased?" he asked, his eyes back on mine, then away.

"Not really, no." This time, I had to look away. The more I stared, the deeper I went into his mesmerizing gaze. "I'd met her at a few parties held at the Arthurs, but it was superficial small talk."

"Can you think of anyone who would have a reason to hurt either Mrs. Arthur or the deceased?"

I cringed at the word "deceased". "No, I've got no idea who would want to hurt either of them. This wasn't an accident?"

"Mrs. Arthur is a customer of your shop?" he asked while writing down the answers.

"Yes, she is. Mine and my partners'." Once again, I matched his stare as I tried to read him. He was a jumble of emotions, very scattered, almost startled. Strange, I thought.

His attention went to my husband. "Mr. Kane, you had no relationship to the deceased, either?"

I could see Jon take a deep breath and I knew he resented the implications of the question.

"No, I never saw her before last night. I went to the concert at my wife's request. It's not really my type of music." He sighed, seeming slightly annoyed. "I met the other two singers at the party I attended, but Diane wasn't around.

"I hear they're pretty good, actually. Well, thank you both. That should do it for now. I may need to speak with you again. I hope it won't be a problem?"

“Not at all,” Jon answered.

Detective Bennette left his card and was gone. Jon and I stared at each other, trying to figure out what had just transpired.

“Wow, I guess your premonition may be right,” Jon said.

“What do you mean?”

“This wasn’t an accident. Well, James, too bad you can’t tell the police about your inside information.” He smiled.

“Very funny.”

“The detective was very attracted to you, my dear. He reminded me of that actor who donates the profits from his cooking products to charities,” my husband teased.

“Yeah, I suppose he does look a little like him.” I sighed. “A young, blond version. Anyway, I think the detective’s just punchy. He looks like he put in a full night’s work.”

“No, he was taken by you, I can tell. He got all jittery. You didn’t pick up on that? I guess I have a little intuition working, too, ya know? You’re quite the beauty, did I tell you that today?”

I laughed. “No, not today, honey.”

“Let me show you, then,” he said, taking my hand and leading me inside and up to our room. Amazing what a little jealousy could do.

* * *

After making love, we lay silently in bed. Neither one of us spoke for quite a while. Jon finally broke the stillness.

“Before I forget, Ouida called late last night. She’s at Lake Pontchartrain—in Louisiana? Some Vodou gathering on the twenty-third,” he said as he rolled over in bed.

“Yeah, I chatted with her earlier for a few minutes. She said since she didn’t go last year, she was determined to be there this year with her daughter. It’s a kind of initiation for Lily.”

"I guess she heard via the psychic hotline about what happened last night?" Jon asked. "What'dya call it? The phone tree?"

"Yeah, she certainly did, from Marisa, I gather. Look, I hope you don't mind, but I thought it'd be nice, since Heena had the day off for a change, that we'd go to her house to celebrate the Solstice." I sat up and looked for my clothes.

"Of course I don't mind."

"Good." I stood and headed for the master bathroom.

"We haven't had good Indian food in ages," Jon said, his brow furrowed.

I turned to face him. "Thinking about last night?" A thought darted across my mind.

"Yeah. I can't get that poor girl's face out of my head."

"Me, too. Hey—guess who just moved in a few weeks ago, two doors down from Heena?" I grabbed Jon's hand and led him into the shower.

"Okay, James, I give up. You're the mind reader of the family anyway, not me."

"Psychic dear, not mind reader. Marc and Veronica Arthur did. I didn't tell you? They're Heena's new neighbors."

Chapter Five

Midsummer Incense

2 parts sandalwood

1 part mugwort

1 part chamomile

1 part gardenia petals

1 part rose petals

A few drops rose oil

A few drops lavender oil

A few drops yarrow oil

A few drops of rosemary oil

~ From Angelica Kane's Book of Shadows

Heena and Nandan Birbal's home was exquisite. The foyer was a masterpiece of Italian marble. To the left was the living room in which, no doubt, no one lived. It was immaculate. A baby grand piano regally commanded the room, with plants and furniture playing second string.

Adjacent to the living room was Heena's dining area, which had plenty of use with all their dinner parties—only a few of which we were invited to. We attend the religious celebrations, which was fine with me. The wining and dining of other doctors and department chairpersons was not my cup of Ceylon tea.

We sat outside overlooking the water and their sailboat, which bobbed in the calm sea. It gently rocked back and forth against the bulkhead. Dusk crept up riding on a slight breeze that blew off the water.

Rich, Jon and Dave, Kara's date *de jour*, were getting to enjoy the big screen TV, while we welcomed summer out back.

"Hey, Heena, where do the Arthurs live? East or west of you?" Marisa asked as she lit the torches.

"They live to the west—two houses down, on my side of the street. The police were there today, all night and this morning. I guess it's concerning last night." Her speech carried the Hindi dialect of her childhood in New Delhi. She brought out bouquets of velvety scarlet roses from her gardens and placed them reverently on our altar. I situated a dozen red candles next to the roses, along with sunflowers from my garden.

Marisa gave Heena the same altar cloth she was giving to Ivy at the full moon *esbat*. It was ideal for the Solstice. Kara had brought beer for the guys and a beautiful bamboo plant in a lovely ceramic pot for Heena. The bamboos twined together like a lattice fence and were decorated with red ribbon, symbolizing long life.

"I'm going to take a walk to see how the Arthurs are doing. You want to come with me?" I asked Heena and Marisa. "Ivy's not here and Kara's glued to Dave for the moment. We have some time before the moon rises."

"All right," Heena said. She instructed her mother in Hindi to do something, relax, I imagine. The woman nodded and went upstairs. "She never sits!" Heena sighed.

"Like mother, like daughter." I smiled.

As we approached the Arthurs' home, I noted the classic Tudor design with Belgian block lining the driveway. Evergreens towered over it like dragons protecting the manor on one side; an unkempt menagerie of trees occupied the opposite edge.

I'd been to their other house on a number of occasions and it was there that I learned about their other passion. Animals. They took in stray cats, had them spayed or neutered and released them outside again. Cats are not stupid and they more often than not adopted Ronnie and Marc. They ate well and had a place to go in inclement weather.

What could be better? But the four-legged kings of that castle were the canine members.

A mêlée of barks came from the yard as we rang the bell. One would think there were at least six dogs inside, but in reality, there were two, a large golden retriever and a teacup Pomeranian.

A broken security camera at the front gate leaned like a drunk clinging onto a lamppost. A voice declared over the intercom, “The Arthurs aren’t seeing anyone today.”

“This is their neighbor, Heena Birbal, from two doors down. I’m here with some friends of the Arthurs. Marisa Arrucci and Angelica Kane.”

“Ronnie knows us from Sacred Treasures,” Marisa piped up.

We heard the buzz letting us through and made our way across the large front yard. Most of the homes on the water sat back on the property, with modest backyards and substantial front lawns.

Marc shuffled to the door in sweats and a tee shirt, looking like he hadn’t slept all night. Which, undoubtedly, he hadn’t, judging from the deep circles under his emerald eyes. His jet-black hair was disheveled and he hadn’t shaved.

“Hi, come in. Hi, Heena, how are you?” Marc invited us in, rubbing his hand against his stubbled chin.

Marble lined the floor and rich, wood crown moldings traced their ceilings. The open windows allowed in the cool breeze from the Sound. Marc led us into the back of the house. I tried to take in as much as I could and noticed Marisa doing the same. It wasn’t every day you get to enter a rock ‘n’ roll icon’s home. I felt silly, like the old washerwomen I complain about to my husband. I had to laugh to myself. It was either that or I would cry. Photos of family, concerts and plenty of candid shots along with promo pictures lined the hallways. Diane was in most of them.

“I wanted to thank you for the gift basket you sent over when we moved in. That was very nice.” Marc’s voice carried the Irish lilt of his homeland.

Heena shook her head. "It was my pleasure. Angelica and Marisa speak very highly of you and your wife. It's a pleasure to meet you. I wish it were under happier circumstances."

"Me, too," Marc said as he led us out back to their deck. Along each side of their property, evergreens and weeping willows stood at attention, which left the view of the Sound. Off to the west, the sun was setting, a raspberry dipped in gold, sinking ever so slowly into the saucy sea.

Veronica Arthur sat huddled in a lounge chair and, despite the warm temperatures, she swaddled herself in a Navaho-print blanket. A glass of wine and a half empty box of tissues sat next to her.

"Hi, Ronnie. How are you?" Marisa asked as she made her way over to the fragile-looking singer. She gave her a hug. Tears escaped Ronnie's red-rimmed eyes.

"Hi, Ronnie, I'm so sorry," I whispered and leaned over to give her a gentle hug.

"Thanks, Angie, how are you? Hi, Heena." Ronnie spoke in barely audible tones. Small holes littered her usually bright aura.

I pulled up a wicker chair across from her and sat.

Abruptly, the onslaught of Ronnie's emotions overwhelmed me. I stared silently at my hands, taking in deep breaths, trying frantically to ground myself. I avoided eye contact at all costs for fear I would fall flat on my face, right then and there. *Dear Goddess, not now.* This was not a good time, not that it ever was.

I lost ground rapidly. The voices threatened to split through the ethers. A buzz that began at the base of my skull wrapped itself around my entire head. It gripped securely and refused to let go. *Tell her I love her and I'm always with her—tell my daughter it was me in her dream last night. Please. Tell her,* the sibilating voice demanded.

A circle of flames appeared. I heard the rhythmic cadence of a prayer.

No, it was a ritual.

Over and over the words repeated, gaining strength and momentum. A static chill filled the air.

I struggled to keep my composure. I could feel the color dissolve from my face. This specter was not going to take no for an answer. I fought with myself and, against my better judgment, I spoke, hoping the dizziness would subside once I relayed the message.

Struggling for control I muttered, “Oh—no.”

Marisa spun her head around. I thought she’d cracked her neck. “What now?” she asked.

“I don’t know—Ronnie’s mom was just here, b-but now she’s gone.” I shrugged.

Ronnie’s eyes spilled over with tears and she began to weep. Marc rushed to her side. I felt like a villain. All that was missing was a moustache to twirl.

“I’m sorry, Veronica, I don’t mean to upset you, but your mom has been—ah—she’s been trying to get my attention lately. Only I didn’t know it was your mom until last night. Mom’s quite persistent.” I laughed nervously, feeling idiotic. “She says she loves you and that she came to you last night. In a dream.”

I looked over at Veronica. Her form became a silhouette as she phased in and out of view. I tried desperately to focus on her, but the more I concentrated, the louder the pounding in my head hammered. A cold breeze blew right through me.

Heena sat next to me. “Angie, are you all right?”

A dark mist appeared behind Veronica. Her aura turned gray and merged with the sinister vapors. I tried to speak, but my voice only croaked. I pointed behind Veronica. A male figure emerged from the energy cloud. Only I could see him.

She wrapped her blanket tighter around her and her eyes grew wide as her mouth formed words I couldn’t hear. A flash of white metal flashed across her face and sliced her lily-white throat.

I blacked out.

* * *

“Angie—wake up. What’s happening?” Veronica cried.

“Not again,” Marisa groaned, taking out another small bottle of Kabbala water from her shoulder bag.

Heena was checking my pulse when my eyes fluttered open. “Are you feeling better?”

“Yeah—I’m back. Wow! That was strange,” I said trying to catch my breath.

“Did you have a vision?” Marc asked.

I nodded. Thankfully, Marisa and Heena took over. I still felt bit nauseous and hung-over.

“You see, Angie’s been getting these...premonitions. Not only gruesome but also...a bit vague,” Marisa tried valiantly to explain.

“Horrifying, from what I understand,” Heena continued. “As you know, they were at your concert last night, and Angie saw what was about to happen—but it was too late.” Heena looked at me as she made quotation marks with her hands to emphasize the word “saw”.

“It all happened so quickly.” My eyes widened as I gazed at Heena.

“Marisa called me last night,” she confessed. That psychic hotline travels at light speed.

I continued the explanation. “It’s all very jumbled, these visions, and it wasn’t until last night when I was there at the concert that the vision became clearer—but...”

Marc interrupted. “There’s no need to explain. Angie, Ronnie and I are all too familiar with the way these things work. A bit like charades, eh?”

I heaved a sigh of relief. “I feel awful, like I failed.” My throat began to tighten. “I still can’t figure it out.”

“No.” Ronnie spoke quietly. “It makes perfect sense. My mother did come to me in my dream last night, and she said it was meant to be. That’s all she kept saying. That, and be careful.” She took another sip of

wine then placed the glass on the snack table and closed her eyes. "It's been a living nightmare." Ronnie buried her head in her hands.

"Ronnie," I said, "I don't want to frighten you and you've probably figured this out already. You're in danger. You need to be extra careful. I can't get a solid fix on who it is other than a male."

Veronica nodded as her husband wrapped his arms protectively around her.

Heena patted my back. "It'll come," she reassured me.

But would it be too late. I didn't want to alarm Veronica any more than she was, so I kept the details of my vision to myself. "We better go," I said. I feared I'd done more harm than good.

"Maybe in a few days you can come back?" Ronnie asked, lifting her head off her husband's shoulder. "I'm a bit out of it, the doctor prescribed something to relax me. I am—I was—very close to Diane, and you know...I was supposed to be holding the swo—" She stopped mid-sentence, but we knew the rest.

I went over to her. "I really am sorry. I hope I didn't upset you too much. It was not my intention. It's just that when spirit comes with a message, no matter how it may reflect upon me, I feel obliged to pass along the sentiments. Again, I'm sorry for both of your losses. It's not the first time I've made an ass of myself and I'm certain it won't be the last. Just please be careful," I warned the young singer.

Veronica stood and hugged me. "You've given me a precious gift. A message from my mother. There's no need to apologize. Heena, you have our new number, right? Could you give it to Angie and Marisa? Call me." Ronnie sat again, quickly. It was clear she was unsteady on her feet. "We obviously postponed our tour. I'd like to talk with you both. I'm just not myself. I took an anti-anxiety pill, wasn't it, hun?"

Marc nodded. "Yes, Xanax, to calm you."

"There's so much I want to talk to you about, Angie, it's just now my head is a jumble of thoughts and I can't seem to stay focused."

There was no incantation to chant to take away their pain, and the helplessness I experienced created more stress for me. “I understand, we’ll be in touch,” I said, turning to leave. My head pounded.

“If you need anything, Marc, if Ronnie or you do, call me,” Heena reassured them, then whispered something to Marc. We made our way to the front door, escorted by the housekeeper.

“What an *ass* I made of myself!” I grumbled. “I can’t believe it! I’m mortified. I’m passing out all over the place, first the concert, now here.”

“You have no reason to be embarrassed,” Heena said, coming to my rescue. “Do you feel all right? Maybe you should have Nan check you out when he returns. Go for a physical.”

“I have an appointment with my ob/gyn this week,” I told my worried friends.

Marisa rubbed my back as we walked. “Yeah, what was that all about?” she asked.

We walked back to Heena’s place passing the night blooming jasmine. Its scent was heady and reminded me of a familiar fragrance from long ago. I struggled, trying to recall where I’d smelled those flowers before

I explained to my friends the vision I’d had of the misty, astral visitor.

When we walked into the driveway, Ivy had just pulled up. Trying to put this awful nightmare behind us, we, the Sisters of the Sea, headed to Heena’s backyard to welcome the longest day. The Summer Solstice was the time when the earth’s magick was at its most powerful. We used this energy to help manifest our individual hopes and wishes. Heena made a wonderful High Priestess, dressed in gold. As a special treat, she marked us married ladies with the traditional *bindi*.

I noticed Jon watching from the dock. He’d taken his two-piece fishing rod with him and passed the time doing what he loved, fishing. Have rod will travel, my husband always said.

Heena stood with a bowl of sea salt in the center of our circle, facing east. She consecrated the area with it, walking clockwise. Once inside the circle, I called and invited the energies of the east, the place of air and inspiration. Marisa invited the north, direction of earth and spirit.

Heena called the west, water and intuition. Kara invited the south, where fire and passion reside. Ivy beat out a soothing rhythm on her drum while Heena called the energy of the Goddess into our circle. She explained succinctly the meaning behind our gathering. It was a beautiful description of the season.

It wasn't an especially long ritual tonight, and by nine forty-five the men joined us outside, digging into delectable treats such as chicken tikka masala, malai kafta, aloo paneer puri, samosas and baingan bharta. Heena even made mango sorbet for dessert.

The sky darkened, as did my mood. All things considered, though, it was a lovely night. Eating, drinking and making merriment was exactly what we needed. We could feel the excitement in the air and speculated it was a combination of the season and the fact Heena's husband would be returning home the next day from India. She could barely contain her joy over his return. It was hard to believe that already the days would be getting shorter. Everyone made an effort to keep the mood light and the energy high. My husband, in spite of his resistance to my witchy rituals, enjoyed himself immensely. I thought I actually saw him beam with pride as he glanced my way during our ceremony.

Would wonders never cease?

* * *

He slowed his breathing and concentrated on his heartbeat, counting back with each pulse. The edges of his awareness scattered into a fine crystalline powder, blew into the astral plane and dispersed into the quantum field.

She stood before him. Dark and regal. The daughter of the pharaoh, promising her undying love to him, Khaldun.

His Jamila.

They met in secret, their union forbidden. She was a Priestess of Isis after all, destined to serve the Goddess. To have a family was not her fate, yet she found herself in love with the handsome warrior.

Static jolted through his body as he emerged from the astral plane. The dark-haired priestess at once became the blonde-haired witch, then back to the priestess. He had to focus. He could not allow her to distract him. Holding his astral knife, he materialized behind Veronica. He must remain centered. If he could not play this out in the ethers, his chances of success in the physical plane diminished significantly. His past memories fought to resurface as he recognized her not as Angelica Kane, but as his betrothed. *Jamila*.

The exertion of astral projection always left him weak and vulnerable to psychic attack. Luckily, he'd taken care of all his known enemies by way of his powerful binding spells.

For some reason, which was becoming clearer, the witch was immune to his attempts to control her power. The connection she had to him was strong. He knew she'd seen him when he appeared behind his beloved. The source of all his angst and passion.

His breathing slowed to a normal rhythm after a few moments and he recuperated more rapidly with each trip into the nether realm. This night was the most powerful for magickal workings. He planned to take full advantage by doing double the work. He would bind both the witch and Veronica, leaving the two women vulnerable targets for his sadistic games.

Still, he wondered how the witch was able to see him. Was their past coming back to haunt him? Then there'd been the night in the park. He'd been performing his adaptation of the Great Rite with another woman and yet her appearance morphed into the Kane witch. Not that he was disappointed. Angelica was a beautiful woman and stirred his desire. Perhaps he would have to enjoy her feminine bounty as well, only in the real world and not just the astral.

All things in time... He became aroused at the thought of having both women. Only his thoughts were of a more gruesome nature.

Chapter Six

Jade ~ Sacred to both the Chinese and the Mayans, this stone is said to bless all it touches. Often used to carve revered artifacts, such as statues of the gods, it invokes knowledge, peace, harmony and a commitment to one's help in lucid dreaming. It aids the wearer in the discovery of their life path and manifesting dreams into actuality. ~ From Marisa Arrucci's Book of Shadows.

The next morning, after two cups of coffee and many attempts to forget the memory of the recent murder and nightmares I'd experienced, I headed off to the shop. Still, the visions haunted me. Images of brutal attacks and blood spatter colored my dreams, and last night had been no different. Jon had been correct; these were not the same visions as before. There were no kittens, puppies or cute little boys. Handsome older guys, yes. But call me crazy, the psychopathic gleam in the eye takes away from the good looks.

Pictures from another life sprang from my unconscious and I couldn't shake them. They demanded examination and continued to enter my dreams. I woke up feeling tired, my throat raw and parched.

It was my turn to open up the store today. Unlike Marisa, who made mouthwatering lavender scones, cakes and cookies, I stopped at the local bakery to pick up some fresh muffins, then I dragged my butt to the store.

Ivy waited for me in the gravel parking lot behind the barn under the newly sprouted leaves of the red maple trees, white birch and the dramatic weeping willows.

She eyed me with a suspicious look I'd seen it before. "So—what's been happening? You can't hide it from me, Angie, so don't even try." Her pale blue eyes probed for signs of a tormented sleep. Ivy's arms brimmed with bags of bagels, butter, lox and cream cheese. "Come on, Angelica, you know I can read people. After twenty-five years as a psychologist, I don't need to have your psychic abilities. Especially to read *you*. Remember, you were a patient of mine for a short time." She winked.

I fumbled for my keys. "Steven, my son, was the patient. The teenage horror, remember?"

"Yes, yes, I remember. So then—what? Bad dreams about the concert, more visions?"

"Boy, you *can* read me! Anyway, I thought therapists listened, not questioned," I mumbled as I grappled with the side door, haphazardly grabbing the flyers tacked onto it. "Jehovah's Witness, Born Again, St. James Roman Catholic Church. When will it end? Ugh! They always think we need to be saved." I had zero patience today.

"Ignore them, Angie, you're stalling. I did the runes late last night," Ivy went on, taunting me with the promise of answers via the runes. I struggled with the lock. "Something happened. I could feel it in my bones. It was a powerful night for magick. I dabbled with your numbers. Big changes for you. Good changes. It showed more responsibility for you, but that comes with the territory, I suppose," she said. She didn't miss a beat or take a breath. "I did a past life spread for you, too. Are you aware you were Egyptian?"

I stared back at her, amazed at the synchronicity. "Yes, I am becoming aware of that recently. It would explain my affinity to Isis."

I no sooner finished my sentence than a group of Jehovah's Witnesses made their way around to the back. The majority of the cluster went on their rounds, I assumed, but two men stayed behind. One young man and another a bit more weathered lingered.

They were heatedly debating something. I noticed the older one shaking his head vehemently. Putting his hand on the younger man's shoulder, he gently nudged him to walk with him. The young man would have no part of it and marched toward Ivy and me.

From the corner of my eye I saw him observing us then he gazed at my vehicle. My *Blessed Be* and *Witches Are Crafty People* bumper stickers proudly adorned my truck. The assessment made, he boldly approached us. I was almost there, two more steps and I would be in my shop. I turned to look at him, debating whether to dash inside or face the music. Trust me, I was number one on their hit parade. What a *coup*, convert the town witch.

"Good morning!" he cheerily said, walking closer. Apparently he'd decided to engage us in a discussion. "I was wondering if I could have a word with you?"

I was in no mood, but I was pleasant. "I really am quite busy."

"Too busy for the Lord?" he asked with a slight twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Oh my!" was all Ivy could manage before she sneaked inside the store.

"Traitor," I grumbled. Now if I went inside, he'd probably follow. I stayed out beyond the threshold of my sanctuary.

"He loves you and wants you to be happy," he continued.

It was almost always the same conversation. "I am quite happy, thank you. And I have a business to run, so—"

"I can see that. I do apologize, it's just that...well, I was wondering." He paused, shuffled his feet and said, "My friends say you worship Satan, is that true? Why have you decided to worship Satan? Satan is here to tempt and see how strong one's faith is and..."

It was at that moment we both noticed the carcass of some sort of dead bird lying between the trash containers. A puddle of hardened wax lay next to it. I moved the trashcan and there it was. Whoever had done this had inscribed a small inverted pentagram with what looked like blood on the side of the store.

This sadistic tableau knocked me off balance. “I know what this must look like—but—I don’t worship Satan. Thank you very much for that stereotype, by the way. Why does everyone think we worship Satan? Shit!” I threw my bags down in frustration while I fought to keep calm. “I can imagine what you must be thinking. I...I had nothing to do with this. We don’t even acknowledge Satan.” I sighed heavily, gazing at the sky as if the answers lay hidden amid the lacey clouds. “Look, I promise I won’t try and convert you and you promise to leave me be. Okay?” I huffed. “I have to notify the police.” I turned to walk into the store, and he followed. I stopped just inside the threshold.

He was the pit bull of Jehovah’s Witnesses. “I’m sorry. You *are* the woman who proclaims herself to be a witch, correct?”

This was not going to be an easy getaway. I dug my feet in deep, ready for battle. “Yes, I am,” I sniped. “Let’s get one thing straight and you can tell your buddies this bit of information. There is no devil, no Satan, in the Craft. Most of us tend to believe in a male and female principle. Others just go with the feminine. I repeat, no Satan, no devil, no evil and, contrary to this horrid display, no—no sacrifices of blood. A cookie, maybe, or some wine, honey or milk but that’s it! I don’t know who did this—Ivy!” I called out to my coven mate.

“Yes, Ang—” She walked out the back door and saw the dead bird. Her mouth dropped open. “Great Goddess. I’ll call the police.”

He looked completely unaffected by what I’d said and continued with his diatribe. “Jesus said about Jehovah, ‘the only true God,’ John 17.3.”

“I know and ‘Jehovah is great and very much to be praised and He is to be feared more than all other gods’ and that’s where you lost me. I choose to believe in a deity I don’t have to fear. *Capisce?* I really have my hands full. I have to go.”

He didn’t *capisce*.

“By the way, there are Santarians in the neighborhood.” He smiled. “You do know your Bible, though.”

“Hmm, I don’t think they would do this. A few of them are my customers, but thanks for the heads up. And believe it or not, I find

myself having these debates more often than I care to.” As my eyes met his, I noticed they were gentle and yet I sensed turmoil smoldering behind them.

I observed the candle next to the bird. It was black. The same type as in my dreams and visions. And the bird was a dove. A love spell gone bad, perhaps?

He reached out to me. In his hand was *The Watchtower*. “Yes, I suppose you would. You sure I can’t interest you...”

I gave the young man my best smile. “Thank you, but no. I had my share being raised a Roman Catholic,” I added, with just a dash of sarcasm.

Ivy popped her head out the side door. “Pugliese is on his way.”

I felt the familiar tug of a specter baiting me to journey into the ethers. It was extremely tempting. From across the street, the fellow recruiters called the young man. Their voices broke the trance.

“What are you talking to that one for? She’s beyond hope. She’s a witch, you know. Ask her,” they shouted. “Look! She’s got the sign of the devil on her store!”

A crowd was beginning to gather. This was not good.

He gazed down at his dusty shoes. “I do believe you. I know you had nothing to do with this bird’s demise. I’ve seen you putting seed out in the winter for them and throwing bits of bread. I’m sorry, a difference in faith is no reason to be rude. My friends have a lot to learn. Have a good day.”

“Do you know who could have done this? Maybe one of your friends wants me to vacate my store?” I asked, grasping at any explanation for this revolting scene.

“There was talk, but I don’t think it went further than that. If I hear anything, I’ll let you know.”

“What’s your name?” I heard myself asking, bewildered, as if someone behind me might have asked the question instead of me.

“Joseph.”

“Nice to meet you, Joseph. Look, you’re welcome to put your literature on my bulletin board anytime. I’m Angelica, by the way.”

“Thank you, I think I will.” Defiantly looking back at his buddies, he followed me into the store.

“Great! Ivy, will you show Joe where the bulletin board is?” I called out to my friend, before she could escape again as we made our way into the comforting confines of the cool store. The bouquet of herbs, candles, and incense always created a peaceful environment for those who entered.

“Want some coffee?” I asked.

Ivy took over. “Come this way, the board’s over here.”

He followed Ivy to the back. “You’ve certainly got a lot of items in here. I like the way it smells, like church. The floors are—cherry wood?”

“Close. Red oak with a cherry stain. I’m impressed,” I said.

A huge bay window occupied the front wall of the shop adjacent to the entrance. It faced east, where sun catchers dangled in the midst of ceramic angels and feathered fairies. Oak beams lazily stretched across the ceiling where dried herbs dripped down like fragrant stalactites, giving the shop a warm and relaxing ambiance.

The crowd that gathered in the back lot now had merged to the front. I was glimpsing out of the window when our solitude was shattered, along with a pane of glass. A brick flew through my front window, barely missing me.

“What was that?” Joe came around to the front and pulled me back, away from the broken glass.

“Angie, did you get hurt?” Ivy asked as she bolted through the kitchen with coffee in hand.

I ignored my friend and headed for the front door.

The older man called for Joseph. He was especially persistent in trying to get him out of the shop. But Joseph would have none of it.

Joe asked, “You have a broom? Of course, you must. I...I meant to sweep the floor.” He blushed.

I smiled at his naiveté. “Yes, but I think the police should see this before I clean it up. I’m just going to leave everything as is. Thanks, though, for the offer.”

“Well then, Angelica, it was a pleasure talking to you. I’m sorry about all of this and if I hear anything I’ll be sure to let you know. If you ever change your mind, you know where to find me.”

“Ringing her doorbell, no doubt,” Ivy mumbled.

I shot her a stern gaze. He was, after all, polite. Persistent, but polite. “Hey, back at ya’, Joseph. If you ever change your mind, I’m here,” I reiterated.

“Touché.” With that, he left, colliding with Kara as she came bounding in carrying a box of doughnuts. They both took a moment eyeing each other and smiling.

“Hey, how are you?” Kara breathlessly greeted him.

“Hi, nice to meet you. See you around.” Joe smiled in return. He reluctantly left the store, looking back at Kara, who bumped into the display of pagan greeting cards.

Unable to tear her jet-black eyes away, she almost knocked it over. I tried not to laugh.

Kara held a handful of flyers that had been adhered to the front door. She dumped them into the nearby garbage pail. Heading for the kitchen and the pot of coffee, she asked, “What’s with all the people out there? What happened to the window? And who was that gorgeous guy? Is everything okay?” Kara’s satiny hair fanned out while she moved around the table, fixing us all another cup of java. She seemed to have had a lethal level of caffeine already as she whirled around the kitchen. Then she noticed the brick on the floor.

“Someone threw that at the window,” Ivy explained, pointing toward the shattered glass.

In the midst of the entire drama taking place around me, I noted a distinct change in the energy. The pull into the ethers became harder to ignore. Coupled with the itch that began at my navel and traveled south, I found it hard to concentrate.

“Angelica, I said are you all right? I had a dream last night that you were stranded somewhere. It was hot, wherever you were,” Kara said, handing me a mug of coffee. “You didn’t look like you, though, you had dark hair.”

That caught my attention. “Yeah, I had a dream, a nightmare really, weird, very weird.”

“No kidding? Wow! I really did tune into you, then. Excellent!” Kara sighed, amazed at her own abilities. “What happened here? Those nuts again?”

I silently laughed as she shook her head in admiration. Kara was just learning about her psychic skills. “I think so, but I’m not sure.”

“The police are here,” Ivy announced.

Marisa should be next through the side door, I thought and, as if on cue, there she was, all aflutter, a swirl of chocolate brown gauze gliding in on a summer breeze.

“Okay, what’s up? There’s a group of protesters out front and one of them accused me of calling the devil to create havoc in town,” Marisa, the drama queen, announced. Her hands rested on her hips and her shiny star earrings danced about her slender neck.

Kara pointed to the brick on the polished oak floor then informed her of the latest news. “Angie had another dream. A freaky one. I did, too.”

“Damn,” Marisa growled, throwing her bag on the counter.

“Hey, Mrs. Kane. What’s up now? You callin’ the four horsemen of the apocalypse again?” Officer Pugliese teased as he stepped through the back door.

“Get out your notepad, Rob.” I sighed and led him out back. Marisa and Kara followed close behind.

* * *

“Angie, what happened?” Marisa asked, peering down at me as she offered her hand to pull me up.

My hands were dirty. “W-What?” I felt my face turn crimson after I noticed the few people who lingered around the shop were all staring at me. I’d somehow ended up on the ground outside.

Marisa reached to pick me up. “That’s what I want to know. You came out back to wash the blood off the side of the store and then you shouted, ‘*He’s here!*’”

I rose to my feet. A layer of fear clung to me. “I said he’s here? I don’t recall.”

“Rob had just taken his notes and disposed of the bird. You said good-bye to him but—you didn’t look right to me. You were heading out back to wash the blood off the shingles, I saw you talking to this guy then I got involved with a customer.”

“I don’t remember talking to anyone,” I whispered.

Marisa led me inside and sat me at the kitchen table. She glared at my arm and twisted it forward.

Her eyes widened. “Great Goddess, what the hell is going on?”

There, in blood, was the inverted pentagram painted on the inside of my wrist.

Chapter Seven

Topaz ~ Recognized as the "stone of true love". Wear any variety of topaz jewelry as an amulet to protect against injury or attack. Topaz helps to create happiness, long life, beauty, intelligence and good luck when worn by persons born in November. One can focus their desires through this stone, visual images in the mind are transformed into universal messages. It also aids in communication from other realms in the universe. ~ From Marisa Arrucci's Gem Power workshop.

Marisa had fresh coffee brewing and lavender cream scones waiting, still warm from the oven, when I entered the shop the following morning.

She'd insisted I go home early the day before after I'd spoken to the police, and we hadn't talked since.

"Good morning," she said in a singsong tone. She wore a saffron-colored handkerchief-style dress. Her auburn hair fell like a halo around her face, looking cool and calm. I, on the other hand, was dragging my butt. I put my over-stuffed purse on the back table.

The aroma coming from the kitchen worked its magick and I began to feel my mood lighten. "Mmm, something smells heavenly, ooh, my favorite," I said, reaching for a scone. I buttered the pastry and watched it melt into the doughy confection. Neither of us wanted to bring up what had happened the day before.

"We finally got our order of books this morning," Marisa said between bites of the flakey dough. "Everyone off to work?" she asked, tip-toeing around the large elephant in the room, the murdered dove.

“Yup...” I answered between sips of Hawaiian coffee.

“Steven and Jon getting along working together?”

“So far there have been no declarations of war that I’m aware of. That’s always good news. It’s not easy working for your father, especially when he owns the company.” In two bites the scone was gone.

“Before I forget, a Detective Bennette was here looking for you earlier. He wanted to talk to you about the broken glass and the bird.”

There, she brought it up. “Oh, he mentioned he might want to talk again. He didn’t mention the concert?”

“Nope. He said he heard about what happened here yesterday and wanted to see how everything was. Some personal attention you’re getting there, baby cakes. A detective whose aura, I might add, turned a healthy red when talking about you.”

“Red, huh?”

“Yup. He said he’ll try and stop by later. You don’t look like you slept very well,” she said, no doubt looking at the dark circles under my eyes.

I knew I had to say something. She beat me to it. “Did you remember anything when you went home yesterday? Do you know who it was you were talking to?”

“I can’t remember. It’s a blur. Marisa, do you recall what he looked like?”

“Hmm... He’s tall, well-built, with curly...no straight...no.” She shook her head. “Damn, all I remember is his height and he wore dark jeans and a black muscle shirt. I think he had a tattoo.”

“I gave myself a migraine last night trying to figure all this out. Between Diane’s death at the concert, the dead bird, the brick through the window and passing out...” Dare I risk asking my friend how the tarot spread went? I’d been postponing the inevitable for days. I wanted to know, and at the same time dreaded asking.

“Well, I can tell you the brick was thrown by the uncle of your friend. Joseph’s Uncle Ethan. I just told Rob to give him a strong warning to lay off and stay away from the shop, or next time we’ll press charges.” My

dear friend finished her scone and began unpacking the books. “By the way, Sally had another treatment. She just left, right before you got here.”

“Mmm—I saw her in the parking lot,” I said absentmindedly. Do I ask, or don’t I? The sense of foreboding had overshadowed me all morning, like the few seconds before you’re going into a pool for a swim and you know it’s ice cold, but you have to jump in anyway. I dove in. “So...” I tested the waters. “The reading? Did you do it?”

“Yes, the reading, I did it,” she echoed, a favorite stall tactic. “I was wondering when you were going to ask about it.”

Not a good sign. Marisa always repeated statements when she was unsure or hesitant to broach a subject. She would make a lousy poker player, she had way too many tells, especially her aura, which darkened a bit.

With a heavy sigh, she recounted the reading. “It’s not so good. Swords, many swords came up...” she said, hands flailing in her typical Italian style. I was left waiting for the other shoe to come crashing down. “...and then there’s the Tower.”

Bingo, there was the size thirteen boot, plopped right onto my lap.

“Well, that doesn’t necessarily—” I tried interrupting.

“Angelica Marie.” Marisa, when attempting to get my attention, used my full name as if she were scolding her child, Andrea Rose, or William Henry. You could almost see her finger bobbing in the air. “Now, you and I know that part of the reading is intuitive and part the cards—if you’re going to go into the meanings of the suit of swords, save it.”

I slouched as she went on.

“Yes, it could be communication issues, but intuitively it didn’t feel like that.”

Deep down, I knew it, too.

“We have to be more vigilant in the coming months,” my red-headed friend lectured, her curls bouncing as she continued to empty boxes of books on herbs, candle magick and aromatherapy. “The cards warned of a dark energy and to be very careful, things are not as they seem.”

Months, I thought. "This isn't going to rectify itself sooner?" I moaned aloud.

"Don't worry, baby cakes, we'll work some protection spells at the full moon. I think we're going to have to share this bit of info with the girls. To be forewarned is to be forearmed."

"Were there any solutions to this predicament offered in the reading? Or...let me guess, this another example of my past life coming back to bite me in my ass. Right?" I asked sardonically.

"No solutions that I can see. It's karmic, Angie, and you know how that goes, you just have to ride it out," Marisa conceded. "There's a male involved, heavy energy around him. I also picked up a lot of female energies intertwined. You were the focus of the reading and somehow connected to all of this. The outcome was a question mark."

"Terrific," I whined, helping Marisa unpack more boxes. "I never get an answer when I need one."

Looking out the window, I saw Joe and Sally in what appeared to be a deep conversation. I didn't even hear Marisa when she began to go over the next night's list of attendees for the healing circle. As I continued to watch the two flirting, I felt the heat between them. It was as if someone was sending me erotic thoughts. I don't normally fantasize about other people. Tightness began to spread from my navel, downward. In a flash, I saw it on the internal screen of my mind.

Sally was naked and lay atop a stone slab. It was night. The only light emanated from tiki torches that surrounded her and him. He rose to meet her and she welcomed him inside her. Then the vision was gone. Who was he?

At that moment, I caught sight of a young man all in black, his back turned toward me. I could see the tall, muscular outline under his shirt. The spot where the pentagram had been drawn on my arm began to itch. Quickly he vanished around the corner, and the sexual feelings slowly subsided. I wanted to go out to find him, but Marisa engaged me in conversation before I reached the door.

A few minutes later, the store buzzed with customers. While I rang up another sale, a handsome young man walked up to the counter. I guessed he was in his late twenties.

“Hi, I’m looking for Sally, a petite blonde about so high,” he said, raising his arm shoulder height. “She was having some kind of treatment here?”

“You just missed her. You are?” I asked.

“Oh—Cliff, a friend of hers. I guess I’ll catch up with her later, thanks. Great store.” He gave me a wink and a nod then flew out of the shop like a leaf on an autumn breeze.

Chapter Eight

Opal ~ Stirs up your psychic perceptions and mystical understanding. There are those who think opal is an "unlucky" stone. This may be because opal can inspire transformation to occur in your life. If you are not equipped for this, it may be better to choose a different stone. It helps to catalyze change, causing opportunities for expansion to spring up around you. ~ Angelica Kane, from her article Gemstones and You.

In a room lit by candles, the ten women who attended our healing circle sat waiting for Marisa and me to begin. Kara was the only one from our coven to attend the circle this night. We had a pretty consistent group of women that attended every month. This was Sally's first time.

It had been almost a week since my last vision at the Arthur's, not including the nightmares, and I needed the boost these Reiki sessions provided for me. I became increasingly frightened and skittish as each day passed. I began to doubt my abilities, and that was not like me.

The healings took place upstairs, in our sanctuary. The atmosphere exuded peace and tranquility. The colors ranged from a deep mauve carpet to a pale blush on the walls. Posters of the chakra system, reflexology points, Japanese symbols of health and prosperity adorned the walls. Pots of lush greenery added to the healing energy.

"Okay, ladies, let's all take a nice, deep, cleansing breath," I said, leading the meditation on this lovely, sultry evening. With the windows open, a breeze blew in from the east. The sheer drapes billowed as if invisible fairies playfully danced behind them.

Marisa walked around with a multicolored abalone shell filled with sage, lavender and sweet grass, smudging each member of the circle.

“For those not aware, the act of smudging creates a sacred space for the work we are about to do, and also cleanses the auric field,” Marisa explained as she waved a turkey feather around Sally, allowing the smoke to encircle her.

When she was through, I instructed the women to grab a mat and find a comfortable position on the floor, while I turned on the CD of Reiki music. The room glowed with candlelight. This created the perfect ambiance to facilitate healing. Marisa and I incorporated Reiki energy in our healings. Reiki, a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation also promotes healing. It's effectuated by laying on hands and developed from the idea that an unseen *chi* or life force energy flows through each of us and causes us to be alive. If one's life force energy becomes low, then we may be more likely to get sick or feel stress, and if it's high, we're more apt to be happy and healthy.

We took the women on a guided meditation, first grounding them then bringing in curative light from the universe. It was a slow process, but very useful. Some of the women there were struggling with breast cancer, diabetes or high blood pressure and others were looking for an emotional healing. At the end of the thirty-minute guided meditation, Marisa and I went around to each woman and gave her at least five minutes of Reiki. Those who needed more received additional time.

I stood before Sally and stayed with her longer. I felt strange energy around her, exceedingly scattered, and patches of gray in her aura. That was not a good sign.

I slowly led the women back to the real world. Everyone stretched and smiled like contented newborns after a long nap. They all seemed extremely satisfied with their experience.

I, on the other hand, felt particularly disoriented. I glanced toward Marisa and Kara, who brought me a glass of water.

“Here,” Kara whispered, handing the glass to me.

Marisa headed toward the stairs. “Ladies, there’re refreshments downstairs and those who wish, feel free to mosey around. Greta, I’ll show you and the others the CD I played tonight. It’s really relaxing, isn’t it?” She led the parade of women downstairs. She turned back to look my way and I gave her a thumbs up along with a wink. Inside, I felt dizzy.

“Angelica, do you feel sick? You look a bit green around the gills,” Kara asked.

She sounded like she was speaking through a tin can. Her lips moved and I knew she was saying something, but I couldn’t make out a single word. I wanted to respond, to say something, but before I could reply, the room went black.

Down again I went, into darkness. Inexplicably familiar with this process, I heard the voice right away, beseeching me to help her. It was the same voice as the last time. I tried to get close to it, moving sluggishly through the pernicious darkness.

A light radiated down the corridor of my mind. *Help her*, the disembodied voice echoed through the shadows. This time, I knew it was Veronica’s mother. But why was she still coming to me? Did it have anything to do with the vision? I felt so weak.

I inched to the light. This wasn’t good. Compelled to move toward it, I gradually made my way closer, hoping to see her and ask why her daughter was still in peril.

Isis help me.

The shard of steel before me rose above my head in clear view like all the other times. My breath came shallow and ragged as I endeavored to grope toward the hollow voice of Veronica’s mother. A whoosh came from all sides of me in surround-sound and muffled the cries for help, along with a barrage of clatter I couldn’t quite make out. Louder it pounded, then heat seared through, as if white-hot lightning had struck and traveled up my arm.

My nervous system went into spasm.

I writhed on the floor.

My body stiffened...then, silence.

The blood, the knife, the pain. Again.

In a circle it went, around and around. As rapidly as they appeared, the flashes of multi-colored lights disappeared.

I saw smoke in the ethers. The sulfuric odor assailed my nose and I found it once again difficult to breath. The energy oozed out of me.

Scents of myrrh replaced the sulfur. I heard chanting in a language I was unfamiliar with, yet understood.

Then obscurity followed.

In the dim recesses, there were two figures. Their appearance was majestic. Was it the Lord and Lady? A rush of sensations pummeled me as the two became one.

Their hunger grew. They came together.

They were the central focus as torches towered over them... They would be killed if anyone caught them, especially her.

Next thing I knew, Kara's almond shaped eyes stared back at me, her rosebud mouth parted, but she appeared terrified to speak. "You called for Isis—and then you were back." She blinked back tears. One escaped. I kept forgetting she didn't have very much experience with these psychic happenings.

"It's okay, Kara, really—don't cry." I sat up and hugged her. Both of us needed significant grounding.

"You were out for at least fifteen minutes," she whispered.

She helped me up and led me to the altar. I took some quartz crystals out of my pocket and left them beside the statue of Isis, saying a silent prayer of thanks to her for bringing me back from the nether-realm.

"You mind putting out the candles?" I asked, wincing while I gently massaged my temples.

"Of course not." Kara went around the room extinguishing them with the candlesnuffer, keeping an eye on me all the while.

I felt light-headed and sat back down for a few moments. I checked my watch; it was ten o'clock. The ache was there again, in my solar plexus. It radiated down to my first chakra and rooted itself there.

Marisa came bounding up the stairs. “Angie,” she called, reaching the top. “Come outside.” She about-faced and took a double take at me. “You’re absolutely ghostly. What happened?” She rushed over, grabbed my arm and forced the energy to pass to her and then directed it to Mother Earth. “You are absolutely buzzing with energy. Are you all right?”

“She had another—spell,” Kara answered, stone-faced.

I tried to smile. “I scared the poor girl to death. I mean, I frightened the hell out of her.”

“Shit!” Marisa cursed. “Let’s get some food into you, you don’t look so good. Can you walk?” She slowly led me downstairs and into the kitchen where a handful of women sipped cranberry juice and munched on cookies and pie. Each held a bag with some trinkets from the shop.

Marisa grabbed a cup of apple juice and handed it to me. Along with the juice, she offered a chocolate chip cookie. In fact, a carob chip cookie made by Lucy, a baker at The Healthy Harvest Café and client of Marisa’s. “Eat this,” she commanded, like Moses in Egypt.

“That was a great meditation,” Barbara, our forty-something, southern belle, gushed. “I think Marisa needs to show you something outside. Come on, I’ll walk out with you, and then I really have to get home.”

I was in a stupor, led around like a puppy on a leash. I grabbed another cookie as we headed out the side door.

Someone had keyed my Explorer, which glowed under the sensor lights of the parking area. The words, *GO TO HELL WITCH*, etched in deep gashes along both sides of my vehicle, lit up like a neon sign against the hunter green paint of the truck.

“Lucy noticed it when she was leaving and ran back into the store to tell me. I called the cops,” Marisa chattered. The more nervous she got, the more she talked. “They wouldn’t just single you out, would they? I guess whoever did this didn’t recognize my husband’s car. I took his tonight because he was parked behind me. Who do you think would do this? Those crazy religious fanatics?”

"Are you going to be sick?" Barbara asked. "You look so pale all of a sudden, poor thing. Come on let's go back inside and wait until the police get here," she said soothingly, in a way only she could. Born and raised in Georgia, she had the sweetest southern drawl. She placed her plump arm around my waist as we walked into the kitchen. "You best eat something, you're skin and bones." She placed her packages down and cut a slice of her contribution to tonight's eats, homemade peach pie.

"I thought you needed to go... I don't want to keep you, Barb."

"Nonsense. My husband's probably sleeping anyway." She shook her head and handed me some pie. Her thick chestnut braid swung like a pendulum as she poured more coffee.

I heard familiar voices outside as two officers peeked into the back.

"Mrs. Kane?" the light haired, slightly older one asked. "It's Schmitt and Pugliese."

I nodded, taking a bite of the pie. I wiped my mouth and sipped some of the fresh coffee Barbara placed before me. She winked as she took the empty plates off the table and tossed them in the trash.

"What are these?" she asked, pulling some of the flyers from earlier that day out of the garbage.

"Oh, we get them from time to time," I said, trying to play it down. I had enough drama between the Jehovah's and Born Agains.

"Well, seeing as someone trashed your truck, I think the officers should see this," Barbara stated, handing the pie-stained flyers to Officer Pugliese.

I knew Barb meant well, but I just wanted to go home. "The flyers say pretty much the same thing as yesterday's and the day before and the week before that. They're advertisements for prayer meetings. The *Watch Tower* pamphlet from the Jehovah's folks. Bible meetings. Nothing sinister," I reported. "I doubt the Jehovah's had anything to do with this."

Rob Pugliese said, "I'm going to call this in to Detective Bennette. He wants to be notified of any more trouble that occurs here."

"Go ahead. You want to file a criminal mischief report?" Officer Schmitt asked.

Marisa tapped me on the shoulder. "Remember the brick," she added, looking suspicious at the mention of the Jehovah's.

"I guess," I answered, just beginning to feel somewhat close to normal.

"I always meant to come in here. Sorry it's always under these circumstances," Officer Pugliese said. He turned down his radio, his hazel eyes bright, looking around as much he could from his view at the back of the shop. I noticed his tiny stud earring, a sterling silver pentacle, not a plain star. I relaxed. His partner was another story. He appeared almost annoyed, and all business.

The younger officer's eyes widened, looking at Marisa then me. "You two are from the case last year. You found the lost boy! I remember now. Little Joey Carbone."

Marisa nodded. "Yes, it's us."

Officer Schmitt took all the relevant information in between his partner's endless questions, looking very unimpressed and quite perturbed. No doubt, Officer Pugliese was a rookie, green as could be, but with a nice aura, which was actually quite blue.

With one series of questioning done, I waited for the detective to arrive and finish the second round. He made it to the shop within ten minutes, dressed casually in khakis and a black polo shirt.

"Is anyone hurt?" Sean Bennette asked, barreling through the back entrance. "I'm going to take photos of your vehicle." He stood by the door, eyeing the parking lot.

"N-No. No one was hurt," I answered.

"Are you certain there've been no other threats made to you or the shop lately?"

"No, Detective, just the incidences with the brick and the bird."

Marisa wrapped up the desserts left by the women of our healing circle. "I don't like to point fingers but— isn't it logical that the Jehovah's may have something to do with this? I mean, Ethan Whelan threw a brick and Goddess only knows who left that dove," she surmised.

The detective looked at Marisa, then me. "I'll question him again, tomorrow. I'll stay with you ladies until you lock up for the night. Just to be safe."

Marisa looked at me and winked. "Thanks for the extra attention, Detective."

"My pleasure," he answered.

* * *

On my way home from the shop, someone or something subtly guided me in the direction of Greenview Park. It was a glorious night. The sky dripped with a wealth of stars. Oftentimes I spent evenings such as this walking along the beach or in the womb of the forest. Tonight I craved the nurturing energy of the dense woods.

I strolled by the pond barefoot and fantasized what it would have been like to live in days of old, our lives totally dictated by the seasons. In the distance, I discerned the flickering of firelight amid the junipers. I wound my way through the vegetation and stopped abruptly when I reached the clearing.

Insinuating itself beneath my skin was the now familiar arousal. Torches glowed, standing sentinel as I looked upon two figures in the night. Each was cloaked in black. One had striking features, blonde and petite. The other, male, dwarfed her. His powerful muscles and aura exuded sexuality. He pushed off her shawl and knelt in front of her. Her skin glimmered under the moonlight.

I thought to leave, but somehow, my feet were rooted to terra firma. The air in the woods felt heavy, but not with humidity. The energy was dense and I found myself unable to leave. The man turned in my direction and I heard him say, *Stay, I need you to watch*. Only his lips never moved, and the message registered in my mind.

The air around me was getting warmer, and my skin prickled in the humid summer night. I gasped at the sight of her nakedness. He kissed her feet, stomach, breasts and lips. She pulled down his hooded robe, his

arousal evident. The couple stood in the moonlight, with arms held up in the air. He spoke an incantation, but I couldn't hear the details.

Nature provided the stone altar. A thick blanket embossed with a Celtic design draped over it. He laid her down and anointed her breasts body with some type of thick liquid, which he lapped up seductively with his tongue. He climbed upon the makeshift shrine. Her arms reached out to welcome him inside her, and together the two were one. I used all my inner strength to break the connection between this stranger and myself. He was powerful and determined to keep me there, watching.

The aching within me began in earnest now and thoughts of my own sacred ritual invaded my mind. I felt a static snap and backed away to my SUV, hearing their moans of pleasure amid the crickets. I broke his hold, partially.

Sitting behind the wheel, I tried turning the ignition. A sudden invisible force slammed into me as I climaxed. I closed my eyes, then opened them and saw the midnight sky above me. Blue eyes looked back. Wave after wave of pleasure engulfed me. My astral body connected to this man and I somehow took the place of his partner as I felt her powerful orgasms.

As if changed by the click of a remote control, the eyes that stared back at me were at once obsidian and I could see into forever in them. The air surrounding us was now dry and lacked the humidity of the forest. A thick gold necklace hung from my lover's throat.

"Jamila," he whispered longingly.

The tunnel vision vanished, and my body arched once more from the sensations. Wiping the perspiration from my forehead, I wondered, what the hell was going on?

My body betrayed me, reacting while I psychically viewed the scene.

What type of magick did this man possess and why did he use it on me? The questions would have to wait as the waves of emotions grew in intensity, nearing their peak. I started shaking—the familiar beginnings of an anxiety attack. Don't panic, I told myself. But like a snowball rolling downhill, it gained momentum.

Whatever abilities I had as a witch didn't help me now. His power immobilized me, frightening me like I'd never been before, and this fear had its claws dug deep inside my soul. *Think, Angelica, think...* I clenched my jaw and bit down on the inside of my cheek, attempting to take the focus off him and onto the pain. I tried to steady my hands. Goddess knew what else this man might be capable of, and I didn't want to find out. "I have to get out of here." I spoke the words aloud, desperate to gain control of myself.

The key gleamed in the ignition, bringing my attention to the task at hand, which was getting the hell out of there. In my panic, my protective barriers lowered and I could feel him trying to keep them down. My heart pounded as I struggled to breathe. *No, Angie, do not hyperventilate, please.*

Reaching for my Tiger's Eye pendant, I clutched it as it dangled from the rear view mirror. I asked Isis for strength. "Please, help me," I whispered. I turned the key, put the Explorer into drive and, scared to look back, focused on getting to the main road.

How could this happen? It never had before. I thought I'd experienced just about everything. Boy, was I wrong.

* * *

Frantically, I reached for my cell phone to call Jon on my way back home. I needed serious grounding and the sound of his voice had a calming magick of its own.

"Are you okay?" he asked. "I was worried about you."

I scrambled, plugging the phone in the console, and turned the speaker feature on. "I-I'm sorry, I did tell you I was going to the park to clear my head, didn't I?" My brain went dead and I couldn't remember.

I heard a heavy sigh on his end. "Yes, you did, but that doesn't mean I'm not going to worry about you. You don't sound right, is everything okay?"

"I'll be fine as soon as I get home." My heart rate had finally gone back to normal.

Jon said softly, "This really has you rattled. I know this is a first, getting your vehicle keyed, but you've had your share of confrontations before. Where's my warrior Priestess wife? Who is this imposter?"

He managed to get me to smile, I knew he would. I debated telling him what happened in the park, but he had another question in mind. "Did the detective show up? What did the cops say?"

"Yes. He took photos of the Explorer and promised to keep us informed if anything comes up."

I was secretly relieved he changed the subject. A fine line existed between what Jon could handle metaphysically and what went beyond his psychic threshold. What happened to me tonight went light years beyond his limits. Not that he couldn't intellectually understand, but it would leave him feeling helpless, and Jon does not like to feel out of control. The way he coped with those feelings was to get angry. I had enough on my plate to deal with; trying to soothe him was not on my agenda for tonight. I needed the comforting.

I rounded the corner and turned onto my block. "I'll be pulling into the driveway in a minute. I love you."

"I'm here."

He took me in his arms when I walked in and held me like that for a few minutes. Cody, our puppy, sat at our feet whimpering, hoping we'd take pity and feed him some treats.

"What a night." I sighed.

"How are you?" he asked. "Really."

"Not too good." He hugged me tighter. "Let's go upstairs," he whispered.

Tonight my hunger for Jon bordered on desperation. The need was intense, but it was more of a desire to erase what I'd witnessed. And what I'd physically felt. The feelings of violation permeated my body until I felt Jon caress it all away with his gentle touch.

Lingering thoughts skulked in the corners of my psyche while we made love. As his pace quickened, I sensed my emotional walls crumbling. The pleasing heat within me began to spread throughout my body as I reached orgasm in sync with my husband. Thankfully, the face that peered down at me hadn't morphed into another's. I gently held Jon's face between my hands and kissed him. Slowly he rolled off me and laid beside me, taking me protectively into his arms.

Whatever the origin of our passions, whether etheric or physical, we sated each other. In the afterglow of our lovemaking, I serenely drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Nine

Turquoise is calming to the mind, body and spirit. It comes from the earth, of course, but has the color of the sky. It can help you turn ideas into reality. Because of this stone's ability to inspire understanding, it is a favorite of many healers. Turquoise can allow you to understand the sometimes multifaceted factors involved in health. It can help you to see beyond the unambiguous to discover the root cause of a problem. ~ From Marisa Arrucci's Gem Power workshop.

What could I say? Monday mornings sucked. They just seemed to carry the energy of what millions of people felt—the weekends were just too short. In our case, for the summer at least, they were much too short.

Perhaps it was just me, not being a morning person. It didn't seem to have an effect on my perky friend. Marisa was busying herself baking fresh blueberry muffins when I arrived at the shop. I just looked at her and shook my head, and she in turn looked at me and laughed.

"Have some coffee, Sunshine, it's strong enough to wake even the dead."

"Not funny, Marisa." I moaned. "I prefer they stay where they are." I poured a large mug of Hawaiian Kona.

She handed me a muffin. "You take care of your truck?"

"Jon took it. I have his Jeep," I answered.

"Have you had any more visitors? Astral, I mean."

I no sooner screwed up enough courage to explain in detail my past life flashes, mysterious libido and the visions of strange rituals, when I

noticed Sally outside the shop. She must have been speaking to someone just beyond my field of vision. She looked flushed with anger as her hands flailed in the air. “No, thank the Goddess. Although I’ve been experiencing some strange occurrences...” I walked to the door and waited a minute, listening.

This time I heard her. “No—I told you I’m not doing that again. I’m sorry.”

“Hi, Sal,” I said cautiously, peeking around her, trying to get a glimpse of who had riled her so much. All I could make out was that it was a male. He turned the corner as Sally moved out of the way.

We walked inside. Sally made her way to the showcases, eyes cast downward, and her face wore a feeble smile. The air that surrounded her was pensive, full of stagnant energy. Dark.

“Hi...” She looked down then back at Marisa and me.

“Who was that?” I asked.

She avoided eye contact. “Paul.”

“Yeah? Is he bothering you?” I asked, heading toward the door again.

She followed. “N-No, he’s leaving. It’s okay. I told him I would call the police if he didn’t.”

There was an awkward moment of quiet that fell over the three of us.

Sally cleared her throat. “I, uh never got the chance to talk to you two about the concert. It’s terrible what happened,” she said.

“Unbelievable,” Marisa added.

I walked over to the counter. “You were there? So—Cliff went with you after all?”

Sally nodded. “No—I mean yes, I was there. Not with Cliff. I didn’t want to bring it up at the healing circle, especially with gossipy Greta there, and then when your truck got keyed... I—I did a dumb thing.” Her eyes searched for some sign that we wouldn’t read her the riot act.

“What do you mean by dumb?” Marisa asked, placing a basket of fresh-baked muffins on the counter. She offered one to Sally, putting it

on a napkin. “You didn’t go with Paul? Please tell us you didn’t go with him?”

Sally reached for the muffin. “N-No, I didn’t—I’m sorry, I’m a bit scattered, lately.”

Scattered wasn’t the word. Not only was her aura dark, it was like Swiss cheese.

She took a bite and put the muffin back down. “Paul bought the tickets for the Arthur’s Graile concert. He’s a big fan. He left two tickets in my mailbox, a note saying he was sorry and that he would leave it up to me if I wanted to go with him.”

Both Marisa and I nodded, remembering our visit with Sally the day of the concert.

“And you went with...who?” I asked, sipping my coffee from my “Witches Brew” mug.

“I went with my brother,” she said. “But that’s not it.”

Marisa rolled her amber eyes skyward. “What then?”

“I wanted to spend the night with someone. It was a terrifying ordeal seeing poor Diane—”

“Yes, it was,” I agreed, cutting her off. There was no need to go into the gory details of a scene we’d witnessed first hand.

“My brother went out after the concert and his friend, Kevin, took me home. You know, just to make sure I made it home safe. Only Paul was waiting for me there.” She sighed. “He was pretty upset when he saw me with Kevin. I mean, I told him he was just taking me home, but I guess to actually see us together... Well, he was angry. Angry and hurt... I think—he looked hurt.”

“What did he do?” I asked.

“Nothing. He just left. He’d brought me flowers, which he broke in half and threw on the ground. Then he left. I felt bad.

“Okay, so what’s the problem?” Marisa asked.

She was quiet for only a few seconds, but it seemed longer. “My tires were slashed and my vehicle keyed,” she softly confessed.

“You think it was Paul?” I asked.

“No, I don’t think so... I don’t know,” she said, half-questioning, half-stating.

“I hope you’re still going to get that restraining order to keep Paul away,” Marisa chided.

“After I’m done here, my brother made arrangements for my truck to be towed to a friend’s body shop, Body Magic, then he’s taking me to family court. I need some amulet or charm, something for protection.” Sally perused the showcases of jewelry and amulets, twirling her hair nervously as she shopped.

“I have just the thing, here.” I went to a display case. “How about one of our gris-gris charms?” I pulled out a bag in royal blue.

“Powerful magick. Our local High Priestess makes them,” Marisa added.

“I’ll take it.” Sally took out her wallet to pay.

“I’ll be upstairs,” Marisa said as she made her way up.

As Sally headed for the stairs, a question popped into my mind.

“Hey, Sally, what was keyed on your car, anything or just scratches?”

She looked at me, her lips curled downward. “It said, ‘Go to hell witch’.”

Chapter Ten

Ruby is a stone of passion. Attention must be taken when using this crystal, because it can bring negativity and anger to the outside. Ruby should be used with knowledge of how to increase from the experiences it brings. Ruby can also amplify positive energies. It is said to heighten the positive aspects that you already possess. Use this reserve of positive energies to help you conquer the negative energies that ruby might allow to surface. ~ From Marisa Arrucci's workshop on Gem Power.

The summer heat arrived with the heartwarming sunshine that we especially cherished after the frigid vagaries of our springtime. My garden was splashed with color and alive with nature. Frogs, turtles and koi all made their home in our outdoor pond.

I took a few minutes to revel in my green thumb achievements. My lavender, a profusion of purple blossoms, perfumed the air. I inhaled the heady aroma of thyme and spicy scents of tarragon. My herbs were all nestled in their well-groomed beds, one for culinary use, the other magickal. Simply having my rosemary survive the arctic winter meant I'd done something right. However, relaxation time was over and I had errands to do.

My day consisted of shopping for Jake and packing the necessities for sleep-away soccer camp. Then there was food-shopping, banking, cleaning and running the shop. All kept me in fifth gear. Thankfully, my son, Danny, rescued me so I could tend to my other business.

I stopped for lunch at the Healthy Harvest. There I literally bumped into Detective Bennette. I was busy taking inventory of the delectable desserts and backed right into the imposing officer.

He was your typical tall and handsome type, very suave, with tanned skin and luxurious dark blonde, wavy hair, peppered with a few grays. The perfect amount of gray, just enough to make him more distinguished looking. He had a build that I deduced required at least a few days a week at the gym. Syrupy sweet eye candy for certain.

But his eyes were his most striking feature. It was as if someone had taken a dropper filled with Caribbean waters and dotted his irises with the crystal blue sea.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't looking where I was going—" I apologized, blushing three shades of rose.

"Mrs. Kane, how are you? Nice to see you." He smiled and his face brightened to reveal pearly white teeth and deep-set dimples.

"Detective. Hi, I'm fine and you? Busy, I would imagine?"

"Yes, I am, unfortunately. When I'm busy, that generally means bad news for someone. Can I buy you a cup of coffee? I—uh—I feel badly about all the trouble you've been going through and then having to question you like that after the concert...but it's the job, you know? I hope your husband didn't get too upset," he shyly asked, his eyes taking a downward glance, but not before looking me over. His gaze finally rested on my own.

I made a flippant gesture with my hand, as if it were a common occurrence for us, being questioned by the police. "Oh no, I understand. We understand—and I'd love to have a cup of coffee, but...I'm running late. I had bunch of things to do this morning and I promised Marisa I'd be back. So... I have to get back to the shop. I'll take a rain check, though." Oh my Gods, I was a babbling fool.

His smile was hypnotic and I found myself having thoughts I shouldn't, but I indulged anyway.

"I'll cash in on that rain check next week. Good to see you." He winked, grabbed his bag off the counter and walked out. His musky, citrus scent lingered behind.

* * *

By the time I got back to the shop, it was mid-afternoon, the time of day business really picks up.

Today we had a scheduled tarot reader, Rhiannon. She had built a nice reputation for herself and Rhia's appointments rapidly filled up. So the last thing we needed was more trouble from the holy rollers, of which there was an abundance, or so it seemed.

But this time it wasn't the Jehovah's, it was the Born Agains. I weaved my way through them to get back into the store as they stood in a cluster on the sidewalk, handing out flyers to all who entered. A few held up signs that heralded *Praise the Lord* and others condemned those who followed the path of Satan to Hell.

We'd been through this before and I knew that, providing they kept the walkway open and allowed customers access to the store, there was little we could do.

Southern Barb was outside, involved in a heated debate with one of the congregation. I couldn't allow her to carry on alone so I rolled up my sleeves and went out to join her. I felt strangely combative.

The overzealous preacher attacked. "Ah, the witch herself has come, no doubt to cast a spell on us all. Watch out! She may look like an innocent angel, but don't be fooled. She's a wolf in sheep's clothing! A vixen! She'll try and seduce you with her wicked ways! Can't you feel her oozing her sexuality like an animal in heat!"

"Hey! Watch your mouth," I countered, making my way closer to the puffed-up reverend. With all the trouble that had been plaguing me recently, I was in no mood for the insults of this fervent manipulator of words.

“Just like they try and convince you that Halloween is innocent and fun. Beware!” he went on, his eyes bugged out. “They claim its origins are in Christianity, but nothing can be further from the truth. It’s based on Baal devotion and sacrifices to demons and they partake in cannibalism,” the preacher bellowed, all decked out in a tight, pristine white suit, with sweat stains that rapidly spread down his sides. The vision of an overstuffed sausage came to mind. I was tempted to go on with a verbal attack, but something stopped me.

I felt *his* gaze on me.

I knew he was near.

The desire began.

The preacher’s gaze went right through me, undressing me. I felt it as surely as if the preacher had done it with his own hands. He sent his thoughts in my direction with distinct desire. But I knew he wasn’t doing it on his own. He had help.

His help.

Where was he?

The preacher’s gaze fixed on my breasts, which peeked over my paisley bustier.

He raised his Bible overhead. “Don’t let them fool you, my friends, they’ll try and cloak what they do under the guise of Druid and Celtic beliefs, but they’re invoking demons, placing curses and summoning the dead. Indeed! Having sex with the devil! The Bible says quite clearly ‘Let no one be found among you that sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells. Nor one who is a medium or spiritualist that consults the dead.’ That’s from Deuteronomy, 18:10-11, my good people.”

I walked over to him. “You have *got* to be kidding me, that couldn’t be further from the truth, but you wouldn’t know the truth if it came down from heaven and landed on your lap, now would you? If you knew anything about what you’re talking about, you’d know there isn’t even a Satan in the Craft. I’m so tired of repeating myself to you. We don’t have Satan. We don’t acknowledge him or demons. Satan is *your* guy.

Samhain—not Halloween—is a day to remember our loved ones who have passed on. And we do *not* claim it has roots in Christianity. It's been celebrated *before* Christianity! Isn't there anyone in your sad, pathetic life who's passed on who you miss? It's not about demons and it certainly doesn't include cannibalism. Where do you get your information?" I was on the verge of yelling, but I knew that was what he wanted. He was baiting me, and if I wasn't careful, I'd fall into his trap.

He puffed up, sticking out his chest, and tapped his worn-out copy of the Bible. "I have the best source for my information."

"How dare you misinform these good people with your fear-based drivel. And sex with the devil! Seems you're a bit preoccupied with sex, preacher. I see you ogling me, staring at my breasts."

His gaze traveled down to my waist. Encircling it was a silver coin belt that jingled as I strode around him.

He became flustered. "I—I am not! N-Not that anyone can miss them—popping out of your blouse like that! Do you want men staring at you? Lusting after you? Vixen indeed!" He harrumphed, pulling down his vest and smoothing his tie. "My information comes from the Bible. If you indulge in the occult, you will not get into heaven. You may think you're only dabbling and aren't serious, but let me tell you—Satan is surely serious about you. You're being drawn down a slippery slope. They've recently found that many suicides are a direct result from this so-called playing around with the occult."

I toyed with him, hoping to get him hot under his rigid collar. "Which Bible? There are many versions." Some of my customers who had appointments for readings were turning around and heading for their cars. Now I was angry. "Barb, could you go inside and ask Marisa to call the police, please? This guy has stepped over the line."

Shaking her head in agreement, my southern peach of a friend did as I asked.

"What about children's fiction?" someone questioned from the gathering crowd. "Those books about magick, that can't be harmful."

The preacher handed out flyers as he spoke. "Have you not heard me, child, any involvement is playing with fire! This is true of all forms of the occult, ever since Eve was deceived in the garden, throughout the worship of Baal which is manifested today in the Roman Catholic Church, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam."

The same man kept on. "But that's not right, preacher, I know many good people of other faiths."

A voice boomed out, over everyone's incessant babbling. "You're a man who preaches fear!" I recognized the dark outline of the man donned in shades of ebony. "You know nothing of what you speak. You're ignorant and so you prey on these people's insecurities."

He It was him. I noted an aura of great power around this individual, and desire. He felt familiar. I had to get to him, to speak with him. I looked frantically through the crowd. He'd been part of the sexual energy that invaded me, the one in the park. I was certain of it.

Where was he? I searched in the direction of his voice, but there were too many people surrounded him.

The preacher spat back at the young man, "You cannot make yourself or any other into a false idol. Look at the one in Rome, bringing all those to hell with him."

The mysterious stranger must have walked toward the outer perimeter of the crowd because his voice now seemed farther away. "You can't mean the Pope?" he asked.

The preacher bellowed, "I most certainly do!"

"You're a fool!" The young man's voice resonated with confidence. Could he be using magick? I'd never actually seen anyone "throw" his voice, but every time he spoke, it came from another direction.

I walked away from the preacher and listened to my inner voice, hoping it would lead me to the stranger. Goosebumps erupted on my arms. The spot where the bloody pentagram had been drawn suddenly itched.

The air felt charged with electricity.

There, walking around the corner, was the man in the dark clothes. His aura glowed a deep red. I followed him.

"Wait!" I called out to him. He either ignored me or didn't hear me. "Hello!"

In a blur of sweeping energy, he stood before me. I never even saw him move, but there he was, inches away. He radiated sexual energy. The tickle that began below my belly became an ache, needing to be satisfied.

I knew him.

His hands were soft and familiar as they caressed my neck, fingering my pentacle provocatively. Dark blonde curls fell down almost to his shoulders, making him look like Michelangelo's David.

I couldn't speak.

He slid his hand around my hip and pulled me against the hardness of his erection. I gasped. His pulsing energy seared my skin. I felt faint. The energies swirled around us like a tide pool, dragging us downward. His other hand wrapped around my neck. My hands lay limp at my sides. The warmth of his breath caressed my skin. His lips hovered close to mine. At the touch of our bodies, one on one, my ability to read his thoughts kicked into overdrive. He must have realized there was more than met the eye here, too. It was shared knowledge, plucked from the etheric realm.

"I know you," I whispered.

"And I know you, but that was lifetimes ago."

"But how?"

Flashes of another time roared through my brain. Sand and stone. Hot desert heat and a figure gasping for water. All at once, I knew I was the one dying of thirst in that arid place. In the distance, a man on horseback road away. He was leaving me to perish in the desert sun.

"You left me to die," I gasped as he pulled me closer. "Who are you?"

"That's not important. Just remember, I did it once, I can do it again. Stay away from me, witch." His grip tightened. My eyes fluttered closed

as I lost my breath and fell toward the cobblestone walkway. But not before I saw regret in his eyes.

"I don't know how to love anymore," he said, his voice laden with misery as I lost consciousness.

* * *

"Mrs. Kane!"

Sturdy arms cradled me as I crumbled into my savior's arms. "Where is he?" I whispered, looking into Sean Bennette's aqua eyes.

"What happened? Can you stand?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so—where'd that man go? He was just here."

"I didn't see anyone, Mrs. Kane. Just you, and you looked as if you were about to faint. It's awfully hot today."

I wiped my hair out of my face and looked around for the man in crowd, but he was gone.

He held my arm. "Come on, I'll walk you back to your shop. You can walk back?"

"Yes, of course. What were you doing here?" I asked as we rounded the corner.

"After lunch I had to pick up my dry cleaning—don't tell my boss." He winked. "I saw you walking off. You looked...desperate."

I looked over at him. "I did?"

"Maybe that's not a proper description. Bothered, you looked bothered. I saw the crowd gathered around your store and thought I'd see if I could help, then you walked off and I followed you. Good thing. That would've been a nasty fall."

I scratched my arm. "I saw someone I thought I knew, but I couldn't find him," I said, a bit confused. "I think it was a man. I don't recall now."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Sean asked.

"It's the heat," I said as we stood at the threshold of my shop. "Do you want to come in?" I asked. He stared at my neck. "What's wrong?"

"You've got a rash half way 'round your neck."

I reached up and felt the heat emanate from the welt.

"It's probably the necklace. I can't wear sterling," I said quickly, wanting to get into the comforting energy of my shop.

He went to touch my neck, but pulled away. "Hmm, it looks like it's in the shape of a circle. You should put some lotion on that." Sean looked as if he wanted to say something more. "I've got to get back to the station. Take care of that rash, Mrs. Kane. Do you need any assistance with this crowd?"

"I'm sure my partner called Rob and Eric." I smiled. "Yeah, we're on a first name basis with the officers now."

"I could stay."

"Thanks, but we should be all right. You've been so generous with your time as it is."

He smiled. "It's my job."

"Nice to see you again." I went into the store and saw Marisa hang up the phone.

"Angie, you okay? You look a bit frazzled. Seems as if the preacher got you riled a bit more than usual. What's that on your neck? Is that a rash, or a hickey?" She winked. "Wow, it's the same shape as—"

Marisa was babbling; that meant she was the frazzled one. "I'm fine, Risa. It's the necklace." In all honesty, though, I'd been a bit jumpy, too.

A minute later I saw the patrol car pull up and went outside to meet with the officers. Pugliese and Schmitt answered the call, as predicted.

I spoke calmly, my hand covering the red flesh around my throat. "I know I've only got so much say in this, but he's affecting my business now and I'd like him removed. A few of my customers who had appointments left because he scared them away. I've got witnesses."

Father Tom walked over from down the road. We had an unspoken agreement, he and I. We had a mutual adversary.

Officer Pugliese started with crowd control. "Folks, the show is over, go on your way now. Preacher, keep the sermon to your congregation from now on, you're disturbing these folks' right to carry on with their business."

The preacher stood his ground. "I'm trying to save some souls, son. But I see she's got you cavorting with Satan as well."

Rob's fingers touched his star earring. "Sir, I said move along."

Finally, people began going their separate ways.

"I'm sorry you got involved in this, Father," I said.

"Please call me Tom. We went to school together, Angie. I can't get used to you calling me Father. Thanks for the heads up. At least I'll know the reason for gettin' the third degree about the Pope and if he's leading everyone to hell." He sighed deeply and shook his head in disbelief.

As the crowd finally dispersed, I looked across the street and saw my friends Joseph and Sally. They gave me a wave. Joe shook his head, not believing what he'd witnessed.

Neither could I. Just goes to show, you can't judge a book by its cover.

Chapter Eleven

Pearl ~ One who possesses or wears a good pearl enjoys the blessings of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity. Traditionally symbolic of purity, innocence and faith, pearls increase personal integrity and help clear the mind so that it can be an unsoiled channel for wisdom and spiritual guidance. These moon and water ruled "gems" augment sincerity, truth and loyalty and bring reassuring reflection and inner peace. ~ From Angelica Kane's Pearls of Wisdom article.

Peace fell upon us for the time being and brought with it our Fourth of July extravaganza. The neighborhood was dressed up gaudily for the grand festivities. For the past five years, we'd celebrated with a massive block party and, from what the neighbors said, it'd been going on long before we moved in. For fifteen years, this quaint neighborhood had been commemorating the Fourth with total élan. Friends and family of all our neighbors traveled here by land and sea. Boats arrived days in advance to see one of the best fireworks displays ever. I'd even seen sailboats from as far as Delaware and Maine moored in our waters. It was spectacular, as were some of the boats. Someday, I thought. That will be us on the water, watching and then perhaps sailing farther south for a lovely vacation.

I do believe I was a pirate in a past life. I knew I'd been an Egyptian.

This fantastic celebration had come about due to a neighbor of ours, and I won't mention any names. He was—how shall I put it—connected.

Growing up in an Italian-American family, I'd always heard about my cousin Vinny or Uncle Tony, involved in funny business, as my mom called it. I didn't think anything of it. It was normal that everyone's

family had a bit of funny business going on somewhere, wasn't it? When I got older and realized the ways of the world, I learned it wasn't so normal. Not at all. As fate would have it, the neighbor down the block, the connected one, knew my dear cousin Vinny. Small world.

Smaller knowing every Fourth of July I could see my cousin, who, all things considered, was a sweet guy. He would do anything for his family. My illusion of Vinny was pristine and I wanted it to remain that way. All I knew was he became involved with a union in Manhattan.

That's all I wanted to know.

Marisa and I took turns running around town prior to the gala, shopping and decorating the yard with red, white and blue lights and dozens of flags. The kids dangled streamers from the trees in the same color motif. Jake, with the precision of a plastic surgeon, transformed our scarecrow into Uncle Sam and sat him on our front porch.

Amber moped around like a heartsick teen. "But Ma, why can't I go to Michele's for the day?" she whined.

"Because we're having a party and Nicole is looking forward to seeing you. Michele's welcome here."

My daughter huffed, her wheels still spinning. "She's got to stay home."

I countered, "Oh, her parents want her home. Amber, does this have anything to do with that guy, Lance?"

"No."

Her aura dimmed, a sign she was lying. "I'm sorry, honey. Nikki will be here any minute." No sooner did I purse my lips to speak, when I saw Marisa's sister, Stefania, drive down the block.

All of Marisa's sisters dropped in early to help. Stefania and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Nicole, were the first to arrive. Gina and Elaine arrived soon after with their families.

Amber and Nicole, with arms linked, disappeared into my daughter's room, no doubt talking about clothes and Nicole's new boyfriend.

Her sisters brought with them steaks and lobsters for the clambake and sweet corn and fresh baked pies from the roadside farm stands and bottles of wine from the local vineyards. I persuaded Marc and Veronica to join us. It was an arduous time for them in the aftermath of Diane's funeral, in addition to dealing with the press. That was a full time job in and of itself, and they were constantly harassed by reporters. I hadn't been able to meet with Ronnie, so we decided the Fourth would be great timing. Marisa invited Sally and a date, which turned out to be Kevin, her brother's friend. After seeing her talking with Jehovah Joe outside the shop a few times, I was secretly hoping it would've been him. My emotions tended to get in the way of my psychic antennae sometimes. But I repeated my mantra daily: "Whatever will be, will be."

* * *

My home is located on an enchanting cul de sac lined with cherry trees. Complete with old-fashioned light posts, surrounded by fuchsia geraniums, it appeared to be plucked right out of a Charles Wysocki painting. Real Americana, including cobblestone walkways on Market Street.

Picture postcard blue skies and sunshine were the forecast for the day. It was perfect weather. Officers Pugliese and Schmitt were there with others from the town, lugging the barricades and going over, as they do every year, what's allowed and what's not, when to lower the volume and, of course, no fireworks.

A certain tingle oscillated in the air and I attributed that to the jitters I usually got before a big party. I loved to entertain, but I despised the stress that accompanied it, and today was no different from any other holiday.

I paced in the front yard. "You bringing the extra barbeque?" I asked Rich.

"He sure is. You need a drink, my friend, relax!" Marisa answered, handing me a cold beer. I took it gratefully.

By noon, the barbecues and blenders were racing full speed ahead. Margaritas, Mud Slides, Virgin Daiquiris, ice cold Budweisers and Coronas along with iced tea, soda and plenty of bottled water flowed freely.

The music of Lynyrd Skynard filled the air as I greeted our guests and handed out cocktails. I dressed in cutoffs and a "Goddess Bless America" tee shirt. Thanks to the newest aerosol tanning spray and some sunshine while weeding my herb gardens, I sported a honeyed glow.

Ivy showed up next with boxes and boxes of desserts. She had a mean sweet tooth.

Kara headed up the walkway. "Where do you want the beer?" she asked. "We can't stay that long, we're also invited to Tiffany's brother's for a barbeque. We *have* to go." Kara pouted, looking gorgeous in a crisp white sundress. What can I say, my friend is sexually adventurous, although I'm not quite certain Tiffany was a romantic relationship. Kara had confided to me that she was bi-sexual. I say, whatever floats your boat.

I gave Kara a "thumbs up" on her choice of beverage, Corona Lights with a bag full of limes. "Beer goes in the large white cooler, help yourself, guys," I answered.

At one-thirty, the Arthurs arrived. Great minds think alike, and apparently dress alike. Ronnie was in cutoffs and a Lady Liberty tee shirt stating "Goddess Bless". We were mirror images of each other, long blonde hair and nearly identical outfits. We had a good chuckle over that one. Nevertheless, I worried about her. Her energy was low and I spotted gaps when I tuned into her aura.

Marc and Ronnie arrived with bundles of fresh vegetables and dip, cheeses and crackers. With a few pounds of T-bone steaks and more lobsters, it was cholesterol heaven.

We all congregated in the kitchen, planning what to cook and when to cook it. As my family entered the kitchen, I grabbed the bundles of groceries from my mom and sister, Amy. The bags overflowed with pounds of thin, Italian cheese sausage, clams and shrimp. My sister

baked an assortment of pies—the pecan was especially for me. She was a superb baker and made a blue-ribbon winning chocolate-pecan pie.

Tina, my mom, a spry seventy year old, was most at home in the kitchen. Amber, her protégé, was right beside her learning the tricks and subtle nuances of Strega Nona's cooking. Moreover, I'm sure she complained endlessly about me and how mean I was.

Jake floated in and out with Will, grabbing handfuls of chips and pretzels. They ran from our place to Marisa's and back, grabbing salty booty along the way.

Ivy joined my mom in the kitchen. They were *sympatico* and commiserated about how each was dealing with the loss of a spouse. My father passed on five years ago. Ivy's loss was more recent. As they say, life goes on, despite the immeasurable heartache. Who are "they" anyway?

My older sons were out with friends enjoying the summer water sports of jet and water skiing. Occasionally they'd pull up to the dock and grab a burger and sodas.

Ronnie took my hand and led me out back, where it was quieter. Her face, though somber, was much more relaxed. "I'm sorry we couldn't get together this week. It was a crazy time, waiting for the ME to finish the autopsy. Diane's family's Jewish and they were torn about allowing the autopsy. But they really didn't want to pursue a lawsuit and their desire to find out exactly what happened took precedence. Then the funeral and all... I wanted to let you know how much I appreciated what you did in relaying my mom's message to me." We made our way to the water's edge, heads down. I searched for the right words, but they eluded me.

"Don't mention it, really. I just wish I knew more beforehand. That way, maybe...I could've helped prevent it." My mind remained a blank. Words seemed so inadequate.

"She's been coming to me in my dreams this week, just saying it was meant to be." Ronnie looked up from the water into my eyes, seeming to seek answers. Only I wasn't sure I had any.

“Just be careful, Ronnie, the air feels heavy today. I don’t understand why, and I feel overly anxious.”

“I get like that when we entertain,” she admitted. “Maybe it’s that.”

I smiled. “I don’t think so, I’m starting to get used to these signals. For the next few weeks, be extra careful, seriously.”

Marc found us by the water’s edge. “Hey, there’s my wife. I was getting a bit nervous, I couldn’t find you,” Marc said, coming up behind Ronnie. He put his arm lovingly around her shoulders.

Snap! An image crackled in the air and the impression of another arm pushed its way through. I rubbed my eyes as Marc’s arm transformed into a taut, muscular one, and this arm held a blade in its hand. My head began to buzz, and I tried to shake the image away.

“Ronnie, I want to show you this awesome fountain Jon just brought home,” Marc said to his wife.

I couldn’t speak. I became solid and heavy, like a piece of furniture. Before the two walked away toward the garage, the arm that held the blade made one clean swipe across Ronnie’s neck.

“We’ll talk some more later,” Ronnie said, looking over her shoulder.

I just nodded. Gradually I made my way to the side of the house, leaned against it and tried to get the images out of my head as they came crashing through. I felt sick. *A mirror floated before me and slowly began to crackle. Muffled cries echoed in the background, then a crash, which caused the mirror to shatter completely. A message in blood.*

I squatted down, putting my head between my knees. I tried to shake the visions, but they refused to dissipate.

Blood appeared on walls, splattered in abstract patterns. Panic gripped me and bile rose in my throat. I tried frantically to grab something to use as a weapon. I tripped over a table and hit my head on the ground.

A stormy sea of energies raged inside me. Once more I stood. This time, familiar voices shattered the silence. I recognized Ronnie’s.

“The police found out that the special effects pedal was wired incorrectly. Something about the polarities being reversed. I’m not at

liberty to discuss that or really any part of the investigation. That detective doesn't want me to talk about it at all. How can I not? I'll go crazy if I can't vent about what happened," Ronnie complained. "Also, the rubber on the foot pad was filed down to metal. You know we wear tap shoes onstage? For some of the dances."

Next was Marisa's voice. "Oh, shit. That's horrible, you must've been so frightened."

I heard a snuffle. "I had to make a list of any wacky fan mail, emails and basically anyone who might have a grudge against me, old boyfriends, especially. I'd been getting some notes on my car and in my mailbox. Angry in nature and vicious. I never dreamed it would get to this. That's why we moved—it was too close to home, literally," Ronnie said. "I was the target. That night, the sword I was supposed be holding wasn't in the designated spot. I couldn't find it, and before I knew it, Diane had it in her hands, so we just improvised. She took the sword and...well, you know the rest."

I had to wait for the waves of emotion to calm within me before I could return to my guests. I prayed Marisa would take Ronnie inside so I could pull myself together.

"Come on, Ronnie, you need a drink," Marisa said.

Thank you, Risa, I thought. I gathered all my strength and turned toward the backyard. In an unexpected flash of stunning energy, *he* was standing in my path, a hair's breadth away. A mist of dark energy surrounded us both.

He whispered in my ear, "You can't stop me, so don't try."

"Who are you?" I managed to squeak out.

"I'm disappointed; you haven't figured it out yet?" He stood behind me. His breath on my skin this time was cold.

"What do you want?" I tried to walk past him, but froze in place.

"You're quite nosy. Curiosity, you know, killed the witch's familiar."

I looked into his eyes. "Why are you doing this?"

"It's none of your concern. I warned you, stay out of this."

"You're after Ver..." I turned to look at him. He'd vanished.

The queasiness erupted in my stomach. The shift in vibrations always made me sick. As I sat down, leaning against the house once more, I heard footsteps.

"How are you doing?" It was Heena. She found me sitting with my eyes closed, taking slow, deep breathes.

I tried to focus my eyes, but the sun was glaring over Heena's head, causing me to squint. "I'm not sure yet. Just some weird premonitions." Scratching my head, I stood slowly. "I just had the strangest ex—"

"Hellooooo!" Marisa's familiar voice called from the dining room window. "You aren't leaving your mom with all the cooking, are you?" Her head poked out after she lifted the window's screen.

"We're out here," I replied. "We'll talk later, Heena. I better get in the kitchen."

Sally and Kevin had tropical umbrella drinks in hand when Heena and I returned to the festivities. Sally, wearing the traditional red, white and blue of the day, was reminiscent of a pinup girl of the fifties. She looked adorable.

Jon operated the barbeque, cooking up burgers and hot dogs for the kids. My mom and sister had all the salads in chilled bowls lined with ice on the tables, covered with plastic liners that resembled mini shower caps. Rich threw more seaweed into the fire pit for the clambake. Lobsters, littleneck clams, scallops, corn on the cob and sweet sausages brewed under his masterful hands. He was undoubtedly the King of the Clambake, and wore an apron boasting that very fact. Marisa wouldn't let him wear his other apron, which stated "I Grill for Sex!" So Jon wore it. My husband, the comedian.

Thanks to the flowing libations, we were all relaxed, even Marc and Ronnie. It was a wonderful respite. Ivy coupled with my cousin, Vinny, and I do believe he was flirting with her.

"Vinny, have you seen Amber, by any chance?" I asked as I filled my glass with fruity sangria.

He held out his cup for a refill as well. "She said her girlfriend stopped by."

Jake snuck up behind me. "She's talking with that guy she likes, Lance. I saw them by the docks."

"Hmm. I'd better go check this out."

"Angie, we need you out front!" Marisa called to me.

I need a twin, I thought as I pivoted and headed for the front porch. "What's up?"

"I'm not really sure. Your rambunctious cat, Luna, ran out and I went to go find her and found this by the side of the house."

I stared at Marisa as she held up an ornate statue of Isis. It was approximately a foot high and eighteen inches wide. Gold leaf covered the majority of the goddess and lapis inlay decorated the base. I took the statue and held it, trying to get a reading on who it belonged to. "I belong to you," the statue whispered.

I thought of my astral visitor. Could it be a gift from him? This whole situation baffled me. He was an enigma, for certain. Cold and calculating, and yet thoughtful enough to perhaps leave an expensive gift?

"It's gorgeous, did you order it?" Marisa asked as we headed indoors. She held Luna and I held Isis. "That's real gold, you know."

"No, I didn't. But the strangest thing happened—"

Amber stormed into the kitchen. "*Mom*, will you tell that runt of a brother to stop following me!"

I put the statue down and went over to my rebellious daughter. "Young lady, I heard you had a visitor?"

"Thanks a lot, brat." Amber fixed her gaze on Jake and the sparkler he held in his hand sizzled.

I swiftly turned to him. "Get out of the house with that thing! I told you outside with those," I scolded as I chased him out back.

"B-but, Mom..."

“No but Mom. Out!” I turned back to Amber. Cleverly, she’d made her escape into the crowd. I could have sworn that sparkler hadn’t been lit. Perhaps I’d had a bit too much sangria.

* * *

“Come on honey, the show’s starting,” Jon called to me. I headed out to join him, forgetting all about combustible sparklers and manifestations of Isis.

The sun dipped low in the heavens, splashed in hues of magenta and tangerine with the promise of a glorious sunset colorful enough to rival even the most extravagant fireworks.

We ate, drank, danced and even sang. Marc and Ronnie always traveled with a guitar and flute and that, along with Marisa’s little magical brew of Jell-O shots, made everyone’s tensions slowly fade, along with the dying light of the sun. As the skies dimmed, the real show began.

M-80s boomed intermittently and we became used to the occasional blasts, sounding as it must have so many years ago during the Revolutionary War.

The dessert portion of the party took place at Marisa and Rich’s. The kids floated from house to house, visiting friends, lighting sparklers and grabbing boxes of Wolf packs, tiny bags of gun powder that snapped when thrown against the cement.

My mom opted to stay at Casa Del Kane with Ivy. Amber did her level best to avoid me. Friends, cousin Vinny included, breezed from house to house sampling foods along the way. It was a veritable all you can eat buffet, and did we eat!

Sitting on the back deck swing, we watched the parade of vibrant colors flash across the midnight canvas of sky, oohhing and ahhhhing with each explosion of color.

Perhaps in retrospect it was the alcohol or the gentle swinging that lulled me into a spurious veil of tranquility. My eyes felt heavy as I leaned

back into my husband's warm and gentle embrace and peered at the light show before me. It felt so serene. I was without a care in the world. I let my guard down.

That was not a good thing.

Chapter Twelve

Lapis Lazuli is said to help filter out the distractions that can keep you from remaining alert. Lapis can also help you attain spiritual illumination. By calming the mind and soothing the body, it allows you to be more open to the subtle messages of the spirit world. Lapis lazuli can help you see the positive aspects of negative situations. It will help you let go of fears based upon past experience and leave you open for a richer, more positive ones. ~ From an article written by Angelica Kane on the healing properties of gemstones.

Like the gentle waters swirling down into an ever-narrowing channel, my spirit glided effortlessly into the watery depths of the astral worlds. I'd become an amorphous being, swimming absentmindedly along. My consciousness was free to roam and it took great pleasure in doing so as it alit from thought to thought, none of which was of any great consequence.

The gentle swaying, mesmerizing in its rhythmic cadence, was like a metronome keeping time.

Tick-tock.

Back and forth.

The rhythm was particularly hypnotic.

I listened to the fireworks overhead, the swishing and sizzling sounds as they took off into the velvety night sky. The popping sounds announced dollops of surreal colors as they sparked the darkness. The gentle waves lapped on the shore and kept time with the motion of the

swing, but alas, all good things come to an end. My nirvana was always uncomfortably short.

I first became aware of a burning sensation all along my upper body. Heat stretched from my arms down into my chest like a forest fire in desiccated woods. It was excruciatingly painful to take in even the slightest bit of air.

Fear clutched my heart with a gelid grip.

Then I plunged into blackness.

My sense of touch gradually returned to me, over time that seemed to stretch from slow motion to abruptly snapping back to real time. I felt myself dragged, my legs chafed by what felt like gritty sandpaper. My hair was yanked at every few feet. I realized I was in the dunes with ragged shells and pointy, stiff beach grass all around. My feet were bare and bleeding. I tuned into the constant boom that erupted at distinct intervals, my eyes focusing in and out, flashes of light and color unexpectedly illuminated before me.

A sickly sweet smell bombarded my nose as I tried to catch my breath. Searing pain erupted alongside my head. I was thrown down and collided with what must have been a rock or a chunk of driftwood. My warm blood trickled down my neck and shoulder. His face was suddenly before me, hovering ever so close, the smell of alcohol strong on his breath. His familiar blue eyes now a dark and stormy gray, he intimately whispered in my ear.

"Why did you have to leave me?" he muttered. Then he turned to ice. "You're just like her, you think you're too good? Bitch! You used me and then tossed me aside. You're all alike." His lips curled in a maleficent grin. "I asked you not to go. That wasn't a smart move, I warned you, but you refused to listen. Now it's my turn. How do you like being used up and spit out, huh? You turned my world upside down and for what?"

I tried to speak, but my lips felt numb, like when I'd had too much Novocain at the dentist. All I could do was make soft, moaning sounds.

He ripped off my top and pawed at me, clumsily unbuttoning my shorts as he attempted to kiss my shoulders and neck. "As I remember, you like it rough."

I twisted and raised a knee to his groin, but it didn't have the momentum I needed. His grip loosened, though, and I dug my feet into the sand for leverage, pushing myself up and him off. I heard him laugh as he lunged toward me. My feeble attempts at escape only heightened his arousal.

"She did the same thing as you, you're made from the same mold, blonde whores, all of you—just like my mother! Screwing around with every freeloader she could find, leaving me with them—those sick, perverted fucks! She was an asshole magnet!" He put his hands around my throat and tightened his grip. "You bitches, teasing me with that pretty smile and empty promises, a bright future we'll have, you say. Then you act like the whore that you are! Why? I wanna know why? Why does everyone I love leave me? I have feelings, too, and I get hurt."

His thoughts took a direct turn inward, lost for a brief moment, his hands moving from my throat to my breasts. I swallowed as much air as I could, but the burning remained. "I thought you were different, you were so sweet, I wasn't enough for you? Now maybe you'll know how I hurt."

"I never left..." was all I could mutter, all she could mutter. With the lights exploding above, he violated me, repeatedly. He murmured a name, but it wasn't mine. While he protested his undying love, his anger played itself out until he was spent.

My wrists stung from the sand as they pushed deeper into the sand. Tears streamed down my bloodied face as I tried to plead with him, my voice barely above a moan.

"It's too late, dear. I know you'll run back to him. He doesn't love you like I do." His voice changed in tone from almost caring to sadistic. "You ruined everything, sweetheart. It didn't have to be this way."

"But—I didn't—"

His perspiration dripped onto my face as I squirmed beneath him, trying to get my leg positioned at an angle where I could do some damage

once he pulled out of me. He was not giving an inch. I looked directly at him, but his face phased in and out of focus. All I could see were those penetrating blue eyes.

His left hand grabbed my wrists and held them above my head as he straddled me. His other hand reached behind him. One, two, three.

Tick, tock, tick.

Flashes of gold, white and green streaks lit the night sky.

Then the glimmer of silver steel caught the reflections of color.

"It's all your fault, witch." And down came his solid, muscled arm. With one swift and effortless swipe, the kaleidoscope of colors faded to black.

* * *

With a profound whoosh, an intense, swirling energy thrust me back from my ethereal body to my physical one. I'd barely opened my eyes when the uncontrollable urge to empty the contents of my stomach took over. I pushed my adoring and frantic husband out of harm's way while I retched all over the deck.

"Oh, my gods! Get her some water and a cold rag," Ouida ordered. She pushed my sweat-soaked hair out of my face and soothed me as my own mother used to when I was a child.

Marisa ran back with a bottle of Kabala water, saved for emergencies of the metaphysical ilk.

"Drink up," Ouida whispered.

Worry draped itself around my friends. Rich came over with rolls of paper towels, the garden hose and a bucket of environmentally safe cleaners to wash away the mess I made. I apologized profusely, both completely embarrassed and petrified by what I'd seen and done.

Jon helped me up and led me into Marisa's cool, cheerful kitchen. I sat at her breakfast nook with Ouida right beside him. I was shaking.

"The spirits came to your wife tonight," she quietly informed Jon as she wiped away a small trickle of blood by my temple.

I ached all over. "I need some aspirin," I croaked out hoarsely.

"Carl, get me some of them crackers," Ouida said, taking control. "She needs some food. Toast, with jelly maybe," she continued, heading for Marisa's bread drawer. I held my head between my hands, trying to find the strength to speak.

Kevin tore into the room, his face flush with dread, fear written all over him.

"Has anyone seen Sally?" he shouted frantically. "I can't find her!"

Ronnie and Marc came to my aid, a look of absolute terror on Ronnie's face.

"What do you need?" she asked me anxiously.

"Call the police," I whispered.

* * *

Thank the Goddess, Officer Pugliese was working a bit of overtime. Within minutes of the call to 9-1-1, he was there. It was far easier to explain to him what had transpired than to, as Harry Potter would say, a muggle. He called for assistance while he jotted down the preliminary report taken from Kevin.

"It was ten-thirty. I'd last seen Sally at approximately nine-thirty. She was heading to Angelica's house to use the bathroom and I haven't seen her since," Kevin told the officer. "I searched all around for her, going from house to house hoping she was bullsh—talking, with some of the neighbors. I panicked when I couldn't find her."

I took Officer Pugliese to the side. "Look in the dunes, down by the abandoned hot dog shack. I'm not sure, but I know she's by the water."

He looked perplexed, but he kept taking notes. "How do you know?"

"Oh, don't ask, Rob—it's a witch thing, you know how that works." I gave him a weak smile.

"I'm learning." He winked as he turned, heading toward the detective.

My mom and sister came over to say farewell and thank you. My mother gave me that stare that only mothers can. "Are you all right, Angie? You look awfully peaked. Did I see a police car? Is there a problem? Drugs—did someone bring drugs?"

"Too much wine, Mom, I'll be all right. No, no one brought drugs, it's just the usual patrol." We hugged and said our farewells and I thanked my mom profusely for all her help. "Are you sure you don't want to spend the night?" I asked her.

"Oh, I didn't come prepared—next time. When Jake's out of camp, I'll come keep an eye on him for you for a few weeks," she generously offered.

"Come on, guys, I'll walk you to your cars," Jon said as he escorted them out.

Heena sat beside me. "Are you sure you're feeling okay? What in the world happened?" As usual, she took my wrist and checked my pulse.

"I'm not sure," I said, looking at Ouida.

"Who's Khaldun?" she asked, wide-eyed. "That's not an American name."

I was confused. "No, it's not. Why do you ask?"

"Because you called it out a few times." Heena sighed.

By eleven o'clock, swarms of police covered the neighborhood. They wrote furiously, taking reports from Kevin and anyone else who might have seen Sally. Neighbors clustered in groups on their front lawns answering a multitude of questions and wondering what in the world was going on. My amiable cousin, Vinny, boisterous as ever, escorted Ivy through the curious horde. She insisted she was my aunt and had every right to be here. Of course, Vinny simply plowed his way through.

"Are you okay, cuz?" Vinny was, as always, a commanding presence in the room, tall, burly and still quite handsome for a man approaching sixty. He took very good care of himself and his family. "You ever have

any problems, you tell your cousin, *capisce*?" he'd say, with all the hand gestures of a first-generation Italian-American.

"What in Great Brigit's name is going on here?" Ivy whispered.

"It's Sally, she's...missing," I said, holding onto the bright but fading hope that I may have been seriously wrong. "I had another vision, Ivy, it was horrible. I think someone killed Sally," I said in hushed tones.

Through the crowd, I saw the familiar profile of Detective Bennette. He was heading toward me.

"Mrs. Kane, are you hurt? What happened?" he asked as he came to stand beside me.

I touched the spot where my head was bleeding. "No, I'm fine. I'm a little dizzy, but I should be okay," I answered, then sipped some water.

"You mind if I ask you a few questions?" He took out his familiar note pad.

As I rested my head in my hands I agreed. "Sure, I don't know what I can tell you," I softly said.

"You invited the missing girl?" he asked, eyeing me closely.

"Actually, my friend Risa—Marisa did." I looked up into those brilliant blue eyes that were methodically taking in more information than what he wrote down.

"Who'd she come with?"

"Some guy named Kevin, I'm not sure of his last name, but he's over there in the backyard talking to the other officer." I pointed to the back.

He flipped over another page. "How long have you known the missing girl?" he continued.

"Sally, her name is Sally, and I met her a few weeks ago. She's actually a client of Marisa's."

He arched a brow. "A client? Is your friend a therapist or something of that nature?"

"Massage therapist, yes."

He suddenly looked quite concerned. "Are you sure you're feeling all right? You don't look too good. You're very pale. You want some more

water? Do you want to lie down? Your head's still bleeding a little." He leaned over, handed me a napkin and placed his hand on my shoulder. I felt a familiar snap of energy and sat back abruptly. It was uncomfortable. "I can take you to the hospital," he offered.

I smiled in appreciation. "I have an ER nurse, a pediatrician and a—now don't tell anyone—a psychiatrist here. I think I'll be okay. But thanks. Ivy doesn't want many people to know she can prescribe medicine, so she tells everyone she's a psychologist."

I heard Carl laugh. "How do you feel?" Carl asked, fixing me another piece of toast and bringing it over. "You want some jam on it?"

Mama Ouida took over. "She needs to rest. Let her eat it plain this time."

"You want me to stick around?" Vinny asked, eyeing Ivy, who looked quite fetching with her salt and pepper hair cascading down her shoulders.

"I think I'll be fine, thanks for offering." I sighed, nibbling at the bread.

The detective attempted to reschedule a meeting with me. "How about I come by your house tomorrow, when you're feeling better?" He whispered to me, "You really look like you need some rest. I don't mean it as an insult—I mean, you're a beautiful woman, it's just, you look...very pasty. Your lips are pale."

"I get it, Detective. I look horrible. I'd appreciate that a lot if you'd come by tomorrow." I smiled.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...I put my foot in it this time," Detective Bennette said then walked over to Kevin. He took over the questioning, looking over his shoulder, back at me.

"Okay. Big Jon, you got it under control?" Vinny asked.

"Yeah Vin, thanks. I got it." Jon smiled, looking cautiously at the detective.

Vinny said his good-byes and upon leaving whispered something to Ivy which made her laugh and blush like a young maiden.

“Ouida, what happened? I don’t remember much. One minute I was watching the fireworks and the next I was on the beach—being raped,” I murmured, so my husband wouldn’t hear.

“Can I take her home, Detective?” Ouida asked as Bennette meandered through the room, questioning guests along the way.

“I suppose, you’re only down the block if I need you. I’d like the names of everyone you invited. But I can get that tomorrow,” he said. “I’ll be by if we find her.”

“Yes, please do,” I said.

* * *

My friends escorted me home. Jon gathered the kids and brought them along a little later. My mom, bless her heart, had put all the leftover food away in plastic containers, leaving only the bags of assorted chips on the counters.

I grabbed the pretzel bag. “Is it normal? I’m starving.”

Ouida handed me some saltines from my cupboard. “Perfectly. Besides, you evacuated your stomach.”

“How antiseptic. Now will you please tell me what the hell happened?” I pleaded.

“Let’s go out back.” Ouida led me through the french doors out to the scattered lounge chairs.

Ouida sat next to me. “It seems as if Sally’s spirit made contact with you and tried to get you to see what was happening to her. When a soul knows—and believe me, they know when it’s near the end—they can reach out to someone who’s open and intuitive, like you. Especially when it’s under such violent circumstances.”

“Do you think Jon knows what happened?” I nervously asked.

Ouida’s eyes were downcast. She looked at me, taking my hands in hers.

“Yes, I believe so. You were crying and saying, *don’t hurt me*. You were squirming, as if you were trying to push someone’s arms away from your sacred place.”

“I feel sore, Oui, as if I were raped.”

“Your body will carry the memory as if it were you, sister. That’s why you were bleeding, too. I suppose Sally hit her head hard by someone or somethin’,” she informed me. Ouida pushed my hair back and rubbed my shoulders in an effort to calm me.

She took in a deep breath before speaking. “It’s very hard to explain, *pen nue*, physically you weren’t raped, but your etheric body is tied to the experience. So, in essence, your soul was raped.”

Marc and his wife were quietly stargazing and watching the remainder of the fireworks presentation across the water. The flashes of colors in the sky brought the memory rushing back and I felt queasy all over again. “Oui—I’ve been having the strangest experiences. Is this like...have sex with your husband and view a past life for no extra charge? The visions are also showing me little vignettes of some sort of ritual. It’s...sexual.”

“What d’you mean, child?” She continued stroking my hair.

“Whoever is raising the power is using sex to do it and somehow I’m getting pulled into it. I think it’s karmic, like Marisa said. I’ve been getting flashes of a past life, too,” I admitted, feeling very embarrassed. “I need some ginger ale. I feel sick again.”

Marc and Ronnie headed back to the kitchen. “I’ll get it,” Ronnie volunteered.

Ouida continued. “Perhaps that’s whose name you were calling out. You should have Ivy do a regression for you. If Ivy can’t regress you, I’ll do it. This is all new to you and we’re going to have to get you to be able to control these episodes. You’ve added a new dimension to your abilities. You’re going to have to keep yourself grounded, Angie, at all times, whether you’re doing psychic work or not. You’re a channel and must protect yourself. I warned you this might happen after Marisa did the

master Reiki attunement.” I nodded in agreement. “You’ve got a natural proclivity toward channeling, Marisa’s strength is healing. I’m a teacher.”

“What do you think the sexual aspect is all about?” I asked.

“Is it an actual ritual you’re seeing?”

“There are two people, usually, and I hear some words of a chant but I can’t remember what they are. It looks like the Great Rite—then I’m left with the residual sexual feelings of arousal,” I whispered, feeling a sudden chill in the air.

“What do you mean usually?”

“Other times it’s just the feelings and candlelight,” I confessed. “And yet others are intermingled with images from another time. I must be connected somehow to this man.”

Ouida put her sweater around my shoulders. “Keep yourself grounded always. You’re going to have to batten down the hatches on holidays and protect yourself with your amulets. You’re also going to have to watch the drinking,” Ouida said. “I’ll have to consult the *loa*, to be sure.”

I stared at the starry sky. “The other night, when my truck was keyed I went to the park afterwards to clear my head. There were two people there performing what looked like the Great Rite.”

Ouida nodded. “At Wedding Cake Rock?”

It was aptly named for its shape of a two tier cake. “Yes, and there’s more...”

Ronnie walked over and handed me a glass of ginger ale with ice chips. When our hands touched, an arc of electricity jolted between us and I knew somehow she was involved in tonight’s horror. I looked deeply into her compassionate green eyes, avoiding the psychic pull. I didn’t want another go-round. I saw nothing. Only fear. She went back to her husband.

I continued. “Oui, the man at the park wanted me to watch them. I heard him telepathically telling me to stay, and I couldn’t move. I-I finally was able to get back inside the truck and...it was so strange. I astral-

projected into the female's body and—I felt everything she did. Only I didn't consciously do it. It just... happened."

Ouida stared. I knew that look; it was one of extreme concern. "The person involved in working this type of magick is tuned into you, or you are somehow connected to him," she warned me. "If it's karmic, you must be very careful, sister. You cannot let the feelings from another life influence you now. That could be a deadly mistake. Come on inside, you're getting cold."

Ivy puttered around the kitchen, cleaning up, making tea, sweeping the floor and feeding the felines. I could tell she was concerned; her brows knit together like a fine cashmere sweater. "I checked on Cody, he's sleeping. Those pills worked great. Angie, do you mind if I spend the night?" my worried friend inquired.

"Thanks, I gave him the sedative the vet gave me. I think I should have split it with him." That was my feeble attempt at humor. "Of course I don't mind, there's the pull-out in the den, you're more than welcome to crash there, you know that. I think the older boys are out for the night, but I can't be sure. Otherwise you could use one of their rooms." I sat on a cushioned stool, still feeling the after-effect of traveling into the netherworld.

"The couch is fine." She smiled.

Marc and Ronnie came over to where I sat with Ivy. Ronnie said, "We're going to head on home. Are you going to be all right here now? Do you need anything?"

"I think she's safe for now," Ivy stepped in.

Marc nodded. "Call us if you need anything or hear anything about Sally."

"Take care of her, be careful, Sympatia," I said, but the words were not my own.

It occurred to me then that I'd been living between two worlds and other lives.

Chapter Thirteen

Unakite ~ This stone can assist us to live in the present instead of dwelling in the past. It is said to help us let go of the mental or emotional blocks to discover the root causes of mental, physical, emotional and spiritual problems before they can become a danger to our well-being. By helping us see the fundamental causes of such problems, we are better able to take remedial action. ~ From Angelica Kane's workshop on Gemstones.

The call came at five o'clock, along with the dawn.

They had found Sally's body in the dunes by the abandoned hot dog stand, just like I said. The detective would be by in the morning for more questioning.

Jon was pouring two steaming cups of vanilla cappuccino for Ivy and me when the doorbell chimed. I pulled my terry cloth robe tighter, as if that unpretentious act would somehow protect me from what was on the other side of the door. Bad news. Ivy sat next to me in a pair of my pajamas, her arm around me protectively.

"Morning," the detective said, always observing.

"I'm going to get changed, I'll be right back," Ivy said as she made her way out of the kitchen.

I was certain Detective Bennette's soulful eyes had seen too much of humanity's abhorrent behavior. He had his notepad out and was poised, ready to jot down any useful information.

"Coffee, Detective?" Jon asked.

"Thanks, if you don't mind. It's been an extremely long night. Mrs. Kane, I've got a few questions I was wondering if you could help me with. Would you explain what transpired last night? We really didn't get a chance to go over much. Are you feeling better by the way, I hope?"

"Yes, I am, thank you. And here's a list of all the people we invited." I took a deep breath and jumped right in. I knew this wasn't going to be an easy pill for him to swallow. Most people have a difficult time with the concept of visions and premonitions. By the look on Sean Bennette's face, I could safely say this was a first. Ivy joined us and put on the kettle for tea.

"So what you're telling me is—that you *saw* these events in your mind?" he asked incredulously.

"Actually it was more like I was seeing it through Sally's eyes, not mine," I corrected him.

He took in a deep breath and slowly let it out, shaking his head as if that would force the pieces of this story into a puzzle that fit. He rubbed at his slightly graying temples. "And you are the same Angelica Kane who helped find the little boy last year? The child from Rivers End? A Joey Carbone, Jr.?"

Jon placed the mug of coffee in front of the detective, eyeing him suspiciously.

"My friend, Marisa, and I found him, yes." I nudged the mug closer to him.

"The same way?" He smiled and took a sip of the vanilla brew.

This wasn't going to be easy. "Nooo... I, uh...that was different. I meditated that time and saw the location, then my friend scryed and—" I was beginning to ramble. "Marisa..."

The detective interrupted. "Wait—you meditated and she scryed?" he asked, clearly lost in my metaphysical lingo.

I nodded, seeing this was extremely difficult for the detective to come to terms with. He appeared to be a believe-it-when-you-see-it kind of guy. I guess I couldn't fault him. In his profession, he'd have to be.

“Detective Bennette,” Ivy said kindly, “it’s much easier to think of it as a dream, only Angie is awake. She sees images, like you would see in a dream state.”

That seemed to help him wrap his mind around the concept, somewhat. “And scrying is?”

I took over the explanation. “That’s done with a pendulum and a map. Marisa holds it and concentrates on the person or object she’s looking for. It spins and hopefully lands on the location of the article or person.”

“Is that how you knew where to look for Ms. Shaw?” he asked as he rubbed at the stubble peeking through his bronzed skin.

I never knew Sally’s last name. “No. I told you—I saw the events as they were happening to her and I saw the shack in the dunes.”

“Okay...” I could hear the frustration in his voice. “You have witnesses that place you in your friend’s backyard at the approximate time of the crime?”

Jon was getting angry. I could feel it. “What is that suppose to mean? You think my *wife* had something to do with this?” He got up from his seat and paced the length of the kitchen.

“Mr. Kane, I have to ask these questions, it’s procedure, anything is possible. I have to follow all avenues.” He paused and looked over at me. “But—no, I don’t think she has anything to do with the crime. You must appreciate how difficult it is for me to understand how your wife can know certain things. You were with your wife, I assume?” he asked, ala Columbo.

“Yes, I was. Along with our friends,” Jon huffed, sitting back down and running his hand through his hair.

“And you say you’ve never met this woman, Sally Shaw?” he probed politely, sipping his coffee in between taking notes.

“No, I never met her,” Jon insisted.

“But she was at your home a few weeks ago. Wasn’t she, Mrs. Kane?” the officer asked. One eyebrow arched cynically.

I did not like the direction he was heading.

“Deep breaths,” Ivy whispered.

“Yes, she was. My husband was upstairs, in the shower and getting ready to go out. We went to the concert that night.” I got up and poured myself some cranberry juice. “You remember the concert,” I said sarcastically.

It didn’t phase him in the least. “Yes, the concert you attended with the Arruccis.” He flipped through his note pad, searching for information. “Marc and Veronica Arthur performed, at ahhh—Ocean Park Theater. They were here as well last night, correct?”

“Yes, they were.” I was suddenly hungry. “Detective, are you hungry? I’m going to make some eggs.”

“I’m sorry. No, thank you, I’ll be done soon. At that concert, the young backup singer had been electrocuted?” He found what he’d been searching for in his notepad.

“That’s the one,” I answered, taking out eggs, butter and cheese.

“They’re friends of yours?” He watched me carefully. Never took his eyes off me for more than a few moments. I felt uneasy and pulled the sash of my robe tighter around my waist.

“The Arthurs? Yes. I thought we covered this before.” I sighed, cracking open a half dozen eggs into a bowl.

“Yes, we did. Hmm...so, anyway, it’s possible that your husband ran into her—Ms. Shaw—here. You may’ve been in the kitchen when she walked in and she might’ve seen him? Met him then?” He walked over to me and looked directly into my eyes. Jon stood and was ready to intercept him.

“What’re you getting at? You think my husband is involved? No, it’s not possible,” I explained, angrily whipping the eggs. “My girlfriend answered the door and brought her directly into the kitchen. This is where we stayed. We had a glass of wine and we talked. You should be looking for her ex-boyfriend, she has a restraining order against him. He abused her. Beat her. She had a fat lip thanks to him. She’s got a few boyfriends. It could be anyone out there that might have done this. You

of all people know how twisted people's minds can be. Somebody keyed her car and slashed her tires, too." I took out the skillet and turned on the heat while seasoning the eggs. I had to do something. I was extremely nervous around the attractive officer. He had the ability, so I thought, to easily twist my words into something foreign.

"I know, we're looking for him and any other men she may've been involved with." He looked at me and smiled. "If you add a little water to the eggs, they'll come out fluffier."

I shook my head, getting as frustrated now as the detective must be, but I had to laugh. Now he was giving me cooking advice. "I prefer milk."

"Mrs. Arrucci told us about that, the abuse," he admitted, sidestepping Jon as he came to help with breakfast by adding butter to the hot skillet.

"Did she tell you how he threatened to hurt himself with a knife? How he tried to manipulate Sally?" I asked, getting more agitated by the minute. I was about to lose my cool. Apparently sensing my discomfort Ivy got up and took over the cooking.

"Yes, she did, Mrs. Kane." The detective held out his hand to Jon. "I'm sorry, it's all part of the job."

Jon took his hand reluctantly and shook it.

"Mrs. Kane, I'll be in touch."

I took his hand and, without warning, hideous images assaulted my mind's eye. A mélange of crimes he'd seen in his years as a police officer and detective flashed before me.

Body parts, severed limbs, tortured men and women. Defenseless children raped, murdered and beaten. Gun shot wounds, stabbings, suicides, people lit on fire, car crashes, hospitals, morgues, all pounded my senses.

A woman. Young, beautiful and brunette in a mangled car wreck. A drunk, a wedding band, another that matched on Sean Bennette's hand. The name Rita. The number ten, fireworks and flowers. A crib.

"Rita—she was your wife—she was killed in a car accident, it was your anniversary, she was on her way to meet you...for dinner...when a

drunk driver went through a red light. It would've been your ten year anniversary—yesterday—she was going to tell you she was pregnant. Oh-My-Great-Goddess!” The words just flew from my lips. He pulled his hand away from mine as if it were too hot to the touch. His mouth opened in shock.

“I’m so sorry. I had no idea!” I hastily apologized. “Please forgive me, Detective.”

He grabbed a kitchen chair and sat down, grabbing his chest like I’d kicked him full force. His eyes questioned me, but his words were lost somewhere else.

“I told you, I see things,” I softly said. “Are you okay?”

Finally he spoke, after Jon brought him a glass of water. His voice was barely a hint above a whisper. “No one—and I mean—*no one*, knew she was pregnant. I found the test at home, in the bathroom. The plus sign was still visible. That was five years ago. I hadn’t told anyone that.” We sat in silence for a few moments. He hung his head, lost in thoughts of the past, no doubt.

“That’s unbelievable.” He regained his composure and stood, shaking his head once again. “Uh, I’ll be in touch. I’m sorry, I have to go.”

“I apologize again, Detective,” I called out to him as he made his exit. We ate our breakfast in silence.

* * *

It was later in the day when the television crews descended. Like a summer storm, volatile and unpredictable, they quickly spread over the landscape. The only positive thing to come out of my television experience was publicity for the shop. Business was booming.

Chapter Fourteen

Rose Quartz ~ Rose quartz is a soothing stone with the ability to reduce the sharp edges of our life. Rose quartz is in tune with the emotional aspects of self. Its energies can help us learn to love ourselves, and through this, give us an increased ability to love others. Rose quartz encourages love on many levels, and it can lead to being better able to accept negative situations and aspects of our daily lives. Rose quartz can help with low self-esteem. Its energies are comforting and nurturing, and that makes this stone one of the best choices for people going through emotional strain like divorce or loss of a loved one. It has a sensitive nature and rapidly attunes itself to the wearer. ~ From a lecture given by Marisa Arrucci at a local Gem Show.

The headlines raged on as the police searched for answers and we were dragged into the limelight once more.

Psychic Detectives of Sacred Treasures Strike Again

By Joel Sanders

The dashing duos of Market Street's Sacred Treasures are once again in the spotlight. Candice Kane and Marisa Arrucci, owners of the famed occult shop, find they are embroiled in the search for the murderer of Sally Shaw.

On Saturday, the Fourth of July, at an annual block party on Harbor Drive, Sally Shaw, twenty-four, of Oceanview was abducted and brutally murdered.

Our own Angelica Kane aided the police by giving them the location in which they would find the murdered woman's body. It was through a so-called vision that Ms. Kane received her information.

Sally Shaw, a client of Marisa Arrucci's, was attending the barbeque with her boyfriend, Kevin Murray.

The circumstances of the night's festivities are sketchy at best. The crime lab found skin traces from under the victim's nails, but no matches have been reported. An abandoned boat was also found drifting across Millers' channel, which was reported stolen July third. Questioning is still ongoing and no suspect has been named as of yet, and no one has been ruled out.

These and other types of visions that Ms. Kane experienced helped locate Joey Carbone of Rivers End last year. This reporter will keep our readers updated as more information becomes available.

* * *

My next order of business, once Will and Jake were off to soccer camp, was to locate Joseph and have a chat with him. Fortunately, he was functioning on the same frequency and came into the shop looking for me. Deep creases lined his clothes, disheveled hair pointed in every direction. It was clear he hadn't had a decent night's sleep in days. The dark half-circles under his eyes gave him a gaunt and hollow countenance.

We walked into the back of the shop. He fell into a chair at the table, dropped his head in his hands and sobbed. I stood next to him, letting him vent all his pent-up emotions.

"The police questioned me!" he stammered. "How could they think I'd do such a thing to her or anyone!" His breath caught in his throat. He was near hysterics.

I desperately tried to calm him down. "I'm sorry, Joseph, they've got to question everyone who knew her." I placed my hands on his back and acted as a conduit. The energy passed through me and into the earth,

where it transformed into neutral energy. If he were involved in this, now was my opportunity to read him. “How long had you known her?”

He rubbed his eyes, which were red from crying. “Not very long. We only just started to date a few weeks ago.”

I reached over to a basket on the counter that contained a colorful assortment of stones. I found the one I was searching for and gave it to him to hold.

“What is this?” he asked as he opened his hand to receive it.

“It’s called lepidolite and it will help facilitate a calming effect on you. It contains some small amounts of lithium,” I explained as I took out the kettle to brew some chamomile tea. I squirted a few drops of flower essence, Relaxing Remedy, into a small cup of water and told Joe to drink it. A combination of a variety of flowers infused into spring water and taken internally, it was nature’s anti-anxiety pill in a bottle.

“Thanks. I feel a bit better already.” He smiled weakly. “You believe me, Angelica, don’t you? I know we haven’t known each other long, but, well, you can feel I didn’t kill her, can’t you?” His eyes searched mine, pleading for a vote of confidence.

“Joe, does that mean you believe *me*?” I countered.

“After what I’d heard and read about you leading the police to—to Sally, yes.”

Asking about shop business, Marisa rescued me from having to answer his provocative question.

I really wasn’t certain how I would’ve responded. I hadn’t felt any overt hostility. He was just a jumble of confusion.

* * *

The remainder of the day passed by fairly uneventfully, thank goodness. Tonight was the full moon and the *esbat* was taking place at Ivy’s Dune Road estate. I loved going to her place on the ocean side of the Island. She always had food brought in from the Gourmet Pampered

Palate, which was a wonderful treat. All the other trimmings were from Sacred Treasures. With what had transpired over the past few weeks, I was especially looking forward to tonight's ritual, especially after the horrors I'd recently experienced. Ouida brought her youngest daughter, Lily, to the ceremony, along with a couple of bottles of Pinot Grigio. I tried to get Amber to come, but, as expected, she turned me down. Again. In retrospect, it was a good thing she didn't attend.

Ivy's home was magnificent. It wasn't enormous, as Hampton homes go, with only three bedrooms, a dining room, a large formal living room, a den and—well, maybe it was enormous. Plus it was Hampton chic, overlooking the ocean, with an oversized back deck done in rich teak wood. Ivy had adorned it with varieties of plants and tchotchkes.

Tropical palms, hibiscus, gardenias and jasmines perfumed the sultry air. In the center sat Ivy's large cauldron, set on slates, where the fire was slowly burning. On the altar, which was a converted bar, she had drums and rattles she'd collected over her many years of world travel.

With the moon peeking over the horizon, we were all smudged with sage, lavender and sweet grass and ready to begin. Lily sat on an oversized pillow and drummed a slow and steady beat. She looked like a Caribbean goddess with her red caftan and silk flower in her hair, which fell in mahogany ringlets. Ivy, all in white, cast the circle using her willow wand, straight from Salem. Ouida, Marisa, Heena and I invoked each of the elements. The drum kept its steady beat, and we could feel the energy rising.

"We're at the fullness of the moon tonight, when all our wishes and dreams come true," Ivy said. "Love and abundance are at their fullness, we're here to rejoice in the Mother Goddess. We invoke her and ask that she hear our prayers, including an added dose of protection. Also tonight, we keep in mind the souls of Sally and Diane. May their journey into the Summerland be smooth and their reunion with family members be sweet. Ladies, keep your desires in your mind's eye now."

Ivy handed out the rattles and cradled a drum in her arms. We began to dance around the cauldron. Each of us had written on a piece of paper

our secret desires and wishes. The beat quickened and the energy rose higher and higher. ‘Round and ‘round we danced, feeling fantastically gypsy-ish. We each dropped our written wishes into the kettle, continuing the dance. I kicked off my shoes as I twirled around the fire, losing myself in the moment. Wonderfully carefree, I danced, feeling the recent burdens slowly peel away from me.

“When I say, ladies—release the energy.” Ivy was monitoring the apogee of power. We were a collage of colors, blue, green, yellow, orange, white and red dancing under the jeweled night. I gazed at the moon, a pearl in the sea of stars.

That was the last conscious thought I remembered.

“*Now!*” Ivy called out, and we yelled in unison, “*Ho!*”

The teak wood slammed under my head. The sky blinked in and out of my vision. I heard a dissonance of voices and had difficulty determining which ones were astral and which were earthly. My arms and legs grew rigid as the familiar swirling energies enveloped me.

“Shit!” I vaguely heard Marisa moan. “Not again!”

“The spirits have her,” I thought I heard Ouida say.

“Momma, can you do something?” Lily whispered.

“*You have to help her—she’s in danger. Now more than ever.*” The voices phased in and out, from specter to human. “*You’re the only one who hears me! He is going to try again!*”

“Angelica, who?” Ivy asked.

I gasped for air. “He killed Diane...and Sally...they won’t tell me,” I said.

“Stay with me, Angie, who won’t tell you?” Ivy asked.

“*I don’t know who they are, they’re others like me. They say they are guides, that all this was her destiny. No names, I don’t know their names.*”

Heena sat beside me; I felt her energy. “Her pulse is too rapid,” she reported.

Ouida ordered, “Keep her in the protection of the circle! Who are you? What do you want from Angelica?”

"I'm Katherine. He's getting closer! He's come back." I frantically uttered the words of the phantom. *"He will not give up. Ever."*

"There's no man here, Angie—who's getting closer?" Ivy asked.

"He wants her—dead! You have to help her, you have to stop him." My body began to quiver and my eyes rolled back.

Heena demanded, "Oui, we have to do something."

"Katherine, you must leave Angelica's body, *now*. She can't go on like this. Please go," Ouida asked of the spirit.

I heard Marisa speak. "It's Ronnie's mom," she said. "It has to be."

My hands reached for my throat and I coughed violently. My head banged against the decking.

"I beg of you, help my daughter. It's not her time."

Ouida fired out the questions in rapid succession. "How—when is he going to try? What's his name?"

"He's the one—"

"She's turning blue," Kara shrieked.

"Call 911!" Heena yelled as she kept her fingers on my pulse point. "Oui, we have to do something *now!*"

Ouida instructed the circle. I heard the strength in her voice. "Hurry, sisters, imagine energy going back into Angelica to heal her. Put your hands above her root chakra. Now!" Ouida offered her astral lifeline to me. "Come on, *peu une*, come back."

I felt the tugging of my coven sisters' energy pulling me out of the etheric realm.

The whispered echoes pleading for assistance gradually evaporated into walls of haze.

My eyes suddenly flew open and I gulped in the sea air.

"Shit—you scared us to death!" Marisa bawled. "Are you okay?"

I sat up slowly and the dizziness ebbed away. "I think so," I answered, rubbing the back of my head, which now had a large bump where it had hit the deck.

Tears welled in my sisters' eyes. Kara was quietly sobbing. Lily tried to comfort her.

"Her heart rate is normal, forget the paramedics." Heena sighed as Lily put her cell phone back in her bag. "We need ice for her head."

"Let's get her something to eat," Ivy suggested as she helped me to my feet.

Handing me a glass of water and an ice pack, Kara asked, "What was that all about?"

Marisa hovered over me like a nursemaid, leading me to a lounge chair. "You sit here and let me get you something to eat." Anxiety lurked behind her golden eyes.

"I wish I knew." I looked around at my friends, trying to focus in the dark.

Heena took my arm. "Was it the same type of vision?" she asked, checking my pulse once more.

I rubbed my neck with my other hand. "Not really. I felt I was in both places at once this time, here and...there. Wherever *there* is." I looked into Heena's sapphire eyes and my pulse slowed to its normal rhythm.

"Do you think the warning is about Ronnie?" Ivy asked Marisa. The rest of my friends seated themselves on reclining chairs and sipped white wine. I felt closer to normal after eating some grounding foods and drinking more water.

Heena poured some tea. "Ronnie Arthur? That'd make sense, after what happened at the concert. I know it wasn't an accident."

Marisa picked on raw carrots and celery. "Yes, she's involved. Ronnie told me about your warning to her. I just don't get why Sally was killed."

I thought about Veronica Arthur and her polka-dotted aura.

Ouida settled down on a pillow next to her daughter. "I overheard Ronnie talking to you, Marisa, at the block party. Something about her being stalked?"

“Yeah, an overzealous fan or something.” Marisa’s usually calm face now wore an aggravated expression. “Ange, this *was* Ronnie’s mom that came through to you tonight, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s the same energy that’s been communicating with me. I still don’t understand Sally’s death, though,” I thought aloud. This time, Ouida checked my pulse.

Kara said innocently, “You know, the three of you do look related, Angie, Sally and Ronnie.”

“Yeah—maybe the killer got confused,” Ivy commented as she filled her plate with fruit salad.

We all sat in silence, staring at Ivy as she looked innocently at us.

“What? What’d I say?”

“Could it be he’s after Ronnie and accidentally grabbed Sally?” I wondered to my friends.

“Oh, Great Lakshmi! Do you really think so?” Heena asked.

Kara reached for the wine bottle. “I wonder if the detectives figured this out,” she said.

Marisa chuckled. “I doubt it. Diane doesn’t look like Ronnie or Sally. I don’t think they realize the connection.”

“No, I don’t think so either,” I said. “From the questions that were asked of us, none of them pointed to any theory of a connection.”

Ouida sat back on the recliner. “You do look a lot like Ronnie, Angie. And Sally could’ve been your little sister,” she said, with Heena nodding in agreement.

“I don’t think he wants to kill me,” I said.

Marisa sighed deeply. “How can you be so sure? From the reading I did, you are smack in the middle of all this.”

“Did you see me in that much danger, Risa?” I squealed.

“No. I don’t know. There was danger indicated, it didn’t give me a scale of one to ten.”

Ivy flitted about, filling wine glasses and passing more shrimp to each of us. “Well, I would tell that handsome detective about this theory. You can’t be too sure.”

Marisa added her opinion to the mix. “Yeah, Angie, if you don’t call him, I will. I know you’ve spoken to Ronnie. She must be scared shitless. She’s in desperate need of help. Your kind of help, Ivy. Why don’t you see patients anymore? We could refer lots of clients to you.”

Ivy breathed out a long sigh. “No, I’m not ready yet. It’s too soon after Ed... I—I don’t know if I really want to. I have thought about it, though. Who knows what the future will bring. I learned that one the hard way. Who thought my Ed would be killed in that horrid car accident and so soon after we both retired.” Ivy shook her head as tears shone in her eyes.

“How long has it been?” Ouida asked.

“Two years.” She sniffled.

“Let us know when you’re ready,” I said.

Oudia filled in the awkward gap of the conversation. “You better call that detective, sister.”

“Yes, Angie, you really should,” Lily quietly spoke.

“I feel the same thing,” Heena added.

I reached for more shrimp cocktail, “Okay, tomorrow I’ll call him.”

“Good. Leave room for dessert ladies!” Ivy announced as she brought over strawberry shortcake. “The strawberries are in season and they’re like candy! Anyone for coffee? Decaf, of course.”

We all managed to taste the delicious cake and had coffee as well.

Ivy escorted all of us out, after dousing the cauldron, leaving the rest of the clean-up to her quirky housekeeper, Sandra, who preferred the title of assistant.

We all stood out front for a few minutes longer, admiring the new plantings Ivy had of crepe myrtle and dogwood trees. Her property was a living work of art.

A sense of uneasiness tickled my senses as we said our good-nights. I suppose it was the calm after the first half of a storm, and I was caught in the eye. The stygian clouds just peered over the metaphoric horizon. Their presence was menacing.

Chapter Fifteen

Jasper (General, All Types) ~ Jasper is a stone of gentleness and calmness. It augments one's ability to relax and brings harmony, comforting, wholeness, healing, and gentle endings. It is every so often called the nurturing stone for its nurturing and protective energies. Physically it's used for the liver, gallbladder, soothing the stomach and balancing yin/yang energies. ~ From Angelica Kane's Book of Shadows

Sean Bennette was still busy trying to put the pieces of this homicidal puzzle together. He took the theory of mistaken identity quite seriously. He also began checking up on me at the shop almost daily, with either a phone call or a visit.

One day he unexpectedly showed up at the shop to go over a few things with me. He didn't come empty-handed, either. He brought sandwiches from the Healthy Harvest, brownies and two Chai lattes.

"Detective, you didn't have to go to all that trouble." I smiled as I led him to the back kitchen, placed the food down and grabbed some paper plates.

"I owe you a coffee, so I thought I'd add lunch. You have to eat, right?" he said as he helped with the napkins and plates.

"Yeah, I suppose, though lately I haven't had time. It's been really busy."

"Angie, don't forget you have a two o'clock reading coming in," Marisa called out to me, underscoring how busy we really were.

We sat across from each other, unwrapping our sandwiches. He looked lost in thought, his eyebrows furrowed. "I've been wanting to ask

you something. It's not about the case, though. How'd you know about Rita? Really? Do you remember reading it in a newspaper article?"

"No, I don't think I was living out here at the time. I used to live on the other end of the Island," I said as I bit into the whole wheat bread with turkey and asiago cheese.

"You really floored me when you told me about Rita." He looked down at his hands, which nervously twisted the sandwich wrapper.

I nodded. "I'm sorry about that. I didn't mean for it to upset you."

"I know you didn't. Anyhow, change of subject... When your truck was damaged, that was the same statement that was carved into Sally Shaw's, right?" he questioned me, always the cop. "Go to Hell Witch?"

"Yes, it was. Which is why I think maybe he's after me," I said, trying to decipher what mysteries hid behind those unbelievably blue eyes. He was not so easy to read today. "Or Ronnie."

"Your vehicles look similar in the dark, it's possible the assailant mistook your truck for Sally's. She was here that night, wasn't she?" He bit into his lunch.

"Yes, she was. Ronnie drives a black Volvo, so I don't think that had anything to do with her."

"Whoever's after Mrs. Arthur knows her vehicle."

"How can you be certain?" I asked.

"Trust me. I can't say more than that."

"Gotcha."

"You also had that altercation with the Born Agains?"

"Boy, you did your homework."

"It's the job."

I detected a slight twang in his speech pattern. After all the conversations we'd had, I hardly noticed.

I smiled, sipping the clove-flavored tea. "So, where are you originally from?"

He stopped and smiled, deep dimples engraved on either side of his alluring grin. "Most people don't pick up on the accent. It's been so long.

Arkansas's where I was born. I spent most of my childhood on a farm. I moved up north when I was seventeen, after my mother died. My father's still down there, he's retired." He took another bite as he handed me a napkin. "So, you said Sally started dating a Jehovah? Joseph Carver?" He redirected the conversation back on track.

"Mmm," I mumbled, with a mouthful of sandwich, wiping the mayonnaise off my chin. Nice Angelica, I thought, you can't even manage to keep the food in your mouth.

He sipped his tea, which was iced. "Maybe the Jehovah's were trying to dissuade her from seeing him. I assume she was a witch, too?"

"Yes, she is—was. That's so out of character for them, though, and rather extreme. I mean of the two, the Born Agains are much more fanatical. I did some research on my own about them. You don't really think the Jehovah's are after me?"

"They did throw a brick and break your window. I don't know. You never should underestimate people, you never know what they'll do. All it takes is one whacko to act on his own. Sally was seeing, how many guys?" He was uneasy about something, but I couldn't put my psychic finger on it.

"Two that I'm aware of. I just recently got to know her," I reminded him. "Now that you mentioned it, there is one of the Jehovah's, an older man, Ethan, who seemed to get really bothered by Joseph having anything to do with me. He was the one who threw the brick. I'd think he'd be pretty unhappy if he knew Joseph was dating a...Wiccan. But murder?"

Sean nodded. "I spoke with them, his congregation. They all agreed that Ethan Whelan was very upset over Mr. Carver's relationship with Sally and you. We're keeping him in mind. He really didn't have an alibi that could be corroborated."

"Yes—he almost hit me with that brick, too. Do you think he possibly keyed my truck?"

"Unfortunately, we'll probably never find out for certain. Don't worry, Angelica, I really think you'll be safe."

"I must say, Detective, you seem awfully certain I'm not in any danger."

"I am. Now, you said you never met the abusive boyfriend? Paul Sumner." Sean Bennette was a driven man and at that moment, I had no doubt that if anyone could solve this mystery, he could. His easy manner made it quite comfortable to divulge secrets, and one would never even realize it until it was too late. I was still puzzled about his self-confidence concerning my safety.

"No, I never met Paul—not formally. I saw his handiwork, though. We begged her to get a restraining order against him," I said, wiping my mouth of more mayonnaise and lipstick.

"Apparently, she did. We checked his residence, but he's long gone. According to his roommate, Mr. Sumner was heading down south to Florida. Seems he lost his job and was moving there to find work and stay with family. So far, we can't locate any family in Florida. He could be in hiding."

"I read in the paper there was a boat found adrift in Millers' Channel?" I asked as I finished my tea and bit into the delicious fudge brownie. I noticed a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"What?" I asked, as I self-consciously brushed imaginary crumbs off my face.

"Nothing, it's just nice to see a woman enjoy her food."

I took another bite of brownie. "I guess I was hungrier than I thought."

"I guess you were. Anyway, the boat was reported stolen the day before, on the third. We've got it impounded. Can I trust you with something? I need you to keep this between us," he said.

"Of course." I leaned forward.

"Not even your husband can know." His voice was so low I had to lean in even farther to hear him. He smelled of almonds and cloves, delicious. "I'm not supposed to be discussing this with anyone who's not involved with the investigation."

"Gotcha."

“We think whoever did this waited for dark on the boat. He then mingled in the crowd looking for Sally.”

“Or Veronica,” I added.

“Right, and by that time, most everyone was pretty drunk, which he was counting on. He took her back into the dunes where the boat was moored and killed her. There are traces of blood in the boat that we’re testing, that’s something the paper doesn’t know. Also—” He paused as if weighing whether he could trust me with the information. For some reason, he seemed to feel he could. “We do believe there’s a connection between Sally Shaw and Diane Seabring’s murder.”

“You do? So you *don’t* think he meant to go after Veronica? I’m telling you, he is.”

“Well, that’s where it gets a little fuzzy. I believe he’s after Veronica Arthur, as you said. You see, we found out that Paul Sumner purchased tickets and got VIP passes to the Arthur’s Graile concert. Word around is that he’s a major fan of the band and never missed a concert. Your friend may be the ultimate target, but he’s playing with her for now.”

“You mean Ronnie? I had no idea about Paul being *that* big a fan of the Arthurs. As I said, I only recently got to know Sally. She told Marisa and me about the tickets for the concert. She said Paul left them in her mailbox. I didn’t know they were VIP. I think she said she went with her brother.” I kicked off my shoes and leaned back in the chair, resting my feet on the opposing seat. I accidentally brushed my leg up against the detective. There was that spark again.

“Oops, sorry—as for the Arthurs, they’re pretty secretive about what’s going on. Ronnie just said an overzealous, angry fan was causing trouble and that’s why they moved. But you know about that. Maybe Paul is the fan. Were you able to find the murder weapon? Or trace any of the threatening mail to him?”

“No. The weapon’s most likely out to sea,” he said, finishing his lunch and his tea. I sensed he didn’t want to tip his hand too much. “How’d you know about the mail?”

"I heard Ronnie talking about it. She's really upset. Don't be too hard on her. She's been through so—"

"I know, don't worry. I don't really expect that everyone I ask not to discuss things with is actually going to listen to me. I mean, I really shouldn't be divulging this information to you, either. I have a feeling, though, that I can trust you."

"Mum's the word." I playfully winked at him. "You really think Paul is the one?"

"That's what I'm thinking. For now. It seems likely. Paul was an obsessed fan, saw Sally because of the resemblance between her and Veronica, and perhaps lost it in a psychotic break."

"But why Diane?"

"I think that was a mistake. He was more than likely after Veronica. According to her, she should've been holding the sword that night."

"That certainly makes sense."

"Can I ask you something?" He sat back and relaxed as well. It was strangely pleasing to know he felt so comfortable around me. Karma at play?

"Sure." I smiled, grabbing the wrappers off the table and tossing them into the nearby trashcan.

"How do you do—what it is you do? This psychic vision thing? I used to see my deceased maternal grandmother when I was a boy. A fiery tempered Irishwoman named Maggie. I haven't been able to see her since I was about nine."

"Really? That's great. I mean, that you were able to see her. Actually, for me, it just sort of happens. Especially if I'm in a meditative state. I think sitting and rocking on the swing that night put me in a trance and the images just came. I know Sally was raped, and that's not in the papers, either. Sometimes if I'm with a person I can feel their thoughts and emotions, and other times I pick up on those who have passed over who were close to the person." I got a strong feeling this was all leading to something. Sean didn't ask questions for the sake of hearing his own voice.

“Yes, she was raped. How’d you know?”

“It’s like it happened to me, Detective. I was seeing it and feeling it. It was horrifying.” I shivered, remembering the awful night it happened and the residue that lingered on my psyche.

“I went to a couple of psychics after Rita died. I wasn’t too impressed with any of them. Do you pick up on her?” he blurted.

I knew that was part of the reason he came by. “Matter of fact, I do. She’s around you a lot. She loves you very much. She wants you to be happy, though. Why did you stop dating...Donna? She wants to know.” I could see I surprised the detective as he physically teetered when he heard the name mentioned.

He was once again nearly speechless. “I...uh...I just didn’t have those feelings for her.”

“She says you must stop comparing everyone to her. She’s laughing—saying she’s one of a kind, remember?”

“Oh my God, I use to tell her that all the time.” He wistfully sighed. His handsome face became wrought with anguish. He rubbed his temples.

“You’ll find love again, don’t let it get away. She wants you to be happy—more than anything.” I nodded to him, touching his strong hands lightly as they rested before him.

“Wow, you’re something else, Mrs. Kane.”

“Listen to her. You do seem to carry around a lot of sorrow. She wants you to find happiness, let it outweigh the sadness. You deserve it. She says you’re a good and decent man and you’ve mourned her long enough.” I went to my basket and pulled out a piece of rose quartz.

“I’ll try,” he agreed. “She’ll be a tough act to follow.”

“That’s all you can do is try,” I said, patting his hands after I placed the quartz in them. “It’ll help you heal. Keep it in your pocket.”

He nodded, stared at the pretty pink stone then placed it in his jacket. “Thanks. I better get back to work. I enjoyed our lunch, and thank you for those words from Rita. That really means a lot to me.”

"You're welcome. Next time, lunch is on me." I walked him to the front door.

"What was that all about?" Marisa asked as she cleaned her plate of salad off the counter.

"Lunch—and a man missing his wife."

* * *

"I love the simple daily running of the shop, but the universe has other plans for me. With the article in the paper boasting how I helped the police locate Sally's body, more and more people are coming in for readings. Please, Danny. I need your help," I asked my eldest for his assistance. It was more like begging.

The phone at the store rang constantly, and I was booked all week for readings. I pleaded with Daniel to come in to work to help Marisa out as my career as psychic/medium took off. As always, my angel was there for me.

At least I was free from the ghastly visions, for now, anyway. Although my dreams were still plagued by scenes straight from *The Mummy*.

"Our calendar is full, with no openings in our healing circles until early October," Marisa informed me as I waited for my next client to arrive. "My daughter's coming in later today I've got a few last minute massages booked this afternoon," she continued.

Marisa's clientele finally took off. Word of mouth reigned supreme and those who required her services found her. People were coming in from the tri-state area to have us locate missing loved ones. We dropped everything to oblige, and no fee was ever charged.

Happily, we were successful more often than not, but as always, there was the downside. It was profoundly draining those times the results ended with heartache and tears. Then there were times we just hit a brick wall and couldn't help at all, except with a shoulder to cry on, an ear to listen and the card of a local therapist.

“Okay—you convinced me to go back into practice,” Ivy announced later that afternoon. She always kept up-to-date with her license and now the need for her assistance was overwhelming. “I’ll take the office upstairs under one condition and that is that I pay rent. Whatever you would normally charge any other person.”

Marisa and I came up with seventy-five dollars a week, for at least two days a week. She had the option of using it as many days as she needed. Of course, we didn’t intend to take any money, but Ivy insisted and made it clear that she meant it when she handed us her first few weeks’ rent.

“This is wonderful, Ivy. When folks come in for news of their dearly departed or cheating spouse, I often suggest they see a therapist to talk things over. Now, I can send them to you.” I beamed. Things were finally settling back to normal.

* * *

“Will you be home for dinner?” was the question *du jour*.

“I’ll grab a bite out, I have to meet with Al tonight and go over the contract,” Jon announced as he grabbed a cup of coffee to go. He and I were like ships passing in the night lately. With a proposal of a huge job looming before him, Jon was busy with the accountants and attorneys trying to crunch numbers to make the deal a reality.

Harbor Realty had a client that offered a large parcel of land to Kane Construction for development, and Jon wanted to purchase it. Allowing many years of work, it was simply a sound financial move all around. With that acquisition, he could finally offer our son, Steven, steady work, perhaps even take him on as a partner. Jon depended on Steven more and more and that gave our son a renewed sense of pride, working side by side with his dad.

“Why don’t you have Al meet you here?” I asked. “At least we could have dinner and then you could do your thing.” I fixed myself a bowl of instant oatmeal.

“He’s squeezing me in. I have to meet him at his firm’s office.” Jon gave me a peck on the cheek and was out the door. I stood there trying to recall the last night we’d had dinner together. I couldn’t.

Chapter Sixteen

Kyanite is a stone of channeling, altered states, vivid dreams, dream recall and visualizations. It gives protection during these states. It brings loyalty, honesty and tranquility and diminishes anger and confusion. Kyanite does not retain negative energy and never needs energetic cleansing. It does align and balance all chakras, often very suddenly. Kyanite can remove energy blockages. Blue kyanite is associated with the throat chakra and heightens meditation. Black kyanite also enhances meditation, and is linked with the root chakra. Black kyanite is also incredibly protective and deflects negativity. ~ From Angelica Kane's Book of Shadows

"I'm so glad the boys went to soccer camp this year," Marisa whispered, as if we'd be labeled truly wretched mothers if we admitted such a horrendous thought.

"Knowing that Jake's occupied for a few weeks and with his best friend is a massive responsibility taken off my shoulders. I'm glad we added those extra two weeks, too. They're having so much fun. Do you realize we've been working more hours now than when we first opened the shop a year ago?" I quizzed my friend.

"Believe me, I know. Hey—any more visions lately?"

"No more visions to plague me during my waking hours, and fewer nightmares, but somehow I feel like there's that shoe waiting to be dropped. The calm before—you know, Risa?"

"I hear ya. We're due for another protection ritual. We should do something at Lammas." She looked over at me pensively. "I have to say something to you and don't get mad."

I eyed her suspiciously. "Okay."

"You've become incredibly sensitive these last few weeks. Particularly after I did that other reading for you and more swords showed up, King of Swords, Five of Swords and Princess of Cups. I know it's very disconcerting, but you don't want to manifest the negative."

"Now why would I get mad? By the way, thanks for reminding me of the swords, Risa."

"What are friends for?"

"Did I tell you, Ouida consulted the *loa*, and their message was one of caution, too. A dark force is trying to penetrate my space. No kidding. King of Swords, perhaps? As if I didn't know. But it was also a bit confusing, there's a great love mentioned as well. Strong karmic ties to two men. Maybe they're the King of Cups and King of Wands from the earlier reading. Anyway, I'm performing rituals to reinforce my perimeter shield around my home and truck with amulets and charms. The store has been salted and smudged every day, and with the updated security system at home and at the shop, I don't know what more to do," I complained.

"You're babbling. Go home, Angie. Ivy will be here soon and you could use some time just relaxing. Go play in your garden," Marisa advised.

"I'd love to, I love the time I spend in my gardens. It's too small, though, for a vegetable patch. Maybe I'll widen it and intersperse my herbs between the tomatoes."

"Sounds like a plan, baby cakes."

"I may take you up on it, Risa. You mean it?"

"Yup. Go ahead. If I need you I'll call you on your cell."

I was getting ready to leave when Ivy walked in the store. Her face was as red as her aura. She threw down her bag, stopping as soon as she spotted me in the back room.

“Oh, hi—I thought you’d left already. Marisa said you could use an afternoon off. That’s why I’m here.”

“Actually, I want to meet with Ouida and do a regression.”

Ivy nervously nodded her head. “Good—good idea.”

“Ivy, what’s wrong?” Marisa and I asked simultaneously.

“Nothing, really. I’m just flustered because—uh—I got caught in traffic.”

“I thought you were meeting a friend for lunch at La Luna’s Bistro. That’s down the street,” Marisa said.

Ivy gave her a stern look.

“What’s up, Ivy? Spill it,” I prodded her.

“Oh, it’s probably nothing—”

“Gods, Ivy, what?”

Ivy paced back and forth. “I did meet my friend for lunch, and while I was there...I saw... Jon was there.”

“Yeah?” My face drained of color. I knew what was coming.

“He was having lunch—with...a woman.”

Marisa jumped to Jon’s defense. “So what, Ivy, it was probably a business lunch.”

Ivy nodded, not very convincingly. “Yes, you’re probably right, Marisa.”

“Spill it, Ivy, what’s the rest?”

“Angelica, talk to him, because I don’t want to cause you anymore worries than you have already.”

“Ivy!” I yelled, exasperated at her dodging the question.

Ivy flailed her hands in the air. “The woman was overly...friendly. She was flirting. It was obvious. I know what you’re going to ask and no, I don’t know who she is, I only saw her from the back.”

“How was Jon acting?” I asked.

“She was very touchy-feely, he was smiling, but I didn’t see him touch her, much.”

“What do you mean *much*?”

“Damn... Angie, go home and talk to him,” Ivy pleaded.

“Ivy, what do you mean by, he didn’t touch her *much*?”

“You know your husband, when he talks to people he may touch their arm or hand. Things like that.”

“I know he’s got a big deal going on. Rich told me. I bet it has to do with that,” Marisa said.

“Yeah, I bet that’s it,” Ivy added.

“It better be,” I said as headed for the door. “But he won’t be home until later, so I can’t talk to him now.”

Ivy poured herself some iced tea. “What are your plans for this afternoon?”

“I’m still planning to go and see Ouida. I need answers and maybe a regression will have a few.”

“Be careful,” Marisa warned.

* * *

“Count back with me slowly and imagine that you are walking down into a crystal cave. Five...four, you’re almost at the bottom. Three...two, look around and notice where you are. One. You are there.”

“She must die. She has disgraced the Temple of Isis. She will not inform us who her lover is. Take her to the desert.” The voice that condemned me to death was my father’s. In this lifetime, he was reborn as my cousin, Vinny.

I looked over at the guards that stood by my father’s side. Khaldun was missing.

“Badru, where is your brother, Khaldun?” my father asked.

“He is not well, my king.” The other warriors were big, strapping men, but their souls identified them as Diane and Sally. Badru was Veronica Arthur.

Tears began to fall from my eyes as the feelings along with the memories washed over me.

"Can you tell me what's happening, Angie?" Ouida asked.

I informed her of the other people and who they were in this life.

"I'm in the desert, I'm the daughter of nobility and my father has just sentenced me to death. The warriors or guards of my father are making sure the sentence is carried out."

"Who in this..."

"Vinny." I knew the question she was about to ask.

"Go get him. He has an errand that can only be entrusted to him."

Abandoned in the palace of my birth with only the guards of my father, I waited. Khaldun would save me.

"Go forward in time, Angelica. Go to the next important event in your life."

We left the city, the only home I'd ever known, and headed away from the rich palace to the desolate sands of the Sahara. For a long while we rode until finally Khaldun stopped and took me off his horse

He spoke not a word to me and with tears in his eyes he carried me out to the desert. I tried talking to him, but it was as if he could not hear my pleas.

"Why won't you talk to me?" I asked. "Why have you stopped? We can run away together now, my love."

The man called Khaldun looked back at me. Tears streaked his dusty face. His eyes carried the pain of what he was about to do. He was the handsomest man I'd ever seen.

"Jamila, I must leave. I have disgraced my family and the Goddess. I cannot continue. Badru informed me if I do not return, your father will kill everyone I love. Including my brother."

A knot formed in my throat. I couldn't speak and could not believe what I was hearing.

"B-but you love me."

"More than anything, but I cannot live with the disgrace."

I began to sob.

“What is it Angie? Who is this man in your life today?”

I could not speak as I watched the man I loved ride off, leaving me to die in the desert. My throat was raw from calling out to him as he slowly disappeared from view.

“Angie, I want you to view the rest of this life from outside of your body. The emotions that are tied into this incarnation have no effect on you now.”

“I’m dying. I haven’t had anything to drink in a long time. I can’t tell you exactly how long, but it seems like a day or two has passed. I see myself watching the star-streaked sky at night. It’s absolutely breathtaking.” The tears subsided as I continued to observe this life and impending death.

“Wait—I am being lifted out of the sun and I feel moisture on my lips. Someone is bringing me to a local encampment. I’m brought to a tent and fed water. Oh, my Goddess!”

“What is it?”

“His face, it’s changing from an older man to—Detective Bennette. He saved my life.”

“Do you recognize anyone else?”

“Jon, he’s the brother of Hamadi, the man who saves me.”

“Angelica, who’s Khaldun?”

“He is riding back into the desert, looking for me. Khaldun. He couldn’t live with himself and he’s searching for me, only I’m far away now. He thinks I’m dead and that he’s killed me. They lied to him. Badru and the others. My father wasn’t going to have me killed, he had to make it seem as if I would die in the desert. Badru was supposed to tell Khaldun to take me to my mother’s sister. He wasn’t supposed to leave me in the desert. Oh Gods, they betrayed us all.”

“Who is he? Angelica, who is Khaldun?”

Engulfed in the visions, I could barely hear her. “Badru told Khaldun that he and I were lovers. He lied again. Khaldun’s performing some sort

of ritual in the desert. It's night, under the full moon. He's praying to Isis. Ouida, he's asking Isis to harden his heart and to never be able to love again. He's asking Seth, the god of chaos, to keep love from him and to Osiris to bring death to him." The emotions were too much and even though Ouida instructed me to feel nothing, the love was strong and it overpowered me.

"I see Hamadi and I live a long and happy life. We have many children together. We love each other a great deal. But the memory of Khaldun haunts me."

"Who is Khaldun?"

"I can't get a name."

"Try," she insisted.

"He's the killer. Khaldun is the killer. Great Goddess, he's the one the police are after. He killed Diane and Sally."

Chapter Seventeen

Smoky quartz ~ The energies of this crystal are more understated than those of clear quartz, so its power is more gradual. Smoky quartz can neutralize negative energies, but its slow-working nature makes it more suited for situations where caution is called for or where slow changes are desired. Smoky quartz is a good crystal for gazing. Meditations using this crystal as a focal point can lead to "hidden" secrets being exposed. It helps one in meditation by clearing worries and emotional blockages. It is a grounding and protective stone. ~ From an article by Angelica Kane in an upcoming newsletter.

The next day as I dusted the bookshelves in the shop, Marisa asked, "So, how did things go with Jon?"

"He said it was a meeting concerning the purchase through Harbor Realty and that this woman's husband was supposed to attend the meeting, but canceled at the last minute."

"I asked Rich, that's what he said, too. Do you believe him?"

"I don't know. Ever since that affair, I find it hard to totally trust him. I can't help it."

"That's a tough one to recover from, baby cakes. It's totally understandable. But why not give him the benefit of the doubt, just this time?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"You always have a choice. You either believe him or not. Why not talk it over with Ivy?"

"I guess." The bells chimed, signaling that a customer had entered the store, ending our talk for the moment.

Detective Bennette clumsily made his way through the maze of shelves and display racks inside the shop. "Mrs. Kane, I was wondering if I could have a moment of your time."

"Sure, Detective, what can I help you with?" I said, trying to find room for the corn dollies that Ouida had made, without much success. Infused with magick, corn dollies promised to enhance the energies of good fortune. Lammas was only a day away and the first batch she made had sold out quickly. People were still requesting them, buying two and three at a time. Finally, I plopped them in an empty wicker basket and placed them next to the register.

The store was hectic this afternoon. I led him to the kitchen area where we would be undisturbed. He sat down and rubbed at his temples, a nervous habit of his I'd come to recognize. My silver bracelets jangled as I poured us some refreshing lavender and rosemary lemonade. In the center of the table, cradled in a ceramic sunflower sunburst dish, were Marisa's recently baked confections, Lavender Madelines. They were perfection in a cookie. I nudged the plate toward him and thought of the regression the day before.

"Mrs. Kane—" He took a cookie.

"Please call me Angelica." I straightened my off-the-shoulder dress. I'd sprinkled some fairy dust on my décolletagé, and I sparkled.

"Okay, but if I do that, you'll have to call me Sean, deal?" He smiled and those dimples begged to be pinched. I refrained.

"Deal." I sipped my drink, trying to size Sean up. Whatever brought him here wasn't good, that much I knew. In spite of the circumstances, he was very easy to be around. I got the feeling you sometimes get when you meet a stranger and right away you either like them or don't, for no apparent reason. This was the former. Now I knew why.

He took a deep breath. "I was wondering." He paused as if deciding whether to go on or run for it. He went for it. "We've got a case I'm working, a lost child, little girl. We hit a brick wall. Would you mind

giving this assignment a once over? I don't know exactly what you'd need, but...we're really stumped." He ran his hands through his hair, another nervous habit.

"Of course I'd be happy to help." I sipped my lemonade and grabbed a cookie. "I've recently worked with the FBI on another missing child. Happily, we found him alive."

"Interesting. I guess a federal law was broken?"

"He was taken across state lines."

"Would you be able to come with me, to the apartment, where the little girl lives?" he asked.

"Sure thing—now?" My voice gave away my shock.

He shyly nodded. "If you're not too busy, I'd really appreciate it. I'll buy you lunch."

How could I say no to the man who'd saved my life, albeit lifetimes ago? I felt I owed him. "Let me just tell my partner," I answered, putting the lemonade back into the refrigerator while handing him a cookie. Ivy was at the shop today, and I suspected between her and Marisa, they'd be all right.

It was a lovely late July afternoon. We drove in silence to Maplewood Grove, where the little girl lived. I asked Sean not to tell me anything about Sara's life other than her name and birth date.

After a thirty-minute ride, we arrived a little past the noontime hour. The apartment complex was welcoming, with maple and sycamore trees lining the pathways and impatiens adding splashes of color, drawing the eye from one area to another.

Sara lived in the building labeled D, on the first floor. Sean entered first to talk to the mother. Then he brought me in. I have to admit, I must've shocked the woman. That particular day I'd decided to wear a long, flowing, off-the-shoulder gauze dress, all in black. In addition, I had an armful of silver bracelets and as always, my pentacle. Huge gypsy-style earrings suspended from each lobe, occasionally going astray amidst the blonde curls that fell to my waist. I looked very—artsy.

I asked Sean to inform the mother to keep silent until I was through.

Those odd sensations ruptured through the astral plane as soon as I stepped across the threshold. Thankfully, I'd brought a bottle of Kabala water, shoved into my already bursting moon and stars handbag.

I looked around the homey apartment and focused in on the girl. I saw a photo of her and kept that image in my mind.

But, like pages torn out of a book, other images began to flood my psychic screen.

Broken glass.

A mermaid.

Blood and a knife.

Screams filled my head and the thrumming of drums beating out a rhythm inside my skull began at breakneck speed. Images of fists flying, tables knocked over, dirt all over and a message in blood.

The scene played over.

Blood and a knife.

I listened for a voice, for any message that might come through, but there was something more ominous. Silence.

Like a fun house mirror at the carnival, the images sporadically flashed by. There were people, a male and a female, but their forms were so distorted I couldn't make out anything other than their gender.

And blood and a knife.

Once more I forced the picture of little Sara into my mind, and again, as before, she was ripped out. All that remained were shattered pieces of glass and blood, along with the knife.

Holding onto the photo of Sara, I looked at her mom and my eyes began to sting. I walked out onto their terrace and took some deep breaths and a few gulps of water.

I took in my surroundings. The images refused to evaporate into the ethers where they belonged. Breathing deeply, I brushed the tears from my eyes. What could be said to this woman? There were no words of comfort to offer.

Closing my eyes and saying a silent prayer to the Goddess for some guidance, I headed back inside. Sara's mom started to get exceedingly distressed. All I could hear in my mind was the phrase, *come back*, and the wailing of a woman whose heart shattered and cleaved out from her very being.

My brain scrambled for the words that would sound convincing enough to ease this poor woman's torture. There were none. I couldn't bear to even think how I would feel if I were in her place. Finally, I could not put off what I must do.

"I—I wish I could've helped you. I'm just not getting anything," I professed.

"Nothing?" Sean asked. His eyes pleaded, asking questions his lips refused to utter.

"It happens sometimes. I could try again if you'd like, another time, perhaps?"

Then it came, the tears and frantic pleading of a mother desperately trying to get to her child. "You're that woman from TV, I know you can help me, please—are you certain you didn't see anything? I went to another psychic and she said my baby's alive. Are you positive? Absolutely certain?" She wept. "Please try again. I'll pay you any amount of money."

"I don't want any money. I'm sorry." I was going to lose control if I stayed any longer. My composure was falling apart. The emotional frequency in the room was too turbulent and it pounded at me. "I am truly sorry. I *will* come back if you like, just let the detective know."

Walking out and down the paved walkway, I burst into tears. My heart broke into a myriad of tiny pieces for that poor woman.

Sean was right behind me. He put his hand on my shoulder as I continued to sob. He gently pushed my hair back, off my bare shoulder. I reached into my bag and pulled out a tissue. My body was shaking and I couldn't stop crying. He awkwardly took me in his arms and held me for a moment, trying to calm me down. Whether he knew it or not, he was

an immediate ground for me. I sighed heavily, releasing the pent-up emotions as I leaned into his capable shoulder.

Finally, he spoke. "What happened in there?" Rubbing my arms and wiping my tears away, he continued to hold me.

Shaking my head, I raised my hand to signal him to give me a moment. My throat was still choked up. I took in a few more deep breaths.

"When you first went in there, the apartment, was there anything out of place?" I asked, wiping my nose.

"No, not at all, just as you see it, that's how it was," he answered.

"Then what I saw had nothing to do with the little girl," I said desolately.

He waited before asking the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. "What exactly did you see?" he asked, looking into my eyes.

"You don't want to know," I moaned, and we made our way back to his car.

"Yeah, well...tell me anyway." He smiled and patted my back.

I took in another deep breath, letting it slowly out before I went into the details of what I'd witnessed in that living room. "There was broken glass and mirror all over, and dirt and blood. The room was a mess and something was written in blood. There was also a knife."

"Do you think it could have anything to do with the mom?" he asked, rubbing at his temples again.

"I wish I knew. I saw two people, but they were so disjointed I couldn't make out anything other than just that. A man and a woman. They were yelling, but I didn't actually hear what they were saying." Frustration coated my every word. "Something about this is familiar. Like I've seen it before."

We got into his car and sat in the parking lot, both feeling worn out and tired. He asked, "Did you feel if the kid's all right?"

"I got nothing. I'm sorry. Every time I tried to focus on Sara, I got these other images. I really don't know what it could mean. I don't suppose you could post an officer outside her apartment?" I asked.

"We had her phone monitored in case there was a ransom demand, but that didn't last long."

I nodded. "Any news on Sally's case?"

"No." He smiled. "It's not like television where DNA tests come back during a commercial break. No other leads and no one's been ruled out. It takes time. We're still working on it. Her family's making sure of that. We were able to obtain some DNA samples from Cliff Kendle's apartment and we're still trying to locate Paul Sumner."

"What about Joe, the Jehovah?"

Turning the ignition key, he said, "He was supposed to come down and give a sample of his DNA. He said he'd be down this week to do it."

"I see, well that's good news. What about Diane's case?"

"You ask a lot of questions, Mrs. Kane," he said, staring at me. I wondered if I was becoming a pest.

"Angie, remember?" I looked out the window and back at him. He was still staring. "What? Do I have something on my face? My make-up's probably run all over, down my cheeks, I look like a raccoon, right?" I wiped at my face.

"Angie... Right. Thanks for trying, anyway, and no, you don't have anything on your skin that doesn't belong there. You just seem...familiar to me is all. It's strange, well...strange for me. Maybe it's not at all odd for you. And you're—never mind." He sighed as he drove out of the development.

"Strange, how?"

"Like, I feel as if... It's weird. Like I've known you longer than I actually have. I've only had that feeling two other times in my life. I guess you get it all the time." He avoided my gaze, keeping his eyes on the road.

"No, but I know what you mean." I secretly smiled. "I've had it happen—sometimes the opposite way. You meet someone and you don't like them, for no apparent reason."

"I hope you don't feel that way about me." He laughed.

"No, I don't, detective."

"Sean." He teased me now.

"Can I ask you something, Sean?"

"Of course, what is it?"

I was going to ask if he believed in reincarnation, but changed my mind. "Have you had any reports of any strange findings in parks—or any people complaining about weird behaviors of their neighbors?"

"Weird how?" he asked.

"Like people getting naked and having sexual intercourse," I said timidly.

"Angie, that happens all the time. *Especially* in the summer."

I thought I noticed him blush. Must be his southern upbringing.

"With candles and an altar?" I asked, looking shyly at him.

"I don't recall anything recently," he thought aloud, rubbing his chin.

I sighed. "Okay, well, don't be surprised if you do."

"What's going on? You want to fill me in?"

"It's just that I've had some strange...premonitions. They involve sexual behavior. Ritualistic behavior. Like someone's trying to raise a lot of power and using sex to do it."

"By premonition you mean, vision?"

"Yes. I—uh—I also almost interrupted a couple at the park the other night. I went for a walk to clear my head and...they were performing a sacred ritual."

"A sexual ritual?"

I avoided his gaze. "Yeah."

He was silent for a minute, no doubt weighing his next question. "Is that what witches usually do?"

“No, not all, though some do. When it’s done between consenting adults and with the utmost respect, it’s a sacred act,” I told him. I could tell, though, he wasn’t quite sure how to take this bit of knowledge.

“I’ll keep my eyes open.”

We sat in silence the rest of the way back to Sacred Treasures. I wasn’t sure I was ready to pursue the conversation. I had a strong sense of where it would lead. Did I want to share my most intimate experiences with the detective at this point? I could sense he wanted to know whether I practiced that type of ritual. But once again his southern manners prevented him from asking, and I was grateful.

Chapter Eighteen

Peridot's energies are motivating in the physical sense while also being tranquil in the spiritual sense. This combination tends to invigorate and balance the physical and spiritual facets of your life. This stone's energies will purify and stimulate the solar plexus and heart chakras. This can bring an honesty and acceptance to your relationships and matters of the heart. Peridot is a prophetic crystal and can help you find an understanding of the purpose of existence. Peridot's energies are in tune with the elevated, spiritual forces. It can help bring an acceptance of the ordinary progression of events in your life, and help you to discover spiritual truths. ~ From Marisa Arrucci's Gem Power Workshop.

The aroma was mouth-watering. Breads were baking in the oven, from corn to honey whole wheat with raisins, to pumpernickel. I meticulously formed the straw that would enfold my homemade broom bread. Amber lent a hand, making the job less daunting.

Lammas was here and we were celebrating at Marisa's home. After an hour of piecing together my broom loaf, I put it in the oven to bake.

It was a hot and muggy August first, and my hair announced that. Curls all over in every direction sprang from my head. I showered and dressed in a light, turquoise Indian-style dress, richly embossed in shades of green, silver and violet. I decided not to fight Mother Nature and allowed my white-blonde hair, bleached from the sun, to dry of its own accord. After taking the breads out of the oven, I packed them up to transport to Marisa's home.

"Mmm, that smells great. I'll meet you over there," Jon said, as he picked at a slice of freshly baked pound cake.

“You’re not coming with me now?”

“Ange, I have to meet with the realtors, we need to go over some fine print.”

“Is that woman going to be there?”

“Yes, and her husband. I just got off the phone with him. Don’t worry. It’s only business,” Jon reassured me.

“Don’t be too late,” I called out to him, as he breezed out the door.

* * *

Marisa was busy sautéing newly-picked tomatoes and basil for a pasta dish after the ceremony when I walked through her door. I helped myself to a glass of Pinot Grigio mixed with seltzer. It wasn’t a good practice to mix alcohol with ritual work, but we weren’t planning anything too vital for the night’s magickal conjuring.

“What’s wrong? Where’s Jon?”

“He has a meeting with that woman again,” I complained.

Ivy bustled in. She, of course, was in charge of dessert, which tonight was a creamy caramel flan. “What woman? Oh, Angie—I found out something you’re probably going to be interested in,” she said as she placed the dessert in Marisa’s refrigerator.

I whined, “I’m not sure if I do want to know.”

“Trust me, you do. The couple that owns Harbor Realty, the DeVries, the husband is a real player. Word is, he’s sleeping around with one of the teller’s at the bank and some married woman from Rivers End.”

“Does the wife know?” I asked.

“I don’t think so. I think they’re trying to have a baby. That’s what Claire told me. Seems Mrs. DeVries gets her hair done at the same salon as I do, and Claire loves to gossip while she’s cutting.”

Ouida was the next to arrive with a basket full of amulets for prosperity. Heena had Nandan purchase Lakshmi statues from New Delhi, one for each of us.

Kara couldn't make it and Ronnie, who was still in town, was invited to take her place. She brought Marisa a lovely St. Brigit's cross that she had bartered for in Ireland on a previous trip there. I laughed when she first told me she got it for a song, but she was serious. Marc and Veronica had decided that the best thing for them was to return to their gypsy life, traveling in Europe and continue with their music. The Arthurs' dedication to their fans was paramount and although the police thought they should postpone touring, Marc and Ronnie felt like prisoners in their own home. The threatening mail had ceased and lulled everyone into a false sense of tranquility.

Even my dreams were back to normal. Now that I was aware of the past life connections, my psyche eased back into normalcy. Normal for me, anyway.

Ronnie's beaten spirit had seemed to be on the mend, but still I picked up some dark patches in her aura. I recommended some healing work before she departed for Europe. She normally refrained from outwardly wearing anything that would point to her pagan beliefs, but tonight she wore a beautiful diamond triskele, representing the Maiden, Mother and Crone. It was a recent birthday present from Marc and we planned on blessing it in tonight's ceremony.

Marisa, being High Priestess tonight, called all the shots and chose an early ritual so we could party after. With the sauce simmering, the salad soaking in ice water and the breads done, we began.

We created the sacred space in the seclusion of her backyard, invited the four quarters, and then our fire-haired priestess chanted the invocation. Marisa called to the Corn Mother. She requested her blessing for Ronnie's stunning, jeweled talisman and for the rest of us as well.

The fire pit was roaring as we danced our way around, circling faster and faster, building the energy. We asked the Goddess Maat for justice to be swift in the capture of Sally and Diane's killers, and that their passage to the Summerland be a peaceful one.

We were a vivid menagerie of lovely women, Sisters of the Sea, dancing around the bonfire. Marisa was in shades of sunny yellow, Ivy

wore luscious creams, Ouida donned a shimmering gold sari, Heena was draped in spicy ginger, Ronnie's ensemble included a rich coffee-color skirt with a gold and brown bodice, and I chose to wear a turquoise blue. All tanned and kissed by the sun, we were ready to enjoy the earth's bounty. The first harvest.

Marisa gave the cue and we released the energy up into the sky for a continued plentiful harvest, in every way.

"Ho!" she called out as we flung our arms skyward, amused and delighted with the freedom we felt.

We expressed gratitude to the four directions and closed the circle.

"Let's go inside where it's cooler!" Marisa ordered, leading the way.

Once inside, we poured ourselves glasses of chilled white wine sangria, saturated with fresh peaches, strawberries, oranges, lemons and limes. Sitting around the festive table, we were ready to chow down.

"Ma—I'm home!" Andrea announced as she bounded into the kitchen, full of spunk and energy.

I called out teasingly "Hey, why don't you join us old ladies, Andy?" Glancing at my watch, I wondered where Jon was. "Come and sit with us."

"I think I will, Aunt Angie, I'm starving. I haven't eaten all day. Hiya, everyone."

With all the pleasantries taken care of, I patted the seat next to me for Andy to sit in. "Ronnie, you've gotta hear Andy sing sometime," I said proudly.

"Oh, Aunt Angie, cut it out." Andrea gawked, embarrassed, turning pink at the thought.

She was the only one who still called me aunt.

Marisa gloated, and rightfully so. "Yes, Andy—you should. You have a magnificent voice."

I egged her on. "At Christmastime, when I heard Andy singing carols while putting up their tree, I was amazed."

Ronnie coaxed the young woman. "Now I have to hear you. Come on, I'll sing with you," she said.

"What songs do you know?" Andy asked.

Marisa reminded her daughter, who sat at the table. Ronnie had wanted to join us more often, but her schedule was usually too hectic. "Andy, this is Veronica Arthur, you know that CD I've always got playing in the car?"

"And my neighbor," Heena added.

Andy's eyes widened. "Yes, you're on the cover of the CD. Holy shit! I mean, w-wow, nice to meet you," she stuttered, wiping her mouth of pumpernickel crumbs. "She moved next to you, Heena?"

Ronnie laughed at the innocence that radiated from Andrea.

Heena lifted her water glass. "A few doors down."

"How about a Stevie Nicks song?" Ouida requested.

Ivy seconded the idea.

"Of course!" They picked a song and Ronnie gave her the signal to start. Both sang together in perfect harmony. It was amazing. We sat with our mouths open in perfect Os as they continued, verse after verse.

I could see tears of pride welling in Marisa's eyes as they concluded the song, a cappella.

There was silence in the room as Ronnie sat with a grin on her face that went from ear to ear. Then we erupted into applause.

Ronnie was the first to speak. "You have a wonderfully strong voice and great range, Andrea, have you ever thought about singing as a profession? How would you like to come by our house and rehearse with us? See how it goes. Maybe not for this tour, but when we come back and do some gigs locally, who knows?" Ronnie excitedly asked.

This was the first time, in a really, really, long time, that my girlfriend was speechless. So was her daughter.

I spoke up next. "I think that's an excellent idea. They don't live very far, Andy, and it wouldn't hurt. What the hell, right?"

"Damn, yeah!"

"I really think we sound good together. Are you going to be home later? I can call Marc. I'm sure he'd love to hear you as well." Ronnie's excitement was contagious, and she grabbed her cell phone out of her bag.

Andrea sat at the table and we all finally ate some of Marisa's delicious pasta while we projected into the future about Andrea's new career.

Ivy spoke between bites of pasta. "Marisa, you must give me the recipe for this sauce, it's out of this world!"

"It's simple, Ivy. I'll email it to you."

Ouida looked over at Heena. "No wine tonight?"

"No, I've got a bit of a sour stomach lately."

I winked at Heena. "Maybe you're pregnant."

That was all it took to get our beautiful friend to confess that she and her husband were indeed trying to have a baby. The rest of the dinner conversation rotated between babies and singing. Happy talk.

We all helped with the clean up while Marisa made iced cappuccinos for us, then we went out back. The torches lit up the yard and we could see the resident bats flying out as dusk descended, ready to eat their share of mosquitoes.

"If you watch the night skies in August, you'll be treated to a most enjoyable meteor shower," I informed the circle, trying to ignore the sick feeling that took hold in my stomach.

"Every night?" Ivy asked.

I nodded. "Yup—every night in August. I'll be right back—gotta use the ladies room." I went inside and snatched my cell phone. I called Jon's number, but he didn't pick up. I couldn't shake the sickening feeling that surrounded me.

I walked out the back door and saw Ronnie pointing to the sky. "Ohh, I see one—hmmm... This could make some great lyrics for a song..." she thought aloud, as I rejoined my friends.

"When are you leaving to go to Europe?" Ouida inquired.

"In two weeks, we'll be gone until October. With the new album out, we have to go. It's in our contract. With Marc and me trying to get the music heard, we absolutely must be out there. The radio stations won't play it here, it's not commercial, no young, hot chick in a thong singing about angst and rage. It'll be tough without Diane."

Ivy huffed. "The show must go on, huh?"

Ouida smiled. "Ah, the merry minstrel is here."

"Hello everyone," Marc greeted us and kissed his wife. He arrived with his guitar and started strumming out the tunes to the song Ronnie and Andy were to sing.

"I took my love...I took it down..." They began their musical foray.

We all clapped when they were finished. Marc sat there shaking his head, a smile on his face. "You're absolutely correct, my love. She has a wonderful instrument. I think it would be fabulous if she came to the house and we played together, see how she sounds with Karen and Becky. I think it'd be a great match. She has the same range as they do."

Andrea positively glowed. "Excellent! Let me know when and I'll be there," she said, looking ready to burst from the extraordinary news.

"Great, come by tomorrow at eleven?" Ronnie added. Her aura turned three shades of blue.

"Cool!" Andrea agreed.

Soon, we were having our own private concert, featuring Andrea Arrucci.

Again, Marisa was without words. She sat next to me, forgot about the coffee and went straight to shots of Bailey's and Kahlua.

"Ange, what's wrong?"

"Jon's not answering his phone and something doesn't feel right, I can't explain it. He shouldn't be taking this long."

"Maybe they got held up—can't agree on certain wording of the contract."

"That's why we have lawyers, Risa."

In spite of the cooling breezes, I felt warm. The familiar tickle that had vanished for a few weeks returned. I walked down to the water's edge and sat staring at the stars. This could only mean my friend of the sexual rituals was at it again, and I plugged into him.

What surprised me was that as I closed my eyes to try to focus on the sender of these energies, I saw Jon's face before me. I felt like someone had punched me in the stomach.

Taking my cell phone from my pocket, I called him again. No answer.

This time when I closed my eyes, I saw the face of Sean Bennette. Handsome and smiling, gorgeous blue eyes that had no business being that spectacular color. If it were at all possible, they were absolutely too blue.

Marisa followed me and threw down a blanket for us to sit on. She handed me another shot along with a plate of dessert.

"What's up, baby cakes? You've got that faraway look in your eyes."

"I'm getting that uncomfortable feeling again, and Jon's face flashed. Something is wrong."

Marisa turned her head to look at me straight in the eyes. "What exactly do you mean? What uncomfortable feeling?"

"I mean—sexual." I was on my way to inebriation. I looked around to make sure no one could hear me. The rest were still sitting with Marc and the others.

Marisa gasped. "Sexual? You can't think Jon's—"

Closing my eyes as tears welled and spilled over, I saw two people, naked. As soon as the vision appeared, it vaporized into the mist of my unconscious.

"Angie, it's the alcohol talking, you're overly sensitive," she said, rubbing me gently on my shoulder.

"I know, Risa, did I tell you, when I did the regression with Ouida, that the man that rescued me in the desert, in this life—"

Marisa finished my sentence. "Is the detective? You're not the only one who can examine the past. I did a tarot spread about the whole situation. I saw the connection there."

"When were you going to tell me?" I took another shot of Bailey's.

She took a bite of dessert. "I just did the spread yesterday."

"Jon hasn't touched me in weeks," I blurted out.

"Oh, honey, why? Is there anything bothering him?" she asked as she put an arm around my shoulders.

I sighed. "I told you something's not right. It's the new job. At least that's what he says. He's consumed with it. So, what am I suppose to do? I live vicariously through visions of a great love who has now become a psychotic killer?"

"What do you want to do? Have an affair?" Marisa scolded as she forced a piece of brownie and ice cream on me. "Eat."

"That's not going to solve the problem," I said as Ronnie, Marc and Andrea began to sing once more.

"Then what will?" she asked quietly.

"Sex," I answered.

"So go home and have sex with your husband."

"Easier said than done," I moaned. "I guarantee I'll be upstairs alone tonight and he'll be on the couch,"

"Speak of the devil," Marisa observed, picking at my brownie and pointing to Jon, who'd just walked out to join us.

"I'll bet you lunch he'll be asleep before any action gets going," I sadly reported as I got up and walked over to my husband. "What took so long?" I asked, looking him over.

"I was inside for a bit, getting a bite to eat."

I held up my cell phone. "I tried calling you."

"Sorry. I left my cell in the truck."

Suddenly I felt awkward. "How'd the meeting go?"

"Good, how'd your ritual go?"

“Good.” I said as we made our way back to the crowd. Before long, we were all laughing and singing, except for Jon. He had his own faraway look in his eyes.

We never did make love that night. Marisa owed me lunch.

Chapter Nineteen

Bloodstone is said to assist the blood and circulatory system. Its subtle energies are supposed to help cleanse toxic blood and detoxify the liver and spleen. It is also said to benefit the heart, reproductive organs, bones and kidneys. The energies of this stone are said to reinforce confidence and be a help in reaching higher levels of consciousness. It is a soothing stone and can help keep one from walking blindly into situations that might be perilous. It is a stone of awareness. ~ From Angelica Kane's article, Blood from a Stone.

He was set to work his magick on the evening of the first harvest. The altar was consecrated, the herbs picked, wine poured and the candles anointed. Wearing his favorite navy cloak with his large silver pentacle, he waited. She wouldn't be able to make it until later, so he took his ritual bath alone. That would have to do.

He languidly massaged his body with High John the Conqueror oil until it gleamed. Every muscle on his taut body rippled, straining beneath his tanned skin. He'd fasted the whole day and meditated, drinking only the water he charged by the full moon. He took his time, meticulously dressing for the special evening, picking out special accessories and his ritual robe.

She had better not be late, he grumbled to himself as he made his way to the designated area. It was an isolated spot deep in the woods of Greenview Park on the outskirts of town.

At the mere thought of her, he felt his desire growing. She looked so much like the one who'd stolen his heart. The night had to be perfect, just as she was.

Tanned and blonde.

Beautiful in a pure way, not whorish.

The stars were always more intense in the wilderness than in the city and they sparkled vividly in the night sky. Pine and oak trees overlooked their ritual space, keeping the tryst secretive and secluded. He walked to the altar and lit the torches and incense, making sure everything was precisely right.

Before he physically saw her, he felt her presence. Next, he caught her scent, vanilla mixed with jasmine. She wrapped her arms around him from behind. "I'm here, my lord."

Slowly turning, he pushed off her black cloak and revealed her nakedness. She, too, glistened with ritual oils. Leaning over her, he kissed her gently. "My lady."

She stood with her back to the altar and he with his back to the south. He slowly kneeled and kissed her feet, knees, womb, breasts and once again her lips. Lifting her onto the altar, he positioned himself between her legs.

"Altar of mysteries, we behold. The sacred circle's secret point, thus do I sign thee as of old, with kisses of my lips anoint." He rubbed her body as he readied himself to enter her. She was more than eager as she lifted herself to meet him. The moon was rising in the evening sky as they performed his version of the Great Rite.

"Here, where Lance and Graile unite, spirits aid me in my plight," he moaned with great pleasure as he entered her. He rocked back and forth, turned his head and stared at his partner. The blonde hair went dark and it was the black-haired beauty looking back, the one who'd haunted his dreams these past few months. The name *Jamila* played over and over in his head.

His consort was lost in the moment and did not hear what he uttered as the name *Jamila* escaped his lips.

As a High Priestess, she knew this would be a bit different. He'd informed her as much, but she had no idea how strange it would be. He

nuzzled his head in the crook of her neck and ground his hips into her, feeling the sweetness of her wrap around him.

Visions bombarded him and he began to lose focus. The Kane woman's face invaded his mind and the memories of their life together hit him with the full force of emotions he'd tried so strongly to repress.

He saw it all, as *Khaldun*, including his trek back into the desert to find her. *His Jamila*. Tears welled in his eyes and he fought to conceal the emotional rollercoaster he found himself riding.

He'd gone too far now. He had to complete the ritual. There was no turning back for him. The faces congealed together as he traveled into altered states. Veronica Arthur's face materialized, slowly transforming into the Kane witch. Obsidian eyes stared back, outlined in kohl; her hair turned to the color of night. He had to control his climax, but the sight of *Jamila* made his body shudder. He feared he would come too soon.

Flashes of light filled his mind's eye. The Kane woman was once more before him. From the deep recesses of his soul, he heard the cry. Jamila is Angelica Kane. He felt he would explode, losing all focus and succumbing to eons of desire.

The woman underneath him now kept her eyes open, watching him as he began to reach his moment of release. He was acting very strangely. Did she see tears streaking down his face?

Hearing the rustling of nocturnal animals in the nearby copses made her anxiety rise. She noted a shift in his position as he seemed to reach for something. A nagging voice kept insisting that she keep her eyes peeled. Immediately, she regretted not heeding the warning from her own coven mates. A moan escaped his lips.

She saw him raise his athame. Watched it glisten in the moonlight.

He couldn't possibly.

"*Jamila!*" he cried out, "forgive me!"

As his arm began to make its downward strike, she slithered out from under him using her legs to kick him off her and onto the ground. He landed with a thud. Grabbing the blanket that covered the altar, she ran barefoot through the woods, praying it was in the direction of her car.

* * *

Snippets of dreams flowed in like waves in the ocean then quickly ebbed out to sea. A desert, strange rituals and, as always, the knife's sparkling blade. I barely remembered Detective Bennette, his caring touch and crystal blue eyes watching protectively, careful that no harm came my way. Veronica was there as well. I was giving myself a migraine trying to make any sort of sense out of it. I finally gave up. Blissful, deep slumber took over like an undertow and I relinquished all efforts of solving the veiled significance of the dream.

All too soon, I woke to my husband's smiling face and a steaming cup of coffee. It was eight in the morning. I was not happy.

"Ah—let me sleep, I only got a few hours..." I moaned, pulling the covers over my head.

"Angie, you've got to get up."

The tone of his voice perked my antennae and I sat up in bed.

"What's wrong? The boys? Are they all right?" I went into Mommy mode automatically.

"The boys are fine—asleep after a long night of partying, but they're home. Detective Bennette is downstairs," he said as his gaze rolled up to the ceiling. He was obviously annoyed at the intrusion.

"I'll be right down. Let me jump in the shower real quick."

I washed the sleep from my bleary eyes and threw on some shorts and a tee shirt that stated, "These Aren't Hot Flashes" on the front and "They're Power Surges" on the back.

The detective was drinking a cup of Jon's fresh Turkish coffee on the back deck.

Pure caffeine in a cup.

I could sense this was not good news. It never seemed to be. "Good morning," I said as I made my way out into the morning sun.

“Good morning, Mrs. Kane. I’m sorry to bother you so early but, as I was telling your husband—” He abruptly was at a loss for words. “Damn, now that I’m here—I hate to always bring you horrible news. You’ve been so generous with your time.”

Jon looked at me with a puzzled expression. I shrugged. “I guess I forgot to tell you.” I sat down across from Sean.

“Forgot to tell me what, Angelica?” Jon asked through clenched teeth.

“It was a missing child. I thought I could help, but I didn’t get anything on the little girl,” I explained, suddenly feeling like a twelve-year old child and resenting the emotion. He was my husband, not my father.

Sean mercifully took over the conversation. “I don’t know how to say it, so I’ll just come out with it. There’s been another murder.” The detective seemed to be tongue-tied around me for some reason. Or was it because of Jon’s presence? “It’s a strange coincidence.”

“What’s so strange about it?” I asked.

His gaze was intense as he looked at me. “It’s in Maplewood Grove at the same apartment complex as the little girl, one floor up. It’s the other backup singer of your friend’s group. Rebecca Landsing.”

I felt the outside closing in. I took in deep breaths and drank from my mug of strong coffee, trying to keep myself in the here and now. My mind was racing in so many directions. Poor Becky. Ronnie must be out of her mind.

“What about Karen? The other singer?” I asked.

“She’s out of state visiting relatives. She’s been contacted and told to remain where she is until we catch this guy,” Sean answered.

I nodded. “Andrea... She was going to start practicing with the band. I’ve got to tell Marisa,” I said, bolting out of my seat, knocking my chair down, ready to run straight to my friend’s house. When I stood, my legs went out from under me. I tried to grab the edge of the glass table, but missed. Sean was right there to catch me, again, before I landed on the ground. Jon stood on the other side of the table and watched, seemingly stuck and unable to move.

“Angie, what’s wrong?” Jon asked as he shoved the chairs out of his way, taking me from the detective’s hold.

“I guess I got a little light-headed. I’m okay, Jon.”

“What’s this about your friend?” the detective asked.

I clarified the situation as best I could. “It’s a long story—Andrea, Marisa’s daughter, was going to start singing backup vocals with the band. She was starting rehearsals this week.”

Sean jotted down something in his pad. “I’ll call over there and inform them of what’s transpired, I think their touring days are postponed for a while.”

Jon looked at us. “I still don’t understand why you’re here, though. What does this have to do with my wife and me?” he asked, confused no doubt by the detective’s and my informality. I’d never told Jon about the little girl, Sara. I certainly hadn’t told him about our lunches. He’d hate me for getting caught up in police business and despise it more due to Sean’s involvement.

I turned to Jon. “We hardly see each other lately and it just slipped my mind with everything else that’s happening,” I confessed, with a tinge of anger in my voice.

The detective shifted his feet as if it would make what he had to say any more palatable. “I’m sorry, Jon. I needed some assistance with a case. Mrs. Kane, everything you told me at the missing girl’s house—you were right on the mark, only it was one floor up.” He watched my reaction. My husband stood next to me. His face went pale.

Sean continued. “And there’s a reference to a witch, left at the apartment. Evidently this guy’s been watching the news and he left a threatening message at the crime scene.”

I gasped. “Shit—does Ronnie know?”

“Do you think the message was for my wife?” Jon angrily asked. “Did it mention her name? He knows she’s involved?”

I sat down, my legs once more unstable. “Don’t forget, Jon, about the TV reports on the news.” I sighed. I dared not tell him of the psychic connections.

I could see the tired lines on Sean's face. "Yes, we were there late last night, or rather early this morning. Mrs. Arthur knows. I assumed the message is for your wife, but I could be wrong."

"Well, I'm not staying out of this. He's threatened me and I don't take threats very well."

"Angie, let the police handle this," Jon ordered.

"I don't understand..." I sighed. "How can I possibly—"

"Mrs. Kane, Angie, I don't pretend to know how you do what you do, but if you're willing, would you come to see what, if anything, you pick up at the scene?" To my husband, he said, "I promise to keep her out of harm's way. I give you my word." I again heard the hint of his southern twang.

"Yes," I said, standing, ready to go inside and get my hobo bag.

Jon grabbed my arm. "No way!"

Sean put the notepad in his inside jacket pocket. "I'll let you two discuss this. If you change your mind, call me. I understand if you can't, though, so don't feel bad. But—if you do decide to do this, the sooner the better."

He left us to battle this one on our own. We walked into the kitchen after Sean left to head over to Marisa's place.

"Jon, I have to do this, I want to—I may be able to help. I don't want to feel like I'm walking on eggshells all the time, this has to end," I implored.

"I don't want you getting involved any further. I love you, Angie. I don't want to lose you." He finally showed some emotion to me. Emotions that lately he'd kept tucked away, somewhere far away from me.

"I love you too, baby. The killer won't know—look, I'll have Marisa scry for his location and I'll take Ouida with me if you like."

"No, I don't like. I don't want you or your friends involved. He's a killer, Angelica. A nut. You're dealing with a fucking psycho!" Jon yelled.

My voice was quieter now. "Jon...I have to. I'm not becoming another victim. Anyway, I don't think he'll hurt me."

“What?”

I knew this would be trouble, but I had to tell him. “Look...I know you don’t want to hear this, but just believe me when I tell you, this guy’s not gonna hurt me.”

“How do you know this?”

“It’s karma.”

Jon stared, looking at me like I’d completely lost my mind. “Karma. You want me to risk your life on karma?” He shook his head as if he could shake himself to an alternate universe.

“No, I’m not asking you to risk my life. I’m telling you—I know this for a fact.”

“Angie, I think you’ve gone over the edge here. Maybe you *should* talk to Ivy.”

“Oh, now you’re saying I’m in need of therapy? For your information, Ivy practices regressions on her clients, sometimes taking them to their previous lives.”

He sighed. “Why doesn’t that surprise me?”

“I’m going, Jon,” I said, heading into the living room.

My husband knew once my mind was made up I was going to follow through no matter what, like it or not. He definitely did not like it.

“Can’t you meditate first—see what his plan is—see where he is?” he begged.

“I can try, honey, but you know the closer I am to the scene, the better the chances are that I’ll pick up on something.”

He glanced at his watch. “It’s almost nine, call Marisa. See what she can come up with.”

By ten o’clock, Marisa was in my kitchen with her pendulum and a map of New York and Long Island. We smudged the room and created a small circle to do the workings. I was meditating and she was scrying.

Marisa’s crystal kept spinning, which meant in all likelihood he wasn’t in the New York area. In the silence of the kitchen, my cell phone went off.

“Hello.”

“Angie, it’s Sean. I wanted to let you know about the DNA samples. The Jehovah, Joe Carver, has been ruled out, and Kevin Murray as well.” He paused. “Has your husband changed his mind yet?”

“Sort of. Hey, you couldn’t by any chance get me a sample of that blood?”

I heard him laugh. “No, I couldn’t. Why?”

“Oh, it makes scrying for him easier,” I explained.

“Sorry, I’d lose my job. Let me know when he changes his mind, for certain.” He hung up.

“Do we have a Connecticut map?” I asked Jon, who was pacing back and forth.

“I think so, in my truck. I’ll get it.” He went out to the garage.

“This is awful,” Marisa whispered. “Poor Ronnie, poor Becky—ugh, it’s just atrocious. Andrea’s singing career is going to be put on hold for now, there’s no way she’s getting in the middle of this shit.”

I picked up a double terminated crystal and held it in my left hand. “Everyone’s singing career is going to be suspended. They can’t seriously consider going out on tour, even if they had someone to sing background vocals.” I rubbed the back of my aching neck, allowing the crystal to remove the building tensions.

“Mmm... We have to do something, Angie, something magickal. This is really getting ridiculous. The police have no ideas yet? No other test results came back? Have you seen Joseph lately, the Jehovah dude?”

I took in a deep breath and slowly released it. “This passed ridiculous a long time ago. No, I haven’t seen Joe. Not recently. I’ve seen the other Jehovah’s, but not him.” After putting the crystal in some Kosher salt, I went to the refrigerator to get a drink, avoiding her question. I couldn’t betray Sean’s trust. “You want something to drink?”

“No, thanks. Of course we have to do some heavy duty protection spells for sure. They haven’t located the ex-boyfriend yet, have they?” she added, making a to-do list.

I poured some seltzer into a glass. “Paul? They’re supposed to get a DNA sample. I’m not sure. Unless Sean got a sample from his apartment. They’re pretty much checking all the guys Sally was involved with. We have to do a spell for justice, too, something that’ll bring him out and get the cops on his trail,” I said, thinking of my dream, trying to piece it together.

Marisa looked at me with her golden eyes alight. “Sean? You’re on a first name basis?”

“Marisa, get your mind out of the bedroom,” I said. I drank down the cold sparkling water, watching my friend. I knew where she was going with this.

“He’s quite good looking, if you like that movie star, male model, GQ type,” she teased. “You know who he looks like, the guy from that movie, ‘Sweet Home Alabama’.”

I played along. “Dr. McDreamy? He has dark hair.”

“No the other guy, the ex-husband.”

I thought about it for a moment. She was right. “Yes, he does. Anyway, back to business,” I said, letting her know I was not going there, that topic was off limits. She’d have to ply me with more liquor to get me to talk.

“What’re you thinking?” she asked, seeing my wheels turning.

“Sean, Detective Bennette, wants me to go to the crime scene and see what I pick up there. Jon doesn’t want me to. If we can’t find him in the area, then I want to do this. Marisa, I have to go to the scene.”

“Angie, this is police business. We’re talking murder and rape. This guy’s a whacko to the tenth power and beyond.”

“Yes, I know that, Jon said the same thing, but I’ve been drawn into this for some karmic reason. I don’t fully understand why. Maybe someday Ivy can do a full past life regression and all the pieces’ll come together, but until then I’m in this whether I like it or not. And trust me, I don’t like it at all. Listen—if Sean won’t let you come, give me your crystal pendulum. If there’s blood, hopefully some of the killer’s, I can

swipe your crystal in it and we can use that to get a better fix on him. Then maybe the scrying'll be more accurate."

"Good idea." Marisa patted my arm. She could be so maternal. "You like this police business, don't you?"

"What? No! Well—maybe feeling needed and useful. I certainly don't like the fact that people are getting killed."

"I know that, I know the type of person you are, it's just that you seem more lively lately. It's a good thing, baby cakes, not an insult."

Sitting at the table, I gave serious thought to what she said. "I don't know, maybe I'm having a mid-life crisis. It feels good to be productive. I guess finding little Joey Carbone last year put a bee in my bonnet, eh? I mean, you help people on a physical level with your Reiki, reflexology and massage. What do I do, answer the same mundane questions, when will I get married, is he cheating on me—blah, blah, blah."

Marisa sat next to me. "You've helped a lot of people locate missing family members. Remember the woman you practically dragged you to the doctor because you sensed something wrong with her heart? You do help people."

"But this is different." I sighed. "There's something else, and I haven't really said anything to you."

"I knew it. I knew there was something else going on with you. You have been acting a little...strange sometimes."

I eyed her cautiously. "Yeah? How?"

"The day the preacher was causing a ruckus at the shop, I was watching you. Now, I know you sweetie—there was something off in your aura. You're always emanating blues and violets, even greens, but when the preacher came over—you were all red."

Taking a deep breath, I went for it. "It wasn't because of the preacher. It's those premonitions of sex rituals. It's not your normal sex ceremony, though," I confessed. "And I think I saw the killer. I have this vague memory of talking to him, but I don't remember what was said, I just remember the intense feelings. If he wanted to kill me, he'd have done it then."

Marisa stared at me.

My eyes widened. “What? Say something.”

She hesitated. “It explains the Devil card in the readings I’ve done,” she finally sputtered. “And the Moon card—things kept hidden from you—from us. He must’ve been the one that was talking to you at the store when you found the dead bird.”

“And why I couldn’t remember. For the longest time I hardly recalled it. It’s this vague memory that’s on the fringes and I can’t quite see the whole picture. I’ve a karmic connection to the killer, you saw it yourself. During the vision I had a while back, in the tub? I felt as if I were being drawn into the energy of the ritual. I was so turned on. It was weird, Risa, that’s all I can say. I never experienced anything like it. It happened the night we had the healing circle, when someone keyed my car. I didn’t go right home after that, I went to the park.”

“What about the park?”

I finally spilled my guts to her. “I went there to clear my head and saw two people performing what looked like the Great Rite. It’s happened a lot lately. It’s all revolving around him. He must be the one that left the dead bird at the shop.”

Tapping her pen on the table, I could sense her wheels were spinning in sync with mine. “And the Isis statue. I felt the energy build up, too, at the full moon. When you tuned into the ritual, did you see who was performing it?” she asked.

“No, that’s the point. The only thing I could make out from all the times I’d been drawn in were the eyes...blue eyes. That, and the connection to the Egyptian lifetime.”

She gasped. “*All* the times! How many times has this happened and you never said anything?”

I looked at her apologetically. “That’s the thing, every time I was going to tell you, something always came up. Plenty of times I started to—I tried to tell you and Heena—but something always got in the way. That’s another thing that’s so weird, he seems to have this spell that prevents me from recalling certain things. I did say something to Ouida about all

this, but it was the night Sally was killed. I guess I assumed she'd tell you."

"Well, I had no idea it was connected to really...evil shit and sex ceremonies! What exactly did happen?" she asked.

"Sometimes I see a circle with candles lit and I just feel the sexual energy. It somehow affects me. That's probably why I was talking the way I did at Lammas. He must have been performing a ritual and I got hooked into it. It's embarrassing, Risa. I can never see the face, either, just like when Sally was killed. I couldn't see the face, just the eyes. Both times there were those eyes, blue eyes."

"Just be careful. Does Jon know?" Marisa asked, with undertones I wasn't sure I comprehended. "Hey—your detective friend has blue eyes."

She caught me off guard with that remark. "Of course I'll be careful—Sean? No way he's involved...not the way you mean. I would feel it. Wouldn't I?" I was getting flustered. "I couldn't tell Jon this, he'd flip out. Not that he complained about the after-effects. I wonder if Jon's...lack of interest, shall we say, is somehow connected?"

Jon finally came in with the maps. "Okay James, I've got Connecticut and Jersey maps. Do your thing."

"Let's see what we get." I got down to business.

Chapter Twenty

Amethyst pendulums are accurate “occult tools”. That is, they make known that which is hidden. Pendulums are habitually used to find answers to questions about life, love, career and more. They are also often used in healing and to locate lost objects or hidden resources (such as water). (Scrying) Methods for using the pendulum do not vary much, since the times when it was used to find out who would be the next emperor. ~ From Marisa Arrucci’s Book of Shadows.

“Mrs. Kane, Angelica, I’m stretching the rules here letting you in—I can’t have your friends, too. I’m sorry. For now, anyway, let’s just see what you find,” Sean said, trying to get me to understand his complex position.

“Okay, Detective. Sean,” I acquiesced. “I understand.”

I had convinced my husband that I was going to the crime scene. I wanted to see what, if anything, my psychic feelers would pick up. He, having no choice, conceded under one condition. He had to accompany me. The detective reluctantly agreed, but Jon would have to wait in the car.

Sean had an officer pick us up in an unmarked car and bring us to the crime scene. It was the same scenic ride as before and predictably, the closer we got the more tension I felt. I couldn’t get Marisa’s words out of my head, either. Sean had blue eyes. But he was my husband in the past life, not Khaldun. Maybe I misunderstood the regression, perhaps I switched identities unknowingly, or the killer influenced the outcome. My head throbbed with all the what-ifs.

I smudged with sage, including my amulets, consecrated myself with protective oils and prayed to Isis for her help. The rest was up to the Goddess. I had enormous faith in her and she never let me down. Ever.

* * *

We walked over to the complex, Sean and I. Secluded in the back, on the second floor was Becky's apartment, with a terrace that faced a thicket of blackberries. When we rounded the corner I could see she'd kept potted tomato plants and a small hibachi grill on her patio, for summer entertaining, I imagined. On the ground level there were picnic tables scattered along the perimeter. As apartment complexes went, it was lovely and old-fashioned.

Yellow tape draped the area, announcing this was a crime scene. Neighbors milled about, nervously chatting about how awful this was and wondering how this could happen. A young woman's wailing broke the stillness. From the looks of her, she had to be a relative. There was definitely a family resemblance. I prayed nobody recognized me from the news. I saw some women looking and pointing. I wasn't sure if it was my outfit, which had Kokopellis all over it, or they recognized me.

I took a few deep breaths and walked into the ransacked apartment. The living room was a disaster. The coffee tables were upside down. Broken mirrors, glass and soil from her potted plants that earlier stood on either side of her glass doors spilled out onto the floor. Her kitchen table lay on its side; blood pooled on the tiled floor that once had been a pristine white.

My body felt heavy and the room slowly dimmed, lit by a few candles. The leather couch was in front of the glass doors and I felt a breeze hitting the back of my neck. I realized I was now viewing the scene from the position on the couch, and Becky's point of reference. She'd been watching television. The screen door was open, letting in the cool night air.

Then, without warning, I plunged into darkness. My head was pinned down to the back of the sofa. The sweet smell that accompanied the vision of Sally Shaw penetrated my nasal passages again. I felt long nails digging into flesh, tearing away the mask of sweet-smelling fumes. I turned to face my attacker. Cold blue eyes stared back at me.

"Hello, Becky."

Unsteady on my feet, I grabbed the coffee table to balance myself. He leapt forward at me. I dodged him somehow and ran into the kitchen. I flipped the table over, trying to knock him off-balance. He swerved out of the way and lunged for my hair, tackling me. I knocked over the potted plants. Scrambling to my feet, I took a statue of a mermaid and flung it, breaking the mirror behind him.

I started to scream and then he hit me, closed-fisted. I fell into the kitchen. "Wake up darlin'—little Miss High and Mighty—come on, bitch! Wake up!"

I opened my eyes and stared into the same ones that leered at Sally, grimacing at me. His face was visible, but somehow I was never able to remember it afterwards. I tried to program myself to remember once the trance was through. He tugged on the oversized tee shirt and pawed at my panties, ripping them down. He shoved a cloth into my mouth, her mouth. I had no energy to fight back. "Why'd you make your hair darker again? You looked so hot as a blonde and what a body you have, honey. That bitch not want any competition? Has to be the only blonde on stage? Afraid you'll outshine her? Damn you're gorgeous! I'm afraid I can't take it slow with you, time is of the essence."

He had his pants undone. I couldn't move. He raped me, hurriedly and angrily.

Though it was happening to Becky, in the ethers it felt all too real to me.

Tears fell, blurring my vision. I tried desperately to plead with him, but I couldn't speak and was fading. He smacked my face and pulled at my hair.

“Don’t you like this honey? You fallin’ asleep on me? You know if it would’ve been you on stage, that would’ve made my life a whole lot easier. I didn’t have anything against Diane—she being gay and all, it’s not her fault. But you—too good for me, huh? You and that fucking bitch. The whore.” He took his anger out on me until he couldn’t hold back any longer and called Ronnie’s name out as he violently climaxed. It seemed to last forever, but only took a few minutes.

He got up and off me and I saw him walking away. I felt relieved. He was leaving, finally, thank God—I morphed between feeling what Becky felt and my own thoughts. It physically made me dizzy.

He buckled himself up then grabbed a knife out of the butcher-block holder on the counter. “I’m gonna fuck her life up like she did mine, but first...I’m gonna get me some of what Marc’s been hogging all to himself. We were friends, him and I—did you know that, Becky? Sure you did.”

Then there was nothing.

The void.

The warmth of blood streamed down my neck and I viewed the scene from above, my life force out of its body, her body. As he turned toward the doors, he wrote in blood on the wall: You’re next, witch.

Slowly I made my way back to reality. My body shook slightly as I got my bearings. The detective waited for me to speak. He didn’t seem sure if I was going to be sick or not. “Are you okay?”

“He wants to get at Ronnie, he blames her for something. He raped Becky, too.

He also took the knife that he used to kill her. I need some water,” I said, somewhat out of breath. Sean listened eagerly.

I sat on the couch and sipped the Kabala water from a bottle that Jon remembered to take from home and stuck in my bag. Sean watched me with eagle eyes, making certain I wasn’t going to pass out. “Is anything wrong, Angie?”

“I’m fine.” I tried to reassure him. “He’s not going to give up, Sean. He has tunnel vision, and the only thing on his mind is getting to Veronica, now. And if he can’t convince her to go with him, he’ll kill her. There’s so

much rage in him. It's eerie, I don't understand." The word *betrayal* echoed in my ears.

Sean shook his head. "Understand what?"

"Why her? What about the abusive boyfriend, Paul? Any news about him?" I asked, rubbing my temples. I tried to piece together what I'd just witnessed with the other information I had. I couldn't get two plus two to equal four. I forgot about the karmic equation.

"We were able to get prints. Paul Sumner was bonded a few years ago. We're working on his DNA. There're only partials on the boat. We're hoping to lift some prints here. We're still trying to locate that other guy, Cliff Kendle." He sat next to me on the couch. "Did I tell you we did some background checks on this guy, Cliff, and found that he worked as a roadie for the band? He may have a grudge."

I put the water bottle back in my bag. "I met a guy named Cliff, he was looking for Sally. I wonder if the guy I met is the same Cliff Kendle. He came into the store about six weeks ago. He looked...so normal, no...negativity."

Sean took more notes. "Could you describe him to a sketch artist?"

"No. I just remember I felt nothing unusual about him. Like I said, he seemed normal."

Sean looked over at me. "There are plenty of people walking around that look perfectly normal."

Frustration laced my voice. "But I should've picked up something," I said. "Whoever it is has an obsession with Ronnie. That guy Paul's a fan of the music, too. He bought the tickets for Sally. He's got a temper. Sally said Cliff was protective of her—" I stopped suddenly. "Whoever it is, is also into magick."

He read from his notes. "You mentioned during the...vision, the perpetrator said he was friends with the Arthurs."

"I did? I don't always remember what transpires during a trance session."

"Well, we won't know one hundred percent until we get the tests back. I'll check and see if Paul Sumner knew the Arthurs, perhaps

through a fan club.” He was staring again, just about to ask me something when we heard yelling from outside.

I heard Jon call to one of the officers, “I want to see my wife!”

“I better go.” I sighed.

“Sure, I’ll meet you at your home. I’d like to hear what else you have to say, before you forget,” he said as he gently rubbed my shoulder. He was so kind, and as I looked into his eyes I couldn’t imagine that he was behind any of this as Marisa had hinted.

I stood up to leave. “It’s the same guy, I know it. It’s the eyes—the same eyes. You’ll find skin under Becky’s nails. I bet it matches your DNA sample from Sally Shaw. He raped Becky as well, he left plenty of evidence, no condom. If you can’t get him for Diane’s death, at least you can arrest him for Sally’s and Becky’s.”

“Is there anything that points to where he may be? Did he say anything?”

“Not that I remember, no. Just that he’s after Ronnie. Sean, did you warn her? Mrs. Arthur, I mean. She needs to know.”

“Yeah, we have an officer watching the house.” He stood now and looked around the scene once more.

“Does Josh Sumner have blue eyes?” I asked.

Sean put his note pad away in his inside jacket pocket. “Offhand I don’t recall, why?”

“The killer’s eyes are blue,” I said as I walked over to the sliding glass doors and pulled the curtains away from the wall. There in blood was the message the detective assumed was for me.

“Sean, I don’t feel this statement was meant for me. You see, the Arthurs are also followers of Wicca. They don’t come right out and say it, for business reasons, I would guess, they don’t want to alienate certain fans. I think this is meant for Ronnie. I didn’t feel him even think of me once during this crime. His anger is focused entirely on Veronica Arthur.”

“Let’s go, James, I want to get you out of here,” Jon ordered, calling from downstairs, making quite a commotion.

Sean looked over at me. "James?"

I smiled. "Long story. If you could get me photos of the suspects, I might be able to tell. Perhaps it'll jog my memory. It's worth a shot." I stood next to Sean, trying to read him.

No, I decided. Nothing pointed to his involvement in any malicious way.

He frowned, casting his eyes down in slight embarrassment. "I'll see what I can do. My superiors aren't too happy with me consulting with you."

"I understand. Sean?"

"Yes, ma'am." The accent was stronger. I noticed with fatigue it became more prevalent.

"The little girl, Sara? Have you located her yet?" I asked hopefully, though I knew the answer.

He took my arm and started to lead me toward the door. "No, we haven't."

Looking again into those periwinkle eyes, I said, "Sara's father's got her."

"We checked him out, he doesn't."

Jon's voice became louder and more insistent. "Angelica!" Oblivious to Jon's ranting, I continued. "I'm telling you, he does. He's got her held up at a friend's place, in Glendale Cove. It's a girlfriend of his. If you can find out who she is, you'll find Sara. I guarantee it. Tell her mom the other psychic's right, she's alive."

He winked and nodded as he was going over his notes once more. "I'll check it out, ask the mother if she knows who the girlfriend could be. I'll keep you posted."

"Thanks."

He smiled.

The officer allowed Jon upstairs and he rushed over to me. "I got worried when you didn't answer me. I know how you sometimes get after

these episodes, I'm sorry, sweetie." He took me into his arms and hugged me. I got the feeling it was more for appearance sake.

"I'm fine. I guess I'm finally getting used to it," I said, pulling back, looking at my husband. He really was worried. "I'm okay. Really."

As we made our way out of the apartment, I swiped Marisa's crystal in some blood that was on the coffee table. I wasn't sure whose blood it belonged to, but it was my only opportunity without being noticed. Or so I thought.

Chapter Twenty-one

Hawk eye ~ This is a black and silver colored stone which aids psychic ability, transforms negative energy into positive and mends negative energy from past lives. It may also aid in letting go of karmic attachments. ~ From Marisa Arrucci's Gem Power workshop.

"It's got to be Becky's blood," Marisa announced as she and I huddled over the maps. "It's not moving. Nothing!"

We tried repeatedly to get some fix on where the killer vanished. He was hiding and we got nowhere with scrying.

"The spirits couldn't help either," Ouida said, sitting at my kitchen table. "I tried my best to get some information. The only explanation is it's karma and that it *has* to be played out. It's between all of you. The singers, Ronnie, the killer, you, of course, and another two males. You would have a better idea from the regression. I don't recall, was Ronnie in that life, sister?"

I nervously paced. "Yes, she was Khaldun—the killer's—brother."

"Ivy tried with her runes," Kara offered. "Heena used psychometry with a piece of Sally's jewelry that her brother brought over, but we've got no information. I've been meditating and getting no answers. Just weird symbols, like the clefs in music. But no location."

"The killer has to be using a glamour to disguise his identity from us," Marisa said.

"Yeah—it's probably Becky's blood. In my vision, I didn't see him cut himself. Bastard! I want to go over to see Ronnie, to make sure she knows what's going on," I said.

Pushing a stray curl behind her ear, Marisa grumbled, "Damn, she must feel horrible."

"He wants to screw with her, in more ways than one. It's creepy, the amount of rage in him. I've never experienced that, ever," I sadly remarked. Marisa just stared at me, clearly fearful for our friend's safety. Ouida and Kara were silent for a moment.

"But why is he connecting to you?" Ouida asked.

"Other than karma, I don't know. I tried to get an answer from my ghostly friend, Ronnie's mom, but she's suspiciously quiet as of late."

"I've got to get to the hospital. Be careful sister," Ouida murmured.

Kara nodded, grabbing her gym bag. "I've a class to teach, I better get going too," she said.

"Thanks for coming by, I'll talk to you guys later." I hugged each one before they headed into the sunshine.

"You seemed to be getting use to this channeling. You're not as knocked out as the first time," Marisa noted as we got in her car. "I like the braids, too," she teased, referring to my hair.

"My Daisy Duke look." I laughed.

Before we could get out of the driveway, the familiar car of Sean Bennette drove up in front of the house. I went out to greet him, with Marisa coming up behind me.

"I wanted to tell you about something you asked me about the other day," he said, all business, staring at my outfit—cut-offs and long braids.

"About?" I'd forgotten, having discussed many things with him.

"A woman came in to the precinct on August first, late. The report's actually dated the second. She filed a complaint that a man tried to stab her during a ritual." He looked over his notes and proceeded. "The Great Rite, he took his—anthem—"

"Athame," I corrected him.

"Yeah—and tried to stab her while they were having...intercourse." He winced. "I suspect this is what you meant about odd behavior?"

I twirled my hair anxiously. Perhaps we were finally getting somewhere. “Yes, exactly. Who is he?”

“That’s just it, she doesn’t remember. They met in the park for the ceremony and she luckily escaped. She said, ‘Something told me to watch him carefully’. She’s a High Priestess of some coven. She was doing this as a favor because this guy told her his Priestess left and he hasn’t been able to replace her. She’s into the sex magick, on occasion.” He shrugged.

“Was that all?” I prodded him. “Anything else?”

“She did say he was very handsome, but for some reason she can’t give a description, she doesn’t seem to remember much about him except—” He stopped short. He must have realized what he was about to say confirmed what I’d been saying all along.

Immensely proud of myself, I finished his sentence. “He has blue eyes,” I said.

“It’s got to be a glamour,” Marisa added.

His brows knit together and he rubbed his temples. “Yes, blue eyes, precisely. Is this a normal practice, having intercourse as favors for a ritual?” Sean was confused by all this new information he was absorbing, and it showed.

“Not normal, no. It’s more often a High Priest and High Priestess who do the ritual and they’re either married or a couple. In any case, it’s always with consenting adults. As I said, most covens do a symbolic Great Rite ritual, using a chalice and the athame. The ritual knife. The chalice represents the female and the knife, or athame as it’s called, the male.” I explained it as best I could to the newbie.

“We haven’t found anything at the site except a makeshift altar and her cloak. The crime scene investigators are looking for any evidence, semen, perhaps. Something that might’ve been left there. She did say she made him wear a condom, though.” He looked around uncomfortably as if he expected someone to come out of my house and intrude on our conversation. His weight shifted from one leg to the other.

Answering what I knew his next question would be, I admitted, “I haven’t had any more visions.”

“All right, then, I’ll be in touch. You let me know if you get any other information, okay?” He finally smiled, although he seemed to have something on his mind he wanted to say, but for whatever reason didn’t.

“Sure thing. Can you find out what coven she’s a part of? Maybe I can get some information from her. Witch to witch, ya know?” I winked at him this time.

“You got it.” Sean left.

Marisa and I got back into the car. I stared out the window, watching the landscape as we rode along Route 26 North.

She finally spoke. “Heena’s going to meet us there. Jon knows where we’re going?”

“Yes, I told him,” I moaned. “He doesn’t really want me over there, like they’ve got a disease or something and I’m going to catch it.”

“Well, in reality, Angie, people around them are ending up dead. Who’s to say how or if this nut is differentiating between band members or simply anyone the Arthurs care about?” Her voice raised a few decibels to make her point.

I kept my eyes on the road. “Anyone *Ronnie* cares about. He’s angry with Marc, but not nearly as much as he is at Ronnie.”

“I guess Marc is one of the males connected, karma-wise. Who do you think the other is?”

I fingered my pentacle that hung around my neck. The energy in the air was heavy, and I knew what that meant. Marisa wanted to talk. “No, it’s Jon, the killer and Sean.”

“That makes sense. He’s attracted to you. You do realize that, don’t you?”

I finally glanced over at her. “No, I don’t. We’re simply working together Risa, that’s all. It doesn’t matter, anyway, I love my husband,” I answered, somewhat defensively.

"I know you do, I just wondered if you realized the way he looks at you. He's smitten." She smiled coyly.

It appeared like a storm was brewing. I felt an internal one, as well. "I think he's just like all the other people I come across who see me as a link to their loved ones who are gone. He loves his wife, still. I'm the closest thing to her—to get messages from her, I mean." I stared at the gathering clouds in the distance.

Marisa wore a serious countenance on her pixie-like face. "How long's she gone?"

"Five years, I think." I sighed, wondering if indeed it was the link to Rita that had him hanging around me more than was really necessary. It wouldn't be the first time something like that had happened.

"That's a long time, and he's a young guy—what would you guess? Thirty-eight, forty?" she asked as she pulled off Route 26.

"I guess late thirties, yeah, sounds right." His face flashed in front of my inner eye, all smiles, his energy so gentle.

"Rich told me that Jon doesn't like him. At all. Evidently, your husband picked up on the attraction as well," Marisa said, glancing over at me, waiting for a reaction. "He's really uncomfortable with him coming around. I mean look at him Angie—he's drop-dead gorgeous! Sorry—I didn't mean that the way it came out."

"I know, Risa."

She backtracked. "Not that Jon isn't, but...you know what I mean."

"I know, Jon told me that, too, that he thinks Sean's attracted to me. I'm helping him with this case and that's all. I wonder why Jon's so jealous. If anything, I should be questioning *him*. He's been putting in a lot of overtime lately, and he's the one with the bad track record. I'm going to have to have an in-depth regression with Ivy and Ouida. Maybe he's got residual feelings from the past. It's really irrelevant, anyway, I'm married and that's that," I stated, sending the message that the conversation had ended.

"The guys are working, honey, you know that," Marisa said, coming to his defense.

“Yeah, I suppose.” I was silent the rest of the way. I was lost in thought about the past, what felt like another lifetime, but unfortunately wasn’t. When Jon had been unfaithful... It had happened years ago, but like a fresh wound anytime I suspected him of something, the hurt was there as if it had just happened.

Marisa called the house so that the Arthurs were expecting us, as was the officer sitting at the gate by the front entrance. They buzzed us in, and Marisa parked in their driveway.

The house was dark, with heavy linen curtains drawn and the air conditioner blasting. Outside it was ninety degrees with barely a breeze.

The housekeeper let us in and led us to the back of house. It was quiet except for the sound of sizzling emanating from the kitchen. The aromas were mouth-watering as we entered the back and went into the kitchen. Heena sat at the counter with a cutting board in front of her. She was slicing garlic.

“Hi, ladies.” She smiled. “I was checking on Ronnie.”

Marc was cooking up a storm. Pots of sauce, sausage and meatballs were cooking on the stove. Like a cross between Merlin the magician and Emeril the chef, he was making culinary magic.

He diced some red and green peppers. “I have to do something or I’ll go nuts. Cooking is my hobby and I love Italian food,” he explained.

I sat next to Heena and asked Marc, “How are you? I’m sorry, that’s a really stupid question. You’re horrified, scared, sad, emotionally spent.”

“Yeah, that about covers it—oh, and angry as hell,” he added, though his Irish accent made everything sound blissful.

“Ronnie sleeping?” I asked, picking at a meatball.

“Yes,” Heena answered.

“She should be getting up soon,” Marc said. “I gave her a sedative and it knocked her out. Ronnie’s devastated. I don’t understand why this is happening. I know you ladies have only known us for what, about eight months? And I’m not saying this merely because she’s my wife either, but she’s the sweetest, most caring woman I’ve ever known. The patience of a saint—to put up with me, she has to be...” His already red-

rimmed eyes welled once again with tears. "I just don't get what this maniac has against her. What could she've done to him?"

"He's sick in the head," Marisa said, grabbing the other half of the meatball I'd taken.

"I think he's in love with her, Marc, and he feels jilted, so he's angry with both of you. He's got a tremendous amount of rage in him," I explained. "He's also got serious issues. From what I remember about the visions, it goes back to his childhood and perhaps beyond. He's extremely disturbed."

Marc poured more wine into his glass. "The detective said they're looking at an ex-roadie and his connection perhaps to the other murders. He worked for me a few years ago. I met him when he was working for my landscaper, then we got to talking. We had some things in common, love of music being one of them. I was single at the time and we'd go out to pubs once in a while. He told me he played the guitar and we'd jam occasionally. I tried to help him form his own band. That didn't work out, one thing led to another and then he was a roadie for a time. Then I met Ronnie. We actually met her at the same time. There was an immediate attraction between us. I know for me, I fell in love with her the minute I laid eyes on her. I think it took her a little longer. We'd go out together sometimes, though I never saw him with the same girl twice. I honestly don't remember what led Cliff to leave."

He reached for his glass and took a sip of the white wine. "But they're not even certain if it's him. They said they're looking at two people at this point. I can't imagine it being him. He's such a gentle soul."

Heena handed him the garlic. "You can't try to make sense out of this. Whoever he is, he's not a normal person. You can't assign regular values to him. Would Cliff know of your spiritual practice?"

"Yes, we didn't keep it a secret from those in our inner circle, so to speak, and he was a part of that group for a time. He's come to our May Day parties, and if we were in town at *Samhain*, he'd be invited." Marc handed me some mushrooms, onions and celery to dice.

"Did he practice magick?" I asked, chopping up the vegetables.

“He dabbled, I think. He didn’t talk much about what he did as far as rituals went with us. It was more talk of music.”

As Marc stirred the sauce, I could see he was lost in thoughts of happier times of parties held here when Diane and Becky were alive. The images that filled his head flashed into mine.

“Do you know who’s in charge of your fan club?” I asked.

Marc shook his head. “No, our manager is in contact with the heads of the fan clubs. Besides, there are a few fan clubs. Just in the U.S., we have an east coast fan club and a west coast one. Now that you mention it, the detective called this morning asking the same thing.”

“We’re back to square one. Remember Kara said she saw clefs from sheet music?” I asked. “That could either point to Paul or Cliff. Both are interested in music.”

Marisa looked over at me as if I had three heads. “Yes, of course I remember. But what are you going to tell the police? That your friend saw musical notes during a meditation, so your killer’s into music, have a nice day?” she asked sarcastically. She turned to Marc. “Do you have any pictures with him?”

After taking a loaf of Italian bread from the oven, Marc began slicing it in sections. “I looked the other day. The only one I could find came out fuzzy. He’s very camera shy. And he’s quite the lady’s man, too.”

I accepted a piece of bread with butter, watching Marc methodically coat each piece with garlic. “Speaking of being a lady’s man, I know this will probably sound strange, but—was he very sexual? Cliff, I mean.”

Marc laughed. “He’s in his twenties, of course he’s sexual.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. Did he ever mention doing sex magick?” I smiled timidly and tossed the mushrooms into the celery and onions.

“No, like I said we spoke mostly of music. Perhaps Ronnie would know. They were more into the magickal aspects of writing music. Muses and all that. It’s possible they discussed it.”

Sampling some olives and cheese, Marisa asked, “I know you two have a contractual obligation, but right now you just can’t take the risk

to go on tour. This guy's determined to get to Ronnie. Can you postpone your travel? Is it possible?"

"Of course. Now with Becky gone, we can't even think of traveling. We eventually will have to replace her and Diane, not that they ever can be replaced."

"I know what you mean. I'm so sorry Marc." I didn't know what else to say. I felt so inept.

He continued, "I won't ask anyone to put their lives at risk, either. Marisa, your daughter came by, as you know, a few days ago, and she is fantastic. Her voice has excellent range, her pitch is good. She just needs to strengthen her vocal chords, which will come in time. From what I can see, under any other circumstances I'd love for her to be a part of our musical family. If she's still interested, when all this is over—if it's all right with you, I'd give her a chance. She sounds wonderful with—with Karen and Ronnie." He stared out the window, watching the clouds move in.

"That's very generous, Marc, and I really am very grateful. I know Andrea's interested; she talked of nothing else when she got home. Let's see what happens. I'm sure it'll work out. Eventually." Marisa tried so hard to sound uplifting.

"Ronnie's sister is coming to stay with us and we've got some other friends as well. Moral support and all that," he said, stirring his pot of sauce. "That's another reason I'm cooking all this food. Would you like to stay for supper? Heena?"

"Of course, that would be wonderful. Nan is working late tonight. Besides, I want to check Ronnie again. Her blood pressure is a little low," Heena offered graciously.

"I appreciate the invite, Marc, but we have to get back home. If you want, we'll do some protection rituals for you both," Marisa suggested, and I nodded.

He thanked us. "Sure, that would be great. Seems like we need all the help we can get. Angie, have you received any more messages from my mother-in-law?"

“No, I’m sorry to say.” I wanted to share with him my feelings about the whole situation, but I thought better of it and declined describing my lifetime in Egypt and ties to the assailant.

Marc fixed a plate of appetizers. “We’ve got friends all over the globe chanting and doing rituals on our behalf. We just don’t have the strength right now. Ronnie’s in really bad shape. She feels totally responsible. I’m very worried about her.”

His doorbell chimed and Marisa and I decided it was time to go, now that Ronnie had her sister and friends coming over. We headed for the front door after hugging our friends good-bye. I tried to think of some words of comfort, something that magically would undo all that had transpired, but there were no such words, no charms to cast that would accomplish that grand task.

“Thanks for coming by,” Marc said as a petite brunette walked in and we made our exit.

“How is she?” we heard the brunette ask as the heavy wooden door closed behind us.

Two more cars parked in the driveway as we got into Marisa’s car. I remembered seeing some of the people in the pictures that lined the hallway of the Arthurs’ home and at the May Day party Marisa and I had attended.

“I’m glad Heena’s there.” I sighed.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Marisa muttered, pulling onto the road.

I certainly had envied Marc and Ronnie’s life at times—the traveling, the freedom, meeting new people—but this was definitely not one of them.

Chapter Twenty-two

Amethyst is said to bring tranquility. It has been called the “stone of contentment”, and is comforting and calming. This makes it a superior stone for meditation. Its shielding powers can ward off negative energies while draw and augmenting positive ones. Amethyst is an excellent stone to help you cope with sadness and grief. It provokes honesty and worthiness. This makes amethyst a good stone for people in the business world, though everyone can benefit from its effects. Amethyst also incites motivation. It can help you assimilate new ideas, and can help open channel to your true higher self. This makes it a good stone for those in search of spiritual growth. ~ From Angelica Kane’s Book of Shadows.

He felt wiped out as he traveled up the winding mountain road to the north and away from his home. The energy it took to sustain the glamour was taking its toll. He began to wonder if it was all worth it. He should have gone for the direct kill instead of taking revenge on all the others. He never meant to kill Diane.

Still, if he hadn’t, he never would have connected with the Kane witch, and that made it all worthwhile. When this was all over, he would do a complete regression. The flashes of the past were like the trailer to a movie and he wanted to see it from start to finish. It would explain her connection to him. And he wondered how she’d been able to project into his rituals. He’d thought he’d put up enough talismans to ward off that sort of occurrence. But for now he still had work to do.

* * *

The afternoon sun shone brightly the day I met with Chandra Mercer. She agreed to talk to me about her coven practices and graciously stopped by the shop one day. It was by invitation only; Sean Bennette made the request. We'd cleared an area in the back, up against the shop, with an outdoor table and chairs. When the weather was nice, we'd have lunch out back, *al fresco*, under the canopy of red maples. This was where I sat and chatted with Chandra.

Her striking appearance was the first thing I noted. She was petite and thin, but buxom, with long, wavy blonde hair. Her eyes were a radiant green with gold flecks that floated by black pupils. Adding an exotic touch was their almond shape. She had what you would call cat's eyes, rimmed with thick, charcoal lashes. Full, seductive lips pursed under a slightly upturned nose, which gave her an almost fairy-like quality.

Flowing sheer fabric draped over one shoulder and gathered at her tiny waist. The remainder cascaded down around her tanned, well-muscled legs. She was a runner, I'd guessed.

"Hi, merry meet. Angelica?" she asked. Her voice, of course, was throaty and sexy, completing the whole package.

"Yes—Chandra. Nice to meet you. Thanks for coming. Would you like some tea or something cold?"

"I'd love something cold." She sat down and made herself comfortable, smoothing her skirt as she did.

I poured us rosemary-citrus iced tea and uncovered a plate of Marisa's toffee crunch cookies.

"The police officer said you needed to talk to me. About the ritual?" she asked as she sipped her drink. Appearing well manicured with Tiffany jewelry and a designer bag, she must have made a nice salary.

"Yes, I was wondering if you remembered anything special about the guy—his eyes perhaps, or body? Anything?" I read her aura. She was very open and honest.

"I told the cops, it's the strangest thing, I can't recall what he looks like. I know he was good-looking. That I remember. I was excited about

doing the rite with him. I thought maybe we'd start our own coven. Mine is breaking up, unfortunately." Her eyes were amazing. It was hard to pick out a best feature on this woman.

"How'd you hook up with him?"

She became quiet, shuffling through her bag for a cigarette. "You mind?" she asked.

"No. Go ahead," I answered, pushing over an ashtray kept for customers that still smoked. Maybe she wasn't a runner after all. Most likely she was one of those women who could eat whatever they wanted and never gain an ounce and was born with the body of a cheerleader. *Wait until she has kids*, I thought, pacifying myself.

"I'm twenty-eight. I know the pitfalls of answering personal ads. I rely on my intuition a lot. I'm sure you do, too." She lit her cigarette and took a long drag on it. *Her skin won't hold up if she continues with this habit*. I found this inner dialogue amusing.

"Yes, I do count on my ability to guide me," I answered, watching her fidget with her skirt once more.

"He put an ad in a local pagan rag. I answered it. We met for lunch one day and after spending about two hours talking, I agreed. He seemed nice enough. We made arrangements and I told him the only thing I insist on is that he wear a condom. He was a little miffed about that, but he agreed." She shook her head.

"So, you do this often?" I probed, sipping my drink, trying to sound innocent and not judgmental.

"Not really, but as a High Priestess I do partake in the Great Rite at Beltane. Don't you?" she asked, as if I weren't a real priestess if I didn't.

"My coven is women-based. But I do partake with my husband. In private," I politely informed her.

She nodded. "Yes—the Great Rite is always done in private. At least for me it is."

"So when did you sense you were in trouble?" I tried to keep the pace going, I didn't want her to feel uncomfortable and clam up on me.

"We met at Greenview Park, way in the back by the pond, in the grove. Do you know where that is?"

"Yes, I'm somewhat familiar."

"It was really nice. He had an altar erected and torches lit." She seemed lost in her thoughts of that evening. "He had wine and incense. We couldn't have our ritual bath together because I couldn't get out of work early enough, so we met after."

"Do you recall anything about what he looked like?" I pushed on, desperate to find out something tangible. I sensed her apprehension.

Her hand nervously fluffed her hair. She took another sip of tea. "All I remember was he's California good-looking, ya know? Like a beach bum, tanned and buff. I really think he had a glamour going." Her clove cigarette burned in the ashtray. She hardly smoked it. Her skin was safe, for today at least.

"I agree. If he's the same guy I've been seeing in my visions, he's definitely got a glamour working because I can never remember what he looks like, either." I smiled.

"You've seen him?"

"Yeah, I've been drawn into some of his magickal conjuring, psychically," I divulged to the young woman.

"So, you're the real deal after all?" She laughed, putting out her clove cigarette.

"As real as they get." I took a cookie and bit into it. Marisa should open a bakery. I offered one to my guest.

"I've read about you in the papers. I had the sense you were legit. It's especially nice to meet another Wiccan. I've been to the shop, but I guess you were off when I came in, I'd have remembered you," she said as she took the treat from me.

I chose to take that as a compliment. "Tell me what happened in the grove."

"He did the invocation and we proceeded with the ritual—but something told me to keep an eye on him. I got nervous, like I'd made a

terrible mistake. Sure enough, I saw the athame raised and just the way he held it—he looked as if he were going to plunge it right into my heart.” Her eyes widened. Once more, she shook her head. “He called out the strangest name, Jamal...Jamil?”

“*Jamila?*” My heart skipped a beat.

“Yes, that’s it.”

“I need you to think, Chandra, did you hear him chanting at all?”

The petite blonde shifted in her seat, taking a long draw on her tea. “I must have. I vaguely recall words like, ‘We’ll never part.’” I could see she was reaching back in her memory, trying to visualize that night.

“With this knife I stab your heart, soon my love we’ll never part,” we unexpectedly said in unison.

“It’s him. The same guy from my vision,” I exclaimed, standing, full of anticipation.

“Wait a minute—he said his name was...Lance. I didn’t ask for a last name,” she added. “I didn’t remember that until now.”

“I knew if we spoke you might recall something else about him. What’s the magazine you saw the ad in?” Leaning over her, I inhaled a whiff of sultry jasmine and vanilla.

“It was *Enchantments News Quarterly*, I told the detective that, but you can give them any name. I doubt he gave his real one.”

“I know the detective that’s assigned to this case and I’m sure he’ll check out the magazine. Is there anything else you remember, a birthmark, scar, a tattoo maybe?”

The buxom blonde shook her tresses, fingering the length of it, pulling stray hairs and tossing them to the wind. “Wait! He did have a tattoo. A dragon on his shoulder, his left shoulder.” She was all smiles now. “It was in blacks and purples, with red eyes.”

“Great. That’s so important you remembered this information. He doesn’t know where you live, does he?” I asked the young beauty as she stood.

“No, that much I know. It’s why we met at the park. Nobody comes to my home. No one except those who are a part of my coven and they, as you know, are like family.”

“Excellent. You don’t have to worry about him stalking you or exacting revenge.”

“Mother Goddess, I hope not!” she moaned.

“Thanks again, Chandra. Feel free to shop around and tell Marisa to give you fifty-percent off on anything you want.” I headed toward my car.

She called back to me. “Angelica, thank you.”

Driving down to the precinct, I wondered why I’d gotten myself involved. A little late, I thought. I was already in it. With the sunlight in my eyes, I hardly noticed that Sean had already spotted me while I straightened my skirts and slid out of my truck.

“Angelica, what’re you doing here?” he said grinning, obviously happy to see me.

“I was wondering if you found out who the guy was that tried to kill Chandra. I met with her a little while ago and she told me some interesting tidbits.”

“You want to get a cup of coffee or something?” he asked, heading for his car.

“Sure.” I followed him to his black Lexus. “Nice car,” I said as I got in.

He turned the ignition key. “Thanks, so—what did she tell you?” He pulled out of his parking spot.

“One thing was that she’s done this before. Her hooking up with him—they met for lunch before she actually agreed to anything. Lance, or whatever his real name is, came about from an ad in the *Enchantments News Quarterly*.”

“Very good. I’ll check that out. A small publication like that doesn’t have the strictest regulations as far as personals go.” He drove into the intersection. “I did some preliminary searches and have a list in my office of recent ads in local metaphysical magazines and newsletters.”

A chill ran through me. "My daughter has a crush on a guy named Lance. What do you think the chances are that this guy is the same Lance?"

"I don't know."

I dug into my bag, pulled out my cell phone and hit speed-dial. "That girl never picks up her phone," I moaned. I left a message. "Amber, I don't have time to go into details now, but I want you to stay away from your friend, Lance. I'll explain when I see you later. That's an order, Pookie." I dropped my phone back in my bag. "Kids." I sighed.

He parked in front of a quaint little cafe around the corner. We got out and made our way over to an outdoor table in the glorious sunlight.

"You eat lunch?" he asked, eyeing the menu, then me.

"No, I didn't have time."

"Great, then we'll grab a bite." He smiled, motioning to the waiter that we were ready to order.

Sitting back with my face in the sun, I began to relax for the first time all day.

"I'll have an iced tea, burger and fries," Sean ordered, handing the menu to the young waiter.

"Cajun chicken sandwich on a whole wheat roll and a seltzer with a splash of cranberry," I said, enjoying the sunshine.

"So, tell me, Angelica, how'd you become a witch, or is it Wiccan? Which do you prefer?"

"It doesn't matter to me, either's fine... I don't know—I've always been tuned in, I suppose you can say." I was used this topic of conversation; eventually, it always came up.

"Really? Since you were a little girl?" He seemed surprised at my answer.

The waiter brought our drinks.

"Yeah, I could see spirits since I was small. Like you and your grandma. First, it was my grandparents coming to visit then friends' relatives. It sort of blossomed from there."

I sipped on seltzer with cranberry juice while we waited for our food to arrive.

He handed me a buttered roll. I bit into it. It was a delicious honey oat with herb butter tucked inside.

“How’d you get involved in Wicca?”

“It sort of evolved. I studied with my friend, Ouida. She’s a priestess of Vodou. Then I taught myself tarot, astrology and took other courses along the way. One day I was shopping with a friend and I saw a pretty pentacle, but I wouldn’t buy it. I said to her, I’m not a witch. She just laughed at me and said, ‘What do you think you are? You know everything that witches know’—so I studied books on goddess worship and that’s basically how it happened. How’d you become a cop?”

“I come from a family of law enforcement. My brother’s a lawyer, my dad was a cop, his father before him. My sister’s a parole officer and my mom was a retired nurse. So I was either going to law school or medical school. I decided I wanted to be a police officer.”

“But you lived on a farm?” I questioned him like a real detective now.

“Yes, but that was more for relaxation, for my folks. It wasn’t their main income. It wasn’t any income.” He laughed. “It’s their vacation home, only we lived there all the time. It was close enough to the city for the both of them.”

I was quiet for a moment, mulling over my next question. “Do you believe in reincarnation, Sean?” I made room for our food on the tiny table.

“I never did before. But, after Rita died and the experiences I had following her death, I changed my mind. Do you?”

“Absolutely. I don’t believe in coincidences, either. I think things happen for a reason, even if we don’t understand what that reason may be. I also believe people come into our lives who we’ve known before.”

“I guess perhaps that would explain why you seem so familiar. You think it’s possible we knew each other in another life?”

Gods, those eyes could strip all emotion down to the bare bones. I pondered his question. "I think it's very possible. I also think it's possible I knew the killer as well."

He took a sip of his drink. "Really? Tell me what makes you say that."

The waiter brought our food and refreshed our drinks, and as we ate our lunch, I described the experience I had with Ouida and my regression. I left out the part where he and I were married. My intuition told me to spoon-feed him small doses of my otherworldly jaunts into the past.

"When Kara said she saw the images of clef notes in her meditation, I figured that's the music connection. That and the same blue eyes were in every vision. I realize you need concrete evidence, but I'll bet my pentacle, out of your two suspects, the one with the blue eyes is your killer."

"Yeah, and your trance experience, where he states he's friends with the Arthurs. Unfortunately, I need physical evidence."

As we ate, I noticed the women at the cozy little café staring at my handsome lunch partner. What I missed was the Jon Kane Construction truck pass by. My husband, on the other hand spotted me, along with another pair of icy blue eyes.

* * *

"What were you doing having lunch with him today, Angelica?"

"I was talking to him about the case, Jon," I said while putting dinner together, a mix of leftovers.

"The case? Angie, I have a news flash for you, you're not a cop! What're you doing discussing *the case* with him?"

I turned on the oven. "I *told* you a woman filed a report on Lammas. She's involved in some ritual gone wrong, the same kind of ritual I've been getting visions of—" I stopped short.

"No, you didn't tell me. I suppose you talk to the detective about these things and not me. Why are you shutting me out?"

Pouring myself a glass of wine, I tried to explain. "Who's shutting who out? Look, I know you're not happy with me getting mixed up with all this stuff. I didn't want to upset you." I took a drink of my wine.

"What about these visions? Tell me about them," he said, slightly calmer, though his face was still beet red.

"Promise you won't get mad?"

He finished the beer he'd been drinking in one long gulp. "Just tell me."

"It's sex magick. The guy is using sex magick to raise power, and I was privy to some of the workings."

"What does that mean?" he yelled, striding back and forth in the kitchen once more.

"I felt the sexual energy he was raising. It kind of took over, became a part of me," I told him, my voice low and serious.

I hadn't seen him this upset in a long time. "You've got to be joking! What did you do under this influence?" His hands banged the counter, his eyes pierced into mine.

"I made love to my husband, though it's been a while since either happened. What're you insinuating?"

"I don't know—but I'm not happy about this, not at all. Why did you have to discuss this with the detective?" He reached for another beer and flipped off the cap.

"I wanted to know if he'd gotten any reports about ritual magick. That's all I asked about. I wanted to speak with the High Priestess who took part in the ritual." I hated this feeling. He'd become my parents, and I had to explain myself to him.

He took a long swig of a Corona. "What ritual?"

"The ritual that took place on Lammas." I took a longer sip of my wine.

I knew what he was thinking. "Did you? Did you get to talk with her?" He eyed me up and down, taking in my outfit now with new eyes, as if I were dressing differently than I normally would.

"Yes, she came by the shop this afternoon, she told me what happened and she recalled some really vital information."

"Such as?"

"A tattoo on the guy's arm that she hadn't remembered up until our discussion, and his name. I wanted to let Detective Bennette know about it."

"Why couldn't the woman tell him?" He ran his hands through his hair.

"I suppose she could've, but I did. Why are you acting like this? I wish you'd calm down."

He huffed. "I can understand his name being important, if he used his real name, but what was so important about a tattoo, anyway? Can you trace it back to anyone? I don't understand the significance of finding out about a stupid tattoo."

"Yes, they can go to the local tattoo shops and find out if he had it done here. And you *know* they take a photo copy of your driver's license when you get a tattoo. The owners of the shop would have his address, and even if he isn't the same guy, at least they'd get a nut off the street that wants to kill priestesses. Why're you so upset that I met with him?"

"Why? How can you ask why? The guy has got a serious thing for you. You seem to be the only one that doesn't see it." He finished his beer and opened another. In four long gulps, he finished it.

"What?" I gasped. I could not believe what I was hearing or seeing. My husband was on a mission, and getting hammered was the outcome. It was a good thing Amber and Jake were at my mother's. I'd hate for them to have witnessed this.

"Come on, Angelica, Marisa thinks the same thing." He sighed, sitting across from me.

"You spoke to her about this?"

"Rich told me she thought the cop had a crush on you." His eyes would not leave mine as he stared at me, trying to read my emotions.

“You know how people get when they know I’m their only link to a lost loved one. He misses his wife. I’m just the local pipeline to her,” I reminded him. “This has happened before, and you know it.”

Jon became silent as he thought about my explanation, but under the quiet, I knew he was stewing. He got up, took another beer out of the refrigerator and popped the top. This time he took a frozen mug and poured the beer into it, adding a slice of lime from a plastic bag in the refrigerator. “You sure about that?” he finally asked, sitting back down.

At least he’d taste this one. “Absolutely. You’ve seen it happen before with other people. He’s no different.” I put my hands over his and gently squeezed them.

“Why does Marisa think he’s got feelings for you?”

“Sweet Marisa is a romantic, she thinks everyone has feelings for me, even George, my music distributor. She thinks Lucy from the Healthy Harvest has a thing for me.”

“Lucy?” His eyes opened wide.

“Yeah, she’s gay and comes to the shop around once a week. Do you see what I mean? I love you.” I came around to his side and placed a kiss on his cheek.

He pouted. “I’m just uncomfortable with him around you.”

“I’m uncomfortable with you around that realtor. You’ve got nothing to worry about,” I said, hoping to assuage his hurt feelings.

“Neither do you. It’s just that I feel between the two of us...we’re so busy lately. We need to take a vacation, just us. You seem so preoccupied with what’s going on with the Arthurs, and I’m caught up with this deal.”

“I’m sorry, and that’s a great idea. How about we go to Salem for a long weekend, maybe around *Samhain*?”

“Sounds good to me,” he agreed as he wrapped his arms around me, holding me tighter than he had in a while.

I kissed him tenderly and got back to dinner. “Me, too. Now let me get dinner going or we’ll never eat.”

We finally made love that night.

Chapter Twenty-three

Crystal Balls ~ Natural quartz crystal balls are cut from naturally occurring veins of crystals. These usually have inclusions or veils. Inclusions are cracks inside the crystal. Veils are like wispy clouds inside the ball. The scryer can use these to his or her advantage. For instance, when the scryer enters the crystal ball, these natural fissures can become a landscape through which the scryer may journey, or they may assist him or her in achieving a trance state (as candle light reflects from them). The veils and inclusions also can resemble doorways or windows into psychic realms. ~ From Angelica Kane's Book of Shadows

For now, all was quiet on the otherworldly front. The only other positive note was that there were no more threats to Veronica Arthur. But that did not fool me. I felt the killer's rage and knew it was just a matter of time before he struck again. I had no more visions, sexual or otherwise, and that was a welcomed relief.

My friends had come for a visit one lazy Sunday afternoon and lounged on the front porch while I dabbled in my herb gardens. Heena had just announced to us that she and Nan were expecting a baby, and we all felt like celebrating. Marisa brought over snacks and sparkling apple cider, and Ivy brought a peach pie.

I've always found peace and tranquility in my gardens. Soft, warm breezes embraced my skin as I plucked the few remaining weeds from around my lemon balm, rue and Mexican sage. I'd put on my cut-off shorts, tossed off my shoes and walked barefoot through my gardens, surveying what needed to be harvested and what could wait. Ivy helped, preferring to get her hands dirty rather than to lounge around.

Sean showed up unannounced, startling me, as I checked the progress of my small pumpkin patch.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you," he shyly apologized, his eyes roaming from my gourds to *my* gourds. "Hi, Ivy, ladies." He waved to the girls sipping their mint tea and sparkling cider.

"Hi. That's all right, I've been a bit jumpy lately. Not sure if it means anything or not." I smiled, my eyes cast downward. Ivy got up.

"I'm thirsty, Angie, you want a drink? Detective?"

"No thanks," he said.

I wiped my hands across my backside, trying to get some of the dirt off. "I'm okay, Ivy, you go ahead." We both watched as she joined Kara to indulge in some sparkling cider.

"I wanted to let you know we found out Paul Sumner was the head of the east coast fan club for your friend's group, but the DNA we got from Paul doesn't match any of the DNA we have on file. We tracked down the tattoo artist and got the address of the owner of that piece of art but he's long gone. It's Cliff Kendle. The ex-roadie."

"That's good news. Now you know who you're looking for." I looked up at him, the backdrop a floral collage bursting with color. I wished I had my camera. It was a Kodak moment.

He kicked his feet at the grass. "Yeah, we just can't locate him." He looked as I imagined he would on his parent's farm, if he lost the suit.

"Nobody knows where he could be? No friends or family?" I wiped the sweat from my lip and tossed back my hair. I must have looked a mess.

"None. He kept to himself, mostly. His family's scattered all over, from the west coast to up north, and down in Texas. No one's claiming to have heard from him, recently, that is." He leaned over and touched my face. "Dirt," he said as he wiped it away.

"That's too bad." I realized how that sounded. I let it go.

"You haven't gotten any more visions, have you?" he asked. Our conversation suddenly sounded strained. I wondered why.

"No, I would've called you if I had."

“All right, well—I was just checking because, I thought maybe—” he stopped in mid-sentence.

“What? You thought what?”

“Look, I wasn’t going to say anything, but...your husband called me,” he gushed, unable to sidestep the issue anymore. “He called a while ago and more than once, recently.”

“What? Why?” I was shocked, as thoughts of “how dare he” raged in my mind.

“He doesn’t want me involving you. I—I don’t blame him. Really, I mean, if you were my wife, I would feel the same way. He’s protecting you. I wouldn’t want you in danger, either,” he said with total sincerity. “I mean, I don’t want you in danger.”

My voice headed up the scale towards screech. “Are you saying I’m in danger?”

“No, of course not. I’ve been keeping an eye on you. That’s why when you asked if you thought you could be in danger, I was so certain you weren’t. Of course I want you to be careful, Angelica, regardless. I wouldn’t want anything to happen to you, either. That’s another reason I came by and checked on you. I—I worry about you.” He looked deeply into my eyes. I got the message loud and clear. Marisa was right. “I’m not a stalker, so don’t even think that. I just feel somewhat responsible for your welfare. I mean, you’ve helped me a lot and so I just—” He sighed, scrambling for the right words.

I came to his aid. “Thanks, that’s sweet of you. So, my husband called you, huh?”

“Oh, yeah—he’s pretty upset. I wanted to see if you were okay. I’m sorry if I caused any trouble for you. That’s the last thing I want to do.” He took my arm and rubbed it gently.

“More dirt?” I asked.

“Nah, no dirt. You’ll be all right?”

“Sure, Sean. I enjoy talking with you and helping, if I can. Jon is just feeling a bit insecure lately and overworked. He’ll be fine.”

“Good. I’d better go. I don’t want him coming home and finding me here. Take care of yourself, Angie.”

“You too, Sean.” That was odd, it almost sounded like good-bye.

His eyes locked onto mine for what seemed like hours, but then he was gone.

My friends joined me on the front lawn, full of questions for which I had only a few answers.

“That’s the handsome detective?” Kara prattled, her voice full of innocence.

“Yes, that’s him,” Ivy answered, handing me some mint tea. “What’d he want?”

“Just to fill me in on what’s going on with the case.” I smiled then sipped the thirst-quenching tea.

“Listen to her, the case!” Kara joked, poking me in the ribs. “He’s good-looking! Is he single?”

“Kara, you think all guys are gorgeous,” Heena teased.

“Yes, I admit it. I love men!” Kara laughed. “And women!”

“Sister, you know he has feelings for you that go past a casual friendship, don’t you?” Ouida asked boldly. Marisa stood smugly beside her, arms crossed. “We all see his aura around you. Just so you know. Don’t play with the man’s emotions. He’s still mending from a serious loss.”

“I know, Oui. Marisa reminds me on a daily basis.”

Chapter Twenty-four

Emerald ~ Magickally, emerald is linked to the Earth Goddess and to Spring, Netzach, the Anahata or Heart Chakra and associated with Venus and Cancer. Emerald is May's Birthstone. The stone is said to ease the pains of childbirth. Emerald symbolizes psychic powers, purity and immortality. Legend has it that light-colored varieties of the gem were found in nests of griffins. Emeralds were often carried by sailors due to the belief that they could calm seas and ensure safe travels, therefore bringing good fortune. Associated with the heart chakra, emerald was thought to lose its color or turn brown if a partner was unfaithful and, as a charm, it was used to ward away lustful thoughts. ~ From Angelica Kane's Gem Power Workshop

Marisa had been scrying to see if she could get a location on Cliff, but nothing ever came of the sessions. We knew from experience not to let our guard down. Our circle met and worked every protection spell we knew for the Arthurs and for Karen, the remaining singer.

Sean continued meeting me at the store rather than my home. He said he just wanted to make sure there were no more broken windows or dead animals left at the shop. He was impatient to get a lead on Cliff from Joseph, hoping Sally had said something to him that would be useful. But Joseph had abandoned the Jehovahs and began working with his father. The tattoo artist insisted his client was very quiet throughout the procedure.

Marisa continued to taunt me mercilessly whenever Sean came by the shop. She dropped little hints, seeing romance everywhere. She missed her calling; she'd have made a wonderful *shadkhn*.

Jon seemed to settle down in his uncertainty, but was still working long hours. We rarely ate as a family anymore and I noticed Amber had become withdrawn. She wouldn't talk to me, except to argue that her friend Lance couldn't possibly be the same demented Lance that I warned her of, so it was a stalemate. She spoke only to her best friend, Michele. Not even Jake could get a rise out of her.

The lingering cloud of tension that constantly peered down threatened to burst over us all, like the final curtain call. We held another healing circle, but I cut down my reading schedule to two days a week. We had other talented readers at the shop. If I couldn't do the reading, I booked one of them and the customers were, so far, very happy.

"Ronnie's agreed to see Ivy as her therapist. Ivy's even been making house calls, for a few weeks at least," Heena told me over the phone from her office one late afternoon. "Nan prescribed Ronnie some medication, just to help her through this, but I don't think she's taken any. Marc is still worrying incessantly about her. I think he needs a sedative, too."

"In the conversations I've had with Ronnie, she's relied on her belief system to carry her through," I informed Heena. "The occasional sleep aid or anxiety pill, but that's it. But this experience has taken a toll on her. Staying secluded has run her down to bare bones. She dropped too much weight for her tiny frame, she looks wraithlike," I said. "Their concerts are postponed for now, but I think they're rescheduling some dates."

I heard Heena yawn as she spoke. "I know. The debut of the new album's postponed, too. They're waiting for Cliff to be arrested before they release it."

"How are you feeling, Heena?"

In my mind, I could see her smile. "Tired, but other than that I feel wonderful."

"You're lucky, I had morning sickness all day with Jake. Amber's still giving me *agita* and the silent treatment."

“She’s at that age. She’ll come around, you’ll see.”

Sighing, I said, “I hope so.”

“I’ve got to get back to seeing patients. I’ll talk with you soon.”

I hung up with Heena and picked up the paper. When the Arthurs weren’t the target of Joel Sander’s reporting, we were. He was a persistent pain in our collective neck and now he renewed his spin on the events, linking our beliefs to the murders.

Wiccan Band Cursed

By Joel Sanders

Our local band of witches, Arthur’s Graile, has been stricken with devastating losses recently. The deaths of singers, Diane Seabring and Rebecca Landsing, have put a sudden stop to their popular concert tours.

Those close to the band remain extremely guarded about what has transpired, but others are freely speculating that it is retribution for their pagan background.

“If you listen to their lyrics, they sing about blasphemous beliefs,” Preacher Laslow, of the Born Again Christian’s Oceanview Chapter stated in an interview recently. “It’s sad those poor girls paid with their lives. I hear one of them had confused sexual behavior as well. People don’t want to listen to the warnings. It just leads them down a path straight to hell!”

From what my sources are telling me, it seems that the murder of Sally Shaw is somehow connected to these shocking crimes. Veronica Arthur, the lead singer of the band, had been receiving threats via the postal mail and her email. There is a warrant out for the ex-roadie of the group, Cliff Kendle, who is also the main suspect in the Sally Shaw murder. Sally was also a practicing witch.

I will be following this and the trial that ensues very carefully.

Joel was not an objective journalist. I knew what it was like to be the focus of the headlines in our local paper and my heart went out to the Arthurs.

Jon was still working a lot of overtime, getting home late and falling asleep on the couch. He seemed less distant, but I still wondered if he resented me for getting involved with these murder investigations. I couldn't imagine not getting drawn in. I was a part of them, regardless of what either of us wanted.

The new deal he'd been mulling over this summer had him tied in knots and that was what occupied his thoughts as of late. He was drinking more and eating less. All for the multi-million dollar job... I left the decision making for that to his better judgment. Between the running of the shop and getting school supplies for my two children, I didn't have time to think—well, maybe a little. But that was a blessing in disguise.

With the start of the new business, we expected it to be a tough year, but nothing like it turned out. Perhaps a long weekend in Salem this October would be a good idea. For me anyway, and as long as Jon could fish, he'd be happy. However, bills had to be paid and bacon brought home, and I was the one frying it, as well.

The first signs of autumn were in the air and in the sycamore trees, their leaves fading to yellow. Nights were getting a little cooler and the Canadian geese squawked in the distance. Labor Day snuck by, spent with my close friends at a quiet barbeque at Ouida's home.

The first day back at school arrived and was just as nerve-wracking for me as it was for my kids. I'm certain it had to do with some childhood trauma I suffered, buried deep in my subconscious.

It was also an exciting day on Market Street, as talk of a new shop spread through town. Annie Pernell, a native of Pennsylvania, was bringing with her a house that was part of her family for generations. It was due to arrive in October, but they were preparing the land for it now.

She was opening an antique shop, transforming the home into a place of business, the same as we had with our shop, only we'd started with a barn. I'd met Annie and she appeared to be a wonderful addition

to our community. She was an open and friendly woman with a lovely yellowy-green aura.

Sitting on my front porch one afternoon, I watched the last hoorahs of receding summer colors in my garden. With a glass of merlot with ripe, juicy peaches marinating in it, I relaxed. Soon I'd be occupied getting this evening's dinner ready. Now, though, my thoughts drifted to the past few months and all that had transpired.

I'd enjoyed working with the police and hoped that it would be something I could be involved with again. My only wish was that Jon would adjust to it by then.

Lying across my lounge chair, I lifted my skirts to reveal my legs to the dying rays of the sun. As much as I worshipped the moon, I loved the sun. Tranquility embraced me and I closed my eyes, letting my thoughts flow like a river. I wondered about Cliff and the past life we shared and what influences that had upon the present. Mostly though, I thought about my family and the approaching holiday of *Samhain*.

The sun was low in the sky, the shift of sunsets changing ever so slightly southbound. My flag for the season, a witch, of course, flying over a full harvest moon, hung from a post on the front deck. I usually waited until the Autumn Equinox, but this year I spotted a neighbor with their Halloween flag out already, so that gave me the green light. In my mind, anyway.

This was my favorite time of year, when Mother Nature turned up the volume on the visual landscape. She painted the trees with wild colors of crimson, vivid yellows and oranges of every hue. We still had a while until our colors peaked. Late October was usually the time for us to enjoy the full effulgence of the season. Then it was a treat for the eyes.

Roadside farms with their abundance of corn, pumpkins and apples tempted drivers to stop and buy a few. Not to mention their caramel apple pies, the mere thought of which sent my salivary glands into overdrive. The air was warm still, the temperatures in the high seventies, I was comfortable in my oversized lounge chair with its big fluffy pillows.

It was a wonderfully soothing afternoon. The warm breeze felt like a hug from Mother Nature and I must have dozed off for a few minutes.

Abruptly, signals went off inside my head and my eyes flew open. I nervously perused the front yard.

Nothing unusual.

Cody was romping in the back; no warning barks from him. No neighborhood children were out, at least none close by.

Still, I felt the hairs on the back of my neck prickling, electrified, as if static filled the air surrounding me. I was never prone to panic attacks, but one was coming on. The world seemed to be closing in on me. A burning in my chest radiated outward with the sensation of heat traveling from my feet to my thighs.

Hot flashes? I was only thirty-six.

A thudding emerged from my chest and worked its way into my head, causing it to throb. My vision was faded in and out, light to dark, as I grabbed onto the arm of the lounge chair.

I vaguely saw an outline of a woman running down the block toward my home, her red hair bouncing around her. I dropped my glass of wine as the image of my daughter flashed on my psychic screen. The phone rang.

“He’s back!”

It was Marisa, bounding up my driveway, waving her pendulum.

Chapter Twenty-five

Amber ~ With an energy like fluid sunshine, amber is the fossilized resin of pine trees. Amber is said to augment the beauty of the wearer. It is used to tap into the influence of the sun, and is good for achievement, abundance, healing, vigor and joy. A major stone for manifestation, Amber is also used for healing of the physical body. It carries a negative electrical charge and therefore is good to draw power and energy into its bearer. Jet and amber combined is one of the time-honored sacred stones of the High Priest or Priestess. This gemstone combination worn around the base of the throat is one of the traditional ritual adornments of modern Priestesses. ~ An excerpt from Angelica Kane's article on Gemstones and Priestesses.

"Amber!" I cried as I ran to grab the phone. "Hello?"

"You have a very beautiful daughter. She looks a lot like you. I like the streaks of blonde she put in her hair. She's developing into quite a beauty. How old is she? Sixteen? She looks more mature than her age. I've gotten to know her quite well over the summer. She did tell you about me, didn't she?" Then the caller hung up.

Tears poured down my face and I couldn't breathe. The air around me went arctic cold. I began to shake violently, uncontrollably. The phone rang again. I picked it up.

"Don't call the police. You wouldn't want anything to happen to your little girl." The voice was void of human emotion. A real-life demon was on the other end. Then the line went dead.

I grabbed the phone again and called over to Michele's.

"Amber left about ten minutes ago, Mrs. Kane."

“Michele, was Lance there?”

“N-no, Mrs. Kane,” she stammered.

I lost my temper. “Michele, you know better than to lie to me.”

“Yes, he offered to give her a ride home.”

I dropped the phone. My mind raced; I needed to calm down, but I couldn't. I grabbed my cell phone and called Jon. It went directly to voicemail. That was odd. I called Steven, but he had no idea where his father was.

Tears filled Marisa's golden eyes. “Call the police. Call Sean!” she cried.

“I can't.” I sobbed, tears once again streamed down my face. “He threatened to hurt her if I call the police. Call Rich—see if he knows where Jon is, please, Risa.”

Marisa took my cell phone and dialed her husband's number. “Did Amber walk over Michele's or take her bike?” she asked, waiting for Rich to pick up his phone.

I began berating myself. “She walked to Michele's right from school. I should've never gone back to work. Jon's right, I should stay home. Why did I think I could do it all—I must have been out of my freakin' mind. Now I'm paying for it, I was being so selfish!”

Marisa gave me a hug, sending me calming energy. “Hey—don't even go there, sister. You're doing what we all have to do to survive here. Stop beating yourself up. Rich... Amber is in trouble. Do you know where Jon is? Angie needs him and can't get a hold of him— Okay, if you hear from him, tell him to get his ass home, his daughter's been kidnapped. No, I'm *not* kidding! Just come over to Angie's, please! Okay, bye.” Marisa turned toward me. “Rich is on his way home.”

The phone rang again and both of us jumped out of our skin. I was petrified to answer, dreading the monster on the other end of the line.

“What's going on, sister?” It was Ouida, “I feel you all the way from here. Is everything all right?”

“No!” I wailed, losing control again.

"I'll be right over."

As soon as I hung up, it rang again.

"Yes," I answered.

"Meet me at Greenview Park, in the back by the pond. You know the place. I felt you watching me that night. Remember, no cops—or else."

I was stark white as I dropped the phone. I made it to the bathroom just in time to throw up.

Marisa was pacing. "Get me a map, I'll find her."

"I know where she'll be. I have to meet him at Greenview Park. No police, Marisa, don't call Sean, promise me or Goddess knows what he'll do."

"Oh, Great Brigit! I'm calling the coven; we're going to work some magick here."

I grabbed my purse and cell phone. "Stay here, please. Jake's upstairs, Steven will be home soon—don't tell them anything—SHIT! Ouida's on her way over. Why her, what do we have to do with any of this? Gods Marisa—I'll die if—"

"Hush! She'll be fine, don't even allow yourself to think anything but that she will be fine! I'll hold off as long as I can with the kids, baby cakes, they're gonna know something's up."

I nodded. "Okay."

I ran to my Explorer, hopped in and tore down the street toward the park. Isis, please be with me, Hecate Great Mother, Mary Queen of Heaven, Kali give me strength, I prayed as I sped down the side roads.

Immersed in thoughts and trying to quell my fears, I was functioning on pure adrenaline and not thinking, just acting. At the light, I grabbed my cell phone and punched in Jon's number again. No answer. Damn it.

Then I tried my cousin's cell phone. The killer hadn't said anything about calling relatives. Vinny was the only other person I could think of who might be able to help me. I wasn't sure if all the stories I'd heard about him when I was younger were true, but I sure as hell hoped now that they were.

“Yellooo,” Vinny answered on the second ring.

“Vinny, it’s cousin Angie, I—I need your help.” As hard as I tried to keep calm, I began to cry as soon as I heard his familiar voice.

“What’s wrong, doll?” He tried slowing me down as I rattled on, trying to catch my breath.

“R-remember the Fourth of July? The girl that went missing and was found murdered in the dunes? Then a few weeks ago the other woman that was killed in Maplewood Grove? Did you read about that?”

“Yeah, I saw it on the news—saw you on there, too. I don’t recall reading about the other woman, but I’ve been out of town—in Maplewood Grove you said?”

I wiped my nose with a Kleenex. “Yes, Vinny, that lunatic killer has Amber!” I cried.

“What! How do you know that? Angie, what’s going on?” His voice rose and then calmed. I sensed him struggling to keep a cool head for my sake.

“It’s a long story, Vin, I just got a call.” I wept as I tried to clear my eyes of the tears that fell, blurring my vision.

“He said if I call the cops he’ll hurt her. Evidently she knows him, and he offered to give her a ride home—and then he called me.”

I could see in my mind’s eye Vinny pacing the floor and scratching his head as he planned his next move. “Okay, try and stay calm. I’m at my place in the Hampton’s, doll, let me make some calls.”

I rushed through lights praying I didn’t get pulled over. “Please, Vinny, I’m so scared! I have to meet him at Greenview Park. By the pond. I’m on my way there now. His name’s Cliff Kendle.”

“Gotcha—try and stall him, whatever you can do, talk to him, get him to talk about himself. Give me a few minutes to take care of some favors that are owed me,” he said, taking control of the dire situation.

“I’ll do my best. I’ve got to get to her,” I wailed, weaving through traffic.

"I know—just try and give me some time to work my magic, 'kay, cuz? And be careful!"

"I'll try."

"Don't try, doll, do it. Your daughter's gonna need her momma after this."

"Thanks, Vin." I hung up. I was still about five minutes from the park. I hoped that was enough time for my cousin.

My cell phone rang. "MOM!" I heard Amber cry out.

"Amber!" I wept, my voice echoing through the phone.

His voice was venomous. "What's taking you so long? You must not care what happens to your only daughter. You got five minutes, that's it!"

My tone oozed with disdain. "I got pulled over by the cops, you asshole! For speeding!"

"You better've kept your mouth shut." I heard a click, then silence. At least I bought some more time.

On Route 26, I headed north toward the park. Rush hour traffic was making it difficult to maneuver and make any headway as I zigzagged in and out of lanes. I had so many thoughts running through my mind—where was Jon, being foremost on my list.

On Greenview Avenue I made a left and entered the parking lot. There were basketball courts on the right, filled with kids playing in the late afternoon sun. North of that was a playground for younger children. Mothers stood with their strollers, little toddlers swinging and playing on the slides, the large pool on the opposite side, closed up on Labor Day.

All I could think of was Amber, visions of her as a small child running into piles of leaves, her first day of school, Christmas mornings and birthdays. I had to gain control of my emotions; later I could fall apart. And I would.

I headed toward the back of the park on a dirt road and entered another lot closer to the pond.

Tucked in the corner was a blue blazer with New Hampshire plates. I pulled behind it and waited, trying to stop myself from shaking.

The driver side opened and Cliff got out. To look at him, you would never guess the malevolence that boiled underneath the good looks and tall stature. He had the look of a young collegiate. All he needed was a varsity athlete sweater. That or a surf board and he'd be your typical surfer dude, blonde and blue eyed, tanned and handsome. Exactly how Chandra described him.

The not-judging-a-book-by-its cover message ran through my head once again and I realized how right Sean was when he said you can never tell what a person is capable of, no matter what they looked like.

"You! You came into the shop looking for Sally." My mind phased in and out as static filled the air and the visions threatened to crack through the ethers once more.

He smirked. "You do remember."

"Where is she?" I begged while searching for any other vehicles that might enter the lot. He walked to the hatch and opened the glass. There, lying in the back, was my beautiful daughter, tied and gagged with duct tape. Tears streaked her face. I immediately reached for her, but he grabbed me and pulled me back. Electricity sparked. I grew dizzy and held onto the back hatch. I saw him grab his temple and massage his forehead.

"I know the past we shared, you don't have to use your magick to get me to remember," he muttered.

"I'm not. I just want my daughter."

Some power was at work. As he leaned against the truck, his body stiffened.

"Why are you doing this, witch?" He put his hand to my neck, but it wasn't a threatening gesture.

I stood silently, thinking about what he said. He was almost pleading with me then, what was it that told me? "That was you that day at the shop, when the preacher was there. I followed you."

"Yes, it was me, and many other times. I saw you with the detective having lunch. Your husband is right not to like him around you. The karma runs deep."

I looked away. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I scry, too, you know, not just your friend has the talent. Only I use a mirror. There was always jealousy between your husband and the cop, even back in Egypt."

I kept my eyes on Amber. "You know about then?"

"I know a lot more than that," he said, shutting the back of the hatch.

Chapter Twenty-six

Tourmaline is a powerful, fast-acting crystal. It helps you to release pains caused by events long past. Tourmaline's energies can be directed at specific areas and it is also one of the best all-around healing and cleansing stones. This stone diffuses and dissipates negative energies, leaving you calm and clear-headed. Tourmaline can aid you to gain a more balanced understanding of the meaning of life. This information, though sometimes painful, can be important to your spiritual growth. ~ From Angelica Kane's Book of Shadows.

"We're going to your friend Veronica Arthur's house and you're going to get me in, or else you're both history. Now hurry and get inside. Leave your truck here," he commanded. I tried to think of something to stall him, but anything would be obvious.

Unexpectedly, my cell phone rang. He glowered at me. I glanced to see the number it displayed.

"If I don't answer, my husband will get suspicious." I answered him defiantly, raising my head and squaring my shoulders, though internally I was scared to death.

"You better be careful. Make it quick!" He shoved me forward toward the passenger side of the Blazer.

"Hello." It was Marisa on the other end. "Hi, Jon, sorry I'm running late, I've got to stop at Ronnie's for a little while."

Cliff glared at me, mouthing, "Get off!"

“Okay, babe, I’ll be home soon,” I said, my voice cracking with fear. I hung up.

Marisa didn’t get a chance to say a word.

He pushed me into the front seat and tied my hands together with a plastic zip tie. It dug in painfully, cutting my skin.

His jaw worked incessantly, clenching and working the taut muscles in his agitated face. A lone vein streaked across his creased forehead. “Stop it! Whatever you’re doing, stop it!”

I tried to stall anyway I could. “I’m not doing anything. What’re you talking about?”

“You know exactly what I mean. The past, our history. That was long ago. You betrayed me. This is payback.”

“Payback for what? Are we talking about the same lifetime? You brought me out to die in the desert.”

“That’s not important now, just stop trying to send me your twisted visions,” he sneered, slowly pulling out of the parking lot.

“I’m not, Cliff.” In an instant his hand raised to strike me, but for some reason he stopped in mid-air.

“You wanted to escape from your father’s control back then and you used me. You set me up. You wanted to be with my brother all along.”

He was back in Egypt. “I didn’t, we were set up. You and I, by—”

“Don’t say another word or next time I won’t exercise such self-control.”

“Can I ask you one thing?” I knew I was pushing it, but something told me to ask.

“What?”

“Why Ronnie?”

“She betrayed me,” he growled.

“You *do* know that she was your brother then, one of the guards.”

His silence stretched over miles. I thought perhaps he hadn’t heard me. I was terrified to repeat myself.

Finally he answered. "Yes, but I didn't know exactly why until recently." He spoke in strained tones, his voice low and seductive. He gave slight chuckle, "A bit of irony at work here. I realize now that I was searching for the wrong woman. I thought I loved her and for a time I was in love with her. That was—until I saw you."

My heart thudded then I could have sworn it stopped.

He continued. "All this time I thought I was looking for a replacement for her, but it was you all along. Sally and Veronica. Both women look like you. Only I was too blinded by my rage to see it."

"I-I don't understand."

His features softened. "Veronica and I met before she and Marc hooked up. In fact, if it weren't for me, they probably wouldn't be together at all. She showed all the signs of being interested in me. I was so attracted to her..." He was lost in the past. "One night I made the mistake of telling Marc I was going out to a pub and if he wasn't doing anything, to come on over. He did, and the two of them hooked up. She dumped me soon after."

"Didn't Marc know you two were dating?" I asked, keeping him talking, just like Vinny suggested.

"Semantics. I said dating, she said we were just friends." He leered.

"But what do I have to do with Ronnie?"

"Haven't you heard me? I'm disappointed. You see, I was attracted to both women because they were imitations of *you*. My soul knew who you were in this life and that's why I was led to Veronica and Sally. I dreamt of you long before I met them—or you."

"But why the others? Why Diane and Becky?"

His tone changed brusquely, "Diane was a terrible mistake. If Veronica had been killed that night, none of what followed would've happened. Then, perhaps, I wouldn't have met you, and so I'd like to believe that everything is transpiring as it should. Becky, when she was a blonde, resembled you as well. It's only recently that she darkened her hair. Still, she had her part in all this and she was a pawn, used to hurt Ronnie."

"But if you've gone back, if you've regressed yourself, you know I didn't betray you. Your brother in that life was supposed to tell you to bring me to a family member's home. I was dying in the desert; someone found me and took me away."

"That's not how I saw it." He looked in my direction and the most sinister smile played upon his lips.

Once again, he was silent.

* * *

As we got closer to the Arthurs', I knew I had to do or say something. I chose to stroke his ego. "Cliff, you're a powerful witch, why don't we settle this and share the past memory together. We seem to have different ideas as to what happened."

"No! Do you think I'm stupid? You'll use your power to alter the outcome. My family was killed because of you. My brother escaped." His rage resurfaced. He reached out and grabbed a handful of my hair, pulling me toward him. "And I was born to the same bitter woman, only this time she lived long enough to make me into the dysfunctional man you see now."

"Of course your brother escaped, he set us up. I was never involved with him in that life."

"You're lying."

I whimpered as he strained to pull me closer. "You can change, Cliff, you have choices."

He laughed in a most maleficent pitch. "Don't try and play me. I am doomed. I am destined to die in the same manner now as I did then. Only I won't go alone." He let go and pushed me back in my seat.

Silence filled the air once more. I dared not press him, not now. His face glistened with perspiration and I was afraid that instead of keeping him talking, I was just infuriating him more. At least he was keeping within the speed limit as we turned onto Route 26. That would give Vinny more time.

He mused aloud, "It was strange how you invaded my thoughts, especially during my rituals. No one has ever penetrated my sacred space, but you're not just anyone."

My blood ran cold.

Cliff drove on, getting closer to the Arthurs'. I could do nothing but pray to the Goddess that Vinny had enough time to do whatever he needed to.

I cursed myself for not joining Kara's self-defense classes. You could be sure Amber and I would be attending from now on. I felt so helpless. A thousand thoughts raced through my mind, but I found no answers, only more questions.

Cliff made his way swiftly through the traffic and pulled up to the gate that was supposed to protect the community of Harbor View. Buzzing it, he told the security guard he was a landscaper there to price out a job. He got out of his truck and gave the guard his ex-employer's card and the gate opened. So much for security.

He drove onto the block where Heena and Veronica lived, pulled over to where he'd be hidden by the arborvitaes and parked. There was no police car in front of the Arthurs' home.

Amber tried to sit up in the back and was three-quarters there. Luckily, Cliff didn't seem to notice. Her tears had dried and I saw a severe look of determination on her somber face. He pulled me out of the Blazer and I felt the sharp point of a knife dig into my side as he slammed the door shut.

Amber sat upright and glared at Cliff and the knife. I tried to avert my gaze so he wouldn't notice that she looked out at us. I detected a fierce look in her eyes, a look I'd never seen before. It was as if she were someone else. She seemed to be giving me a glance that said, "Don't worry, Mom". Funny, she was trying to comfort me.

I wondered where the officer assigned to watch the Arthurs' home was as we slowly made our way over to their gate. Cliff stood a hair's breadth away from me, jabbing the knife every few seconds as if I needed reminding that he held the sharp dagger. As he rang the buzzer, he

suddenly dropped the knife. “Fuck! That’s hot!” He grimaced. “You better not pull any of your glamours on me.” He twisted my arm tighter as he pushed me forward.

* * *

Back at my house, Ouida, Ivy, Marisa, Kara and Lily created a sacred circle with white candles surrounding them. In it, Ouida begged the spirit Ezili to watch over us and keep us safe. She promised a sacrifice on her part if the spirit granted her wish. They placed two bottles of rum and sweet rolls as some of the gifts for the spirits. Her makeshift altar included plants from the deck, crystals and incense that were scattered throughout the house.

Marisa rummaged through the cabinets looking for more cakes, candy and cookies to add to their offering plate. Over a simmering cauldron with herbs of sage, rosemary, sandalwood, dragon’s blood and salt, Ouida took her *boline* and slightly cut her hand. She let the blood drip into the bowl.

Finally she spoke. “I offer my life’s blood, spirit, please take this gift and keep my sister, Angelica, and her daughter, Amber, safe.”

Marisa reached for the knife, held it over the flame of the white candle and followed suit, putting a small cut in her hand. “This is my life’s blood, Ezili, please accept this as a token and keep Angelica and Amber safe.”

Lily, then Kara followed, as did Ivy. The room filled with spirits and from what they told me later, the energy was positively dynamic.

* * *

The housekeeper answered the buzz. “I have to see Ronnie. It’s Angelica. Angelica Kane,” I said, trying not to sound too panicky.

“One moment.”

Cliff grabbed his head and his eyes were tearing. “What’s going on—it feels like someone’s stuck a poker in my eyes!” He rubbed them, sticking the knife farther into my back. I turned when he wasn’t looking and saw Amber concentrating her stare at Cliff, piercing him with her infuriated gaze. I couldn’t imagine what she was doing. She’d never expressed any interest in magick or even attended any circles. I tried to take that opportunity to run, but he grabbed my arm, jerking me toward him. As he did that, he jabbed the knife into my side. He pierced my flesh.

“They’re getting ready to go out for dinner, can she meet you out front?”

Cliff gave his head a violent shake. “Tell her it has to do with her mother’s messages.”

She buzzed us in.

“Nicely done.” Cliff commented, pushing forward, hiding behind me, ducking down as we made our way to the front door.

“You’re hurting me!” I yelled, hoping they would hear me.

I was panicking now. I tried to think of some clever move to get him off me and warn Ronnie. I certainly didn’t want him to get his hands on her. I sensed the ire building inside him as we approached the front door. It felt like years of frustration and torment were getting ready to unleash themselves. My mind rushed in agonizing pain, trying to think of something. I was blank, petrified with fear.

The knife had stuck me a few times now and I was bleeding, getting light headed. I could feel the spirits around, trying to get through to me. The familiar thud blossomed in the back of my skull, the prelude to a vision. I could only hope Ronnie got the hidden message. Her mom had always warned her of danger.

* * *

“I see her going onto their property,” Heena reported to Jon, who had finally gotten home to find the calamity in his kitchen, candles all over and my coven sisters chanting. Marisa castigated him for not answering

his cell phone. He was beside himself, pacing back and forth. The only thing that kept him somewhat sane was the knowledge that Heena had called the police, Detective Sean Bennette, specifically. After handing Ivy the phone, Jon hugged the kids and warned Daniel to stay put. Steven was on his way to the Arthurs'. He'd arrived home before his father and took off immediately after coercing Kara into giving him directions. Jon soon followed with Rich. Marisa sensed something wasn't right with Jon and she silently worried he might do something foolish.

* * *

Only five feet from the door, my head filled with the sound of a dozen turbine jets and all were ready for take-off. I became detached, as if someone switched a channel and now we all moved in slow motion. The blood dripped little by little down my side and I began to get cold. I tried to slow my breathing and keep my cool for as long as possible. That, or until I passed out from blood loss, whichever came first.

I thought about so many things in what appeared to be a short span of time—my kids, mostly; family and what a wonderfully lucky woman I was. These thoughts gave me strength.

Each movement took more time than the last. Amidst the raucous symphony in my cluttered, frazzled mind, I heard the softest whisper. I wasn't sure where it was coming from. Was it spirit? There was also an echo. *Listen*, they were trying to tell me.

Then I heard it. It was ever so slight, but branches crackling far off in a dense wooded area echoed.

Cliff heard it as well.

We both turned and looked in the direction of the snapping twigs.

He grabbed me closer as the black muzzle of the gun peered through golden leaves. I was in the direct line of fire.

He dropped the knife and grabbed my chin in his hand, turning me toward him. The hard lines that ran around his eyes softened. Our energies mingled. He pulled me to him and time seemed to slow.

Abruptly, all the hostility between us evaporated in the heat of our embrace. In a bizarre way, if I died at this moment, it would have seemed natural, to die in a loved one's arms—and we surely would both be killed if a bullet hit. I sensed he felt it, too, as he wrestled with his emotions. A calm expression washed over his face as he gently kissed my lips.

"I could let you die right now," he whispered, then threw me down to my knees and out of harm's way.

In an instant there was a pop and he spun around. The bullet slammed into his abdomen and I watched as Cliff's muscular frame fell backward.

Blood surged out of the wound, staining his immaculate shirt as he lay staring at the sky.

I kneeled next to him. From somewhere far away, I heard screaming. My body began to shake. I pressed down on the spot where the blood oozed out.

"I couldn't be the cause of your death—not again—not in this lifetime," he groaned as his eyes stared at mine. Taking my hands in his, he stopped me from preventing the blood loss.

"You weren't then, either. They set us up. The other guards and your brother. They killed your family, not my father."

"You don't understand. I'm just as guilty, whether you survived in the desert or not. I know now...I should've waited to see if my brother came to get you, but I didn't. I made the mistake of trusting him—then the merchant found you. You know he's still your protector, only now he's a cop." He was struggling for breath. "That was your good fortune, but it doesn't make me innocent. I should never have believed my brother in that life. He said he would take you to a safe place. I learned too late it was a lie. That's why Ronnie was a target."

"Ssh, don't talk, Cliff."

"She's prettier this time around." He tried to smile, but his face was pale.

“Your brother was supposed to tell *you* to bring me to my mother’s sister. Instead, he lied and said he would do it. He never did,” I said, my teeth chattering from shock.

He took in a deep, guttural breath. His chest rattled. As he exhaled, he whispered, “Isis didn’t totally harden my heart. Perhaps she’ll soften it more someday. I did come back for you—forgive me.” Then he was gone.

Sobs wracked my body as I called out for my daughter. My side ached with a hot searing pain that radiated from my lower back to my right side. The white shirt I wore was soaked red with both Cliff’s and my blood.

The next few moments were a complete blur. I vaguely remember Marc running out, grabbing me and trying to get me inside.

“Amber—my baby’s in the Blazer!”

“Ronnie, get some scissors,” he shouted, running to the street. “It’s okay, angel—it’s me, Marc.” He gently brought her out of the truck. Ronnie ran over with the scissors, cut me loose then released Amber from her bondage.

Sounds of sirens filled the air and swarms of police cars invaded the block. There was Heena running at breakneck speed to the Arthurs.

I clutched onto Amber and sobbed as we held each other tightly.

“I’m sorry, Mom, I’m so sorry. From now on I will listen to you, you were right about Lance. I’m sorry,” she whimpered.

I then heard Heena. “They are fine. I don’t know what happened, but he’s dead. Yes, I’ll put her on,” she said, handing me her cell phone.

“I’m right outside the development with Steven, they won’t let us through yet. They’ve had it closed off,” Jon relayed. I could hear him struggling to keep calm. “How are you? How’s Amber?”

“I—I’m f-fine, a little c-cut up, horrified and sh-shaken, but okay. Amber’s fine. The same. She’s not cut, though—she’s just t-terrified. It was h-horrible—but she’s a resilient young woman.” I couldn’t stop shaking.

“Like her mother,” Jon said. I could tell he’d been crying.

Sean rushed over to me and got the paramedics to dress my wound. He ably lifted me onto a stretcher and made sure the EMTs attended to me, never leaving my side. “She’s going into shock,” he called to the nearest medic. “You’ll be all right, Angel,” he whispered.

I passed out.

I awakened to find my wounds bandaged. I’d been wrapped in a warm blanket. I tried to explain as best I could what happened. But Sean didn’t believe that Cliff had suddenly become so altruistic. It wasn’t as simple as that. In fact, it was far from it.

I lay in the ambulance with Amber by my side. The police were searching the grounds for the gunman, but so far all they found was a nine millimeter shell casing. I suspected they never would find the actual shooter.

“Angel, before you go I thought you’d like to know. Sara, the little girl that’s been missing, we found her,” Sean said with a big grin. “She was located in an apartment complex in Glendale Cove. The father’s girlfriend was keeping her there. Just like you said. I owe you an apology. The mom wants to thank you when this all settles down. I’m sorry I got you involved in all this. I really feel terrible that your family had to be dragged into this mess.”

I could see and more importantly feel that he really did mean what he said. “You don’t owe me anything, Sean, and you don’t need to apologize. I got involved on my own. Can I go now?”

“No, you’re off to the hospital. I think you’re going to need a few stitches. Do you want me to come along? Is your husband here?” he asked.

“I don’t know if they let him through. Everything’s barricaded.”

He winked. “I’ll find him and tell him where they’re taking you.”

“Thanks. Oh, Sean?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I thought there was supposed to be an officer watching the house.”

“There was, but my superiors let him go—cutbacks.”

I winced at the cut on my own back. The irony.

Chapter Twenty-six

Angelite is believed to be helpful in telepathic communication. If two people desire to be linked in mind, they should each carry a piece of Angelite crystal. In mediation it facilitates one to communicate with spirit guides and, as its name suggests, angels. Its light-blue color is associated with healing anger, especially anger caused by lack of communication. ~ From Angelica Kane's Workshop on Angels.

Ronnie told the story of how she met Cliff to me, Ivy and Amber. "He'd been the landscaper at Marc's old house. I did meet him before I met Marc. I flirted a little, but it was harmless. We were friends, a little innocent kissing, but I never slept with him. Once I met Marc, my heart went to him. Cliff began helping with the equipment on tours. He also dabbled with the guitar. He was good and I tried to get him to start his own band. So did Marc."

Ronnie took a long pause. "We had our guys in the band. They've been playing together for years. There's a chemistry between the members. It didn't work out for Cliff. I guess he took my kindness for something else. Then he started getting possessive, wanting to hang out with just me. He wanted to perform rituals together. I think he really snapped when Marc and I were engaged. That's when Glenn, our old manager fired him," Ronnie confided. "I never thought his feelings ran that deep and were filled with such hate. I just feel so responsible for Diane's and Becky's deaths."

She began to weep once more. I had my own feelings of responsibility and they ran too deep to admit, I had a hard road ahead. We all did.

Ivy sat and listened to all three of us, Ronnie, Amber and me. Trying to make some sense out of all of this was going to take a lot more time than one evening, if it ever could be.

* * *

It was long after midnight by the time we'd finished our session. Marc and Ronnie thanked Ivy, said their good-byes and headed home. It had been a long and tiresome day. Heena brought over some sedatives for me and sleep aids, samples her husband had. It definitely came in handy having them as our physicians. Heena checked out Amber, and when Nan got home from the hospital, he checked me again, to make sure the sutures weren't bleeding. We would be fine in time.

The girls waited patiently. Kara made the soup that was supposed to be that night's dinner and a salad. As I walked into the kitchen, I looked out the window and noticed my Explorer in the driveway. It was illuminated by the street lanterns. I must have left the keys in it. How it got back was a mystery.

In the kitchen, sitting next to Marisa, was Vinny, eating a bowl of soup. He got up and walked over, arms outstretched. I began to cry, losing my composure all over again. He embraced me with a warmth that was at once calming and protective.

"You left your keys in the ignition, you should know better," he whispered. "Everything all right? You okay? Did he—you know—hurt you?"

"No, n-not that way and nothing that won't heal in time. In fact, I think I hurt him. I-I'm all right. I'm not making any sense. I don't know how to thank you..." I said, trying to hug him without straining against the stitches.

"Hey, that's what family is for." He winked. "How's Amber?"

"Jon brought her upstairs to bed, she took a sedative, I don't really know. Time will tell." I began to cry.

"He didn't hurt her did he? You know what I mean, cuz?"

“No, he didn’t, she said he just scared her, but no, he didn’t touch her.”

I hooked my arm through his and walked into the den, nursing my side. The pain pills were beginning to kick in.

I looked up at him and had to ask. “How?”

He took his hands and cupped my face. “Don’t you worry your gorgeous little head. You did great. You gave me the time I needed and it’s done. No one needs to know how, who, when or why. The less you know, the better, doll. Especially with that cop friend of yours asking questions.” He winked at me. “Yeah, Ivy tells me stuff.”

I began to sob again. “Thank you, Vinny.”

We headed back into the kitchen. Vinny took Jon into the den and the two were gone for quite a while. I sat down, too exhausted to investigate that little scenario.

Soon my cousin emerged from the den, frowning. “I didn’t call your mother, Angie. I figured it’s something you better tell her in person, so she can see you’re all right.”

I smiled. “Jon called her. She was bound to see it on the news. Thanks for everything, Vinny.”

“Come on, Ivy, sweetheart, you promised me a ride home,” Vinny teased, his mood suddenly lighter.

Ivy questioned me lightheartedly. “Can I trust this tall, dark and handsome man, Angie?”

“You couldn’t be in better hands.”

* * *

My three sons watched as my coven sisters, who could wait no longer, surrounded me with gentle hugs, kisses and lots of love. Marisa was crying profusely, Ouida was beaming proudly and Kara was a total wreck. Lily stood in the background taking it all in. Kara spoke first,

“You ladies are all going to learn self defense. I’ve decided to teach a class at the shop.”

“You did good, little sister, the spirits are very pleased with you,” Ouida cajoled.

“The spirits did good by me, too! What did you do? At one point the knife Cliff held got red hot, and then his head was pounding and his eyes were tearing.”

“Not us—we did protection only,” Ouida informed me.

“Ah—I knew it! It was Amber, she had this crazed look in her eyes and she was staring at Cliff as if she was throwing daggers at him. I’d never seen her like that—ever!”

“The little witch is coming into her powers!” Marisa laughed.

We all felt a great sadness about those who had gone to the Summerland. They would undoubtedly be remembered this coming *Samhain*. There were still many unanswered questions, but they would wait for another day. We deserved to laugh, and we did, in full agreement about the newest witch in the family.

Finally, we were all able to let our guards down, to let go of the past. When time created enough distance, I would explore this relationship that Cliff and I had. I was grateful I could count on Ivy to help me on this journey. Not too many people would understand. Jon especially.

I knew the next few months would be a busy time. My husband and I had many things to discuss. We both were guilty of keeping secrets from each other and somehow that needed to be dealt with—his fancy luncheon dates with overly affectionate clients, and mine with handsome detectives. Perhaps an unbiased marriage counselor was in our future.

Through it all, I found it comforting knowing that love transcends time. As misguided as Cliff was with his tortured past that haunted him, in the end it was love that set him free.

May Wine

½ cup strawberries, sliced
1 bottle of white wine (German is ideal)
12 sprigs of woodruff, fresh

Pour wine into a wide mouth jar or carafe. Add the sliced strawberries and woodruff, and let sit for an hour or more. Strain and serve chilled.

* * *

Lavender Rosemary Lemonade

1 quart fresh squeezed or pre-made lemonade
1 tsp. to 1 Tbsp. culinary lavender
1 cup boiling water
1 sprig of fresh rosemary
Add sugar to taste

Pour boiling water over the lavender and rosemary, allow to steep for 10 min. Strain out herbs and add to the lemonade. Serve well chilled. ~
Recipe from Angelica Kane

* * *

Lavender Cream Scones

2 cups Pastry Flour
1 Tbsp Baking Powder
1/4 tsp Salt

4 Tbsp Lavender Sugar
6 Tbsp Butter
1/3 cup Cream or Milk
1 Tbsp Lavender Buds
2 Eggs, beaten

In a mixing bowl combine flour, baking powder, salt, and Lavender Sugar (see recipe garnish below). With a pastry blender or two knives, cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Meanwhile, bring the cream and Culinary Lavender just to a boil. Remove from heat and allow Lavender flavor to infuse for 20 minutes. Then strain out lavender flowers and discard them.

Now in a separate bowl combine eggs and Lavender cream until well blended. Stir cream mixture into dry ingredients until they are moistened. Divide the dough into two 8-inch rounds on a greased baking sheet. Cut the dough with a sharp knife into 8 wedges. Brush the top with milk and sprinkle with sugar. Bake at 400°F for 10 to 15 minutes or until the scones are a golden brown. Over baking will result in dry scones. Oven temperatures DO vary so remember to check your scones at least five minutes before your baking time is up.

Garnish: Lavender powdered sugar

(To make lavender powdered sugar, put a few lavender flowers in a sealed, pint jar of powdered sugar for a day before using sugar.)

Lavender scones and garnish recipes used with permission and thanks from:

<http://www.lavenderfarms.net/hoodriverlavender/contact.html>

Hood River Lavender

P.O. Box 266

Odell, OR 97044

541-386-9100

* * *

Caramel Pecan Apple Pie

15 oz. pkg. all ready pie crusts, or make your own
1 tsp. flour

FILLING:

6 c. thinly sliced peeled apples
3/4 c. sugar
1/4 c. flour
1/4 tsp. salt
2 tbsp. Butter

GLAZE:

1/3 c. caramel topping
2-4 tbsp. chopped pecans

Prepare pie crust according to package directions for two-crust pie. Heat oven to 425 degrees.

In large bowl, combine apples sugar, flour, and salt; toss lightly. Spoon apple mixture into pie crust lined pie. Dot with butter. Top with second crust and flute; cut slits in several places. Bake at 425 degrees for 35-45 minutes or until apples are tender. Remove pie from oven; immediately drizzle with caramel topping. Sprinkle with nuts.

TIP: Cover edge of pie crust with strip of foil during last 10-15 minutes of baking if necessary to prevent excessive browning. Serves 8.

About the Author

To learn more about the author please visit <http://b-elladonna.com>.
Send an email to Ella at Belladonna_47@hotmail.com or join her
Myspace group to join in the fun with other readers as well as B. Ella
Donna.

<http://myspace.com/elladonna>

My Blog <http://luna-chyck.blogspot.com>

Surgeon Victor Galloway kept death at bay in the operating room—now death has claimed him. Resurrected against his will, he must fight for his family and his soul.

Dark Resurrection

© 2007 John A. Karr

Victor Galloway is a prominent surgeon and family man. When he suffers a heart attack, he claws his way to the phone and dials 911. The paramedics arrive, smile down at him and quickly administer a lethal injection.

Victor's life is ending, but his nightmare has just begun.

Close to death and strapped to a gurney, he's offered an unholy deal by Tobias, H.E.L.L.'s CEO: Use his surgical skills to harvest the living to feed the undead in exchange for immortality.

Refused but not to be denied, Tobias presses his unwilling recruit into the ranks of the undead. Whether by chance or divine intervention, Victor is different from the others. He is a monster with a conscience, a force for good ensnared by evil, and the only one willing to stand against Tobias and his burgeoning nest of zombies. He must destroy them, but doing so risks the lives of his family and the last hospital employee with a pulse.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Dark Resurrection*:

It was easier to think now, Victor realized, as he watched the grave robber race away, over the headstone-laden hillsides before finally disappearing into the night. He'd become fully conscious. Was it triggered by anger?

Something had made him want to tear the grave robber apart, something other than the contempt Victor felt toward the man. What it was, he wasn't sure. All he knew was that he'd had a massive urge to break the man's neck, rip him open and...

Jesus.

He'd wanted to feed on the man.

How utterly repulsive.

Even so, it had taken every ounce of willpower he possessed not to surrender to the urge.

Urge? No, not just an urge. It went far deeper and came on far stronger. It was an instinct. One that had set in with this—what should he call it?—second existence.

Now the grave robber was gone, the instinct to kill and feed had backed down, but by no means had it disappeared. Instead, it lay hidden in the shadows of his new psyche, a famished lion crouching in tall savannah grass, muscles tensed and fangs bared, waiting for the right moment to charge forward and spring with lethal power onto the back of some unwary prey.

As revolting as this inhuman instinct was, he wasn't sure he'd be able to control it next time. It was too strong. He also had the disturbing feeling that with time it was going to grow and dominate him until it became impossible to ignore.

God, what had he become?

In his previous life he'd been Victor Galloway.

But who was he now? What was he?

He was no longer Victor Galloway. His sense of self—his soul?—was housed in Victor Galloway's body, but the body had changed. It felt familiar and unnatural to him at the same time. The body carried out his mental commands with frightful speed and power, but it was like some kind of exoskeleton that merely contained his sentience. His mental processes had changed as well. The vibrancy and beauty and tangible feel of life had been stripped away. Now the world was shrouded in a perpetual shadow, as if he now moved through some dark, unsavory dream.

He existed, but he didn't belong. Having gone through death and now this...resurrection...he no longer felt a part of the natural world.

He stared at the headstone of his grave. Carved upon it was his name, two of the most important dates of his life, and a simple phrase:

*Here lies our beloved Victor,
Loving husband, caring father,
Too soon taken from us.*

It moved him.

Even through the veil of this strange existence, he could feel the pain invoked by those words. It was pain that scalded his throat to form a blazing pool at the base of his tainted soul.

He couldn't go to Lenora and Walt like this. The old Victor was dead. The new Victor was...not something he wanted to be.

In the torn sod and scattered dirt of what had been his grave, he tried to find answers.

Perhaps in reality he wasn't here at all. Perhaps he was actually in some insane asylum, cloaked in a straightjacket while staring at some featureless wall. Could he be experiencing pure insanity at its highest delusional form?

But the answer was already at hand, as if it had been ingrained into the fabric of his new mind.

Not insanity... Death.

And death can put some changes on a body, brother.

He walked, amazed at how easy the movement came to him.

He almost glided above the ground.

He used to be a physician. He knew the human body. Fact: The brain needs blood and oxygen to stay alive. Yet he felt no blood coursing through his veins. He looked at the backs of his hands in the moonlight as he glided through the cemetery toward the destination that pulled him.

His hands were dirty from his grave. He rubbed the dirt and clay from them. The backs of his hands were completely smooth. In a quick series of motions he jerked the threadbare, soiled suit jacket from his body and

let it fall to the ground as he walked. He pulled the tattered sleeves of his shirt upward, the cuff buttons popping off to glint in the frozen turf.

He turned the undersides of his forearms to the pale moon. There again, smooth. In his previous life there used to be a network of protruding veins through which oxygen-rich blood flowed. The wind pushed at Victor, blowing his sleeves until they flapped against his upper arms. As he strode onward, he scrutinized the moonlit world.

There were patches of snow here and there among the gravestones and monuments. The massive trees lining this access road on which he traveled were completely stripped of foliage. The grave robbers had worn coats. It must be cold out, yet he felt no sting from the wind that blew the branches overhead. They swayed back and forth in a rattling, bone-dance melody.

Victor knew he'd died in the springtime. It was cold now. Winter. He'd been in the grave nearly a year.

Victor halted. The wrought iron gates of the cemetery stood before him, a hundred feet away. The wind caused the gate to slam shut and open. Evidently the grave robbers hadn't taken the time to secure the latch. The sharpened heads adorning the iron shafts in the gate looked like an arsenal of spears. But he hadn't stopped to observe the motion and fine detail of the gate.

Tobias had said something when they brought Victor to the hospital. They would remove...

Victor's pale hands flew to his shirt. He whipped the ragged tie from around his neck. He grasped the decayed material that was his shirt and yanked. Buttons popped off as he ripped his shirt open to expose his bare chest to the moonlight.

He stared at his chest. A raised scar ran from his clavicle to his navel. He saw no signs of a heart beating within his breast. Desperately, he felt for the carotid artery in his neck. Nothing. No pulse. They'd sliced him open and taken his heart and God knew what else.

What was he?

This time, he had an answer.

He was something that did not belong in the world.

Monster.

He clenched his fists and raised them to the leering moon, so bright overhead.

“No!”

This couldn’t have happened. He couldn’t be here like this. Imagine Lenora and Walt’s revulsion and horror if they ever saw him. He should be nothing. This should be the body of a man dead and buried in a grave.

“No...!”

How could he go to Lenora and Walt as a monster? They would shun him. They would be terrified and confused, and it might drive them insane.

What good was he?

Tobias had taken his heart and some other organs. But he had said that the stomach was essential...so they must have left it in.

The instinctive drive to feed that he’d felt earlier had to be linked to the way this new—old—body processed food. Victor raised his fists and cursed Tobias.

He knew what he had to do.

And it wasn’t going to be pleasant.

Past, present or future, a man is a man. The beast never changes.

Evolving Man

© 2007 Bonnie Dee

You think men have changed over the centuries? Forget about it! Scratch the surface of any twenty-first century male and you'll find a cock-wielding caveman underneath.

In this time travel comedy, three roommates discover the truth about men as each becomes involved with a special lover. The friends also learn a little about themselves. Skeptic Chrissy sets her logic aside and allows her libido to run free with a primitive barbarian named Gareth. Scientist Lila experiences the testosterone hidden in her geeky cyber-buddy, Zach. Free-spirited Taylor brings sexuality and fun into the life of John, a repressed businessman from the future.

As they unravel the tangled knot transporting people through time creates, the women all come to realize a man is a man. The beast never changes.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Evolving Man*:

"I've taken it a step further than simply viewing moments in time. Not only can my machine show images in time, but it can literally 'capture' a frame and materialize a figure contained in it in the flesh. Right here in this booth."

"Oh, I get it. Like in *Star Trek*. 'Beam me up, Scottie'." Taylor laughed. "It's amazing, Lila."

"Yes, just like *Star Trek*." Lila's voice dripped sarcasm.

On the screen, the marauding Vikings anchored ship and rowed small skiffs toward land. Lila fast-forwarded with a click of the mouse, making the boats race across the water. She slowed the scene again, and

the men climbed out of the boats to splash through the shallows toward the beach.

The sailors were tall and muscular, dressed in hide shirts and leggings, their faces almost hidden behind full beards and moustaches. Long, blond hair flowed from beneath their helmets. The Norse warriors brandished swords, pikes and other assorted pointy things as they charged onto the pebbled shore.

Waiting to meet the assault was a much smaller group of men, dressed in fur and leather hides. Remembering a little history, Chrissy guessed they were northern European or Briton villagers facing the marauders. The obvious leader of the defending army was taller and bulkier than his men. His shoulders and chest strained his deer-hide jerkin. Black hair was caught back in a leather thong at the nape of his neck. White teeth flashed against tan skin as he shouted encouragement to the other men, most of whom seemed on the verge of breaking and running before the attacking Vikings. The leader held his sword high and urged his men forward.

Although the moving picture was silent, Chrissy could imagine the man's cries to defend the village and the women and children. She felt sorry for the young leader, in charge of a timid group of fishermen with lame-looking weapons, facing a pack of huge, fierce Norsemen.

The two sides clashed. The fishing folk were definitely outmatched by the invaders. Chrissy cringed as limbs flew and blood spurted.

"Nasty," Taylor murmured. "But, man, that guy's kind of hot." She pointed to one of the Norsemen with flowing gold locks and bared teeth.

Lila frowned and froze the scene. "Typical, Taylor, I'm talking about assembling a think tank to solve the world's problems and you're ogling the men."

"No harm in looking." She shrugged, tossing back her curly, blonde hair.

Chrissy stared at the frozen image of the battle. It was crystal clear down to the details of sunlight glinting off the sharp edges of weapons and blood welling from an open wound. Despite her disbelief, she was

intrigued at the prospect of a time-traveling think tank. “How would you communicate with them? Da Vinci didn’t speak English, and I’m sure if you talked to one of these guys,” she nodded at the screen, “you’d get some incomprehensible dead language.”

“Ah.” Lila went to her work table and came back with an ear-piece much like a hearing aid. “I’ve also invented this translating device. It works by reading thought patterns and deciphering them into words the listener understands, rather than translating one language into another. Cool, huh?” Lila beamed, pleased with her own cleverness.

Chrissy stared, feeling terribly guilty she hadn’t even noticed her friend was cracking up. Lila spent days holed up here alone on the third floor of the house in her attic workshop. Her friends had always thought of her as an innovative genius with her many, ongoing experiments and inventions, but clearly her train had derailed.

Chrissy looked from her insane friend’s exultant face to the frozen picture on the screen. The Viking leader and the head defender of the soil were engaged in combat, swords poised ready to thrust. Their mouths were open, shouting. Blood and sweat streaked their bearded faces. The charge of testosterone in the air was almost palpable, and she was embarrassed to feel her crotch tighten simply from staring at the image of the two primitive warriors.

“Well, it’s an amazing idea. I can see you’ve worked hard on it.”

“So, exactly how would you do it?” Taylor traced a finger over the Viking seaman’s bulging biceps. “I mean, actually pick one and bring him to life?”

“It’s like computer animation,” Lila explained. “You choose the figure you want to work with, then, instead of manipulating the image as you would in movie making, you press this button and bring him to this moment in time. Your *Star Trek* analogy actually isn’t that far off the mark. Basically we’re deconstructing molecules and reassembling them here.”

“Very cool.” Taylor nodded as if it made perfect sense.

Lila did a point and click thing with her mouse and soon the dark-haired barbarian was outlined in red. “See? I’ve ‘cut him out of the picture’, so to speak. He’s the target now.”

Chrissy decided it was time to break the spell. The only way she was going to reach Lila’s addled brain was to demonstrate that the machine didn’t work. “Then you’d press *this* button?” She reached out and pushed a black button on the left side of the control panel.

“No! Chrissy, don’t!” Lila yelled, grabbing at her wrist.

There was a high-pitched, whining sound and the air shimmered then became as opaque as a dark cloud. Chrissy actually felt a change in the density of space around them, a thickening that made the air almost palpable. Suddenly an extra body crowded into the booth with the three women. Chrissy was pressed up against solid muscle, hot, sweaty skin and rank, half-cured animal hides.

The big, bearded man was still roaring his battle cry. Momentum brought his arm down with a mighty slice of his sword, right past Taylor’s face. The sword cleaved the monitor screen in two, sending jagged glass shards and electric sparks flying.

All of the women screamed and scrambled to get away. The barbarian bellowed and drew his sword out of the wreckage of the monitor.

As she stumbled from the booth, fighting to keep her balance and run away at the same time, Chrissy caught a glimpse of the man’s eyes.

They were wide and confused and they zeroed in on her. He lunged and grabbed her wrist, holding her fast in his powerful grip while yelling something in a language that sounded like pebbles being ground in a cement mixer.

Chrissy screamed at the top of her lungs, a piercing, fire engine wail.

The man dropped her wrist immediately.

She fled across the room.

The barbarian raised his sword, knocking the control panel and sending it crashing onto the floor. He backed out of the booth, holding the sword up in front of him and turning in a slow circle, assessing the room around him.

Shrieking, Taylor ran out the door and clattered down the stairs.

Lila froze near the open door, holding her hands up in a surrendering posture.

Chrissy sidled over to stand shoulder to shoulder with her. It was imperative they didn't let this guy out of the room. She pictured the barbarian hacking his way through the city, maiming pedestrians and stabbing shopkeepers, probably getting run over by a car or shot by the police. They must contain and calm him then send him back where he came from.

SAMHAIN PUBLISHING, LTD.

It's all about the story...

Action/Adventure

Fantasy

Historical

Horror

Mainstream

Mystery/Suspense

Non-Fiction

Paranormal

Red Hots!

Romance

Science Fiction

Western

Young Adult

www.samhainpublishing.com