

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



## Midsummer Charm

Amy Redwood

Witch and warlock, a match made in heaven. Until a wolf stakes his claim. Midsummer night was never hotter – or deadlier.

Maya enjoys the attention of a sexy warlock who fulfills her every wish and then some. It's perfect, really. Then *he* returns. David. The match made in hell – *a hot, sweaty, scream-your-throat-out-it-hurts-so-good* hell. The match who left her in the cold, may the bastard rot.

In her spellbound erotic dreams, she embraces both men. They satisfy her body to the fullest, if not her heart. But on midsummer night, reality makes a comeback when she is confronted with hard truths and easy lies. And a surprise she never sees coming. Torn between the two men, she learns to her sorrow that one of them is ready to kill the other in order to win her love.

She faces the impossible choice between heaven and *oh-so-hot* hell. And midsummer night has only just begun...

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Midsummer Charm

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# *MIDSUMMER CHARM*

**Amy Redwood**

## **Chapter One**

Maya Winters tried to relax her shoulders, tried to relax, period. But the tingly sensation in her gut told her something bad was about to happen. Or maybe she simply had to lay off the second glass of ruby-red burgundy wine.

Or maybe she needed to get laid.

"Aren't we the hottest couple here or what?" Sinclair whispered in her ear, and then straightened, making him easily the tallest guy at Nell's housewarming party.

"Speak for yourself." She ditched her wineglass and plucked another piece of finger food from the buffet, noticing a barely legal blonde girl flirtatiously brushing through her hair and shooting Sinclair a smoldering glance.

All right, so he was indeed hot enough to make virgins spread their legs faster than one could say multiple orgasms.

Maya bit into the garlicky miniature pizza, thinking she would describe herself as lukewarm at best, and licked along her olive-oily lips.

Tonight, she'd take him into her bed to lick every hot inch of him.

He just didn't know that yet.

"Don't you see how they look at us?" he asked, making her wish he'd drop the topic. "All the girls want to be at my side, but I prefer you." He gripped her by the shoulder, and she noticed the shimmering aura hovering above his skin. A sassy redhead walked by—one of Nell's new neighbors—and his gaze dropped to her scantily covered butt wrapped up in white hot pants.

Maya resisted rolling her eyes. "It would help if you wouldn't use your glamour upon every unsuspecting female."

He scowled, scratching his square jaw, and placed his hand at the small of her back. He had beautiful hands with long, tapered fingers. Tingling warmth seeped into her skin as he used magic to warm her up. She wasn't sure if she should complain. Hands like that wouldn't fail to deliver in the bedroom. A bolt of heat shot between her legs, and she bit back a moan.

Dating a warlock sure had its benefits.

He splayed his hand across her bottom, which made her grin. He was definitely an ass guy. "Why don't we leave early?" he said, his voice rough as he gently squeezed her butt.

"Why don't you stop staring at other girls' asses?"

"But I want you. We complete each other." Leaning into her, he wiped a minuscule pizza crumb from her bottom lip, leaving a tingling trail of hot need on her skin. "Come on, Maya. Put out. I promise I won't disappoint you, my witch." He laced his voice with magic, making her stomach dip and her breasts ache for a strong touch.

She gave him a slap on his ripped stomach. "Cut it out."

Witch and warlock, a match made in heaven—or hell, depending on the point of view. She wasn't sure what her own point of view was yet. She slinked away from his grasp and piled more mini pizzas into a napkin. Damn, they were yummy. He wouldn't mind her less-than-minty breath, she thought, but gave his words more consideration. Yes, they completed each other. No normal guy touched the witch part of her soul as well as a warlock, as well as Sinclair.

If only this realization didn't leave her ever so depressed.

But tonight she'd find out if he was a good fit, in every sense of the word. Because, really, what was she holding out for?

Maybe for someone less vain?

Shaking her head, she had to admit she was being unfair. If he was vain, it wasn't without reason. Sinclair looked like a disgraced angel, disheveled from his long fall

from heaven. His features would make Michelangelo weep. His honeycomb-colored hair teasingly touched his shoulders, his high brow was set over a pair of ridiculously pretty sky-blue eyes and his stamina was legend, at least among witches.

In short, he was her ideal mate.

All she had to do was give in to his seduction. He stirred the fires gradually, working his magic until she was as hungry for sex as one lonely witch could possibly be. He'd even tried to invade her dreams, the sneak. She'd woken up, her clit begging to be touched, her mind full of him doing unspeakable things to her. She'd satisfied her lust using her own hands, reaching her climax in seconds.

While impressed with his spell work, she'd given him an earful for trying to go under her skin while she was dreaming. Laughing her complaints off, he had continued to make her pant for sex during the day. He was patient, she'd give him that.

Why she still resisted him she couldn't even begin to explain, much less answer her best friend Nell's probing questions about their relationship.

Closing her eyes, she drew in a deep breath. The aroma of sizzling barbeque mixed with the faint smell of chlorine from the pool always reminded her of garden parties and hot summer nights. Fueled by alcohol or by the joy of being alive, the other guests at Nell's party danced to tunes of the seventies and eighties.

The beat snuck into her bones, making her tap her foot. Maybe she should grab Sinclair and take him for a twirl on the roped-off dance floor. It would be enlightening. If he wasn't in harmony with her body while dancing, there was little hope they would be in harmony between the sheets. Inching closer to the dance floor, she kept her eyes peeled for her sexy warlock but couldn't spot him anywhere.

Instead, she spotted Nell and waved hello, giving her the thumbs-up. Nell grinned, flicked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear and looked thoroughly pleased. The neighbors Nell was so keen to make friends with had shown up in droves.

Popping another miniature pizza into her mouth, Maya looked up into the sky, stars sparkling against a velvety blue canvas, outshone by the gazillions of tiny lanterns

Nell and she had installed into the woodwork of the terrace. A slight breeze grazed her cheek, balmy and sweet. She pulled her hair into a ponytail, letting the breeze reach her neck. Maybe Sinclair wouldn't mind outdoor sex. Nothing like cicadas serenading slow lovemaking. Shooting a look around for him once more, she found him admiring himself in the pool's glassy reflection. Now that was just great.

But life wasn't perfect, so what?

Something fluttered past her face, making her jump. It was probably a moth dying to get close to the lanterns. Or maybe a small bat. *Goddess, I hope that's not a bat. Such a bad omen...*

She let out her breath. *Why am I so twitchy tonight?* She shot a searching look into the sky. Nothing.

Lifting her hand, about to nibble at the pizza crust, she froze. On her hand, perched on top of her ring finger, a butterfly beat its wings. With its bright orange and yellow colors, it looked as if it had escaped straight from the rainforests in Brazil.

Speaking a silent thank-you to the goddess for sending her such an uplifting sight, she broke into a wide smile.

"Well, well," she said softly, careful as not to scare this good omen away. "Hello, gorgeous."

"Hello *you*."

Her blood about froze.

It couldn't be *him*...

The deep male voice had spoken from behind her, and she sucked in her breath, barely noticing how the butterfly took off into the night.

Turning around, she gazed up and into a pair of soul-crushingly dark eyes. A sight she'd thought she'd never see again. The napkin dropped from her hand and the miniature pizzas hit the wooden terrace with a wet thud. She winced, heat rushing to her cheeks.



Reflexively, with a flick of her wrist, she whispered a spell, weaving an illusion of indifference, a shield to hide her feelings from the rest of the world.

And from him.

Knowing her face wouldn't betray her emotions, she said, "You."

"Good to see you, Maya."

"And you..." *David*. She wanted to say his name but didn't trust her voice.

He nodded, taller than she remembered, his dark hair shorter, but his gaze held the same intensity she recalled too well. He took a sip from his red wine, a slight smile playing around his mouth. If Sinclair was an angel, David was a goddamn demon from the hottest pits of hell come to Earth to haunt her.

*Pull yourself together.*

Her gaze fell on the pizzas she'd dropped. Flustered, she picked up the ruined food from the deck with the napkin. Staring at his summer linen shoes, a stretch of bare tanned skin visible, she realized she knelt before him. Her spine protested as she shot upright.

With what she hoped was an "I don't give a damn" gesture, she threw the napkin into one of the garbage bags Nell had provided.

"So, you're back," she said, thankful that her calm voice didn't reveal she was about to lose it, and lifted her chin in an attempt to stare him down. Futile. He towered half a head over her. Always had.

"Yes, I'm back." He pinched his slightly crooked nose between his fingers, a weary expression in the depths of his eyes.

If she didn't know better, she'd say he was nervous. When he lowered his hand to his side again, she followed his movement. His hands weren't as elegant as Sinclair's but square and callused. Strong and capable. And skillful.

Crossing her arms, she took a step away, increasing the distance as if this could save her from the memory of those hands stroking her mindless. A shudder went

through her body. Shuffling her feet, she grew uncomfortable as an uneasy silence settled between them.

"Excuse me," she said, turning away.

"Stay, please." His hand settled on her shoulder, holding her back.

"Why?" His touch burned through her skin, almost igniting her bones, and he didn't need magic to achieve that. "Why, David?"

He didn't answer, but his hold on her shoulder intensified. About to tell him to go to hell, the party noises ceased to a faint roaring in her ears. For one small moment she was transported back in time, looking at the man whose touch she'd craved night after night.

Her nipples puckered, hardened. Why wasn't she wearing something less revealing than the skimpy strapless dress? It made her feel naked in more ways than one.

"Dance with me?" He nodded toward the dance floor, placing his empty wineglass on a nearby table.

*Run, Maya*, a voice whispered in her head, her sane, levelheaded voice. She didn't reply or offer any other indication that she wanted to dance with him, but he took her by the hand.

Twining his fingers around hers, he pulled her toward the other dancers.

"I don't dance," she said, following him to the dance floor as if her legs had developed a mind of their own.

"I saw you moving to the music," he said lightly, and placed his hands around her waist, his thumbs coming to rest on her hipbones. "You sure looked like you wanted to dance."

The breath caught in her throat.

How long had he watched her before he found it worth his time to saunter over to give her a heart attack?

All the mini pizzas became a heavy glob of unease in the pit of her stomach. His face was so close; she feared he would smell the garlic on her breath, and she —

Ice flooded her heart. She should *not* care so much, she shouldn't.

"One song," he said, a sudden amused glint in his dark-as-sin eyes. "For old times' sake."

*So, you think this is funny, you bastard? "Sure, why not."*

She didn't put her hands around his shoulders, she wouldn't. But she moved with him, guided by his hands, to the tune of Cyndi Lauper's *Time After Time*. Slowly, her movements became fluid and she closed her eyes, the pain in her heart threatening to overwhelm. Digging her fingernails into her palm, she vowed she would *not* start sobbing against his damn chest.

"Put your arms around me," he whispered, and drew her closer, aligning his body against hers. "Just for this dance, please."

Her arms obeyed his wish, sneaking around his neck, and she gave a small sigh as her breasts pressed against him, her nipples two hard buds, and she met his gaze.

He knew.

He knew she craved his touch. She held his gaze, letting him see the lust reflected in her eyes, because lust she could admit; it was love that gave her headaches.

His hand drifted lazily up her spine, tracing each vertebrae, and he delved his fingers into the hair at the nape of her neck, his mouth so close his breath feathered over her lips. Her entire body tightened, a craving for more than simply dancing intensifying so fast it left her dizzy with desire.

If he were to slide his hand between her thighs and touch her there, he would feel her arousal. If he were to slide a finger inside her, claiming her again, ignoring that other guests watched them, she would let him.

She bit her lip.

A knot formed in her throat and she swallowed hard. He didn't even try to feel her up, but she wished he'd grab her bottom and draw her into him.

Moving to the music, rolling her hips, she sought his dark gaze as he grew hard against her belly. Unbidden and unwelcome, images flashed before her inner eye. How she had knelt in front of him, kissing, sucking, touching every inch of his body. How he'd ordered her to spread her legs so he could trace his tongue over her wet folds, his bare chest slick with heat. How he'd inched his cock into her until he filled her completely while telling her exactly how tight and hot her pussy was, how he loved to hear her come undone.

If she wanted to retain at least a trace of her pride, she should stop dancing with him now, but it was as if her arms were glued around his neck.

He buried his nose into her hair. "You smell good," he said so quietly she wasn't sure if she'd heard correctly. "You always smelled so good and —"

"No," she interrupted, anger hitting her as hard as lust had a second before.

*Fool me once, shame on me, fool me twice...* She grabbed hold of her spell, knowing he would see a mask of indifference, and not how badly she hurt. "Song's over," she said, stepping away from him and temptation.

"Wait," he said, touching her shoulder as if he had guessed her plans of making a run for it. "How've you been?" he asked, his voice low and oddly rough.

"I'm fine." Avoiding his gaze, she caught sight of a tall blonde woman purposely striding toward her. No, not toward her. Toward *him*.

"David," the blonde said when she reached them, "you have to join our conversation and set Tim straight. Sometimes he's full of bull."

"Sure, Jane, I'll be with you in a minute," David said, the ghost of an angry expression crossing his face.

*Or maybe I'm imagining the angry expression...*

"Don't let us wait too long." Jane, obviously too polite to argue – or too smart – left, but not before giving him a winning smile and squeezing his shoulder as if they were partners in crime.

Or as if they were fucking.

Maya closed her eyes, focused her energy into her center and willed herself to calm down. Her heart beat in her throat, her palms slicked with sweat, and despite her best efforts to keep her feelings at bay, jealousy kicked in.

When she opened her eyes, David was gazing at her intently. "Jane is –"

"I don't care," she interrupted, her stomach lurching.

She should slip Jane a note that heartbreak was around the corner if she stayed with him. But maybe when he whispered sweet nothings while fucking *her*, he meant it. Maybe he wouldn't leave *her* without a word of goodbye.

"Are you okay?" He cocked his head, leaning forward, a slight frown furrowing his brow. "Need a glass of water?"

His concern threw her. They weren't friends. They weren't lovers anymore.

Shaking her head, she inhaled his male scent of cologne and wine and something uniquely him. It made her knees weak. But a witch never submitted to a male. Only, she had. Many times over, goddess help her. Whatever he'd wanted, whatever he'd whispered into her ear, she'd done and begged for more. Biting her lip, she forced back a moan.

Why was he still hanging out with her? "You know," she said, waving her hand in the general direction Jane had wandered off. "The minute is long over."

Her merely gave her a tight-lipped stare and stood his ground.

*Why didn't Nell warn me he was here?* She wanted to kick herself. Nell didn't even know they knew each other, that they'd been together.

"Tim invited you, I take?" she asked, trying to bring the conversation back to small talk.

"Yes, while he picked me up from the airport today," he answered. "Tim and Nell worked hard on their dream home, don't you think? I wish I could have seen the house grow from the ground up. They had just started building when I left."

It was a sucker punch to the heart. "Yes," she said. "You sure missed a lot when you left town so suddenly."

He gave her a strange look then smiled, and she couldn't tear her gaze away from his full lips, the way he tilted his head. She might as well hand him her heart again so he could stick a knife in it. She'd save them both time and trouble. In the background, Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive* echoed through the night.

How fitting.

A bitter laugh rose in her throat, but she took the highroad. No accusations coming from her mouth, no sir. And before she made a complete fool of herself, she sent out a silent cry of help only one person could hear.

In the blink of an eye, Sinclair wrapped his arms around her from behind, resting his chin on her crown. "You okay, honey?"

"I was missing you, that's all."

She tried not to look David in the eye, but saw the look of stunned surprise reflected on his face as he took in the six-foot-something glory that was Sinclair.

But it failed to give her satisfaction.

She squared her shoulders, gritting hard on her teeth, and leaned against Sinclair's chest, forcing a smile. "David, it was good to see you," she lied.

Sinclair's body grew tense as he drew her stronger in his arms, and she was sure he noticed her distress, but she sure as hell hoped he wasn't able to guess the reason.

The last thing she wanted on her hands was a pissed off and jealous warlock. He might just kill David.

## Chapter Two

"Any chance of meeting at Joe's tomorrow?" David asked. "Catch up over a coffee, my treat?"

*Catching up over a cup of coffee?*

Her first reflex was to say yes. Goose bumps erupted over her skin. Had she this little self-worth? "I don't think that's a good idea," she said, her throat tight.

"If you change your mind –"

"Sinclair, darling, I'd like to dance." She slung her arm around his waist then made the terrible mistake of seeking David's gaze. For a fleeting moment he had gazed at her with so much longing it made her ache all over.

"Take care, Maya," David said so quietly she barely heard him, then he turned and left her standing alone. No, not alone, with Sinclair in her arms.

"Let's dance, then," Sinclair said, a grim note in his voice.

Swirling her around, doing an impromptu but perfectly executed dance, he held her in his arms as if he already was her lover. She forced a laugh, weaving a glamour around them, making them look like a couple in love. There was a way to get over David. The only way she could think of anyway. When the song's last notes faded, she snuggled deeper into his embrace.

"Sinclair," she said, taking a deep breath and sucking up the courage to utter the next words, "I want you tonight."

\* \* \* \* \*

"You have to come to the Midsummer in the Park festival. Everyone is going." Jane said once more, turning her steel-gray gaze up to him, and then gave Tim a nudge. "Tell David what he would miss."

"Yeah, man," Tim said, "she's right. Nell has been looking forward to it for weeks."

David raised his eyebrows, taking a sip from the ice-cold beer. He'd always found Tim's wife Nell, while sweet and charming, a bit on the odd side.

"Well," he said, "I might stop by." David caught Tim pointedly looking to Jane, who was busy spearing pieces of strawberry from her punch with a plastic toothpick. David groaned inwardly, understanding what Tim seemed to expect of him—inviting Jane to be his date.

*Over my dead body*, he thought, taking another sip from his beer.

When his cousin had picked him up from the airport and invited him to the party, he'd failed to add that he'd arranged for a blind date. For one reason or other, Tim assumed David would hit it off with the trim software programmer. But having the same profession wasn't enough to make up for a complete lack of chemistry.

"You just moved here," Jane said. "It would be a great way to meet people."

David shrugged. "It's not like I haven't lived here before."

"For three months," Tim said. "You hadn't even unpacked properly before you left again."

"What made you leave?" Jane asked.

"I got a lucrative contract job offer," David answered without missing a beat. "East Coast. Where the money is. I pretty much had to decide on the spot. You know how it is."

Jane nodded. "I'd have done the same. With the right contract, you earn more in a couple of months than in one year."

"That's right. But, well, I'm back for good." David shot his cousin a sharp glance, a clear warning to drop the topic now.

"I'll believe it when I see it," Tim said. "But again, welcome back." He lifted his beer and drank.



Jane gave David's arm a squeeze, an annoying gesture coming from a woman he didn't even know. "I think my civil duty," she said, "is to introduce you to all my friends. Why don't we go together to the midsummer party?"

David took a swig from his beer, swallowed then coughed as her meaning registered. Had she asked him out? Jane gazed expectantly up at him. Oddly enough, she was the first woman to ever flat-out ask him for a date.

He did the only thing a man could do in the same situation. "Sure," he said, "why not?" If everyone was going, maybe he would see Maya there... "It's the day after tomorrow?"

Jane nodded and Tim clapped him on the shoulder. "Good decision. Stay at Jane's side or the witches will get you." Tim gave a short laugh, his gaze drifting to Nell, who stood a few yards away talking to...Maya.

*My girl.* David lifted his beer to his mouth and emptied the bottle, 'cause getting drunk looked positively inviting. Maya was his girl no more. What had he expected? When they'd hooked up, she'd made it clear he was just a rebound guy.

Tearing his gaze away from Maya in her sexy red dress, he asked, "What witches?"

"Don't you know the town's history?" Tim smirked and kissed his wife as she joined his side. "I was telling my dear cousin about the witches."

"Did you," Nell said slowly, giving her husband a strange look. "Some things are better left unsaid."

"What?" David asked. "I don't get it."

"Forget it," Jane said. "It's old wives' tales."

"What is?" David asked again, getting irritated. Glancing around, he couldn't spot Maya anywhere. Most likely she'd left. And she wouldn't spend the night alone. He wished it wouldn't make him so fucking angry. Wished the thought wouldn't hurt so much.

Nell slipped her arm around Tim. "Some old townsfolk still believe witches gather around the bonfire at the midsummer festival to seduce unsuspecting men."

Tim laughed. "So you better keep your hands off these girls or they'll suck you dry, heart and soul, using you to fulfill their kinky desires."

"Sounds good," David said dryly. Fulfilling sexual desires as long as the woman's name was Maya suited him just fine. But he wanted the unattainable—her heart, her love.

"Better watch out for the wanton little wenches," Tim said, giving Nell a quick kiss.

"That's silly," Jane said, clearly annoyed. "There are no witches."

"How would *you* know?" Nell asked coolly.

Tim chuckled, squeezing his wife's butt. "Well, David, you know what our Italian nonna used to say about *stregae*."

"Burn them all," David said, biting back a smile. "I wouldn't mind meeting a witch."

"I know another saying." Nell gave him a wide smile. "Careful what you wish for."

\* \* \* \* \*

Sinclair had dragged her away from the lit terrace and into the square garden next to the house. The aroma of kitchen herbs lay fragrant in the night air. A few torches lit the darkness, painting a stark pattern of shadows and light on his face. A few yards away, Nell's house was a beacon of light and laughter.

Maya leaned against a tree, watching a firefly next to Sinclair's head. "So," she said, "why bring me here?" Not that she was complaining, she had wanted to leave the party.

"I wanted you alone," Sinclair said.

"Mission accomplished."

"Say again what you want from me."

"I want you to fuck me," she said, no hesitation in her voice, but no lust either.

He laughed, though it didn't sound amused. "Here I was thinking I've found myself a shy witch. We've dated for about a month, and I was patiently waiting for you to take it a step further. All of a sudden you talk dirty?"

"Something you can't handle?"

"I can handle you all right." He pulled her into an embrace tight enough she feared she'd suffocate, close enough for the hard ridge of his erection to press against her stomach. "But why now, witch. Why?"

"Because I know you want me," she whispered, rubbing up against him, getting a groan from him in return.

"And do you want me?" he asked, still holding her painfully tight. "Or is it because of him?" He jerked his head toward the lights and laughter of the party.

No need to ask whom he meant. "He is nothing to me."

"You were hiding behind an emotional shield as high as the Empire State Building. You can hide your feelings from him, fair enough. He's blind to it, the fool. But you wanted him," he said quietly, but she heard the underlying rage. "Wanted him badly."

"I hardly know the guy."

"And I feel like killing the guy."

Fear crept along her spine. "Don't."

He slipped his hands under her dress, inside her panties, kneading her ass. Using his thigh, he spread her legs farther. "I want you," he whispered into her ear, stroking her slick clit in lazy circles. "Are you wet for me, witch?"

Her answer died in her throat as his fingers slipped inside, toyed with her, then spread her juices away from her clit. With one slick push, he slipped his finger inside her ass.

"You like this," he said, moving his finger within her. "Don't you?"

She spread her legs wider, making room for Sinclair's invading fingers. She wanted invasion. It would take her mind – and maybe her heart – off David.

"Yes," she whispered, craving the mindlessness of a sexual act, the release.

"Beg me to fuck you," he said, stepping away from her. "Do it on your knees."

A stunned laugh tore from her lips. "You wish." If Sinclair wanted her submission, he could wait until hell froze over. Massaging her temples, she felt a major headache coming up. "A witch never begs."

"True." His blue eyes lit up, a delighted smile spreading over his face. "We will have so much fun together."

"Ah, damn." For him, she was just another challenge. She should know better than to play games with a warlock. She could only lose. "Okay, Sinclair, pretty please, fuck me," she said, but her heart wasn't in it anymore.

He tilted his head, giving her a quizzical look, then he dropped to one knee. At the sight of him at her feet, her blood turned cold, the feeling in her gut that something bad was about to happen back with a vengeance.

Taking her hand between his own, he said, "Maya, this midsummer night, I want to be your companion, your lover." His gaze insistent, he pressed her hand to his mouth, his lips settling against her palm. The slight touch jolted her wide-awake. He whispered against her palm, words of magic that made her head spin. "Come midsummer night," he whispered, "I'll pledge myself to you, body and, more importantly, soul."

Snatching her hand away from his grasp, she staggered, her spine painfully hitting the tree. "You don't mean –"

"Yes, I do," he said. "Your choice, sweet witch."

Blood rushed to her head as she understood his implications. "An ultimatum."

He shook his head. "A decision."

"If I don't –"

"Don't decide tonight. We both know about the magic of midsummer night."

"A warlock's pledge," she whispered, shivers running up and down her spine. "Really?" There it was—temptation, however small. And he knew that, this *hotdamn* bastard of a warlock.

"Sweet dreams, Maya." His long strides took him away from her, leaving her standing in the garden with nothing but unfulfilled desire and the impossible choice between a man—a warlock—who welcomed her with open arms, and a man who still held her broken heart in his hands.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Have you seen Maya?"

Nell turned around, a friendly but reserved look in her eyes. "Maya," she repeated. "I guess she has left with Sinclair, why?"

David shrugged, a knot forming in his stomach. He took a swig of beer, wishing it was something stronger. "Forget it," he said, but Nell's hazel eyes took on a different expression.

"Well, well," she said, and bit off a piece of strawberry cake with gusto, curiosity blazing across her face. "I wasn't aware you two knew each other."

He evaded her scrutiny by glancing into the sky. "I think it's going to rain, don't you?"

"I don't," she said. "It's going to get an awful lot hotter and will reach its peak in two days during midsummer night. Then it will rain."

The surety in her voice surprised him. He gazed back at her, but before he could ask what made her so sure, she said, "I just know, don't ask how."

"The midsummer party..." He took another swig from the bottle, found it empty. "Maya going too?"

"Oh yes." Nell smiled like a cat playing with a mouse as she bit off another piece of cake, and he had the impression he wasn't in on a joke. "She'll be there. Not alone, though," she added. "Then again, you asked Jane out."

He worked his hand through his hair, not bothering to point out that it had been the other way around. Then it hit him like a fist to the stomach. Sucking in his breath, he grasped the empty beer bottle tighter. "Maya never mentioned me, did she?" he asked, dreading Nell's answer.

Nell's eyebrows rose. "No, why would she?"

The bottle cracked in his hand, glass cutting deep into his palm. "Damn," he said, fighting off Nell as she tried to stop the blood flow with a couple of napkins. "Don't worry, it'll heal."

"Really, David, you have too much suppressed energy." Still shaking her head, dabbing at his hand, she suddenly gazed up. "Tim's always matchmaking..." she said quietly. "Did you have a blind date with her the first time you moved here?"

His heart grew cold. "Forget it, Nell." Before he could snatch his hand back, a searing heat coursed through his skin tissue. She still held his injured hand and her eyes widened. A low growl erupted from his throat as the broken skin on his palm healed.

Nell squinted at him, and he had the sensation of being x-rayed. "I think I know what you are."

"No idea what you mean," he deadpanned, but the damage was done. He'd grown careless in the last months.

Then she surprised him by laughing. "You obey the moon, don't you?"

His first instinct was to grab her by the throat, making her swear not to tell. *Steady, man*, he thought, forcing himself to chill. After all, Nell was married to his cousin, she was family. "The moon doesn't affect me," he said. "But the pull is there."

She cocked her head. "Does Tim know?"

David weighed his answers and opted for a simple, "Yes."

Nell turned pink around the nose. "My husband has been keeping fucking secrets from me."

Gripping her by the shoulder, he feared Tim was in serious trouble. "He swore an oath, Nell, never to tell."

Her expression turned stricken. "Don't tell me he is, you know, like you?"

"No, but he's still family."

"Who knows, then," she asked. "Maya?"

"Only if you tell her."

"Why would I tell her," she said. "For all I know, she exchanged no more than a handful of words with you." Nell was royally pissed, he could tell. She'd balled both hands into tight fists, a strange smile plastered over her face. "One could think my husband and my best friend find me untrustworthy," she muttered, throwing the half-eaten cake away. "Thanks for not bullshitting me, David," she said. "As far as I'm concerned, this conversation never happened."

He gave her shoulder a squeeze before he turned away. He believed her, believed his secret was safe with her. Why? He couldn't say. Maybe because she was Maya's best friend. But if Maya hadn't confided in her best friend that she was seeing him, he'd never played an important role in her life. Then it really had been just about sex, a means to an end.

"David," Nell called, making him pause in his step.

"What?" he asked, looking over his shoulder.

"I'll be at the beach tomorrow afternoon, at the south end, close to the old lighthouse."

He lifted his eyebrow, missing her point. "So?"

"With her."

"Thanks, Nell," he said. Leaving the party noise behind him, he made up his mind. He wouldn't give up his girl without a fight.

## Chapter Three

After Sinclair had left her standing in the dark, Maya returned home. She brewed an herb tea to help her sleep and to forget for a few hours that this evening had ever happened. Forget what Sinclair had offered. Forget David...

Forget, period.

Hands shaking, she almost spilled hot water over her fingers. As her tea steeped, anger started brewing inside her at the two men in her life and the tears burning in her eyes. After she stored away the tea herbs, she slammed the cupboard door closed.

Taking the occasional small sip from the hot brew, she undressed, not bothering to switch on the lights, not caring to catch sight of her puffy eyes in the mirror. She grabbed the empty vase from her dresser. The sound it made when it hit the wall and shattered was satisfying but did nothing to soothe the restlessness gripping her heart.

With her mind rotating around David, she tried to put into words what bothered her most – that he had left, or had come back.

And for both times, she didn't know why.

After she'd downed half the cup, her tongue tingling with the taste of valerian root, she slipped between the sheets.

And found herself walking barefoot under a starry night so bright with moonlight she blinked, confused at the sky. The pale yellow light of two moons, one in the east, one in the west shone down on her. Under her feet, coarse rubble dug into her soles.

Her mind did a double take.

*Dream.*

Hot damn.



The night remained deadly quiet, but she kept her witch senses at full alert. *My own dream, I'm safe.* On the brink of forcing herself awake and back to reality, she let out a deep sigh when she recognized the house at the end of the street.

David's house.

The one they had spent almost every night together.

*My dream, my choices.*

The summer-warmed street pavement tickled her soles, but she kept her gaze on the whitewashed house, the lawn unmowed, lights switched on at the ground level.

Wind whipped at her as she closed in and slipped through the squeaky gate. She ran her hands along her body. She wore her old T-shirt, the white cotton soft and washed out. The one she'd slipped into before she went to bed. The wind picked up, pressing the thin fabric against her body, tugging with greedy hands at her hair, making her nipples stiff in the cold. Shuddering, she clutched her arms around her middle.

Then she saw him.

From behind the window on the first floor, he looked at her. She gazed into David's dark eyes, and while he showed no joy, he neither appeared hostile.

Leaves rustled in the ever-increasing breeze. When she gazed up, no stars dotted the sky, but thunder-gray clouds stormed across a black canvas. She sought David's gaze again—

And found him standing on the porch of his house, the door open behind him.

He held out his hand.

Chills ran up her spine. Her heart flooded with the need to close her fingers around his, with the wish he would take her into his arms.

When he spoke to her, she almost didn't hear him above the rising storm.

Then his words registered.

Fury slammed into her body, making her shake. "If you do, why did you leave me?" she whispered, but her words echoed through the night so loud she covered her ears.

Again she heard him speak, the deep timbre making her weak with longing.

She choked, her throat too tight, too dry to say the three words back.

*My dream, my choices.*

She stripped her tee over her head, shivers working its way over bare skin. If she couldn't say it, she could show him her love.

He pulled his shirt over his head, stripped off his pants. Naked, his muscled torso rising and falling with his calm breathing, he held out his hand again. For a few seconds she reveled in the sight of his athletic body, the dusting of dark hair against his chest, the hard stomach she used to punch when he tickled her until she was in tears with laughter.

Words still failing her, she met him halfway as he stepped off the porch and wrapped her arms around his neck. His body's warmth seeped into her skin, but strangely, it didn't reach her heart.

A moan slipped through her half-closed lips. Feeling his hard body against her, she discovered anew what she once knew so well. "Make love to me," she whispered, her breath coming faster as she let her hands explore. Under her fingers, the breadth of his wide shoulders, the flex of his biceps. So familiar, so strange.

Rising on her toes, she sought his mouth. His clever mouth that had made her smile, giggle, scream in pleasure. Wrapping her arms around his neck, her legs around his middle, she plunged her tongue inside his mouth. The hard flesh of his cock nudged against her stomach. She wanted him—wanted him to claim her, wanted his cock buried inside her pussy, driving her to a mindless orgasm. Her pussy clenched as she grew wet.

She sank to the ground, taking him with her until his weight pressed her into the cool grass. She pushed her hips forward, allowing him to inch into her. He leaned over her, lying between her thighs, his cock probing at her pussy.

*Too fast, too fast.*

Sliding away from under him and climbing on top, she allowed herself a smile. He'd always made her work for it, if she wanted to be on top, but this had been easy. Too easy. Seeking his gaze, she saw that his eyes were closed.

"Look at me," she whispered, her voice catching in her throat. He didn't, and she didn't hear his rough groan as she rubbed her hips against him, against his cock, slicking him with her juices. Need, hot and desperate for release, spread through her, making her body shake. A groan shot from her lips, but what she wanted was his deep voice urging her on, his voice telling her to make love to him. She wanted to see his pleasure, hear his lust more than anything else.

Kneeling between his legs, she took him into her mouth, working her tongue up and down his shaft. Tasting herself on his skin, feeling his cock jerk in her mouth. The first salty drops of his come almost sent her over the edge.

*My dream, my choices.*

"Look at me," she said, straddling him. Frustration hit her hard as he refused to give her what she needed. "Damn you, David."

She spread her legs, taking his cock, inch by inch, into her eager pussy. She closed her eyes in sheer bliss as he stretched her wide, and she began to move. His cock slid in and out, hitting the right spot. She clenched around him, taking him deeper. Tipping her head back, she found the perfect rhythm.

"Naughty witch," an amused male voice said behind her back.

Her heart stuttered and she stopped all movement. Slowly, she turned her head to look over her shoulder.

Sinclair leaned, in all his naked glory, against a tree, watching her with unveiled interest. His skin glowed golden, and his erection rested hard against his stomach.

Squinting, she saw the shimmering aura around him. Pure magic hovered over his skin like a lover's touch. Their eyes locked then his gaze slid to her bare ass. He stroked himself until liquid glistened at the tip of his cock.

"Sinclair, get lost," she pressed through her teeth, but was all too aware that her arousal hadn't dimmed but had leaped at the knowledge someone watched how she made love to David. "I told you to stay the fuck out of my dreams."

He laughed, still leaning against the tree. Light filtered through the branches, hitting every muscle of his hard body. A warlock was a remarkable sight, more so when he was naked. She followed his lazy movements as he ran his hand up and down his cock. A smile lit his face, an expression in his eyes as if he knew that he was able to arouse her.

"Like what you see?" he asked.

*Arrogant bastard.* "So what," she answered with a shrug. Only a dead witch wouldn't find him sexy.

He nodded, as if he had heard her unspoken words that while he aroused her, he had no place in her heart. "So what," he repeated, pushing away from the tree and circling closer. "We are of the same kind, you and I, witch. We belong together." He trailed his finger across her cheek, across her mouth.

She didn't want to hear his words. She closed her eyes, her hands splayed over David's hard chest.

May he watch her all he wanted, she didn't care.

She rocked back and forth, the friction, the slide of David's cock turning her liquid with desire. Knowing Sinclair watched her sent a sliver of heat into her pussy. She groaned as tension rippled through her body, a sharp sensation jolting through her clit. *Almost there, almost...*

"I want you, witch," Sinclair said, his hands stroking through her hair, his mouth settling on her shoulder blade and blowing kisses up to her neck.

"You want sex," she said, her voice hoarse.

"If you haven't noticed yet," he said, a sudden dangerous tone in his words. "At least *I* talk to you, touch you, look at you."

His words made her stomach plunge.

It would take only a flick of her wrist and he would be gone. It would also catapult her out of her dream. Catapult her away from the illusion she had built. The dream of making love to David.

And nothing, not even Sinclair's presence, would make her leave this dream.

"Your dream, your choice," he whispered, kneeling behind her and between David's legs. His hands closed around her breasts from behind. "I want to share everything with you. We belong together."

She bit her lip, accepting there was truth in his words. No man would ever understand her as well as Sinclair. Torn, she hesitated, caught up in her dream, caught up between two men. Then Sinclair began to knead her breasts, gently, teasingly.

Her nipples hardened under his skilled fingers. The sudden feeling of being touched overwhelming, she fell back against his chest to enjoy. His touch became more demanding, rougher, turning her nipples tight and aching.

*It's just a dream.*

But it felt damn real as she clutched around David's cock while Sinclair toyed with her breasts, sending tiny hot sparks from his fingertips all over her skin. Her gaze sought David's, but she already knew he wouldn't return it. *But it's my dream; I can play pretend if I want to.*

From now on, every word, every touch, came from David and from him alone.

"I'm going to use you, warlock," she said as he bit into her shoulder, sending a firework of lust straight between her legs. "This means nothing."

"I'll still make sure you get what you need, sweet witch."

Touching and being touched blurred to one feeling. She lost herself in the hands of the man behind her, his fingers, his mouth. Lost herself in touching David, tracing every dip and curve of his body with greedy hands and lips.

"You make me so hard," he whispered against her neck, lifting her hair. His mouth closed around her neck, licking and biting none too gently. "I want you so much."

Everything in her tightened, and she knew when she broke, she would scream her orgasm. She moved faster, the friction of his cock in her pussy turning sharp and sweet. Hands roamed her body, invading every space, leaving nothing left to explore. Her orgasm so close it was painful, she heard him say, "Don't you dare come." A hard slap landed on her left buttock, taking away her breath.

"I'll tell you when you can let go," he said, a kiss landing on her ass. She nodded as pain turned to lust. Grabbing her by the neck as if she were a cat, he pressed her down. Her cheek rested against David's chest, his cock inside her pussy making her wild with need, but she couldn't move while Sinclair held her down, fingering her ass, licking and plunging his tongue inside her.

"My wild witch," he said, his hands splayed over her buttocks. A finger slipped inside her ass, probing. She let out a guttural groan as the thick head of a cock replaced the finger.

"I'm going to fuck your sweet ass, my witch," she heard him say and his hard cock inched into her, stretching her wide, making her thoughts spiral away and turn into sharp lust. "Relax," he groaned out, his voice rough. "It's going to hurt so good." He gave her another slap, gentle this time.

Her breath stuttered. Then she moved, slow at first, adjusting to the new sensation of having two cocks buried deep inside her. He wove his magic around them, enhanced her arousal, made sure she experienced nothing but pure bliss. Quivering with need, she let him, sighing as raw pleasure settled over her skin.

She matched his movements, hearing a harsh male groan while two hands clamped around her hips. A hard slap landed on her butt. "I want you to come, witch." His cock, magically slick and lubed, pounded into her ass, fucking her hard.

David's heart was beating against her flat palm. Shuddering, she moved against him, groaning at the pleasure of being filled so completely by the two men. *David*, she thought, remembering how he used to hold her, how he used to make her come.

Helplessly, she took what she could get from David underneath her, from Sinclair fucking into her ass. Working the two cocks sliding in and out of her, she screamed as heat blazed through her every nerve, white stars erupting behind her closed eyelids. Reaching between her legs, she fingered David's cock, feeling how he penetrated her core. She broke, screaming as her orgasm slammed again and again into her body.

Thrust up to his balls inside her, Sinclair shouted out her name as he spurted his hot seed into her ass.

For a couple of breaths, she held still, grasping the last waves of pleasure. Breathing fast, she slipped off David, coming to rest on the ground. Then she opened her eyes, hoping to see David's loving gaze. He was gone, not a trace of him remained, his house looking dark and deserted in the distance.

"You belong to me, witch," Sinclair said, taking her into his arms. "Only to me."

Guilt slammed into her as hard as her orgasm had seconds before. With a sob, she flicked her wrist.

## Chapter Four

"You're kidding, right?" Nell asked, snapping the lid shut on the bottle of sun lotion and storing it into her beach tote.

"Afraid not," Maya answered as she snicked open the lid of her bottle and squirted a dollop of coconut-scented sun lotion onto each of her kneecaps. "That's what he said." Maya dragged the back of her hand across her forehead, beads of sweat sliding down between her breasts. Suddenly, she craved raspberry ice cream to cool her down. With a sigh, she rubbed the lotion from her knees to her shins.

Nell, murmuring under her breath, adjusted the beach umbrella before she flopped again onto her belly, giving her a *look*.

"Is that jealousy I see in your eyes, or what?" Maya teased.

"Shut up, girl. You don't know what he offered if you speak that lightly."

"I don't take it lightly," Maya said, drawing half moons in the sand next to her red-and-blue-striped beach towel. "I don't believe Sinclair wants to pledge himself to me. He's fooling around."

Nell snorted. "No way he'd fool around with that." Nell flopped onto her back, seemingly unable to relax, making Maya wonder why her friend was so antsy.

"Imagine," Nell whispered, grabbing her sunglasses and sliding them down her nose. "Being able to draw from his magic, use it as you see fit, drain him of it if you so wish. Your magic would reach a high you couldn't even dream of. He would be forever yours, forever your man, lover, friend..."

"Hello, you're married," Maya said, staring up into the impeccable diamond-cut blue sky. But Nell's words had pulled the rug from under her feet. "Tim is forever your man too."



"Hah," Nell said. "Marriage vows." She blew into her hand and made a throwing-away gesture. "There's a nasty little thing called divorce, you know, if he ever gets sick of me. I'll kill him if that ever happens, though." Laughing, she propped herself up on her elbows. "There's no way in heaven or hell a warlock would ever leave your side after he pledged himself to you. You could do no wrong. He'd love you forever and ever and ever and —"

"Stop it," Maya said, throwing a fistful of sand onto Nell's belly. She grabbed the sun lotion to do her arms. "I can't and won't let him do that. It's positively medieval."

"That it might be, but you'll still see him tomorrow night?"

"Midsummer night... I'm not sure if I should go."

"*What?* Are you nuts?"

The tone of outrage made Maya laugh. "You know perfectly well I nearly killed myself last year."

"Be reasonable," Nell said. "It was a broken ankle."

"Easy for you to say," Maya said, tugging her feet under. "It took an awful lot of time for the pain to subside."

"I could have been of assistance," Nell said sarcastically.

"Yes, but only because we *can* use magic, doesn't mean we *should* use it at the slightest level of discomfort."

"Suit yourself. Anyway, this year, you'll have someone at your side if you trip in the dark."

"Right," Maya said, following the flight of a seagull as it crashed into the rolling surf and emerged again with a small silvery fish. "I might stay at home."

"And do what?" Nell asked, her eyebrows threatening to disappear into her hairline. "Have an early night and sleep through solstice? What a nightmare."

Unbidden, last night's dream flashed before her eyes, and her cheeks prickled hotly in response. In the pit of her stomach, the churning guilt as if she'd cheated on

someone. Worst of all, she couldn't figure out which man she had cheated on, Sinclair or David.

"You ever dream of another man?" Maya asked quietly, seeking Nell's gaze. "I mean after you married Tim. About an ex-boyfriend, maybe?"

From behind her dark sunglasses, Nell returned her gaze, a smile playing around the corners of her mouth. "Well, well, girl, you got something to tell me?"

Maya dug her nails into the palm of her hands and shook her head. "It's rude to answer a question with another question."

"I'm a witch."

Maya rolled her eyes but kept quiet until Nell said, "There's love and there's lust. With Tim, I have the best of both worlds. Honestly, a dream's just a dream, why worry? But sure, I've had the odd dream about a dark stranger going down on me."

"I don't," Maya said. "Worry, I mean."

Nell slipped her sunglasses off her nose, giving her a knowing smile. "Sinclair's not enough for you, eh? Having the hots for someone else?"

"There's no one else," Maya said quickly, too quickly, fearing Nell would give her another *look*. She'd never confided her affair with David to her; now wasn't the time to do so. "You know me. I don't do hots over anyone."

"No, you don't." Nell let sand run through her fingers, looking thoughtful. "You're one cool chick of a witch when it comes to guys. Instead of fire, a slab of ice in her heart."

It knocked the breath out of Maya. "You think that?" she asked. "You think I'm a heartless bitch?"

"Gee, look at your face," Nell laughed. "Would I be friends with a heartless bitch?"

"No?" Maya said, hating that she sounded so hopeful.

"I'm here when you want to talk." Nell shaded her eyes, looking in the distance. "Speaking of hot, I'll take a quick dip in the water to cool down."

"All right," Maya said, turned her back to Nell, happy to escape her friend's scrutiny for a while. "Can you do my back before you go swimming, though?" She held up the bottle of lotion.

Nell jumped up, sending sand flying as she sprinted toward the water. "Ask David," she called over her shoulder.

"Who?" Heat slammed into her head as comprehension dawned. Before she had a chance to glance over her shoulder, the crunch of sand under bare soles sent a shiver along her spine.

"Let me," David said, leaning down close to her ear, taking the sun lotion from her hand and settling behind her in the sand. "I don't want you to get sunburned." Warm breath hit her neck as he closed his hand around her hair, forming a ponytail.

"What are you —"

"Doing at the beach?" he said.

"Yes." With him touching her, it was hard to gather focus and determination to wrap herself in a spell to hide her emotions. Each brush of his hand against her bare skin screwed up her concentration. As if he knew, he kept one hand on her right shoulder.

"I came for you," he said. "To see you."

Her breathing hitched, strength fleeing her muscles as he brushed the tips of his fingers over her shoulder blades. She sat rigid, unable to speak, last night's erotic dream flashing before her eyes. How she'd sat astride him, her fingers funneled into his chest hair, his cock deep inside her as she rode herself to an orgasm.

The touch of his chest against her back made her head spin. He was real this time, his closeness not a dream. She didn't need to turn around to see his dark eyes, the strong nose, the dimple in his chin. Or his mouth... There was a spot on her neck he used to kiss, below her ear. He didn't kiss it now, wouldn't do it, and that knowledge made her stomach clench. She jumped when he started working his hands over her skin, his fingers slick with lotion.

"Hold your top," he said.

She pressed her palms against her breasts to hold up her top as he pulled at the knot of her bikini. Then his hands were back on her skin. The sliding touch of his hands, brisk and sure, shot straight between her legs, made her nipples stiff.

Cradling her breasts in her hands, she wondered if he knew that all she wanted was for him to do just that. She stroked her thumb over her hard nipple. Her head tipping backward, she bit hard into her lower lip.

Too late. He'd heard her moan. She could judge from how he stopped all movements, his hands resting on her lower back. Then his deft fingers double knotted her bikini again.

"Lie down on your belly, keep your eyes closed," he said, his voice a whisper against her ear. His hands splayed across her back, he pushed her onto the beach towel. "Relax, Maya."

*Relax?* Shaking with suppressed anger and lust, she wondered if she had ever *not* done what he demanded. *Close your eyes, Maya. Let me taste you. Come for me. Trust me.* And now it was *Relax, Maya.*

For a few breathless seconds she fought his strength as he tried to bend her will, fought his domination. Sensing her rigidity, he said, "I just want to rub in the lotion properly."

If there had been any laughter in his voice, she'd have killed him. But he didn't sound as if he made fun of her, didn't sound as if he knew how wet, how aroused he made her with his voice, his touch. *Ah, go to hell, David.*

She lay down on her belly, careful to keep her eyes shut.

Waiting for him to touch her again, she wondered what he would do now that she'd caved. Would he slide the length of his body against her back, his weight pushing her deeper into the towel and the hot beach sand underneath? The picture all too clear in her head, she imagined him pushing his knee between her thighs, opening her,

tugging her bikini bottoms to the side. He would take her breath in one hard motion, his cock thrusting into pussy, fucking her hard until she was begging for mercy.

Her heart hammered against her chest, and she spread her legs ever so slightly, digging her toes into the sand as if to anchor herself for the storm to come.

When his hand closed around her ankle, she gasped and her illusion shattered.

Of course, he wouldn't fuck her in the middle of the beach. The searing disappointment was hard to acknowledge, but disappointed she was.

Swiftly, he spread lotion up one leg then switched to the other. His hand closed around her inner thigh, moving higher until his thumb brushed over the edges of her bikini bottoms, leaving goose bumps on her skin in its wake. She fought down her urge to flip around and pull him into a tight embrace. He worked his hand down her leg again to her ankle, and up again smoothly, the side of his hand touching between her legs.

"You are tense," he said, massaging her inner thigh.

No kidding, she thought, digging her fingers into the towel as he loosened the muscles in her leg. Her clit begging to be touched, she wiggled her ass, stopping when she noticed what she was doing. Up went his hand again and touched her where she wanted. "David," she whispered, her pussy clenching in anticipation. She'd come screaming if he would give her one firm touch against her clit. Her own moan drowned in his harsh intake of breath, as if he finally noticed that she was writhing with unfulfilled desire beneath his hands.

He stroked up her leg in a slow and languid motion, worked his hand over her ass and up to her shoulder. Brushing strands of hair away from her cheek, he leaned down. "We have to talk," he said, sending her building climax crashing to the ground.

Opening her eyes, blinking at the glaring sun, she shook off his hand on her shoulder and wove a spell to protect herself from total embarrassment.

Pulling her legs under her, she straightened up on her heels, still feeling as if there was too little air to breathe, but safe in the knowledge that she would appear composed.

*Heartless bitch.* A voice suspiciously sounding like Nell's echoed through her head.

Her gaze traveled over him, taking in his faded black shirt and shorts, the bulge of his erection. As she met his dark gaze, the sight of his dilated pupils shocked her to the bone. She gritted her teeth. So what if he got hard touching her. It meant nothing. All the words he'd whispered against her skin had never ever meant squat.

She folded her arms, hiding her still-hard nipples from his view.

"Nothing to talk about," she said. "You left, you came back. Free country, David."

"I see," he said, his gaze growing a few notches cooler, and she clutched herself tighter, the sun failing to warm her suddenly. "You must be happy, then. The least you should do is thank me."

She blinked, thrown by his words. "Whatever that means," she said, wondering what he held so tightly in his fist.

"Or is he a rebound guy as well?" He rose and moved a couple of steps away as if he suddenly couldn't bear to be near her. "Did you give him ample warning not to get the wrong impression about your relationship with him?" he asked, brushing away sand clinging to his legs. She followed his hand movements, her fingers itching to explore the lean muscles underneath his tan skin. "Is that it, Maya?"

With a jolt, it finally sank in what he implied. "I didn't use you," she said, raising her head, anger blazing through her with searing heat. "It wasn't me leaving head over heels for greener pastures and —"

"So, this is serious," he interrupted, his voice so sharp it cut the air and left scars. "You are in a committed relationship with, what's his name?"

She grimaced, refusing to answer his question, when a cheerful voice said loudly, "You two talking about Sinclair?"

Nell plopped down on her towel, her skin glistening with saltwater. "Hi, David."

He inclined his head, his gaze never leaving Maya's face, silence growing heavy with tension.

"Oh, speak of the devil," Nell chipped in again and waved at someone in the distance.

Sinclair walked with long strides toward them, holding something in his hand.

Her heart in her throat, Maya wished the ground would open up and swallow her whole. One look at Sinclair's face, seeing the absolute fury etched between his brows, and she feared he'd strike out at David. There was little guessing involved in who would win.

She almost tripped over her feet as she rushed to David. "Leave," she said, touching his hand. "Please, for me."

"For you," he repeated, anger tingeing his words. "Sure." He backed away a step...then two. Something dropped from his hand and into the sand as he opened his fist. "Anything for you," he said, and when he turned his back to her, tears pricked at her eyes.

Her vision blurry, she crouched, quickly closing her hand around what he'd let fall.

"See you tomorrow, David," Nell called after him. "You still going with Jane?"

"Of course, I asked her out."

It cut through her soul like a blade. "He's going with that woman," Maya whispered, but before Nell answered, Sinclair wrapped his arm around her waist.

"My witch," Sinclair kissed the top of her head. "I've brought you something."

He held the largest ice-cream cone she'd ever seen under her nose.

"Raspberry," he said, unnecessarily.

"Perfect," she said weakly, taking the cone in one hand, in her other clutching whatever David had held in his hand.

"Of course perfect. *We* are perfect," Sinclair replied, shooting a glance like an arrow at David who was almost out of sight. With the grace of a demi-god, he folded down onto her towel and picked up her sun lotion. "Let's give your shoulders a rub," he said, sniffing at the bottle.

She shook her head, sharp edges cutting into her palm, and she couldn't wait to see what she'd picked up from the sand. Licking her ice cream, she opened her hand, her heart beating in her throat.



## **Chapter Five**

One glance at the two fat, yellow orbs hanging in the sky, their pale light reflecting on the street pavement, and Maya knew what to expect.

She'd left the beach in a rush, fighting off Sinclair's wish to walk her home, promising Nell to call her later. Seeking the solitude of her apartment, she'd called it a night after taking a shower and slipping naked between the bed sheets. But not before she'd taken the little treasure David had dropped so carelessly—an iridescent, gold-flecked seashell—and crafted a small hole through it.

She briefly touched her neck, reassured when she found the shell dangling from a slim leather band. Now, glancing at the swirl of stars, a whipping breeze lashing at her bare skin, she let out a sigh of longing. Without hesitation, she strode toward his house, which shimmered invitingly in the distance.

When she stepped onto his lawn, she hoped to find his door open, but it remained closed, and nothing but the faint whisper of a deep male voice slipped into her consciousness. Lights shone through one of his windows. Drawn closer, she followed the whisper until it became louder, until she overheard each word. Gazing through the window, the tip of her nose touching the cool glass, her gaze fell on his bed. And on the tangled couple in it. Tall candles on the nightstand dripped wax, illuminating the room, casting deep shadows.

She clutched the windowsill, her breath fogging the glass, as she watched David rise from the bed, his muscles moving and flexing as he stretched like a lazy cat.

"Lie down," he said, in his hands a whisper of black silk. "And close your eyes." The woman on the bed, a tumble of dark hair covering her features, rolled onto her belly. Her skin glowed in the flickering candlelight. He leaned down, his hands clutching silk, kissed her bare butt, her spine, and lingered on her neck. When the

woman lifted her hand to touch his face, he wrapped her wrist in long black silk ribbons, did the same to her other wrist.

Maya craned her neck, but the woman's face stayed out of view. She raised her own hand, feeling as if something tugged at her wrists. How odd. She gazed back at him, feeling like a voyeur, and heat rose in her blood.

His hand had dipped between the woman's legs, teasingly. She heard his rumble of laughter as her hands joined his between her legs. He caught the silk tied to her wrists and knotted her securely to the bedpost. Again, his hands slipped between her legs, stroking her slowly.

Maya moaned, could almost feel the agony of need his fingers created.

Then he stopped to trail his hand down the inside of the woman's leg and took her foot in one hand. "Do you trust me?" she heard him whisper. His erection resting hard and thick against his stomach, sweat glistening on his chest, he blew a kiss on the sole before tying black silk around her ankle.

"Spread your legs," he said. The woman, tied up by both wrists to the bed, spread her legs wide. He paused, one hand wrapped around his cock, his other hand braced against the bedpost as if to steady himself. He kept his gaze glued on the woman as if he tried to drink in the sight of her.

Maya licked her lips, shuffling her feet. Odd really, how something had tickled her sole when he kissed the woman's foot. She pushed the thought aside, not ready to accept, not ready to learn who the woman was who so readily surrendered to him.

She watched how he tied the woman's legs, thoroughly checking her restraints until she rested spread-eagle upon his bed, leaving her completely open for his viewing pleasure.

He leaned forward, close to the woman's head. "Are you feeling good?" he whispered and kissed the woman's neck. Whatever it was the woman answered, it made him smile, his dark eyes lighting up. Watching the woman writhe with unfulfilled

lust, he gave himself long strokes until the head of his cock glistened. The woman raised her ass as if to lure his attention.

Maya smiled, watching how he tickled her, how he made her squirm. She could almost feel his touch, could almost feel his hands against her own skin... She slipped her hand between her legs, watching how he worked his lips and tongue across the woman's body, how he licked between her legs. How he played and toyed and gave pleasure, using his entire body. Circling her swollen clit, she closed her eyes, drawing out her own need. *David*, she thought, and slipped her fingers inside her wet pussy.

When she opened her eyes, he was propped up on his hands behind the woman, rubbing his groin against her ass. Taking his cock in his hand, he guided himself inside her.

Maya groaned, knowing very well how good it felt when his cock stretched her wide. "David," she whispered, placing her hand against the window glass, but he didn't look up, didn't hear her.

His face was twisted in concentration as he rocked against the woman, his cock thrusting in and out of her in hard, steady strokes.

The faint feeling as if someone were fucking her too materialized within her core. She wanted more. Maya sucked in her breath, plunging two fingers into her pussy. Keeping her eyes on David, on his face twisted in pleasure, she worked her clit as the pressure built, her breasts aching for a strong touch.

She screamed out as someone gripped her hard from behind.

"Witch," Sinclair whispered into her hair, his hands resting on her hipbones. He drew her against his chest, his erection pressing hard against her lower back. "Bend over." His hands slipped between her legs, finding her wet pussy, and plunged his thick fingers inside her. "I'll make you hurt so good."

Lust slammed into her body, aroused at his demanding touch. Still, it wasn't the touch of the man she craved. Trying to shake him off, she cursed as he held her tighter against him, his low laugh filling the air. She struggled against him, against his

overpowering strength. Her breath came hard as his cock slipped between her legs, rubbing over her clit. She moaned, never taking her gaze off David, and rocked herself against the hard ridge of Sinclair's cock. He pushed his knee between her legs, bending her forward with one hard motion of his hand. He guided the thick head of his cock into her, making her cry out at the sudden invasion.

"Fuck me," she pressed through her teeth, her body shaking with suppressed need. "I want it hard."

"I'm going to give you what you need, witch," he said, his voice triumphant.

Pushing her legs farther apart, he groaned as he thrust the length of his shaft into her pussy. He pulled her hard against his groin, making sure he filled her completely. He began to fuck her in fast strokes, raw and hard. Everything inside her coiled tight, her climax a few thrusts away.

When he pulled out of her, bringing his palm down on her ass, the pain twisted her lust into an unbearable need for release. Once more, he slapped her with his flat hand, and she was sure he'd leave a red print on her ass cheek.

He thrust into her again, fucking her harder than before, his hands cupping her breasts. He fucked her without gentleness, almost brutal in the act, as she wanted him to. When he pinched her nipple, she groaned out, her internal muscles clenching around his cock as the sweet friction mounted to sharp pleasure. Curling her fingers around the windowsill, she kept her gaze on David, watching how he made love to the woman, while Sinclair pounded his cock deep into her pussy, his fingers working magic on her clit.

"So tight and wet," he groaned, and tilted her hips. He pumped her hips down onto his cock, making her fuck him in deep thrusts.

Helplessly, she surrendered to the sensation of being fucked so thoroughly. Closing her eyes, reveling in the feeling of his thick cock pounding into her again and again. *David*, she thought, opening her eyes to seek his gaze. A shudder gripping her, she was almost able to grasp the pleasure David gave the woman tied to his bed.

Her gaze locked on him, she whispered, "I want you to come, come inside me."

Two harsh male groans answered her words; then Sinclair pulled her hard against his groin, his cock deep within her core. "I'll make you come so hard, witch."

Hard and fast, he pounded his cock into her until she threw her head back, letting go. Screaming as her orgasm erupted outward from her center, she rode the waves and shivers that convulsed through her body. With a rough sound, he stopped all movement, his cock pulsing as he spilled his come.

Sinclair wrapped her in his arms from behind, his cock still hard inside her, his warm seed wet between her thighs. "I want you," he whispered, and stroked her damp back. "We belong together."

Her eyes flew open in time to watch through the window how David took off the restraints, how he gently wrapped his hands around the woman's face and said, "I love you, Maya."

Everything inside her coiled tight, pain stabbing at her heart. *You didn't*, she thought. *You left me*. It was the last time she'd seen him before he'd left, the last words she'd heard him say. She'd felt so loved, so cherished that night in his arms.

Balling her hand to a fist, she hit through the window, the glass cutting into her flesh as it broke into shards. He'd left without a word, without a note, only to return six months later to destroy her all over again. She closed her eyes, banning the image of herself in David's arms, and banning his words of love from her memory.

"I'll never hurt you," Sinclair said quietly, "never leave you, witch. Everything I am, I'll offer to you. Whatever you want, I'll give you."

"And no witch in her right mind would turn you down," she said, because it was the truth.

## Chapter Six

Maya threw open the windows in an attempt to lure in a cool breeze. Outside, hot air wavered miragelike above the pavement, and the breeze nearly scorched her nose. She licked her dry lips, slipped out of her cropped jeans and shirt and, wearing her panties and bra, walked to the fridge. The tiled kitchen floor cooled her bare soles, and the ice cube she retrieved from the icebox melted in heavenly liquid coolness against her stomach as she stroked it in small circles over her skin.

Her cell phone rang and, after she checked the caller ID—*Nell*—she snapped it open.

“Too hot to talk.” Maya moved the ice cube up and down her arm.

“Honey, it’s midsummer. I *want* sweat running down between my breasts.”

“Our tastes differ.” Water drops fell down to her feet, forming a small puddle. Maya stuck her toe in it.

“You didn’t call me yesterday,” Nell said.

“Sorry, I went to bed early.”

“Alone?”

“Nosy much?”

“You and David looked cozy yesterday.”

Maya swallowed. It was hard to get something past her best friend, the most talented witch to ever breathe down her neck. “I hardly know the guy.”

“Is that so,” Nell said. “I’ve always found him to be, I don’t know, *animalistic*.”

Taken aback, Maya did a double take. “Animalistic? What the hell do you mean by that? I mean, he’s in terrific physical shape, ‘cause he’s obnoxiously religious about running five miles each day, but he also eats like a horse and —”

"Why so defensive?"

Maya drew in a deep breath, held it for ten seconds and hoped her heart rate would slow down. "You know, don't you? That I've been with him."

"The question is why I didn't know sooner."

"It's over, Nell," Maya said, and to her shame, tears burned at the back of her eyes. "Nothing to tell. It was, it was..." Struggling for words, she rubbed the palm of her hand across her forehead. "It was for sex, and now it's over."

Nell was quiet at the other end of the phone.

"Don't give me the silent treatment," Maya said, forcing a laugh.

"I worry about you," Nell said. "Ever since you dumped that asshole Richard, you haven't been quite yourself."

"He dumped *me*, Nell."

"Bullshit, honey. You intimidated him and you stopped putting up with his crap and that's why he buggered off."

"We've been through this too many times. Fact is, I don't get along with normal guys and they don't with me. That's why Sinclair is perfect for little old *moi*."

"Witch and warlock," Nell said. "Isn't that a cliché?"

"A cliché that holds true. David would have run like Richard if he'd ever found out I'm a witch. They all leave, and most sooner rather than later. Richard followed the established pattern." She hadn't meant to sound bitter, but bitter she was.

"I see," Nell said.

"I highly doubt that."

"You're still not over Richard."

"He called me a fucking *crazy* bitch," she said, and hiccupped. "Sooner or later, they *all* call me that." The tears no longer burned in her eyes. They were flowing freely.

Nell was silent on the other end of the line, giving her time to collect herself. "I've stopped caring for him a long, long time ago," Maya said, meaning every word. She'd

stopped caring about him even before the door had hit him in the ass. And she'd stopped thinking about him when she'd spotted David. In his arms, time had stopped. She'd stopped at nothing to get to sleep almost each night for three months straight in David's bed. "David was only the rebound guy." She winced because it sounded so lousy. And heartless.

"You never told him?"

Maya snorted. "What, that I'm a witch?"

"Yes."

"And wait for him to call me a crazy bitch?" Maya hiccupped again, grasping the shell she wore around her neck. "No, I didn't tell him. I wanted him to stick around for a while before telling him about the witch thing. Guess what, he left me before I spilled my secret. But with Sinclair, there are no more secrets," she said, crossing her arms, wedging the phone between shoulder and ear. "We understand each other."

"Everyone has secrets. David might not mind your witchcraft at all."

"Yeah right."

"Ah, honey, I'm sorry he hurt you," Nell said, sounding tired. "It's my hubby's fault you met him in the first place. He set you up with him, right?"

"Tim gave me a call that night," Maya said, closing her eyes. "He said he was busy at work and already late for the anniversary dinner you had planned, and if I would pretty please do him a favor and pick up his cousin from the airport and give him a ride home."

"Goddess," Nell said, "I remember he came home late that evening, I was so furious. But he also brought a bunch of sunflowers and lemon sorbet for dessert, and he went out of his way that night..." Nell let the sentence trail off, and Maya practically saw her smiling.

"Good for you," Maya said dryly.



Nell made a humming sound. "So, and what happened then. David hit on you, the sly...fox?" Nell giggled.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing," Nell answered quickly. "But I want to know every dirty detail now."

Maya sighed. "Well, I didn't know who I was looking for at the airport, so I let them call out his name over the speakers. We met. Then I drove him home. We talked. We had sex. We repeated the last part over several weeks."

"Wow, girl, easy here, don't give me the juicy stuff all at once."

"That's my story and I'll stick to it, sorry," Maya answered, working her hand up and down her arms to smooth down her gooseflesh.

"Why not give him a second chance?"

"He fucking left me!" Maya slapped her hand over her mouth, sending the phone clattering to the floor.

When she picked it up again, Nell said, "No need to yell. So you going tonight?"

Maya leaned her forehead against the fridge. Typical of Nell to ask the question of all questions. "No," she said, but thought *Yes. No. Maybe.*

"Come on, it's summer solstice. Just imagine the starlit night, music, dancing—"

"Yeah, yeah, I know." It was an open secret among all witches in a five-hundred-mile radius that the best way to celebrate Litha in style, to honor the sun and the goddess, to honor one's own living, breathing body, was to make sure to attend Midsummer in the Park.

The last sliver of ice melted between her fingertips, tiny cold water droplets covering her arm. If Sinclair were with her, he would lick them off. Which would be pleasant, but it wouldn't set her heart racing. "With my luck, I'll not sprain my ankle but break a leg or something this year." She sighed. As lame excuses went, this one had to take the cake.

"Hush," Nell said, "you shouldn't say stuff like that. It will be different. The bonfire is going to be huge, the music is live and there is Sinclair waiting to pled —"

"Don't say it." She hardly needed a reminder of what awaited her when she met him tonight. If she only had more time to think... She pressed her hand against her forehead. "Maybe I'll stay in and bake a few midsummer cookies to celebrate?" Maya said, grasping her last excuse, but heard Nell's instant laughter ringing in her ear.

The laughter rubbed her the wrong way, so she quenched it by saying, "I'll accept his pledge."

The laughter died a sudden death. For a few moments, she feared she had stunned Nell into silence, but then she said, "Wow."

"I'm doing the right thing, right?" Maya asked, and even she heard the self-doubt reflected in her voice. "Forget I asked," she added. "I'm nervous."

"Remember the book I got you for your birthday?" Nell asked. "Give it a try. Might get you in the right mindset. Might help you make the *right* decision."

Maya bit her lip, pondering for the last time her options. Maybe she should pack her MP3 player, a magazine and towel and head to the beach as she did most free afternoons, and then have an early night.

*A dreamless night.*

A large butterfly, stunningly patterned in orange and sun-yellow, sailed through the open window into the kitchen, made a graceful turn around the dusty ceiling lamp and landed on her forearm. For a few heartbeats she stared at the insect perched on her skin amidst drops of water. "I've seen *you* before," she whispered. A good omen was hard to ignore, even if she wasn't exactly happy about it. All signs pointed toward accepting Sinclair's pledge.

"See you at ten thirty at the park's entrance," Maya said. "Be on time, flakey."

"Look who's talking."

The butterfly took flight again as Nell hung up the phone. Thinking about tonight's summer solstice made her blood sing suddenly. A call she knew she had to answer, *needed* to answer.

A shiver worked its way across her spine. David would be there too. And his date, she added sourly, jealousy gripping her by the throat. Had meeting him been the same for Jane as for her, she wondered. Was it always easy for him with women, were they all easy prey?

She still had no explanation for what had happened when she'd first laid eyes on him at the airport.

How her heart had jumped when he'd shaken her hand and introduced himself. How she'd tripped over her feet, stuttering meaningless small talk. She'd wanted to run from the chemistry that surged between them, frightening in its intensity.

And as if he had sensed her emotion, his eyes had gone dark, his body tense as if he were prepared to give chase.

She hadn't made a run for it.

And there had been no words necessary when they reached his home.

She curled her hand around a chair. The memory alone made her knees weak. The door had clicked shut behind them and he had backed her up against a wall. They'd shared one look of mutual desire then his hands had slipped inside her dress, sending buttons flying in his urge to reach her bare skin.

Maybe he'd wondered too, she thought, if once they were skin against bare skin, their sexual chemistry would fizzle out or explode to new heights.

She shook her head, banning the image of him leaning into her, sweat beading his forehead as he restrained himself from taking her fast, as he voiced his wishes and willed her into submission. And he'd rewarded her with pleasure so intense she'd begged for more every night.

But that was then.

The now was Sinclair. She wouldn't need to fear that he couldn't satisfy her body tonight. She wasn't sure if he could satisfy her heart.

So, a little magical boost wouldn't go amiss.

*The book...*

She browsed the bookshelf, her fingers brushing along the cracked and old book spines. *Here we go...* No title on the cover, a dark red leather binding. She flipped open the book. *Erotic Love Spells and Potions*. She hadn't been in an erotic mood when Nell presented her with the book. Tucking the book under her arm and taking a fresh ice cube from the icebox, she reconsidered.

She sat at the kitchen table, careful that no water dripped on the old pages. Scanning the handwritten words, she sucked in her breath as a poem caught her interest.

*Yearning that no kiss can tame,*

*Waves of pleasure heat the flame,*

*Seek fulfillment in the night,*

*Let your desires take flight,*

*Passion's shudder and lust will mesh,*

*Consume you all, heart and soul and flesh.*

She slipped the ice cube into her mouth, contemplating. It would bring her in the right mood to accept Sinclair's pledge. If she longed for him the same way he wanted her, she'd be happy for the rest of her life. And after she'd accepted his pledge and made love with him in the real world for a change, she'd forget about David.

And nothing and no one would ever make her as lonely and hurt as David when he'd left. With Sinclair, she'd be safe. No one would ever again call her crazy. Why *not* use magic to rein in her heart, why *not* use it to fall in love? Once she fell in love with Sinclair, she'd laugh at her past heartbreak. It would fade into insignificance, into nothing.

Tracing the spindly writing with her finger, she checked what she would need to perform the spell. Candles, seeds, cinnamon, salt, sandalwood...yes, she had everything, except seeds. Her gaze fell on the fruit bowl on the kitchen counter. Bananas, a few past-their-prime strawberries, and shiny red apples. Witches ought to be creative. Apple seeds it was.

She gathered all necessary items to perform the spell, substituting when she didn't have the right equipment. Because, really, what witch had a copper pot over a fireplace in her apartment?

After she set up a protective circle in her kitchen, she placed two candles inside a copper pan, and breathed in the sandalwood smell of the scented candle wax. She lit the two wicks and silently recited the spell, visualizing a man with sparkling blue eyes, strong arms, a wicked smile, and a solid, well-endowed, muscled body, fit to make a woman scream with pleasure. In short, Sinclair.

She cut open an apple, licked two seeds into her mouth and then sprinkled cinnamon and salt into the flames. With a hiss, the candle flared up, burning her hand. She pulled her hand back, which showed an angry red mark on the tips of her fingers. Sticking them into her mouth to cool them, she remembered how David had once soothed her finger when she'd gotten herself a paper cut. It seemed like a million years ago...

A drop of sweat ran down between her shoulder blades as she breathed in the odd smell of burnt cinnamon.

"Fuck," she whispered. For half a breath, David's features popped up in her mind, his dark eyes shining, faint stubble on his cheeks, his lopsided smile. Her heart twisted with longing so painfully intense she wanted to claw it out of her chest.

Trying to push all thought of him aside, she hummed the spell one last time. A tingling sensation from her soles to her crown spread through her body.

She hadn't expected a bodily reaction to the spell, but the shivers were pleasant. Wetness gathered between her legs; a jolt of pleasure hit her clit. She rotated her hips

experimentally, biting back a moan. Movement alone became sensual bliss. Swallowing the apple seeds, she thanked the goddess for her help.

Another spine-tingling shiver gripped her and she grabbed the doorframe, now very much looking forward to meeting her warlock so he could take the edge off her arousal. Stripping off her panties and bra, she made a beeline for the bathroom. She *needed* a cold shower.

*Please, let him be there tonight.*

Otherwise, she'd die of horniness.

## **Chapter Seven**

Traffic was horrible. Maya cursed, realizing she was half an hour late. When at long last luck favored her and she found a parking space across the park's gates, she switched off the engine and opened the door to absolute mayhem. She slid from the car seat, pulling the hem of her floaty summer dress over her bare knees, breathing in the breeze from the ocean, tasting salt on her lips.

Flocks of people flooded through the park's gated entrance like bees into the hive. Overhead, tiny lanterns dangled from tree branches, and in the distance, she saw bright bonfire flames. Drums sounded through the night air like wild heartbeats, beckoning her to move, to dance.

She turned on her heel, searching, but unsurprisingly, she couldn't spot Nell anywhere in the crowd.

"Probably dancing," she muttered, and shouldered her way through the gate. Grass tickled her toes through her open sandals. Female laughter and husky male voices assaulted her senses and she bumped into a group of people. For a second, she saw David's profile, could swear she sensed the heady scent of his skin. She walked on, keeping her gaze to the ground until the sense of him being near evaporated. Seeing him laughing and talking with his date would hurt, would distract her from her goal to accept Sinclair's pledge.

The air was heavy with the perfume of grass and lilies and roses and pheromones. She breathed deeply, her heart gathering speed the closer she came to the stage where performers stomped a tribal dance, their faces hidden by sun god masks, while others were ferociously drumming in a deep, trancelike concentration. Again she shot a glance through the crowd, but instead of searching for Nell, she hoped she would spot Sinclair. She'd made up her mind, no need to delay the inevitable.

The beat of the drums drew her closer to the circle of dancers. She joined them, reluctant at first. Almost without intention, her hips began to move to the beat. Lifting her arms, she gave herself up to the night and the drums and blended into the people dancing all around her until her every sense surrendered to the hypnotic beat.

\* \* \* \* \*

David sensed her before he saw her, her scent wafting by him on a teasing draft of air. Her body brushed his as she passed by and went through the park's gates, and every nerve ending woke up and started screaming. God, to pull her into his arms, to touch her, to make her his...

But she drifted by without meeting his gaze, without acknowledging his presence at all.

"Maya," he whispered, her scent of sandalwood lingering in the air as she disappeared out of sight. She hadn't noticed him, her gaze locked to the ground. Just one more proof that she rejected him, or she'd have felt his presence, surely?

"You were saying?" Jane beamed up at him.

"Nothing," he answered.

She and a cluster of her friends had met him at the entrance, and he was cursing himself for ever agreeing to meet her. Her hand closed around his forearm and she pulled him close. "Do you mind getting a few drinks for us?" She nodded to a nearby concession stand.

He gazed into the direction where Maya had disappeared, wishing with all his heart he could ditch everyone and hunt his girl down. But what good would it do if she didn't want to be hunted? Maya didn't want him. He wasn't one to break his word to Jane, because whether he liked it or not, he'd said he'd go with her. He didn't want to admit that he wanted to make Maya jealous—it was a new low, even for him.

Tomorrow, he'd visit Maya at her home and lay at her feet how he felt about her, if only he didn't have the premonition that tomorrow would somehow be too late.



Fighting down his primal need to take her tonight anyway, if she wanted or not, he spotted Tim and Nell laughing in the distance. When Nell spotted him, her gaze swiveling between him and Jane, her forehead wrinkled. She then gracefully crossed the distance between them.

"David," she said. "I was looking all over for you. Why did you turn off your cell phone?"

He opened his mouth to tell her his cell phone wasn't turned off, when she said, "Doesn't matter. Listen, on my way here, I think saw a fire truck in front of your house and I smelled smoke."

"Oh my God," Jane said next to him while he still struggled to come to terms with Nell's words. "You have to go and check. I'll come with you."

Nell shook her head, smiling kindly as she looked at Jane, and David swore he saw something spark as Nell laid a gentle hand on Jane's shoulder. "Nah," Nell said, "you want to stay here and *forget* about him."

Confusion crossed Jane's face as she nodded.

Nell grasped him and dragged him a few feet away. "Okay, buddy," she said. "Whatever reason you had to stick to her side, I've gotten your ass out of it."

"What did you do to her?"

"Why give a damn?" She smacked his chest. "And there's no fire," she unnecessarily added, he had figured that much already. Nell bit her lip, worry etched on her forehead. "I shouldn't interfere, I really shouldn't, but Maya's making a mistake and I'll be damned if I let her do it."

"You trust me," he realized, and he couldn't put into words how much that meant to him. If only he'd been able to earn Maya's trust. Her love.

"I trust you to do the right thing. Go now." When he didn't move, she lifted her hands, seemingly exasperated. "Go and get your girl."

"Thanks, Nell," he said, tension rippling through his muscles as he slipped the tight reins on his inner beast. He'd need all his senses to find Maya in the crowd.

"Watch your back," Nell said. "Your competition plays dirty."

He didn't need to ask whom she meant. "Does she love him?" His stomach coiled at the thought of another man touching Maya.

"I guess that's for you to find out."

He turned, stretching out his senses—*there she is*—and walked without second-guessing into the direction of the music.

*Maya.* He sucked in his breath as she lifted her arms and swayed to the rhythm of the beating drums, a slight sheen on her forehead.

He moved closer, planning to pursue her tonight with everything he had until she willingly came into his arms. His hunter senses sprang to life, increasing every noise and smell lingering in the air. Above all, he detected the scent of her glowing skin, traces of sandalwood, her sex, and something purely *her*.

Barely keeping his inner beast under control, he felt the subtle notions of his eyes shifting to blue, the lengthening of his fingernails, the cords of his muscles straining to shift into his second nature.

He opened the buttons on his shirt, almost able to taste her on his tongue.

She shimmied her hips from side to side, her arms in the air. Her dress parted and moved, baring her shoulders and legs and hinted at soft curves underneath the fabric. Her skin was glowing golden when he gazed at her out of his shifted eyes; her profile cast in shadows and light. Her tongue slipped out to moisten her lips, and he imagined a soft moan coming from her throat. Her eyes were closed, and she twirled around, dark curls swinging, and gyrated her hips in sensual circles that made his cock harden.

Then, squinting, gazing at her with his enhanced eyesight, he saw the translucent aura around her, saw how she weaved her hand through the air, moving her lips, how she made the air swirl and dance around her, with her, like...like *magic*.

He licked over his sudden dry lips.

*Strega.*

He about resisted crossing himself.

*Witch.*

He hadn't believed Tim and all his talk about witches at the housewarming party.

He had laughed.

Fuck. What had Tim said? *Better keep your hands off these girls, or they'll suck you dry, heart and soul, using you to fulfill their kinky desires.*

Looking at Maya dancing — she gracefully arched her back, which made the swell of her breasts look damn fine. He knew that while she'd given him her body, she'd never given him her heart. He wondered if it was true, then. Witches really did suck men dry. It pretty much summed up his time with her before he left.

He'd given his all, had fallen for her fast and hard, heart and soul.

She had fallen for the physical pleasure only.

Someone shoved him and he stumbled, making him lose sight of her. He almost slammed his fist into the other man's face for accidentally bumping into him.

A flash of gold reflected from the ground. He crouched and picked up a mask, the same the dancers wore onstage. Slipping the mask over his face, he made his way toward the witch, hoping to find out how her hot summer skin tasted on his tongue, giving it his last try to win her love.

\* \* \* \* \*

Maya's eyes flew open as two sure, strong hands wrapped around her waist from behind. It took her a moment to return to reality. As if drunk, the beat of the drums and the sensual effects of the spell had made her lose control. Thumbs pressed into the small of her back as someone danced behind her. She wanted to swivel around and shoo the guy away, but it was as if a thick layer of air held her in place in front of him.

Then something snapped into place in her mind.

He'd found her—Sinclair. After all, she'd magiced him to her side. And he felt so *good*.

She tripped over her feet, out of sync to the beat of the drums. Laughter bubbled up in her throat until he pulled her ass against his body, the movements of his hips urging her on to dance. Heart racing, she wished she could turn around, but slowly she found her way back to the rhythm.

When he let her go, her heart skipped.

When his hands returned to brush over the bare skin of her arms, she yearned for a stronger touch. Needing the contact, she danced closer like a moth to a flame. She closed her eyes as blissful awareness ran over her skin. When she tipped her head back, it wasn't the drums causing her to fall into trance, it was the hard body behind her, touching her.

He ground against her, making her catch her breath. She let her head fall against his chest, brushing her bottom up against his erection. She took a deep breath, taking in the scent of his skin. Confusion slipped into her mind. His smell...she lost her train of thought when he leaned into her, wrapping both arms around her middle.

She pressed her mouth against his neck and sneaked a taste with the tip of her tongue. Faintly salty and definitely male. She licked her lips for more, more of everything he had to offer tonight. She wasn't sure where her inhibitions had gone, her doubts about Sinclair, but she hoped they wouldn't return soon.

His hand found hers and he whirled her around, breaking the barrier of air that had held her in front of him. Her lips parted as she looked at his face. Mischievous ice-blue eyes—*wait, weren't Sinclair's eyes more like a sky-blue?*—sparkled behind a golden mask. His mouth was wide and even white teeth flashed at her in a sinful smile. She cocked her head, trying to get her wits. Something was wrong... Thoughts slipped from her mind as if she was...*drugged*. Drugged with magic. *Damn spell*.

Her breath coming faster, she took him in, from his sure stance to his broad chest visible beneath his open shirt. He was clad in dark jeans, a prominent erection pressing against the fabric. Sinclair looked like a sun god. And that was one god to her liking. She moved closer and closer still until his breath feathered over her skin. "Circle me, o god, and let your arms hold me," she whispered, watching his pupils dilate. "Circle me, o god, and worship my body." She touched his chest above his heart, letting magic spark from her fingertips.

He jerked back as if she'd touched him with fire.

*So, not so godlike after all.* She followed him on the balls of her feet, hot need rising in her blood, her nipples so hard they begged for his touch. For a moment, she'd thought she had actually summoned a real god to her side. Sinclair was using a damn good illusion. A god he was not, and that was just as well, because she wanted earthly delights and she wanted them *now*. Who would have guessed she'd yearn so desperately for her warlock?

Dancing forgotten, she rose to the tips of her toes to kiss her pretend god. Thrusting her hips forward, she rubbed against the bulge in his jeans. His lips met hers openmouthed, and she twirled her arms around his neck, seeking the heat of his tongue. Slow and full of promise, he returned her kiss, sending jolts of pleasure through her clit. Her panties grew moist as wetness gathered between her legs. If she wasn't careful, she'd let him fuck her in the middle of a dancing crowd.

"I want you so much, sweetheart," he whispered against her lips, and his dark voice chilled and heated her blood at the same time.

Catching her breath, she broke the kiss. She licked her lips, the taste of his mouth and the shape of his lips had been so damn familiar...

She gazed up, a movement catching her eyes, and there, standing a few feet away and watching her, was Sinclair.

Letting out a small cry, her gaze swiveled back to her pretend sun god.

Realization hit like a lightning bolt. Anger and pain and lust gripped at her insides. She lifted her hand and swiped the mask from David's face.

## **Chapter Eight**

He wouldn't forget in a hurry the shock reflected on her face. She'd probably expected someone else behind the mask. Little guesswork involved in who that someone was.

"Don't run," he said, interpreting the haunted look in her eyes as fear.

His eyes were still blue, his voice hoarse. Never had he allowed her to see him in the early stages of shifting. Blindfolds had always played in his favor during sex.

Now, though, she probably put two and two together. She was a witch, after all. The thought made him proud. His clever girl, a witch.

Then she bolted from his grasp like a slippery fish.

A guttural growl erupted from his throat, and he didn't bother anymore with hiding his second nature. If there was one thing she shouldn't do, then it was this. Running woke his hunting instinct.

He drew in a deep breath, and then gave chase to catch his prey. When, not if, he found her, he'd take her, making her see reason. Ripping her clothes off her body, throwing her down, he'd spread her legs, feasting on her smell and wet juices, fucking her until she surrendered to him. Fuck her into submission even if he had to use force.

Lust clouded his senses, and he was distantly aware that his plan had a flaw. He couldn't take her against her will, but the beast in him wouldn't listen to the voice of reason.

Her scent lingered as clearly before him as if someone had drawn arrows pointing the way. She was running away from the crowd, into the darker areas of the park. Throwing back his head, he howled. Knowing he might hurt her when he found her, he was still unable to rein himself in. His cock throbbing in his pants, he felt his canines elongate as the wolf inside him clawed its way into the open.

Sharp pain pierced his heart.

He came down on one knee, grasping at his chest. A metal taste spread on his tongue, his fingers wet and sticky. He raised his slickly dark fingers to his face. He choked, pain spreading in hot bursts like fire. Once more, he touched his chest, trying to find the source of the pain. A sharp point, a thin round wooden shaft coming from his chest. Arrow. If it was an iron-tipped one, he'd be dead soon.

Coughing, he spit blood. Fuck, it hurt.

"Just die already," an amused voice said from behind him.

He raised his gaze, trying to find the other man, but darkness spread fast behind his eyelids. Otherwise, he'd have gone for the throat. *Shit*, he thought, clinging to consciousness but failing rapidly, *and Nell even mentioned I should watch my back.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The howl sent shivers up and down her spine. It also made her stop so abruptly, she toppled over and came down on her knees and hands.

Animalistic, Nell had said.

"Oh goddess," Maya whispered, accepting what couldn't be denied. Coming down on her haunches, she caught her breath. He'd hidden his secret from her while sharing the most intimate of moments. How had he managed to hide that from her? Hanging her head, she remembered the strength he possessed, his keen hearing, his fast reflexes, his potency.

A sharp pain pierced her heart, unearthly in its intensity.

*David.*

She was running back toward him before she reached a conscious decision. Her legs eating the distance, she bumped into a wall of solid air, knocking all the wind out of her. Then a pair of strong arms wrapped around her waist.

"Not so fast, witch."



When she had regained her ability to speak again, she pushed him away with all her might. "Never stop me like this again." How fucking dare he throw a block in her way. "That fricking hurt." She shouldered past him, but he held her back again, much gentler this time.

"Sorry, darling, it was a reflex. You were so fast." Leaning forward, he nuzzled at her neck then found her mouth.

As kisses went, it wasn't a bad one. And it was better than good when he added a touch of magic, making her mind spin with erotic pictures of them making love. He touched her body but not her heart. And no amount of magic would make her fall in love with Sinclair.

"No," she said, dying to get to David, but this had to be dealt with first. "Us together isn't working. If you'd be honest with yourself, you would know that too."

Sinclair licked his lip, taking a step away from her. "You've made your decision, then."

She nodded, fearing what an angry warlock was capable of. "You're not going to hurt me, right?" she asked, his half smile worrying her more than anything.

"Never," he said, reaching out and brushing with his fingertip over her cheek. "And he won't ever hurt you again, I made sure of it."

It took a few seconds to register. "You *what*?"

And another second to spot what he held in his hands.

"Ah, you noticed," Sinclair said, stroking his thumb over the longbow. "Always has been my weapon of choice."

"No," she whispered, knowing without a trace of doubt that David was in mortal danger.

She reached out, trying to find the connection she'd had with David before and came up short. There was nothing. Fear gripped her heart, made her stumble. It couldn't be, he wasn't —

"He's dead," Sinclair said, shrugging.

"No, he can't be." She shook her head, her knees giving way. "I never told him that I love him," she whispered, regret slamming into her body, taking her breath.

"Honestly, you should thank me."

Touching her forehead to the ground, her eyes remained dry, but tears burned at the back of her throat. Her body started quaking under the grief.

*I'm a coward.*

If only she hadn't hidden her true feelings from him. When he'd told her that he loved her, she'd remained cool, reminding him they had only a sexual relationship. If only she could go back in time. She'd let her guard down, even if he left her in the end and called her a crazy bitch. Nothing was worse than the river of regret coursing through her now.

*And now it's too late to be brave.*

She glanced up, seeking Sinclair's gaze. "If you ever cross my path again, warlock," she said, "I'll kill you like you killed him."

Their gazes locked, and he was measuring her, she realized, calculating her words. She stood up, squaring her shoulders, cloaking magic around her until her strength was humming in the air between them. She held his gaze, unblinking, waiting until he understood she wasn't threatening him with death, but promising.

He dropped his gaze first. "Goodbye, Maya," he said, and she knew she wouldn't see him again, ever.

\* \* \* \* \*

She raised her head from the ground, rubbing her eyes. She wasn't sure how long she'd buried her face into the soft grass. A few seconds, minutes, hours—she couldn't tell. Drums sounded in the distance, reminding her that close by people were celebrating life while her love was dead.

A large butterfly caught her attention, flying a few feet above the ground, weirdly out of place in the dark park. A strong urge to follow it made her jump up. Her path lit by moonlight and a handful of fireflies, she wandered as if in a trance deeper into the park. Moths sailed through the air, drawn to the night-blooming flowers. And there was still the butterfly next to her as if guiding her steps.

*There.* Deep between the shadows of the trees rested the largest wolf she'd ever seen. If she wasn't mistaken, the wolf's body rose and fell in gentle breathing. She pinched the skin on her forearm until pain bloomed in her mind—sharp and clear and real. She wasn't dreaming, he definitely was alive.

"I love you," she whispered, realizing that when he'd shifted, she hadn't been able to make a mental connection to him. No wonder she'd thought him dead.

Taking one silent step after the other through the ankle-high summer grass, she approached him. Aware of the music and laughter nearby, she slipped out of her shoes, grounding herself in earth's energy. Lifting her hands, she wove a spell, walking in circles, weaving a protective circle around him and shielding them from prying eyes. When she was sure the spell would hold true, she lowered her hands, directing her sole focus of attention to him.

Sure, she'd known of shifters, Lycans, but they were rare and she'd never expected to meet one. The rumors she'd heard about them reached from the believable to the outright outlandish. The gaping wound at his chest made her flinch, but as she watched, the wound became smaller. Eyes closed, the wolf seemed to sleep. *Healing.* He was healing without any help.

He was as powerful a wolf as he was as a man, she thought, stroking through his thick coat. Underneath her fingertips, she sensed his body vibrating with the effort to heal. Murmuring under her breath, she drew upon the healing powers the goddess had granted her. Crouching, she rested her palm against the gaping wound, pouring all her love for him in the incantation. Closing her eyes, she let go of all her reservations, embracing the love she felt for him, directing a stream of energy into his body.

Her breathing quickened, sensing how he welcomed her help, but soon she began shaking with the effort to maintain consciousness. She gave all her energy to him, keeping nothing for herself, and she was beginning to suffer the effects. Heart pounding in her throat, she sensed the wound closing, the underlying tissue healing. When the wolf growled in his sleep, a sound full of life, her spirit soared, the joy that he would survive spreading through her, making her laugh.

Seeking his gaze, she found the wolf looking at her out of ice-blue eyes. She cut off the stream of energy. "Hi," she said, torn between coyness and the wish to throw herself around his furry neck. As if all her blood had been drained from her veins, she blinked against dark spots creeping into her vision. Struggling to remain conscious, she kept her gaze locked on him until his form started to shimmer and swirl. A sickening sound of bones adjusting made her clutch her stomach. Glad he shifted back to his human form, she closed her eyes to block out the sight of fur turning to skin.

Standing up, she heard him say her name, but her legs felt like someone had removed her muscles. "Just a second," she murmured, faintly noticing that hands gripped her before the dark spots bloomed into complete and utter blackness.

## **Chapter Nine**

“Maya,” he said, catching her as she fainted. He drank in her still features, the straight nose, the pointed chin, then drew in a deep breath, testing his lungs. The air smelled sweet. And so did his witch.

Lowering her to the ground, he inhaled more of her sweet smell, but there were dark circles under her eyes. Exhaustion from healing him had drained all strength from her, and while he didn’t fear for her life, he wished she hadn’t bothered. He would have healed on his own, but it would have taken much more time. Why had she done it?

“Witch,” he whispered, stroking the tip of his finger along her sharp cheekbones. She didn’t know that he knew her secret. She still believed him to be in the dark about her witchcraft. He wondered if she would have ever told him.

Stretching out beside her, consoled by her steady heartbeat, he struggled to grasp the wonder of her presence next to him.

When she had touched his chest, his heart stopped, to beat stronger when her touch left his skin. He wanted her as he had never wanted a woman before. And knowing her for what she was made his wish to have her forever even stronger. She was a mix of sweet and hot, dangerous in her skill to bewitch him. He’d follow her over the edge of the earth if she promised him he could first lick her toe to fingertip for the rest of the night.

He wanted her taste on his tongue, wanted her to come in his arms. She held a spell over him, which he intended to break by thrusting inside her, making her his, hearing her hoarsely begging for release. Light filtered through the branches and no cloud dared to ruin the starlit sky. The half moon painted shadowy patterns on her face underneath the trees. He wanted to look at her forever. He wanted a chance at

something more with this witch. Tim's advice turned unbidden in his mind. *Keep your hands off...*

If she had only wanted to enjoy their physical chemistry, why bother healing him now? Did witches take pleasure in torturing men? Did she take pleasure by the hurt she caused every minute of every day she wasn't in his arms? Did she make a habit of letting men fall in love with her? Or was she not capable of giving him her love? Closing his eyes, he remembered her healing touch. If he didn't know better, he'd think she loved him right back.

She moved beside him, making low noises. Propping himself up, he watched her eyelids flutter. It hit him that she had never spent the complete night with him, never woke up in his arms. She'd always left like a thief in the night.

When her eyes opened, meeting his stare, she bolted upright. Moving quickly, she stood two arm lengths away, as if she were afraid of being too close to him.

"Feeling better?" he asked, relieved that she seemed to have regained her strength, but she was still pale around the nose.

"Umm, I'm good, good..." Her gaze traveled over him, hitting first his chest, as if checking to see he was all right, then over the rest of his body. She bit her lip, her gaze resting a second too long on his erection.

"I wanted to tell you something," she began then said something so soft-spoken, he strained to hear her.

"I couldn't hear a word you said."

She flexed her fingers, a helpless expression crossing her face, making him wonder what she wanted to tell him. Cold fingers gripped at his heart. He ached to hold her, but he didn't want to hear that she'd healed him because she was feeling sorry, but best to get it over.

"You were saying," he prompted her again, because she couldn't seem to get another word over her lips.

"I wanted...I feel...I should have told you sooner that..." She hung her head as if struggling to regain her composure.

"Goddamn it, Maya. Spit it out already." Immediately he regretted his harsh words because her mouth pressed to a thin line. But why make it easier for her to rip his soul apart?

"How are you, David?" she asked, crossing her arms, and then something slammed into her body, making her rigid, making her features calm and so, so goddamn cold. It gave him shivers. It also pissed him off.

"How do you think I am," he replied, raising his eyebrow at her sudden ice-queen expression. "Apart from the fact your lover tried to kill me, not so bad."

"Notmylover," she said so fast her words blended into one.

"No need to lie."

"I didn't," she said, and then, after interpreting the look in his gaze rightly as disbelief, she added, "At least not in this world."

"Whatever that means." *Not in this world?* He replayed her words over and over in his head to find the logic in it but came up short. *Witches, strange creatures.*

"And I, I only ever wanted..." She let the sentence trail, guilt clear as sunshine on her face. "Would you hold a dream against me?"

She'd dreamed of having sex with this guy? Almost worse, he thought, if she wanted him this much. But what did it matter? He wanted her, no matter what. Even if she had slept with someone else after he'd left her. "I can tell you that the fucking arrow was very much sticking out of my chest in *this* world."

She flicked her hand, a dismissive gesture that made him angry beyond words. "You look all right to me." She let her gaze travel over him.

"Maya," he said, holding her gaze to make her understand he wasn't kidding. "Your boyfriend or whatever he is might have a head start, but I'll find him, make no mistake, and when I do, he won't run around shooting arrows ever again."

She shook her head, sending her dark curls flying. "You won't find him. He's gone. I don't want you to go looking for him."

"Because you care for him?"

She didn't answer, but there was a sheen of tears in her eyes. It took him aback. He inhaled, counting to ten to calm down. While he wanted revenge, he also didn't want to cause her sorrow. "Okay," he said, breathing out. "I won't harm him, I promise. But if he ever attacks me again—" He shook his head.

"He won't," she said, relief etched into her face. "He won't." Biting her lip, she gave him a half smile then lowered her eyes to the ground as if she found her naked toes utterly fascinating.

He nodded, letting the silence settle deeper between them, hoping she'd feel compelled to fill the silence with whatever she was thinking of right now.

"So," she finally said, glancing up.

"So," he said, stretching his arms up, his spine still stiff.

She avoided his gaze, but wasn't too shy to stare at the rest of him. He didn't bother covering up. It was her fault that he was aroused. His clothes had seen their last seconds when he shifted, ripping everything to shreds. He had his lust under control but wanted to know how she was feeling. Closing his hand around his cock, he gave himself a slow stroke, watching how she followed his movements with her gaze. Keenly aware of how her nipples hardened underneath her summer dress. "You do that to me, sweetheart," he whispered, aware they should be talking about what had happened, past and present, and not engage in sexual power plays. "Come to me," he said, the demand in his voice not missing its mark. He already knew she was drawn to him on a physical level. Reminding her gave him a guilty sense of pleasure. She hadn't moved, but she leaned forward.

"Closer," he said, curling his finger at her.

She took a step toward him, her lips parting.



He made the mistake of smiling.

She took two steps back. "No," she said. "I want you to know this is not about —"

"I know, sweetheart," he said, resigned. "No love. Just sex works for me, don't worry."

It wasn't that he wasn't familiar with her attitude. *Just sex, David, nothing more.* No flicker of emotion crossed her face, her eyes two pieces of black ice. She'd given him this look every time he'd told her he loved her. He had to have her tonight, even if she didn't love him back. Then he would get his ass out of this city.

Again.

A man could take only so much rejection; a wolf could stomach much, much less.

He jumped up, stretching his legs, looking at her and how she curled her naked toes into the soil. "So," he said, the strong wish to shatter her self-composure churning in his chest. "I think I'd like to fuck you up against this tree." He smacked his palm on the tree behind him, the rough bark scratching his hand. He deliberately didn't look at her, but a sharp inhale of breath told him he had at least made a crack in her armor. He sought her gaze, holding it until, to his satisfaction, a faint blush rose on her cheeks. "Strip off your dress," he said, keeping his voice low, luring her to him. "I want to see every inch of you tonight."

A shudder went through her and plain longing showed on her face as if a veil had lifted. For this moment, he could almost believe she wanted, needed him as much as he needed her. It perplexed him, how this ever-changing battle between vulnerability and confidence was reflected on her face.

"Do you know," he said quietly, "that a wolf has only one mate for the rest of his life?" When she gave the slightest nod, he said, "When we first met, I wanted to be inside you so bad, I almost embarrassed myself." He laughed, seeing her eyes widen. "And do you have any idea how good you smell when you're aroused?"

"That would be a no." She didn't smile, but the sparkle in her eyes told him enough to guess she was enjoying relieving the evening they'd met, the night he'd had sex with her for the first time. "Do you remember our first time, sweetheart?"

"Vaguely."

"I remember better than vaguely," he said, and watched as she started fidgeting. "You wore a thick dark brown wool dress and some ratty winter coat, pretty unflattering I might add."

"Well, it didn't stop you from thrusting your hand under my unflattering dress the moment I stepped over your doorstep. But I won't deny that you managed to pique my interest when you shoved me up that wall."

"And did I ever tell you I sensed you getting hot and bothered shaking my hand at the airport while I introduced myself?"

"You did not!"

"Did so." There was only one thing he loved doing more with her besides verbal sparring. "You were good and ready by the time you stepped over my doorstep."

"And this happened when again?" she asked, feigning ignorance. "Sorry, I don't remember this night after all."

"Come closer and I'll refresh your memory."

"Arrogant—"

"Wolf," he said, hiding his smile behind his hand.

Her eyes narrowed to two small dark slits, and he knew he was in trouble.

"Wolf," she repeated. "Exactly. You are a goddamn frigging shifter," she said, placing her hands on her hips, her feet shoulder's width apart, giving the impression she wanted to pull a gun out of its holster. "Did it never cross your mind while you were fucking me for almost three months straight to relay that tidbit to me?"

For a brief moment, he wondered if he should throw that question back at her. *Sweetheart, you fucked my brains out for three months, why never tell me you're a witch? Is this why I want you, love you so much? You bewitch me?*

He shrugged. "I have the soul of a wolf, Maya. I should have told you sooner."

Her mouth opened, closed as she clearly struggled to find a reply. What had she expected? That he would find excuses or explanations that he hadn't told her sooner? That would be a lie. He hadn't had the guts to tell her sooner, afraid she would bolt if she found out. Some women were funny that way. "I'm sorry," he added as an afterthought. "You are rightfully angry at me."

"I'm not—" She closed her eyes, pinching the bridge of her nose. "I'm not angry, I think."

"I'm glad to hear it," he said, careful to keep his voice calm. "Anything you would like to tell me?"

"Whatdoyoumean," she replied in lightning speed.

"Everyone has secrets."

"I don't."

"Sure you have."

She shook her head, blood draining from her cheeks, making her look almost sallow with...fear? Was she afraid to tell him? About to ease her anxiety, his heart almost stopped.

He'd seen her do it.

Saw how she flicked her wrist, moving her lips to form a few silent words, a silent spell.

Her features turned calm, her shoulders squared and her chin rose in a haughty fashion, her eyes pools of ice.

"Don't do this, Maya." This goddamn witch used a spell to school her face into an "I do not give a fuck" expression.

“No idea what you’re talking about.”

He’d fallen for her act every single time, believing her indifferent and cold and almost cruel in her disregard of his love for her.

By far, this was worse than an arrow to the heart.

The growl started in his chest, rising to his throat. Her eyes widened a fraction in alarm, and she raised her hands, as if alarmed by his sudden change. He crossed the distance between them and drew her into his arms, stifling her surprised yelp with his mouth. Just like on that first night, tension rippled through her body. Holding nothing back, he plunged his tongue into her mouth, claiming what he thought was his by right.

She made a low sound when he palmed her ass cheek. “Do you remember now,” he asked her, pinching her ass because he was so goddamn angry at her for denying him the chance to see her real emotions. His cock rubbed against her belly, her attempts to escape his sudden attack on her making him rock-hard and desperate to thrust inside her, claim her as his. “You were so wet,” he whispered against her neck, breathing in the scent of her skin. “So hot.”

She shook her head, a breathless laugh on her lips. “Don’t remember.”

Slipping his hand under her dress, he sneaked his fingers past the elastic of her panties. Finding her swollen and wet. His cock jerked in response, and his groan reflected pure longing. When he stroked his thumb over her clit, she went limp in his arms.

Cupping her ass and lifting her up, he held her with both hands. Her dress rode up to her hips and his cock slipped between her legs, brushing up against her soaked panties. Pulling the elastic to the side. The first contact of the head of his cock against her wet pussy made him groan. Tilting her hip, he pulled her against and down on him, thrusting up and inside her in one hard motion. His cock slid inside her smoothly, her wet pussy a tight fit. She tried unsuccessfully to stifle a moan.

“You were so tight and you were making these low noises. Drove me crazy,” he said, meeting her wide-eyed gaze, her pupils huge like black opals. “But I didn’t do

this." He leaned in to kiss her, taking his time, exploring her mouth, adjusting his stance as he locked his hands beneath her ass. She began moving against him, her legs wrapped tightly around his hips. "Yes," he whispered, the slow friction of his cock sliding in and out of her, almost killing him with need to let go and come inside her, but he held back. "I want to feel how you come, sweetheart."

She let out a soft cry, rocking against him, leaning back and taking him deeper. In one hard thrust of her hips, she took the entire length of his cock deep into her core. "Faster," she whispered, her arms clinging around his neck.

He pumped his cock into her pussy, drawing deep moans from her throat until she went still in his arms. He fucked her in long strokes toward her climax, hearing with satisfaction her low scream as her pussy gripped his cock in a viselike grip. Her internal muscles spasmed as her orgasm coursed through her body.

He tried to hold her upright as her legs slid from his hips, but she folded as if someone had cut all strings holding her upright.

She glanced up at him, her eyes huge and black. "You didn't come."

"I want this night to last, *witch*."

## Chapter Ten

His words shot into her consciousness like the arrow that had hit his chest.

*I want this night to last, witch.*

He knew?

"You *know*?" she whispered, adrenaline surging in her body, erasing the exhausted bliss he had created. Blood pounded in her temples. "And...and do you mind?"

"Do I mind? Are you crazy?" he asked back, sounding incredulous.

It knocked the air from her lungs. *Crazy witch.* Always would she be a crazy witch for him.

She raised a shaky finger, pointing at his chest. "Don't call me crazy."

*Because if you do, I'll probably have to kill you.*

"Don't point your witchy finger at me," he replied.

"Afraid?"

"Well, I guess after I'm done with you tonight, we'll have to burn you at the stake, witch."

"This is not funny," she pressed through her teeth.

"Guess not," he said. "You ever bewitch me, sweetheart?"

His hand settled on the crown of her head, his fingers stroking through her hair. It felt so good, but on her tongue burned the taste of cinnamon, reminding her she indeed had bewitched him. "Only tonight," she whispered, wondering if this was why he sought her out this midsummer night. Tomorrow, all would have been a dream.

"You *did*," he said, sounding perplexed. "Well, I'm not sure I like that."

Tears shot into her eyes. Thighs still trembling, she bolted upright. She felt the swish of air at her back as he tried to get a hold on her, hearing his suppressed laughter,

but she was faster, breaking through the protective circle she'd woven around him to shield them both from prying eyes. All she wanted was to tell him she loved him, but what for? So he could laugh some more?

Smoothing her dress down, she ran toward the bonfire in the distance, knowing she'd find Nell there, and safety. She'd be safe from falling to her knees and begging him to stay with her forever.

Her toes hit something hard, her foot sliding sideways. "Oh shit," she cursed, hitting the ground with a soft thud. "Not again," she said, her ankle throbbing with a dull pain. With any luck, just a sprain. But she couldn't count on her luck lately. Pulling her legs into herself, she glanced over her shoulder, seeing her magic circle shimmer, but he was only a dark shadow inside. Her spell still held after she'd left and she couldn't help feeling a little proud. Would he ever be able to be proud that she was a witch? Or would he forever ask if she bewitched him, doubting his love for her was real?

*I'm such a fucking coward.*

She swallowed the lump in her throat, the taste of cinnamon on her tongue bitter. *Damn this spell.* Her blood was surging with lust. She hated to admit it, but tonight she needed the release. Denying it would be like denying her need for oxygen. Craving his touch even numbed the throbbing pain in her ankle.

She came up on her feet again, keeping her weight off her right foot. Holding her head high, she hobbled back to him. He leaned against the tree, still naked, making her wonder how he would get home. As a wolf, of course, she thought, almost smacking her forehead at the obvious. If someone saw him, they might mistake him for an overlarge shaggy dog. The idea made her smile.

She slid through her protective spell, the faint static in the air crackling.

"Forgot something?" he asked, cocking his head.

"Yes." She didn't want to make the same mistake twice. "I forgot to tell you something."

"How's your leg," he asked, nodding at her ankle.

"Hurts like hell." She stepped close to him until she had to look up to meet his gaze.

"You shouldn't have run."

"Well, I'm back."

"I'm hoping for the right reasons."

Placing her hand on his shoulder, she said, "I never bewitched you before. The spell today wasn't meant for you anyway. And I'm suffering the consequences already."

"Meaning?"

"And here I thought you sensed when I'm all hot and bothered."

Grinning, he slid his hands around her waist, down to cup her ass. He backed her up against the tree. "Let's stay here, then," he whispered against her mouth. "To give your leg some rest."

"Would you have let me run away?" she asked, so she could stop wondering.

"Never," he said, sounding so sincere it made her heart leap. "But I'll flip you over my knee and spank the living daylights out of you if you ever hide your true feelings with a spell again."

"I could blast you to pieces if you ever try," she said, only half joking.

"Fair warning, witch." He closed his hand around the shell she wore around her neck and gave a slight tug. "You found it."

She wrapped her fingers around his, seeking his gaze. "I'll always be a witch. Can you live with that?"

Lifting the shell away from her skin, he said, "See the tiny gold flecks sprinkled across it?" he asked. "It makes it perfect. Just like your witchcraft perfects you."

She nodded, her throat too tight to speak, but her heart opened for him.

He dropped to his knees in front of her.

She sank her hands into his hair, luxuriating in the sight of having him on his knees. "This is a rough night for me."



“‘The course of true love never did run smooth.’”

She gave a soft laugh. “Shakespeare. On midsummer’s night? How fitting.”

He closed his hands around her knees, inched his way up. Her inner thighs trembled as he passed the barrier of her panties.

“So soft,” he murmured, exploring deeper, plunging two fingers inside her pussy. She arched up against his hand, a breathless groan in her throat. She moved her hips to the faint sound of music in the distance while he caressed her clit with his thumb.

He slipped his hand out of her panties and rose to face her. “Take off your dress.”

“You managed fine earlier.”

“Now you’ll take it off,” he said, impatience tingeing his tone.

She laughed, about to deny him again what he wanted, when he stepped close and drowned her words with a kiss. Her hard nipples rubbed against his chest through her dress. She twined her arms around his shoulders and wrapped a leg around his calf, biting down on his lip hard enough to make him crave her more.

“Turn around,” he said, his voice strangely rough in her ears, and all playfulness evaporated from her.

When she did, he unzipped her dress, revealing the bare skin of her back. He pressed a kiss against her spine and pulled the dress down over her hips. She turned back around to him. The way he slowly tugged down her panties was almost her undoing. She swallowed, her mouth dry. She leaned against the tree, the bark scratching against her spine. Balmy air caressed her skin, but what she wanted was him pressed against her, inside her.

When he stepped forward, a hungry look in his dark eyes, she slid her hand down his abs to follow the hair that arched down. She dropped to her knees.

Hearing a strangled sound from his throat, she licked along the shaft of his erection. A thrill slid down her spine, hitting her core. She took him into her mouth, deep, and was rewarded with a groan that spiked her arousal to an excruciating level.

His fingers dug into her hair, and he yanked her almost brutally to her feet. "Not tonight, witch." He pushed her back against the tree and closed in on her.

She rubbed her breasts against the hair on his chest, her nipples sending shockwaves through her pussy. His erection juttied against her stomach. He pushed his knee between her thighs to open her wider. His mouth crushed down on hers and their tongues tangled until he moved lower. When he closed his lips around her nipple, she tipped her head back, arching into his mouth.

"Lower," she whispered, tunneling her fingers into his hair. "I want your tongue inside me."

Curling his hands around her hips, he sank to his knees.

She lost her train of thought as he latched his lips to her swollen mound. He traced his tongue over her clit then plunged his tongue deep where she wanted him. Waves of pleasure erupted over her skin and she bucked against him, the sensation so strong her legs buckled. But it wasn't enough. Shudders shook her body and her hips shot up at the feeling of him fucking her with his tongue.

A scream formed at the back of her throat. The rough tree bark scratched her skin as he slid one finger inside her, his tongue circling her clit. Her legs gave way.

He caught her in his arms, lowering her to the ground. For a moment, she covered the length of his body, thigh to thigh, belly to belly, breasts to chest. His cock pressed hard and promising against her stomach. Spreading her legs, she tried to guide him inside her, but he flipped her over, pressing her into the summer-warm ground. The grass tickled the back of her legs. She didn't mind the occasional insect crawling over her skin as long as he rested between her thighs, his cock prodding at her wet opening.

She gazed up at him as he loomed over her. "Why did you leave me?"

"Tonight, if the arrow hadn't taken me down, I would have taken you against your will once I caught up with you."

"It wouldn't have been against my will."

"But I didn't know that. I'd have fucked you like the animal I was at this time." He stroked the head of his cock over her pussy, slowly and in control, but it made her tremble with need.

"But that doesn't explain why you—" Shuddering, she closed her eyes as he pushed his cock a fraction inside her, just enough so she could feel her pussy wrapping around his shaft.

"You were killing me," he said. "I fell for you so fast my head is still spinning. I had to get away from you, or the day would have come where I thought it was okay to force you to stay with me. Force you to have sex with me. And that's why I preferred to leave you on my own terms, thinking you wouldn't really mind."

"Oh goddess," she whispered, realization hitting her gut. "You thought I was indifferent—"

"Just sex," he said, making her aware that she'd told him this almost every time they'd slept together. "I thought the distance would help, but I couldn't get you of my head. So I came back, trying to win your love for the last time." In one swift stroke, he pushed inside her, burying his cock deep inside her pussy as if afraid she would bolt in the last second.

She clenched around him, arching up. The longing for him was overwhelming in its intensity. She gazed up, tracing one finger around his lips. "It's only this night," she said. "Then the magic is gone."

He placed his finger on her lips as if to silence her. "Don't say that."

She caught his face in her hands, tracing her thumb over his mouth and strong jaw. "I wanted you the moment you shook my hand at the airport. I was so afraid you'd break my heart. And you did."

"I'll never again leave you."

"Fuck me," she whispered, running her hands along his spine, sending a sliver of energy over his skin.

"Cursed witch," he said, shaking under her fingertips, his muscles tense.

"I love you," she said too fast, tripping over her tongue, but promising herself to never keep him in the dark about her love for him again.

"I didn't catch that," he said. "Did you say you'll be my willing sex slave?"

"Goddess, yes." The laugh died in her throat as he began to move, teasing her with his cock in slow strokes that stretched her wide. She bit hard on her lip as she watched him thrust in and out of her body. He kept his movements slow, stroke for stroke, taking his time while she writhed under him.

Pressure shot through her and she met his gaze. The longing she found in his dark eyes was enough to send a ripple of contractions through her pussy. He slipped his hand between their bodies. When he started rubbing her slick clit in slow, excruciating circles, she tightened around his cock. She wrapped her legs around him, taking him deeper. Closing her eyes, she delighted in the friction and heat of his body.

He rocked her slowly into a new wave until bliss turned into lightning-sharp pleasure. She cried out as her orgasm rippled through her body in hard convulsions, her pussy so slick with her juices she barely felt him pull out of her.

"Lift your ass," he said.

She came up on her hands and knees, shaking, while his hands wrapped around her hips, his knee spreading her wide. "I want to taste your come." Then he moved below her, pulling her toward his face. Then his mouth was on her, his tongue licking over her drenched pussy.

His mouth and tongue worked her clit, his finger slid inside her ass, and she cried out his name, his flicks against her clit almost painful in its intensity. "Enough," she whispered, feeling his tongue inside her pussy, his thumb thrusting in and out her ass until she screamed out as another orgasm slammed into her.

"Never enough," he said, but she gave a sigh when he moved away from under her after pressing another kiss against her swollen and sore pussy.

She came up on her knees, seeking his gaze. Her breath caught, seeing him loom over her, his erection resting hard and thick against his stomach.

“Run,” he said.

She swallowed, meeting his blue gaze, the wildness in him both frightening and arousing as he stared at her as if she were his prey.

*And this is it.*

She lifted her hand to the shell dangling around her neck. Maybe Sinclair had fulfilled her every wish, but David fulfilled wishes and desires she never knew she had until she’d met him.

“I want it hard when you catch me,” she whispered, her heart beating in her throat, her legs shaking as she jumped up and darted away and through the protection of the circle. Instead of running toward the flickering flames of the bonfire and the people gathered around it, she sprinted farther into the quiet shadows underneath the trees where darkness promised to keep her hidden from prying eyes.

When his arms closed around her, a growl vibrating at the skin of her neck, she screamed as her nerves got the better of her, too intense was the fear of actually being hunted down.

He brought her to the ground until she sprawled underneath him, her breasts pressing into the grass as he slid along the length of her body, his cock slipping between her legs. He gripped her by the neck. She’d never been more aroused in her life as with him breathing hard against her neck, his thick cock nudging against her pussy.

Without warning, he thrust his cock into her to the hilt, making her scream out again at the sudden penetration. Each deep thrust made her gasp. The pleasure mixing with pain as he violently fucked her sore pussy. She grew wetter with each thrust until he pulled out, a hard slap landing on her ass and she cried out. She heard herself whimper his name, waiting to feel his cock thrusting into her again, making her his.

“Maya,” he said quietly, stroking gently along her spine. “Too rough?”

"No," she whispered. "I want you to come inside me."

He pulled her hips up, inching his cock into her until he was deep inside her core. He pushed her closer to the edge, thrust after slow thrust.

She pushed against him, urging on his movement. He pulled out of her suddenly. When he touched her clit, she thought she'd die of the intense pleasure that bordered on pain. "No," she pleaded, but he started circling her flesh in antagonizing slowness. Unbearable need streaked through her pussy into her womb.

"You feel so hot," he said quietly, his slick fingers rubbing the hard bud of her clit. "My hot, tight witch." He thrust his cock hard and sudden into her pussy. He began to pound into her, hard and fast, his harsh groans sending her over the edge as he hammered his cock into her aching pussy. Her orgasm jolted through her so intense she screamed out as she clenched around his cock.

His shout sounded like a roar in her ears as he pushed deep into her core, his cock pulsing in hot bursts. Her own cry mingled with his hoarse shout as he filled her with spurts of his seed before he fell heavily on top of her.

He crushed her hair in his fist and turned her head to him, kissing her with such warmth, her heart made a leap. A longing for love she hadn't experienced in an eternity – what she'd avoided for an eternity. He fell next to her on the grass, breathing hard, and wound his fingers between hers. Exhaustion filled her bones, but she still wanted to touch him. For a while, she enjoyed the silence interrupted by the faraway noises of the midsummer party and a few crickets.

"Tomorrow," he asked, "will I find you at the beach?"

"Will you be there?" she asked, unsure where he was heading, but willing to play along.

"Yes."

"Then I'll be there."

"We'll start over," he said, playing with her fingers in his hand.

"How?"

"I'll try not to stare at your ass while I invite you for a cup of coffee."

"I prefer tea."

"Just so, then," he said. "And then we'll have a proper first date—dinner and a movie, and I'll kiss you goodbye at your doorstep."

"Will you come in for a coffee?"

"You prefer tea."

"Will you come in for tea, then?"

"Not on the first date. But I'll call you when I get home."

"Where you will tell me you're sorry you didn't come in to sleep with me?"

"No, where I'll initiate phone sex."

She burst out laughing and turned to face him. Next to his head, perched on a long grass blade, a butterfly beat its wings softly, and she knew they would have a chance to find true magic outside midsummer night.

"But this night isn't over yet," she said, trailing her hand from his chest down to his stomach.

"Damn right it isn't." He pulled her in for a deep kiss and started all over again.

## About the Author

Amy Redwood lives in Vancouver, Canada. This wasn't always the case. She grew up in Europe, moved to New Zealand and then explored China before settling down on the west coast of Canada. She likes nothing better than dark chocolate, autumn rain and curling up on the couch reading a great story. But what she loves is writing about smart heroines and sexy heroes enjoying hot nights, hotter days and a happily ever after. After all, nothing beats a happy end.

Amy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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