

Dee Carney

THE CRAFT OF THE WISE 2:
DIVINATION



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*The Craft of the Wise 2:
Divination*

A paranormal erotic romance short by

DEE CARNEY

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Chapter One

Jenna Whiteman threw her hands into the air as if praying for divine intervention during her conversation with the stubborn, arrogant werewolf.

She tried again. “We need to get the Book of Shadows back. It doesn’t matter how much protection we provide Ava if she doesn’t have the means with which to defend herself. And us, I might add!”

Frosty blue eyes did their level best to bore a hole into her forehead. She simply glared back. No way she’d let the lieutenant intimidate her in any shape or form. No matter how good looking he might be.

He slammed his fist against the table, then winced as the noise echoed in the large room. The growl that followed was low and contained. “My pack leader is upstairs recovering from severe injuries after trying to save the princess. From another witch, I might add. We are pledged to protect *her*. I will not break that pledge!”

Just to get him to stop talking, she wanted to scream her frustration at him.

If Ava Valentine’s cousin, Dina, didn’t possess the Book of Shadows, they wouldn’t be in this mess. But no, the thirteenth daughter of the coven had a relative who wanted the power the book and related tools could provide. Never mind she joined forces with the demons to do so. If they could get the book back, Ava might be able to permanently banish the demons from their realm. Until now, the werewolves’ protection was supposed to be a boon, not a hindrance, to that mission.

Jenna had no problems standing toe to toe with the pack’s lieutenant, Vince Albright, who wanted no part in trying to retrieve the book. He wouldn’t be budged without further instruction from his pack’s leader. Unfortunately for everyone,

Aaron was still recovering in bed upstairs. Ava would not allow anyone to seek his guidance for their next steps in defending the witches from demons. Not, at least, until he had regained his full strength. That could take days. The longer Dina had the book, the more Jenna feared.

Jenna's hands formed a mock strangling position. If *An' it harm none, do what thy will* didn't guide her life's principles, she could have wrapped them around his thick neck and throttled to her heart's content. The conversation—argument—had long since taken her past the tipping point.

What made matters so much worse was simply how irritatingly good looking Vince was. Long red hair tied in a ponytail, shocking blue eyes and a firm, muscled body were only a few of the attributes that held her attention when she talked—argued—with him. An intricate tattoo flexed over a meaty bicep. He walked with a hunter's grace and carried himself in a manner that could intimidate lesser men. All of it made her heart thump louder.

She'd drown out the thumping by yelling at him if that's what it took.

How could she get him to understand what her dreams foretold? Each hour they delayed, Dina strengthened her position within the demon community. As the days passed, she would seek other witches to join her cause. Congregate a coven of her own. Solo practitioners, dark arts idolizers, and any banned from covens would be quick to buy her twisted philosophies. The Craft would never be the same.

Jenna had already cost her coven by not interpreting the signs quickly enough. She might have been able to prevent the injuries already caused if she had done more. Guilt preyed on her mind every hour that passed. Dark circles under her eyes grew darker with each morning. Nights found her enveloped in black dreams.

She looked towards the High Priestess, who sat with a bemused expression on her face. Why didn't she say something? "High Priestess, we need your guidance here. Please?"

Mayda Valentine waved absently and then leaned forward in her chair. "I suspect you object so vehemently because you

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know more than you're telling us." She arched her eyebrows. "Am I correct?"

Jenna stared into the soft green eyes. The older Valentine could always read her like a book. She fell back into her chair in a slump. Chewing on her bottom lip for a moment, she opened her mouth to reply but then caught a glimpse of Vince waiting expectantly for her answer. His expression made her snap her mouth shut.

Stupid, arrogant werewolf. He'd probably ridicule her or dismiss the unclear warnings if she voiced them out loud.

Closing her eyes, she shook her head. She didn't know. Not *for certain*. Just fleeting images and feelings.

"See? There's no rush. No need to move forward without a plan," Vince sneered. He took his seat again and pointed a finger at Jenna. "Not until we hear from Aaron."

She chanced a glance at Mayda only to feel a blush creep over her cheeks. The white-haired woman kept her gaze on Jenna. She probably knew full well there was more to the story. But she wasn't ready to share it. Not yet, at least.

She couldn't share with the group that she knew without a doubt waiting would be a mistake that would cost them dearly.

A huge mistake.

* * * *

He moved with excruciating slowness. Each step seemed a conscious effort to put one foot in front of the other. Still, he had to be given credit. Aaron would not allow any of his men to help him. Ava hovered nearby, eyebrows furrowed and her mouth set into a grim line. Despite her diminutive stature, she'd be the first to his side if the six-foot-four hulk of a man faltered.

Jenna hid a smile behind a feigned cough. The relationship between the princess and alpha wolf had blossomed literally overnight. As quickly as it had taken off, it grew to soaring heights. No one who saw the two of them together doubted their devotion to each other for a moment, though.

They looked good together. Happy. She was happy for them. The future of the coven still appeared cloudy, but she

harbored only good prophecies for their love in this dark time. It gave her a small measure of hope.

She glanced across the table and the smile slid from her face while her back stiffened. The redheaded lieutenant sat across from her, tracking her movements. Damned werewolf. The next time the coven and its protectors assembled in the same place, her first priority would be to sit somewhere he couldn't see her.

Vince flashed a smile at her when she narrowed her eyes at him. His stare tracked over her as if to consume her inch by inch. A flush heated her neck but she refused to wilt under his smoldering look.

Dimwitted, arrogant werewolf.

He gave another half smirk and raised an eyebrow in salute when she did not evade his leer.

Aaron waited for Ava to be seated before he cleared his throat and sat at her side. He drew a deep breath before speaking. "Thank you everyone for coming. I wanted everyone to get a chance to see who's here. Who the players are. Whom we all depend on. The coven will handle its business as usual. Our pack will handle security. Princess?"

"Dina exploited our weakness from the very beginning. We're not fighters. And we have to be. We can protect ourselves on a daily basis from demon attacks, but what of others? How long before she teaches them how to break through our defenses?" Ava looked towards the High Priestess. "Grand is our best fighter at this point, and I still have a lot to learn, as you know. I'm afraid the time is now for *all of us* to start relearning our craft. Hone it so that we aren't trapped by our own good intentions."

Across the table, Vince shifted in his seat to look at Aaron. "Am I to understand that we will sit here only to serve as guard while they work on their spells?"

He frowned. "I wouldn't put it that way."

Vince turned back to stare Jenna in the face. His eyes didn't leave hers as he spoke. "Good. This one has another suggestion, then."

All heads turned to face her direction. A rush of heat covered her neck. Jenna swore under her breath. She'd fought

him tooth and nail on this point only to have him switch sides at the last minute.

“Jenna?” Ava prompted. “Is this true?”

Her friend would be the first to believe her. Always had. If anything, she believed a little too strongly in Jenna’s divination. How many times had she explained the unpredictability of her prophecies? Some science mixed in with innate ability. Not to be dismissed, neither to be counted on one hundred percent, either.

“Ava,” Jenna replied slowly. “Part of our defense has to be offense. We can’t wait for Dina to come to us. We have to go to her. Take back what she’s stolen from us.”

“Good girl!” Vince clapped. “Go and fight them. That’s more like it!”

She almost hurled an insult at him for calling her a girl, but the previously low drum of voices rose to a roar. Jenna glanced around the room. The werewolves stood at the ready, some with curved knives in hand while wicked glints played in their eyes. The witches, as she knew they would be, were less eager. Their combined whispers to each other rose to a crescendo in the crowded room.

“Everyone!” Ava raised her hands and tried to bring the room under a semblance of control. “Everyone, please! Please sit back down. Let’s discuss this.”

Aaron’s voice cracked like a whip through the air. “Brothers!” he bellowed.

Each and every werewolf snapped to attention, their conversations halting the instant their leader spoke. Jenna chanced a peek at Vince. Like his men, he remained rigid, his blue eyed gaze fixed somewhere above her head.

She wasn’t the only one impressed with the display of discipline, she noted. The coven members stopped speaking in the same instant it had taken the pack to come to attention. Almost all of them stared slack-jawed. At the head of the table, the High Priestess looked on with a smile on her face.

“With our lives in the hands of men such as this, I would not fear for the lives of my coven members, Aaron,” she said. “I think perhaps that is the source of their reticence in Jenna’s suggestion.”

At the sound of her name, Jenna found her voice. She could feel the heat of incredulous stares, but pressed on. "High Priestess, it is not merely a suggestion. I have seen this. It is something we *must* do. I'm afraid we are losing precious hours as we sit here and discuss it."

"What else have you seen?" Ava questioned. "The outcome, too?"

She smiled at her friend. Ava was new with the Craft. Barely had a chance to discover which gifts came to her easily as Jenna and the others had. "Never the outcome, princess."

"Then can you give us any insight at all, Diviner?"

Jenna turned to the werewolf next to her who'd spoken. "Three witches. Four werewolves. And we search for a particular athame." At his frown, she hastened with an explanation. "An athame is a double-edged knife. A witch's tool. Ava will need it in the end. But we must get it before Dina gets it first."

"We?" Ava leaned forward. "Does this mean you will be a part of the group?"

She hadn't known until that moment, but felt the sudden call to her mission. "Yes, princess."

"Who else? Do you know?" Aaron kept his gaze on her, but she watched him reach for Ava's hand, squeezing it tightly.

"It should be easy to tell." She hesitated for a moment. How much did the pack know about how witches divine? "If I could see everyone's palms?"

She stood and walked the circle of the table, reading outstretched hands as she moved from person to person. Jenna barely glanced at the people, only read the lines of their hands, which foretold their lives' journeys. She called out 'here' when she came across a palm that told of the search ahead. Only when she came back to her empty chair, did she realize that she'd made the full circle.

"That's settled then," Aaron said. "Good hunting, brothers."

Wait a minute. The pack traveled in a pecking order. They would need to know who led them, wouldn't they? Isn't that how they worked? She couldn't understand how Aaron would just let them go without making that important decision first. They seemed to have understood though. Witches and werewolves

alike stood from their chairs and either milled about or made for the exits.

“Whenever you’re ready, Jenna.” The words pulled her from her thoughts. Her shoulders fell forward as her back stiffened at the familiar voice.

“Ready for what?” she said between tight teeth.

“To start the hunt, Diviner.” Vince stepped in closer, his proximity removing the oxygen from the air. The suffocation of his presence must have made her lightheaded because she swore she must have heard his next words incorrectly. “You and I have an expedition of sorts to lead.”

Whoa.

“E—Excuse me?” There was no way she’d heard those words come from him. She would have noticed if she picked his hand. Might have nudged fate into picking someone else, well, not that she really could, but still! She might have given it a try.

“You seem surprised.” He brought his hand up and it grazed by her cheek. Vince pulled his fingers from her hair with a small piece of lint trapped in them.

As she watched it float to the floor, Jenna didn’t know what actually surprised her more: picking him for the mission, the intimacy of his gesture or—good Lord and Lady—that she wanted him to touch her again.

She physically reeled from her thoughts. Her voice trembled but she wouldn’t let the chill running through her veins shake her hands. She reached for his hand again. “Let me see that.”

He didn’t respond when she tugged him closer, bringing his hand closer to her face. Her finger traced the lines of his palm, following the destiny line and its branches to completion. She found the travel line and nodded. Yes, he was meant to be on the quest.

Something in one of the other lines caught her attention.

Her breath held as she skimmed the heart line. It looked eerily familiar. She’d seen this heart line before. Not in his hand, but somewhere...close.

With a cry that spoke of discovery and apprehension, she flipped her hand open next to his. And son of a gun, if it didn’t stare her dead in the face.

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Their heart lines—the lines that foretold their love lives—were an identical match.

Chapter Two

“What do you see?” Jenna could hear the alarm in his voice over the ringing already in her ears. “You just went white as a sheet. And you’re...” Vince pried his hand from out of hers, “squeezing the life out of my hand.”

“It’s nothing,” she whispered. She didn’t dare speak any louder. Her body couldn’t stand the physical strain on top of the mental one pounding into her mind at the moment.

“Like hell it’s nothing.” He pushed her into a nearby chair. “If I’m going to die or something equally horrible, I want to know about it now.”

He sat down opposite her, trapping her body between his thighs. He leaned forward and took one of her hands into his, which made her look up at him, her eyebrows raised. Her startled expression softened when she looked into his face.

She hadn’t noticed his freckles before. They played across the bridge of his crooked nose. In parts, the features of his face could never be classified as conventionally handsome. The big picture was another story altogether. A whisper of a smile curved her mouth as she stared at him.

“So are you going to tell me? I can take it, you know.”

Jenna’s smile broadened. “It’s nothing like that. You’re not going to die, or at least, I’ve not looked.”

The gray flecks in his brilliant blue eyes appeared to brighten. “That’s always good news from a diviner. That I’m not going to die.”

“We are all going to die one day.”

He let out an exaggerated moan. “So then I *am* going to die.”

“Oh, for Goddess’s sake. Stop being exasperating!” She chuckled. “You know exactly what I mean.”

“Good. Now that we’ve got that established...” His face grew serious. “What in my palm has distressed you?”

The torture hadn’t been invented that would make her confess their heart lines had the potential for crossing. That fate, an enthusiast of jokes, might find amusement in making lovers of the two.

She clasped his hands in hers. “It does not matter what I see today. Divination, despite what many think, is not necessarily about foretelling the future. It’s more useful for telling us about ourselves and helps guide decisions.”

He said nothing for a long stretch of silence while he searched her face. Finally, he said, “You’re diverting the truth, Jenna.”

She sat back against the chair, pulling away from him. The wooden slats supported her stiffened back. “Are you calling me a liar?”

“Why does everything between us turn into an argument?” His eyes darkened like angry thunderclouds. “Just tell me what you saw!”

Without thinking first, her hands shot out to shove his chest. “You’re impossible!”

If he hadn’t quickly grabbed her forearms, she would have toppled over as her chair tilted backwards. But not before she noticed how *solid* he’d felt beneath her. The man had probably never eaten a piece of chocolate in his life.

When he roughly pulled her chair back into place, their faces met only inches apart. His warm breath puffed against her cheek. She narrowed her eyes and mentally dared him to say just one more wrong thing to her face. She was already stressed enough as it was. If he wanted to be the straw that broke the camel’s back, then so be it.

Her throat burned with the bitter words she’d hurl at him if he provoked her. She wanted him to say something, anything that would send her over the edge. She needed to know in this case, her prediction about their future together would be false. And if this case was wrong, maybe there were other wrong predictions. She yearned for that bit of comfort. That bit of hope.

His gaze blazed into hers for a moment more before his voice dropped so low that she barely heard him. “When was the

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last time you got some sleep, Jenna? You look exhausted.” He pushed his chair away as he rose to his full height. Before turning away, he dropped his head next to her ear. His voice still soft, he said, “Get some rest, Diviner. We need you.”

The soft stroke of his fingers across her cheek startled her even more than his words could. Before she thought to react, he moved away, walking with ease towards where Aaron still remained seated.

Jenna did her best to ignore the streak of warmth where his touch had been.

* * * *

Liana, the most experienced of the witch trio, cast the circle. With graceful motions, she glided over the area she consecrated. As she moved, a gentle glow of white light burned into the wooden floor. Jenna chanted next to Selena while Liana wove her magic around them.

Jenna caught a glimpse of Vince who stood next to his men against a wall and almost lost her concentration. His stare was bold, assessing her with a raking gaze that heated through her bones. In the brief moment their eyes met, she thought she saw his inner wolf howling to break free of him and head straight towards her.

When Jenna chanced a look at him again, this time prepared for what she might see, the feral hunger had dissipated. She forced herself to look away quickly. Even if the beast had been contained, what she saw in the man made the wolf look tame by comparison.

Liana grasped her hand, breaking the hypnotic spell he seemed to have cast on her, and she took Selena’s in turn.

No time to think about him now. Focus. She needed to send her concentration on the vision quest for the ebony athame. It could be anywhere in the world or worse, in another realm. She squelched a shudder. *Please let it be here and not where the demons were. Not yet.*

She closed her eyes and sent a ripple of calm over her body. Releasing a slow breath, the tension from her muscles melted out of her fingertips and bare feet. Jenna searched through the warm

haze in her mind, her thoughts centered on locating the sought after athame.

A cool breeze caressed her skin as she lifted free from the constraints of her body. A soft giggle escaped. It felt so good here. Euphoric.

Arms outstretched, she became supple and allowed the out of body experience to take her where it will. If she focused on...the athame. Yes, the athame. If she focused on it, she would be able to locate it. Only had to focus....

Her mind drifted with her instead to her destiny.

She didn't have to see him to know he was there with her. His unique presence pressed on her from all sides. Warm arms wrapped her in a loving embrace. Jenna turned into him and lifted her face to capture his. Needed to touch him. Needed him to touch her. Oh, Goddess, how she needed. Her fingers entwined in red hair and pulled him closer.

His image shattered when a familiar voice whispered against her ear, "Yes, go to him, Jenna. Your souls, your very lives are entwined. For the future of demons everywhere, you must go to him."

The chill that sliced through her as Dina spoke shouldn't exist in the ethereal realm, but the tangibility of it made Jenna gasp. The terror keeping her immobilized was very real.

Dina's blue eyes twinkled. "You seem surprised to see me, Diviner. You know I would seek the athame, the same as you."

"Why?" Jenna whispered. She didn't want to know why the former coven member wanted the athame. She needed to know why she did *this*. All of it. Why Dina forced the coven into an alliance with the werewolves for the protection of witchdom.

There were so many questions. Her mind stumbled over itself, trying to sort through them in some semblance of order. The one word question gave her the best hope of understanding the situation they now found themselves in.

Dina's image shimmered. "There's room in this world for all of us. Witches, demons, humans...all of us. Let me show you how it would be. Get me the athame and I will show you. You'll see."

But what did the athame have to do with her and Vince? Why did Dina need them both?

“Go to him, Diviner,” she said softly. Her voice took on a dreamy quality. “Go to him.”

A jolt of lightning struck Jenna’s extremities and her eyes snapped open. Darkness surrounded her on all sides. *What happened?* Her breathing came in ragged pants as if she’d been gasping for air.

“Jesus. We didn’t know what happened to you. Your friends didn’t seem phased, but, don’t do that again, okay?”

Even in the dark room, she recognized Vince. His luminescent eyes brimmed with worry.

She remained silent, trying to catch her breath, willing him to stay where he was across the room. If he touched her now, her skin would crackle from the electricity he’d sent through her in the aural realm. They’d been intimate there. Beyond intimate. She knew his every breath, his every heartbeat. Each one matched her own.

Something else happened there, too, right? She couldn’t remember. It seemed like something important...something she needed to remember.

“Do you need me to get somebody for you?”

“Where am I? And why are you here?” An ache formed at the base of her head and her throat was raw. The words barely croaked out.

“You’re in one of the guest rooms. We brought you here when you wouldn’t come out of whatever it was you were doing.” His avoidance of the second question didn’t escape Jenna. She couldn’t be bothered now though. Her skin felt prickly. She wanted a shower. Needed a drink of water.

Wanted to sort through whatever message she’d been sent.

“If I was in danger, Liana or Selena would have pulled me out.” She started to rise, only to still with a low groan. Her body felt stiff, like she’d been in the same position for several hours.

There was a rustle of clothing and Vince was leaning over her. “Are you all right?”

His eyes and the nearness of his voice helped her triangulate his new location. He sounded so worried. It felt nice to have someone care about her welfare.

No. She would not allow herself to go there.

"I'm fine. Just a little stiff." She rose through achy limbs. "I just need to walk around or something."

A firm hand gripped her waist and helped her stand. Jenna leaned into Vince, inhaled the peppery scent he exuded. The aroma tingled her senses and she inhaled with the appreciation of a sommelier.

Except, she wasn't supposed to be enjoying this. Couldn't enjoy it. Goddess, please. Not him.

She pulled away, but if he noticed, he didn't say anything. Instead, they walked side by side, his hand still on her waist. Her legs seemed untrustworthy so she kept a firm clasp of his upper arm.

"Where to?" he asked at the doorway.

Jenna thought about the question for a minute. Where better to re-energize than with Gaia? "Outside, please."

She reflected in silence as they made their way noiselessly through the house. They ran into no one, passing one closed door after another. It must have been late in the night. Only the moonlight spilled into the occasional window. Hours must have passed when she went into her trance, but it seemed like only minutes.

Vince's closeness to her now was a vivid and painful reminder of what had transpired during that time. Jenna had given herself completely to him. Longed for him now while awake. Unlike other times when she'd become fixated in that state, this time seemed more memory than dream in its sharpness. She could remember his taste. How his warm fingers felt on her. The velvety texture of his tongue.

Too late, she tried to suppress a shiver at the memory.

"Are you sure you're all right?"

She nodded and reached for the bench in front of which they'd stopped. He eased her down and sat next to her.

Jenna couldn't turn to face him. If she did, she would be lost. She knew it as surely as she knew the moon hung from the sky above.

The reflection of swaying branches caught her attention. Next to the scrying pool, the gnarled oak tree stood in majesty. Its branches extended to cover a portion of the patio, the bench they sat on and the small body of water. She could just imagine a

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younger Ava having to spend many hours retrieving fallen leaves from its surface.

“Stay here, please,” she said to him as she rose. Jenna walked to the pond’s edge and peered in.

Lord and Lady, she invoked silently, watch over us in this dark time. Show me the path that we must follow to keep the balance. Whatever your wills, so mote it be.

The image in the water shifted. Darkness swallowed the reflection of the branches until only a black body of water shimmered in the moonlight. Even though she peered directly into it, Jenna didn’t see even the reflection of her face.

She waited with endless patience for the image to change. She’d cried often enough to know what to expect. Before long, the image *did* shift as she expected.

Her hand covered her mouth as she waited with bated breath.

Maybe this time she’d see something different. Maybe this time she’d be given a reprieve from the visions that foretold of love and malevolence. The ones that haunted her. *Please.*

The image didn’t have time to fully materialize before she took one step away from the pond. Then another step. And another.

She didn’t want to see the ecstasy seeking bodies touch and fondle. His long, red hair flowing over them both. Her auburn hair spread like a halo around her head. The look of rapture on their faces. Her mouth twisted in silent moans of pleasure.

Jenna cried out when Vince’s hand lighted on her shoulder. She turned to him and buried her face against his chest. Letting the tears pour of her tired eyes to be absorbed by his shirt.

“Hey...hey,” he cooed. “Tell me. Tell me what’s wrong.”

The words remained trapped in her throat. She could only wrap her arms around him, clutch his clothing, and release her frustration against him. Frustration for herself, for the coven, for everything she’d seen come to pass. Then there was the frustration for what she couldn’t remember.

Something important happened a little while ago. She knew it. Just knew it. It had to do with her and Vince. Goddess, what was it? They weren’t supposed to be alone together or something bad would happen. Something to do with the athame.

Why couldn't she remember?

His hand stroked her chin, tilting her face up to his. "Please, Jenna. Tell me what's wrong."

Her eyes closed when his lips pressed against her cheek. There was a delicate swipe of his tongue against her shed tears before he pulled away. "Don't cry," he said softly.

Vince kissed her other cheek. "You make me sad when you cry, Jenna."

This. This was what was wrong. If he kissed her again, she would give in to the kiss. She would give in to the feelings she'd tried to ignore. The visions of the future would be deadly accurate if she gave in.

If she remained enveloped in his embrace, her predictions both good and bad would come true. If she let him kiss her one more time...she would fall in love.

Vince leaned closer, searching her face. His fingers tenderly traced the line of her cheekbone and jaw. Her lashes swept down when he came closer still.

In heated expectation, Jenna's heart drummed passionately when his lips touched hers. For a moment, all was right the world and her fears melted away.

Chapter Three

She'd heard women describe time standing still when the right man kissed them and she'd never before believed it.

Vince's kiss chased away all doubt of that belief.

Jenna reached up to him, pulled him in closer as his mouth captured hers. A low growl of possession escaped his lips when he pressed closer. His hand slipped under the material of her blouse at the same moment his tongue probed gently into her mouth. The peppery aroma he exuded flooded her senses.

His hands searched the skin of her back, smoothed over it in delicate caresses. When he pulled her tighter against his body, his growing hardness pressed against her belly and sent a shiver through her.

She moaned when his hands found her aching nipples, tracing over them as if memorizing their details. He stilled before they dropped away, leaving her breasts heavy and aching for more of his touch. When he pulled his lips from hers, she almost wept from the pain it caused.

"Diviner, this—we should stop," he gasped.

Jenna clutched his outstretched hand and pulled it to her mouth. She grazed his palm with rough kisses until she finally bit into the fleshy area. The low sound he made confirmed the desired effect.

"Jenna..." It was the last warning she would receive from him, but her boiling pulse wouldn't let her hear the caution. He pulled her against him again and devoured her mouth with his. Forceful, passionate, his tongue warred with hers. When her feet left the ground, she barely noticed.

Vince carried her to the tree, hiding them both from view of the house, where he pressed himself almost painfully against her. She didn't take the moment to reflect on the bark scraping against her back. Only focused on the way he tasted, the fevered

trail his hands left over her skin and his hardness pressed against her belly.

His fingers found her thighs under her skirt, massaging them until they almost melted. The sting of her taut panties being pulled against her and the ripping of material resonated faintly in the distance of her mind. At this moment, she could only focus on feeling him. Being with him. Needing him.

Jenna hissed against his mouth as a finger plunged inside her waiting moisture. She pulled away, dropped her head against his shoulder when a second finger followed. Almost violently, Vince probed the inside of her slick folds. A quick stroke of his thumb over her hardened clit and she had to bite her lip against the ecstatic force. When he stroked again, she ground her face against his shoulder and moaned louder. A third stroke as he continued to withdraw and plunge and she shattered.

Frozen by the force of the sudden orgasm, Jenna could only breathe through the pleasure. Felt her body ripple and pull him deeper into her depths. She dug her fingers into his shoulders as she tried to communicate with him. She needed more. Needed him to stop. Don't stop. Needed more of him—all of him.

He eased down his ministrations. Released the awesome pressure against her clit. Let her gently rocking hips almost come to a stop before pulling slowly out of her. Again the distant noise of clothing sliding against skin sounded. And then he was there. Her thigh draped over his forearm. His smooth cock pushing heat against her.

"Jenna, look at me," he breathed. "I want to look in your eyes when I'm inside of you."

Picking up the heavy weight of her head, she looked up into the blue.

And saw the future.

In it, Vince stood at her side. Red surrounded them both. They held on to the athame as a mix of both witches and demons watched them. The crowd closed in, hands and claws blindly reaching for the couple. She could only stand there, the athame pressed against her chest as Vince pulled her closer to him.

Then the image vanished.

THE CRAFT OF THE WISE 2: DIVINATION

She didn't mean to stiffen against him. The horror that reflected in her eyes came unbidden. Too late, she looked away but not before he reacted to the change.

His grip loosened. Clearly alarmed, he asked, "Have I hurt you?"

Any words she'd speak would only lodge in her throat. Jenna shook her head and let her head drop against him again. Grief for herself, for him and for their doomed future sliced through her in chilling waves.

"Do you want me to stop?" Her heart broke at the kindness with which he asked the question. If his ache for her resembled anything close to what she felt a few minutes ago, his world would be falling apart.

"No," she croaked.

Vince relaxed his hold, though. Her thigh slid against his hand until she stood on her own two feet again. Her skirt settled into place when he stepped back. She inclined her gaze away from him when he pulled his pants up to his waist and fastened them.

She felt his heat directly in front of her before she noticed he'd stepped up to her again. He placed his hand under her chin and tilted her head up to his. Her eyes closed of their own accord when soft lips caressed hers.

"One day you'll trust me enough to tell me what it is you see when you look at me, Jenna." His eyes searched hers for a moment as he waited expectantly.

Her mouth dropped open so that the words could tumble out. Nothing escaped past her lips. How could she tell him if she didn't veer their individual destinies apart, the war raging between witch and demon would come to a horrifying end? She had to deny herself—deny him—and try to steer the course in another direction.

Instead, she remained silent and hoped he could feel the sorrow of her mind. Vince stood still for a moment longer. When she continued to say nothing, he stroked her cheek softly, glanced at her with the tenderest of looks and walked alone towards the house.

Wrapping her arms around herself, Jenna watched him leave as she willed the pieces of her mourning heart into a

corner. The future of the coven was more important than any feelings she might harbor for a man. Her visions might try to push her into his arms, but if she went there, Dina, who already possessed the Book of Shadows, would get the athame. At that point, she would be almost impossible to stop. How and why her destiny with Vince played into the saga was unclear. Only open to her was the understanding she had to deny herself and thwart fate. No matter what her heart told her.

* * * *

The following morning, Liana rushed into kitchen. Jenna stopped staring at the dregs at the bottom of her coffee cup long enough to figure out if the look on her friend's face was good or bad.

"I've found it!" she cried. The grin splitting her face should have been infectious.

"Found what, Liana?" Her head hadn't stopped pounding even though her tears stopped flowing hours ago.

"Found what? What do you mean...oh, Jenna...are you okay?"

If the motion wouldn't have made her dizzy, she would have nodded. But the horrible ache that started at the base of her neck and traveled noisily up to the peak of her head prevented the movement.

At first, seeing herself in the mirror after she'd finally given up on trying to get some sleep was startling. Until Liana arrived, she had planned to sneak back upstairs with a small bag of ice to put over her swollen eyes. Now the telltale redness would have to just dissipate on its own. Even with the horrific state of her eyes, at least her nose wasn't as swollen or red as it had first been. Once again, she mused about why on the Goddess's green earth did women cry when upset. By the time they were done, they felt and looked worse than when they first started.

Jenna cleared her throat. "I'll be fine. Long night. That's all."

Liana's lips set into a hard line. She walked over to the coffeemaker and poured some of the hot liquid into a waiting

cup. After adding condiments, she pulled out the chair next to Jenna and settled herself into it.

“I used to think that always knowing about the future would be such a cool gift,” Liana said. She took a sip of coffee, searching Jenna’s face. “But it’s not always good news, is it?”

Jenna thought she shouldn’t have been able to bring up even a single teardrop. She’d spent hours pouring the sadness of her heart into her pillow. When the soft material went soggy, she turned over the pillow only to start again. By the time she had stopped, she felt used up. Completely drained dry.

With Liana’s words, her heart lurched and jumpstarted a new well of tears. She didn’t trust her voice and nodded through a starburst of pain in her throbbing head.

Behind them, a male cleared his throat. She didn’t need to turn to know it was *him*. His very presence always called to her. This morning was no exception.

With the back of her hand, Jenna wiped her moist eyes and focused again on her coffee cup. With ten people camping out in the three-story house, very little in the way of privacy could be had. She wasn’t surprised by the sudden interruption.

Please change the subject. She would die an eternal death of misery if any of the werewolves found out about last night, if Vince hadn’t told the rest of them already. She grimaced internally. No. That wasn’t like him. It wasn’t fair to spit undeserved venom his way. He didn’t deserve it.

Almost as if she’d heard her unspoken plea, Liana said, “I was just telling Jenna that I think I’ve found the athame.”

“That’s good news,” Vince said without emotion. “Someone should probably tell Ava and Aaron about it. Mayda, too.”

Someone pushed past her, but Jenna didn’t look up. The refrigerator opened and closed to her left. She remained focused on the rings of drying coffee.

“I’m starving,” Jarod muttered. She’d met him and his twin, Ronan, after the meeting yesterday and immediately liked their peaceful mannerisms. Both brothers brought balance to Vince’s volatility.

“Jarod. I said someone should probably tell Ava, Aaron and Mayda about it,” Vince rumbled. A subtle menace highlighted his words.

Jenna peered at the young man standing in the open door. He looked past her with narrowed eyes and evident confusion. “I don’t think I should disturb those two.”

Thank goodness for her friend who seemed to have a better grasp of the hint. Liana said, “Why don’t you and I go buy some grub for the group? By the time we get back, everyone else should be up and we can let them know then. What do you think?”

With a scrape of the chair, Liana pushed from the table. When she strode to Jarod, she tugged him away from the refrigerator, almost prying him away. The look on her face was of gross determination and she would get him to leave the room one way or the other.

Poor guy. Even as they passed by her, Jenna heard the loud rumble of his stomach. She’d have to find a way to make up the delay in breakfast to him.

“But why can’t I just...” The sentence cut off when the door clicked shut.

Undoubtedly, Liana would find a way to pacify him until he could fill his empty belly. Ever the mothering type, she had good instincts for knowing what others needed. Jenna would have loved a minute more with her to voice her fears to someone, knowing full well she probably wouldn’t in the end. The group relied on her strength of vision so much. She didn’t want them to know about her own apprehension with it.

Vince dropped into the chair Liana had vacated, but she didn’t turn to him. The bottom of a coffee cup had never before held her attention so much as this one did.

He sighed. “Look at me, Jenna.” When she didn’t move, he pushed on the handle of the chair, dragging her until she faced him. “We need to talk about last night.”

He smelled good, she noted. Freshly showered, she thought she might even recognize the brand of soap. Still the peppery scent she associated with him managed to peek through.

THE CRAFT OF THE WISE 2: DIVINATION

She shook her head, immediately regretting the motion when her headache flared. “Nothing to talk about,” she mumbled.

“I forget sometimes that werewolves are stronger than...” He ran a hand through his damp hair. “Just tell me. Did I hurt you?”

She glanced up sharply. The concern written on his face gave credence to his words. He really did think that was the matter. “No, Vince,” she said softly. “It was lovely. You didn’t hurt me, I promise.”

“Good.” His eyes narrowed to thin blue slits. “I’m not going to beg you to talk to me...”

She could hear the *but* coming to his sentence. He wouldn’t beg, but if she were a betting woman, a thousand dollars told her he would come close. If there had been any doubt in her mind before, she knew for certain now that the scorching attraction she felt for him burned on his end, too.

Before Vince could start speaking again, Jenna felt a shift. Something within her twisted and wrenched at her gut. She doubled over, clutching the painful area. She gasped for breath, her face breaking out in a cold sweat. The air next to them shimmied and a woman materialized into view.

“Just the person I was looking for.”

Jenna’s blood ran ice-cold at the sound of Dina’s voice.

Chapter Four

“He won’t be bothering us,” Dina said. She pointed her chin at Vince and giggled. “He’s otherwise preoccupied.”

Jenna twisted to look at Vince. He hadn’t moved despite the threat in the room. For someone who seemed to thrill in violence, she couldn’t understand his stillness. When after another minute only his eyes moved, a sudden realization shook Jenna to her core.

For Dina to be able to immobilize someone, especially a powerful werewolf, took an extraordinary wealth of magical strength. Separated in age by a matter of weeks, it only made sense that she might inherit some of the power bestowed upon her cousin, Ava. Why none of them had reached that conclusion before might be part of their undoing.

Her own limbs still available, she had to keep Dina’s attention focused only on the people currently in the kitchen. Had to find a way to get the others in there. Help Vince somehow. “Dina.”

“Not one word, Jenna. Say another one and I’ll kill him.” Rooted to her chair, she stared in disgusted silence at the woman she used to consider her friend. Even knowing she had betrayed the coven, Jenna held out a small measure of hope. Everyone could be saved and forgiven. Surely, she knew that? “I’ll crush his throat until he stops breathing. Not a particularly good way for your lover to die, is it?”

Maybe not everyone was worth saving. Or forgiving.

She blinked as she replayed Dina’s last sentence. Her lover? She almost protested the familiar term. At the last second, Jenna shook her head.

Dina snorted. “Give me some credit, Jenna. I’ve always been a pretty good diviner, too. I know about the man with red

hair that you're destined to be with. He's even better looking in reality. Kudos to you for snagging him. Even if he is a *were*."

This conversation was absurd. Why was Dina here? The risk of discovery had to be too great for her to chance her life over something trivial.

"I'll tell you what," Dina continued. "Tell me where to find the athame and I'll let him go unharmed. Oh, and you can speak now. Just mind yourself."

All of her suspicions were true, then. Dina sought the same tools the coven did.

Jenna glanced at Vince before facing her again. "I don't know where it is."

"Are you so sure about that?" She nodded curtly at Vince, directing Jenna's attention to him. Her breath caught in her throat as she watched a thin trail of skin split open as if a knife dragged across it. A tendril of blood ran down his cheek. He kept his fearless gaze fixed on Jenna.

Without thinking, she whispered a spell of healing and touched her finger to the place, which sealed after a brief caress. Dina momentarily ignored, she wiped the trace of blood with her hand, keeping her palm pressed to the closed wound.

Dina's sneer brought her out of her reverie. "I can do so much worse to him. Things that you won't be able to heal. Are you certain you don't know where it is yet, Diviner?"

"No," she snapped.

"Then, remember our conversation." The statement, almost a command, baffled her. Eyebrows knotted, she reflected on the words.

Dina watched her patiently. If she were concerned about being in the house with the others, her cool gaze and relaxed posture hid it well. At this moment, she seemed focused on Jenna.

Something niggled at the back of her mind. A distant memory that grew in clarity prodded at her. Last night, while astral projecting...Dina was there!

Then she remembered all of it.

Dina wanted them together because she and Vince would obtain the athame together. Dina watched over them in order to take it at the first opportunity. Jenna still didn't know how the

rogue witch knew this, but based on the wealth of power Dina seemed to possess, her skill with divination should be just as potent.

Turning to her, she stared into the void of Dina's blue eyes to focus herself. She needed to calm down and think rationally. Detach herself from Vince for a moment to get them out of this precarious mess.

Jenna needed Dina's attention on her. The werewolves were useful in fighting demons, but witch had to stand against witch. One on one, Dina was the stronger of the two, but with a little luck, Jenna stood a minute chance of taking her down. If Dina continued to use Vince against her though, her already small chance of defeating her diminished to almost nothing.

At that moment, voices drifted into the kitchen from the staircase. A rush of hope swelled through Jenna at the sound and she made a rash decision. In the scheme of things, her life meant very little. Regrettably, Vince's life meant not much more either. She had to use whatever opportunity given to her to take Dina out.

With a quick flit of her eyes towards him, she prayed he would forgive her.

A surge of power lifted through her as she conjured the spell. A crackle of energy arced from her fingertips when she raised them to touch Vince.

"In life, there is love. In death, eternal sleep."

"What's wrong with the damned witches in this covenant?" Dina shrieked. "Stop!"

Before she actually touched him, she leaned in close and whispered to him her final words. "Wake me from sleep, my love."

Jenna knew a moment of triumph when she heard his cry of anguish. Dina's spell on him had been broken.

Then she knew no more.

* * * *

"See?" Mayda's voice hovered close by. "She's coming around now. She's fine."

THE CRAFT OF THE WISE 2: DIVINATION

Her eyelids barely fluttered open when the bed dipped and she felt a crushing weight surrounding her. Strong arms pulled her into an embrace, lifting her torso from the mattress. She inhaled his scent and a wave of relief swept over her. He was alive.

He was saying something, but with his head pressed so closely, she could barely make out the words. It took a minute for them to sink in.

“Why?” he kept repeating. “Why would you do that?”

Jenna curled against him and scattered soft kisses over his neck. He was alive. All that mattered in the world right now was that he was alive.

Ava’s smug but affectionate tone came from somewhere behind them. “It’s about time, you two.”

Someone made a shushing sound, followed by shooing noises. “Let’s give them some privacy, huh?”

Beneath Vince’s embrace, she watched the small crowd of people leave the room. His eyes blazed when she finally looked at him. Tight with anger, his face reddened. “Why? Tell me why you would almost kill yourself to save me. Even I know the witch’s rede. An’ it harm none, Jenna. None!”

At the time, for a brief moment, she didn’t think the spell would work. She transferred the immobility spell from Vince to herself. Then cast the Sleep of Death spell over herself so that Dina couldn’t use his feelings for her against him. Fortunately, it could be reversed if too much time didn’t pass.

The only consequence was that The Craft dictated just as he’d stated. The moment of desperation called for breaking the rules. But if she had to do it again, she would. In a heartbeat.

He wasn’t finished. “Mayda tells me you could lose your gifts because of that little stunt. Your abilities to cast spells gone forever. *Fuck!* Not to mention your life. Why, Jenna?”

She pushed away from him, trying to break his grip. “Because it made the most sense at the time. She wanted me to help her get the athame. She would use you against me to get it and I would have probably eventually given in. And...”

She looked down. Didn’t want to say her next thoughts out loud.

He shook her roughly, his fingers tightening on her arms. "And?"

Jenna's breath whooshed out. "And I needed to break the spell over our lives. Our love lives. I needed to interrupt our destinies. I gave you the chance to break free from her spell so that you could try to injure her. If one or both of us didn't live through the encounter with Dina, then it wouldn't matter because the coven would be safe."

"You aren't making any sense. What does our destiny, as you call it, have to do with the coven?"

Her hands clenched into fists against her sides. "Because it's been foretold. You heard Dina. Even she saw it. You and me, destined together. I see it every time I look into the future. Goddess," she moaned, "even Dina is pushing us together. It's all wrong. Wh—what happens if I don't listen? What happens to everyone around us?"

"I don't believe our lives could be laid out in our palms. Who we fall in love with. Maybe some things can be told, but not something like that. I don't believe it."

"You don't have to believe it. *I do*. And what else I believe in is that if that particular prediction comes true, so do the others that I've had. And they're not good predictions Vince. If Dina gets the athame, she's that much closer to defeating us. Do you understand that?"

The sadness in his voice was more heart wrenching than the anger. "Is that why you pushed me away last night?"

"I didn't—I didn't push you away."

"You might as well have."

True. She'd come precariously close to listening to her heart, but the call of duty fared better.

"What happened to Dina?" The change of subject would do them both good. They were both too sensitive. Raw emotions too exposed.

Vince shook his head. "By the time I even had the thought to shift, she vanished." He smiled. "She's good and pissed with you, though."

Her lips twitched. Score one for witchdom.

THE CRAFT OF THE WISE 2: DIVINATION

Jenna sobered after a moment. “She’ll be back and better prepared. Did anyone talk to Liana yet about the location of the athame?”

He shook his head again, becoming a regular bringer of bad news. “After Dina left, Mayda fortified the protection around the house while the rest worked on bringing you back. About that, Jenna...”

When he didn’t continue, she looked quizzically at him.

He exhaled forcibly before he spoke again. “Did you mean what you said?”

She racked her brain to locate the appropriate memory. Nothing came to the forefront. “About what, Vince?”

“When you cast that spell. You said ‘wake me from sleep, my love.’ Did you mean that last part?” He searched her eyes. “Calling me your love?”

Jenna considered her answer. Tried to figure out how to best answer him. The knock on the door saved her from herself.

It opened and Ava stuck her head in the doorway. “Meeting downstairs in five minutes.”

Vince stood and strode to the door without looking back. “Never mind answering that, Jenna. I shouldn’t have asked.”

* * * *

“Because Dina is a witch, it will be next to impossible to bar her presence from this house,” Mayda finished.

“Do you think she would be so brazen as to come back here again?” Aaron asked.

Jenna nodded. “If she wants that athame as badly as we do, she might try. It’s not impossible.”

Only a few days into this mess and she was already sick of the basement meeting room. The group spent more and more time together strategizing and preparing than they used to spend celebrating and spell casting. They had very little to show for it.

Mayda addressed Liana again. “You’re positive about the provenance of the athame. It is the one we’re all seeking?”

Liana nodded and frowned. “A couple of us scried until we couldn’t see straight anymore. I happened to use a pendulum to

locate it, in the end. I'm one hundred percent positive it's the one we seek."

"What is it? I sense a *but* or a piece of bad news in your statement," Ava said.

"*But* although I know where it is, I'm not certain of its *exact* location."

Aaron leaned forward. "Well, which is it?"

The regretful look on her face couldn't be good news. Liana winced and said, "It's in a graveyard. The Winding River Cemetery. I found out that much."

He drew out his next question when he guessed the issue. "But you don't know which grave, right?"

"Right." She looked around the room, staring into the skeptical faces.

Jenna had a feeling the thoughts running through her mind echoed those in the room.

They were screwed.

Using a pendulum could get them the general location of a person or an item, but in a graveyard where perhaps hundreds, if not thousands, of people were interred, they were looking for a needle in a haystack.

Ronan was the first to speak out loud. "You're telling me that none of the witches here can pinpoint where to find the athame?"

Ava turned to him. "It's just not that simple. Maybe with the Book of Shadows, we could have determined just the right spell. Without it, right now, we have mostly intuition and a bit of magic to cast what spells we have been. Someone correct me if I'm wrong, but since it's not one of our personal objects, something we're intimately connected to, most spells will only yield a general idea. That's about it."

Another silence fell over the room.

Jenna chewed on her thumbnail. She was a better diviner than Liana. Maybe if she tried, she could locate it.

As soon as she finished the thought, she dismissed it. That was arrogance talking. If Liana could not pinpoint the athame, it was likely she couldn't, either.

Mayda looked up, directly into Jenna's eyes. "Well, we could cast an affinity spell. I haven't done one for probably a dozen years, maybe two or so, but it would work."

Jenna grinned broadly. Of course! An affinity spell would be ideal. She turned to Ava. With her and Aaron's help, they could locate the athame. A piece of cake.

"When can it be done?" Vince asked.

The smile still in place, Jenna turned to him. "Right now, really. I don't know why someone didn't think of it earlier. Ava and Aaron are perfect for it. It..." Her eyebrows narrowed at the expression on Mayda's face. "What's wrong?"

"Well, dear, I don't know how to say this, but I don't think Ava is ready for a spell like this. We'd need someone else to cast it."

Jenna sobered immediately, tried to ignore the sinking feeling that began in the pit of her stomach.

Selena's quiet voice broke the silence. "And I don't think Liana or I are quite as qualified, either."

She stared at Mayda with a mixture of horror and disbelief plastered on her frozen expression.

No. No. No.

No way.

Jarod raised his hand. "Um, for the non-witches in the room, can I ask what the problem is?"

Mayda said, "The affinity spell requires the strength of the greatest magic in the universe in order to work. We need two bodies."

Jenna's blood started to simmer.

"Preferably a male and a female."

Her muscles refused to obey any commands. She wanted them to take her away. Run at top speed in the opposite direction of this conversation.

"A couple in love."

They couldn't want this from her. There had to be another way. *Think!* Think of something else. Anything else.

"At the height of passion." Mayda cleared her throat. "At the peak of making love."

And there it was.

Chapter Five

Heat traveled up her neck, across her face and singed the tips of her ears. With the exception of Vince, all other eyes had turned to her. He had the decency to blush right along with her, at least.

“I can’t—we can’t. It wouldn’t work.”

Aaron’s lips twitched in a poor attempt at hiding his amusement. “And why wouldn’t it?”

She had to think fast. They were latching on to this idea with too much enthusiasm. “Well, because I just cast the death spell on myself. For all we know, I’ve lost my spell casting abilities.”

He shrugged. “Why not try something simple right now and see if you still have them?”

For the sake of her friend, Jenna tossed away the urge to turn him into a horned toad or something equally distasteful. Instead, she raised a hand into the air and felt the magic before she actually saw it. The tips of her fingers glowed with the white power that signified her magic still remained in place. Mayda acknowledged it with a curt nod.

“That doesn’t matter,” she declared. “We simply cannot do what you’re thinking.”

“But why not, Jenna?” Ava demanded. “We wouldn’t ask this of you if there was another way. You know that.”

In a hushed tone, Vince voiced her fear. “Because she is afraid of what might happen afterwards. Not only has Dina been pushing for this all along, Jenna’s divined something bad happening to the coven as a result of us obtaining the athame. But, you were the one who said divination is not the same as prediction. Merely a tool to guide decisions. Which is it, Diviner?”

She could have kicked herself at that moment. He was right, of course. She'd said the words and they were essentially true. Her hesitation came from knowing that the line between divination as she defined it and actual *prophecy* was finer than a single stand of hair.

Mayda took charge once again. "Are you agreeable to this Vince? It's obvious that you have some feelings for Jenna. But, if you're *both* unwilling to try this, this conversation can end now."

He crossed his arms and glanced at Jenna. "I'm willing."

"Good," Mayda replied. "Then everyone else out. I want to talk to Jenna alone."

She slumped in her chair as everyone, the bunch of traitors, filed out of the room. Mayda sat down next to her, but she couldn't face the older woman. How embarrassing to have a conversation about sex with a woman who was as precious to her as her own mother.

"Jenna, dear, tell me what you're thinking."

She sighed. She'd wanted to tell someone about her visions. Now was as good a time as any. "No matter what method I try, Mayda, all I can see is him. Us. Together."

"And this scares you?"

"Not being intimate with him, per se. It's the consequence of our union. I see an evil time ahead for witches. A war with the demons that goes horribly awry. It's all jumbled into the images of me and Vince."

"Tell me this. Do you return his feelings?"

She chewed on her bottom lips before looking into Mayda's kind eyes. "I do," she admitted. "I want to see where our path may lead. With the visions, I'm just not certain. And what about Dina? She wanted this so badly."

Mayda held up a hand. "You, Diviner, have the least fulfilling task of all the coven members. You know too much. See too much. You have a heavy burden to carry as a result. But I want you to think about this...If you didn't have your gift, you wouldn't know what the future might hold for the two of you. You'd jump in with both feet and take your chances."

"But I do know, Mayda. That's why I'm so hesitant..."

She cut her off. “You *don’t* know, Jenna. Your visions are about interpretation. Perhaps you’ve interpreted incorrectly. It’s not impossible, you know.”

Jenna almost snorted. Of course it was possible. Not likely, but possible.

“Dina is a very smart young woman. What better way to prevent you from joining with him by having your enemy *encourage* it? Think about it. Not only that, perhaps your visions foretell of what might happen if you two *don’t* follow the path you’re being led to. Maybe your visions are telling you that he’s *the one*. Don’t miss this opportunity, they’re screaming. And you’re running in the opposite direction, doing exactly what you’re *not* supposed to be doing.”

A half-smile creased her face. In its stubborn way, it made sense. Maybe she should ignore visions and spells for just a little while. Give in to what her heart told her to do. To think she gave Dina power over them by allowing her to sway the decision that was best for the coven and for her.

She leaned back against her chair, closing her eyes. A long moment of silence stretched out as she toyed with a mental image of Vince. Recalled the way he felt against her mouth. Pressed against her body.

Jenna released a sigh and nodded. Goddess help them all if Mayda was wrong. “Let’s do this.”

* * * *

The room was freezing. With just a thin sheet covering her now, it was no wonder she’d never noticed before. The table beneath would never give a good old-fashioned bed a run for its money. Her bones popped in protest if she shifted too much.

“Shouldn’t the rest of the coven be here?” Ava whispered to her grandmother.

“I heard that!” Jenna called out.

The rest of the coven, indeed. She already put her foot down against the werewolves being in the room. With their heightened hearing, the compromise of having them just outside the door frankly did not make her feel better. Either the group would

make this work with the other five witches present or they would have to move on to something else. Period.

The things she put up with for her Craft.

When Vince slid under the sheet next to her, she couldn't look at him. She listened instead to the others cast a circle around them. Watched them position themselves around the table, facing the walls. They picked up a slow, melodic chant and waited.

"Are you cold?"

Startled by the question, she finally looked at him. The heat beneath his gaze made her stomach do a somersault.

Her lashes lowered until they almost rested against her cheeks. "A little," she admitted softly.

"Come here." He tucked her next to his body. The spark between their touching bodies generated a fire on her skin that fanned out across her flesh.

She tried to relax against him. Inhaled his scent. Matched her breathing to his. But the only things that she could focus on were the low chanting around them, and the hardness of the table pressing against her back.

"Vince, I-I don't think I can do this."

"Look at me, Jenna. Good. Keep looking into my eyes. Don't see anything but me. Don't hear anything but me. I'm right here with you, okay?"

She exhaled slowly and nodded.

Vince lowered his head until their mouths caressed. He swept his lips over hers, while he maintained direct eye contact with her. He burned a trail of kisses down her chin, nuzzling against her neck.

Jenna tilted her head and melted against him.

"That's it, baby," he cooed. "Just you and me."

She curled her fingers into his hair. Found the band holding the ponytail and tugged it free. The soft tendrils of hair fell forward, tickling her face and chest. The curtain blocked her sight from everything except the hard lines of his face. The soft curve of his lips. The captivating blue.

The sheet slid down over her breasts and instinctively, she clutched the material to her chest. She broke contact with him, tried to peer past his body to see if anyone else had seen.

“Look at me, Jenna!” Her gaze snapped up to his and he dipped in for a kiss. Probed her mouth with his tongue before he pulled away. His voice dropped down to a hoarse whisper. “My lovely Jenna. I want to see you. Show me your secrets.”

When the blanket slid past her breasts and over her aching nipples, her body flushed all over. Vince must have seen the panic in her eyes because he swept his mouth across hers again. Pressed himself against her until she yielded. His lips and tongue explored her mouth expertly.

He curled his fingers with hers. Pushed her arm above her head and held it in place. Slid her other arm above her head, too, then held both wrists in one hand. All before she realized his intentions.

Jenna shivered when the blanket slid further until she could no longer feel its light touch. The cool air caressed her body all over. Touched her in ways that made her long for Vince’s warmth. She trembled against him, her pussy humming with need.

Her back arched to him when he trailed his mouth further down. He captured her breast in his fingers, rolling her nipple. Jenna whimpered and pushed herself against his hand, wanting more. He pulled on her flesh, manipulating the peak of her breast until her whimpers echoed loudly in the room.

The hand that left her breast aching and alone traveled across her belly and between her thighs. Vince stroked through her curls and found the moisture. With too fleeting a touch, she moaned when his fingers deserted her before she could savor it.

She struggled to bring her hands down to him, to guide him back to what she needed, but his eyes glinted at her with wickedness at their edges. Keeping her pinned, he ran his moist fingers over the rim of her bottom lip. The scent of her arousal flooded her senses and made her body go taut with unfilled desire.

“You belong to me, Jenna,” he growled before bringing his mouth down on hers.

She nodded beneath him. Yes, she belonged to him. Had from the moment they met. Through their disagreements and the tension. Through the longing and the fear. She belonged to him body and soul.

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Vince sucked her lip into his mouth and tongued it until it felt swollen. His growls starting deep in his throat sang into the air. He continued to growl even after he released her lip, moving his mouth over her jaw and neck. He bit down again on the tender flesh above her collar, the skin growing painful beneath him.

Jenna bucked against him, a combination of ecstasy and pain spurring her on. Her fingers clenched and unclenched into the air, needing him to release her, at the same time wanting to remain pinned.

“Please,” she pleaded between gasps for breath.

She didn’t know what she wanted more. His mouth against hers. His fingers on her breasts or sliding between her sensitive folds. To feel his cock buried deep inside of her.

As if sensing her unspoken desires, with the feral grace of a wolf, Vince rolled in between her thighs.

“I need to be inside of you,” he whispered.

He grasped her legs and spread her wide before him. For a moment he seemed stunned as he looked down on her swollen lips. He shook his head with a moan and then grasped his erect cock. Jenna kept her arms stretched above her as he pushed forward.

Her pussy stretched around him as he sank into her. Jenna wrapped her legs around his slender hips and pushed against him. Vince gripped her thighs and pulled her to him, his cock stroking deep inside. Her muscles tightened around him, drawing him even further. He hissed between clenched teeth when she slanted her hips to match his thrusts. He immediately shifted though and regained the control he’d let slip.

When Vince angled again and stretched his lean body over hers, Jenna shivered violently. She looked into his face and déjà vu struck her with solid clarity. This was the scene she’d played in her mind over and over again. Right here. Right now. The way his hair fell over them both. The extreme joy coursing through her veins. The moans of pleasure escaping them both. She’d been here before in her visions.

“Stay with me, baby,” he whispered against her cheek.

The words caught in her throat when a wave of ecstasy washed over her. She was with him. Could be no place else.

He changed his rhythm, slowed down to an agonizing drag that made her body sing. A pulse of pleasure coursed out from her belly, traveling over her body until her toes curled.

“Vince?”

He didn’t answer. Increased his pace and a new angle pressed him against her clit. Stroked her so impossibly good that the waves of pleasure picked up speed and intensity.

“Oh, Goddess! Vince!”

Her heart thundered against her chest and she knew it wouldn’t be able to withstand the orgasm that hovered close by. Vince’s fingers threaded into her hair and used it to pull her roughly towards him.

With a gasp of surprise at the pleasurable pain, she cried out as their mouths crashed together. He began to growl again, the vibration rippling over her throat and traveling into her mouth. And then she heard a sound that she didn’t recognize. With another start of surprise, she realized the keening escaped from her own lips.

She rode Vince’s thrusts for a moment longer before a swell of emotion—pure, unadulterated bliss—rose over her. At the same moment he threw his head back, Jenna’s orgasm swept through her and she screamed his name. His cock released jet after hot jet inside of her and her body pulsed for his seed. Greedily drank from him.

When their shudders ebbed and she regained some control of her trembling muscles, Jenna curled against him. He pulled the cast aside sheet over their bodies and the rest of the room slowly came back into focus.

Vince took a moment to caress her mouth with delicate kisses before he grinned down at her. He winked and said, “Just you and me, Jenna. From now on.”

Chapter Six

“Okay,” Liana gushed, “now that you’re actually looking people in the eyes again, I just have to tell you how *hot* that was. I know we were supposed to be focused on the affinity spell, but Jenna...”

Unless the world was about to come to a screeching halt, Jenna would never do something like that again. At least, she smiled to herself, not in public. Hours later and she could still feel the aftereffects of their powerful union.

“He is *so* into you!”

She glanced up and caught Vince’s heated gaze. Even from across the room, she could see the smoldering look his darkened eyes transmitted. Without a doubt in her mind, she agreed with Liana. He was so into her.

And she was into him, too.

Absently, Jenna replied, “I think Jarod has a little crush on you.”

“Yeah. I like him...and his brother.”

Wait—what? And his brother?

She didn’t get the chance to inquire further because Mayda rapped sharply on the table. She would be certain to come back to this vein of conversation at another time.

“Thanks to Vince and Jenna, the spell worked and we’ve acquired the athame.”

The catcalls and jeers that boomed from the men shook the house through its foundation. Even Ava clapped happily. The entire coven now knew what she’d done, if they didn’t already. Most of Aaron’s pack, too. She made a mental note to herself to perhaps consider joining a new coven when this mess was finished.

Jenna dropped her face into her hands, knowing full well her ears turned a shade of red previously undiscovered. Before

she could shrivel away from embarrassment, someone put a knuckled fist under her chin and tilted her head up. Vince had left his seat to stand by her side. He leaned down and with the gentlest caress, swept her mouth with a kiss.

The soft breathy sigh Liana released echoed her own sentiments to perfection.

What a man.

The room became silent at the display of affection but over her pounding heart, she could almost hear the smiles beaming from everyone. Vince remained standing behind her chair, his hand resting on her shoulder. She wrapped her fingers in his and tried to focus on the business at hand.

“As I was saying,” Mayda continued, “we’ve acquired the athame. One more piece of the puzzle. As previously suggested, we need to go on the offense now. We need to not only continue to gather tools, but we must find Dina and her minions. Ava’s powers are growing with every hour that passes. As much as we’d prefer to wait and allow them to mature, we cannot keep waiting for Dina to show up here. We’re taking the fight to her.”

The werewolves pounded on the table with the butts of their curved knives. Vince leaned past her to join in the ruckus. The air crackled with penned up magic and Jenna reveled in it.

They were all yearning for a chance at Dina. The chance to end this once and for all.

* * * *

Jenna trailed her fingers through the shimmering water, distorting the reflections in the pool. Her heart lurched at the glimpse of red that appeared at the periphery. She looked up and smiled as Vince dropped next to her at the pool’s edge.

He brushed his fingers over her cheek and she leaned into the touch. “Are you okay? You’ve been quiet since the meeting.”

“I’m fine.” She looked back into the water. Felt the pull of its secrets.

“We won’t have much of a future if we can’t talk to each other, Jenna.”

She nodded. “I’m sorry. You’re right.”

Vince chuckled when several minutes of silence passed. “Baby, that was your clue to tell me what’s wrong.”

Jenna still hesitated. Was it fair to tell him her worries? Could he even understand them? Goddess, why couldn’t she be happy with the right here and now?

She took the plunge. “I’ve been tempted...”

His eyebrows narrowed and his voice became hoarse. “Your heart is with another?”

“Oh, Goddess, no! No, Vince. My heart is with you.” She squeezed his hand. She really did need to talk to him more if that thought even attempted to cross his mind. “I’ve been so scared about us. And I’ve been tempted to look. To see what the future holds.”

The worry that creased his face slid away. “Then why not look?”

“Because what if...what if...” She shook her head, unable to voice the words. What if everything she feared came to pass? What if they were all wrong and her relationship with Vince prompted the beginning of the end of witchdom?

“It’s my fault for not adequately preparing you, Jenna. I’m sorry for that.” His voice sounded grave. The words final. “But I should have told you from the beginning that when a werewolf mates, it’s for life.”

Her eyebrows shot up.

Oh. Wow.

Vince continued. “When I said ‘you and me,’ I meant it. Whatever the future holds, I will be by your side and we will face it together. Understood?” She nodded because if she said one word, the tears would start to flow. “Look into the future, Diviner. It’s what you do.”

She didn’t need to look. Not anymore. The strength of his words, the passion behind his eyes foretold their paths better than any spell or any divination she’d ever mastered.

“Oh, Vince,” she murmured. Jenna leaned against his chest, listened to the rhythmic thump therein.

His hands stroked down her arms, sending ripples of goose bumps over her. “Look into the water, Jenna. Look and never doubt us again.”

She brought her lips to his. Whispered the spell against his mouth. Breathed him in as they caressed. Teased him with her tongue. Nipped with her teeth.

When she finally pulled away and looked down, the image on the water brought tears to her eyes. She covered her mouth with a trembling hand and looked up at him through blurred vision.

His jaw tightened. "We will face it together, Jenna. Whatever it is."

Her breath hitched in her throat as she shook her head. "No," she gasped. She tried to smile as she wept. Wiped at the falling tears. "It's good. A baby. A redheaded baby. A boy. That's what I see. Oh, Goddess, Vince. Our baby is what I see."

She stopped rambling when the color drained from his face. An aching pit formed in the hollow of her belly. She'd been sure, just assumed he'd be excited, too.

"Right now? You're pregnant right now?" His gaze kept shifting from her face to her stomach and back again.

"No. Well, maybe. I don't know, really." Jenna blew out a breath and whispered next because she wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer. Maybe whispering would soften the blow. "You're not happy?"

Vince brought his hand to her stomach, stopping short of touching it. His hand trembled as it hovered. When he looked up, Jenna saw stunned amazement in his eyes. "Happy? Baby, I want to touch you so badly right now." He barked out a nervous laugh. "I'm afraid if I do, this moment might shatter and I wouldn't know what to do then if it does. You have no idea how happy this makes me. Happy? Oh, Jenna..."

She cut him off by throwing herself in his arms. Grasped his jaw in her hands and pulled his face down to hers. She regarded his face for a moment, memorized his details again and pressed her mouth against his.

The future of witchdom and the battle against the demons might still be unrevealed to her, but without a doubt in her mind, Jenna knew with absolute certainty what *her* future looked like. For this witch and her werewolf, days would pass in love, nights in passion.

And she looked forward to each and every one of them.

THE CRAFT OF THE WISE 2: DIVINATION

So mote it be...

DEE CARNEY

About the Author

Dee Carney is the author of several erotic romance novellas, including the Craft of the Wise series with Phaze Books. Visit www.DeeCarney.com for more information on her available titles.