



OVER THE MOON

by

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Dedication

To Dr. BCW,
may all your naughty dreams come true.

Chapter 1

Madam Korina's Fortunetelling parlor was a seedy stand-alone storefront in the middle of downtown Sanford. A neon rainbow *Open* sign shone bright against the tinted window. The gutters, which had been damaged during the last hurricane, hung forlornly off the structure waiting for the damp wood rot to corrode their remaining screws. A decided feeling of loss surrounded it, much like the faded beauty of an aging movie star.

Edward Justice stepped out of his black Ford pickup into the sweltering heat of a Florida summer. Glancing at his watch he wondered for the second time if he should just wait until nightfall to come. His powers would be much stronger then. It was five o'clock with actual darkness not due for another two to three hours. *I'm here now, might as well get this over with.* Walking along the cracked cement path, he pushed the rickety door open and stepped inside.

A small air conditioning unit hummed in a corner window laboring beyond its ability to cool the stuffy room. Ribbons of alternating cold and heat licked at his face.

Everywhere Ed looked there was occult merchandise: books on witchcraft and spell casting; aura reading; past lives; and even mind reading. A cracked glass case housed Tarot

cards and small opaque vials of scented oils. The far end of the room was hidden by a curtain decorated with crescent moons and stars. Ed couldn't help himself. He smiled. *What a lot of silly, expensive junk.*

The curtain stirred and a woman he assumed was Madam Korina emerged dressed in a long green t-shirt, blue polyester pants, and worn leather sandals. With a distinct limp, she lumbered past Ed and settled on a wide stool behind the glass counter. He glanced at the warrant photo in his pocket and confirmed her identity. She looked to be close to sixty but Ed knew from her warrant her real age was fifty-two. A strong stench of cigarette smoke drifted up from her clothes. The woman ran her fingers through her hair showing gray roots. "Can I help you, young man?" she asked, breathing heavily as if the simple act of walking were a great and terrible burden.

Ed hesitated then freed his dark power. Pure scarlet energy flowed from him in the form of four large vipers, hitting the ground with an audible thump and slithering toward the madam. She gasped and was about to bolt from her chair when he said, "Be still while I search you." His voice had claimed the room: deep and commanding. The madam flinched from the sound like she'd been struck.

The vipers reached her, slinking up her legs and penetrating her heart and mind. Within seconds Ed knew everything about her: her real name (which matched the warrant); her birth date; and even her favorite ice cream. He also knew her powers as a witch and psychic were nonexistent.

Visions came to him unbidden, like movie trailers in his mind. In his vision he saw the madam luring clients with false

newspaper ads, defrauding some with promises of winning lottery numbers and others with questionable donations to unscrupulous associates. Yes, Madam Korina had been a very busy woman but her nefarious deeds had now come to an end. Ed withdrew the vipers and the woman slumped.

"Helen Winters?" Ed asked already knowing what her answer would be.

The madam's eyes fluttered open. She squinted at him as if trying to see inside his soul. "Yes, that's my name. But who are you and how did you..."

"I'm Special Investigator Edward Justice with the US Paranormal Agency. I have a warrant for your arrest."

"A warrant for what? What crime have I committed?" she sputtered.

"You have a warrant for fraud and conspiracy to commit fraud, among other things. You'll have to come with me," he said.

The madam, who only a moment ago appeared to be in dire need of a hip replacement, suddenly took off running. She sprinted from her chair and raced for the curtain and a doorway beyond. The woman moved with such startling speed, Ed almost lost her behind a locked door. Ed grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her away from the escape route.

"I'm not going back to federal prison!" the woman shouted, clawing at the hand that held her. With a feral snarl, she dipped her head down and bit the flesh on the back of his hand.

An explosion of furious rage filled Ed, quickening his blood. Like hot lava from an erupting volcano, molten anger

crept over his senses and poisoned his goodwill. Unbidden, the dark power spilled from within, its lashing tentacles seizing the madam and throwing her against the wall with a harrowing crash. Ed stared in stunned disbelief. He thought he had more control than this. He had to stop this *now*. Taking a deep breath, he harnessed his mind and forced it to his will, summoning the dark power back into the secret place in his soul. When he finally had control, he rushed to the woman who was already struggling to her feet. She speared him with her venomous gaze.

"Freak!" she spat out and pulled a knife from the elastic waistband of her pants.

Ed froze. The madam was apparently tougher than she looked.

"I know your kind," she growled, coming toward him with the knife out in front of her. "All high and mighty daring to judge me! It took me a moment to recognize you but now I realize who you are. Not many have power like yours." She lifted her free hand and pointed an accusatory finger at him. "You're that warlock they call the Black Prince!"

"I'm not that man anymore," Ed said, keeping a wary eye on the knife. "I protect people now from charlatans like you." He slid his ID card out of his pocket and held it out to her. The madam eyed his identification and he put it away. "I work for the federal government and I've already told you why I'm here. So why don't you put the knife down and come with me nicely?"

"And if I don't?"

“Then you’ll force me to use magic to subdue you. And as you’ve seen, if I have to use magic, you won’t like it.” He took a step back and gave the madam room to consider her options.

The madam scowled and tossed the knife in a corner. It clattered and came to rest under a golden statue of Buddha. She turned around to allow him to handcuff her.

Ed took out his restraints and twirled them around his index finger. “Do I really need to use these?”

Madam Korina turned around to face him, a tiny mischievous grin playing at the corner of her lips. She shrugged. “No, I guess not.”

They stepped outside into the sticky humidity and the woman paused, tilting her face up to the sun. She closed her eyes. Ed gave her a moment to enjoy the heat while he stayed in the shadow of the doorway. He didn’t much like the sun, or the heat for that matter.

“I’m ready,” the madam said finally heading for the car. Gone was the limp. She walked with the strength and agility of an athlete.

Ed opened the passenger door for her. “What happened to your injured hip?”

Madam Korina tossed her head back and cackled. “Guess you warlocks don’t know everything, eh? It’s fake. I just use it when I’m looking to generate profits for the store. A bum hip is great for business. People buy more stuff if they think they’re helping an injured old lady.”

He pushed her door closed and stalked over to the driver’s side. “Nice,” he muttered under his breath.

* * * *

Ed arrived at the Bureau of Paranormal Investigation just as the last rays of sun were coloring the sky a brilliant orange. He placed Madam Korina in a holding cell and went to his desk to process the paperwork for her arrest. The minute his screen saver blinked off he noticed an urgent message from his boss, Chief Investigator Warren Lord. The chief wanted to see Ed right away.

Knocking on the partially open door, Ed poked his head in. "You wanted to see me, Chief?"

Warren, the Grand Master of the Coven of Nine and a long-time friend, gestured for Ed to come in. Ed took a seat in front of Warren's desk trying not to fidget with the hem of his jacket. He hated office meetings even when they were just one on one. And the moon, his beautiful mistress, was calling, inviting him to come out and play.

Warren interlaced his fingers over his stomach looking grim. "The Fallen Lady has a new owner," he began. "Her name is Jillian Cross and she's the niece of Archibald Cross, who I'm sure you know by reputation. We've done a thorough background check on Archibald and Jillian seems to be his only heir."

"Lucky girl," Ed said sarcastically. Archibald Cross was a notorious necromancer often sanctioned by the Bureau for casting dangerous spells and summoning demons. By all reports Cross was schooled in many types of magic, especially the black arts. He had traveled all over the world building his knowledge and most in the Bureau knew the necromancer was well on his way to becoming a third tier warlock. Thank

God he died before reaching that power level or they'd really have a problem on their hands.

Ed had never met the man but he'd heard the stories. He couldn't count the number of bloodcurdling tales told by other investigators who'd gone to the Cross residence to police the goings-on. The house became so infamous staff just started referring to it as The Fallen Lady and the name stuck.

"Since you're the highest ranking warlock with the exception of myself, I'd like you to conduct the investigation." Warren leaned across the table and handed Ed the key. "That house has a long and dangerous history. You'll really need to be on your toes with this one."

Ed frowned. This was a test. Why else would the Bureau give an ex-black magician like him a seductive case like this? What if he wasn't ready? Ed pushed his doubts to the back of his mind. "What about the new owner, Jillian Cross? Does she know I'm coming?"

"We've placed a heavy duty lock on the front door with a notice informing her we must complete our investigation before anyone can take possession of the house. Our research tells us she's a first tier witch but she doesn't practice. She spends her time doing minor psychic stuff like Tarot reading and automatic writing. But as a first tier she's more than a match for your power, Ed, even if she is untrained. This may be the opportunity she's been waiting for to build up her power and experiment. That house is a black magician's goldmine."

"And what if I find the house is unclean and can't be mended?" Ed asked as he rose from his chair.

“Then we bring the whole damn mess down with a wrecking crew. Do I make myself clear, Ed? I’m counting on you. Do you think you’re ready for this?”

“Absolutely,” Ed said, pocketing the key. “Thanks, Warren. I’ll be in touch.”

Chapter 2

Jillian Cross marched up the walkway of her newly inherited Georgian Revival mansion, planted her hands on her hips and frowned. There on the front door was a huge lock covering the handle. Jillian turned around and stared at Tim and Mary, her friends and assistants. "Who put a lock on this door?" she asked.

Tim gave her an exaggerated shrug. "Don't look at us. This is the first time we've been here."

Mary took a tentative step toward the house and pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose. "Is there anything on the lock that says who put it there?"

Jillian turned around and squinted at the dark gray lock. All it said was *US Steele*. "No. It doesn't say anything." She ran her gaze around the porch and spotted a crumpled piece of paper wedged under the porch railing. "Wait a minute." Reaching down she grabbed the paper and smoothed it out against the siding. A few pieces of clear tape still stuck to the corners. It was an official notice from the US Bureau of Paranormal Investigations. Basically it said the house could not be occupied without the express consent and presence of a Bureau official. *What a bunch of hoey that is.*

"Is that a note from someone?" Mary asked hopefully. "What does it say?"

Jillian came down the porch steps and handed the letter to Mary who read it silently. Jillian wasn't going to sit around here and wait an eternity for some federal investigator to show his face. They were just going to have to break in. What's the worst they could do to her? This was her property after all.

"There's a phone number here," Mary said, pointing at the bottom of the notice. "Tim, give me your cell phone."

"We're not going to bother with that," Jillian said, signaling Tim to put his cell phone away. "We're just going to get in through a window or something."

Mary folded her arms. "That's breaking and entering, Jillian."

"How can that be breaking and entering when I'm the one who owns this house?" Jillian replied impatiently.

"I think we should call that number," Mary said.

Jillian ignored her and walked around to the side of the house. Like most old properties there were lots of large windows that looked easy to open. She pushed at the base of one and it gave about an inch. "Tim, come over here and help me."

Tim and Mary went over to where Jillian stood on her toes pushing the window as far open as she could. Both their faces were pale and grim. *Oh for heaven's sake! You'd think we were robbing the First National Bank.*

"I don't know about this, Jillian," Tim said.

"Stop being ridiculous and give me a leg up."

Tim walked over and, going down on one knee, interlaced his fingers together to give Jillian a step up. She placed

her foot in the cradle of his hands and felt him lift her up until she was able to hoist her torso over the ledge. Jillian scrambled through the window and fell on the hardwood floor with a thump.

Jillian stood up and looked around. The house was elegantly furnished and appeared in good repair. Chestnut hardwood floors and fresh white paint gave the home a clean, warm, ready-to-move-in feeling. She moved out into the hall and explored the kitchen, parlor and the library. Across from the kitchen was an impressive dining room but the chandelier had been removed for whatever reason.

Outside, Mary and Tim were calling her name in hushed whispers. Jillian came to the open window. "What?"

"Let us in," Mary said. "We really don't want to be standing out here if a police car should roll by."

"Oh *now* you both want to come in," Jillian teased. "Okay. Meet me over by the back porch. Hopefully they haven't put a lock on that door too." Making her way to the back of the house, Jillian passed through a small area of cold air and stopped. "That's odd," she said, testing the cold spot by walking in and out of it. She held her hand out to see if there was a draft coming from one of the doorways but couldn't feel anything.

Just as she was about to continue to the rear of the house, a sudden feeling of sadness came over her. Off to her left she heard a voice call out her name in a harsh whisper. But it wasn't her name being called in an empty haunted house that made her stomach twist into knots, but the memory of the person that voice belonged to.

“Mom?” Jillian called as she scanned the barren white walls for the source of that beautiful voice.

“Jillian,” the voice sighed. “Help me.”

* * * *

Ed Justice pulled up to the house and double-checked the address. This was it all right. It looked exactly as described in the paperwork. By the front gate were two large stone gargoyles keeping a silent vigil over the quiet neighborhood street. A blue sedan was parked in the driveway and he thought he saw movement around back. Obviously he wouldn't be alone. He wondered if it was the new owner trying to thwart the lock. Well, whoever they were he was pretty sure they weren't expecting him.

He stepped out of the car and paused for a moment. He thought he felt something. It wasn't threatening, but did hold a definite edge of someone who was blessed by an impressive amount of magical power. Letting his dark power slip out, he frowned. The sun was sapping some of his strength. The morning light was much too strong for him to reach his power all the way into the house. No, he'd have to go inside.

Walking up to the front door, he removed the master key and inserted it into the lock. He made sure to make lots of noise to warn whoever might be inside that he was coming in. It would be a shame to get shot on his first day here.

* * * *

A hard knock on the back door jolted Jillian from her trance. It was Tim and Mary anxious to get in. Burying the pain in her heart, Jillian took a step toward the back door to let them in when she heard someone unlocking the front.

A tall, gorgeous man all dressed in black stepped through the front door. He moved with the restrained might and grace of a hunting shark: all coiled power and tense, patient hunger. He was quite a presence standing easily over six feet tall. He wore nothing but black from his sport jacket to his jeans, and even down to his work boots. His face was brutal perfection, reminding her of the noble countenance of a golden eagle. Hazel eyes fixed on her as he approached, and as he drew near she caught a faint scent of roasted pine.

“Who are you?” he asked.

Jillian folded her arms as a delicate heat warmed her cheeks. “My name is Jillian Cross. I own this house. Who are you?”

“I’m Chief Investigator Edward Justice of the Federal Bureau of Paranormal Investigations.” He removed a badge from his inside breast pocket. It was silver with the words ‘First Tier Warlock’ etched in black. Jillian stared at it doing her best to look bored and unimpressed. He placed it back inside his jacket. “You’re not authorized to take possession of this property yet. Didn’t you see the notice posted on the door?”

Handsome or no, Jillian didn’t like this man very much. “I threw the notice in the trash.”

“I could arrest you for that,” he said with a suggestive gleam in his eye.

Jillian took a bold step forward and held her wrists out. “So what’s stopping you?”

The investigator didn’t hesitate. Reaching behind his back, he took out a pair of silver handcuffs. They clicked ominously as he manipulated the mechanism with one hand to

open the cuffs. Jillian lowered her hands and was about to protest but he already had her. Using firm but gentle force, Ed turned her around and pressed her into the wall. Pinning her with his thick, muscular body, he snapped the handcuffs on securing Jillian's hands behind her back. But instead of pulling back, as she expected him to, he lingered, spiking anger in her mind and heat in her body.

Jillian's heart pounded out a frantic rhythm in her throat. "I can't believe you're going to arrest me for breaking into my own house," she seethed.

Ed leaned in close to her ear. "It's not your house until I certify it as clean."

"Okay, okay, you win. I'm sorry I threw away your little note. Now please let me go," Jillian said. Something was happening to her the longer he stayed close. A slow, smoky heat was building, burning, making her like this unexpected capture. She could feel his growing stiffness where his groin rested against her buttocks.

"Do you agree to follow my instructions for your safety?" he asked. His voice had grown richer, deeper.

Jillian nodded barely able to think straight. "Yes," she managed.

"Good." He unlocked her handcuffs as he took a step back, breaking their contact.

Jillian turned around to face him, rubbing her wrists. "I think you liked that a little too much."

Ed smiled. "I think you did too."

Jillian planted her hands on her hips determined not to be driven out until she could conduct a séance. "Listen," she said. "Maybe we can help each other."

Ed studied her with amused caution. "How?"

"Well, you have to conduct your investigation and I'm basically here for the same thing. Maybe we can do our investigating at the same time."

"What could you possibly be looking for?"

Cautiously backing toward the rear door, Jillian opened it and signaled for Mary and Tim to enter. They hesitated on the back porch, staring at her wide-eyed like kids fundraising for their school. Jillian beckoned them inside impatiently, giving Ed an apologetic smile. Mary and Tim stubbornly stood their ground. They apparently wanted to see how this stand-off between her and the investigator panned out. Jillian threw her hands in the air. "Someone close to me, a relative, disappeared while visiting this house and I think their spirit is still here, somewhere."

Ed stepped through the kitchen and stood by the back doorway deliberately blocking Mary and Tim from entering. "So you intend to contact this person during a séance. And then what?"

"I have a spell memorized to set their soul free, so I'll just use that," Jillian said surprised that a man who *claimed* to be a paranormal investigator had to ask her such a question.

"Do you have a lot of experience casting spells?" he asked.

"Um," Jillian said, glancing at her crew. Both of them were smirking. "No, but how hard could something like that be?"

"It could be very hard." Ed nodded as if his suspicions about her were correct. Whatever those suspicions may be. "And what if the spirit who shows up at your séance is a demon masquerading as your relative? Then what?"

Jillian was insulted. She'd know a demon if she felt one. She wasn't a *total* novice at this kind of stuff. She had studied white witchcraft for a while. "I can handle it."

Ed shook his head. "I'm sorry, Jillian. I can't let you conduct a séance yet."

"Why not?"

"Because your uncle released a lot of dark energy into this house. If you hold a séance here before we know what we're dealing with, it could put you at considerable risk," he said.

She frowned. Who the hell did this guy think he was, anyway? "Risk for what may I ask?"

"Risk for demonic possession."

"I don't believe that exists," she said, just trying to be contrary. To tell the truth, she really didn't know if it existed or not, but she'd never *seen* anyone possessed.

Tiny wrinkles formed around Ed's eyes. "Whether you believe it or not, I can assure you it does happen."

"Can I at least bring in my equipment?" she asked.

Ed's features softened. "I don't see any harm in that."

Jillian let out an exaggerated sigh. "Okay, you guys," she said to Mary and Tim who were still standing on the porch waiting. "Bring the stuff in."

"Where do you want us to put it?" Tim asked.

“Just put it in the library for now. We’ll distribute it later. That is,” she said as she smiled at Ed, “if it’s okay with the inspector.”

Ed grunted his agreement and stalked off to explore the rest of the house.

Chapter 3

The inside of the house smelled of fresh paint and polished wood floors. Ed followed Jillian through a few rooms, watching how her hips moved in those tight jeans. From above the front door a blue stained glass window cast a reflection of stars along Jillian's back as she passed nearby. There was something about this woman that was...different. He could sense it. Jillian wasn't just boasting she had power, he could feel it coming off her body like morning mist. He wanted to unravel her mystery and lay it out all over the floor.

Jillian turned on her heels to face him and raised a sculptured eyebrow. "The house doesn't seem that dangerous to me."

Ed stretched out his power trying to detect what could be lying in wait, unheard and unseen. "Things are not always as they seem."

She studied his face. "You really think there's black magic here."

"Your uncle had a remarkable reputation for casting spells," he said.

"He was a crazy old hermit who *wanted* to believe in the occult because it made him feel strong. I think the only power he really had was to make people feel afraid."

“If you didn’t think there was any truth to the rumors about your uncle, why did you bring your friends with you? Why not show up here alone?”

Jillian smiled. “You have me there. But then I couldn’t very well conduct a séance by myself.”

Ed moved through the house admiring the high ceilings and large windows. It was impossible not to be impressed by the sheer size. Every room he entered felt open and vast. Ed turned to where Jillian had been standing and was just about to tell her to stick close and not wander off on her own when he noticed she’d slipped away while he was distracted. Mary was in the dining room attaching some motion sensors to the walls. “Where did she go?” he asked Mary.

Mary pointed up the winding stairs.

Ed took the stairs two at a time. He reached the landing and scanned up and down the hall trying to pick up a clue as to where she went. Deciding on the master bedroom, he came in to find Jillian kneeling by a large cardboard box about to open it. Ed rushed over and grabbed her hand just before she was about to pull back the flaps.

Like making contact with an electrical wire, his hand tingled, shaking under the high voltage contact. For several seconds he tried to break their connection but he simply couldn’t. A small, frightened sound came from Jillian and he realized with mounting horror he was hurting her. With grim determination, he forced his mind to focus and was finally able to let go. He fell back, his chest heaving as he fought to catch his breath.

Jillian lay on her side trembling and he thought his heart would shatter watching her in so much discomfort. Taking care not to touch her again, he moved closer. "Jillian?" he whispered.

Jillian groaned and blinked up at him. "What on earth happened? Did I touch an electrical wire?" She sat up and boldly reached out, slapping her hand against his chest a few times to see if the charge would happen again. Fortunately for both of them, nothing happened.

At least, nothing happened at first.

With a sudden predatory cunning, his power slid from inside him and wrapped itself around Jillian's torso. It pulled her close, enclosing her with tentacles of potent magic. Ed had never had his power act on pure emotion before and the realization was startling. Jillian didn't resist, instead she seemed to be entranced by his hold on her, closing her eyes and leaning her head back waiting sweetly for a kiss. He moved his lips close to hers, pulling her warm breath into his nostrils and struggling with the overwhelming urge to strip her naked and have her right there.

"Let me go," she whispered.

"Not until you tell me why you came here."

"I'm looking for something."

"What?" he said, letting his gaze drink in the delicate glow of her skin. Wanting her this bad was killing him.

"Something that belongs to me."

"Tell me what it is and we can look for it together," he said.

“No,” Jillian said. She was squirming now, getting uncomfortable with how tightly he held her. Ed loosened his grip and she tried to bolt but he tightened it just enough to hold her still. “You’re hurting me.”

Ed moved his lips as close to her ear as he could without making contact. “Tell me what I want to know and I’ll release you.”

Quick footsteps came up the stairs. Her friends were coming. Ed released Jillian and caught her just before she swooned.

“Oh my God, Jillian!” Mary said, racing into the room to help her friend. Ed stepped back and let them help Jillian outside for some air. He could feel them watching him, accusing him with their eyes of doing something to Jillian none of them understood. But Jillian’s friends were the least of his worries. The young woman was attracted to this area for a reason; all Ed had to find out was what had summoned her here. And for what grim purpose.

Chapter 4

Jillian sat on the steps outside the house trying to clear her head. Ed walked outside and took a seat one step above her. Jillian ignored him.

Mary adjusted her glasses. "I'm going to the car to get you some water out of the cooler," she said.

Tim cast a nervous glance at Ed. Then, after a few awkward moments sitting with Jillian, he slipped off to explore the outside of the house.

"Are you feeling better?" Ed asked her.

Jillian looked back at him. "I guess. This is your fault. What the hell did you do to me anyway?"

"I didn't do anything to you. We just must share some..." he paused for dramatic effect, "chemistry."

"I don't want you using your sorcery on me," she seethed.

"You shouldn't have run off without my permission. In the future, I don't want you to do that again. As for using *sorcery* on you, I can assure you what happened between us was as unexpected for me as it was for you."

Jillian rolled her eyes. "So you say."

Ed ignored her snide comment. "I don't feel it's wise for you to stay here, Jillian."

"Well, it's my house and I'm staying in it. The only threat I can see here is *you*."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"You're the one being ridiculous," she shot back. "I'm staying."

"I could order you to stay out," he offered.

Jillian stood up and glared down at him. *No one is going to tell me what to do on my own property.* "Are you placing me under some kind of arrest?"

"No," Ed replied.

"Then you can pretty much bet I'm not leaving here." Mary returned and handed Jillian a cold bottle of water. Jillian took a sip and stared up at the house. "You should also know that I'm planning to conduct a séance tonight."

Now it was Ed's turn to stand up. "That's a dangerous idea, Jillian. No one is quite sure what you're dealing with here. If you open up a spiritual doorway before I have a chance to conduct a thorough investigation, there's no telling what might come through."

"You sound like a superstitious old lady," she said amused.

"Listen," he said, his hazel eyes growing darker. "Just give me a few days to finish checking things out. That's all I ask. Just a few days."

Jillian chewed her bottom lip. "And I can stay at the house while you conduct your investigation?"

Ed sighed. "As long as you promise to do as I say until I clear this place. Can we agree on that?"

Jillian studied his face. *What's one week?* "All right," she said. "But two days is all you get."

Chapter 5

After reaching a truce with Ed, Jillian spent the rest of the morning helping Tim and Mary set up the paranormal monitoring equipment all over the house. She also kept a suspicious eye on Ed as he wandered about taking notes. Jillian didn't know much about witches or warlocks apart from what she'd picked up while dabbling in the occult a few years ago, but there was undoubtedly something strange about Ed Justice. She remembered back to when they'd been in one of the upstairs rooms together and he'd held her captive with his power. Now that was an impressive feat. *Who has the power to restrain someone by a sheer act of will?*

And the worst part about it was she'd actually *liked* being under his control. Heck, she'd even almost kissed the man. What the hell was she thinking? Well one thing was for sure, she was going to have to stay as far away from him as possible.

Grabbing her suitcase from her trunk, Jillian lugged it up the stairs and tossed it on the king-sized bed in the master bedroom. It was one of only two beds in the house and Jillian was glad she wasn't going to have to sleep on the hard floor. But just as she unzipped her case, she noticed another suitcase in the room: a dark brown one.

Oh no, he is not going to sleep in this room with me.

Jillian turned on her heels to go out and find Ed when he surprised her by walking into the room. She planted her hands on her hips and frowned down at his suitcase. "What is this?"

Ed's dark eyes shone with evil joy. "My stuff."

"Why is it in this room?"

"Because it would be very inconvenient to put it in a room where I'm not staying. Don't you think?"

Jillian couldn't believe his cheek. "You, sir, are not staying in this room with me."

"Yes I am. I thought I made myself clear on this matter. I'll leave when the investigation is complete."

"You can't seriously be thinking of sleeping in the same bed with me," she retorted.

"Sure. It's a big enough bed. It can hold both of us comfortably."

"How do I know you're not going to try something?"

Ed let out a wicked laugh. "You'll just have to be strong enough for both of us."

Suddenly, a window to their left slammed shut so hard the glass cracked. Jillian felt a cold chill move over her skin and she shivered. Ed walked over and examined the window. He lifted it up a few times with difficulty. It was clear the window hadn't just fallen on its own.

"What the heck was that?" Jillian asked, wrapping her arms around herself to keep warm.

"Poltergeist." He turned to stare at her. "You seem to attract a lot of supernatural energy. I just can't tell yet whether that's good or bad."

"I don't know what a poltergeist would want with me." Ed came closer, taking off his black blazer. He held it out in offering to her. Jillian hesitated, then took it and draped it over her shoulders. "Thank you."

"You mentioned you came here to conduct a séance. Who are you trying to contact?" he asked.

Jillian sat on the edge of the mattress, pulling his blazer tighter around her. "My mom. Both my parents died not far from here and I think my uncle..." She fell into a grim silence. Even just talking about this stuff made her feel like a nutcase.

"You think your uncle did what?" Ed asked.

"I think my uncle took her remains and buried them here in this house...somewhere."

Ed nodded. "That was a tough confession. Being here must be very hard for you."

"I don't *know* he did it for a fact," she said, trying to stay objective.

"But you suspect he did."

"Yeah."

Ed scanned the room as if the answer to all their questions might be written on the walls. "If your mother's remains are really here, Jillian, that may be who our poltergeist is. But I can promise you one thing. If we work together, we'll find her."

"I didn't think ghost hunting was part of your job description," she joked.

"My job is to keep the public safe from supernatural entities. If your mom's remains have been taken for a diabolical

purpose, that sounds like something that would concern the Bureau.”

Jillian shrugged feeling the chill in the room finally fade. “I guess you’re right.” She handed the blazer back to him.

“You hang onto it. Just in case you get another chill,” he said.

She smiled at him. “You know, Ed, I’m starting to suspect you might be a nice guy after all.”

He chuckled. “Just don’t let that get around.”

Chapter 6

Night rolled in quietly on the wings of a large silver moon. Jillian wasn't much of a night owl so she excused herself early, brushed her teeth and went to bed. Unfortunately though, sleep didn't come as easily as it usually did. Instead the specter of Ed haunted her.

Oh he was quiet enough but his simple presence sitting in a wing chair nestled in the corner was a definite distraction. The chair was bathed in beautiful frosted moonlight and he seemed to drink in every drop of its soft, eerie light. Ed had found the chair in the downstairs library and moved it up to the room earlier in the day while the rest of them had finished setting up the paranormal equipment. He'd placed it right by one of the large windows and once night had come, he had settled in it and hadn't moved. It was unnerving to say the least.

Jillian had finally had enough of his weirdness. "Are you just going to sit there all night and stare at me?"

"You sound like you're asking me to come to bed," he said. His tone was smooth and sexy. It awoke a tender sensuality hidden deep within her.

"You know what I mean," she replied.

Without uttering another word, Ed rose from the chair and unbuttoned his pants. He approached the bed letting the

fabric slide down his muscular thighs. Jillian's cheeks burned when she realized he wasn't wearing any briefs. She wanted to look away but once she caught a glimpse of his beautiful, thick cock she just couldn't. He was a fine specimen of male flesh and her passion was riding high.

Ed pulled back the cotton sheets and climbed into the bed next to her. Jillian was so excited she could barely breathe without panting. So she did the only thing she could think of, she turned her back to Ed and faced the wall. But no matter how tired she was sleep wouldn't come. Instead, her body lay there coiled like a tight spring waiting—no wanting—this man to touch her.

Then, with contact as gentle as a baby's breath he ran his fingers along the flesh of her arm. Jillian held her breath, fearful and excited at the same time. It had been at least two years since she'd had good sex, but should she be having sex with *him*? Ed scooted closer, spooning against her back. She could feel the insistent push of his erection against her inner thigh and her pussy became shockingly wet. A soft kiss tickled the back of her neck.

"You smell so good," he mumbled in her ear.

Jillian licked her dry lips. "Thank you but why don't you go back over to your side of the bed?"

Ed chuckled and the sound was dark and sinful. His reply was to brush his fingers against the front of her shirt teasing the nipples into tight little nubs. A sweet agony throbbed between her legs hungry for whatever he could offer her.

"You don't really want me to go away, do you?" His fingers grew bolder, slipping past the border of her panties and

roaming lower until Jillian placed her hand over his to stop his exploration.

"I need to get some sleep," Jillian complained, not meaning a word of it.

"You'll get plenty of sleep when I'm done."

Jillian squirmed in protest, momentarily taking her hand off his. Ed responded by pushing his hand all the way down into her panties until his fingers found the wet center of her lust. Jillian froze and her cheeks burned hotter.

Ed let out a tiny gasp as if he'd found a treasure chest of gold. "So wet," he whispered. Pulling the panel of her panties aside, Ed ran the mushroom tip of his cock through her folds.

Blood filled Jillian's ears as her body thrilled at the intimate contact. *Why am I letting him do this to me? Oh...because it feels sooo good.*

"You like toys, Jillian?" he asked, removing something small from under the bed.

"I'm not sure what you mean."

A gentle buzz filled the silence, and before Jillian could demand to see what he had in his hand, he'd slipped it between her legs and rested it against her clit. A tickling vibration sent plumes of joy up her spine. Pleasure like none she'd ever known before filled her. Her thoughts disappeared only to be replaced with white-hot need. Ed maneuvered the tiny vibrator against her pussy, teasing here, tickling there until Jillian was right on the edge of an orgasm. Then pushing his chest against her back, he bucked his cock into her drenched channel and filled her up. Penetration brought an intense and immediate climax. Jillian twisted and jerked, losing complete

control of her body for at least a full minute. Every pump of Ed's cock brought another wave of desperate lust until Jillian lost track of how many orgasms she'd ultimately had. And when Ed finally pulled out, Jillian was deliciously sore and satisfied. *Maybe working with this warlock won't be so bad after all.*

Then he wrapped his arms around her and squeezed her affectionately. "Good night, Jillian."

"Good night, Ed."

Chapter 7

Ed awoke with a start, sitting up in bed with his heart pounding. He wasn't quite sure *why* he'd woken so suddenly but he was sure that whatever it was, wasn't good. Reaching out next to him in the dark, he felt for Jillian's warm body but she wasn't there. Edgy now, he got up and pulled his pants on. He strained to hear her moving around in the bathroom across the room. Nothing.

He walked out into the hall and felt the soft carpet runner under his feet. "Jillian," he said softly, not wanting to wake Tim or Mary in the other bedrooms.

Ed slinked down the hallway. Jillian wasn't in the hall bathroom either. Creeping down the stairs, Ed caught the faint scent of Jillian's body and was annoyed when his cock filled with blood. What a strong and interesting reaction. He couldn't remember ever getting this hot this quickly for any woman. But then Jillian wasn't just *any* woman. She was a very powerful white witch, even though she didn't choose to utilize all her gifts. With a little encouragement and training, she could be an impressive power. The only curiosity was that her power seemed to be stronger during the day. His in contrast was three times stronger at night, especially during a full moon.

At the bottom of the stairs he paused to listen for movement. The faint sound of a pencil scratching on paper came from the kitchen. Ed walked toward the kitchen trying to be as quiet as possible. If Jillian was sleepwalking, the last thing he wanted to do was to shock her.

He entered the dark kitchen and paused at the doorway. Jillian sat at the Formica table, her back ramrod straight scribbling on a stack of blank papers. Moving closer, Ed noticed she'd already gone through several sheets. Most were meaningless scribbles but a few actually had words on them, like: *buried* and *bones*. Ed looked into her face and was alarmed by her expression. Jillian's eyes were wide open and glassy staring at the far wall. Her lovely pink lips were fixed into a grim line, only moving to occasionally whisper something Ed couldn't hear. She wrote constantly, using her whole arm to make the words or patterns on the paper. Sometimes she was aware enough to push off one full page and move onto a blank one. Ed had never seen automatic writing before but he knew that's what she was doing.

But it wasn't her channeling a spirit that worried him; it was that they didn't know what *kind* of spirit she was channeling. Demons were well known to hide their identities behind a person's supposed loved one only to gain access to that person's mind and soul. And once they were inside of someone, it was hell getting them out.

As much as he hated to do it, Ed knew he had to wake her up. She'd be upset but better that than her doing this alone. Easing himself into the chair next to her, Ed placed his hand on her shoulder and said, "Jillian?"

Jillian trembled and flinched like he'd slapped her in the face. Her lovely eyes blinked and then her gaze fixed on him. She glanced down at the papers. "What's going on?"

"I don't know. I just found you here doing this," he said, picking up one of the papers and holding it out to her.

Jillian took it from him and examined it. Her hand flew to her forehead. "Oh my God! I must have been channeling my mother." She read a few more pages, separating those with the clear writing from those with just scribbles. "Why did you wake me? I was so close to finding out where he'd buried her."

Ed frowned. Finding her mother's remains was so important to Jillian, she wasn't thinking things through like she should be. "You shouldn't be channeling *anything* unless I'm present," he scolded. "You're assuming that was your mother. You don't know that for a fact. You could have been channeling a malevolent spirit or a demon. Who knows what spirits are residing in this house? It's my job to make sure you stay safe, Jillian, and I intend to do just that."

"I think I know the difference between my own mother and a demon, Ed," she retorted angrily.

"Why? Because they showed you their ID?"

"Now you're just being an ass." She got up and grabbed the important papers off the table tapping the edge to make them straight. "And for your information, I didn't come down here to channel spirits. I thought I heard one of the sensors go off."

Ed stood up too. "Why didn't you wake me?"

She shrugged looking vulnerable. "I don't know."

“You see, Jillian?” he growled. He tried and failed to control his temper. “That’s exactly what demons look for in their victims, a careless mistake—a moment of innocence. Then they strike.”

“I think you’re being a little melodramatic.”

Ed slammed his fist on the table and his power slipped out of his control. The serpentine power fell to the floor with an audible thud and snapped two legs off the kitchen table. Jillian cried out in alarm and took several steps back.

Calming his mind, he pulled his power back and took a few deep breaths. “I’m sorry,” he muttered.

Jillian’s fright disappeared quickly. Soon she didn’t seem frightened at all. Instead she looked fascinated. “That’s some temper you have there, Ed.”

“I shouldn’t have let it escape me like that. Again, I’m sorry.”

She considered this for a moment. Then she said, “Well, I’m sorry too. I know you’re just looking out for me.”

He walked over and wrapped his arms around her. “Why don’t we forget about this and go back to bed?”

“Okay,” she said still holding onto her writing papers. “But only if you don’t break any more furniture.”

Ed laughed despite his anxiety. “Okay. I’ll behave. I promise.”

Chapter 8

Ed hadn't slept much after that so he decided he might as well go downstairs and make some coffee. Now he sat at the kitchen table enjoying a cup and thinking about Jillian. It was early, much too early for the other houseguests to be awake. On the table before him were the leftover pages she'd been writing on. Most of the paper surface was covered with scribbled writings, none of which made any sense. He hated to admit it but he was very worried about her. Jillian was the perfect target for a malevolent spirit or ambitious demon. She had lots of untrained power and she was on a quest to find what had become of her mother's remains. The more eager a person was for answers, the more open they were to deception. Ed had seen it all before. But this time it was someone he cared about and he wasn't going to stand by and watch Jillian fall victim to paranormal trickery.

Another thing that worried him was this house. He could feel it teeming with energy like a panther waiting to pounce on its unknowing victim. The forces at work here had already disabled Jillian's equipment, although Tim insisted it was the faulty wiring. Ed knew better. Whatever evil Jillian's uncle had practiced in this house had remained long after his death. It filled every nook and cranny, waiting, watching for the right time to make its introduction.

Ed wrapped his hand around the coffee mug and realized it was cold. Then a chill came into the air, one so shocking and potent it made the hairs on his arms stand on end. He shuddered, listening carefully for a message from beyond. A spirit drifted into the room dressed in a t-shirt and jeans. She looked a little like Jillian. *This must be Jillian's mother, or a spirit pretending to be her.* Moving over to the table, the ghost let out a mournful sigh and blew on the scattered papers. They shifted around on the tabletop and Ed placed his hand over them so they wouldn't fall off. When he looked up again the apparition was gone taking the cold with it.

No message no nothing. Ed was disappointed. He was hoping the spirit, no matter who it was, might tell him *something* useful to help Jillian in her quest.

He got up from the table with his cold coffee, intending to dump it and pour another cup when he happened to glance down. The papers had reshuffled and resting on top was one scribbling that looked as though it might be a word upside down. Ed turned the paper to examine it more carefully. There, amid the scribbles, was one clear word: *gargoyle*.

His thoughts immediately raced to the front of the house and the two large stone gargoyles situated by the gates.

Maybe it's nothing. But then again...

Outside the morning sun was just touching the horizon. He'd better wake Jillian. She'd definitely want to explore this new clue.

Chapter 9

It was just after six in the morning when Ed woke Jillian up and tried to drag her out of bed. Normally she was an early riser but this...this was ridiculous.

"Wake up, Jillian," Ed barked. "I have something important to show you."

Jillian rubbed her eyes and sat up. She scooted to the edge of the mattress and sat there certain her hair must be standing on end. She took a moment to glare at the warlock to show her displeasure. Running her hands over her hair, she tried to smooth out some locks but soon just gave up. "What are you going on about?" she asked.

"I think you may have written down a clue to your mom's whereabouts," he replied, tossing her a hairbrush.

Jillian glared at him harder and ran the brush through her hair a few times to tame it. "When did I write this clue down?"

Ed frowned. "You wrote it down when you did that automatic writing exercise last night. Please don't tell me you don't remember."

The truth was, Jillian *barely* remembered but Ed didn't need to know that. "Oh yeah. So what's the clue say?"

"You wrote the word *gargoyle*," he said.

"That's it? That's your big clue."

"There are two stone gargoyles just by the front gates," he said, impatiently gesturing to the bedroom door. "Let's go see if maybe there's something near there."

Jillian rubbed her face. She thought she'd picked up all the legible writings from last night and put them in safekeeping. *Now all of a sudden Ed thinks he's seeing a word that probably isn't there.* "Are you sure you saw the word *gargoyle*?"

Ed pulled a folded piece of paper out of his pocket. He carefully unfolded it and handed it to her. Her original writing was in pencil but Ed had outlined the word in red. It sure as heck looked like the word gargoyle all right. She stared at it a little too long for his royal highness and he got mad.

"Will you get your jeans on and get out of bed?" he asked.

Skeptical that he hadn't just *imagined* he found that word, Jillian climbed out of bed and crept into the bathroom.

"Now where are you going?"

Jillian made a face at him. "I have to pee. Is that okay with you?"

"Hurry up."

"I'll take as long as is necessary," she retorted. "It's not like the gargoyles are going anywhere."

"I thought you wanted to find your mother's remains? Here is a great opportunity to do just that and you're toddling around like some old woman in a nursing home."

"Okay, Ed, now you're really starting to piss me off. Why don't you wait for me downstairs?" And before he could utter a word of protest, Jillian slammed the door in his face.

Chapter 10

The gargoyles were remarkable pieces of art. Standing close to eight feet tall, each of them had impressive detail like sharp fanged teeth and narrow evil eyes. If Jillian had not been afraid Ed would make fun of her, she would have just skipped the creepy things and stayed up at the house. Instead she was here at the front gate with Ed climbing all around these two behemoths looking for God knows what.

After several minutes trying to look like she knew what she was searching for, Jillian finally fell back on her butt and said, "This is crazy. There's nothing here."

Ed regarded her with those mysterious hazel eyes. "I have a gut feeling there is. Keep looking."

"I thought warlocks used their powers to find out things."

"We use our powers if we can but most of the time we use our brains," he said. "Now help me search around the base."

For what?" Jillian asked, not bothering to hide how exasperated she was.

"Anything unusual," he replied, running his thick muscular hands along the stone base.

A dark blue Lincoln Continental turned onto the end of the street and headed right for the house. She wasn't expecting anyone and she doubted Ed was either. Jillian waited for a

few seconds to see if it turned around. It didn't. If anything it seemed to be going faster. "What about a strange blue car driving right for us? Would you consider that to be unusual?"

Ed glanced up and frowned. His eyes narrowed into menacing slits. "Maybe, it depends. Could this be someone you're expecting?"

"Nope," Jillian said, also watching the car approach. "You?"

"Not me either."

The car pulled up alongside them and the passenger's window rolled down. Ed leaned in to talk to the driver but Jillian stayed just behind the warlock. *Someone has to call the cops if Ed gets abducted by a weirdo.*

A skinny old man glared at them both from the driver's seat. "Jillian Cross?"

"That's me," Jillian said, staying right where she was behind Ed.

The old man handed a manila envelope to Ed. "I'm suing you."

Ed handed the envelope back to her but she didn't open it. "For what?"

"This house," the old man said. "My name is Leonard Hack and I was your grandfather Archibald's associate. He promised me this house upon his death and I fully intend to get back what is rightfully mine!"

"There's no mention of you anywhere in my uncle's documents," Jillian retorted.

Leonard shrugged. "That proves nothing. I have a promissory note."

"May we see a copy of this note?" Ed asked.

"And *who* are you, sir?"

"He's my boyfriend," Jillian shot back, noticing Ed glanced at her. "And he works for the Bureau of Paranormal Investigation so I warn you, if you're trying to pull anything, he'll find out about it."

Leonard gave her a grim smile full of yellow teeth. They reminded Jillian of a rat's teeth. "I can assure you, young lady, this is all aboveboard. But I must also insist you not disturb *anything* in the house or property until this lawsuit is settled. Do you hear me?"

Ed took a step back from the vehicle. "Then you'd better get a court order."

"I guess I'll just have to do just that!" Leonard said, revving his engine. Then he stepped on the gas and roared off down the road.

Jillian fanned herself with the envelope. "I hope you didn't mind me telling him you're my boyfriend. It was just the first thing that came into my head."

Ed grinned. "Don't be silly. I don't mind at all. Besides, I guess I am your boyfriend." He put his arm around her and they started back toward the house when Jillian thought she saw a crack in the driveway right by one of the gargoyles.

"Wait," she said, kneeling down. Rolling up her sleeve, she reached into the crack and felt something cool and metallic. "I have something." Grabbing it by the chain, Jillian pulled out a large necklace. A strange amulet hung from a silver chain. "I think I found what my mother's spirit wanted me to find." She held it up so Ed could get a better look at it.

“You sure have. But the question is, what is it and what does it do?”

“My grandfather has a huge occult library. We can see if there’s any clues in there,” Jillian said. “We probably have a lot of reading to do.”

“You’re certainly right about that.”

Chapter 11

Ed sat at the kitchen table and removed the lawsuit paperwork from the envelope. He was no lawyer but he could tell immediately that the papers looked faked. The first problem he noticed right off the bat was there were several spelling mistakes. Lawyers were usually very precise. No self-respecting law firm would allow spelling mistakes on their final documentation. The next thing he thought was suspicious was the smudges on the papers. It looked like these documents had been dug up from under a rock somewhere.

Leaving the documents on the table, he went into the library where Jillian was. She was holding a ladder so Tim could attach energy sensors to the molding. Ed took a second to admire the generous swell of her lovely breasts. Back to the task at hand.

“Either of you see a phone book anywhere?” he asked.

“I think there’s one over there,” Jillian said. She was pointing to a medium stack of books in the corner. “But I have no idea how old it is.”

Ed went over and saw the large yellow book on the bottom of the stack. He dug it out and flipped right to the lawyer section.

“Are you ordering pizza?” Tim asked. He finished attaching the sensor and was climbing down the ladder.

"No, I'm searching for a lawyer," Ed replied as he scanned the pages.

"What do you need a lawyer for?" Jillian asked. "You planning to countersue Leonard?"

"If my suspicions are correct, I won't have to," Ed said. The listings were in alphabetical order and he hadn't found the law firm that had drawn up Leonard's lawsuit.

Jillian came over her pretty lips set in a frown. "I don't follow you."

Ed held off answering her question. He pulled out his cell phone and called directory assistance. When the operator came on the line he asked for the number to the law firm. As he suspected, there was no listing. He thanked the operator and hung up.

"There is no lawsuit," he told Jillian.

"But he..." Jillian stammered, confused.

"There's no *real* lawsuit," Ed explained, "because the law firm who supposedly drew up those papers doesn't exist. Leonard is lying to scare you out of here."

"What a dirty trick," she said, folding her arms and scowling.

"Maybe so, but look on the bright side. At least we caught on to him."

"But who knows what he'll try next?" she said.

Ed grinned. "We'll just have to keep our eyes open for more of his tricks."

* * * *

The library at the house could have rivaled any occult bookstore in the world. From floor to ceiling there were

shelves and shelves of books, most looking old and valuable. Jillian sat at the large center table examining the amulet. It was a large piece, almost the size of her palm with writing in the center, none of which was in English. Ed sat across from her frowning.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“There’s a bad energy coming from that thing,” he said. “I can’t exactly define it, but I can sense something corrupt.”

Jillian scanned the walls. “Well surely there must be a book in this room that might be able to tell us what this thing is.” She got up and began examining the book titles. Ed hesitated then got up to help her look. While he was preoccupied, Jillian took the opportunity to stare at him. What an extraordinary man he was but her attraction to him went far deeper than his handsomeness. No, there was a force in him that seemed to charge her and pull her in. When the moon rose at night she could feel his power growing deeper, richer, as it filled the room waiting to do his bidding. But the strangest thing of all was how he kept that power from touching her. It was almost as if he feared contaminating her with it. She’d have to ask him about it tonight when they were getting ready for bed.

“Here’s something,” Ed said, pulling a thick volume from the shelf. He placed it on the table and opened it to a chapter on medallions and amulets. Jillian came up behind him to watch. He placed the amulet Jillian found next to the book and examined each illustration. After several pages with images that looked nothing like it, they finally found a match.

“Here,” Ed said, pointing to one of the pictures.

“Well?” Jillian said impatiently. “What does it say?”

“It says that this amulet is called *Favor’s Beast* and it’s one of the three original cursed objects tainted from a spell cast by Archibald Cross. The original spell was called *Bringing Down the Moon*.”

“What does the original spell do?” Jillian asked.

“It increases the power of the sorcerer who cast it.”

“Doesn’t the spell die when the spell caster does?”

“Unfortunately not. After your grandfather died, the spell remained even though it was confined to this house. That’s why we’ve both been experiencing such power surges. The spell is working on us,” he said.

“So what are the three cursed objects?”

Ed ran his finger over the chapter. “Apart from what we just found, there is supposed to be a Raven’s Claw and White Witch bones.”

“I already have the Raven’s Claw. It was given to me just before my grandfather’s cremation. He’d been wearing it around his neck. As for the witch’s bones, that must be my mother’s remains. That’s the reason behind him stealing them after her death. He wanted to complete the spell. That’s why she haunts this place. She can’t get free!”

Ed rubbed the back of his neck. “Well the good news is we can reverse the spell and free your mother’s spirit, but we don’t have much time. The reversal spell must be done on the full moon this Thursday, and it’s already Tuesday,” he said.

“And we still don’t have a clue where my mother’s bones are buried,” Jillian said thoughtfully.

“We’re just going to have to look harder. Her remains must be buried in this house somewhere. Your grandfather would have needed them nearby to maintain the spell.”

“But where?” Jillian said, pacing. “This house sits on an acre and a half. That’s a huge area to search.”

“I just thought of another problem,” Ed said.

“I can’t wait.”

“We still have Leonard and that fake lawsuit on our back. Who knows what he might try next? That guy must know about the spell and wants to increase his own power by getting possession of this house.”

“No wonder Leonard didn’t want us touching anything. He wanted to conduct a search himself,” Jillian said furious. “We sure have our work cut out for us.”

Ed took her hand and squeezed. “Don’t worry, Jillian. We’ll solve this problem together. But let’s get Tim and Mary in here. We can sure use some extra bodies for our search party.”

Chapter 12

They split up their search of the house by dividing it from top to bottom. Ed and Jillian paired up to search the attic and upper floors while Tim and Mary started in the basement to work up to the main floor. Everyone was to meet in the dining room when they were done, unless of course they found the bones. In that case they were to round up the others immediately.

Ed walked into the attic first, straining his senses to feel anything that might be a danger to Jillian. Feeling nothing, he eventually let her come in. She gave him a strange look and walked to the center of the room. Planting her hands on her hips, she said, "There sure are a lot of boxes up here."

"And we have to search each and every one of them," Ed grumbled.

Jillian went to one large box and peeled the packing tap off the top. "I'm surprised you can't use your warlock powers to see inside this stuff. It would sure save us a lot of time."

"I'm not a psychic, Jillian," Ed replied.

"But you *are* a warlock." She lifted the flaps and dug into the box contents. Finding nothing, she closed it up again and moved on to a smaller box on the floor. "What does a warlock do anyway?"

Ed grabbed a crowbar and pried open a wooden crate. "We're basically male witches but, some of us, as in my case, get stronger during the full moon."

"My mom was a full-fledged white witch. She tried to teach me some spells when I was younger but I was never any good at it. All the spells I cast never seemed to do anything."

Ed stopped what he was doing and watched her. A small beam of sunlight fell through a gap in the attic window and played across the pale skin of her lovely face. She was suddenly so beautiful his heart ached. He wanted her like he'd never wanted any other woman and he became obsessed with having her *now*. Without thinking, Ed let his power escape him. Long invisible tentacles erupted from his center hitting the ground with a rather loud thud. They slithered toward Jillian who crouched innocently over the small box she had just opened.

His power wrapped around her waist and legs, turning her to face him. She let out a surprised gasp and stiffened. Her eyes widened in fear. "What has me?"

"It's just me," he rumbled in a low seductive voice. "Don't fight."

"What are you doing?"

"Seducing you," he said half-joking.

Jillian leaned her head back and let out a soft sigh. Her body relaxed. "I think I kind of like it."

Ed let out an evil chuckle. *How had I known she would like this? I don't know. I just did.*

Focusing his energy, he wrapped two of the tentacles around her legs while two more unfastened her jeans. Then with gentle restraint he lifted her hands above her head and

held them there with yet two more. Jillian squirmed under his control, clearly enjoying the feel of his power as it slid cool and smooth across her skin. More invisible tentacles moved up under her shirt, lifting it off her torso along with her dark pink bra. Within moments he had all of her clothing on the floor next to her lush, writhing body.

A fleeting moment of guilt filled Ed knowing that he was using his power to entice and corrupt Jillian but, as much as he knew he should stop, he just couldn't bring himself to do it. Instead he took this game a step further and wrapped the tentacles around her ankles and thighs, opening them wide. The delicate pink flesh of her pussy sent his lust reeling and soon the only thoughts that entered his mind were dark and carnal ones.

Ed was riveted. Taking a few bold steps forward he directed one of the tentacles to tickle Jillian's exposed clit. She bucked wildly. "Oh, Ed," she said in a breathy whisper. "That feels so good... Mmmm..."

Transfixed by her sexual energy, Ed let his power grow bolder, tickling her swollen clit faster and faster until her slick folds glistened in welcome. Walking up between her outstretched legs, he unbuttoned and unzipped his pants kneeling into the decadent valley of her thighs. Placing the head of his cock against her open passage, he concentrated on tightening the tentacles around her limbs so Jillian was completely at his mercy. Then he moved one tentacle down to tickle and tease her butt. With a fierce and angry lust, he pushed into her hot wet channel, moaning with delight as her slick muscles clamped down on him.

Jillian climaxed instantly, screaming his name as her hips pumped to get more of him inside her. Then Ed released her and her legs flew around his hips, riding him like a wild woman. Her next screaming orgasm was his undoing, milking the seed from his cock in a frenzy of hunger and release.

* * * *

Jillian lay on the floor, her body humming with potent energy. Groaning, she rolled onto her side and grabbed her panties. With trembling hands she slipped them over her still quivering thighs. She turned her head and glanced over at Ed who had laid on his back next to her, his semi-erect cock the only thing naked about him. Just the memory of being held by his incredible power made her flesh thrill.

"That was incredible," she whispered.

"I'm sorry, Jillian," Ed said softly. "I should have warned you about the dark side of my power. I hope it didn't frighten you."

Jillian smiled. "Hell, no. That was some of the best sex I've ever had. How did you *do* that thing with the invisible tentacles?"

He chuckled. "It's a leftover spell from when I used to use my powers for...other things."

"Like what?"

Ed tucked his cock back into his pants but didn't bother to fasten them. "I used to be a practitioner of the black arts, just like your grandfather. I got so notorious after a while the Feds nicknamed me the Black Prince."

The title sounded familiar and Jillian remembered reading about the Black Prince in the newspaper a few years back. “Didn’t they send you to prison?”

“Almost,” Ed said, standing up and helping Jillian to her feet. He picked up her clothes and handed them to her. “But I agreed to work for the Feds and they pardoned me.”

Jillian took her clothes from him and got dressed. “So you know a lot about what’s been going on here.”

“Let’s just say I know enough.” He went over to some more boxes they hadn’t looked through yet. “Come on. We have a lot of places to search and not a lot of time.”

Jillian let out a small sigh and resumed her search. “I think that’s supposed to be my line.”

Chapter 13

After a full day of searching, Jillian could think of only one solution: they had to conduct a séance. All she had to do was convince Ed of that. Unfortunately there was no doubt he'd be opposed to the idea. He'd made his feelings known often enough. She found his concern for her safety sweet but it annoyed her at the same time. Jillian scowled, anticipating his objections. *I've done séances before, damn it. I know what I'm doing.*

Jillian watched Ed as he sipped a beer in the library studying a crude map of the house. Ed had already let Tim and Mary go off to get pizza since they hadn't found anything either, but he was still determined.

Jillian walked over to the large bay window and stared out at the approaching night. "I think we've overlooked something."

Ed put his beer down and gave her his full attention. "What's that?"

"A séance," she replied, watching the tiny lines around his eyes deepen.

"You want to channel your mother." It was a simple, disapproving statement of fact and she resented his parental tone.

She leaned against the wall and stared at him for a full minute. "Yes. What's so wrong with that? I *know* her spirit is here, Ed. She'll contact me again. I'm sure of it."

"Either her or some other spirit inhabiting this house. Jillian, you know better than anyone you can't be sure who'll inhabit your body. This house has some very dark forces at work. What if you channel an entity you can't handle?"

"That's what I have you for," she said with an offhanded grin.

Ed shook his head slowly. "I'm just not comfortable with you exposing yourself like that."

"Your concern is really sweet, and I love you for it, but as you said, we're running out of time. Please trust me. I know what I'm doing."

Finally he surrendered with a shrug. "When do you want to do this?"

"Tonight, after Tim and Mary come back."

"Okay," Ed said. "I guess we'd better get set up so we don't waste anymore time."

"Thanks, Ed," Jillian said with a soft smile.

"Thank me after the séance."

Chapter 14

The séance began at ten thirty. Tim and Mary sat at the round table in the kitchen holding hands and looking pensive. If either one objected to this spiritual exercise neither of them was saying a word. Ed half expected one of them to make a bathroom excuse and sneak off for the night. He sure wouldn't blame them if they did. This wasn't his idea of a great evening either.

Ed sat on Jillian's right feeling like he was about to jump out of his skin. All this communing with the spirit world reminded him of his long deceased girlfriend Sarah. Like Jillian, she'd been a gifted witch, but Sarah had a morbid taste for the dark side of everything. One night, against his advice, she'd summoned a spirit who claimed to be her grandmother but ended up being a powerful demon. That malevolent spirit had seduced her into a life of crime and drugs before the demon eventually persuaded her to kill herself. The memory filled Ed with a million regrets. Was there more he could have done to save her? He would probably never know. But one thing was for certain, he wouldn't make the same mistake with Jillian. Ed was much savvier now and had a lot more experience with demons.

"Are you okay?" Jillian asked.

"Fine. Why?"

“Your palms are sweating,” she replied.

He glanced at Tim and Mary. Tim glanced away but Mary gave him a friendly grin. They knew how worried he was about Jillian. “Well it’s no secret I’m a little nervous.”

“I’ve done this before, Ed.” Jillian was trying to reassure him but it wasn’t working.

To keep the peace he gave her his most pleasant grin. When she continued to stare at him, he said, “Can we get this over with?”

Jillian pursed her lips and closed her eyes. She took her hand out of Ed’s and placed both hands palm up on the table in front of her. On her right were several sharpened pencils and a stack of paper. “Spirits of this house, I summon thee. Send to me the spirit of my mother, Julie, whose remains were brought to this house for a sinister purpose. Help us find her bones so we may release her and all of you to the afterlife you deserve.”

A few dishes in the cabinets began to rattle. The window in the kitchen banged open and blew the curtains over the sink. “Oh, Mother,” Jillian continued, “I feel your energy. Come into me now. Come into me and tell us where your bones lie.”

The table lifted from the floor a few times, slamming down over and over again. Jillian’s eyes remained closed tight but in spite of that, she was able to reach out and grab a pencil on her first try. She held it in her fist so tight her knuckles turned white. Ed peeled off a piece of paper and placed it under her pencil. Jillian began writing immediately.

Chapter 15

The entity came on Jillian fast...*really* fast, causing her to suck in her breath and hold it for several seconds. A sensation not unlike sand on skin scratched up and down her arms causing her to shudder. The entity was calming itself, moving in to use her flesh and she was allowing the contact. Jillian's hand twitched and it took her a moment to realize she was writing. Ed reached out and took her hand, flexing and writing without her willing it to do so, and placed it on a stack of papers.

Words and images flooded Jillian's mind. Their potent energy rushed immediately to her hand and onto the paper in great scribbles of fast script. Jillian tried to stop it or slow it down but she simply no longer had control. Her mother's voice joined in now, speaking in rushed phrases Jillian couldn't understand. The outside world melted away leaving her alone in the crowded space in her head.

Then as quickly as it had begun, it was over.

Jillian slumped forward resting her head on the table, her hand aching from all the intense writing. She felt hands touching her, straightening her up and covering her with a blanket. Her lips moved in silent speech to thank her caretakers. Someone smoothed their hand over her hair and Jillian glanced up to see it was Ed.

"Is it over?" Jillian croaked.

Ed flashed a nervous smile. "Yeah. You wrote fifty pages."

Jillian tried to swallow but her mouth was bone dry. Mary handed her a small Dixie cup of water and Jillian tossed it back. It revived and refreshed her. "Anything useful?"

"We don't know yet. Tim's still looking everything over." Ed lifted her from the chair and headed for the stairs. "I think you need to get some sleep."

"No," Jillian said. "Please, Ed. I want to wait and see if Tim finds anything that can help us. After that I promise I'll go up and rest."

Ed diverted her to a large wing chair in the hall just outside the dining room. He eased her down in it with such kindness Jillian felt her eyes burn with unshed tears. *Don't you start blubbing. You'll look like an amateur.*

"I'll make you some tea," Mary said, putting the kettle on to boil.

"Here!" Tim shouted, standing up with a sheet of paper in his hand. "Come take a look at this."

Jillian was about to stand up when Ed shot her a stay-where-you-are look. Normally she would have ignored that look but she really wasn't up to walking around yet. Mary brought her the tea and even though Jillian didn't feel like drinking tea, she took an obligatory sip. Mary smiled and went to make herself one. Jillian placed the cup on the table next to her.

"Can I see the writing too?" Jillian shouted at the two men staring down at it and speaking in hushed tones.

Ed brought the paper over. "We can't quite make it out. Can you read it?"

Jillian took the paper from him and stared at it. "It says 'What you seek lies under the stars of heaven'," she said.

"Great," Ed grumbled. "A riddle."

"Could it mean outside?" Jillian asked.

"That's an awfully big search area," Tim complained. "Besides, we've already searched outside."

"Maybe it's something you can only see at night?" Mary ventured, adjusting her glasses. "Something lit up by the stars."

"Maybe," Jillian said, beginning to feel stronger. She took the blanket off her shoulders and draped it over the back of her chair.

"It could be a false lead," Ed said, leaning against the wall.

Jillian frowned at him. *Ed is ever the optimist.* "It's not a false lead. We just need to think this through."

Ed glanced at his watch. "Well, it's almost one in the morning. Why don't we all get some sleep and start back on this in the morning."

Everyone grumbled their agreement. Jillian wanted to protest that they should stay awake and keep searching but she was just as exhausted as everyone else. So, instead of complaining, she followed Ed up the stairs to their shared bedroom.

Chapter 16

Jillian snuggled into the warm bed reveling in the rich masculine scent of Ed beside her. She'd had a few boyfriends in her time but her connection with Ed seemed somehow more *natural*. Being with him was easy. She never had to put on a front; she could just be herself. As she lay on her side, Ed spooned up behind her and squeezed. She grinned.

"Touch me with your power," she whispered without looking back.

Ed leaned his lips up to her ear. "You like when it teases you?"

A hungry thrill brought gooseflesh to her skin. "Yes."

Then, like arms, the invisible tentacles moved around her waist, some sliding under her t-shirt to caress her breasts. Jillian closed her eyes and sighed. The sensation was the most wonderful feeling in the world. Chewing her bottom lip, she ventured to open her legs just enough for Ed to touch her throbbing pussy. Getting her hint, Ed moved two tentacles around her thighs, pulling them open, and slithered two more between her legs.

Smooth invisible limbs explored, teasing her already pulsing clit and reaming the threshold of her anal core. Complete bliss filled every cell, every nerve ending as Jillian rocked her hips against the unseen. Ed pulled the hair away from the back

of Jillian's neck to scorch savage kisses along her flesh. The two tentacles under her shirt wrapped their narrow ends around her nipples, pulling and squeezing until the pleasure devoured every sane thought in her head.

Then Ed pulled Jillian up on her hands and knees, the tentacles helping to maneuver and control her until she was positioned with her buttocks high in the air and her elbows on the mattress. Ed glided her pajama shorts off her hips, dragging them mid-thigh before burying his hot tongue into her drenched sex. Jillian squealed with need as he explored and teased her, gasping out her explosive orgasm in the hopes this night would never end.

Grabbing her hips with his hands and caressing her body with his exquisite power, he thrust his large cock into her hunger. He cried out, growling her name, pumping his rod into her and wringing two more sweet climaxes from her more than willing body. Her flesh was worshipped by his hands and tongue and best of all by his dark and sinful power. And by the time Jillian finally fell into an exhausted heap on the bed, she knew she would never feel this connected to any man ever.

* * * *

Leonard had been waiting a long time to go through the paranormal investigators' trash. Hopefully his patience would soon pay off. They had been very busy the past couple of days searching for *something* Leonard knew must be important. Well they weren't fooling him. He knew they were searching for Archibald's cursed objects but they would never find them because Leonard was going to find them first. And once he

did, Leonard would become the most powerful warlock in the country. Thrashing around in his car seat, he tried to find a position where his legs wouldn't fall asleep and failed miserably. He glanced at his watch. It was eight o'clock and finally dark.

Now was as good a time as any.

Leonard opened his car door and winced as it uttered a loud creak. He hesitated a moment, unsure if anyone in the house had heard it. But when no one emerged, he stepped out and crept over to the dark green trash can.

The stink of rotting pizza and rancid milk assailed his nostrils and for a fleeting moment, he thought about abandoning his plan. But he'd come too far now to give up, so he crashed on.

He lifted the lid and was assaulted by an army of flies. Leonard swatted them away and tried to breathe through his mouth so he wouldn't take in too much of the horrible smell. *What the hell kind of things are they eating in that house anyway?* Pushing his revulsion aside, he used his fingernails to loosen the tie. Once open, the odor was twice as strong and Leonard struggled to continue his task without throwing up.

Scanning the ground, he found a long stick and used it to poke the garbage contents from side to side. Then, just as he was about to give up and creep off, he found what he was looking for.

A clue.

It wasn't much of a clue as clues go but it was better than the nothing that he had. With the very tips of his fingers, Leonard pulled a piece of paper from the trash and rushed back to

his car. With trembling hands he smoothed it down onto the hood and read the strange scrawl written there. It said *gargoyle*.

Leonard frowned. *What is that supposed to mean?*

Disgusted, he climbed back into his car and glanced up. There, right in front of his face where they had been all night were two stone gargoyles stationed at the entrance of the house. *Of course!*

That's why they'd been poking around the front gate the other day. They found something. In fact, they probably had at least two of the cursed objects right now. But they wouldn't keep them for long. Because Leonard was watching their every move and sooner or later they were going to leave that house. And when they did, Leonard was going to be ready to do a little shopping.

Chapter 17

At the first crack of dawn Jillian, Ed, Tim and Mary continued their search in the backyard. Mary put her hands on her hips and scowled at the huge space.

"It'll take us all day to search a huge area like this," she complained.

"Not if we organize it right," Ed said. "We'll do this like we were searching for a lost ring. All four of us will line up side by side and walk slowly together scanning the ground. If someone finds anything of interest, we'll all stop to investigate. If it's nothing, we'll continue until we've covered the whole yard."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Jillian said.

They started walking scanning the ground carefully. After a few yards Tim stopped suddenly. He prodded the ground with his toe. The others glanced over at him "I think there's something under here," he said.

Ed stuck a wooden stake in the ground to mark where they paused the search and walked over to where Tim stood. The area was one of the few places in the yard not covered with grass. Instead, there was only a thin layer of sandy dirt. Ed knelt down as the others watched and dusted away some of the soil. He didn't have to dig far before he uncovered a cement slab.

Jillian and the others went to their knees to help Ed uncover the rest of the slab. "Wow," Jillian said. "This thing is huge."

The slab was about an inch thick with two crude stars drawn into the cement when it had been wet. "We're going to need a crowbar to get this thing off," Mary said. She stood up and slapped some dirt off her hands.

Ed stalked over to his truck parked in the driveway and pulled a crowbar out of his toolbox. He returned and wedged the bar under one side of the slab, lifting just enough for the others to get their hands under the edge. Then they all lifted together.

"This damn thing is going to break my back," Tim complained.

"We just have to move it enough so we can get down there," Jillian said. She sure hoped Tim wouldn't abandon the lift. They'd never get it off without everyone's help.

Finally they had enough of a space for two adults to enter the hole below. "Who's going first?" Mary asked, taking a cautious step back.

"I'll go," Ed said. "Tim, get me a flashlight from my truck, will you?"

Tim rushed over to Ed's truck and came back with a heavy floodlight. "How's this?"

Ed took it and nodded. "Great." He shined the strong light beam into the darkness and spotted a few dingy white objects. "Well, there's something buried down there all right."

"What is it?" Jillian asked.

Ed jumped down into the hole. The edge was at chest level. "Well," he said, digging around with his bare hands. "If I had to guess, I'd say it's bones."

"We found her!" Jillian cried happily.

"Now wait a minute," Ed cautioned. "We don't know what kind of bones they are."

After several moments, he came up with something in his hand. Jillian squinted through the darkness trying to see it. Ed held up what looked like a dog's skull. "Obviously," he said grimly. "These aren't human."

Jillian felt her heart clench and her stomach drop. *How could this not be it? How many more places do we have to look to find my poor mother's bones?* An arm wrapped around her shoulder and hugged her. It was Mary.

"I'm sorry, Jillian," Mary said. "I know how disappointing this must be."

Jillian nodded fighting to keep down the lump in her throat. "It's okay. We'll find her."

Ed jumped out of the hole and dusted his hands off on his pants. "Let's cover this back up and keep looking."

A high-pitched ringing sounded from the house.

"What is that?" Mary said, frowning.

Jillian knew exactly what that was. It was the house's fire alarm. "It's the fire alarm," she shouted over her shoulder. "Come on! We have to put it out before the whole house burns down!"

Chapter 18

Jillian stormed into the house with the others hot on her tail. Although there was no smoke the alarm continued its relentless din making it hard to think. Ed grabbed her arm and shouted, "We're going to have to search each room! Why don't you and I go upstairs and Tim and Mary can cover the downstairs."

Jillian nodded and glanced at Mary to make sure she'd been able to hear Ed's suggestion. She and Tim were already heading into the living room so Jillian took off up the stairs taking two at a time. Once they reached the second floor it didn't take them long to find the source of the problem. The first empty bedroom they came to had smoke. A small electrical fire was blazing where a portable stereo was plugged into the wall.

"I'm going to go cut the power to the house," Ed said. He turned to Jillian. "You go get the fire extinguisher from downstairs. But don't use it until I tell you."

Jillian nodded and followed Ed down the stairs again. She threw open the hall closet and grabbed the wall-mounted fire extinguisher. Mary came up behind her. "Did you find the fire?" she shouted over the alarm.

"Yeah," Jillian replied. "It's an electrical fire upstairs. Ed's going to cut the power so I can put it out."

Suddenly all the ceiling fans stopped and the refrigerator went silent. "Jillian!" Ed called from outside. "Go put out the fire."

Jillian raced back up the stairs lugging the fire extinguisher with her. Mary was a close second. It took only a moment to put out the small fire and soon she was joined by Tim and Ed.

The wall and floor were scorched and the radio ruined but other than that, the damage was minimal. Ed moved closer to the damp mess and crouched down. His brow furrowed.

"What is it?" Jillian asked, putting the heavy extinguisher into a corner. He beckoned for her to join him. She came over and was assaulted by a strong feeling of *filth*. It was a difficult feeling to get a handle on. "What on earth is that?"

Ed stood up his knees crackling. "Black magic."

"But who would want to start a fire with black magic?" Mary asked.

"Someone who wanted to distract us from what we were looking for," Tim whispered. He chewed his thumbnail.

"Or someone who wanted to take what we've already found," Ed said. No sooner had he finished his sentence when Jillian bolted from the room to check on the amulet and the raven's claw necklace.

Jillian ran into the bedroom she shared with Ed to see all the stuff in her suitcase pulled out all over the bed. "Just great." Already knowing they were gone, she moved some clothing aside and found the lockbox open and its contents gone.

Ed walked in and frowned at the scene.

“Maybe if we jump in the truck we can still catch whoever this was?” She sounded hopeful.

Ed stalked over and ran his fingers along the top of the broken lockbox. “There’s no need,” he said in a cool dangerous tone. “I have everything I need to find the person right here.”

* * * *

Leonard barreled down the road singing with the radio. On the seat next to him were two of the cursed objects he need to conduct the bringing down the moon ceremony tomorrow night. *Finally after all these years of being a two-bit magician I’m going to have all the power I ever dreamed of!* And after he succeeded no one, not even a first tier warlock like Edward Justice or his white witch whore would be able to stop him from doing whatever he wanted!

Chapter 19

Ed hadn't created a magic circle in a long time but it was just like riding a bike, once a person knew how to do it they never forgot. After sending Tim and Mary to the movies so he and Jillian could work without distraction, he set to work blending his skills with hers to uncover the identity of the thief. He gathered some soil from under the window where the intruder had climbed in and made a magic circle on the floor of the upstairs bedroom.

Jillian stood against the wall holding the lockbox in one hand and looking pensive. "What are you going to do?"

"*We* are going to uncover the identity of the thief." Ed finished the magic circle and took a few steps back to survey his handy work. "Come here."

Jillian walked over and carefully stepped into the circle. Ed took the lockbox from her and placed it on the floor. Then he directed her to sit on the ground. Jillian did. Then Ed grabbed some paper and several pencils. Stepping into the circle with her, he handed her the pencils and placed a large stack of paper in front of her. Jillian licked her lips and Ed admired how lush and full they were. A current of lust tempted him but he soothed it by reminding himself there would be plenty of time to have sex later, after they'd reclaimed the stolen items.

“Okay,” Jillian said after a big sigh. “Now what do you want me to do?”

“Place your hand on the lockbox and let your mind open up,” Ed instructed as he took a seat next to her.

“You’re a powerful warlock. Can’t you just touch the lockbox and find out who it is?” she asked.

“I might be able to but why waste time with that? You were right on with the gargoyles. Why don’t we see if you can get this information too?”

Jillian shrugged and placed one hand on the lockbox. She closed her eyes and her right hand immediately began writing on the paper. Three pages later, she’d written down a name and address. Ed placed his hand on her shoulder pulling her from her vision.

She blinked several times then stared at him. “Well? Did I do it?” she asked still a little confused.

Ed examined the paper and grinned. “You sure did. But more interesting than that you’ll never guess what name you wrote down.”

Jillian took the paper from him. “I should have guessed. Leonard.”

Standing up, Ed held his hand down and helped Jillian to her feet. “The good news is, at least we have an address. Won’t Leonard be surprised to see us?”

Ed grabbed his keys and took off out the front door with Jillian close behind. But just as he reached the truck, he realized she hadn’t followed him outside. Frowning, he went back and found Jillian standing in the foyer staring at the floor.

“What?” he asked impatient to leave.

Jillian pointed at the floor. "Under the stars of heaven."

Ed stared down and almost dropped his keys. There on the ground was an image cast by the partial moon casting light through the stained glass window above the door. The image lit onto the floorboards was that of five large stars.

Chapter 20

Jillian watched with apprehension as Ed slipped the crowbar under the first of the floorboards. This was it, this *had* to be it. And if this really was the location, how would she handle it? A flood of powerful emotions filled her: anger; fear; sorrow. They all blended together into a melancholy that threatened to overwhelm her.

Ed had already pulled away two of the boards. He paused and glanced up at her. "Are you okay?"

No, she wasn't okay. But she had to know the truth. If this was where her evil uncle Archibald had hidden her mother's bones, she needed to get them out of there. Jillian swallowed and it hurt her throat. "I'm just feeling a little overwhelmed."

"You want to go outside while I do this?" Ed asked. His expression was cautious, grim, and she was surprised by his kindness.

She sighed. "No, I think that would be worse." Kneeling down next to him, she picked up the crowbar. "I want to help you."

Ed helped guide her hand as she slid the end of the crowbar under another one of the planks and a soft current of power filled her. It warmed her heart and all she could think of

was how glad she was she'd met Ed. He was a strong foundation in a weird and confusing world.

Half the planks were off now and Jillian could see there was definitely something down there. She ran her hand along her forehead to wipe away some nervous sweat. Ed was just about to remove the last loose plank when a shrill scream filled the house.

They both froze, for this was no human scream. It was pained and hollow like someone was trying to imitate a woman in anguish.

"What the hell was that?" Jillian asked.

Ed gave her his devilish grin. "Ghosts."

"Maybe someone doesn't want us doing this."

"I'm sure *something* doesn't."

Jillian placed her hand over Ed's to stop him from removing the last piece of wood. "What if it's *her*? What if this is my mother?"

Ed leaned forward and gently kissed her on the lips. "I have a strange feeling that it is."

She bit her lip and fought the tears that threatened to come. It was one thing to have her mother die and receive a proper burial. It was entirely another to think her uncle might have stolen her mother's remains for his own selfish reasons.

"Jillian," Ed said, brushing her hair from her face. "There's only one way to find out. We have to finish this."

Jillian nodded even though she was far from sure that this was what she wanted.

Pulling off the last plank, Ed shined his flashlight down into the hole. The beam illuminated a large green velvet bag

with a gold drawstring. A light odor of decay touched Jillian's nose and she scooted back trying to keep herself together.

Ed pulled the bag out of the hole and laid it on the polished wood floor. He placed his fingers on the drawstring and glanced at her. She nodded, telling him she was ready for whatever the bag should hold.

Ed slipped the velvet back from the silken golden rope and opened the bag. Just as they had feared, the bag was full of large human bones. Reaching inside, he pulled out the skull, tenderly touching a few faded strands of blond hair.

The sight of her mother's bones, found after all these years, wrenched a sob from Jillian. Before she knew what she was doing, she had run from the house into the backyard sobbing so hard it made her chest ache.

Warm arms came around her. Ed pulled her against him whispering that it was okay, that there could be closure now. But how could there be? They were still missing two of the cursed objects. At least that fiend Leonard didn't have the bones. Jillian wiped the tears from her eyes angrily.

"I'm fine," she said. "It was just such a shock." A sudden wave of paranoia overtook her. After breaking out of Ed's arms she raced back into the house and was relieved to find the bag still where they'd left it. Ed came running up behind her.

"What's wrong now?" he asked, startled by her abrupt departure.

"I'm sorry but I just realized we can't leave these bones for a second. If Leonard gets them, he'll have everything he needs for the drawing down the moon ceremony tomorrow night."

"We can't watch them twenty-four/seven," he replied.

"Maybe we can lock them up somewhere."

"There are a few closets in the house. Is that what you had in mind?"

"No. You have that toolbox on the back of your truck," she said. "What about that?"

Ed frowned. "Will it make you feel better?"

"Much better."

"Alright. But I'll need your help. You think you're up for that?"

If her mother's remains were safe, she was up for anything. "Yeah. Why don't you drive your truck around back where creepy Leonard can't see what we're doing?"

Ed headed for the door flipping his keys across his knuckles.

"Oh and, Ed?" Jillian said.

He turned around.

"I really appreciate it."

"Good. Because I know of plenty of ways you can pay me back."

Jillian watched him go outside and shook her head. *Men. They really do only ever think of one thing.*

Chapter 21

After they had placed her mother's bones in his toolbox, they went up to bed. Jillian took a seat by the window and stared out into the rich dark night. Ed had to admit, he was very worried about Jillian. She seemed more fragile than before but he knew her healing would come with time. It was unfortunate she was having to relive the trauma of her mother's death all over again but at least this time, if they did everything right, her mother could finally rest in peace.

He finished brushing his teeth and came out dressed only in some loose-fitting gray sweatpants. "You need to get some rest, Jillian," he said. "We're going to have a long day tomorrow trying to get back those other items."

Jillian looked up at him with soft blue eyes. She looked so beautiful he thought his heart would break. "Make love to me."

A fierce erection filled the front of his pants and he wondered if Jillian had any clue as to how sexy she was. He doubted it. Most women didn't have a clue how hot they could make a man. Ed wanted every piece and part of her; he wanted to stuff his cock into her until she made those tiny groans that drove him fucking wild. Stroking his hand along his chest, he approached her, hungry to taste her mouth and the sweetness of her pussy.

Jillian's eyes fluttered closed for a moment and he knew she was picking up the energy of his need. "Use your power," she whispered.

Ed stopped for a moment surprised. Every woman he'd ever been with in the past had *hated* his power, hated how it felt on their skin, hated how it could grip and control them without them being able to see what actually had them. But now Jillian didn't seem to just tolerate it, she welcomed it. *Very cool.*

From deep in the darkness of his soul, Ed let down his guard, freeing the magic within. It erupted from his core, ferocious and eager to touch and explore this beautiful young woman.

The invisible tentacles hit the floor sounding like a sack of flour dropped from the kitchen table. He knew their direction by the scarlet glow they gave off and the energy that attracted them. Jillian's energy. She was remarkably beautiful, her long lashes fluttering over eyes like butterflies in an open field and he could sense abandonment in her, a freeing of the self that pulled at him even more.

Tentacles gripped her, lifting her gently off the chair and carrying her over to the bed. With surprising skill and speed, they stripped her clothes off, stopping to explore and caress her flesh. Then her legs were opened and the fragrant core of her sex was exposed, massaged, tickled and penetrated.

Jillian arched her back and gasped in pleasure as the first tentacle wriggled its way inside her pussy. She was beyond beautiful, she was living art, and Ed couldn't stop himself from dropping his sweatpants and wrapping his hand around

his pulsing shaft. He stroked, matching the rhythm of the tentacle that squirmed inside Jillian. But soon he wanted to heighten her pleasure, so he directed another to tickle and tease her tight little ass.

Ed watched, mesmerized as Jillian's ass was massaged and wickedly penetrated. Jillian cried out, her hips pumping up to encourage the sweet violation. Leaning forward, she watched him, her eyes blazing with need. "I want you inside me, Ed," she cried.

Tortured with his own desperate hunger, Ed directed the tentacles to lift her wiggling hips up off the bed. Stepping between her legs, he filled her slick pussy, massaging her plump clit with his thumbs while still enjoying the pleasure the tentacles gave him as they explored Jillian's virgin ass. He pumped his cock fast into her wet channel, relishing the divine friction and the high-pitched cries of his lover.

"Deeper!" Jillian shouted. "Yes, yes. Oh, Ed, your cock is so beautiful!"

Sweat poured down his face and chest as he worked. "You want my cock in your ass?" he growled.

Jillian sucked her index finger. "Yeah. But do it fast because I'm gonna come."

Ed slid his cock out of her pussy, lubed it up more with his spit, and eased it into her anal core. Focusing his mind, he directed the tentacles to penetrate her pussy and tease her clit. Within seconds Jillian was convulsing, her body rocked with a tempestuous orgasm that left her gasping. Then another came right on the heels of the first, rippling her anal muscles along his shaft until he spilled his seed deep inside her.

Spent, Ed collapsed on the bed beside her.

Jillian was smiling. "That was incredible."

He slipped his arm around her and felt the fuzzy edges of sleep clouding his mind. "That's because you're incredible," he said. Then he let go and fell into a deep and satisfying sleep.

Chapter 22

Jillian woke up Thursday morning trembling. She'd dreamt that Leonard had gathered all three of the cursed objects and had become a powerful wizard bent on amassing even more power for himself. Sitting up in bed, she ran her fingers through her hair and glanced at the clock. It said five a.m. She nudged Ed sleeping next to her.

He started awake and she felt a moment of guilt in scaring him. But it was only a moment. "We have to get those other two objects back," she whispered.

Ed groaned and sat up. "What time is it?"

"Five in the morning."

She could see he was thinking of arguing with her about getting up so early but to his credit he didn't. He knew how important it was to get that stuff back. "Okay," he said groggily. "Just give me a second to get cleaned up."

He got up and the bed creaked. When Ed disappeared into the bathroom, Jillian decided to go down the hall to the other upstairs bathroom and freshen up instead of waiting for him to come out. That way they would both be ready to go at the same time.

Creeping down the hall, Jillian paused near the two bedrooms where Mary and Tim slept. She thought about waking them up to come with them but she decided against it. They'd

been through a lot since coming here to help her find her mother's remains and she just didn't have the heart to wake them. No she and Ed could do this alone and all the danger would be on them.

Jillian jumped in the small shower and cleaned up, a little sad to be washing off Ed's scent. It was nice to have a man's scent on her skin, especially his. She blushed remembering their weird and passionate lovemaking. Then she hurriedly stepped out, dried off, and got dressed. When she returned to the bedroom Ed was just pulling on a black t-shirt. Jillian paused to admire the bulging muscles twisting under his tan skin. *Yummy.*

On their way to the car Jillian grabbed two apples for breakfast: one for her and the second for Ed. They got into his truck and she placed his on the dashboard. Jillian bit deep into hers with a loud crunch. He started the truck and paused to study the piece of paper Jillian had written Leonard's name and address on.

"Do you know where this is?" she asked as Ed pulled out of the driveway.

"Yeah."

She took another bite, chewed and swallowed as a twinge of guilt gnawed at her heart. "I'm sorry for waking you up so early."

Ed glanced at her as if he didn't know what she was talking about. "No that's fine," he said. "You're right, we need to get those cursed objects back as soon as possible. We're out of time. If we don't get everything back by nightfall Leonard can try and cast the spell without your mother's bones."

Jillian finished her apple and tossed it out the open window. Ed gave her a stern look and she grinned. "What? It's biodegradable."

A few streets later they pulled up a few feet from Leonard's house. Ed cut the engine.

"Weird," Jillian said. "It looks just like my dream."

Ed took a revolver out from under his seat and placed it in a holster on his hip. "What dream?"

"I had a dream about this place just before I woke up this morning. It was strange and disjointed but I do remember this house. I think it was empty in my dream," she said.

"Well let's just hope your dream was wrong," he said climbing out of the truck.

Jillian came around and joined him. Together they walked around the house. She didn't know what she was expecting but the house kind of matched Leonard's personality. It was dark and creepy with lots of junk and trash scattered around. Unfortunately though, there was no car out front or in the driveway.

"I don't think he's here," Ed said.

"Where could he be?" Jillian asked.

"He's probably at our house looking for those bones." To confirm his guess that the house was empty, Ed walked up to the front door and knocked hard. Jillian stood there stunned by his boldness. What the hell were they going to say if Leonard opened the door with a gun? But much to her relief, Leonard never came to the door and none of the inside lights came on.

"What now?" Jillian asked.

“Shit,” Ed said, rushing back toward the truck. “We’ve got to get back to your uncle’s house. Hopefully we can beat Leonard there.”

Chapter 23

“Get up!” a man’s angry voice shouted.

Mary sat up in bed clutching the blankets to her chest. “Who...who’s there?”

Squinting through the morning haze, Mary recognized Leonard. “I said,” he growled through clenched teeth, “get up!” He snatched the covers from her and yanked them off. Leonard was holding a gun.

Mary held her hands in the air as a block of ice settled in her belly. “What do you want, Leonard?”

“You know what I want. I want what you’re all hiding from me. I want the white witch bones. Now give them up or I’ll start shooting!”

“If you kill me you’ll never find those bones,” Mary said, trying desperately to keep her cool. She thought she heard a muffled shout from Tim’s room. Leonard had probably tied him up already.

Leonard shoved the gun in her face. “Where are those bones?”

She didn’t even know if Ed and Jillian had found the white witch bones yet. Mary wondered if they were tied up too or if they had been out of the house when Leonard broke in. Ed was a very powerful warlock. Mary doubted Leonard would be able to make him do anything against his will.

"I don't know where the bones are," Mary said.

Before Leonard could reply, the sound of Ed's truck pulling into the driveway came through the open window. Leonard's mouth spread into an evil smile. Mary waited a few seconds then took a chance and shouted, "Jillian, Ed, look out! Leonard's in here with a gun!"

Furious that she'd warned them, Leonard went over to her and struck Mary in the head with the gun. Then her world went black.

* * * *

Jillian had never been so scared in her life. *He's going to kill Mary and Tim! We have to do something!* "What does he want with them?" she asked Ed. "They don't know where those bones are."

"He probably thinks they do," Ed said, frowning. "He's running out of time and getting desperate."

"We have to *do* something. Can you use your power to disarm him?"

"Not at this distance and he's not likely to let me get too close. No, what we need is a decoy," Ed said thoughtfully.

Suddenly Jillian remembered the dog bones. If they switched the dog bones with her mom's in the velvet sack, Leonard might be fooled enough to let Tim and Mary go. It was worth a try. "What about those dog bones we found?" Jillian whispered.

Ed stared at her for a moment, and then caught on to the idea. "It's risky," he said. "But if he's too distracted to check inside the bag, it just might work."

“We just need it to work long enough to get that gun away from him.”

“You tell him we’ll get the bones and I’ll take the truck around back and make the switch,” Ed said.

Jillian nodded. She waited until he’d driven into the backyard then called up to Leonard. “Okay!” she shouted. “We’ll get you the bones. Just please don’t hurt Mary or Tim.”

“They’re fine,” Leonard called down to her. “Just as long as you and your boyfriend don’t try anything smart.”

“We won’t. Ed’s gone to get the bones right now. Why don’t you meet us down here and we’ll turn them over to you?”

Leonard hesitated and for a moment Jillian feared he wouldn’t take the bait. But then he poked his head out the window and said, “I’ll be right down.”

Chapter 24

Leonard came down and onto the porch with the gun to Mary's back. Ed had returned from the backyard and presumably had made the switch, holding the velvet bag with a sinister gleam in his eye.

Jillian took a brave step forward. "Let her go."

"Oh no," Leonard said. "First I want those bones."

A furious rage filled Jillian's heart. The very thought that this piece of human filth wanted to exploit her mother's remains for his own selfish reasons infuriated her. A force from within her reached out and touched Ed's power. The two energies blended together, swirling and kicking up a nasty wind.

Ed held the bag of dog bones out to Leonard. Emboldened by the gun, Leonard shoved Mary aside and grabbed the velvet bag with a cry of pure maniacal glee. That was when Jillian struck.

Focusing all the rage within, she imagined Leonard being struck by lightning. And just as the villain's grip tightened on the decoy bones, a thick bolt of white light flashed from the sky. It struck Leonard in the chest, charging him for a full minute before disappearing back into the darkened sky.

Leonard dropped the bones and fell to the ground. Jillian gasped and stumbled back a few steps, the potent energy still tingling in her spine.

Ed knelt by Leonard and felt for a pulse on his neck. He looked back at her, a tiny grin playing at the corner of his mouth. "Wow, Jillian. He's dead."

"Good Lord," Mary said, placing her hand over her heart. "That was something else."

Jillian blinked at Ed. "Did I do that?"

Ed stood up and pulled out his cell phone. "You sure did. And I for one am damn proud of you. It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy." He dialed Emergency Services and relayed that he'd just seen a man struck by lightning. He gave the dispatcher the address and hung up. Sirens wailed far off in the distance.

"I've killed someone," Jillian said still in shock.

Ed walked over and put his arm around her. "You did what you had to do. If you hadn't, Mary would be dead right now instead and, when Leonard looked inside that bag, we probably would have been shot too."

The ambulance was turning onto their street. "What do we tell the authorities?" Jillian asked.

"The truth," Ed said, taking the bag of dog bones out of Leonard's charred hand. "This man came to rob us and in the process got hit by lightning."

Jillian and Mary looked up at the sky. The dark clouds that had been there when Jillian had first gotten mad were now gone. "But," she protested, "there isn't a cloud in the sky."

Ed shrugged. "Who can predict the wonders of mother nature?" He waved over the paramedics. "Now just stand there and look upset. I'll do all the talking."

* * * *

That night, after all the police and fire personnel left, Ed took Jillian out back and gave her the bones of her mother. Together they took the dog bones out of the bag and put her mother's bones back in for the last trip the white witch would have: the one to rebury her remains in hallowed ground.

It only took them a few minutes to find the original gravesite. Jillian's mother had a double stone: one side for Jillian's father and the other for her. Ed dug up her mother's side as Jillian sat next to the bag, her thin pale hand resting on the velvet fabric. She looked more at peace than before and Ed was glad this whole ordeal was finally coming to an end. All Jillian had to do was utter a release spell after her mother was properly buried. Then the white witch's soul should be free to continue its journey to the other world.

Ed jumped out of the grave and came to sit with Jillian.

"I'm so confused," she said. "I don't know how I'm feeling."

"That's normal. You've been through a lot."

"Thank you for everything," she said, touching the side of his face.

He kissed her palm. "I was hoping you'd consider coming to work with me at the department. I think we make a great team."

Jillian stood up and eased the bag with her mother's bones into the grave. She picked up a shovel to help him bury

the remains. "Will we still be able to see each other? You know, romantically?"

Ed laughed. "I'd insist on it."

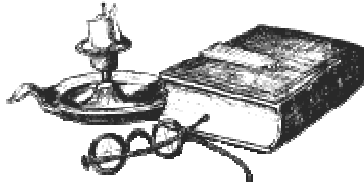
"Well, in that case, how can I say no?"

Then they both buried Jillian's mother. And this time it was for good.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle is a huge fan of erotic romance and has authored many novels for the Internet. For more about her, please visit her website www.michelle-oneill.com.

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