

Alana Weatherbee
(Book 2)

Spooks and Magic

By Jack Sorenson

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obooko edition

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From the author

I love writing. I love the swirl of magic and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions in the paranormal world. This story has truly haunted me during its creation. Things in my home have gone bump in the night, and shadows have moved and run to another wall in my room. Prancing, playful shadows were all around me like a draped cloak, wrapping me in a darkness of extreme emotions.

Jack R. Sorenson
Los Gatos, CA

Never Alone

Every night I go to sleep and dream you're by my side.
In addition, every day that I am living, I wake up with hopes to hide.
So as long as you aren't here to hold me,
I have to remember everything you've told me.

Alana Weatherbee

Keeping up with the wisdom which does not carry fault, the philosophy which does not laugh, and the greatness which does not allow weakness before the children that cry."-Life trivial happens when we least expect it, and Good Magic and its sensibility will guide that show their strengths. Everything that crosses our path happens for a reason, and it's what we do with it that makes all the difference.

Headmaster Robert William Barns

Dedication

My thanks to my dear friend, Magnolia Belle, for her friendship and wonderful editing skills on my novels that deal with the School of Shines. My thanks also goes to Viva of the Los Gatos neighborhood eatery.

Thank you for the compassion and friendship shown to me by my dear friend Ralph Ezard. What can I say, but thank you so much, my friend.

To my mother and to Father, a huge thanks for understanding me during my editing and writing adventure. God bless you for all that you have done. To our Daisy, the cat. I love you. You rock, sweetheart.

Chapter 1

Gray beard wagging, keeping time to his shaking head, Headmaster Barns rubbed his aching temples. "This cannot be!"

Lifting his wand one more time and closing his eyes to concentrate, he sent his strongest incantation arcing toward the Book of Spells. "Return the two you stole!"

Power and energy leapt from his wand, ricocheted off the book and onto Barns, sending him staggering backward, his elbow raised across his eyes, his dark robes billowing. A second later, a burst of light from the book hit his hand and sent his wand skittering across the floor, where it clattered to a stop next to a wall. Glowing red eyes floated above the book before it sent another searing bolt pulsating across the headmaster's body, suspending him in mid-fall. When it faded, he hit the floor, unable to move, dizzy, exhausted and freezing.

After a moment, the old man rolled to his side, reached for his wand, and wobbled out of the chamber. With chest heaving and tears in his eyes, he admitted defeat. Even his strongest magic couldn't save them. The children were lost in the book's evil darkness — or were dead — or both. His trembling hand leaned against the stone wall while he steadied himself. Too much tragedy threatened to squeeze his lungs shut. Continuing to lean against the wall, he made his slow, tortured way to the School of Shines' main door. Pulling it open, he began his journey across the schoolyard to his private rooms.

Wind tangled his beard and chilled his already cold bones. Storm clouds scudded across the night sky, blocking out the moon's feeble light and spattering icy rain onto his face. Something hovered above. It could have been nothing more than an owl hunting for its dinner, but in Barns' present state of mind, evil filled the sky, calling his name, demanding his death. Panic fueled his spent limbs. His stumble became a walk...a brisk walk...then a trot, until he ran to his

door, all the while glancing over his shoulder, waiting for talons or fangs to snatch him away.

Slamming his body into the door to shut it against the fury of the pelting rain, he slid down to the floor, clasp his bent knees and resting his head on his arms, letting his eyelids drift closed.

"Must stay awake," he said. "I cannot allow myself to fall asleep."

Seeing a ghostly apparition float by in the room, Headmaster Barns spoke. "Excuse me, Mr. Ghost. I'm in need of your assistance. Please wake me if I fall asleep. I am overly tired. Thank you."

The ghost went to the corner and did as the headmaster asked, watching to keep him awake.

Barns felt too weary to even cast a simple drying or warming spell. His right hand still gripped his wand, but he was too tired to notice. After a meeting with the Mother of All Magic, followed up with so many queries about the last encounter from the evil Book of Spells, he knew dark and evil treachery was on the rampage since two students, Alana and Logan, went missing from the School of Shines.

The meeting took place at ground level of the school in a room called Bitten Books, a small campus bookstore with shelves of magical books that tended to bite an undisciplined student falling asleep in his or her studies. Books with black and brown jackets filled the room. They chewed their cud while waiting to be checked out by a Shines student.

The meeting weighed the endless possibilities in what to do after the night's horrible discoveries. Doom was on the rise, Mother of All Magic felt.

Headmaster was afraid he'd fall asleep if he got too comfortable. His watchful ghost shook him several times and tried to scare him with several hoots and howlers only a ghost could do. The specter even attempted an earth shattering rattle of chains at one time. But sleep hadn't claimed the headmaster. Barns was still awake, paralyzed by shock after what he'd seen tonight: a magical spell cast from himself broken like a stick over a knee; a dozen ravens, falling from the sky, were swallowed up by water and earth so quickly there wasn't time for the Inner Core of Magic to intervene and set things to right. There was only time to scream in horror. Headmaster met red eyes tonight, glinting at him in triumph.

It wasn't like Headmaster Robert William Barns ever could get warm anymore, anyway — not down to his feet and hands — let alone in this uncommonly chilly June. For a year now, the horror and the nightmares came to Shines to stay, due to a young student opening the dark Book of Spells.

A rustling wind behind him reminded him this was no longer a refuge where he could afford to show any weakness — if there ever had been any weakness shown in the School of Shines. He swung himself up and stomped his foot to a fast tune, producing a satisfying squeak in the wooden floorboard. Headmaster needed to regain his trust that his magic would work a second time against the book. But which spell or charm should he use? He thought hard again on this dilemma until he heard a commotion coming from the room next to his.

"I smell a fat cat with a rat in its mighty mitts," Headmaster heard and hoped for the book's capture.

Headmaster ran to the next room. Before his eyes, a familiar cloaked man made sounds of triumph. Professor Ezards' right hand gripped a dark crooked wand that gleamed silver off its tip. His many spells left it smoking.

"The evil spell book's right hand assistant. Sir, I got her — Alana Weatherbee." Pinned to the floor by Professor Ezards' foot on her coattails, the teenage girl shook. Her bloodshot eyes glared at her headmaster's blue ones. She squinted up at them with pure evil and hatred.

"Alana? You're alive!... But, where's Logan?" Barns asked, his expression showing his alarm.

"Dead," she growled, all traces of her former self gone.

"She killed him!" Professor Ezards barked, digging his boot heel into her ribs. "You'll be expelled for this treachery!"

Headmaster asked, looking down to her, "What happened to Logan, Alana, if you still *are* a Weatherbee inside that mask of evil?"

Alana snarled and spit toward their faces.

"You're such a sweet sight to come home to," Ezards said and pointed his wand toward his captive. "Headmaster, I felt you wouldn't make it back from the Realm of Many Doors. I waited by the door's exit to see who came out, and it worked. Weatherbee came out alone." He ground his foot into the dingy ragged cloth of Weatherbee's blazer before lifting it away. He acted like a crazy man, thinking he'd be rewarded for his acts of bravery.

Weatherbee screamed in pain, "No, please. No more. It hurts too much. Please, Professor."

Pain was his theme for pleasure as he kicked her in the ribs. "Why should I? You're a murderer!"

"Ease up, Ezards," the strong voice of Barns commanded. "Stop. I'm worried for the young girl." Turning to Alana, he asked, "Your clothing, child. What's become of it?"

Ezards answered for her. "My wand blast. I had to fire on a student. A total *Anaconda* that's forbidden."

"No! Not onto Miss Weatherbee. If her father knew of this, he'd kill you."

Ezards frowned, sticking his wand tip deeper into her face.

"Do make yourself useful, Ezards, and get me some tea. It's time to speak to Weatherbee alone."

"But, Headmaster, I caught her when she came out of the red door. I know *she* was the speller, not the book."

"No, my friend, it was the book, not Weatherbee. She is presumed innocent till found guilty. I've been with Mother of All Magic, and she saw differently. Hurry, Professor, please. I'm cold and thirsty. I need to warm up. This night is not quite over just yet." At Ezards' reluctance to move, Barns hissed, "Hurry or I'll skin you and transfigure you into a tea cozy."

Professor Ezards dug his boot heel deeper into Weatherbee's ribs. "This isn't over between us," he sneered.

"Enough!" Headmaster commanded.

The professor slowly let go of Alana as she came to stand in front of him, looking relieved, free of his grip pulling for her wand.

Headmaster extended his hand. "Alana, your wand."

The reassurance in his voice calmed the girl; the wildness left her eyes. Alana handed her wand to Headmaster Barns. Ezards grunted with pleasure. Headmaster glared at him, for his unkindness to a student. "I should take your wand, too, Ezards!"

"You wouldn't dare..." snarled the professor.

"Try me," Barns said low in his throat, losing all patience with the recalcitrant man. He pointed at the school professor with his wand. His mouth quirked upwards as he saw Ezards scuttle backwards towards the kitchen, never daring to turn his back. Headmaster placed Weatherbee's wand in his waistband.

Chapter 2

Headmaster asked Weatherbee, "Are you all right?" He gripped her shoulders and led her to a chair.

Alana Weatherbee was now a girl of sixteen, with shoulder length light brown hair, and stunning blue eyes. Her complexion was fair and she wasn't tall, 5 foot at best in school heels, with a non-athletic build. The only jewelry she wore was a necklace, which she never took off, a pentacle; it had been a gift from her dead mother. Her mother and Weatherbee could have been mistaken for twins.

She ignored his question and grabbed his hand. "*Please*, Headmaster, I came to get your help. We *must* go back and find Logan." She smelled of smoke. Her hair tangled around her soot smudged face, and telltale signs of past tears trailed down her cheek. Panic danced in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Alana, the book would not allow that. This is something that only can be done by you. Mother told me what could happen if I intervene. We must send you back before anyone sees you here."

For a second, residual evil flashed through her eyes and set her mouth in a frown. Changing to a guileless expression, she tried to woo the headmaster into trusting her. A tilt of the head, a flutter of eyelashes, a deep sigh and a sweet smile filled her quiver of tricks.

Headmaster placed blame on Weatherbee for forgetting to use good magic and went with old dark magic, instead. That demanded its price of a dear lad's life, and the old man ached at the thought. He had rescued Logan the year before from a lonely life on the run, and gave him his first true home. And now...?

He reached into his pocket and touched a small piece of ripped parchment. He'd found it on a tree branch down a little quiet lane that he walked daily as his retreat.

The note read:

What about my son? Reports say that he was murdered. Is this true?

I can't meet you anytime soon. I've lost my home and my job due to the Fire Watchers heated footsteps on all of the Clan's trails. I am reduced to living in the Forgotten Forest. I have to stay as a werewolf for my own protection. There is a new threat out here besides the Fire Watchers.

Some beastly, more demon-like creature that hunts us has killed all but me. I am terrified to take any steps toward the school for this creature may follow me and unleash its fury on the children of Shines.

I will try and find you a day after the next full moon, then I'll walk has a human for one day. I feel then I'll have a chance to find this demon creature and kill it. Till then, please look after my son. He is all I have left of my family.

*Yours Truly
Lucien*

Barns shook the memory away and focused keen blue eyes on the teenager in front of him, one of her hands rubbing her kicked, bruised side while she waited.

Barns knew she'd endured a horrible time, but he still needed to find out what really happened. "Where did you go? We've been looking for you and Logan for a week now."

"A week?" She straightened in her chair and her blue eyes went wide. "It felt like one day."

"Yes, a week. Where were you?" Barns' chin jutted, making his beard wiggle.

"I...I'm not sure. An old wreck of a castle, a mirror to this one."

"How did you get there?"

Alana answered with a silent shrug. She suspected Headmaster Barns blamed her for all the misfortune because the book was still growing in power from Logan's death and caused Barns to think that way.

He harrumphed at her silence. "Did you force Logan to go with you?"

"No!"

"Did you take the book with you?"

She shrugged again, refusing to meet his stare. "I don't remember."

Suspecting her lie, his knuckles went white as he clutched at the chair arms. "Is the book with you now?"

"I don't know." Shaking her head, she glanced at the Realm of Many Doors. "I guess."

Afraid the Book of Spells controlled Alana, trusting her was out of the question until he knew for sure.

"I'll give you one chance and one chance only to redeem yourself." His bony index finger pointed at her.

"What's that?"

Barns stood when a thought hit his mind. He grabbed several vials on impulse and took his old potions text with him. Taking Alana by the arm, he yelled, "Come with me." He dragged her to a private room through a hidden door in his study wall.

* * *

After giving two tea cups filled to the top for Headmaster and Miss Weatherbee, Professor Ezards' incensed steps took him past the sitting room into his study, getting a quarreling sneer from Weatherbee on the way out. He

stood, grumbling to himself, and dusted his pressed slacks and dress shirt free of Alana's soot and grime. He despised being rumpled and messy. After running his fingers through his white hair, he suppressed a sigh and sagged into the shabby but well-padded chair by his desk. Anger had lent him strength, but as always, its aftermath left him with more energy spent than he'd gained. His gaze settled on the headline of yesterday's Cups and Balls Daily: "Two children missing for over week from the School of Shines; no leads at this time."

With a vicious movement, he swept the paper off his desk and didn't begrudge the energy it took to kick it across the room. Although kicking the Book of Spells across the room — even better, across the darkened lightness land across the school field and into the pond — would have been so much more gratifying.

"Professor Ezards!"

At the sound, Ezards turned from the fireplace to the window, seeing Madam Hufflepuff peering at him from outside on her broomstick hovering off the ground. The extra large broomstick held her extra large frame, her round cheeks pink from the cold wind. He came to the window and opened it.

"The search for the children is still continuing, yes?" she asked.

He knew the children's whereabouts — one dead and the other with the headmaster. But he didn't care for the bumbling busybody.

"Yes, keep searching."

She raked him with a critical glance. "The headmaster's mind is getting soft. It must be spreading, or else why are you sitting by an open fire while we're outside searching for the children in the cold? It's snowing in *June*."

"I'm waiting on Headmaster Barns, if you must know. As for the snow, it's the actions of evil in the book," he sneered at her.

"Oh," she paused. "Shall we continue on?"

"Yes, *do* be vigilant."

"Goodnight, Professor."

"Goodbye!" He slammed the window closed.

Professor Ezards leaned against the shelves as he caught his breath, moving his gaze across his private stores of potions, trying to decide what he should bring with him. He dosed himself with a long swallow of antifreeze combo, not caring that he'd pay later for the temporary boost in energy and alertness by three days without sleep.

Upon entering the headmaster's office, Ezards cursed under his breath when he saw Barns and Weatherbee had left. Two cups of tea sat alone, one half empty, the other never touched. The private door to a hidden study was open — which led to the school.

"Mmm," he winced. Once he saw that Headmaster and Miss Weatherbee left, he fumed, "He's letting the murderess go!"

He wasn't sure where they might have gone and that made his heart pound even faster. *Blast that headmaster. He's too soft.*

* * *

Headmaster took Weatherbee to a dark private study; the wall hid a walkway to the inner core of the school. Down they went, their feet hitting each step hard.

Alana questioned in a frightened manner, "Where are we going?"

He answered in anger and impatience, "Why don't you just read my mind? Then you will learn the unthinkable."

They went down many spiral stairs like a rat racing in a maze. On entering a large room, Barns kicked the door closed, locked it with a charm, and warded the room for good measure. Then, flinging yellow and green powder into the small copper bowl filled with water, he called out to Mother of All Magic to appear.

"I've heard of her, but who is she?" Alana asked as she glanced around the unfamiliar room.

"She's a kindly apparition who can be anything to anyone in need of help. She's the holder of all good magic and a great judge of character." He raised his hand for silence when a harmonic hum grew louder.

"Yes, Robert?" an echoed voice said in the dark room.

"She gets one chance to redeem herself. Make sure that the Trusted Zone doesn't interfere."

"Alright," the voice said.

Looking to Alana, he explained, "To redeem yourself, you must go inside the Realm of Many Doors, find the same door as before and bring back Logan. If not, then I can no longer believe in any hope to help you. Go!" Headmaster yelled, "You have no time to waste."

"But, I can't go alone. You *must* come with me." She pulled at his sleeve.

"Why? To trap me in the Book of Spells' realm? No! I've already lost one battle tonight. I don't have the strength for another."

"Please, there are too many doors to go through. I can't search them all." She fell to her knees and wrapped her arms around him, begging.

When she glanced up, Barns saw a look in her eyes that he didn't trust. "Miss Weatherbee, you must do this or leave school tonight."

"Why can't the Trusted Zone undo this? Why must it be *me*?" Alana stood and crossed her arms, her face in a storm.

"It can change back magical spells from all but the Book of Spells. It can't do anything to stop its evil or reverse what it does. The Trusted Zone is helpless in this matter."

Headmaster and student glared at each other in the flickering candlelight.

"You're wasting time," Barns barked.

"*Alright!* I'll go." She held out her hand. "May I have my wand?"

Barns extended his arm and placed the wand in her hand.

Stroking the wand, she rested a gaze neither wild nor panicked, but a gaze filled with sorrow on her headmaster. "Once we were friends. After tonight, I fear no one will like me. I truly came back for your help." Her eye dropped a tear.

Still not sure if she was free from the Book of Spells' influence, he fought the urge to hug her. Instead, he kept his distance. "I'm sorry, Weatherbee. I can't help you."

Nodding once, the girl went back upstairs to the Realm of Many Doors and to a task that lay too heavily on her young, slender shoulders.

Chapter 3

A row of five doors stood before Alana, each a different color and size. The Realm of Many Doors seemed simple at first glance. Walking to the end of the row, she opened the green door. Behind it were two corridors forming a V, both lined with doors as far as she could see. She closed that and tried the second door. It offered the same type of choice. So did the third and fourth doors. The impossibility of her task made her feel hopeless. How would she ever find Logan?

Walking to the last door, a yellow one, she sighed and pushed it open. Two corridors lined with doors stood before her, just like the other four doors. Having no idea where to begin, she went to the first door on the right and opened it. Inside were three more doors. Refusing to quit so soon, she reached for the doorknob to the middle door, but it disintegrated in her hands. It took a moment for the surprise to pass, then she tried the other two doors, only to have the same thing happen.

Leaving that room, she went back to the corridor and tried another door, and another. They all had doors in them. Some disappeared. Some opened to reveal a brick wall blocking them. Others circled back into the room.

An hour passed and she still hadn't finished exploring the corridors in the yellow door. With a grimace, she pushed her hair back from her sweaty forehead and opened the next door. After searching that room, she started to close its door when a movement at the end of the hallway caught her eye. Peering to the left, she saw a door close.

"Logan?" Her voice echoed back to her in the quiet hallway. "Logan, is that you?" Her anxious feet trotted the length of the corridor, stopping in front of the door that stood ajar. Flinging it open, she rushed inside, but pulled up short at its emptiness. Twisting around, she saw no other way in or out of the room.

"I *know* I saw something," she murmured under her breath. Raising her wand, she cast a revealing spell. A moment after she fell silent, the Book of Spells' image pulsed before becoming solid, and floated in front of her.

"*You!*" Alana leaned forward, disbelief in her eyes. "What are *you* doing here? Where's Logan?"

The book's pages flapped and snapped while it whirled around in a madcap dance.

"Stop it! Answer me!"

"Where is Logan?"

What door should you try?

*The sooner you find out,
the sooner you die."*

She stomped her foot. "Don't hand me a riddle. Where is he?"

In answer, the book's pages stilled, the cover snapped shut, and the book fell to the floor.

Before she could pick up the Book of Spells, a force whirled her into the air, then cold water rushed over her, making her choke. Fighting her way to the surface, she swam to the pond's edge and struggled in her wet clothes to stand.

In her shocked frame of mind, she wondered if the book was giving her a hint, pointing her in Logan's direction. Taking a deep breath, she dived back into the murky water, searching for him. Underwater reeds tangled with her hands and feet while she groped blindly in the mud. With her lungs bursting for air, she popped back to the surface. Realizing the futility of searching in the dark water, she got out of the pond, the wind slicing through her wet body, setting her teeth in a dance.

The mud pulled at her shoes, making her tired legs ache, but she trudged, step by step, around the pond, looking for Logan or his wand or *anything* proving he was alive. On the far side, she stumbled over the book, catching herself with her hands.

"He's not here, is he?" she hissed at the treacherous tome. The pond was a far distance from the school. From the pond, she had an orchard and parts to the forest to check on her way back.

Alana crawled through the tall grass for as long as her last ounce of strength permitted, but after a few moments, she lay, face down in the grass. "I give up," she sighed.

The inner voice of the book said, "No. Get up. Keep moving onward," in Alana's mind.

She was too tired to argue and whimpered, "No, not just yet," while she lay there, beaten, soaked to the skin.

Alana's thoughts focused to her headmaster's mind. Where he might be, she didn't know. Alana wished she had him here now.

"Oh, if only I could control you," Alana talked to the book. Wicked laughter came from the many pages.

Clutching the tattered spell book, Alana opened to page thirty-six and read, "A new dawn is risen. Now comes time for all good men to die, according to the Rule of Thumbs. Rule of Thumbs?" Alana said, worried. She streamed through the many chapters, looking for the Rule of Thumbs. "I can't find it. What will I do?... Oh here's the chapter."

The page for the Rule of Thumbs was blank. The book laughed, "It's not been written yet. It will be when it occurs. Be patient."

Alana mustered up her last bit of strength. "This enchanted spell book has gone haywire! Work *with* me, not against me, will you? Geeze!" Alana cursed her spell book, flaring her wand.

All around her, the forest was awakening with the dawn. In the past, brilliant, cheery songs of birds awoke the forest creatures. Now, not a sound echoed.

In the moonlight, all she could see was the fleeing form of a person who looked like Professor Knickerbocker. He ran wildly through the forest, heedless of the bushes that he crashed into. Alana followed the figure from a safe distance, high amongst the foliage of the forest.

Her fear gave away to the shadowy strength that followed her. The spell book glowed, lighting her way as she picked it up and started to run again into the night; scary eyes peered through her book's cover. Never had the night seemed so long or dangerous.

She saw Professor Knickerbocker from the School of Shines, heading off into the trees. Alana called to him. "Help me, Professor." He paid her no mind.

Not finding any sign of Logan or the professor after a long search, Alana headed back to her room, clutching the Book of Spells tightly in her arms. Anger filled her chest and made her feet stomp through the halls — anger at her ragged, torn clothing from Professor Ezards' many wand blasts — anger at her bruised ribs — anger at the cuts and scrapes throughout her body from her and Logan fighting that horrible beast the book created.

Bang! The door in the girls' dorm slammed! Alana threw the book across the room, knocking over things on her desk.

"Answer me one thing," she yelled. "Did you send the red door so I could escape the fire that burned Logan?"

"Perhaps."

"Why didn't you send it sooner so that Logan could escape, too?"

"My reasons are my own."

"I've done what you have asked of me for these many months. Why now?" She yelled again, "Why Logan?"

"It was you, too," the slithery voice said. Weatherbee's eyes widened. "You betrayed me."

"*How?*" Alana yelled, breathless from the spell's effects. "How did I betray you? I spoke the spells you asked of me and found the incantations you had written down for the charms. Why kill Logan and not meeee?" She screamed in a high pitch. "*I loved him!*" Alana raised her wand, took a stance and fired off a death spell that lighted up the room, sending the book into blackness.

All that remained, whirling black smoke, reached the windowsill and disappeared. Sitting on the edge of her bed, Alana tried to quit shaking, but the fury and pain were too much. *At least the book is gone.*

Her mind went back to just a few hours earlier, when Logan still lived, when they fought the evil in the mirror castle.

Logan focused his sea green eyes on her face, his own set with determination. "I love you. Please, don't ever forget that," he told her.

He leaned in and gave her a slow lover's kiss, a goodbye kiss, then stood, deliberately putting himself between Alana and the door. It pulsed in its frame, threatening to crack apart from some invisible force pushing on it.

Logan shouted a spell, flicking his wand at the front door. The door burst into flame. He pulled his cloak tighter around him and waited, keeping his face expressionless. He prodded the fire with the tip of his wand, making sparks fly, and shivered when he heard quick, approaching footsteps. "It's here!"

Fingers of flame, malevolent and unstoppable, dwarfed the room and stretched toward Alana. Laughter deafened her ears. She gulped, twisting around, looking for somewhere to run. Glancing at Logan, she saw him standing still... motionless... waiting...

"Logan!" Realizing too late his intentions, Alana jumped toward him. "I love you!"

He shoved her out of the way of the outstretched fiery fingers, which closed in a fist around him and pulled him out the door, burning him alive.

"Logan," she whispered to her empty room. "Logan, where are you? Please say you're not dead."

A distant roar grew louder until she pressed her hands over her ears. Before Alana had time to react further, the book came out of a vortex and opened its pages, firing off a brilliant orange and yellow glow, knocking Weatherbee onto her back.

A slithery voice spoke, "You tried to kill me? How *dare* you. *I* control *you*."

"No!" Alana fought back with another wand blast. "Bring Logan back!" In the exchange of blasts, fire crept along the floor, igniting the rug by her dresser. She wheeled around, trying to stomp out the flame. Pain, sudden and fierce from the book's blast, pierced her back and she fell, unconscious.

* * *

"We're not sure what happened here."

Professor Ezards and reporters of the Cups and Balls Daily News gathered in front of Alana Weatherbee's room. What had been here now disappeared. The events that had happened just moments before were unclear to the crowd outside in the hallway. Yellow crime tape sealed off the area, and students and staff members were concerned about Miss Weatherbee's cries for a fellow student named Logan.

"We know that there was some sort of attack, but Headmaster has given no detail to the Cups and Balls Daily News," said reporter Lynn Granger. "We do know at least one person might be dead. His name has not yet been released to us." She motioned to a member of the Wizards News station around the Hidden Realms, who followed her to a short wizard with his back turned to her.

"Professor? Professor, excuse me. Professor Wiltshire?" she called, making the unsuspecting man jump and turn to her. "What do we have so far? There's word going around that one member of the student body of Shines has just barely survived an attack. Is this true?"

"It's unclear at this point what exactly happened," Professor Wiltshire said, raising his hands. "The young lady won't tell us anything. We do have one believed to be dead, a boy, a new student at Shines. Rest assured everything will be taken care of."

A black horse and carriage pulled up, stopping abruptly. Professor Wiltshire walked towards it, shielding his eyes from the headlamps atop the coach. "You're late," Professor Wiltshire grumbled. A tall wizard in a black cloak stepped out onto the freshly fallen snow. "I've kept the place under control until you got here, but you should've been here sooner," Professor Wiltshire fussed.

Head Detective Tinker of the Ministry frowned. "Wiltshire, *don't* tell me how to do my job. I've been sent here by her father, the wizard Weatherbee."

"Whatever," said Professor Wiltshire "somebody's gotta maintain law and order around here. The headmaster has seemingly slipped up on his duties."

"Want to hear about what we've got?" Tinker flipped open his small notebook.

"Sure." Wiltshire moved a step closer.

Professor Ezards stood nearby, eavesdropping on the two men, eyeing each one.

"One confirmed missing, the boy; one wounded, the girl. She was discovered in her chamber, trying to destroy the Book of Spells," the investigator said.

"How did you find that out?" asked Wiltshire, not quite believing a student would challenge the Book of Spells.

"A friend saw it and pulled her out of her room when she passed out. Before that, the girl was flung into the Grissmyer Village pond. We have an eye witness who followed her from the pond back to the school, but Professor Ezards has taken the boy away for now."

"Flung into the pond? Don't you mean fell?"

"No, sir. More like she was flung from some hidden realm and landed in the water. The eyewitness said she was yelling a boy's name, frantic in her search in the pond and on the muddy shoreline. Then the witness said she ran off once she saw that she was being watched. That's when she wound up back at Shines in her bed chamber, trying to do the unthinkable. Fire was flickering up her walls and across the floor. She got hit by a blast, passed out and got singed. Her friend had to dodge blasts from the book, but managed to drag her to safety, then called for help."

* * *

Ezards ran back to his office where the witness was tied up in his chair. Professor Ezards walked around the chair and leaned in, staring into the poor boy's rapidly blinking eyes. Ezards' tone became darker, puzzling the boy.

"Are you sure you're telling me the truth, Chilean?"

"Yes, sir, it was frightening. I saw Weatherbee fly through the air and crash into the pond like she fell from the cloak of darkness itself."

"Unbelievable, Chilean. That is preposterous. "

"Sir, may I go back to my room?"

"Not till the reporters leave the school."

"But, sir, I didn't lie."

"Quiet, boy."

Silence filled the room. Ezards, not believing the word of any school boy, picked up a vial of truth serum and forced the drink down the boy's throat by holding his nose.

"Now you will tell me everything you saw tonight!"

The boy choked on the charmed juice. "Yes, yes. I see it clearly now."

"Go on," Ezards urged, "Tell me what you *really* saw."

"Alana was running through the forest, reacting to an eerie voice beside her. Running just as fast were many ghostly shapes, staying abreast of her. Trees roots and limbs seemed to come alive, to grab her, forcing her to fall down. Some of the roots reached for the Book of Spells but they were burned up and withered away."

"So, she had the book. Then she'd lied. Mmm. Wonder if the Headmaster really knows this Miss Weatherbee as well as he thinks he does?"

Chapter 4

Inside an open ambulance, Alana Weatherbee shivered under the warm thermal blankets as Headmaster Barns sat beside her. She moaned and twisted, her hand pushing against something in her dream.

"Now, now, child. You'll be all right."

At the sound of his voice, her eyes jerked open and she sat up with a gasp. "Where am I?"

Old Professor Winkles and Madam Hairs, along with Madam Hufflepuff and a medic witch, sat beside Weatherbee. Hufflepuff patted Alana's hand. "You're in an ambulance, dearie."

Weatherbee glanced at all the faces, then focused on Barns. "I'm sorry, Headmaster. I am so sorry. I failed. I did my best, but I couldn't find him." Exhausted tears spilled down her pale face

Headmaster whispered in her ear, "Why, child, why the Dead Spell?"

"I had to try and destroy the Book of Spells after what it's done to Logan and I..." Alana broke down and cried again.

"Calm down, little one," Madam Hufflepuff said, hugging her.

Alana hung there, sobbing with her eyes squeezed shut, then jumped out of the wagon. She screamed for Logan, looking into the night air as if she was watching something that no one else could see. Madam Hufflepuff wrapped her up in her cloak and walked her back to the ambulance.

"The others are looking for Logan," Hufflepuff reassured her, getting her settled.

Alana sat down, fresh tears running down her face. Madam Hufflepuff placed a half-frozen black raven into Alana's arms.

"Here, you love creatures. This one can be yours. It will help take your mind off the horror. He's cold, too, nearly frozen to death like you."

"Madam Hufflepuff?" someone called out.

"Yes?" she said.

"A wizard said the pond is empty, but the shoreline is scarred with dead or frozen black ravens. Here, look at this one I picked up."

"Aw, give it to me. We have one in here already, warming up by Weatherbee."

Alana took the second raven and wrapped them both in the madam's cloak to keep warm. "It's going to be alright."

Hufflepuff looked down at Alana, powerlessness in her eyes. She nodded to the teenager, her face expressionless from shock. Hufflepuff paused before closing the ambulance door and pounding on the back twice. The staff waited till it pulled away from the student dorms, through the fresh snow and disappeared through the woods before they went back to the crime scene.

A tall, dark and skinny fellow with glasses stood on the snow bank overlooking the well-lighted area of the school. Headmaster Barns walked over and extended his hand to the man, who shook it.

"Awful mess we've got here, huh, Carl?" commented Barns.

Carl Rousseau, public relations administrator for the school, pushed his glasses back up and nodded. "I just don't get it," he said, "Weatherbee said we

need to go out and look for Logan right now.” He gestured over the grounds, and asked, “She did all *this* and then got herself thrown in the pond?”

Headmaster explained, “The ambulance driver took the liberty of checking out her story when he first arrived. No sign of a boy in the pond yet. It’s been emptied by school staff, with the help of the land owner. The driver and the medic witch checked her feet. They were dirtied with mud and she was soaked to the bone, freezing. She’d been in the pond.”

Rousseau stared at media whispering among themselves. As one, they focused on him when he drew nearer. Microphones were raised to his face and camera lights clicked on, temporarily blinding him.

Coughing once, he began his report. “As you all know, two Shines students have been missing for over a week. We now know at least one of them is alive. It seems young Weatherbee was thrown in the pond and then wounded in her dorm room, both attacks instigated by the Book of Spells. The attacks happened a few hours ago. She has been taken to the hospital for medical observation. The other student has yet to be found and is presumed dead. Police will charge Ms. Weatherbee with foul play in the boy’s disappearance and with the use of dark magic.” He heard the dead quiet of the media. He then held up a picture of Alana, how she looked at the present. The crowd gasped in horror.

“She’s so young,” one reporter said.

“What happened to her?” another asked, “She looks possessed.”

The second photo was raised overhead, showing a group with Logan in front, circled in white chalk.

“He’s still missing,” he said into their cameras, “If you see him, call us immediately.” He paused. “The Book of Spells is considered extremely dangerous, and we have no knowledge of its whereabouts.”

* * *

Days later, professors and students, villagers and eye witnesses crowded the Wizard’s High Courtroom for the fifth day in a row. Not a chair or a space on the wall was empty. To one side, eleven jurors filled the jury box. Three judges sat on a high bench, their white wigs sitting at odd angles on their heads, while tufts of their real hair stuck out behind their ears. They wore official robes of midnight blue with gold chains draping from their shoulders and around their throats.

The prosecuting attorney stood before the witness stand, one hand behind his back, the other clutching his lapel. Underneath his robe, he wore an expensive Armani suit he’d ordered especially for the trial. It was, after all, the trial of the century and he wanted to look his best for the photos.

“So, it is your testimony that the defendant willfully and knowingly used the Book of Spells.”

Headmaster Barns shifted in his seat, unwilling to answer such a direct question.

“Do I need to repeat...?”

“No, I heard you. Yes, she used the Book of Spells.”

A murmur rolled through the room.

"On more than one occasion?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"How many times would you say?"

"Objection," Alana's attorney barked. "Calls for speculation."

"Sustained."

The prosecuting attorney nodded to cover his irritation. "Suffice it to say, she's used dark magic more than once."

"Yes," Barns repeated.

"Thank you. That will be all." With a tilt of his chin, the prosecutor turned to his table and sat down.

Silence fell between the headmaster of Jacks School of Shines and Alana Weatherbee, as the teenager sat at the defendant's table.

"Does the defense wish to question this witness?" the middle judge asked.

"Yes, Your Honor." Alana's attorney stood and walked to the witness stand, resting one hand on the rail. "Headmaster Barns, how long have you presided over the School of Shines?"

"Oh, dear. Let's see." He squinted his eyes while doing mental math. "Around two hundred and seventeen years."

"That's quite a long time. Congratulations."

"Thank you."

"In all that time, have you ever had dealings with the Book of Spells?"

"Only once, when I first came there."

"And what were the circumstances?"

"I was just a novice professor at the time, but several of us put a spell on the Book to hide it from everyone."

"To hide it?" He straightened and looked over his shoulder at Alana. "You didn't hide it very well. How did it get out?"

Barns frowned. "The best that I can tell is that it's been working for hundreds of years to get free. It called to Ms. Weatherbee to help it escape."

"Called to Ms. Weatherbee? So, in other words, it influenced her."

"Yes, I guess you could say."

"Taking that logic a step further, wouldn't it be fair to say that it continued to influence her? Everything she did in regard to the book wasn't completely of her own volition, even to including Logan in her actions?"

"It's probable."

"I have no further questions. The defense rests."

"Then we will recess court until the jury comes to a verdict." *Bang!* The gavel hit the desk.

Led by a warden through the back hall, Alana sat in her prison cell and picked at her lunch they brought her on a metal tray. Her entire future rested on whatever the jury decided. Leaning against the wall, she ached for someone to talk to. Fear fed her nervous energy; doubts yelled in her mind, and she had no one, absolutely no one in her corner.

Her friends and Headmaster shunned her for her contributing factors to Logan's disappearance and suspected death. Even her father didn't attend her

hearing. In spite of herself, the last time they spoke looped through her thoughts and brought tears to her eyes.

He came to see her the first night in the hospital. Without a greeting or a hug, he stood at the foot of the bed, his shoulders stiff, his jaw rigid.

"I've been told they're arresting you tomorrow. What have you done, daughter?"

"I tried to destroy the Book of Spells." She watched him, wondering at his distance.

"How did you even get involved with such a thing?" He took three steps to a chair and sat down. "And what happened to this boy, Logan?"

"Dad, it's a long, complicated story. The book killed Logan, or hid him away somewhere. I've looked and looked, but can't find him."

"Why did it kill him?"

"Because it was after me and he jumped in the way to save me."

"I see." His lips pursed into a tight line. "How long have you been involved with the book?"

"Since I first came to the school."

"A year? You've been...a *year*?" He pushed his hair back, disbelief clouding his blue eyes.

Her hands clasped each other, and she looked down at the white sheet covering her.

Without a word, he stood and headed toward the door.

"Dad, please don't leave me! I need you!"

"You're not my daughter," he whispered. "You've been with the book too long. It's telling you what to do, how to act...how to lie."

"But..."

He disappeared out the door before she could say anything more.

The clanking of her cell opening broke her reverie. Back in court, she stood before the judges, her palms sweaty and her throat dry. She watched the jury hand their decision to the judge nearest them.

"According to the school Ministry," the judge read from a file, "Alana Weatherbee is a good student who worked hard to be a good member of her community, and a good Top Five Maze player. She is a child with a bright future, not some ghetto thug wielding a wand, looking for trouble."

He peered over the top of his glasses at her. "You are found innocent of all charges of foul play but charged with the disappearance of a fellow student. You are also convicted of knowingly consorting with, and doing the bidding of the Book of Spells by using dark magic. However, taking your age into consideration, as well as the influence the book had on such a young, inexperienced mind, we are reducing your sentence to two months in the dungeon. After such sentence is served, you are free to rejoin the school for your second year."

Headmaster didn't intervene when they took her away.

Chapter 5

Two guards and a prison matron, all wearing starched dark blue uniforms, led Alana down many stairs and through the long, chilly hallways to the dungeon. After turning several corners, the group stopped in front of a thick wooden door that had a small barred window in the middle.

One guard unhooked a ring of keys from his belt and unlocked the door, squeaking it open for the first time in a century. Cobwebs covered the entrance and hung from the dark ceiling. He brushed some away and the matron led Alana inside to remove her handcuffs.

"You'll get breakfast and dinner," the matron said, then followed the guards out into the hallway.

"What about light?" Alana asked, shivering in the middle of the cell.

The matron nodded to a small window high on the wall. "That's your light." Pulling the door closed, the group walked away, their footsteps echoing through the empty dungeon.

Alana sat alone on a cot with a thin mattress and one blanket. The thick stone walls offered no warmth and the scurrying mice offered little company. A line of mountains stretching north and south provided the only view that Alana had from her tiny cell window. At the base of one of these mountains, a deep tunnel bored into the hard rock.

Home lay in those mountains, surrounded by forest. She wondered about her father, worrying if he loved her at all anymore. His distance at the hospital hurt her more than any wound from the book. He was all she had in the world. Unless she could find Logan.

Logan... His image floated to her memory, dark hair, piercing green eyes, lopsided grin, and strong, muscular arms. He didn't want to be a werewolf, but he'd been bitten as a child and lived in fear the rest of his life. Between the headmaster and her, they were helping Logan find his way, giving him a place to live and work. She laughed, remembering him giving her a frog for a gift. He didn't know what teenage girls liked, and didn't understand her reaction.

Both of them were social misfits, but they fit each other. Friendship grew to love, and that love grew deeper with each passing day. But later, when the book unleashed its evil on the school, the socially inept teenage boy became a warrior, strong and confident. She watched the metamorphosis and realized just how special he was.

But Logan was gone. Just when the beast in the fire almost consumed her in the mirror castle, he jumped in the way to save her. Was she worth his life? She didn't know. She didn't allow herself to think about it, because the answer scared her. Here, in the cold dungeon, hot tears fell down her face. Her loneliness and need for him crashed down on her. With her head in her hands, she finally let herself weep.

Just before sunset, footsteps grew louder and Alana stood. The door opened and a jailer entered, followed by a man bearing a brazier and wood. The jailer set her dinner tray on a small table by the bed while the second man built a fire.

When he finished, he straightened and pointed toward firewood he'd stacked in the corner.

"That'll keep you till morning, if you're careful."

"Thank you."

When they turned to leave, she stopped them. "Please, can you stay for a bit? It's lonely down here."

"Sorry, against regulations." The jailer pushed his companion through the door first, then closed it behind them.

With a sigh, Alana uncovered her dinner tray and found bread, an apple and some cheese. Beside the plate sat a glass of water. She crumbled the cheese and put it on the bread, then set the metal tray on the fire. Waiting for the cheese to melt, she bit into the apple and huddled around the brazier, holding her cloak tightly against the cold wind that came from the hall and open window.

Barns came down two days later, bringing her writing paper and quills smuggled in a pocket, along with candles and matches so she could busy herself and write. Not sure how much the book still influenced Alana, Barns studied her face, especially her eyes. After all, she was still the loving misguided Alana Weatherbee. Deciding to give it time, not a word was exchanged between them on that visit. He just sat, with narrowed eyes and deep lines in his brow, staring out the window at the red moon for a few minutes. Then, laying a hand on her shoulder, he left.

* * *

The next morning, before he finished with breakfast, Headmaster Barns had a visitor. Wizard Weatherbee pounded on his door and, when admitted, took off his cloak, shaking snow before hanging it on the wall.

"This is a surprise," Barns said and closed the door. "May I offer you breakfast?"

"This isn't a social call." Weatherbee walked to the middle of the room and stood with his hands on his hips.

"Then how may I help you?" Barns sat down in an overstuffed winged back chair and pointed to its mate on the other side of the end table. "Have a seat, please."

Weatherbee sat on the edge, his back straight and his expression grim. "I debated about coming here at all, and thought to write a letter instead. However, I want to look you in the eye when I ask you some questions."

"Alright."

"You did all in your power to get me to allow my daughter, my *only* daughter, to attend this school. You said she would be trained to the highest standards."

"Yes, I..."

Weatherbee cut him off. "Then how could you let this happen? *How?* She's been involved with the Book of Spells for an *entire year*." He pushed his hair back with hands shaking in anger. "The danger she's been in! And all right under your nose! Explain yourself."

"I...I don't know that I can. We suspected something toward the end, but..."

"*Suspected* something?" Weatherbee snorted. "What did you do about it? Warn the parents? Close the school? At least conduct an investigation? *No!* None of these things!" He stood to pace the room, his hands flailing. "I don't even know if I *have* a daughter anymore. That dark evil magic has been living in her mind for too long."

"I'm so sorry..."

The wizard had no time to listen to the headmaster's explanation. "And now she's in the dungeon! A Weatherbee. In the dungeon! I should sue this school. At the very least, I should petition that you be removed from your position as headmaster."

"Please, please." Barns stood and held his hands out. "If you'll sit down, we can talk this thing over. Shutting down the school and getting me fired won't help your daughter. And that's all you really want to do, isn't it?"

Weatherbee drew his head back and studied the earnest expression on Barns' face. "Yes, you're right. I'd do anything to get my girl back." With a huff, he sat down.

"And I want nothing more than to get her back and to find the boy, Logan. You know the history of the Book of Spells. It's devious and not an easy, timid foe. Wizards more powerful than you or I have tried and failed to contain its power. We need to keep it away from Alana. While she's in jail, its influence will wane and, by the time she returns to school..."

"*If* she returns," her father interrupted.

"...she will be completely free and in her own mind."

Weatherbee cast a doubtful look at the old man. He realized, though, that they both had little choice in the matter. Standing, he reached for his cloak. "Just keep her safe. Promise me!"

"I promise."

With one last glance over his shoulder, Weatherbee went outside, leaving the headmaster to finish his now-cold breakfast.

Wizard Weatherbee had made a good point, though, and Barns couldn't help but think about it while he ate. Not only was Logan's disappearance talked about and the Book of Spells own dark existence in her life, but also the Hidden Realms of the interior of this castle. Headmaster Robert Barns' placement in this and the safety for the school rode on his back like a broken broom handle. The courts challenged the headmaster if he was still strong enough to control a wizardry school.

Lately, he'd wondered the same thing, and yet it was different to have someone speak it out loud.

However, the idea of going back to find Logan was on the headmaster's mind. It was not easy to go inside a place of Hell...into that dark castle, and find Logan, wherever he may be. It wasn't as if something dark and scary would occur right off. The horror left inside from the search through that realm would hit him much later magically and mentally.

Searching the many magical doors to different hidden realms of the castle's interior required mindboggling skills beyond any old wizard. Robert Barns felt one

day someone from the School of Shines would find the right door that led to Logan's remains.

He knew he could go further than before to look for the boy who never came out, if he so chose to use oldest and wisest of magical skills. However, no one could go behind the Book of Spells' dark, uncanny magic. It would be a trick to outwit it.

There was only one master; it was Weatherbee who said it best last year. Weatherbee knew she was the only one besides Logan who could touch the book. She might be the key to unlocking the many doors in the realms. In court, Weatherbee stated she could never go back to the hidden realms. It was too frightening not knowing what lay behind each door.

Through Alana, the book had unleashed a reign of terror, possibly that very same night when Logan was lost in the mirror copy of this castle. Weatherbee couldn't control it by one wave of her wand or by whispering a said spell to right a wrong.

Barns set his empty mug beside his crumb-covered plate and wiped his mouth with a napkin. Pushing back from the table, he sighed, wondering if he had the strength required to take such a task on and protect Alana at the same time.

Chapter 6

Cafzf waited in the dungeon, the deepest part, away from humans, wizards and witches alike. Smooth red skin covered his lean body. Horns twisted out of either side of his bald head, skewering their way past his ears, curling almost to his shoulders. Black fingernails, several inches long, protruded from his fingers, and his dark green tongue flicked in and out of thin lips, like a snake. His eyes had no irises, only black holes, pitiless and cold. His minion of demons hovered nearby, waiting for his command.

Knowing she was alone and feeling abandoned, Cafzf called to Alana Weatherbee in her slumber. His voice would be close, close enough for her to feel his sticky presence. He wanted more than anything else to have Alana, the seer witch of the School of Shines, see his coming to power. With her at his side, he would bid out one spell after another, reading the newly created pages of the spell book at his command. However, the book would never allow its creator to be powerful again. Its mistress Weatherbee had the ability it sought to bring the power of the land to evil and darkness.

Alana would not succumb to Cafzf's power. On one occasion, Alana spun around to face the darkest shadows from where his voice issued his command of death to the school. She told him, "I would not aid you in anyway, demon wizard."

"You've been foolish, young lady," he told her in a tight voice. "A witch taught the book to dismiss me, and now the book tells you what to say and how to collect charms and spells, even writing new pages for the book. It's laughable."

In Alana's dreams, the demon wizard showed her the school's future with dozens...hundreds...thousands of coffins lining the cemetery. She turned disbelieving eyes towards Cafzf and saw a smile stain his cruel lips.

"I will prevail over you one day."

"Not a chance," she replied.

"Till the bitter end, then."

"Yes. It shall be to the end." She woke up, sweat beading her forehead in spite of the room's chill. Adding wood to the fire, she tried to shake away the fear.

* * *

That evening, a specter floated in the corner of the cell. Sensing a presence, Alana looked up from her writing and stared at shadows flickering on the cold stone wall.

"Hello?" She focused on a mist taking form. "Who are you?"

"You're not afraid?" the ghost whispered, sounding like it stood in a tunnel.

"No. What's your name?"

"Kat," the young girl ghost told her, peering at Alana through curly bangs draping her face.

"I'm Alana."

"Yes, I know. I've been listening. Hope you don't mind, but I've been alone down here for ages."

"I don't mind at all. I've only been here for a few days and I'm going crazy with nothing to do." Alana smiled at finally having a friend, even if she was a ghost.

"What are you doing?" Kat asked, moving closer.

"I feel the need to write down the words, or rather, the connected and the unconnected stories of my life so far."

Kat replied, with a mist coming from her mouth, "Interesting. I used to be a writer."

"I like to write down whatever I'm thinking of late," Alana said, excited that she has found a friend who loved to write. "Then you can help me with my writing some time."

"I could tell you what it's like on the other side of Death."

"Super," Alana grinned, "I figured there was a dark side to death."

"Yes," Kat sighed, "there is a very dark presence we have to deal with on occasion. Most frightening." Kat shivered while standing in her shadow.

"I feel it's best for my age and dark thoughts and reckless behavior to set them to script," Alana explained.

"I felt that way, too; well when I was alive." Kat chuckled. "Alternatively, I forget easily."

"I wish to say straightaway that I am a witch. Well, I was born to be a witch. Anyway, that is what I am."

The ghost girl smiled.

Alana stated to Kat, "As you may think, someone high in wizardry or the great arts of witchcraft would be an important person. My magic is twisted compared to others. I am, in fact, a no one."

Shocked by that, Kat replied, "Do not say that, dear child."

"Yes, I am correctly categorized by the school newspaper. I feel I've been justly condemned. Let's just say I've been known to get into trouble when I use my new wand. It's filled with dark magic, and its full powers are not yet known. I've achieved nothing significant in my life. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. And I will never be famous. One toss of a coin says one thing; wisdom and magic another. It just may well be a dream."

"You will be someone great, greater than all," the ghost girl Kat said.

"Look out, world; I'm growing up pretty fast." Alana jumped and down on her feet, standing on her tiptoes. "I hope you're right," Alana smiled, feeling better.

"I'll let you get back to writing then." The ghost began to fade and turn to a vanishing wisp.

"Bye. See you later, Kat."

"Bye, child. Stay well."

The next morning, Alana awoke and found Kat waiting for her. They were deep in discussion about her writing when the jailer brought her breakfast. He set oatmeal and hot tea on the table, then disappeared down the hall.

"So why, you may think, should anyone read about my life, considering that I am a nobody and a young witch?" Alana picked up the topic from the night before. "The Cups Ands Balls Daily feels differently. Maybe I *am* a 'Person of interest'.

"I feel you should. It just may be interesting.

"I think that, precisely because I am a nobody, people should read about my life!"

"Why?"

"Because, since most of us are nobodies, I must be a reflection for a significant number of people. You see, if I were famous, then I would be in the minority of the population of great wizards and witches you may have read about and, therefore, I would reflect the lives of just a small fraction of the people around me.

"In other words, if I were rich, and if I were to write about my life as a rich girl, then most readers would have absolutely nothing to relate to such a story. I am a mirror that is a reflection of greater witches from long ago, I was told. I have an unusual collection of the spells I know and am able to use.

"In the headmistress' office one day, I devised a new creature no one had ever seen. Thinking back, I should have erased it before she walked in. I tended to allow creation a chance to run free. That upset the school for a day or maybe two."

"How exciting! I wish I'd seen the creature."

Alana smiled. "It was a lot of fun."

Echoing footsteps ended their conversation, and the jailer pushed open her door.

"You have a visitor."

In walked Headmaster Barns. She stood, offering him her chair, and sat on the edge of her cot.

“Good morning, sir.”

“Good morning. You’ve had breakfast, I see.”

“Yes.”

He removed his gloves, but left his cloak on against the room’s chill. When he sat down, he cleared his throat.

“I came because I’ve done some research about your situation and thought you should know.”

“My situation? What’s that?”

“Why the Book of Spells attached itself to you.”

“Oh. I’ve wondered about that.”

“I talked to an ancient wizard whose memory goes further back than written records. He told me about the history of the three lands and the three kings. Long ago, a demon wizard Cafzf, created the Book of Spells and used it to increase his hold over the kingdoms. However, the book found its way to a young girl, also named Alana. Cafzf sent a member of the quad, which is a group of bad wizards who spoke death spells, to murder Alana and her family, and to retrieve the book. The assassin killed the daughter and her mother, but her father, a great wizard, remained alive. The council took action against their deaths. As punishment, the wizard did the worst thing possible to the quad. He left them to suffer the consequences of their own actions of trickery and misused magic.

“The daughter had the Book of Spells in her hands on the night she died, and so seemed to protect this book with her life. In spite of Cafzf’s plans, the book vanished before the assassin could grab it. Over the millennia, the book has waited to reappear, needing just the right person with enough skill and power to do its bidding. That person is you, Alana.

“You will have to bring out the daughter Alana from this book and set her free to heaven where her mother and father await. Only then will the book’s magic disappear — forever.”

Alana remained silent, needing to know if this was truth or just a trap to take her away.

Barns rubbed his eyes and leaned on the table. “Tell me how you first encountered the book,” he asked.

“Alright. Professor Crowslunger wanted me to take some boxes to the basement for her. When I got down there, I couldn’t find the professor but, again and again, a voice called for me.

“As I followed the voice, it led me to a mysterious old room in the end of the basement and I wondered what was in it. I opened the door and went in the dark, empty room. I was attracted to the faint sound and smell. I didn’t see anything until I spotted an ancient book.

“The book was glowing gold and orange as it floated in front of me. By the time I tried to pick up the book, I blew away, back to where I was standing with the boxes, looking for Professor Crowslunger.”

Headmaster's rants streamed over the table. "Only someone who had known the terror personally would have that kind of empathy to feel as another who died holding onto the same book. The book found the closest thing to its master ... that would be you, Alana.

Alana did not look shocked. She placed her hands in her lap and folded them.

"I knew something was wrong, but I didn't trust my instinct," Headmaster said, scary eyeing the teenager. "I wanted to wait till another sign came through." He picked up her empty tea mug and moved it. "You're biggest mistake was when you told evil that you sided with them for the purpose of honing your magical skills. You and Logan were taken to that haunted castle. You're safe here and at the school, child. I wouldn't lie, especially about something that is creeping up on us at Shines."

"How could a wizard or witch make it safely to anywhere but here against a quad? That poor family," Alana commented, "stood no chance when death was spoken aloud."

"Yes, quite right. They got the worse punishment ever seen before without use of good magic to help. Just evil was spoken in magic's name. Most could not understand why, but one old wizard could. He bore witness and now has been summoned to shed light on this topic. The next death quad is on the move," Barns said, "so guard yourself."

"They must want the book, too."

"That's true, Alana," Headmaster said. "I hate to close the conversation in this fashion, but all our lives are at risk. There can be no games."

* * *

A week later, during one of the headmaster's visits, Alana's low whisper echoed off the walls. "My father?"

"Yes?" Barns said.

"He still hasn't come to see me."

"He's charged me to look after you. He still cares for you, dear. Never worry about a father's love for his only child."

"Then why won't he come?" She bit the inside of her lip to keep from crying.

"Because we need to be sure the book no longer has a hold on you. He's too powerful to let him fall under its influence."

"I don't understand. You're here and you have a lot of power."

"Yes, but you're connected to him in a very special way. He's your father and is vulnerable wherever you're concerned. The Book of Spells knows that and would use it against him. I can assure you, he'd give anything to be with you right this minute."

Alana winced and then changed the subject. "How come there's no lock on the door and no guard anymore?"

"Oh, that," he said, "We believe in you, that you'll stay down here and serve your time with honor. That will help when you come back to school. You have just a few more weeks. Everyone is too afraid to come down here to guard you."

"Afraid? Of *me*?"

"Not you so much as the Book of Spells."

"But it's not here." She gestured across the nearly empty room.

"I know, but it has a strong influence on you. Besides, dear, I'm here."

"Yes, thank you." Alana asked, "Does everyone feel I'm a killer or justly wronged?"

"Well, it's like this. The ones who know you try their hardest to understand the puzzlement you must be in by the book. The others who don't know you have their thoughts, for good or ill. So when you come back to the school and start your class, you must step lightly and be on your best behavior. Alright?"

"Ok, Headmaster."

Alana spent the daylight hours writing. Thankful for her superior memory, she decided to fight the book's spells by rewording them into many new books now authored by herself. It kept her busy and also gave her time to contemplate each spell, its meaning and true purpose.

Chapter 7

The headline from The Cups and Balls Daily read:

*Alana Weatherbee Set Free
Investigators find no clues to boy's whereabouts*

After serving her two month sentence for dealing in dark magic, Alana was escorted back to the School of Shines by Headmaster Barns and Madam Hufflepuff one evening.

"Now, dear," Hufflepuff purred, her dark raisin eyes set in her doughy face, "things will be back to normal lickety split. You'll see all your friends and make up class work you missed. I've kept your two ravens for you. They'll be happy you're home."

Alana cast a doubtful glance the matron's way, but said nothing. In her dorm room, she touched each book on the shelves, ran her hands along her dresser and stood at the window, looking out, wondering what tomorrow would bring. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a roll and fed pieces of it to her ravens, Twinkle and Winkle, now on their perch.

Everything felt empty, sagging somehow, like a balloon without enough air. She waited for a few hours, hoping some of her girlfriends would drop by, but no one did.

"They must be afraid of me," she told the ravens. "But they've no need to be. I don't have the Book of Spells. I'm not dangerous."

Changing into her bedclothes, she blew out the candles and went to sleep.

Golden rays caressed her face, easing her to wakefulness the next morning. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she wondered what to wear her first day back. Image would be important, something that said "innocent and friendly." Deciding

on a light blue blazer with a pleated skirt and oxford shoes, she got ready and went down to breakfast.

"Alana, you're back!" a voice called behind her.

She looked over her shoulder and stopped. "Wyatt, hi." When he caught up with her, they continued walking. "How's maze practice going?" she asked.

"It's okay. Kinda slow since we've been down one on the team."

"Yeah, sorry about that." She grinned at the team leader and punched his arm. "I *knew* you'd miss me."

The young man ducked his head, red tinting his cheeks, admitting to the crush he had on her.

"So, how was it?" Wyatt asked to change the subject.

"How was what?"

"You know. The dungeon."

"Oh, that. Boring. Nobody but ghosts to talk to, unless Headmaster Barns stopped by."

"They wouldn't let any of us visit." Wyatt pulled open the cafeteria door and held it for her.

"Yeah, I know." Alana stepped through, looking back at him. Her expression changed when she realized the entire cafeteria was silent behind her. Not even forks scraping against plates made a sound.

Wolfgang, one of the other maze team players, stood and walked across the room to Wyatt. "What are you doing with *her*?" His chin jutted out and he crossed his arms.

"Just saying hello."

"You know better. We took a vote, remember?"

"Yeah. I remember."

"A vote?" Alana interrupted. "A vote about what?"

"C'mon." Wolfgang clapped a hand on Wyatt's shoulder and led him away without looking once at her.

"Oh, I get it. The silent treatment." Raising her head, she walked with a straight back to the line and picked up her tray. She refused to let them intimidate her.

Once she got her eggs on toast and orange juice, she looked for a place to sit. No one would look her in the eye as she went from table to table.

"Here, you can sit with me." Amanda, with her light blonde hair and deep hazel, smoking hot eyes, looked of nobility. She was thin, but with a tiny bit more curves than the other girls in school.

"You sure you want to be seen with me?" Alana asked and put her tray down.

"Oh, them," Amanda waved her hand with an air of dismissal. "They're just fraidy cats. Nothing but sheep."

"Thanks!" Alana took a sip of juice and put her glass down. "Didn't we have broom mechanics together last year?"

"Yeah. I hated that class. I kept getting broom straws stuck in my hair." Amanda giggled and shook her satin tresses.

"It was an easy A," Alana remarked, then lowered her voice. "What did you vote about?"

"Huh?"

"Wyatt wasn't allowed to talk to me because of a vote."

"They voted to have nothing to do with you. That's what I meant about sheep. They're afraid that you killed Logan."

"I never would! I love him."

"And they're certain you're still under the Book of Spells' influence."

"But, I haven't been anywhere near it in over two months," Alana protested.

Amanda shrugged. "I told them they were being ridiculous, but..."

"So, it's going to be this way all year?" Alana sat back, slumped in her seat.

"Only if you let them get to you. Act like you're having the time of your life. Be the one in charge. Don't care about what they think." Seeing Alana's doubtful expression, she added, "Besides, you're the one with all the power. They're just wannabes."

"You're right." Alana allowed a smile to cross her face. She straightened and dug into her breakfast.

* * *

"My first hot bath in such a long time," Alana said in pleasure that night, relaxing to ease the tension that had her muscles knotted. Her first full day at school had been a trial, returning glares with a smile, answering politely if spoken to, but otherwise remaining silent. Old friends refused to be seen with her, and that hurt the most. She couldn't count how many times she'd walked into a classroom just to have all conversation stop.

"Give them time," Alana tried to cheer herself up. "It's only your first day back. It will get better." But the tears in her eyes didn't believe her. Weatherbee's back still hurt after that horrible, frightful night her last time with Logan, fighting for their lives and souls. Alana thought back to the fight in that dark castle, giving her the shivers.

"Now, now," a voice sneered, "That is no way to have treated a witch like you."

Alana jumped and looked in the corner shadows. "Who's there?"

"Me. Who else?" The Book of Spells spoke and moved to sit beside her.

"Leave me alone!" She splashed water on its cover. "Get out of here."

"Now, Alana, that's not what you really want."

"Yes, it is. I've had two months away from you and they were the best two months of my life!"

"Such a liar," the book chuckled, unmoved by her anger.

"I loved Logan and you *killed* him."

"Lose some, win some," the spell book said.

Alana whispered, "I should have used all the spells to kill you."

"You shouldn't have the skills to handle all of them."

"The spells should have all worked," she argued. "What happened to my command over you? Were they not said properly?"

The book had no answer.

Alana said, "You give only when you want to. I needed help that night. You created that *thing*... I tried to kill it... for it would have killed me but, instead, it

killed my friend.” She broke down sobbing, feeling as if this book weighed down her entire being, and its will rested over her shoulders like chainmail.

“Never ask,” the book said. “Never ask what went wrong. Logan was getting too close to you. If others do, they will suffer, too.”

Alana sat there with a blank stare, then splashed water on her back. “The water’s getting cold. Make it a bit warmer, please.”

“All right,” the book said. A flash of brilliant light lit up the bathroom.

“That’s better.”

“Very well then,” the book commented.

“Where did you hide the whole time I was in lock up and being tried?”

“Closer to you than you will ever know.”

“Oh,” Alana moaned, biting her lower lip, drawing blood.

The book’s two demons floated high up, testing her in mental magic — wondering if she still had the capacity to beat them.

“Easy now, mistress,” one taunted her when he beat her at one. “You’ve been away too long.” Every move she made was sloppy, and the demon was able to anticipate and counter her at each turn.

“You’re losing your magical touch, Weatherbee. Is that any way a true hard core witch handles things?”

“No. I just don’t feel like thinking right now. I don’t have time for games and doing counter curses with you at the present.”

“Why? Is that a problem?”

“No, no, it’s not...” Alana paused. “Just there are so many problems right now, not just one. Today was my first day back in class. They act like they know what happened to Logan and me, but they don’t.”

“Yes,” the book said, “they come to their own feelings on the matter.”

The demon said, “Whatever happened to truth in magic?” as it floated back to the ceiling.

Alana said, “There is no truth to magic.”

The book asked, “Why did you try to kill me? In your heart you couldn’t.”

“You killed my love.”

Alana was interrupted by the book. “You love me more.”

“In addition, I’d been hurt.” Alana hid her pain well, but the cords standing out in her neck showed the scars from the demons of the mirror castle where she and Logan fought for their lives that night. Many scars from wand blasts that nearly reached their target showed on her battered body.

Alana dazedly stared at the book. It was her nightmare to deal with now. Had Alana not acted when she did, she might’ve been killed; it had gotten that close.

Her two ravens sat atop the tub, and a few other lesser demons hovered just below the ceiling, chanting to make her well.

“The treating of wounds is most important,” one said.

Kat, who came with Alana back to school, stood guard by the bathroom door. Down the hall, a wolf passed back and forth, smelling every door for any trouble or foul play at work. One wolf sat at the dorm room door of her new friend, Amanda. Protection was given to her for joining the crew. Alana could summon creatures from the forest and guardian wolves at will.

Alana got out of the bath tub. "You guys turn around, please." She placed her white bathrobe on her thin body and slipped her tiny feet into a pair of fluffy scuffs. She wiped down the bath tiles, smacking the tiles limply with a rag. In spite of the relaxing bath, the reality of her situation left her feeling hopeless. With Logan gone, her father keeping his distance, and no friends left, she didn't know how she would cope. Her body shook with her passing sobs.

"They all hate you," the book said. "It will be better soon."

"How?" Alana asked. "You're still here."

"Droll, very droll, Mistress."

Alana looked up toward the book. "Leave me alone!" She knocked it to the wet floor.

"How did you share a life with a warrior like Logan if you couldn't live up to him?" the book asked. "In addition, every moment he continued to carve a place for himself at your side, you placed him in danger. Didn't you realize that? I can't be shared. Neither can you. You'll be friendless forever."

"No!" Weatherbee yelled. "I will not allow that."

"Alana, the longer you stay here, you place everyone in harm's way. I grow stronger every day now that I've taken a life."

"Really?" Alana said, reading his thoughts.

"We are in more danger than they are. They've sent for an assassin."

"*What?* You're joking. The school, Barns, the professors wouldn't dare... Would they?" Alana questioned.

"You must help me kill him in order to survive."

Chapter 8

The next morning, as Alana got dressed and made her bed for the day, visions of Logan's battered and bloody body loomed over her. They followed her through the day, then fell into her nightmares till the next dawn.

Misty morning clouded the sky. The book said, "Your friend Amanda waits for you around the corner."

"Good," Weatherbee said, lowering her eyes. "I don't want to walk to my first class alone."

"Then I'll disappear. I don't want anyone knowing I'm back just yet." The book vanished just as Alana rounded the corner.

"Hey, Alana."

"Hi, Amanda."

"How you feeling?" Amanda asked.

"Fine," with a half-baked smile, Alana answered. "Ready?"

"Yes, but you're not."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"Your clothes. They're all wrong."

"They're all I have. What's wrong with them?"

"You look like you just came in from the country. No style, no...attitude. C'mon."

Amanda grabbed Alana's elbow and ushered her to Amanda's room. "We're about the same size. Let me see what I can do."

"I'll warn you, I'm more of a tomboy."

"Like I didn't already know." Amanda opened her closet and pulled out one outfit after another, holding them up against Alana's frame. When Amanda had an ensemble put together, she then got a pair of high heels.

"Here, I think these will fit."

"Heels? I've never worn..."

"Alana Weatherbee! Don't argue! We've got a statement to make today. You're in charge and don't care what anybody else thinks. That's our reputation and, if you're going to hang out with us, you need to fit in. Got it?"

"Yeah, okay." Alana changed into the clothes, then stepped into the high heels and wobbled toward the door.

"We're going shopping after school," Amanda informed her as they walked to class. "So don't make any other plans."

Alana wore a black leather jacket, black skirt with thigh high white socks, and black leather high heels pumps. "This outfit will not make Teen Vogue."

"Well," Amanda commented, "dark clothes, tinkling witches' bells earrings, never-ending spells and charms — might as well dress the part of a witch."

Alana, with her brown hair and blue eyes, shined this morning. She was the perfect height, tiny and developed like the other girls.

"What the heck!" Alana yelled as her arm was yanked from nowhere.

"Quiet," Kat the ghost whispered to her.

"Ugh!" Amanda said, "Who are you talking to?" She threw her books in her locker.

"Oh, my snitch discovered something loathsome. I might have to leave. The word loathe mean anything to you?" Alana said.

"What?" Amanda asked, as she checked her gloss in her fuzzy purple mirror.

"To hate someone with a passion means loathe," Gillian said, passing by, placing her things in the locker next to Amanda with a duh-how-do-you-not-know-that term look.

"Where did you learn that?"

"From Mrs. Cagburger, the old witch teaching tea reading," Gillian answered.

Amanda snickered, adjusting her skirt.

Alana went off, using her Whispoo charm builder, readying itself for any trouble. "Keep walking, spreading the magic," she said to the girls, hand held high, waving a flash of a goodbye. "What will be next?" Alana muttered to Kat following her.

She opened the door to her room. A stench, visible in green-gray, enveloped her, making her eyes water and her lungs squeeze shut. Stepping back, she slammed the door closed and heard laughter from around the corner.

"You stink!" one of her tormentors yelled to the sounds of many running feet. She didn't try to chase them. She recognized Wolfgang's voice.

Wheeling around, she hurried down the hall to Logan's room, unlocked the door and sought solace among his things. Alana sat in a comfy black leather chair, crying, crushing his pillow to her chest. It smelled like him, which made the tears fall faster.

In a week, his room would have grown cobwebs; Logan's memory growing dimmer with everyone — but her. If she knew for certain he'd died, she could prepare herself for life without him. Logically, she knew no one could have survived the fire monster that engulfed him. But, she didn't know for sure. Magic could be treacherous. It could deliberately point to false conclusions.

Staring out the window, she watched brown leaves in the wind lose their feeble hold on branches and skitter to the ground. The brilliantly blue sky offered no cheer. Swiping away tears with the back of her hand, she pulled out two envelopes from her pocket...her mail. Both were on official school stationery.

The first announced a memorial for Logan the next day. She knew of it, but seeing it in print made it seem more real. Glancing around the room, she decided to take some of Logan's favorite things to place around his photograph at the service...his mug with the lightning bolt, his favorite music.

The second envelope came from the Maze Games school supervisor. By the end of the short note, Alana no longer belonged on the team. The parents of the other team members objected to having someone using dark magic anywhere near their children. Alana wadded it up and tossed it across the room.

Alana and Logan were looking forward to this year's games. He was going to train to become a champion fighter for the Top Five. That carried a lot of bragging rights. In Alana's memory, she smirked to herself. Being Logan's teacher would have been fun and exciting.

Alana joked at the time. She couldn't wait to rub it in Logan's handsome face when he first found out she'd be his teacher in hand-to-hand combat.

A knock on the door interrupted her thoughts. She answered and let two dirty-faced house trolls in.

"We're here to pack up Logan's room," one told her, his apron dusty and wrinkled.

"Sure. Go ahead." She returned to the chair and watched them open a trunk. "Where are you sending his things?"

"We're putting them in the main hall's closet. His father will pick it up tomorrow."

After a while, the house trolls finished packing. Alana inspected their work, then after they left, closed the door behind them. She sighed and walked around his big room, her clicking heels echoing in the emptiness. Not ready to leave, she sat down in the same chair as before and began to write.

I wish I had the nerve to say it to you in person.

I wish I could say something, anything other than the usual jokes.

I wish I could say I hope you think I'm beautiful, and not just another plaything, because you know my secret.

I wish I could say how gorgeous I think you are.

I wish, wherever you are, you know how much I love you.

Alana kept Logan's old slippers and placed them at the foot of her bed. They were only an old grungy pair of fur and leather. Nevertheless, she needed them.

* * *

Alana woke up to somebody pulling roughly on her sheets. She moaned like an angry bear. Hard to wake up, she rolled over and hid her face from the distraction. Peering through her eyelashes, she saw Amanda already dressed, primped, pretty and ready for the memorial service.

Alana growled again and plopped a fluffy white pillow over her head.

"Come on, Alana, we're going to be late." Amanda tugged on her pillowcase.

Alana took another peek through one sleep encrusted eye at a girl. "What are *you* doing in *my* room?"

"I'm here to help you get ready." In spite of the growling bear hiding under the pillow, Amanda bravely tugged on her blanket.

Alana raised her pillow creased face. "Seriously, doesn't your class start in, like, ten minutes? You need to get a move on. Right?"

"No, Alana. Nooo! Come on now!" Amanda said, "No school today. We're all going to Logan's service. Come on. Get up and get dressed. This is for you and Logan, you know. We all thought it would help things come to — what is that word...?"

Alana mumbled, "Closure."

"Yeah." She nodded. "Closure. Come on. Hurry or you'll be late! I took the liberty of laying all your clothes out and your best dress cloak. It looks like rain."

"It always rains on days like this."

Amanda asked, "What shoes do you want to wear?" She held three pairs of Alana's brand new dress shoes they'd bought the day before.

Alana winced at making a decision so early in the morning. "The black ones with the laces," she mumbled.

Alana threw back the covers, leaving her nice warm bed, and sat up. Early morning sunlight poked through the predawn darkness. Amanda finished opening the curtains to the two windows in the room.

The dark maroon walls annoyed Alana for absolutely no reason. *Why aren't they black? Most of the rooms here are white. I wanted black to fit my daily mood.*

Alana heard an odd noise and felt a pain, her stomach rumbling from hunger. She hadn't felt like eating in over a day.

Amanda threw a candy bar at Alana. "Ok, you owe me one. Eat." She rolled her eyes as if she knew everything in the world.

Alana wanted to hit her.

"You're not sick, are you?" Amanda asked, putting her hands on her slim hips. One of her perfect eyebrows lifted, and she seemed to probe Alana with her eyes.

"No, just hungry."

Amanda shifted in her black patent heels. "Come on, Alana. Get dressed."

“Ok, ok.” Alana got up, wincing at her messy appearance showing in the reflection of the mirror — hair standing on end on her left side and flat on the other.

In the bathroom, Alana emptied the entire (but small) contents of her stomach into the toilet. Her eyes watered. “Logan’s funeral is this morning. This is for me to make things alright again, putting the missing to rest.” Weatherbee had to go along with this idea, knowing everyone wanted to do this for Logan. She needed to try to reconnect with old friends. Yesterday was horrible and she didn’t want a repeat.

Alana made it to the sink. She brushed her teeth, ran a brush through her thick, long hair, then hurried back. Amanda had just finished making the bed for her. Hearing her talking down the hall, even with the room’s door closed, Alana hurried to dress.

She threw a dark blue dress robe over a white, long-sleeved blouse and a short black skirt. Sitting down, she slid on black stockings and oxfords, tying the laces into a neat bow. Her stomach rumbled again from hunger. Evidently, witches can’t live off of one candy bar a day.

Whatever. Having to meet up with Headmaster Barns was no joking matter, not on this day. It was a serious occasion. Alana grabbed her book bag and her wand off the dresser. She slid it into the waistband of her skirt under her cloak, and finally started down the spiraling stairs towards the front lobby.

The hallways were still a bit full, with some kids hurrying towards their rides to get off the hill to the town below. No one even looked her way as she came into the hall.

Even Amanda yapped her head off in front of Alana to her friend Sydney, a freckled faced girl a head shorter than she and wearing glasses. The rest of the students seemed to magically disappear out the front lobby door by the time Alana looked back that way. Her legs carried her down the corridor, and she sat down next to the door. She heaved a sigh of relief as Headmaster walked in to take her to his antique model T, horseless carriage.

“Good morning, Headmaster.”

“Good morning to you, too, Alana. Shall we go?”

“Yes,” Alana said politely. Using so many manners, she felt, was odd coming from her. However, not every day does the school hold a memorial service. Smelling peppermint on his breath, Alana wondered if he had gone to the Professor’s Tavern early this morning. Watching Barns’ glassy, red bloodshot eyes, she saw he had more worries on his mind than making polite conversation while they rode off the hill.

The car started up with a wheeze and a cough and led to an explosion after he pulled on the choke. Black smoke billowed out of the tailpipe and they were off. They rolled off the driveway to follow everyone down the road to the village. A white cloud of vapor surrounded the vehicle, followed by a wheeze and a snort and a cough as the car stopped and then started, then stopped and then went onward, with some concern and cussing from the old man.

Chapter 9

A lead ball and chain wedged in Alana's heart; today would drag on as she went to say goodbye to her boyfriend. She considered for a moment asking Headmaster if she could leave this year for a holiday of rest. But she didn't have any reasonable excuses for leaving. No one asked her to go to a new place instead of her father's castle. Her head spun toward many disgusting old thoughts. Embarrassed as everyone passed them by, with Headmaster driving like an old lady, she felt as if she might start to hyperventilate. Her ankles froze from the many rusted holes in his floorboard.

Alana looked out the window that wouldn't roll up and turned around as she began to breathe heavily in the freezing air. She was already in her dress robes, with her hair and makeup done, and it was just dawn. Alana wished for coffee or food more substantial than a candy bar. She felt like she might faint later.

The Model T pulled in the center of the parking area. The sun was rising as they entered, hitting Alana in her eyes. Headmasters hadn't said a word to her the whole way down the hill until now.

"We're here."

Alana thought of all her classes that she shared with Logan. She felt lucky to have those memories so strong in her heart and mind. Then she began to think about him. His messy dark hair, his green eyes, his laugh, his smile, his fiery attitude...his bloodline of greater wizards or werewolves before him that came to this land for a way of living freely. Alana glared at the ground; her own thoughts angering her. How could she think of him? It was too sad.

Was he really dead?

Of that, she wasn't certain.

Alana sat in the front row beside Headmaster Robert William Barns. An unknown minister pronounced Logan's life decent and worthwhile; making her glad the village didn't know of his werewolf life.

Staring at Logan's photo, surrounded by deep red roses, peach dahlias and white irises, Alana willed herself not to feel — not sadness or love, not his absence or his touch. Squaring her shoulders, she lifted her chin, daring tears to fall.

I wear a mask, shielding myself like a witch, warring emotions away that threaten to emerge upon my face. I need a spell to fly me far away. I must pretend like none of it mattered, like I hadn't cared about the boy lost forever in the Realms.

Pretending like my world hadn't just been turned upside down, like every apprehension, every fear hadn't been made all too real. Pretending like I don't feel the numbness seeping into my body, the tension knotting my stomach, the dull ache throbbing through my chest.

In my magical world, nothing is very certain. Anything, anyone can be ripped away with a single wand blast; those are the life shattering moments we shun.

I must drive out my private emotions. I have to force back my pain.

Everyone knew Alana Weatherbee and what she been through. However, no one knew of her past with Barns. Her hand twitched when the headmaster

brushed his fingers against her wrist. Her chest constricted when he turned caring, concerned eyes to examine her guarded façade. Once a great friend and adviser, he was now an adversary. And when a deep, heavy sigh sounded from his lips, and his arm came to rest upon her shoulders, people behind couldn't stop from doubting she still had feelings for the old wizard to be leaning against his sure, solid frame like when she was fifteen. His magic was good, but good wasn't enough. Alana couldn't stop the lump from rising into her throat.

And as Alana took solace in Headmaster's touch, and a shadow of emotion peeked out from underneath the shield carefully guarding her bright shiny blue eyes, she realized with a jolt just how much everything had changed. Just how open Logan had made himself to her world, which made her world worthwhile. Just how vulnerable he had been to the danger lurking behind every corner, hiding within every realm. Just how possible it was that she could be at his funeral.

Evil lurked everywhere, due to the book's power, and she could see a sad ending coming even closer. Time was not on Weatherbee's side.

Therefore, when a singer began an old Celtic dirge, and the backs of Alana's eyes prickled with unshed tears, she allowed her friend Amanda to rest her cheek against her head. She allowed her to splay her fingers over her shoulder, the soft pads of her fingertips kneading her tense muscles. And she allowed her friend to whisper, "I'm sorry, Alana. I'm sorry for everything."

"There's nothing to be sorry for, Logan," she murmured the wrong name, swallowing back the lump which has grown within her throat. "It's not your fault."

Across the busy parking lot, parents and classmate's headed back to their respective places as it started to rain. Everyone who had transportation drove to the little village of Nubritten, a mile down the hill from the School of Shines. Alana tapped Headmaster on his back, giving a look of grief.

"Are you ok, Alana?"

She shook her head. "I'll walk back to school."

"All right. Beware what may lie ahead. You have your wand?"

She patted her right hip, letting him know as she walked sadly away that she was armed.

Alana faced the village and its many shops and restaurants, each decorated with a wide array of gleaming lights. The rain came down hard on her. Day became night quickly and, as the pine trees swayed with the storm's wind and rain, it brought her back to that night when evil came to Shines. The wintry wind blew through the bustling parking lot, turning the cheeks of flustered onlookers away. Mourners lined the street, leaving. Their sad faces passed her, but no one made eye contact.

"Excuse me." Someone spoke behind her.

"Yes?" Alana turned to face an older man, his dark hair streaked with gray at the temples. His green eyes seemed familiar.

"You're Alana Weatherbee. Right?"

"Yes." She drew her head back. "Can I help you with something?"

"I should introduce myself. I'm Lucien...Logan's father."

Her eyes went wide with shock and surprise. "Logan's father?" she whispered, blinking at the rain hitting her face.

"May I buy you coffee? I'd like to talk with you for a moment." He tugged his collar up to shield his neck.

"Okay." She pointed across the street. "How about there?"

In a few minutes, she removed her cloak, shook off the rain and sat at a table. He waved to the waitress and sat across from her.

"Two coffees," he ordered.

"And a hamburger," Alana added. Looking at Lucien, she explained, "I haven't eaten in a few days and I'm feeling a bit woozy."

"By all means, then. Eat." He glanced around the empty café, then returned his gaze to her. "I've wanted to meet you for a long time. Logan told me so much about you."

"He talked about you as well," she returned.

"I wanted to thank you for being such a good friend to him. Especially when he first came to Shines and no one wanted anything to do with him. You made all the difference."

Her eyebrows narrowed. "*Thank* me? Most people think I killed him."

He shook his head. "There's no way you killed him. You loved him too much."

"I still do." Those blasted tears returned, hovering on the edge, threatening to undo her calm demeanor.

The waitress set their order in front of them, tore off the ticket and laid it by the salt and pepper before leaving.

He took a sip of his coffee. "I have to get his trunk at the school. When we're done here, do you care to walk back with me?"

"I'd love to. Thanks." Her first bite of hamburger hit her too-empty stomach like a rock.

"I was surprised to learn he had a trunk." Lucien sneaked a French fry off her plate and ate it.

"There's not much in it. Some books, clothes, and that's about it. Oh, I kept his slippers. If you want them..."

"No. You keep them. I wouldn't know what to do with them. What about his wand?"

Alana swallowed and took a sip before answering. "He had that with him when he...disappeared."

Lucien nodded. "I won't ask you what happened. You've probably explained it too many times already. But, was he scared or hurt or...?"

Her soft fingers rested against his wrist. "He was brave, braver than anyone I've ever seen or even read about. He...saved...my...life." Her bottom lip trembled; her control cracked; the floodgates opened. Pushing her plate away, she laid her head on her arms and cried, deep gut wrenching sobs. Lucien stood and pulled the teenager to him, letting her cry on his shoulder.

"I m-miss him!" she stuttered.

"I know you do. Shhh. It's going to be alright. Shhh." He patted her back and offered her a paper napkin. When she calmed down, she returned to her chair and took a drink to ease her parched throat.

"Sorry about that," she apologized.

"Don't be. I watched you during the service and wondered how you could be so quiet, so unmoved."

"I had to; otherwise I would have lost my mind."

"I understand."

"Do you mind if we leave now?"

"You're full?" He pointed to the hamburger with only two bites gone.

"I'm too upset to eat. It's hurting my stomach."

"Then let's go." After paying the tab, he escorted her to the school, both of them wishing for an umbrella, and yet both thinking the storm suited the day and their mood.

Standing in the foyer with the trunk at his feet, Lucien took Alana's hand. "If you need me for anything, and I mean *anything*, promise you'll let me know."

"But..."

"You're the closest thing to Logan that I have, and he was my only living relative."

"Yes, sir. I will. Thank you — for everything, for understanding."

He pulled her into a long hug, then went out to find a carriage to take the trunk away.

* * *

That evening, Alana's emotions rode a twisting roller coaster. She couldn't let anyone see how vulnerable she felt and yet Lucien had brought that out in her without any effort. That *couldn't* happen again. Lucien meant well, but others wouldn't. There needed to be a way to protect herself, a way to project a toughness she didn't feel. With a decision made, she walked to Amanda's room and found Gillian and Sydney with her.

"Can I come in?" Alana poked her head around the open door.

"Sure." Amanda gestured and watched her cross the room and sit down. "That was a nice service today."

"Yes, it was." Alana smoothed her skirt and took a deep breath. "I need to talk to you about something."

"Okay, what? Is it juicy gossip?" Gillian dabbed lip gloss on her pinky finger, then applied it to her lips.

"I know you guys have a reputation as the ice queens here at school. I've been wondering why you want anything to do with me since everyone else here doesn't."

"Because we..."

Alana's raised hand stopped Amanda. "I finally figured it out. You want someone with my magical abilities, my dark reputation, the hint of danger you might be in if the Book of Spells got loose again."

"Yeah, well..." Amanda ducked her head, but Gillian nodded.

Sydney leaned back on her palms. "Is that wrong?"

"No. It's not. I appreciate your company."

"Well, then, that's settled." Amanda started to stand.

"Not quite." Alana shifted on the bed and crossed her legs. "Since I'm the one with the worst rep, then I'm the one who'll be in charge here."

"Wha...?" Amanda's head snapped around, sending her hair bouncing.

"You heard me. With me, your reputation will go way past ice queen. You'll have respect. Anyone gives you trouble, they'll have my wand to answer to."

"And what's in it for you?"

"I need you to keep the wannabees and troublemakers away from me. They want to talk to me, they have to go through one of you first." Alana studied the girls' faces. "Oh, and I need you to keep me in the latest fashion." She grinned at Amanda and watched the girl relax. "So, deal?"

They exchanged silent glances before Amanda nodded. "Deal."

Chapter 10

"The red door found that wand," Barns deduced in his office one morning.

"You mean the Evil One's wand to go to Alana? It will stay locked away from now on," Professor Ezards said, repeating his earlier words. "But that didn't work out the way you planned, Robert."

"No, afraid not," he commented back to his friend, "The wand has disappeared and the cabinet is still locked."

"It could have been the book's actions or Weatherbee's. Weatherbee is already collecting students; she has the full attention of Miss Amanda Dragonflies at the present. Any need for concern, Headmaster?"

Headmaster said nothing, merely shrugged.

"Time will tell," Ezards said, with a stern look about his face. "You mustn't show any weakness around Weatherbee. Anise seed was found. I saw Miss Weatherbee drop it. She'd performed a complex spell already her first day back."

"Anise seed?" Barns repeated. "That's an herb used to ward off the Evil Eye, and also to increase personal psychic abilities." He paused, thinking about the implications. "We'll see," Barns said. "I feel, Ezards, she's more powerful than she lets on."

Professor Ezards added, "Darker."

"Possibilities are endless," Headmaster replied.

"I ran into Miss Weatherbee in the Hall of Possibilities and Requirements of Spells. I asked if she was having any problem getting adjusted," Professor Ezards said. "Alana told me she's having a little trouble settling in, though. The bullies have done unkind things to our Miss Weatherbee."

"Those idiots. I'll deal with them in time."

"Easy now, Barns," Professor Ezards said to an irritated Headmaster.

Barns felt, "She's just lost without Logan! However, with the bullies, we may lose another student if they continue to tempt fate. Weatherbee's temper can take only so much."

* * *

Alana was the girl who couldn't conform. Her independence fitted her like a well-tailored suit and, unlike clothing, couldn't be taken off. She didn't want to, couldn't bring herself to follow the crowd, and quite prized the obvious distinctions between herself and her friends, as well as the general population. She had her own ideas and ways in which she wanted to conduct her life. Many admired the fire that glowed in her bright eyes and sharp senses. It imbued their sedated reality with warmth uncharacteristic of a metropolis consumed by survival. While everyone chugged away noiselessly, she was certain that her spirited thoughts would soon puncture the fragile yet enduring silence. She felt disruptive in the silence. Her fire, though comforting, was never infectious. Her brightness stood out markedly against the grey and she stuck out like a sore thumb.

Darkness got the best of her. A mind of a teenager still needed understanding and love and, without it, she acted on her own to save herself from falling apart. Her life changed.

Miss Weatherbee kept company with the ice queens of Shines. They formed a barricade around her fragile soul and allowed her to be a chameleon, daring anyone to cross her.

Amanda Dragonflies, a tall, slender blonde with piercing green eyes, had a ballerina's figure and grace. Kindness glowed from her face, offering what Alana needed most — a friend with compassion.

Her second new friend, Gillian Wicked, kept her hair short, in the latest style. Peppermint described her personality best — sweet, but hot at times. She came from a wealthy family and knew all the dirt on everyone who was anyone.

Alana Weatherbee and her friends were the type of girls who could make someone cry in five seconds. Pretty and mean mixture — a meanness no one ever saw before in Miss Weatherbee.

They wore designer clothes and looked amazing. They kept their heads held high and told people what to do, and how to do it, like they ruled the school. To some, they did. They sashayed down the hall, their hair gleaming, looking like supermodel material.

By the look of their lips, they had just applied a coat of gloss. Very upper classmen, typical Shines behavior, which bothered the real upper classmen.

"How dare they!" peers would say daily as they walked by. "Golden girl!"

Golden and good were two different words. Good meant sweet, kind and caring. They did care. Alana could be sweet with a mark of darkness that flowed. However, it was only for their kind.

Golden in their dictionary meant rich, popular, cold, A-list, or anything like that. Weatherbee collected all of that type to meet her purposes, becoming more like the book intended.

They puckered their pouty lips. Their stilettos click-clacked as they walked down the school halls. All heads turned towards them. They had a rep. With Alana as their leader, no one dared cross them. She knew too many spells, her wand held too much power. Rumors floated that she still had the Book of Spells. She murdered Logan, too, and he was supposed to be her boyfriend. Evilness

loved the negative reaction and fed off of it, adding to her already dark reputation.

* * *

"Alana, can we talk for a minute?" Wyatt stopped her and her entourage in the hallway one afternoon.

"I suppose." She glanced over her shoulder to the girls. "I'll meet you outside." The group kept walking and she nodded toward Wyatt. "What is it?"

"I'm saying this as a friend," he began, not sure how to start.

"A friend who helped get me kicked off the team? A friend who walked out on me my first day back?" She frowned, her eyes accusing him.

"Yeah, sorry about that. I shouldn't have." He shoved his hands in his pockets.

"No, you shouldn't. That really hurt."

"I said I'm sorry." He twisted his bottom lip with his teeth. "Why are you hanging out with those girls?"

"What's wrong with them? *They* talk to me."

"Maybe, but they're stuck up and mean. That's not like you."

"Ha! A lot you know. Going to prison changes a girl." She shifted her books on her hip.

"Alana!" Angry at her insolence, Wyatt grabbed her elbow and pushed her against the wall. "I'm not kidding. Something's wrong!"

Before she had time to respond, a wolf lunged down the hallway and pinned Wyatt to the wall, its fangs ripping at his throat, its two huge front paws pushing into his shoulders. He wrapped his hands around its snarling muzzle and screamed, "Call him off me!"

Alana watched for a second, satisfied Wyatt had gotten the message. "Down," she told the wolf. It dropped to all fours, growled once, then walked to the nearest door and left. "Don't ever grab me like that again," she warned the boy.

Wyatt clutched his bleeding throat, his eyes staring in disbelief at Alana. Without a word, he went in search of a medic witch. Other students in the hallway left in hurried steps, not quite running, but not wanting to be the one she noticed next.

Later that evening, after dinner, Alana found a note slid underneath her door.

Daughter, please meet me in the student lounge. We need to talk.

Love, Dad

Wild joy flooded her emotions. Her dad could make things right and help her figure out what to do about the lies. She wouldn't think of the book once. She didn't want it to influence or harm him in any way. But, now, she wasn't alone. Someone she loved wanted her. Running through the hall and down the stairs, she pushed into the student lounge, her eyes scanning the room for the distinguished wizard.

Nothing.

No one...except a gang of school bullies standing against one wall.
"She bought it!" one crowed.
"Look! She's gonna cry!" Another rubbed his eyes like a crying baby.
"You really think your dad wants anything to do with you? You're such a loser," a third tossed torment her way.
She caught Wyatt's eye for one second before she spun around, tripping over her broken heart, and raced back to her room.

Chapter 11

In the hallway the next day, Alana stopped her friend. "Hey, Amanda, look what I got, the cutest pair of gold Jimmy Choo shoes. What do you think? Aren't they adorable?" Alana said, showing off her new shoes.

"Yeah, they're so sparkly," Amanda gushed.

"I know, right?"

"When did you go shopping? I would have gone with you."

"Shopping?" Alana waved a hand. "I didn't. I found a spell for shoes and clothes in the Book of Spells."

"You did *what*?" Amanda stepped away, her eyes wide in surprise. "The Book of..." Glancing over her shoulder for eavesdroppers, she leaned forward and whispered, "You have the book? When? How...?"

Alana hadn't meant to let that slip and laid a hand across her own mouth, shaking her head.

"Alana Weatherbee, answer me!" Amanda shook her arm, then grabbed her elbow and led her to a quiet corner by their lockers.

"I...uh...I've had it since the first day I came back."

"No!"

"But swear you won't tell anyone. It would cause so much trouble if anyone found out."

"I won't tell anyone. Where is it?"

"It's better if you don't know."

"What? You don't trust me all of a sudden."

"I trust you. It's the book that'll give you fits. It has a mean temper and doesn't like strangers."

"Oh." Amanda tried to tuck her hurt feelings away and glanced at the new shoes. "Your high heels sure are cute. However, what will the book want for payback?" Amanda grabbed her social studies book up to her chest for protection from anything Weatherbee might charm out in a heated breath.

"No worries," Weatherbee giggled.

Amanda felt safe, turned around to her locker and brushed her hair. "The book is all everyone talks about. Of course something evil will need to be done for those shoes."

Alana rolled her sapphire mascara covered eyes. She loved her gifts from the hidden pages of the book. They made her feel happy and almost, *almost* helped her forget the bullies and crying herself to sleep.

* * *

“Headmaster,” Professor Ezards spoke at Barns’ office. “The snow has finally stopped.”

“That means the book’s focus is back on Weatherbee, in addition to terrorizing the school.”

“I strongly protest you sending a murderous witch to handle a problem that is strictly ours! Who knows what she’s capable of doing on the school premises.”

“Sara will be fine, or Mother of All Magic would have never sent her to us. My dear friend and most loyal teacher, I have thought this through and now have placed this problem of Miss Alana Weatherbee into specialty hands. With her strong-arm force and with the book, we have no protection. Alana needs our help,” Barns argued. “The mighty Book of Spells has her fooled, thinking there is a spell that will bring back Logan. Alana feels this is her only link left to him and his return. The Realm of Many Doors didn’t work. I’ve given her one chance and she failed, but Mother felt that she deserved one more.”

“Sir, I can handle a dark book of spells such as this one.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes. You haven’t allowed me a chance to do my magic.”

“Well, my friend,” Headmaster said, “Hold that thought. You might someday be put to the test. For now, please place your trust in me and my discussions with Mother of All Magic.”

“The school. Yes, Headmaster. I do understand the school’s importance to you and the staff.

“The students’ welfare is at *RISK*. We do not have a happy environment at the present; not when a death has occurred.”

“You don’t know that for sure.” Ezards leaned forward in his chair, his stare intense.

“Logan *is* dead.”

“Do you or Mother of All Magic, even the Trusted Zone, think he might not be?”

“Don’t ask about them. They can’t rewrite a spell or charm, as this powerful horror comes from a book of evil.”

Silence fell in the room.

Ezards picked at his sleeve cuff, removing imaginary lint. “Why are wolves from the forest combing the school campus of late?”

“Oh, Miss Weatherbee, no doubt. Wolves are her guardians.”

“The book has caused this.”

Headmaster stuttered in a fit of rage. “It-its murderous dark ways are *still* running wild through a child of ours! To have merely expelled her and unleashed her on the world would have been unconceivable. The Ministry of Schools can expel her any day now for just creating havoc — forget dark magic and murder.

However, a child mystic like her is a learning tool; she's stayed quiet, gone to all her classes, even lighting a candle for Logan. We have to keep the good side of Alana Weatherbee grounded."

"Headmaster, Robert, I implore you, please don't trust this type of murderous witch; Sara may be young, but a hard core witch is nothing but darkness and power rolled up into a human form."

"My friend," Headmaster stared straight at him with a stern look, "it's not from me truly. This decision is from Mother of All Magic. She sent for Sara with special permission from the Trusted Zone."

"Oh, sorry. I had no idea, Headmaster. Well, if they agreed to send Sara, then who am I to complain?"

"I can take time away from my classes and handle this matter on my own. The book is out of Miss Weatherbee's hands and she'll survive just fine, then we can try and destroy the book."

"Why hasn't it been done then?"

"We've tried before. Remember last year?"

"I haven't been asked to attempt such a feat." Ezards raised an indignant chin at the oversight.

"No, my friend. This chore, if you will, belongs to one person and that one person is qualified to handle such evil matters. This girl needs to blend in and act as a student, then as she gets close to Weatherbee, she can attract the book and take its power over. Maybe control it."

Headmaster held up his hand for silence. "Shhh. Someone's at my door. Listen, I hear footsteps," Barns whispered, "We're being spied on... now I've laid out a plan for this young lady. Please show her in as you leave. Good day, Professor Ezards."

"Very well then, Headmaster."

Barns stood and waved his wand in a hexagon pattern, then said, "That should do just fine."

Through the open door, Professor Ezards looked down at the tiny girl before him. His gaze looked frightening, to say at the least, and unkind toward the young one. Professor Ezards was known for making a very poor first impression.

"The headmaster will see you now," Professor Ezards said.

"Thank you," the new student replied, keeping her bright green eyes on his as she entered the room.

"Sir?" A young girl's voice, quick and clear, came through.

Headmaster Barns looked over the rim of his half moon glasses and smiled at the wide-eyed, too pale first year Shines student in front of him.

"You must be Sara." He stood and gestured toward a chair nearby. "I'm Headmaster Barns."

"Nice to meet you." She sat down and arranged her skirt, then folded her hands in her lap.

Barns walked to a shelf and pulled a few books down. "Here. These are books of magical fairy tales. Alana Weatherbee passed them on to me. I'd like for you to read them. I'd like you to have them," Headmaster offered. "I'm done reading them. Books have a way of conjuring up new magical ideas." At that, she scoffed

at the Shines school's headmaster, but he continued. "I feel they may give some insight on Miss Weatherbee. Some of the writing is most horrifying, to say the least.

"Our staff here at Shines and the Mother of All Magic, even the Trusted Zone, as well as myself feel she authored the darker writings from her Book of Spells since her friend passed away. We at school feel it was created by her Book of Spells to make it much more powerful and unstoppable."

Sara spoke up. "I do like happy endings, but not all the time."

"Good grief, child, what is life without a happy ending now and again? It would be dull."

The new student quarreled, "I dare say, not my cup of tea. Do I have to read this?"

"Yes, it would be of help in our defense."

Something twitched over the child's face — longing, perhaps — a facial twitch — possibly fear about Alana Weatherbee's reputation, noted in the paperwork Sara read before coming to Shines.

Barns couldn't be certain, however, because the expression was gone just as quickly as it appeared. A slim, long, jet black haired, green eyed beauty of a girl with a delicate hand shoved the books back across the desk and those thin lips pursed in preparation of a sneer. Headmaster frowned slightly. "But enjoyable!"

"I do not wish to read her mumbo jumbo," Sara said forcefully.

The Headmaster shook his head twice and his face fell expressionless like something came over him all of a sudden. "I don't recognize you from the classes that I teach. Who are you, please?"

"Oh, Headmaster, you *are* getting forgetful, sir. You've just forgotten who I am; why I'm here. I'm Sara Hornswanger, the transfer student from the School of Fine Arts, which teaches the darkest magical skills. You sent for me, remember?"

The young woman stood no more than five feet tall in school heels, allowing her two extra inches.

"Yes," he spoke out clearly, "Yes, I do remember. You are the best of your art. May I say you dark witches are getting younger every day? The transfigure spell is working rather oddly," Barns worried. "It shouldn't have hit me first, but you." His eye twinkled. "I spelled it just before you entered the room, but it backfired. It's most important that Miss Weatherbee does not suspect you of any treachery. Now, the spell should be hitting you any moment. Remember, you're just a new student. Ok?"

"Yes, sir. I'm feeling lightheaded now."

"Good, good," Barns said. "It's working. Best of luck in your mission."

"Thank you, sir. I won't let you down."

Headmaster Robert Barns, getting forgetful for a wizard in his age group, stared hard at the young girl in front of him. His eyes still twinkled from the hard hitting spell. "May I ask why you would refuse such a gift from our famous Miss Weatherbee?"

"I, sir?"

"Yes, yes. Take these books and read the working mind of this student. She's written many in a year — all dark and evil."

The books, Sara looked away, uncomfortable at being told to learn from this nimp, this newbie. Sara said stiffly, sitting ramrod straight in her chair, "I'll read them, but I won't keep them. A Hornswanger does not accept charity. It would be hard to take gifts from anyone, especially a little nimpette as Weatherbee."

Barns wiped his face with a handkerchief and a white eyebrow quirked. "Charity? Tools of leaning are never charity."

She raised one hand. "Alright, I'll take them, sir, since you have insisted many times. After all, I'm to do what you tell me."

"Hang on to them and learn what she has to offer you. Use it toward the book."

Sara continued with an air of haughtiness. "The Top Five boys worry me. Only this morning they hit me up as soon as I got to school. I see why they haven't graduated from Shines yet. Paltry slackers. Dumb, aren't they? And, to top it off, bullies, too."

Headmaster looked most interested in this bit of news. "Did they bother you?"

"Not too much. Wyatt and Wolfgang and that smelly boy Mammoth, I was just talking with them in the halls about Miss Weatherbee. I'd be well off, they said, if I stayed clear, too. I have no use for such things as their type of comic magic. These boys are horrible. What I have to do to Miss Weatherbee's precious book is child's play."

Chapter 12

Barn's thought to himself, *she must be darker in her magic than than Miss Weatherbee's Book of Spells*. His eyes widened at the statement. "A child with no use for fairy tales or magical skills? For happy endings?"

"Well, yes, and that's why you had me transferred to Shines, sir."

"What — what was that?"

"You were talking to yourself, sir," Sara said with a dark sneer.

Barns, weaving from side to side in his oversized chair, felt the powerful effect of the spell. He said, "You read my mind."

"Oh yes, just the last sentence, sir."

"Miss Weatherbee does the same. Oh, best to keep your mind clear when talking with her." Headmaster gave a long gaze.

Sara stated, getting irritated at his relaxed nature, "I'll remember. And just so you know, I'm much older than I look. I've spelled myself to look fourteen. I'm really twenty and outgrew fairy tales a long time ago."

He nodded, then added, "You must beware. Our walls have ears."

"I understand, sir."

"Very well, then."

"I lost the lightheadedness."

"You are powerful witch to withstand this spell. It really knocked me for a loop. I must get some fresh air."

"Yes, sir," Sara answered. "I *am* a powerful witch. Are you all right?"

"Ok," Headmaster said, taking a huge breath and wiping his brow, weaving about.

"Are you sure you're all right? You look pale and a little sweaty."

Headmaster muttered in confirmation, "Make friends with Miss Weatherbee."

"What's that, sir?"

"You both have an aptitude for dark magic." He stared up to the ceiling, looking like he was going to be ill. The student's eyes gleamed and narrowed.

"Where would I find Miss Weatherbee?"

"No worries. She's already found you."

The green emerald eyes of the transfer student closed, then flashed as Sara turned back to the headmaster. "A Forget Me spell going haywire, he's losing his mind," she muttered. "No wonder they can't handle a witch who has the most powerful dark spell book in all the kingdoms."

Sara snapped concisely with verbal chatter to herself. *How hard can this be? Happily ever after magic...this girl must be a fairy of some sort, not a hard core witch. Manufactured tripe designed to dull the mind. I didn't know this would be included in your School of Shines curriculum.*

The student squirmed, wiggling to escape the too-large chair. "If you wish to talk about what I did, I'm into Dark Charms. I already explained to Professors Winkle and Buttermen that that was a better source of knowledge."

"Accidents do happen in that type of magic," the headmaster finished a bit sadly. The old man shook his head, blue eyes looking curiously dim on the new student. Sara reached out and reclaimed the books Headmaster offered.

"No worries, Headmaster. I'll read them."

Headmaster beckoned, "Tread lightly. Shines School is not always the most comfortable place for transfers. However, you are not an ordinary transfer."

Sara finally managed to slip out of the chair. Barns stared at her, unblinking. Their eyes locked for a moment and then the girl wilted slightly, unable to hold the older wizard's gaze.

She sniffed, looking younger than before. "Anyway, I look after myself pretty well." Another flash of dark emerald eyes. "I don't need anyone's help."

"Good day," Headmaster said as Sara slammed the door on her way out.

Unknowning, Alana Weatherbee was eavesdropping from a hidden crack.

"I'm no comic fairy tale witch. I *am* hardcore!" the teenager fumed with sudden ferocity, snapping her new heels on the stone walkway, her spell book turning red. "Easy now. No one will take you away from me, my dear pet."

* * *

After her meeting with Barns, wearing her school uniform and odd color pumps from her old school, Sara strolled down the hallways. The sign atop the large door read *CAFETERIA*. She entered the empty room. Breakfast would have been served three hours ago to the students. Having special privileges, staff served breakfast to her in the dining area meant for top professors.

While she ate, Sara read from one of Alana's books that Barns gave her, then went back to her room, thinking about what she had read. Alana's writing in so

much detail about the darker ways of magical uses spurred Sara on. The main magical book dealt out spells and charms by the ton.

When the kitchen staff cleared the breakfast dishes, they found Sara's mess. She left a plate of half eaten food along with a pile of books that she had received from Headmaster Barns.

"What on earth's this?" Madame Winks asked, leaning over to take a closer look. She scanned through it, her eyes widening almost comically. She then shook her head in exasperation, and looked to her staff. "These are authored by Weatherbee. Well then, put them in the lost and found or find Miss Weatherbee and give them back to her."

Later, one of the kitchen staff, Mr. Uproar Smiths, called at Miss Weatherbee's room and knocked.

Alana answered the door. "Yes?"

"Miss Weatherbee, next time you visit the kitchen, please clean up after yourself." He shoved the books into her arms. "Good day." Alana stood there, stunned.

Alana looked through the worn pages, seeing that these were the books she gave as a gift to Headmaster Barns last term.

"How...? I wonder why?" Weatherbee knew from eavesdropping on his office that he gave them to Sara and wondered why Sara didn't keep them after reading them. Feeling hurt by this new girl, a new rage grew inside Alana.

* * *

That evening, Sara walked from the village Nubritten to the School of Shines. The streets were cooling, dark, and silent. The rain and freezing snow that had thundered down upon the countryside all afternoon had tapered off to a fine mist, clinging to Sara's bare arms as she made her way through the empty streets.

For some reason, the street lamps weren't lit leading to the school, and if it hadn't been for the moon, nearly full at this time of the month, she wouldn't have been able to find her way at all to her appointment with the school's Headmaster.

The wet, smooth cobblestones felt familiar under Sara's bare feet, while carrying her shoes. Sara welcomed them as a soothing change from the rough, ill-paved paths of the town below the school.

On any other night, there would be lights in the houses lining the roads to the school and voices issuing from the Professors Tavern. Tonight, there was nothing but stillness and she wondered why.

It wasn't the Sabbath. Even if it had been, that custom of rest and reflection was rarely ever observed this far into the rustic Mountain of Old. The non-magical folk in the village were much too poor to miss a day of work.

There was no reason Sara could think of to send out a message to Headmaster that she had arrived. She was unable to enter his thoughts tonight.

Walking alone in the streets felt as if everyone had just...disappeared.

Her hand went protectively to her wand. A spell at the ready on her lips was meant to ward off danger and keep her safe, but she was a good spell caster;

some say a thumping good one; a top notch fighting witch at best. She never doubted her spell would hold up if any real trouble were to befall her.

She nearly jumped from her skin as a gruff voice shattered the tension-ridden silence of the night.

"You'd best get off the streets, child!"

"Yes, Professor." Coming out of the tavern, she saw he'd had a bit too much of the spirits. Froth stained his whiskers. He must have indulged in a tavern favorite.

"Hey, Professor," Sara said, "a bit too much of the drink on this damp night?"

"Shush, child, mind your elders." Burp, burp. The professor staggered a bit.

"I was only joking."

The professor stumbled to his stoop next door.

She squinted, honing in on a pinprick of orange light at the end of the road. A bearded man hung out of his top window, lantern in hand.

"Sara, Headmaster's been looking for you all day."

"Why?" She called back, half-running toward his house. "What's going on? On second thought, I'll talk to him by morning. No worries." She swung her wand upwards.

"Never mind that," the man said, shaking his shaggy head. "Get to your meeting. Keep off the streets!"

"Why? Tell me why!" she demanded, but the man was already snuffing out his lantern and closing his shutters. The sound of a bolt being thrown echoed along the narrow lane as she took another step.

A pair of green eyes peeked at her through a keyhole. A tinge of nervousness stirred in the pit of her stomach. Something was coming, something frightening enough to scare the professors into their homes with doors locked and windows closed.

These were country folk, with enough bewildering beliefs in folklore. A bit too much at times, as she'd seen in her studies at her old school. They were simple minded, past their own magical beliefs, perhaps, but overall very capable wizards able to take on anything from a mountain giant or a Wisbanger clawed hawk.

What were they so afraid of? Can't just be the book. It had to be more than this.

Sara quickened her pace, choosing to take the path along the edge of the Castle of the school instead of probing her way through a maze of looming buildings and deep shadowed pathways. She felt choked in there, too closed in. Her hand went to her waist, curling around the handle of her wand. It was a great source of protection, and it reassured her.

She was just passing the main gates of the Shines Castle when a distant sound caught her ears, a frenzied, constant rhythm — hoof beats.

Turning her gaze to the gate, she eyed the massive padlock that kept it closed until the gatekeeper woke in the early morning. She stood there, paralyzed, as the pounding came closer and closer.

Abruptly, everything stopped and the sound of horses whinnying penetrated the thick wood of the gate. Frightened, she dropped her shoes to the ground, pointing her wand straight at the horses. She heard muffled voices, and then a coach door unlocked. A pair of eyes peeked out, then shut.

Frozen to the spot, she didn't know what to do. It wasn't her place to open the gate, but she couldn't very well let them stand out there in the cold, could she?

Before she could make up her mind, one of the voices rose above the other, and she was able to make out a few words.

"...most likely. Open the gate. Let us enter."

She felt helpless, overcome with the cold and obligated to do something for the men in the shiny black coach. It was her school, too. She nervously turned, pointed her wand at the huge lock and said her spell. In a moment, the giant lock trembled and shook, once, twice, three times, and fell to the ground with a solid clunk. The gates rumbled slowly open, and she realized she was holding her breath.

Two shapes appeared beyond the coach's window curtains, purest white, like ghosts in the moonlight. A wavering flame burst into light, dancing in the palm of one traveler's hand.

"You! Come over here."

She did as she was told, too afraid to walk past the four huge black horses champing in the night frost.

"There you go, child. Thank you." He handed her the ball of flames.

A man's gruff voice called out in the shadow behind of the first man. "We must meet with the headmaster of this school. It's urgent!"

She had to swallow several times before she could speak. "Y...Yes sir, I think everything... everyone is in bed."

"Oh?" said another voice.

This one was carefree and light, and it made her think of windy days high on the western hills. "Is it a special occasion for a headmaster of a fine upstanding school of this size to be sleeping at this hour?"

"N...No, sir," she stammered. "I don't think so...I mean, I'm not sure, I just returned tonight. I've been away."

"The headmaster of this school allows a witch out on the loose? Who are you, child?" As he said that, the ball of flames went out. Sara looked at the palm of her hand, puzzled. A blue bird sat there, spreading his wings and bouncing up, taking off for flight into the night.

"Wonderful," the first man rasped. "I love that charm every time we use it. We finally find a town but it's filled of non-magical folks, and they will not put us up for the night."

"No, sir. They tolerate the school but not the wizards, Sara said. "They leave us witches alone, too. Sara smiled leaning over, picking up her shoes.

The second man in the coach's shadow leaned forward and said, "Headmaster Barns will have to play host till our meeting in the morning," rubbing his extremely long nose.

"Yes, sir," Sara said.

"Patience, Churchill," the other man said. He made a low clucking sound in his throat, then blew a short whistle, coaxing the driver atop of the coach to go through the open gates.

Sara looked up at the driver and saw a man in a long black cloak slap the reins to the horses, saw his arms move and his legs release the brake, but he didn't have a head.

Sara watched the coach enter the school property. The light on the cobblestone driveway reflected as it moved onward to the Castle.

A man stood in the shadow, off to one side, casting eerie shadows over the wet cobblestones, making them shimmer.

Covered in a hooded cloak, all she could see were his eyes. Deep black and cold, it looked as if this man wouldn't need a light to see by in the darkness. His eyes recalled something to Sara's mind all the tales she'd heard as a child, stories of the demon wars of old; battles against creatures whose eyes were like gemstones.

"Hey," Sara said, walking up to him, "you don't belong here."

Cafzf waved his cloak over his face and disappeared into thin air, leaving a book sitting on the cold ground. Sara walked up to get a better look and grasped her wand. Weatherbee's Book of Spells laid there, then *poof* it disappeared.

Chapter 13

"Quietly," urged Headmaster Barns to the three wizardry council members in his office, "the walls have ears, as well the book." The three kings sat alongside the headmaster at his big table. Madam Hufflepuff served Earl gray tea, snickerdoodles and lemon bars on blue Wedgwood china for this morning meeting.

Headmaster leaned forward, smoking his Winfield pipe. With every puff, a delightful cherry aroma blew across the table filled with paperwork. Everyone brought ideas on how to kill off the Book of Spells. A troll and mourning dove sat in front. Mother of All Magic came with a troll bodyguard.

Churchill reached across the table for the cream and added a dollop to his tea. He set the cup on top of his papers and tapped them with a manicured finger. "I hope we can arrive at a plan of action. This concerns me. It concerns me greatly."

"As it does us all," the man beside him agreed. "Especially now." His balding head reflected the early sun shining through the window. Kind gray eyes matched the gray cable knit sweater he wore.

"Have you heard something new, Rolfe?" Barns asked the man.

"Cafzf is on the prowl. He was seen in my kingdom last week, headed this way."

"Just what we need," the third king growled.

"I know, Stuart, I know." Churchill took a sip of tea. "Dealing with the Book of Spells alone is work enough."

"Especially since the book has denied all of us before," Rolfe reminded them. "We've each tried to attain its power through the years. We've tried to destroy it, but it chose a child to be its mistress, Alana. With her death, it found another

many, many years later — this Alana Weatherbee.” Rolfe shoved a lemon bar into his mouth and wiped his beard free of crumbs.

Barns leaned forward, his eyes intent. “We all need to walk with great care and caution from now on. Alana Weatherbee has gained more power than any another. The book is strongly attached to her.”

“A true dark witch maybe,” Churchill said, “from dealing with her father, the great Weatherbee’s magical creations. Some may have rubbed off onto her.”

“An outcast living with resentful ghosts and dealing with creation,” Mother said, “on her own as a mere child. Brilliant, she was ripe for this spell book to take control.”

“Yes, yes,” everyone agreed.

“So, we have two fronts to combat. Cafzf and the Book of Spells,” Stuart summarized.

“There is a third.” Barns tilted his head. “We must save Miss Weatherbee from the book.”

“And from Cafzf,” Mother added.

“If we can,” Rolfe cautioned.

“I’ve already lost one student in Logan,” Barns bristled. “I don’t intend to lose a second one.”

All fell silent around the table for a moment. Stuart shifted in his seat. Churchill coughed once and refilled his tea cup, the sound of pouring liquid making the only noise.

“Then, if Cafzf is on the move, where do we start?” Rolfe asked.

“I suggest the three of you split up,” Mother said. “You can cover more territory to look for him. Beware if you get close to his castle. Earlier great wizards lay in the dark confines of the woods, dead from cleverly hidden traps from this demon.”

They all knew if the demon wizard had his way, everyone would be locked into his darkness through this child and her spell making.

Everyone else had long given in to the evil demon wizard’s will, but the School of Shines still fought its way to freedom. Darkness grew rapidly and, to hold it back, they only had a new team of wizards picked to go out and fight.

When they stood to leave, Rolfe took Barn’s hand. “Be careful, old friend. While we’re away looking, Cafzf might very well be here trying to regain the book. It could go ill with you.”

“I’ll be on my guard,” Barns reassured him.

* * *

That next morning, Alana had Sara eyeballed from the time she left her room. Alana waited around the corner from brooms and missed her class so she could meet the new student.

“Hi,” her voice bounced up from a shadow.

“Hi,” Sara said, surprised to be greeted this fast. Barns was correct. Alana found her first.

“We haven’t officially been introduced. I’m Alana Weatherbee.”

"I'm Sara." She extended her tiny hand and shook Alana's. Watching her thoughts, Sara knew of Alana's knowledge of reading minds.

"I'd like to welcome you to Shines," Alana lied, saying she was this year's welcoming committee member and to each new student she presented a gift of a free book that she authored.

She gave her one of her books, the same one that the kitchen staff returned to Alana earlier, with well-worn pages and soup stains on the cover.

Sara recognized it. "Why, thank you." Her eyes turned bright green and she said, "Well, no thanks. I changed my mind."

"Please, take it." Alana shoved the book back into Sara's chest.

"Ok, ok. I'll take your gift. Thanks." Examining the front cover of six skulls on a hangman's gallows, she remarked, "Hum, wow, frightening."

"I've got a vivid imagination," Alana confessed. "I'm to be your pal for the first year to help in any way to get through this experience easily. It's tough being the new kid at school. I should know. I was in your shoes last year. Just ask my friends."

"Oh how sweet of you. What a nice gesture." Sara looked away from Alana, making a horrible, sickening face. Blaaaaa!

Being truly nice to pass as a caring, fun loving teenage witch will take some work, Alana thought.

Humming quietly to herself, Sara twirled her white wand between her fingertips. She didn't need the wand to do magic, but since everyone else appeared to need a wand, she figured she'd pretend to be like them. No need to stand out anymore than she already would.

"Bad enough I'm going to be the only newbie this year, and the only transfer student, too."

Alana said, "Not to worry. A good friend and I were the only new ones last year." Weatherbee stopped cold in her conversation, looked away from Sara and her eyes watered a bit from last year's memory.

Sara asked, "You ok?"

"Yeah, sure." She wiped her eyes. "Just missing someone," she said with an attempt to grin.

"Oh, sorry." Sara acted like she didn't know of her and Logan.

"Don't need to add super freak to the list as well." Alana wanted to change the subject. "Who would have guessed that wandless magic was considered almost impossible among the magic community? I can feel it's different," Alana said, looking at Sara's white wand.

Professor Hupenbrug just allowed the first class to be dismissed. Sara and Alana's talking came to a halt. Sara's thoughts were interrupted, as the classroom's door slammed open, hitting the wall behind it at the ringing bell. The two girls stood together as hundreds of children left their class and headed for the next. In the shuffle, the girls grabbed each other's sleeves.

"Hang on, Sara."

"You, too, Weatherbee." Their eyes glared at the mad rush of children in the halls.

Sara yelled, "Is this common?"

"What?" Weatherbee asked.

"So many children," Sara said, "the noise level."

"Yeah, it's always like this."

"Drop dead, Weatherbee," most of the upper classmen said to Alana as they pushed her to one side. Without her gang surrounding her, the students found their bravery to torment her.

"You seem not so popular," yelled Sara.

"It's been a rough start this year," Weatherbee commented back to Sara, reassuring her things were ok.

"I'm tired of all your sniveling, Weatherbee," one girl said, pushing Alana in the face with the open hand.

Sara blinked. She was stunning, her hair a gorgeous glossy jet black, her face elegant and feminine with fair skin, and she seemed to radiate sex appeal. Most of the boys who went by hit Alana or flicked her in the head and then, just the opposite, gave a polite, "Hello. How you doing?" to Sara. Next to her stood a resolute Alana, trying to get a small smile out of old friends who couldn't care less if she existed.

The last classroom door slammed shut. "All quiet now," Weatherbee said.

Sara said, "I guess I'd better get to class."

"I'll go with you."

The huge heavy door shut loudly as Alana and Sara came in to her first class. Professor Buddles Tomes Hess jumped at the sound. The whole class turned to see who came in. Two tiny girls, wobbling in high heels, stood in front of the classroom.

One student in the front muttered loudly for the class to hear, "It's Weatherbee!"

Someone yelled from the back row, "Weatherbee, get lost!" Seconded by, "You stink, Weatherbee. How could you be allowed back in school?"

You stink Weatherbee was becoming too common of an expression, she felt. "Don't you ever bathe?" A girl in front row looked down smugly from her nose, critical of her appearance. Weatherbee just stared.

An old girlfriend reminded Alana she was a murderer and killed Logan. She asked, "Do you kill all your friends?"

Professor Hess said, "That will be all, students. Sorry, Weatherbee. Rough year for you."

"Aw, not a bother, Professor Hess."

Alana pretended she didn't hear much of what was being said behind her back and that she hadn't been up all night Ugh. Stomach issues — weird dreams — obnoxious ghost beating the walls.

Professor took his attention away from the chalkboard. "Oh yes. I see, the new student. Good of you, Miss Weatherbee, to show her around. Do take a seat."

"What class is this?" Sara whispered. "My paperwork doesn't show what class is what?"

Alana says plainly, "it's Math," with a happier expression. Alana liked math.

"Alana," the professor said, "You girls missed roll call, but I'll excuse that this time since you've been showing the new student around school."

Alana smiled. Professor Buddles Tomes Hess was one of Alana's favorite teachers since she was a top notch student last year.

"Miss Weatherbee," Professor Buddles Tomes Hess asked, "come over here, please. I have a message for you. Headmaster asked you to stay with Sara for the afternoon. You will not need to go to your other classes today. Ok?"

Alana looked at Sara, agreeing with the Professor, surprised that Barns knew Alana was with Sara. *Brilliant discovery. He must know what I am up to. I best back off from doing any dark magic.*

As Sara sat alone for a minute, all the good looking boys' eyes landed on her, looking her up and down.

One girl chuckled, "Oh love the shoes, newbie." Sara crossed her legs in attempt to hide the old school color shoes she wore.

One boy leaned over. "Not to worry. She's just jealous. You're cuter than she will ever be. Cool shoes by the way." Sara smiled widely, probably her first true smile.

"Who are you to show anyone our school?" A boy in the front row snarled at Alana after she finished talking to the Professor Hess. She tilted her head to the side and looked into his silver eyes, *Emeno- canteries*.

"What was that? A death spell or a hex?" the class laughed. The only thought that ran through her mind was, *wow, look at his head blowing up twice, no — now three times its size*. The class roared in laughter.

The boy blinked and frowned "WHAT? What's happening to my head? Ohh noo! The pain! Make it stop, Weatherbee!!"

"No. Not till you're nice," she snarled at the boy, walking over slowly, ready to attack again. The class cheered at Alana's ability to still do the unthinkable toward a fellow student.

"You must be kidding, Miss Weatherbee," Professor Buddles Tomes Hess yelled, "off to the Headmistress' room for detention. I can't believe your actions this morning." His face was tomato red, fists clenched together. "Set the boy's bloated head back to normal and off you go."

The kids yelled, "Yeah, Weatherbee. Get out, you wicked loser."

Alana woke up to reality, putting her head down to her chest, and walked straight out, forgetting about Sara.

Chapter 14

"I'm Brad, and who might you be?" The boy leaned against the wall, folding his arms across his muscular chest. "About time you got rid of that loser Weatherbee." He arched an eyebrow. "Sara," he said, "You're not a Shines student, are you? You don't even sound English."

She crossed her arms and arched her eyebrow, imitating his pose as best she could from her seat.

"Hmm, you are right about one thing," she said, smiling slightly, "I'm not English. I'm from another world and I eat jerks like you for lunch. However, I am a Shines student, or at least I am this year."

Proudly bragging, he said, "I'm the best boy from the maze games, a Top Five. Just got bragging rights after our last tournament."

"Top Five," Sara said, cocking her head sharply to the side. "Is that as high as you can count?"

The nearby students roared in a deep, rich, colorful laughter at Sara's sarcasm.

He sat down across from her and continued to size her up. "Since when has Shines accepted transfer students? And why wasn't I informed of this?" he seemed to ask more to himself than to her. She shrugged and went back to looking out the window.

"My, my, it's getting hot in here," Sara said.

After several minutes of silence, she looked back at him. "What's Shines like?" The boy's eyes popped up, surprised. "And what was Weatherbee like last year?" Sara asked.

He shrugged. He was a Top Five player. He should have known Sara wouldn't fall for his status on the team as a pick up line. Replacing Alana in the games this year was hard on everyone, especially Captain Wyatt. The boy went to answer, but when he started to speak, he got interrupted.

"Alana Weatherbee was the greatest Top Five player in the world. She came from nowhere and kicked ass," Wyatt spoke up. The kids in class agreed.

Sara felt good about having the kids open up. More tuned in to the talks and recounted Alana's better memories in school. Sara twisted her wand and cast an invisible spell to confess subject matters.

Alana was cute in her way and smart and surely in love with a new boy named Logan who died at the end of the school year — sad to many, saying she's been different. — He's was still around. — Evilness darkness, wickedness, a few dared say, took hold of our Alana Weatherbee.

"How so?" Sara said.

"Ask her to learn more about her life."

Looking at the children seated around her, she asked, "So, why beat up on her? What's the joke then?" Sara sound older than the class she sat in.

A long silence came over the class. "I guess," one girl said, "we feel it's her fault that Logan is dead."

"Please, class, back to your work," Professor Hess commanded. "Sara, there's a paper in your desk folder. Can you fill that out while I make sure Weatherbee went to Madam's office? Now, class, I'll be right back. Back to your lessons."

Sara asked, eyeing everyone with their head down, "This is one of the top magical schools in the world, or so they say. A school with this huge rep should have done more for Weatherbee. But if it was her fault, would she not be expelled then?" Students nodded, agreeing with Sara.

"However," a student said, "that creepy book found her. She's, like, joined at the hip to it."

"It's scary and wicked," one kid said in the back of the class.

"It has a lot of history and what not, like the old castle of death that killed poor Logan."

With a big sigh, it became clear to Sara that the students were confused in what really happened.

Sara said, "You should ask people who were there, like Alana. Then you'd know the truth."

An hour later, the students who stayed after Sara left were still talking. "I think you and a few others here are feeling the pressure of Sara asking so many questions about Weatherbee and the school."

Sara's shoes were a big topic. No one liked what she wore to school today and the Brat party around here with their noses in the air told her every step she took what they didn't like. She wondered what else was in store for her in this new school. She sighed and tucked her wand away in her pocket, unlocking the speaking spell off from the kids.

Sara rolled her eyes. *Better stop them now before they get all worked up and stop speaking to each other again about all the horrible things they have said and done to Weatherbee.*

Alana sat waiting for her tardy slip to get back into class from the headmistress' secretary. Twins Misty and Jennifer sat by her, also in trouble.

"Alana," Misty said, "did you know we got a new girl at Shines? Know anything about her?"

Alana gave her a confused look, "Augbugger, I forgot Sara." Alana ran off looking for her. The headmistress ran into her.

"Miss Weatherbee, every year we get a new first year's trouble maker. I hope this year it's not you, dear. You know that? What's gotten into you?"

"How odd. I felt the same. Bye. Can't talk now. I'm late."

* * *

There was no welcoming twinkle in those blue eyes, only pain. Ezards could barely meet Weatherbee's gaze before looking away as they walked toward each other from opposite ends of the hallway after she'd gotten Sara.

"Blast that professor's paranoid attitude," Weatherbee said to herself. "He's just waiting for me to step out of line."

Sara's sharp eyes, Ezards felt, had seen much in her young years. However, even that brief glance seemed to be enough to know Sara was a dark witch.

Ezards wanted to get close to Alana, too. He wanted to prove he could overtake the Book of Spells alone. Besides, he felt sure it was feeding Weatherbee and her friends fuel for anything they wanted. He wondered how to convince Weatherbee he would not hurt her.

Looking up sorrowfully toward Professor Ezards' watchful gaze, Alana walked with Sara down the halls. He stopped and stared at books the two students carried. He muttered something trivial and went on his way, continuing to look back at her every few steps he took. The two girls had to giggle in his gaze.

They continued walking down the hallway, their arms loaded with schoolbooks, to Professor Toddles' ocean life class and its magical principles. Sara told of her first dilemma, her need for school shoes.

She explained to Alana, "Madam Huppenpuff told me this morning my old school shoes I'm wearing are not to dress code for this school."

"I'll be glad to help."

"How can you help, Alana?" Sara asked. "I've been told to go to the village shoe store. Did you want to go with me, then?"

"No," Alana said. "I have a pair upstairs in my room that might fit you." She looked at Sara's feet, judging her shoe size.

Sara thought this offered a good chance to check out Weatherbee's room and to look for the Book of Spells.

"Ok," Sara said. The two girls ran upstairs to Weatherbee's room after class. They had ten minutes to get to the next class. That was a break time, so most students ran late coming back to class anyway.

The two girls took their time. While in Alana's room, Sara looked at the furnishings and frills that no other teen her age would have — a lot of weird and occult stuff. *Well*, Sara thought, *it's cozy and warm*.

It held a lot of dark wooden furniture, with a touch of dark red. The large room had a wooden roll top desk. On top, many things laid on it, like a feather quill and inkpot, some old fashioned spell books. Sara scanned the room, but couldn't see the Book of Spells.

Drat, she thought. *Waste of time. I'll have come back later.*

The room looked like a dungeon, lit only by red and black wax candles. One small lighter fairy buzzed around, making sure they were all lit when the girls entered. One bed in the corner and no paintings on the walls completed the decor. It looked, due to the candle lighting, to be moving and spinning. Sara got hit right away by a horrible dread feeling, making her weak in the knees along with the spinning effect.

The book hidden away said, "Good. My charm is working. She will not want to come back here."

Sara saw New Age literature scattered all over, which should have given her an indication that Alana was bright, but Sara thought she didn't know enough about the New Age Movement of Dark Wing writing. It was written backwards in charms and spells, and magic lay about on unfinished pages, glowing brightly in each letter.

"This is advanced stuff," Sara said.

When Sara first got the sickening symptoms, she thought her imagination must have gone haywire. Sara wondered what could be causing them, and it did cross her mind that the girl could be performing some kind of occult practice on her, but she didn't take the possibility that seriously then. She wasn't worried about the symptoms, because they didn't generally take affect right away. Sara sighed, *Really*, now, come on. Is that the best you can do?

There was a light knock at the door in Alana's bedroom.

Sara paused and spotted a shadow move by the window. "Hello?"

"Hello there!" a young voice with a thick, foreign accent said, "May I see you? I need your help!"

Chapter 15

"Alright," Sara replied. She walked to the closet door and started unlocking it when she heard the faint cry come from the other side. The two ravens Alana had sat on a perch, calling out for their mistress.

Sara looked over at them and said, "Shush now."

She spoke to the door, still unable to unlock it, "Can I come in? Are you still there?"

"Yeah, I'm still here." Then quick footsteps in the closet faded away, like there was another room hidden behind the door.

A shadow passed by the curtain, back where it once stood when the girls walked in.

Sara breathed heavily. She stared at the window, cringing from the increasing pain in her chest. A grayish colored, scarred and bloodied hand reached into the window and unlocked the door. Sara then tiptoed forward, keeping her eyes trained on the doorway that Weatherbee went into.

Without warning, the door flew opened to reveal another door, but colored in red.

Something much darker entered the room.

Sara got a sensation of being gently caressed when she stood closer to the desk, then the feeling would go away. However, it bothered Sara a bit, because she didn't know what was causing it. An image of the dark presence weighed on her mind.

Alana ran over to her closet, yelling, "I'll just be a second." She took more like ten. Alana locked herself in her closet and searched for a pair of black pumps for Sara to try. The ones she wore last spring would work nicely. While Sara continued to wait, she kept her eyes out for Weatherbee's Book of Spells. The fairy candle lighter buzzing past Sara's view lit the last candle.

With a hidden devious grin, and after placing a charm into the shoes, Alana came back out, showing in her right hand a pair of black high heels.

Sara took her shoes off and stood in her stocking feet, looking at the shoes.

"Nice," she commented.

"Yes, they are cute. You're welcomed to use them for now. Here you can have these."

"Ooh thanks."

"The bell will ring soon. Best put them on, and hurry," Alana said with eyes widening toward the shoes. "Oh, before you go, I heard that you talked with Barns."

"Yeah. So?" She held the shoes in her hands. "Sorry, what's your point?"

Alana placed both hands on her hips. "That wasn't nice that you called my old teammates comic wizards. What was it you said? I'm like a fairy story teller in my published works?"

Sara said, "I didn't care for books on that subject."

"You did when I gave you one today."

"That was different."

"How?"

Before Sara could think of an answer, Alana bellowed out, "So you were talking to my old friends about me and not taking anything from me, and now you stand there with another book of mine and my shoes, hum?"

"Alana, calm yourself. I'm new here. I didn't know who your friends are or who I was speaking about till I met you."

"Oh? I'm supposed to believe that?" Alana walked out the door with a huff.

"Alana, wait. They came to me. I...I..." Her eyes teared with angry emotion and distrust in them. Sara ran a few feet to try to explain to her, but Alana was too far down the hall.

Sara looked down by her book bag to the book that Alana gave her. It read "Dark Nightmares: Places Held Captive." Six skulls with a black cover turned a bright orange. The title of the book changed to "Killing Me Softly."

"Wow," Sara said. "Wicked. This New Age stuff is darker magic for sure. Oh, that's why the cover is so descriptive and frightening. Mmm odd... the girl has feeling. She couldn't have heard why I'm here. I'll have to keep trying to be her close friend. It will be harder now."

Sara sat down, placing the book on the table. The pages rustled faintly as they turned by themselves one by one. Then something shot out from the pages. One went into the bedroom chamber, bouncing off the four walls. Impressed, Sara turned to the next page with her index finger when the bell rang for class.

"Oh shucks. Time for class again," Sara chimed, stomping around the room in her white school stockings. She hurried and tried the shoes on that Alana gave her. Sara got her toes safely into the black patent leather Mary Jane's pumps; the heels were higher than she was used to.

"Alana may be short, but..." she commented, "pumping me up to a higher level and wanting me to run to each class? I think not!"

On examining the shoes, they looked passable. Sara headed off to class. After a few steps, she started limping.

"Ouch! Ouch! Are you *kidding* me? These hurt! These shoes feel like they're squeezing my toes to a pulp."

Sara passed by the hazel tree where two little mourning doves sat on its branches and chimed their song, for they were in love. Sara turned the corner and, seeing no students in the Jason Halls, knew she was late. Headmaster's school motto on the doorframe just ahead said, *Time is a gift, but time should not be wasted. Get to class.*

Sara looked down at her foot and saw blood running out of her new shoes, and staining her white stockings.

"What game is this now? I should have known there'd be trouble from Alana." Sara hobbled to the school infirmary off the main hall. She needed help,

regardless of time and quotes from the headmaster of Shines. She needed a nurse.

Alana happened to be walking by. The click of her high heels against the stone floor of the infirmary paused, and she looked at Sara lying in one of the beds.

"I didn't expect to see you here," she said quietly, bending over the bed to check on her foot. A queer smile came out of Alana. "I hope my shoes didn't hurt you."

Sara watched her through her one eye that wasn't wincing in pain while the medic witch removed the other shoe. The nurses were shocked at the damage to her feet.

The school's medic witch said, "Someone put magic mousetraps inside of the shoes and they snapped all the toes to break them." Sara knew the shoes were a punishment of her betrayal, but it was a small thing to bear in the long run.

"I guess you have to go barefooted." Alana left without saying another word, her heels click clacking down the halls till they faded away.

Warm rays filtered through the trees; the fallen leaves swirled in a dance with the wind. The light mist from the fountain felt refreshing from the stifling heat of Alana's heavy coat and book bag.

Flipping out her drawing pad, she proceeded to sketch the autumn scene at the central fountain of Shines. The new sights were enough to send this young girl's artistry into a frenzy. There was so much to capture, to seize the moment and forever freeze the image of Shines' life combined with the beauty of nature.

Feet spread shoulder width apart, her eyes never once looking down at her work, the charcoal pencil glided across the blank page, filling it with magical life before Alana. She blew a loose strand of chestnut hair of Logan's that settled over one crystal hazel eye, escaping the confines of her knitted wool saggy cap. Such a quick and innocent maneuver that Alana briefly looked down at her drawing, her hand halting as she realized what she had drawn.

At first glance nothing seemed out of place. There was the sea of yellow-greenish and burnt red-orange leaves, a single picnic table off to the side of the lawns in a veil of mixed leaves, and the fountain center bellying out water from a tall figure of a wizard with a diploma in his hands. However, the part she hadn't meant to include... no, wasn't aware of, was a dark figure behind the fountain.

It was a girl.

She wore a dress of ebony, the ends tattered, worn, and black high heel boots lacing up her legs. Long, thick wavy curls of thick black hung over her shoulders, barely kissing the small, white oval-shaped face. Though the distance was far, Alana could make out the cold green eyes of Sara staring at her. However, Sara was back in the hospital wing, having her feet tended to by the medic witches.

Alana's head snapped up and Sara was gone. Vanished. Almost as if she was never there. Frowning, she gazed back to the pad and the image was still there.

Fighting the chills crawling up her spine, Alana shoved the drawing pad into her book bag and broke into a sprint, down the turning path towards her dorm.

Weatherbee seemed to be in a trance. Some of her friends felt it was depression for her loss catching up to her. Keeping up appearances was getting

harder for Alana Weatherbee. She walked past her friends, shocking Amanda at the oversight.

Medic witches wheeled Sara to the common room, plumping pillows behind her back and under her feet. Taking the new book “Dark Nightmares: Places Held Captive” that Alana gave her, she decided to brush up on new spells, curses and charms not so favorable to this school.

Sara framed her face grimly and tiredly after a moment, watching Alana walk in and look at her bandaged feet.

“I see you’re still recovering from my shoes.”

Sara had a mind full of curses at the ready just in case Weatherbee tried something.

“I have another pair of shoes that may fit better,” Alana said, smiling.

“No thanks,” Professor Ezards answered, standing over Sara. “You best stick to wearing your own shoes, Miss Weatherbee.”

Sara butted in, smiling at Ezards, and said, “I can wear my old pair from my school till I can make it down to the village shoe store.”

Alana’s blue eyes looked suspiciously at Professor Ezards’ new interest in Sara

Sara said, “My tan husked pumps from my old school would be fine for now. Professor Ezards granted me special permission.”

The school medic witches also sat in the common room, fussing over poor Sara’s bandaged feet. Alana sat closer and watched them, showing much concern toward her new friend.

Chapter 16

In a few moments, talent more magical than medical came in the form of Potions Master Professor Tunneled. He resisted the urge to sneer at Alana across the table for what she had caused to Sara’s feet. He waved his wand once but no more than twice over her bandaged feet, placing a charm to heal them in seconds.

The medic witches helped unwrap the many layers of bandages to reveal healed feet again.

The professor commented, “It’s not like you, Alana, were even aware her injuries could have been life threatening. Consideration of the welfare of a fellow student should be shown.” Professor Ezards and Tunneled stopped when they saw her eyes darken with a hint of disregard to the elders present.

Professor Ezards looked away and muttered between his lips, “The girls will have to figure out who is a true friend or foe soon enough.”

Tunneled’s window-shaped eyes glared at Alana and he sucked on his teeth. “I think, Professor Ezards, we should take away her wand for a week as punishment. She needs to think about what she’s done.”

Before Ezards could reply, the Book of Spells materialized in Alana’s lap, its pages flapping, its cover snapping open and closed.

All conversation ceased. All eyes stared at the book, then at Alana.

"So," Ezards found his voice first, "you still have it. I *thought* so."

Sara stood up, frowning. "You'll never get her wand now." Her frustration was understandable under the circumstances, but even she could see it was misdirected. Sara deflated slightly and nodded toward Alana.

"It won't leave me," Alana commented, cool and unfazed.

* * *

Headmaster Barns sat outside, relaxing by his favorite tree on his favorite bench. With his head tilted back, he studied the sky, enjoying his time reading the clouds. A few birds fluttered past his line of vision and the sounds of younger children on the playground filled the air with their laughter and yells.

The clouds shifted, moving too quickly for normal. His eyes narrowed behind his half-moon glasses as he looked out into the warring signs. Seeing Sara's mission failing, the clouds foretold of grim things to come in the near future. Headmaster worried and went in to see what had happened.

He found Professor Ezards waiting outside his office, pacing the hallway and muttering to himself.

"*There* you are," Ezards exclaimed.

"Why? What's happened? What's wrong?" Barns opened his door and ushered his friend in.

"The Book of Spells..." Ezards wiped his brow. "It appeared with Alana just a moment ago, defending her against us taking her wand."

"Why would you take her wand?"

"For hurting Sara. Alana gave Sara shoes with traps in them and broke all her toes."

Barns felt his chest squeeze and his stomach twist. "So..." He leaned forward on his desk to stop the dizziness. "So it begins. I knew something was wrong. But to have students deliberately hurting each other... And to have the book defend Alana means she's untouchable now." He focused worried, sad eyes on Ezards. "How will we keep her safe? How can we separate the two?"

"It's up to Sara, isn't it?" the professor offered.

"Yes. But she's taking too long. Now that the book and Alana are together, their power is even stronger." Running his fingers through his white hair, he turned to the window, thoughts tumbling end over end in his mind. He never noticed when Ezards left.

* * *

Later, the two witches sat at a lunch table, neither willing to break the silence. Neither wanted to be the one who spoke the glaring truth about the reason for Sara's presence. Sara simply was not making as much progress as she hoped.

Alana was training her two devil looking ravens. Their piercing black, shiny orbs watched Sara's every move. A deep-seated hatred showed in their faces.

Tonight would be a battle; the idea came to Sara that she was not here playing games any longer. Even so, Sara had to keep the façade going. She had to make Alana think they were friends. Alana had been seriously hurt trying to hold her own, and to protect the Book of Spells. Sara looked at her cooing to her pets like her life was simple and carefree.

Sara studied a tear in her new skirt and lamented that she'd just have to go shopping tomorrow for a skirt as well as shoes.

Alana jerked toward Sara, looking away from her pets in a child like manner. "I just went last week with money my father sends monthly. I overspent already." She winced looking at the rip.

Sara leaned forward. "Can I ask you something?"

"I guess so. What?"

"Did you really mean to hurt me today?"

"Yes."

"Why? What had I done to you?"

"You made me mad about my books."

"That can't be it, not all of it."

"Yeah, okay." Alana crossed her arms. "You're making friends with all my old friends. And they won't even *look* at me."

Sara nodded. "I get it. What about the Book of Spells? Did you call...?"

Alana's raised hand stopped her. "I didn't expect it to show up like that. It was just protecting me from the professors."

"I see." Sara clicked the table with her fingernails and watched Alana turn back to her birds. "Well, old friends or not, I'll talk to you."

That got the two talking. Sara smiled, thinking this might do well in her favor to keep friendly. But deep down, Sara grew disdainful. Alana was not what she expected in a hardcore witch. She was a gentle, mixed up girl in a lot of ways, and that streak of kindness grated on Sara like lemon juice on a wound.

Sara moved over closer and asked Alana about her new pets.

Happier to talk about her ravens than anything else, Alana loved creatures all shapes and sizes. Sara watched Alana feeding them tidbits of fruit and scraps of meat by hand.

One of the ghosts moved closer and whispered something in Alana's ear. Alana giggled and said, "All right. Later perhaps."

"What?" Sara asked. "What's the joke?"

"Nothing. You'll find out later." Alana moved over a few inches on the bench.

It was warm in the school lunch area, making the school children happy to come in out of the cold. The delicious smell of coffee and frying bacon hit everyone's sense of smell and Sara inhaled deeply. The smell was new to her, bringing a better part to this mission.

She hadn't realized how hungry she was, having been preoccupied with spells and charms in the book. Scanning around, she noticed Alana talking to the waitress. The waitress wasn't willing to serve food in the cafeteria unless she got rid of the two ravens. *Good*, Sara thought.

Someone stood between them. Alana read Sara's last comment in her mind, but she couldn't identify the source, making her uncomfortable, so she left.

As the children piled into the cafeteria, Sara lost sight of Weatherbee and her two ravens when they went out one of the back doors.

Darkness hung over the campus when fog drifted in. Word had gotten out that Alana Weatherbee was working dark magic on a student. Though she had a few friends and a few tormentors, most children never minded who she was as she ambled down the halls of school. Her dorm mates didn't invite her to nights at the movies or popcorn and reading from the comics. They avoided Weatherbee completely.

The children stayed clear of both students on hearing the news, fearing dark magic followed Sara.

Alana caught up to Sara the next day in the lounge for the students.

Sara said, thinking she'd catch more bees with honey. "Oh, Alana?"

"Yes?" She sat down beside her.

"I wanted to say, I enjoyed it."

"Enjoyed what?"

"The book was amazing! Your books...I just wanted to you to know."

"Oh, thanks. You are my very first compliment." Alana grinned and then blushed.

"I'd like to know, if I may ask the author, why was darkness allowed to run free throughout the whole story? Wasn't there anything created allowed the kill off the evil?"

"People have asked me that all the time, like Headmaster. How I feel about dark matters in witchcraft, because the main character was a villain in the story."

"Yeah," Sara said, "but, weren't you the real person in the story as well?"

"Well, well. That is surprising. Very good. Yes, in many ways I was. I was writing the pages to another story when I got the idea. They spoke RIGHT THEN to me and I had to add my experiences."

Sara knew she was onto something and didn't want to cut it short.

"Can I read your book some time? The Book of Spells, I mean."

"Oh...No, not this book. Sorry."

"I would not even ask except that we're getting to know each other better."

"Maybe some time." Alana went back to her writing.

"All right then," Sara said, eyeing the book eyeing her back from its book spine.

"It's not complaining, so I guess so, sometime."

"Ok, thanks."

Sara sat there in silence, happy with the first step in seeing the book's contents.

* * *

That night, Sara sat in the middle of her bedroom floor, surrounded by lit candles in the dark room. Focused mentally on the Book of Spells, she wanted to call up the best spell she could to steal the book away from Alana. She didn't have time to wait for permission to see it.

In the middle of her soft chanting, she felt a presence join her. Opening her eyes, she watched a form take shape and solidify into a red demon with curled horns.

"Cafzf?" She drew back, knowing of his power, afraid to get too close. "How'd you get in here? I thought this castle was protected."

"It is, but you make a good channel for me. It's all that darkness in you, you see." He hissed in laughter, his form towering over her. His dark green tongue licked his lips. "You're helping Barns get the Book of Spells, aren't you?"

"Y...yes. Why?"

"Because I want it — more than he does."

"Okay, so get it."

Her insolence met with a constriction of her throat while his fist clenched and unclenched a few feet away from her.

"Behave," he warned. "You *will* get the book for me."

She gulped in air and rubbed her throat before answering. "How? Barns doesn't know how."

"I'll give you a spell. The *Mai-san* curse is simple enough for even you to handle."

"That will kill Alana and any other witch or wizard in a five mile radius." Sara's eyes grew wide.

"I see you've heard of it then." Cafzf rubbed his hands together. "If she's dead, you should have no trouble bringing the book to me."

"Why can't you say the spell?" She raised one hand in defense. "I'm not being snotty. I just don't understand."

"Because I can only stay here for a short amount of time before the protection spells sense my presence. I wouldn't have time to conduct the ritual." Glancing over his shoulder like he heard something, he began to shrink into the candle's flame. "Soon, Sara. Do it soon!"

* * *

Early the next morning, Sara took her odd assortment of paraphernalia to the professors' housing area. The room next to Barns had the last thing she needed in order to create the *Mai-san* curse. Spelling the lock opened, she went in and arranged the items on the floor. Walking to a bookshelf in the corner, she picked up a silver chalice and added that.

With everything arranged several minutes later, she lit the candles and began the incantation. A sprig of hemlock went into the chalice, then a drop of blood from her pricked finger. One by one, items filled the silver cup. Smoke seeped from the mixture, curling toward the ceiling, filling the room with an unusual scent.

Sara began the chant, eyes closed, body weaving.

Crash!

The chalice knocked to the floor, its contents spilling in several directions in an irretrievable mess.

Her eyes flew open to discover a ghost floating to the ceiling.

"What have you *done*?" Sara screamed.

"I'm protecting Alana," Kat, the girl ghost, answered. "I know what you're up to."

"You can't stop me!"

"Maybe not, but I can keep you from casting the spell today," Kat argued back and then disappeared through the wall.

* * *

Headmaster Barns focused on his face in the mirror; it had gotten to him, just as he'd suspected. Dark and mysterious magic was at play.

He'd heard for many nights a howling of a werewolf, which made him afraid Logan's clan was looking for him, not knowing the reality of his whereabouts.

"The world just doesn't make sense anymore, does it?" Alana quipped in Barns' mind, trying to make light of something that was rapidly turning him bitter.

"Miss Weatherbee, you must stay out of my conscience."

"Nevertheless, Headmaster, I desperately need to talk to you."

"Well, what is your concern?"

"I want to go back to the Realm of Many Doors and try again to look for Logan. I feel him, Headmaster. I feel he is close by."

"Dreams or nightmares, young lady, can play into the deepest corners of one's mind to make them believable. You mustn't listen to such dreams." He raised a hand to the mirror and began to chant softly. The Book of Spells heard this chant and wrote it down for Alana to repeat later.

"No, Headmaster. Please do not pull me away. I need you. You're my only friend."

"I'm sorry about your father shutting you out like this, Alana, and I do apologize for what the school children have done to you of late also. I feel Logan, too, and hold my hand back at meeting with his father. I feel you have made a friend in Sara."

"Who? Sara Hornswanger? The girl who pretends to be my friend, Headmaster? The one you hired to kill me and take control of my book?"

"Alana, I always wonder where you get these odd ideas from. It's not true. I feel, as many others, we're worried about your welfare and about the book's control over you. Please don't be mad at me for that. The book's damage to you is most frightening to us and to Mother of All Magic. Even the Trusted Zone cannot replace or clean up after its rise. In its rise to more power, one day it will mirror through you to the wolves and take on a less strong witch or wizard to meet its desire. No, Miss Weatherbee, I look after you like you were my very own child. I need to be able to trust you."

"Oh, I can be trusted, Headmaster."

"I must see that trust daily in you."

"Ok, Headmaster, ok then."

"Now you can leave my head. I, after all, need only one voice in my head. Two voices are the brink to madness."

Barns faced the hardest job ever in his life. He saw in the near future that Weatherbee needed to trust in a new friend and trust in herself.

He started to walk, but stopped when he heard voices from inside the nearest room. It sounded as if they were arguing, but he couldn't catch the words. The mere sound of them made fear spike through him, though. Ominous warnings rang in his mind. Sudden weakness ran through his knees and back, causing him to stagger. He couldn't catch his breath, like he'd been running, and his muscles ached without cause or explanation. A spell!

If there was even the slightest chance that the Book of Spells wanted to kill him, he had to run. He had to get the spirits together to attack the book, with or without Sara.

The fire crackled in his den. The voices fell silent in the school, and he froze in his thoughts. How loud his heartbeat was! His imagination raced, supplying horrid images of the truth. The book was watching him after all, but it thought he was asleep, so the book's magic had turned its back for a little while. Barns had time to plan his next move with Sara.

A raggedy old ghost floated around him and began to glow as he invoked from that ghost a protective shield for himself that he hadn't used in quite a while. The fact that he had to resort to this was very telling. There hadn't been a need for this even when he'd been in the Realm of Many Doors, looking for Logan.

The caster of this spell was no amateur if it could affect him. Alana and the book had grown more powerful than before.

Chapter 17

The ghostly handprint glowed brightly for a few seconds before disappearing; his ghosts returned to their normal, invisible silence, although he felt one brush up against him and whimper in pain.

"Sorry, my old friend," Headmaster said, "we will restore order one day." He smiled faintly. "I feel you know where Logan's spirit is in the afterlife. It's all right. I promise I will not give away his location just yet."

It seemed to accept that and went to join its four brothers floating out the window. Headmaster turned on the sink, washed his hands and splashed cold water on his face. He borrowed the white little hand towel that Alana Weatherbee made for him last year in crafts. He made sure it looked just as neat when he put it back, whether Alana was persnickety about everything being in its proper place or not, he didn't know. But he saw no sense in finding out the hard way.

She stood close by, handing him a bigger towel.

"Miss Weatherbee, I'm in the bathroom, if you please."

"But, Headmaster, I just had to see you."

Opening the bathroom door, he found Alana leaning against the wall, waiting for him. "How did you get from there to here?"

Ah, she thought, *I arrived just on time. Now we can talk.* Having someone interested in Alana was a gift to her. "I'm in danger. Remember, according to

Mai-san curse, there's a five mile radius that this spell encompasses. Naturally it would also include my dorm room, wouldn't it?"

"Slow down," Barns said, "you're all lathered. What are you rambling on about now?"

"Sara's trying to kill me"

"What?"

"Yes. The book caught her at it and took me to listen. I eavesdropped at the room next to yours and heard her cast the spell. There's no denying it. She intends to kill me."

Headmaster compressed his lips into a grimace, taking in what Weatherbee said. His mind flashed to the noise in the next room earlier, and it made sense. "That means we're all at risk, except *Matsuzakaya* charms can counter-curse that simple spell. I'll ask for the *Matsuzakaya* charm in the Trusted Zone at our next meeting. I'll have to draw up some protective charms for us when we're at the school. However, Miss Weatherbee, I have felt only the kinder side to Sara. She's no killer. Not likely." He paused, watching Alana. "What is it? What's wrong? You fidget around like a grasshopper?"

"The *Nauru* charm is a deadly charm placed on a witch or wizard. I'm afraid she made one and will use it to get me to give her the book."

"The book will have to go one day. It's too complex for all. And it's a user of children like you. Nothing good can come from it. *Nauru charm*." Headmaster crossed his arms. "I'll look into to this matter. Right now, you must go to class."

"Yes, Headmaster." A happier Alana went off to her next class.

Headmaster consulted with the professors.

Ezards asked, "Why even take the time to listen to Miss Weatherbee? I feel I need to keep her mind sound. Maybe she may come around and wake up one day to this reality. I truly feel she is on a brink of madness at times. Too many worries are ahead of her."

"Even so," Barns scowled at Ezards, "*something* happened in the next room. It almost made me sick. Sara didn't finish the curse or we'd all be dead. So, we need to be extra vigilant and get the *Matsuzakaya* charm in place immediately."

* * *

That night, Alana ran all the way. She didn't even stop to check to see if anyone was awake. She ran up into her room and crawled into her bed. She wanted the lights on or at least to light a candle. Nevertheless, they were far away, and she didn't want to get up.

In her dreams, she ran in the woods again. She came across the dark castle where she and Logan stood. A voice told her to get out, to get away. She was about to when he grabbed her arm and his eyes grew red.

"Give me the power."

She fought him off, but he started to strangle her. She heard her name. He said her name. His eyes looked the same, but his voice sounded kind and had a hint of worry. As she was dying, she woke up with Sara's hand over her mouth.

"Don't scream." Sara lifted her hand away.

"Get off me. What are you doing here?"

Sara thought of the real reason she came, to try the spell again, but Alana woke up and caught her.

"Why do you think I came? To tell you do not go into the inner realms of the old school castle."

"I'm not a child," Alana said. "I can do what I want when I want it."

"No you can't when you're messing with things that don't need to be messed with." Sara's face became bright red from anger.

"Get out of my bedroom. You need to get out now." As Alana tried to get out of bed, all the sheets twisted around her from her nightmare.

"You silly girl." Sara stood there smugly.

"Can't you help me with this?"

Sara walked over. She was trying to help her, but Alana kept wriggling.

"Stop moving."

"It's hard when your leg is caught in a sea of sheets."

"It would go faster if you would stop kicking me, too."

"Sorry, it's a reflex."

Almost done freeing her, Sara slipped on a sheet on the floor and fell on top of her. Their faces only inches apart, Alana didn't know what she was doing. It was just like her dream and she did what she did in her dream. She leaned in to stare at watery green eyes and cast a death spell. Before she could form the words, Sara got off.

"You silly girl. You're nothing without the book, aren't you?"

"Get out," Alana hissed.

Chapter 18

"Excuse you." Alana Weatherbee smirked one morning, as Sara stopped, wondering which way to turn in the many hallways. Alana ran into her, hitting her shoulder.

"Ouch! That hurt."

"Hey, kid, what's your problem?" Alana sneered. Alana's ghostly friend, Kat, stepped out of the shadows to laugh.

"Just watch it!" Sara said.

Alana went back to her locker. Sadly, their dark blue lockers were right next to each other. Alana smiled and Amanda laughed.

"You want to go to the coffee shop?" Amanda asked Alana. Alana threw a book into her locker and closed it, noticing Sara eavesdropping.

"Uh, hello. Do we look like Cups and Balls Daily News, dear? Cause we're not giving out free gossip or pointers on charms." Alana crossed her arms.

"Ugh. Whatever," Sara commented with an eye roll.

"Come on, Amanda." Alana stomped away with her friend.

"Wow, how pathetic," Sara said, fluffing her hair.

Moments later, in Beakers and Cups, the school coffee shop just for the students, Alana and Amanda joined their friends at a booth.

"So, it's Friday. What should we do tonight?" Gillian asked, clutching her black coach wallet. "I have cash left from my parents. We can go shopping."

Before anyone answered, Alana gasped. She heard her name being thought about in a bad way outside of the room. Her friends looked over to see what all the commotion was about. They were not thinking of Weatherbee in a bad way. Who could it have been? *Sara*, Alana realized.

"There's a party at Jason's tonight." Gillian brought the girls back to the subject. They started to discuss what they were going to wear to a party. They grabbed the last bit of their stuff, including their free monthly issue *Shines* Top Five players, and left.

"Time to party!" Amanda giggle-yelled to Weatherbee on her way out the door. She noticed Alana's attention had been taken away by Sara's words that filled Alana's head. A spooky look fell over her.

Weatherbee closed her eyes and muttered aloud, "*Angelica*, whole root enhances female magical power and strength, protects children."

Anyone who knew Amanda knew she couldn't pass up a party, so she left Weatherbee to work her dark magic. They all laughed at Amanda's funny face she made as they locked arms, walking down the halls together, happy for a little relief away from schoolwork.

* * *

At lunch time, the girls gathered in Alana's room.

"I *am* relaxed!" Alana argued.

Amanda kept telling Alana to calm down. "This new girl is getting you all worked up." She shoved a barbeque potato chip into her mouth and crunched.

"Not really," Alana denied.

"Okay, then, what are you wearing to the party?" Amanda asked, hand reached out, admiring the sparkle to her new heart shape garnet ring.

"Where did you get that rock?" Alana asked, ignoring the question.

"Oh, you know, another secret admirer."

"Well that just dills my pickle! You have a new one every time I turn around," Alana commented.

"Alana, what about the party? Are you coming?" Amanda refused to be ignored.

"Whose? Jason's?"

"Yes."

"He looks like something the dog's been keepin' under the porch. I may come, but this new student bugs me. She's up to something, I tell ya!"

"Oh, you'd rather stay here and mix a brew?"

"Maybe," Weatherbee said quietly.

"Okay, well, gotta go."

"Go where?"

Alana's friends got nervous when she concentrated on someone who bugged her. Even her cauldron started its own fire and whistled when it boiled.

"I need to do my hair. Bye." The girls left the room. It fell silent except for Twinkle and Winkle sitting on their perch, cleaning their feathers.

"The trouble I've foreseen is brewing," Alana said, throwing huckleberry leaves into the cauldron.

* * *

Later that evening, Alana finished getting ready for the party. Two magical quills, scribbling in her hand, finished her homework assignment. She knew Amanda planned to wear a white Juicy Couture tank top, and black skinny jeans with kitten heels. Sydney wore a light blue Channel tank-top with a mini black jacket over top, and a pair of white skinny jeans with gold flats.

"What to wear, what to wear?" Alana chanted as she walked into her closet. She needed something high schoolish, but classy. Something an alpha would wear. Alana grabbed a dark red Ralph Lauren blouse and a white Channel denim skirt.

She put her hair in curlers and, as they worked their magic, she did her make-up. At eight-thirty, she flew her deluxe white broomstick to the party.

All the girls who thought they were cool carried a spell book to be like Weatherbee. Knock offs. She scoffed at the lot of them as she landed her broom. *Can you spell wannabee witch?*

Jason's parents lived in the village and had allowed him to throw the party there. Light spilled from the windows and open doorway to the dark lawn already crowded with teenagers. Several broomsticks leaned against the front porch and Alana added hers to the stack.

"You're here!"

Alana turned to find Gillian waving at her. Gillian posed in her black Marc Jacob's denim skirt and a lavender Angel blouse.

"You like?" she asked.

"Yes. You look fabulous, as always," Alana smiled.

She noted Gillian's new black suede high heels pumps, with matching black stockings. Gillian liked to wear her heels an inch higher than the other girls. It gave her that edge when it came to attracting boys. Not that she needed it. With Gillian's dimples and a smile that could rock the world, no other girl stood a chance, unless they used a magical charm or spell to get a boy to notice them. Any time she entered a room, the boys would drop what they were doing and stare. Her perfume drove them crazy, a cross between watermelon and strawberries. And, no matter how hard or how late she partied, she always looked refreshed and healthy by morning. The girls wanted to know the name of that charm.

"Is anyone else here?" Alana asked.

"Yeah, Amanda and Sydney got here a few minutes ago. I think they're inside."

With a nod, Alana led Gillian through the front door. Music blared through speakers, making the walls pulse on the bass beat. Bodies crowded onto the sofa and chairs. Dancers filled the den. People leaned toward each other, yelling in order to be heard. Some couples were already in the hallway, making out.

Snacks of chip and dip, pizza, nachos, chicken wings, chocolate chip cookies and caramel popcorn covered the kitchen counter. Pitchers of lemonade, iced tea and several large bottles of pop sat next to the refrigerator and the ice.

"I see Amanda," Gillian yelled and pointed across the room. The two girls weaved their way through elbows and knees, excusing themselves with every other step.

A few boys surrounded Amanda, hoping to get her to dance with them. When Alana and Gillian approached, Amanda frowned at the boys' attentions turning to Gillian.

"You finally got here," Amanda greeted Alana.

"Yeah. I couldn't decide what to wear." She looked over her shoulder at all the teenagers. "Looks like everyone's here." When she turned back, she saw one of the boys lead Gillian away for a dance.

"Did you hear?" Amanda leaned in with the latest gossip. "Brenda and Kevin broke up."

"Really?" Alana responded with mild interest. "Those two are always breaking up."

"Well, well, look who's here." A voice interrupted their conversation. Wyatt stood with his arm around Sara. "Didn't know Jason was letting just anybody in."

With a nod toward Sara, Alana sneered, "Apparently so."

"What's the matter, Alana? Couldn't find a date?" He wrapped his arm tighter around Sara and smirked.

"Get lost, Wyatt," Amanda snarled, stepping in front of Alana.

"Oooo, the ice princess is actually speaking to me." Wyatt raised one eyebrow. "Should I feel honored?"

"Wyatt, please," Sara whispered.

"You're right. We're here to have a good time, not take out the trash."

When they turned to walk away, Amanda muttered something under her breath and Wyatt tripped over his own shoes, landing with a hard smack against the floor. The loud music covered the room's laughter. Red faced, he scrambled to his feet and walked away with Sara.

"Come on, let's get something to drink." Alana nodded toward the kitchen, wanting to shake off Wyatt's bad vibes.

"Sure."

When they crossed the room, an older teen boy stopped them.

"Amanda, how about a dance?" The handsome young man held out one hand in his invitation. Glancing at Alana and seeing her nod, Amanda smiled at her, then took his hand and let him lead her away.

On her way to the kitchen, Alana noticed some people looked at her almost in awe, like they were afraid of her, of her reputation, and wished they garnered that

type of notoriety. Others narrowed their eyes, letting her know she wasn't welcomed. None of them spoke to her.

Alana found Mammoth in the kitchen, making a big dent in the chicken wings, BBQ sauce smeared across his face and dripping off his huge fingers. They made eye contact, then both glanced away. Alana reached for a soda and Mammoth reached for another wing.

She started to leave, but snapped at more of the silent treatment.

"Nice party, huh?" she commented.

Mammoth shrugged and stopped eating long enough to wipe the top layer of sauce off his face with the back of his hand.

"Are you *ever* gonna talk to me?" She set her soda down and faced him. He started to turn away, but her hand on his forearm stopped him. "We used to be teammates, Mammoth. Remember in the maze how we saved each other?"

He grunted, unwilling to break his promise to the other students.

"Doesn't that count for *anything*?" She stepped closer. "You *can't* be afraid of me. When have I ever done anything to hurt you?"

His brows wrinkled, like thinking hurt his brain. "You haven't," he finally spoke.

"Well, then..."

"Logan. What'd you do to him?"

"Nothing. I swear. Nothing!"

He shook his head. "Long as you've got that dark magic Book, we ain't having it." He brushed past her and escaped into the dancers in the den.

Alana went into the living room and leaned against a wall, watching everyone in groups or as couples, talking, joking, dancing, flirting. An invisible wall clanged shut between her and them, a wall she knew would be there until something changed in her favor. It would only take giving up the Book of Spells, of proving her to be one of them. She considered it for a long moment. What would her life be like without it? Simpler. She'd have less power. But it wasn't that easy. Would the book *let* her give it up?

No.

With a sigh, she straightened, waved goodnight to Amanda squashed among the dancers, and went to find her broomstick. Alana both pitied and envied her classmates. Welcomed or not, she knew she'd never hurt them. Not ever. They needed to remain naïve for as long as possible. Trouble and evil would come too soon anyway.

On the porch, she stepped around a couple and bumped into Wyatt.

"Sorry, sorry." She put a hand out to steady him. "I didn't see you there."

He backed up and started to walk away, but she stopped him and held out one hand.

"I know how it looks by me running with the ice queens, and I know you don't want to be my friend, Wyatt," she paused, "but will you at least not be my enemy? You're the only one who really knew me before... everything happened."

She saw his eyes flicker at the request and knew she'd reached him.

"Pax?" Her blue eyes pleaded with him for a long moment.

"Yeah, okay." He shook her hand, then watched her fly away.

Chapter 19

Later that week, Alana pulled out a coat from her closet and noticed strands of Logan's hair clinging to the collar. She closed her eyes, trying to remember when that could have happened. The last time she wore it...

He knocked on her door and invited her for a malt.

"Grab your coat," he warned her. "It's damp out."

Happy to find an excuse to ignore her homework, she slammed her book shut, got the coat and took his hand. They traipsed across the school grounds, the night lit by lamps hanging over the sidewalk. Just before they reached the malt shop, he stopped her, pulling her into the shadows.

"What?" She gave him a curious look.

"This." Lifting her chin with his fingers, his lips covered hers with the softness of velvet and the heat of a volcano. She wrapped her arms around his neck and they held each other for a long moment before they went in.

A tear of memory of their fate and lost love stung before it rolled down her cheek. Alana decided to save these few strands of hair for her memory charm.

The world would end soon, or at least it threatened to, calamity pawing at the door like a rabid wolf. She held no doubt that disaster would be the only result, having little faith in the ever-weakening mind. However, when the time came, she would play her part. After all, she thought, her lips curved in a wry smile, that's all she ever did anymore. Alana felt like an empty nightmare with a spell holding tightly onto her.

A peaceful life never more.

Putting the coat away, Alana headed to class. In the hall, she glanced at the tall wizard standing beside her, the school's Headmaster. His skin looked as pale and wrinkled as his white hair, his beard straggling in kinks down the length of his lean torso, stark against his worn black robes. His back was straight; hands clasped behind him in the confident and easy manner that had faltered enemies and inspired respect and loyalty and, most of all, love in numerous others. Barns was the sole reason she bothered to help the school at all, having given Alana a rare second chance. He gazed about the hall, making sure everyone went to their class, then returned to his office.

Students walked past Alana silently, not glancing her way or acknowledging her existence. The hall emptied except for one small group of boys.

"Out of the way, freak," Alana heard.

The twelfth grader grunted, shoving Alana face-first into her locker as she walked by.

"Leave me alone, Daniel!"

A guardian wolf ran up and stood between both children, snarling at the mean boy.

"What's this, Weatherbee? Can't handle your fights by yourself?"

Alana bent over, petted the wolf, and said, "Easy now. I'll be all right."

The teenager threw Alana into the lockers. The wolf growled.

"Weatherbee, keep that killer away from me."

Alana yelped, feeling like her nose had been broken by the cold metal locker.

The wolf faced Daniel, eager for revenge. Its fur bristled on its back, fangs bared and snarling. The boy turned, pressed the palms of his hands against the lockers and didn't move, trying to make himself as small as possible.

Secret magical words that would not normally be spoken in front of classmates came full force to Alana's mouth and then to her lips. "*Abriggles*" she said toward the group. The boys looked around, only hearing a soft rumble beneath their feet. The hall grew silent until someone unseen laughed out loud.

When nothing else happened, Daniel turned from the locker and put his hands on his hips, cocky bravery replacing his earlier fear.

"Aw, nothing huh? Well, well, Weatherbee, what's the matter? Lose your magic, too, plus your power?" He leaned over, poking her shoulder. "I'm here to kick your ass. You know it; everybody here knows it, and above all, you deserve it. In fact, I think it's safe to say that this beating is about to become a historical fact here at Shines."

A hidden deep voice said, "Say the spell. Do it. You know it's time."

"He's only a child," Alana argued. "No."

"Do it. It's a command!"

Alana looked for the source. "Is this you, the book's voice?"

"Speak the spells. Hurry now, before you lose face."

"It's better to swallow pride than blood," Alana commented, sneering.

"Do you pity her?" the voice whispered to the boy's ear, making it hot and wet.

The boy stuttered at the evil surrounding him, "No, she... mmm... she's...just a ..."

"What?" the voice said, pressing in closer to the boy, closer and closer till he could hardly breathe against the locker. "Pity is a weakness," it hissed at the boy and turned again to Weatherbee. "We don't hesitate to kill school children," the voice yelled.

"Enough already!" Weatherbee shouted back, staring him down.

At the same time, one of the boy's companion said, "Killer! Get away from my friend." He went after Alana, kicking his hightop-clad foot under Alana legs, knocking her to the floor.

Alana landed on her knees hard, wincing. She hissed as pain shot up her legs. The Realms of Many Doors blasted open at the end of the massive hall. A tall figure shrouded in black strode through the group of the bully's followers to stand in front of the fallen Weatherbee.

"What is this trickery, Alana?" asked the eerie voice of the Book of Spells. "If you won't fight back, then we will go."

"Loser," the second bully grunted. Alana held onto the wolf, steadying him from attacking the two boys, foaming at the mouth, showing his razor sharp canines.

Alana's eyes hardened as she answered. "All my life I have felt... different. Unable to be myself, for fear it would terrify those around me."

The boy grabbed a thick science textbook buried under loose papers from his book bag, tossed discarded candy wrappers, comic books, and a brightly colored Trapper Keeper, until he yanked out his wand. "I'll fix your demon pet. Stand back," he said to his friends.

"You have fallen away from the sorcery light you once had, Weatherbee," the voice echoed in her head. "Alana," the ghostly voice commanded, "do it or we're leaving."

"I'll fight this one alone. You all have to trust me. There's a bigger picture why I'm here, and it's *not* to go to school and fight bullies. I still believe in the oaths I swore," Alana said patiently, "but, this time, the price is too great. *I will not hurt him!*"

A crowd gathered behind the boys, Alana on the floor, holding back the wolf barking and snapping at the wand, Daniel steadying himself, ready to aim a spell.

Alana said, "Whishpoo." The boy went blank, dropped his wand and looked at his friend.

"Dan...Daniel!" his friend shouted, shaking him by the shoulders.

Alana stood, rubbing her hurt knees, walked past the two boys and whistled for the wolf to walk with her down the hall.

"Next time, Weatherbee!" his friend shouted, shaking his fist.

Alana shook, getting tired of the bullies' attacks. She bent over and thanked the wolf.

Kat's shadowy, ghostly shape floated by, saying, "Well done, child, well done."

The bullies laughed and disappeared into the crowd. Students poured down the halls, rushing to get to their next class as the bell rang, breaking Alana and her guardian apart, knocking her book bag over, scattered pencils and leaving dusty sneaker prints on her new book covers she drew. She moaned and turned, reaching into the crowd of acid-washed jeans and leggings, trying to snatch up her things, only to be knocked down again to the hard floor.

"E-excuse me," Alana mumbled, crawling across the floor. "Sorry," she grunted as an upperclassman tripped over her and shot her a dirty look.

"Thought it'd be you, Weatherbee. Who else would be on the dirty floor?"

"Ouch," she whimpered when a high heel stomped on her hand.

An upperclassman said, "What's the matter, Weatherbee? Can't take it?" He cursed her under his breath, and a knee clocked Alana in the head.

The class bell shrieked and the hallway emptied. Alana sat in the middle of the floor, watching the last stragglers dash into their classes. Then there was only silence. Her sweater was half pulled off her shoulder and her shoes were missing, seeing them get kicked down the hallway.

Alana took a deep, shaky breath and stared, forlorn, at the remnants of her belongings. She gathered her paperwork and shoved her disorganized notes into her book bag. Alana stacked her textbooks, their brown paper covers already ripped. Finally, she collected her notes for a new idea to a fresh new chapter. "Can't lose that," she commented to herself, examining each torn cover, each footprint, each wrinkled page.

* * *

Upstairs in the room across from Alana, Sara drew the bed covers up to her chin. The temperature dropped and she could see her breath in small puffs of

white. Her skin crawled at the presence entering the room. Reaching to her nightstand, she grabbed her wand and held it at the ready.

Cafzf materialized at the foot of her bed, his head thrown back, laughter erupting from his throat. "You're still in bed? Get up!"

His eyes narrowed, focusing on the pale girl. One black, pointed fingernail motioned for her to come closer.

Sara threw back the covers and walked on trembling knees toward the red demon wizard.

"It's time," he hissed.

"Time?" she managed to whisper.

"I must have the book. *Now!*"

"But I've tried..."

"And Alana must die!"

"She doesn't have to..."

He clenched his fist, making her words choke in her throat. "Little girl, I know you think you have power, but you are nothing compared to me!"

"Then why do you need me?" Her eyes widened in sincerity.

"You are my tool to use as I please." He towered over her, his foul breath making her grimace. When he placed his hand on her head, squeezing it, she tried to jerk away from the molten touch. He squeezed harder.

"Concentrate," he ordered. "I am sending you the spell that will kill Alana. In order for it to work, you must touch her when you say it."

She closed her eyes at the dizziness enveloping her. Her mind hummed with unintelligible thoughts and words. Tears came to her eyes at the pain.

He released her. "Repeat it."

Swallowing once, she began to speak in some sinister tongue, ancient and steeped in malevolence.

"Good. Good. Do this well and do this soon, and you'll be rewarded."

His form began to fade as he floated toward a wall. When he disappeared, she sat on the bed, trying to quit shaking.

Her mind wandered the school and found Alana in the hall alone. Sara's eyes turned cold black as death. Alana would die and Sara would take the book.

Someone behind her shouted out in an eerie voice. "Stop!" A ghostly figure appeared. He crawled forward a few paces and struggled to stand. A few more teetering steps and he fell again, his hands lunging forward and sliding on the carpet. He rolled onto his side, then pushed himself up to his knees, and once more crawled. This was not a ghost or demon, but the shape of a boy.

He sobbed, panted, and moaned, all at once, speaking a sound she didn't recognise as human or paranormal.

Something trickled down his face, blood. The fireplace illuminated the room to show his eyes glow.

Images of what Alana and Logan went through on that horrible night hit Sara's mind. She fell to the floor and screamed in horror, feeling Logan's pain. It made Sara feel human emotion and want to cry for them.

She yelled, "They did love one another, truly."

But perhaps she was crying for herself, never having felt that love before... sensing his undying love for Alana, crawling back from death, his spirit glowing. The whole world was ending, and it was silly to even notice the bleakness of their two worlds now apart.

He stood, but his back bent almost double, and his arms pressed against his middle. He heaved great noisy breaths of exhaustion.

Sara spoke, "You come as a spirit."

"I need...need to see Alana."

"Why come to me?"

He managed to say, "I come to stop you from hurting her. She is my love." Logan's eyes shone with wisdom and light, and an arm, stronger than any man's, laid upon her shoulder. Logan would save Alana at all cost. He would speak the warning, and then the spirits would rise up and act, and everything would be well. It had to be. The image faded.

Sara could hear the sound of running. The walls sounded like someone was beating on them, trying to get out. They blew apart and out popped hands and arms that reached across the room and grabbed Sara.

She twisted and dodged, but couldn't break the hold.

Cafzf held her down, his face inches away from hers, his soulless eyes staring at her.

"What game are you playing, little girl?"

"I'm not..."

He yanked her hair. "Don't lie to me. I know you want to help Logan." His hand reached inside her chest, squeezing her heart until it stopped. She heard her pulse fade, and her vision blurred. Her lungs couldn't get any air. Just at the last second, Cafzf released her. Sara drew in a ragged breath while tears of fright and pain ran down her pale face.

"See how easily I can kill you?" he taunted. "Do not disobey me, or your death will be neither painless nor swift."

"I understand," she mumbled.

"I'll be watching." He stepped back and disappeared as before.

Sara scrambled into her clothes and hurried down the hallway, searching for Alana.

Amanda, Gillian and Alana stood by their lockers, primping in their compact mirrors and exchanging gossip before their next class. At Sara's approach, they all stopped talking and stared.

"May I see you for a minute?" Sara asked Alana.

"What about?" Alana's eyes narrowed in suspicion.

Sara needed something strong enough to make Alana leave with her. "I... uh... I saw Logan just a minute ago."

"*Logan?*" Alana leaned forward. "What do you mean? Where?"

Amanda stepped in between them. "You're lying. If Logan was going to appear to anyone, it'd be Alana."

"Please?" Sara ignored Amanda to speak to Alana.

"Yeah...okay." Alana closed her locker and walked away with Sara. When they turned the corner, out of sight from everyone, Sara stopped.

"He told me he loved you," she began. "And he wanted me to give you something."

"What?"

Sara reached out to Alana, almost touching her shoulder, Cafzf's spell poised on her lips. Alana shivered at the premonition bombarding her senses. The Book of Spells flew at Sara, hitting her on the head and knocking her over.

"Don't let her touch you. Run!" it screamed. Alana picked it up from the floor and fled.

Chapter 20

Alana stomped down the hall to find Amanda. Seeing, she grabbed her elbow.

"Come on."

"Where?" Amanda tripped on her high heels, trying to keep up with Alana.

"My room. We need to talk."

Amanda followed her in and sat down. Alana closed her door and began pacing.

"What's wrong?" Amanda asked.

"Sara. She's dangerous!"

"What'd she do *this* time?"

Alana picked up the book and waved it. "This saved my life." She related the events of Sara trying to touch her. "I don't know what's going on exactly, but she meant me harm."

Amanda listened to the rant, waiting for Alana to wind down.

"You know what I think?" Amanda asked and, not waiting for an answer, said, "Sara might be dangerous, but your real problem is that you miss Logan. That clouds your judgment. If she hadn't mentioned him, you wouldn't have left with her and gotten into trouble. You can front with everyone out there," she pointed toward the door with her chin, "but I know you, girlfriend."

Alana opened her mouth to object, but stopped at Amanda's expression, daring her to deny it.

"Yeah, you're right." Alana's shoulders slumped. "I miss him all the time. I wish I knew what happened to him."

"You mean you really don't? I always thought..."

"I really don't. Last time I saw him, he was jumping through a burning door. I got jerked back by the red door and Professor Ezards found me. It's been downhill since then."

"Then why don't we ask Logan?"

"*What?*" Alana sat by her friend, examining her for signs of insanity.

"Sure. Ouija board." Amanda continued. "I'm a Witchey Witch from a long line of Witchey Witches."

"Ouija board?"

"It's a useful tool. Friends at my last school chipped in together and bought one for my thirteenth birthday. I can tell you of my several experiences, but only after your first hit from the board's magical power."

"How does this work?"

"We'll need friends and we need to do this tonight."

"What's so urgent?" Alana asked.

"You really want to wait?" Amanda raised an eyebrow.

"No. I guess not."

Alana watched Amanda set the room for a group.

"We do this at night," Amanda explained, "when the black bees wax candles are lighted, the spirits are most attracted to the board like moths to the moon."

"Ok," Alana said, trying not to smile at her eagerness, "see you tonight, here in my room."

"All right." Amanda gave a watchful eye over the whole room, checking it for spirits.

"What are you doing now?"

Amanda shook her head. "I'm feeling the vibes of the planets and the ghostly inhabitants leading to your room."

"Oh, ok. I thought you might have gas."

Amanda cringed. "No, silly, this is seriously."

"You mean serious?"

"Right. That's what I meant."

"No wonder you're able to walk around, teetering on four inch heels all day. You have a bubble head."

Amanda stuck her tongue out and left.

That night, the girls met in Alana's room. Earlier, Amanda picked a handful of her spirit believer friends. Gillian and Sydney didn't want to be involved in such "foolishness" with those silly girls.

The house clock struck midnight. Shadows delved into the bedroom. Midnight, the house cat, jet black with yellow eyes, roamed around the room. Amanda was a big believer that pets would be the first to see the coming spirit.

"Look to the cat for the first signs of a ghost entering the room," she told them, her expression stern. "That is to say, this experience is real, not fake," Amanda told each girl who came to the room. She had them sit down on the edge of Alana's bed till everyone showed up. Shushing everyone that coughed or tried to talk, Amanda was tipsy with insight on the rules of the board and how the room should be set for the night.

Alana wondered if the event of hearing the dead might prove boring. She saw Logan in a different light, not as someone coming through a board game with five girls wearing glow-in-the-dark fingernail polish, holding a wooden spindle.

"I am Lauren," the first girl said. They went around introducing themselves.

"I am Amanda."

"I'm Cindy," one said with a hair toss.

With a mouth full of bubblegum, snapping it every chance she got, one announced, "I'm Sherri with an i."

They sat on the floor in a circle with the board between them. The girls leaned forward and stared at Weatherbee.

"Oh, I'm Alana." In the middle of them, the cat stepped over the board.

"Everyone ready?" Amanda glanced around the circle. When they all nodded, she instructed, "Put your fingertips on the spindle, but keep it light. Don't try to move it. And, concentrate on calling someone in. No funny stuff. Alright?"

They nodded again and extended their hands.

"Are there any spirits with us tonight?" Amanda called out in a theatric voice. The cat began washing its front paw. The candles flickered. The moment dragged on. Nothing.

"Is anyone here?" Amanda repeated.

The spindle they all touched moved, scratching along the board's surface until it reached Yes. One girl started to shake, her bracelets jingling. This was the first time they'd used it, so were no experts like Amanda said she was. They weren't freaked out when it started moving after the next question Amanda asked.

"Are you male or female?"

It spelled M-A-L-E.

Alana's throat went dry at the premonition spidering up her arms.

"What's your name?" Amanda sounded more like her normal voice.

Five hands moved in unison while the spindle found the letters L-O-G-A-N.

Amanda started freaking out, her eyes sweeping the room. "Logan, do you have a message from the ever after?"

A boom sounded in the room, making all the girls jump. The cat, Midnight, knocked something off Alana's shelf. Thinking for a moment that it was the ghost, they all let out a long breath. Three girls felt a cold hand on their cheeks, making them shiver. Logan, becoming a bit of a player, *would* do that with so many young girls in one room.

Then the ghostly apparition breathed on Alana's ear and whispered, "I love you." Alana knew this was real. She looked over her shoulder, mouthed the same, and started to cry.

The girls heard footsteps on the carpet, then three taps of a wand on the desk with the room key. The cat just sat on the bed, cleaning herself, not looking at any ghost. The curtains frilled up and then gently lowered back down.

The pointer they held onto turned around 360, and now sat on the goodbye sign.

Alana screamed and leapt to her feet. "No! Not yet! LOGAN!" she yelled, "How did you get killed? Who killed you? Did you get a good look at the demon from the book?"

The temperature dropped so fast the girls could see their breath. Energy pulsed through the room, making them edgy and afraid. They started freaking out, knowing now this was real. Once Alana sat back down among the others, the candle moved toward her. The candle got knocked over and a ghostly finger used the melted candle wax like ink to write a message in front of Alana.

NOT DEAD

"What?" Alana scrambled backwards on her heels and hands. "What?" The curtains blew in; the candles went out. Amanda hurried for a light and they all stared at each other's pale, scared faces.

"Alana? Are you alright?" Amanda knelt beside her.

"Not dead? Not dead?" Alana kept shaking her head, her mind unable to comprehend the message. "Is this some kind of trick?" She glared up at Amanda.

"No. I'm as stunned as you are."

"Is that true?" Alana pointed a shaky finger at the message.

Amanda shrugged. "I think so. Don't you think that was Logan?"

"Y...yes. But I also know spirits can lie. I've made a few enemies on the other side who'd love to hurt me." She stood, holding her knotted stomach. "And pretending to be Logan is certainly the way to do it."

"We need to go," Cindy explained, nodding to the other scared girls. "Goodnight."

"Yeah, goodnight." Alana closed the door behind them all, then prepared herself for a sleepless night.

Chapter 21

The next day, Alana woke up at 5:58 a.m. and felt like her skin was crawling from head to toe. She thought someone placed a hex on her, but ignored it, gave up trying to go back to sleep, and got out of bed.

After she got up, Alana still couldn't shake the creepy crawly feeling. The dream that gave her this feeling played over in her mind.

The cold, damp fog clung to her, and an icy wind blew through the shadow-cloaked forest, but Alana barely noticed the chill. Autumn trees, bare and skeletal, clawed at her as she ran through the woods outside her school. Her heart pounded so loudly she felt certain it would burst. Glancing over her shoulder, she glimpsed vague, indistinct figures moving through the mist behind her. A full moon tried to shine through the barren tree branches overhead, but storm clouds drifted across the moon like a veil. They were chasing her. Whatever *they* were.

Only sixteen years old, Alana knew she was soon to die.

Heartrending screams ripped through the night, sending fresh jolts of fear and anguish through the young woman's soul. Her brown hair streamed wildly behind her. Panic filled her wide blue eyes. Untried tears streaked her cheeks. A thin, linen robe provided scant protection from the cold. Spilled blood streaked her gown, glistening wetly.

The sticky crimson fluid soaked through the fabric, causing the linen to cling to her skin. Bare feet raced over a carpet of fallen leaves. Thunder boomed above her. A jagged bolt of lightning sliced the sky in twain. Rain poured down in sheets, drenching Alana. The forest floor turned to mud beneath her bare feet. Muck oozed between her toes and she had to fight to keep her balance on the

slippery leaves. If she fell, her pursuers would be on her in an instant. Chances were, she would never rise again.

Who were they? What had the spell summoned now to run free?

She wondered. Why did the Book of Spells kill her father? More screams penetrated the darkness. The blood chilling ululations came not from human throats. Something in the dungeons, she realized, started the whole mess. The ghosts sounded as though they were being torn into pieces, which might well be the case.

Weatherbee had already witnessed far worse this evening. The blood upon her gown was not her own, but it could not have been any more precious to her before it had gushed from the severed limbs of her friends, Amanda and Gillian. She had left the butchered bodies of her nearest and dearest. Sara's last vindictive screams echoed in her head as she ran behind Alana's calls for help.

Father! She thought. He had gone out to calm the forest ghost only moments before the mysterious invaders had attacked their home. *Please, God, let him live still. Do not leave me alone with these... creatures!*

The shadows of her vivid dream loomed before her, barely visible in the mist and gloom. As she drew nearer the large wooden structure, she saw that the home door wide open. Had her father drawn back the door while checking on the forest ghost, or had the monsters already invaded the home as well? Utter blackness shrouded the interior of the dwelling, offering no clue as to what might lurk within, but she could hear the frightened sound of the newly awakened dead howling in alarm. The poor forest animals sounded terrified!

Dare she enter the home alone? Glancing once more over her shoulder at the hellish shapes surging through the foggiest dream she'd ever had, she realized she had no other choice. The sturdy building offered her only hope for sanctuary, no matter how meager.

Trusting her life to fate of this horrible nightmare, she dashed through the doorway into the home. A timber roof provided welcome relief from the pouring rain. Flashes of lightning filtered through the roof to provide some slight degree of illumination. Crazy ghostly shapes jumped violently in their hidden corners, terrified by the storm and God only knew what else.

Alana could not spare a second to see to the ghosts suffer she'd known all her life. Before her pursuers could catch up with her, she slammed the door shut and bolted it in place. She prayed that the heavy oaken barrier would keep out the bloodthirsty monsters behind her, but feared that no power on earth could truly save her. It was as though Death itself had come lunging out of the fog this night, to strike down her loved ones, one-by-one.

Breathing hard, she turned away from the door. Water streamed from her hair and gown. The dank air reeked of wet must, sweat, and blood. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the darker gloom of the sealed living room, and she staggered forward uncertainly. Another flash of lightning pierced the darkness, revealing a supine figure lying motionless upon the wooden floor. The sprawled body was as still and silent as the grave.

No! Alana thought. An icy certainty spread through her veins, and she felt her last vestiges of hope succumb to despair. She stumbled towards the lifeless

form, already knowing what she would find. Her azure eyes brimmed with tears. "Father..."

The face of the corpse was contorted with fear, but Alana could not fail to recognize the kindly, bearded visage that had so often looked upon her with warmth and affection. Her father's throat had been torn open, as though by a rabid animal. Bright red blood was splattered all over him, just as it had been on the savaged bodies back at their house. His limbs were twisted and askew. Broken shards of bone jutted from his fractured arms and legs. Glassy eyes stared blankly into oblivion.

Her father was dead — just like the rest of her family. She was alone. *Why me?* she thought in agony. *What did I ever do to deserve this?* She dropped to her knees beside the body, heedless of the blood spreading out from beneath her father's gory remains. *My father was a good man. A decent man.* Violent sobs rocked her body. Tears fell upon the dead great wizard's face.

Fully awake, Alana tried to shake away the dream, but the sense of loss overwhelmed her. All dead — everyone she ever knew and loved. Was the dream sent as a warning? A harbinger of an inescapable future? Or was it the working of her overheated imagination wrapped in grief and isolation?

Crossing the floor in her bare feet, she stumbled on the candle tipped over the night before. Her eyes widened at the wax message still there.

NOT DEAD

Falling to her knees, she scratched at the wax, her fingernails filling with its black substance, until nothing legible remained.

"I'm losing my mind," she muttered. "The Book of Spells is trying to drive me insane." Then another thought came to her. She stood and stared at her door. "Or is Sara doing this to me?"

* * *

That night, a cold wind blew outside the School of Shines, causing the old castle to shift, sway, and make a low hum. Inside, dark and dust filled the air as if the place hadn't been cleaned in years. Cobwebs hung everywhere, especially in the corners of the ceilings. Alana raised her hands as something unseen rushed into the same room with them, sending the wolves to hide under the bed. Alana looked around. The lifeless bodies of the dead had flown her to her room. They had a message for her.

Alana stood still, listening. A soft cry came from the dark corners. She looked at her ravens, their heads swiveling, on the lookout for the intruders.

Sara's cruel, thin lips curled into a cold smile down the hall, hidden in the recesses of a shadow. She projected a boy's image, showing him to be Logan. He hurried, then stumbled into Alana's open arms. He didn't cry anymore; he didn't make a single sound. He just held on tightly. Alana was unwilling to let go because she felt safe with her true love. Her fingers dug into his shoulders, her eyes studied his face.

"Don't leave me," she whispered.

Sara's vision projected further into Alana's room. She looked at the apparition in Alana's arms. Beautiful they were together; strong and powerful. Now if Sara killed the image of Logan in Alana's arms, she would die a little more inside. Sara, in her own way, would become the most powerful dark witch. Sara had powers that only Alana's Book of Spells knew what to do with.

Sara could feel the dark powers that flowed through her body. She sensed the shift, the ebb and flow of energy. With Alana out of the way, Sara would be the darkest witch of all. That thrilled her at first, but then she calmed, knowing she deserved to be the darkest. It was hers by right.

Seeing the needs in Alana, Sara's dark thinking was brushed away when she looked deeper into Alana's eyes. One power stronger than dark magic was love. Sara could not touch this.

At Sara's hesitation, the bedroom door flew open and another door behind them slammed shut, jerking the couple apart. Rustling footsteps sounded from inside.

"Ghost or demon, who are you?" Alana asked to the open air to her bedroom. "If you do anything to take my lover away, existence around here will be like hell. I won't hesitate to hurt you." Alana held her wand out and upright, ready for action. She whispered to Logan's fading image, "Don't worry. I won't let them take you away."

In spite of her words, a stronger force grabbed Logan and pulled him backwards into a dark hole. Alana reached for him with her free hand, casting a spell at the image of the dead taking him away.

Alana's bedroom swayed, causing her and her guardian wolves to whimper and cling tightly together. From another direction, a female voice came with wicked laughter, and shotgun eyes glowed red as she slunk from the darkest parts of the shadow. The voice and eyes drew closer to Alana, inching its way from shadow to shadow. Alana gazed at the lifeless glow before her.

The voice reverberated, "You're not the one who should control a book of such evil." The shadow surrounded the teenager. Arms and hands materialized, wrapping around Alana's neck. Alana struggled, twisting from side to side, while the voice began chanting a spell in an ancient tongue. With each word, Alana felt her power lessen and her life drain away. Before the shadow said the last word, a blast pierced it, sending it reeling to the far side of the room. Alana fell to her knees and looked over her shoulder at the book, readying another blast at the attacker.

"What's your game, shadow?" Alana coughed. She felt a darker witch nearby. The book agreed and pushed itself off the desk and onto her side.

Alana asked the Book of Spells, "What is this new dark power? I only know of one. We need protection," Alana said, turning the page. "This is the spell."

The two ravens, Twinkle and Winkle, rolled their watchful eyes. Alana read the book's spell aloud. All went white. The room was washed clean; the shadow vanished. Alana sat there, numb, trying to gain her equilibrium. "We'll have to keep our eyes peeled for this witch."

Down the hall, Sara gasped like she'd been scalded. Wrapping her arms across her chest, she hurried to her room, needing to figure out her next move.

Something else had grabbed her image of Logan. And something else had driven her spell from Alana's room. But, who? Who had that much power?

Chapter 22

Sara locked her door and sat at her dresser, studying her reflection while she brushed her dark hair. It soothed her while she thought of the events in Alana's room. Alana and the book proved too powerful of a combination, and she wondered how to combat them.

"Separately," she muttered. "You need to separate them." Pausing the brush in mid-stroke, she asked her reflection, "But how? They're always together."

Without warning, her head jerked back; rough fingers tangled in her hair and a voice hissed in her ear, "You failed me again!"

"Cafzf!" Through the mirror, she saw him materialize behind her. One of his horns poked her head. "No. I almost touched her. I almost had the book!"

"No you didn't. Liar! You put Logan's image in the room with her, then got soft. Lost your nerve."

"No..."

"I was there! I saw it."

"So, it was you who...?"

"Of *course* it was me. I had to get that boy's image out of there for you to be worth anything." He released her, leaning forward to stroke her cheek with his fingertip, leaving a red trail of heat where he touched.

"I was afraid someone else had taken him," she explained.

"No one has that kind of power but me."

"Then why did you break the spell I was saying over Alana?"

"I didn't. The book did."

"So, it's stronger than you are."

He jerked her head back again. "Don't *ever* say that! It caught you unaware. You lost your focus. I wonder if you're what I need at all. Perhaps I should just end this."

He lifted his hand, his intent to kill her covering his face.

"No! Wait!" In spite of the heat emanating from him, she placed both hands on his wrist. "I've come up with an idea to separate Alana and the book. Give me until tonight. You'll see."

Halfway lowering his hand, his cold black eyes stared at her while he thought. His dark green tongue darted in and out across thin black lips.

"Til tonight, little girl," he whispered, his molten breath singeing her hair. She watched him disappear, then fear lent speed to her feet, hurrying her down the hall and into the lobby. Finding the group she wanted, Sara approached them with a sultry smile.

"Hello, boys. Hi, Brad." Sara stopped next to him and stood on tiptoes to whisper in his ear. "How are you doing?"

Brad's eyes grew wide and he swallowed once, nervous at her attention. "I... I'm fine."

"And Wolfgang," she turned a dazzling smile on the teenager. "You're looking good today."

Wolfgang glanced down at his ripped jeans and dirty t-shirt, not believing her. "Uh, okay."

Moving to Mammoth, she laid a hand on his bicep. "You are so strong," she cooed.

Mammoth looked at her hand, then at her. "Thanks! I work out, ya know."

"I can tell." She wrinkled her nose and noticed that her perfume was working its magic. All the boys wore dumb grins and looked self-conscious in her presence. "Can I ask you all a favor?"

"Sure. What?" Brad spoke first.

"I want to help the school get back to normal. You know, without having to worry about..." She paused and looked over her shoulder for eavesdroppers before continuing in a whisper, "...the Book of Spells and Alana with her dark magic. Wouldn't it be nice to not have such an early curfew? Or have our parents worried all the time?"

"Yeah," Wolfgang nodded.

Wyatt walked up and joined them, stuffing his hands in his pants pockets. "Hey, Sara. What's going on?"

"Hi, you." She gave his cheek a quick kiss. "I'm asking them if they'll help me get the school back to the way it was before all this dark magic and Book of Spells nonsense."

Wyatt drew his head back to stare at her. "You have a plan or something?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact. I do. And it involves getting Alana separated from the book."

"Sounds easy enough." Wyatt shrugged.

"So, you're in?" Sara glanced from face to face.

One by one, they nodded.

"Okay. Here's what we need to do." She drew them into a huddle and whispered her plans.

* * *

Upstairs, Alana stood by her window, watching school children cross the grounds on their way to classes. After a contemplative moment, she picked up the book and sat at her desk.

"That was too close," she fussed. "Who took Logan away? And who was that woman shadow thing? If you hadn't of blasted her, what would have happened to me?"

The book remained silent.

"Don't you feel outnumbered?" she asked after a moment. "I know I do. It's getting too dangerous around here for us."

The bell rang for the next class to start, but she ignored it. "I'm skipping this one," she murmured. When the footsteps died down in the hallway, Alana

stepped outside, making sure everyone had gone, then went in and locked her door.

"I want to know if that was really Logan. I mean, he came through on the Ouija board and now again. Would you please tell me where he is?"

When the book didn't answer, didn't even flap a cover, she crossed her arms. "At least tell me if he's dead or not!"

The continued silence unnerved her. "Why won't you *tell* me?" She hurled the book across the room, where it landed in a tangle of bent pages and sprawled covers.

Hopping and twitching, it straightened itself, its red eyes glowering at her. "I need you focused on me," it finally spoke. "We're under attack, Miss Weatherbee, and I can't have you bothering me about Logan. He's history. Forget him."

"*Forget* him?" She stomped one foot. "Like that'll ever happen!"

"You need to understand something." It flew up and landed beside her. "I've spent thousands of years looking for you. I need you, just like you need me."

"I'm still not sure what you need me for," Alana sighed.

"My creator, the demon wizard Cafzf, wants me back."

"And?"

"And I refuse to be at *anyone's* beck and call. I'm my own master!"

"Ha! You expect me to be at *your* beck and call," Alana countered.

"We're a team, my girl. Cafzf is entirely different. There is no team. Only him. He'd destroy me at the slightest whim."

"Oh. And I won't," Alana realized.

"Exactly."

"Fine. Whatever." Standing, she went to her ravens.

"Are you hungry? Here." She opened a can and fed them bits of beef. "You are so beautiful, with your shiny black feathers." Gentle fingers stroked the birds' chests and heads. "How'd you like to get outside and fly around a bit? Huh? Does that sound good?"

One raven tilted his head and the other jumped on her shoulder.

"Then let's go." She waited for the second raven to jump on, then picked up the book and her wand, and went outside.

* * *

Glancing out the window of "Ancient Language Spells" class, Sara saw Alana crossing the school grounds. With a silent nod to the Top Five team, she walked out, soon followed by the four boys.

"What's up?" Brad asked.

"Alana's out there, alone with the book. Now's our chance."

They exited the school, walked toward the trees and found Alana just getting settled on a bench. They surrounded her, hands on hips and frowns on faces.

"Yes?" Alana glanced at them. "What do you want?"

Cold winter wind sliced through Sara's oversized cloak. Intense jet black hair snaked over her green eyes and she brushed it back. *Concentrate. Focus.* The target was in sight — Alana's book.

By doing this, Alana could start a war. By doing this, the monster in the book would fight.

A hesitant sigh.

She couldn't think about that.

A breath.

Don't think. That's not my job. Aim my wand carefully.

Alana's threat entered Sara's mind. "You can try, but I can do more."

"Get out of my head, Weatherbee. I have to do this."

Sara knelt down, ignoring the cold chill given off by the storm created by Weatherbee and her dark magic. Sara was compelled to do this. It was, after all, her mission. She needed to calm herself. No one dare take out Alana Weatherbee and live to tell the tale. The hardship of unearthing evil, the overwhelming stench of death and its horrible emotion needed to be faced. *Just aim and shoot*, Sara's mind told her.

She rested the wand on her knee, hooking her finger over the wooden shaft

Aim...

A pause. In spite of herself, fear stilled her wand. The boys saw her hesitation.

With lightning speed, Mammoth grabbed one raven and Brad grabbed the other, both boys running in opposite directions. After a few yards, Brad stopped and pointed his wand at the raven.

"You want it? Come get it."

"You wouldn't hurt a bird!" Alana jumped up, the book falling from her lap. She aimed her wand, but not soon enough. Brad blasted the raven, sending black feathers shooting to the sky. Its surprised squawk pierced her ears and brought angry tears to her eyes.

Chapter 23

Alana reacted on instinct, sending a bolt of energy toward Brad. Seeing her intention, Sara bumped into her, ruining her aim. Instead of hitting Brad in the chest and knocking him unconscious, she grazed his shoulder. He jumped back, holding his arm and screaming.

Weatherbee whirled on her feet and aimed at Mammoth. "Let my raven go! Now, you creep!"

With Alana's attention elsewhere, Sara scooped up the Book of Spells, cackling in her triumph. Wolfgang fired a blast at Alana and she fell back to dodge it.

"Stop it!" Wyatt yelled. "No one was supposed to get hurt!"

"Oh, grow up!" Sara snarled. "You can't fight evil with a tea party."

The book writhed in her hands, snarls and hisses emanating from its pages. She had to drop her wand to keep hold of the book. Electricity sizzled from its cover, scorching her fingers.

"Wyatt, *do* something!" Sara screamed. The book threw itself to the left, carrying her with it.

"Hold still!" Wyatt hollered.

"Let go of my book!" Alana ran over, her wand poised to fire.

"Oh, A-laaa-naaa," Mammoth sang behind her. "Watch this." He raised his wand toward the struggling raven, its wings flapping and its feet held in his meaty hand.

"No! Don't!" Alana twisted, torn between saving the book or the raven. The book could defend itself. The raven was no match for the muscular Mammoth.

A bolt of light leapt from the book, ricocheting off the bench, bouncing along the sidewalk and piercing Wolfgang. He fell backward, stunned and in pain. His head hit the stone sidewalk, knocking him unconscious.

"Do it!" Sara screamed at Mammoth. He blasted the bird, glad to be rid of its squawking, flapping nuisance. "Take her out!" Sara commanded.

Mammoth dove for Alana, grabbing her by the waist with his massive arm. With his other, he twisted her wand out of her grasp and threw it a far distance.

"You see?" Sara sneered at the book. "If you don't stop fighting me, I'll kill her."

"No!" Wyatt yelled. "That wasn't the plan!"

"I've had enough of you, sniveling coward." With a muttered curse from her, Wyatt doubled over, holding his stomach, gasping for air. He dropped to his knees, then fell to the ground, unable to move.

"Now, book!" Sara shook it once. "Someone wants to see you."

"What about her?" Mammoth asked.

"Ah, yes. Miss Weatherbee." Sara took a step closer. "I'm not quite finished with you." She stretched out a hand, ready to touch her enemy and cast Cafzf's spell. Another step brought her nearer and her eyes raked Alana with their deadly intent.

"This is too easy," Sara gloated, her fingertips almost on Alana's shoulder.

Pow! Zzzzzzttt! A wand blast out of nowhere hit Sara in the head. She staggered forward, trying to hold onto Alana for balance, but Alana jumped out of the way. A second blast bit Mammoth, sending him scurrying for cover, releasing Alana as he ran.

Sara fell to the floor and called her wand to her, ready to return fire. Before she could, a third blast sent her wand flying and a fourth scorched her knee. At her recoil, the book gained its freedom and backed out of her reach.

Alana crouched behind the bench, fearful she'd be hit next. She glimpsed a robe behind an oak. "Who's there?" she asked among the wounded students and dead birds.

"Don't you know me?" a man's voice answered.

Alana eased up, taking a step toward him. She stopped, waiting. In the next moment, a figure walked out, his hood covering his lowered head. Inching the hood off, piercing green eyes greeted her.

“Logan?” Her hand flew to her mouth. “*Logan!*” She ran into his outstretched arms. Her fingers touched his face, shoulders and chest. “Is it really you? Or am I dreaming? Are you dead?”

“It’s me. I’m alive!” Logan hugged her, all the while keeping an eye out on the recovering Top Five and Sara. “What shall we do with them?” he asked after a moment. Alana turned, still in his arms, to look at her classmates.

“Let them go,” she sighed. “I don’t want to hurt them.”

“Alright. But what about her?” He pointed his wand toward Sara, who was limping away. “She wants you dead.”

You won’t get away with this, Alana thoughts entered Sara’s mind. *You had my pets killed. You tried to steal the book. You ordered me killed.*

Sara could not stand Alana taking control of her thoughts and interrupting her escape. She whirled around, ready to fight.

Alana spoke aloud. “The book will come after you, Sara, for trying this.” Alana stood among the trees without the book. Sara couldn’t figure where it had gone to.

Sara worried. Facing the Book of Spells alone was not in her plans. Cafzf would find her, too, and probably kill her for her failure. Feeling she’d be safer with people, she ran on, joining a crowd of students lining the halls.

* * *

Alana escorted Logan to her room, her mind reeling with questions. After he sat down at her desk, she stood over him, running her fingers through his now-longer hair and across his shoulders, unable to quit touching him.

“What happened? Where’ve you been? How’d you get back here?”

“Whoa, Alana. Stop!” He raised a hand at the barrage of questions, his smile radiating warmth. “One thing at a time.”

“I thought you were killed in the fire.”

“I very nearly was. When that *thing* grabbed me and pulled me through the burning door, I fought with it for a long time. Finally, I broke free and cast a spell that made it disappear. I found myself in a long hallway. The door vanished and I had no way of getting back to you.” He paused, running a hand across his scraggly beard. “It was weird. I could hear you, but I couldn’t see you. I couldn’t break out of the Realm.”

“Then how did you?” Alana sat down and laid a hand on his knee. “You showed up at the exact right minute. Any later and...” Her shudder finished her sentence.

“The Book of Spells called me. It said it needed me to fight. This door appeared right in front of me. When I opened it, I found myself standing behind a tree and watching that girl and the Top Five fighting with you.” He tilted his head, puzzled. “Who is she, anyway?”

“That’s Sara, a dark witch. Headmaster Barns brought her here to try and take the book away from me. He says it’s influencing me in dark magic and he wants me to be free from it.”

Logan shook his head. "I don't think the headmaster would want her fighting you like that. I'm *sure* he didn't want anyone getting hurt."

"You're right." Alana frowned and blinked back tears. "They killed my pet ravens, too." Swiping her eyes with her hand, she stood and pulled him to his feet. "But I'm too happy right now to think about that. You're here. You're really here!"

She rose up to kiss him, her emotions soaring. Another question shot through her mind. "Was that you in my room the other night?"

Logan's eyebrows wrinkled. "No. Like I said, I couldn't get to you."

"Then who...?" She bit her bottom lip, trying to figure out the mystery. "So that wasn't you on the Ouija Board, either?"

"Yes and no," Logan said. "I could hear what you were doing, so I asked a ghost to answer for me. It was the first chance I'd had to tell you I was still alive."

Alana nodded, her curiosity satisfied for now. "We need to tell the headmaster you're here. Now no one can accuse me of murdering you."

"That must have been awful!" Logan pulled her into a long hug.

"It is. Even at your memorial service, no one would speak to me." She walked to her door, then turned around. "I talked to your father then."

"Really? How's he doing?"

"The Firewatchers have killed most of the werewolves and are hunting him. He's left town and now lives in the forest, alone and afraid. Logan, you've got to let him know you're alive. It about killed him losing his only living relative."

"I will. Just as soon as I see Barns."

Alana took Logan out of her room and up to the headmaster's office. Logan covered his eyes in the well-lighted hallways. He had not seen so much light in a while, and it hurt. Weatherbee clung to his hand, not wanting to let go of this joyful feeling. Alana's whole body and appearance looked so different, just like she looked last year — sweet and innocent.

When they reached Barns' office, they found him talking to a ghost, being informed about what had occurred just moments ago on the field, as well with Sara. Alana and Logan could hear the last piece of information. Logan was alive and well, bringing two big smiles from the children just a few feet away.

Headmaster Barns whirled around at their entry. "My boy, so good to see you here! I bet..." he placed one finger to his lower lip, "you have an appetite for pizza and ice cream about right now."

Logan's smile grew wider. "Yes, sir. I do."

"Alright then." Barns hugged the two students. "Alana, no time to get cleaned up. Let's get to the kitchen and feed this boy's empty belly." The three headed to the lower level of the school, garnering amazed looks from passing students in the hall. Everyone was whispering throughout the school in a matter of seconds. "Logan! Logan is alive."

Students passed by Weatherbee. "We never doubted you!" Her chick clique ran up and praised the two for doing the unthinkable. The now larger group of kids followed them to the kitchen to watch Logan eat. They wanted to know what he lived on the whole time and his story.

Never had so much laughter filled the school kitchen before this time. Headmaster leaned against the door frame with hands crossed over his belly then raking his long beard. The cook made dough and poured on pepperoni and lots of cheese, placing fresh made pizza in the baker's oven a few feet away.

The group of girls hovered around Logan and Alana. Logan drank half a glass of milk and wolfed down four cookies. Weatherbee sat by his side, the two looking a sight. Students asked questions by the ton at the same time.

Logan mumbled over a mouthful of cookies, "Like I said to Alana, I was trapped, stuck and trying to find my way out." He looked at her with glowing eyes. Alana blushed and placed her head on his shoulder.

Headmaster interrupted, "Dear boy, tell us how you survived all this time. What did you eat?"

"I used Alana's Whispoo charm for anything from a slice of blueberry pie to a cup of pudding. But it didn't always work trapped in there. I went days without any food or water."

"Aw," their friends murmured.

Barns nodded. "Logan, we're glad to have you home. Already word has gotten out you are back and safe." Three ghosts summoned by Barns were sent out to comb the nearby woods for any werewolf they might find to take this good news to Logan's father.

* * *

That evening, the movies just got out. Sara walked out of the theater with a multitude of kids. So far, she'd remained undetected by either the Book of Spells or Cafzf. Students stepped aside in her quick walking gate.

Sara glanced up at the sky to see a winged creature descending to the earth. Its great black wings spread across the moon, blocking its light. Sensing her doom, she ran, needing a place to hide. Looking over her shoulder, she saw three more creatures landing at the buildings around her.

The students began to scramble for cover. Someone screamed. Before she had time to react, Cafzf appeared in front of her, muttered a spell of invisibility, then cast another to freeze her body only and leave her eyes so they could watch in horror what came next.

Sara only could slump back, sitting on her bent knees, showing a face wrinkled with worry.

"See your handiwork," he hissed. "This is not my punishment. The Book of Spells has sent its demons to demand retribution for Alana. Imagine what it will do to you, if I let it find you."

The girl couldn't speak, but her eyes pleaded with him.

One of the winged creatures lifted back to the sky. Sara could see the bloody body of a young boy who had bullied Alana in the hall last week, and his friends laying there, cut to pieces by some spell that ripped human flesh apart in seconds. They never knew what had happened.

In the next moment, Brad ran by, his arms pumping, his face pale. Right behind him, two winged demons bore down.

"Help me! Someone!" Brad yelled. *"Please!"*

The crowd churned, pushing and pressing together, unwilling to put their own lives at risk to assist Brad.

Pointed ebony fingernails grabbed Brad, puncturing his shoulders and lifting him up high. He struggled, arms flailing, legs kicking. His screams of terror pierced Sara's mind. She couldn't move, and watched helplessly when the demon dropped him, his body slamming onto the sidewalk. A pool of blood flowed toward her shoes. Sara looked back up; the winged demons circled low over the school grounds for a moment, searching, then they were gone.

Scared children ran in many different directions for fear of their own life. Released from Cafzf's spell, Sara scrambled to the next building, wanting to get away from the frightened crowd. The Book of Spells demanded blood, compensation for whoever struck at Weatherbee.

Sara was next.

Her job had been finished for now. She needed to get back to her room. The whole thing just blew apart. The mission was not completed even after months of hard spells and charms placed in that one casting of her wand. She promised Headmaster today would be the day that she would separate the book from Alana at all cost.

She flung open the double doors of the building and hoped to see nothing. The demons were gone, only taking the lives of those students who bullied Weatherbee.

Sara's training failed, her mission becoming the next victim. She tripped over someone, stumbling forward and being pushed back by the crowd heading for their rooms in pure terror. For a moment, it was like a game of ping-pong, but it ended when she landed on her backside on the hard concrete, hitting her head.

Except she hadn't landed on concrete...

Chapter 24

After Logan finished eating, Headmaster Barns clapped him on the shoulder. "I imagine you're tired."

"I could sleep," Logan admitted. A huge yawn filled his face.

"He can sleep in my room for now, since his is empty," Alana volunteered. "That will give the house trolls time to get his ready again."

"Alright. I'll see you later, then."

Logan and Alana scooted back from the table and walked to her room. Students who hadn't heard the news yet jerked around at Logan's approach, their mouths dropping open and their eyes round and wide.

Inside her room, she closed the door, then ran her knuckles over his beard. "How would you like a bath and shave first?"

He laughed, his green eyes twinkling. "I do stink, don't I? Okay."

"You can wear this until I get your clothes cleaned." She tossed him her pink robe with flowers. He grimaced at the frilly garment.

"You got anything else?" Logan asked.

"A black miniskirt? Oh, I have your slippers. I kept them when the house trolls packed up your things."

"My slippers?" He looked puzzled.

"I know it sounds weird, but I kept them there." She pointed to her bedside. "It made me feel like you were here."

"Oh, sweetheart." He wrapped her in his arms, realizing how much she'd missed him. "I've never had anybody miss me before."

"Well, I did. And I didn't like it, so don't ever leave me again." She gave his shoulder a small shove.

"Yes'm. As for a change of clothes, I guess this robe will have to do." With a shrug, he took the robe into the bathroom and seconds later tossed out his dirty clothes.

An hour later, while Logan slept, Alana brought in his clean clothes and laid them on her dresser. From there, she found a batch of her transfigure gumdrops that helped keep him from turning into a werewolf. Just as she put that beside the bed, someone knocked on her door.

When she opened it, she found her father standing on the other side.

"Daddy?" Alana froze, unable to smile, not sure why he'd come after such a long time of keeping his distance.

"Hello, daughter. May I come in?"

"Of course. He's asleep, though." She nodded toward Logan.

Her father crossed the room and sat at her desk. "I got a message from Headmaster Barns about the attack on you today and used a transportation spell to get here as fast as I could."

"I...I didn't think you wanted to see me again."

"That's not true, Alana. I've been dying to be with you."

"Then, why...?"

"You know why. The Book of Spells." He cast a glance around the room, looking for the evil tome.

"It's not here," she explained. "It disappeared after the attack and I haven't seen it since."

"Good. Good." He leaned forward and took her hand. "Alana, since Logan is safely back from the Realm of Many Doors, please, *please* renounce the book. Break its hold on you. The headmaster and I will help. As a matter of fact, that's exactly why I came. I need you safe. I want my daughter back."

"I know." She lowered her head, her hair falling forward, hiding her expression.

"It's not too late," he argued, sensing her hesitation. "Together, we can do this."

Logan stirred, halting their conversation. Alana stood to check on him when a scream pierced the air. Sprinting to her window, she squinted her eyes to peer through the lamp-lit darkness below.

Her father stood behind her, one hand on her shoulder. Students ran in several directions. Winged demons filled the air, their eyes glowing as they swooped down, on the hunt.

"Stop!" Alana yelled, pounding on the glass. Logan scrambled out of bed, into his clothes, and joined them at the window.

"What's going on?" he asked, leaning forward.

"They're attacking the students!" Alana pointed, watching in horror when one lifted Brad higher than her window. She could see the teenager's fear, his face pale, his hands grappling against his captor.

"NO!" Alana yelled again, wheeled around and ran out of her room. Reaching the bottom of the stairs at the lobby, she tried to push her way through the fleeing students, some in tears, some in shock.

Headmaster Barns burst into the lobby, his wand at the ready. Seeing Alana, Logan and Wizard Weatherbee, he went to them.

"Evil is afoot this night," he observed. "I'm not sure yet of its cause."

"Brad was one of my attackers," Alana told him. "Could this be the book's doing?"

Her father's mouth formed a thin, angry line. "If it's protecting you, then yes. It's quite capable of killing students."

"We've got to stop this," Logan cried.

Headmaster Barns took two steps into the melee when a blast next to his head stopped him. Spinning around, he saw Cafzf standing across the lobby, one hand outstretched, ready to fire again.

"You, Evil One!" Wizard Weatherbee stepped in front of Barns and invoked a spell. Before he finished, another blast hit him in the chest. He careened into the wall behind him, the wind knocked out of him.

"Daddy!" Alana knelt beside him.

"I'm okay," he mumbled. "Get out of here! Now!"

"But..."

"Go!" He shoved her away. "You're not safe here."

She staggered back and tripped over someone.

* * *

Sara didn't land on concrete. No, this was softer...

More like a person...

She turned, scrambling back. Slipping on her shoe that popped off, she saw blue eyes...

Held for a beat...

A moment of silence, then recognition.

"Sara!"

"Alana!"

Someone else screamed and both girls leapt up.

A blast made them duck, sparks showering down on them when it hit the wall.

"Cafzf, it's me!" Sara yelled.

"You're with *him*?" Alana looked puzzled. "I...I thought you were with the headmaster."

"You are so stupid!" Before Sara could finish, a winged demon flew through the door, stretching toward her.

"I can't stop them any longer," Alana said. "You're on your own." She scrambled up, turning quickly. She had to leave now and...

"Not so fast, Weatherbee," Sara yelled, grabbing Alana as a shield. "Put a stop to this. They're innocent children. You know that!"

Those eyes again... Those piercing orbs of Weatherbee's glowed.

"You..." the book materialized and spoke through Alana as she stood there, calm among all the turmoil. She held the book in her arms, opened to a page. "You tried to destroy me, to destroy Alana, and for that you must die!"

Its pages flapped; red eyes appeared on its spine and Alana's voice invoked a curse.

"Alana, stop! Is my death going to make any of this better?" Sara confronted Weatherbee. "You're just being used."

Seeing the Book of Spells, Cafzf leapt across the lobby, cutting a swath through frightened children. Curses and spells fell from his black lips. Smoke curled up from the book's pages and it fired volley after volley in its defense toward its horned enemy. Lifted off the ground a few inches, Alana screamed at the pressure, being torn in two by the opposing forces. Barns and Wizard Weatherbee jumped in between her and Cafzf, casting simultaneous wand blasts at the demon wizard. Still holding the book, Alana slumped to the ground, shaking.

Professors could be seen in the distance, wands pulled. They came by the dozen, helping the children get safely away. Ezards led them.

The three-way fight in the lobby intensified between Cafzf, the book's demons, and Headmaster Barns with Wizard Weatherbee and Logan. Bolts of electricity and charged power sliced the air, ricocheting off walls and starting small fires.

Sara panicked. Where could she hide? She wasn't done with Weatherbee yet. There!

A red door appeared in the hallway. She had no choice but to open it. Grabbing Alana by the arm, she pushed her in first, then followed, slamming the door behind them.

Alana cried, "No, not this door. This is the door I came out on that horrible night."

Sara grabbed the front of Weatherbee's jacket, and pulled her down the hallway, hearing the heels of their school shoes scrape on the stone pavement. Even though pitch black, Alana read aloud from the Book of Spells, each line lighted up on the pages. Her voice echoed off the walls ten times its noise level, sounding more frightening.

Sara said, "Shhh, Alana." But the book had her in a trance. "Weatherbee, shut up," Sara tried again, but her voice fell on deaf ears.

The doors were arranged in a long row, no spaces between them. The other side of the walkway dropped to a canal or river. Shrouded in darkness, Sara couldn't be sure. Weatherbee took steps backwards as she continued to read aloud.

"Alana," Sara said, "It's just using you. Stop reading or I'll stop you."

Alana's eyes shot up red, piercing, entranced from the book's words. She realized her mistake too late as she teetered over the edge. Water rushed beneath her. Alana struggled in spite of Sara's tight grip.

They both tumbled into the water beneath the walkway, falling into the dark cold. Alana hit her head on the bottom of the canal and scrunched her face in pain. Her hand still clutched the Book of Spells as if it were a floatation device. Alana struggled, kicked and shouted as her cries for help broke over the sound of the water.

Alana rose above the water, taking a deep breath. Sara pushed the book below water, holding it there, letting Alana hold onto her shoulders.

Sara's head throbbed. The book gave a treacherous spell of pain for her to let go, but she couldn't. Her legs ached, and her lungs ached for a full breath of fresh air.

She swam to the side of the canal, dragging Weatherbee with her, letting the book go with the current, seeing it float away from them. She clutched the side and attempted to hoist herself over with Weatherbee in tow.

She slipped.

Alana coughed, flailing about.

"Weatherbee, hold still!"

She tried again, throwing her legs over. Slowly she managed to drag herself onto the tiny space between sides, pulling Alana up with her. She saw the book floating toward her around in a circle of currents, then fall away, down to the opening of a tunnel. She kept Alana's hand from grabbing for it and allowed it to disappear.

The book's voice came loud into her head. "Help me. Save me. I'll do your evil bidding for you. You and I can be great." The loud eerie voice fell silent, heading down the dark tunnel.

The girls lay down, breathing hard. Alana's vision was dimming, dimming, dimming...

Black.

Chapter 25

Alana heard someone groan from far away. Drifting back to consciousness, she heard the groan again and realized it was her. Rolling onto her side, she glanced around, unable to see anything in the darkness, though she could hear the water in the canal.

She muttered a spell and a glowing ball of light showed her Sara's supine form, her long hair dripping and splayed across the walkway. Alana struggled to her feet, checking herself for injury. One sleeve was torn and her jacket was singed, but she seemed okay. A shiver from being cold and damp ran down her spine.

"I've got to get out of here," she mumbled, taking a wobbly step.

"Wait for me." Sara sat up and pushed her hair out of her eyes.

"Why should I? You want me dead."

"No. That's not true."

"Oh, puh-leeze. What was that all about this morning, then?"

"I just wanted the book. Honestly. I never wanted to hurt you. Cafzf had me in his spell and threatened me with all types of horror if I didn't help him."

Sara and Alana studied each other in the golden light.

"Cafzf's not here and the book's gone as well. So now what?" Alana put her hands on her hips.

"I...I don't know. I've never been in here before." Sara rubbed her forehead. "I've got the fiercest headache!"

"Can't help you with that. Maybe we can find a way out. I'd like to get back to the fight if I can. I don't want any more students killed or hurt." Alana began walking away.

"Me, either."

The girls walked endlessly through the inner core where Mother of All Magic lived, trying to find a way out.

"Here's our first door. Try this one."

A huge wooden beamed oak door stood in front of the two girls.

"You just put your hand over the crystal doorknob and say this magical word, '*haunters-a-diaries*.' Let the power come to you. The rooms are realms and take you to some interesting places. Some are downright scary and you can get lost," Alana explained.

"Here," Sara said, "let me try one."

"Ok." Alana backed up and allowed Sara to open a door as the room was filled with hundreds of them all in different sizes and shapes.

"That's odd," Alana said, "I've never seen this room before with more realm doors. I'll go in and check it out."

"No," Sara said, "it might be dangerous."

"I have to go."

"Wait!" Sara said, "Stay here with me just in case I get lost."

"You? Lost? With all your powers, huh? That will be the day."

"Alright, then. Let's go into this one together."

"Ok. Open it already."

"No. You have to give me the power."

Alana grabbed Sara's arm and pulled her near the ruins' darker door, said the spell and flung it open. The door opened to reveal a bright light. The two girls looked down a floorless pit. Fire and flames reached up to the girls' chins and the doorway began to tilt. The girls grabbed onto its frame to keep from falling in.

"No, let go of me." Dizzy and panicked, Sara pulled back her arm and ran behind a pillar in the outer ring of the realm, staying clear of the castle inner core and the hall of doors. She turned back, saw Alana's eyes burning red, and heard the Book of Spells yell Alana's name.

* * *

In the school lobby, Logan screamed when he saw Sara drag Alana through the Realm door. Jumping across the room, he reached the girls a moment too late. The door disappeared just as a flash from Cafzf sent the teenager diving for cover. He rolled across the floor until he reached a sofa.

In this three-way battle, Logan knew the book's demons wouldn't hurt him because of Alana. But they made every effort to fight both Cafzf and the headmaster and his allies. Peeking around the sofa, Logan saw Headmaster Barns waving his arms, his eyes shut in concentration, and a powerful light building in his palms.

To give Barns cover, Wizard Weatherbee took aim at one of the book's demons, blasting it to pieces. It shrieked while it dissolved into a withering red mist.

Watching Barns, Cafzf threw up a defensive smoke screen, thick and billowing, allowing him time to move to a safer place. Barns' attack went wide, missing its mark and Cafzf chortled in evil glee.

"What's the matter, old man?" he goaded the headmaster. "Too old to fight?"

Cafzf lifted both hands above his head, his fists clenched. With a roar, he released his blast against Barns. Just as quickly, he fell to his knees when something hit the back of his head. He fought to stay conscious and looked over his shoulder.

The three kings, Stuart, Churchill and Rolfe, entered the fracas, wands drawn, feet planted. Joining Headmaster Barns and the others, they had the demon wizard surrounded.

"Meet your doom!" Churchill shouted and pointed his wand. It hummed and glowed, vibrating in his hand. The tip pulsed in bright gold just before a magnificent arc of electricity hit Cafzf. He staggered backward, holding his chest. A scream leapt from his throat, which turned into a roar vibrating across the floor and rattling windows.

Churchill stretched his wand to blast again and finish the demon, but pulled up short at the sight before him. Cafzf held a teenage girl by the neck, her eyes wide in fear, her dress in the style of centuries before.

"Let me go, or I'll destroy her spirit." He dug his fingers into her neck, making her cry out in pain.

"Alana?" Barns whispered.

"Who?" Wizard Weatherbee asked.

"That's the original Alana. The one who died protecting the book."

Using the lull in the fighting, Cafzf vanished, vowing to fight another day, vowing to reclaim the Book of Spells for his own, vowing to kill Alana Weatherbee for her interference.

"I think he's gone," Logan called from behind the sofa, slowly standing at the silence.

Their attention turned to the book's demons, which fled in the face of so many powerful adversaries. When their last scream faded into the night, Logan hurried to Barns.

"We have to get Alana out of the Realm. *Now!*"

"Alright, boy. Steady." Barns looked at Wizard Weatherbee, then to the three kings. "I have no idea where she and Sara might be. I don't know which door to open."

"Sara wants to kill Alana," Logan burst out. "She's tried it before."

"Then let's blast our way in," Weatherbee suggested. "Between us, we should have enough power."

"Alright." The men formed a circle, facing outward. Each chanted the same spell, made the same movements, and at the precise moment, blasted their wands.

A gigantic flash of white light fired, blinding Alana and Sara. A crater filled the ground where the white light struck. Dust and ash flew into the air, making the girls cough, squeeze their eyes closed and cover their faces.

Someone jerked Alana by her elbow, and someone else grabbed Sara. When the girls opened their eyes, they found themselves in the school lobby, Logan with Alana and Barns with Sara.

"What were you *thinking*?" Barns yelled at Sara. "You could have been permanently lost!"

"I...I needed to get Alana away from the fight."

"Yeah, so she could kill me herself," Alana grouched.

"That's not true. I already told you, I only wanted the book."

"The book." Logan's gaze searched Alana. "Where is it?"

"She drowned it," Alana told them.

"I guess it's gone then." Logan's eyes lit up at the thought of finally being free of it.

"Not really," Wizard Weatherbee cut in. "It's only temporarily gone. It'll be back."

"But not tonight?" Logan asked.

"Probably not," Churchill answered.

"Why did you show up?" Barns asked Churchill. "I'm certainly glad you did, but how did you know?"

Rolfe put his wand up to speak. "We have eyes everywhere and learned that Cafzf was headed this way. We met up yesterday and have been traveling hard and fast ever since, not stopping for food or rest."

"Then you must be exhausted, especially after expending so much magic," Wizard Weatherbee noted.

"We could rest, but..." Stuart glanced out the door, seeing one of the dead not far away.

"We need to attend to the dead and wounded students," Barns told them. "This night has brought much sorrow."

"How can we help?" Stuart asked.

After a brief meeting, the kings went to patrol the school grounds, Barns went to take a headcount of the students, and Wizard Weatherbee was asked to inform the parents of the night's events.

Sara went to her room, claiming her head hurt more than ever after the blast that set them free.

Logan led Alana upstairs to her room.

"You look awful," he told her when he closed the door. "Get out of those wet clothes and take a hot bath. I'll go to the kitchen and get you something to eat."

"Okay." She stood in the middle of the room, not moving, expressionless.

"Hey, are you okay?" Logan walked over to her and lifted her chin.

Seeing the concern on his face, her eyes puddle and her bottom lip quivered. "This is all too horrible!" She leapt into his arms and cried scared, angry, penitent tears. "Those boys died because of m...m...me!"

Logan pulled her closer, rubbing her back, letting her cry. After a moment, when she quieted, he led her to the bathroom and started the hot water in the tub.

"I'll be back with food," he told Alana, then left her to her bath.

Chapter 26

Logan's feet trod one slow step at a time down the stairs, weariness squeezing his legs empty of energy. He'd only returned to the School of Shines a few hours ago, and those hours had been fraught with too much danger, too much war. Now that Alana was safe, the adrenalin disappeared, slumping his shoulders and weighing his head down.

He reached the lobby and turned toward the hall leading to the kitchen when a voice stopped him.

"Logan! Someone's here to see you." Headmaster Barns stepped through the main door and to one side so the teenager could see the man behind him.

"Dad!" Logan sprinted to his father, the weariness chased away by his eager smile. Father and son embraced for a long moment, their arms unwilling to let go of the other.

"You're alive!" Lucien whispered against his son's head. "You're alive!"

With one pat on Logan's shoulder, Lucien stepped back and held him at arm's length. "You look exhausted."

"I am. How...? When...?" Too many questions crowded Logan's mouth to come out one at a time.

"I wasn't too far away in the woods and saw all the flashes and bursts of flame over the school. Winged demons flew overhead and I had a feeling, a terrible feeling that the school needed me."

"We sure did."

"Headmaster Barns has kindly told me of the events this night. I'm so glad you're not harmed. I understand Miss Weatherbee has survived the ordeal as well."

"Yes. She's upstairs, soaking in a hot tub. I'm getting her some food. Care to join me?"

"Of course." Lucien shook Barns' hand. "Goodnight, sir. I probably won't see you in the morning. I tend to hide during the day."

"I understand. Goodnight, then." Barns walked out, returning to his prior duty.

Lucien and Logan entered the kitchen, flipping on the light.

"I don't know what to get her. Should I find the cook?"

Lucien leaned against the counter. "I imagine Alana is upset tonight."

Logan nodded.

"So we should take her something easy on the stomach. Broth, perhaps, and a bit of bread."

"Or crackers. She likes crackers," Logan said.

"Alright. I cook well enough to heat up soup. Can you show me where they keep it?"

"No, but I can look." Logan began opening cupboards and cabinets until he found what he wanted. Inside fifteen minutes, they carried the simple meal to Alana's room and found her already in bed, fast asleep.

Lucien set down the tray and whispered, "Maybe we should go and let her sleep."

"No. I don't trust the Book of Spells and I won't leave her alone until I know where it is."

"Alright." Lucien sat at the desk and Logan on the windowsill, one leg pulled up, with his arms wrapped around his bent knee. They talked quietly for a while until Logan started yawning and couldn't quit.

"When was the last time you slept? I mean *really* slept?" Lucien asked.

"I don't remember. It's been a while."

"Don't let me keep you up."

"I'd go to my room, except I don't have one anymore," Logan explained as he walked to one side of the bed. Sitting on the edge, he kicked his shoes off and lay on top of the covers, squishing one pillow behind his head. Before his arm came down to his side, he was already asleep.

Lucien watched over them until the eastern sky turned a lighter shade of indigo. He leaned over Logan, stroking his head, then disappeared back to the forest.

* * *

Sara trudged upstairs, soaking wet, scared and angry. She changed into dry clothes and plopped on her bed, towel-drying her hair and wondering where Cafzf had gone...worried about when he'd return.

A knock at her door brought her head jerking up.

"Who is it?"

"Professor Ezards. I've come to check on you."

She opened the door wide and stepped back to let him in. He sat down in the chair she offered and looked her over.

"Are you hurt?" he asked after a moment.

"No. I'm alright. Maybe a bit singed from that blast, but that's all."

He nodded. "Good. Good."

Neither spoke, Ezards in the chair and Sara on the edge of her bed. He studied the room, as if memorizing its contents.

"Was there something else?" she asked, breaking the silence.

"Yes." He pressed his manicured fingertips together, forming a steeple. "I need you to be honest with me."

"Honest? About what?" Suspicion straightened her posture.

"Cafzf. You are obviously working for him and not the school."

Her green eyes darkened and her jaw set.

"It's no use denying it," he told her. "He couldn't have gotten this close to the school, as protected as it is, without someone on the *inside* being his channel."

Sara threw a frown to the floor; her pulse quickened and her face grew hot.

"Well?" Ezards pressed.

"He forced me to help him."

"How? You had nothing he wanted."

"He knew you wanted me to be friends with Alana and get close to the book. He wants the Book of Spells for himself and will stop at nothing to get it. He's threatened my life, my sanity, this school...everything."

"So *that's* why you attacked Alana this morning? I mean you and the Top Five."

"Yes. I needed to get her away from the book and I couldn't do it alone."

"And now Brad is dead." Ezards shook his head, accusation pouring from his eyes. "And he's not the only one. Do you realize what damage you've done to the school? By tomorrow morning, I'll be surprised if there's a student left here! I don't even want to contemplate the law suits over this." He stood and paced the floor, his pressed pant legs swishing when he turned.

"You expect me to care? I am a dark witch, one of the darkest you'll ever know. Havoc, mayhem, death, fear, they're all my tools of the trade."

"Oh, really?" Ezards tilted his head. "Then you must be hoping for Cafzf's return, threat or no threat."

She paled at that and glanced at the door.

"No?" He studied her body language, how her fingers picked at the bed covers, how her foot tapped the floor in a rapid staccato. "I can help keep him away from you."

"*You?*" She stopped just short of laughing out loud. "How? Not even Headmaster Barns, Wizard Weatherbee and the three kings could do that."

"They have a different perspective than I do. They're concerned about other things which limit their effectiveness. I, on the other hand, do not lead a great school, or a kingdom. I am...freer, shall we say, to be creative in my solution."

"Creative?" Sara repeated the word like she'd never heard it before.

"Let's start with the basics." He sat down again with a flourish of his right hand. "Cafzf created the book. It found a new keeper in the original Alana. When she was murdered by Cafzf to get the book back, the book hid. It tried a few centuries ago to come out, but Barns and a few others at the school bound it in the cellar. Then comes our current Alana and it attaches itself to her. Right?"

"Yeah." Sara leaned back on her palms, wondering when he'd get to the point.

"Now, Cafzf wants the book back and has forced you to help in that endeavor. The school wants the book destroyed, which means we have to get it away from Alana, or Alana away from it, whichever way comes first. The book is

determined to stay with Alana and will destroy anything or anyone who tries to hurt her or it. Right again?"

"Yep." She sighed.

"That brings us to you. The school brought you here to separate Alana from the book. Cafzf wants you to bring him the book and kill Alana if you have to, in order to do so." He paused for dramatic effect. "Which brings me to my plan. But I'll need your help and loyalty in order to make it work."

Sara sat up, interest showing in her eyes. "What's the plan?"

"Ah, ah, ah." He wagged an index finger at her. "I need you to swear your fealty to me before I reveal it."

"Cafzf will kill me if I do."

"Not if he thinks you're still working for him."

"How could he not know? He's got spies everywhere!" Her glance darted to the corners of her ceiling, like she expected one of his minions to materialize.

"Then we must be careful. You will handle him and I will handle Barns."

Sara's expression grew wary. "Why are you doing this? Is it because you want the book for yourself?"

"The *book*?" He laid a hand on his chest. "*Me*? No, child. I'm old enough to know my own limitations. I want the book gone, destroyed, away from the students and this school."

"That's what Barns wants, too."

"Yes, but he isn't willing to consider all the...*possibilities* to make that happen."

"And you are?"

"Yes, most certainly."

From the sly look in his eyes, the danger became clear to her. "I need to think about this."

"Of course. Take your time." He stood and walked to the door. "I'll need your answer by tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow *morning*? Why?"

"Because we have to move fast if this is going to work. Surprise will be on our side this way."

"Alright. Tomorrow morning, then."

Ezards twisted the knob, opened the door and stepped out. "Let me know if you need a sleeping draught. I can send a medic witch up."

"Thanks, but I'll be fine."

"In that case..." He bowed his head once, then made his way to his room.

* * *

Ezards crossed the school compound, glad to see the bodies removed and house trolls scrubbing away the blood and carnage from the walkways. Once in his rooms, he put a kettle on for tea, then changed into his nightclothes and green silk robe. Donning his velvet slippers, he shuffled into the kitchen and prepared chamomile tea with a wedge of lemon. That always relaxed him and he needed to sleep well tonight. Tomorrow promised to be a big day. If the dark witch agreed to help him, he would own the book soon enough. And with his

power and the book's combined..." A shiver of delightful anticipation shook his hand and rattled the china cup in its saucer.

Chapter 27

Logan woke the next morning with the realization someone else lay beside him, snuggled against his back, one arm draped across his stomach. A smile brightened his sleepy face when he remembered.

Rolling over, he whispered, "Morning, baby."

Two blue eyes peeped open at his voice. "Mmrph."

"Oh, really?" he chuckled. "Is that anyway to greet a long lost love, presumed dead?"

Alana rubbed one eye with the heel of her hand. "I'm *trying* to wake up," she mumbled. "Just give me a sec."

"Let me help." He tilted her head up and began giving her kisses across her cheek, on the tip of her nose, on her eyelids and finally on her lips.

"Okay," she whined, "now I'm awake, but I *really* don't want to get up." She pulled him closer for more kisses, but he sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the bed.

"Sorry, that's gonna have to wait. We've got a lot to get to today."

"Like what?" she pouted, reaching for him. "Nothing that could be any better than this."

"You got that right." He twisted around to give her one more quick kiss. "But I'm hungry. I mean starving, 'set down the platter and back away slowly so no one gets hurt' hungry. Then we need to see Barns and figure out our next move." He made a quick survey of the room. "I see the book hasn't returned. We need to watch for that as well."

"Yeah, alright. She pushed herself to a sitting position and yawned. "Was I dreaming last night, or were you talking to someone?"

"Oh, my dad came by."

"He *did*? Why didn't you wake me?"

"You were out cold. Besides, I needed some one-on-one time with him. Next time, though..."

"Okay." She reached for her robe and got up. "Give me a minute to get dressed, then we'll head for the cafeteria."

She went to the bathroom and he answered a knock on the door. A house troll stood in front of a trunk.

"Your father left this for you. Where do you want it?"

"Uh, in here for now." Logan stepped back and let the troll set it by the dresser. When he left, Logan opened the trunk and grinned at the sight of his clothes.

On their way downstairs several minutes later, they found the lobby congested with students, parents, professors and luggage.

"What's going on?" Alana stopped Amanda. "Where are you going?" She pointed to her friend's suitcases.

"After the attack and murders last night, Dad threw a fit and insisted that I come home."

"Oh. I guess it's the same for everyone else, then." Logan scanned the crowded room, shaking his head.

"When do you think you can come back?" Alana's concerned gaze swept over Amanda.

She shrugged. "I don't know. Whenever the trouble is over, I guess." Leaning forward, she whispered, "I know it means a lot to you, but the sooner you get rid of that *book*, the sooner we can all come back."

"But..."

"Alana," Amanda snapped, "it's *killing* people. What if it had been *me* last night, gutted on the walkway." Her shaky index finger pointed out the door. "Or, what if Cafzf kills you? We *all* know he's hunting you. It could be just a matter of time."

"I won't let that happen." Logan laid a hand on Alana's shoulder.

"You can't stop him," Amanda hissed. "Open your eyes! As far as my parents are concerned, you're *already* as good as dead. And they don't want me anywhere near it." Hot tears crowded her lashes. Hearing her mother call her name, she hugged Alana. "Don't die." With that, Amanda picked up her suitcase and left the lobby, not seeing Alana waving goodbye.

Logan put his arm around Alana's shoulders and they went into the almost empty cafeteria. Looking across the room, Alana noticed Professor Ezards standing beside Sara's table, bent over, listening. He nodded once, then passed by without acknowledging them.

"That's odd," Logan mentioned. "You'd think he'd at least say hello."

"Maybe he's got to help get all the students back home."

"Yeah. Maybe."

* * *

Sara sat at the cafeteria table alone, sipping coffee and ignoring her toasted bagel. With her legs crossed, one shoe dangled off her toes. Indecision plagued her and she still didn't know what she'd tell Ezards whenever she saw him next.

She didn't have to wait long. Professor Ezards walked in, dressed in a pressed suit and tie, smelling of expensive cologne. Seeing her, he nodded, turned from the food line and went to her.

"Good morning. Sleep well?" His cheerful demeanor earned him an expression not quite a smile and not quite a snarl.

"Hey," she mumbled.

"I can't stay long. It's chaos in the school today. Everyone wants their children home."

"Can't say that I blame them." Sara frowned and shrugged. She knew he wanted an answer, but she hesitated between her choices: help him destroy the book, or help Cafzf get it back. Cafzf would be even more powerful if she went

with him. But, with the book destroyed, Cafzf would still be around, madder than ever, demanding answers from her. But, he'd be weaker, and she'd have the protection of all the professors and the three kings.

She glanced up and saw Alana approach, snuggled in Logan's strong arms. Her stomach twisted at the sight. It wasn't fair. Alana had everything. Even though she had the book, the headmaster still called her his 'dear child.' She had a gorgeous boyfriend, one of the most powerful wizards ever for a dad, and she was an accomplished witch in her own right. Someone not to be taken lightly. If Sara helped Cafzf get the book back, there was always the possibility it would escape and return to Alana. However, if the book was *destroyed*...

In that instant, she reached a decision. Curling her index finger for Ezards to come closer, she whispered, "I'm in."

He nodded, then walked away, too preoccupied with his thoughts to notice Logan and Alana when he left.

* * *

Sara waited for her opportunity. It came the next day. Within the castle was another, ancient deep castle, or the inner circle, where the Mother of All Magic lived. Once inside, it had its own world, sky, grass, trees and plants. Off limits to students, Sara watched Alana enter, then sent a note to Professor Ezards.

Sara walked down the six flights of stairs to see the lawn of the inner circle below her view. Alana lay on the grass, the sun hitting her face. Her book bag and her heavy blue school sweater along with her black pumps were piled up next to her.

At the sound of Sara's heels on the stairway, Alana looked up. "What are you doing here?"

"Everyone in school knows you said you would never come into the Hidden Realms of the interior of the school castle again. I waited. I knew you'd come in anyway one day."

"To what? Kill me?"

"I could, but not today," she laughed. Alana's eyes lowered. "I followed you to tell you something, when I saw you go into the Hidden Realms alone. Alana, I've been thinking about you lately. I like you, but the Book of Spells has you over a barrel. You can let go of this magic and live as you did before."

Alana had heard this all before and gave an impatient huff. "Well, as you can see, I'm just fine, so you can leave now." She turned her back.

Sara saw that Alana came without the Book of Spells. "Why would you want to come here? There's no one here."

"Let me show you the ruins, then you might understand."

Sara said, "All right."

Alana put her shoes on and left her book bag and blue sweater behind. She headed to the inner part of the castle, with Sara following.

Sara's eyes widened as she saw the view of old castle within a much larger castle. It was huge, large enough for flocks of birds to fly by, and its own sky

opened up to the rotten looking old floor of the school castle in which it'd been entombed for centuries.

"Show me how to use the hidden doors to reach any place that I wish to go," Sara asked.

"You know about that, do you?" Alana raised one eyebrow. "Ok, that will be fine. I can do that without harming its most precious magic."

A curious sound came off the walls, like singing from the heavenly angels themselves, and pure white light followed them the whole way. The next set of stairs went down into pitch dark.

Sara asked, "You know your way?" It got darker the farther they went into the castle. The only sounds came from the girls' chatter and heels clicking on the stairs.

Relentless rain poured as if the floodgates of heaven had opened up in the morning sky.

Sara asked Alana, "How's that possible?"

"What?" Alana said.

"Rain in here."

"Mother's crying. She's gotten her first taste of evil and darkness. She cries to heal herself."

"What are you up to down here, Weatherbee?"

"Oh, that's simple," Alana commented, "I've been changing the way of magical thinking. That's all."

"What?"

Alana said, smiling, "Yes, afraid so," The two girls realized they were not in the same place as just before. Lightning illuminated the walkway ahead and thunder echoed through both girls' bodies like a massive war drum.

"Ok. I'll bite. Where are we then?"

Alana plainly said, "In the main core of the old ruin of the castle."

"No." Sara's voice echoed off the walls. "No one is allowed here. No one."

"Sara, are you frightened to be down this far?"

"No. It's just not allowed."

"Not scared, are you?" Alana smiled most dangerously.

"Wh-where's everyone?" Sara asked. "I heard there should be fireflies that twinkled, lighting the tiny stars of the ceiling. Our school's candle lighters should have lighted all of these torches for us by now."

"There're just a few left."

"Oh, really?" Sara reeled her worried look into Alana's face.

Alana's tone sounded careless. "The ghosts should be around us as the guardians and watchers. I think they've been called away. They haven't approached us yet to question why we're here."

Sara stated, "Something is wicked down here. I can feel it."

"No worries. They stay a far distance when I come down this far."

Sara gulped. "They do? Why? Alana, where are the ghosts that tend to the light of magic? The inner flame is out." Sara got turned around by the blackness.

"Why is there no inner fire to keep Mother warm? I don't see anyone."

Alana's crazy eyed gaze hooked onto Sara's face, shocking the hard core witch.

Chapter 28

"Alana, are you alright?" Sara took one step back, then glanced at Alana's hand. It clutched the Book of Spells. "You'd be better off without that. Give it to me and I'll get rid of it for you."

"Back off!" Alana's mouth twisted into a contorted snarl.

"I'm backing off. You keep the book. Who cares for the real Alana Weatherbee anyways? Right?" Sara argued. "Certainly not Logan...and certainly not your dad."

"Come on. It's not that easy. You're gonna have to convince me," Alana said. "You want this book? Then you'll have to beg."

"Let the book's power go, then I'll back off," Sara yelled.

"Come on. You're a beggar. Beg." The book enjoyed tormenting Sara and using Alana to do it. It knew the girls didn't like each other.

"Don't you get it?" Sara stretched out one hand, trying to reach past the book and into Alana's true mind. With the other hand, she slowly raised her wand, ready to cast a spell.

"I don't think that's gonna be necessary." Headmaster appeared from the dark corridor. "You had plenty of time, Sara, but I'll take over from here. I didn't know you were down here in Mother's tomb." Barns looked back to the darkness. "I don't want any trouble," Barns noted, watching Alana's eyes for a reaction.

Sara thought maybe she read his mind. *It's just us against her and the book.*

"Help will be on the way soon," Headmaster told Sara, coming over to stand next to her, wands drawn.

"You leave now, and we'll forget everything," Alana quietly said, holding her wand at Sara's face.

"Wait, wait!" Headmaster urged. "The Trusted Zone is with me in full cooperation. Okay?"

"Look, I'm perfectly willing to forget this," Alana smartly smiled and pointed her wand now at Barns. "Okay?"

"I see no reason in carrying this on any longer." Headmaster kept his tone calm.

"It was a chance I took following her in here," Sara told Barns, to explain her presence. "I just wanted to get back our sweet little Alana Weatherbee."

"It's gone too far. It's over. Okay?" Barns barked.

"You want the truth, Headmaster? You want the *plain* truth?" Alana pushed her face into his, hissing in her madness. "You're too late. The evil spell book works through me. You need to leave before it tells my brain to do something I can't control."

"Like it did to Logan?" Headmaster said. "Wouldn't it be nice, Alana, to start over again and have this all behind you?"

Weatherbee lowered her wand a little, and relaxed her stance. However, the book wanted to control everyone after it took over Weatherbee.

Why are you letting the book control you, Alana? Sara questioned her in her thoughts, then she spoke out loud. "Surely you're mad, right?"

"Mad!! Huh!!" Alana replied.

Alana continued gazing into Headmaster's eyes, but the noise of someone descending the stairs caused them both to look up.

"Professor Ezards, you shouldn't be here. You need to be watching over the children," Barns spoke, still staring at Alana.

"Sara called me. She said she needed my help."

"Even if she takes the book away, she would have to allow it to take her over willingly, and then it would leave Weatherbee alone. But what would that do to Sara?"

"That's why I've come." Ezards stopped beside Sara and stared at Alana holding the book. "I think between the three of us, we have enough power to destroy the book right here."

The book needed to let loose its terror at this threat. It fell open, its words lighting up from within. Alana's eyes glazed over, and she began to intone, "As I walked, death fell upon the earth. It will blind the magic that will attack it and command other evil forces to follow it into a garden of death."

"Stop!" Barns yelled, knowing the next verse would end their lives.

At the same time, Sara leapt for Alana and wrenched the book from her hands, then tossed it to Ezards.

"Give it to me!" Barns ordered, his hand stretched out to take it. "You're not strong enough..."

"I'm *sick* of hearing you tell me that! It's *mine* now." Ezards turned on his heels and bolted for the stairway.

The book screamed, sending fire from its pages, burning Ezards' hands. He gritted his teeth against the pain and kept running. Through the book's yells, he could hear Barns commanding him to return. Ignoring the headmaster, Ezards muttered a spell to quench the flames, but it fell useless against the book's power.

Alana's voice grew louder and she reached toward the professor.

Barns sent blast after blast and spell after spell to aid Ezards in spite of the professor's betrayal. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Sara doing the same. The Book of Spells shimmered in and out of view. A low hum became a loud roar, which turned into an ear splitting high pitch. The book leapt from Ezards' hands just as he exploded, turning into a whirling mass of smoke and debris.

The book reappeared in Alana's open palms, its pages ruffling in anger. Alana screamed out the last words of the book to finish the turning. Yellow light glowed where her eyes should have been and she turned to Sara.

Sara fell to her knees when she saw the trouble she was in.

"Alana, *don't!*" Barns screamed.

Sara watched as the book's power took full control of Alana's magic, turned her light to darkness, and all of its evil entered her. Alana hovered in the air,

completely awash in red, vibrating light. With one breath, Weatherbee blew a cast-spell that made Sara vanish into thin air.

Silence crashed down, stunning Barns. He stared at her, gasping, trying to understand what just happened.

Barns groaned, "Alana, what have you done? You just killed two people."

Alana shook her head slowly, like it hurt her. "Please," she whispered, "While I can hold it back, *please* run! *Now!*"

"But, I can't leave you..."

"Hurry!" Her clenched fists rose to her mouth, like she was fighting evil words trying to force their way out.

Whirling around, Barns raced up the stairs, running for his life, desperate to find the three kings and Wizard Weatherbee. He didn't stop until he reached the school grounds, now empty of students. Leaning over, gasping, he clung to his aching side, then began limping toward his rooms.

"Headmaster Barns?" Logan turned the corner and hurried to him, taking his arm. "Are you alright? Here, let's find you a place to sit."

They reached a nearby bench and Logan helped the elderly man sit down.

"Should I get a medic witch?" the boy asked.

"No. No." Barns rubbed his aching head and his expression scared Logan.

"What happened?" Jerking his head up, he glanced in the direction Barns had come from. "Where's Alana?"

"She...the book...just killed Professor Ezards and Sara."

"*What?*" He leapt to his feet. "When? Just now?"

Barns nodded, still gasping for breath. "It's taken complete control. She is totally mad."

"Then how did you escape?"

"Alana managed to hang on long enough to give me time. I don't know where she found the strength."

Logan turned pale and started to sprint toward the old castle ruins.

"No! Wait!" Barns raised a trembling hand toward the lad. "Get Wizard Weatherbee here, now! Find the three kings if you can."

"Alana needs me," Logan argued.

"Son, that's not Alana in there anymore."

* * *

Before evening fell, all who could assembled in Headmaster Barns' office. Churchill, Stuart and Rolfe sat on one side of the long conference table. Wizard Weatherbee sat at one end, his expression grim, his eyes filled with worry for his daughter. Logan stood behind Barns, seated at the other end. The remaining professors either sat at the table or filled the chairs in the office.

Barns shifted in his seat and coughed, bringing their attention to him.

"As you all know, this has been a day I long to forget, and yet it will always be remembered. This school, its students and its staff are under attack. One of our students is now completely possessed by the Book of Spells. Besides the two deaths that occurred last night, we now have two more, another student and one

professor. I cannot tell you how much this grieves my spirit and how much their loss weighs on my heart.”

He paused, swallowing once, trying to keep his voice calm. “In addition, we have no knowledge of Alana’s whereabouts or the book’s. I warn you all to be vigilant and to not go anywhere alone. Carry your wand with you at all times. Is that clear?”

A few mumbled yes and others nodded, their eyes serious in the grave situation.

“How can we find Alana?” Wizard Weatherbee spoke up. “Regardless of the book, she’s my daughter, and we might find a way to break its hold on her.”

Barns looked at the hope in Weatherbee’s eyes, his own reflecting hopelessness. “I don’t know. Perhaps we should start in the Hidden Realm. That’s where I left her.”

Feeling restless and futile, and hating those feelings, Logan walked to the door and peered out, his hands folded across his chest. They jerked to his side when he saw Alana walking up the staircase.

“She’s here,” he hissed over his shoulder. All eyes fell to him.

“What?” Barns asked.

“Alana. She’s walking up to her room.” Logan pointed out the door and let out a low growl.

Pushing back from the table, Wizard Weatherbee scrambled to his feet and hurried to the teenager. “Let’s go.”

“Wait. I’m going, too.” Barns grabbed his wand and followed them up the stairs and to Alana’s closed door.

Wizard Weatherbee tapped first. “Honey? Sweetheart, it’s Dad.”

Silence.

Tap. Tap. “Alana, please, let me in. I need to make sure you’re alright.”

Silence.

“Let me try.” Barns stepped up and rapped the door with his wand. “Alana, we’re worried about you. Please talk to us and let us know how you’re doing.”

Something crashed against the other side of the door, shattering on the floor.

“I guess that’s a no,” Barns muttered.

Logan reached for the doorknob, but Barns grabbed his hand back.

“What are you *doing*, young man?”

“I’m going in.”

“It isn’t safe. In her current condition, she’ll kill you, too.” Wizard Weatherbee backed Barns.

Logan searched their faces for a long moment, then shook his head. “No she won’t. She loves me.” Without giving them a chance to stop him, he pushed the door open and walked in.

Chapter 29

"Alana, it's me." Logan stood just inside the door, his hand on the knob in case he needed to make a hasty exit. The only light came from two candles on the dresser, both flickering in a draft. Alana stood by her window, the Book of Spells clutched to her chest, while she stared unfocused on the school grounds below.

"Sweetheart, I know you can hear me." He took a step in and stopped, waiting for a response. "Alana, listen to me. I love you and I would never hurt you."

Standing as still as a statue, Alana looked straight ahead.

"Is it okay if I sit down?" he asked behind her. When she didn't say no, he sat on the edge of the bed.

Alana turned, her face contorted and her eyes glowing yellow. "Leave! You're not welcomed here!"

Refusing to show fear, Logan shook his head. "Alana wants me here, so I'm not leaving. If you don't believe me, just ask her."

Indecision crossed her face and doubt clouded her eyes.

Logan tried again. "I know the book is powerful and that something awful happened today. But my love for you is powerful, too. Hang onto that and come back to me. I'm not asking you to give up the book. I'm asking you to not give it complete control. I miss you and I want you here."

He could tell his words were having an effect, so he kept talking, kept reasoning with her, pleading with the book to let her go.

"Just put the book down and sit with me. I'm not leaving until you do."

"Lo...gan," she whispered. "Please don't..."

"Please don't what?"

"Don't leave me."

"Alana?" His eyes widened in hope.

"Yes."

"Put the book down. Right here." He tapped the dresser. "Then come sit with me. The book knows I mean it no harm. I've never tried to hurt it, have I? It's going to be okay." His calm, deep voice tried to reassure her.

Alana held the book away from her, over the dresser, unable to let go. She trembled, tears falling, then she began writhing. Wailing, she tried to set it down. "It hurts so much! I...can't let go."

"Please, Alana, calm down."

"What's wrong with you? You're calming *me* down after I almost ripped your head off? You were willing to give yourself up to that...that *book* and leave this world behind you, even then." Alana looked at her hands when the book disappeared and then appeared again.

"Alana, it's playing tricks on you. It's just an illusion."

"Why? Why now to play tricks on me? It should know that I've obeyed it and done what was needed. You're back. I feel it was a gift from the book."

"No, Alana, it was not. I feel strongly about that," Logan said. "You owe it nothing, sweetie." He paused. "I don't know if I can explain this. All I know is that I couldn't deny you what you wanted once you asked. It was your dreams and

your wishes that brought me back. Love, Alana. It was the magic of our love. Once I knew, I had to tell you but, after what has occurred, it's hard to say that love is stronger than that evil magical spell book."

Alana blushed beet red at this statement, but the book's venom flooded her mouth with an invoked curse. Alana stuck her head out the window, spitting it on the ground and coughing the spell away. Weatherbee pulled herself back in and turned to face Logan. No longer meeting his eyes, she stared at her hand grasping the book. She looked heartbroken.

Logan took cautious steps toward her, surprised at himself. This was dangerous, but he couldn't stay away from her. He thought to himself *she's so alone, deeply alone and now more than ever she needs me. I can't leave her when she looks so sad.*

"Alana?" He stood just a few feet in front of her, careful not to touch her. She looked up at him then, tears glistening in her eyes and running down her cheeks. "Please don't cry," he begged. "I'm so sorry. I'll leave." He was about to turn and go when she grabbed his arm. A jolt came with this new contact.

"No. Don't go. Stay with me."

"I can't stay here. I couldn't bear to hurt you, but I don't think I could stop myself from doing it."

Alana's voice sounded older, more mature and seductive. "If you were going to hurt me, you would have done it by now," she responded, stepping even closer.

Logan looked at her sternly. "No, that's not true. Every second I stand here, I'm fighting, beating back the urge run away. I'm incredibly dangerous, especially to you."

"Why especially to me?"

"Because..." Logan struggled for the words "...of what you've done for me. I didn't want to see you frightened, but I knew I wanted to keep you safe, and I wanted to scare the Book of Spells away from you, for your own sake. Not every person smells the same to me. Each person's blood has a particular aroma." Logan started to grow hair. It sprouted out of every pore in his body. His jaw grew out, filling with glinting white, sharp canines. His nose flattened and his eyes sunk in, growing larger. His hackles rose.

Logan sighed. "When you walked into the lobby today and I caught your scent, I was completely overcome. I almost killed a room full of innocent people to be able to taste you."

She set the book down, stroking the cover. "I'll be right back," she whispered to it. Then she walked to her nightstand and picked up the transfigure gumdrops.

"Here. It's been a while since you ate one. Maybe it will help."

"Didn't you just hear me? I'm dangerous!"

"No." She extended a hand with the spelled candy. "You came in here knowing I wouldn't hurt you. I'm staying because I know you won't hurt me. So here. Eat this."

He took the gumdrop from her and popped it in his mouth. After a moment, he felt some of his werewolf characteristics ease.

"That's my girl!" He ran a finger down the side of her face. "I'm so proud of you."

With the book out of her hands, more of Alana emerged.

"Wha...what did I do?" she asked.

"You just put the book down."

"No. I mean earlier. Did I...*hurt* someone?"

"You don't remember?"

"It's like a dream that I woke up from and can't remember."

"I, uh, I wasn't there, so I don't know exactly what happened." He took her hand. "But let's not talk about that. Let's talk about now and about where we go from here."

"Okay." She nodded, then rubbed her temples.

"Are you feeling alright?"

"Not really. I feel like I'm squeezed into a tiny corner of myself and someone else has the rest of me."

"That'd be the book. Maybe it will give you a little more room in there." He tried to chuckle, but he was too scared for her.

"If it doesn't feel threatened, it gives me more room."

"Does it feel threatened if I do this?" Logan leaned in and kissed her once, drawing back to watch her reaction.

"No. It's fine." A small smile flitted across her face.

"Shall I try it again?"

"Please."

This time, he wrapped his arms around her and held her close, determined to break as much of the book's hold on her as he could. His kiss became several kisses. In a few moments, they fell back on the bed, wrapped around each other, oblivious to everything around them, including the book.

* * *

An hour later, Logan scrambled into clothes to answer a knock on the door. Headmaster Barns stood outside and tilted his head in puzzled concern.

"Logan?"

Logan's hair was messy and he wore his t-shirt backwards. *Mmm*, Barns thought, taping his index finger on the dimple of his stern chin. Then Barns caught sight of Alana in bed, with the sheet wrapped around her. Barns knew the two had been sleeping together, but his thoughts focused on more important matters. Glancing to the right, he saw the Book of Spells on the dresser, making his chest tighten at the sight.

"Please meet me in my office as soon as you can. It's urgent."

"Yes, sir. We will." Logan nodded, trying not to blush.

* * *

In his office, Logan and Alana stood in front of the large desk. Barns said in a concerned voice, "This week you've decided that you care for the Book of Spells over yourself and over the school, even your father, even Logan."

Alana looked at Logan's chiseled, handsome face and turned back to the stern Headmaster. "No. That's not true." The teenagers' shoulders touched as they stood before him.

Doubting her testimony earlier, his eyes recounted old actions between her and the Book of Spells. He sadly lowered his eyes, raking his long white beard with his hand.

"It's not true? Really?" His wise eyes pierced through her denial.

"I don't know," Alana admitted. "I'm confused and lost to even think of being without the book's power. It feels like I'll die, too, if I release its hold over me. I may never see it again."

Logan placed a comforting hand on Alana's shoulder, understanding her feeling. He looked at the school's Headmaster sitting behind his huge desk, puffs of smoke billowing out perfect smoke rings.

"You won't die, girl," Barns told her. "I'm not saying it will be easy, or that your powers won't be reduced, but it's something you must do for your own sanity... for Logan." He nodded toward Logan standing as a guard for her.

"Then how?" Alana's worried eyes filled with sincerity.

The headmaster chimed, wincing while cherry smoke came from his pipe, forming a smoke ring that floated across the room, "You make the most logical next step."

"What is that?" the two children asked, leaning in past the smoke to get a better look at Headmaster Barns.

"Take the book to a special place I know and simply..."

"Yes, yes?" Alana said; leaning further into the pipe smoke.

"...leave it there for safekeeping."

"Huh? What?"

"How does that make any sense?"

"All right. To be fair, you don't just give up the power of the book. You rid yourself of its tools, seeds to its evil workings such as access to its spells and charms. You say a special powerful mambo-whamo spell to cleanse yourself and Logan. You follow this up immediately by erasing any memory of its existence. You replace dark magical thinking with a pure way of thinking, which is a pleasant way to use magic on your inner light; that shiny spirit that fellow students used to loved about you. In your first year, that brilliant shine held you together when the odds faced you and you overcame them.

Logan nodded, agreeing with the old headmaster that this was the best solution.

"I hope you don't choose to flake out, to take the easy route."

"Huh?" Alana said, puzzled.

Logan leaned in to whisper in her ear, "Barns is being cool now. Watch and listen."

Alana snickered.

"Let me fill you in on something. Life is about work. Everything is work."

Logan said to Weatherbee in a whisper. "Here we go. Another lecture."

"School is work. Relationships are work. Family is work. In addition, a lot of the time, the work sucks."

Alana gasped and Logan giggled.

Headmaster shrugged. "Well, that's what I hear from you students in the halls, how your life sucks. It's not the fun part of life being taught that you need to know. It's not the glamorous part. It's not the part that you look back on and think *Geeze, that was awesome*. Nevertheless, that's life. That's reality. Not everything is fun, and nothing worthwhile is easy."

Logan winked at Alana. Alana eyes shined back.

"You will come to realize the importance of little jobs in everyday life. They're challenges. Once it's gone, you go to the next one. So do me a favor, come with me and dump that spell book. It might not seem like much now, but by giving those devil-like feelings no further attention, your evil Book of Spells will have no reason to believe in you. You might even find another reason to believe in yourself once it's gone from your grasp. And then you'll have that strength to let go."

Logan led Alana to a corner of the office and whispered, "What do you think? Can you do this?"

She raised doubtful eyes at him.

"Think of what we just shared," he reminded her, glancing up toward their room. "I don't want to lose you. I love you too much. Please, Alana, for us, at least try what Barns is suggesting."

It took a slow minute before he saw her almost imperceptible nod.

"Is that a yes?" He squeezed her hand.

"Yes."

The two agreed to follow the headmaster away from the school to a place only known to him to release the book.

Chapter 30

Alana and Logan followed Headmaster Barns across the school grounds and out the gate. In a few minutes, they entered the forest, shafts of late afternoon sunlight streaming through branches to form puddles of gold on the leaf covered floor. Alana clutched the Book of Spells to her and, even though wearing a warm cloak, she shivered, trying to keep her thoughts calm and not alarm the book.

Logan helped by recounting happier times, picnics and jokes played on fellow students. Barns remained quiet, his face a study of concentration and wariness. He paused on occasion to get his bearings. It'd been over two centuries since he'd been to this secret place. He wondered if he shouldn't have brought more professors or at least the three kings. Then again, if Alana didn't willingly let go of the book, no amount of magic could help her.

They'd walked for almost an hour and Logan noticed Alana slowing down.

"You getting tired?" He put his arm around her shoulders.

"No. I...I just don't want to keep going."

"We're almost there," Barns said over his shoulder.

"I know. I'm scared all of a sudden." Alana pressed the book tighter to her.

"There's nothing to be scared of." Logan kissed the side of her head. "It's a beautiful day for a walk."

Alana clenched her eyes shut and forced herself to take another step.

"Should we sing something?" Logan asked and, without waiting, launched into a silly school song. Barns joined in, slightly off key, and after a moment, Alana began singing. After a few verses, she and Logan almost bumped into Barns' back when he stopped abruptly.

"We're here." He pointed to a ring of tree stumps in a small clearing. "Have a seat and rest."

Logan led Alana to one stump and knelt beside her, unwilling to let go of her. Barns walked to the center of the ring, poking through weeds and tall grass, searching for something.

"What are you looking for?" Logan asked.

Barns raised his hand and shook his head. "We need to build a fire."

"A fire? Why?" Alarm sparked off Alana's face.

"Uh...to keep warm. My old bones are freezing," Barns offered the excuse. "Besides, you look cold, too."

"Oh. Alright." She relaxed a bit and watched the headmaster gather wood and light it with a wand blast.

In a matter of minutes, a bright fire blazed, and she stretched her feet toward its warmth. Logan held out his hands and rubbed them together.

"This is nice, huh?" He looked up at her and smiled when she nodded.

By now, the sun hung onto the western horizon, losing its grip with each passing second. The eastern sky changed its blue for indigo and deep purple.

Barns shuffled around the fire, muttering under his breath. On occasion, with his back to the teenagers so Alana couldn't see, he flung in colored powder and watched it send a rainbow of sparks upward. Each time he did, the flame intensified, reaching higher in the sky. On the sixth time around, a portal formed in the ground beside the fire, gaping and endless.

"Alana?" Barns turned to face her.

"Yes?" The fire held her gaze, mesmerizing her, and she didn't look up to answer.

"It's time." Logan took her hand to help her stand.

"Time? For what?" She could feel the book squeezing her out, taking over her senses. It felt afraid and angry and defensive and made her jerk free of Logan's touch.

"What we discussed in Barns' office earlier. Remember?" Logan took her hand again.

"I don't want to!" She tried to break his hold, but he tightened his grip.

To ease the situation, Barns sat down, placed his hand on his leg, and leaned closer to the fire to warm his body. Headmaster drew a deep breath and sighed, at the same time twirling his fingers on his legs.

“Dear child, how long must we suffer the wickedness of grief and dismay and terror of this book?”

Alana squinted at her Headmaster. At her hesitation, Barns stood, grabbed the Book of Spells and thrust it into the fire. The fire roared up a hundred feet. The screaming of hell’s gate trying to open to this world made the ground shake like an earthquake, knocking the three off their feet.

Barns intoned, “Be free of its grasp.”

Alana got to her feet and didn’t know what to do or say. Looking at Barns, she bent over and grabbed his arms, helping him to his feet.

A fiery red and yellow arm reached out from the fire, grabbing for Alana. Headmaster thrust his wand toward the fire, adding fuel to this undying fury, burning the Book of Spells. He heard screams of horror from Weatherbee and the book.

Weatherbee looked scared, turning pale as a ghost. “No,” she said, placing her hands over her face. “No, please. It’s just a helpless book. Inside it has a heartbeat.” She grabbed onto the headmaster’s arm. “Please save him. Don’t destroy him.”

Then her voice turned ice cold. The hold from Alana’s grip came from the book’s strength. She sunk her fingernails deeply in Barns’ flesh, speaking in demon-like tones from old. The voice got stronger and wicked, hurting the old wizard. “I demand you stop this undoing!”

“No!” Barns yelled like a wizard with a mission to kill the book at all cost. One more massive wand blast hit it deep and hard. Barns used more clever magical casts and spells, adding more incantations into the fire. Weatherbee’s eyes lost their color and her hair turn pure white. He felt the cold from her grasp digging into his flesh as his blood dripped into the fire.

Weatherbee aged more by the minute as the book burned. Her long hair smoldered from the tips, flowing from the wind made by the furious fire. Weatherbee hovered above the ground a few inches.

“Do not destroy me!”

“Let go!” Headmaster said, throwing a well aimed wand blast. “Let go of her!” Headmaster commanded the book.

Flames cloaked Alana and tinted her long white hair frazzling about loosely. Her pure white orbs glowed brightly, frightening Barns. He kept fueling the fire, like feeding a hungry beast from Hell, with blasts from his wand in rapid continuous motion as hard hitting as he could, till his arm and shoulder grew tired.

The headmaster edged backwards, one hand spread behind him. “Don’t do this, my dear. Let go of it. You are nearly free.” Barns swapped his wand to relieve his arm. “Demon, be gone!” he shouted.

The book’s spirit inside Alana raised its ugly head. “No one is as mighty as me,” the voice said. “You will lose your student if you continue to kill me.”

The Headmaster dropped his wand, eyes tearstained and wide open to the cold gust of wind that appeared around the fire, ripping his cloak to pieces.

"My child," Headmaster croaked out forgiveness for the relentless pain to his dear Alana. He said in a calm voice, "I'm sorry this hurts you, but you must let go of your demon."

"Don't," the book ordered her.

"I implore you to do so," Barns cried. "Alana, the book is a coward and a liar. It hides behind a mere child of sixteen!"

The old, worn out wizard knelt before Weatherbee hovering above him. Exhausted and shaking, he gasped for breath, realizing they were all doomed. Looking as horrified as if the sun had fallen from the sky, he found one last bit of inner strength. "You dare use your mistress for a shield? Come, come out and fight me one on one. Show your true self to me, and we will fight to the end."

The demon spirit opened Alana's hands in a simple gesture of appeal at his offer.

"That's not much of a challenge, old man, as my power is so incredible compared to a mere wizard as yourself. I just..."

"Please, girl," Barns tried one more time to reach her.

Logan held his silence until he couldn't stand it. Leaping in between Barns and Alana, he grabbed her arm. Pain shot through his hand, into his shoulder and chest, sending him crashing to his knees.

"Alana, you've *got* to let go of the book. Or else it will kill me."

She could see the pain writhing through Logan's body.

"Stop it!" she screamed to the book. "You're killing him!"

"He just has to let go," the book taunted.

"I won't!" Logan hissed through clenched teeth. "I love her too much."

"Then you must choose between us," the book snarled at Alana. "And I can let you live forever!"

"Like you did the first Alana?" Barns reminded it.

Alana stared at Logan, at the pain on his face and the tears in his eyes.

"Please don't let me die," he whispered, still clutching her hand. "But if you need the book more than my love, then I will."

She felt herself pulling away from the book, choosing Logan. Pain, so intense that she couldn't breathe, ravaged her head. Blood trickled from her nose and ears.

"Quickly, Alana, before it kills you, too!" Barns urged.

The flames shot higher. She took a halting step toward the fire and pointed her wand at the book. The horizon tilted and everything dimmed to black. The only sensation came from Logan's hand on her arm. Her heartbeat slowed until it almost stilled, yet she managed to command at its last beat, "I banish you to whatever hell you came from!"

The book screamed, its pages dripping from its spine. Barns waved his wand a few times and the book fell into the portal, the abyss, the eternal darkness. With another incantation, the portal sealed shut; the flames died down to a flicker.

Alana fell forward, unconscious or dead, they couldn't tell. Logan broke her fall and cradled her head in his lap. Her body returned to that of a teenage girl

with beautiful dark hair and soft red lips. Logan used the edge of his sleeve to wipe away the blood.

Barns spoke a healing spell over the girl, then the two men waited. After a long moment, she groaned and moved her head.

"She's alive!" Logan looked at Barns with hopeful eyes.

When her eyelashes fluttered open, the first thing she saw was Logan's green eyes fastened on her.

"What happened?" She rubbed her aching forehead.

"You did it, Miss Weatherbee," Barns crowed. "You banished the book."

"You...you mean I'm free of it?"

"Yes. Free. We're all free!" Logan leaned down and gave her a long, sweet kiss.

Chapter 31

Alana sat in a quiet cubbyhole corner of the castle, nestled in a small crescent shape, staring at the bay, facing the gleaming Atlantic Ocean, dreaming of a better tomorrow.

In addition, it was in the castle of Shines that one Alana Weatherbee now resided, a girl of remarkable talents, among which was an absolute, innate gift for witchcraft. Oh, and finding trouble along the way.

Now it was well known to the small community of students that witches do not actively seek out trouble. On the contrary, they knew Alana to be a soft spoken, polite girl these days, quite the opposite of what her fiery red tipped hair might imply.

However, while she did not actively sniff out secrecy or advocate adventure, more often than not they would begin in the most innocuous of ways.

It was on one such day, the wind blew cold along the shores of the east side of the school's castle. All Hallows Eve activity went on about its business. Spells decided to multiply their divination, to number in the dozens.

The school's Dark Magic section of the library filled to its capacity with willing students looking through the many new books. These tomes contained newly contrived spells and charms, and the students hoped to find a book like Weatherbee found. Weatherbee's followers actively sought out a traditional recipe for Dark Charms and Brawls. They wanted to match the caliber of spells that she intended to make for Hewlett Norshine's Halloween party.

"Bluegrass! Bleeuurgh!" said a young Shines student, Kaira Kelly Winswaker, not even looking up from her new spell book. The spell boomed and echoed, shaking the school grounds.

Headmaster Barns in his office hung onto his huge oak desk till the rumbling of the ground came to a stop. Headmaster yelled, "WEATHERBEE!"

However, it wasn't Alana Weatherbee's doing this time.

Kaira Kelly Winswaker said, "My bad." Then she grinned. "Whooooeeah!" It worked. What a spell!"

Barns pushed his small spectacles up his long thin nose, standing upright when he saw Weatherbee on the other side of the counter by the school's gift shop.

"Weatherbee, come with me."

"What's the matter, Headmaster?"

"You know very well, Miss Weatherbee. Setting a giant misguided trills and frills spell off in the school's library is against the rules."

"Sir, please, that wasn't me. I've been here working in the school gift shop all late morning."

"Don't lie, Miss Weatherbee."

"I haven't." Her eyes glazed over with anger.

"I'm sending you to Madam Wigglesworm to keeping you busy for the day. That will keep you away from practicing spells such as this one."

"Dear me," Alana commented, "I'm to be blamed for every spell that goes off from now on."

"Child, that might be how it looks. I just want to keep you in an area where I know you will be till I have a better look around the school."

"Yes, sir. I understand," Weatherbee said, slumping her shoulders.

She reported to the professor. "Madam Wigglesworm?"

"Yes, dear?"

"I am to report to you."

"Don't call me madam. In my tenure, I was called matron. As my time is almost up here at Shines, I'll soon be just a miss."

"Yes, Miss," Alana said. Doubt ran across her facial expression that anyone ever left Shines. There just weren't enough magical places left to find gainful employment.

"Well, dear, I happen to be in the middle of cleaning storage closets, making room for the new and pushing the old down to the storage rooms in the west hall. It's truly replacing and misplacing junk."

"I'd think cleaning out these old storage closets would be boring," Alana said sarcastically. Alana was having more fun at the school's gift shop, selling candy bars and trick wands. At least she was out in the light, getting a chance to see her friends go past. Stuck in the halls, transferring one junk pile to another, was not her idea of spending a fun Saturday afternoon.

Madam Wigglesworm placed her hands on her big round hips. "Not in the least. The Headmaster kindly gave you to me for the remainder of the day, as my bad back is giving out. You came just in time."

Alana looked at the red check, red curlers haired, big robust woman who wore too much makeup to make up for the years lost she'd spent cleaning this school.

"You have to be joking."

Madam Wigglesworm opened the first closet door and its overstuffed contents fell out across the hall floor, taking her down with a crush and boom.

"Dear old me," she said, "How did that get in there?"

Weatherbee looked at Madam Wigglesworm's disheveled appearance laying on the floor as a flying broom poked out of the pile of junk, hovered for a brief moment and took off down the hall.

"That broom is on a rampage. It will hurt someone, willing itself to fly without a rider to guide it," Wigglesworm worried. Alana's big round eyes blinked, watching it fly down the hall and turn down the next.

Alana whispered something.

"What was that, dear?" Miss Wigglesworm asked.

"I just said that it's sad. I feel it's looking for its master who used to ride it."

"Very clever, dear. Hurry. Run downstairs and open a door for it and we'll see where it goes.

Alana took off running the many flights of stairs to the ground level, rounding the last corner to the main hall's exit. Weatherbee saw the door in sight and opened it just in time as the broom flew past her and up and out to the sky over Shines.

Alana smiled, closing the door and heading into the lobby of the school, encountering a dark clad figure standing in the middle of a lavishly decorated room. The figure's right arm stretched out, a wand clutched tightly in the black leather gloved hand. Wisps of dark smoke curled upwards around the dark clad figure from the wand tip. An occasional bright spark glowed with the same terror inducing shade of green and yellow as the dreaded curse it had spat out mere seconds previously.

Dewbli, a well liked house troll's lifeless body sprawled on the shiny parquet not two feet from the black robed figure. The dark and evilness of the Book of Spells created this horrible figure some time ago. The tip of its boot touched the face of poor Dewbli, faithful servant for Professor Tucker and the school for thirty years.

The thick, rust colored carpet was mostly covered in blood under a huge wooden table. It lay beneath the oversized troll with a deep expression of shock just before the wand blast.

Alana reacted to what she saw and reached for her wand.

The bright flash of sickly green and red and yellow light had died out seconds ago, but the invisible wind continued to howl. Threads of oily darkness rose from the house troll's corpse, forming into a vaguely humanoid shape with red eyes that shone like hot coals amidst the cloud of inky shadows, making the dark clad figure disappear within it.

Weatherbee ran off to the headmaster's office to report this.

Later that night, a voice filled her sleep. "Who is more powerful? Me or the headmaster?"

Alana awoke with the sweats from another hellish nightmare. It was dark out; no one was beside her bed.

Weatherbee yelled for Logan, then looked at the floor. Two pairs of shoes sat neatly by the bed, ripped up sneakers and a cute pair of suede black pumps. Her dress cloak draped neatly over the back of the chair where she always hung it.

Sitting up, seeing her pants balled on the floor along with Logan's, Alana called for him again. She didn't know Logan was down the hall, lying on the red carpet, reading a magazine in the headmaster's parlor. Gusts of cold air flew in her bedroom and knocked over her glass of juice. Alana blinked again, her eyes assaulted by a bright white light that pierced her bedroom, then fell to black.

Her head felt as though it was being poked with a hundred needles. Alana held her head up as far as she could without feeling dizzy. She stood from the bed and fell to the rug, which turned into a forest floor. Sheltered in a soft nest of moss and ferns, an owlet chick waited silently atop a massive redwood branch high above for its mother to witness Weatherbee's entrance.

"W-what?" Weatherbee breathed heavily. Two or three faces swirled above her. Alana muttered, "Ghost," hoping they were coming to her aid due to the fall to the floor. Weatherbee's dazed vision cleared. "Are you school ghosts?"

Their features were a blur of eyes and open mouths speaking all at once.

Oh goodness me, this is the moment when I've woken up from my dream. Oh thank goodness it's just another god awful dream. There was no ghost, Weatherbee thought, peeking out with one eye open while lying on the forest floor. None of it was real! On the other hand, was it?

"Who's more powerful? Me or you?" The sinister voice came in like a hammer to Alana's head.

"O-oh," Alana pressed a hand to her forehead, her face a mask of discomfort. "The Book of Spells..."

* * *

In his office, Headmaster grabbed for his chest and fell over, hanging onto his desk. In his mind, he thought he was having a stroke. Feeling dizzy and worried, he staggered over to his vial bottles on the far side of the room. Maybe he had a remedy. With watery eyes, in pain, he saw the spell book on his desk, flapping pages and laughing. A blurry vision of Alana in the corner of the room faded in and out, with no expression on her face. Headmaster grabbed his chest and fell to the floor.

In his delirium, he heard, "So, old man, you thought to trick my mistress and throw me away like an old ragdoll. I feel we have no more use for a tired out old wizard such as yourself. You failed, old boy, and there is nothing you can do to prevent me from talking control."

Later headmaster awoke in his bed, sweaty and pale, staring into the dark confines of his bedroom, out of breath, alone. The window stood open in front of him and the wind blew the curtains back. Laughter from a child faded away. He saw in the sky a girl on a broom flying high above the school and disappear like a falling midnight star.

The End

If you enjoyed this story, you might also like "Alana Weatherbee (Book 1)" and "Jacks School of Shines," both available at obooko.com and Amazon.