

# TWISTED FATE

SEASON OF THE WITCH



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*If you dislike swearing, sass, or steam, you should probably turn around now. My books are definitely not for you.*

*If you do... buckle up bitches.*



## CHAPTER 1



“*J*ust a few more lines to go,” I told Akira as I moved my tattoo pen along her upper thigh, drawing a shield with a snarling wolf in its center.

“Perfect.” Akira flipped through her phone, seemingly unaffected by the pain. “I can drag my ass to work on time so Leroy doesn’t get pissy again.” Her lavender eyes, glinting mischievously, met mine before flitting back down to her phone.

“As if he’d ever fire you,” I said with a snort.

Closing my eyes, I concentrated on the energy that flowed through my veins—the power the color of the most vibrant magenta with the scent of vanilla and lily—and pulled on it, gently coaxing it to follow the lines of the tattoo and make it into something

*more*. To protect Akira by changing her scent and magical signature.

She laughed. “Yeah, he knows the Dirty Dragon would crash and burn without the total perfection that is me.”

Akira worked as a bartender at a local dive bar, and Leroy was the owner and her boss. He liked to pretend to be a hardass, but in reality, loved her like a daughter.

A teeny, tiny part of me was a bit envious of their relationship. Being abandoned at a supernatural orphanage as an infant had left its mark.

The orphanage had never been entirely certain, but they’d assumed I was from a dalliance between a witch and a human, something unheard of in the supernatural community. Witches believed *very* strongly in preserving the purity of magic.

Mine had always been a bit wonky, never quite working right until I, quite accidentally, discovered that I could imbue my magical energy into tattoos I designed. It had been a life-changing discovery for me, and I’d moved out of the orphanage and into Akira’s mom’s house the next day.

Not long after, I opened my tattoo parlor and never looked back at the bullies from the orphanage. I wasn’t swimming in money, but I had a steady stream

of income for the first time in my life and it felt incredible.

“As long as you overlook the leather pants, sass, and tendency to punch before asking questions, sure. Pure perfection,” I teased, opening my eyes and throwing her a smirk.

“You say sass, I say confidence,” she said, peering down at my handiwork and giving me a thumbs up. “Looks great, Lei. As usual.”

It was a running joke between us.

Akira was a special case because my tattoos never seemed to be permanent on her like they were for everyone else. Her magic was just too damn strong to conceal for long, but I didn't mind doing it over and over.

I'd die for that bitch.

I glanced over the tattoo, rather impressed with my artwork, the wolf appearing almost as if she were about to lunge out of Akira's leg and attack.

I put down the tattoo pen and cracked my knuckles. “Alright, I'm finished. You can thank me by restocking our supply of licorice and M&Ms, we're almost out and our movie nights will be seriously pathetic without snacks.”

Akira chuckled and swung her legs over the table, her long, black hair flowing over her shoulders. “I'll

stop by the market on the way back from work if another idiot doesn't try to start shit again tonight." She shook her head. "I'll never understand why shifters always think they can handle more liquor than is physically possible. It's like they have something to prove."

"Then I guess it's a good thing you're so cocky, seeing as I just reinforced your false wolf shifter scent. You should fit right on in," I replied with a shit-eating grin.

She fake shuddered. "That reminds me, I have a pack meeting on Thursday. I'll have to figure out some kind of emergency to get me away if they want to have a pack run again."

While Akira could change forms, she certainly didn't shift into a wolf, which made being part of a wolf pack complicated, not that she had any choice in the matter. All supernaturals of Mystic Oaks were required by law to be a part of a House.

The house insignia was stamped on our IDs, and certain group activities were mandatory. Like pack meetings.

I packed away my supplies, throwing out the used materials and sanitizing the rest. "Just get Greer to cover for you again, isn't that the whole reason you joined her pack?"



She sighed and jumped off the table. “She gets excused a lot for her work, so she’s rarely present.” She waved her hand. “I’ll figure it out, no worries. And if the store has it, I’ll even snag you some of that boxed wine you think tastes good.”

I stuck my tongue out at her. “Don’t hate on my wine. You’re just jelly you aren’t a classy bitch like me.”

“Who’s a classy bitch?” Greer said as she walked in, daggers hanging from the sides of her ripped jeans, and another, longer sword, sheathed down her spine. If she wasn’t one of my best friends, I’d be scared shitless. With her tall, strong frame, steel-toed boots, scar that ran down the left side of her face, and the *fuck off* she had permanently stamped across her brow, Greer was seriously intimidating.

“Awww, come on!” I whined, running forward and yanking a towel from the cupboard and throwing it at her. “You’re dripping blood everywhere.”

She looked down, puzzled, her blonde hair disheveled and her white t-shirt dirty and covered in blood. “Oh shit. Oops.”

Akira cackled, her slanted lavender eyes glinting mischievously. “Looks like I missed a good time.”

Greer cracked a smile as she cleaned up the blood.

“Had to wrestle a demon who had no intention of being arrested today.”

“Do they ever?” I asked, bringing over another towel.

She chuckled, sopping up the mess. “Demon blood is such a bitch to clean up.” She threw the ruined towels into the trash. “Listen, Lei. I have a favor to ask.”

“Please tell me you’re ready to let me tattoo you,” I said, picking up my sketchbook. “I already have a stunning design created.”

She shook her head, a slight smile gracing her lips. “No. Nothing like that.” She paused, uncertainty washing over her face.

Akira hopped back on the table, crossing her legs. “Ohh... Greer looks nervous. This should be good.”

Greer snorted, but continued, “I have job and all the intel points to the bounty attending the Samhain ball tonight.”

My stomach dropped. Anything to do with the witches was never fun for me. “Okay... And?” I asked, praying she wasn’t about to say what I thought she was.

“I need you to bring me as your plus one. I don’t know any other witches, and you know they’d never bring me anyway. Purists.”

It was an annual masquerade ball on Samhain hosted by a different ruling coven every year, and I'd avoided going at all costs.

I sighed, rubbing a hand down my face. "I don't know—"

"I'll give you a ten percent cut."

My heart stuttered. I was running low on some herbs and they were rather pricey. A cut from her job would help me out quite a bit.

I raised a brow. "Twenty."

"Fifteen, and I'll buy movie snacks for a month," she offered, mirth dancing in her hazel eyes.

"Deal," I said, a cold feeling creeping down my spine. I was sure I'd come to regret helping Greer into the party.

## CHAPTER 2



I sat cross-legged on my bedroom floor, my black lace dress hiking up to expose the black, rose-patterned tights that encased my legs. If there was one thing that connected me to the witches, it was my clothing style. Everything I owned was black, no matter how much Mori tried to convince me to add colors to my wardrobe, I just wouldn't budge.

Black was my comfort color. Even my emerald eyes were rimmed with black liner and mascara, the only pop of color being the blood-red lipstick that covered my lips.

I closed my eyes, taking in a deep breath as I shuffled the tarot deck in my hands, thinking about this evening and what lay ahead.

*Tell me what I should expect tonight.*

I exhaled and deposited three cards on the fuzzy carpet before me and opened my eyes. Tarot wasn't fortune-telling. Nobody had a single, never-changing future. Tarot simply allowed me a hint at potential futures depending on my current course of action.

I sat there, confused at the cards I'd never once witnessed for myself before reeling back once I realized what they meant.

The first card was the Ace of Wands, most commonly used for inspiration or desire. Okay, that could technically mean a whole bunch of things. Maybe I'd be inspired for a new art piece because it couldn't possibly mean *romantic* desire... could it? I hadn't even bothered with dating since my epic disaster of a relationship with an angel. Let's just say he was no angel.

The second was the Knight of Cups which indicated following the heart or romance. Two things I truly couldn't see myself considering. Raf had left my heart a tattered mess when he flew out of my life, and I hadn't been able to bring myself to try dating again.

Akira had downloaded *Supé Swipe* on my phone, saying, "*You don't have to actually date any of these guys, Lei. You can just use 'em and lose 'em.*" Her

words, not mine. The app had been left unused on my phone, obviously.

The third and final card from the draw was the Seven of Swords which hinted at deception and trickery. Somehow, that seemed less anxiety-inducing than the previous two cards.

“Why do you look constipated?” Akira asked, leaning against my open door, her hand reaching inside a bag of chips as she glanced down at the spread. “Oh, let me guess. It says you’re going to win the lotto and run off into the sunset with a secret shifter lover.”

I rolled my eyes. “Don’t be salty because the cards don’t like you.” Every single time I’d ever drawn Akira’s future, it said the same exact thing over and over. Death, betrayal, vengeance. Her future was shrouded in shadows and gloom.

She shrugged, popping a chip into her mouth before offering me the bag.

I shook my head, my gaze drifting back down to the spread.

“Damn, rejecting snacks. It must really be something bad.” She sat down beside me and nudged my shoulder. “What’s wrong?”

“Desire, romance, deception... that doesn’t bode

well, does it?" I met her lavender gaze, my mood souring.

"Desire and romance are good, right? And if anyone tries to mess with you, we have your back, you know that. I'm due for a good ass-kicking anyway. It's been too long."

I laughed, cleaning up the cards. "Didn't you just get into a fight at the bar yesterday?"

She grinned. "Well, yeah. But that was yesterday." She jumped to her feet, her movements agile and fluid. "Today's a new day!" She moved to the door, pausing at the exit. "You might have some work getting Greer into the party. She's determined to go dressed in ripped jeans and a white t-shirt. I doubt that girl even owns a dress."

"I'll handle it," I said, grinning as I got to my feet and opened my closet, determination settling over me. Messing with Greer would be just the thing to lift me out of my bad mood.

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"I'M GOING to go sniff out my bounty," Greer said with a dangerous glint in her eyes. "I'll see you back at home."

We were standing just past the entrance to the ballroom, having been reluctantly let in by two narrow-eyed witches. I'd been half-expecting them not to allow us entrance at all because I was covenless. But how was I supposed to choose a coven when I was orphaned and hadn't been taught a specific magic?

"Wait," I said, grabbing her arm. "That's it? We *just* walked inside. You're already leaving me? You know the Hawthorn coven will be offended if I go now."

The Hawthorns were one of the four ruling covens, and they specialized in dark magic. Being experts in curses and attack magic made the Hawthorn coven the most feared in all of Mystic Oaks.

The corner of her mouth lifted. "I'm sure you'll find something to do, and maybe next time don't put unsuspecting women in ridiculous glittering gowns." She sauntered away and called over her shoulder, "I'm about to make myself a rich bitch."

Knowing it would be pointless to chase after her, I let my gaze wander around the massive ballroom, the twinkling lights and classical music giving off an expensive but relaxed vibe.

The room was oval, the tables circled an expansive dance floor where many partygoers were



already spinning about on the polished, hardwood floors.

I adjusted the black lace mask that covered most of my face and accepted a champagne flute from a passing waiter as I made my way toward the gardens I spotted just outside the ballroom.

I exhaled as I entered the enchanting gardens, an overwhelming feeling of envy at seeing all of the beautiful flowers and herbs surrounding me. It was entirely unjust how the Hawthorns had this much wealth when there were so many that had none; that struggled for every cent they made.

Looking around at all the opulence, I sincerely doubted a single Hawthorn alive had to work even one day of hard labor for the money they so callously threw away at all of these parties.

My inner venting came to an abrupt standstill when I stared open-mouthed at what I was certain was a bushel of saffron flowers a hands-breadth away. The purple outer petals were vibrant and breathtakingly beautiful, contrasting wonderfully with the inner yellow petals and red stigma of the saffron herb.

My blood froze in my veins.

Saffron was the most expensive herb in the world and it was right in front of me. Ripe for the taking. I shook my head. I couldn't... shouldn't.

I looked around, finding myself entirely alone and unsure what to do. Saffron could be made into potions for wealth, strength, and even used as a powerful aphrodisiac. I could make a crap ton of money from a single flower. And they had at least fifty.

Would they even notice if I just took one?

Making up my mind, I plucked the three red stigmas off a single flower and froze when a voice sounded behind me, “And what might you be doing?”

### CHAPTER 3



*I* whirled around, my hand fisted over the stolen property as I caught sight of a man standing a few feet away, his navy blue suit fitted to perfection over his tall, muscular frame. His mask was designed like the head of a raven and covered everything from his nose up.

“Shit,” I said, my nerves wracking up ten-thousand notches. He was definitely someone important. “Please don’t tell anyone, I’ll put it back.” I opened my already sweaty hand, my fingers shaking slightly as I turned to place the herbs back on the flower. I didn’t even want to think about the world of trouble I’d be in if he told the Hawthorns I had the audacity to steal from them. They’d probably curse me and my next five generations.

The gravelly sound of his chuckle caressed my ear, and my heart stuttered when I took in his magical signature. It was the flavor of mint and were three different shades of blue.

His signature was *blue*.

Crap crap crap.

Red was the only color more powerful than blue, and I could count the number of people on one hand who were known to have one.

“Don’t worry about it, sweetheart,” he said as he approached, plucking a few saffron stigmas of his own and casually tossing me a wink. “I won’t tell if you don’t.”

I narrowed my eyes at him, my body losing a bit of tension. “What use do you have for saffron?” I gestured to his obviously expensive attire. “Aren’t you wealthy enough?”

He grinned, my eyes jumping to his strong jawline and the single dimple that popped out on his cheek. “Who says I’d use it for wealth? Perhaps there’s a witch I’d like to entice to my bed.”

I snorted. “Somehow I doubt you have trouble getting women into your bed.”

He shrugged. “Never seems like the right woman though.” He looked me over from head to toe, his cobalt eyes shining in the moonlight. “What are you

doing out here? Aside from committing theft, of course.”

I gave him a dry look and he chuckled again, my traitorous body reacting way too inappropriately to the rough sound. “This isn’t really my scene, but I made a deal with a friend.”

He made a show of looking around us. “And where is said friend? I’d guess he must be supremely bored without your company.”

I rolled my eyes at his antics. “*She’s* fine and I’m sure thoroughly preoccupied right now.” If luck went her way, Greer had hopefully already bagged her bounty and was heading out.

“Ahh,” he said as a cold breeze drifted through the garden and I shivered, goosebumps appearing all down my arms. “Then I guess I should thank her for leaving you all to myself,” he said teasingly before noticing the sudden chill and removing his jacket to hand over to me.

I ignored the offer. “I was actually planning on heading out now that I...” I trailed off, my gaze flitting between the saffron and the exit.

“Now that you’ve completed your thievery, you mean?” he asked, an amused flick of his lip making me reconsider leaving so hastily.

Maybe the cards had the right idea. Perhaps I

should be more open to the idea of romantic entanglements.

His outstretched hand was still waiting and I wondered how strong he had to be to keep it up for so long. My entire arm would have been trembling by that point.

“You know what,” I said, cursing myself internally for being so weak. “I didn’t have any plans other than to drink boxed wine and watch the new Marvel movie anyway.” I extended my hand to accept his jacket.

He snorted but handed it over. “What changed your mind?”

I paused, wondering if he’d accept an honest answer. “I guess you look like you could use a friend.”

“A friend.” He mulled over the word as if it was foreign. “Yes, I suppose I could use one of those.” He gestured forward and began walking through the gardens, slowly taking stock of all the different plants as if it was something he did often.

And perhaps he did. I had absolutely no idea who this mystery man was and it was high time to change that.

“So,” I said, running my fingers over the soft

petals of a ranunculus flower. “Are you ever planning to tell me your name or am I meant to guess?”

He turned toward me and captured me with his cobalt gaze. “Tobias,” he said after a pause. “And you are...”

I swallowed, trying to dispel the dryness from my mouth. “Leilani, though my friends call me Lei.”

“Leilani.” He mused over my name as if tasting it on his tongue. “Has anyone ever told you your signature is absolutely *divine*, Leilani? I’ve never encountered two scents in a single signature.”

I froze, confused by his words. “You can smell two?”

“Of course. Lily and vanilla, an extraordinarily alluring combination if I’m being entirely honest with you.” He took in my confounded expression. “Do people not typically sense both?”

I shook my head. “You’re the first.”

He grinned widely. “Well, look at that. It must be fate.”

“Uh... sure,” I said, suddenly feeling way out of my depth. Was he flirting with me? Did I want him to? Should I reciprocate? From what I could see of him, he was ridiculously attractive and clearly wealthy. Most likely way out of my league, which I

had no doubt he'd figure out the moment we took off our masks.

Maybe I'd just take Akira's advice and *'use 'em and lose 'em,* though that wasn't my style at all.

"So, Leilani. Tell me about yourself. Do you come from a large family?" he asked, dousing the fire that had slowly been rising the longer I was in his presence.

Of all the questions he could have asked. I dread social engagements for this specific purpose. I've made good impressions on witches until they find out I'm an orphan, and then suddenly it's as if I contracted some contagious disease.

I'd hoped he'd take longer to ask me that, knowing the second he did the moment would be over. He'd realize his mistake in flirting with me and leave me there... alone.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I said, "I'm actually an orphan, so I don't know about any blood family. My best friend and her mom took me in as a teen though, so I consider them family."

He stopped walking, his gaze fixated on mine, making my heart palpitate way too quickly. "Huh," he said before continuing onward. "Good riddance, I say. They clearly didn't deserve you if they thought abandoning you was a smart decision."



My jaw dropped open.

“What?” he said, amused by my confusion. “Blood means a lot to witches, but the family you choose, the ones who stay by your side through thick and thin, they are just as much family.”

A wonderfully soulful melody drifted in from a nearby window, causing Tobias to pause to listen. He turned back to face me and lifted a hand. “Would you dance with me?”

“You want me to dance... with you?” I stuttered, feeling entirely out of sorts. I couldn’t even remember a time I’d ever danced formally. The closest I think I ever came was dancing in the kitchen to pop music with Akira in our underwear.

He smiled crookedly. “Yes, with me.”

Warmth spread through my cheeks and I knew they were bright red. I was almost positive this was the moment the cards had been speaking of.

Should I throw away caution and accept his hand or do what I always did and run away from any possible attraction?

I loosed a breath and slipped my hand into his, hoping I wouldn’t regret it. Wondering if it wasn’t already too late. “I don’t really know what I’m doing.”

He pulled me close, wrapping a warm hand

around my waist while keeping the other clasped around mine. “Not to worry, just follow my lead. Feel free to step on my toes as much as you’d like.”

We danced in silence, he kept our movements easy, simply swaying back and forth, my body relaxing with each passing minute.

I opened my senses and let his signature wash around me, enjoying the fresh taste of mint on my tongue as the shades of blue swirled around us.

Tobias stopped swaying for a moment and gently tilted my head back with a finger beneath my chin. “There’s something about you, Leilani. I can’t put my finger on it right now, but I can tell our futures are meant to intertwine.”

My heart skipped a beat. Nobody had ever said anything remotely close to as romantic as that to me before. I glanced down at his full lips, wondering if he’d object to me kissing him.

He seemed to understand where my mind had wandered because he leaned forward, his lips right above mine as if waiting for permission.

I took in a deep breath, praying to the fates not to royally screw me over, and let our lips touch.

## CHAPTER 4



*I*t was magic, plain and simple.

Our lips moved together, slowly building intensity as we familiarized ourselves with each other.

I sunk my fingers into his lush hair, my core heating when his arms tightened around my waist.

Our tongues swirled against each other and I moaned into his mouth as his fingers moved up and down my body, leaving delicious tingles in their wake.

Tobias pulled away and we looked at each other, both of us breathing heavier than normal, and it occurred to me that I just kissed a person whose face I had yet to see.

How strange, yet it felt so... nice. The anonymity.

I opened my mouth to speak and my vision spun as my body went flying through the air before landing in a rose bush, the thorns embedding painfully in my skin.

“What the hell?” I groaned, pushing myself to my feet and staggering around as I blinked my vision into clarity.

Tobias’s back was toward me as he faced three opponents, his mask discarded on the ground, dark red hair trimmed close to the sides of his head suddenly visible.

Sparks flew back and forth between our attackers and Tobias, and it was hard to tell who was winning with all the noise and flashing lights.

Tobias was standing tall and strong, and I ripped off my mask, activating the tattoo on my arm to pull my sword from the ether, twirling it around once it materialized in my palm.

I readied myself to join the fray when one of the attackers noticed me and sent a massive fireball in my direction.

I jumped to the side, narrowly missing being barbecued, and winced as a flash of heat seared my arm, the smell of burned flesh making me gag.

Tobias's energy levels multiplied to dangerous levels, my magic instinctively reacting as it rose to meet his. He was a terrifying sight to behold as he marched forward, slashing his arms in complicated patterns, blue and black streaks of light flying around the masked assailants.

A chill swept over my body, goosebumps appearing along my skin at the sudden and complete terror displayed on their faces.

They were frozen. Whether it was in fear or from Tobias's magic, I didn't know. All I knew was that Tobias was a *lot* stronger than I originally suspected.

"You know this only ends one way," Tobias said, his tone quiet and menacing. While it was frightening to have someone yell, there was nothing as petrifying as having someone speak in such a spine-chilling tone. The utter promise of death in his voice was unmistakable.

He moved closer to the attackers, slowly withdrawing a dagger from somewhere within his suit, and then it hit me. He was about to commit murder right in front of my eyes in broad daylight. Okay, it was nighttime, but murder was murder regardless of the hour.

"Wait!" I shouted, running forward, trying to

ignore the sharp shoots of pain as I approached. “You can’t just unalive someone. We need to call The Supe Squad.”

Tobias halted, his back tensing before he slowly turned around to face me. “Can’t I?”

My mouth fell open as I took in his features, my feet stumbling backward of their own accord. Every cell in my body screamed at me to run as my brain recognized who stood before me.

He was no guest like I’d thought. No, the man meeting my gaze was none other than Kieran Hawthorn, heir to the Hawthorn coven, and he’d just played me for a fool.

His eyes softened and he took a step toward me, his arms raising in a submissive stance. “Leilani, it’s not how it looks.”

The moment his back was turned, our assailants fled, their footsteps becoming increasingly more quiet as the seconds trailed by, my heart thumping in my chest.

I was speechless.

Why would he bother with the facade? Was it some sort of sick joke because he caught me stealing from him? My stomach churned, and I had the sudden urge to throw up. I felt like such an idiot for thinking he had been sincere.

Anger flooded my veins, expelling the embarrassment and making me see red.

“Please, let me explain,” Tobias — no, *Kieran* urged, taking another step forward, my eyes tracking his every movement.

I put up a hand. “I don’t want to hear it.” My skin throbbed both from the thorns and the burn on my arm, so I released my sword back to the ether and proceeded to yank the thorns out of my flesh. “I’m getting the fuck out of here.”

I went to walk around him, but he sidestepped directly into my path.

I glared at him, certain he must have a death wish to mess with me after everything. And how was his suit still so fresh? He looked like he’d been on a casual stroll through the gardens not moments after an intense magical scuffle. Lucky bastard.

“Get. Out. Of. My. Way,” I growled through clenched teeth, my fists balled at my sides.

“I can’t do that, Lani,” he said calmly, his face devoid of emotions. Oh great, he gave me a pet name. How adorable. *Not*. “They saw us together and know what you look like. Whoever they are will come after you to get to me, so you’ll have to come stay with me. You aren’t safe on your own.”

I tilted back my head and barked out a laugh. “If

you think I'm going anywhere with you after this, you're beyond deluded."

Footsteps sounded and Kieran leaped in front of me, shielding me from the newcomer. If I wasn't so enraged, I'd be touched by the gesture.

"Holy crap on a cracker, what happened out here?" an amused voice called.

Kieran's body relaxed and he moved out of the way, putting Enzo Arturo, easily distinguishable by his blue hair, tattoos running up and down his arms, and multiple piercings lining his ears into view.

"Hi there!" he said jovially, looking between Kieran and myself. "Hmm..." he stroked the non-existing stubble on his chin. "The garden in shambles, clothes still on, and blood coating the pretty new witch. I'm going to guess... a fight?"

He shot a faux glare to Kieran. "Damn... And you didn't invite me? I am offended."

"We were attacked by rogue witches, and they caught us in a... compromising position," Kieran explained, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Shit sticks," Enzo said, tapping the earpiece that wrapped around his ear. "I need a security sweep of the property, detain and question anyone who looks suspicious." He turned toward me. "I guess you're coming with me then. Don't worry, love, I'll set you



up at a secure hotel and make sure nobody sees us arrive.”

My mind spun. Why did they automatically assume I’m just going to go with complete strangers to unknown locations? Were they absolutely daft?

“She’ll be staying with me,” Kieran practically growled, his voice giving no room for argument.

Enzo’s face looked shocked for a moment before he schooled his expression. “Of course.” He gestured for the exit. “We should get going though, don’t want anyone else catching sight of her.”

Enough was enough. “Yeah, that’s a hard no from me. I’m not going anywhere with either of you. And who gives a flying fuck if they see my face? We don’t even know each other!”

“Be that as it may, the rogues that jumped us don’t know that, and they’ll use whatever they can to get to me. Believe me, it’s happened plenty of times before, so unless you feel like ending up as extremely expensive fertilizer, we need to leave. Now.”

Fuck. I didn’t want to die, but I didn’t want to go with him either. Not after what he did, but what choice did I have?

Enzo smiled on the sidelines, clearly entertained by our argument.

I sighed. “Fine, but we need to stop by my place

to pick up my shit. I'm not wearing stranger's clothes."

Kieran raised a brow but nodded. "Anything you want, Lani."

## CHAPTER 5



*A*fter collecting my belongings silently so as not to wake up Akira and be bombarded with a host of questions I couldn't and didn't want to answer, I left her a note on the fridge door and headed back to Kieran's electric and very expensive-looking sports car.

I rested my head on the window, drawing smiley faces on the glass as my eyes slowly drifted closed, the adrenaline from the fight having ebbed away.

Strong arms surrounded my body and lifted me up, the scent of mint wafting through the air as I was carried steadily in a straight path.

A part of my brain yelled about feminism and how I should be standing on my own feet, but I was much

too tired to open my eyes, let alone walk unassisted, so I let my body relax in the strong, capable arms.

And then we stopped, and the sound of a door creaking open reached my ears, muffled voices echoing around me.

“You brought a woman... here? This is most unusual, sir.”

“Yes, I know, but it couldn’t be avoided. I won’t have her in danger. Not her.” He resumed his pace.

“Who is she?” the unfamiliar male voice asked.

“Someone I didn’t even realize I was searching for.”

“Lani.” His voice was like liquid chocolate, smooth and decadent, and not at all healthy for me. “Wake up and tell me where it hurts so I can heal you.”

My body touched what was possibly the softest sheets I’d ever felt and my eyes slid open.

“Hmm?” I grumbled, my mind fuzzy from sleep.

Kieran’s face swam into view as he chuckled, his teeth perfectly straight and white. I fought the urge to punch them. How utterly annoying. Couldn’t he have at least one flaw?

His hands started roaming over my body and I began to bat them away until the first wave of healing

energy flowed over me and I moaned audibly before snapping my lips shut.

His magic was like a cool caress, whispering across my flesh as it mended the burns and gashes. I let my eyes drift closed as his energy swirled around us, lulling me to sleep.

\* \* \*

I woke up in an unfamiliar room, the furniture deep shades of brown and the color scheme an array of natural tones. I sat up, rubbing my forehead, wondering what in the hell happened when the memories of the night before came rushing back.

I was in Kieran's house. Kieran Hawthorn's fucking house and he hadn't killed me for stealing from him, in fact, he'd done something decidedly more wicked. He'd pretended to be interested in me, to make me kiss him... for a joke. As some sort of payback.

While I supposed it was better to be embarrassed than murdered, it seemed the people were right. The Hawthorns were bad news and I had somehow been convinced to come stay here to what... be their guest? It was madness. Who knew what other humiliating things Kieran had planned for me.

I spotted my belongings on the dresser across the

room and leaped for them, pulling out my tarot deck and settling back on the bed as quietly as I could.

I waited with bated breath, straining my ears to understand if someone had heard me, but the house was eerily silent.

I cut the deck, shuffling the cards as I thought of my past, present, and future before taking a deep breath and flipping over three cards in rapid succession.

My eyes dropped to the first card, the Ten of Swords, which was easy enough to decipher. I had been betrayed before. Stabbed in the back. By *him*. He who shall not be spoken about ever.

The card to represent my present was Death. While it didn't always mean actual death, it could speak of significant change. My heart thudded in my chest. I didn't want change in my life. I *liked* my life, thank you very much. I had no interest in changing it, and definitely not to include an arrogant asshole like Kieran.

I shook my head and switched my gaze to the card that would give me insight into my future and gasped. It was the Three of Swords. Sadness, loneliness, heartbreak.

I rubbed my eyes, wishing I could rewind time and take back the deal with Greer. I don't know what

I'd been thinking, letting her convince me to go to that stupid party. This was exactly why I didn't get involved with witches. They sucked.

I cleaned up the cards and turned on my cell phone, activating the GPS to figure out my location, a bunch of texts from Akira lighting up my phone.

*Bitch, I sure hope you have a better explanation for where you went than that crap you stuck on the fridge. Call me back or I'm coming to check on you. You know I can find you anywhere.*

I knew she was serious. Part of Akira's powers were seeking abilities, so almost anything she was searching for, she could find. People paid her to discreetly locate and retrieve certain items for them. Items they didn't want others knowing they possessed.

*Leilani Fowler, I am standing in your room, and your tarot deck is missing. What the fuck is going on?*

My GPS pinged with my location. I wasn't too far from the city. I gazed out the window to the forest that surrounded me. I could just make a run for it. It wasn't like I was a prisoner or something. He couldn't force me to stay here, and I wasn't some damsel in distress, regardless of whatever danger Kieran said there was.

I could defend myself, and I had some of the most

powerful supernaturals as friends. I didn't *have* to stay.

*That's it, I'm on my way. Mori's coming too.*

Fuck. That wasn't good. I didn't want them anywhere near the Hawthorns, especially not Akira. Not that I thought the Hawthorns would care about her real identity.

I typed out a quick response. *Keep your panties on. I'm on my way back now.*

I prayed she saw that before getting too close and began tossing my stuff back into my bags, using my energy to activate the tattoo behind my ear to make my movements undetectable, and the tattoo on the back of my arm to hide my scent.

With a last lingering look at the bedroom door, I opened the window and slipped out, dropping to the ground and landing on my feet. I couldn't believe my luck that the window had been left open, and then it hit me.

Nobody dared to steal from the Hawthorns, knowing the consequences weren't worth it. Except for me, apparently.

I sprinted for the coverage of the trees and followed the direction on my phone, stupidly not paying enough attention to my surroundings when a



group of witches stepped out from the foliage and blocked my path.

I skidded to a halt, my heart pounding in my chest as the now-unmasked witches looked me over, their hands raised and magic crackling in their palms.

Fuck.

## CHAPTER 6



There were five witches approaching me but one face stuck out in particular. A blonde in her early twenties with hair perfectly coifed, and a cold, cruel smile that crossed her face, her cheekbones sharp and prominent.

“I need her alive, though feel free to mess up that pretty face a bit.”

A chill ran down my spine at her obvious callousness. I trained with my friends a lot, but it was always one-on-one, I’d never expected I’d need to learn how to fight against multiple opponents. I was a tattoo artist for magic’s sake. This entire situation was absolutely garbage, but maybe I could talk myself out of it. It seemed like they wanted someone important to Kieran, and that wasn’t me.

“Wait!” I shouted, shocked to all hell when they halted. “Look, I think you might have gotten the wrong impression the other night. I’m not involved with Kieran. Like... at all. In fact, I didn’t even know who he was when we kissed at the ball.”

Gods, saying those words made me sound ridiculous, like some sort of Disney princess.

The blonde looked me over, seeming unimpressed. “You certainly aren’t his usual type, that’s for sure.”

Wow, this bitch was just asking to be hit in the face.

“Exactly, I’m not even his type. I promise you, I mean nothing to him, so using me against him is pointless. He won’t give you whatever you want from him. I’m a crap bargaining chip.”

She paused, looking at her lackeys and turned back to face me. “You say that, yet here you are, coming straight from his property. The only person he’s ever allowed step foot inside. That says all we need to know.” She gestured to the witches. “Get her.”

I took a deep breath, my heart pounding in my chest as I activated the tattoo that crisscrossed over my abdomen, real-life vines materializing in my palms a second later. A sword would do me no good

against multiple assailants at once, but with the vines, maybe I had a chance. Hopefully.

A ball of crackling electricity flew toward my face, and I whipped up a vine at the last second, slicing through it as shocks spread along my skin from the contact.

I gritted my teeth against the pain and snapped a vine, whipping it out at the nearest rogues. If I was going down, I'd try to take as many with me as possible.

Two of the witches leaped for my arms, grabbing me and stopping my movements.

I struggled against them, but they were twice my weight and covered in muscles.

One of them kicked out my legs and I fell to the ground, my entire weight crashing down on my kneecaps. A wave of terror washed over me as the blonde walked up and I saw the fury written all over her face. I couldn't understand what would make her that pissed at me.

"I don't get it," she said, looking me over once more. "You're so ordinary."

"Maybe she has a golden pussy," one of the witches holding me suggested with a laugh, his fingers digging into my arm painfully.

Panic choked me and I wondered how the hell Greer was able to deal with people like them every day. Every damn day, she chased after criminals, fending off attacks and taking them out.

I couldn't even last a single attack before getting overwhelmed within seconds. It was pathetic.

"Please," I said, tears leaking out of my eyes. "You have it all wrong. I mean nothing to him. Just let me leave and I won't go anywhere near him again. I'll move to another city, I promise."

She tilted her head back and laughed, and even that was cold and unfeeling. "You think I care about your feelings? The world is a savage, bloodthirsty place, and people like you aren't meant to survive it. You need to be stronger, smarter, and more cunning than the people around you, or you'll get eaten alive. Too bad you won't live very long to figure it out."

And while I hated her with a burning passion, part of what she said rang true. I was weak, pretending that I could get through life by ignoring my own people, regardless that they shunned me since I was a child.

The tears dried on my face as I lifted it, determined to find a way out of this when the world turned dark, shadows flowing through the trees.

The blonde's face paled and she cursed before grabbing something from her bag and slamming it to the ground, her body disappearing in a flash. Transportation potion. It was expensive, and damn near impossible to brew.

The rest of the witches weren't as lucky and they all turned to flee but froze as their bodies were consumed by shadows, and the terrible sound of bones snapping echoed through the woods before Kieran and Enzo stepped into view.

The shadows receded, the bodies of the now-dead rogues littered the ground, their necks all facing the wrong direction.

Bile surged in my throat and I heaved, but nothing came up. I sat back on my heels as Enzo reached my side, dropping on the ground and looking me over, presumably for injuries.

"Did they hurt you?" he asked, concern lining his features.

I shook my head, unable to get the words out of my mouth.

Kieran offered a hand to help me up, his expression giving nothing away. "Am I so horrible that you'd choose death just to escape me?" he asked quietly.

My mouth dropped open, but before I had a

chance to reply, he continued, “I know this wasn’t what you signed up for when we met in the gardens, but fate clearly brought us together for a reason, Lani. I’ll make this right, I promise.”

Fate. There was that word again.

Fate could go screw itself for all I cared.





## CHAPTER 7



*A*fter a long, hot shower to wash off the remnants of the fight, I followed the sound of voices into the kitchen to see Kieran sitting at the table talking to a man who had his back facing me.

Someone please explain to me why he had to be wearing grey sweatpants and nothing else? What did I do to deserve the torture of seeing every chiseled muscle that lined his arms and torso all the way down to a delicious v that escaped into his low-strung pants?

I swallowed and turned my gaze to the stranger, but all I could see was his shoulder-length, dark brown hair and his lean frame, but I had a distinct feeling I knew who it was.

I sighed, wondering how my life had changed so

abruptly that it was perfectly normal to wake up in one coven prince's house to see another at his table.

"Hey," I said, stepping into the room, and Kieran's eyes flicked over to me. I didn't miss the way his eyes trailed over my body, leaving tingles as if they were his fingers instead. *Bad Lei. You don't like this asshole.*

"Leilani, have you met Ace Sinclair?" Kieran asked as he gestured to the newcomer who turned around and met my gaze, ensnaring me with his emerald orbs.

I felt a static charge sweep over me the moment our eyes locked, but the sensation left so quickly, I wasn't even sure it was real. "I can't say that I have," I forced out.

"Huh," the heir of Coven Sinclair said, his brow furrowing. "Are you sure about that? There's something... familiar about you." Oddly enough, I felt the same way as if we'd met before, but that was impossible.

I snorted. "Unless you spend a lot of your time in Twisted Hollows, I highly doubt we've ever met." The city as a whole was named Mystic Oaks, but Twisted Hollows was the darker, seedier part of the city.

Ace grinned. "I've been there a time or two, a

friend of mine frequents that dive bar on crescent drive.”

My mouth dropped open. “You’ve been to the Dirty Dragon?”

He barked a laugh. “I’ll deny it to my dying breath if you ever tell my mother, but yeah, they have great drinks.”

Kieran looked between us and frowned. “Ace stopped by to try and help us identify the attackers today since a few of them bore Sinclair coven tattoos.”

Ace’s expression turned serious. “Look, man. If there were any witches from my coven involved in this, it didn’t come from up top. They are likely mercenaries following the money. It most definitely isn’t an affront from my parents. They are your closest allies.”

Kieran pinched the bridge of his nose. “You know I had to ask, and allies can turn from friend to foe at any moment.”

Ace shrugged nonchalantly and took a sip of his tea as if they were casually discussing the weather, not their families turning into enemies.

“I think you’re right about them being mercenaries,” I said, looking around for something to eat when a grey-haired man entered the room carrying a tray

with a stack of steaming hot pancakes, a cup of tea, a mug of coffee, and maple syrup. He placed it before me without a word and departed before I could thank him.

“What makes you think that?” Kieran asked, not at all surprised by what just happened.

I decided not to ask questions and just dig in. I wasn't in any position to shrug off a free meal. “Well,” I said as I started on the pancakes, “There was another woman there who seemed to be in charge. All of the others were following her lead.”

“Another woman?” Kieran asked, leaning forward. “Apart from the witches lying dead on the ground outside?” He said it so dispassionately; as if committing mass murder was an everyday occurrence for him. Maybe it was.

“Don't waste your thoughts feeling sympathetic over their deaths,” Ace added, his gaze inquisitive. “They were, without a doubt, there to either abduct or murder you. They wouldn't waste sympathy on you.”

“Right,” I said, wondering how long it would take being involved in their world to make someone so callous about the loss of life. Though, Greer and Akira certainly weren't bothered by it either, so maybe I was the odd one for being uncomfortable by needless death.

“There was a blonde woman who used a transportation potion to escape just before you arrived. She had blue eyes, sharp facial features, and she was taller than me, but not close to your height.”

Kieran and Ace cursed simultaneously.

“What?” I asked. “Who is it?”

“Sage,” they answered in unison.

“Who’s Sage?”

This time, Ace grinned and clapped Kieran on the shoulder. “Lover boy’s ex. She was convinced they were going to get married, but Kieran here dropped her to the side of the road like the trash she is.”

“I see,” I said, the pieces beginning to fall together. “So you’ve been having threats on your life and your mind doesn’t immediately jump to your spurned ex? Seems pretty straight forward to me.”

“Not in our world,” Kieran responded, a slight blush creeping up along his neck. “It would be normal, expected even, for her to publicly humiliate me for ending our affair, but murder? Unlikely. She knows my coven would decimate hers instantly.”

“She’s cunning enough to be the mastermind behind something like this, but I just don’t see her going through all of this just because you rejected her,” Ace said, his brow furrowed before getting to

his feet. “I have a few sources I can look into, discreetly, of course.”

“I appreciate that, Ace,” Kieran said and shook his hand.

Ace turned to me and held out his phone. “Give me your number so I can let you know the next time I’m in Twisted hollows. We can get shit faced together at the Dirty Dragon.”

I laughed as I put in my number, ignoring the pinched expression on Kieran’s face. “Sounds good to me.”



## CHAPTER 8



“So,” Kieran started once it was just the two of us. “I’ll admit, I looked you up after the ball, but there seems to be a bit of mystery surrounding you. You don’t have any registered powers or coven.”

I gave him a blank stare, trying not to get lost in his cerulean gaze. “Is there supposed to be a question somewhere in there?”

He raised a brow and I could swear I saw the corner of his mouth twitch. “Lani Fowler, would you please tell me about your magic and why you aren’t registered to a specific coven?”

I guess I should have been more surprised it took him this long to bring it up. “As you already know, I’m an orphan, so my magic was never formally



tested or trained. Everything I know I taught myself.”

He paused a moment as if gauging my reaction to the conversation. “Would you be open to me testing your magic? I can sense it, and it’s clear whatever magic you do have is extremely strong, but it seems almost... untapped. I’d be more than happy to explore that with you.”

“Oh,” I said, totally not expecting his offer. I doubted I’d get another opportunity like this again, so who was I to throw it away? “Sure. That would be great, thanks.”

He waved a hand. “You’re really doing me a favor. I never seem to find enough time to go back to the basics.” He got up from the table and gestured to the exit. “Come on, I have a training room just down the hall.”

His house was pristine and almost entirely white. Everything from the paint on the walls to the tiles on the floor was white. I got a glimpse of the living room and even the couch was white. The only splashes of color were accent pieces that matched the style of my bedroom furniture. No, *Kieran’s* guest room furniture.

Gah, It’s like I moved in and claimed a room for myself. I must be going crazy.

He led me into a room that had gym equipment on

one side, and a mat covering the floor on the other side with a long row of mirrors lining the exercise section. Greer would probably orgasm just from stepping foot into this room.

He pointed to a set of shelves. “Your tank top is fine to train in, but you might want to grab yourself a pair of sweats.”

I looked down at my clothes, suddenly remembering that I was wearing fishnet tights and a black leather mini skirt. Right, not the best training outfit. Especially when I was absolutely *not* going to let a repeat of that kiss happen. Right?

I jogged over to the shelf and grabbed a pair of sweats and quickly switched clothes, keeping an eye on Kieran to make sure he kept his back facing me. “So,” I said, tapping him on the shoulder, “I’ve only figured out some aspects of my magic a few years ago when I was doing my first tattoo.”

“Okay,” he said, taking the opportunity to roam his eyes along my exposed skin, taking in the various ink that trailed my flesh. “And?”

“I realized I can imbue my magic into the tattoos to make them do things.” At his confused expression, I continued, “It’s probably best I just show you.”

I took in a breath and activated the matching tattoos that lined the sides of my wrists, smiling when

Kieran jumped back as daggers materialized in my hands.

After recovering from his initial shock, he grinned devilishly. “That is probably the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen.”

I choked. “It wasn’t meant to be sexy, it’s meant to be intimidating!”

“Well, to your enemies, I’m sure it will be, but not to me. I was enthralled by you before ever seeing your face, then I was enamored by your beauty. But this? That makes you utterly captivating. Thoughtful, intelligent, beautiful, and fierce. The ultimate seduction.”

“I think we’re going off track,” I said as I took a few steps back, desperately trying to get the thought of licking my way down his happy trail out of my head. He probably sucked in bed anyway.

“Fine,” he sighed, exasperated. “I’ll behave. Why don’t we put aside the magical aspect of your training now, and do a test run of your physical training.”

I nodded and followed him onto the mat and dropped into a fighting stance, letting myself sink into the familiarity of training.

He walked around me, assessing my fighting stance, making a comment here or there on how I

could improve, somehow not making it feel obnoxious.

The moment he stood behind my back, I whipped my elbow back, making a beeline for his face, hoping to make contact with his nose.

He leaped to the side, moving out of reach of my elbow, and chuckled darkly. “Tsk tsk, Lani. How very naughty of you, using a cheap shot like that. We haven’t even really begun.” His eyes lit with excitement, clearly thrilled by my underhanded tactic.

I rolled my eyes. “Sorry, I was getting bored waiting for you to make a move.”

“If you wanted me to make a move, darling, that’s all you needed to say.” And then he pounced, bringing his fist around to my face, which I easily deflected and countered with a three-part combo. Head, chest, and ribs, all of which he fended off without a sweat.

Narrowing my eyes, I moved to the side as his arm came back around, catching it and twisting him around to lock him in an armbar, which he slithered out of before I could blink. Damn it, he was fast.

He was really killing my confidence here. One-on-one combat was my specialty, so I tried a move I was still perfecting with Akira. One that I only half the time succeeded in, but what the heck.

Using his knee as leverage, I leaped up and

wrapped my legs around his neck to use my momentum to bring him to the floor. Only, he didn't budge and I was left with him standing totally erect with my legs tightly wrapped around his head, his face staring directly into my crotch. Oh, for magic's sake!

"If I weren't a gentlemen, I would point out that I'm in the perfect position to make you scream in pleasure instead of pain. And trust me, you would." His arms lifted to wrap around my thighs and I froze, my breathing labored from more than the fight.

I slid down his body slowly, every centimeter of my skin staying flush to his as I dipped lower, his arms forcing my legs to stay wrapped around his waist.

We stared into each other's eyes and, for the life of me, I couldn't remember why I wasn't supposed to be touching him this way.

He slammed his lips down on mine as he walked to the wall, pushing me against it as he ravished my mouth.

I moaned as his tongue touched mine, loving the sheer strength of his body underneath my fingers as I moved them everywhere I could reach, and from the stiffness of his cock, I could tell he was as turned on as me.

I yanked his hair back to gain access to his neck and I sucked on the skin there as I ground my body against his, moving my hand down to yank on his pants.

He groaned, one of his fingers rubbing my clit through my sweats in the most amazing way before someone's voice echoed throughout the room. "Isn't this adorable?"

## CHAPTER 9



I screamed, bashing my face into Kieran's and hearing the crunch of his nose before the torrent of curses released from his mouth.

My feet landed on the floor as Kieran dropped me to bring his hands to his face, stopping the flow of blood with a hastily conjured healing spell.

"Rue," Kieran grunted, tossing a glare to the absolute bombshell that was waiting at the entryway to the room with a shit-eating grin on her face. "What have I told you about showing up without warning?"

"Hmm," she tapped her chin which her straight black hair barely reached. "That I should do it whenever I want because I'm your sister and you love me unconditionally?"

I tried to stifle my laugh, but apparently I didn't

do it so well because Kieran directed some of that glare toward me.

“Shit,” I said, wincing as I took in the blood that now coated his shirt, miraculously, none of which ended up on me. “I’m so sorry.”

Rue stepped further into the room, her crop top and short-shorts looking hella good on her extremely toned body. “I would pay a ridiculous amount of money to see you smash his nose again.”

I laughed, instantly taking a liking to her. “As long as you make sure to get video evidence.”

“Absolutely not,” Kieran interjected. “You two are banned from bonding.”

“Nah, I don’t think so,” Rue said before slipping an arm over my shoulders. “I think I just met my new bestie. Don’t you?”

“Definitely,” I agreed, mostly because I knew it would annoy Kieran.

He rubbed a hand down his face. “Why do I feel like this is going to end very badly for me?”

“Because it probably will,” Rue quipped.

“Why are you here, in my home, bothering us?” He walked over to the shelves and wiped his face off with a towel, only managing to get off half of the blood which had begun to dry.



“She’s not bothering me,” I said, grinning when he narrowed his gaze at me.

“At least someone wants me around,” Rue said as she poked Kieran in the ribs. “And I came because you didn’t answer your phone and the ‘rents want you to come to dinner Friday night.”

He threw the towel in a basket beside the shelves. “Rue, it’s Tuesday. You didn’t have to come all the way over here to tell me that.”

She shrugged. “I was in the neighborhood.”

His brow furrowed. “There is nobody else in the ‘neighborhood’ besides me. What’s really going on?”

Her grin faltered and she tossed me a side glance. “Am I not allowed to miss my brother?”

His expression softened and he gave her a sweet smile that I doubt many people got to see. “Of course you can, Ruru. If Lani’s okay with it, you can spend the rest of the day with us.”

“And who exactly is Lani?” Rue asked me with a lifted brow, her cerulean gaze so similar to her brother’s.

“It’s Leilani, actually. Nobody calls me Lani.”

“I do,” Kieran interjected.

“Precisely. Nobody.”

“Ow,” he said, clutching his chest. “That was so... cold-hearted.”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m down for some company, I’ll probably lose my mind if I need to be alone with your brother all day every day.”

“All day, every day?” Rue asked, confused. “Do you live here?”

Kieran sighed. “Why don’t I explain it after Lani and I shower.”

I balked as she smirked. “Separately.”

Kieran almost seemed to pout. “Fine, separately.”

I let the door swing into his face as we exited, chuckling when he let out a curse, followed by the refreshing scent of magic when he undoubtedly healed himself. Again.

We spent the next few hours getting to know each other while I taught them to bake cookies and set up the perfect movie marathon. Superhero-themed, of course.

It turned out Rue was only two years younger and was finishing up her studies in the only mixed-race university that existed in Mystic Oaks. I was almost glad I hadn’t had formal magical education because it sounded hard as fuck.

She even let me give her a small tattoo that would boost her speed when she said there was a vampire giving her some trouble.

Overall, a great day, but I was glad when she

finally made her exit, leaving the house quiet again as the sun made its descent over the horizon.

“Lani,” Kieran said as he inched closer on the couch and put my feet into his lap. “About earlier—”

“Nothing happened,” I said, hurriedly, not giving him a chance to make a fool of me again. “Let’s just chalk it up to a rush of endorphins from the training.”

He frowned. “That wasn’t what I was going to say at all. I’m sorry for not being honest about my identity when we first met, but I’m hoping you can understand the difficulty I have making honest connections. I never know if the women I meet are after my money or my title, so I wanted to be more careful this time, especially because I was drawn to you.”

He began massaging my feet, my breath catching in my chest and I didn’t know what to think. How did one explanation from him suddenly make what he did so reasonable? I didn’t want to let him off so easily, but a part of me did sympathize with his situation.

“And I’m sure whoever wasn’t after your money or title would be more hesitant simply because you’re a Hawthorn.”

He nodded. “That’s another thing.” He took my hands in his own. “Lani, I feel very strongly that fate brought us together, and I’d really like to explore what there is between us. If you don’t feel the burning

connection that I do, then fine, but if you do, give us a chance before you write us off.”

I trailed my gaze from his throat, up to his strong jawline until I met his eyes, a storm brewing in their depths.

“If I do this, you have to promise me something,” I said, hardly able to believe the words were really leaving my mouth.

“Anything,” he breathed, moving even closer until our lips were a hairsbreadth apart.

“Swear that you won’t break my heart.”

“If you give me your heart, there is nothing I would treasure more,” he said, and I could feel how earnest he was. How the sincerity rang through each word.

So, gathering every last bit of courage I had left, I said, “I guess you better kiss me then.”

## ABOUT SHANA

Shana Vernon is a full-time author and mother to triplet boys. She grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, and moved to Israel in 2012. She completed an undergraduate degree in Social Sciences from Bar Ilan University.

Shana fell in love with reading as a child by escaping into the fantasy lands of Hogwarts and Narnia.

When she isn't writing or taking care of her kiddos, Shana spends her time reading, exercising, experimenting with cooking, or traveling around the world.

If you liked Leilani and her friends, follow along for an epic ride. Leilani, Akira, Greer, and Mori are all going to get their own series in *The Supernaturals of Mystic Oaks* world!



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