

CHAPTER 1 :IN WHICH NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INFIDELITY

"If you don't do this spell, Charlotte is going to die!" Leo said looming over her.

"You think I don't know that!?" she irritably replied, "I told you, I can't do it – it requires 'passion acquired in a lover's arms' and I. Don't. Have. That!"

"Are you seriously going to stand there and state that after seventeen years of life, you've never once been kissed?" Leo stated derisively, "This isn't the time to play the shy and retiring maiden – so stop the shenanigans and DO THE SPELL!" he shouted invading her personal space. He was quite intimidating when he wanted to be; towering eight inches over her own not insubstantial height. The grey eyes that seemed simultaneously cold as slate yet hot with piercing contempt saw right through her soul- a sight which clearly did nothing for him. The look in his eyes almost caused her to quail but she rallied, stiffening her spine. She was made of stronger stuff than that. After all, she was descended from Abramelin the Mage on her mother's side. Her father's people traced their roots to Mekatilili, female leader of a proud African people and renowned sorceress. She could hold her own against this overindulged, pretentious basketball star type idiot. Okay, maybe not idiot, but he was undeniably overindulged. An abundance of sporting talent, a six foot four slender muscular frame, jet black hair that fell about his face like it was windblown ('blow-dried more like', she thought with a sneer) and the hypnotic eyes that led him to believe he was God's gift to the universe. She, for one, wasn't buying whatever he was selling. She wasn't one to be taken in by the superficial.

Once this point was settled in her mind, she drew herself up to her full height and opened her mouth to tell him to get out of her room, because this was a clear case of trespassing. Too late, he got there before her. With an impatient sound deep in his throat, he swooped down and kissed her lips.

Leo was scared, and when he was scared he became extremely irritable. Charlotte was lying as if dead in her living room and here he was forced to interact with this...weird chick who may or may not be a witch, in order to have the only chance there seemed to be to save her. He had to save Charlotte, there was no choice about that; the alternative could not be considered...So, much as he found this strange girl faintly repugnant in a 'you are completely not my type' kind of way – he would just have to grit his teeth, and get this done.

He only meant to kiss her long enough for her to work up enough passion for the spell. After all, he had yet to meet the girl who could resist him, and this was a matter of life and death. Charlotte tended to act now and ask questions later – if at all; one could say she had poor impulse control. It came from being a privileged and overindulged child, used to getting pretty much anything she desired, from her absentee parents. She was the girl every other girl envied- curly golden locks, aquamarine eyes and dimpled smile- and knew it. It was natural then that when she saw the strange lights that looked like Aurora Borealis, shining over the pool that had materialised as if by magic, at the bottom of her garden; that she had to see if she could touch them... When she tried to though, the strange pretty lights caught her hand, and pulled her into the pool, whence none but Mya's magic could retrieve her. But although Mya had managed to perform a spell that got Charlotte out of the pool, she could not stop her life force from slowing fading without the recasting spell – this she learned when Leo drove her home to consult her grimoires...and that required her to draw energy from passion's embrace.

Mya was a virgin though, and the alteration of that state was a challenge for a number of reasons. First there was the mystique of magic that surrounded her, coupled with her chocolate complexion so rare in this rural backwater. Added to that, the fact that she lived with her grandmother in what was practically a shack in the woods; and seemed to share her wardrobe. All this tended to repel the local male population, even had she made any effort to be noticed. Before she was invited by Charlotte to hobnob with her royal circle, she had no friends to speak of. And here was the king to Charlotte's queen, with his lips on hers! Since her mouth was already open, his tongue found ready access and gently explored heretofore-unplundered depths. Their sensitive tips met in tentative greeting, and conducted that ancient mating dance that is as old as love.

Her lips are so soft. He wasn't expecting that; almost unconsciously, his lips pressed down on hers. Now their tongues were intertwined, it was difficult to know whose tongue was whose.

She felt dizzy with shock and dismay, like all the blood had left her head; she leaned into him to keep some sort of balance and her breast pressed against his chest.

Bigger than they look...was his incoherent thought as his hands rose of their own accord and circled her surprisingly tiny waist. Apparently underneath all the grandma sweaters was the body of a seventeen-year-old girl. 'A hot seventeen year old girl' The blood in his body was pooling a little lower than his head as he sank his teeth gently into her lower lip, pulling it into his mouth and sucking with lips gone suddenly hot. "I want her!" He thought with surprise. 'how did that happen?' "This is crazy" was her last coherent thought before she was surrounded by madness. She felt a sudden draft across her chest and realized that her dress was unbuttoned all the way down to the waist and Leo's hands were everywhere – touching, caressing, squeezing, and pinching. Her nipples were painfully erect and seemed to cry out for his mouth without bothering to consult her. As if he heard their silent cry, his lips moved from hers and fastened themselves on her left breast. She felt dizzy and confused, as she pressed his head tight to her breast. She tried to control her breathing but it was impossible, and she was gasping like there was not enough oxygen in the whole world for a fortifying breath. Leo was making a low growling sound deep in his throat like a cat purring over a succulent piece of meat. Suddenly he picked her up and threw her onto her bed. A few seconds later, she was divested of her dress and the covering that her embarrassingly huge granny panties had afforded her vagina was replaced by his hot mouth. She froze in shock at the action and the sensation. She was torn between wanting to push him away, and wanting to pull him even deeper into her. She compromised by moaning out loud. Oblivious to her internal battles, Leo was absorbed in the sensations of touch and smell and taste that were opening up to him. He wanted...he couldn't put into words what it was that he wanted, but he wanted it now. His erection was so hard it hurt him, but he had enough coherence to want her wet and ready, because once he was in, there was no turning back, no slowing down, definitely no stopping. He licked the liquid that dripped from the lips of her vagina and knew that she wanted him too, but he was big, and he was hard and she had said she'd never been with a man...

But of course she must be lying; who stayed a virgin that long these days? Honestly. He was willing to bet she had strange weirdo witch ritual sex all the damn time. Unzipping his fly with sudden impatience, he nudged her legs apart. He thrust into her as far as he could go...which wasn't very far, her entrance was so tight. He lay over her, wrapping her legs around him to widen her entrance and pushed himself in deeper. She gasped in his ear, and he didn't know what the sound signified but he was long past the point where he could stop. One more time through the breach...and he was all the way in; the feel of her tight around him, gripping him in her wetness and her warmth was almost more than he could stand. He felt control of his body slipping from him; and almost came. This shocked him so much that he came almost all the way

back to himself – never, not even during his first time, had he ever come too fast. He froze into stillness to give himself time to get it together, and to give her time to get used to his size, and then slowly, very slowly, he began to move. The world seemed to spin and he thought he could actually see colours swirl in the air. His vision blurred and he let out a groan that seemed to come from inside his soul. He thrust at her a little faster and she seemed to give as good as she got. She was making little gasping sounds that alone were sure to have him spilling his seed like a novice and he tried not to listen. Sensation overwhelmed him. Sound, touch, heat, wetness, colour, need, urgency; a jumbled kaleidoscope that swirled around him so that he was almost blind and deaf to anything that wasn't her, that wasn't him, that wasn't them joined in the eternal mating dance united in desire and lust and need so that he didn't know where she ended; and he begun.

She.

He had no name for her. He had no name for himself. In a moment that lasted an eternity, none of these mattered – then the world exploded and all thought was extinguished in a shooting flame of release.

He came to still lying over her and lifted his head to look down at her. Her eyes were closed and she was breathing really hard. He was still inside her and slid out and off her; feeling a strange reluctance that he didn't care to examine. He lay beside her on his back staring up at the ceiling and waited for her to say something.

Mya's brain was going like lfmeccggjthejlmcdfjljflseflk; completely fried.

What just happened?

How did it happen?

What the hell am I to do now?

Was he still here or had he gone?

She opened one eye into a slit and peeped but she really didn't need to. She could feel him there beside her, silent and still.

Is he dead? He had seemed to collapse there at the end; maybe he'd had a heart attack.

She didn't know whether she wished he had or not. All the time nowwhatnowwhatnowwhat, kept circling inside her brain, the words segueing together like some mantra that could possibly give her a solution to this impossible situation she found herself in. The beloved boyfriend of her one and only friend lay naked beside her after indulging in what she was pretty sure were acts of a sexual nature with her. She wished he would move, or speak or leave...something. But he just lay there like someone had hit him over the head with a poleaxe! She sat up cautiously, waiting or hoping for a reaction she didn't know which. Either way, she was disappointed – he continued to lie there with his eyes closed. She got to her feet and tip toed out of the room and into the bathroom, shutting the door gently behind her. She leaned on it and let out a breath. 'Wow, what was that?' She thought. She walked to the mirror and examined herself in it. Her brown eyes stared right back at her through the mirror. They tended to change hue depending on her mood and now they were the colour of well-aged brandy. She looked herself over and thought that she still rather looked the same. Not like the world had ended or anything...Her hair was still short, curly and braided into a ponytail then tied in a huge afro. She'd seen the look on one of the starlets in the movie 'Shaft' and liked it so much that she decided to adopt it. Never mind that it was like thirty years out of date; the style suited her head and she liked the African-

ness of it. People avoided her because she was different, so she might as well own it, embrace it, and commit to it. The Afro added at least another inch to her height and framed her oval face, making her cheekbones more prominent. Her shoulders were rather broad for a girl, anchoring her breasts. These stood erect with the tips pointed up like a pair of attentive puppies with their noses in the air, eagerly awaiting a bone. She would have smiled at the analogy if she wasn't so shell shocked and her eyes continued their inspection. Her torso tapered off to a tiny waist, the result of mostly living on vegetables that she grew in her garden. Her unblemished chocolate complexion was also a result of her lifestyle in spite of the challenges of adolescence. She followed her long legs all the way down to her size ten feet – long, slender and elegant; like her father's they said, though she'd never met him. He had died before her birth, according to her grandmother, but she would not tell her how. His death was shrouded in mystery. 'Looks like I'm still all here...or not – I think we're possibly less the virginity...' she thought, turning away from dark thoughts. She went to the sink and rubbed herself clean then put on her father's old bathrobe that hung behind the door. She was a witch and there was a spell to be done – a life to be saved. Everything else would have to wait.

CHAPTER 2: IN WHICH A LIFE IS SAVED

When she walked out of the bathroom which was across the hall from her room, she copped a peek to see whether Leo had stirred. He was standing in the middle of the room, fully dressed to his black alligator skin boots. Leo's family was in the alligator business – hunting them, raising them, and selling their various components; skin, meat or teeth-whatever anyone wanted. So when he wasn't wowing the school courtside crowds with his basketball skills, he was at his uncle's farm, learning the family business, or else canoodling with his girlfriend Charlotte in one of her various family properties and hosting exclusive parties for the 'in' crowd at her lake house. His life was pretty much set the way that he liked it; or so it seemed.

'Do you have what you need now?' he asked her, his voice slightly huskier than usual. She was startled out of her thoughts by his words. She wasn't really sure that all this was happening or he was simply a figment of her imagination. Although God knows, if she was going to imagine herself in passionate embrace with anyone, his name wouldn't top her list. Arrogant, insensitive, alligator-killing son of a...gun, she thought resentfully. 'Y-yes. I have what I need.' She replied and turned abruptly away heading for the stairs to the attic where she kept her herbs, and the cauldron sat waiting in the fireplace. Sensation was still shooting through her body in disconcerting aftershocks, and there was something wet running down her legs that she didn't want to think about too much. She could feel her legs wanting to shake with reaction but she would not let them. At the same time, she had to set her mind to the spell, and try to keep it on the business at hand. He was following her up the stairs. Sigh. Why couldn't he just go!? She opened the little attic room and crossed straight to the herb drawer. The only way through this was through it, and she would just have to pull herself together and function! She pulled the herbs she needed together and then looked at the fireplace where a fire immediately sprang into being; burning merrily like it had been at it for hours. The water that was in the cauldron began to bubble and she shredded the herbs into it, keeping her mind strictly away from the figure standing silent and still across the room, watching her with eyes that betrayed nothing of what he was thinking. She would not let him unnerve her.

When the last herbs had been added to the cauldron, the concoction was giving off a pleasant smell that reminded her of grassy meadows on a hot summer day and ice cream sundaes eaten on the porch with Grandpa George before he died. She closed her eyes and let herself relive the moment Leo's lips had touched hers in her bedroom downstairs and said the spell that would transform the concoction before her into the life-giving elixir that Charlotte needed to survive. She wondered if the tumult in her soul would affect the recasting spell but even before she opened her eyes, she knew the spell had worked because the liquid had turned the colour of a glorious sunset and its bright colours were reflected behind her closed eyelids. Leo made a sound, and she opened her eyes and looked at him straight in the eye for the first time since his lips had touched hers. His eyes were wide with shock and awe and she realised that he had probably never seen magic performed in front of him in his life. A part of her felt a little smug and pleased that she'd managed to impress him – but it was a tiny part really, not even worth mentioning. To his credit, he returned her look steadily and for a minute that seemed to last forever, neither spoke. 'Did it work?' he asked at last, his voice still a little huskier than it had been when he'd been busy accusing her of not wanting to completely heal Charlotte of whatever was the matter with her, and letting her know what an ungrateful, incompetent bitch she was as

well as being completely useless if the one time that Charlotte needed her, she claimed not to have the skill to help.

'Yes, it worked. She needs to take a spoonful every hour, on the hour, for five days. She must not miss a dose or else she could suffer a relapse from which I cannot save her'. She was decanting the mixture into a flask as she spoke, which she then handed to him, face averted in apparent preoccupation with the residue at the bottom of her cauldron.

'I'll keep some on hand in case you need more but what I've given you should be more than sufficient', she continued briskly as she wiped down the spotless surface where she'd gathered her herbs together, so she had a reason to avoid looking at him. There was silence behind her, she dared not turn to see why, and then he spoke;

'Thank you...Mya.' He said, and she heard his footsteps as he left the room. It was the first time he had ever said her name. Just because Charlotte had chosen to co-opt Mya into her inner circle didn't mean that the inner circle was happy to have her. She was an anomaly they did not understand; her clothes tended toward long dresses that buttoned at the front and had no discernible shape, topped with thick woolen sweaters of uncertain pattern and finish. Her jewelery was outlandish consisting of animal bone and bizarre looking stones; to make matters worse there were birds' feathers poking out of an amulet around her neck and that was topped off with the big hair and feet...she simply did not fit. The girls tended to be catty and the guys to ignore her. Before Charlotte's accident today, Leo had acted like she didn't exist, and when he couldn't do that, they traded polite insults or engaged in increasingly nasty sarcastic banter. Charlotte enjoyed their antagonism, certainly their exchanges never failed to entertain. And if Charlotte was all about anything, it was the entertainment.

Their history made what just happened even more incomprehensible to Mya. She sank into the nearest chair to just breathe and her treacherous mind turned tentatively toward the memory that was waiting eagerly in the wings to claim her.

In a heartbeat, she was back in her room, very irritated at Leo's assumptions and preparing to acquaint him with the sharp side of her tongue. She'd just opened her mouth to do so, when his invaded hers. Invasion was the right word, she'd never had anyone's tongue in her mouth before...it felt extremely strange. Her whole body had frozen with the shock of it and then his hands were touching her in places she'd never been touched by a man before and she was at a loss of what to do. It didn't even occur to her to resist, the whole experience was so alien to her that she did not know how to react. The next thing she knew, he was between her legs – hot and throbbing and urgent and something like fear gripped her. She felt her spirit temporarily leaving her body; she knew she left because she was somewhere up on the ceiling looking down at her naked body and his. Her eyes were scrunched shut, he had spread her legs wide, and he was on top of her; with that throbbing hot rod of pain about to enter her. She hadn't even been entirely sure what was happening and then he thrust into her, and she was back in her body, under him, feeling him stretch her to beyond her limits. He grabbed her legs and wrapped them around his waist and pushed further into her. She felt plundered; conquered by the alien thing that was taking over her without so much as a by your leave. Her body was a confusion of sensation. Pain? Yes there was that, but not as much as she thought there'd be, in fact even as she thought it, it was fading away. He was frozen still inside her, and she did not know why but it stopped the pain. Then he moved, and other sensations were added to the pain. Electric shock type sensations, almost pleasurable although she thought she must be mistaken about that. She found her body responding to his rhythm, going with it, and finally glorying in it and in spite of herself she gave in to the sensation. It grew, and grew like a helium balloon that is blown and blown and blown into a bigger and bigger bubble, until it bursts with sound and fury. Except the

bursting of this balloon was not the end but the beginning of new sensation. She felt like she had when her spirit left her body, except that she could still feel her body around her trembling with the force of whatever shook her. He made a sound like his heart was being forced through his chest and she felt something cold and wet flood her insides. The sensation seemed to ignite her again so that her inner muscles spasmed, closing tightly about his shaft like they wanted to milk him dry. She might have made a sound, she didn't know. She did know that she had never felt it's like in her life. Her heart was drumming in her chest like it wanted to run out and escape and there was no strength in her limbs. So much tumult in her head, and in the room...silence.

She came back to herself thinking, 'Is that what love is like? Being ready to violate someone else for her?' while staring pensively at the scene no one but she could see.

CHAPTER 3: IN WHICH MUCH IS EXPLAINED

Leo walked to his car with his head spinning. He unlocked and opened the door, placing the flask Mya had given him securely in the cup holder next to the seat. He put his seat belt on and placed the key in the ignition, all without conscious thought, then sat with his hands on the wheel, staring ahead at nothing.

'What just happened?' he asked himself in confusion. One minute he was at his intimidating best, attempting to force the witch to perform the magic that would heal his ticket out of this life, the next, he was making mad passionate love to the woman!

'No. Not making love. Having sex. It was just sex...mad, passionate sex; but just sex all the same. In fact, it was barely sex- more like an assignment.' He nodded to himself in affirmation. 'Besides, I did it for Charlotte. The witch needed the passion for the spell, and I provided it...someone had to do it, and I was there. 'With that firmly settled in his mind, he turned on the ignition and headed toward the Le Carre mansion where Charlotte lay hovering between life and death, waiting for her prince to save her. And when he'd done that, then she could save him right back. Just like in *Pretty Woman*... He smiled grimly as he thought this and dismissed Mya from his mind. His future lay in front of him, not behind. "Was she alright though?" He couldn't quite stop himself from thinking...she'd looked a little shell-shocked when he left, definitely trying to act calmer than she was. It looked like what she'd said was true; if she wasn't a virgin, she was definitely virgin-adjacent. Or maybe she was just naturally tight; who knew with witches? They had their spells and things, they could make you believe anything if they wanted... Why was he still thinking about her?!Charlotte, Charlotte, Charlotte; his future wife if he had anything to say about it. His ticket out of this one-horse town. Not that he didn't love her, of course he did. She was hot property, she was rich, she was beautiful, and she was the most popular girl in school. What was not to love? But if she died today that was it; back to square one. He pressed his foot down on the accelerator and went faster. Ten minutes later, he was at her gates. The guards saw him coming and let the gates up without stopping him. They knew what was at stake, and it wasn't worth their lives to impede him. His best friend Miles was waiting at the Mansion doors; pacing up and down in anxiety. He barely waited for Leo to get out of the car before asking, "Did you get it?" "Yeah. I got it" Leo replied, streaking past him on his way to the living room, where Charlotte's still body lay on the divan.

"Thank God", he heard Miles murmur behind him. Ahead of him in the room were a number of people, milling about anxiously. There was Teddy the Bear, otherwise known as 'the bodyguard' who towered over everyone around him and who managed to top Leo's own 6'4" by a good four inches. Tina the Barbie doll sat close to the divan, wringing her hands anxiously – she was Charlotte's bestie; in her own words. Next to Tina stood her boyfriend Aaron, staring off into space in indifferent boredom and smoking a joint. At the far corner was David, brother of Aaron and rival in his affections for Tina. He leaned against one of the huge marble pillars that dotted the parlour, shooting envious glances at his brother from time to time. The other girl in the room was Ashley- dark-haired and pale; she was there because Miles was there. Hopefully one day he would notice her...Leo sank to his knees as he reached the divan in three huge steps. He uncorked the flask and pried Charlotte's mouth open. It was hard to keep her mouth open and manipulate the flask..."Help me!" he threw over his shoulder at whoever was there, and immediately Miles leaned down and held Charlotte's mouth open for him. He measured a spoonful of the liquid and carefully decanted it into her mouth. With Miles' help, he lifted her head slightly so she wouldn't choke, while massaging her neck muscles so that she could swallow. When they were sure she'd got it all down, they lay her head back down on the pillow

and waited...and waited. Nothing seemed to happen for a long time and Leo began to wonder if Mya had given them a dud, then...Charlotte opened her blue eyes, and stared around her at everyone in the room. "W-what happened?" she whispered painfully before suddenly shooting upright and projectile vomiting all over Leo's black Levis and Tina's Jimmy Choos. The vomit was black with slime interspersed with unidentified chunks. Leo froze in shock while Tina screamed in revulsion, but then Charlotte heaved again and they both quickly jumped out of the way. Apparently nothing was left to come up and so she dry heaved herself into exhaustion and then lay back down. Teddy the Bear ran for some water for her to drink and David hurried forward with his hankie proffered so that Tina could wipe her shoes. Since no such solicitude was shown him, Leo took off to the nearest bathroom to affect what repairs he could. Everyone else, meaning Miles, exclaimed in relief that Charlotte was better and the room relaxed. When Leo returned, slightly damp but feeling a little cleaner, if with a slight whiff of vomitus about him; Charlotte smiled and held out her hand to him. He did his best to smile back, and taking her hand in his, looked her straight in the eye, and said sincerely; "I'm so glad you're better." She smiled weakly at him and pulled slightly at his hands so he could come closer. He approached the divan and sat on the edge still holding her hand in his. "Miles tells me you saved my life," she whispered huskily, eyes shining with adoration at him. He smiled modestly back, shaking his head in dismissal of his heroics and thought wryly to himself that that just might be the first time saving a life could legitimately be used as an excuse for infidelity.

"I know you'd have done the same for me" he replied smiling into her eyes. "Now you need to rest, shall I take you upstairs?"

"I'll take her", Teddy the Bear said, just like Leo knew he would. He bent down and picked her up in his arms like she was a doll. Leo let go of her hand, mouthing, "I'll see you later" to her as Teddy bore her off. Returning the little wave she gave him, he turned away from her, his mind immediately moving on to other things. Or rather, continuing the thought that had occurred earlier.

'Speaking of infidelity...' he thought, his mind returning to his last glimpse of Mya, frozen in surprise because he had said her name. What was to be done about that situation? Was she likely to talk? Maybe tell Charlotte what had happened between them?

'Unlikely' he thought derisively. First, she didn't have the guts; and second, Charlotte would ostracise her if she knew that she'd had sex with her boyfriend. And Charlotte was her only friend, so no. She wouldn't risk it. But should he go over there maybe, make sure of it? Talk to her, so that they both knew what the deal was?

"So what happened over at the witch's?" A voice asked in his ear, startling him out of his reverie, "How did you get her to do the spell?" He turned around to look at Miles and opened his mouth to lie to him, and then found that he couldn't do it. "Not here". He murmured, grabbing Miles by the arm and dragging him out to his car, "Let's go". They got in his car and drove, Leo concentrating on the road until they had put several miles between them and the mansion. He drove to their favourite spot, an abandoned cabin in the woods where they came as boys to play cowboys and Indians and dream about pirate ships and fools' gold; a spot where they came now to hang out, drink beer and smoke cigarettes and dream about leaving this town in their rear view.

"Well?!" Miles demanded, "You're making me antsy; what's the big secret? Did she turn into a hag or something? Or did you sell her your soul for the cure?" Leo could see that he was only half-joking. The anxiety in his eyes was real. He sighed aloud, looking out into the twilight. "I slept with her." He said resignedly.

“WHAT!!” Miles practically screamed in his ear, “Have you lost. Your. Mind??”

“Don’t scream at me”, Leo said, wincing at the noise. Miles continued to stare bug-eyed at him, opening, and closing his mouth like a landed fish so Leo decided to take pity on him and tell him the whole story.

“...so you see, I had no choice” he concluded at the end of his tale – which did not include the part where he had never wanted a woman more or exactly how fan-fucking-tastic that orgasm had been.

“You had no choice” Miles repeated in a disbelieving whisper, “the spell required that you fuck her?”

“Well, technically no... It just required passion but I didn’t think that that was the time to be taking any chances okay? I wanted to make sure she had enough. I mean, Charlotte was dying!”

“Yeah she was”, Miles agreed after a pause, “Are you going to tell her though?”

“Are you out of your mind?” Leo asked him in disbelief, “For what, why, why would I do that?” he asked a bit incoherently.

“You’re probably right, but if she finds out...” Leo said.

“She won’t” Leo replied promptly and decided that yes, he would pay Mya a return visit; just to be sure.

CHAPTER 4: IN WHICH THERE IS MUCH DENIAL

Mya was out in her garden, pottering about with her plants and letting their energy infuse her with life and joy again. It had been a difficult two days. She'd heard that Charlotte was awake now, and even making short trips out of bed, but she had not yet gone to pay her a visit. She knew she must do it soon, or else Charlotte would wonder why she hadn't when practically everyone else in the town had. Mya also supposedly owed her a debt of gratitude for being included in Charlotte's inner circle and from a purely medical point of view, she must want to see how well her elixir worked...Right?

Wrong.

Charlotte would know by now that passion was needed to make the spell work, and she knew that Mya was a virgin because she'd asked her who she'd been with sexually and Mya had (foolishly in hindsight) told her the truth. So she would probably be curious as to where the passion came from, and knowing her nature, wouldn't rest until she'd pried every last detail out of Mya's reluctant bosom. Considering that she was still in two minds whether 'The Incident' (as she called it in her mind) had actually occurred or whether it was a particularly realistic hallucination, complete with side effects such as aching muscles, unidentified discharges and a guilty conscience, she was just not ready to discuss it with anyone. Particularly not the culprit's girlfriend.

Speaking of the culprit, he seemed to be walking toward her right this minute. Perhaps the hallucination continued or else she was losing her mind. She hoped that that was it, though she knew that losing your mind is not as easy as people make it out to be. 'Hi.' The hallucination said, 'can we talk?' She considered just ignoring it and hoping it would go away, but when she looked at what she could see of him, which was simply a black silhouette because he was standing in the sun, he looked pretty solid so she decided to treat him like it...he was real. She stood up and wiped her hands on her skirt, then turned and headed for the porch. He followed behind her, close enough that she could feel the warmth of his body, yet far enough away so he didn't step on her heels.

She sat down on the porch swing and he stopped a few feet away, leaning on the porch frame. "Is your grandmother here?" he asked.

"No." She said, and then wished she hadn't said anything. Why was he asking her that?

"I need to speak to you in private" he said, like he'd read her mind. If he had, that increased the likelihood that he was a hallucination because real-life, Mundane, Egotistical Leo was definitely no mind reader. And what would Real-Life, Mundane, Egotistical Leo have to speak to her about anyway. The chances of this being a hallucination were climbing by the minute! But why was she hallucinating about him of all people?

"So speak" she said boldly, now that she was fairly certain he wasn't real. Leo sighed deeply. This is a bit awkward, he thought. "Can we maybe go inside?" he asked her, "Have a drink? It's rather hot." Okay, the hallucination wanted a drink; she could play along. She stood up and led the way into the house, crossed over to the fridge and poured some cabbage juice into two glasses. She'd just juiced it this morning so it was fresh. She handed him his glass, which he took with no problems, considering he wasn't real, and sat down on the sofa. It was an old sofa with mismatched pillows, but extremely comfortable for all that. He sat down next to her and took a sip of juice...then promptly spat it out. "What the hell is this?" he asked with a frown.

“Cabbage juice”, she replied coldly, “you did say you wanted a drink?” He opened his mouth to retort then remembered that he was supposed to be softening her up so she would do what he wanted. So he forced himself to smile painfully and take a sip. Urgh! It tasted like snail slime or something equally revolting.

Mya watched him forced down the juice while trying to look like he didn't want to spit it out all over her threadbare Aubusson rug; and came to the conclusion that it really was a hallucination. The real Leo would never bother to pretend politeness with her, unless there was something in it for him.

That thought stopped her in her tracks. What did he want? She put down her glass of cabbage juice and waited. “Do you plan on telling Charlotte what happened here the other day?” he asked abruptly.

‘Aha’, she thought, ‘here we go’.

“Well, she's likely to ask me, and keep asking me, until I tell her.” She replied. There was a silence that she hesitated to call loaded. He stared into his cabbage juice like it contained the answers to all of life's questions. She wished he would say something. This situation was getting way beyond uncomfortable. “So. What you're saying is you're planning on telling Charlotte that you fucked her boyfriend?” he demanded in a voice that wanted to be threatening but was struggling not to be. Why did she get the feeling she was being set up for something here?

“No, I'm not planning on telling her that we may have...engaged in some sexual activity” she said quickly and a tad breathlessly, “but you know as well as I do, how persistent she can be when she wants something.”

“I do know.” He replied, “What I don't know is what your intentions are right now. You know that however you choose to play this, you come out covered in shit right?” She folded her arms, eyeballed him and then demanded, “Leo. What. The hell. Do You. Want?!” “Now that,” he replied, “is the right question.”

Leo walked quickly to his car, and got in driving off like he was pursued by demons. He did not look back. “Shit” he whispered to himself, “shitshitshit. WhathaveIdonenow?? Shit!”

‘Okay’, he thought, ‘Plan. I need a plan’. Breathe. Breathe. Calm down, all is not lost. The little lecture made him feel a little better, as well as the deep breaths and he thought back to the scene he'd left. “You will say nothing about what happened between us, okay?” he had told her with the approximation of a smile, “We'll just forget it ever happened”.

“Right” she'd replied with an ironic smile that was more in her eyes than her mouth, “Nothing happened. Are you leaving now?” she asked, standing up. He stared at her, not sure whether she was serious or not. She stared right back at him, her eyes, and demeanour betraying nothing. Her hands hung loose at her side, and she stood up straight just staring at him with that irony in the back of her eyes like he was nothing but an amusing bit of entertainment that had run its course. Kind of like the way he looked at girls when he was through with them. ‘Can't have that’ he remembered himself thinking, though why he should care, he couldn't quite say. The next thing he knew, he had covered the two steps of distance that separated them, and his lips were on hers. She froze with surprise and he took advantage of it to insert his tongue in her mouth. He was kissing her in earnest and it was a while before he realised she was struggling in his arms.

‘Trying to get away!’ he thought in surprise, and held her tighter; kissed her harder. She was trying to free her lips, say something to him, but he was done talking. For some reason, he was

most mightily aroused! He picked her up and carried her to her shabby sofa, laying her down on it all the while kissing her. He lay down over her and increased the pressure on her mouth. He could feel her weakening, opening her mouth wider; in spite of herself. His hand brushed her breast, and felt her nipple harden. He wanted; needed, to see her naked. Now! He tore at the buttons on her faded print dress and her body was exposed to the waist. Only then did he lift his mouth from hers, to fasten it on her left breast. His hand worked one breast while his mouth worked the other; and she was making noises that sounded like mewling and he could feel her breathing hard. He didn't know what emotion she was feeling, and couldn't spare the brain cells to wonder. All the blood had left his head anyway; oxygen to his brain was in short supply. Apart from a buzzing that was making him dizzy, not much in the way of thinking was going on up there; let alone conjecture as to what Mya might be feeling. She was merely the Object of his Desire; a desire he needed to satisfy forthwith or die in the attempt. He tore desperately at his flies freeing his massively engorged penis and in one motion; he had pushed her skirts out of the way, spread her legs, and inserted himself in her without the bother of removing her underwear. She made a noise halfway between a scream and a moan and he wanted to follow her example but he was too busy pounding her into the sofa. His breath came like the bellows and sweat was pouring down his face. The room was silent except for the wetly slapping sound of flesh on flesh. In addition to Leo's harsh breathing and Mya's occasional moaning. As he felt his climax approaching like a murderous beast bearing down on him with intent, he came to a slight awareness that he wasn't alone in this and whispered, "Oh God, I'm coming" in her ear, moments before his seed shot out of him like a bullet from a gun and he felt something like an explosion in his mind – a nuclear bomb had gone off and destroyed every nerve and synapse in its path; leaving him nerveless and weak. He collapsed on the sofa then fell to the floor, breathing hard and trying to pull the scattered bits of himself together. After a moment, she sat up on the sofa, looking down at him as she pulled her clothes together. Then standing up, she stepped over him and headed for the hallway and possibly the bath. She did not say a word to him or acknowledge his presence in any way. He heard her feet climb the stairs, and a door close.

He zipped his flies and straightened his clothes. Then he stood up and lit out of there like a bat out of hell.

CHAPTER 5: IN WHICH DENIAL CANNOT BE SUSTAINED

It had been two weeks since he'd seen her last. He had barely been able to draw breath in that time, waiting for the axe to fall. Waiting for her to do something about what had happened in her living room maybe by telling Charlotte about it, or, or... something. But he hadn't seen or heard a word from her. He wanted to go and see her; first to make sure she was okay, then to find out what was going on in her head; but was terrified of going near her. Clearly he couldn't trust himself and he couldn't understand it. She was hardly his type; she wore grandma outfits, barely groomed herself, and was apparently a witch. Seriously, she could not be less like his type. His type was blonde, had blue eyes, and belonged to a family that was rich as Croesus. That was his type. So the huge afro, the chocolate skin, mango breasts, long, long...long elegant legs...He lost his train of thought. This had been happening to him a lot lately and he was at a loss to explain why. He stood up abruptly, picking up the house phone to call Miles. Operation Distract needed to be put into effect. He'd see what Miles was up to; maybe they could go shoot some hoops at the school gym or get a beer if Jon would agree to sell them some. Being underage blew, but Jon was cool people – as long as no overzealous law-abiding citizens were around. Before he could hit the speed dial though, it rang. Charlotte.

He stared at her name for a while, wondering whether to answer or not. It had been like this for the past fortnight. Dread filled his insides like molten lead every time he saw her name. He hadn't had the courage to pick up yet, but this time, he took in a deep breath, and answered. "Hi." He said, feeling that his voice was a little too high.

"Hey Stranger" her sultry tones purred down the line, "Where you been?" Was this some sort of play? He wondered. If she hadn't heard from Mya, still she should be mad at him for being AWOL for two weeks..Just go with it? Or fess up?"I've missed you babe" he said, in a better approximation of his usual gravelly tones, "it's been a while".

"I noticed" she said, in slightly sharper tone, "Where have you been?" He took a deep breath, all the time wondering what to say. "This isn't a conversation that should be had on the phone, where are you now?" He asked on the exhale, stalling for time.

"I'm at Freddie's, you coming?"

"Give me five minutes" he said, instantly hanging up. 'Shit.' He thought, 'now what?'

'Now you go to her, and you do what you do best... spin'. A voice that he wasn't sure was his answered him.

'Right. So, step one,' he thought, 'how do I look?' He went to his room and examined himself in the mirror. Navy blue shirt that brought out the grey in his eyes, his trademark black levis that showed the length of his legs to perfection, ending in 'bad boy' alligator skin boots that just added a few more inches to the length of his legs. Jet-black hair artfully mussed, falling in an elegant sweep over his eye. 'Perfect'. He thought with a self-satisfied side smile.

"Okay" he said to himself, "let's do this".

☐Freddie's was packed with young people, enjoying the last days of summer break before the new school year began. The whole gang was present; Aaron and David sitting on either side of Tina the Barbie who was opposite Ashley; which meant that Miles was near, though Leo couldn't see him. Teddy Bear leaning anxiously to the side, his large head bent to listen to whatever she

was saying – Charlotte. A vision in brown and gold. He smiled as she turned and saw him. Teddy turned too, but he didn't smile. "Leo" she said in that sultry voice, pronouncing his name in the Italian way that made it something exotic and foreign.

"Hi." He replied not looking at anyone else, "Can we talk?"

"Of course", she said standing up. Her dark brown denim skirt stopped just short of being patently indecent, hugging her hourglass figure like an ardent lover. Her golden top didn't leave much more to the imagination. It was cut low over her luscious breasts and the gold of her top blended well with her light tan, making her look naked at first glance. She accentuated the look with gold sandals that emphasised the delicate turn of her ankle and gold jewellery graced her wrists, ears, and neck. All this topped by long blonde wavy hair left loose to cascade down her back. She looked...expensive. He was treated to the full frontal view as she sashayed toward him, her hips gently swaying from side to side. He was quite sure the walk was in slow motion in her mind. They had so much in common -Leo and Charlotte- almost like they were made for each other. In the dictionary, under narcissism, was a photo of the pair of them, perfect smiles in place. "Shall we go?" she asked as she drew level with him.

"Yes. Let's." He replied looking into those blue eyes that reflected his face so perfectly, "Your place?" She made no reply but moved forward toward the parking. Teddy Bear looked like he wanted to protest but what could he say? Leo gave Ashley a look, asking with his eyes for her to pass his regards to Miles and let him know where they'd gone. Miles would know to call him up in an hour or two with 'an emergency'. She inclined her head slightly to let him know she understood. Ashley was good people; it was a real pity Miles had no real interest...But he couldn't think about that right now, he was on the clock.

Charlotte was standing by the passenger door of his black jeep. He had acquired it at a bargain because it had been 'beyond salvage' in an accident. His uncle Jamie- who was actually his mother's on again, off again boyfriend -and he had worked evenings and weekends fixing it up in Jamie's auto garage. Now it was the most beautiful car in town. He went over and opened the passenger door for her then got in and drove off. There wasn't much conversation between them as they drove and he used the time to think up a strategy.

The guards let them in without hindrance and they drove straight to the side door that led off the patio. He helped her out and led her inside. The room was empty apart from a solitary maid laying hors de oeuvres on the table. Service was efficient at the Le Carré manor; the staff was well trained. The maid finished laying out the dishes and left the room. As soon as she did, Leo turned Charlotte toward him and kissed her. 'The best defence is a good offence' was his decided strategy. He deepened the kiss, running his hands down her body with amorous intent. He waited for the madness that had overcome him with Mya to take over him now, but although he was aroused, he was also very much in control.

He mentally frowned at this puzzle and stowed it away for future examination. "Babe? It's been too long - I have missed you" he whispered as he kissed her face all over. She let him kiss her, and touch her but did not reciprocate. After a minute, she pushed away from him.

"Leo," she asked, unaccustomed steel in those blue eyes", what are you doing?"

"What am I doing?" he asked in surprise, "Clearly I'm doing something wrong if you don't recognise kissing" he said, leaning toward her again. But she pushed him away, giving him a look that he could not mistake. He sighed deeply and walked away from her to sit on the sofa.

“Okay babe, let’s talk” he said; resignation in his voice and stance, “You wanted to know where I’ve been for the past two weeks right?” She moved toward him and sat on the love seat next to him, “Yes” she replied, looking him in the eye. “Well, just remember you asked for it, okay?” he told her with a warning look in his eye.

“Leo, you’re scaring me. Just tell me already!” she snapped.

“Okay! It’s like this. You were lying on your deathbed, and the only thing that could revive you was a spell –“

“I know all that” she interrupted“, what’s that got to do with anything?”

“If you let me finish, “he said impatiently, “I will tell you.”

“Okay, sorry. Continue.” She said contritely.

“So you were lying over there, “he pointed at the divan, “at death’s door, and this spell needed to be done. But your girlfriend Mya said she couldn’t do it because of some proviso which said she needed passion from a lover to perform it. And we all know no-one’s ever looked twice at that girl and here was this vital ingredient missing...something had to be done – or you would die”, he trailed off, staring into the distance. She gave him thirty seconds to contemplate her premature death before saying;

“Go on.”

“Well... I was at a loss for what to do you know?” he said catching her eye for a second before looking back into the middle distance.

“If there was someone at least who was interested in her, I might have...persuaded them to kiss her, but there was no-one. So I had to resort to some drastic measures. “He broke off, looking at her as if assessing her ability to hear what these measures were.

“Tell me!” she demanded breathlessly, torn between fascination and fear.

“Okay! So there was no way that she could do the spell without the passion, and she had kind of gave up. So I grabbed her grandmother who was asleep in the other room, put a knife to her throat, and told her to hypnotise that retarded dude from the graveyard to make love to her...or I would slit her grandmother’s throat.” He said in one go, barely stopping to draw a breath; like saying it fast would lessen the horror of what he was saying. Charlotte was certainly looking horrified...horrified, fascinated, and impressed. She always was one for drama .

“You did, WHAT?!” She asked her eyes wide as saucers.

“I’m not proud of what I did” he said, his eyes on the carpet”, but I had to do something fast and it was the only thing that came to mind.”

“So you threatened an old woman...to save my life?” she whispered.

“Like I said, I’m not proud of it.” He replied, eyes still on the carpet.

“But...what does that have to do with where you were these last two weeks?”

‘God, she was a persistent little bitch’

“I was scared. I thought she would come and tell you what happened and you would hate me. I haven’t wanted to face you, see the horror in your eyes...I’ve been a coward I know. A coward

and a bastard and I don't deserve you." He said with a shaking and broken voice. There was silence in the room. He wanted to look up and see what she was doing but that would ruin the effect so he kept his eyes on the carpet and waited, rubbing his eyes a bit; just for added drama. She stood up and moved from the loveseat to the sofa and her slender fingers came into view as they touched his arm. He took a deep breath of relief, which he quickly turned into a sob. Her other hand went around his shoulder as she laid her head on it. His hand crept out and touched her fingers gently and she immediately encircled his hand with hers. 'Checkmate' he thought.

"That would explain why she hasn't been to see me," Charlotte said suddenly, "I wondered".

"Well, I imagine she would rather not run into me. And to be honest, I'd rather not run into her either..." he replied quickly.

"Well, you'll have to you know? School starts in two weeks."

"Yeah" he said.

'Shit, that's right' he thought. 'School does start in two weeks. I gotta see her before then...the sooner the better. The thought of seeing her again made the blood run faster in his veins and he decided to bite the bullet that very day. Now if Miles would just call so he could get out of here...

But she was caressing his hand in a way that he knew only too well. Her hand moved slowly caressing his back, until it reached the waistband of his jeans, and she pulled up his shirt so she could touch his bare back. Her breathing was deep and slow as she pressed her breasts against his arm. She began to unbutton his shirt and when she'd loosened it sufficiently, she pulled it over him and threw it on the carpet. He turned to her, cradling her butt cheeks in his hands, and kissed her lips. She moaned softly pressing her luscious breasts closer, and then moved away so she could take her top off. She was back again, her breath panting in his ear. He moved his hands up her tanned legs as he placed butterfly kisses on her neck. She was beautiful and aroused and he should have been raring to go, but nothing was happening for him. Heart rate; slow. Blood pressure: normal. Penis: flaccid...'God, what was happening to him?!' When it was Mya, he barely had to touch her to be ravening with lust. At the thought of her, his penis gave a twitch. His mind went back to that day on her sofa, the orgasm he had had. Suddenly he was hot and ready; he picked Charlotte up and turned her over so her ass was in the air. Pausing to slip on a condom he proceeded to ram himself inside her -eyes closed - pounding into her as tan legs were replaced by chocolate in his mind and long blond hair became short, curly, and black...

'I have to see her' He thought as they lay on the carpet afterwards.

" Mmm... That was incredible", she whispered into his chest, sounding satisfied and replete, "Looks like absence definitely made the heart grow fonder", he heard the smile in her voice.

"Mmmphm..." he replied absentmindedly. How fast could he get out of here? Charlotte lay against his chest, body heavy with sleep after that intensely passionate session he'd just put her through. Yet although they lay so closely intertwined, their minds were distant as the stars. Charlotte was falling asleep; she couldn't believe how passionate Leo had been. The sex had been beyond amazing. Obviously almost losing her had stirred him to greater passion than ever...Leo meanwhile was feeling...deflated. He had just had the most incredible sex with his girlfriend. The only problem was that he hadn't been fucking her. He'd been fucking a tall, slender, crazy- looking black witch with the strangest habits this town had ever seen. Bad enough that she was a witch; that wasn't the worst. The worst was that she was poorer than a church mouse and wore faded floral print grandma dresses circa 1969! How could he want her? Correction, how could he want her over this glorious golden vision lying at his side, who was his

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