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Nothing ruins a lovely day like being stalked by a supernatural. I know someone is following me. I just haven't been able to catch a glimpse of the fellow.

I presume it's a "fellow." No one ever sends a woman to threaten me, which really is an oversight—the supernatural women I know are far more dangerous than the men. Maybe I just travel in the wrong circles. Or the *right* circles, depending on how you look at it.

At this moment, though, I would prefer a little less danger in my day, given that I'm walking along a very busy London street with my very human friend and her very human cousin. If anything goes wrong, I'd never want Audrey and Henrietta to be caught in the cross fire. Especially when—like most humans—they have no idea that their world contains things like, well, me. A witch, currently conveying some very dark magic to my aunt's half-demon client.

Magic this fellow stalking me might be hoping to steal.

Audrey taps me with her parasol, opened against the midday sun. "Don't turn around now, Cordelia, but there is a man following you."

She says this lightly, teasingly, but I still tense.

"No need to worry," she says. "He's just interested. As usual."

Henrietta rolls her eyes my way. "And here I thought we

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might actually finish a walk without Cordelia attracting at least one admirer.”

I sigh dramatically. “He’ll need to get in line. I already have more suitors than I can possibly handle.”

“None,” Audrey says. “You have none, because you accept none, and if you send this poor fellow into the queue, he’ll discover he has stepped over a hole and disappear forever.”

Henrietta laughs.

“I think you might like this one,” Audrey whispers. “He has a dangerous air about him.” She leans toward her cousin. “Cordelia always pays attention to those ones.”

As we pass the next window, I look at my reflection while pretending to adjust my bonnet. At last I spot my stalker across the narrow street, about a dozen feet back.

I frown as I examine him in the reflection. He’s not the sort of “dangerous man” Audrey teased me about noticing. Those are supernatural thugs who look as if they have a blade in each boot and a pistol in each pocket.

This one is a very different kind of threat. A wolf in sheep’s clothing. The sort of man who seems ordinary but radiates a palpable air of menace that has others giving him a wide berth.

A vampire? A high-level half-demon exuding something that even humans sense?

Or maybe I’m overly sensitive to danger, and humans grant him space only because he’s too well-dressed for this street. He wears a crisp new top hat—very fashionable in fashionable neighborhoods, which this is not. His relaxed suit is also up-and-coming couture for the man-about-town. He’s tall and clean-shaven. Maybe only a few years older than my twenty-three. His jet-black hair is already curling despite pomade.

He *does* look dangerous. But why? My brain seizes on this little mystery with the ferocity of a terrier. Is it the angles of his face? The set of his jaw? The intensity that pulses from him? Or is it the way he moves, powerful despite his lean build and fancy suit?

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I shake off the question. What matters is that he must be dealt with, and I can safely do that, this being midday on a public street.

I catch up to my friends and chatter nonchalantly until we reach the next street.

“And this is where I leave you,” I say, a little louder than necessary. “We’ll meet back here at the top of the hour.”

As Audrey and Henrietta continue along, my pursuer tucks himself behind a group of tradesmen. With that distinctive hat, though, he towers several inches above them.

It’s a poor attempt at concealment. I can do better. The first step is to raise my parasol, giving him an easy marker to track. Then I, too, join a group of factory workers. I’m tall for a woman, but there are enough men in the group to hide me. Once among them, I turn to a ruddy-faced young woman and say, “You look as if you could use a parasol. Please, take this.”

I press mine into her hand. Her mouth opens in surprise, but before she can say a word, I slip behind a hansom cab awaiting a fare. Her group continues on, the parasol high, her friends tittering and exclaiming over her luck.

I cast a blur spell. It’s sorcerer magic—my aunt and I aren’t Coven witches, so we use every spell we can master.

When I peek out, my pursuer’s top hat bobs along behind a cluster of men. I switch to a witch’s cover spell, which hides me as long as I don’t move. Then I wait until the men pass, and I see the shadow of the tall fellow in his fancy hat. I step into his path—

“Oh!” The man draws back, and I find myself staring at an older gentleman, his hands raised as if I’m about to rob him.

I look up at his hat—the exact one I’d seen on my dangerous-looking pursuer.

“Nicely done,” I murmur under my breath.

The fellow sputters, but I wave him on as I survey the street. It’s emptied, and there’s no sign of my pursuer.

I walk back toward the corner. As I near the spot where I’d

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last seen the fellow, a smell tickles my nose. It's a musky scent, not quite buried under an expensive cologne with notes of vanilla and . . . anise?

The cologne is lovely. The underlying musk should be unpleasant, almost feral, but I find myself inhaling deeper, satisfaction unfolding inside me, as if I have scratched a particularly difficult-to-reach itch.

How strange.

The fact that I can tease out a complex scent, though, isn't strange at all. My father—whoever he is—was a perfumer, and I have inherited his finely honed sense of smell.

I try to follow the scent, only to notice two women watching me.

"You don't smell that?" I say. "Vanilla pastries, I think."

They sniff obligingly, and one mentions having passed a bakery. I thank them and continue following the scent for a few steps, but it's fading quickly, and I have an errand to run.

Another slow look, this way and that, and then I cross the street and hurry to my destination.

A half hour later, my errand is done. I have delivered the magical items to Lord Wilkes, a powerful half-demon who has been my aunt's client for a decade. It goes so smoothly that I get out a quarter hour before Audrey and Henrietta will return. The distant smell of bread has my stomach rumbling, and I remember what the two women said about a bakery.

I could use a snack. Lenora would tease that I could always "use a snack" but she also concedes that, while I'm not at all slender, I'm in obscenely good health, with a figure that most people—especially men—find pleasing. Of course, there was that seamstress who tried to convince me that I needed to drop two stone or better tighten my corset. She lost not only my respect but my aunt's business.

I'm following my nose to the bakery when another scent slips in. Vanilla and anise with an undertone of musk.

"Don't turn around," says a deep voice behind me. "I'm going to walk beside you."

I stop short.

"Miss Levine . . ." he murmurs, and my hackles rise.

I don't use that surname. No one in my family does. As witches, we fly under as much cloud cover as we can gather. My grandmother began using the name Carter, and my mother and aunt followed suit. Calling me Levine feels like a threat.

"Don't be afraid," he whispers.

"I'm not afraid, sir. You ordered me to continue walking, so I stopped. I don't like being told what to do."

"Please continue walking." The words are polite, but spoken with an air of command that has me narrowing my eyes.

"I will"—I turn to face him—"once we've been properly introduced."

"I don't have time," he says.

"You don't have time to give me your name? You could have done it as easily as saying that. Here, let me demonstrate." I extend one gloved hand. "Miss Cordelia Carter. You, sir, owe me an explanation and a parasol. I'll settle for the first."

"You didn't like me ordering you to continue walking, so I requested it politely. If you'd prefer I returned to ordering it . . ."

A shiver runs through me. A not-unpleasant shiver that I decide not to analyze. Instead, I say, "You've already made it a request, sir, which means I have the option of denying it. I'm asking for an introduction. Your name at least. If you can't provide that—"

"I don't have time for games." He grinds the words out now. "Either you resume walking . . ."

"Or?" I say when he trails off. "An 'either' requires an 'or.' I presume you were about to threaten me. You need to finish or I won't know whether or not I want to comply."

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His mouth opens.

I cut him off. "If you tell me again that you have no time for games, I'll show you how a witch plays games, and I suspect you won't like it."

That gets no reaction from him, which is admittedly disappointing.

"I will explain later," he says. "You need to come with me."

"Why? You can't expect—"

He grabs my arm, tight enough that I gasp. My free hand flies up in a knockback spell, and he stumbles, releasing me.

Around us, several people have slowed, the women's gazes uncertain, the men's narrowing on the stranger.

"Take care," I say, in a voice so low I'm not sure he'll hear, but his expression says he does. "Touch me again, and I'll scream. No one here will tolerate a fancy toff laying hands on a local woman."

"I'm not a threat to you, Cordelia."

"You take liberties, sir, and calling me by my given name is the least of them. I gave you an opportunity to speak to me. Now, as you know who I am, you also know where to find me. Pay me a proper visit, provide a proper introduction and explain yourself."

"Cordelia!" a voice calls, and I look to see Audrey waving a handkerchief to get my attention.

"Walk away, sir," I say. "Cause a scene in front of my companions, and I'll interpret that as a threat against them, which I absolutely will not tolerate."

"You're making a mistake, Cor—"

"Miss Carter to you. Now walk away."

His jaw sets, his eyes black coals that burn with a look that should terrify me. Except there's no rage in it. Just the frustration of having his will thwarted, coupled with a sense of outrage that says this doesn't happen to him often.

That look has me longing to stoke the fire, to thwart him further and see what happens. Again that shiver runs through me.

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“Cordelia,” Audrey says as she reaches us. “Good day, sir. Is something wrong?”

“Not at all,” he says gruffly as he withdraws, his gaze shuttered. “I mistook your friend for someone I needed to speak to.” His dark eyes fix on mine, the unspoken message being that he’s granting me one last chance to be reasonable.

Reasonable . . . about being manhandled on a public street by a stranger who won’t even give me his name.

I meet his gaze with a level stare.

His cheek twitches, and victory ripples through me.

“Good day, sir,” I say. “I hope you find whoever you’re looking for.”

With that, I take Audrey’s arm, and we continue back the way we came.

Two

Audrey and Henrietta leave me at the steps of the town house I share with my aunt. As I step through the door, I finally relax. I'm home, where I can be myself.

The thought comes with a nudge of discomfort, the reminder that I can't be myself with my friends.

Lenora warned me about this when I met Audrey. There are advantages and disadvantages to having human friends. To Lenora, the main advantage is that it helps us blend into human society. That's never been a consideration for me. I prefer to keep my fellow supernaturals on the professional side of the fence, so I never have to feel the sting of betrayal if they turn on me. In our world, someone is always turning on you.

Which is why, when I walk through the door, I head straight for Lenora's office to tell her about the stranger.

The house is silent. We have staff, of course. For a widow of Lenora's wealth and social standing, society expects a full staff, outnumbering us by a factor of at least three to one. We employ only a maid, a cook, and a "boy" for running errands, and they all live elsewhere. We can't have humans in the house, hearing our business, and we can't risk hiring supernaturals. At this time of day, the maid has gone, the cook hasn't arrived, and the boy only pops by now and then to see whether we need him.

I didn't grow up here, in this world of town houses and

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domestic staff. My mother and I had a little house by the sea, where she was a healer, like my grandmother, who'd lived with us until her death. Lenora was the fascinating and fashionable aunt who swept in every other month with presents and tales of the city. It was the stories I loved best, glittering jewels of a very different sort of life, one that had me secretly planning to run off to London as soon as I was old enough.

And then, the year I turned fourteen, my mother died, and for a time, I'd been certain I'd somehow magically caused it. I'd wanted to go to London and live with my aunt, and that's exactly what happened. I know now that my mother's death was not my fault, but as I pass her portrait in the hall, grief still seizes my heart.

Will I ever follow in her footsteps, leave the city for a quiet life, using my powers only for good?

No. I can understand my mother's and grandmother's choice, but it'll never be mine. No more than my aunt's will be mine. At twenty-three, I'm still in my apprenticeship stage, learning the business and learning magic . . . though maybe not the sort that I find Lenora practicing.

When I backpedal from her office, her sigh wafts after me. "I'm not going to hit you with this spell, Cordelia. Not unless you give me a reason."

I peek around the doorframe. "Can we clarify that? What could I possibly do to make you suffocate me to death?"

She tilts her head, considering, as a smile plays over her lips. "Well, if you tried to murder me in my sleep, I'd feel justified suffocating you."

"Unless I were justified in murdering you," I say.

"And what could I do to deserve that?"

"Trying to murder *me*."

"If I tried to kill you, I'd succeed, and your ghost would need to take revenge."

I lower myself into a wingback chair. "Hardly. You'd attempt it. I'd thwart the attempt. You'd claim it was all a terrible

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misunderstanding, and I'd pretend to accept that, only to murder you in your sleep before you could try again. You'd then attempt to suffocate me with that spell, but it would be too late, since you're nowhere near mastering it."

"Maybe you should try."

I shake my head. While I do cast the sort of spell that would get a Coven witch exiled, I draw the line at the sort that would get a Coven witch *executed*. That's not to say I'll *never* learn them. I'm still considering the matter.

Lenora believes in mastering the darkest magic in case she ever needs it. I believe in foreseeing a situation where I might need it before I learn it. Perhaps that says a little about each of us.

Lenora returns her grimoire to its case. Despite the fact that she has no intention of seeing visitors today, she's dressed as if she's entertaining for lunch, in a gorgeous gown of washed silk. She still wears a bustle pad. I don't, proclaiming such things belong in the past. Also, I—ahem—have my own built-in padding. Lenora hasn't embraced a lighter corset, either, and hers is cinched tight around her tiny waist. Her true pride, though, is her black hair piled high, not a strand out of place.

When I was young, everyone accepted that we were aunt and niece. The older I get, the more often it's subtly questioned. Am I her secretary? Her very dear friend . . . or her, er, "very dear friend"? Anyone who looks closely sees our similarities, but a less discerning eye sees only our differences.

We're both tall. That's a distinguishing feature of Levine women. Most have black hair, like my aunt. My own hair started as pale gold and mellowed into a honeyed blond. Lenora is the willowy sort of tall. I tend toward an odd mix of softness and muscle. Lenora's eyes are brown, while mine are "cerulean blue" according to the last young man who penned an ode to them. Beyond that, though, our facial features are very similar, with wide-set eyes, strong noses, and matching dimples on our left cheeks. My coloring comes from my father, the nameless and face-

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less French perfumer who did nothing more than contribute to my making.

Once Lenora has locked her grimoire case, I say, “A man followed me today.”

“Men are always following you, Cordelia. It’s high time you consider the time-honored solution open to all witches. You’re the proper age. Past it, even.”

She could mean the solution of leaving the country for a few months and claiming widowhood when I return. Or she could just be encouraging me to take a lover. I’m certainly ready for *that*. Working for my aunt, I’ve spent enough time in brothels to know I’m interested—it’s been years since I blushed and stammered catching a glimpse of two people coupling. I am quite ready for a lover. Finding one is just damnably difficult at my age—still young enough that men want to fit me for a wedding trousseau first. I am a witch. We do not marry.

“This was a supernatural,” I say.

Her hands still as she realizes I mean the man wasn’t an admirer.

“What sort?” she asks.

I unbutton the cuffs of my dress, too warm in this windowless room. “I don’t know. He didn’t display any powers, but he referred to me as Miss Levine.”

“He had the gall to *speak* to you?”

“He even called me Cordelia, as if we were old friends, but I’m sure I have never seen him before. I’d have recognized his scent.”

Her brow furrows. “Scent?”

“He wore cologne, applied with a very light hand, but underneath there was a musky odor. Oddly pleasant.” I roll my sleeves up my forearms. “It was very strange. I felt as if I should know the scent, but I didn’t.”

“Tell me what he looked like,” she says, and her voice sounds almost strangled.

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I look up from adjusting my sleeves to peer at Lenora. Her face is slack with something I have never seen on it before.

Fear.

A chill tickles up my back.

"Lenora . . ." I say.

"Tell me everything about him. Now."

I give a quick description, which she turns into a proper interrogation, plucking out every detail and digging for more until she sits back in her seat, her expression unreadable.

"You know him?" I say.

"Tell me what he said. Every word."

I do, and the more I speak, the paler she becomes.

When I finish, Lenora pushes to her feet. "Is your bag ready?"

"My . . . ?"

"Bag," she says sharply. "The one you must always have ready."

"Of course." The witch hunts might have ended over a century ago, but we remember. We will always remember.

"Get the bag," Lenora says. "Pack your grimoire and anything else you need. We leave in an hour."

She marches past me toward the door.

I vault up from my chair. "What's going on?"

"I'll explain later. Get your bag—"

I stride into her path. "I'm not a child, Lenora."

"There's no time to explain."

"You can spare two minutes to tell me what's going on. I have already had to deal with one person today trying to drag me off for my own good. I expect better from you."

Her mouth opens.

I cut her short. "Don't ask whether I trust you. I do. But you need to give me something. Otherwise we walk out that door into an unknown situation, where we're apparently under threat from a supernatural, one I know nothing about."

“Bishop Daniels.” She seems to spit the words. “His name is Bishop Daniels. He’s a werewolf . . . and he works for your father.”

I follow Lenora down the hall. “My *father*? My father is a human perfumer my mother met in Paris. She didn’t even know his surname.”

Lenora keeps walking. “With every moment you delay, you have less time to pack. You need all your magic supplies and grimoire. We’ll have room for two bags each.”

“You know who my father is. You lied. You and my mother. For my entire life, you’ve *lied*.”

Tears spring to my eyes, hot rage and hurt, and Lenora spins, her hands gripping my upper arms. “I’m sorry, sweetheart. I know you’re furious right now, but it’s not the time—”

“Not the time?” My voice rises, even as the fear in her face tells me she’s right. I squeeze my eyes shut. “Why is a werewolf working for my father? And you know this Bishop Daniels? Are you in contact with my father?”

“I haven’t seen your father in years, which suits us both. I’ve never met Bishop Daniels, but I know of him. I must know. For exactly this situation.”

“*What* situation? My father is a threat? A supernatural? What—”

“This is why I didn’t want to say anything until we’re gone, Cordelia. Because you’ll have questions. Endless questions, all of which I can’t answer now.” She takes my hands in hers and meets my gaze. “I’ll answer them. *All* of them. I promise.”

When I nod, she squeezes my hands. “Thank you.”

We’re on the second level of the town house. Our rooms—with our emergency bags—are two floors up. Lenora steps back to let me climb the narrow stairs first.

I’m halfway up the first flight when the front doorbell

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rings. I turn carefully. Lenora stares down at that door, having gone perfectly still.

“He wouldn’t ring the doorbell, would he?” I say.

She casts a privacy spell, as if worried he’ll overhear.

“He’s a werewolf,” she says. “And, from all accounts, brilliant, bold, and ruthless. I wouldn’t put anything past him. I’ve heard stories.”

“Stories?”

“Bishop Daniels seems like a gentleman, persuasive and restrained, even civil. He’s not. He’s preposterously young for his position, and he hasn’t earned it by being gentle.”

“What position—?”

I stifle my questions and rein in my thoughts. Later. I can ask everything later.

As Lenora descends the stairs, I follow. She glances back, as if ready to tell me to stay where I am, but then she continues on. Only when we’re halfway down the final flight does she turn.

“Stay here,” she says. “If it’s him, get to the secret room. Don’t hesitate. Run and lock yourself in.”

I bite my tongue. Yes, we have an actual room where we can hide. As Levines, we despise hiding. As witches, we know sometimes we must. Hide now to fight later.

I pause on the lower steps while Lenora continues on. Halfway to the door, she stops and exhales in annoyance. When she turns to me, I lean over the railing to whisper, “Not him?”

She shakes her head but still motions for me to stay back.

A moment later, the front door opens with a click and a whoosh, the sounds and smells of the street rushing in.

“Mrs. Carter,” a male voice says. “Lord Wilkes requires your presence at his quarters.”

“My presence? My niece was just there.”

“Yes, and there’s a mistake with his order. He’s most displeased. He has been a loyal client for years.”

“I know that, which is why I’m sure there’s no problem with his order.”

“Then I’d suggest your niece isn’t as competent a craftswoman as yourself.”

I bristle but only grip the railing.

“I’m the one who prepared his purchase,” Lenora says. “So it’s my craftsmanship he’s questioning. I know what I sent. It was exactly what he ordered. But, in light of our long relationship, I’ll stop by later today, in case he requested the wrong items.”

The man’s voice goes brittle. “He didn’t, and he won’t wait. I’m to escort both you and your niece to him immediately.”

A heartbeat of silence. Lord Wilkes wants us both? Drawing me out of the house? After this Bishop Daniels fellow intercepted me on my way to Lord Wilkes’s home? That can’t be a coincidence.

Lenora continues, “I’m afraid my niece isn’t here. She stopped in to say the delivery was complete and then went off with her friends. You know how young ladies are.”

I cast a quick blur spell and silently climb to the next level.

“She’s with friends?” he says. “Where?”

“Strolling around the botanical gardens, hoping to catch the eye of handsome young men. I could bring her with me when she returns—”

“No need. You’re the one Lord Wilkes needs to speak to about this mistake.”

So Lord Wilkes doesn’t need me . . . but his messenger asked where I am? Asked *specifically* where I am? This lout must think us fools.

“There’s no mistake,” Lenora says. “But I’ll come and set this straight, in deference to our long professional relationship. Let me get my hat and boots.”

I continue down the hall, only to stop short at the clack of boots below.

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“Excuse me?” Lenora says to the messenger.

“I’m stepping inside. Out of the sun.”

She huffs. “Don’t come any farther. I’m being polite about this intrusion on my time. An intrusion on my home is very different.”

“I won’t come any farther . . . as long as you’re back here in five minutes or less. I’d suggest less.”

Another huff, and she marches up the stairs. I retreat to her bedchamber. She enters, slaps the door shut behind her, and casts another privacy spell so we can speak.

“I’ll handle this.” She sits to pull on her boots. “I can’t imagine Lord Wilkes consorting with a werewolf, but there must be a connection. I’ll find out what it is.”

“But—”

“I’ll be fine. I’ve been doing this for many years, Cordelia. I can protect myself. My concern is for you. Luckily, they’ll be looking for you in the botanical gardens. Once I leave, ward the exits and the windows and then retreat to the locked room.” She snatches her gloves from the dresser. “Stay in here until I’m gone. Then start warding.”

THREE

Protective wards are witch spells that can be removed only from inside the house—unless you have the “key,” which Lenora does. Warding every door and window is slow going, and nearly thirty minutes later, I’m still at it, with sweat trickling down my face.

Witches and sorcerers have a well of casting energy. Each spell drains it. The greater the magic, the greater the drain. I won’t even feel something like a light spell or lock spell. I feel these.

Still, I remind myself that most witches my age would have dropped of exhaustion on the second floor. I’ve spent half my life working to deepen my well. While it’s good to know as many spells as possible, it’s more important to have the reserves to cast them.

I’m casting the ward at my bedchamber window when the doorbell rings and the spell stops in my throat.

Bishop Daniels.

The name drags a hundred questions behind it, flapping like flags, demanding my attention.

A werewolf?

Working for my father?

Is my father a supernatural?

Is my father a *threat*?

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I've been stifling all these questions so I can focus on my casting. Now they rush in, and I slam down the portcullis against them.

Someone is at the door. Someone who may very well be Bishop Daniels.

An inexplicable part of me wants to stride down and throw it open. Demand to know what he wants. Demand answers.

Madness, of course. But my aunt was right. Something about Bishop Daniels lulled me into a false sense of security. I sensed danger in him, but it was—gods save me—an exciting danger, the sort that promises an adventure unlike any you could imagine. That's what I sensed, rippling through his intensity.

Come with me. I have secrets. I'll show you another life, a more exciting—

Damn it, I really need to stop reading adventure novels.

And not only childish adventure novels, either. When I think of Bishop Daniels, there's another pull there, one that whispers of very adult adventures.

The bell rings again.

A silvery chime, siren-calling me to—

Dear *gods*. I grit my teeth and give myself a shake.

Be sensible, Cordelia. You're always sensible.

Er, no, not always. But I can be sensible.

I should retreat to the locked room. Run to it.

But what if that's not Bishop Daniels? I can't flee to the locked room without having finished the warding.

I ease soundlessly down the stairs in my silk slippers. When I can see the covered window, I note two heads on the other side, both significantly shorter than Bishop Daniels.

Our message boy and a friend?

When I catch a female voice, my eyes widen. Audrey? Oh, no. Please don't tell me Audrey is at the door.

I continue along the hall until the voices come clear.

“—not here,” Audrey says.

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Henrietta's voice answers. "She said she was spending the afternoon home with her aunt."

"A plan isn't an obligation."

"I really need to talk to her. Warn her."

"I understand," Audrey says. "But we can't do that if no one is home."

"Why don't they have a butler? Or at least a housekeeper. It's very irregular."

Audrey laughs softly. "Lenora *is* very irregular. Let's leave a note."

"I really think Cordelia needs to know. I've seen that fellow before. I felt as if I had, and I should have said so."

I chew my lip. I can't imagine what Henrietta would have to say about Bishop Daniels that I need to know right now. But they're on my doorstep when Lenora claimed I was with them in the botanical gardens, and if anyone's watching the house—

I undo the ward. Then, standing behind the door, I open it and whisper, "Inside. Quickly."

Once they're in, I close the door to see Henrietta with one brow raised.

"The constables," I say. "Someone has been asking questions about my aunt's business, and she swore they were watching the house."

Henrietta sniffs. "The police have nothing better to do than bother women tending to their health?"

Audrey shakes her head. "Since when do men consider our health our own?" She looks at me. "I didn't see anyone watching."

"Neither did I," Henrietta says.

"Good. Go on into the parlor. I'll lock the door and meet you there."

I find Audrey and Henrietta in the parlor. Audrey sits at the solitaire board, her fingers deftly moving the pieces, already caught

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up in a game. Henrietta paces, gloves off as she nibbles a fingernail.

“Is everything all right?” I ask.

“I’ve noticed him before,” Henrietta blurts. “The man who stopped you today. He was lying when he said he was looking for someone else. I saw him yesterday at the seamstress. He passed the window three times, and I noticed him because . . .” She clears her throat. “He’s not unattractive.”

“I’ve seen better,” Audrey says, not glancing up from her board. “There’s a look about him I don’t like. He makes me uneasy.”

“The point is that he lied,” Henrietta says. “He was at the seamstress while Cordelia was being fitted. He passed *three* times. That isn’t a coincidence.”

“No, it’s not,” Audrey says. “I never believed that nonsense about mistaking Cordelia for someone else. He only said that because he was caught.” She waves a game piece my way. “*You* didn’t believe him. I could tell. You didn’t seem overly concerned either.”

Audrey pauses and glances at her cousin. “Which isn’t to make light of *your* concern, dear Henrietta. Following Cordelia on two separate occasions suggests more than a casual interest. She will need to deal with him.”

“Which I will,” I say. “I’ll ask Lenora’s advice.”

Henrietta still looks worried. With a sigh, Audrey finishes her game and sweeps the pieces aside.

“You can’t win them all,” Henrietta says, pausing to kiss the top of her cousin’s head.

I smile. “That wasn’t Audrey’s sound of defeat. It was her sound of dissatisfaction. The game ended too soon. An easy win.”

“Indeed,” Audrey says. “Come play chess with me, Henrietta. I require a challenge.”

“What about Cordelia?”

“My darling Cordelia presents entirely the wrong sort of

challenge, one where I must constantly be on guard against her cheating.”

“Cheating is a valid strategy,” I say. “If I’m caught, I’ve failed. Otherwise? A win is a win.”

“Ignore her. Sit, Hen. Play me.”

I glance toward the mantel clock. If Lenora returns to find me entertaining my friends, she might test that suffocation spell on me.

I need to get rid of them. But if I rush them out, they’ll be suspicious.

I settle into a seat as I think up an excuse. Or that’s my plan, but the moment my mind wanders it heads straight into forbidden territory, like a sheep seeing the gate left open.

I met a werewolf today.

Of course it makes sense that he was a werewolf, between his musky scent and viselike grip. I know werewolves are strong, and while I’ve never heard anyone mention the musk, it’d take a high degree of olfactory acuity to detect it.

What else do I know about werewolves? They can transform into wolves, obviously. Large canines that look like wolves. Other than that, my knowledge nestles deep in the land of legend and rumor.

Vampires and werewolves usually exist outside the supernatural community. Some supernaturals *might* hire one for their special skills, but they are otherwise objects of mistrust and fear. Witches and sorcerers, half-demons and necromancers, we can all hide very easily in the human world. Werewolves and vampires can’t. They’re less human. Monstrous.

My mother was always careful to say that while *they* can be monstrous, we should not paint an entire species with one brush. Lenora has always been less generous, especially when it comes to werewolves.

Since Lenora refuses to deal with werewolves—and shuts down any conversation about them—I know little. I’ve heard that

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the Albion Pack has an estate outside the city, and like wolves, they mostly live communally. I believe the Albion Pack also has a London residence. That keeps the city safe from lone wolves, who aren't as disciplined as their Pack brothers. Loners skulk through as quickly as they can.

Except Bishop Daniels had hardly been skulking. Is he allowed in London because he's here on my father's business? Given permission to trespass on Pack territory?

My father. Not a perfumer, which means my keen sense of smell doesn't come from—

My stomach drops so fast that I clutch the chair arms, as if I'm about to fall through.

"Cordelia?" Audrey says, frowning. "Are you all right?"

"My monthlies," I say.

She only nods in sympathy. That's a wonderful thing about dear friends—one can say such things as freely as mentioning a sore throat.

When Audrey returns her attention to the game, mine flies back to my thoughts.

I presumed Bishop Daniels was a lone wolf. But he walks about London as if he owns it.

He works for my father. But werewolves rarely associate with other supernaturals.

My father isn't a French perfumer, which means I didn't inherit my sense of smell from him. Except I did, the perfumer part being my mother's explanation for my refined sense of smell. And my other little oddities? Why I can see well at night? Why I'm filled with restless energy, always needing to move more, eat more, forever driven by something I can't name? Things my family always chalked up to flukes of nature.

When I caught Bishop Daniels's scent, it felt as if I'd found something, an itch finally scratched, as if I've spent my life searching for that particular smell.

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That must mean my father isn't just a supernatural. He's a werewolf.

And Bishop Daniels works for him. A werewolf frightens my fearless aunt, despite not being more than a few years older than me. A man like that isn't going to work for a mere supernatural. He isn't even going to work for a mere werewolf.

Also, from what I know, werewolves only "work" under one of their kind. The Alpha.

My father is—

A click in the back of my skull. At first, I mistake it for puzzle pieces clicking into place, but then I'm on my feet.

The wards have been broken.

Lenora is home, and I'm sitting in the parlor with my friends when I'm supposed to be hiding in the locked room.

I murmur an excuse to Audrey and Henrietta as I stride from the room. I need to intercept Lenora. My aunt might be the personification of composure, but if that composure even ripples, she'll be as annoyed as if she'd thrown a tantrum in front of humans.

Warn her. Explain. Apologize. I just need—

The hall is silent. I hurry down the stairs as fast as I can, but when I reach the bottom, the front door is still shut, no one there.

I mentally poke for the ward.

Gone.

Did Lenora undo it and then get delayed on the steps by a neighbor?

I have absolutely no doubt that I re-cast it correctly after letting my friends inside. I might be on the dregs of my spell power, but I'd been extra careful and poked it afterward, to be sure.

Staying along the wall, I ease toward the front door. Then I tug the drapery just enough to see the steps.

No one is there.

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My heart rate picks up.

That isn't possible.

Only Lenora knows the key to snap my ward from the other side. But if she undid it, she wouldn't do more than pause to answer a neighbor's greeting. She wouldn't let anyone lure her off the steps.

Another witch could break the wards, but only from the inside, and no witch could sneak in when every opening was sealed.

I squeeze my eyes shut. Somehow I made a mistake. That's the only explanation. Everything is fine. I only need to re-ward the door.

Except that snap hadn't just been the door. The wards are connected, like a spiderweb. I could unlock either a single one—as I'd done to let my friends in—or the whole web. The snap I'd felt told me the entire web had disintegrated. All the doors and windows need resealing, and my spell power hasn't replenished enough for that.

I take a deep breath. I can handle this. Lenora has trained me well. I made a mistake with the wards, and I can chastise myself for that later.

Begin by sealing the doors. Start with the most obvious entrances and—

No, start by getting rid of my friends. Then ward the doors and street-level windows and continue on as my energy refills.

There, I have a plan. I exhale as some of that hovering panic drains away.

I'm not ready to face an actual threat. I thought I was, but even this warding slipup makes me realize how lucky I am that the threat is only looming, not actually upon me. I am in no way ready for that.

I hurry back up the stairs, stride down the hall, throw open the parlor door, and—

The room is empty.

I look left and right, as if my friends could be concealed in a corner. They aren't.

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I frown and survey the parlor.

They must have left to find me. I was gone too long and—

My gaze catches on the chessboard. One piece lies on its side. Others aren't where they should be, as if more pieces had fallen and someone had hastily righted them, missing that one.

My friends didn't just leave their game to come after me. They rose quickly, as if startled. Or they were grabbed, the game board jostled.

I whirl, my gaze sweeping the room.

I didn't make a mistake. Someone broke my wards. Someone is here. Someone came after Audrey and Henrietta, and I am not prepared for this, not even a little bit—

Stop. Breathe. Think.

How could someone grab them both so easily, leaving only a disrupted board? Audrey would scream, shout, *bite* if she had to.

A werewolf couldn't get them both silently out of the room, against their will.

That requires magic.

I don't have time for games.

You need to come with me.

What if Bishop Daniels was telling the truth? What if the threat doesn't come from him?

I still inhale deeply, trying to catch Bishop Daniels's scent.

There's no trace of it.

I'm turning, looking and listening, when I stop. I just tried to smell whether Bishop Daniels was here. Can I use that sense to find Audrey and Henrietta?

If I'm right and my father is a werewolf, while I clearly don't have his strength or his ability to transform, I might have a gift I've never used.

The ability to track someone by scent.

And if I find that someone? Well, then, I'll fight. I can handle this.

I resist the impulse to run into the hall, searching for Audrey

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and Henrietta. Use my nose, yes, but also my head. I can't endanger my friends.

I've never noticed Henrietta's scent. I haven't known her for long and what I do recall of her smell is lemon, from the Thomas family laundry soap. But I know Audrey's scent. It's that same lemon, mixed with a subtle note that's her personal odor. I easily find that in the air. I head to the door and inhale, only to be reminded that I'm not a werewolf. I barely pick up traces of Audrey's scent.

I close my eyes and inhale. Those traces seem to come from the right, in the direction of the stairs.

I roll my steps, careful to avoid the boards that creak. I was fourteen when I came here, old enough that back home, my mother gave me the freedom to roam. I'd lost that freedom in the city, and I used to sneak out on my own. I know every board that might creak and give me away.

I stop at the first door—the library—and inhale. Audrey's smell continues on. The next door leads to a small storage closet, and when I step past it, I lose her scent.

They're in the storage closet?

Wouldn't their attacker have gotten them out of the house?

Unless they just wanted them out of the way.

By putting them in a storage closet.

I step toward the door and then pause. Should I leave them in there and deal with the threat?

Tilting my head, I strain to listen, but I hear nothing. In the hall, I can smell Audrey and a second faint odor that I recognize as Henrietta.

What I don't smell? A third person.

That gives me pause.

Does the intruder know I have a well-honed sense of smell, so they've avoided perfumes and pomades?

I take hold of the doorknob and quietly twist. My fingers twitch as I ready a knockback spell. I've used them before in front

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of Audrey. With a hidden flick of my fingers, anyone who comes too close to us falls back as if stumbling, and she's never noticed anything odd about that.

What if I need to use stronger magic in front of her?

Then that's what I'll need to do. I'd never let my friends be hurt rather than expose myself as a witch.

"Stop," a woman's voice says from inside the closet.

I push open the door, letting in the hall light as I lift my fingers—

Audrey stands there, staring at me, wide-eyed and frightened, with Henrietta hiding behind her, holding tight . . .

No, Henrietta isn't hiding behind her cousin. She has one hand around Audrey's waist, while the other presses a blade to her throat.