

wicked

Resurrection

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SIMON AND SCHUSTER

PROLOGUE

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Remember me to one who lives there,
For she once was a true love of mine.

Tell her to make me a cambric shirt,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Without any seam nor needlework,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Tell her to wash it in yonder dry well,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Which never sprung water nor rain ever fell,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Tell her to dry it on yonder thorn,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Which never bore blossom since Adam was born,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Ask her to do me this courtesy,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
And ask for a like favour from me,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Have you been to Scarborough Fair?
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Remember me to one who lives there,
For he once was a true love of mine.

Ask him to find me an acre of land,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Between the salt water and the seastrand,
For then he'll be a true love of mine.

Ask him to plough it with a lamb's horn,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
And sow it all over with one peppercorn,
For then he'll be a true love of mine.

Ask him to reap it with a sickle of leather,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
And gather it up with a rope made of heather,
For then he'll be a true love of mine.

When he has done and finished his work,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Ask him to come for his cambric shirt,
For then he'll be a true love of mine.

If you say that you can't, then I shall reply,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Oh, let me know that at least you will try,
Or you'll never be a true love of mine.

Love imposes impossible tasks,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
But none more than any heart would ask,
I must know you're a true love of mine.

Part One

Melchior



In the time of the end, kings and lords shall be laid low and their treasures given to those who will never understand their power nor know until it is too late the terrible things that they behold and the curse that is upon them.

—ancient Celtic prophecy

ONE

GOLD



Dancing, spinning all around
Wounded now we've gone to ground
But Deveraux power still remains
And where we are, darkness reigns

An uneasy peace on Cahors lies
We dare not dance 'neath moonlit skies
We fear the dark that creeps outside
Not half as much as the one we hide

Medieval France: Fantasme, Pandion, Jean, and Isabeau

Thrum, thrum, thrum.

Fate loosed Fantasme, ancient falcon, powerful familiar of House Deveraux, upon the wind. The bells around his talons jingled like a temple dancer's anklets as he soared high above the wooded lands of France. He smelled the heat of Pandion, the hawk familiar of the Cahors; if one could say that a falcon smiles, Fantasme grinned in lustful anticipation. The son of his master, Duc Laurent, would soon bed the daughter

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of House Cahors. Perhaps Fantasme would take their familiar in the same way. Or *peut-être* he would simply rip her to shreds.

Thrum, thrum, thrum . . .

Below, the beaters threshed out the serfs, smashing the branches of the oak trees with poles in order to flush the unwilling sacrifices from their wretched hidey-holes. Other, lesser game would serve as for the great feast before the marriage of Jean de Deveraux and Isabeau of the Cahors—venison, pork, poultry. Ancient enemies, joined in matrimony—the result of decades of plotting, planning, and assassination.

The Deveraux asserted that a century before, Nicolette of the Cahors had poisoned Elijah, son of the most powerful warlock family in all of France, and buried his body in a ditch.

It was claimed in turn by House Cahors that Elijah had lured their witch princess to the festivities at Scarborough, and there had hacked her to pieces.

Neither claim was ever proven, but Fantasme knew that one hundred years later, history was about to repeat itself. A Deveraux and a Cahors bound together? More likely they would bleed each other in their sleep.

Below, fine young Jean raised his arm, his signal for Fantasme to return. Farther back in the hunting

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party, Jean's mistress, Karienne, rode alone, knowing she would soon be sent away.

Thrum, thrum, thrum: teardrops on leather; heartbeats; and the sly chuckle of unseen forces, who were, once again, about to set the families at each other's throats.

In a castle some leagues beyond, the hawk Pandion jingled her bells in protest, hobbled to her perch when she would rather be searching for game. She smelled Fantasma in the wind, and she would sooner slice his eyes open with her talons than see him at the marriage.

Dressed in yards of black veils chased with silver, Catherine, witch queen of the Cahors, prepared her daughter, Isabeau, for marriage to Jean de Deveraux—steadied her with sacrifices, raising bloody hands to their Goddess, while Isabeau wept with fear and hatred. She would marry Jean, but she would not keep him long.

Unless the Deveraux revealed the secret of the Black Fire to the Cahors, the proud warlock dynasty would be murdered in their beds before the year was dead. Catherine had sworn it; and Isabeau was her mother's child, raised to obey no husband and lord, only her liege lady, author of her birth. Despite the presence of Isabeau's father, Robert, women ruled in

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House Cahors. Men were for getting children, and not much else. Dispensable, and pitiful.

The Present: Jer, Without Her

“Holly,” Jer Deveraux whispered as he drifted in darkness. And loneliness. And in dreams. . . .

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?

If we could turn back time; if we could go back; if there was something I could have done differently . . . The path not taken . . .

His life was nothing but regret. There was no joy in it, only pain.

If I could see her again before I die . . . but if I can't, I would rather die . . .

Holly Cathers. Holly of the Cahors. You have bewitched me. Ruined me.

By the Horned God, damn you, love me still. I beg this of you.

Thrum, thrum, thrum, the beating of his heart, the fluttering of his soul.

Seattle: Dr. Nigel Tamar and Hecate

It was hard to believe that it had all started with a cat. Not just any cat either, but the resurrected familiar of a witch. The zombie cat that he had found in the ruins of a house, hissing and spitting and trapped under debris, had been the greatest gift he had ever received.

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He had taken the feline, and studied it. He knew little about magic but much about science, and with the cat he was sure that he could bring his greatest dream to fruition. A lifetime of searching, and the answers he needed were trapped inside the tiny feline body.

Perhaps most amazing of all, he had discovered that the creature could not be re-killed. No matter what happened, it revived, just as angry, just as miraculous. *Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought him back.* He had no idea what had actually killed it, although from the violent reaction to water dishes, he guessed it had something to do with drowning. However, the doctor knew it wasn't satisfaction that had brought the hellcat back. Months of study had finally paid off: Two days before, he had finally replicated the resurrection—but with science, not magic. Now he had two angry revived cats in his lab, and he couldn't be happier.

Around him Seattle smoldered in ruins. The destruction caused by Michael Deveraux in his battle with Holly Cathers and her cousins had ensured that the city would be years recovering, if ever. Thousands were dead or missing, victims of unnatural storms and fiendish creatures. Yet still people wanted to carry on as usual, lying to themselves, pretending that the stuff of their nightmares wasn't a reality.

But as he walked to his office in one of the few buildings left intact at the University of Washington at

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Seattle, Dr. Nigel Temar's thoughts were not on the victims. They weren't even on the two dead cats waiting for him in his lab. Nor were they on the twisted metal debris that once had been classrooms, or the gaping crater where the chemistry building had once stood, or the hundreds of impromptu memorials set up to honor students who had lost their lives there.

No, his thoughts were on one student only. Kari Hardwicke had been one of his grad students, and hers was the only presence he longed for, hers the only absence he felt.

He entered his building and made his way down three flights of stairs to his basement office. He unlocked the door, flicked on the lights, and quickly locked the door again behind himself. An unearthly yowling met his ears, and he smiled at the cat that was throwing himself against the bars of its cage. The other one glared sullenly from its enclosure, still not entirely used to its seemingly uncomfortable life-after-death.

All those months working so closely with Kari, prepping lectures, grading papers, discussing mythology. All he had wanted to do was take her in his arms and share with her the real secrets of his research. He might have given into the temptation, too, if it hadn't been for her ill-timed affair with the brooding warlock Jeraud Deveraux.

Nigel was nothing, though, if not patient. He

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knew how to watch and to wait. He'd known when the warlock's passion had waned. He'd watched Kari's vain attempts to recapture her lover's interest.

Then something had happened that he couldn't have foreseen. Kari had gotten involved in an age-old feud between the warring houses of Deveraux and Cahors. He had lost track of her a couple of months back, but he felt confident that he could find her.

He swept a place clear of papers on his desk and then gently set down a laptop, *her* laptop—which he had finally managed to locate, beneath a huge pile of rubble that had once been the tiny office she'd shared with two other teaching assistants.

“Kari, dear, you won't believe what I've achieved,” he whispered as he stroked the case a moment; then he opened up the clamshell and hit the power button. He hoped he would be able to show it to her soon. If only he could find her.

An hour later he had scanned all her documents, skimmed through e-mail, and even launched her Instant Messenger. Although there was an address book, he realized he didn't know what names he should be looking for. Finally he started hitting her Web site favorites.

It took a while, but he finally found the site he was looking for. It was a Wicca site, nothing too interesting, but it had a forum that Kari had posted in. He was

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able to view a string of communication between Kari and a user named Circle Lady. Recognizing that name, he opened her Instant Messenger and fired off a note to Circle Lady, who appeared to be offline. Then he returned to the Web site and sent a message to her there.

A moment later, the Instant Messenger pinged, and he turned to it with a flare of hope. He was disappointed to see that the response was not from Circle Lady, but someone calling themselves English Rose. He sent a brief response.

"Hi."

A moment later English Rose accused: *"You're not Kari."*

"No, but I'm looking for her," he typed without hesitation.

"I'm looking for Circle Lady," came the unhelpful reply.

"Maybe they're in the same place?" he suggested.

"Goddess forbid . . . Kari's dead."

He stared for a moment at the screen as the words registered. His stomach twisted; his heart felt numb. Dead? He should have known, should have felt it. For a long time he stared at the screen.

And then the yowling of the cats penetrated his fog of grief. There were worse things than dying. There was *staying dead*.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sorry."

"How long ago?"

"A couple of days."

"Where is the body?"

He waited for the answer to this most important question. It was slow in coming, and for a minute he wondered if English Rose had decided not to tell him.

"It hasn't been . . . recovered . . . yet."

He caught his breath. Blinkered.

"Kari," he whispered. "Don't go. Don't leave." He realized he was talking to her soul. Or trying to. Did he believe in such things?

"I think we need to talk," he told English Rose.

In the end she wouldn't give him her phone number, so he gave her his university extension and waited impatiently for the phone to ring. When it finally did, he was actually a little surprised that his caller did in fact seem to be from England.

Coy as she had been in giving him her phone number, he was not surprised that she didn't seem willing to reveal anything else. He took another deep breath. He needed her to find Kari, and if she was right and Kari was dead, then time was of the essence.

"I know Kari was in over her head. She was caught up in the middle of a coven war that destroyed half of Seattle," he said.

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“It didn’t do much for London, either,” she snorted.

Nigel closed his eyes. So, London it was. He tried to stay focused, make plans, behave like a scientist. “I need help transporting her body back here . . . for a proper burial in her hometown,” he said.

“Then I suggest you contact the local authorities. However, you might want to wait a few more days.”

“Ah, yes, the business of recovering the body.”

“Yes, quite.”

He could hear the suspicion in her tone. Of course, if he’d known about dead bodies before the police and had not contacted them, he’d be suspicious of people who asked questions too.

He decided to gamble. Tenuous as the link was, English Rose was the only connection he had to Kari. “The problem is, you see, I need the body to be preserved as best as possible. The family wants an open casket.”

“Why don’t we drop the games,” the woman said.

He sensed she had made a decision about him. Or was willing to. “Gladly. You first. You could tell me who you are.”

“English Rose is as good a name as any. And you, professor?”

“Since I can only call you by your screen name, how about I give you mine. I’m generally known as Dr. Frankenstein.”

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He could hear her suck in her breath. “I think I understand you, Doctor. What you want, however, will be tricky.”

“I don’t care how it is done. All that I care about is retrieving the body quickly. I can pay you well for your time and your services.”

“In that case, I think we can work something out. Although I’m more interested in information than in money.”

He had gotten her attention, that was for sure. Although the cat he had found had been clearly resurrected by magic, he had been fairly sure that most witches didn’t possess such knowledge of resurrection.

And now he was certain of it.

Outside Cologne, Germany:

Holly, Pablo, Armand, Alex, and the Temple of the Air

Holly thought that she must not have a heart anymore, because if she did, it would have broken long ago. She had walked away from everyone she cared about: Amanda, Nicole, Uncle Richard, Jer, and Owen, Nicole’s baby. Well, Jer had walked away from all of them, leaving without a word. Nicole had been giving birth to Owen, and Holly had been forced to choose her destiny.

Her cousin Alex Carruthers had invited her to join forces with him to rout out more strongholds of the

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Supreme Coven, bitter enemies of both the Mother Coven and Holly's people as well. The Mother Coven, made up of female and male witches who worshipped the Goddess, had tried to force Holly to claim allegiance. After she had reluctantly acquiesced, the Mother Coven had twice failed to protect Holly's coven against attacks from their bitterest enemies, the Deveraux.

Because of that, Holly had chosen to go with Alex. Amanda, Tommy, Richard, and Nicole all wanted peace. And they deserved it. They had done their bit for Coventry, as it were.

Philippe, the French male witch aligned with the Goddess, would have been willing to continue the fight, except that he was in thrall to Nicole, and so his first loyalty lay with her . . . and with the child, who might or might not be his. Nicole had been with him, Eli Deveraux, and her now-dead husband, James Moore. James had betrayed his father, Sir William Moore, leader of the Supreme Coven in London.

James had thought he'd killed his father, but at the last instant, a hideous demon had pushed out of Sir William's corpse like a huge cobra. The memory chilled Holly's blood, and made her wish that she, too, had stayed behind with Nicole and Amanda. Together, her twin cousins and she were the three Ladies of the Lily, said to be very powerful. Of the three, she possessed the most magical power . . . pur-

chased at terrible prices. Parts of her soul were dark now, as dark as that of any Deveraux or Moore.

Of those who had fought beside her, only Pablo and Armand accompanied her on her new journey, with Alex. Her long-lost cousin was fair-haired and blue-eyed, such a contrast to Jer Deveraux. And in more ways than one: Alex loved Holly. It was obvious in every smile, every look, in how he checked to make sure she was all right after they attacked enclaves and strongholds of warlocks dedicated to the Supreme Coven. How he conjured wine and good food for her, and made pillows and a mattress out of thin air for her, expending valuable magical energy that he might need in their next foray against the enemy.

And speaking of energy . . .

I need a vacation, Holly thought grimly as they trudged along under cover of darkness somewhere in the German countryside. *Holly Cathers, you just defeated your archnemesis, the man who killed your parents and made your life a living hell. What are you going to do?*

Apparently she was going to start the whole process all over again.

She should have chosen to go to Disneyland instead. As the group began to move even more slowly and silently, she wondered if it was too late to change her mind.

There were sixteen of them in total. Besides Holly,

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Pablo, and Armand, Alex traveled with a dozen members of his coven, which he called The Temple of the Air. It was a good name. Air was definitely Alex's element, and he could control it in ways that were astonishing.

I wonder what my element is, Holly thought. Her introduction to her witchblood and the legacy that came with it had been a bloodbath, literally. She had never had a chance to explore all the subtleties and niceties of the craft. She had unbelievable power but no idea what she was doing most of the time.

It's probably water, she thought grimly. It would be ironic and morbid. After all, those who loved Cathers witches were doomed to die by drowning. That was how her parents had died, on a rafting trip. *That's what happened to Nicole's cat, Hecate. That's how I killed her.*

Nicole. I wonder how she is. Fire would definitely have to be her cousin Nicole's element. She was always the drama queen, so wild, so passionate. Nicole's twin sister, Amanda, with her practicality and thoughtfulness, was definitely like the earth, a nurturer through and through.

The group came to a halt so suddenly that Holly bumped into Armand hard enough to make them both stumble. The moon slid out from behind the low-hanging clouds, and for a moment she could see the others clearly. Alex was deep in conversation with

one of his men, a witch named Stanislaus, who had just returned from scouting ahead.

Rumor had it that there was an outpost of the Supreme Coven nearby, one renowned for dark magic and evil purposes. Although Alex had once lectured Jer that there was no need for covens, or even families, to fight, it wasn't entirely true. Evil was evil, and Alex insisted that it had to be dealt with to make the world a safer place for all of them.

Except I am evil, Holly thought. It was the brooding fear that she always tried to push out of her mind. Sometimes at night she dreamed that the reason Jer didn't want to be with her wasn't because of his terrible scars or his own black heart, but because of hers.

You're not evil, Pablo said, popping quietly into her head.

Thanks, she said, too tired to yell at him for reading her mind. It was the young boy's special talent, one they had put to good use while spying on the enemy. But she found it disconcerting that he knew her secret thoughts.

Alex finished consulting with Stanislaus and turned toward her, his face eager and his eyes alight. "We've got 'em," he announced.

"Oh, goody," Holly said, under her breath.

Pablo looked at her sharply, but Alex had missed her sarcasm.

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“We’re going to take them now,” Alex continued, looking keen and fresh. His blond hair glowed in the moonlight, and his blue eyes gleamed. He grinned at her. “You ready?”

“Now?” Holly asked, stunned. “Shouldn’t we plan or prepare or hold circle or something first?”

“No time,” Alex said impatiently. “We have the advantage of surprise. If we don’t strike now, we risk losing that.”

Armand and Pablo looked as uneasy as she felt. She was sure that Alex had never seemed more confident, though. Reluctantly she nodded agreement. All she really wanted was to find a nice soft bed to crawl into. If he thought that they should go in, that was what they’d do. After all, she’d had less warning than this before a fight.

Holly cast a spell that muffled their movements as they continued on their way, walking closely together. In a valley below, a large black-and-white structure with a shingled silo dominated a crisscross maze of animal pens. Holly blinked in surprise. A barn?

“Are you sure we’re in the right place?” she asked Alex.

“Not all branches of the Supreme Coven have the audacity of the London one,” he said. “Some prefer to remain much more anonymous.”

Holly shook her head as she stared at the wooden

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structure. Pablo and Armand gazed impassively at her, and she couldn't begin to guess what they were thinking.

An owl hooted as Stanislaus led them around the west side of the barn, away from the main doors. Inside, horses chuffed and stamped in their stalls. Did the animals sense that death was about to rain down upon their owners?

Rickety doors in the ground looked like the entrance to a root cellar of some sort. Several of Alex's covenates were already at work, silently punching holes in the wards that she could see shimmering in the air. Their presence helped calm her nerves and focus her mind. Suddenly the serene barn was instead a fortress of evil giving lodging to her enemies.

The enemies of my House, and my friends, she thought. I shall give them no mercy. None.

As the wards came free, she realized that she was beginning to sound more and more like her ancestress Isabeau. The only daughter of a bloodthirsty, merciless witch, Isabeau had been trained from birth to be hard and unforgiving.

Maeve and Janet, two of Alex's female covenates, threw open the doors. Alex hurled himself down a flight of stone stairs dripping with broken wards. Holly lunged after him, and the blood began to sing in her veins. She could hear shouts below her, and she conjured fireballs in each hand.

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The first warlock came into view, a tall, thin man wearing black pajamas.

“Verdammt!” he bellowed, lunging toward Alex.

Slightly above Alex on the stairs, Holly threw one of her fireballs into his face. The man screamed, collapsing and rolling to the bottom of the stairs. He blazed, and she did nothing to help him.

Maeve, Janet, and Stanislaus clattered around Holly and down the stairs. Alex leaped over the burning man, then turned and held a hand out to Holly. She sailed over the warlock, who had stopped struggling.

“To the right!” Pablo shouted.

Holly and Alex turned to the right and found themselves inside a large cavernous space. At least two dozen warlocks were rushing toward them. Some cast wards; one came at her with a sword; others pulled out revolvers and submachine guns.

Holly laughed as she knocked her adversary’s sword aside with a wave of her hand. A moment later the room rocked with explosions, and then walls of flame. The smoke made her cough and choke, until Alex conjured a shield around them, a bubble. He grinned at her, and she threw back her head in wanton pleasure.

And then it was over. The fire died, revealing the carnage. Holly looked down at the scorched bodies of her enemies, and she couldn’t help but feel disappointed. That had been far too easy.

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It was barely midnight when they locked the cellar, replaced the wards around it, and melted into the night. It had happened so quickly it was almost as if Holly had dreamed the whole thing.

“There’s a great hotel in Cologne,” Alex said. “I’ve stayed in it before. It’s just a short walk.”

Great, more walking. Holly was really starting to wish for a magic broom. In her mind she remembered past fights, when she had conjured spectral warhorses to ride into battle.

A spectral warhorse would mean she wouldn’t have to walk anymore. She sighed. It would also take more concentration and strength than she was capable of. The adrenaline from the short skirmish had drained out of her the moment it was over. So she put her head down and kept walking, forcing one foot in front of the other. And when she looked up again, they were in the city.

Even her exhausted brain couldn’t help but marvel at the beauty of historic marble buildings juxtaposed with soaring skyscrapers of neon and glass. Cologne sparkled with bustle and lights.

On their left they passed an ancient Gothic cathedral of ornate double spires, stained-glass windows, and elaborate friezes of saints. Holly paused, moved by its beauty. She had never seen anything like it in her life.

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I wish witches had structures like that, she thought. Beautiful places where we could gather to worship, and the tourists could take pictures and brag about having been there.

“This is Cologne Cathedral,” Alex told her in hushed tones. “The bodies of the Three Wise Men are said to rest inside it.” He took her hand. She let him.

“Do you believe that there were three wise men?” she asked.

“Most men are fools,” he replied, smiling faintly. “They throw away their power . . . and their chances for happiness.”

He’s talking about Jer, she thought with a flip of her stomach.

Suddenly Pablo made a choking sound. He staggered and then fell, crashing to his knees. She let go of Alex’s hand and dropped down next to Pablo.

“Pablo!” she shouted, grabbing his arm. His eyes had rolled backward in his head, and only the whites showed.

“Phil—ippe,” he gasped, then collapsed onto the street.

London: Rose

Rose was thrilled with the contact from Dr. Frankenstein. She still didn’t know his real name, but she could find out easily enough. It didn’t bring her any closer to finding Sasha, but if she could learn what

he knew about reanimating the dead, it would be well worth her time and efforts.

Luna, the high priestess of the Mother Coven, had personally asked Rose to search for Sasha. Rose's special talent was finding people, especially those she had met before. Yet, despite all her skill, she had been unable to find the woman who had once been Michael Deveraux's wife, before she had escaped him and lost herself in the Mother Coven.

The last time Rose had seen Sasha, the woman had been a member of Holly's coven. Luna herself had sent them to Rose. Rose's home served as a Mother Coven safe house, and when she had sheltered the Cathers Coven, Kari Hardwicke had also been with them. She remembered the younger woman as being flighty and frightened—not of witchblood, and not really even a borrower of magical power. Just . . . angry, and anxious to get out of the terrible war she'd stumbled into.

The Mother Coven would not approve of Rose's bargain with Dr. Frankenstein, so she would have to be careful in deciding who among her witchly friends she could trust. The Mother Coven frowned on ambition. They saw it as a warlock trait. In the coven every witch had their role, their place, which they were carefully prepared for. Unlike the members of the Supreme Coven, they were strongly encouraged to pick a specialty and not to learn much outside their roles. As

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a result, only a very few in the Mother Coven had a broad base of power, or the knowledge or skill to challenge Luna, their high priestess.

Rose had no desire to challenge the high priestess, but she was tired of feeling as if she lived in a cage. She was a safe house keeper, a person locator, nothing more. If she could learn Dr. Frankenstein's secrets, though . . . She pushed the thought from her mind. One step at a time. She still had to figure out how to retrieve Kari's body.

It took two days to gather the witches she needed and another day to make sure that they could sufficiently break the wards around the former Supreme Coven headquarters to get inside. They went at night and dressed in dark clothing.

What they found inside was a nightmare. Bodies of humans and demons were lying broken and lifeless in crumpled piles, limbs askew as though flung by giant hands. The stench was unbearable, and Rose struggled not to vomit.

"By the Goddess," Sarah, a young witch, breathed in horror.

"I didn't know there were so many women warlocks in the Supreme Coven," a male witch, Kyle, muttered as he flipped over yet another body and Rose shook her head.

"Neither did I," Rose said grimly. Finding Kari

was turning out to be a lot harder than she had anticipated.

Finally, an hour later, Rose gazed down on a familiar form. It took a moment for Rose to be sure it was her. Bodies often looked very different when the spark of life was gone. Additionally, someone had slit this woman's throat, and her face was covered in blood.

"It's her," Rose said, at last.

Sarah wove a spell of invisibility around the body before Kyle stooped to pick her up.

"Light as a feather, stiff as a board," he joked.

Sarah wrinkled her nose, and Rose shook her head. "Let's get out of here," Rose ordered them tersely.

"I feel tainted," Sarah said with a shiver as they started back to the entrance, picking their way around bodies. "To think that I've stood on Supreme Coven soil . . ."

"It is very disturbing," Kyle added, serious for a moment.

Once outside they all breathed easier. A few minutes later they reached their destination without mishap. The Supreme Coven had clearly abandoned London. That should be cause for rejoicing.

When they were safely inside Rose's home, they laid Kari out on the living room floor. Her face was mottled and gray, and maggots crawled in the deep slash across her throat.

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“Decomposition has advanced,” Kyle said. “This isn’t going to be easy.”

“Do what you can,” Rose instructed. Kyle was the only witch she knew who loved dead things. His skills with preserving bodies were often called upon for ceremonies and rites, and if the occasional preservation seemed odd, he never asked questions.

“If we remove the organs, this will be easier,” he ventured, lifting one of Kari’s arms and inspecting her fingertips.

“Like mummification?” Sarah asked.

“I was going more for taxidermy, but yeah,” he said, lowering her arm and frowning at the gaping hole in her chest.

“No, the family would like her as intact as possible,” Rose said. She couldn’t help but wonder if Dr. Frankenstein would be able to reanimate a body that had been dead several days and was as badly damaged as this one. If he could, his would be a secret worth knowing.

“I’ll need the usual,” Kyle said. “Salt, myrrh, amber.” He made a face. “This isn’t going to be easy.”

Four hours later, it was done. Kari was as well preserved as possible. Rose and Kyle placed her in a large box, and Sarah went to work putting a glamour on it, so that no one would see the body inside.

When it was done, Rose dialed the number she

had for the doctor, and when he answered, she said, “We’re ready to ship. Please give me the address.”

Seattle: Dr. Temar and Hecate

Inside his laboratory Dr. Temar carefully, reverently opened the plain wooden box. Inside he saw what appeared to be dozens of gilded dried herbs and flowers. They were beautiful, delicate, and completely unreal. This was the glamour that English Rose had placed upon the crate to make sure that anyone who opened it would not see the body that was inside. He muttered a few words under his breath, ones she had told him would break the illusion.

The air seemed to shimmer for a moment, light traced the outlines of the flowers, and then they faded and he saw the beautiful face of Kari. The witches had been true to their word. Although she had now been dead a couple of weeks, her body was in a state of preservation, though it was far from perfect.

Something had exploded in her chest, shredding flesh and bone until there was not much left intact. Her throat had also been cut, a jagged line passing over the jugular. He had prepared himself for what he might see, but he couldn’t stop the tears that fell from his eyes and wet her lifeless cheeks.

“Kari, I swear I will bring you back,” he vowed.

Inside their cages the cats screamed.

Wicked: Resurrection

Avalon: Eli

Eli Deveraux walked the beaches of the island of Avalon like one in a dream. After the battle at the Supreme Coven headquarters in London, he had somehow ended up at Avalon. He still wasn't sure how or why. What he did know was that he was different.

He was stronger, more powerful. He could feel the vitality that he had taken from his father, Michael Deveraux, and from his rival, James Moore, when he had killed them that night. It had been Wind Moon; anyone who killed a witch or warlock on Wind Moon gained their power.

He turned, and without lifting a finger or uttering a single syllable he set an oak tree on fire. Then just as easily he put it out with a sudden violent wind. He seemed to have control over three of the elements now, but the fourth, water, eluded him. As did a way off the island.

At least he wasn't in too much of a hurry. From his past experiences on the island he knew where everything was, including the kitchens and the larders. Most of the island's demonic inhabitants seemed to have disappeared. Whether they had gone to aid their masters in the fight or had fled at the first opportunity, he wasn't sure. Either way, he walked the island mostly undisturbed, watching the waves crash on the sand, the rushes wave in the wind. Towering

Gold

rocks gazed down on him like castle turrets, and sea birds cawed.

With the island almost entirely deserted, though, it was easier to feel . . . something. Nicole had told him that there was a presence on the island. He had never felt it before, when he had come there to rescue her, but he could feel it now. It was as though something were watching him, peeping out at him through the cracks and crevices, through time itself. Whatever it was, the evil that emanated from it freaked out even him . . . and he was just about as evil as they came.

He had been there for a month, and every day he scryed for Nicole, trying to find her. Every day he found nothing. He refused to believe that she was dead. Somehow he was sure that if she was, he would feel it, would know somehow. Even if the baby wasn't his. With the magic now at his disposal it would take some incredibly powerful wards to hide her forever.

He combed every inch of the island, turning over rocks, feeling along the crevices of ruined stone walls, looking for something that might have belonged to her. A personal object could serve as the basis of a finder's spell. All he could find were things of James's that she might have touched—a jeweled goblet; James's clothes, left behind. He found a cache of

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James's backup athames—ritual knives used in magic ceremonies.

He spent undue amounts of time in the bedroom where Nicole had been kept a prisoner. It was decorated in the style of warlocks who worshipped the God—with carved images of Pan, and the great, leering face of the Horned One.

He tore the bed apart—the very bed where James had forced Nicole—and pounded it in anger with his fists. He found the hidden cavity in the headboard. It was empty, but he sensed that powerful magical objects had once lain inside. His blood froze as he recalled the stories he had heard from his father, of the silent bargain the Deveraux and Cahors had made—the secret of the Black Fire in exchange for a son of both their blood. James had possessed the magical ability to force Nicole to carry his child. Had he done it?

Eli's imagination clawed at him, tormenting him as each day on the island dragged past. He became obsessed with the marriage room; he scoured every inch; then, one day in despair, he stood in the center and turned slowly, eyes closed.

“Open my eyes that I might see the treasure that belonged to my lady,” he whispered. He winced as he thought about how much it sounded like a prayer to the Goddess. In many ways Nicole was his Goddess.

Gold

And after everything that had happened, she should have been the lady to his lord. He grit his teeth as he thought again of James marrying her, taking her. His fingernails dug into his palms until he could feel blood oozing out. The drops hit the floor, a fitting sacrifice.

“Take my blood in this hour, grant me a prize from my lady’s bower.”

He opened his eyes and continued to turn, hoping to see something, anything, that could have belonged to her. And slowly he tilted his head up, and as though compelled, he lifted his eyes to the ceiling. It was ornately carved with symbols of the Horned God.

And there, in the dead center of the ceiling, was the glint of something round, something metal.

He lifted his hand and willed it to come to him. It came free easily, as though it had been long waiting for just such a call, and fell into his hand. It was a thin ring of gold with a tiny circumference. He wondered if it would even fit Nicole’s pinky finger. He closed his hand around it, and let his blood cover it.

That night he tried his seeking spell one last time, but with the gold ring as the focus of it. “From this ring give me power to see the woman newly a mother, and tell me then where I might find this lady who holds the heart and mind.”

A woman’s scream pierced the night. He jumped

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to his feet and whirled around. His heart slammed against his ribs as he wondered if somehow he had managed to bring Nicole to him.

There was another scream, and he realized it was outside; he ran as fast as he could, conjuring fireballs to light his way. A third scream—it was coming from the cave where he and Nicole had hidden when they'd been trying to escape the island.

The cries grew fainter; fear spurred him to put on a fresh burst of speed. What if he hadn't brought her to him? What if he was about to see what was happening to her right now?

Then: silence.

He swore to himself as he ran the last one hundred feet before bursting into the cave. He stopped at what he saw. A spectral woman lay there, trembling with pain and exhaustion, a newborn baby upon her breast.

Nicole? No, it wasn't she; it was someone else. From the style of her clothes she had been dead a long, long time. The ring, then, must have belonged to her. He sank to his knees in rage as disappointment ripped through him.

Then the ghost woman turned and looked at him.

He blinked, and so did she.

"Can you see me?" he asked her.

Her brow furrowed, and he realized she couldn't

Gold

understand him. He held up his hand slowly. He pointed first to her, then to his eyes, and then to his own chest.

She nodded. Her eyes were wide, young, and incredibly gentle. He knew he had never seen her before, yet something about her seemed so . . . familiar.

He pointed again to himself. "Eli."

She smiled faintly at him before pointing to herself. "Mary."

A shiver went up his spine and a terrible fear raced through him. Slowly he lifted his finger and pointed at the baby she clutched.

Her smile widened and she looked down at the child. "Jesus."

And suddenly the entire cave changed. Everywhere he looked he saw animals and people. Mary and her child were the center of attention. He turned to where the entrance to the cave was. He didn't trust his legs to hold his weight, but he figured he could try to crawl free. Only, standing at the mouth of the cave were men of great power and wealth. Their clothes were bejeweled. They carried with them boxes. He could feel the magical energy coming off them, crackling powerfully.

They strode by him without noticing. No one there except for Mary seemed to see him. Her ring—he guessed it must be hers—and his spell must have created some sort of portal between their times. He

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turned back to watch as the Magi—that must be who they were—laid their gifts at her feet.

He remembered the legends and he watched as they laid down gold, frankincense, myrrh . . . and silver. And that was when he realized.

There were four of them.