

Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall Chapter 26

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“COLTON! COLTON!” I yell in the hopes of him hearing me and being close enough to respond, but there’s nothing but deathly silence in the eeriness of this green mist. It seems like even the wind around us is captured on the other side of the boundary and we are left standing in an airless stillness that isn’t natural. My body shudders involuntarily and I cover my arms with my own palms to comfort the sudden pang of vulnerable that courses through my body. My heart screeching that this is all kinds of wrong.

“What’s that, look, there.” Meadow points thorough to a slightly less dense patch to our right and we catch sight of a huge dark figure moving across our horizon, getting close to the rune border and yet not coming further. It’s almost like they hesitate as they reach the line from fog to clearing.

“Who’s there.... who is it?” I call out boldly, feeling nothing of vampires and sensing only wolves nearby. I can feel the presence of my love, somewhere beyond that line, yet he can’t seem to interact with me at all.

“Why aren’t they answering us?” Meadow steps forward to gaze intently into the wall of emerald smog but she can’t see through as it still billows and bombards our magical resistance with an effort to get at us. It’s like watching the clouds roll in a thunderstorm and if it wasn’t so terrifying, it would be almost mesmerizing.

“Maybe it’s dampening sound out there and we can’t hear them..... I can feel them, so surely they can feel us too. They’re right here and yet not a single one has breached the boundary.” I query in confusion.

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We both flinch and instinctively step back as a pair of clawed hands come at us through the mist and meet an invisible almost gla** like wall. It makes the barrier shudder with a magical spark that travels outwards like a ripple of disturbed water. Enough to startle my heart into pumping like I’ve been running and we both leap further back and stare in open eyed shock as they come at us a second time to try with more force. The claws bang against it with a violent reverberation, making us both recoil slightly into our own bodies this time and a face appears through the mist pressing to the separation, baring teeth and fueled with rage.

“Cesar?” Meadow frowns at the familiar face of her mate in wolf form, relaxing slightly, even if she seems confused at his behavior and moves to him, but his eyes catch my attention and I grab her by the upper arm and haul her back in panic. Fear gripping my soul and I shake my head dramatically to drive home she should stay back.

“Don’t! Look at his eyes...” I nod towards the angry snarling glare of our pack brother and Meadow gasps as her own soft eyes land on the emptiness of his.

Where normally his amber eyes would glow, is deep almost endless black, covering every part, including the whites and completely changing his entire appearance. Sheathed in darkness, sending tremors of mistrust through me and I step further back as another wolf makes a break at the wall to my left. The same ripple shuddering between us as they fail to get through and the slight dampening of fog reveals more wolf turned angry kin coming our way.

"They can't get in.... something is wrong with them." I point out as more appear along our invisible line and growls and snarls aimed our way pierce the air, proving sound is not a barrier issue as they spy us standing here. I shudder with a wave of apprehension and back away, hauling Meds with me so we leave a good ten feet gap from the rune line.

"Chica... It's Cole." Meadow drags my attention back to the center with a pointed finger, as the mist begins to thin out enough that those within the first few feet begin to become completely visible. I spot Colton standing only feet from me, tucked behind them, directly facing us, only he's not wolf, he's still human but his claws are extended, and his eyes are the same terrifying abyss of black as Cesar. He's focused straight at me, with a blood curling glare that isn't the Colton I know and love at all. He's a hunter in kill mode, rage pulsating around him, his snarl in place and his teeth beginning to peek. It's obvious that I am his prey. Trembling under his unbreakable and penetrating gaze I shiver and curl my arms around Meadow's arm, feeling instantly vulnerable and unsure what to do. The way he's looking at me makes my blood run cold in my veins.

"Colton, what are you doing?" my words tremble weakly, shaking with emotions as they pa** my lips and for the first time since I have known him, I'm truly afraid of him in this moment. He looks like him, only he's not. I can feel the aura of sinister ebbing from them all and I sink down against her as he bares his teeth fully, elongating as he growls at me and scoops forward into pounce mode.

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"It's a spell, it has to be. Only that could keep our own out. Look at them. They're almost feral and if they could get over here, I think you and I would be brindis" Meadow shudders and reaches out impulsively towards Caesar as he punches a clawed fist at the barrier and roars in rage when he can't get through. There's no denying the anger and aggression seeping from them, that we're what they want, and it's not for sweet reunions. Our pack mates are looking at us the way they look at vamps just before a kill. Somehow, we are now the enemy and who they want to tear limb from limb.

"Maybe when the fog clears, they'll be okay." My voice breaks as the words tumble out like a child, and Meadow grabs my hand and starts pulling me away as she notes Colton readying himself to leap at us. He's poised, moving low and setting his sights higher than where the others keep trying to get through. "Wait. I can try something." I gasp in desperation and yank free, turning my attention back to Colton. Pulling my hands together to cage my own palms with my fingers until I feel my energy build into a loose ball, I throw it out wide, like a veil, to part and push the fog into the background of where our mates stand. Trying to clear the air around them in a bid to remove its effects.

Meadow watches with silent anticipation as a clearing in the shape of a half dome is thrust back like a 'p***' of someone blowing at it. It's gentler than I expected given the force I threw but I guess that's the nature and power of the fog. There's instant clarity as I clear around them completely, and they stand in perfect focus breathing in newly fresh air as I hold my breath and wait. With the immediate ten feet lifted and clear in the morning light we can see just how many of the sub pack are standing close by and staring murderously our way. How many of the other packs are hanging behind, crowding around, and surrounding their alpha as though waiting for something. All of them. Every wolf that was caught out there in that green smoke is huddled here and not a single one has amber eyes.

They all seem to be waiting on Colton to make a move, still in pack hierarchy, even if they're enchanted. Colton looks up and around at the fog clearing, pulling back like the tide, the air around them returning to normal. He tilts his chin back down and stares me dead in the eye. Eyes still black, gaze still venomous and he makes a run for me through the clearing. A vicious and high leap that sends his full body shuddering into the invisible veil. The entire wall of air in front of us vibrates and ripples horrendously, as though he almost pushed it to its limit. The cascading effects sent out along left and right, like it was hit by a sonic boom, yet he still remains on the other side as he tumbles back down to land on his hind paws.

I fall back in startled shock as he smashes the barrier for a second attempt, level with my height and the subs follow, all aggressively pounding into the magical safety net and clawing, trying to rip through. It's like they are hoping combined force will be enough and my breathing becomes ragged as I freeze in real terror. Afraid they may actually get through, and then what? Teeth gnashing as they all fully turn to wolf form and begin a frenzied attack, intent on coming over. Piling up together in a wave of furred bodies and the light is blocked out by the mountain of them clambering together.

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"Come on, we're going to Sierra! NOW!!!..... She can tell us what the hell is going on, Chica. This is f***ing terrifying. They don't know us!" Meadow takes one last desperate look at Cesar, her eyes welling up with tears and I glance at Colton, afraid to make eye contact when it hurts this much to see him like this. My heart ripping in two that he's a stranger to me and it's as though all his love and humanity is gone. Someone I don't know; he's never been like this in all the time I have known him, and I recoil as he lurches again and again at the barrier in an attempt to take me down repeatedly, throwing his body into unbreakable gla** and insane with the need to do it. They are consumed by bloodlust, much like vampires going after a feed.

"f*** you!" I snap impulsively at him, at all of them, emotion getting the better of me as a fire rages deep in my belly. Tears pricking my eyes, at this whole situation; my heart breaking while I throw my hand at the wall in one impulsive last anger ridden reaction to make them stop.

The wall of wolves and fog is ripped apart straight down the center, like I blew a harsh gust of powerful wind to rip through them, going for miles into the distance that causes a path like a huge tunnel. Colton and Cesar, some of the others, are thrown back away from it with my precise eruption and sent s***tered into the forest brush with yelps of shock before they tumble to their feet and snap their heads back to me. My gifts are clearly not bound by the border so it's definitely them that can't come in; the fog has done something that means they are no longer recognized as our pack, as our blood, or our mates.

I turn and follow meadow at speed, no more hesitation at getting away from what my heart cannot bare to see anymore, as we come up against some of our patrolling sentinels who are walking the path. looking as confused as us.

"The fog has done something to the pack, they can't get in. Make sure no one crosses the rune line or gets too close to the boundary until I say otherwise. Pa** it on via the link. Everyone is to stay home, stay safe until we figure this out. That's an order. The alpha is not to be trusted even if he stands at the border...Understand?" I snap aggressively, tears starting to blind my vision, but I have to swallow it down and pull myself together and seem like I am in control. Meadow has turned broody and quiet yet her emotion filters through and I taste her equal heartache to mine.

The guards nod, glancing from her to me as though expecting her to say something, looking equally afraid given they are some of the males from the village and not from our usual sentinel packs. All our fighters, our warriors, our strongest – they are all out there in the fog with our alpha. We couldn't be in a worse position if we tried. We lost them all in one fell swoop. One tragedy has literally taken all of our protectors out from us in the blink of an eye.

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We hit the main doorway at speed and zoom straight for Sierra's room, scaling the stairs without a pause but meet her halfway up the final landing as she comes bounding to find us.

"You see it?" I ask briskly as we close the gap and I grab her hands in panic. Her small hands and cool skin enveloped in mine and the worry and confusion is written all over her delicate face. Right now she doesn't seem like my mother figure, but that she's looking to me for answers as a young and scared femme.

"I did. It climbed up the walls of the boundary and can be seen from every direction of the homestead. What's going on. There are so many awful feelings in the air and noises of wolves howling in the forest" Sierra is pale and trembling and her words catch in her throat almost choking the last ones out as I frown at her. We didn't hear them howl from our side but that means more are behind the stead and around the village border now, where the wind would have kept their calls from us. They must be surrounding the border looking for a way in.

"We don't know. The fog has more than a third of our pack, that's more than half the adult wolves, and Colton, he's with them; they seem different. I think it's some sort of curse or spell or something." I blabber it out almost incoherently as the tears finally scratch my voice and turn my throat hoarse. Meadow is pale and

staring out past Sierra's head at the window along the corridor, watching the fog settle halfway up our view from up here. My gut tightens and I pray it doesn't get higher than our magic does. I don't know how else we would stop it if we didn't have the Runes.

"Different how?" Sierra queries and Meadow doesn't hesitate to place her fingers on Sierra's temple to show her. I think Meadow is in mild shock and doesn't know what to do or say. Seeing Cesar that way, it's shaken her to the core because I know that despite her fiery and strong nature, he is literally her world and she would crumble without him. Cesar has been her mate since her young teens, and they have become so completely as one over the years that she doesn't seem to know how to function right now. I'm only six months into a mate bond and despite how much I love him, I still know that I can be strong on my own two feet, have proven so in the past. I am not too used to falling back onto him in every way just yet to be as lost as Meadow seems.

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Sierra's eyes widen in horror as she sees exactly what we did as the memory filters through, and she covers Meadow's hand with her shaking fingers as she inhales sharply. Her already pale skin seems to white out further and her body instantly seems to frail and sway so that I reach out to steady her.

"It can't be. That kind of dark magic is almost impossible to put in action on such a scale, with multiple hosts. This is no normal witch or simple spell. This is so beyond my knowledge, or skill." Sierra grabs onto my outstretched arms to steady herself as she falters on her own feet and I blink at her, my mouth drying with the realization that this is something major. Heart racing, nerves already taut, and I struggle to breathe as the weight of this disaster seems to come down even harder over me.

"So this IS a spell. How do we break it, how do we get them home and okay?" My mouth is firing out words as part of my brain tries to take control, even if my insides are trembling and my biggest urge is to curl up on the floor and sob.

"We don't. I don't know how to deal with this.... I don'tI ...don't know.... We have to check the library downstairs, read the grimoires, get the Shaman, and figure this out. I'm primarily a healer and a seer, although I can conjure protection spells and an occasional bond, but this is way over my gift limit. I have heard of this kind of magic, but I have never seen it. I didn't think one witch alone could do this." Her voice fully breaks and tears stream from the corner of her eyes delicately. Shaking with the sheer knowledge that she doesn't know how to fix this. One thing I know is, the Shaman was out there too and no longer here with us but I can't find the words to say it.

"Maybe that means it won't last. Maybe it will fade out as the fog does?" Meadow asks hopefully, suddenly finding her voice and sounding nothing like her usual sa**y self. Sierra lifts her palms helplessly, almost in response of saying 'I don't know.' Eyes full of fat unshed tears and her own breathing has become labored. Here we stand, three femmes in various states of emotional distress, faced with a huge problem, and the only ones left in the pack with the ability to do something about it, is us. We're so screwed.

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"It didn't work when I cleared the air around them" I point out, close to manic, my emotions rising in my throat to choke me, but I hold it all in and breathe slowly to ease my heart rate and try and think clearly. I need to remember I am the Luna and my people will look to me to fix this.

"That was only seconds, maybe it takes more time." Meadow is grasping at straws of hope, and yet something in my gut tells me she's wrong. An inkling that it's not that easy to undo whatever it is that's out there. I don't think clearing them from the smog alone will work.

"The Shaman he's out there isn't he? I can't link him..... we need him... Oh my god, Okay, so..... We go downstairs and start looking without him. We look and we find something, anything. We can't just sit here and freak out, right? We've lived through worse. We can do this." Sierra hastens us with a nod, visibly shivering, afraid, and yet like me she is trying to reel it all back and return to a state of composed. She knows I need her to be with me and figure this out. The shock has hit, we reacted, and now we need to be the Luna and Rema and do something about this. For our pack, for our people, for our men. "Radar?" Sierra adds in a hushed tone, her eyes misting over again as she locks a gaze on me, a begging question and held breath, and I can only nod sadly, telling her that he too is out there in the fog and lost to us. She gasps in a semi sob, a shocked inhale and clutches her chest, emitting a woeful stab of pain in the air around me and confirming how deeply she feels for him, before pulling herself back together and lifts her chin defiantly. An even stronger will to figure this out.

"Let's go. They need us to save them." I turn and gesture for them to come and don't wait in heading where we need to be.

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We move fast, making light work of scaling the stairs, getting through the house and down into the secret passage to the underground via the library nook that used to be Colton's and I's bedroom. Just seeing this room, free of our things and our bed, almost breaks me in two. My soul throbbing with the loss of his presence and the knowing I won't be able to see or touch him until we do something about this curse.

I feel like he's gone somehow, that I've lost him to something I don't know how to fight and this room where we began, where he first marked me, stabs deep into my heart and soul and wounds me to the core. My anxiety and pain rising up like bile in my throat that threatens to choke me and I have to heavily inhale to push all the chaos down to my inner depths to stay calm. I stifle a sob as Sierra pulls back the concealed door behind where the bed used to sit, and Meadow grasps my hand in comfort, her own face ashen and stiff.

“We will save them. We have to. They’re our pack, our mates...our hearts. We’ll bring them home, back where they belong. With us!” Meadow can feel, and shares, my devastation and it’s mirrored back at me, not only visually, but in her emotions swirling around me. I nod tearfully and cling to her fingers as we follow Sierra down into the dark musty passage that stings my nose with its aged smell, and I blink away the dust of centuries of sleeping airless surroundings.

With a click of her fingers, she ignites the wall mounted blue flamed torches around us to an eerie glow, lit by her magic, it illuminates the winding narrow passageway as we make our way beneath the homestead to the secret rooms below which feel unearthly and icy. This almost dungeon like lair has always fascinated me but yet always scared me too so Colton usually only comes here with her as I tend to avoid it.

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It has an aura, an ambience of unease. Like it harnesses so many souls of the past with so much power and energy in its confines in the ground below the house. I can almost feel the eyes of spirits taking note as we venture in and it raises all the hairs across my skin as I goosebump in reaction. The room is large and dull, despite the many candles flickering with that familiar witchy blue that makes me think of Colton, and I dart my eyes to take in the room and shake him from my head. If I let him linger then I won’t find the strength to carry on.

The shelves are formed from ceiling to floor on every wall, crammed with generations of spell books, and a vast array of potions and bottles, and weird things in jars. Nothing touched by age as this room magically stays sealed to any form of interference when not in use and you can only come in here with a gifted touch. Witch blood is needed to open the door and light the torches. You can’t get in otherwise, so I presume much like our rune border, this has some kind of protective spell holding it timeless and still as the years tick by.

“Don’t touch any books unless I hand them to you. Grimoires are special and can bite. You need a witch’s permission to touch one.” Sierra makes haste and lifts two huge leather bound books from a low shelf, handing one to me and one to Meadow, nodding towards the long center table that looks like it’s had much use over the years. It has stools tucked in all around each side and the worn imprint of many decades of witches sitting here to browse and learn from these ancient texts. Sierra told me that when her family was plentiful and had many offspring, they used this room as a witch school and taught them everything about their own gifts. Sierra came here as a child to learn about her gifts too but as she was the last of her bloodline, it was left to sit quietly alone and wait for a new purpose.

I take my book to one end of the roughened, stained, dark surface and lay it down carefully. A huge old somewhat unidentifiable book, bound expertly, and strangely ornate. I flick it open to reveal the pages inside which are yellowed and worn along the edges, some are splattered with drops and smudges that hints at a great many uses. Handwritten in black ink in a beautiful scroll, mostly English, but it varies. My Spanish s***s and this is a bilingual spell book pushing more to the other language than my own.

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"I can't read this." I point out, lifting my eyes to settle on Sierra who seems to be looking along the rows for a specific book herself and she turns to me with a patient smile.

"Grimoires are enchanted.... don't look...feel. Ask the book to help you, push your emotion to its very core. See what it gives you." Sierra nods at us before bringing her armful of six smaller books to the table and pulls out a stool to begin with her own search. She looks as determined as Meadow does, who already has her pages flicking fast and furiously as she scans the words. Meadow lifts her chin and frowns at me as though she thinks Sierra is a bit mental for telling us to feel rather than read the pages and I shrug, telling her to do as she asks. I stare down at my book and focus all my thoughts and energy on a little faith.

Please show me how to help bring my pack home. How to bring my mate back to me. I utter the words inside my head and lay my palms flat on the open pages. Sighing as I do so and jump as the edge of the next page lifts and tries to move under my restrictive hold. I yank my hands back in shock that it actually made it do something and watch in awe and horror as the pages begin to flip over in this windless room. They move fast as though caught in the throes of a gust of vicious wind and seem to hasten as it progresses. I swallow down my saliva and choke on the sudden dryness of my mouth.

Even though I have been around witchcraft and seen Sierra and Colton practicing together, this still is an alien sight to me, and I recoil and muffle a gasp as it flips harder and harder. Picking up speed like it might fly off the table at any second, getting halfway through the book before the pages fall open with an almighty thud that makes me flinch and jump.

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Sierra scrubs her chair across the floor quickly and comes to me, obviously excited that the first book I tried gave me some sort of answer. She seems oblivious to how abnormal this is, and I wonder at how often she has seen a book do this with wide eyed wariness.

The two pages open in front of me are in some foreign language I don't recognize, not Spanish, and I squint at it and lean closer in a bid to understand. They look like symbols of some sort and cover the pages fully, all over, some even running up the edge and not following regular lines of a book.

"What are they?" I ask quizzically as Sierra leans and scrolls her fingers along the inky decorative images. Meadow gets up and comes to peer over my shoulder and we fall silent as Sierra focuses.

"Runes. Some sigils. Much like what are etched into the stones buried around our land. Protection.... mostly about keeping things out. I don't understand why this...." She sighs and turns the book to face her to get a better look. Seemingly unsure why of all the pages, this one seems to want us to read it. Her expression falls a little with obvious disappointment that she doesn't seem to be finding the answers we need.

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"So it's the spell to make the rune border?" Meadow interjects flatly, probably also wondering how this is meant to help us now, and Sierra nods, shrugging with confusion that the book would show us this. It's not exactly useful given our pack are already bewitched on the other side of it.

"Maybe it wants us to reinforce the border? Maybe it's a sign we should be focusing on protecting ourselves first, maybe another spell is coming." I blow out air in frustration, clawing for reasons and Sierra squints and leans into the book to read it for a second time. Her brow furrowing harshly and her mouth pinches up, making it obvious she really wants to see more than just that.

"No, the runes don't fade. The spell will outlast all of us and for the time being we don't want to extend it, although now we know we can..... I just don't.... wait! Of course!!" Sierra's hands fly to her mouth as she covers a gasp that escapes loudly, and she throws us a wide eyed look.

"What?" Meadow almost snaps impulsively, startled by her gesture and I begin tapping my foot on the floor as anxiety overtakes me. My blood rushing to warm my skin with her sudden outburst.

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"It's not the spell.... it's who wrote it. She's a witch." Sierra turns the book, sliding its heaviness around to face us again and taps at the bottom right of the second page somewhat excitedly; at a little symbol that looks like it was burned into the page with hot metal. It's tiny, a small flowing L and C surrounded by a vine design that wrap it into one continuous form and is unusually pretty.

"You know this witch? She's alive... I don't understand?" I point out knowing the runes predate even Sierra's father and as witch's have human life spans then it's probably not reasonable to think she lives still. Meadow sits down on the stool next to me, her energy wavering as she too comes to the same conclusion and I'm engulfed with her extreme sadness and stress. Her mind on her mate, much like mine is, and desperate for Sierra to explain seeing as she has latched onto this ray of hope, or whatever it is.

"Leyanne Cruden... And oh yes, she's alive, unless in the last eight years someone figured out h***** an immortal witch who has lived for thousands of years. She's not like any witch you will ever meet. She wrote this spell for my ancestors to protect themselves and much like everything she does, it's powerful, flawless, and unbreakable. Much like her. She's the most powerful witch I have ever known." Sierra's awe and deep respect for this person shines through her words,

her face flushing slightly and there's a new light of something in her eyes. Dare I say she has found a reason to hope.

"Immortal? Witches only have human life spans. What if she is the one behind the fog? You said no witch could pull off that spell...could she? Can we trust this Bruja" Meadow interjects, a hint of doubt and fear rising in her voice as my mind falls in line with hers. And I wonder if the witch who wrote our protection spell could remove it and let the fog in am*** the rest of my people if we are stupid enough to let her in here.

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"No...Leyanne would never choose a side and take such drastic action. She is all for preserving the species, of all kinds. She wouldn't choose to get on side to rid the world of wolves. She's an ally. She isn't bound by a coven or any kind of higher power like most witches. She used to be part of the high council before she even walked away from that. She's solitary and marches to her own beat, and yes, immortal. She's over three thousand years old, give or take and no one knows exactly why. Rumor has it her father is some sort of druid lord, and they're immortal beings. Sorcerers." Sierra strokes the imprinted insignia lovingly, her face aglow with new light and I glance at her then meadow, so torn in how to feel.

"So, we have some unkillable, all powerful Sister, walking around with the ability to create unbreakable spells and throw her power around? And we're only hearing of her now? Where is she, how do we find her?" Meadow props one hand on the table to slide her fingers under her chin, her other hand waving that finger in the air, with a sa**y tone that hints at a mix of disbelief and lack of trust that this is the answer to our problems. Sierra ignores the underlying att**ude and beams our way.

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"Scotland.... well, maybe. She travels a lot. But she's Scottish."

"Scotland! Are you kidding? That's almost the other side of the world. How the hell are we supposed to get in touch? I balk. "Do you think she has Facebook? Do witches social network? A cell number....an email?" I sigh in defeat and rub my fingers on my temples to try and combat the brewing stress migraine and exhale heavily. My body heavy, and tired, and everything in me is starting to ache. What I wouldn't give for Colton to stroll in and take command like he always does, and I bite down the urge to cry with the need for his presence.

"No. But we do have other means to find out where someone is, providing they aren't hiding from sight. Witches have ways and means." Sierra closes the book as though she now realizes we never needed that damn page and fixes her gaze on my slump posture, reaching out a loving hand to comfort me.

"Explain?" Meadow cuts in sharply. Getting impatient.

"Locator spell. Normally we need a person's belonging to enchant but we have a room full of books where she added her own spells. We have items she gifted my ancestors, and we have this." Sierra moves off to a wall of bottles and pulls out one small vial with a glowing white liquid that sparkles like liquid glitter. It looks like a fake bottle for a children's fairy costume and I can't even imagine what it's meant to be for.

"What is that?" I blink at it, lifting myself up to sit upright once more and push off my fatigue and despair, as the soft glow illuminates the space around it, and she lays it on the table. Acting like it's made of precious and fragile crystal.

"It's an elixir, which contains Leyanne's own tears. She made it for my grandmother when she needed ailment. I'm not sure what it does, but I used to play with this because it's so pretty and was scolded so many times. A witch's tears are a powerful thing and they only gift them to people they trust." Sierra touches it once more, lovingly, and then retracts her hands and stares at it as though somehow it will magically transform into something amazing. I just see a bottle of liquid glitter and sigh again.

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"So what do we do with it, how do we 'locate' her." I ask tentatively, air emphasizing the word with my fingers. Sierra sighs and presses her palms to her chest, over her heart.

"We find the book which tells us how to perform a locator spell. It's been nine years since I used it and it's rusty. I used it to find out where you were being cared for, Alora." She smiles softly at me and I blanch as I click on what she means exactly. The night Sierra crept into my room to bind us for eternity and protect me from Juan. She used a spell to know exactly where I was that night and now that's the same spell we need to find this witch. A vague feeling of full circle claws at the back of my mind and the fates flicker through my head in weird kinds of ways. I can't help but wonder if this is relevant.

"So tell us what the book looks like and we look." Meadow interrupts my moment of reverie, on her feet and ready to do something more than sitting here and I nod in agreement. Sliding up from my own chair to get busy.

"It's green, large like this one, with a dark vine wrapped around to keep it shut. Leyanne is a witch of nature so it suits. It's where I learned the spell and I know it's here. No one ever removes the books, not that they can. The stairwell won't let a book pass upwards so it will be here wherever I left it."

"Hmm, okay.... Let's look." Meadow jumps to it and starts trawling the lined cases all around us and I follow suit. Moving to the ones behind me and I start passing my fingers along the shelves gently, making sure not to actually touch them, something tugging me to my left, and I let it guide me. Like an inner instinct, deep in my belly or my gut and I look that way in response of whatever is urging me onwards.

Sticking out slightly more than the others on a low shelf, almost concealed by shadow because of where it sits, I spot a green book and go to it immediately.

"This?" I call out to Sierra, pointing down and she looks around and gasps in glee.

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"If I didn't know better I would think you're part witch. The books are calling to you as though you are." She beams at me joyfully and I frown it away and go back to the table as she slides it free. Remembering we can't touch without her say so and eager to get this done. Sierra brings it to the table and flicks through quickly, finding a dog-eared page and Meadow eye rolls dramatically. Slumping onto her own seat and making a show of her extreme disapproval.

"You bent the corner? Who does that, especially not hundred-year-old magical books? What is wrong with you?" her obvious distaste and disgust is heavy in her tone and that glare is not very respectful towards her Rema. I giggle at Meds, an argument we have had in the house library many times and it warms me out of my cold sadness for a few seconds. She believes in the sanct**y of books and keeping them pristine, while I'm a page folder to keep my place and it drives her crazy.

"I did not. It's how I found it." Sierra retorts sharply, eyeing her up as though she's just been incredibly rude, accusing her of a heinous crime and scans the words quickly, nodding to herself as it refreshes her memory. A little flick of recognition going off in the depths of her eyes as a small smile relaxes her pretty face.

"Okay, we need a map of the world, seeing as we are looking much further than I ever had to. There's one on that wall, bring it." She nods to Meadow who obediently goes and takes down a large, aged print of the world, in one clear space of wall by the stair way door. Sierra pulls off the long necklace she wears daily, a chain that almost reaches her waist and a pointed quartz crystal that hangs from it, pulling the chain together and holding it halfway down so the crystal swings freely. Meadow lays the map out on the table and I move our books to accommodate its large size.

Sierra carefully opens the little vial and dips the very tip of her stone into it before closing it back up and laying it aside gently. She is careful not to touch her stone again and lets it hang over the map and still by itself as she concentrates and regulates her breathing to keep her hand steady.

"Bring those candles all four from there. One on each corner of the map." She points at a bookcase behind me with a nod and I quickly move to collect four tapered candles in silver holders from the shelf and put them on the table. Moving them to the corners and I can reach and handing Meadow the other two to lay out for me. Sierra clicks her fingers and all four light immediately, with blue flame much like the pa**ageway and lighting in here. She holds her pendulum still over the center of the map, closes her eyes as her hands begin to glow blue and travel up as far as her elbows. She stays motionless and still as a statue as she softly utters the words with a faint breath that we almost don't hear.

“Oportet te invenire me, quod mea proposito.

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Super terram, mare caeli spatium non habet terminum.

Dirige ma***, trahere lux mea, et in offus***ione.

Unus enim fas est inveniet te debere ostendere.”

Her words are haunting, foreign, and as she utters the very last one, the blue light travels down the chain of her stone and lights it up like a bright beacon that scalds my eyes and I squint to adjust to its brightness. The tip that was dipped in the potion turns a brazen green and the pendulum starts swinging freely of its own accord as though it's caught by a sudden gust and seems to tug Sierra across the map.