

The Coming Storm

The copper curls on Randy's head felt so heavy, weighing him down as he tried to keep his eyes open. He should have gone to bed hours ago, but the blue moon was high in the sky, and he had promised to help Abigail build a protective ring around their house to keep them safe.

"If we're going to get married here, and bring children to live here with us, we *have* to make sure it's safe" she'd said, giving him a dirty look. The unspoken "it's your fault that we're demon hunters now" made him laugh, because she was the one who usually went out of her way to pick fights with dark and scary things.

He rolled his head back and forth, cracking his neck a couple of times. The sound was kind of gross, but he liked it when it made people jump. He ignored Abigail when she told him to stop, reasoning that there really wasn't much wrong with it besides the sound. It felt good and wouldn't hurt anyone but himself, so he saw no problem with it. *It's my neck to break if I want.*

"Hand me the salt." Abigail stuck her hand out, eyes closed in silent work.

"Here. Do you want me to light the juniper? If we're both working together, we'll cleanse the space faster."

"Why do you want to work faster? You're always rushing things."

"Darling, I've been up for almost 23 hours at this point," he huffed, striking the flint of his lighter and setting the bundle of juniper in his hand on fire as she sprinkled salt on the ground at their property line. "At this point, I'm trying to remember what my bed looks like."

Abigail looked at him, sizing up the dirty clothes and cold bare feet of her boyfriend, and she sighed. "Just go to bed. I can do this by myself, love." She ran her fingers lightly over his shoulders and planted a kiss on his cheek, taking the lighter and juniper from him.

He tumbled into bed a few minutes later, wishing she was next to him. They'd only broken out of the Council of Blight's prison a month or two ago, and it was still hard for him to sleep without her. He rolled over and took her pillow in his arms, and fell asleep dreaming about the ring box buried in his sock drawer.

The dark edges of the forest behind the old mansion leered at Abigail, shadows dancing between the trees. But it was fine. Totally fine. There couldn't be anything out there, because Abigail wouldn't allow it. She didn't want to believe that the Council of Blight was coming back, or that the dark clouds that they'd kicked up during the final battle were reforming.

They thought that locking her away, brainwashing her, trying to kill her when that didn't work, would stop her from trusting the humans of Dufferton. She snorted and rolled her eyes as she sprinkled coarse salt mixed with a little bit of juniper ash at her feet. They couldn't even kill her last time, when they had a whole army.

The dark spellcaster in charge of their evil order had killed a demigoddess. He'd taken Caeda's power, used it to terrorize her daughter and friends and try to destroy everyone who thought humans deserved to live, even if they didn't have magic. And yet, Linda had torn him in half out of pure rage. Surely, if he'd managed to set anything truly dangerous in motion, it would've shown up by now.

Her fangs twinged, reminding her that she should feed soon. There was probably a blood bag in the freezer...No. She couldn't let hunger distract her. She could eat later, when the shadows at the edge of the lawn in front of the store she lived in stopped moving like they wanted to come inside. When she was certain she wouldn't find bloody footprints on their back patio again.

When she could be sure that when she climbed into bed with Randy, she wouldn't wake to hear him screaming from nightmares brought on by a psychic attack she couldn't protect him from.

As she shuffled around the house, repeating protective incantations and occasionally stopping to pull stinging nettles off of her pants legs, she began to feel as if she were on auto pilot. Her mouth didn't need her brain to tell her what to say, in the same way Randy's hands didn't need his brain to tell him when to stop when he was making cake mix. In lieu of this requirement, her conscious mind was free to wander, and she decided to let it. There was a dog in the house across the street, dreaming about chasing rabbits. She could picture its legs kicking, chasing his

dreams. A light blue Chevrolet went past just as she rounded the corner to face the road, headlights cutting through the 2 am fog that always settled at the base of Mt. Wapetona and left dew on everything. It was a model she'd always liked, a '56 Bel Air Cabrio. That was a good year for her. She'd had a stable job as a clerk, and steady access to blood, and a nice house, and...

And she completed the circuit around the house to the sound of Lesley Gore's *You Don't Own Me* coming from the car's stereo. Sighing, she set the smoldering end of the juniper bundle down on the ground in front of the porch steps, far enough away that it wouldn't burn the house down. It was finally time to join Randy in bed.