

## Chapter Six

*Soft of the eye and light of the touch—speak little, listen much.*

*"The Rede of the Wicca"*

"We've done well these past years," Sharon said. She was sitting on the patio of Martin's home with Martin and the fire chief, Sam Ellison, as they waited for the other members of the council to arrive. She had exchanged her business suit from earlier for a comfortable pair of slacks and a white blouse. Her eyes scanned the wooded area as she listened to the sounds of the crickets. She continued her thought, "Yes—done well for both the town and the community."

"If only they realized they were being steered by a bunch of witches," Martin added in a somewhat sarcastic, yet humorous tone. Sharon gave him a rueful smirk. Martin was usually the one to come up with the humorous side of things. She drifted into thoughts of the past.

She and Martin started the coven ten years ago, she as the high priestess and he as the high priest. They met at a meeting of a coven in an adjacent town. Martin was then living and working as a detective in Boston, but, as he was contemplating quitting his job in Boston to move to a small town, he had been visiting some Wiccan friends who lived near Putnam. As a guest of members who belonged to the coven, he was allowed to attend.

Sharon and Martin were introduced after the meeting, and they fell into discussion. Both had been practicing Wicca for about fourteen years, and had risen to elder status in both of their respective covens. They talked about their ideas of how Wicca could help society if people put away their old beliefs of witches and witchcraft and adopted the beliefs of the Earth-based religion. Then it happened at virtually the same moment: they jokingly came up with an idea of how they could secretly maneuver their way into a town to put their ideas into practice to see

what would happen. When they stopped laughing and joking about it, they became serious as they realized that their idea was not that far-fetched.

Later that year, when Sharon had been elected Mayor, she convinced Martin to come to Putnam to fill a vacancy as Chief of Police. He agreed and was easily accepted. His credentials were impeccable and were considered a blessing by the local community. Over the next ten years, as each other position opened on the town council, other members, most from the local community who Sharon and Martin knew to be practicing Wiccan, were recruited to fill those positions.

Most of these people were known in the community both from a social as well as business standpoint. Also, many of them were family men and women whose spouses were also involved in the practice of Wicca. However, the members agreed they would attend various local churches as a show of community spiritual association even though they were Wiccan in belief. They divided themselves up evenly amongst the religious groups and showed up regularly for Saturday night or Sunday morning worship. This practice worked to smooth their acceptance into the community and bypassed any suspicions that may arise.

"And if they did know we were witches, then what?" Sam asked, rousing Sharon from her thoughts.

Sam, the Fire Chief, was a stout man in his late 40s with a mustache that covered most of his mouth. At times people wondered if he had any lips at all. "It's not illegal to be Wiccan," he added as his fingers twirled with the ends of the large mustache, a chronic habit.

"It may not be illegal," Sharon began, "but it would be enough to not get re-elected. You know the old stereotype is hard to get rid of. It'll take years before we could openly announce that we practice Wicca. But when that day comes, we will prove that we are as capable as anyone

else to be part of society and dispel people's traditional fears. We'll make a monumental stride for the Wiccan belief."

"I understand that, but look how much our coven has already accomplished," Sam said. "Why do we continue to hide? We have no petty squabbling, and all is well with the town both financially and spiritually. Our coven and its connection to the ALL, keeps this place alive and robust. We make the correct business decisions by using all of our positive energies culled together. Everything we do is for the betterment of our community. Don't you think that's enough to end this stereotyping?"

"You're correct," Martin piped in. "However, much of our success is because the community believes we are evenly split amongst the religions. And as long as we keep showing up in those respective churches, everyone is happy. It's a ruse of sorts, but necessary to maintain their belief in our diversity and that their individual interests are being represented."

"Someday it won't matter what religion you practice. But for now it does," Sharon said firmly but with sympathy for the frustration they felt. "Our time will come, be patient. So for now, no broom riding in the city limits, okay?"

Both Sam and Martin laughed.

Three vehicles carrying the rest of the council members arrived in Martin's driveway. Martin lived in the middle of twenty plus acres, so they were safe from any questioning eyes about meeting together so late. As the remaining nine members approached the house, Sharon watched as Martin rose from his chair and went to greet them. Being the large man he was, he took long purposeful steps, but his lively gait faltered as he neared his car. He stopped and looked toward the car with what Sharon thought was suspicion for several seconds. Sharon watched his preoccupation with the vehicle and wondered if something was wrong.

“Martin, are you all right?” she called.

Martin turned toward her, his face appearing apprehensive. “I think you better come over here. I think...I have to show you something.” Sharon moved quickly to where he was standing.

“What’s wrong?”

“I forgot all about it...I shouldn’t have, but I did,” he said.

“Forgot about what?” asked Sharon.

“In the car, on the floor of the backseat, but don’t touch it.”

Sharon opened the car door and looked on the floor. In the dim light she saw the poppet lying on the floor looking up at her. She studied it for several seconds before saying anything.

“Where did that come from?”

“I think...Clyde brought it to me. But...it’s so...I don’t know. Fuzzy.”

“Did you touch it?” she asked, “how about Clyde?”

“I think so. He brought it over to my office and I had to touch it in order to put it in my car.”

“It looks like a binding poppet,” Sharon commented as she stared intently at the doll.

“Yes,” Martin said dreamily. “But I think its more...something else.”

“Leave it here for now,” Sharon said as she closed the door. “We should cleanse the circle and ourselves before we touch it. Once all is prepared we can bring it into the circle and examine it without harm.”

“Yes,” Martin agreed as an ashamed look formed on his face. “I’m sorry; I should have been better prepared.”

“We must all be more careful,” she said, “it appears that the warlock has taken new steps to fight us. She uses the poppet, but includes black magick with it. Very clever and very dangerous.”

She placed her arm around his burly shoulders and led him to the house. When the other members came to them, she spoke. “Listen, everyone. We must do an extra good cleansing tonight. The other...the warlock has touched some of our coven. We must clean her touch away from Martin and Clyde so that they can think clearly.”

“What the high priestess calls us to do, shall be done,” a chorus echoed from the group.

Sharon turned toward Martin and Clyde. "You shall take a cleansing shower while we clean and consecrate our place."

Martin and Clyde silently nodded.

"Bob," Sharon said to Bob Mueller, the Public Works Director, who was standing nearest her. "Get one of our sacred bags and placed the poppet inside of it. Do not touch it. Use a stick to get it into the bag. Once it is sealed in the bag, place it underneath the altar on the ground."

"Yes, Priestess." Bob moved off to do as he was told.

"Let us get changed," Sharon said.

The rest of the group followed Sharon into the house and descended the steps into the basement. Martin's home had a full basement, and the walls were made of cinderblock, but the dirt floor had been left unfinished per Martin's request. He claimed he hadn't enough money at the time, but the dirt floor was better for their meetings and communing with the entities. The area was illuminated by a string of 60-watt light bulbs that ran the length of the basement. In the center was a stone altar he had built from large rock he found on the property.

Here they held their meetings without fear of being seen or heard. They all knew that they could always fall back upon the reason that as the town council, they met here whenever they could to discuss goings on in the town. Because of their busy schedules, the odd hours in which they gathered could always be explained if questioned.

In one corner of the basement stood a large wooden wardrobe; Sharon walked up and opened it. Inside hung their robes, all were blue with the exception of two, which were golden yellow. These two belonged to Sharon and Martin, their colors indicating that they were the high priest and priestess. Next to the wardrobe was a long series of individual wooden lockers that enclosed each coven member's individual tools. Tools were private to each person and generally were not touched by another.

They quietly put their robes on, and each member moved toward the lockers and removed a homemade broom. Sharon started the chant.

"Sweep, sweep the room with your broom. Clean all the negative energy and send it away. Sweep, sweep the ground and cleanse it. All the bad will be gone, only the good shall remain." She began to sweep the dirt floor as the rest of the members repeated the chant and they too began to sweep. They continued sweeping for several minutes ensuring they covered every square inch of the basement. When they had accomplished this task, Martin and Clyde rejoined them, also dressed in their robes.

Sharon nodded to two of their members, Sam Ellison and Joan Santiago. "Mark our circle."

Using their brooms, they gently swept the dirt away from the bricks that had been sunk into the ground in a circular pattern to mark the outline of their circle. The circle was approximately nine feet in diameter, just large enough for the members of the coven to work, and

the altar was located in the center. Anyone standing behind the altar would face toward the North. North was the direction affiliated with Earth, thereby associated with power. At times the direction of the altar would be changed to the East; the direction of the rising Sun and Moon depending upon what the current phase of the moon was.

"Our circle is not just on the ground," Sharon began. "It goes through the ground and surrounds us on all sides."

"Our circle protects us," the rest chimed in. "It focuses our energy and keeps us safe."

When Sam and Joan finished sweeping the perimeter of the circle, they stood to the side and said, "The circle is marked."

"It is time to consecrate our space," Sharon said to Martin.

Martin busied himself by removing things from his personal locker and placing items on the altar. The items he selected represented Water, Earth, Fire, and Air. Lastly, he removed a long wooden staff and placed it alongside the altar. When he had everything in place, he picked up the bowl of water.

"First I walk our circle with water to clean and consecrate the ground." He slowly walked in a clockwise direction. When he returned to the starting point, he placed the water back on the altar. "I shall walk the circle another time," he said as he picked up the bowl of salt, which represented the elements of Earth. "These elements we use and then give them back as they shall be used through the passages of time." Again he walked in his clockwise circle.

As he completed his second trip around the circle. He placed the salt back on the altar and lit the censer that contained the incense. "I light the elements of Fire and Air and walk the circle for a third time. The protection of the Lord and the Lady shall be ours."

As Martin completed the circle, Sharon stepped into the circle followed by the remaining members.

"Close the circle," she said.

Martin grasped his wooden staff and walked the circle, in the same clockwise circle to pull the circle around them and to close it, sealing them in where no negative energies could harm them. Sharon and Martin stood in the center as the rest of their coven, which numbered twelve, encircled them.

They were silent for a few seconds as they each focused their energies to ensuring that the circle was secure and that nothing had snuck into it.

"We must undo what has been done so that no further harm comes from it," Sharon began. "The magick is dark so we must cleanse it with light."

"Cleanse it with light," the rest answered in chorus.

Sharon removed a candle from her robe pocket and lit it. Martin in turn lit his from hers. "We must dispel the negative energy that resides within so we shall walk Widdershins and not Deosil."

Each remaining person removed a candle from the inside pocket of their robe. One by one, they walked to the altar and lit it from the two candles, then returned to their spot in the circle, but this time walking in a counter clockwise, or Widdershins direction. Deosil would be walking clockwise which is used to draw the positive energies.

Sharon lifted the bag from below the altar that contained the poppet. She undid the latches and shook the bag until the poppet fell out and lay upon the altar. "I command that whatever spell has been placed into this object be cast out into the light where it will face the truth."

"Come into the light and face the truth," the rest said in chorus.

A dark cloud oozed from the poppet and rose into the air above the altar.

"I wish the magick contained within to be undone and gone forever," Sharon said.

"Gone forever," the chorus echoed.

The black cloud hovered over the poppet as little sparks of light appeared and began to eat away at the darkness.

"Gone forever," the chorus repeated.

As the last specks of darkness were eaten away, a second cloud emerged. This one was much lighter than the first, but much larger, spanning almost half of the altar. Sharon sensed the tension and surprise of the rest of the coven. "It's alright," she said. "Remain focused on the good and the positive. This appears to be a—"

Within the center of the ominous cloud, a burst of light occurred and images appeared within it. The images were of a man. Sharon quickly recognized him as Joe Caruso. He was out in front of his shop and he looked terribly agitated and appeared as if he was trying to run away from something. Then the image of the dragon moved into view. Joe tried to move away, but he fell. The dragon moved closer. He got up and lunged toward the street. Next came the squealing of tires and the sickening sounds of bones breaking.

As silence settled upon Sharon and the rest of the group, a sound emitted from the poppet, the sound of a woman laughing. Martin took his candle and lit the poppet. The sound of laughter continued to come from it as it was engulfed by flame. Then there was a "pop," and silence returned.

"She summoned a dragon," Martin said.

"Not summoned," Sharon corrected. "She dragged it from its slumber cruelly and without need, making it angry. Dragons are very powerful and should not be summoned lightly or without justification. Somehow she made Joe Caruso the focus of its anger...and it killed him."

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It was near one AM, their meeting had finished and Martin, Clyde, and Sharon sat upstairs in Martin's living room.

"I don't get it. What reason did she have to kill him?" Clyde asked.

"I don't know," Martin said. "I can't see any primary motive."

"She doesn't need one," Sharon said, her voice filled with loathing and disgust. "I think she is mentally disturbed, has been for years."

"Didn't you know her when she was younger?" Martin asked.

Sharon looked suddenly uncomfortable and fidgeted in her chair. "No. No. I'm just repeating what I've heard," Sharon said, her voice rising as if she had to justify or clarify a point that should have already been known. Both Martin and Clyde stared at her questioningly. She forced herself to calm down. "Sorry, I didn't mean to sound like that. It's just that she has our coven in turmoil and that really pisses me off."

"It's okay," Martin said as he patted her hand gently and then asked, "What about acquaintances we might talk to, any boyfriends?"

"I don't think so," Sharon said, her voice drifting off as if she was thinking about something else and not really listening to the conversation any longer. "After high school, she

just faded away. No one saw her for long periods of time. I think everyone assumed she went off to college."

"I still don't get the connection to Caruso," Martin said and then sighed deeply.

"There doesn't have to be one that makes sense," Sharon interjected. "She's crazy and confused. She's been ostracized from every coven she ever belonged to and she ignores the Wiccan Rede: An it harm none, do what ye will. That's why she has been deemed a warlock by most of the covens she's tried to influence."

"But murder?" Clyde said.

"What murder?" Martin scoffed. "There's no smoking gun here. No proof. It's been officially declared an accident. Besides, what we saw in those images may not have even been true."

"Do you believe that?" Clyde asked.

"I don't know what to believe," Martin answered. He rubbed his eyes with his hands. "She may have just conjured up those images to throw us off, too. I don't know..."

"For now," Sharon began, "we will have to pray and use protection spells to surround ourselves and anyone else she might try to do something to. If she was responsible for what we saw, the rule of three should hamper her for the time being. Three times the result of the negative magick she used will be pretty potent and last for a while to punish her for what she's done. But the one thing *we* must not do is become confused and unfocussed. That's what she wants so we will not be able to keep up the good we do for the community."

"But if she is into black magick, the rule may not apply," Martin said and then yawned. His eyes were red and bloodshot. "Excuse me; it's been a long day."

"One thing at a time Martin," Sharon said and reached out and touched his hand. "It's late, and we have things to do tomorrow. For now, all we can do is keep our eyes out for any more signs."

"What about the guy who found the poppet...the Whitworth fella?" Clyde asked. "Do you think he may have been affected in some way from it?"

"I don't know," Sharon said and sighed heavily. She rose to leave. "We'll have to see tomorrow."

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As the first signs of light entered through her kitchen window, Julia sipped her coffee and she stroked her cat, Christina. She would have slept in today, having had a restless night of broken sleep, but she had some paintings she wanted to work on. Her sleep had been uneasy because *they* had gathered last night and she had felt their petty antics of deceit at work.

*What a bunch of hypocrites they are.* Under the guise of community support, they worked their spells and potions...such fools. Most of them probably don't have the faintest clue of what is really happening around them. But she knew...oh yes she knew exactly what was happening.

She went to the coffee pot and refilled her cup. As she put the sugar and half and half into the cup, she forced her restless thoughts from her mind and tried to think about the paintings she wanted to work on today. She had several that were half or three quarters completed that she needed to finish today. Her art being her only source of income, her financial commitment to her work was important considering that sales were sporadic at times. She always tried to keep a few pieces in reserve in the event she sold several in a short time span. Trying to survive on the

income from her art was hard enough, and if she was fortunate to have a few successive sales at once, she wanted to be prepared.

Her energy usually peaked at its highest level first thing in the morning. She felt focused and channeled her energies to accomplish as much as possible before noon. But today she wasn't feeling that way, she felt...off, somehow sluggish. She got up and placed her cup in the sink. Before she would enter her art studio she would first perform her ritual to place her in a tranquil mood. She turned on the basement light and descended the steps into the coolness.

She conducted her cleaning and consecrating of her small circle with her broom and the elements of Earth. She arranged her things on her altar; an antique wooden table she had picked up locally which supposedly came from Salem, Massachusetts from the late 1600s when witchcraft was at its height. She always liked to imagine that several orders to investigate people suspected of being witches had been signed on this very desk. She loved the irony of it all.

Removing her clothing, she stepped into the circle and closed it behind her with her athame, a double-edged dull knife used only to slice into the energy of a circle. Its actual representation was of a male phallus; hers was made of pewter and adorned with gemstones. Feeling secure as she closed her circle, she placed the athame on the altar and lit two candles. She closed her eyes and tried to focus her energies to bring the cone of light to her. But she found her thoughts were jumbled as she tried to concentrate. She was plagued by images that would not melt away to bring her to the center of her cone and into the light. She was able to banish all but one—the one image was very strong, the man she had met yesterday who had bought her painting would not leave her thoughts.

*Yes he is here. The one who has been called has come. It has begun—the beginning of the end. It has been a long time coming, but soon all will be set right again and the evil will be vanquished forever...*

She soon realized there would be no cone of light for her today. Her mood was not right and her energies were off. She wouldn't be able to call upon or summon anything to help her, and suspected there might be more at play than just her restless night's sleep. She may have been subjected to a spell that has caused her breach of concentration. Perhaps later she could try again if she could become focused.

She blew out the candles and stepped out of her circle. Her athame was in one hand and without any conscious thought, she began to stroke it with her other hand, languishing in its firmness. It became warm from the friction, and her flesh responded with a tingling sensation as waves of warmth encompassed her. She wavered on her feet, her legs felt suddenly unstable, and she slid to the cool ground. She ran the athame along her body; her excitement rising as its implicit shape and its firmness sucked all previous images from her mind and replaced them with images of another man...the image of Joe Caruso filled her thoughts.

Joe Caruso had been a strong man and he used his strength to command her to do his will. As their relationship progressed beyond their first time together, he had begun to exhibit a viciousness that grew in intensity each time thereafter. This viciousness excited her, and Joe seemed to take immense pleasure in the thought of her submissiveness as he compelled her to perform whatever he wanted. She hadn't cared because she reaped as much pleasure as he did.

Julia, her eyes closed and fully engaged in her thoughts of ecstasy, writhed on the dirt floor as the athame worked its magic. She moaned in pleasure as her body temperature soared. Her hair became plastered to her forehead and her body covered with sweat. Dirt from the floor

clung to her in patches where her precious moisture pooled. She arched her back as she climaxed, overwhelmed with the sensation of the man's strength and virility as she slipped into the unpleasant remainder of the memory.

In the memory she lay on the bed breathing heavy, Joe still on top of her. Then suddenly, the previous thoughts and feelings of pleasure slipped away quickly as Joe got up on his knees, withdrawing from her abruptly. She opened her eyes feeling strangely disoriented suddenly chilled, leaving her feeling dirty and used. She grimaced as she looked at him. His mouth stretched into a sneering, contemptuous grin. He raised his hand and struck her across the face. Stunned, she looked up at him, and he struck her again, the side of her face stinging from the blows as she looked at Joe with surprise and hurt on her face.

"Don't look at me like that," he said, his voice condescending. "You know you like it. You've been aching for me to do it." He stated it so matter of fact like that she couldn't say anything. She shook her head back and forth. He hit her again and again...

"Stop!" She shouted as she opened her eyes and saw the surroundings of her basement. The images and pain the memory had brought were now gone. However, her chest was still heaving as she gasped for air. She rolled over onto her side; her face only inches from the dirt floor and her heavy breathing producing small dirt clouds as she struggled to regain her composure. *Safe. I'm safe. It was a dream...some form of manifestation twisted by that bitch—Sharon. She's somehow managed to corrupt my thoughts.*

Slowly Julia got to her feet. She still had dirt caked on spots of her body, but she didn't worry about that now, she could shower it off later. She picked up her athame and took it to a counter where a container sat, its lid labeled holy water. She lifted the lid and placed the athame into it. After a few moments, she carefully dried it off and put it away with her other personal

things. As she completed the mechanical aspects of her ritual, her thoughts were already considering what had happened.

*They're trying to lure me with my own memories. I'll have to be more careful. Even my thoughts are no longer my own. I'll have to weave protection spells to guard against these new invasions.*

Julia gathered up her clothes and carried them with her as she ascended the stairs and headed toward the bathroom to shower. She dropped the clothes in a pile by the bathroom door. Then she turned on the water and let it run to get hot. As she waited, she felt the gentle touch of fur as Christina rubbed against her legs. The cat moved toward her clothes on the floor and sniffed at them curiously.

"Yes, my pretty girl, I've been foolish and not taken precautions. They've invaded our privacy. We need protection spells."

The cat looked at her, its large eyes twinkling, and meowed loudly.

The End of Chapter Six.

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