

The
Witchery
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Hallowe'en, five weeks until the Haunting Season

Logan Wyatt had never known real fear until she moved to this fiendish little witchtown.

Haelsford. A hellmouth, if there ever was one, in the muggy mass of Florida's belly.

Looking out from her window at the top of the Hill, Logan watched the humidity envelop the town in a gray haze. The night was sticky. Summer had long since trickled into autumn, but the humidity had not ceased. Wherever she went, the mosquitoes buzzed near, hungry for her blood.

Haelsford will eat you alive, her mother once said.

Logan had tightened her fingers around the handle of her suitcase. Her mother clutched the amber gem at her neck. They were standing in front of the security line at Ontario International. While other families embraced, the Wyatt witches only stared at each other.

Diane Wyatt's parting words were not encouragement, or even the general don't-have-sex-and-die type of *normal mom* warning that Logan would've welcomed. They were words of doubt, of the strangling type of love that

convinced witchy mothers to keep their children under overprotective charms. But it wasn't entirely an exaggeration. Born and bred in Wicker, Ontario, Logan was accustomed to the frostbitten peculiarities of the north. She knew of ice-covered homes that creaked and shivered, housing nameless ghouls and their ancient sins. Pale mundanes wandered around in the cold, transfixed by the smell of an oncoming snow. As annoying as it was to live in a household of witches where every single one was powerful but her, she had felt safe.

Heart twitching, Logan picked up the letter waiting on her bed.

A message from Jailah Simmons, Thalia Blackwood, and Iris Keaton-Foster.

They were called the Red Three.

Logan spent her first months at the Mesmortes Coven Academy obsessed with them in the way all the other students were. Not catty, but in *wanting*. Wanting to be looked at in the same way they looked at one another, like each was the most beautiful thing on earth. It was easy to be entranced by them.

While the Red Three often kept to themselves, they didn't operate in the intimidating way of a clique. They mixed and mingled with the freshmen, offering all the sage advice that came with junior year. Each had her individual hobbies—Jailah was part of the Junior Witchery Council, which comprised sociable and ambitious witches who would one day rule the world; Thalia frequented the herbalism lab to tutor those who weren't skilled in greenwitchery; and if Iris liked you enough, she might teach you a thing or two about calling the dead.

Logan couldn't imagine being so unapologetically witchy. They wielded their wands like weapons, wore the blood of their pricked fingers like badges of honor, and delivered textbook incantations as if the words belonged only to them.

In a castle filled to the brim with young witches, these three felt so different to Logan, who couldn't heat up her tea with a simple warming spell, and whose wand only ever emitted wisps of smoke instead of brilliant sparks.

But on this Hallowe'en night, she would become one of them.

She didn't know what to wear.

After a frenzy that left her wardrobe scattered around her room, Logan settled on what she was already wearing. Her Mesmortes uniform. White silk shirt, thick socks, and black cape. She opted for the plaid skirt instead of the slacks, her vest adorned with a patch of the school sigil—a severed wolf's head, its howling mouth stretched toward the moon. She liked the hat most of all because it wasn't a comically pointy thing, but more of a top hat—quirky but fashionable. She kept her wand in the vest's inner pocket, resting uncomfortably against her heart.

Logan gave herself a quick look in the mirror. Her pale skin was still adjusting to Haelsford's relentless sun, and she was thankful for the apothecary's sunburn salves. She ran her fingers through her messy blond bangs, though it only made them messier.

A soft yellow light flashed in Logan's peripheral vision and her phone chimed. She picked it up and found two texts.

The first, from her mother:

Darling, I can see that you are troubled.

There is no shame in coming back home.

And a warning from her older sister, Margot:

FYI, MOM'S GOT THE LOOK ON YOU.

The Look. Logan was getting better at detecting the super-nosy spell, but she was distracted tonight.

“This is no big,” she whispered, ignoring them. “You got this.”

She pulled the creamy stationery from its envelope.

Logan Phillip Wyatt, this is your fate!
Your time to shine with your new best mates!
Like Artemis and Apollo, this archer can't wait!
So, find me and fly me, precisely at eight!

She smiled. This note was written by Jailah Simmons, surely. Even without the elegant handwriting or the reference to Jailah's favorite sport, Logan would have known purely from the use of her embarrassing middle name. Only Jailah would've bothered to look it up in the school directory.

Logan ran out of Mesmortes and onto the Hill, an affectionate nickname for the tall curve of land that crested Mesmortes, placing it higher than the Hammersmitt School for Exceptional Young Men, their mundane rivals. Odd looks and giggles from witches dressed like cats and superheroes blurred past her. Logan wasn't quite sure what the trio of witches waiting for her had planned, but she had a feeling that her night would be considerably more sinister than glitter and hot pants.

At the entrance to the archery fields, a bronze statue of Hattie Mesmortes, the academy's founder, waited atop a square of pristine gray marble. Tonight, a real bow and arrow had been positioned adjacent to its bronze twin so that Hattie looked to be wielding both.

The string of Jailah's bow was already nocked back with another string, tied elegantly to Hattie's finger. Logan climbed onto the base of the statue

and snapped the string with her teeth instead of her wand, like a mundane might do.

The arrow disappeared into the night. Another letter fell at Logan's feet.

My roses are red.

Your eyes are blue.

You'll find me where the green vines grow.

See you . . . soon?

(Jai asked me come up with a rhyme. I made an attempt.)

Heartbeat quickening, Logan jumped off the statue's base and headed for the thick circle of trees that surrounded the Mesmortes herbalism lab. The enormous greenhouse smelled like sweetness and rain. Electric-green vines covered the glass walls in thick tangles, and the moon shone brilliantly between passing clouds.

Logan eased toward Thalia's cubby, careful not to bump into the vials floating freely in the air, the iron cauldrons stacked against the wall, or the jars of witchy ingredients. *Purified toad blood, crushed baby peacock feathers, sap of a weeping willow . . .*

A hastily scribbled note was tied to the farthest vial.

The Cavern.

Hurry the fuck up.

Logan swallowed hard. The Cavern was carved into the land at the highest part of one of the many hills surrounding Mesmortes. It was the type of place that served as cover for bodies hastily buried, or nightmares come to

life. Witches were hanged there long ago, before Haelsford became a witch-town. A series of tunnels ran under it, once used by witches to escape the mundanes' violence.

Of course, the friggin' Cavern. Iris Keaton-Foster had a love of all things dark.

Logan felt the same buzzy cocktail of confusion, excitement, and horror that overwhelmed her last week when the Red Three strolled into her room. While other witches used the time to gossip or nap, Logan had been practicing *Raiamora*—water to wine—though she had only managed to turn her bowl of water into something that smelled vaguely of cat piss.

When the girls came up to her, she didn't know what to do and tried that smirk Margot always did when she performed a spell for a cute mundane. It fit like an uncomfortable mask.

"What are you working on?" Thalia had asked, pushing up her too-big glasses.

"Ye olde Jesus trick," Logan blurted out. She shouldn't have admitted that, but Thalia laughed and she'd felt comforted.

Iris looked her up and down. It hadn't felt mean, but Logan fidgeted. She'd lived across from the deathwitch for two months now, but it was the first time Logan caught a glimpse of the silver lines peeking out from the hem of her skirt—a horror-film pentagram emblazoned on her deep brown skin. Iris pushed her neat, long braids behind her shoulder and leaned over the bowl. She wrinkled her nose, shot Jailah a disappointed look, and turned away.

Logan expected the three of them to leave her then. But with a smile that soothed her anxieties, Jailah said with a Southern twang, "We should chill sometime."

Standing outside the Cavern, Logan huffed. Sweat dripped down her back. Someone giggled. Logan squinted, but she could see nothing in the black mouth of the cave. “Uh, hello?”

The air shifted. The Cavern air constricted around her, yanking her in like it’d sprouted actual hands. She didn’t resist the movement. The dark demanded her cooperation, and then it let her go.

For the first time since arriving in Haelsford, Logan felt cold.

Another witch might’ve pricked her thumb for *Light*, but the Red Three were watching. Logan avoided performing magic if she could, and especially in front of others.

Sighing, she tapped the flashlight on her phone. The light came, and it showed her a horror. Four walls, no exit. The space around her became a stone box. Perhaps it would become a grave. The Cavern—*the box*—wasn’t filling up with water, and the walls weren’t closing in, but a stone tomb fashioned by witches could present something much more dire.

They’re gonna leave me here to rot.

Just as Logan opened her mouth to scream, the ground dissolved beneath her. She fell sharply through the air and was now having trouble distinguishing reality from illusion. She couldn’t really be falling through the earth, could she? Was she really here? Was Jailah’s arrow laced with essence of blackthorne?

“She’s claustrophobic,” a voice said.

Logan hit the ground.

“Ow,” she muttered. She looked up to find the Cavern reconstructed. There was no box, no high ledge to fall from. Just simple rock—dark, wet, and solid. Torches lined the walls, lit by enchanted firelight.

Two witches stared down at her.

Logan pushed herself up from the ground and wiped the blood from her lip.

Jailah Simmons giggled, the firelight dancing over her deep brown skin and the coils of her glossy black fro. She crunched on what sounded like the last bits of a cough drop or hard candy. “Sorry. We were burnin’ fearmonger leaves. Iris’s idea. I think she was curious what it’d do for you. Shame she ain’t even here to see it.”

Iris didn’t show. Logan didn’t know if she was relieved or disappointed.

Thalia rifled through her knapsack. Her usually messy chestnut curls were pulled back into twin braids. She wrinkled her nose, and Logan noticed the smattering of freckles on her light brown skin. A scruffy black dog stood at her side, and he sized Logan up with searing yellow eyes.

“Here.” Thalia procured a homemade cough drop from a little canvas pouch. “For the fearmonger.”

Logan popped it into her mouth without question. As a greenwitch, Thalia worked in plant magic and healing magic. The candy tasted like lavender and smoke. Logan felt calmer suddenly.

Thalia eyed her. “So. Claustrophobia. That’s your thing.”

Logan moved the lavender drop from one cheek to the other. “Um. Yeah.”

There was a line of black ink on Thalia’s wrist. When Logan tilted her head to look at it, Thalia pulled down the sleeve of her shirt. “Why else would fearmonger put you in a box?”

Logan shrugged. Jailah and Thalia stared at her, trying to figure out where the lie was hidden. She wouldn’t give.

“Is that it, then?” Logan said quickly. She had so many questions. *Do you do this to everyone? Did I pass?*

Thalia looked to Jailah, and even in the dark, Logan saw fear there. The

dog leaned into Thalia's leg. "This is just the beginning. The Haunting Season's almost here. The Wolves are waking up."

Logan tensed.

Jailah threw an arm around Logan. "But first, tonight's Hallowe'en. We're gonna have so much fun!" She glanced at Thalia. "Now, where the hell is that deathwitch?"

Her eager attempt to soften Thalia's warning was only slightly comforting. The Haunting Season—the yearly hex that plagued Haelsford—was just a few weeks away. Monstrous Wolves would soon emerge from the depths of the Swamp with the singular goal of bloodshed.

As they walked back toward the Hill, Logan's gaze drifted toward the Swamp. She couldn't help herself, she had to look. From this vantage, she could barely make out where the beautiful oaks stopped and the corrupted, mangled trees began.

The Swamp was far off, but so heady and full and dark that it felt *close*.

And maybe she was still dazed from the fall, but Logan swore she heard a howl.