

# Winter's Thrall



Winter's Magic Part 2.5

L. STARLA

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WINTER'S THRALL

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# Prologue

*September, during the early events of Winter's Maiden 2.*

Sensing him close by, Bridey surveyed the dingy country pub. The news of Daddy's thugs tracking him down had thrilled her to bits. And there he was. Grinning, she gave his group a cursory glance confirming her prediction: Caleb had befriended an assortment of magical people.

It pleased her no end that her brother instantly recognised her, even after all their years of separation. She had missed him and hated her mother for tearing their family apart. When she reached his booth, she drank in the sight of him: from his high cheekbones and chiselled jaw to his long black locks and delicious piercings. 'Hello, Brother dearest.'

'Bridey? W...what are you doing here?' Caleb's shocked reaction was not what Bridey had hoped for.

The guy sitting beside Caleb gripped her brother's shoulder in a show of support. 'Well, well, well. The wayward sister returns.'

*Holy shit!* When she scrutinised him, he took her breath away. She'd never seen such a fine specimen of a man. Bright green eyes glared at her from beneath dark, choppy hair. A silver ring

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adorned his prominent brow and a five o'clock shadow accentuated his jaw, drawing attention to luscious lips. And that was merely his outward appearance. Even the man's aura was sexy. She had to know him in every way possible. 'And you are?' The way he studied the air surrounding her intrigued Bridey. *Is he an enchanter too?*

'Brendan Winters. Perhaps you've heard of me?'

*Bingo!* 'Oh, indeed. The infamous enchanter of Gaeilge Shores. I didn't realise my brother had such interesting friends. Mother did such a stellar job of hiding him from me.' She looked at Caleb and smiled. 'Relax, darling. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm here on business and I'd like your help connecting with the magic community in town.'

'Just business?' Caleb asked.

'Yes, sweetheart. *Just* business. Unless you want more.' When he visibly shivered, she could not hold back the laugh. 'Oh, Caleb... you are precious. And far too much like our sweet Mother. But your friends?' Her eyes travelled around the group, settling on Brendan. 'I think your friends will be a lot of fun. And I'm all for mixing business with pleasure.'

Intense lust flickered in Brendan's aura as his lips parted.

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Bridey narrowed her gaze. 'May I sit?'

He shrugged. 'It's a free country.'

When her backside perched in his lap; Brendan rewarded Bridey with the sensation of his arousal. She could not help herself as she writhed against him, drawing an odd sound from his pursed lips.

Their dry humping did not amuse Caleb and she detected a hint of jealousy on top of his disgust.

The mage with spiky hair rose. 'I'm getting another round of drinks. Who's in?' The rest of the group pushed their glasses forward.

She smiled at Spiky. 'I'll have a Purple Haze, thank you darling.'

He frowned at her. 'A what?'

'*Pur-ple Haze*. It's a cocktail. Don't tell me this backwater doesn't know about cocktails!'

'Sure, we know about cocktails. We're just not pretentious enough to care.' Spiky was also sassy.

'Oh dear. I see I'm going to have my work cut out for me with you. What's your name, handsome?'

After a moment of hesitation, he replied, 'Bailey. Bailey Dougherty.'

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Remembering the sign on the door, she gasped with delight. 'As in *the* Doughertys? Owners of this fine establishment?'

'Exactly. So, I suggest you show this *backwater* more respect if you don't want piss in your fancy-schmancy drink.' Bailey turned on his heels and strode off to the bar.

'Wow. What a gem.' Bridey turned back to her brother. 'So Caleb, who else do we have here?'

He introduced the rest of his friends.

Bridey noticed how most of the other guys at the table stared at her with hungry eyes, especially the orc and werepup. If she played her cards right, she could bank on a wild night without compulsion. Taking them willingly provided a more exciting challenge, although she'd settle for using her old tricks if necessary.

# Chapter One

*Eleven weeks later: the day after Brendan sees Liam kiss  
Alannah.*

*(This occurs prior to Alannah's showdown with  
Richard.)*

Brendan's eyes fluttered open and landed on the dark fae enchantress in bed beside him. 'Oh Shit!' He had several regrets in life, most of which involved Tinder. But looking upon Bridey's sleeping form hit him with a compunction which trumped the lot. In a moment of weakness, he had divorced his soulmate and sold himself into the service of a woman he despised.

Feeling the call of nature, he rose from the bed and froze when he discovered metal cuffs around his ankles, tethered to long chains. He bent over to inspect his bonds. 'Cold iron. Damn it!' The material blocked magic and the locked restraints held tight. Even if he could channel a useful mana source or tune into any ley lines, there would be no

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escaping his shackles. At least the chains had enough length for him to reach the bathroom.

When he returned to the bedroom, Bridey — or Lady Violet in business circles — sat up and gawked at him hungrily. 'Morning, handsome. How do you feel? Has the pain gone away?'

He glared at her. 'The physical pain has.'

'Excellent. I have fulfilled my end of the bargain, now let's discuss yours.' She held out a contract. 'I honestly thought you would've learned your lesson last time you signed one of these without reading the fine print.'

Snatching the page, Brendan stared in horror at his signature, a bloody autograph beneath seven clauses:

1. *The subject, Brendan Winters, has agreed to enter a period of sexual servitude in service of Lady Violet.*
2. *The agreed period for this contract is one full calendar year from the date of signing.*
3. *Sexual servitude requires complete submission to Lady Violet, who invokes the right to insist upon any sexual act she desires.*

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4. *Failure to submit may lead to the use of compulsion or result in punishment within Lady Violet's dungeon.*
5. *The subject will dress and act according to Lady Violet's every whim and show due respect to all other members of her household.*
6. *The subject may not leave Lady Violet's residence during the period of servitude except under her express orders.*
7. *Attempts to escape will result in punishment within Lady Violet's dungeon and may risk the wellbeing of other members of the Winters Clan.*

*This is much worse than the Rhapsody production contract.* The chains rattled as he slumped down beside her and tugged at them. 'Are these necessary?'

'I could hardly have my latest acquisition running off in the middle of the night, could I? When you earn my trust, I will permit you to move freely through my home. They are a precaution until such time.'

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Brendan groaned. 'How am I supposed to earn your trust?'

'By doing everything I ask and not making any escape attempts when I loosen your tethers.'

'Can I at least go home first and put my affairs in order?'

Lady Violet laughed maniacally. 'Do you think I am stupid, Brendan? I will send Caleb to deal with your apartment when the time is right. For the next twelve months, this is your home, sweetcakes. And when you do step outside, you will remain by my side. Is that clear?'

His last sliver of hope disintegrated as he looked at her with frosty, dead eyes. 'Perfectly.'

'Good. Now get yourself cleaned up. I expect to see you at breakfast in twenty minutes. Levi will collect you at the appointed time.' She strode across the room and left, not bothering to dress before stepping out.

After letting out the mother of all sighs, he pulled himself up and dragged his feet along the floor. Showering challenged him, with his chains tangling several times. He usually preferred to take his time bathing, allowing himself to relax, but it was an impossible task in his current state. So, he sprayed himself with scalding water and wrapped a towel around his torso.

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Stepping out of the steam cloud, he found a shirtless guy waiting for him. By all appearances, he was a half-mage; tall and slim, although well-toned, with tanned skin and a small goatee. Aside from the spiked leather collar around his neck, he wore only a pair of faded, ripped jeans.

Brendan jumped. 'The fuck, man? You startled me.'

'Sorry. Brendan, is it?'

He nodded.

'I'm Levi. Lady Violet told me you were expecting me. Here are some clothes.' He dropped the pile of clean laundry on the bed. 'I hope they're an adequate fit. I have filled your drawers with much of the same. There are also some suits and special outfits hanging in the wardrobe, but you can only wear those upon Lady Violet's request.'

Glancing over the options, Brendan observed an assortment of jeans and leather pants. 'There are no underpants or tops here.'

'She only grants such luxuries when we escort her outside.'

Brendan gaped at him. 'For real?'

'Yes. Lady Violet likes to see as much of our bodies on display as possible and she wants us ready to service her at a moment's notice. We only

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get pants because of her more... conservative clientele.'

He noticed the bruises on Levi's torso. 'So, you're one of her sex slaves too?'

Levi winced. 'I prefer the term *submissive*, but yes, I am essentially a slave.'

Brendan began rubbing himself dry. 'How many of us are there?'

'She likes to keep our number at seven.'

He snorted. 'What? One for each night of the week?'

Levi laughed. 'If only. No, Lady Violet has a thing about the number seven being auspicious or some shit. But I think she also likes to have a variety of men to cater to each of her different tastes. You should expect her to call upon you several times a week... possibly more, given you're her new favourite.'

Throwing the towel aside, Brendan picked up a pair of black leather pants.

As he stood upright, Levi cast an appreciative eye over Brendan's naked body, lingering a while at the sight of his Prince Albert piercing. 'I can see why Lady Violet likes you.'

Brendan was no slouch when it came to his physique, and he knew his other assets were desirable. 'No offence man, but I'm not into dudes.'

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'None taken, but you should know your sexual preference means nothing to Lady Violet. If she wants you to sleep with a man, you will do it if you know what's good for you.'

His eyes bugged out. 'What happens if I refuse?'

'One of two things: either she will compel you to do it, or she will beat you to within an inch of your life.'

Brendan gulped. 'Is that what happened to you?'

Levi smiled. 'No. I actually enjoy the way she marks my flesh.'

With a cocked brow, he shot Levi a dubious look. 'Really?'

'It may come as a surprise to you at this stage, but most of us have grown quite fond of Lady Violet. So, don't get any funny ideas about running off.' With a wave of his hand, Levi released the cuffs from Brendan's ankles. 'You will only need to wear these in your room.'

Brendan slid into the tight pants that clung to every ridge and valley of his sculpted legs, emphasising the bulge between them. *May as well look the part.*

'Excellent choice,' Levi nodded his approval. 'Those pants are sure to please Lady Violet. She also

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insists you wear this.' He stepped forward and attached a collar resembling his own to Brendan's neck.

He brought a hand up to test the feel of the thing. The spikes were sharp, made of cold iron. Not enough to stop him channelling mana, but they would prevent him from magiporting.

'Come on, let's get some breakfast. We must not keep Lady Violet waiting.'



The moment Maurus Hawthorn walked into the dining room that morning, Caleb stiffened. He wasn't in the mood for one of his father's lectures. But when Dad planted his larger-than-life presence directly next to him, Caleb knew that's exactly what he was in for.

Maurus scowled at him. 'Put a shirt on, Son. You look like one of your sister's slaves.'

He snorted. 'I may as well be, with all the demands she makes of me.'

His dad's fist clenched on the table. 'You ought to show her more respect. Bridey adores you.'

'She has a sick and extremely twisted way of showing it.'

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As if on cue, the devil herself walked into the room and smiled the moment she spotted Maurus. 'Hi Daddy!' She ran into his arms, falling into his lap as they kissed.

*Ick!* Caleb still couldn't deal with the level of intimacy they shared. His whole family was all sorts of messed up.

Dressed in one of her many purple corsets and black miniskirts, Bridey moved across to Caleb and straddled him. 'Morning, sweetheart.' As her skirt hitched up, his sister's slick arousal soaked into his jeans and her mouth claimed his with the hunger of a starved lioness.

Caleb detested how remarkable her lips felt pressed against his, how sweet she tasted, and most of all, how much his cock responded to her. 'I didn't realise I was on the breakfast menu.'

Bridey dabbed his nose with one of her manicured fingertips. 'Caleb, dear, you are always on my menu.' She moved to her own chair to his left and watched as servants spread the actual food on the table.

'Have you started training yet?' Dad's gruff voice pulled Caleb's attention away from Bridey's huge breasts.

'No.'

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Maurus growled. 'I've been patient with you, Son, because of what your mother did, but I'm done waiting. You could be a great necromancer, Caleb. It's about time you lived up to your potential.'

'Not gonna happen. I don't wanna go dark.'

His dad chuckled. 'I've got news for you, my boy: your soul is already damned. You may as well embrace it.' Then all signs of humour fled. 'It's time to man up and start pulling your weight in this family. You have two options: either join my business or Bridey's.'

Caleb hated the idea of working for his father. From what he'd gathered, it was more of a cult than a company: one practising some of the darkest magic known to mage kind. It made Bridey's life of crime look like a teddy bear's picnic. 'Fine. I'll join the Dark Syndicate.'

Bridey gasped and clapped her hands together. 'Oh Caleb, do you honestly mean it?'

He looked at her and nodded.

She pulled him into a firm embrace. 'I love you so much! I can't wait to work together.'

A young woman in a skimpy French maid costume announced, 'Breakfast is ready.'

Bridey pulled out of Caleb's arms. 'Thank you, Isabelle. The seven may enter.'

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The maid bowed, turned, and opened the door for Bridey's harem.

Caleb had been dreading this moment since the previous night.

As soon as Brendan entered — head lowered, as expected of a slave — Caleb observed how Bridey's eyes lit up. Her reaction didn't surprise him either. He had never seen a man pull off tight leather pants so well. The bastard even rocked the slave collar better than anyone else. Ironically, the whole outfit on Brendan's imposing frame made him look more Dominant than submissive.

Maurus erupted from his seat. 'Are you insane, Bridey?'

Having thought as much for ages, Caleb couldn't help the snigger.

Her jaw dropped open. 'What's wrong, Daddy?'

Dad thrust a hand toward Brendan. 'This. Him! Surely you realise your latest catch is a pure mage. Don't you think the Council will notice he's missing?'

Bridey moved across the room and encircled the shoulders of her latest prize with her arm. 'Don't be silly. Brendan here came to me willingly. Didn't you handsome?'

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Brendan's gaze lifted and immediately fell upon Caleb. 'Yes, Madame.'

Pure delight registered in her expression.

Maurus shook his head. 'He must be a spy. You cannot trust him, sweetheart.'

'He is not just any pure mage. We have history. Brendan, honey, this is my dad, Maurus. Please explain the situation to him.'

Stepping forward, Brendan offered his hand to their unimpressed father, who shook it reluctantly. 'It's a pleasure to meet you, Sir. Your daughter refers to my involvement with the Dark Syndicate. I was the original source of Rhapsody.'

Caleb almost choked on his coffee. This was news to him. He hadn't realised all those previous visits had been business calls. After Bridey told him about the time she'd fucked Brendan, Caleb had assumed a more sexual relationship existed between them.

Maurus narrowed his eyes on Brendan. 'Let me see your aura.' A moment later he grinned. 'Well, I'll be damned a second time. A bloodline mage with balls enough to dabble in the dark arts.' He glared at Caleb. 'Yet my own son, born with a tainted soul, won't even practise a modicum of necromancy.'

*Christ! Even my old man prefers Brendo.*

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Dad turned his attention back to Brendan.

'What clan are you from, son?'

'The Winters clan, Sir.'

'No shit? You're *the* Brendan Winters?'

Caleb rolled his eyes. *Trust a fellow womaniser with a track record more infamous than Dad's own to impress him.*

Maurus clapped a firm hand on Brendan's back which didn't even make him flinch. 'So, it took a minx like my baby girl to reel you in, huh?'

'Ha! You are precious, Daddy. I wasn't the woman who stole his heart, but I do get the honours of mending it after the bitch went and broke it.'

Bridey took Brendan's hand and kissed it.

'Is this true?' Maurus asked Brendan.

'Yes, Sir. Alannah, my soul mate, betrayed me. Lady Violet severed the link for me.'

Caleb had seen and heard as much when Brendan's miserable arse came crawling back to Bridey. He couldn't believe Alannah would do such a thing, but Brendan had seen it with his own eyes.

The old man offered him a nod. 'Women can be vicious creatures. I've had my fair share of heartache too, son. But stick with my girl here and she'll treat ya right.'

Bile rose in Caleb's throat because Dad knew shit about women. Mum leaving was his fault. Dad

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had corrupted Caleb's sweet sister and turned her into the monster who, in turn, took Caleb's innocence. Mum was only trying to protect him.

'Yes, Sir,' Brendan replied.

Caleb missed the flippant Brendan he once knew. *Is this all an act of compliance to protect himself from Bridey's wrath, or has Alannah majorly damaged him?*



Everything about Maurus Hawthorn sickened Brendan. Knowing this man's history did not help, but even if it had been a true first impression, there would be nothing to recommend Maurus. The long black hair—moustache and beard—along with the biker tattoo sleeves all added to the sicko sleaze vibe. But his aura spoke extensively for him: a pure black soul covered in a thick layer of lust pulsing brightly every time he looked at his daughter. It went some way in explaining Bridey turning out the way she had.

Brendan could clearly see Caleb's hatred for his father, but the jealousy oozing from him was a mystery. *Did Bridey stick her claws into Caleb that deep?*

'Come on, handsome, I'd like to sit with you for breakfast.' Bridey tugged on his hand, pulling

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him onto a chair. Of course, her idea of 'sit with' meant making a seat of Brendan's lap.

His famished stomach groaned at the sight of the feast laid out on the table. He wondered how he would actually eat with a fae enchantress perched atop him. Fear prickled across his skin as he glanced at the other slaves who took positions on the floor around her feet. They were all skinny men, with pale complexions and hair that varied in length from medium to long. Brendan could see how he fitted the aesthetic, although his muscular build stood out like a tall poppy. *Does she starve these guys? Will I wither away too?*

With a heeled boot pressed into Levi's back, Bridey leaned over the table and filled her plate with an assortment of fruits and pastries. Once she had served herself, Caleb and Maurus followed suit.

After throwing a few scraps to the floor for the other guys to fight over, Bridey turned to straddle Brendan. 'Don't worry, handsome. You will all get a chance to eat the leftovers once I have finished. She handed him her plate. 'Feed me.'

His eyes widened with shock, but he smacked the metaphorical mask back on his face, remembering what Levi had told him. 'Yes, Madame.' Brendan took the dish and broke the food

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into smaller chunks. He brought a piece of croissant to her lips.

She grazed his fingers with her teeth as she took the pastry into her mouth. The gesture was too damn hot, and he felt himself slipping. As soon as she had swallowed her mouthful, Bridey sucked on his fingers with a lascivious gaze piercing the last of his composure.

'Fuck!' He exhaled the muttered curse.

Bridey beamed as she ground against his hardening cock. 'Later, handsome.' She opened her mouth for another bite. Brendan continued to oblige, and as he lifted a grape, she flashed him a wicked grin. 'I want to take those from your teeth.'

*Oh hell!* It amazed him how this woman could turn something as simple as breakfast into an act of foreplay. Gripping the fruit between his teeth, he braced himself for the contact. But nothing could have prepared him for the heat of her lips as they pressed against his. Memories of their first night together flooded his mind. Her kisses were still among the most erotic he had ever experienced. Logically, he knew she achieved this through her magical attunement to his senses and emotions, pulling the same tricks he often used to enhance the experience; but his body still responded favourably to her touch.

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'Mm, delicious.' She licked her lips and eyed the plate to indicate she wanted more.

This time, she bit into the grape with her lips pressed against his, letting the juices explode into his mouth. It was the sweetest torture to have his stomach grumble while the rest of his body cried out for more of what Bridey could offer. Yet his mind and soul wanted none of it. He could not have been more conflicted if he was Parliament.

A sudden commotion broke the spell between them, and the maid appeared at their side. 'Sorry to interrupt, Madame, but Lady Scarlett is here to see you.'

Bridey tensed and swivelled around to face the girl. 'Thank you, Isabelle. Let her in.'

'Yes, Madame.'

When Isabelle stepped aside, Tara burst into the room like a storm cloud. As soon as she spotted Brendan her eyes flashed with lightning, and she unleashed her fury on Bridey. '*You stupid girl!* I warned you to keep your hands off him. Do you have any idea what you have done?'

Bridey scoffed. 'I'm sorry, Madame, but I'm not the one who broke his heart. Your precious Alannah did that without my help. No offence, but I still don't get what you see in the girl.' She leaned

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into him and rubbed his bare chest. 'Brendan, on the other hand... I can definitely see his potential.'

Eyeing him, Tara spoke to Brendan telepathically, '*Does she speak the truth about Alannah?*'

He opened his mind to his grandmother, letting her see for herself as he replayed the memory of Alannah leaping into Liam's lap and kissing him. The recollection emotionally traumatised him, but at least the physical pain he had felt as their souls separated had dissipated. Bridey's ritual had successfully severed their link.

Tara's wide eyes betrayed her surprise. 'Is there some way you misread the situation?' she asked aloud. 'Alannah has the entire Council looking for you, Brendan. She is worried about you. When I sensed you here, I assumed my misguided *employee* was holding you against your will.'

More doubts plagued his mind. *Why does Alannah care about me? What am I missing?*

'Shit!' Maurus cut in. 'See, sweetheart, this is why I warned you to stay away from the bloodline mages.'

'Relax, Daddy. Brendan wants to remain hidden, don't you, my dear?' Bridey's nails dug into his thigh as she smiled at him sweetly.

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Shielding his thoughts from Bridey's mind reading, he nodded. 'Yes, Madame.' Addressing Tara telepathically, he admitted to selling his freedom. *'I'm one of her slaves now, please get me the hell outta here.'*

Tara gave Bridey a sidelong glance. 'If Brendan is not your prisoner, why is he wearing a slave collar?' Her own thoughts entered Brendan's mind. *'You are not ready, darling prince.'*

'A mere formality,' Bridey continued. 'We have a mutually beneficial arrangement, which I assure you he enjoys as much as I do.' She squeezed his hard nipples to emphasise her point, drawing a pleasurable moan from his throat. 'See? What I'd like to know, Lady Scarlett, is how you were able to sense him here when I have wards up strong enough to conceal this place from the Council's detection magic.'

*'Not ready for what?'* Brendan demanded.

*'Not ready to leave here, to return to Alannah.'*

*'Please, Grandmother, I'm begging you. Don't leave me to rot in this place.'*

Tara's arctic eyes pierced him with shards of ice. *'Enough! My word is final. Accept your fate and wait for the right time.'* She returned her attention to Bridey. 'Some magic is more powerful than anything of Earthly origin.'

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Bridey sighed. 'Always so cryptic. I may not channel Aether or nether, but I know they can't be used in scrying spells. You are not soulmates, so the only other possibility is blood magic, which would require....' Her voice trailed off as her eyes flicked back and forth from Brendan to Tara.

Tara laughed drily. 'Has it taken you this long to figure it out, Violet?'

Caleb furrowed his brow. 'Wait, what's going on?'

Brendan bit his tongue.

Bridey ignored him as her eyes narrowed on Tara. 'You died.'

'A minor inconvenience for a lich, I assure you.'

'The fuck?' Caleb glared at Brendan. 'Did you know?'

He nodded. 'Kinda hard to fail in recognising one's own grandmother.'

'Was this why the Council were cagey about letting us in to watch Alannah's trial? Because they discovered the truth and wanted to cover it up?' Caleb asked.

'Alannah's relationship with me was the premise of the trial.' Tara admitted. 'They charged her with treason and the practice of illegal magic... magic I taught her.'

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With eyes bulging, Caleb whistled a single note. '*D-amn*. How'd she get outta that mess?'

Tara directed her gaze toward Brendan and smiled. 'She had an excellent lawyer.'

Caleb shot him a look. 'You represented Alannah?'

Brendan nodded.

'Gods, dude. Is there anything you don't excel at?' Although light-hearted, Caleb laced his words with envious undertones.

He could think of plenty of his own flaws and failures, but he did not want to go there. Especially not in present company.

'I still do not trust you, Violet,' insisted Tara. 'As a show of good faith, you will accept Brendan's help on your next job.'

'Wait, don't I get a say in this?' Brendan demanded.

Tara grinned at him. 'Trust me, darling prince, you *will* want in on this job.'

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