

# THE LAST WITCH NOVELLA

## Free Chapter I

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I could watch her sleep for the rest of my life. Watch her wake. Watch her eat. Watch her play and tantrum. I'd even take watching her cry as long as I can see her. As long as she is safe.

My dearest Callie. My sweet daughter.

I reach out and sweep the dark brown mess of curly hair from her beautiful little face. Her eyes dance behind her lids as I rest my hand on her cheek and close my eyes.

I see her dreams. They're of me. Of us today. In her dreams, we sit in the meadow behind our home and watch a fawn graze alongside his mother. Dream-Callie and dream-me hide in the long grass, watching in silence as the cute little thing stumbles on his new, long, uncoordinated legs.

Callie sits in my lap and twirls my hair in her dainty little fingers before she loses interest, and we make daisy chains and chase butterflies instead.

It's a beautiful dream. The dream of a young and untainted heart. And that is what she is.

Young and untainted by the cruelty and blood-soaked world I saved us all from.

It's been six months since I arrived back in the Arcane Realm.

Six glorious months.

I continue to stand in the meadow, watching dream-Lilly and dream-Callie create endless daisy chains. I remain alone in the dream, but the hand I feel on my shoulder tells me I'm not alone in the real world.

'What is she dreaming about?' he asks before planting a warm kiss on my cheek.

'Come in here and see,' I whisper back, reaching out and taking his hand to place upon her head. In a swirl of smoke, another joins my side, standing in the meadow to watch the dream before us both. 'Isn't she just perfect?' I admire.

'Yes,' Gabriel replies with a soft smile. When I look at him, his brilliant blue eyes are on me. 'She takes after her most perfect mother.'

He plants another kiss on my knuckles before turning to watch her. His fingers entwine with mine, and we stand side by side, silent and lost in the simple dreams of a happy child.

Gabriel's thumb traces back and forth over my knuckles in both the real world and this one. I smell his scent. Feel the warmth of his skin. The ebb of his patience and understanding as I keep him here with me for another night.

Sleep refuses to come easily for me. It always has, I guess. Being in a different realm has changed so much for me. For us all. There is no more war. No more hiding or running. No more humans.

But it seems the nightmares will never end for me.

‘Daddy!’ dream-Callie calls joyfully as dream-Gabriel strides towards the pair with a picnic basket in his hand. The same one we forgot before he rushed off to fetch it earlier today.

Her call startles the mother deer and her baby, and the two dart off into the trees.

Callie runs to Gabriel and leaps into his waiting arms.

I hold the same smile now as I do in the dream, watching the two most precious people in my life make their way towards the dream version of myself.

‘And what have my girls been doing whilst I was away?’ dream-Gabriel asks, sitting in the grass by my side.

Callie answers his question by sliding one of the enormous daisy chain necklaces we made over his head.

‘I have been dreaming of spending our days like this for years,’ Gabriel whispers beside me, his eyes glued to us all. ‘It’s almost as wonderful watching it as an outsider as it is living it.’

His hand tightens in mine, keeping me close. Checking I’m still here.

‘Come,’ he whispers. ‘Let’s get back to bed.’

I nod and pull back from my connection to her mind.

The sunshine of her dreams fade into the darkness of her bedroom.

I’m still kneeling on the floor at her bedside, so close to her face that her soft breaths land on my skin. Above, an enchanted ceiling twinkles with stars, acting as a night light for her. Her kitten, Shadow, slumbers at her feet, purring incessantly.

And sat beside me with a look of concern, my Gabriel.

Our hands are still knotted together as he reaches over with his other hand to tuck my long red hair behind my ear.

‘Do you want to talk about it?’ he asks in a low whisper.

‘What is there to talk about?’ I ask, knowing precisely what he means.

‘The crack in our bedroom ceiling, for a start. And the fact that I hate waking up to find you gone.’ He pulls me closer, so his arms wrap around my middle, and he places me on his lap.

‘It was just another nightmare,’ I reply, sinking into his touch as he softly kisses my cheek. ‘I didn’t want to wake you up again, so I thought I’d just walk it off.’ I look at him with worry. ‘I didn’t realise I caused any damage. I put a crack in the ceiling?’

‘Just a little one. It will be easy enough to fix.’

‘Shame my head isn’t so easy to patch up.’

Callie gives a light giggle and shuffles beneath her blanket before stilling once more and returning to her dreams.

‘I think I lose a year of my life every time I open my eyes and you’re not beside me,’ Gabriel says.

His heart thumps harder beneath his chest and his lips brush gently over my skin, causing goosebumps to ripple over every inch of me.

‘What did you dream about, my love?’

‘I dreamt that he had her,’ I tell him, the terror I felt in my dreams stirring at my core. ‘I dreamt that Theo took Callie.’ I swallow a painfully dry swallow. ‘I just had to see her. I had to know she was okay.’

Gabriel stills, and every muscle in his body goes rigid. Even his grip on me becomes uncomfortable and I inwardly scold myself for my idiotic and insensitive mistake.

‘I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything. I shouldn’t have said that name-’

As I go to sit up, knowing I’ve just poked at a wound still healing within him from the betrayal and brutality of the man he believed to be his father, he yanks me back down and holds me even closer.

‘I told you,’ he insists. ‘You’re not allowed to say sorry to me. The “S” word is off-limits.’

He lets out a heavy breath and turns his face towards Callie, and we both watch her.

‘No one will ever get her. Those monsters are long gone and no one else alive would dare attempt to harm a single hair on her head.’

‘She’s the next Arcane,’ I say mournfully, hating the enormous amount of responsibility and danger that will place her under. ‘Someone will try. One day.’

She still has her dark brown hair for now. We all keep waiting for the day her magic awakens and turns it red, signalling the transformation into an Arcane Witch.

It terrifies us. Absofuckinglutely terrifies us.

So many people have tried to claim one of my kind for their own, and with the most sadistic methods anyone could possibly conceive of. And the trail of chaos, destruction, and death that we have all somehow survived, still clings to us every day, following us. Haunting us.

‘Theodore Kendryk is dead,’ Gabriel says firmly. ‘His body, along with Grayson’s, lies in the darkness of the caves back in the human world.’ Gabriel states these facts with coldness and finality. ‘They are far from us. And far from our daughter. That fucker Hendrix too. Dead. Gone. You made sure of that.’

‘I wish my brain would get the memo. Every night I dream they’re in this house, coming for her.’

‘I’ll go in there and give your mind a good talking to if you like.’ He rests his forehead against mine. ‘Then maybe you can do the same and explain to my head that every time you leave my sight doesn’t mean I’ve lost you again.’

I lean in, my lips rest on his, and again, every inch of me tingles.

It's been six months since we stood atop that hill, Lois Quinn and I, and performed the spell that sent us over here together. Six months since I first breathed in the fresh, unpolluted air of the Arcane Realm. Six months since I saw a fucking dragon do a flyby in recognition of the return of the Arcane Witch.

Six months since I reunited with my family, after five years of hell, living on the run with Mama Quinn and avoiding the humans who still hunted us.

And that was after a lifetime of horror at the hands of a monstrous uncle, his vindictive wife and their sadistic piece of shit son.

And another lifetime of blood, betrayal, heartbreak and carnage at the hands of the Kendryk men. Gabriel excluded, of course.

I know that they're gone. I know that the monsters who fought to own me, my magic, my body and my bloodline are as far from us as can be.

Grayson is dead. Theodore is dead. And Toby Smith is buried deep inside Bias's mind.

But yet, the nightmares still come. The feeling of dread refuses to relent.

I fear for my daughter.

I fear for us all.

It was a month before Callie would agree to sleep in her own bed after I returned. She wanted her mummy, and my God, I wanted my daughter in my arms as much as fucking possible. She's happy enough in her room now, but I can't seem to let go as easy. More often than not, Callie wakes to me sleeping in her room and, by extension, Gabriel.

'We can sleep in here again tonight,' Gabriel concedes, shifting himself into a more comfortable position. His back leans against Callie's bed and his legs stretch out as he repositions me on his frame and yawns.

'You sure you don't mind?' I ask, still watching our daughter sleep and instantly relaxing at his words.

'I'll sleep on a bed of nails and it would still be heaven if I've got the pair of you in my sights.'

I snuggle down and close my eyes. The same as last night, the night before that and the one before that.

'I love you, Beautiful.'

'I love you more.'

He kisses me on the top of my head and closes his eyes. 'Impossible. That, my love, is simply impossible.'

Within a few minutes, Callie shifts in her bed. She sleepily slides out and crawls into my arms, pulling her blanket with her. She sinks into me and falls straight back into her dreams. The damned cat even joins the pile and curls up on Gabriel's legs.

I wrap my arms around her. Gabriel wraps his arms around us both.

And we all fall into the most blissful sleep together.

# Thank you for reading

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