

## Chapter 34

Verena

When Axton said a High Priestess would be visiting me today, I expected an older woman. Gray hair, wearing black robes, a permanent scowl on her face. I expected her to be strict, training me until I could no longer stand. To be honest, I pictured McGonagall from Harry Potter.

So why is the literal embodiment of sunshine staring at me right now?

Dressed in a flowing skirt bursting with colors and a top adorned with sparkling sequins that catch the light with every movement, Kris is like a walking celebration.

Her hair is a cascade of vivid blue and purple and an array of wildflowers, tumbling over her shoulders in wild, carefree curls framing her face, which is bright with a warm, infectious smile. Around her neck, layers of beaded necklaces clink together melodiously, and her arms are adorned with an assortment of shimmering bracelets.

This woman is apparently my aunt, but she looked the complete opposite of my mother.

"Verena!" she exclaims, her voice a melody of joy and surprise. She rushes over and envelops me in a warm, enthusiastic hug that smells faintly of jasmine and summer rain. "Oh, darling, look at you! You're the spitting image of Kate!"

I'm momentarily stunned, her happiness infectious, making it impossible not to return her smile. "It's nice to meet you, Aunt Kris."

Axton, who had followed her into the room, chuckles at our

exchange, a twinkle of amusement in his eyes. "I'll give you two some privacy," he says, still smiling as he leaves the room.

Kris turns back to me, her enthusiasm undimmed. "I know you must have a million questions, honey," she says, and her voice is like a warm blanket being wrapped around my shoulders. "Fire away!"

Taking a deep breath, I start with what's been burning inside me. "Why aren't you in the cult? With my grandfather?" It feels strange to refer to my own ancestral legacy that way, but that's how it seems from where I'm standing.

Kris's laughter peels through the room, light and unbothered. "Oh, my dear, your grandfather banished me a long time ago. He never did like my way of doing things—too free, too wild for his tastes." She waves a hand dismissively, her bracelets jingling like tiny bells. "When Axton reached out to me years ago, I was shocked to see Kate with two little girls. It was a surprise, but a wonderful one."

"You're her older sister?" I ask, curiosity piqued.

"Yip and I trained her, just as I'll train you," Kris responds with a nod. "Kate was very powerful, very gifted. You've got her blood, her potential."

I frown slightly, feeling uncertain. "I'm not sure how this will work, Kris. I don't feel any different. Not magical even though I'm apparently the one who will kill my grandfather."

Kris's smile is knowing. "That's because you have no intention to use your magic, darling. Magic is about intention, desire. You've been holding back, maybe out of fear, maybe out of disbelief. But that's okay. We'll start small."

She reaches up, plucking a vibrant flower from her hair. She places the delicate bloom in my palm and then covers it with her hand,

guiding my other hand to hover beneath hers. "Picture this flower floating, Verena. It might sound silly, but just imagine it."

Feeling a bit foolish yet intrigued, I concentrate on the flower, on the image of it rising into the air. For a moment, nothing happens, and I'm about to apologize for failing her first test when suddenly the flower lifts off my hand, hovering between our palms. My eyes widen in shock.

"Now, let it go further," Kris encourages, her voice a soft whisper.

Encouraged by her confidence, I focus harder, and as I do, the flower doesn't just float; it bursts into a shower of sparkling petals, each piece shimmering in the air like tiny stars. I gasp, staring at the spectacle, a mix of awe and fear coursing through me.

"See? You're doing it, darling!" Kris exclaims, clapping her hands delightedly. "You've got a natural talent. It's just been waiting for the right moment to come out."

"But how?" I stammer, still staring at the glittering remnants of the flower floating gently to the floor. "How does it all work?"

"Magic isn't about doing the impossible, Verena. It's about believing in your own power to make the impossible happen," Kris explains, her eyes twinkling. "Your heart, your spirit, they're powerful. When you accept what you can do, you'll be amazed at how far you can go." 1

I nod slowly, the initial shock giving way to a budding excitement. Maybe I can actually do this. Maybe I can be the person my mother believed I could be.

I process her words, the weight of the reality settling on me. "And what about the sacrifices, the darker parts of this magic?"

Kris's expression sober. "Magic, like anything powerful, has its dark



sides. It can be tempting to take shortcuts, to use it for quick gains. But remember, every action has its consequences. The key is balance and responsibility.”

As Kris and I sink deeper into the plush cushions of the sunroom, the afternoon light casts a warm glow over the array of mystical paraphernalia she’s brought along. From crystals that shimmer with hidden depths to jars of herbs that smell like a wild forest, each item seems to pulse with an unseen energy.

“So, where do we start?” I ask, my curiosity piqued despite the heaviness of everything I’ve learned so far.

Kris claps her hands together, her bracelets jingling merrily. “First things first, let’s get you familiar with the basics of energy manipulation. Think of it as learning to feel the natural flow of the world around you.”

I nod, eager to distract myself from the heavier implications of my newfound heritage.

Kris picks up a small, smooth stone from the table and hands it to me. “Hold this and close your eyes,” she instructs. “I want you to focus on the weight of the stone in your hand, feel its surface, its temperature.”

I do as she says, the cool hardness of the stone grounding me. “Okay, I can feel it.”

“Now,” Kris continues, “I want you to imagine warmth spreading from the center of your palm into the stone. Picture it in your mind. Feel the heat transferring.”

I concentrate, imagining a warm light glowing in my hand. After a moment, I swear I can feel a slight warmth seeping into the stone. “I think it’s working,” I murmur, surprised.



Kris beams. "See? You're a natural. Now, let's try something a bit more fun." She takes the stone back and replaces it with a feather. "This time, try lifting it using only your intent."

"A feather?" I raise an eyebrow but decide to go along with it. I focus on the feather, picturing it rising into the air. At first, nothing happens, and I feel a flicker of frustration.

"Don't force it," Kris chides gently. "It's not about power; it's about harmony. Align your energy with the feather's."

Taking a deep breath, I relax my mind and imagine a gentle breeze lifting the feather. Almost imperceptibly, it begins to quiver, then slowly, it lifts off my palm, hovering a few inches in the air before it flutters back down.

"I did it!" I exclaim, a laugh escaping me.

Kris claps, her delight infectious. "You're doing wonderfully! Let's move on to something a bit more advanced."

The hours slip by as Kris introduces me to the basics of magical constructs, how to create shields of energy, and even how to imbue objects with temporary enchantments. Each lesson is interspersed with anecdotes about her own experiences with magic, making the session feel more like a conversation than a formal training.

"So, there was this one time I accidentally turned my cat blue," Kris recounts with a chuckle. "I was trying to create a protective aura around him, and well, let's just say he was not pleased."

I laugh, picturing the disgruntled blue cat. "How long did it last?"

"A week!" Kris laughs. "He was quite the spectacle. But it taught me a valuable lesson about precision and intent."

As we wrap up for the day, Kris's expression turns thoughtful. "You know, Verena, magic is a lot like life. It's unpredictable, sometimes messy, and it doesn't always go as planned. But it's also beautiful, and it can bring a lot of joy if you're open to the possibilities."

I nod, feeling a sense of peace settling over me for the first time since this whole ordeal began. "Thank you, Kris. Today was... more helpful than you know."

She stands, stretching her arms above her head. "Well, my dear, remember, this is just the beginning. You have so much potential; I'm just here to help you unlock it. We'll meet again tomorrow, same time?"

"Absolutely," I agree, already looking forward to it. "Thank you again, Kris."

She hugs me again, her energy as infectious as ever. "You're going to be amazing, Verena. Just give it time and patience," she says, rubbing my arms and suddenly looking serious. "Just promise me one thing."

My heart lurches at the stern look on her face. "Okay...?"

Placing her hands on my shoulders, she levels me with a stare that has my blood running cold. "Promise me you'll never, ever call me 'Aunt Kris' again."

My mouth falls open, and she leaves, her laughter echoing down the hall, I sit back, the room suddenly quiet without her presence. That woman had me believing it was something serious!

The reality of my abilities, of the path that lies ahead, feels scary as hell, but also thrilling. With Kris's help, maybe I can work my way through this new world.



Maybe I can even change it.



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