



## Witch Magic 2: The Shining

By MicheleBardsley

### Chapter 1

Turning twenty-one felt good, Ginger Thorne decided.Damned good. Okay. Maybe that was the champagne talking. Holding her flute of bubbly, she wandered out into the lush and colorful gardens behind CastleDundrury . The moon was high and full, a big white circle in a velvety black sky.Perfect

night for a witch's birthday.

Her sister Sage had been dancing with that elf... what's-his-name, Nadrin. Yeah. Seemed like every elf's name ended in "rin." Weird. As Ginger stumbled along the path lined with well-trimmed hedges, she inhaled the sweet scents of the flowers, of the mowed grass, of the night air. Sage had looked happy wiggling her pointy hips across that big-ass ballroom.

But not as happy as Rosemary and Drake.

Her oldest sister and her hubby had been married a little more than three years. And Rose was expecting a baby. That was a mind-blower all right.

The music and the sounds of laughter and clinking dishes faded. Ginger realized she'd gone farther than she'd intended. She only wanted a breath of fresh air, a chance to clear her head. She looked around and frowned. Where the hell was she?

"Lost?" asked an amused male voice.

Ginger whirled. Emerging from the shadows, she saw the tall, lean form of the blond man she'd seen here and there at her party. He had brown eyes, she remembered, like melted chocolate. And his lips always seemed on the verge of smiling.

"Sorry," she said. "I don't remember your name."

"Yours is Ginger," he said smoothly. "You're the birthday girl." She'd noticed him in the buffet line. Shook his hand in the receiving line. And

watched him in the ballroom. He never danced, just stood near the wall and looked on as others be-bopped. It had struck her at the time that he seemed the type of person who lived on the sidelines. Yeah. Only he liked to observe rather than participate.

Hmmm. He was tall and graceful. His eyes were kind and seemed to twinkle with mischief. Dressed in khaki pants and a short sleeved white dress shirt, he looked cute. Normal. Average. His hands looked like they should be playing the piano or making love to a woman. Her heart jolted. Where had that thought come from? "Do you need me to escort you back to the party?" he asked in a low voice that sent skitters down her spine.

"Why don't we sit down?" She plopped onto the ground. Her champagne flute flew out of her hands and sailed into the air. It landed a couple of feet away. She laughed. "Oh, shit. Didn't mean to do that."

Mystery Man sat next to her. The moon lit his features, highlighting the slight curving of his fabulous lips. "You are drunk," he accused gently.

"Amnot .Giddy. Not drunk."

She watched his gaze drop to her chest. Her nipples hardened under his perusal. The tingle in her breasts arrowed straight to her core; her thighs trembled.

The curve of his lips widened. "You've ruined your dress." He pointed to the large rip on the side of her green sheath.

His gaze returned to hers and those lips... those incredible lips inched up into a full-blown smile. Oh dear Goddess. He's gorgeous. Suddenly, Ginger realized what she wanted for her birthday. The only gift she could give herself... the only gift she wanted from him.

She wobbled onto her knees and yanked off her dress. His eyes rounded in shock. "Ginger! You'll get cold!"

"You can warm me up," she purred.

He looked at her bared breasts and visibly swallowed. "Th-that's acupless bra. You've been walking around all night in that... that get-up under your dress?"

"A-yup." She stood up and turned, showing off the green lace lingerie. The cupless bra unsnapped in the front. She wore a green lace thong that barely hid her neatly trimmed pussy and thigh-high stockings that encased her legs. She also wore ankle-busting stilettos that were worth every bit of torture given the shocked-lust expression of her mystery man.

"You should see the look on your face," she said as a giggle escaped. She did another turn then jiggled her C-cup breasts. "What do you think?"

"You are beautiful," he said. "Everything I've ever wanted."

"Wow. That's a great line. Kiss me!" She threw her arms around his neck and pressed her lips

against his.

He unwound her arms and set her away. His grip stayed on her shoulders, his thumbs drawing lazy circles, but his gaze had lost its twinkle.

Well, poop. "What? Don't you want me?"

"Don't be ridiculous," he snapped. "You're the only girl I've ever wanted. But not like this. Father Earth! I could be anyone."

"Nope. You're you. The one I want. The tall blond with the graceful hands and the kind eyes."

He looked stunned. Goddess, he was cute. "You... you noticed me?" "Yeah. At my party. You watch everyone have a good time, but you don't, you

know... have a good time with them." She leaned close, brushing her breasts against his chest. She was gratified when he shuddered. "Have a good time with me."

"This isn't what I expected," he finally said. "I'm not sure this course of action is wise."

"I don't have to be wise on my birthday," she said. "I want to lose my virginity with you. Now, what's it going to be? If you don't want me, then I gotta go find a second runner-up."

"No." He swept her into his arms and marched toward the castle. "There will be no runner-up, Ginger. There will be only me."

He sounded serious. Usually when a guy acted like a possessive jerk, she had to fight an urge to punch him in the nose. This time, with this guy, she felt really, really, really wanted. Goddess, I'm horny. Horny and tipsy and lovin' the feel of this guy carrying me like I'm a puff of wind.

As they neared the castle, the sounds of her ongoing bash trickled into the late evening. Ginger blinked up at him. "If I go back to the party with my boobshangin' out, my mother will kill me."

“We’re not going to the ballroom. I know a few things about the castle. There’s a secret passage that goes to my room.”

Within minutes, he had traversed the dusty, dark passage and entered a small bedroom. Well, small for CastleDundrury . The huge four-poster bed dominated the space. She glimpsed the bathroom through the open door on the left side of the room. There were chairs and bookcases, an armoire and a dresser -- all cherry wood. She didn’t get a good look because Mystery Man dumped her on the bed, locked the door, and turned off the lights in thirty seconds flat.

What am I doing? For a moment, she thought about dipping into his head, finding out the truth about him. But that would ruin her fun, her fantasy. And her psychic oath forbade her to read anyone’s thoughts without permission. He didn’t emit a single bad vibe and his aura, which she could view without his consent, didn’t have so much as a gray smear anywhere on it.

Ginger heard the snick of a match. A flame appeared in the blackness. Mystery Man had lit several candles in the room, giving the space a romantic glow.

Her heart warmed. She had picked the right man. This was going to be a glorious night. Hmm-umm. It would be a fabulous, wonderful, fantasy-filled night of passion, of possibilities.

She heard a heavy curtain swept aside. A large window revealed the big, white circle of the moon. Contentment settled her stomach, though her body buzzed with anticipation. How had he known the moon would comfort her?

The gorgeous blond returned to the bed and began to shed his clothes. Lust beat an ancient tempo in her pulse, her body thickened with heat, desire... yes, oh yes. Perfect night for a witch’s birthday.

## Chapter 2

NigelBrubre’s heart thudded as he crawled onto the bed and gathered the beautiful, champagne-giddy Ginger into his arms. He wanted to make love to her slowly, thoroughly. He wanted to show her with his touch what he’d never been able to tell her with his words.

How did you admit to the woman who didn't know you existed that you'd been in love with her since you were ten years old?

He threaded his fingers through the silky strands that had escaped from her upswept hairdo. The enchanted green sparkles had long since faded, but he remembered how they'd looked... how she'd looked entering the ballroom with that hip-wiggling, boob-jiggling sashay and yelling, "Let's blow these doors off, people! Happy birthday to me!"

"Your hair reminds me of fire," he said.

"Wow." Her tone was heavy with sarcasm. "I've never heard that one before." He blushed, lowering his head to her neck, his lips barely pressing the flesh, to

hide his embarrassment. C'mon, Nigel! Be more original. This is your chance. Your only chance!

"I guess that was lame," he admitted. "Sorry."

"You know, sweets, you can do a lot more good with your mouth than talking." She shimmered her breasts against his chest.

He groaned.

She laughed.

Then she pushed on his shoulders until he rolled over onto his back. Flinging a leg over his waist, she straddled him, nestling her pussy against his hard-on. "I'm a virgin."

"You mentioned that." So am I, Ginger. I've been waiting for you. I've wanted to be your first, last, and only. No other woman will ever do.

"Oh. All right then." She snapped her fingers and her thong disappeared in a flare of red magic.

Then she rubbed her pussy on his cock. He felt her slickness, her warmth. Nigel's fingers danced up her thighs, stalling at her hips.

"This feels good," she said, her eyes closed, her body undulating like a belly dancer while she made him hotter, harder... At this rate, he would come before he even got inside her.

Trembling, he reached for her breasts, cupped those big beautiful mounds, and squeezed. Her nipples hardened against his palms. She had big nipples the color of pink sea coral. He brushed his thumbs against the taut peaks, his pulse stumbling when she moaned.

Her eyes flickered open. "Do that again, lover. Only harder. Like you mean it." "Hardly the chaste and embarrassed directions of a virgin," he said as he complied.

She practically purred. "Yeah, like that." She looked at him, her eyes glazed with lust. "Virgin body, baby, not a virgin mind. My sisters and I read every sex book and watched every dirty movie we could get our hands on. You think I'm bold? You should've seen what Rosemary marked in The Witch's Guide to Pleasuring Your Warlock.

A little old-fashioned, but very detailed."

"I'll take your word for it," he breathed. She was moving again, sliding her wet cunt across his aching cock. He tweaked her nipples again, tugging hard.

A low moan escaped and she bit her lower lip. "Isooooo like that," she said. His whole life, Nigel never had control. He plodded along on the life course set

by his parents, his instructors, and his so-called destiny. But this night with Ginger belonged to him. For once in his twenty years on this planet, he was making a decision for his own happiness. Screw the consequences.

"Should we try penetration?" she asked. "Not yet. Let me taste you."

His plan had been to flip her onto her back and sample her flesh, inch by luscious inch. He wanted to tongue lash her all the way to her succulent pussy. But Ginger thwarted his idea. She crawled up to his face and, planting a knee on either side of his head, lowered herself to his mouth. She used her fingers to

open her pussy... a very erotic blooming flower.

Lust rippled through him as he breathed in her feminine scent. Beautiful... so beautiful. He kissed the spot just above her clit, dragging his tongue down the slender line. Ecstasy trembled through him as he licked the plump flesh.

His thorough exploration continued until her thighs quivered and her pussy dripped.

Then... and only then... did he slide his tongue into her wet heat and begin a slow rhythm.

"Oh Goddess!" she said, moaning. "That feels so good!"

He reached one hand between her legs and pinched her clit. Nigel looked up, wanting to see her expression, and found an even more erotic sight: she cupped her own breasts, playing with the nipples. Lust poured through him, a quaking need that rocked him to the core.

Her long red hair brushed his stomach as she moved in rhythm with his tongue. He wanted nothing more than for her to come on his face, to taste her essence, to know he had brought her pleasure.

"Oh! Oh yes!" Her pussy clenched, sucking at his tongue, then she cried out. Her juices flowed into his mouth, onto his face, and he drank as if he'd been a mortal granted sacred ambrosia.

"I want more," she said. "More of you, my cute birthday present." Scooting down, she squatted above his cock. He looked at her position, which so

clearly showed her swollen, wet cunt, and felt the breath whoosh out of his lungs. "Ginger..."

She fit her pussy onto his hard length. Ever-so-slowly, she lowered herself until he was half-embedded.

"I... I need help," she said.



If his heart hadn't already belonged to her, he would've given it to her this very moment. He couldn't remember a time that Ginger Thorne had displayed vulnerability. And yet, here she was, eager, but hesitant.

He stretched out his hands. "Hold onto my hands. Then push down and I'll thrust up."

"Okay." Her eyes, green as jade, were still glazed from her orgasm. But he saw the lingering uncertainty, the ghost of fear.

"Do you want to stop?" he asked.

She blinked at him. "What? You mean you would actually stop?" "Yes. I want to you to be happy. To find pleasure in what we're doing. If you're not... then we'll do something else."

She grinned. "You mean like play Parcheesi or talk about politics?" She shook her head. "Forget it, babycakes. I want to play with you."

Grabbing onto his hands, she pushed down and he thrust up. Her maidenhead gave way and Nigel found himself completely sheathed by her tight, warm pussy.

"Feels weird," said Ginger. "But I like it."

"Move when you're ready," he said, panting. He was a virgin, too, and though he'd often stroked himself to orgasm, he knew plunging into Ginger's tight cunt would bring him to the edge in a matter of moments. Then again, they had all night to experiment, to play, to learn... together.

It took a few moments for her to adjust. Then she experimented, pumping her hips up and down, clenching and unclenching his cock with her inner muscles. It was torture of the worst -- and of the best -- kind.

Re-positioning herself so that her knees were on either side of his hips, she once again drew his cock into her pussy. She leaned forward and brushed her breasts across his chest. As her nipples scraped his sensitized flesh, he drew in a harsh breath and grappled with his thin control.

Ginger smiled and those cherry lips covered his in a long, sweet kiss. As her tongue thrust into his mouth, he wrapped his hands around her hips -- to steady himself and to give her gentle encouragement. At first, her movements were unsure, but soon, she gained momentum, grinding her pussy against him as she took his cock again and again.

She turned wild -- all fire and heat and need -- kissing him ravenously, her nails scraping down his ribs, as she rode him hard.

"Yes, Ginger," Nigel moaned as pleasure ricocheted through him. "Fuck me!" "Oh!" she cried. "Say it again, baby."

"Fuck me," he begged. "I want to fill up that beautiful pussy with my come." "Oh, that's hot," she panted. "So fucking hot. Tell me again, please. I'm on the edge, so close. Let's go over together."

"Fuck me, Ginger. Fuck me hard. I want you to come. Yes, baby... come on my cock!"

The orgasm burst with a rush of heat and light and joy. As his semen spilled into her pussy, he felt Ginger's release, the violent pulsations of her cunt wringing him dry.

He'd found paradise with her... and he couldn't stay.

### Chapter 3

One week later...

Victoria and William Brubre were wealthy, class-conscious, and vain. Ginger did not want to enter their perfectly white living room or sit on their expensive leather couch or drink herbal tea sweetened with

honey.

And yet, here she was... entering, sitting, drinking. Damn it.

“As you are aware,” she said, “I am required by magical law to use my gift to help any and all who ask. To be honest, I don’t understand why you’ve contacted me. I would think MageHonorus to be more to your liking.”

“You would be correct,” said Mr.Brubre . His nasal tone held just the right touch of censure. The man was tall and thin with a narrow face and flat, black eyes. She’d always thought of him as the human equivalent of a knife -- sharp and deadly. “However, since you are responsible for Nigel abandoning his familial duty, we feel you should be the one to find and return him to us.”

Ginger’s mouth dropped open. “I had nothing to do with your son’s disappearance.”

“Hah!” crowed Mrs.Brubre .

She was as tall and thin as her husband. Both wore white robes and the finest gold jewelry money could buy -- nearly mirror images of each other. However, Mrs.Brubre’s eyes were livelier than her husband’s. Where he gazed out coldly at the world and everyone in it, she calculated the worth of the people and the objects in her immediate vicinity. Ginger figured she didn’t rate much on Mrs.Brubre’s Scale of Worth.

“He is engaged to Lorette Rhia -- of the South Rhia Clan. It is an appropriate alliance. You are beneath him.” Mrs.Brubre ground her teeth. “And it appears that is a literal reference.”

“What are you --” Sudden realization hit her like a lead fist. “He was the one at my birthday party? The one who -- oh. Oh my Goddess.”

NigelBrubre had lovingly taken her virginity? She hadn't recognized him. Not at all. Then again, his older brothers were the ones who grabbed the spotlight. Her heart thumped in her chest. She'd been trying to find out the identity of her mystery lover to no avail. Goddess above! She couldn't believe she'd spent the night with aBrubre. TheBrubres had caused nothing but strife and hardship for her family.

Ah, but Nigel had given her a night of pleasure and of wonder that she would never forget. And now she knew why he had left her without revealing his name. Had he thought she'd attempt to get a marriage proposal from him? Or ask for bucketfuls of money? Fury whipped through her.

"Oh, don't play coy with us, young lady. You knew exactly who you were taking to your bed," sneered Mrs.Brubre. Her pale cheeks turned an angry red. "And don't pretend that you don't know the boy has some idiotic notion of becoming an Ovate." Ginger carefully put the china cup onto its matching plate. And she clamped a lid on her temper. One spell, just one... and neither one of you will talk for a week. Truthfully, Nigel seemed sweet and patient and... he'd liked her. Really liked

her. But how could she ever know the truth about his motives? "Your son left to become a monk scholar, all on his own, and you think it's because he slept with me?"

"Of course! You bespelled him somehow! Why else would he give up such a profitable marriage, take a vow of poverty, and pursue... knowledge?" Mrs.Brubre waved a hand in front of her face as if to hold off a faint. She said the word "knowledge" with the same distaste as "penniless."

"Maybe that's what Nigel wanted," said Ginger as she stood and straightened her simple green skirt. "This may be a stretch for you, but not everyone cares only about money and prestige. Sending your son into a loveless marriage because it profits you is selfish and wrong." Ginger picked up her purse and glared at the two people looking at her with snide expressions. "Then again, why would you ever put someone else's happiness above your own?"

"How dare you!" Mrs.Brubre put a hand against her heaving chest -- the very picture of indignation.

"I will have MageHonorius contact you at his earliest convenience. Blessed be." Ginger inclined her head then turned to go.

"Wait," said Mr.Brubre. "You must be the one to convince Nigel to return. He has pledged to marry Lorette, and it is his duty as our son to wed her."

Ginger inhaled a calming breath then she turned to face theBrubres once again. "Your son has the right to live the life he chooses. You'll just have to deal with the fact that what he wants does not coincide with your wishes."

“We ask for your help so you must give it,” reminded Mr.Brubre . “Only if doing so will not incur harm to another. I will not help you create

unhappinessfor another person. And if I find Nigel and force his return, it will only bring him misery.” Ginger walked until she was scant inches from theBrubres . They looked at her, obviously shocked she would encroach on their personal space. “Now, if you don’t understand what I’m telling you, let me clarify. Fuck. Off.”

Mrs.Brubre sucked in an outraged breath; her mouth opened and closed like a freshly-caught trout. Mr.Brubre’s black gaze looked the same as always, though his lips thinned into a murderous frown.

“You refuse us?” he asked. He considered Ginger, a finger tapping his lips. “Perhaps you only need proper motivation.”

Ginger crossed her arms and glared at him. “Oh, please. Don’t even try to bribe me.”

“Don’t we hold the deed to theThornes ’ herbal shop, my dear?” His harpy wife placed a hand on his arm, her smile white and soulless. “Why

yes! And I believe we discussed selling that property.”

“It’s in a prime location,” agreed Mr.Brubre . “We could get quite the pretty penny for the land and the building.”

“You can’t do that,” said Ginger, though it was likely theBrubres not only could, they would. “You would not have the deed at all if you hadn’t blackmailed my parents -- the same way you’re trying to blackmail me.”

“We did no such thing,” exclaimed Mrs.Brubre . “Could we help it if theThornes were plagued by bad luck?Problems with the plumbing, not getting suppliers for herbs, losing valued customers... such a shame.”

“Funny how all that bad luck ceased the instant my parents signed over the deed.” Ginger wouldn’t give them the satisfaction of seeing her blow her top. Itsickened her the way they wielded

money and power. Where were the karmic consequences? Surely the Brubres would have been repaid for their unkindness and greed many times over... and yet they only grew in power and gained more wealth. And no inquiry brought against them had ever yielded evidence of black magic.

"Isn't your sister Sage applying to study curative magic?" asked Mrs. Brubre in a bright voice. "It's a shame she can't attend the Brubre Centre for the Healing Arts. I understand she has quite the talent for healing and herbology. How sad she'll be denied the best facility and most experienced instructors because your family is too poor to afford a quality education."

Rage rolled over Ginger in thick, hot waves. A spell to weld the Brubres' feet to their marble floor hovered on her lips, but she resisted the urge. She would derive petty satisfaction from the act, and yet it would mean getting the same back threefold. No. She would not curse herself. Instead, she took several calming breaths. "Let's be clear. Are you saying you will return the herbal shop deed to my parents and pay for Sage's education at the Brubre Centre if I find Nigel for you?"

"Find him, return him, and make sure he marries Lorette," said Mrs. Brubre. "No. I'll find him. And I'll bring him back to this house. But I cannot guarantee

he will marry anyone." Ginger couldn't believe she was consenting to this nonsense. "I want our arrangement in writing. And the contract must be examined and approved by my lawyer."

"We agree," said Mr. Brubre. "But you won't get the deed or the scholarship unless you produce Nigel."

"Fine."

Unable to stand another second in the smarmy presence of the Brubres, she hurried out of the house and into the beauty and light of the afternoon. The idea of getting back her parents' rightful property and insuring Sage got a premium education was too big an incentive for her to ignore. And, if she was honest with herself, she wanted very much to see Nigel.

I need to know if what we had together was a one-night stand... or the reason he ran away from his impending marriage.

And there was only one way to find out...

## Chapter 4

Ginger sat on the floor of her bedroom. As was tradition for an unmarried witch, she still lived with her parents. Warlocks, however, often left their parents' home when they turned eighteen. Some witches scorned the old ways and got jobs and apartments before marrying. Those who did so rarely made a marriage match within the clans. No, those witches often married mortals.

Despite her independent nature, Ginger honored the traditions of her people. Some day, she wanted to marry a warlock and have little witchlings. But for now, she was content to develop her psychic gifts and use them to help others.

Even the Brubres. Argh! She'd bartered with the cousins of the devil, hadn't she? Despite all that her family would gain from the contract signed and approved by the Thornes' lawyer, it still galled her to give that awful couple what they wanted: Nigel.

Her heart jolted. Nigel. So very sweet. So patient. So... unattainable. He had known who she was that night when he had seduced her. She'd been willing enough too. She couldn't be angry about his deception, not when she'd examined his aura and

known the truth about him. He had not technically lied... he'd just never given his name. And he only wanted to please her. Whew, baby. He'd done that in spades! And he'd given himself to her at great cost.

She grimaced as she lit the last candle. The Brubres had been unable to track their son by other means. It seemed that clever Nigel had paid oodles for a complicated spell that made it impossible to trace him. Not only had the spell wiped away his unique magical signature, which most trackers used to find runaways, it had also wiped the memories of any who might've seen him traveling.

In addition, there were many Ovate sects all over the world. Nigel could've fled to any of their retreats. The Brubres hadn't attempted bribery. For one, any attempt to influence an Ovate meant automatic penalties and for two, no Ovate was accepted into a sect if he or she cared even a teeny tiny bit about personal gain. If Nigel had been accepted into an Ovate sect, that meant he didn't give two damns about material possessions.

Ginger smiled. Nigel Brubre had the mind of a scholar and the heart of a gentleman.

Candles sat at each corner of the five-pointed star she'd drawn with her magic. Murmuring a prayer to the goddess, she put her arms straight out over the pentacle, palms out. As her red magic

weaved patterns designed to aid her psychic abilities, she closed her eyes and thought about Nigel.

Within moments, a picture formed in her mind.

Built into the side of a steep, cold mountain was a forbidding structure with dark gray walls; it was as tall and sharp as broken glass and surrounded by thick ice, whipping winds, and constant snowfall.

Across the entrance gate were the words: The Ovate Order of Warlock Scholars, Sect of the Dragons. Underneath it were the words:Gnothiseauton. Ginger muttered a translation spell and the words wiggled into, "Knowthyself."

Breathing deeply, Ginger pushed forward, but could not move through the gate. She wrapped her magic tighter around her, inhaled long, deep breaths, and tried again.

Who are you?boomed a man's deep voice into her mind.

Startled by the sudden and powerful interference of a guardian psychic, Ginger almost lost her connection. She steadied herself and refocused her energy.I am Ginger Thorne. I seek NigelBrubre .

I appreciate someone who seeks knowledge. What do you hope Nigel will teach you? I don't need his wisdom. I need his cooperation.

The man's disapproval felt like a lead weight dropped into her mind.No one who wants personal gain may enter our doors.

I want nothing from him.Though others will benefit if he returns to his parents.

Ah... you want Nigel to forsake his calling so that others may profit? His sigh of disappointment whispered through her.I think, Miss Thorne, that you believe you fulfill a lofty purpose. It is a sad justification. If one person's suffering rewards another with favors... then it is personal gain.



I see your point. Had she not told the Brubres the very same thing? She had refused to help them because to do so was to harm Nigel. Only when they offered to alleviate her family's financial problems did she cave into their demands. She'd had no thoughts for Nigel's welfare then. Shame heated her cheeks. Please forgive me, Guardian. Be assured that I will not reveal Nigel's location.

I never said Nigel was here.

Ginger smiled. Yeah, right. Nigel was certainly safe in this mountain fortress. He could live the life he wanted without the interference of his parents. In case you do know the location of Nigel, would you tell him that Ginger Thorne said thank you for a beautiful birthday gift. And let him know that I wish him happiness through all his days.

Is that all?

She hesitated. If I asked you to tell him that I wanted to see him again... that I wished we had the chance to be together... would it be personal gain?

What do you think?

I think to reveal my heart to him, which might influence his calling, is selfish. Hmmm. I see. Then before you go, I give you one gift, so that you might have the answer

to your question.

Into Ginger's mind poured a series of images.

In the first, she was a gangly ten-year-old. Then, she'd hated her red hair and freckles and knobby knees. She was in the Dark Forest, lost and afraid. Sitting on a fallen tree, she'd cried and cried. Her parents forbade her to go into the Dark Forest alone, and while the place was creepy enough in the daylight, it was very dangerous at night. Then a blond-haired boy appeared. He took her hand and led her out of the forest. She thanked him, kissing his cheek, and ran all the way home.

In the second, she was fifteen, attending her first school dance. Halfway through the evening, her first boyfriend of one whole month dumped her for his ex-girlfriend. She'd been too stubborn to go home and made a point of dancing, drinking punch, and talking to her friends. Then the last song of the evening

played -- a ballad meant for

slow-dancing couples. She was left, alone and heartbroken, in the dark corner of the gymnasium. Then, a blond-haired boy with the kindest eyes she'd ever seen asked her to dance. He held her gently, saying nothing, and made her feel cherished. When the song ended, he kissed her cheek... and faded into the crowd.

In the third image, she saw herself wandering the gardens of Dundrury Castle and there was her knight again. He took her into his arms and carried her away... into a singular night of passion.

That was him... all those times? I didn't know. Why would Nigel do such kind things for me?

Sometimes the soul recognizes its other half. Nigel knew what you did not... that you were meant for each other. But love should be given freely, without expectation of return. If his parents taught that young man anything, it was that love cannot be bought, sold, or traded.

Thank you, Guardian.

Blessed be, Ginger Thorne.

## Chapter 5

The next day, Ginger found herself in the same living room, sitting on the same couch, as she prepared to deliver the bad news to the Brubres. Their robes were blue

today, and the jewelry adorning their necks and fingers was made of gold and sapphires. It was a pity such beauty held such emptiness.

Instead of attempting to intimidate her by standing, as they had last time, they sat on the opposite couch and stared at her. Mr. Brubre's gaze was as cold as black ice and Mrs. Brubre's blue eyes snapped with impatience and temper. They hadn't offered her tea -- a serious breach in manners. All guests entering the home of a witch or warlock must be offered hospitality.

"I am unable to procure the location of your son," said Ginger. "That's impossible!" said Mrs. Brubre. "You are the only one who can find him." "Why do you think that?" asked Ginger. "Is it because... oh, I don't know... a

soul recognizes its mate?"

The woman paled. "You are delusional! You are not Nigel's mate. That's absurd! A Brubre would never, ever marry a Thorne."

"That's the problem, isn't it?" asked Ginger. "I did some checking and found out that Nigel's arranged marriage happened very quickly... as in two days after my birthday. You thought Nigel was going to be an Ovate. And you were okay with that because he was following the tradition of most youngest sons -- scholarly pursuits."

"Ah. But then he told you he wanted to court me. So, you arranged the marriage with Lorette Rhia. You thought that if Nigel was going to marry, then he would marry someone who would profit the Brubres."

"A very nice fairy tale," said Mr. Brubre with a razor grin. "You have no proof that such an absurd situation occurred."

"Yes, it is a hypothesis," said Ginger. "But if Nigel had intended to be an Ovate all along, why the sudden push into an arranged marriage? And now that he's gone and away from me, why the desperate need to find him?"

"We've entered into a marriage contract with the South Rhia Clan," said Mr. Brubre. "And we have every intention of seeing that Nigel fulfills his obligation to Lorette."

"You have every intention of seeing that Nigel never has the chance to marry me. An Ovate has the same rights as all warlocks. If he wishes to marry and have children, he can. However, his bride-to-be must be approved by the Order." Ginger smiled. "Everyone knows that once a warlock becomes an Initiate, all parental rights and obligations transfer to the Order."

"He's already an Initiate then," said Mrs. Brubre in a trembling voice. "And she knows which Order he has chosen. He's been preparing his whole life to be an Ovate. All he ever wanted was to be a scholar monk... and you, of course. We've always known he wanted you."

Mrs. Brubre's admission that she and her husband knew of Nigel's love for her was a lance to Ginger's heart. Oh, Nigel. How she ached for the chance to know him, in

both mind and body. He had awakened her to the possibilities of love. At least now he was protected by

his Order and able to carry out his studies free from parental manipulation.

“You would destroy your parents’ business and your sister’s career to protect our son’s location?” asked Mr.Brubre .

“I told my parents and Sage what you asked of me, and they said to me what I should’ve told you, ‘Do what thou wilt, but harm none.’ I will not give you back Nigel because it will most certainly harm him. And if you think to exact revenge upon my family, feel free. One day, and if the Goddess is merciful it will be soon, you’ll reap all that you have sown with your greed and your inhumanity.” Ginger stood, purse in hand, and nodded. She couldn’t bring herself to give the traditional good-bye, so she said, “Good day and good riddance.”

“Wait a minute,” said Mr.Brubre . He looked at his wife, who nodded, then at Ginger. “Please, Miss Thorne, sit down.”

Ginger reluctantly retook her seat. “There is nothing you can offer me that will affect my decision.”

“Nonsense,” said the man. “Everyone has a price.”

“I’m sorry you believe that.” She resisted the urge to whap him upside the head with her purse. He really didn’t understand the value and the sanctity of love. And he would probably never be able to comprehend that loving someone deeply, unconditionally meant risk, meant sacrifice.

“We’ll give back the deed. Send Sage to school. We’ll buy you ahouse - - furnished however you like. We know many, many influential people. We can send them to you when they need help... you’ll benefit greatly from their donations.”

Ginger rolled her eyes. “So what?”

Mr.Brubre looked taken aback. “Does nothing I’ve offered entice you, Miss Thorne?”

“Not really.”

“Fine. You can have anything you want. All that I’ve named so far and whatever else you like. Tell us what you need, and we’ll provide it. For the rest of your life. In fact, you can have a relationship with Nigel. Hell, live with him for all eternity if you so choose.”

Ginger frowned. Why were the Brubres so desperate to gain her cooperation? “What is the price I must pay for your generosity?”

“You must never, ever marry Nigel,” said Mrs. Brubre. “And though you may sleep with him all you like, you must never, ever bear his child.”

Ginger had to admit it was tempting to think about the Brubres bankrolling her every whim and want. A life of luxury for herself and for her family... and all she had to do was to never marry or have children with the one man who might give her real happiness.

Mr. and Mrs. Brubre looked at her, their smiles smug, their eyes blazing with triumph. She felt genuine pity for them. How sad that neither of them knew true love or the abundant joy of giving from the heart.

“No, thank you,” said Ginger. “I would not trade Nigel’s happiness for all the gold in the world.”

“If you will not reap the rewards,” said Mr. Brubre as he and his wife stood, clasping hands, “you will suffer the consequences.”

Ginger felt a jolt of fear. The Brubres were formidable. And it still galled her that no matter what misery they caused for others, they always prospered. The laws of magic were absolute. What you sow, you reap threefold. And yet, the Brubres seemed immune.

“Choose your fate,” said Mrs. Brubre. “Will you take our munificent offer... or insure that you and yours will know nothing but misery?”

Okay, that was it! She was sick and tired of these horrible people. She didn’t care if they were Nigel’s parents. They were mean-hearted and undeserving of such a wonderful son.

Ginger popped to her feet. "I refuse any token from you. And as for all the rest," she looked them up and down like they were mold between a troll's toes, "bring it on!"

TheBrubre's joined hands pulsed with purple energy. Each pointed an open palm at Ginger and muttered an imprisonment spell.

"Hold!" shouted a deep male voice. A tall, broad-shouldered man dressed in blood-red robes appeared. He surrounded theBrubres with a silver bubble, forestalling their spell... and freezing them. "Hello, Miss Thorne."

Ginger assessed him, though her heart still thumped wildly from almost gettingbespelled into a permanent prison. "Guardian of the Ovate Dragons," she guessed. "How did you know to arrive in the nick of time?"

"I pay attention," he answered. Gray threaded his brown hair and his dark eyes were deep with wisdom and mischief. "I heard you turn down their offer.Numerous times. And so did someone else..."

In the blink of an eye, Nigel, looking yummy in his white Initiate robes, appeared next to the Guardian. Ginger felt her mouth go dry. "Nigel."

"My love," he said, smiling. He pointed to the bubble surrounding his parents and it popped.

TheBrubres stared in horror at the Guardian, then at their son. Their gazes shifted to Ginger, who lifted a shoulder in casual denial.

"What is all this?" shouted Mr.Brubre . "Nigel, get over here. And everyone elseleave my house this instant!"

"Stop blustering, you fool," said the Guardian. He pointed an accusatory finger at theBrubres . "The time has come, William, for you and your family to pay your debt - - in full."

“What debt?” asked Ginger.

Nigel shyly reached out his hand and she grasped his fingers, thrilled when he yanked her into his embrace. He brushed his knuckles across her cheek. “I have missed you.”

“And I you,” she said.

“There’s time enough for that, you two,” said the Guardian, chuckling. “Now, to business.” He nodded toward Mr. and Mrs. Brubre. “Just after many witch-warlock families first settled in California, the ancestor of William Brubre sought council with a powerful witch named Giselda. You see, Josiah Brubre had fallen in love with a woman... a woman betrothed to Michael Thorne.”

“Lies!” hissed Mrs. Brubre.

“Quiet,” warned the Guardian. “The witch told Josiah that he had two options. One, he could risk rejection and reveal his feelings to the young lady. If she chose him

freely, he and all generations of Brubres would be rich in love and happiness. Two, he could choose the safe route and approach her father with a better marriage offer. If he won the witch-maiden by bartering for her, he and future generations would prosper financially, but only as long as no descendant of his ever married a descendant of the Thorne family.”

“But why would that matter?” asked Ginger.

“The closing of the circle,” said Nigel. “What Josiah began when he took the safest course -- he bartered to get what he wanted. Giselda also told Josiah that the day would come when one of his kin would choose love over money, and on that day, what he had sown, his family would reap.”

Shock vibrated through Ginger. “I’ve never heard this story. Not ever.” “No one has. My family spent a great deal of effort and money making sure it

was never told. Giselda wrote it down and gave it to the Sect of the Dragons for safekeeping.” He looked at his parents, his eyes sad. “I’ve been to the Sect of the Dragons every summer since I was fifteen exploring their libraries and asking questions of the elders.”

“You... you what?” screeched Mrs.Brubre . “You went toEurope with your grandparents those summers.”

Nigel rolled his eyes. “Where do you think the Sect built its monastery, Mother?” He looked at Ginger. “When my parents realized I knew you, that it was you my heart had chosen, they did everything they could to keep me away. And everything they could to keep theThornes under their control.” He leaned down for a lingering kiss. “If I could not join with you, Ginger, then my only other wish was to be an Ovate with the Dragons.”

“He foundGiselda’s prophecy,” said the Guardian.“Right before yourtwentyfirst birthday.”

“Interesting timing,” said Ginger with raised brows. “Indeed.” The Guardian winked at her.

“I gave them one last chance,” said Nigel. “To do what Josiah could not -- to risk for love. Unfortunately, my parents could not choose their son’s happiness over the possibility of losing their wealth and status.”

“He asked for their blessing to court you,” said the Guardian to Ginger. “He told William and Victoria that he had every intention of marrying you.”

“And they went out and found me someone else to marry,” said Nigel.

“It doesn’t matter if you love Ginger Thorne,” said Mr.Brubre . “You must marryLoretteRhia . It is our right as your parents to arrange a suitable marriage.”

“Nigel has been a Dragon Initiate for nearly a year. It is we who decide his course, not you,” said the Guardian. “The marriage contract to the SouthRhia Clan is not binding because it was not approved by the Sect of the Dragons.” He turned to Nigel. “And what say you, Initiate, if I give you the same choice given to Josiah. Will you barter with your parents... or will you risk your heart?”

“Ginger is worth every risk,” said Nigel softly. “And I choose her.” The Guardian smiled. “And you, Ginger Thorne?”



“What are you, crazy?” said Ginger. “I want Nigel!” Then she wrapped her arms around her knight and kissed the hell out of him.

## Chapter 6

One year later...

“Why, Mr.Brubre , I do believe you removed my bra!” Ginger laughed as her new husband nuzzled her breasts.

“I should inform you, Mrs.Brubre, that your panties are next.” “It was nice of Rosemary and Drake to let us have the same room. The one you

seducedme in.” She gazed around the luxurious abode. It looked much the same as it had that night so long ago... rose petals, lit candles, and a very naked Nigel.

He helped her wiggle off her panties.

Side-by-side, naked and wrapped in the warmth created by their closeness, they looked at each other. Nigel’s fingers drifted across her arm, down her side, to her hip. He stroked her buttock, cupping it and kneading it. Then his hand moved leisurely to her thigh. “You are beautiful, Ginger.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere,” she murmured, stretching against him. He chuckled as he rolled her onto her back and covered her, his hardening cock

nestled against her pussy. Kissing her shoulder, he dragged his lips along her collarbone then trailed up her neck, peppering kisses along her jaw.

Ginger stretched her arms above her head. Her back arched slightly, pushing her breasts into his chest. Her nipples pebbled against his warm flesh, tightening with need.

He kissed her, a slow melding of lips, a slow slide of his tongue that made her breath hitch and her heart pound. She felt his cock jerk against her clit; hot desire raced through her. Her breasts ached for his mouth, and her pussy trembled with need.

Then Nigel cupped her breasts and pinched the nipples into hardness. When his mouth surrounded one nipple and his tongue flicked the peak, pleasure jolted through her, spearing her to the core. He laved her nipple, suckling one while his hand tormented the other. Then he switched mouth and hand and she went up in flames, wiggling against him. “Oh... wow. Do that some more!”

“It would be my great pleasure,” he promised. He crawled down her, his mouth trailing a wet line of lust to her navel. His tongue encircled her navel before sliding oh so -slowly to her thigh. Pushing her legs apart, he kissed her pussy lips, his tongue sliding into the folds to taste her.

Erotic elation pierced her, quivering, aching tendrils that built heat and need. His tongue flicked her clit, teasing the hard nub, before sliding down and tasting her some more. His kisses drove her wild.

He parted her folds, licked the juice pearly there, then his mouth settled on her clit and sucked it, hard. The orgasm swelled, waves of pleasure threatening, then burst, sensation after joyous sensation rolling over her. She screamed and bucked, her cunt pulsating as she came.

Nigel pushed her legs up and forward until her heels rested on his shoulders. She panted, still shuddering from the orgasm. He lifted her hips and plunged his cock into her pussy. His erection impaled her, stretching her and filling her.

“Yes, my love. Oh yes... fuck me, Nigel!”

Hemoaned, his hands sweaty on her thighs as he held onto her legs and pumped into her again and again. The rocking of their bodies singed her to the core. The slap of flesh, the glazed look of lust in his eyes, the thick cock piercing her over and over again... all of it drove her wild.

Her body strained toward bliss as love bloomed in her heart. Such joy she owned now that she was well and truly his... and Nigel was well and truly hers.

His thumb rubbed her clit and he fucked her harder, his cock pistoning into her pussy. She matched his movements, her heart pounding, sweat slick on her skin.

As she plunged over the edge into another juicy orgasm, Nigel shuddered and moaned. Then he stilled his movements.

“What are you doing, husband?”

“Enjoying myself, wife.” Nigel slipped out of her, lowering her legs and lying on top of her. He plucked red strands from her sweaty temple and traced her cheek with one finger. Then he took her

mouth in a gentle caress, his breath skirting her lips. Only when her mouth was pliant, willing, did he deepen the kiss, thrusting his tongue inside to mate with hers.

Then he moved down her throat, lingering at the base. He trailed a path to her breasts, raining tiny kisses over each of them, cupping them in his hands to bring them closer to his mouth. He tugged a nipple between his lips and flicked the tip with his tongue. Her hands fisted against the sheets as she cried out, tortured and delighted. Then he turned his attention to her other nipple, giving it the same lovely attention.

“Nigel, oh, how I love you.”

“You are my heart.” His hand coasted down her stomach and found the nest of curls at the apex of her thighs. He gently pinched her clit between his thumb and forefinger, released the tiny nub, and pinched again.

Nigel renewed his attention to her nipples and slipped two fingers inside her pussy. She moved in rhythm with his strokes, and pressed his head against her breast. He lightly bit her nipple, the rough edge of his teeth sending waves of pleasure through her.

“I want you inside me,” she said. “Please, husband. Fuck me again.” Nigel parted her thighs and entered her in one swift stroke. With one hand, he

captured her wrists and raised her arms above her head. With the other hand, he steadied himself over her. His cock filled her, his motions slow, steady, and tender. Oh, so tender.

He held her wrists, his thumb pressing against the erratic pulse. She bucked against him, her clit throbbing. Her body was awash in need, desire. A buzzing climbed her spine then zipped down again, sensation after sensation vibrated from her core.

The third orgasm burst, so brilliant, so pure, she screamed, caught in a web of pleasure.

Nigel stilled, his eyes closed, his breath harsh. He released her arms. When he opened his eyes, he whispered, “Hold your breasts together.”

Eagerly, Ginger did so without question. He scooted forward until his knees were even with her arms. He inserted his cock into the tight space created by her squeezed breasts.

His penis dripped with her come. Nigel groaned as he pumped into the tiny cave created by her

tits. Goddess above! Her fingers curled around her nipples and tugged. “Oh,” she gasped as pleasure stabbed her core.

“I’m going to come,” he said in a pant. “Will you suck my cock?” “Goddess, yes!”

He stopped his thrusts and pushed the tip of his round thick head against her lips. Pre-come glistened there and she licked it. It tasted salty and pleasant.

“Take me, Ginger.”

She opened her mouth, and allowed him to slide between her lips. She cupped his balls with one hand and curled the other around his cock. Her tongue lapped and suckled his head while her hands stroked the hard flesh of his penis and the round softness of his balls.

Nigel pushed his cock all the way into her mouth. He jerked once, twice... and warm salty come filled her mouth. She swallowed it with ease, drinking from him until he was sated.

After a moment, he eased away from her mouth and settled beside her. Love thrummed a beat in her heart as he gathered her into a tender embrace and kissed her neck.

“Are you happy, Nigel?” “With you, Ginger... always.”

The End