

A woman with long, straight, light brown hair is shown from the chest up. She is wearing a red hooded garment. Her eyes are closed, and she has a serene expression. She is holding a small, ornate, blue and gold ceramic candle holder with both hands. A single lit candle is inside the holder, casting a warm, soft glow on her face and hands. The background is completely black, making the woman and the candle the central focus of the image.

In the Darkness

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“Aww, poor Anna,” Ginger teased, running her finger over my cheek in such a way that I want to smack her. “Is there going to be any scary—”

“Stop it!” I hissed, earning me glances from everyone standing around us in the packed hallways. “Don’t baby me. I told you, I’m not scared, and if you think I am, you are a fool.” I shove everything into my locker just as a piece of paper floated down from the top shelf. I grab it in mid-air. There is a drawing of a clown on it. Ginger giggled. I squashed it in my fist, growled, and threw it to the ground. The janitor would sweep it up later after everyone went home.

I knew that whole throwing thing probably made me look like a ranting five-year-old, but I didn’t care.

I tore off, walking in the opposite direction, and not once did I look back to see if she was following. She’d made me mad, and I wasn’t in the mood to see if she was lagging behind—I hope she wasn’t.

Every day for the past week she’d been torturing me about a text I sent her. She said I had a *clown stalker*. I claimed that I saw a figure standing in my backyard with big hair—which sort of resembled a clown, in a way. I know what I saw, and what I saw was someone that was just there to scare me. They were standing next to a tree, and I had just enough light from the moon to make them out. I’d lived in my house ever since I could remember, and I’d looked out those same windows millions of times at night, so I knew what the landscape looked like in the dark, and I knew where all of the shadows were, and what they were from.

This shadow was not something normal. Nor was it something friendly.

Someway, somehow, I felt darkness rolling off it even though I was on the second floor, and about thirty or so yards away from the thing. My window was closed, but that still didn’t stop the dark mass of vile energy from seeping in through the glass.

The thing sent shivers crawling up my back, and caused my stomach to clench with unease. I didn’t know who—or what—it was, but I wasn’t going to think about it anymore because I was going to scare myself for nothing.

The only thing that I could think of is that it was a spirit—an evil spirit at that.

I totally believed in the paranormal and everything that went bump in the night.

Because... because that was who I am, and I was not mundane.



By the time I made it home, I was so ready for this day to be over, but that didn’t stop me from texting my boyfriend, Killian. I never told him what the hell happened last week, and I

wanted to keep it that way. Killian was over-protective, but that was okay—it just made me love him all the more—but this I needed to handle by myself. If this thing was out to get me, I didn't want to get my boyfriend and his family involved. I couldn't, and wouldn't do that. His dad died a year ago, and he had three little sisters—one with cancer.

Before I even got the text out, he called me. I smiled and answered. "Hey," I said, lying back on my bed, propping a pillow under my head.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Killian asked. "I'm feeling ten times better today, but I'm still having nausea and bad headaches."

"Nothing much, I just got home from school." I rolled my eyes. Of course he would know that, he knows what time everyone gets out of school. I wanted to smack myself at my own stupidity.

"I think I'm going to take the rest of the week off.

What's the point of just coming in on a Friday?" he said.

"That is true. You're lucky you're sick and didn't have to come in today. Trust me, we had tests and a bunch of worksheets... it never ends, does it? You're going to be so behind when you come back." My boyfriend had mono, therefore hadn't been in school for the past week.

He let out a small chuckle, and then coughed. "Yeah," he said in a raspy voice. "I just wish I could see you, I've missed you, sweetie."

I grinned widely. "I know, I miss you too." I heard a banging sound on his end of the call and scrunched my eyebrows up. "What was that?"

"I don't know, but I think my mom needs help, the sound came from her room. I'll call you later. Bye!"

"Bye." I hung up and closed my eyes.



Darkness came quicker that night. It was fall, by the way. The air was crisp and sweet—like apples. The smell of rotten leaves and rain tickled my nose as I walked down the driveway to get the mail. I never knew why the mail always ran late on Thursday. It was past seven at night.

When I got to our mailbox, I noticed weird, lengthy holes in the mud, leading back behind my house. I pulled my phone out of my pocket, and turned its flashlight on so I could see what the shapes were.

My breath caught in my throat. I whimpered.

The shapes were footprints... *long* footprints. Holy crap! Did the person wear size twenty shoes or something?

I held up my phone in front of my face, trying to see how far back the tracks went. I wondered if this was the guy that was in my backyard last week. I wanted to follow them but decided

against it. I wasn't going to be like those brainless girls in horror movies who always call out "hello?" and then leave the safety of their house to go look around. No thank you, I was a little smarter than that.

I hurriedly grabbed the mail and made myself be aware of my surroundings as I started the hike back to the house. My eyes darted every direction, trying to spot any movement in the darkness of the night. Leaves crunched under my feet, when suddenly I heard a peculiar sound... it was almost like a coyote or something, but it was deeper, more sinister. It sounded like it came from the woods. I was sure it was just an animal. It might be injured, or maybe it was their mating season. The males always fought over females. Right?

Living up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, any kind of animal could be out there. I've seen bears and mountain lions and giant bucks and all that good stuff.

When I got back inside the house, I slammed the door and locked it. I pulled on the handle to make sure it was totally closed and secured—it was.

"Anna? Can you come in here for a moment?" My mom asked.

I threw the mail onto the counter and went out into the living room. She was watching TV, and eating peanuts. When she saw me, she smiled, and waved me over. I didn't feel like sitting, so I stood in front of the couch and crossed my arms over my chest to ward off the evening chill... No, the chill came from those footprints and the sound I heard outside.

"Dear, do you think you could go outside and get the ladder out of the shed? I think there is a mouse or something living up in my windowsill. I heard scratching and chewing all night long. It drove me half out of my mind. I didn't get any sleep. Maybe you could set a mousetrap? I would really like to catch it."

She wanted me to go into the backyard... after what I had just heard and seen and what I witnessed last week? No thank you, but I wasn't going to tell her that. I was going to pretend to go outside.

I smiled as warmly as I could manage. "Okay," I said in a fake cheerful voice, and went to the back door. I opened it; shut it. Hopefully, my mom believed I went and did what she asked me to. I stood in the dark of the foyer silently, and listened to the tick-tock of the clock in the hallway, which I could hear all the way out here. My heart pounded in my ears, and my breathing was actually normal, which was a miracle all by itself.

I shifted my weight from foot to foot while I waited to "come back in."

What my mom heard... was it anything to do with the muddy footprints? I should really ask her about those. Since the evidence was right there, she wouldn't think I was going crazy.

When I was sure five or so minutes had passed, I opened up the door again. As soon as I was getting ready to shut it, something slammed into the storm doors glass, causing it to make a loud, crashing sound. I jumped and shut the other door with a loud slam. I swear to God I almost threw up from the fear of it all.

My hands were shaking, my breathing was uneven, and I thought I was going to hyperventilate or something along those lines that could involve me passing out and being carted off to the hospital by my over-worried mother.

“Honey, what was that?” she called.

My heart was pounding so hard I could have been having a heart attack. I held my hand over my chest, willing my heart to slow down. There was probably some reasonable explanation for the noise. There were wild animals around here, kids that lived down the street—who would most likely take an opportunity to egg my house, or to throw a rock at it, because that’s just what kids did... they think they’re so fucking smart. All. The. Time.

I peeked out the window in the door, but I didn’t see anything. I wasn’t going out there to check. What if it was that thing standing there? What if it was someone with a knife or a gun?

I trembled.

“Honey?” Mom’s voice rang out again. I had to answer her before she came in here and found me in a mental mess.

I swallowed. “Yeah?”

“Are you okay? Did you fall or something?”

I walked out into the living room, and toed my shoes over to the carpet that started in the hallway. My mom hated when I left my shoes lying around, but whatever, it wasn’t hurting anyone.

“I’m okay, Mom. Hey, did you notice any big footprints out in the yard? They’re leading from the mailbox all the way to the side of the house. I think they go behind it, but I couldn’t be sure.”

She scoffed. “Probably just your dad. Don’t worry about it.” She waved it away like it was no big deal. “So, did you find the mouse, and did you set a trap?”

I leveled my gaze with hers so she wouldn’t think I was lying. “I didn’t set a trap, but as soon as I climbed up to your window, the mouse took off along that small ledge on the side of the house. It squeaked all the way until it was out of sight.” I cringed. Mice were such gross, revolting creatures.

“I *knew* there was a mouse! Thank you, honey!” I nodded and smiled. “No problem, anytime.”

I left the room after that, and made my way back up to my room. I needed to get some of my homework done before it got too late. Otherwise I would use the “I’m too tired” excuse on myself and it would never get done.



After about ten pages of math, I put everything back into my book bag and set it onto the floor. I went over to lock my door. I got on my hands and knees in front of my bed, and pulled out my wooden box that held all my magical stuff. I was a spell-caster, or, AKA: witch. It was inherited from my grandmother, and my own mom didn’t even know I had the gene. She didn’t have it, and I bet she would freak out if she knew. She didn’t like magic in any shape or form. She claimed nothing good could come from it, and she had lectured my grandma before on altering things in the universe... it was like, *what in the hell?* I didn’t know where she got her

philosophy from, but it was annoying at times, especially when I had to play along with her. Magic is *not* evil. People have always said that, when in reality, only a handful of people who use magic drip themselves into the dark arts. I on the other hand, used it for good and for my own personal enjoyment.

Nothing more, nothing less.

I popped my box open, and pulled out a red and a pink candle, a piece of twine, and a book of matches. What I was going to do was a simple spell to help Killian feel better. I moved my rug, and smiled when I saw my pentagram still drawn on the floor. Sometimes it got scuffed up and I had to re-do it.

I lit my pink candle, and then the red one. I sat in the middle of my circle, and closed my eyes. I let myself focus on sending love and warmth to Killian and envisioned him feeling better. I took slow, deep breaths, and chanted quietly:

For the one I love, please feel your best I send you warmth, light, and vast sight Please know that I mean you no harm I only mean to send you this magic charm.

After I said that three times, I was ready for the second part of the spell. I held the piece of twine over the candle, and then gently dipped it inside the red wax. I waited for it to dry because I held the now waxed-up end in my fingers, lighting the clean end on fire. I held up the quickly burning material, and gently blew on it before it reached my fingers that were slightly sticky with wax.

My spell was complete. I put everything away, slid it back under my bed, and unlocked my door just in time to hear my dad walking toward it. He knocked once before letting himself in. He seemed surprised to see me standing so close to the door.

“Hey, pumpkin, I was just coming to say goodnight,” he said, ruffling up my hair in a way I hated. I wasn’t a freaking puppy. I would never tell him that, though.

“Good day to you too, Dad,” I said with a smirk, planting my hands on my hips.

Dad sighed and ran his hands through his hair. “I’m sorry I’ve been working long hours... but I can’t do anything about it. The ER was crazy last night, and with all the drunk people getting into car accidents and drug dealers shooting their buyers for unpaid money. My day got bumped up from twelve to fifteen hours.”

“That’s okay, Dad. I know how crazy it can get.” My dad was a nurse, and he always had crazy hours and shifts... and he was always on call. “Have you been in the backyard lately? There are these big footprints leading from the front to the back...”

He shook his head. “Nope, sorry, Kiddo. It wasn’t me. Maybe it was a bear or something? You know we always have those running through our yard at night.”

It wasn’t a bear. Bears didn’t have feet that long, and their feet definitely weren’t extra-large human shaped.

I shrugged my shoulder slowly, “Maybe,” I agreed. I hugged him good night, changed into my pajamas, and crawled into bed. I passed out the second my head hit the pillow.

I was almost sure of it.



Sometime later, I was awakened from the sound of my window shaking. It was almost as if there was a really strong wind blowing. I sat up slowly, my hair falling like a curtain over my face. I pushed it all back with a huff. I really needed to get it cut soon.

I squinted my eyes, and then gradually stood up. I wobbled slightly and had to grab onto my nightstand so I wouldn't fall over. I looked at the clock—3:33 in the morning.

I went to my window and looked out. I didn't see anything, but as soon as I was ready to turn away, my eye caught some movement from the left side of the yard. It looked like it was coming from between the trees. Like a pendulum—back and forth—back and forth. It was moving too fast to be any animal. I narrowed my eyes further to try and make it out. There was no way I was shining a light down there.

I slid my hand to the base of my window, and noiselessly pushed it up. I wanted to see if I could hear anything.

And I *could*.

The sound was like suction cups under water... that annoying little *pop-pop-pop* sound... but it was more eccentric and mysterious than anything I'd ever heard. The resonance was unique. After listening to it, I couldn't describe it very well. The little pops started sounding like something was slapping together... God, I was so confused. My mind was whirling with what it could be.

My phone rang, startling me.

I backed away from the window and felt around on my bed until I came across my phone. It was Killian.

"Hello?" I whispered so my parents wouldn't hear.

They didn't like when I was on the phone this late at night except in emergencies—which this wasn't. I hoped. I knew they couldn't hear me from their bedroom, but my room is right next to the bathroom, so they could walk past at any time. Sometimes I didn't even hear them.

"Anna?" he said in a gruff voice that made my stomach do summersaults.

Those little fluttery butterflies were moving through my body. I gasped. I'd been with my boyfriend for two years, and we still haven't had sex. I wanted to, but I didn't think I was quite ready. Killian understood, even though I knew he wasn't a virgin. He and his ex-girlfriend, Gina, got caught under the bleaches in the gym, which I thought was funny at the time. He was sixteen then, eighteen now.

I sat down on the bed, and finally turned my body and gaze away from the damned window. "What's up?"

"I feel much better." He chuckled. I could hear wind coming through the speaker. Where was he?

I smiled. My spell worked. How could my mom think anything like this was evil? I helped someone. Shouldn't she be proud of me? I know my grandma would be. Wait until I told her tomorrow.

"Look out your window," he said with amusement.

My heart thudded... he was outside when there was something out there... I scrambled off the bed as fast as I could and flung my window open. I wasn't even worried about my parents hearing anything anymore. I needed Killian inside so he was safe.

I glanced down. He was already halfway up the trellis. I shut my phone off—I didn't even know he had disconnected.

When he got to the top, a high-pitched whine/squeal sound came from deep within the woods, causing Killian to lose his footing. He almost fell. I didn't think there was a spell for a broken neck. God, I couldn't even fathom him dying. I loved him so freaking much it hurt me sometimes.

"What the fuck was that?" he said slowly in a whisper.

I shrugged, gave him my hand, pulling him inside the house. My breathing was picking up again. I shut the window, latching the lock.

"How did you get here?" I asked, holding his hand. "My bike. I rode my bike in this cold for over two-

and-a-half miles just to see you. You should feel very special, which you are. You're my little Anna Banana."

I blushed slightly, glad that the room was almost dark so he couldn't see my cheeks.

I glanced up at him and took in his features in the moonlight. From his strong jaw to his long, dark lashes. To his green eyes to his dark brown hair... everything about him was irresistible, and everything about him pulled me in like blood does for a vampire. The love I felt in my heart and soul poured out when I did the next thing. I hooked my arms around his broad shoulders, and pulled him to me. My fingers wound around the hairs on the nape of his neck, and I dug my fingernails into his skin slightly.

I kissed him on the lips, searching his mouth with my tongue. His hands were at the bottom of my back, running over the smooth, warm skin. He pulled me closer until our hips were touching, and I felt him through his pants.

"I love you." I gasped out. "I love you so much."

His lips trailed down my neck, to the top of my breasts. He groaned while he started to rock himself into me, causing me to clutch his shirt in my fists and let out an airy moan.

"As I love you," he murmured softly, causing the little hairs on my neck to tickle.

He pulled away and was breathing hard. "We better stop," he said, pulling me down so I sat on the bed. "Do you know what the hell that noise was outside? It sounded like a dying cat." He smirked.

“Who knows what it was, probably a deer in heat or something of that nature.”

“Yeah, probably.” He laughed loudly. I punched him to shut him up. I really didn’t need my dad to catch him in here.

He and I talked a long while, until I fell into a soundless, peaceful slumber.



“*Anna Marie Bowden!*” I woke up to my mom’s loud shouting. I looked at the door, and saw her hands on her hips. Her face was red, and it looked like she would start spitting bullets any second.

“What?” I asked groggily.

Crap, did I forget to put my magic stuff away last night? I swung a look over the side of the bed. It was all out of sight. Thank God.

“You know what? I’m so mad I can barely speak.

Why is he in your room? Why is he half *naked?*”

I looked to my left and found a jeans free, shirtless Killian only wearing boxers—*snug* boxers. I could see everything. He rolled over, and grabbed me around the waist.

“Oh, baby, I’m so hard for you,” he murmured with a groan, not fully awake. “I love you so, so much.”

He pressed a kiss to my chest. My mom just about died of a heart attack. I kicked him. He shot awake, looking at the door.

Killian’s face went from white to red in a matter of seconds. “Holy shit, I fell asleep,” he said, looking back and forth from between me and my mom.

My mom tapped her foot. Killian jumped out of bed so fast he almost face-planted himself on the floor.

“I think you should go home, Killian.” My mom said, holding her ground.

He nodded, and turned to me. “See you later, Banana.”

I waved a little and smiled.

As soon as I heard the front door shut, I knew I was in trouble.

Big trouble. Fuck me man.



The next afternoon, after a long argument with my mother about Killian being in my bed, and going to school, I was sitting out on the back porch, sipping hot chocolate when a figure appeared about ten yards away from me. It was a man cloaked in shadows. His eyes were dark abysses. It was sort of like that demon guy from the *Haunting in Connecticut*

documentary I saw a few years back. It was just like that. My heart pounded. I was so scared that I couldn't move. I didn't know if this was the figure I saw in the yard last week, but I knew this guy wasn't even a real person. I think he came from another dimension.

That was the only explanation for his sudden appearance. The way he just felt wrong—felt evil—was sickening.

He stood there and stared at me whilst I was gripping my coffee mug for dear life. I was surprised it didn't shatter yet from all the pressure I was putting on it. My whole body was paralyzed with fear. I could do nothing but stare at him; just as he was me.

When I saw his outline flicker in and out, I thought he might disappear, but *no*, he just came closer and closer. His legs moved, but I think he was floating. No one could walk that smoothly and flawlessly. Something was wrong here. I mean a big something. Whoever this guy was I had a feeling he was connected to the first shadow I saw.

Shadow. Figure. Whatever!

The closer his dark, blank eyes got to me, the more my body tensed up, and the more my heart hammered. When he made it to the porch, my body's instinct was to run. That was just what I did. Screaming, I flung myself out of my chair, threw my mug at the guy's face, turned around, and ran into the house, slamming the door.

My mom was there within a second. I slid down the wall, hugging my legs to my chest. I didn't even know I was crying until I saw a dark patch appear on the material of my gray sweat pants.

"Honey, what's wrong? I'm sorry I yelled at you earlier, but you know I don't like guys in your —"

I cut her off with a look. "Mom, it isn't that. I just saw a guy outside. He had no eyes. Everything was like a dark abyss. Remember that *Haunting in Connecticut* documentary? It was just like that, but scarier because it was in real life." I hugged my legs closer and fought off the need to both shiver and cower, and to see if he was still out there. I was worried about my dad's well-being, seeing as he wasn't going to be home before it got totally dark outside.

My mom gave me a stern look. "You haven't been messing with witchcraft have you? You probably summoned it somehow. Please tell me you aren't!" She stared at me. "I'm going to have to call your grandmother and tell her to knock it off! She's tainting my little girl!"

"No, nothing like that!" I lied, looking at the floor, trying to focus on the warped wood from years of water hitting it.



I woke up with a start, and looked around my room. It was dark. Arms tightened around me. I tried to wiggle and break free, but they just held me that much tighter. I tried to bite them, but I couldn't reach any bare skin.

"Anna, it's okay." Killian said. Wait, *what?*

What the hell happened? Why was he here? Didn't my mom catch him in my room? I was confused as I turned around in his arms.

"Didn't my mom come in here?" I asked, leaning my head onto his chest.

His eyebrows furrowed "Anna, no, I've been awake the whole time holding you while you slept."

I let out a long breath. So my mom never caught us, and the demon or whatever the hell it was wasn't real. I knew witches had certain powers where they could see future stuff, but I didn't think it was one of my powers. I'd never had it happen before. Those powers usually manifest by the time a child was seven or eight. I was way past that.

"I better get going. I'm really tired. I wouldn't want to be caught in your bed, right?" He winked sort-of-knowingly, and slowly got up, making me immediately cold. "I'll stop by later, if my mom lets me. You need to get ready for school."

I looked at the clock. It was just after five-thirty in the morning. Yeah, he better get going, because I was sure my dad was getting ready to head to work right about now.

I nodded and smiled. "Okay. Be careful out there. I still don't know what that noise was earlier."

"I will. Promise," He saluted me. I giggled.

I kissed him, and he left. I watched as he got onto his bike and rode off. I scrutinized every shadow in the darkness, hoping nothing would go after, and hurt him. I would never forgive myself.



After Killian left me, I sank back onto my bed, and closed my eyes, only to wake up with a start. I didn't think too much time had passed, since it was still sort of dark outside. I groaned and rolled over, scrubbing my hand across my face. I winced when I felt something flake off my hand as I was rubbing my face. It smelled like earth. And mold. And wet dog.

What the hell was going on?

I sat up, clicked the lamp on, and lowered my eyes to slits from the sudden change of light. The clock read 6:46. I glanced at my hands and gasped. My eyes went wide. There was dirt embedded under my fingernails. All of my nails were broken down to little stubs. A few of them had crusted blood on them from being ripped down too far. They sort of hurt. I stood up and heard something dropping. I looked back and saw leaves, twigs, and more dirt all over my bed.

I ran my hands through my hair. More debris came flying down, hitting the floor with a sound like sand filling a bucket.

Um... why the hell was I dirty? Did I go outside?

I must have. That was the only explanation for it. I looked down at my pants and saw that the legs were completely covered in mud and grass stains. Whatever I was doing involved me being down on my knees. That was the only explanation why my legs were so filthy.

I shook myself out as best as I could and snuck down the hall to the bathroom to shower. God, I didn't want my mom to see me like this. She would have a heart attack. I pulled off my shirt and dirty pants and shoved them deep into the garbage can, hoping no one would notice that there was a big lump covered in tissue and God knows what else was in there. I had a feeling that I didn't wanna know. I would just take a shower and forget about it.

I turned on the faucet and made the water go as hot as I could stand it, and then lifted the latch to turn the spray on. I stepped under the water. Immediately, the dirt turned to mud, and slowly ran down the drain. I washed my body and hair about ten times before the water ran clear and I could get out.

When I grabbed my towel and dried off, something caught my eye. On the mirror were the words: *You will never find out what I did and what I am now paying for... walking amongst the living.*

What the fuck?

Another message appeared underneath that: *Find her, she's dust and ashes and silent.*

Who the heck wrote that? My mom wouldn't have done it... my dad *definitely* wouldn't have... And I know damn well I never would have written something so stupid, something that didn't even make any sense. That left only one other person who was in the house—Killian.

Why would he do something so meaningless? It didn't make any sense. I could guarantee he never went to the bathroom while he was here, for fear of running into my parents in the hallway. He usually just pissed out the window. Typical guy right there.

I pulled on my bathrobe and left the bathroom. I thought about all the dirt on my sheets and blankets and all over my floor and growled in annoyance. I really wasn't up to cleaning anything today.

I slowly went down the stairs, trying not to wake up Mom. I went into the kitchen to grab the broom, but not before I ate. I was starving.

I made a cream cheese bagel, shoved it into my mouth to hold it with my teeth, and went to the pantry door. I unlatched the hook and took the broom and dustpan out. I chewed my bagel and probably looked like a piglet, but I didn't care—I think I even had cream cheese on my nose. I headed off back in the direction of the stairs when I thought about the loud sound on the door after I "checked for a mouse" for my mom. I never did see if anything was on the porch.

I turned around, leaned the broom against the wall, and went to the back door. I unlocked it, propped it open, and peered through the glass of the other door. Lying on the porch was an old, worn baby bottle filled with red liquid. I could only imagine what it was. I could find out the contents with a spell, and that was exactly what I intended on doing. I wasn't stupid enough to open it.

I so wasn't going to school today. There were more important things to do.

†††

After I played the “I have period cramps” card to my mom, I went upstairs and got all my magic stuff out. I grabbed the small wooden bowl and filled it up about halfway with water. I held the bottle up and said three words.

Revealed... unconcealed... exposure.

Swirling fog came up from the water. I peered deeply into it, waving the small bottle around the right side of the bowl, willing words to appear that I could discern. When I was about to give up, one word came through, and my pulse pounded.

Blood.

I got up and put the bottle inside my nightstand’s drawer and picked up my phone. I needed to talk to someone about this. Something seriously wasn’t right here, and I didn’t know who to go to besides her. I called my grandma. She answered on the first ring.

“Hello, Annabelle, how are you doing?” she asked, using my full name, which I hate.

“I’m kind of okay... I’ve just been having some things happening this last week.” I cradled the phone in my hands and held onto it for dear life, afraid that if I let it go, something else was going to happen.

“Like what?” she asked with concern in her voice. “Well, last week I saw something in the backyard...” I told her everything and gave her as much detail as I could recall. I could feel her cringle over the phone when I told her about the bottle filled with blood.

“Honey, that’s a lot to take in. Why didn’t you call me sooner?” She tsked, frustration creeping into her voice. “You know I’m the only one who will understand all of this. Don’t even bother with your mother.”

I lowered my head. “I should have told you, but I didn’t want to sound like a freak.”

She laughed lightly. “Anna, there is nothing freakier than being a witch that can perform magic spells and them actually work. I think you are okay about your troubles, but I’m more concerned with you having dirt under your nails and on your knees. It seems to me that you were outside digging or something.”

I closed my eyes and took a breath. “That’s what I’m afraid of, Grandma. What if something is trying to tell me something? Like the words in the mirror. It was almost as if two people wrote it. The messages seemed that way, at least.”

She sighed. “Anna, I’ll do a reveal spell. I don’t know if I’ll get anything useful, but I’ll try.”

My hand shook. I held the phone that much tighter. “What should I do? I must have been sleepwalking. Right?” “Mm-hm,” she replied. “You can always try a sleep spell, but if something *is* really in the house, like a demon or something, you need to be awake in order to fight it off. A demon can enter your body if you’re not conscious. A sleeping spell will knock you on your little behind for at least twelve hours.”

“You think it’s a demon?”

“I don’t know, but after that “vision” you said you had, probably. I’m sure that scenario was a *possible* future for you, but you woke up and got your boy-toy out of your room in time.” My grandma busted out laughing. I joined in half-heartedly.

I loved my grandma. She never scolded me for anything, and I knew without a doubt I could tell her anything and she would never reprimand me about it— unlike my mom and dad.



The next day, I woke up and found the same thing. My nails dirty, my hair matted with leaves and sticks and God knows what else. I did the same thing I did yesterday morning. I cleaned my room as best as I could, scrubbed my body a gazillion times, and threw away my dirty clothes. There was no way of saving them anyway. The mud and grass stains would take weeks to get out. It was so embedded. I think it sort of melted into the material or something.

By the time noon came, I heard the doorbell ring, so I went to open it. It was Ginger, holding a colorful, huge birthday bag... *birthday?* Wait... October 30th... yeah, it was my birthday. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I’d been such a wreck this last week. I totally forgot about my birthday. The smell of cake baking didn’t even register in my mind until now. What the heck was wrong with me?

I needed help.

“Damn, Anna, you look like you’ve seen a ghost!” Ginger exclaimed, pushing past me into the house. “Or should I say *clown?* Is Killian still coming, or is he going to give you your present later?” She wiggled her eyebrows in a suggestive way. I smacked her on the arm.

I didn’t know if he was coming at all—he didn’t say anything about it. I grabbed my bag of presents, and set them on the coffee table just when my mom came out of the kitchen.

“Oh, good, Anna, could you help me for a moment? We need to get this cake cooled and frosted before Killian shows up.”

There was my answer.



After I opened a mountain of presents that mostly consisted of clothes, CDs, movies, and makeup (plus a beautiful necklace from Killian), I thanked everyone, and went to turn around to go upstairs to put everything away. Movement on the ceiling caught my eye.

I looked up and saw someone... or *something*, crawling across the dry wall like a spider. Its movements were too quick, too lanky to be anything other than a creature not of this earth. Its body made popping sounds every time it moved. I watched as it crawled toward to the stairs and followed it with my arms full. I headed up the stairs but didn’t see it.

I knew I was going to have to make contact. I needed to figure out what the fuck was happening.

After I tossed everything into a messy pile on my bed, I grabbed my witch board, and sat on

the floor cross-legged while I held my pointer finger gently against the glass.

“Is anyone there?”

I asked that about ten times. Just when I was about to give up, the temperature in the room dropped suddenly. I gasped and watched steam come out of my mouth in clouds. Okay, supernatural phenomenon. Cool.

“Who are you?” I asked again, trying not to feel scared.

The dial moved. I was so startled that I almost let go. I watched the thing wiz around the board while I spelled everything out in my head.

Robert

“Did you used to live here?”

Yes, and killed here

I was shivering now. “Who did you kill? Why are you still here?” I could practically hear the answers in my head. It was almost like a whisper of wind rushing through the trees.

I want everyone to know what I've done No one knows but me

“Did you need help crossing over?” I asked lightly.

Yes, you need to help me and my baby

Please

I can't get to Emma

Something is blocking me from getting to my baby I want my baby!

Okay, definite change in moods. Moody, bipolar ghost... wait... “Are there *two* people here?”

A sudden wind whipped through my hair while the dial moved. I already knew the answer before it was even spelt out. I guess my witchy senses could pick up on this sort of thing. I was magically amazing and totally on the ball.

Yes

“What is the second person’s name? I already know Robert is here.” I waited and waited and waited, and I still didn’t get an answer. After about five more minutes, I put everything away. I needed to get downstairs and to convince everyone to leave so I could go to the library. I needed to see who this Robert guy was and if he used to live here.

†††

After an extensive research, I found what I was looking for. The guy named Robert lived here back in the 1940s. He, his wife, and daughter were supposedly missing, never to be seen again. The criminal case was closed years and years ago. It was said that they drowned in the lake that wasn’t too far from here. No one ever searched the lake, because then, there was no

scuba gear or sonar to pick up on things under the water. I think people just forgot about it over the years.

The only thing that I could think of was that Robert killed them. Wasn't that what he told me?

The thought was heinous in its own right. My stomach churned just thinking about it. Who knew where he hid the bodies? Who knew if he was still alive? If he was, I was sure he was some frail old man with a cane.

I decided to call my grandma. She would know how to perform all the spells I needed in order to find them. Hopefully I could locate them and bring them some peace.



An hour later, my grandma was standing on my porch with her eyes closed. Geez, I didn't even let her in yet and she was already getting prepared. I opened the door. She turned to me. "Hello, dear, I think we need to go in the backyard where you said you first saw this shadow. It was back there, correct?"

It was a pretty good idea. I was so glad she was here. Otherwise, I wouldn't know what the hell to do. I've never done this type of thing before, and I couldn't admit to her that I was super nervous, even though I think she already knew that.

We walked along the line of trees in the yard until I felt my grandma go rigid beside me. She grabbed onto her quartz necklace, and said something I couldn't decipher.

"Anna, I don't want to frighten you, but there is a portal to Hell right here, in your backyard."

I almost choked. "What?"

She nodded. "It's true. I can feel it." She started walking so fast that I didn't think I would be able to keep up with her. I didn't even think she was capable of moving that quickly.

Way to go, *grandma!*

I tromped over leaves, sticks, and everything in between until she came to an abrupt halt, startling me so bad that I almost knocked into her.

She pointed at the ground. There was a small hole that I never knew was there. I could feel the darkness rolling off the vortex in waves. The scent of sulfur and singed flesh saturated the air around us. Eerie wails and screams slammed their way into my eardrums, making me cry out in fear. *This was what I have been hearing. Oh, God...*

All the goddesses and gods out there, please keep me and my grandma safe.

The heat from the portal was unbearable. I was sweating uncontrollably, even though it was only thirty-five degrees. Black smoky haze rose up from the opening, making it hard to breathe. It felt like the oxygen was being sucked out of the air. I was suffocating. I coughed and gasped, and held my hand over my throat. I couldn't breathe. I was going to die. I was going to die and go to Hell like everyone else... everyone else... I was going to burn and my flesh was going to drip off like wax on a candle and then it was going to grow back and it was

going to start all over again... the torment. All I could think about was pain, wretchedness, suffering, loss, anguish. It flooded my mind. I didn't want to think anymore... please, let me stop thinking for a little while. Please put me out of my misery while I wallow in my grief before I'm delivered the deathblow...

What did I do in life to deserve this?

Someone was shaking me. I opened my eyes to see my grandma kneeling next to me on the ground. Whatever had its hold on me didn't any longer. My heart was and felt a million times lighter without all of those sordid emotions pushing down on it.

"Anna, please get up," she said.

I sat up, and coughed some more. "What the heck just happened?" I asked, blinking up at her.

"The negative energy is affecting you. You're feeling everything those souls down there are. Ignore it, and it will stop. It's just giving you hallucinations, trust me. I'm fighting my own off. That's what demons do. They prey on your weaknesses and then go in for the kill. If you let them get the better of you, you risk getting possessed. Trust me, you don't want that."

I shook my head. "No, I don't."

She smiled. "Then get up and show me how powerful of a witch you are."

I got to my feet and emptied everything negative from my mind. Hell was only trying to play tricks on me.

"We have to close the portal. Do you think you are up for it? It shouldn't be too hard, but if we don't do it correctly, we risk it opening again. That means it will be a bigger hole—thus harder to close, and keep closed," she said.

"What do we have to do?" I asked, getting pumped up like I always did before a spell.

"Well, we can hold hands and pour out love and happiness and all those other good emotions, or we can call upon the goddess, Venus, to close it. Which would you prefer?"

"Calling upon Venus," I said with a giggle. I'd always wanted to invoke the goddesses, but I always felt as if I would be bothering them just so they could stop over so I could say hi.

"Right then, stand in a cir—" "Anna?" someone said.

I turned around to find my boyfriend standing ten yards away. What was he doing here? I thought I told him to go home?

I smiled for his benefit. "Yeah, what's up?" I didn't want him to know what we were doing. I didn't want to freak him out. I had no idea what his reaction would be, and I didn't wanna find out.

He came to me and pulled me in for a soft, sweet kiss. "I wanted to know if you want to come over tonight. My mom insisted on making you a birthday dinner. I didn't know anything about it until I got home. You're not answering your phone. I figured I would stop back over."

"Oh, that's fine, and yeah, I'll be there." I said, hoping he would go away so this would get done quickly. I wanted my life to go back to normal.

He wasn't leaving.

Then, I saw why. His eyes were wide. He was breathing deeply. "Anna, get away from there!" He pointed at the hole. I frowned in confusion.

"Why?" I played for nonchalance. Maybe he just saw a snake or something, and he wasn't talking about the hole.

He furrowed his brows. "It's Hell," he said matter- of-factly.

"You *know*?" I asked, baffled.

He busted out laughing. My grandma joined in. "What's so funny, guys?" I asked.

"Dear, I believe your young man here is a warlock," Grandma said. "Didn't you know?"

Killian was a *warlock*? Whoa, back the heck up. "What?" I turned to him, and he was all smiles.

"I know what you are, Banana. You're a witch, and a powerful one at that. You have the essence of Diana in you."

I didn't know that. How the heck did Killian know more about me than I did?

"It's true, Annabelle. Our family line is descended from Diana," Grandma said.

"You never bothered to tell me?" I said vehemently. She shrugged. I looked at Killian. "How did you know what I was? Is it stamped on my forehead or something?"

He chuckled. "No, baby, I can smell you." Huh? "What do you mean, *smell*?"

He breathed deeply. "You smell like sand and water and blueberries. It's your pheromones. Only other witches and warlocks can smell another of our kind's pheromones. It is how we can tell each other apart, and how we can find the other if one of us gets lost. Isn't it great?"

Then it dawned on me. "So that's why you smell like rain and boy and everything sweet." I pointed a finger at him.

He smiled that sweet smile. My heart fluttered. "Why haven't you told me that you knew?"

"I didn't think you'd want me to know. I knew you probably didn't know what I was, so I was leaving it up to you to decide when you wanted to tell me so I could tell you.

"That's nice, but—"

My grandma cut me off. "Go enjoy your birthday dinner. We can do this tomorrow. The portal being open isn't going to change a thing."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, now go have fun."



After a meal of homemade pizza and breadsticks, Killian and I found ourselves in his room

kissing. I lay back on his soft bed, and sighed, enjoying the feel of our bodies tangled together. His lips were quick on mine and passion was swirling around us. My stomach pounded with desire. I let go of his lips with a gasp.

“I want you.”

He smiled. “You have me,” he said, slightly out of breath.

I shook my head and leaned forward to flick open the button of his black pants. “No, I want *this*.” I continued sliding them down his hips and then his boxers followed. He tugged his shirt off. I reached forward, putting my hand around him, feeling him stiffen and lengthen even more under my skin. It was time. I wasn’t afraid.

He quickly got me undressed, and then paused above me. “Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes, I need you. I love you.”

“I love you, too.” He slid a condom over his large erection, and lowered himself down. When he slid inside me, it felt like a part of myself was missing before it came back. We fit together like a puzzle piece, and it hurt at first, but that was okay—that was expected.

He moved slowly and groaned into the crook of my neck. “You have no idea how this feels.”

I smiled slightly. “I can guess.”

After the initial pain evaporated, he moved quicker and I moaned softly with pleasure, letting him bring us both into oblivion.



After we cuddled, he drove me back to my house in his mom’s car. We kissed, and I nuzzled his neck. I’d never felt so much love in my life. Parts of me were sore, but it was perfect.

I stood in the driveway after he pulled out, and watched him all the way down the road until he turned off my street.

I started walking toward my house when I heard a baby crying. I stopped and listened. It sounded like the infant was in distress. Where the hell was it? Did someone drop off a baby out here? Oh, God, please tell me something that horrible didn’t happen!

My mind stopped working. I came to a complete standstill. I couldn’t move as much as I tried. I didn’t understand what was happening to me, but really wanted to know.

Against my will, my feet began moving in the direction of the woods, and then I slipped inside. My whole mind and body were screaming to turn around, but my feet wouldn’t stop moving. I walked probably a mile into the woods, further than I had ever gone before, and came across an old cabin...

...and a hole?

The crying had completely stopped now.

Whatever hold that was on my body dissipated. I almost fell to the ground. I slowly got up and

went over to the cabin door, turning the badly rusted knob. It broke off, and I tossed it aside. I went inside and smelled mold and dirt. There was still furniture in here. The majority of it was chewed up and warped from years of water damage. There was another room to my left and a set of crumbling stairs. I turned and went into the other room only to come across a large skeleton. It was face down on the floor, and it was completely decomposed, which I was glad for. I didn't want to smell anything decaying.

Sorrow lingered around the room. It was the worst I'd ever felt sadness. I came closer to the bones. There was a hole in the skull, with a little pebble wound around a string. It was through the hole and dangling like a piece of jewelry.

The sickening part about this was that it was probably left there shortly after the person died. Someone put it there purposely. The pebble was an eggelkt stone; known in the witch world for keeping a spirit trapped here on earth.

I had to call the cops. I needed to get the body out of here. I went back outside and prayed I had reception. I did and dialed the emergency number.

"911, what's your emergency?" a woman said.

I walked back into the house and into the room with the skeleton.

"I just found a body in the woods behind my house! There is an old cabin I came across while... *hiking*." I lied.

"What is your address?"

"1125 Bay Creek Road." I said, not taking my eyes off the body.

"Wait outside until the police arrive. They've already heard the call. They are on the way.

I hung up and went back outside to wait. They probably wanted to make sure I didn't have a weapon or something. That was why they needed me out of the house.

I went to the right and came across that cavity in the ground again.

When I looked closer at the opening, I saw so many handprints and knee prints, and scratch marks all over the surface that I gasped. This was where I must have gone all those nights I woke up dirty. I was digging around out here in the middle of the woods. Something must have propelled me out here.

My heart started to thump as I got closer, seeing a plank of wood inside. It was a grave—it *had* to be.

I knelt over, and began digging. I dug and dug and dug until my fingers had blisters all over them and they were bleeding. When I looked down, there was a small wooden box, with the name *Emma* on the lid.

Tears fell down my cheeks as I opened the lid.

Inside was a small skeleton... probably of a newborn—it had the same stone in a hole in its... *her* head. I let out a choked sound as I picked the little skull up, and cradled it in my hands. I felt so bad that this little baby never got to experience life. She never knew laughter, or the

excitement of opening presents on Christmas. She never went to school and made friends. She never got to experience love. It was sad thinking about it.

I unwound the string holding the rock and let it fall to the ground. Immediately, a small yellow orb made its way back into the house. I followed.

The orb hovered over the adult's body. I assumed it was the mother. That Robert guy did this to them. It was so sick that I felt like I was going to throw up.

I went over to the other skull and released the string.

A gust of wind blew the door open with a smack.

The orbs... *souls* were flying around each other frantically.

In my mind, I heard their silent *thank you* as I watched their souls disappear into nothingness. I could guarantee they were making their way to Heaven right this minute.

I felt so much elation in that moment that happy tears burst forth. I went back outside and fell to the ground on my knees while waiting for the police to arrive.



The next day I was sort of a town hero. Everyone old enough to remember the woman named Nelly and her baby, Emma, came to say thank you and gave me all sorts of goodies and everything in between. I was so proud of myself that my whole soul and heart were singing.

The police took the bones for examination and to try to find the cause of death, and then they were going to be laid to rest in the town cemetery on the hill. It was Halloween today, and I was sure people thought I staged the bodies with fakes from the *Spirit* store to try and get famous or something. You know how people were nowadays. They never took anything seriously.

After the initial shock died down, my grandma came back over to help shut the hole that led to Hell. Killian also showed up. I was so glad that I knew his secret now. I'd always known there was something extraordinary about him, but I just couldn't put my finger on it.

After having sex with him we were closer. It was like I knew him deep down where no one else did. I shared a part of myself with him that I was never going to get back, but that was okay. I was glad he was my first. I loved him so much that I couldn't put it into words.

"Okay, Annabelle, let's call to Venus to see if we can shut this thing. I'll be happy once there is nothing tormenting my granddaughter anymore."

I never agreed with anything more than what she just said.

I shivered. Killian came over to me, burying his face into my neck. "It will be okay. Promise. We can do this together. I just wish you would have told me what was happening instead of hiding it. I would have believed you. I love you."

I shivered again, but for a different reason this time. "I know, I love you too, but—"

My words were cut off by a loud groan/growl. I turned quickly towards the vortex. That same *Haunting in Connecticut* demon guy from my vision was standing there, staring at us. Wickedness radiated off him. My stomach rose into my throat. I didn't want him to hurt the ones I loved.

"Who are you?" I asked.

One word popped in my head. *Robert*. So this was him. "Are you the reason why this portal opened? You don't belong here. Go back to where you came from."

I came to check on my family. They still reside in those woods. I never meant for it to come to that.

I answered him in my head. *"I found them both, Robert. Why did you give me a baby bottle filled with blood? What was the point?"*

"I felt like it. I've had that saved since 1944. I stored it out here for that long. It never dried up."

"You're sick."

I know. I found the only weak spot that would lead me close to my family. It took a while to break out, since I had to wait until no one was paying attention.

"Be gone, vile being," Grandma yelled, gesturing for me and Killian to hold her hands. "Diana, we call on you to remove this demon from our world and restore it to its natural peace. We ask you humbly to come and clean our hearts from the wicked this portal had made us suffer, and to restore our peace of mind with your love and guidance. We ask of you this not in a proud or narcissistic way, but because we adore you, and are asking for assistance... you are our family... please hear us. We know you can help. So mote it be."

She was calling on *Diana*? I thought we were doing Venus?

I felt intense darkness as the demon stepped forward. He had a smile on his face. He was mocking us. He clapped, and moved so fast that I didn't see him. He grabbed Killian's foot and dragged him across the ground—to Hell.

Killian grasped at the dry grass and kicked Robert with his free foot, but it wasn't slowing him down any. I was so scared for Killian that tears burned my eyes. I dove for his hand, latching onto it.

"I love you," I cried, trying to pull him free.

"Anna, it's okay. I'll be okay." He and I were being dragged faster and faster. I felt hands on my feet. I glanced over a shoulder and saw my grandma with a determined look on her face.

"Let go of my granddaughter, you son of a bitch!" she yelled, gritting her teeth. I'd never saw my grandma more emotional in my life. She was fighting back tears.

When Killian's body moved downwards, I knew we were at the edge of the void. My eyes widened. I tried to think of a spell that might save him. Nothing came to my panicked mind. I didn't know what to do. Diana wasn't coming. We were both going to die because I wasn't letting him get dragged to Hell without me. Hell to the fuck no. Whatever happened, we did together. No exceptions.

At the last second, before we were both pulled under, my hands were ripped from Killian's. I watched in horror as he was sucked into the hole. It closed up with a sharp hissing sound.

I screamed as loud as I could. Oh my God, not him... *please*... I turned to my grandma. "Why did you *do* that?" I cried.

She looked guilty. "I didn't want you both to die. I tried every spell I know to get him to let go of you two, but nothing was working. I didn't have a choice. I hope you know that. I wasn't going to lose you, Anna."

A blue and pink mist swirled through the air. I felt love so intense that I couldn't breathe. I forgot about Killian, and looked at the sky to find a woman rapidly spiraling down. She was naked and was so gorgeous I couldn't help but check her out. She had long brown hair and looked quite short—like me. This was Diana, my bloodline—my *family*.

She smiled. That was when I saw that she held Killian in a red silky looking thing. He looked okay. I cried out in relief. I was so happy that I could have done a naked jig in front of everyone.

"Hello, Annabelle. Hello, Pearl." Diana said to Grandma and me. Her voice was like a waterfall. "Sorry I didn't get here in time, but I got him out of Hell for you. Thank you for calling on me. I appreciate the opportunity to help you."

She set my love on the ground. He opened his eyes slightly, and grinned up at her. "I love your boobs."

Everyone was laughing. I felt so much liberation that I could have started floating.

Actually, I was.

About Leah Hamrick

Leah Hamrick lives in Michigan with her partner in crime husband Jon, young daughter Khloey, and plethora of reptiles, fish, and a tree frog named Sticky. She can always be found with her nose in a YA book, daydreaming and thinking up new ideas for a story, and trying to figure out how to make a characters chemistry clash with one another's. She is a fan of romance, and anything paranormal. She gets the inspiration for her stories from things that have happened in her real life—except the paranormal/fantasy aspect... She wishes she were that awesome! She enjoys listening to heavy metal music, traveling, watching bad reality TV, and everything pink. She hopes that one day she can be become a well known author, and to keep writing stories for everyone to enjoy for years to come.