

The Grimoire Chronicles

Veil Between Worlds



SALLY DUBATS

**The Grimoire Chronicles:
Veil Between Worlds**

a novel by Sally Dubats

**The Grimoire Chronicles:
Veil Between Worlds**

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Dedicated with Thanks and Gratitude To

My wonderful husband Neal
who is my foundation,

My amazing friend Karen
who relentlessly listened, read, edited, and lovingly critiqued,

and to

Debra, Annie, Demi, Lisa, Jan, Claire, Kimby, Kathy, Kathy too,
Pam, Harley, Mariann, Nita, Wayne, Davia, Dave, Deane, and a
special thanks to Marco, and to

Jerry and Joann, my parents.

Brightest Blessings

What They're Saying...

This is a brilliant foray into paranormal romance and Wiccan practices. This stunning beautiful masterpiece drew me in from the first page.

- Earth's Book Nook

* * *

The background to Trenton's family is a brilliant twist to the story and introduces something that I have yet to see in the paranormal genre. I could tell you more.....but I won't! I don't want to give it away. A fun and exciting read, and I am looking forward to book 2: "The Grimoire Chronicles: Winter Solstice".

- www.darkissreads.com review

* * *

Let me start off my saying this book was just great! I was absolutely fascinated by it right off the bat because it is about witchcraft. Since this is a spoiler free review I can't exactly mention what mythological creatures Sally Dubats involves in her story. But let me say this is the first story I've read that involves them and I was pleasantly surprised.

- Books Are Magic

“I thoroughly enjoyed this novel. Even though it is labeled "Young Adult", it is a tale for readers of many ages. The book is well-written and well-conceived, allowing us to move into the overcast and rainy world of Oregon, the local high school, and deep, deep secrets. And I loved learning about the real world of Wicca.”

* * *

“I highly recommend *Veil Between Worlds* and look forward to the next installment.”

* * *

“I COULDN'T STOP READING IT!!!! It was very detailed, fast paced and all I can say is I can't wait for more. The characters were teens... but I told my coven about it and hope they will read it too. I will be on to download the next one as soon as I know it's available!! Bravo Sally, Bravo!!!”

* * *

“I was hooked right at the first couple chapters and read it all in one sitting! I want More! GREAT author! I am looking forward to reading other books by Sally!”

**The
Grimoire Chronicles
Veil Between Worlds**

Prelude

200 B.C.E.

She floated across their minds, unwelcome, and the fury began.

“Skinny, disgusting, uneducated!” said one.

“Snake of a human girl,” agreed the other.

The young sisters stood atop a huge spiked rock overlooking the sea like a masthead on a ship. Giant waves thundered onto the rock, and the sisters clutched at one another. Heavy wind swirled and mixed their long sun-bleached white hair and slapped their tattered tunics. Identical lavender eyes searched the infinite horizon.

Nothing.

“A little trollop of a human! Uncultured!”

“A human!”

“And our Beloved chose *her!*”

Bitter loneliness and desperation engulfed them. A yearning tore at their very spirits. The yearning tumbled and rumbled in their starving hearts and poisoned minds as it had since being banished to the tiny island.

Their lust for revenge grew and they vowed to crush her one day. They would crush her. Crush her. One day. Crush her.

A fishing boat drifted unnoticed upon the horizon, white sails billowing, manned by seven sailors, bronze shirtless backs gleaming in the sun.

“We will crush her!” raged one sister.

“I cannot bear it!” the other wailed.

And spying the hapless boat, the Sirens screamed.

The screams rang out and out, vibrating against the cliffs and the water and the sky. The Sirens screamed until it exhausted them; one collapsed to her knees, helpless and sobbing.

The unfortunate sailors who heard the screams were dead.

* * *

Two hundred years later
Mt. Vesuvius erupted
and shook the world;
hot lava poured over Pompeii
causing tidal waves that covered
the tiny island,
and the sisters drowned.

* * *

Two thousand years after that
the story of the Sirens
had been reduced to myth.

Part I

Lost Time

Chapter 1

I don't know if they're going to steal my memory again, so I am writing this record now, while I can, because you need to know about *Them*.

They're elegant, more beautiful than you can imagine, and ruthless. They've done some wonderful things for humanity. They have influenced our music, art, dance, science, and architecture for centuries -- but at what cost? I know they are killers.

In case these writings don't make it to the person I intended, and if you're reading this by some bizarre fate instead, let me introduce myself. My name is Cassie. I'm seventeen, a senior at Orion High. The other thing you need to know about me is that I'm a Witch. I'm tired of defending or explaining myself, but I'll let you in on a little secret: I'm not evil. I don't worship the Devil or poison people. I also don't levitate or make things fly through the air or read people's minds. Well, not directly, but I am pretty intuitive. Wicca is my religion. We celebrate the changes of the seasons and use things like Tarot cards and visualization and magick to help us navigate through life and help others. We learn about herbs and natural healing.

Oh, and intelligence. Wicca has been called the Craft of the Wise. We rely on our own intelligence and intuition, not someone else's. It's great to get advice, but when it comes right down to it, no one can tell you what is right for you, and it's a good idea to go through life assuming that everything you *think* you know could be wrong.

One thing I do know is that *Happily Ever After* can be gone in the time it takes to sing a song.

Images come and go, but I'll tell you everything I can, in exactly the order I eventually remembered it. I'll start with the day it happened.

Chapter 2

“I hate daylight savings time.” I rolled my eyes and promised myself for the millionth time not to mumble out loud. I hated when I talked to myself. People probably think I’m casting spells or something, but at the time I couldn’t help it. My best friend Violet moved away during the summer, and I’d been talking to myself ever since.

I finished tutoring a sophomore in geometry and headed home in the time between dusk and dark. In two weeks the clocks would turn back, and it would be another long dismal winter. After the time change it would be almost dark when I left school. It was stolen time.

I didn’t have room for all my books in my backpack, so I had to carry the rest in front of me. I looked to my right. The cheerleaders sat with their troglodyte boyfriends, football players who looked pretty low on the gene pool. Like cavemen. As usual, they congregated around the covered picnic tables.

I glanced at the cheerleaders, and there was Holly, Head Cliché, sitting not on the bench, but on the table. The bench was the receptacle for her feet. Correction. Toe. Holly’s legs were

crossed and balanced perfectly on a pointed toe as she casually leaned back on her hands. How she kept a tan in Oregon was beyond me. I considered the position; it couldn't possibly be natural to sit that way. They must teach them posing in cheerleading school.

I noticed all the cheerleaders were in various poses as if waiting to be photographed, and I remembered a similar picture in my aunt's yearbook from the 80's. Jocks had gathered at that table for decades. Holly looked at me like I was dog poo on the bottom of her designer sneakers, then leaned forward and whispered something; the entire table erupted in laughter.

I quickly turned my eyes straight ahead and felt heat swarm across my cheeks as I walked. Stupid. It was my own fault. I had been the one staring. I didn't want to compare Holly's long blond hair to my own curly red hair, okay frizzy red hair, but I couldn't help it. My hair was a curse in the damp Oregon weather. I pulled the hood up from the back of my jacket and turned toward home with more important things to do than worry about cheerleaders.

I thought about the 'homework' my Aunt Faye had assigned, a simple protection spell. I wondered if there was a protection spell to stop irritating thoughts; crush basil, or was it mugwort? Good thing all spells were open book, well, open Grimoire.

"Hey, Cassie! Do you want to come over for a movie?"

Startled, I stopped and peered around my hood. Laine stood there like a damp mouse with a hopeful look on her face,

her backpack slung on one shoulder. And that's exactly how I thought of her – Mouse. I didn't intend to be mean and would never say it out loud to Laine. The girl just reminded me of a mouse.

“Oh, Laine, I can't. My aunt wants me to do some things.” It was true, but not entirely accurate. I had promised the protection spell a couple of weeks ago and one more night wouldn't hurt, but it was a good excuse to evade Laine who was a freshman, and probably the tiniest one in her class.

“What are you working on?” asked Laine.

I always wondered why Mouse was so interested in spells and witchcraft. “Protection spell,” I said, and started to walk toward home a little faster than normal. Laine began to walk-jog beside me.

“Is something going on?” asked Laine.

“No. Just the usual study.”

“Can I work on it with you?”

I wished I hadn't mentioned it. “This isn't about brewing some love potion, Laine. Mostly it's a bunch of me sitting around reading.”

“I know! I'd love to know what you're reading!” Laine kept up with me in silence for a minute. We had known each other since we were little, but never had the easy chatter that long-time friends should have.

Apparently Mouse had suffered enough silence. “K. Well... I guess that's a 'no.’” Laine's shoulders slumped a little, and she ducked down the tree-lined street toward her house in a row of

old Craftsman homes. In their day they were luxury homes for wealthy loggers, but now they were just ordinary homes.

I sighed and felt guilty. Laine didn't have many friends, but I didn't want a charity case for a friend. I liked Laine but didn't have much in common with her, least of all her drive to learn about witchcraft. Movies were okay since they solved the conversation problem, but I just wasn't in the mood.

I walked a little slower and zipped my jacket against the damp autumn air. Orion was a small town with a population of about five thousand, and it just sort of stopped being a town after Third Street. I made the familiar march home on Macon Street which turned into gravel after leaving town, and home was about ten minutes away. The road was riddled with potholes that became mud puddles in the winter. A meadow grew on each side of the road and then became a wall of Douglas fir trees and scrubby oaks. I crossed the old but still-used railroad tracks that hugged the Tualatin River; trains had carried lumber on those tracks for generations.

I stepped onto the bridge, stopped about half-way across, and looked down at the cold black water rushing under the bridge. I decided to stay for a minute. The bridge was my personal gathering place, my private place to think, and had been ever since I could remember. Ever since I came to live with my Aunt Faye.

A mist of rain began so fine it might be called humidity anyplace else. To me the mist was comforting. I looked down at the water rushing under the bridge and thought this must be a

power place. All the elements were here: Earth, Air, Water, and Fire from the sun. My presence brought Spirit as the final element.

I dropped down onto the worn path beside the bridge, and then hunched down a bit to walk under the bridge and onto the huge moss-covered cement support. It was dark and smelled of moss and dampness, and it was quiet except for the gurgling river. I sighed, put my books down, and sat on them.

“Hi.”

I sucked in a huge gulp of air and leaped up. A couple of pebbles slid from beneath my feet and plunked into the black water below. I grabbed my books to scramble out, my eyes adjusting to the dark. I could just make out a guy getting up. He was close, about three yards from me, and he was looking at me. I scuttled to the slick path, and he called to me.

“Hey! I didn’t mean to scare you. I’m sorry. Don’t go.” He was on his feet. “I was just enjoying the river.”

“Don’t let me interrupt you,” I said as my pace quickened, and then something made me turn. The guy sounded young, but I knew everyone in town so he couldn’t be anyone local.

“I’m here visiting family.”

I was several steps up the slick path when the stranger came into the dusky gray light. I examined him more closely. He was tall with sandy hair. He didn’t look threatening, and he looked about my age.

“You scared the crap out of me.” I was still wary, but the guy didn’t seem like a threat.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t expecting company either,” he said.

And then he smiled. My spider senses still told me something was wrong, but he had such a beautiful and friendly smile. And it wasn’t just his smile that was beautiful. He had pale green sea foam eyes, the same as mine, and they sparkled with mischief. He looked like an angel. I tried to keep from smiling back, and at the same time fought to keep my cool.

“Which family?” I asked.

“I’m Trenton,” he said, as if that was an explanation. His voice sounded like deep wind chimes. Still smiling, he took a step closer.

I couldn’t take my eyes off of him. Something told me to pay attention to the risk, but at the same time an odd peace engulfed me. The sound of this Trenton’s voice relaxed me when I should be running.

He was an arm’s length away from me now. An incredibly intricate gold pendant hung around his neck, a tiny coat of arms in the shape of a shield that was divided into four parts containing the profiles of a man, an eagle, an ox, and a lion. I was shocked. The image was straight from a card in the Tarot deck, the World card. Powerful. The card symbolizes success, achievement, attainment at the end of a cycle of life . . . or the beginning of a new one. I felt like I had just drawn the World card from thin air. I stared transfixed into this Trenton’s eyes.

“My family is at the . . .”

A flash of gold ripped through the air.

Hot acid scorched my throat.

Paralysis. I couldn't move.

I wasn't sure if I was breathing, but my heart still thundered loudly in my ears. Then it happened. The pain stopped, I turned ice cold, and I felt the rush of my spirit leaving my body. Time stopped.

Quiet. Peace.

Astral projection.

My spirit slammed to a halt and hovered above the scene below. This hadn't happened to me in years. When I was little, my spirit used to leave my body during extreme danger or emotional duress. It only happened a few times. It was involuntary and unwanted. In extreme danger, time slowed and the only connection to my body was its heartbeat. But in one heartbeat, or between heartbeats in the slow time, I could think, and my thoughts became crystal clear. Once during the slow time, I could see the movement of a hummingbird's wings during flight.

My heart beat once, and I looked down. My heart beat again, and I saw the young man, Trenton, pulling me tightly against him. My heart beat again, and I looked at the ragdoll shell of my lifeless body below and knew I was defenseless.

Heartbeat: my books dropped to the ground.

Heartbeat: I considered that if this Trenton killed me, I might not have a body to go back to.

Heartbeat: I watched in detached amazement as energy was drained from my body. And then it dawned on me. Energy centers in the body. Chakras. This was the first time I actually

saw chakras. I had read about them and even worked with them. The energy centers are only visible to a few, like the aura. They're the seven colors of the rainbow. I watched in horror as my energy, my life force, drained into Trenton's body.

Heartbeat: Trenton's hand gripped my low back and pulled me tightly to him. My second chakra, my creativity center below the navel, was being stolen. Trenton absorbed the orange light.

Heartbeat: Trenton roughly moved his hand to the middle of my back, holding my body tighter, overcome by his hunger. My third chakra, my personal will/intention chakra at the solar plexus, was being drained. Yellow energy lit up both of our bodies, and then flowed into his alone. Trenton emptied my will.

Heartbeat: I had to think of something fast. There were hundreds of minor chakras in the body, but only seven major. It was obvious the seven were what he wanted.

Heartbeat: Trenton moved one hand to my upper back, still gripping me tight. My fourth chakra, my heart chakra, swirled into him like green smoke.

Heartbeat: Trenton jerked away. Shock and horror filled his face. I couldn't mistake what I saw. Trenton was terrified of me.

I didn't know exactly what he had done or how he had done it, but I thanked the Goddess that he stopped.

"Go home," he commanded, his voice like thick honey, and he disappeared into the woods faster than I thought possible.

Chapter 3

My mind was in a fog. I remembered something about a smile, but that was about it.

'Wasn't I just at the bridge?' I looked down, and my feet were crossing one in front of the other, seemingly by themselves. I was almost home. *'Wasn't I supposed to see a movie with Laine?'*

No. It was time to do a protection spell. It was time to *'go home.'* The thought didn't feel like my own.

I watched in mild surprise as my feet climbed the steps to the rambling white Victorian farmhouse. The old house belonged to my Aunt Faye, my mother's sister, who inherited it from my grandparents. It originally belonged to both my mom and Aunt Faye but my mom and dad have no use for it in the Summerland – some people call it heaven. The house was in need of some care, but it was comfortable and homey. As the fog began to lift in my brain, I realized that I must have astral projected. Memory lapses and brain fog always equaled recent astral projection. But why? I couldn't control when I left my body, but I knew from past experience that if I found myself in a daze, something bad must have happened. I also knew from past

experience that it was best not to tell my Aunt Faye. I adored my aunt, but she was a worry wart.

“Hi Aunt Faye,” I yelled. “I’m home.” The mental fog was almost gone.

I hung my jacket on the hook by the door. My aunt said some kind of hello. I could smell something good cooking, and it occurred to me that I hadn’t eaten in hours. Still, I didn’t feel hungry. I felt tired.

I walked up the stairs to my room. I loved my room. It was large and decorated in various shades of green and deep violet with a beautiful alcove overlooking the greenhouse and a cherry orchard that was as old as the house; sometimes the cherry orchard gave me the creeps at night when it was winter and the trees had no leaves. When the moon was full and lit the seemingly dead trees they would sway in the wind, and their branches looked like gnarled hands with claws that came to life. Beyond the orchard was a meadow and finally the woods. The alcove was large enough to be called a separate room, and it was here that I did my private rituals and spells. The rooms were my sanctuary. I put my books down and noticed they were covered in mud. I thought I must have dropped them when I astral projected. I turned the radio on low, rummaged around, found my favorite humungous sweats in a wad on the floor and changed into them. I flopped down on my unmade bed and stared at the ceiling.

'Protection spell. Just a general spell.' I was tired, and something was wrong but I had no memory of it. Did something happen at the bridge? *'Something about a smile . . .'*

If Violet was here I would have someone to talk to about my astral projection other than Aunt Faye. Violet was my best friend and the only other Wiccan in school, but she was given no choice and had to move to some Detroit suburb with her family during the summer. We had grown more distant since school started. It was hard to keep in touch with a three-hour time difference, and Violet had found new friends. For now I had to figure this out on my own.

I sat up and was instantly dizzy. Maybe I was hungrier than I thought. The dizziness settled, so I tromped over to my bookshelf and pulled out the huge three-ring binder I kept for spells, references, tarot predictions, herbal remedies, and everything else I had worked on since my spellwork studies had begun. This was my Grimoire, my personal book of magick. I vowed again to transfer the best of it to a leather-bound journal like my Aunt Faye's.

I leafed through the pages and smiled as I saw how my handwriting changed over the years. Then I found what I was looking for: protection spells. The first one was from the fourth grade, written during my teeny-tiny phase. The letters on one recorded spell were so small I could barely read them.

4th Grade: Protection Spell by Cassie

Dry a bunch of basil and oregano and

bind it together with some of my hair.

During a Capricorn full moon ritual

bless the herbs and say:

Nothing can hurt me. I'm Okay.

Nothing can hurt me. There's no way.

Night or Day I'm Safe From Harm.

Day or Night I'll Wear my Charm.

Carry the charm to feel safe and protected.

The childish spell brought back memories and made me smile. I remembered trying so hard to please my Aunt Faye. We were just getting to know each other back then. I wanted to throw away the old spells, but Aunt Faye told me that spells from young ones with pure hearts had a lot of power. I thought she was just sentimental.

I read the spell again and thought it sounded like a cheer at a football game. Maybe that's all cheerleading was, collective spell casting.

“Cassiiiiiiiiiiii! Dinnerrrr!!”

I closed the book and headed for the stairs, and thought for the hundredth time that it would be nice to get new carpet. I hated the moss green, textured, worn carpet. My aunt was at the bottom of the stairs looking up at me.

“I see that look on your face. New carpet is not ecologically sound. There's still a lot of life left in this one.”

“Um hm.” I wondered if my aunt really could read minds. I walked down the stairs looking at Aunt Faye and smiled.

Aunt Faye dressed like a hippie. She was wearing dark purple denim bell bottoms and a tank top with a super long black gauze shirt over it. A set of huge silver hoop earrings with several matching bangles on her wrist completed the ensemble.

Aunt Faye looped her arm through mine and walked with me to the dining room.

“And how was your day?” asked Aunt Faye.

I waited, knowing that Aunt Faye would just keep talking.

“It’s Thursday,” said Aunt Faye.

We entered the dining room. Gentle light glowed everywhere. Candles softly shimmered on white linen in the middle of the table, lighting the gold-rimmed china with little grape clusters and leaves. Candles in sconces on the walls illuminated the dining room’s beautifully preserved wood paneling. The old crystal chandelier needed polishing, but it was still enchanting, tossing delicate prisms of light around the dining room. It was Thursday, our “The-week-is-almost-over-let’s-celebrate” day. Aunt Faye insisted on at least one meal a week together. Actually, it was more than a meal. It was a dining experience. It looked beautiful.

“I’m sorry, Aunt Faye. I forgot.”

“That’s okay. You seem preoccupied.” Aunt Faye pulled a chair out at the head of the table. “Sit, sit, sit!”

I couldn’t help but smile at my aunt, and then sat while my aunt pushed in my chair and plunked a kiss on the top of my frizzy red head.

Aunt Faye loved to cook and was inspired by the great Pacific Northwest cuisine and wines. She also loved to shop for fresh organics at the Thursday Farmers’ Market in McMinnville. “Tonight we’re having pesto baked salmon, winter squash stuffed with spicy wild rice, tossed organic salad, and

homemade bread with olives. And of course, dessert will be extraordinary.”

“It looks and smells wonderful!”

Aunt Faye pushed play on the stereo and some feisty jazz filled the air.

“Who’s that?” I asked.

“Coltrane. Who else?” asked Aunt Faye, and began to hum absent-mindedly.

Thursday nights were magical, and not in the witchy way. Aunt Faye was eccentric, but it was the most lovable kind of eccentric, and she was the only family I had.

Aunt Faye sat down across the table. The deep purple she wore was dramatic against the family red hair, although Aunt Faye’s curly red hair had premature streaks of white that she refused to color. It didn’t make her look old, rather the opposite. It gave her a style that she owned. Then I noticed the bracelets on my aunt’s wrist weren’t bangles that matched the silver hoop earrings; they were more silver hoop earrings.

Aunt Faye looked mischievously at me, “Samhain’s just around the corner. Do you want to help with anything?”

I wished that for once I could do a regular Halloween with pumpkins, candy, and costumes. It also occurred to me that it would be my first Samhain without Violet. We used to have a blast during Samhain weekend. “No, not really.”

“Sweetie! Everyone from Portland to Salem will be there! All the covens and lots of solitaires!” Aunt Faye was a solitary witch, choosing to practice Wicca on her own rather than in a

coven, but she loved meeting up with friends at various Sabbats throughout the year. Samhain was her favorite.

“What is it, Cassie? Too busy at school?” asked Aunt Faye.

“Pretty much.”

“Well, we’ll find something for you to do when we get there.”

I took a bite of spicy rice. It was delicious as always, but I was preoccupied about why I astral projected and the resulting blocked memory.

“So, how’s the protection spell coming?” Aunt Faye served herself some salad and passed the bowl to me.

“I’ve been doing protection spells since the fourth grade. Isn’t there something else I can work on?” I took a bite of the salmon; it was warm and the garlic and basil enveloped my taste buds. “This is delicious!”

“Thank you,” said Aunt Faye fully absorbing the compliment, and then she became serious. “Cassie. You’ve been doing all kinds of spells, not just protection spells. However, protection spells are some of the most important spells you can do, and they’re great since they can’t harm your karma. Besides, writing one spell just makes the other spells you write easier, and you need to make sure that you’ve got it all covered.” My aunt scooped some spicy rice onto her plate. “Especially,” said Aunt Faye with her butter knife pointed at me, “since you’re getting to the age where you’ll need a completely different kind of protection, and you know what I mean.”

“What?!” I was horrified.

“You know,” said Aunt Faye. “Boys.”

“Oh my goddess! I thought you meant pregnancy!” I blurted it out before I could stop myself. I could feel my face turn the color of my hair. Aunt Faye smiled her own unique smile, pinching her mouth to one side like she was kissing somebody who wasn’t directly in front of her.

“Oh my goddess, yourself!” said Aunt Faye. “I don’t think there is a protection spell for that!”

We both burst out laughing. I needed the release of stress and tension. We talked and laughed through the rest of dinner. Dessert was an amazing warm chocolate pudding with lavender-infused chunks of dark chocolate.

After dinner, I walked up the worn green carpeted stairs to my room. I flopped on my bed, tossing my three-ring binder Grimoire to the side. I didn’t want to watch TV or do homework. What I wanted was to know why I had astral projected this afternoon, and it suddenly occurred to me that I should do the Drink and Know spell. The spell had triggered my memory in the past.

I stood and walked to the little bathroom that adjoined my bedroom and poured a glass of water. I padded back into my bedroom; the huge gray sweats I wore puddled like slippers around my feet. I sat on the edge of the bed, both hands cupping the glass. I stared into the water and cleared all my thoughts.

“Beloved water, beloved Goddess,” I said addressing the water, “Just as water has existed for all the ages, moving through the earth, feeding the plants, feeding the cattle, and

becoming rain that falls to our oceans, so does the wisdom of your travels move through me. I need to know what happened this afternoon. As I drink you, let your knowledge mix with my mine to illuminate what is now dark. Blessed be,” and I drank the water.

I lay back, and looked at the lamp on my nightstand. It was too far away to simply click off. I promised myself for the hundredth time that I would move the lamp closer so that I could just turn it off. I pulled myself up on one elbow, strained and switched off the lamp, then flopped backward onto my pillow wishing I could just twitch my nose like in the old tv shows and movies. The darkness soothed my thoughts. I wasn't cold, but I pulled a bit of the blanket over my hips in case I wanted to grab more covers during the night. I made a mental note that my dreams would be clear and I would have my answer in the morning. I heard my aunt downstairs knocking around doing who knows what. It was a comforting sound. My body began to relax, and I fell into a deep sleep.

Then I had the first nightmare.

Chapter 4

A damp heavy fog surrounded me; I could barely see my hand in front of my face. I could hear the rush of the Tualatin River, but the air was so murky I couldn't see it. The river thundered along its banks with an echo that made me unable to tell if the river was ten yards or two feet away. The force of it sounded like the spring melts when the Cascade Mountains shed their snow into the rivers, but it was autumn and the river level should be low. I wanted to run, but was unsure of the ground beneath my feet. My pulse quickened and I became alert as a shiver ran down my spine. Where was I?

The mist swirled around me as if it were a living, breathing thing toying with me, caressing me. I looked down at my feet, and the mist cleared just enough to see where my next step should be. I put my foot on the damp and mossy ground where the mist had cleared, and a new swirl of earth appeared. *'Thiss waaayyy!'* the mist seemed to sing. *'Thiss waaayyy!'* I followed the enchanted path as the mist moved and swirled, beckoning to me with each step.

I was compelled onward, feeling pulled toward some dark unknown destination with each cautious step. A knot of fear

welled up in my throat threatening to suffocate me, but I had long since learned to know Fear and face the challenge anyway. I swallowed the fear.

Where was the path taking me?

The terrain changed under my feet. I looked down, and I was walking on cobble stones. I took a few more steps on the cobble stones.

BOOM!

I let out a small yelp at the unexpected deep thud. It was the unmistakable sound of a huge door slamming behind me. No, it was more than the sound of a door. It was the deep low sound of a barricade slamming shut.

Silence.

I could no longer hear the river. My eyes had adjusted to the dark, and the mist slowly cleared. I was in a vast deserted courtyard.

“Hello?” My voice echoed in the empty courtyard.

The walls came into focus as the mist cleared, and I realized I must be inside the old broken down building that I, Violet, and Laine used to play in when we were little. It had been vacant on and off since World War II, or maybe a little later. The three of us used to pretend it was a castle, but it was really an old resort with a restorative hot springs spa where people used to come to “take the waters” as a cure for various ailments. The hot springs cooled, and without the attraction of the healing waters, tourists stopped visiting. The resort eventually closed, and the giant building stood vacant. It must have been glorious

in its day, but now it was rotting where it stood. The brick façade seemed to be held together entirely by the old English ivy and brambles that surrounded it.

A dark shape formed in the courtyard. It was hard to see in the mist, and I squinted trying to make out the shape, my heart pounding. Out of the mist a silhouette emerged. Human. Whoever it was, he must have been there all along.

I looked behind me; I could now see the giant wooden barricade and it had been barred shut.

I was trapped.

The shape took on definition, form.

“How did you do this?” the shape asked. It was a deep whisper . . . and somehow familiar. I looked at the shadowy figure, my heart pounding harder, and my mind went numb. All I could think was, *‘Nothing can hurt me. I’m okay. Nothing can hurt me. There’s no way.’*

Brilliant.

It was the protection spell I had written in the fourth grade.

The mist cleared to reveal a teenager about my age. He looked at me, and for a moment surprise registered on his face. I took a step backward. The boy looked curiously at me as if he wasn’t sure how to proceed, and then slowly walked toward me like a stalking panther. He was tall with broad shoulders and sandy hair. As he walked closer, I noticed that he had pale green sea foam eyes the same as mine. My blood quickened. This guy looked so familiar, but I didn’t know why.

He was beautiful.

“You look lost,” he said with an overly gentle tone, as though trying to sooth a frightened animal. If golden honey had a sound, it would be this boy’s voice.

I felt hypnotized. I felt light and euphoric in his presence. There was a terrible déjà vu happening, and I couldn’t figure out how to make it stop. The boy kept his left hand behind his back.

“I’m a witch,” I said. “You don’t want to mess with me.”

The young man cocked his head sideways and smiled. “You’re right. I don’t want to mess with you. I just want to get to know you.”

My mind was racing. I searched for every person I had ever met and still couldn’t figure out why this boy seemed so very familiar, and why I felt like this had all happened before. He walked up to me, and I felt paralyzed. There was nowhere for me to run. The main door had been closed and barred. But did I want to run? I was enchanted by this stranger.

The boy looked deeply into my eyes. He lifted his hand, and I flinched backward. He smiled, and then took a strand of my always wayward hair and gently tucked it behind my ear.

I couldn’t move.

The touch was electric, the smile magnificent. He took my hand and held it tenderly in his own; it was a handshake without movement.

“My name is Trenton,” he said. His voice sounded like deep wind chimes. “I’m new in town.” Trenton leisurely released my hand, but he still hid his other hand behind his back. He turned and walked toward the once elegant arched entrance to the

building. I still couldn't see what was in his other hand. "I'm visiting family."

My mind turned over; the missing time during my astral projection combined with the familiarity of this boy made me follow him. After all, it was only a dream. I thought perhaps I was compelled by some unknown magick, or that this stranger was part of the puzzle, or perhaps I was just enchanted by sheer physical attraction. I might be walking into a life-sized Venus fly trap, but stepped through the huge ten-foot carved door to the resort as Trenton held it open for me.

Inside, my eyes adjusted to the light. We were in a massive entrance hall skirted by a curved staircase on each side. As my eyes followed the stairs to the second floor, the blood in my veins froze. At first I saw a woman in shadow, and then realized it wasn't a shadow. I could see right through her.

As my eyes further adjusted to the darkness, I realized that there were several people moving around, elegantly dressed, busy with their everyday lives, and they were oblivious to Trenton and me. A sickening thrill ran down my spine. There were ghosts in the old resort.

'Nothing can hurt me. I'm okay.' I was near tears, chanting the old protection spell in my mind. It was the only anchor my mind could latch onto, but I stared at Trenton in defiance and feigned bravery.

"You're Cassie, aren't you?" Trenton whispered. One of the ghosts paused as if she heard Trenton, and then continued on about her business.

“How do you know my name?” I whispered, barely able to speak. Night or day I’m safe from harm.

Two of the elegant shadow people were talking very near to us. Their lips moved, but they made no sound. I felt trapped between dimensions.

“I want to get to know you. But first, I want to know if you know yourself.”

Trenton began to pull his left hand from behind his back.

‘Nothing can hurt me. I’m okay . . .’ The spell wasn’t working. Oh, Goddess, why didn’t I listen to my aunt about protection spells?

I looked around. I wanted to scream to the shadow people for help, but knew they could not help.

‘Nothing can hurt me. There’s no way . . .’

Trenton continued to slowly move his hand from behind his back, to finally hold up nothing more than a beautiful gilded mirror.

I looked at my reflection and staggered backward in horror.

In place of my familiar heart-shaped face, freckles and red hair, I saw the face of a decaying corpse -- my decaying corpse. My face was a mass of rotting flesh. My once thick hair was thin in some places, bald in others. My putrid toothless mouth formed a slow tortured “Ohh” of despair until I could no longer hold back the screams.

Chapter 5

I bolted up from sleep sucking in deep gasps of air, sweating, and completely out of breath. I looked at the clock, only twenty minutes before I needed to get up for school, but I was exhausted like I had only slept a few minutes. Dawn was bringing filtered light into my room. Everything was as it should be. My breathing slowed to normal. I looked at the glass of water sitting on my night table. The nightmare wasn't supposed to happen. Drink and Know spells didn't make nightmares. Unless, I reflected, the image did somehow tell the story of what happened to me. The thought made the hairs on the back of my neck stand. I had only used a Drink and Know spell to make a difficult decision or prepare for a particularly hard test in school.

I pushed the covers away, got out of bed, and walked to the bathroom afraid of what I would see in the mirror. I turned on the bathroom light and stood to the side of the mirror for a moment, tucking my long sweats under my feet on the cold tile. I closed my eyes preparing mentally for the worst, not completely convinced that my corpse face was just a dream. Finally I stepped onto the rug and looked.

Just my own face.

I sighed a breath of relief and felt foolish. I looked closer and saw two small, barely noticeable, puncture marks on my neck. It looked like two needles had pierced my neck. I had thrown the spiral notebook on my bed before I slept; it must have been the coils at the end of my spiral.

I showered and dressed eager to shake the nightmare.

“Cassie!” yelled Aunt Faye from below, “Breakfast is on the table. I’m taking off for work!”

I waited for Aunt Faye to leave, and then walked down the stairs glad that I wouldn’t have to make idle breakfast chitchat. My Aunt Faye left a homemade croissant with fruit and cheese and a steaming mug of hot chocolate. I took a few bites of each, and then put them into my lunch bag and poured the hot chocolate into a thermos and headed for school. The nightmare and lost time still stewed in my mind.

It was drizzling, and I pulled the hood over my head. I walked down the dirt driveway, and onto Macon. Close to the bridge I spied a huge, majestic chestnut buck grazing in the meadow. I was used to seeing deer; bucks were rare. He lifted his proud head, holding his rack of antlers high, and I was reminded of the stag, symbol of the God. He was magnificent, and I wondered if he was a sign of some sort, or a coincidental nod from the gods as a reminder that they watched over me. It was hunting season, and I paused to bless the buck. I drew a pentagram in the air to surround and protect him.

I walked briskly down Macon Street, over the bridge and into town. School was three blocks away. I couldn't get the gruesome image of my rotting face out of my mind, and yet the more powerful memory was the boy. The nightmare of my face was just a nightmare. The memory of the boy felt real. Specifically, the memory of his touch felt real and gave me chills. He said his name was Trenton, and he was new in town in my dream, but I felt like I had already heard that somewhere.

My first period was Communications, and we had been working on the differences between public speaking and interpersonal communication.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Boyle. "We're working on a dyad project today, groups of two. I've created pairs, so, let's see . . ." Mrs. Boyle looked down at her notes. "Rearrange your seats according to the names I call out." Mrs. Boyle called out several pairs of names and the class awkwardly began to rearrange themselves.

". . .Cassie and Holly."

I was mortified. By the look of Head Cliché, she wasn't any more pleased.

"The point of this exercise is to find common ground with someone whom you thought was very different from you. The other point is to not be judgmental," said Mrs. Boyle smiling. "Maybe you'll make a new friend."

If Holly wanted to be friends with me or vice versa, it would have happened in the last four years that we had known each other. Head Cliché and I moved our desks together.

“Hi,” I said.

“Hi.”

The room was noisy as chair/desks scraped the floor while the rest of the kids rearranged in pairs.

“No offense, but I think Mrs. Boyle has finally lost it,” I said.

“I know what you mean.” It wasn’t a game day, so Holly wasn’t wearing her cheerleading outfit, but instead wore a pair of tight jeans and a baby blue cashmere sweater that made her perfect figure all the more obvious. I instantly became aware of my baggy khakis and brown hoodie.

Mrs. Boyle’s voice rang over the din, “First, please compliment one another.”

I thought I would be swallowed alive by humiliation, but decided to get it over with as soon as possible.

“I think your hair is really pretty,” I said.

“Thank you.” Holly sounded genuinely surprised. “Honestly, it takes me forever to straighten it, and I have to use a ton of product so it doesn’t frizz.” Holly’s eyes grew large and she began to stammer, “Not that there’s anything wrong with frizzy hair. I mean . . .”

“It’s okay.” I was surprised that Holly truly didn’t mean to hurt my feelings, and as a peace offering, said, “I always thought your hair was naturally perfect.”

“Not by a long shot,” said Holly. I thought she really meant it.

“Anyway,” I lied, “I’ve made peace with my hair.”

The room was noisy, and there was an awkward silence between us until Holly realized she hadn't complimented me.

"I . . .," said Holly.

"Okay," said Mrs. Boyle. "Next, tell something about yourself, for instance, a goal, or a dream, or a profession you're thinking about, and then explain why."

I wanted to bolt from the room, but instead I looked directly at Holly and said, "It's okay. You don't have to strain to think of a compliment for me."

"No, no! I wanted to tell you this. I've always admired how smart you are, Cassie. And I think the color of your hair is really pretty."

I didn't know what to say. It was probably the first nice thing Holly had ever said to me. "So," I said to fill the awkward silence, "What do you want to be when you grow up." In spite of how weird it was having an actual conversation with Holly, we both laughed at the utter stupidity of the question.

Holly became serious, "Well, honestly, I want to be a physical therapist. You know I live with my grandma, well, she had a stroke. The physical therapist comes to the house a few times a week, and she's worked miracles with my grandma. I want to be able to do that for someone. To help people."

I was floored. I had expected that Holly would want to work in a hair salon or try to be a model or something, and I didn't know that Holly's grandmother was sick. It never occurred to me that Holly had any kind of goals other than cheerleading, especially a goal that was focused on helping

people. The sincerity took me by surprise, and so I decided to be open.

“Wow. That’s pretty amazing, Holly. I don’t have a clue what I want to do with my life. I need a scholarship to go to college, and I want to go to an ivy-league school, but I don’t know which one yet. So, I don’t think I’m that smart, I just try really hard because I’m going to need that scholarship.”

“Are you kidding? Everyone knows that you’re going to be the valedictorian,” said Holly.

Again I was bowled over.

“Okay,” said Mrs. Boyle, and the room quieted down. “You’ve got a good start. Now, your homework is to do a report with your partner. Interview them.” The room gave a groan pretty much in unison. “And then compare and contrast your partner to yourself. Again, this is a report with your partner. I only want to see one paper between the two of you. This is due one week from Monday. The day you turn it in, each of you will introduce your partner to the class, and let everyone know a little something about your partner based on your findings and your paper.”

I looked around the room. The other pairs were totally at odds just like Holly and me. I saw John the quarterback; I had nicknamed him “John Juan” after Don Juan the infamous womanizer because he had dated most of the girls on the cheerleading team. He wasn’t very smart, and he was paired with Ian the brilliant nerd. Darwin was a stoner. Okay, his real name was Darren. He was paired with Stacy, one of Holly’s

cheerleading friends. Then there were some pairs that were a bit more blurry regarding labels. I didn't realize how much I labeled people. Looking at the pairs, I knew that this couldn't have been a coincidence. Mrs. Boyle did this on purpose.

The rest of my day was fairly uneventful. I sent a text to Violet asking her to call. Still no reply. I knew that Violet would eventually change her number to the metro-Detroit area code, and immediately forced myself to shake away the loneliness.

It was getting toward dusk, and I finished tutoring and was leaving school. Holly and crew were hanging out on the picnic tables again. I walked past them, and Holly actually waved, well, lifted her hand in my general direction. I was surprised, and nodded my head in Holly's general direction with just a bit of a smile on my face. Laine was jogging to keep up.

"Hey, Cassie!" said Laine.

"Hi, Laine." I looked at Mouse who always seemed like she needed guidance after the initial 'hello', and then suddenly felt a pang of guilt about the labels I gave to people. "You want to come over for dinner?"

Apparently I had just made Laine's day. "Sure! Your aunt is the best cook in the world!"

We started the walk home with an awkward chatter that was soothing and familiar. I thought that maybe I could forget the time loss and the nightmare for a while. Maybe today wasn't going to be so bad.

“Hey,” said Laine excitedly, and I could tell that Laine was a puddle of delight over some new gossip. “You know the old hot springs resort we used to call a castle when we were little?”

Suddenly I was hyper-aware of what Laine had to say. The resort was the location of my nightmare last night.

Laine continued, “You and Violet left me there one time?”

I grimaced; I knew Mouse’s mind was like a well-oiled machine, and any subject was capable of turning the opposite direction if Mouse remembered something even remotely related to the original topic. The conversation was going off road.

“We were playing hide-and-seek and you said you were hiding, but you both went home while I counted, and I looked for you for hours. My mom was furious.”

I held back a laugh. “I told you Violet made me do that. I wish you would just let go of it, Laine. I came back for you. Anyway,” I said, wanting to get back to the original story, “What about the resort? Did it finally fall down?”

“No! Someone bought the old place! My mom said it’s a pretty big family.” Laine looked pointedly at me and said, “What kind of family would buy something like that?”

My blood turned to ice.



*This is the end of the free sample of “Veil Between Worlds”.
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