

## Prologue

*One week ago...*

Tia should have been fast asleep. She couldn't remember the last time she snoozed through an entire night. But that wasn't a surprise. No other nineteen-year-old anywhere on Earth had as much on their plate as she did. Lucky her home produced the strongest and tastiest coffee ever made.

Her bed shook as if there was an earthquake. Tia glanced over to the guy who had been sharing this California king bed with her for the last two years. He let out a moan. His six-foot frame rolled from stomach to back. His fist slammed the mattress over and over. There were so many reasons she cared deeply for him, only one of which was that they came from the same settlement in Northern Africa.

"Jas?" "You okay, hon?" Tia shook him but Jas didn't wake up.

He threw his hands across his forehead. "No, no!" he shouted. His eyes were still shut tight.

Tia sat up. She reached to her nightstand and turned on the lamp. Jas, which was short for Jasper, let out a deep exhale from his mouth. Her love demanded she pull him from whatever deep, dark nightmare ran through his brain. But this was his Wiccan power. Those bad dreams had benefited their people time and

time again. She had to let him see it through, no matter the duress it caused.

Jasper shot into a sitting position. His eyes opened wide, as if he had just seen a ghost. "Jas, are you okay?" Tia asked again.

"Yes," he responded between heavy breaths. "I am okay." He sure didn't look okay. Jas stood from the bed. He walked to the window and looked up at the full moon illuminating the night sky. "No, we cannot let this happen," he mumbled.

Unlike Tia who slept in full-length pink pajamas with a purple bathrobe nearby, Jas only wore boxer shorts each night. He peered back at her with a rapid blink and a shaky jaw. It was a look she had come to recognize as a warning that required her full attention.

"Jas, sweetie, talk to me—"

"Give me a moment!" He threw up his hand, cutting Tia off. "I need to focus on every detail before it fades." He paced from one end of the room to the other, running a hand through his buzz-cut. Jas finally stopped at the foot of the bed, his wide eyes focusing on Tia. "There was a war on our land. It was a battle between witches," he said.

"Our witches?" Tia tossed aside the thin brown blanket and stood from the bed.

"No, they were strangers. Powerful ones." Jas tipped his head toward the ceiling. "They will come one week from this morning. Our witches will bear witness, but they will not engage even though the battle will affect our village forever."

"Affect us in what way?" Tia asked.

"I don't know." Jas shook his head. "But, in my dream, it did.. .which means it will, but it is unclear to

me in what way."

Tia walked around the bed until she was face to chest with Jas. She reached up, throwing her hands around the back of his neck. "Do you know what they will be fighting about? Do you know why they come or why we allow it to happen?"

"I do not. As always, much of what went through my mind was unclear. But one statement still lingers." She leaned in. "You remember what it said?"

"I do, but I am unsure what it means."

"Tell me." Tia placed a hand on his cheek.

"The statement. . .no one in particular said it, but it was known by all." After a moment's hesitation, he answered. "The immortal witch has won the day."

Tia wrapped her arms around Jas' pronounced chest. She squeezed so he would feel her embrace. Jas' dreams hadn't always been accurate, though many had proven to be useful premonitions. But sometimes they were just dreams. She made a point to investigate them all. Six weeks ago, when he dreamt of the dining hall being destroyed by fire, Tia personally checked out the place that night after it closed. A gas stove was left on in the kitchen. Tia turned it off and had the gas cleared out of the kitchen. Later that night, they had a major storm. A lightning bolt shot through the kitchen window. The damage was minimal, but if not for Jas' warning, the room would have been filled with gas. Had it ignited, it could have created the massive fire he saw in his dream.

Tia prided herself on always keeping an open mind, but the premonition in Jas's dream didn't make much sense. It did, however, spark her curiosity. Who were these witches that were coming to their home?

Where were they from and why were they at war? She certainly would like to meet them, but how accurate was the danger Jas foresaw? She had never seen him so spooked.

Tia's curiosity always got the better of her. Perhaps, this time, she would have to set that aside for the safety of her people.

## Chapter One

*Now...*

Her birth name was Isis Flores Rivera, but she chose to go by Isis Quinn-Santell. It was a compliment to the family that saved her life, took her in, and gave her purpose. That purpose led to them saving the world thanks to their Wiccan abilities. But to their audience, it was all part of the show. To them, Isis was simply the sixteen-year-old member of The Witches of Vegas, the greatest, and last stage magic act in the city.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we hope you've enjoyed our show so far," Isis' adopted dad Sebastian Santell announced from the center of the stage. "But we are not done yet. Prepare yourselves to be once again amazed. We will now bring up three walls for our grand finale!"

Sebastian stretched out his arms. "Walls rise!" he shouted so the audience could hear him without the microphone near his mouth.

Isis stood offstage while three brick walls, each around one quarter the size of the stage, rose from the floor. The walls stood an equal amount of space from one another and faced the audience. She stood back for most of the show and watched her family perform. Now it was her turn to shine.

"Hey." An arm wrapped around Isis's stomach. "This is it, your big finale. Are you ready?"

"I am," she answered with a smile.

Isis turned to look into Zack Galloway's handsome green eyes. They complemented his golden-blond hair and blue collared shirt. Zack was just nine weeks older than Isis. Unlike the others, he was not a witch, but an actual magician. Well, he was a magician's assistant for his uncle, the late Herb Galloway, but he had so much knowledge on the subject. Now he was one of The Witches of Vegas, a member of their coven. They considered him part of the family. Isis didn't think of him that way, and nothing could make her happier.

"After the show," Isis said to him, "do you want to take me out dancing again?"

"You sure your folks won't mind?" he asked. Isis rested a hand on Zack's elbow and grinned. "We can always ask."

Isis leaned in and kissed him. She loved feeling Zack's soft lips against her own. Her adopted mom Selena and Aunt Sacha returned to the backstage area. They pulled apart as the pair passed. It was no secret to her family that they were together. But Isis and Zack agreed it was better not to flaunt it in front of them.

"The audience is all warmed up," Sacha called out to Isis. "Go get 'em, kiddo."

"Let her focus, Sach," Selena said. "This is a whole new way for Isis to use the energy, she will need to concentrate."

"You hear that, Isis? Your mom's in worry mode again," Sacha responded with a blatant eyeroll. "You'd better come back in one piece."

"I know you don't need it," Zack whispered in Isis' ear. "But good luck, anyway."

"Thanks," Isis giggled.

"At this time, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome once again to the stage," Sebastian shouted with paternal pride in his voice, "my little princess and the future goddess of magic, Isis!"

A light melody—one chosen by Zack—played through the auditorium speakers. Isis' heart raced much as it did during her first performance one-year ago. The reason was that today she would be doing something new and exciting. After a month of practice with Dad, she couldn't wait for the moment she could do it in front of an audience. That moment was now.

Isis stepped out to a smattering of applause, stopping next to the wall closest to her. She closed her eyes and concentrated. Although this was part of the show, for Isis, it was a lesson. In fact, it was the equivalent of a mid-term exam.

In her mind, she pictured duplicate versions of herself standing behind the walls on the left and center of the stage. They had the same brown hair tied in a ponytail. They wore the same purple blouse and mini skirt. Earlier she stared at herself in the mirror, memorizing every detail including the cute watch with the pink band on her left wrist that Zack gave her for their one-year anniversary.

She opened her eyes. Sure enough, two mirror images of herself stood behind each of those walls. Isis held her watch-wearing hand out for the audience to see before sticking it back behind the wall. On command, the illusion of herself behind the center wall stuck out its hand and wiggled its fingers. Both Isis and the illusion pulled back their arms. Now, it was time to do the same with her head.

"Don't forget to look at the audience," Zack

whispered from offstage.

Isis nodded. The two illusions of herself did the same. She threw the audience a knowing grin, then hopped back behind her wall. The illusion on the far left stuck its head out from behind that wall. The image flashed to the audience the same grin. Isis willed the image to pull back behind the wall. At that point, Isis brought her head out behind her wall. To the audience, it looked like Isis was teleporting from behind one wall to the other. The effect received a smattering of applause. The preliminaries were over. It was now time to step it up.

Isis faced the concrete in front of her face. "Phase through," she mumbled to herself. Against the wall she saw what looked like static on a television screen. Isis leapt forward and stepped through, coming out on the other side. The wall was thin, but solid. The audience gave her a collective "Ooh." Now that she was through, she sensed the wall solidify behind her.

Isis ran back behind the wall. She then commanded the illusion of herself behind the far left wall to step through and stare out into the audience with a hand on its hip. The image received a collective gasp. To them, it was as if Isis had stepped through one wall on one side of the stage, and then come out of another wall on the opposite side of the stage. She had practiced this many times, but this was the best she had ever pulled it off. It was now time to bring it home...

Whoa!

A pain ran through Isis' chest. It felt like a mallet slamming against her heart. She tried to take a deep breath, but it was a struggle, like sucking a watermelon down her throat. An image formed in her head. It was



Valeria, the Wiccan vampire who turned their lives upside down. Isis hadn't thought about her, or the torture she endured at her hands, in a long while. Why now all of a sudden, and while her chest screamed in pain?

Isis leaned her back against the wall. Everything circled as if she were in the eye of a tornado. She had felt this sensation before, but never with such intensity. Her hands trembled. Something was happening, but she didn't know what. "Not again, not right now." She blinked her eyes rapidly. It's been over a year since Valeria was in their lives. She demanded of her brain to never think of her again. Time to refocus on the now.

At the sound of audience members gasping, she picked up her head. Different voices all yelled the same thing, "Where did she go?" Isis glanced over. Her illusions, including the one on the far left had vanished before ducking behind her wall. She had to bring at least one of those illusions back to finish the act. Stay focused on the spell.

A few deep breaths pushed away the dizziness. Same with the pain in her chest. Her hands no longer shook. Talk about a close call. Isis focused on the back of the center wall. The image of herself returned. "Rise, rise," Isis whispered. On command, her illusion slowly levitated above the wall, looking out at the audience, its head turning from right to left. High up, the image hovered in place.

Isis took in a mouthful of air and allowed her body to levitate. As she went up, the image simultaneously drifted down. Once behind its wall, the illusion disappeared completely. Isis called this routine "Elevator." The audience cheered as the walls dropped

forward, leaving only Isis hovering several feet above the stage floor.

Sebastian ran out, microphone in hand. "Ladies and gentlemen, let's hear it for our youngest witch, Isis!"

The crowd roared. Isis floated down to the stage floor with a huge smile across her face. Dad had worked with her on creating and controlling more than one illusion at the same time. It wasn't easy but if they believed in her ability to pull off such a complicated spell, how could she not believe in herself as well? She had to demonstrate to her family, and herself, that she was old enough and ready to handle such focus. In the end, they were right. She did it.

Isis took a bow and skipped offstage, her symptoms a fleeing memory.

"We hope you enjoyed our show," Sebastian continued. Selena joined him on the stage, taking his hand. "Come back anytime to see THE WITCHES OF VEGAS!"

The audience exploded in cheer. The lights in the auditorium came on.

Isis stopped in front of Zack, who was waiting near the dressing room's open door for her. "So, how did it look?" she asked, her lips stretching into a huge grin. "I think it looked good. Did it look good?" God, they'd been together for a year and her heart still fluttered around him. They'd been through so much together she couldn't imagine life without him.

She expected Zack to return her smile with one of his own, then embrace her with a big hug. That was what usually happened. In fact, it was the main reason Isis was so quick to run off the stage. But that wasn't what happened this time. This 'time, Zack's eyes were

tight with worry. "Isis, what the hell happened out there?" he asked.

"What was wrong?" The words flew out of Isis' mouth before she even thought to ask them. "I thought I nailed it."

"I saw your eyes blinking and your hands shaking. You were about to pass out."

Isis's mouth popped open. "You saw that? Did they see it, too?"

"Sacha's in the dressing room and your folks didn't have the angle. They were near the front of the stage. The wall blocked their view of you. But I saw it. I saw your face when the illusion fluttered and disappeared. They thought your concentration broke, but I know that's not what happened. Something was wrong."

"I'm okay, Zack," Isis insisted. "Can we talk about this later?"

"Later? Why?" His head tipped left. "Has this happened before?"

"Yeah, it's happened a few times." Isis shrugged. "But never during a performance. Not until this time." "A performance?" Zack shouted. "That's not what I'm worried about! Were you ever going to tell me?"

Isis shushed him. She clenched her fists. "Zack, can we please talk about this later?"

She tried to step away, but he grabbed her wrist and pulled her back. It was an aggression she'd never seen from him. The way his mouth dropped, his actions must have surprised himself as well. He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, just.. . at least tell me if I should be worried."

Isis clenched her jaw. This boy just couldn't take a hint. "No, Zack, I'm—"

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