

THE AWAKENING

Prologue

Salem, Massachusetts; 1692

Isaac watched the smoke curl and drift up towards the sky. The embers of glowing flecks drifted like tiny glowing stars into the wind. Their love had not been enough to save her, despite his determination. Isaac had promised her he would always protect her and let no one harm her, but here he stood among Lucinda's accusers and prosecutors. His face blank, his eyes brimming with tears he attempted to hide from the others. The other members of the council had not been discreet about their doubt towards Isaac and his loyalty. His actions had been questionable and caused quite the controversy between him and the other executioners. He remained as stoic as possible, refusing to show any emotion for the woman being executed. There had been rumors, yet he was able to refute the claims on her insistence to protect him. She protested keeping it a secret, but nay, he believed when the time was right, their love for one another would be revealed. Now, he regretted not following his heart. He turned his head to the side and caught the gaze of Mary Margaret. Part of him wanted to confront her with his own suspicions, but he could not move from where he stood. Isaac cast his eyes away from the vindictive woman he thought he knew, then looked back up at his love, his Lucy. Still, she remained brave and confident as she looked down at him; the flames inching closer as the fire grew.

In his palm he held the pendant she always wore, the one Lucy claimed was blessed by her great-grandmother for good luck and protection. It was a small clear piece of quartz, pencil shaped with an intricate design from the metal wrapped around the top. He held it so tightly in his clasped hand, it cast an imprint against his palm. Though she only mentioned it once and he had dismissed her, Isaac did not understand what Wicca was, and he was unsure he wanted to. But now, he only assumed it was evil; forbidden. He opened his hand and looked down at the mark, the odd shapes that imprinted against his skin caused him to pause for a moment. Did he believe in magic? Nay, he did not. He closed his hand around the pendant and closed his eyes for a moment. Did he still love her? Aye, he was still helpless against her charms, his heart still longed for her. Did Isaac believe Lucinda was guilty of witchcraft? Despite how desperate he was to refute the claims, he had no proof of her innocence. The town had turned against her and made claims against her, sealing her fate. He'd been so powerless, caught in between doing

what was right and fighting for the one he loved. But what was right anymore? The town had gone mad. Nay, hysterical. His fellow man and brothers believed they had to rid the world of such evils. Christianity prevailed and all other beliefs were blasphemy. Keeping their love a secret for so long, even now, she refused to let him risk his own life by protecting her. She said it was what would happen, and you could not change fate. Your destiny had been written out long before you entered the world. Isaac didn't understand how he was able to stand there and do nothing to stop this. Was she doing that? As he looked through the billows of smoke, over the blaze of the fire they had started, he watched as each of the men on the execution council placed their torch against the cedar. They created a circle at the base of the pile to show their unity in one goal. Someone had hit his shoulder and broke his thoughts, reminding him of his duty. He stepped closer and placed his torch in the pile, adding to the flame. It grew and continued to creep up towards her. Now, here he stood and watched the only woman he ever loved being burned at the stake. They had ruled she must burn because of her powerful magic that saved her from the day they once tried to hang her. Part of him wondered where the true evil lay if murder and torture were held in such high regard. It disappointed him at how easy it seemed to be, taking one's life and not batting a lash as their last breath escaped from their cold, blue lips. The stench of burning human flesh filled his nose as he stood there powerless against what was happening. All he could do was chant the mantra in his head he had been reciting since they tied Lucy to the wooden post, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...'

Lucinda's hands were bound behind her back and her feet tied to the post. Cedar wood that surrounded her was now engulfed in hot flames that crept across it, lapping at her feet like ravenous dogs. Sounds of the fire crackling and wood burning competed with the sound of the townspeople cheering, ranting and raving as they watched on and tossed their torches onto different parts of the wood. The flames snuck up towards her, inching closer and closer to her body. She felt the heat of the flame now as it teased at her feet. The smoke from the fire filled her lungs. She coughed and turned her head to the side, trying to clear her eyes of the smoke and small pieces of embers that flew up into the twilight sky. Her lungs were filling fast with smoke and she felt that she didn't have much longer. Lucinda fought for precious clean air, trying to avoid the heady smell of burning wood. The smoke plumes billowed out and blocked her view of what was happening before her; forming shadows that danced like demons taunting her death. It began to dance lazily towards the sky as more of the wood caught fire, building and growing

with intensity. The fire consumed the wood, sliding over the cedar like a serpent, in between each piece of wood, igniting it in flame. She looked up at the sky, dusk setting. The sun already disappeared over the horizon, the sky was now illuminated with a mixture of colors. It was one of her favorite times of the day. The sky was beautiful, flawless. Now, the plumes of smoke were blocking the rustic orange in splotches. It reminded her of the flames at her feet, the irony of that was amusing to her. When she turned back to face him again as some smoke cleared, she smiled softly and gave him one small nod of understanding. There was no longer a point in struggling against her fate. A tear ran down her ash-covered face. Still, she forgave him.

Her love, her Isaac. The man she would die a hundred deaths for. He appeared pained, no matter how much she insisted this was the way it was to be. Anger still surged through her as she saw the woman who began it all. Mary Margaret's hands were covered in gloves as she stood and watched, her face was blank and hard to read. The betrayal this girl had inflicted to enact revenge on her, the spiteful and evil ways of this nice facade she presented. She dismissed her presence and focused on him, focusing her last moments on this good earth to his eyes. Lucinda smiled, attempting to comfort him. She shifted against the wood and winced as the ropes bit into her flesh, burning her skin as she moved. Her legs and feet could barely move, being bound so tightly. The pain of the rope and fire were nothing compared to the pain of heartbreak. Lucinda accepted this would be the last time she would look into his eyes or see him again. As she studied every curve of his jaw, the stubble on his chin and the way his hair fell around his shoulders, she tried to sear it into her memory.

Lucinda hissed at the pain around her ankles, her concentration on him broken as the pain seeped in. The hem of her dress had caught fire, the fabric burned quickly, radiating heat onto her legs as it traveled up. She would not scream, she would not cry or beg. Never would she give these people the satisfaction they craved. Hysterical and hypocritical, the town had gone mad. Lucinda balled her fists as her nails dug into her palm, so hard she knew she was close to breaking the skin. Her head fell back, hitting the thick wooden post she had been tied to. Closing her eyes, she focused her last remaining energy, the last thing she did before she perished to the hungry flames. As she looked up into the sky, silently she called forth the elements and said a chant repeatedly in her mind. It overtook her and the pain fueled her powers that seemed to swell with her own agony. She groaned hard in her throat and her eyes shot wide open, her gaze cast toward the darkening sky as she whispered the end of her chant.

The next thing to follow....was darkness and silence.

His heart was breaking, watching her die before him. Her coughs had died down, her fight faltered and he blamed himself. Isaac met her ocean blue eyes and forced himself not to rush to her. He knew the consequences if he would, but what more did he have to live for? His jaw was tightly clenched as he stood silent and still while the others cheered and taunted until they were oblivious to his ears. Nothing else mattered to him, nothing but her. The pain of losing her was so overwhelming. Lucinda's body slumped and the light in her eyes faded out...he was losing her. Soon, she would be nothing but ash and memory...