“NO! NO! YOU CAN’T DO THIS!” I shrieked, clinging to the wooden post by the dock. I used all my strength to keep myself there, but it was not enough. My mother was already wrapping both arms around my stomach and tearing me away from the dock, trying her hardest to reason with me, pleading that I stopped trying to escape and just accept the fact I was not able to sail alone. I did not like that fact, so I continued to kick and scream, digging my nails into the sun-worn wood, dragging cat like scratches through the post. At the time, it felt like she was trying to cage my soul, my true self; just rip it straight out of me and shove it in a box to worry about later.

Little did I know it would not be the last time I felt like my soul was being ripped out of me.

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Stars have always fascinated me. My small village, situated in the North of Africa, would always gift us with the most tremendous views of the starry skies. I would often go out at night and study the stars, using my index finger to join imaginary line between each, then make a chart or sketch of the ones I had found. I would always mark down the phases of the moon too, watch it closely for the smallest change, taking note of when it was at its least powerful or when it had the highest potential to cause havoc amongst the seas. My obsession with astrology was what led me down the path I so irresponsibly got sucked into.

The people in the village would come to me for advice on when to plant their crops, believing the full moon enhanced their growth and whereabouts their past loved one's stars would shine brightest in the sky. I tried to answer their endless questions as best I could, supplying them with semi-accurate drawings of Dorado, or Musca and explain in detail what a supernova was after reading stacks of books on astrology. That is how I got my name. *The beautiful witch.* People believed because my knowledge extended as far as space, I must have witchcraft in my veins. Beautiful was just a word to me, but according to the village I had adopted the word as my own. The older women would say my sparkling blue eyes drew men in and my long black hair kept them captivated. My neighbors would say my strong posture and delicate body was the reason all villagers would watch me with jealousy burning in their eyes. I never saw any of it. However, I learnt that what you have is always going to come back to you in a way you least expect it.

People used the word *‘witch’* in such a perfect way when they used it to describe me. It brought me a sense of pride to be referred to in such a majestic but oddly exclusive way. I would carry my smile with pride whenever someone would shout after me “*it’s the witch.*”

That was until I picked up a book from the battered down shack. It had a tatty brown cover, the edges fraying, the binding fragile. It had a gold imprint on the front that reflected the sun and drew me towards it. It felt as if this book was calling me. I had never felt such a connection, need or desire to pick up a book and trace my fingers across the lines of words, taking in each with such curiosity. I handed over my last golden coin and snatched up the book. I ran my fingers carefully over the gold writing, a pulse from the words shooting through them as if it were coming alive at my touch.

The Book of Witchcraft.

I held the book tights to my chest, the cover pressing against my skin. I wanted to ensure no one saw my book. It was mine. And I ran as fast as I could down to the dock. I collapsed on the edge, letting my bare feet hang just above the water, then set the precious book so attentively in my lap, making sure it was positioned in the middle so I could take in its full potential. There was so much beauty in this insignificant book, but it just felt so much more than words on paper. I ran my fingertips along the edge, then slid underneath, handling the book like it was a newborn child. I treated each page with such care, terrified to leave so much as crease, in case the book would fight back and rebel against me. The book seemed to hold that validly and level of power. I spent my entire afternoon down at the edge of the dock, reading over each word, letting each sentence sink in, allowing each paragraph to make a difference in my way of thinking. I spent every day after that re-reading it, then reading it again until the true fact sunk in.

A witch was not good. A witch was powerful.

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I spent weeks studying every inch of the book, from the spine to the simpler words. I left no part of the book unturned, undiscovered, or unread. I followed the instructions that were laid out so temptingly at the beginning of each chapter. My shelves in my tiny shack started to become cluttered with glass jars that were filled to the brim with different spices and plants or whatever I could get my hands on. I would seal each of them with the wax of the candle on my wall. I had protection, power, strength, beauty. Each small jar packed with ingredients the book had told me would bring each desire to me. It was addictive, knowing I could create and control my own words. I was in charge. I held power. A woman liked me held power.

My downfall was inevitable.

There was one spell jar I had not dared to go near; the idea of it made my body racked with fear. Love. The emotion was too strong to meddle with. Love was like the moon, it was powerful, people craved it, it caused havoc. There was no denying the fact, no matter how much I tried and studied, they were two things I would never be able to have complete control over. It would be dangerous to try such a stunt. That was until I decided it would not be my emotions I would affect, therefore there was no harm in trying.

I found myself down at the local market, a list of ingredients crumpled up in the pocket of the dress. I whisked through the village, giving my advice to people who asked and using the money I received to gather my ingredients. Honey. Herbs. Rum. Cinnamon. On my journey home, I foraged for the petals of a red rose and thorns, then scooped up a small bag of sand. I stopped by the coast, rinsing it all in sea water to ensure it was cleaned and at its most powerful, a small tip I had picked up from the book. Once I got home, I set out a silk cloth on the table, I had saved up for months just to buy the delicate fabric and placed all my freshly cleansed items inches apart. I took the last glass bottle from my shelf and whirled the little sea water I had left, so the edge of the bottle had small droplets of salty water lightly coating the glass.

I visualized the intrusions in my head and added the ingredients accordingly. Add a bit of honey to and alcohol to a jar, along with rose petals, thorns, and herbs. Write my intentions on a small sheet of parchment and roll into a small coil. Put on the lid and toss it in the air three times to shake the contents together. Seal it with wax, repeating my intentions as I do so. The spell was like any other but for some reason it carried a lot more pressure, like it was guilty of its own birth, like it knew it was about to meddle with dangerous emotions. I sat the bottle precisely on the shelf, so it lined up with its partners and drew back the curtain to allow the moon to greet its new demanded. The light shone on the bottle. It was mesmerizing. I felt the emotions being sucked into the bottle. Love from all over was being drawn to my beaten-up house. A positive charge felt like it was crushing my existence, overtaking every feeling that was not love.

Then it stopped

I drew my curtain.

Said my prayers.

And left the power alone to form. Born with its task.

The following day, the sun woke me up, its warmth caressing my dark skin through the window, the birds chirping a song of joy, the villagers muttering words of happiness as they walked along the dusty roads. I collected my books from the windowsill and decided it was the day to wear my shoes. I pulled them out of the locked cupboard and wriggled my feet into the flat bottoms, my toes felt it if they were thanking me for extra comfort. I strolled out my door, my book slotted tightly underneath my arm, an unconscious bright simile across my face.

I meddled with emotions so powerful, my entire existence felt worthy of more.

It was intoxicating.

The entire day I felt as if I was floating on clouds, living in a world so different from my own, it felt like a dream. Yet there was nothing physically different, nothing the human eye alone could see. I knew it was all in my head, but it was a feeling so high I dared to think of the people who only longed for this sort of emotion.

It really did make me think, is this prominent level of happiness something an average person could feel on their own or was it truly the work of bottled-up love? Did it make me see the world in such a way that I adored it then loved it? What I would it was not going to bring me actual love but some sort of love and appreciation for what I needed for what I needed it rather than what I wanted it for?

That was until both what I needed and wanted showed up right in front of me.

A tall man, with an intense gaze, that only made the river blur colour of his eyes stand out more. His broad figure blocked out every inch of light that dared to break through the wooden door. He had the same dark skin as the rest of our village yet, it carried a subtle glow, like he was an angle straight from the stain glass of a chapel, the type that was sent down to watch over someone, protect them, but also blend in. Silently, he stood in my doorway, no word nor action was exchanged.

The room was filled with the same positive energy that it had been the previous night. I caught a glimpse of the small bottle of on the shelf from the corner of my eye and a soft pink glow was pulsing from around it. I returned my full attention to the main in the doorway and knew this was not just a coincidence.