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## Heritole

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Heritole:  
A Novel in Progress

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2023



## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my mother and sister who have supported my writing my entire life.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank:

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My friends and family for supporting and giving me feedback

The Written Arts Department



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## Chapter 1

*I hate packing. Can't stand it. I always over pack and still manage to leave something. Even when I write out a list! It never matters, I'm still gonna leave something. At this point, it feels like I'm doing it on purpose. Which is why I don't pack for myself anymore.*

I walked into my mom's room, which was across the hall from mine, with my last armful of clothes. She was on the rug waiting patiently as I dropped the clothes at her feet. The floors in the house were bare except for the bedrooms and dining area downstairs. We placed rugs there for rituals and spells. We'd often track dirt from the garden and my mom refused to have to constantly vacuum the carpet. Walking on the grass or dirt with shoes on is disrespectful to Nature. Or in the house. Mushroom plants were stationed at the front and back door as a reminder to take off our shoes and to scrub our feet, but sometimes it slips my mind. *It also tickles and sometimes I'm not in the mood to be tickled. The mushrooms never know when to stop.*

"This better be the last of it. You don't have no more space." My mom looked up at me before starting to roll my clothes. I didn't know how she did it. She didn't fold them like most people. She rolled them as tiny as possible so that she'd be able to fit everything. Which doesn't help because I'd have to repack later and I fold my clothes very big.

"I'm pretty sure that's all." She looked at me skeptically. I avoided her eyes. "Pretty sure?" I scratched the back of my neck and closed my eyes. "Yeah." She looked at me expectantly. I let out a breath and mumbled "I was gonna put the rest in my bookbag."

"Nia, You don't need that many clothes!"

"I'll be gone for the year! I need all my clothes. What if I left my favorite shirt and suddenly need it one day?"

“I’d mail it.”

“It wouldn’t be fast enough! What if I need it that day?” I said, throwing my arms in the air. “Things happen. We need to expect the unexpected.” My mom looked at me before rolling her eyes and holding out her hand.

“Go get me all of the clothes you want, Nia. Hurry up.”

“Yay!” I went to go hug her but she was still glaring at me, so I just left the room. My mother was a scary woman when she wanted to be. *I’m about two inches taller than her but that doesn’t mean anything. She will still hunt and chase me down.* Her kind eyes turning to steel in an instant. I ran back into my room grabbing the clothes stash on my bed, whacking a hanging vine in my way. *Sorry Mother!* Plants hung on every hallway wall in this house. They helped around the house, but I spent most of the day avoiding running into them. And where there wasn’t plants, there were family pictures, sigils that keep the plants alive, and bookshelves. There was barely any wall space left. Speaking of which...

My room was bare. Like my bed still had its sheets, and there was still a little bit of decoration on my blue walls but not much. It didn’t fit with the rest of the house. I had taken down my posters, pictures, string lights, all of it. There was an empty spot where Hector, my Peace Lily plant, used to be on my nightstand. My room was bare, as if I never dreamt comfortably here. I quickly grabbed my clothes off the bed and dropped it at my mom’s feet. She gave me a look so I went back into my room to make sure everything else was packed.

“Nia! Can I keep this sweater?” My sister, Iris, yelled while walking into my room. She was referring to my oversized sweater that I thought I lost. Apparently not.

“You had my sweater? You said you didn’t know where it was.”

She had the nerve to look sheepish, even bringing her hand to scratch her afro nervously. “At the time, I didn’t know where it was. I found it later, but you never asked about it so I just kept it. I thought you didn’t want it no more.” I went to snatch it back but she was quicker than me.

“Well, I do want it.” She held it out of my reach and took a step back. “Iris,” I warned. I was about 3 inches taller than her but she knew how to keep it away from me.

“I could keep it as a reminder of you. Since you’ll be gone for so long and you packed so many sweaters you wouldn’t even miss this one.” She was playing with me. I knew she was. But still. *She still does this. I let her borrow my gold hoops last month. Haven’t seen them since.*

“Fine. You can borrow that one. But I want it when I get back.” *I can’t lie. Her smile and little cheer make me happy.* I was gonna miss her. I was gonna miss all of them.

Besides my dad, I was the first of the family to leave for a long time. It was always the four of us or the three of us. Me, my mom, and my sister couldn’t go anywhere together without people saying we look like twins or something. *My mom and sister look identical besides the hair. Both have wide noses and full lips.* Well, they say that until they see my dad, then they say, “No, the kids look just like him!” *I was my dad’s copy. Right down to the same dark complexion.* But my dad wasn’t here right now. He worked at Siniara, the university everyone wanted me to go to. *Well, I thought everyone wanted me to go.* I fiddled with the red charm on my bracelet.



*I walked into the dining room, clutching my acceptance letter. ‘I can get through this. It’s simple.’ My dad was looking at his syllabus for the class he’s teaching at Sinaria. Of course he was. Right when I needed to tell him this. I approached my dad. He looked up and smiled at me.*

*“Hey sweetheart, what’s on your mind?” I stared at him.*

*‘It’s simple. It’s so simple.’ My hand shot out and I all but pushed the letter into him. I looked at the ground and played in my reddish brown locs while he read over the letter.*

*“Wow. Your mom told me you applied here. I was waiting for you to tell me.” I still refused to meet his eyes.*

*“I’m so proud of you Nia,” he said, bringing me into a hug, his braids tickling my nose. “Full scholarship too?” He pulled back to look in my eyes. “I shouldn’t be surprised. I taught you all that you know.”*

*I looked at him hesitantly. He was smiling like he won a million dollars.*

*“What about Sinaria? Shouldn’t I be there with you and everyone else instead of going to an all girls school hundreds of miles away?” He was silent for a minute before taking a deep breath.*

*“Nia, I would love for you to be with me at Sinaria. Me being around my baby girl, best thing ever. But that’s not gonna help you. You need to explore the world, learn different magic, and experience new things. I would be holding you back if I told you to come with me. As much as I want to keep you safe, it’s your time to fly.”*



We all have tattoos of the Sinclair crest on our right shoulder. My sister just received hers not too long ago. Each Sinclair gets it at the age of 14, which is when they can start training with their magic. The crest shows our honor and respect for not only our ancestors but our magic and Nature as well. When the first Sinclair started worshiping Nature and practicing magic, she was

given the crest. But when she bore two children, she thought they wouldn't be able to practice magic. Even though she taught them, they weren't able to practice, the plants wouldn't talk to them. Until one day, on their fourteenth birthday, the children ran to her happily. They heard the plants talking. One reached out and touched them. That night, she grabbed two fistfuls of dirt and asked Nature if they were to bear the mark and practice alongside her. She then rubbed the dirt on their shoulder and told them to go to sleep. The morning after, the crest was on both of their shoulders. The children told their mom that Nature talked to them. She said they are ready and welcomed. She then touched where the crest would be. She smiled and walked away and that's when they woke up.

My arm was numb when I woke up with my new crest. I had thought it would be painful, like a tattoo. But it was the opposite. The sensation was similar to hitting the funny bone. I wasn't in pain, just a prickling cold feeling. Nature had traced the outline of the crest before waking me up. *I still remember the feeling.* That was the only dream I could vividly remember. Her voice was rich like fresh soil. Her afro was as soft and full as moss but I would never dare to touch it. She was ethereal, mesmerizing, *What I would give to see her again.* She only appeared to set someone straight or on special occasions.



*It was Iris' fourteenth birthday. The party was finally dying down. It was dark out and the moon was bright. Everyone was patting Iris on her shoulder and told her good luck and to not be nervous. She seemed to not need that advice. She was jumping up and down, playing in the dirt, and running around. I've never seen her more excited before.*

*“Nia, come put the food away. Iris, help your sister.” My mom said, starting to straighten up. My dad was grabbing the sleeping bags. Iris and I grabbed the food and headed into the house.*

*“Hand me the macaroni. And wrap up the chicken,” I said. I opened the fridge to make space for the new food.*

*“Nia,” Iris said in such a small voice that I had to look up. “Will it work?”*

*“Of course it will work. I got my magic, right?. So did your friends and mom and dad. It’ll be fine, I promise.”*

*That didn’t seem like it convinced her. “What if Nature thinks I’m not ready? What if I go to sleep and I don’t meet her.”*

*I closed the refrigerator and placed my hand where her new crest would be. “It’s okay to be nervous. Everyone gets nervous. But don’t think for a second that you don’t deserve this. Iris, you are gonna be such an amazing witch, I’m gonna have competition for sure.” A small smile formed on her face. “You’ll see Nature. She believes in you just like I do. Just like mom and dad. You’re gonna go to sleep and it’ll be amazing. Then you’ll wake up and tell me all about it, right?” She nodded her head and wrapped her arms around me.*

*“Thank you.” She whispered.*

*“You’re welcome. Now help me put the food away.”*

*Once we finished, everyone had left and the sleeping bags were ready. My mom beckoned Iris to her. “C’mon Iris. Are you ready?”*

*Iris looked at me. I gave her a nod. She smiled and looked back at my mom, approaching her.*

*“Yeah.”*

*We all got in our sleeping bags except for my mom. She knelt at Iris’ sleeping bag and grabbed a handful of dirt.*

*“Mother, please allow Iris to bear the Sinclair crest. Please allow her to practice your magic alongside us. Please guide her, teach her, love her. Thank you, Mother.”*

*She rubbed the dirt on Iris’ arm.*

*“My arm is tingly.” Iris said.*

*“That’s good. Now, let’s sleep. Tell us about your dream in the morning.”*



It’s not just us either. Each Heritole family has a story about how Nature came to them and gifted them the crest. But it all ends the same, rub dirt where the crest will be and sleep. Each family crest has a tree and ancestor initials. When a family member passes away, their initials show up on the crest. My friend, Ali, was telling me the other day about one of his ancestors. He said they were trying to communicate with him, wish him luck on his journey. He just left for college and met up with our other friends a few days ago. I was the only one that was left behind. *No, they didn’t leave me. I just wanted different things.*

I placed my three bags and suitcase by the door. I’m glad the school is sending someone to pick me up. I can’t travel with all this by myself. The acceptance letter made it clear that they had to pick me up, which I’m kinda okay with. My mom had a habit of asking too many questions and I didn’t want her to embarrass me.

“Do you have your charms? Your bracelet? Auntie’s necklace? Where are your earrings? Nia, this should have all been done by yesterday!” My mom rushed downstairs into the living room, scanned my body, then started pacing around the house trying to find my jewelry. Our living room was just as cluttered but cozy as the upstairs hallway. Pictures, plants, books everywhere. My mom was constantly reading books and talking to the plants. She kept the house alive.

“Ma, I packed them already. They’re in my bag. And I have my bracelet on.” I shook my wrist then gestured to my bag that was on the floor.

She shook her head. “No no no.” Take them out and wear them. You need to be safe. Keep them on you at all times. Did I charm them already? Let me do it again just in case.” She started reaching for the bag but I stopped her.

“It’s fine, I’m pretty sure you did. I’ll put them on now. I just didn’t want to lose them on the way there.” She was a bit of a control freak, especially when it comes to packing and being late. Yeah, I should have packed yesterday but I was tired! Can you blame me? Also, I didn’t think I’d be packing a lot of stuff.

“No no no. I will charm them again. I need to make sure.” I sighed and handed her my jewelry. She clutched them and went into her room. “Go get the black pepper from the garden!” She called out. A few seconds later, she added, “Make sure you packed some to take with you!”

I walked through the kitchen to get to our backyard. The air smelled of baked chicken and sweet potatoes.

“Are you cooking something, Ma?” But I couldn’t hear her reply. The mushroom started reaching for my feet when I got to the back door. “Not now.” I said, walking outside.



There's a lot going on back there. Anything you can name, we're probably growing it. My mom finally agreed to label everything. There have been a few times where I handed her Elder flowers instead of Jasmine. So yeah, we needed organization or else I was gonna keep accidentally poisoning people. *That still happens sometimes. Things shouldn't look alike. Especially when one is poisonous!* I grabbed the black pepper like she asked. When I pulled my hand away, a vine shot out and wrapped itself around my wrist. I sighed. They have been doing this since I got accepted.

"You know I'm leaving today. You can't do this." That only caused the vine to tighten. I sighed and started rubbing some of the leaves. "I'm gonna miss you so much, you know that. And I'll be back before you know it. Plus Iris is still here to talk to you." Iris and I would often come to the back yard and talk to the plants while my mom tended to them. I started speaking softly. "I have to do this. I have to see what's out there. But I'll always come back. Nothing can keep me away from here. Especially not away from y'all. You know that, right?" The vine still didn't let go. I sighed. "I won't be alone. Hector is coming with me. He'll protect me. Just like you have." The vine slowly let go. My eyes started to sting. "I love you," I whispered before giving it a pat and getting up.



*"What are they saying?" Iris and I were laying in the garden watching the stars. We had just finished telling the plants about our day.*

*"They said they are glad they don't have to go to school."*

*Iris laughed, "Yeah, y'all are lucky. No homework or responsibilities." The leaves rustled.*

*I lightly pushed her. "Don't say that."*

*“What?”*

*“They have responsibilities. They care for us and allow us to practice.”*

*She looked confused. “I hurt their feelings?”*

*I nodded. “They like feeling appreciated.” I patted the grass. “She didn’t mean it like that. It was a joke.”*

*“Yeah, you do so much for me. I was just kidding. I’m sorry.”*

*Out of nowhere, she started laughing. “Nia!” she squealed. “Nia, they’re tickling me!”*

*I smiled. “Well, maybe this is their payback. She’s really ticklish behind her knee caps.”*

*She was laughing hysterically.*

*After a while they stopped. I was about to tell Iris it was time to head inside when she started speaking.*

*“What do they sound like? When they speak to you? Is it in your head, or an actual voice.”*

*Her question made me pause. “I don’t know how to describe it. It’s kinda like leaves rustling but while someone’s talking. You have to pay attention to hear what they are saying.”*

*“When will I be able to hear them?”*

*“When Nature grants it.”*

*“What if that never happens?”*

*“It will.”*



I grabbed a few cloves and pocketed them. You can never be too safe. *Should've grabbed more.* I also took a few random seed packets from our shed. Hopefully, there would be a store nearby where I could buy more. And also somewhere I could buy some gardening supplies. I waved goodbye at the garden then turned and walked back into the house.

My mom sat on her heels on the floor of her bedroom. In front of her was the mortar and pestle, wood ash, salt, charcoal, and my jewelry. I handed her the pepper and sat down in front of her.

“Why are y’all doing that? Isn’t that a waste of time, Ma?” Iris said, walking into the room. She sat on our mother’s bed.

“Why is it a waste of time?”

Iris looked down at me. “You’ll lose your magic as soon as you walk into that school.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Why is mom wasting magic just for you to throw it away and learn white people magic.”

“Iris,” My mom warned. She was mixing all the ingredients together. I turned to face Iris and we continued the conversation.

“I’m not throwing anything away. It’s an elite school-“

“For white people” Iris interjected.

“And I got a full ride-”

“To learn white people magic.”

“Maybe I’ll teach them our magic. I could graduate and become a teacher there.”

“Yeah, because that’s what they want. A Heritole teacher at an Obsidite school.”

“How do you know they don’t want that?”

“Are you serious? Nia, no one heard of this school until you got a letter. If this school was elite, how come none of your friends are going? No one in our coven is going Nia, that’s for a reason.”

“Why can’t I be the first? Why do I have to go where everyone is going? I’m going to a college, for free, and will not only be strengthening my own magic but learning about other magic. That sounds like a great opportunity to me.”

“Yeah, but-”

“Iris!” My mother’s voice was sharp. “Go make sure Nia’s bags are all together.” She rolled her eyes before leaving the room. Luckily for her, my mom wasn’t looking in her direction.

“I want my sweater back!” I called after her.

“You already gave it to me!” She responded.

“Nia, come on,” my mother said. I took a breath and turned back to face her and the jewelry. She then began chanting into the bowl. “Mother, please protect my child on her journey. Let no evil stop her, please guide her as she is away from home. Let this protect her when I cannot. Thank you, Mother.” There was a small moment of silence before the mixture lit into a blue flame. My mother grabbed some in her hand and drew a circle around my jewelry. She then got up, put more in her hand, and drew a circle around me. The flames were warm and I felt a calmness wash over me. I closed my eyes and sighed.

“Are you okay?” My mom’s voice was barely a whisper. I nodded.

“Okay, sit there for a few minutes then get ready. Your ride should be here soon.”

The flames died about 5 minutes later. The spell becomes fully activated if you let the flames die on their own. It never took long. At most I waited 10 minutes. I got up, put my now

warm jewelry on and cleaned up. I went downstairs to join my mom and sister who were sitting on the couch just waiting I guess. My mom had tupperware in her hand and Iris held Hector with both of her hands. He wanted time to say goodbye to everyone so I gave him a little space.

“Do you have your acceptance letter? You should keep that in your pocket.” I showed her the poorly folded letter. It was old parchment paper. I probably should have taken better care of it.

“They should be here in about 45 minutes,” my mom said. She placed the tupperware into one of our reusable bags and placed it on my luggage. She then looked at me for a minute before grabbing my arm and pulling me in. “Come here,” she said, putting her face on my shoulder. She held me tightly for a while, my cheek resting on her head.

“I’ll call you when I get there.”

“You better. That wasn’t an option.” We stood there for another minute before she sighed and pulled back just enough to look me in my eyes.

“I’m so proud of you. We all are.” She paused. “I’m not worried about you not doing well. I know you will. You’re just gonna be so fa-”

“I’ll call as much as I can.” I interrupted, holding her tighter. I didn’t want to cry but the way she was talking was gonna have me bawling in a few minutes.

She was silent for a while before she yelled, “Iris, come say goodbye to your sister.”

## Chapter 2

### *When it all begins...*

The car came exactly at 3 o'clock pm. I didn't even hear it arrive. One minute, I was hugging my mom and Iris, then 3 o'clock happened, and then there was a black car outside of my house. It was a black Escalade, which was too big of a car to be picking up one person. Inside, the car was jet black, a void trying to suck me in. Once I sat down, I had a small urge to rock my feet but didn't. The windows were heavily tinted and the car looked brand new, fresh off the lot.

"I'm very proud of you," My mother's tearful goodbye was still replaying in my head, "So very proud."

Iris also hugged me and whispered, "Good luck, don't fail," in my ear. She went to sleep after that. I was gonna miss them, I was gonna miss them so much. Was it too early to call them now? Iris wouldn't pick up but my mom would. No, I had just left. I'd call them when I got there. I could manage one car ride without talking to them.

I opened my messages and texted Ali, 'Heading out finally'. He responded a few minutes later.

'Ayy, Nia's finally leaving us. Btw everyone says good luck! Take pics!'

I stared at the text. Everyone. Everyone said it. They didn't have to individually text me because they're all together. I felt a pang in my chest. They were all together without me. I clutched Hector who was sitting in my lap closer. He rubbed my hands with his leaves. -It'll be fine.- Yeah, I was gonna make new friends. Plus, they wouldn't forget about me. We'd keep in touch and we'd hang out when I get back. I let out a breath. Yeah, it'd be fine.

I sent a 'Will do! Miss y'all already<3' before closing the screen.

I settled into the back seat. The driver wasn't much of a talker. He got out of the car, put my luggage in the back then jumped straight into the car again. *I don't remember hearing his voice actually. Which I don't think is a bad thing.* I wasn't in the mood for small talk. I looked out the window and watched the buildings go by. Buildings that I probably wouldn't see for a while. The driver made a coughing noise, then mumbled something. I paid him no attention. I really didn't want to start a conversation, it was already too late. Plus he didn't seem that friendly.

I went back to staring out the window. Seeing the path I'd take to my old high school fade into the background. I smiled sadly. After school, my friends and I would decide who's house we'd go to. It usually ended up being Aura's. She lived the closest, plus her mom always left snacks for us.



*Ali, Aura, Nessie, Daniel, and I were in Aura's backyard, laying in her garden.*

*"I can't believe you aren't coming with us, Nia. I mean, we've always gone to school together. I don't think we've even been apart for less than a week," Ali said.*

*He was right. We'd all been going to the same school since we started. I couldn't remember a time we've been separated.*

*"It's just for a year. I'll see you next summer! As long as y'all don't replace me, we're good."*

*"We would never replace you Nia!" Nessie said, sitting up quickly.*

*Aqua nodded. "We'll text you everyday. And we're all coming back here, right? We'll have a big reunion when we come back."*

*"Yeah," said Nessie. "This is our home." She laid back on the ground.*

*"I was just joking. Of course y'all won't replace me. Y'all will just flat out forget me."*

*"Nia!"*

*"C'mon Nia."*

*"Really?"*

*"That's not even funny!" They all said it at the same time*

*But I started giggling. "Okay, okay. I was just joking."*

*We all laid there in silence for a few minutes before Daniel shot up.*

*"Let's make charms!"*

*"Charms?" I questioned.*

*Daniel shook his wrist where his bracelet was. "So we never forget each other. Aura, do you have beads and forget-me-nots?"*

*She nodded. "I'll ask if we can use them."*

*A few minutes later we were sitting in a circle with a bowl in the middle.*

*"You know how to do this?" I ask. This was one of the spells I couldn't do. It never worked no matter how hard I tried.*

*He nodded, "I made my own bead yesterday. It's actually pretty simple."*

*We each put a bead in the bowl followed by a strand of hair. Daniel took the lead.*



*“Mother, the road ahead calls for us to depart. We wish to not forget. Allow us to preserve and store. Into each bead, place myself in it. With each bead, allow me to come alive in memory. Thank you Mother.”*

*We repeated the chant. Daniel then placed 5 forget me not petals and placed one on each bead. We’re only allowed to use fallen petals. They have aged the most and don’t harm the plant. We whispered our name into the bowl and had to think of times where we were together. At first, I couldn’t think of anything. I didn’t think it would work. But then I felt someone grab my hand. And someone grabbed my other one. Two hands held on both of my shoulders. Tears started filling my eyes. I tried to pull away from the hands but they all tightened their grip.*

*“It’s okay, Nia.”*

*It was as if a dam broke. Memories of all of us sitting in this garden, walking to school, celebrating birthdays, everything.*

*They all let go of me after a few minutes and we each took a bead. I tried to discreetly wipe my face.*

*“How do we know it worked? Should we test it?” Aura asked.*

*Ali shook his head, “Let’s check later. If it doesn’t work, gives us an excuse to either text or mail a new one.” He looked at me while he said it.*

*We all stared at each other until Nessie broke the silence. “Nia, you better tell us if it doesn’t work immediately.” she said, throwing her arms around me.*

*The others agreed and hugged me as well.*

*“I will” I said sniffing, “I promise.”*



I blinked as the memory passed, looking out the window. It looked as if someone was slowly covering the car with black smoke. I pressed my face to the glass and could barely see anything. Not the red and yellow playground I used to go to. Not Mrs. Johnson's corner store, where she would give me a free soda if I helped her stock up. Nessie's house was gone as well. I quickly looked out the other window just in time to see Ali's house get covered in black smoke. What was happening? I turned to look at the driver.

"Um, where are we?" My voice cracked. I cleared my throat and tried again. "Where are we?" The driver's eyes looked at mine through the rearview mirror.

"We'll get there in about a few hours. You're going to Datiam Academy, right?" *Oh yeah, he does speak.* I nodded and he smirked at that. "Then we're going in the right direction. Just relax."

I looked out the back window hoping to see some sort of sunlight or anything. Nothing. Hector wilted to the side dramatically. Normally I'd call him out for doing too much, but I was just as worried as him right now. I looked back at my driver. Was he using magic to transport? Were we invisible? What was he doing? I went to open my mouth to ask but shut it immediately. He couldn't see anything outside of the front window. The panic started building in my chest. I wiped my hands on my pants.

"Is the car on fire? Where is the smoke coming from? Why are you still driving, you can't see out the window." The driver laughed. He then turned all the way around to face me. Hands off the steering wheel. Hands off the fucking steering wheel?!

"I know you didn't practice Obsidite magic but you're making it way too obvious. I told you to just relax." It felt like ice went down my spine.

“Your hands, your hands are off the wheel.” This caused him to chuckle to himself before turning back around and not putting his hands on the steering wheel. Holy shit, I better not die. Was this what Obsidite magic is? Black smoke covering everything? Was he teleporting using Black smoke? How the hell could he see?

The rest of the car ride was silent. Was I ready for this? Of course I was. I would succeed, hopefully at the top of my class, and become a teacher and teach Heritole magic. *I wish achieving that was as simple as saying it.* Maybe I should have practiced Obsidite magic before I came here. I couldn't be surprised like that again. Maybe I'd scout out a library before classes start.

I looked down next to me where Hector was. “Are you excited?” I whispered.

-New place! New plants!-

I smiled. He was mostly on board with leaving with me when I told him about meeting new plants and exploring. Hector loved seeing new places. That was the reason he wasn't in the garden. He didn't like being stationary.

I pulled out my phone again and opened up the course list. The school had already made a schedule for me but I wanted to look at all the courses. I looked it over once this summer but there was no harm in looking again. It didn't look like there's any herb classes but I also didn't really understand some of the names of the classes, like “Time of Yarn” or “Capturing the Moment.” It looked like all classes started tomorrow. Yeah, it was the start of the week. But I was only just arriving. I knew this school was intense but still. I wished they sent me my schedule earlier. It would've helped me prepare for tomorrow. They told me I'd get it when I arrived. This school wanted to be suspenseful.

The car suddenly stopped. The black smoke uncovered a big golden gate. The maroon words “Datiam Academy” looked back at me. It opened slowly but the car didn’t drive forward.

“This is where you get off,” the driver said, not turning to face me.

I stepped out of the car and it just drove away. I hoped that meant he would drop my stuff off in my room. I kinda needed my stuff. I held Hector in my hands, where he was standing straight up because of the sunlight.

Holy shit, this place was privilege. Just pure privilege. Every building looked like it just got remodeled. I bent down to introduce myself to the grass, but they didn’t even acknowledge me. They barely moved. I mean, it happened. This was a new place and they have to get used to me just like I have to get used to them. Hector shook in his pot. I went to place him on the grass but he started shaking harder, almost thrashing. I immediately stood up. “No?” I asked him. He had never done that before. He had to get used to this place as well, I guessed. I started to look around.

The students looked... I didn't know how to describe them. They were all wearing some form of lace with red bottoms. But Datiam didn’t have uniforms. That was what my acceptance letter said. Did I read it wrong? Did they forget to change it? Holy shit, I was gonna stand out. Every other girl seemed to be wearing it. I didn’t know if I can-

“Hi! you must be new here! I’m Beldam, your tour guide!” That high pitched peppy voice belonged to a short white girl with her blonde hair in two braids. She was wearing a black lace shirt with a red skirt and black heels. I looked down at my own outfit. My colorful floral print shirt with green pants, topped with my favorite orange head scarf. It was one of my best outfits. I loved anything with flowers, and green was my favorite color. But at that moment, I felt as if there was a spotlight on me.

“Is it that obvious?” I said, cracking a small smile. She laughed and linked her arm through mine. I shifted Hector to my other arm.

“Okay! Let me show you around! Don’t hesitate to ask questions. I know it’s a lot to take in.” She pulled me and started the tour.

“We’ll start this way and work our way around. I think we’ll go to Venzur last.”

“Venshur?”

“This way!”

We started walking on the concrete path. There were small patches of grass around.

-No no no no- Hector was repeating himself. I petted his leaves in an attempt to comfort, which worked a little. He stopped saying no but was still shaking.

There were random marble bench tables everywhere. Some of them were filled with girls. Girls who were wearing the same thing. Girls who weren’t wearing what I was wearing. Girls who didn’t look like me. I kept scanning my surroundings and cleared my throat.

“Is there a dress code here? I thought people would be wearing, ya know, different clothes.”

Beldam laughed, “We are wearing different clothes. This is just what an Obsidite wardrobe looks like. It also helps us spot outsiders.” She paused and looked at me. “So we can help and welcome them,” she added.

“Okay, this is the Pentacle Oak library!” Beldam pointed to a beautiful hexagonal shaped building that was mostly windows. I could see everything in there. Girls who were sitting at the chairs. Some were looking at books. Others were sleeping. There were two men standing outside the doors in suits. They both had blank faces. “I’m pretty sure you know what a library is. So, If

you need to learn something, that's where you'll go. I think there's a book on all magic types in there. You practice Afridite magic, right?"

"No, Heritole magic." She got red in the face and started sputtering.

"No no no. Of course not. I didn't mean to get it mixed up. I don't know a lot about outside magic. I'm so sorry."

"It's cool. I was just correcting you." I gesture to the building. "Can we go inside? I want to see what types of books y'all have on herbs and jewels. Hopefully I can check them out before they're gone."

"Unfortunately, not on this tour. But you'll have time afterwards." She cleared her throat and pulled me along. "I love just walking around campus. It's beautiful here, isn't it?" She looked at me.

"Yeah, it's beautiful here." That wasn't a lie. The campus looked unreal. As if it were in a magazine. The marble tables were in fact not randomly placed but actually circling the marble fountain that stood in the middle of campus. Everything looked like I'd either get in trouble or break something if I touched it.

Rows of tulips followed along the concrete path to each building. -No, no, no- cried Hector. I wanted to console him but I couldn't. The flowers shouldn't be planted like that.

"Who does the gardening here?"

Beldam shrugged. "I'm not really sure. I don't see people tending to the flowers. Maybe it's the guards. They do a really good job if it is them."

They didn't even know who does the gardening? Maybe I could do it. Give them some pointers. Was I the first Heritol witch here?



*"Why are they so far apart?" I was sitting in the backyard with my mom while my dad and Iris were inside cooking. Iris was four and not yet ready to garden with Mama. The plants were still afraid of her.*

*Mama was planting pansies. They looked excited, moving around and wrapping themselves around her arm. I reached out to touch one gently.*

*"They need space of course. They can't grow if they're too close to each other."*

*"Why wouldn't they want to be close to each other? Don't they like each other?"*

*She laughed. "Of course they like each other. They'll come together when they are ready." She looked at me for a second before continuing. "Wanna plant the next one?"*

*"Yes!" I had never planted anything yet. While I did touch the plants, Mama was the one who put them in the ground.*

*She handed me a pansy. The dirt was a little dry, crumbling between my fingers. The pansy was shaking in my hand.*

*"Introduce yourself, Nia. It's shy." My mom gave me an encouraging smile.*

*"Hi." I said in a small voice. "My name is Nia. Can I plant you in our garden? You'll love it. Mama takes good care of it."*

*The plant slowly stopped shaking. I didn't know what it said but Mama patted me on the shoulder.*

*"Let's plant it. Place your hands over the spot where you think it should go. It'll decide if it's good or not."*

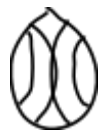
*I placed my hands next to the other pansy. The plant in my hand was shaking as if it were saying no. My mom took hold of my wrist and guided my hands to a spot away from the other pansy. The plant was bobbing in my hand. We then placed it in the soil.*

*"You have to listen to what they want, Nia. If we want them to allow us to use their petals, we must make them feel comfortable."*

*I looked at the pansy. "Are you comfortable here?"*

*The plant started bobbing again.*

*"Good job! Maybe you can start being my helper in the garden." I smiled big at that. "Now go tell your dad that you just planted your first plant."*



Beldam pulled me along. We came up on a long triangular prism building. It also had a lot of windows and two men in suits standing outside of it. She pointed at it.

"That's the dining hall, Somerhall. We have all types of food, so you'll probably like something there." I pulled my arm out of her grasp.

"Cool."

It didn't look like she noticed. In fact, she just kept talking.



“This is the only food area on campus. Which is fine because we’re so small. Have you noticed there’s not a lot of people around? We only accept the best. Which is probably why you’re here!” I gave her a small smile. “Oh! If you look over there, that’s the auditorium. It’s about 20 minutes from here and I don’t want to walk over there right now. You can do it some other time, yeah?” She didn’t give me time to answer. “That’s where we have assemblies and announcements. They’ll let us know when to go to the auditorium, don’t you worry. Now, let me show you the field.” She started pulling me in the opposite direction.

“Is the auditorium also shaped like a hexagon?”

“Nope, Olfetr is a pentagon. Each building has its own shape, I’m sure you’ve noticed.” She smiled at me. “They really put time and effort into making Datiam. It’s so beautiful here.” As we were walking to the field, two men in suits were walking towards us. Beldam waved at them but neither acknowledged her. They both were looking straight forward and walking in sync. As they passed us, one lightly bumped into my shoulder.

“That’s like the fifth guy in a suit I saw today. Why are there just men in suits here?” I ask, rubbing my shoulder.

“Oh! Those are guards. They are here to protect us in case something happens. We practice magic outside a lot. Most of us do it at the field, but occasionally there’s people practicing at the tables.” She turned to look at me. “You’ll be at the tables a lot, right? Your magic is rituals.”

“It’s not just rituals-”

“But it’s mostly rituals, right?” She interrupted. I nodded.

“Ooo! At some point, you have to show me how to do Afridite magic! I’ve always wanted to learn.” She squealed and clapped her hands.

“Heritole.” I said, coughing. It felt as if I was breathing in something solid.

“Right! Sorry again.”

“Do they not have Heritole classes here? I figured they would have like one or two.” I said, in between coughs. Beldam either didn’t notice or pretended not to notice.

“Oh, I wouldn’t know. I’ve only taken Obsidite classes. But maybe next semester we could take a Heritole class together if they have one!” She pointed at the field. “Here we are!”

I didn’t know how to feel about the scene in front of me. There were spells being thrown all over the field. Someone got hit with black smoke and they flew back. Another person threw a black fireball but it was blocked. Two witches were holding hands while casting a spell. There were screams and chanting. Guards were surrounding the field. The grass looked scorched. Everyone was wearing shoes. I hope that is not mandatory.

-I want to leave- Hector had turned away from the field. I don’t blame him, my stomach was churning and my lungs felt as if they were on fire. I heard someone yell and then saw black smoke hurtling towards us. I screamed and my hands instantly flew to my face. When nothing happened, I looked up and saw one of the guards catch it in their hands before it disappeared. Oh. I looked at Beldam, who didn’t even flinch. Something lightly touched my leg. I looked to see Hector luckily on the grass hitting my leg.

“Sorry Hector!” I whisper yelled as I pick him up. He was thrashing in my arms. -No no no. Don’t like it-

“Sorry Mother.” I whispered to the grass. It didn’t react. Just like before, it was still. I went to touch it but Hector started thrashing harder. Maybe later. I stood back up and Hector started calming down.

Beldam didn't acknowledge me at all. In fact, she just kept talking. "So we mostly practice here outside of classes. Oh fuck! I forgot to show you where classes will be. I knew I should've walked over to the auditorium. It's next to the auditorium. Do you wanna go see it or can you go on your own?"

"I'm sure I'll be fine," I pointed at the field where someone got blasted in their chest. "This is practice? Everyone looks so serious. And do we have to practice on the field?"

"Well this year everyone will be competing in The Game, so we have to be our best. And yes, this is the only practice place besides your room. Speaking of which." She started pulling me away from the field. "Onward to Venzur!"

We walked for about 10 minutes and came across the only building I've seen that wasn't just windows. It was a black tall rectangular building. It almost looked as if it didn't belong on campus. It was just there. We opened the pitch black doors and it looked...cozy? There was a fluffy white rug in front of a soft looking red couch. There was a fireplace in the wall to the left and a spiral staircase on the right. There was also a small kitchen area in the back. It looked like a mini cottage house. It didn't match the outside world at all.

"It's comfortable here, yeah? I love just sitting on the couch after classes. It's honestly my favorite place on campus." Beldam gestured to the stairs. "Your room is on the top floor. You're so lucky. You have the best view of the whole campus. I'm on the second floor. I wish my view was as good as yours!" She turned to leave the building.

"Can you show me where my room is?"

"I have to go but you can't miss it! You'll know as soon as you get to the eighth floor! See you at the assembly tomorrow!" And with that, she left.

“Thanks,” I sarcastically said to no one. I took a deep breath and made the treacherous journey up the eight flights of stairs.

Everything was black. And the doors didn't have door knobs. How the hell did anyone see here? I went down a flight of stairs and that was pitch black too. Was all the dorm floors black? I went back up the stairs.

It was quiet. I could hear my own breathing and footsteps as I slowly made my way through the hallway. I placed my hand on the wall to feel around the doors. I made it to the end of the hall when my foot hit something. I bent down and blindly searched the floor before my hand touched paper.

“You are gonna have to stay here for a second,” I said to Hector before placing him on the ground. I could already feel him wilting over. I then fished out my phone from my pocket and turned on the flashlight. It was an envelope with my name in red letters. *Nia Sinclair*. My hand touched the wall and it felt like a door! Hopefully my dorm. I pushed on it and it didn't budge. Didn't feel a doorknob either. The envelope didn't come with a key. I tried knocking. Nothing. Wasn't my dorm, I guess. I turned my attention back to the envelope in my hand.

Inside the envelope were two papers. My schedule. Thank Nature. I forgot to ask Beldam about that. I quickly scanned it.

*Monday-Intermediate Potions-9:00am-11:00am*

*Tuesday - Witches of History-9:00am-11:00pm, Drawing 101 -2:00pm-4:00pm*

*Wednesday -Prep/background-12:00pm-2:00pm*

*Thursday -Witches of History-9:00am-11:00am*

Okay, wasn't bad. I looked at the other paper in my hand. It was blank except for the word "Serpent" in the middle of it.

"Serpent?" I read aloud. The door swung open. I guess this was my dorm. I took my shoes off, picked them up, and walked in. The lights immediately came on.

Oh.

I didn't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't this. It already looked lived in. The bed was made with black sheets. It almost blended in with the black walls but the red pillows make it stand out. The walls were bare. I took another step into the room. There was entirely too much space. My bags were by my bed but even that only took up a little bit of the room. I could do a somersault and not touch any of the walls. There was a small rug in the middle of the room but it looked too small to sit on let alone perform rituals on. I should've taken my rug from my room. Why didn't I take it? Maybe my mom could ship it.

I shook my head and took a deep breath. This was just nerves. I was in a new place. I just gotta get used to it. I'd get a new rug after I found out what stores they have nearby. It would be okay. I would just have to settle in.

I walked to the bed and sat down. It was comfy. Really comfy. I hated to say it but it might be comfier than my bed back home. And I loved my bed. Across from my bed there were two dressers and a cabinet pushed against the walls. All black, but I could make out their shapes. There was a chandelier in the middle that gave off a dim light. I didn't see the point of it, honestly. I could still barely see anything.

I walked over to the cabinet. Up close, I could see it was detailed with what looked like engravings. I traced one trying to see what if I recognized it, but no. I'd look it up later. I opened

the cabinet and immediately closed it back. Was something in there? And did it wink at me? No no no no no.

I backed away from the cabinet. What did they put in my cabinet? Should I report it? What the hell? I shook my head. I was gonna have to open it again. See if was actually a rat or something. I closed my eyes, sent a quick prayer to Mother, and as quickly as I could walked back and opened the cabinet.

It was eyeballs. It was a bunch of eyeballs. I felt vomit rise into my throat. There were about twelve naked eyeballs staring back at me. They were wiggling? How were they moving? I swallowed and kept looking. And almost shut the door back. There were toenails and what I believed to be eggs. Where was the plants? The herbs? Did they only use things they could find off of creatures?

That was enough of that. I closed the cabinet and looked at the dressers next to it. They also had unrecognizable engravings on them. I opened the drawers of the first dresser. Empty. All of the drawers were empty. I opened the second dresser and it was filled. There were different black shirts and red skirts. I grabbed one and it was my size. Was this why they asked for my size on the application? Was I supposed to wear this? So was there a uniform? I put it back and closed the drawer. I was gonna have to get more storage. Why did I pack clothes if they were gonna give me some?

I walked back over to my bed and sat on it. I didn't have a nightstand to put Hector on. Damn, I forgot Hector! I quickly went out of the room and started feeling for him on the ground. My fingers bumped into his pot.

“Sorry Hector!” I said after I found him. “My bad.” I brought him into the room and tried to put him on the dresser but he kept wiggling.

“Are you mad at me?”

He kept wiggling.

“Hey, I’m sorry about today. I didn’t think we would see that. I know they aren’t Heritole witches, but I still thought they would take care of Nature. And I’m sorry for leaving you outside the door.” He stopped moving. I went to pet him but he immediately tensed up. I tried a different approach. “I already started thinking about how I could help with the gardening. I need the plants to warm up to me though. They didn’t even budge when I talked to them.”

He still didn’t say anything.

“We just got here. We just need to get comfortable. It’ll be okay.” I placed him on the dresser. There was just enough sunlight from the window.

I looked around at the bare black walls. This was my room for the next year, at least. I took out my phone and texted the group chat. ‘Made it.’ I texted my family too and told them I was really drained and would call them tomorrow. I’d cleanse the room and unpack later. I needed a nap. I laid down on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Everything was going to be okay.

*Yeah.*

### Chapter 3

It didn't take me long to unpack. *Okay, that's a lie, it took me two hours. Unpacking is just as hard as packing!* I really shouldn't have brought all these clothes. I couldn't even put it all away because the school decided to go shopping for me. Do they just have an abundance of these things? When I called my mom, all she could say was "I told you so" and that she should've come with me so she could show me how to unpack. I wished she had come. She could've given me one more hug and explored the campus with me, probably helped me connect with the Nature here.

I grabbed my shower necessities and left the room. It automatically closed behind me. Serpent is the key.

It was still hard to see in this hallway. I began to feel around on the walls, which didn't seem as helpful. I couldn't tell bathroom doors and dorm doors apart by touch. And I didn't want to knock on every single door or wall until I found it.

"So do you normally grope doors or is mine just a special one?"

*I can't believe that's the first thing you ever said to me.*

I turned to see the only other black girl I'd seen at Datiam, dressed in a red hoodie and some jeans. Thank Nature I'm not alone. Her head was shaved and she wore black glasses. She was slightly lighter than me. Then I realized what she said. Oh shit. I'd just made a fool of myself in front of the only other black girl.

I took my hand off the wall and started sputtering, "I'm so sorry. I can't tell which door is which and I just wanted the bathroom. I thought I could touch the walls until I found the bathroom. I can't see anything." I tried to give her a small smile but I think I just looked frightened. She started laughing.



“Relax. I’m just messing with you. I can tell you’re new here. Every year, there’s always someone lost trying to find either their room or bathroom. Let me guess, Trixie was your tour guide.”

I shook my head, “Beldam. She didn’t even touch the stairs, let alone show me to my room.”

The girl nodded. “She was gonna be my next guess. They do that every year, leaving the returners to actually explain this place. You’re gonna have to learn how to see in the dark. Obsidite witches have fucking bat vision or something. So most things will be in the dark.”

She then smiled, “I’m Devyn, your neighbor and one of the few cultures on campus.” She laughed at my puzzled expression. “I already know you thought you were the only person of color on campus. We all had the same thought. She whispered and pointed around us, “We’re all pocs up here.”

I looked over my shoulder, “Why are we whispering?”

Devyn stood up and shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. Dramatic flair maybe. Anyways, I didn’t catch your name.”

“Nia.”

“Nia.” She repeated and smiled. “That’s a pretty name.”

I gave a small smile and looked at the ground. “Thank you, so is your name, Pretty. I mean. Your name is pretty too.”

She smiled again and pointed down the hall. “That’s the bathroom. It won’t open if someone’s in there. You know, privacy and all. All you gotta say is Deuce.” She looked at her door before saying, “Mine is Wing. You can come by whenever. But you know, knock first.” I smiled at that. “Oh yeah, before I forget, you have to picture the door opening. It won’t open if

you don't do it. Anyways I'm gonna head to sleep. You know where the bathroom is now. You should get some sleep. Tomorrow we're having announcements before classes start. If you want, we can walk over together. We might even have some classes together."

"Yeah, I'd like that. What time are we leaving?"

"Be ready by 7:30 am."

"Okay. And thank you for showing me the bathroom."

"No problem. See you tomorrow." And with that, she went into her room.

I made my way to the end of the hall, thought of the door opening, and said, "Deuce." The door swung open just like my door. The bathroom was white. Which I would normally expect from a bathroom but given that everything else was black, I assumed I'd need a flashlight here. But it was just a normal bathroom. There was a toilet, bathtub, a standing shower, plus a sink with a mirror. I made my way to the shower. The water was at a perfect boiling temperature. I sighed. I just made a friend and classes start tomorrow. I was ready for this.

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Why did I have to be up at 7 o'clock? Most of the world was still fully asleep. It didn't seem like Devyn was awake yet. I didn't hear anything outside my dorm. I quickly put on my clothes and grabbed my toothbrush and headed to the bathroom.

"Deuce." The door didn't budge. I tried again. "Deuce." Still nothing. I heard footsteps and noticed Deyvn was walking towards me. She was dressed in just a blue t-shirt and some ripped jeans. She also had her toothbrush in her hand.

"Remember what I told you yesterday? It won't open if someone's in there. Plus, it's probably Medora in there. She tends to shower in the morning." She banged on the door.

"C'mon! We're gonna be late!"

About five minutes later the door opened up and a tall blonde Asian stepped out of the door. She was wearing an orange sweater dress with a belt and black ankle boots. She held her bunched pjs in her hands.

“You know my shower schedule and yet still can’t plan accordingly.” She said to Devyn. She then turned to look at me and smiled. “I don’t know you. I’m Medora.” She made a kissy face and sound. “I’d kiss your cheek but my hands are full.” She then walked past us and walked to what I assume to be her room, which was across the hall from Devyn’s. “By the way,” she turned to face us again. “We need to leave in about 6 minutes. You need to hurry up.” Then she walked into her room. *Y’all really know how to make a first impression.* Devyn rolled her eyes before opening the bathroom door.

“C’mon. You’re just brushing your teeth, right? We can do it together.”

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We left about 5 minutes after that. I didn’t know what to expect so I just grabbed my book bag filled with my two notebooks and some pencils. Devyn wasn’t carrying anything and Medora’s book bag looked as if it was gonna explode. She carried it as if it weighed nothing. We were walking along the path passing the library, when Devyn started speaking.

“I’m shocked there’s only one newbie. We usually get two. Did Datiam forget about the other?”

Medora shook her head. “No, remember this year is The Game. The Victor is coming back.”

“Oh right. She’s one of us right?”

“Yes, they’ll probably put her in the room near the bathroom.”

“She’s gonna be competing again, right?”

Medora nodded, "It's not very likely she'll win though. It's rare that a Victor wins again."

This was the second time I was hearing about a game. I cleared my throat.

"There's a game? And a victor? I was never told that. Just that there will be opportunities to get internships and stuff."

Medora nodded. "The Game is the opportunity. It's a competition to see which witch is the best. Whoever wins gets to intern at a business of their choosing until the next Game. That sets you up for life. You basically get to work anywhere you want after you graduate from here."

Devyn continued, "Yeah, and it's crazy competitive. Literally everyone is dying at the chance to win."

"When will the Victor come back?"

"I think they come back just before the Game, right Medora?"

She nodded, "Yeah, there's a small ceremony to welcome them back. That ceremony kicks off The Game. They'll tell you all about it at announcements. Speaking of which."

We made it to a pentagon shaped building that was just windows. But the windows were heavily tinted, so I couldn't see anything inside unlike the other buildings. I followed Devyn and Medora inside. The inside was huge. Everything was also black but the benches were a blood red that stood out. There were candles everywhere, I guessed they weren't afraid of burning alive. There was a huge stage with a microphone in the middle. The ceiling was a beautiful painting of angels. This place was beautiful. I then noticed something was off.

"Where are the chairs?"

"In preparation for the games, they remove the chairs. I heard there's a lot of standing."

Devyn responded.

Medora interjected, “After each game, we all line up and they reveal who got eliminated. It’s humiliating to lose in front of everyone.”

I turned to look at her. “You’ve been in the games before?”

She nodded. “Yes, I was in one my first year, but I got eliminated in the second round.” She looked sad for a moment before smiling. “But I get a second chance this year. So who knows? Maybe I’ll be the next Victor.”

Devyn shrugged, “I’m just excited to finally be in them. I’ve been hearing so much about The Game ever since I’ve been here. I just hope it lives up to the hype. I don’t really care if I win or not.”

Just as Devyn finished, the auditorium was filled with cheering and clapping. One smiling, suited man danced to the microphone. I wished there was a spotlight or something. His black suit matched the black auditorium too well. The cheers hadn’t stopped. He was smiling and waving to the crowd. Everyone was cheering and shaking. I half expected people to faint. The man winked and waved some more before he put his hands in the air. The crowd stopped immediately. He then leaned slowly towards the mic and whispered slowly, punctuating each word.

“Who’s. Ready. For. The. Game?”

The girls went wild again, cheering and screaming. The man smiled before shouting into the mic.

“It is the moment we’ve all waited for! After years, it’s finally here! Ladies, I hope you’re as excited as I am!!” The cheers got louder. I thought my ears were gonna fall off. I looked at Medora and Devyn and they both had their ears covered.

Was I excited? It sounded amazing. I wanted to win The Game and be set for life. I let out a little cheer and clap.

The man finally gestured to everyone to stop. “If you don’t know, my name is Damian. I am the Head Master as well as the host for The Game this year. It is a big honor so I am just as excited as you are, if not more. This year is the year, ladies. I hope you have been training and practicing as hard as you can. For the new ladies, there is a class about the Game offered this year. You should already be enrolled. Everyone else, just prepare yourselves as you’ve been doing. And now, I wish everyone a wonderful year. And Happy Games!” And with a smile, he exited. The auditorium started clearing out soon after.

“It’s actually happening.” Medora looked on the verge of freaking out. Her hands were shaking and her eyes were bulging. Devyn placed her hand on Medora’s shoulder and gave her a smile. Medora then took a few deep breaths before attempting to calm down. “We should get ready for class.”

Devyn nodded, “Yeah.” She reached into her pocket and pulled out a paper. “Nia, what’s your schedule?” I pulled it out and handed it to her. She looked quietly before proclaiming, “We have two classes together! Not today unfortunately. You just have Potions today. Easy day for you! I have Time of Yarn but it’s still an easy day.” She gave me a high five. It stung slightly but I still smiled.

Medora looked at my schedule and said, “I have Potions today as well.” I smiled at that too. I was hoping I would have them in some of my classes so I would know someone.

“Lucky me, right? I have classes with both of you.”

“Yeah! But we should probably head to class now,” Devyn said, leading the way.

We walked to the only building I haven't seen yet. It was a cube shaped building with a bunch of windows and, of course, two guards standing at the front of the door.

"I'll catch y'all later. We can meet at Summerhall for lunch." With that, Devyn gave us a two finger salute and walked down the hall. I went to follow her but Medora stopped me.

"We're on the third floor. And there are no elevators."

"Why does this school love stairs so much? I would like just one single story building."

"Obsidite witches can teleport. So they don't need to use stairs. Us other witches aren't so lucky."

"We're gonna have really toned legs after this year."

"I already do."

We began the journey up the stairs. As we're climbing, black smoke started filling the air, causing me and Medora to cough.

"That's them teleporting now. They leave smoke everywhere," she said through coughs.

We made it to the black classroom which thankfully had some light because of the windows. There was a desk in front of the class and a chalk board behind it. There were three rows of tables, two per seat. I followed Medora as she looked for a place. I didn't want to choose a bad one. She had more experience in this. In high school I usually went to the back so I could focus better on my work. Medora chose the seat in the middle. Which I respected. I gave her a nod of approval in my head. We were one of the first ones in class. As soon as I sat down, my name appeared on the table. Medora's too.

More people started filling the room. There was a group of four girls. One of them was a tallish blonde with blue eyes. She had a crowd of shorter girls following her. All of them wearing the obligatory Obsidite uniform. They were talking about the Game, I presumed. Medora rolled

her eyes as the girl passed. The girl group looked around, deciding on their seats. The girl in the front scanned the room. She stopped when she saw Medora then immediately sat down in front of us..

“Elaine, can I sit next to you?”

“No, you sat next to her before.”

“Can I please sit with you, Elaine?”

It was almost insufferable with the three girls pleading so loudly. I leaned over to Medora.

“Is she famous or something?” I whispered looking over at the fan club. Medora sighed.

“That’s Elaine. Lucky us, we have a class with her.” She whispered back. “Her family is very involved with the school so everyone is convinced that she’s gonna win The Game. Even though she didn’t win last time.”

“She was in The Game?”

Medora nodded her head. “She got eliminated in The Game, didn’t even make it to the final round. Everyone thinks she’s got some special talent and will win this year. I highly doubt it. ”

“Y’all were in the Game together?”

Medora’s face darkened. “Yes. But she won’t make a fool out of me again.”

“A fool?” But she ignored me. She stared at the desk for a little bit before taking her stuff out of her bookbag. I copied her and started placing stuff on the table.

“Hey Medora!” Elaine stood right in front of us, smiling down at Medora. “Are you excited for this year’s Game?”

I tried to interject, “You were in The Game before, right?”



She looked at me. “Yeah, this year is my second chance,” She turned her attention back to Medora. “May the best person win, right?” Medora didn’t acknowledge her. She opened her notebook and started writing. Elaine stood there for another minute before finding a seat across the classroom.

The professor finally walked into the classroom. She wore the Obsidite uniform. Wasn’t that a little inappropriate for a teacher? Her brown hair was in a bun and her white skin had few wrinkles. She smiled and lifted her hand. Black smoke encircled the chalk and picked it up. It wrote “Ms. Whish” on the board.

“Hello class, I’m Ms. Whish. Welcome to Potions class!” Her heels clacked on the floor as she walked around the classroom. “While there are many different ways to make potions, we will be mostly focusing on the Obsidite approach. But feel free to come with your own method as long as you come to the same conclusions.”

She went on to explain the syllabus. I began to write down the dates of the projects we’d been given when Medora tapped her finger on my book. I looked up at her but she quickly looked away.

“Sorry.” She mumbled. “I just don’t like Elaine. I shut down sometimes. I’m sorry.”

“No worries. I’m just glad you’re okay.”

She gave a small smile and I returned it. I turned back just in time to hear Ms. Wish assign our first project: a salve.

“I’ll go get the supplies. Can you clear the table?” I nodded and started putting my stuff away while Medora went to the back. Potions came easy to me. That’s one of the main things I do as a Heritole Witch. *Easy A.*

Medora came back with a confused look on her face. She placed the items on the table and I almost threw up.

“What the hell is that?”

“It’s what they had. Beeswax, eyeballs, some leaves, and oil. I didn’t think we needed the batwing.”

I felt the bile try to climb its way out my throat. “No! We don’t need that.” I pointed at the eyeballs. “We don’t need that either. What animal even is that?”

She shrugged and went to put it back. I looked at the leaves. Nettle leaves. Hopefully they weren’t plucked. This was a real simple salve. I looked up to see where Medora had gone when I noticed Elaine looking at our table. She averted her eyes when she realized I was looking at her. Okay? I paid her no mind and started to crush the leaves.

“Can you melt the beeswax?” I asked Medora when she got back. She nodded.



*“Sweetheart, you busy?” My dad stood in the entryway of my room. It was the day before he left for Sinaria. I was laying on my bed, not really doing anything. Just thinking about leaving for Datiam.*

*I sat up and shook my head. He came in and sat next to me holding his journal.*

*“You already know I’m so proud of you, and I’m upset I leave before you do. But I thought you could take this with you.” He placed his journal in my hands. “I think this would help you a lot.”*

*My dad was always writing in journals. Anything he learns or anything he wants to remember. But I’ve never seen this one before. It’s a brown, leather*

*bound book with my name painted in gold. I touched the brown pages. Heritole witches don't use regular paper. We make the paper out of fallen leaves. I flipped to a random page. It was a recipe for Invisibility.*

*"Is this a recipe book?"*

*"Kind of." My dad said, taking the book from me. "It's a recipe book for you. I took notes on all the potions you know how to make and wrote down why they work. You know you can use different ingredients to make the same thing."*

*"Yeah. You have to find what works for you. See what gives you the best results."*

*"Exactly. So when your mom or you would tell me the potions you worked on, I would write it down and see if I could figure out what you used and why. You use the blue iris flower a lot. That flower pairs well with your intelligence. You don't use honeysuckle even though it's a commonly used flower."*

*He then smiled and handed the journal back to me. "I know it's not a big gift, but I thought you'd like it. It would mean a lot to me if you took it with you."*

*I felt tears welling up in my eyes. Why is my family so good at making me emotional? I buried my head into his shoulder but I knew he saw my face.*

*"Of course I'll take it. You didn't have to say all that."*

*"I wanted you to know how much I care about you."*

*"What about Iris? Does she get a book?"*

*"When she leaves, She'll get hers. I have one for your mom too. But that's our secret."*



Medora finished melting the beeswax. I added the crushed leaves and a little bit of oil.

“I usually ask Nature for her permission. You cool with that?”

“Yeah.”

I closed my eyes. “Mother, I ask that you allow this salve to work. Allow it to heal, to nurture, to restore. Thank you.” I opened my eyes.

The salve became bright green before returning to its greenish-yellow color.

“Done!”

Medora looked at the salve in awe. “Wow. Never seen it done like that before.”

“This is kinda muscle memory. I’ve done this with my dad a bunch of times. Don’t know why people are using eyeballs for this though.” I said as I looked around the room. Elaine was staring again.

Medora stood up. “I’ll show Ms. Whish and see what she says.” She grabbed the bowl and left. No sooner than she left, Elaine walked to the table. She had a big smile on her face.

“I didn’t catch your name earlier. I’m Elaine.”

“Nia.”

“Nice to meet you, Nia. I was wondering if you’d like to get lunch with me? I like to get to know all of the students at Datiam. You know, it being such a small school.

“Um, I already have lunch plans but thank you..” What was happening?

“Dinner then?” She practically threw the words at me. Still with a smile on her face though. I didn’t really have a reason to say no. Besides, it was just dinner right?

“Sure, I guess.”

“Great, see you then!” And with that she left, passing Medora on the way to her seat.

Medora looked confused as she sat down. “Ms. Whish said we can go early.”

We packed up our things and headed out.

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We were walking to Somerhall to meet up with Devyn when Medora cleared her throat.

“Are you actually going to meet with Elaine tonight?”

I shrugged, “I guess, just to see what she wants. No harm.”

Medora’s eye got bigger, “There is harm. Lots of harm. I don’t think you should go. I’ve been going to school with her since I got accepted here. She doesn’t have a nice bone in her body.”

“I’m not gonna let her do anything to me. We’re just having dinner. She probably won’t even look in my direction afterwards.”

Medora shook her head, “It’s a bad idea.”

We were approaching the guards standing at the door. One of them opened it while looking straight ahead.

“They creep me out,” I whispered to Medora as we walked in.

She nodded, “I would say you’ll get used to it but that would be wrong.”

“Isn’t it weird that we have only male guards at an all girls school?”

“Yeah. They haven’t done anything gross as far as I know, so at least that’s a bonus.”

“Still creepy.”

The cafeteria looked pretty, to say the least. It was spotless even with people eating in here. Lots of windows which means lots of light thankfully. The floors were black and the tables were a white marble color. The food must be in the back because I couldn’t see it from where I’m standing.

Medora started pulling me by the arm to the left.

“Devyn’s over there, c’mon. Maybe she can talk some sense into you”

Devyn was sitting by the windows writing in a book. When we got to the table, she nodded at us and closed her book.

Medora didn’t give us a chance to sit down. “Devyn, tell Nia she is insane.”

Devyn looked at me. “You’re insane.” She then gave Medora a thumbs up and smiled. “Just like you said.”

I let out a little chuckle and sat down next to Devyn, “Elaine asked me to dinner tonight and I said yes.”

“More like told you to go,” Medora interrupted. She finally sat down across from us.

“She asked you to dinner? I thought she was straight,” Devyn shrugged. “That’s news to me.”

Medora rolled her eyes. “No, Elaine basically demanded Nia to go to dinner with her for whatever reason. And she said yes.”

“Ohh.” Devyn said. “You should go. Maybe she’ll invite you to join her cult. Now let’s get food. I’ve been waiting for y’all since forever.” She stood up and gestured for us to do the same.

“She did not demand me. And she was being friendly. I’m just going to say hi and eat food. That’s all.” I stood up and looked at Medora, who looked at Devyn. “And I’m not joining a cult.”

Medora was still sitting down, “Devyn, do you really think she should eat with Elaine tonight?”

“Yeah, what’s the harm in it? I had dinner with her once and it was boring. She just asked questions until she got bored. Then we both left.” She gestured again at Medora to get up. “Now. Let’s. Get. Food. My insides are eating each other.”

Medora looked at me before sighing and standing up. “Alright, but if she does anything, you tell me right away. I can take her.”

I dramatically placed my hand over my heart, “I promise.” That seemed to calm Medora down a bit. She gave me a small smile.

Devyn started speed walking to the back, “Let’s go!”

We got to the back and I don’t know how to describe it. The food smelled good, I’d give it that. Smell wise, I would be so excited to eat. I was just concerned about how it would taste. Like other colleges, I presumed, they used magic in the back. Which makes sense, use the magic you have. But Obsidite magic created a lot of smoke. I didn’t want that near my food! Did it affect the taste? I hoped not. There was smoke everywhere. The other witches were getting food as if the smoke didn’t bother them.

Devyn saw my expression. “It doesn’t affect the food as far as I can tell. It’s not the best but it’s alright. If you want to be safe, go for the pizza or sandwiches.” She nodded towards the pizza stand and started walking that way. “I’m a firm believer that you can’t mess up pizza.”

Medora cut in, “Devyn, when are you gonna start cooking again? I don’t wanna keep coming here.”

“After I settle in. Gotta make sure I have enough time for it.”

I looked at the pizzas. There were all personal pan cheese pizzas except for one which was just bread. Toppings were floating above each pizza covered in black smoke. Devyn said

pepperoni and peppers and those two items floated until they were on the pizza. She smiled and grabbed the pizza. “I’ll see y’all at the table!”

Medora just got a plain cheese pizza. I asked for spinach on mine. The pizza looked good. I hoped it tasted good as well.

“You know how to cook?” I asked Devyn when I got back to the table.

She nodded. “My whole family are chefs. We all love cooking and baking.”

Medora nodded, “Nia, you gotta try it. Everything she makes is so good. She even makes better pizza.”

“I’d love to try it. What’re you gonna make first?”

“No clue. Maybe since you’re new, I’ll let you decide.”

I smiled at that and looked at my pizza. “Um, yeah I guess. I’ll try to pick something good.”

Devyn smiled, “It’ll be good. I trust your judgment.”

Medora looked at the both of us and rolled her eyes. We all finished our pizza.

“Y’all wanna hang in my room before Nia’s date tonight?” Devyn asked, swallowing the last bits of her food.

“It’s not a date-”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

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“So, what type of magic do you use?” Devyn asked.

We were sitting in Devyn’s room. It was a pretty simple dorm. She had a few posters up, a picture of her family and some jars in one of the dressers. The other dresser and cabinet faced the wall so you couldn’t open it. I was sitting on a gray bean bag chair and Medora was sitting on



a black one. Devyn was sprawled out on her bed with her head hanging off the side so she could look at us.

“Heritole magic. It’s magic we get from Nature.”

“Yeah, I’ve read about it. You have like a symbol on your body right? Can we see it?”

Medora looked confused, “You have a symbol on your body?”

I nodded and lifted up my right shoulder sleeve. Medora gasped lightly and Devyn reached out her hand.

“Can I touch it?”

I nodded and moved to Devyn. It was a little awkward because she was still upside down. Her fingers were warm.

“It’s like a tattoo. That’s so cool!”

“Did it hurt?” Medora asked.

I shook my head. “It appeared when I was asleep. Didn’t feel anything.”

“That’s so cool.” Devyn said again. “I wish I had a symbol.”

“A crest.”

“Oh, my bad. Crest.”

I turned to Medora. “What about you? What magic do you use?”

She took a deep breath before holding out her hand. She closed her eyes and whispered something I couldn’t hear. A small spirit-like creature appeared in her palm. It moved around for a bit before disappearing.

My eyes widened and I got excited, “You use Salesta magic? How does that work? I’ve heard so much about it but never tried it.”

“You kind of have to be open with the spirits. They give you the power you need to perform. It’s honestly pretty simple.

“Wow,” I said, still looking at her hands. I then turned to Devyn. “What about you? What do you use?”

Devyn shrugged, “Mine’s kinda boring compared to yours.”

Medora interrupted, “Don’t say that. Your magic is great.” I nodded in agreement.

“Okay,” Devyn said. She turned over so that she was on her stomach. “My family uses Zelts Magic.”

I looked at her confused. “Zelts? Is that self magic?”

She nodded. “We use magic within us. We don’t get it from a source or anything. It’s hard to start use Zelts magic but it gets easier once you get the hang of it.” She paused for a moment.

“I mostly use it for cooking or crafting. I don’t really need to use it for anything else.”

“Wow, that’s amazing. Self magic? Do you ever run out of magic? Like do you overexert yourself?”

“Yeah, it happens often.”

“Wow, you should show me one day.” That caused her to smile a bit.

“Yes! You need to cook for us. It’s been so long since I ate your food.” Medora said. She then looked at her phone. “Nia, shouldn’t you be heading out soon?”

“Oh shit, really?” I quickly got up and started putting on my shoes. “Thank you for having me over!” I said, struggling out of the door.

“As payment, you must tell us every detail!” Devyn called out behind me.

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Elaine was sitting at the table alone when I got there. I half expected her group from earlier to be standing over her.

“All alone?” I joked sitting down across from her.

She tilted her head in confusion. “Yeah, I want to get to know you. Why would I bring my friends?”

“No, yeah. I was just, um, just joking.” I sputtered. “Anyways, how has your day been since I last saw you last?”

“Productive. I practiced some of my magic and started preparing myself for the exam. How about you?”

“My day was pretty chill. Still settling in, I guess.”

She nodded her head. “That’s to be expected. You are the only non-Obsidite witch to come this year. A lot of weight on your shoulders, huh?”

“I guess? Haven’t really thought about it.” That was a lie. “I’m sure it’ll hit me at some point.” I pointed to the food area, “Did you wanna grab food first or?”

“Oh, I already ate.”

Huh?

“You already ate?” I asked slowly.

“Yeah, I was hungry earlier so I grabbed something. Plus I won’t keep you long. I just wanted to formally introduce myself and talk to you alone.”

“Oh. What did you want to talk to me about?”

“I think we can help each other prepare for The Game.” She took a deep breath. “We can tutor each other.”

“Wha-”

“Let me explain.” She interrupted. “I saw you in class today. Your approach to making the salve. I would have never done it that way. I only know how to use Obsidite magic. I think I would have a better chance at winning The Game if you taught me your magic.”

I stared at her. “Are you being serious?”

She stared back, not blinking. “Completely. A non-Obsidite witch won The Game last time. If I hadn’t been so focused on my own magic, I could’ve stood a chance. But this is my redo. What you did in class was amazing. If I could think like you do...”

“Why would I tutor you? And why do you want to learn Heritole magic?” This was not the way I thought this was going to go.

“Your magic is powerful. And it would be a fair trade. I will teach you about The Game and Obsidite magic and in return you’ll teach me your magic. Think about it. You wouldn’t be surprised or stunned when an Obsidite witch does magic. You’ll know the spell and how to stop it. And you’ll know what to expect when it comes to The Game.”

“This still doesn’t make sense. Why do you want to help me?”

“Think of this as a business. You have something I want, so I’ll give you something you want.”

“How do you know I want to win The Game?” I did want to win but still.

“Everyone wants to win. Just think about it okay?”

I nodded my head. “Okay, I’ll think about it.”

“Cool. Goodnight.” And with that, she got up.

It wasn’t a bad idea. I’d be more than prepared. And I’d be teaching someone my magic, which is what I want anyways. This could work.

“Okay.” I say just before she left out the door. “We can tutor each other. But I don’t want anyone to know.” She nodded and headed back towards me.

We shook hands.

*Think of this as a business.*

## Chapter 4

Something light was touching my face. I groaned and swatted it. There was a few seconds of peace before it happened again.

-Up. Get up- I groaned and pushed him away a bit.

“Let me sleep.”

-No-

I opened my eyes and glared at him. “So you start talking to me when I want to sleep?” He didn’t talk to me yesterday either. Didn’t even wave at me when I left or came back from talking to Elaine last night. I sat up and stretched. He has done silent treatments before but they never lasted longer than a day. *I didn’t realize how upset he was.* “I don’t want to fight with you, Hector. We’re gonna be uncomfortable at first but it’ll get better.” I nudged him a bit. “I would appreciate it if my friend would experience this with me and stop being mad at me.”

-Why bring me here? They hate plants.-

“They don’t hate plants, they just don’t care for them like we do. But we can change that. We can start taking care of them. And I thought you wanted to explore new places like me. Thought we could have this adventure together,”

He started tilting towards me as if he was trying to come to me. I picked him up.

-Not mad.-

“Are you sure, you were ignoring me for days.”

-Sorry.-

“I’m teasing you. I didn’t realize how different this place would be for us. You know I would have warned you.”

He nodded. A few leaves rustled gently in my ear, tickling me. I rubbed my ear on my shoulder. A couple seconds went by before it happened again. Hector started tapping my arm and wiggling in my arms.

“I couldn’t hear you, I’m sorry. I’m still waking up,” *Yeah, that’s what happened.* He repeated himself and I forced myself to hear him this time. It had been a while since I had to do that; it gave me a headache.

-We help the gardens?-

I smiled. “Yeah, we’ll help them.” I placed him on the desk and went to the dresser. “Now let me get dressed. I hope Medora and Devyn didn’t leave without me.” I made sure to clean my ears twice while getting ready in the bathroom.

\*\*\*

“So what happened with Elaine?” Devyn asked and Medora stiffened. We were in the kitchen getting ready for the day. I had quickly thrown on some plaid overalls and a white shirt. Devyn wore a buttoned down over a white tank and black joggers. Medora had on a black top with a flower print skirt. Clearly they spent more time on their outfits than I did.

Devyn was munching on a cinnamon bagel overflowing with cream cheese and Medora was drinking a yellow smoothie. Probably mango or pineapple.

I avoided Medora’s eyes. *I didn’t think she would understand why I did it.* It wasn’t like I wanted to be Elaine’s friend. I just wanted a better chance at winning. My friends back home would understand, it was nothing personal. I didn’t even know Elaine. Or Medora really.

I wondered what happened between them.

“Um, it was pretty boring actually. She just asked questions and then left. She didn’t even eat.” Devyn pushed a toasted bagel and cream cheese at me.

“She didn’t eat?” Medora asked. “Then why did she ask you to dinner?”

I bit into my bagel. “I don’t know. I found it weird too.”

“It’s because she’s insane. She probably gets off on watching others eat. Did I tell you that’s what she did to me?” Devyn said, not taking her eyes off her bagel. “I don’t think I ever saw her eat. Maybe it’s an Obsidite thing?”

“They eat.” Medora said. She turned her attention back on me. “She didn’t do anything to you?”

“No.” I said, in between bites. “Why would she?”

Medora quickly shook her head. “I don’t know, I was just asking.” She got up and grabbed her bag. “I don’t want to be late. Let’s go.”

“I didn’t finish.” Deyvn groaned.

I grabbed my bookbag. “Aren’t we gonna be early anyways?”

“Isn’t being early a good thing?” She was practically out the door. Me and Devyn were behind, scrambling to finish our breakfast.

“My legs don’t move that fast!” Devyn called after her.

She slowed down, allowing Devyn and I to catch up to her. “I don’t want to talk about Elaine anymore”

Deyvn and I nodded.

“Um, do y’all know who does the gardening here?” I asked, changing the subject.

They both shook their heads.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone water the grass. I never really looked though.”

Devyn said. “Maybe they use magic.”

“Makes sense. They use magic for everything,” Medora added.



That actually made a lot of sense. “That’s why they don’t respond to me. I thought I did something wrong.” I smiled. “I told Hector there was no problem!”

“They don’t respond to you?”

“Who’s Hector?”

“Yeah, I can talk to plants but they wouldn’t acknowledge me when I got here. Hector is my plant from home. I brought him here with me but he’s not having a good time.” I explained. “But now I get to tell him that we just have to convince the school to let us care for the garden.”

Devyn’s eyes looked like they were gonna pop out of her head. “Okay okay wait. First, I want to meet Hector-”

“I do too,” Medora interjected.

“-And secondly. You can’t take care of all of the plants. That’s way too much.” She continued.

I shrugged. “I can manage it. After they get used to me, it’ll be easier to help keep them healthy.” I stopped walking to bend down to the grass. “Y’all will be okay soon.”

“Why is it bad to use magic?” Medora asked, They had both stopped walking too. Medora kept standing while Devyn bent down next to me. Other witches were walking past us and staring at me.

“Magic takes the easy way out and can mess up. You’re supposed to put care and thought into the Earth. Especially if you use its power. How are you supposed to show you care if you don’t put effort in?” I said. I started taking a few breaths. No need to get worked up. I felt a hand on my arm. I looked and saw Devyn staring at me.

“I’ll help,” she said. “You’d definitely have to teach me though. I know nothing about the green part of Earth.” I smiled.

Slowly, Medora bent down too, making sure her skirt didn't bunch. "I'll help you too. Maybe not in the dirt department but I can talk to the Head Master with you."

"It's not that big a deal. I can do-"

"Nope! We are helping you. I already said it," Devyn interrupted.

I didn't know what to say, Devyn looked serious. Medora's face mirrored hers. I nodded.

*Thank you guys.* Medora then stood up.

"Now, let's go. We're not gonna be early to class anymore."

\*\*\*

We still made it to class rather early. Medora was still waiting for her class to start. Devyn and I had the same class, "Witches of History." My favorite class. My dad and I would read up on history all the time; he taught this class at Sinaria. Should I tell someone that they basically are handing me A's for free with the classes they gave me?

We walked in the classroom. It was a regular set up with school desks and chairs that faced a chalkboard. The teacher's desk was in the corner. There were stacks of paper all over it. Of course, they used a lot of paper here. I need to get used to it. Or that could be another thing I bring up to the Head Master.

Everything would have been swallowed by the black floors and walls had it not been for the huge windows. Windows will always be a bonus at Datiam.

Devyn looked at me. "We're sitting together, right?"

I nodded, "That's the plan unless you say otherwise."

She smiled, "Nah." She pointed to the back. "Let's sit there. I don't really want the teacher calling on me."

"Same. I was secretly wishing you didn't say sit in the front."

“The first thing you should know about me is that I would never say that.”

I laughed. One of Elaine’s friends from Potions class, I don’t remember their name, came in. She sat in the front of the class, right in front of the teacher’s desk. She then pulled out her notebook and began to write.

The class started filling up after that. There was another black girl who walked in and sat next to Elaine’s friend. They were wearing the Obsidite uniform. I looked over at Devyn confused.

She looked over at them. “She lives on our floor but we don’t speak. I don’t know why.” She then shrugged. “She must like their clothes I guess. Personally, it doesn’t suit me. Never liked tight clothes, you know.”

“Yeah, I don’t think I own skinny jeans. They feel as though they stick to my body.” I agreed.

“Right?” She gave me a once over. “But you’d look cute in skinny jeans. Not that you don’t look cute now but they’d bring out your curves.”

I felt a smile creep up on my face and ducked my head. How was I supposed to respond to that?

I opened my mouth when the teacher walked in. She was wearing the Obsidite uniform with her brunette hair in a high ponytail. She opened her bag and made a gesture with her hands. Black smoke left her hands and filled her bag, only to come out holding papers. More papers? It was fine. I’d handle it later.

“Hello and welcome to the first class of the year. I’m Ms. Temple. Right now I’m handing out the syllabus. Take a few minutes to read it over while I finish setting up.” With that she began organizing her desk and then writing on the chalkboard behind her.

I started looking through the syllabus. “This is ‘Witches of History’, right?”

“Yeah.” Devyn didn’t even touch the syllabus. It sat in front of her as she thumb wrestled herself.

“But this barely scratches the surface. We’re just focusing on Obsidite witches.” There was nothing significant about Heritole witches or really any other witch. It was just historical Obsidite moments. I’ve seen my dad’s syllabus and it had way more witches than this one. “And this is all common knowledge. I learned this already.”

“What did you expect? Have you not noticed who runs the school?” I gave her a puzzled look. She stopped her game. “This is an Obsidite school. We’re only gonna learn what they want to teach us. Other witches’ history is not one of things. And shhh. Easy A’s for us then.” She winked at me and went back to her game. “C’mon, I can beat me. Oh yeah, that’s what I think.”

“Why still call it ‘Witches of History’ then?”

“It’s still about history, just not ours. Damn, I lost.” Deyvn looked at me pouting while showing me her hands.

I laughed. “Aren’t you gonna focus on the teacher in front of the class or keep beating yourself?”

“If I don’t beat me, who will.” I tried to stifle my laughter. “This is serious, Nia. I gotta be the champion.” She had a straight face so I tried to copy her. I lasted a few seconds then I slammed my hand over my mouth to keep the laugh in. That broke Devyn and she started laughing.

Ms. Temple cleared her throat to get the class’ attention. I quickly stopped laughing but I could still hear Devyn giggling. “Okay, did you all read the syllabus?” There was a chorus of yes

and nods. “Great, does anyone have any questions about it? I could go over the sections.” I went to raise my hand but Devyn stopped me.

‘Not worth it.’ she mouthed. ‘Trust me.’

No one raised their hand so Ms. Temple moved on. “We’re not gonna go too heavy on our first day but we will starting next class. You will need to pay attention in my class if you want to win in The Game. The history of witches’ is just as important as perfecting your magic. As prep for the exam at the end of the week, we will be going over some of the topics albeit it may be a little challenging.” She raised a hand. Black smoke started lifting one of the paper stacks off the desk. “I’m handing out topics that will most likely be on the exam. We will discuss them next class.” She made a pushing motion with her hand and the stack went flying. “Take one when it comes near you.”

The topics were just as bland and simple as the syllabus. Ms. Temple said these were challenging? One of the questions was ‘when was Obsidite Magic first discovered?’ That was one of the first things I learnt. Maybe I really was ahead of the curve. The class broke out into mini discussions. Some of the girls looked confused and others looked terrified.

“This is what’s gonna be on the final?” I heard one girl cry out. They really found this hard? *Obsidite witches care more about perfecting their witchcraft than learning about history. Who am I to judge, though?* I started answering the questions on the page. I was breezing through. My dad taught me a few things about Obsidite witches.

“Why are you filling it out? It’s just a guide.” Devyn whispered, peering at my paper.

“Just so I can see if I know it or not. There might be something I haven’t read about.”

“Smart.” She sat up and looked at her paper. “Okay, not too hard. Guess I do have a chance at passing the exam.”

“You’ll pass. Then we’ll compete and I’ll have to show you no mercy.” I kept my attention on my paper so I wouldn’t laugh.

“See, I was gonna be nice but then you said no mercy. Now I have to destroy you.” Devyn said, trying to keep a straight face. She couldn’t hold it and I started giggling with her.

“Okay okay. Let me fill this out,” I said, regaining composure.

“Sure, we can compare answers after?”

“Yeah.”

Was this how the class was gonna go this year? Me finishing with the work before everyone else and just waiting for the class to catch up? Maybe I could teach myself while the class was learning, get even more ahead. I could see what books the library has on other witches and start there. My dad could send me his syllabus too. Maybe I would be even more prepared for The Game.

Devyn’s face was scrunched up as she wrote down her answers. Her pencil kept moving, stopping only when she needed to think. She finished her questions a few minutes after me, slowly sliding my paper towards her to compare answers. Her faced scrunched again as she switched between my paper and hers.

“I got them mostly right,” she finally said after a few minutes. “But isn’t the Oldra when they discovered their magic?”

I shook my head, “No, they discovered their abilities way before the Oldra. I believe it was in the 1500s. The Oldra was when seven Obsidite Witches were hung in the 1600s in this town. They refused to give up other witches. I believe that became a day of remembrance.”

“Oh, I thought that happened earlier.”

“Nope, they haven’t been around that long.”

Devyn nodded. “Okay, I need to remember that. Dates always confuse me.”

“I can help if you want.” I said.

Devyn looked at me before squinting her eyes, “Is this so you can see if I’m a challenge to you? Because I am.”

I chuckled, hoping she was joking. “No, I was being serious. I can help.”

She laughed, “I know. And yeah, I’ll let you know if I need help.”

Ms. Temple clapped to get the class’ attention. “Okay, this was a good first class. Remember we will review on Thursday. If you have any questions, stay back,” she said as we were leaving the class. Devyn grabbed my arm and dragged me out of class before I could even think about talking to the teacher.

## Chapter 5

I had my next class, Drawing 101, with Deyvn also.

“We are gonna be Tuesday and Thursday buddies. All you’re gonna see is my face.” She said as we walked into the next class.

“I’m not complaining.” I gave a small smile. She returned it.

“This time, you pick a seat for us.”

There were eight easels with drawing pads circling a main easel in the middle of the room. There were more windows and little cubicles in the back. After much consideration, I chose two seats closest to the door. There we could see what the teacher would draw without having to move.

“How about these seats?”

“Yeah, let’s sit down.”

“Have you taken a class like this before? What should I expect?”

“First, everyone wants these classes so we’re extremely lucky. And I haven’t taken an art class here. I think the closest I got was an art history class but I’m not counting that.”

I nodded. I’ve never taken a drawing class, but art classes are supposed to be easy, right? Or at least fun.

People started filling in class. I’ve seen some of them already but that’s what happens when you go to a small school. One person went to the middle of the room and stood there while everyone else sat around them. They were wearing a white skirt with a floral pattern with a beige shirt. Her hair was in a low ponytail. I waited until the seats were filled, then I leaned over to Devyn.

“That’s the teacher? She’s not an Obsidite witch?”



Deyvn shook her head. “Nope! Isn’t that great? I heard she does Zelts magic.”

“You’ve never met her before?” I thought Devyn and Medora would know all the teachers here.

She shook her head again, “I haven’t heard anything about her until this year. I just knew she wasn’t an Obsidite teacher. Plus I thought I wouldn’t meet another Zelts user here. It’s not that common.”

There’s other teachers here besides Obsidite? I wish Iris could be here to see that. Maybe I’ll tell her tonight. I knew I was right about becoming a Heritole teacher here. I needed to talk to the teacher, see how she became one.

“Excuse me! Let’s begin,” the teacher said, quieting the room immediately.

“Good afternoon class. Hopefully, you are all ready to draw because I’d like to get started right away.” She started to draw on the pad of paper when she stopped abruptly. “Oh! I forgot to say my name. I’m Ms. Lozano.” She gave us a smile and clapped her hands together. “Great. Now I’d like you all to draw an object. Keep it relatively easy. Or else the next part will be difficult. When you’re finished, raise your hand and I’ll tell you the next step.”

It took me a minute to decide what to draw. Devyn went straight to work. She didn’t even take a second to think, just went for it. I was stuck. What was simple to draw? Ms. Loranzo said to keep it easy but how easy? And how detailed?

I decide to draw a mug. It was a bit crooked but I assumed it didn’t have to be perfect. Devyn was already signaling Ms. Loranzo over. I tried to work faster.

“You’re done?” Ms. Lozano asked. Devyn nodded.

“Me too.” I chimed in, just finishing up one of the worst mugs I’d seen anyone draw. I never claimed to be an artist.

“Okay, so the next step is to pull the drawing out of the paper. Use whatever magic you're used to. I want to see how everyone does it and what they are comfortable with. Try to finish before class is over but if you need more time or help, just call me.” I nodded and Devyn gave her a thumbs up. Ms. Loranzo smiled and returned the thumbs up before going to another student with their hand up.

I looked over at Devyn's drawing pad. “Did I overthink it?” I asked. She drew a cube. “I didn't know shapes counted. ”

“It was the first thing to come to mind. She did say keep it easy.” She looked at my drawing. “That looks pretty simple to me. And if you do it right, you get a free mug. Win-win.”

I chuckled before focusing on my drawing. Pull it out of the drawing. I traced the mug with my finger and closed my eyes. “Mother,” I began. “Please allow me to pull this mug out of the drawing.” I opened my eyes and placed my hand where the handle was. I tried to push my hand through the paper but it didn't budge. Was I not allowed to get the mug? I didn't even feel anything. I pushed again and nothing. It was rare that Nature didn't allow a spell. She only did it as a punishment or if you didn't do it right. I didn't do anything wrong. And I didn't need ingredients or anything. I looked around. Most of the other students including Devyn had pulled their object out. Me and another student were the only ones left. I raised my hand,

“Ms. Loranzo, do you mind if I finish my work outside?”

“Of course. Just don't leave before I see your work.”

I grabbed my drawing pad and headed outside. I was gonna sit on the grass but I still believed I was not welcome. Hopefully just being outside would help. I tried again.

“Mother, please allow me to pull this mug out of the drawing.” This time I felt something moving inside me. I smiled. I really thought I messed something up. I pushed through the paper

and grabbed the mug's handle and pulled. Usually it took some time so the object could form as it came out of the paper. But my hand came out very quickly, before I could even blink. I looked at what I had done. The handle was the only thing in my grasp. I only pulled out the handle? I needed to talk to the Head Master about gardening soon.

I thought about heading back to my dorm. Devyn would probably get my bag. But Ms. Loranzo wouldn't let me outside anymore. But then she wouldn't have to see my crooked handle. I could just say I wasn't able to do it and throw it away. No, that was more embarrassing than showing her the handle.

After I debated back and forth in my head, I slowly made my way back inside. Everyone else was sitting holding their objects. I put my handle behind my back. Ms. Loranzo was back in the middle of the class. "I see everyone was able to do it. Good. We will be doing stuff like this throughout the semester. Using art and magic synonymously. If you have any limitations with your magic, let me know and we'll talk about solutions. Okay, show me your object and then you can leave."

Soon it was just me, Devyn, and Ms. Loranzo left. Devyn got up and showed her cube. I thought about escaping.

"Hi! I'm Devyn. Here's my assignment. I used Zelts magic." She was shaking with excitement.

Ms. Loranzo smiled. "A fellow user. I don't meet many people who practice Zelts."

"Me neither. I mean besides my family."

"Your family? That's amazing. I am self taught."

“Can I...I mean, Is it okay I come to you with questions?” Devyn’s voice wavered a bit as she rushed through her words. She cleared her throat then continued. “Maybe you can tutor me or something. I haven't met another user on campus.”

“Yes, of course. I’d love to help.” She then shifted her eyes to me. “Can you remind me your name? And were you able to complete the assignment?”

“Nia.” I said, nervously. My hand tightened around the handle as I slowly presented it to her. She examined it for what had to be five minutes before she finally said something.

“Oh. Was that what you drew?”

I shook my head. I wanted to go home. I couldn’t believe this is how I introduced myself to a non-Obsidite teacher. I was supposed to amaze her so that she would take me under her wing and show me how she became a teacher here.

“What type of magic do you use?”

“Um, Heritole.” I said in a small voice. Devyn placed her hand on my shoulder soothingly. Ms.Lozano’s eyes lit up at my words.

“Ah okay. That makes sense.” She paused. “Wait, you did this outside. Was this a hard assignment?”

“No,” I said. “I need to talk to the Head Master and ask if I could be in charge of the gardening. How they are doing it is affecting my magic. I was only able to take out the handle.”

“Would you like me to talk to him?” She chuckled a bit at that.

“I can do it, but thank you.” I had to be the one to ask.

“No worries. Let me know what happens and I’ll accommodate. Now I have another class coming in soon. So I’ll have to kick you both out. But feel free to come back whenever I’m available.”

We left the class and started walking towards Somerhall.

“When are you gonna talk to the Head Master?”

“Maybe I’ll go after lunch.”

“That’s good. Luckily we don’t have homework so you have the rest of the day to chill.”

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“Are you ready?” Medora asked as we stood in front of the Head Master’s Office. She came with me after lunch. Devyn went to take a nap but insisted that I tell her what happened when we met up again. Just like the front Gate, the Head Master’s door was gold with his title in red letters. It was a huge contrast against the black walls all throughout Olfetr. This office was behind the auditorium, almost as if it were hiding.

“Yeah,” I said, knocking on the door. Nobody answered. I tried again.

“Well, aren’t you two a lovely pair?” Medora and I turned to the voice. It was him, Damian. He looked the same as he did yesterday. Clean-shaven, wearing a suit, and a mischievous smile. He opened his door and beckoned us inside.

His office...was not what I expected. The walls were not black. It was a dark red. Not maroon, more of a crimson. There was light everywhere. I squinted as my eyes adjusted. A chandelier hung from the ceiling. There was also a standing lamp on either side of the room. To my left was a small table with two stools. An unlit candle sat in the middle of it. There was a white shaggy rug in the middle of the room which made the pure black desk standing on top of it much more menacing. He strode into the room and sat at his desk. He then gestured to the two black chairs in front of the desk.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?”

I took a small quick breath. “Can I be incharge of the gardening at this school?” His brows furrowed at that.

“We don’t have a garden. Do you mean the tulips? If you’d like to water them, be my guest.”

“No, sir. I am a Heritole witch. I need to be around nature in order for my magic to work properly. While you all are doing a great job tending to the plants here, it is affecting me negatively. I can’t link to them and therefore can’t perform spells. So to help, maybe I could tend to the plants and reconnect.” I felt my back straightened as I folded my hands in my lap.

“We have hundreds of acres of land. No, that’s too much for one person.”

“But what about my magic? That puts me at a disadvantage. Everyone else can access their magic.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t have a student taking care of the plants. How would you focus on your studies or The Game? It’s too distracting, and practically abuse.”

I opened my mouth to rebuttal but Medora beat me to it. “What if she tends to a small portion. No one else can use their magic over it. Then she’ll have her area to practice and not be taking care of the whole school.” Medora looked over at me.

Damian seemed to consider this. He looked at me and ran his hand through his hair.

“How much space would you need?”

“I think something about the same size as a quarter of the field could work.” I said. I didn’t know how to feel about Medora stepping up for me. I appreciated the help but what if he eventually said yes? What if that wasn’t enough to connect with Nature?

“Okay, I’ll see what I can do. I will send you a location tomorrow.”

“Thank you, sir.” Medora and I both said as we left his office.

Medora looked excited as we walked to the dorm. “We did it!”

“Yeah,” I tried to copy her enthusiasm. *It’s okay to accept help.* “Thank you. I hope it works.”

“What do you mean?” Medora said, looking puzzled.

“I don’t know how much space I need to connect with Nature. I’ve always had my garden back home. So I’m just a little nervous.”

“If it doesn’t work, we ask for more space. And we’ll say that you, Devyn and I will be gardening together.”

I let out a small laugh, “I thought you didn’t like dirt.”

“Yeah but you need access to your magic. I can get a little dirty. I will take a long shower afterwards though.”

“Thank you.” I said genuinely. I just met them and they have helped me so much already. I didn’t know how to return the favor.

“Of course.”

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It was about 8 o’clock now. Devyn was in the shower and Medora was probably in her room. I took a deep breath and grabbed my book bag. Hector moved as if to tilt his head. “It’s nothing. A simple session to help me. And it’s just for the exam.”

–Session?–

“A classmate agreed to help me with my magic. I’ll be back.”

I left the dorm. We’re meeting at the tables by the field. Few people were practicing but there was enough space for me. Elaine was there just sitting there.

“Hey.” I sat down across from her.

“Hi.” She gave me a small smile. “Are you ready?”

“What’re we working on?”

“Something simple today. Do you know how to use Obsidite magic at all?”

I shook my head. “Not one bit.”

“Great, so this lesson is necessary. Once you learn this, it’ll be easier to catch on to everything else.

“Okay.”

She placed a blue water bottle on the table. “All you’re gonna do is lift this bottle. Like this.” She lifted her hand. Black smoke fell from her hand and wrapped around the bottle, lifting it in the air.

“How does that work exactly? Are you controlling smoke?”

“Kind of. The magic takes the form of smoke.”

I nodded. “Okay, so is it like an extension of your arm? Like it still feels like you grabbing it without being you?”

She blankly stared at me. “You lost me.” She beckoned for me to give her my hand. “The magic comes out of here.” She points to my palm. “But you feel it all over. It’s like your palm is the only exit point.”

“I think I am following along.” I nodded. “Is the magic in your body smoke? Or does it become smoke when it exits?”

“You ask weird questions.”

“How else am I supposed to understand?”

“By doing it.”

“That’s not how I learn. I need to understand it first. “



She shook her head. “You won’t be ready for the competition in time. It’s in three days. Understand it later.” She closed my book and focused on my palm.

“One last question. Who do you pray to?”

“What? No one.”

“You don’t give thanks for your magic?”

“I did when I received the magic. But I don’t pray when I do a spell. That makes the spell slower.”

“Probably. But it makes the spell stronger and the deity feels appreciated. It’s a win-win.” I shrug. “I’ve never performed a spell without praying.”

She looked at me for a moment before speaking. “Well you’re not necessarily using outside magic. You’re gonna turn your Heritole magic into Obsidite magic. Obsidite magic works well with outside magic.”

Okay, then this should be easy. I nodded.

“So in your mind, imagine that you are grabbing onto your magic. Hold tight. Then once you have a good enough grasp, imagine grabbing the bottle and lifting it.”

My eyes widened. “I can do that.” I gulped before placing my hand over the table, palms facing up. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine what my magic would look like inside of me. All that was coming up was green dust floating in my body. Interesting, I thought, and went with that. Now I had to grab it. I reached out and grabbed it but it was gone.

I shook my head, “I can’t do it.”

“You’re not gonna get it on your first try. Do it again.”

I closed my eyes and imagined my magic again. This time I tried to solidify it. I reached out and I touched it! It disappeared after I grabbed it, though.

“Open your eyes!”

My eyes darted to my hand. Some greenish smoke left my hand. Smoke!

“I did it. I did it!”

“I told you. You just need to work. Try again.”