

## Chapter 2

### The Message

A chill wind swept up, signaling the very end of summer. However dismal this weather may make the average student, who knows that textbooks and essays are not far off in the future, one young woman was quite happy on this August date. Her eighteenth birthday had just passed, and now this young woman was preparing for the greatest moment of her life, possibly even better than the moment she was born: she was moving away to college! At long last she would escape the tortures and trials of her parents and siblings, and be able to do anything she wanted without being constantly monitored.

Finishing up her packing, Brittany moved the heavy suitcases out to her car, managing to wedge them all in after a bit of a struggle. There was no one to help her in this, the rest of her family having gone to Chipotle and were currently gorging themselves on a multitude of oversized burritos. They rarely paid any attention to Brittany other than berating her, and probably had absolutely no idea that she was leaving their house today or even going to college at all. This behavior used to annoy her, but she had since become used to it, and did not expect anything more from them.

She went inside one last time to check for anything she may have missed, and to say goodbye to her hedgehog. The college did not allow them as pets, and so Brittany had no choice but to leave her pet behind, trusting his care to her brother. Putting Tori into a hamster ball, Brittany waved him goodbye and kicked the hamster ball into her brother's room, only remembering that it was downstairs after she heard her hedgehog hit eleven steps on the way down.

Assuming that her pet would be alright and would probably only have a minimal amount of brain damage, Brittany hefted the car keys and left her home, ready for a new beginning. However, unawares to her, this would begin far sooner than she expected. She was also unaware of the fact that right now she was being observed by a figure in a black cloak, who was holding a carved staff in its black gloved hands. From a place outside space and time, this figure watched as Brittany drove her white car away. Only after she had left did the thing begin to contemplate the matter to itself, magick runes floating in lazy arcs around its cloaked form as it did so. The one in black watched the fading image of the car's taillights for a moment more, contemplating

the person who had just departed. She had power, that was easily apparent. Of course, her fledgling talent was nothing compared to the immense forces ones such as itself had mastered eons earlier, but she was well worth watching.

This thought playing in the figure's immense mind, it whispered a few quiet words, and disappeared into the ether, moving to another time and place.

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The day was burning hot, the sun blasting down through a parched sky that held no clouds. Brittany stood outside her car, studying a road map and making a vain attempt to delve her present location. It would have been much better, she figured, if she did not suck at driving. At least she hadn't hit anyone on this trip yet. That always killed her insurance rates.

Brittany finally crushed her map into a ball, giving up in disgust. Apparently she was somewhere south of Kentucky, but that couldn't be right. She thought she had driven north. Or was it east? She did not really know anymore, and decided to rest for a few moments from the unbearable heat and find the soda that was somewhere within her car.

Soon she was back in the driver's seat, chugging her two-liter of Mountain Dew and watching the crowds that filled the rest of the rest stop.

"Uh, hello?" Upon hearing a squeaky voice, Brittany shot around and saw what could only be an elf sitting in her backseat. It was only about two feet tall, with wide eyes and huge floppy ears.

"Who the hell are you?" Brittany shouted, knowing that something like this did not normally happen to lost travelers.

"I am here to warn you, God damn it." The tiny creature shot back. "You can call me Dobby."

"Dobby? Like the house-elf in Harry Potter?" Brittany asked a little incredulously.

"No it's not like fucking Harry Potter!" the miniature elf screamed, almost shaking with fury.

"Okay, okay, sorry." Brittany hastened to apologize. "It's just that..."

"It's always just that!" Dobby continued, "People are always saying shit like that!"

"You have a bit of an anger problem, don't you?" Brittany asked the foul-mouthed elf.

“What’s it to ya?” The creature shook his tiny fist in her direction.

“Are you drunk?” It was a sneaking suspicion Brittany had.

“Just a little, but I need to be a little sloshed to converse amiably.” The elf admitted.

“Wow. I would hate to see you sober.”

“Ha ha. Shut up.” The elf sarcastically replied. “I am here to warn you.”

“Alright, about what?”

“Not here.” The elf said, climbing over Brittany’s luggage to get to the passenger seat.

“It’s dangerous the longer you stay here. The Dark Lord will find you.”

“The Dark Lord, huh?” Brittany asked, “So I suppose he is hiding in the men’s restroom or something?” Nevertheless, she put the car in reverse and backed out of the parking space, not quite hitting a few pedestrians in the process.

“Aren’t you a clever one?” The surly elf spoke up, rummaging through her belongings in the front seat. “Can I have this beef jerky?”

“I barely know you, and you’re already trying to eat my stuff?” Brittany asked, but nevertheless she consented her meager food supply to the little elf, who gobbled down the entire bag of jerky in a few moments, finishing it off with slurps from a enormous bottle of vodka he had produced from somewhere within his ragged clothes. All of this Brittany watched with a mixture of fascination and disgust as she merged onto the highway and sped her car up.

“Would you like a quick pick-me-up?” the elf asked, offering the giant vodka bottle over to Brittany, in what she assumed was a rare act of generosity.

“Uh, I have to drive.” She replied, waving away the half-empty bottle. “I don’t think I should really be drinking.”

“Oh, come on.” Dobby persisted, pushing the bottle a little further in her direction.

“Did you hear me say that I was driving? Because I am.”

“Relax.” Dobby replied, taking another pull off his bottle, spilling a good deal of the alcohol on himself in the process. “One shot couldn’t hurt you...”

“Put that shit away, won’t you?” Brittany asked, becoming a little angry at the drunken elf. “That’s like an open-bottle violation or something. If I get pulled over and they smelled all the vodka you spilled on yourself, I’ll go to jail.”

“You won’t get pulled over. Trust me.” The elf said, but still consented to Brittany's demands and shoved the bottle back under his grungy clothes.

“Oh? Why should I trust anything you say, you drunken belligerent little...”

“Ooh! You have a bit of a mouth on you, don’t you!” Dobby feigned surprise at this.

“Why don’t you shut up before I step on you?” This apparently got the elf’s attention, for he quieted down and resumed sorting through Brittany’s things. “Okay, now what was this warning you had to give me?”

“So *now* you want to listen to what I have to say. Fucking typical.” The elf muttered to himself, but at a threatening glare from Brittany, continued on. “Okay, I suppose it is safe enough here to talk.”

“We’re driving at eighty miles an hour.” Brittany commented as she changed lanes, “I seriously doubt that anyone will overhear us.”

“You might be surprised.” The elf commented, but when Brittany glanced over, he appeared to be completely serious for once. “The Dark Lord has a number of powers at his command.”

“Powers? Like magick?”

“Of course it’s magick!” Dobby was obviously getting angry again. “What the fuck else would it be?”

Brittany was forced to admit the grungy elf had a point.

“So this Dark Lord has magick, then?”

“Of course. Powerful magick, too. Very dangerous spells and shit that would just flip you out.”

“So why are you telling me this?” Brittany asked.

“Because the Dark Lord’s after you, bitch!” Dobby exclaimed, expressing his frustration by trying to tear up one of Brittany’s shirts.

“And why would he be after me?” she asked.

“Because The Dark Lord wants to trap you in order to siphon off your inherent magickal skills, in order to perform the rite of El’Ran’Kasheen and defeat death, so he can become immortal and use his phenomenal magicks to conquer the universe and set up an undying regime of pain and terror.”

“Whoa. Hold on a moment. Tell me that again.” Brittany had only gotten the first few words of this little speech.

“Do I have to?”

“Yes you little bastard! Now repeat it.”

Dobby did so, and from what Brittany could tell, his second speech was verbatim to the first. It could only have been a memorized message, which meant that this pathetic little creature was merely the messenger for another person...or elf. She explained this reasoning to Dobby, ending with the question of who he was working for.

“Oh, I’m sure you would just love to know that.” The elf replied, crossing his minute arms and turning away, having apparently satisfied himself with the edible contents of Brittany’s luggage.

“You’re a messenger, you idiot.” Brittany said. “You can’t just tell me that some Dark Lord is wanting to capture me, but then not tell me who sent you. If some person is trying to warn me, obviously they would want me to know their identity.”

“Actually, you are wrong.” The elf spoke up in a very satisfied voice.

“What do you mean?” Brittany asked.

“My master instructed me to warn you, and to give you directions where to find him, but otherwise he wants his identity to remain a secret. He specifically told me that.”

“Okay, great. So where the hell is this guy?”

“Juts keep driving. I’ll give you directions along the way.”

“Can’t you just give me a map and then leave?” Brittany asked, although she did not have much hope this would be a possibility.

“Of course not.” The elf said, settling himself into the car seat. “I have to personally escort you every step of the way. Which means I will be right beside you this whole trip.” He sounded quite satisfied with himself at this.

“Oh, wonderful.” Brittany muttered to herself, but kept on driving nevertheless.

