

Cast it Out

"So, you believe me then? You're really going to come and take a look?" Dove voiced her disbelief first, still taken aback by his abrupt offer - but in truth, the excitement she felt in the moment overrode that disbelief almost entirely. Her eyes lit up as she spoke, and the grateful smile turned into a grin.

"We'll take my bike." Greyson spoke in a deep, definitive tone that left her feeling a little confused. Bike? Dove's brows furrowed a little, confusion flashing on her face momentarily. How were they both supposed to fit on a -

The answer hit her before she could even finish the thought. The man was wearing a leather jacket and riding boots. He was a member of the Vanguard - an elite force of magical action heroes. He was covered in tattoos. He was tall, dark, and broody. He was obviously talking about a motorcycle.

And at the thought of riding one, Dove paled.

"A - uhm - bike? Y-you mean uhm, a motorcycle? Oh, I've never - I mean, I don't know if I can. . . I could call us a cab instead?" Dove was really getting tired of all her own stammering. She was a perfectly eloquent speaker in normal circumstances! What in the hell gave this guy the right to be so intimidating?

The man looked down at her, face impassive as ever. "No." Dove shouldn't have been surprised, but his very blunt refusal stunned her. His voice left no room for debate. But the thought of getting on a motorcycle for the first time in years made her chest feel tight and her mind go a little fuzzy. So, she tried to debate him anyhow.

"A-are you sure? I'm happy to pay for one. And we've both been drinking so wouldn't it be safer if we just -" It was hard to wrap her mind around a good argument, with the way he was looking at her - but Dove persisted regardless, even if she felt like a blithering fool as she did. "I just, I might be too heavy you know? I could call a cab and you could follow?"

He was very good at the whole "unnerving gaze" thing, and it was hard not to squirm under it. She tucked a stray white curl behind her ear and gave it one last try. "Or I could. . . walk?" . . . It was worth a shot.

His response was simple. "I don't have to bargain. I'm not the one who wants something here." Well, he had her there. Her shoulders slumped some and she chewed on her lower lip as she took half a moment to consider her options.

It was either getting on the back of a two-wheeled death machine or let the only person who bothered to take her seriously walk out the door. . . Well, she'd done and faced plenty of things that were far more foolish and a hundred times more frightening. This would be easy . . .

"Alright then. Motorcycle it is!" She said with a bright smile, trying her best not to sound as anxious as she felt. "Before we go though, I should take a second to freshen up."

Dove didn't give him the chance to object, slipping passed him in a split second. As she did, to avoid a passerby, she brushed close enough for the scent of her perfume to linger with Grey momentarily; notes of lilac, cedar, and moss drifting up in her wake. In her rush to get away, she tried not to think too hard about the fact that she'd come close enough to bump into the man ever so slightly - her hand having moved up instinctively to act as a buffer between her shoulder and his chest.

She entered the bathroom and went to the sink once again, leaning against it with both hands as she took one deep breath and another. This wasn't a big deal, she told herself. There was nothing to be afraid of, getting on a motorcycle with a good-looking, grumpy giant of a man who she had just met. Though, admittedly as she had that thought she had to admit that did seem like the beginning of a B-rate horror flick. But in all truth, she knew that Greyson could be trusted. Even if she had no idea what he was thinking, she knew he wouldn't hurt her. Not purposely at least. She'd been through literal life-or-death situations - this was in no way one of them.

Pull yourself together, Dove. You can do this! She tried to convince herself that she was more than just a bundle of nerves and a jumble of foolish words that leapt from her tongue. She didn't know if she had what it took to find her godmother on her own. But she was brave - and gods damn it all - she could ride on the back of a motorcycle, no matter her history. And if she could do that, then maybe she had what it took to find Esme after all.

Smiling a little at her internal pep talk, she turned to leave the restroom, feeling a little calmer compared to a few minutes' prior. As she turned, a stall door opened - the brunette from before coming out from it, wavering a little as she stepped forward.

Honey eyes, bloodshot and exhausted, met Dove's, prompting the woman to offer a flimsy smile. "You're very pretty," The young woman said, her voice a little raspy as though she'd been crying. "And I love your dress. I think that man you're with likes it too." Dove felt herself blushing again, despite herself.

She appreciated the compliment, and honestly, the comment about Greyson would have made her blush if the woman didn't look like she'd just been hit by a bus. The poor thing was trying so hard to be kind, even as she stumbled to the sink. Dove watched her with worry, noting the sallow look of her skin and the dark bags under her eyes. Her hair was unkempt and greasy, and her cheeks were sunken in. The light in the room was dimming, and the shadows in the corners were once more reaching out.

Every hair on the back of Dove's neck stood, and chill moved through her. A voice somewhere in the back of her mind whispered to her, urging her to do something.

"Thank you love," Dove replied softly, head turning to follow the woman as she reached the sink. "Are you. . . doing ok?" The woman met Dove's gaze in the mirror, the look in her eyes entirely blank for a moment. As Dove watched her, the light above her flickered again - buzzing. The shadows played against her features, and those honey-hued eyes flashed black with malice.

But then the woman blinked, breaking her gaze from Dove as she gave her head a little shake. The woman then brought a hand to her forehead, forcing that flimsy smile to return. "I'm fine, I just - I have a little headache, that's all."

But tears glassed over the woman's eyes as she insisted, and her voice cracked - her entire expression betraying her pain and distress. Before Dove could push further though, the woman let out a pained yelp, hands flying to her head as she fell to her knees and doubled over.

Dove was at the woman's side in a split second. Thinking quickly, she reached into her purse and pulled out her pocketknife. Pricking a finger, she used the blood to draw a ward that would block anyone outside the room from hearing or seeing whatever was about to happen. Next, magic pooled at her fingertips, glowing a faint blue before she pressed two to either side of the woman's temples. The instant she made contact, she was hit with a frigid wave of air followed by a clammy sensation clawing its way up her spine.

Instinct is a funny thing for a witch. Certainly, as for all creatures, it is one part primal - something ancient and innate that is hard to ignore. Biology that pulls you in one direction, or fear that pushes you in another.

It is also partly learned; bits and pieces of knowledge and experience gathered through the years. Passages from ancient tomes come flying to the forefront of your mind at just the right time or something your mother said about a particular herb that you were just about to pick rings in your ear.

But at times, it is something different altogether. A flash of Sight or ghostly whisper. An animal, carrying an unseen message or omen in the way it stops to stare at you. An aura in the periphery or feeling that hits you so hard it knocks the wind from your lungs. Sometimes it is a glimpse into something's true nature - or a voice that is not your own shouting at you from inside your mind and all around.

For Dove, at this moment, it was a voice that was not quite unfamiliar, ghosting against her ear. "**Cast it out.**"

Dove quickly changed gears, her intent shifting from healing to cleansing with a push of her lungs. Energy surged through her, setting her blue eyes aglow as it moved from her very

center, through her veins like lighting, and out her fingertips. It then moved through the woman in a flash, blue light radiating from her as Dove's spell did its work. The woman bent backward, facing the ceiling to let out an unearthly wail. Light beamed from her eyes and shone through her open mouth, even as shadows that were both viscous and smoky poured out and upward to the darkest corner of the room.

When every ounce of that darkness left her body, the poor woman passed out immediately - falling into Dove's ready arms. Dove pulled the woman to her as she brought two fingers to her neck, searching for a pulse. Relieved to find one, she gently lay the woman down and raised her gaze to the twisting mass of shadow in the corner. Its very presence swallowed the light, the bulbs above the mirror and the ceiling bursting as it passed them.

Eventually, the twisting shadow-thing took a somewhat nebulous shape. A head that fell somewhere between wolf and boar sat atop a humanoid torso that then extended into something altogether insectoid; with lots of skittering legs on an elongated body, it reminded Dove of a centipede. Three sets of much-too-long arms were attached to the torso, each of them with hands that had spindly fingers to match. Two pairs of bright red eyes glowered down at Dove, who stood in defiance of it. It let loose a terrible screeching howl - making its rage at her more than clear.

Dove didn't flinch, not even as it lunged her way. Instead, she focused her energy, envisioning a bolt of lightning in a storm for a split second before she brought her hand up and snapped her fingers. With a crack, the creature went reeling back from its charge, yowling in pain.

Good. With the unconscious woman at her feet, she needed its attention on her.

As the thing shook away the momentary panic and pain Dove had just inflicted, blue flames pooled in her palm, ready for her next move. It once more turned its attention to her, murder written in its furious gaze. "Come on then big guy; pick on someone who bites back."