



A WITCHES OF PINE LAKE  
PARANORMAL COZY



MOUNTAINS  
AND MAGIC

NATALIE SUMMERS

# MOUNTAINS AND MAGIC

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Mountains & Magic

By Natalie Summers

Much love to the book that got wildly out of control.

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Book 1 of the Witches of Pine Lake. Also released w/a lesbian MC under another name.

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## CHAPTER ONE

I drove my car up the driveway, which was more gravel than driveway and had obviously long been in need of repair. Or maybe they just liked rocks for their driveways in Arizona. It was hard to tell, with the only light being the street lamp nearby. That was the downside of arriving somewhere new at midnight. It had been a long drive from Minnesota to Arizona, but I'd finally made it to the small town of Pine Lake.

See, I didn't start here. I grew up in Minnesota, in the Twin Cities, and lived there until just about a week ago. A month before that, I'd got a letter in the mail from my great aunt Penelope. It came with a note, a key, and a cottage that was apparently now mine. I could do whatever I wanted with it

It was sort of hard to believe. I hadn't even known I had a Great Aunt Penelope. I had been adopted as a baby, after being found abandoned at a hospital. We never found any clues as to who my parents were, so the fact that I had a great aunt that knew me at all, much less was able to find me, was weird as hell.

But I'd checked with a lawyer, and the letter and will were valid. The cottage was mine. When my job finally got to be too much - social work was not for the faint of heart - I'd taken the key and made an impromptu road trip to my new city.

After a week of wandering through states, visiting some tourist sights, I now stood in front of the house I had apparently been gifted. And not entirely surprisingly, it looked like it was right out of a horror movie,



especially in the late hour. The orange-tiled roof was in need of repair and the grey/orange rocks in the 'yard' had scraggly weeds erupting all around them. This was Arizona; people didn't believe in grass for lawns. Instead, like everything else, it was rocks. To give them credit, it was easier to see the rocks in the dark.

The cottage itself was built of wood, and the blue-grey paint was peeling on the sides. The windows no longer had curtains, and the frames appeared a bit broken. I looked down at the note that was still in my hand, the note that had been sitting on the passenger seat the entire trip. There was no date of death, though, so I wondered when this great-aunt had supposedly died. I knew from experience that the court system took its sweet time.

I got out of the beat-up VW bug I called Betsy and closed the door behind me, wincing as it made a crunching sound, stifling a yawn with my other hand. Social workers didn't get paid a lot, so I made do with what I had. Betsy had done a lot for me. She had got me through graduate school and through my first job. I had some savings, but I'd shoveled those into an emergency fund like Mom had always said to.

I took the key out of the letter and tucked it in my pocket. It was heavier than most modern keys and felt weighty in my hand, almost like those old-fashioned ones you'd see in the movies. I half expected it not to work, because it just looked so over the top.

I took a few seconds and looked around, trying to get a feel for the place that was, at least for now, my new home. I didn't know whether I was going to stay here or not. Not that I really had another choice, not at the moment, but if I had to, I could sell the cottage and use the proceeds to make a new life somewhere else. Not that it promised to be much more entertaining than this. I wasn't sure I could go back to being a social worker, much less work for CPS again.

There were a couple of other cottages, each spaced by a couple hundred feet, with the same sort of dour look and fraying edges. They, too, had rocks for lawns. It probably took a lot of water to maintain any sort of lawn.

I turned and looked at the haunted house, my hand on the key in my pocket. It wasn't exactly easy to turn around and flee back to Minnesota, especially at this time of night. Although my adopted parents had died a couple years ago, I could probably find someplace to live. But if I did that, then I had just wasted all that gas, and put all those miles on Betsy, for absolutely no reason.

I sighed and tromped up the driveway, grimacing at the crunching of gravel underneath my feet. I really needed thicker shoes. Tennis shoes hadn't been allowed at work, so I'd worn a lot of flats. Flats did not really work well when you were walking on uneven ground. You could feel the sharp edges of the rocks digging into the undersides of your feet.

I put the key in the keyhole and was surprised when it twisted to the right and opened. Well, wasn't that creepy. I half expected to hear organ music playing as I opened the door, except it was eerily quiet. I was sort of grateful for that. Otherwise I would have suspected my Great-Aunt was a serial killer.

The house looked about as unkempt as I would've guessed. The furniture - what I could see via moonlight shining in the windows - was covered in dust, and cobwebs crowded up near the ceiling high above. I was going to have a lot of work on my hands in order to turn this into something livable. Well, not livable. Something *more* than livable.

Home.

There was a knock on the door, and I jumped and turned around. Who was out at this time? It was almost midnight. Yes, I had taken forever to get there, I liked to take my own sweet time, thank you. The fact I had absolutely no sense of direction was entirely unrelated.

"Hello?" I said cautiously, moving so I could see the front door. Just in case it was a serial killer, I kept my hand on my cell phone. Dialing 911 probably wouldn't help much, but it made me feel better. Too bad I didn't have my mace.

"Hello?" A girl came into view, moonlight casting a shadow at her back and making her difficult to see. She looked about my age, late 20s or so, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. She had long brown hair, and kind, light eyes.

However, those eyes were currently narrowed in suspicion and focused intently on me.

I looked at her. "Hello?" I said again, as if that was going to change anything.

"How did you get in?" the woman asked. Then her eyes flickered to the key in my hand. She didn't wait for an answer. "Where'd you get that?"

I went and grabbed the letter from where I'd put it on the dusty desk and gave it to her. Maybe they thought I was robbing the joint. "I got this letter from my great-aunt a month ago," I said. "It just took me a while to get down here."

The woman's face creased as she read the note, the furrow in her brow deepening. She looked up at me, not looking at all reassured. "This is your Great Aunt Penelope?" she asked, pointing to the name.

I shrugged. "I didn't even know I had an aunt," I said. "Much less one named Penelope."

"She died 15 years ago," the woman said, looking at me.

Well crap. Now I definitely looked sketchy. "I can fetch the envelope," I said, hopeful I was actually telling the truth. I didn't know where it was, but I was certain it was somewhere in my car. I'd crammed everything I owned in there and trundled on down to Arizona, so theoretically it was there.

"What's your name?" the woman asked, looking at me suspiciously.

"Amalie," I said promptly.

The woman seemed to consider this, then frowned. "How did you get in this place?"

I looked at her like she was a bit special and pointed to the letter. "It gave me the address? And the key?"

She narrowed her eyes at me yet again.

It was starting to get tiring. I hadn't done anything wrong, and I just wanted to sleep.

"There's magical wards on this place," she said shortly.

"Magical wards?" I just stared at her. Maybe I'd misheard her. Or maybe she was crazy. It would be my luck, finding a crazy person at midnight in a

brand new town.

"What are you?" the woman asked, looking at me with her hands on her hips. "Some type of witch? Some kind of angel? Maybe you're a naiad." Her thin lips were pursed as she thought.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," I told her frankly. "I was a social worker, moved here for a break. I wanted to clean up this cottage and see what happens. And I'm really tired. So if you don't mind -"

"Oh," the woman said, her eyebrows raising as she cut me off. "You don't know, do you?"

"No," I said, looking at her with an exasperated smile. "If I knew, do you think we would be having this conversation?" What the heck was going on? This was not what I wanted to deal with at midnight after 16 hours of driving.

"I'm Kara," she said, extending her hand. "What's your last name?"

I shrugged. "I'm an orphan. No idea what my real name was. If I ever had one. My adopted name is Holmes."

It was something I'd come to terms with, being adopted. I'd loved my adopted parents; they had given me the world. They had died in a car crash two years ago, two years after I had started working for CPS. I missed them every day.

"I think you should come with me," Kara said, amusement lurking in her eyes. They were the icy shade of blue, the one you only saw on TV. Maybe they were fake. "There are some people that need to talk to you."

"Can I sleep first?" I asked frankly, glancing longingly in the direction of what I hoped was a bedroom.

Kara looked at me, the corner of her lips twitching up. "These are people you really don't want to keep waiting."

I thought back to one of her previous statements and sighed. "What are they going to do, turn me into a toad?" Witches. I scoffed.

Kara actually looked thoughtful. "No, Castia actually prefers spiders," she said with a totally straight face.

I just looked at her. That had to be sarcasm.

Yet there was no trace of it on her face. Maybe I was just going mad. I definitely was, was the right answer. Being a social worker for Child Protective Services for four years could drive a person to madness.

"Where are we going?" I asked, deciding to humor the crazy of the woman hanging outside my new house at midnight.

I locked the cottage up behind me and trotted after her. She was slightly taller than I was, and her legs were longer. I had to walk a step and a half to every step she took. It was almost obnoxious, in the way that tall people always were. I wasn't *short* short, but I was on the shorter side for a woman at 5 foot 2. It was something that had plagued me my entire life.

"So where'd you come from?" Kara asked, as we headed down the street.

I shrugged. "I was adopted as a baby in Minnesota," I said, wondering exactly why I was sharing so much history with this random person. "What about you?"

"Born and raised here," Kara said with a smile. She stopped and glanced around, apparently judging where we were. "We're almost to the main house."

"The main house?" I asked, furrowing my brow.

"It's where my mom and her sisters live," she said absently. "And my grandmother."

"What's she like?" I had never met my grandparents, but I knew they existed. Or at least my adopted ones, anyway. My brain really wasn't working, but hey, I felt I got a free pass, given how tired I was.

Kara let out a short laugh. "She's interesting," she said, shooting me a glance. "I would be careful what you say to her." There was an inside joke there, I just didn't know what it was.

"Noted," I said, staring at the house as we walked past it. It was at least two stories, but wider than I would have expected. It seemed to have the same tan sort of hue as the other buildings I'd passed, but it was better kept up. The windows had black screens over them, presumably to protect from the sun.

Kara pulled out her phone, typing away at something, and I walked after her. Part of me wanted to stop her and demand that she explain, but I had a feeling that she would just look at me with that enigmatic look and continue walking. She would win, too, since I didn't know where I was and she did. Wasn't like I could turn around and storm home.

"Where are we going?" I asked, a bit fed up from walking around in the dark in the middle of the night with no idea where I was going. Much less with a stranger.

Kara looked at me, something incredulous in her face. "We're going to the Witches' Council."

"Come again?" I blinked twice at her.

"They'll explain it when you get there," Kara assured me.

I stared at her as if she had suddenly grown a second head. Why was she talking about witches? She mentioned naiads, earlier. Angels, too. Was it code for something?

I didn't quite know what to think. That was, until a super fancy house came into view. It wasn't quite a mansion, but it was an opulent two-story thing that looked way too rich for this town. It was even fancier than the 'main house' we had passed. It was made of brick, which enhanced its fancy appearance. "Whose house is that?" I asked, pointing to it.

Kara swatted at my hand. "Don't point at it," she hissed.

I looked at her, trying to figure out the new rules of this strange world. It was just a different city, but it felt like I'd moved into a madhouse. Maybe I *was* going to go back to Minnesota after all.

"Okay," I said patiently. "Can I know what it is?"

Kara grinned at me. "That's the Witches' Council." She seemed to be enjoying herself.

"Is that some sort of club?" I asked.

Kara looked at me and pulled something out of her purse. "Biscuit?"

I just stared at her, looking at the biscuit in her hand, that was complete with jelly, that she had seemed to produce from nowhere. "Thanks, but no thanks."

"I'd really recommend eating the biscuit," Kara urged.

"Yeah, but I try not to take food from strangers."

Kara smiled at me. She was starting to get a bounce in her step now, almost gleeful. There was definitely something going on that I didn't know about.

Joke was on me, I guess.

"I've already notified them," Kara said. "So they should be assembled."

"Assembled for what?" I asked, almost morbidly curious for the answer. I was definitely in a madhouse. Maybe I was dreaming? Maybe I hadn't left the hotel sixteen hours ago.

Or maybe I was just mad. Either option was possible.

"The Council," Kara said, looking at me. Understanding flashed across her face. "They're the top four witches in the city," she explained. "The head of the Council is named Castia, and my Gram's on the Council as well."

"Okay," I said, deciding to play along. That biscuit thing had been weird, but magic wasn't really a thing. It couldn't be a thing.

This was reality, after all.

Still, that didn't stop me from following Kara up the pathway to the front door. What could I say, I could be a wicked gossip when I wanted to be.

Kara knocked on it twice, and then three more times. The door creaked and opened, revealing nobody there. I took a couple steps in, my skin prickling with goosebumps. There was no butler, no fancy servant, nothing. It literally looked like the door had opened up on its own.

Which was, of course, impossible.

"Do you still have the letter?" Kara asked, extending a hand.

I clutched the letter slightly closer to me. "Yes," I said cautiously. "It's my only copy."

Kara smiled at me, almost reassuring. "We're not going to hurt it," she promised. "They just want to see it, in order to verify its authenticity."

Reluctantly, I handed over the letter. She pointed to a fancy-looking marble bench, which I gratefully sank down onto. My head was spinning,

and I really, really needed a nap. Instead, I was sitting in the middle of a nowhere, with somebody who was talking about magic, in the dead of night.

Why, exactly, did I think Arizona would be a break? At least when a parent got mad at me when I kept them to their care plan, I could do something about it. This, I was just sort of floating along, trying to figure out what was going on.

Kara disappeared through another door, leaving me there sitting by myself.



## CHAPTER TWO

I considered running, then stopped when I heard a voice.

"You must be our new visitor," a woman said. She was probably in her early fifties, with long, thick, dark hair and startling blue eyes. Her face, however, was the same structure as Kara's. Kara's mother? That would make sense.

In as much so, really, as the entirety of this whole situation made sense. Which was not at all.

"Yes," I said helpfully. The woman looked a bit odd, which I was starting to expect just based on the bizarreness of the whole thing. She had an ivy crown on, and her clothes were green, with flowers crawling over the cloth. Wrapped around her neck was a choker that looked like it was made out of leaves. She touched it and smiled. "How long have you been here?"

I glanced at my watch, then back at her. "Ten minutes?"

The woman laughed. "Call me Iris," she said, extending a hand for me to shake.

I shook her hand, figuring if they wanted to kill me they would have done so already. "Amalie," I introduced myself. "Amalie, from Minnesota."

Iris seemed to consider that, studying me as if she could tell something from the way I looked. Considering I'd never once been over to this side of the US, I had no idea what she was looking for.

Although maybe, just maybe, there was an answer.

"Did you know my birth mother?" I asked. I had no idea what made me ask the question. I blamed it on a lack of sleep, and the whole Great Aunt thing. If the Great Aunt actually existed, then theoretically, maybe she could be traced back to my birth parents.

"Maybe," Iris said. And it wasn't in the mocking way that I was used to, the way kids used to make fun of me at the schoolyard as a kid. It was a genuine answer.

There was a knock on the door that Kara had disappeared through, and then her head poked in. "The Council is ready."

Of course it was. Maybe this was some theatrical display that I had wandered into in the middle of nowhere. Then again, I definitely wasn't sleeping. I pinched myself to make sure. Maybe I was unlucky enough to be hallucinating.

I stood, nodded to Iris, and then to Kara, who handed me the letter and key, and headed into the room. It was set up like a mock court, just much smaller. Four adults sat at the far end, behind a large rectangle table. I took a seat at one of the small tables in front of them, easing back into the plushness of the velvet chair. I had no idea what I was doing. Would I even be able to talk? Kara hadn't come in, so I had a feeling she wasn't really allowed to. But, heck if I knew.

The four people sitting at the table were all equally imposing. The one in the middle-right was an older woman who looked almost like a grandma, if your grandma gave you a look that made you want to hide under the table. Scary-Grandma, I decided. The one on the far left was a man, who was dressed in an impeccable suit. A business person? I dubbed him Thurston Howell The Third.

The woman next to him, between him and the Scary Grandma, looked like a grandma, but she wore more earrings than the others. More jewelry. She didn't seem particularly interested in what was going on, instead looking at her nails, and adjusting her bangles. I mentally dubbed her Fancy Grandma.

On the other side of Scary Grandma was this sweet looking, late-forties woman dressed in a red tunic. I had no idea what to label her. She was actually sort of normal-looking. "Thank you for coming," the woman said, gesturing to the seat that I was in. Ginger, I decided, to go along with the Gilligan's Island theme.

It wasn't really like I had a choice. But I wasn't going to say that.

"What am I doing here?" I asked.

Ginger looked at me, slightly confused. "Kara says that you showed up at Penelope's house," she said. "With the key, and you got inside."

"Yep," I said, trying to look back and forth from one of them to the other to figure out exactly why that was so baffling.

"What type of magical creature are you?" Thurston Howell the Third demanded.

I stared at them. "What?"

"What type of magic," Scary Grandma added. She seemed to be in charge. Kara had told me her name, but I had no idea what it was.

"Magic?" I blinked at them. "I think you have me confused with someone else."

"Penelope's cottage had a magical marker on it," Scary Grandma said. "Entrance could only be granted to somebody of magical blood."

I sat there for a second, staring at her. Blinked a couple times, just for good measure.

"What?" I repeated again, probably the smartest person they'd ever met. I was half asleep.

"I take it you're unaware of your magical abilities?" Ginger looked at me, concerned, but also intrigued. Maybe she was a scholar.

I was going to have to be careful about that one. Scholars were weird.

"Since we haven't introduced ourselves, I'll let Castia do the honors," Ginger said. I was sort of sad that they were going to get actual names.

Castia, who was apparently the one in the middle, nodded politely. "I am Castia, a stitch-witch and the head of this council. The man to my left is Joseph, a water witch. The woman to my right is Vivian, a weather witch,

and on my other side is Rasha, who is a metals witch." Castia looked at me, her eyes like flint.

I looked back, then glanced at Kara who had appeared and was just hanging out near the front. She was standing next to a scary-looking lady with blonde hair. Scary-lady had a nice smile, though, I decided. I just nodded at the introductions, not sure what they expected me to say. Who was coherent after midnight, anyway? Why were we talking about magic? Was I dreaming?

I stood there politely, trying to figure out what the heck was going on.

"You're not aware that you're a witch?" the middle woman asked. Castia, I corrected myself. Scary Grandma had a name.

"A witch?" I raised my eyebrows. Maybe I had landed in the middle of some reality show, or something. That was the only thing I could think of that made sense. There was that word again. It couldn't be a thing. Yet it kept coming up, and I wasn't sure whether to be excited or terrified.

"Or potentially another magical creature." That was Ginger - Rasha.

"She's a witch," the Fancy Grandma - Vivian - said. She sounded irritable. As it was, her eyes flicked up once to me, and then went back to her wrist. She twisted the bracelet in circles, not paying attention.

"You determined that already?" Joseph asked, arching an eyebrow in her direction.

Vivian didn't even bother looking at him. However, Joseph was the one to back down. Whoever Vivian was, I knew I didn't want to mess with her.

"So how did you come to take possession of this cottage?" Castia asked, apparently the designated spokesperson.

"I got this letter in the mail, about a month ago." I'd told the story so many times I was starting to get sick of it. Or maybe just sick of telling it for the third or fourth time in a row. "It was from my Great Aunt Penelope, which was sort of hilarious because I didn't even know I had an aunt." I searched the eyes of each of the council members, trying to figure out what they were thinking about my story. But there was nothing there.

I wish I had their type of poker face. My poker face was shit.