

JANE AUSTEN COZY MYSTERIES



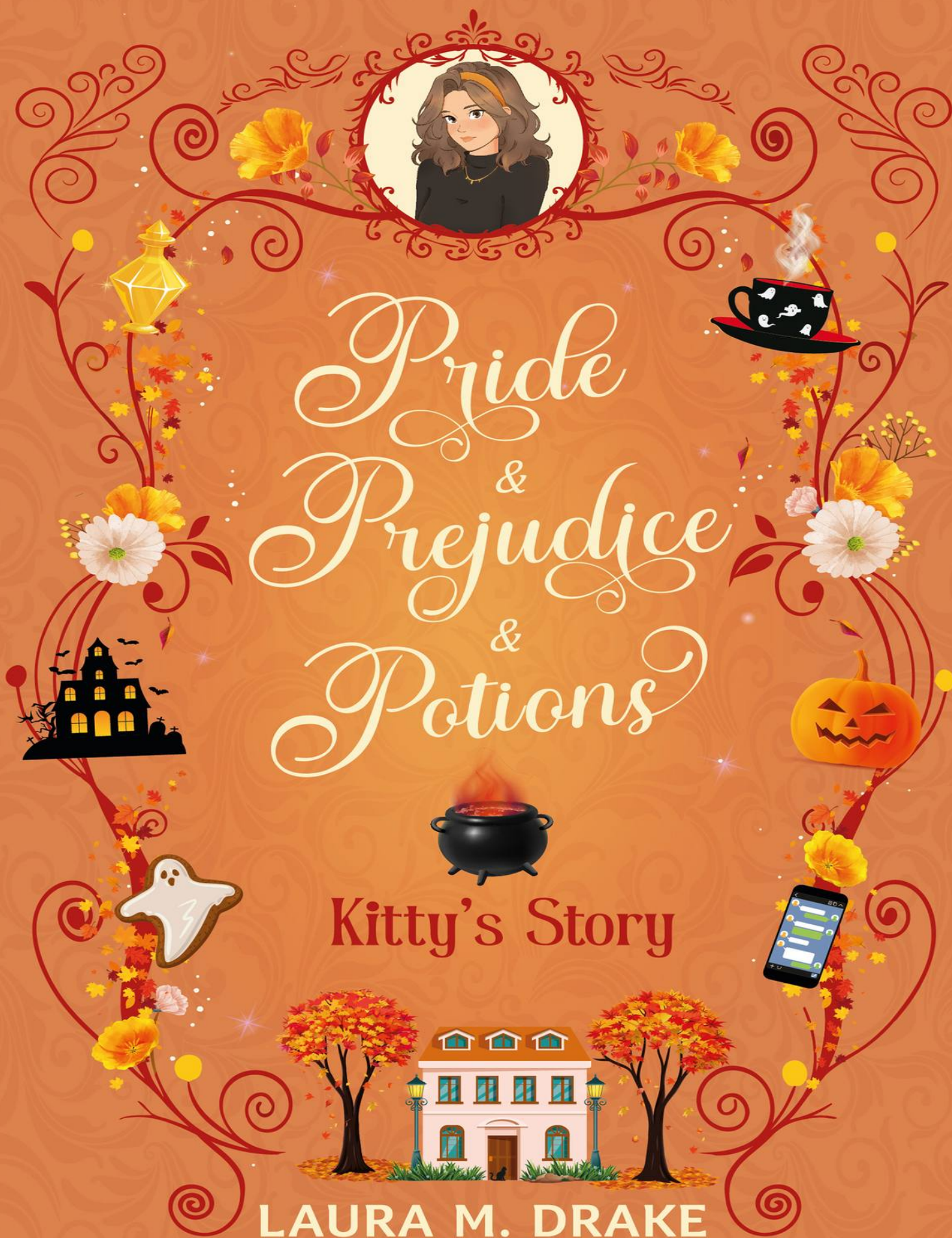
Pride & Prejudice & Potions



Kitty's Story



LAURA M. DRAKE



Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

Kitty & Riley Art

[Northanger Abbey Art](#)

[Reading Order](#)

[Austen Heights Map Left](#)

[Austen Heights Map Right](#)

[Austen Heights Gate Left](#)

[Austen Heights Gate Right](#)

[1. Chapter 1](#)

[2. Chapter 2](#)

[3. Chapter 3](#)

[4. Chapter 4](#)

[5. Chapter 5](#)

[6. Chapter 6](#)

[7. Chapter 7](#)

[8. Chapter 8](#)

[9. Chapter 9](#)

[10. Chapter 10](#)

[11. Chapter 11](#)

[12. Chapter 12](#)

[13. Chapter 13](#)

[Kitty & Jane Text](#)

[Jane's Story Title Page](#)

[Chapter 1 Sneak Peek](#)

[About Laura M. Drake](#)

[Also by Laura M. Drake](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Cheesecake Recipe](#)

[Book Club Questions](#)

Pride
&
Prejudice
&
Potions



Kitty's Story

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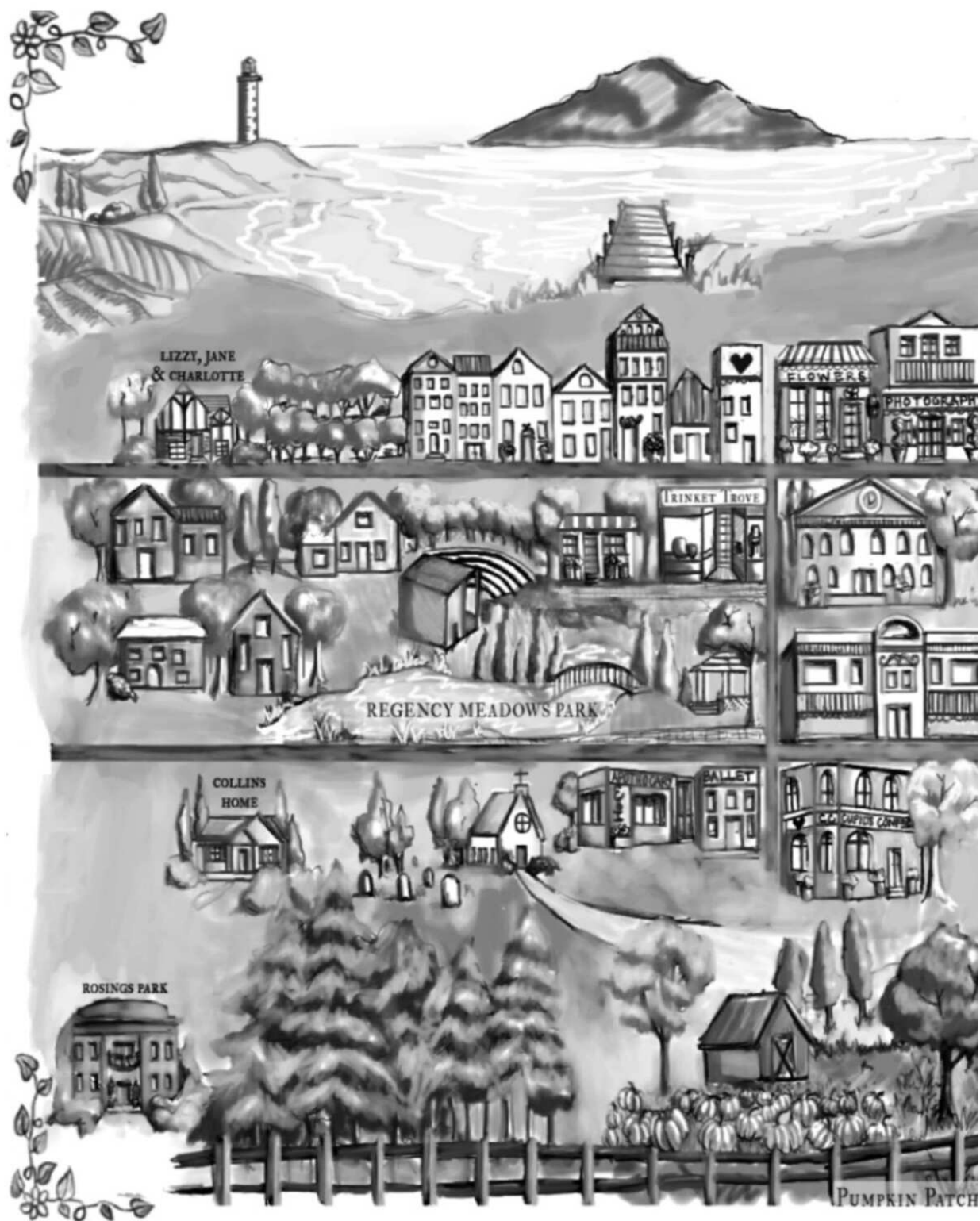
This is book 4 of 12 in
Pride & Prejudice & Potions.

Each mystery can be read as a stand-alone,
but reading out of order may reveal spoilers.

Since every book follows part of Jane
Austen's original *Pride & Prejudice*, here's
the suggested chronological reading order:



Lizzy's Story by Laura M. Drake
Caroline's Story by Michelle Cowart
Mary's Story by J. Ann Curtis
Kitty's Story by Laura M. Drake
Jane's Story by Rebecca Yockey
Charlotte's Story by Laura M. Drake
Anne's Story by Michelle Cowart
Georgiana's Story by Rebecca Yockey
Lydia's Story by Rebecca Yockey
Wickham's Story by J. Ann Curtis
Charles's Story by Michelle Cowart
Darcy's Story by J. Ann Curtis



AUSTEN HEIGHTS







Chapter 1

POTIONS COULD FIX A lot of things, but the challenge lay in deciding if they were worth the risk—especially when it came to giving one to your ex-boyfriend.

“Come on, Kitty.” Elaine pushed open the door and walked into Mansfield Book Haven.

I clutched my purse, which held my cell phone and the potion-laced cookies I’d brought from my family’s bakery, and followed my friend out of the crisp autumn air into the bookstore. The bell over the door chimed softly as we entered, and the scent of old paper and wood polish wrapped around me like a favorite sweater. A happy sigh slipped out as I took in the shelves stretching from floor to ceiling, packed with colorful books with worn spines. Despite the many enchanted shops and buildings in Austen Heights, the bookshop was a favorite of mine—that and the lighthouse.

Elaine glanced at her watch, then lowered her voice as we passed a woman stretched across the loveseat near the front window, enjoying her book and sipping from a mug. “You’re sure Graham is supposed to work at 2:00 today, right?”

I double-checked the text from Graham’s roommate. “That’s what Jaxon said.”

“I knew giving him the cookie at the bookshop was the way to go.” She smiled and glanced at me. “And you have the cookie?”

“Yup.” I pulled out the bag of baked goods from my purse, which now smelled like vanilla and sugar. I’d brought two of each cookie in case something happened; one could never be too careful when dealing with potions.

“Then you should be good to go.”

Good to go wasn’t exactly how I’d describe myself, considering I still wasn’t even sure *if* I should give Graham a cookie. It wasn’t too late to call this off. I could throw everything in the trash and head home to do some statistics homework, something with nice, clear-cut answers. But if I did that, I’d never learn the truth.

“I think you should choose just one cookie.” Elaine glanced at the bag in my hand. “More than that and you might look like you’re trying too hard.”

“Yeah, I was only planning on giving him one.” The question was *which* one. Elaine insisted the love potion was the way to “make him fall in love with me again,” which would mean giving my ex-boyfriend one of the bat-shaped red velvet cookies with buttercream frosting. I was pretty sure I didn’t want Graham to fall in love with me again and instead was leaning toward the veritas potion I’d put in the ghost-shaped sugar cookies so I could finally find out the truth of what happened before our last breakup. “But now that we’re here, I’m unsure if I should,” I said.

“Shouldn’t you be the poster child for love potions and baked goods considering your bakery sells them?” Elaine asked.

“That’s *exactly* why I’m not sure if it’s a good idea.”

Elaine grinned and tossed her blonde hair over her shoulder, claiming a spot behind a bookshelf where we could keep an eye on the door. “Because of what happened with Mr. Jenkins?”

Despite my worries, my lips curled up at the corners. Last week, Mr. Jenkins bought a slice of our mystic midnight pie for his wife and a love potion to spike it with, claiming he wanted to up the romance for their anniversary—something I tried not to think too hard about—but somehow

their cow had eaten the pie instead. For a week, Miss Butterbelle had followed him around town, mooing nonstop whenever he was out of sight.

“You know why,” I said. Mom had just gotten in trouble for abusing her magic, and while this wasn’t nearly as serious as what she’d done, it still made me uneasy.

“It’ll be fine, Kitty. You’re worrying too much,” Elaine said. “Besides, your mom was already released.”

If only I could brush off my mother’s arrest as easily as Elaine did. Elaine was Unmarked—the slightly obnoxious word the Marked used for humans untouched by magic—and didn’t feel the gravity of the situation since she was more removed from it. Every time I turned around this past month or two, it seemed like my family was caught up in some sort of scandal. And considering we were the only half-witch, half-fae family in town, we were already treated differently. All I wanted to do was peacefully get through my last year at Austen Heights Community College while saving up some money from my part-time job at Cupid’s Confections. Was that too much to ask for?

I chewed on my lower lip. “Maybe it’s better if I just let it go.”

Elaine whipped her head around to face me. “Why wouldn’t you want to get back together? Since your last breakup, you’ve told me multiple times how much you miss him.”

“I’m not sure Graham is right for me.” I thought I missed him, but the more time that passed, the more I suspected I actually missed Mom not nagging me about being single.

Elaine scooted down the row so we could have a better view of the door. “Because of how your magic reacted before your breakup?”

“Sort of. Yeah.” My chest squeezed at the reminder of that moment when my magic had hinted that something was up with Graham, that the balance in our relationship had subtly shifted. It wasn’t long after that that we broke up.

“I thought you talked to Graham about it, and he said there was no one.”

“He did.” But that didn’t stop the doubts, even if it should have.

To avoid Elaine's piercing blue eyes, I dropped my gaze to the overstuffed armchair by one of the massive bay windows where the owner's cat curled up in the chair, soaking in a sun puddle.

"This could be your chance to start fresh." Elaine took my hand. "This love potion will help him fall in love with you once more. Plus, if he eats it, you'll never have to worry about him cheating again."

I blew out a breath. Elaine was wrong about the love potion—that wasn't how they worked—but she was right about one thing. This *was* my chance to start fresh. I'd give Graham the veritas potion and find out whether he cheated. If I could confirm that in the next twenty-four hours before it wore off, I'd know if my magic was still stable or if something had happened. Then I'd move on permanently. No more on-again, off-again relationship with Graham.

"Okay, I'll give him the cookie." I didn't specify *which* cookie as I pulled a veritas-laced ghost cookie from the bag and put it on a small pumpkin napkin. Then I closed the bag up with the rest of the cookies inside and put it back in my purse. "Thanks, Elaine."

"Of course. That's what friends are for." She knocked my shoulder with hers.

The door opened, and the chime went off with a different tone as if to make each customer feel personally welcome. Elaine and I glanced toward it, but instead of Graham, Caleb walked through the door.

Elaine's smile widened. At twenty-two, one year older than me, Elaine was passionate about three things: trying different cafes, watching old movies, and Caleb. She'd told me more than once she was "100%, totally, completely in love with him." So when he'd broken up with her—briefly—two months ago, she spent a week in pajamas crying into microwaved popcorn. When they'd gotten back together, she'd bought matching maple leaf necklaces to celebrate since fall was Caleb's favorite season.

She stepped out from our hiding space into the aisle, and Caleb's long legs ate up the distance between him and his girlfriend. "Hey." He leaned down

and pecked her on the cheek. “Do you want to walk me to work today? I thought we could swing by and grab some tea from that place you love.”

“Oh, how sweet. I’d love that.” Elaine turned to me. “Is that all right, Kitty?”

“Sorry. Were you two in the middle of something?” Caleb pulled his hat off and ran a hand through his dark hair, which was a little long on top.

“No, not really.” I hid the cookie behind my back.

“Are you waiting for Graham?” Caleb’s mouth twisted. It was no secret that Graham worked here and that he and Caleb had never gotten along. Caleb had never said so explicitly, but it was the little things, like how he’d reacted just now or how he’d always been busy when Elaine and I had tried to plan double dates in the past. I wasn’t sure if it was just that Caleb didn’t like fox shifters or if there was something specific between them. I’d asked Graham about it once, but he’d laughed it off saying it was nothing.

A book floated by to reshelve itself onto a nearby row, the spines of the series standing like soldiers in precise red uniforms.

“Just figured I’d say hi.” I tripped over something as I dodged another book.

“Are you okay?” Elaine knelt next to me.

“Yes.” I pushed away a lock of hair that had escaped my braid and gave a rueful smile to the cat that had wound around my ankles. “I just didn’t realize the cat was there.”

“Animals really love you, huh?” Elaine petted the cat. “Speaking of, I think Sir has been missing you.”

Sir Whiskers, or Sir as we affectionately called him, was what we’d named the abandoned cat we found last year. Elaine had made some joke about how cliché it was for Kitty to rescue a kitty and agreed to take the cat home since I couldn’t. After that, we’d become fast friends.

“I’ll have to come visit soon,” I said.

“Here, Kitty. I think you dropped this.” Caleb handed me the cookie and the napkin. “Don’t worry. It landed on the napkin, not the floor.”

“Oh, thanks.” I accepted it and climbed back to my feet, pushing away another strand of hair that had gotten caught in my lip gloss. A quick examination showed that the cookie was miraculously undamaged, so I didn’t switch it out with the one in my purse.

One of Caleb’s friends called to him from the front of the shop, and he walked over to say hello.

“Here.” Elaine rummaged through her purse and handed me a compact mirror. I grinned at the tiny “Drink Me” bottle in her bag, then put down the cookie to straighten my chestnut curls as best I could, containing them with my favorite orange headband. “Are you planning an *Alice in Wonderland* costume for Halloween?”

“It was supposed to be a surprise.” Elaine sighed. “How did you know?”

“The bottle in your purse was a big clue.” I laughed and adjusted my black sweater, then returned the mirror and picked the cookie and napkin back up.

“Don’t tell Caleb.” She flashed a quick grin at me. “He doesn’t know about my costume choice yet, but he’s coming over tonight so we can work on them.”

I held a finger to my lips as he came up behind her.

“Well, should we go?” he asked Elaine.

“Okay.” Elaine gave me a quick hug and whispered in my ear, “Tell me how it goes.”

At their departure, the enchanted paper bats hanging upside down from the rafters rustled and squeaked. I inched closer to the fireplace that was spelled to never stop burning during the fall and winter months. It filled the store with a cheerful crackle and the scent of cedar.

The bell above the door chimed again as someone else came in. I peeked around a shelf at the tall man with a buzzed head, dark skin, and sparkling brown eyes who came in. I watched him for a beat too long before jerking back to attention. What was I doing staring down a stranger like that? Albeit an attractive stranger, but still. He wasn’t why I was here.

I edged away from a carved pumpkin, leaned against one of the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, and closed my eyes, focusing on my fae magic to calm

me. Unlike my sisters' magic that they had to activate, mine was always on, and it wasn't nearly as exciting. Dad called it "Breath of Balance" when he wanted it to sound cool, but really all it did was give me better balance, physically and emotionally. Which was exactly as boring as it sounded.

My fae magic tugged my attention toward a book on a top shelf leaning at a haphazard angle. It was like a tingle running down my fingers or like an itch I couldn't scratch. I reached up, my fingers brushing against the book, and it slid to the side. A few other books on the top shelf tumbled around me, and I threw my hands up to protect my head.

"Look out," a deep voice said before a pair of strong arms appeared on either side, while someone's chest pressed against my back from behind. Books clattered to the floor around me and my mysterious rescuer. His arms cocooned me in warmth, and my nose filled with his unique scent. He smelled like coffee and the crackling fire. And something else. Cloves?

I flushed. So much for balancing the shelf. I'd just made a mess of everything and embarrassed myself. And what was I doing smelling the guy who'd saved me?

"Thank y—" I turned around and glanced up, meeting a pair of intense brown eyes.

For a moment, it was like the shop slipped away, like the snap of the fire and the rustling of pages were trapped in the man's dark gaze as easily as I was. He tilted his head, studying me as if trying to memorize me.

"You okay?" he murmured, his voice warm and low against my ear.

"Y-yeah." I winced at how breathless I sounded. "Are you?"

"I've been worse." The man stepped back and rubbed his head, though he still stood close enough for me to feel the heat emanating from him. He bent and retrieved one of the fallen books—*The Priory of the Orange Tree*. He studied the tower and dragon on the cover, one corner of his mouth tilting up in an uneven smile before handing it to me. "Somehow I have a feeling that's not what people mean when they mention heavy reading."

"Probably not." I held it to my chest, unsure what to do with it since I didn't dare try to straighten the shelf again after my last disastrous attempt.