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Chapter Eight: At Least There Won't Be Midgets

Lilith

“He’s stalking me.”

Briar looked up at me. “Huh?”

I could never tell if she just played dumb some days, or just genuinely didn’t know what went on with anyone but herself. “The gentleman from the bank.”

“Oh yeah. I almost forgot—he left a message last night.”

“He left *three* this morning.”

“If he’s not hanging outside of your house yet, it’s not stalking. He’s just...eager.”

I didn’t like throwing accusations around, but... “This is your fault.”

“Nuh-uh. You’re the sexy succubus. You attract people.”

“You did a mojo bag.”

“But that’s nothing compared to the hotness that is you.”

I sighed. “I do fairly well already keeping them at bay. This is different.”

“Nope. Sebastian is totally in love with you too. He told me so.”

“Who, pray tell, is Sebastian?”

“My new client. You haven’t met him.”

“Then how do you know he finds me attractive?”

“Oh, right. I suck at lying.”

“You haven’t told me about a new client. Is this private or—”

“He came into the shop, therefore the money is going towards our, ‘Save Curio Killed the Cat fund.’ Plus my modest commission. We should do a fundraiser.”

“You want to organize one?” I found that to be a bit of a challenge to believe.

“Well, no. I thought that you should. I’d probably just watch.”

Of course. I wasn’t exactly averse to the idea of fundraising, but we weren’t a non-profit organization, so I wasn’t sure how we could encourage people to give us their money for nothing in return.

“Stop it,” Briar said.

“Hmm?”

“Stop it.”

“What?”

“Thinking.”

“I cannot very well stop *that*, now can I?”

“You can stop thinking whatever it is your thinking of. You’ve got that look. Plotting.”

“I don’t ‘plot.’”

“Well, you plan. Next thing that happens is you ask me to do something. Probably for free.”

It dawned on me suddenly. It was so simple, I couldn’t believe I hadn’t come up with it sooner. I turned to Briar, eyes wide with excitement.

“Oh, saints,” she muttered and dropped her head onto the counter.

“A psychic carnival.”

“You want to hire a midget? You know how they freak Liam out—”

“No. A weekend where we give people entrance for a nominal fee...say, twenty dollars per person. And they we have booths set up. Tarot readings, easy spells—”

“Hey, I don’t want to—”

“Liam can do the spells then. You can do the readings.”

“This keeps getting worse and worse...”

“We can run it over a weekend.”

“Which one? We only have...um...two more before we’re closing the shop down.”

She had a point, but I didn’t want to let that distract me. “We’ll see how quickly we can put it together. We can get people to help out for us. Alastair would volunteer, as would some of Liam’s circle.”

“What would you be doing while you’re making the rest of us work? Kissing booth?”

I blushed a little. “I’d be overseeing it, of course.”

“I think you should have a kissing booth. Bet your mom would do it.”

“Let’s not ask her to participate. We will need more for people to do, though...”

“And space. We don’t have room. And you need to pay for supplies. Those aren’t cheap.”

For once, Briar was being the logical one and it was all incredibly disconcerting.

“Yes, it will take a bit of an investment. One we probably don’t have.” I sighed and sank down onto the stool across from the counter. “You’re right. It was a silly idea.”

“Oh, don’t be like that.” Briar left her chair and walked around to sling an arm over my slumped shoulders. “It’s a good idea. We just need to exploit people so that we get everything for free. Leave that up to me.”

Liam

Lilith had asked me to take over some of the accounting for the shop that day.

I wasn't sure why, but then she seemed under a lot of stress. Truthfully, I felt a lot of worry myself, but I wouldn't let it consume too much of my time. The universe would unfold as it should.

A shadowy figure stepped into the doorway of the back office. I didn't look up from the computer where I had been working.

"You're late," I said to Briar.

"No I'm not. I was doing business errands."

"Sure."

She walked over, nudged some paperwork onto the floor, and plopped her rear onto the edge of the desk beside me. I sighed. Whatever she wanted, I didn't want to hear it, but before I could reprimand her, Lilith joined us. She sat in another chair near the desk.

Both women looked at me, obviously up to something that they were at last ready to let me in on.

"Oh dear," I mumbled.

"We're having a psychic carnival," Lilith said.

"A what?"

"Psychic carnival," Briar repeated. "Everything's ready for Saturday afternoon, except you need to do some things."

"How are we going to have a carnival in here?"

"We aren't," Lilith said. "We're having it at a small park."

"That you're renting?"

"That's where you're helping," Briar said. "You're getting it because your circle is an actual non-profit charity thing. So you're "renting" it for us, and we're having donation bins for a soup kitchen, which you're also going to have to work at for a few weeks."

How delightful. "You're doing this on the weekend? But—"

"I got the vegan restaurant next door to cater for free," Briar said.

"And why would they do that?"

“Their logo is going on all our material...which at this point is just some fliers, but we’ll have signs at the carnival too.”

“And how much is the advertising costing?”

“I’m doing that too,” Briar said.

Better and better.

“The print shop down the street is doing it for free because we’re including their logo on it.”

“That doesn’t seem like a good enough reason to.”

“Well, I’m doing some freebie spell work on the side,” she said.

Lilith briefly looked confused. “You didn’t tell me that. What is it?”

“Just a little reconciliation spell to get the owner’s wife to come home.”

We knew Fred and Stacey quite well—we used to have fliers for the shop printed there all time, when we could afford to. *Strange...* “I hadn’t heard they were having problems.”

“Well, they weren’t, until I hotfooted her out of town,” Briar said with a quick grin. “It didn’t take much, so she was probably going to leave anyway. But I’ll get her home for him and it’ll be all good.”

“I’m going to pretend I didn’t just hear that,” I mumbled.

“We figured Alastair would volunteer to help,” Lilith continued. “And perhaps the students from the Wiccan Youth Group because they need volunteer hours to graduate. You and Briar will be overseeing spell and that. I’ll oversee the whole thing and hope that we don’t have any problems.”

“And Sebastian—my new client—is going to help out, and his company is donating five hundred dollars if we hand out their fliers to people. Oh, and Lil’s mom is running a kissing booth.”

Lilith paled and swung around to face Briar. “What?! I told you—”

“She called to talk to you this morning,” Briar said. “She wanted to set you up with some guy. I told her what we were doing and she offered. Buy a ticket, get a kiss from a hot succubus MILF. I think people will go for it.”

Lilith sputtered something incoherently.

“You really think we can pull this off?” I asked.

Briar shrugged. “Probably. It was Lilith’s idea originally, and she’s the smarty-pants around here. What could possibly go wrong?”

Letters of Love by Alastair Nightshade

*Liam. My love. My life. My death. My afterlife.
My heaven. Not my hell, though. That’s Briar.*

Darling Liam.

*I’ve stood in the dark shadows the shop, dreaming
that you would break the monotony of
ceremonial ritual books and English Lit
homework with just a brief smile away. But,
alas, I feared I would be doomed to yet another
day of darkness.*

And then it happened.

You spoke.

*You stopped next to the bookshelf, just feet away
from me. It was like sunlight suddenly spread
upon me, warming me from the cold dark winter
of utter loneliness and solitude—the kind of*

winter with icy slush on the street that gets stuck in your combat boots and makes your socks wet and cold. But you, my love, warm my socks.

“You heard about the carnival on the weekend?” you said.

I nodded. The harpy had mentioned it, but I tried to ignore her.

“Can you help run the cash register that day?”

I nodded again.

“Good. Lilith will tell you more later.”

And then you left once more, but your warmth remained. This is a sign from the goddess—we’ll be working together. It’s meant to be!

Forever yours,

Alastair Nightshade

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