

# RESTRICTED SECTION



*The Origin Story of Acadia*  
**MARY BLACK ROSE**

# RESTRICTED SECTION

SOMEONE DIED IN THERE!

NO ONE HAS BEEN BACK SINCE!

## EERIE ACADIA

THE ORIGIN STORY

BLACK ROSE READS

&

MARY BLACK ROSE

BLACK ROSE MEDIA ARTS LLC

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# WELCOME TO EERIE ACADIA!



In the tiny New England town of Acadia, Connecticut, strange and paranormal occurrences unfold more often than not. The town inhabitants are trapped in a vortex of both enchanted and cursed experiences, each with a unique tale to tell.

Welcome, to the strange little town where you will find creepy and charming stories alike! We hope you'll settle in with a cup of tea and stay awhile. Maybe you too, will never leave!

# CHAPTER ONE

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ONCE YOU LOOK, YOU CAN never go back. It's why the section was labeled 'Restricted.' No one is supposed to look - ever! I'm sorry I did, and now I am stuck with a mistake I can never take back.

I'm probably stalling, getting on with this story because this is really hard to write.

I grew up in the little town of Acadia, Connecticut. I didn't even know our library had a restricted section. To be fair, it was well hidden from public view, and difficult to discover for an excellent reason.

I'm a bookish kid - the kind who'd rather sneak away and be reading than be at a pep rally. Yeah, that was me. All seniors at Acadia High School had to put in twenty community service hours for graduation. I knew I'd volunteer at the library. Not the school library, but the town one, right smack in the middle of Acadia next to city hall, the police station, and the town green where all our little festivals and farmers markets were held.

Another thing you should know about me and the little town of Acadia. Although we were a little New England blip on the radar, our community was tight. We were an all-around Americana 'everyone-knows-everyone,' kinda place. Most kids my age would have scoffed at it, called it boring.

Not me. Like I said, I was an oddball. I didn't have grandiose plans to escape Acadia after high school like my other classmates wanted to. My plan was, go to college, get my degree, and

come back to Acadia and be a librarian. I know it sounds perfectly boring and provincial, but my parents and teachers would say I was 17 going on 37, and I couldn't disagree.

Maybe I didn't mind it because I had this small group of friends who provided an unspoken united front. Most bookish kids like me have a rep for being ostracized and bullied. I was lucky because my friends were just influential enough within our school community that I was left alone. We'd all been friends for as long as we could remember, and they took it all in stride that I was who I was. Maybe it's because each person in the friend group was somewhat unique.

Ausha was gay and while she wasn't in the closet, she also wasn't super out and proud. Efraín was the only mixed-ethnicity white/Puerto Rican kid in our white-washed community, leaving him with a feeling that he didn't fit in with either the Caucasian or Hispanic crowd. Gage was probably the least of the oddballs among us. He had heterochromatic eyes. One of them being bright ice blue, and the other being coppery brown. He was a really good-looking guy, but I think he was self-conscious about his eyes. He wore sunglasses whenever he could get away with it.

It helped that we'd all grown up together in the same neighborhood and had known each other since kindergarten. Our parents were friends, and by extension, we were friends as well. At least that's what I believed my entire life.

Honestly, knowing what I know now, I'm unsure if any of that mattered at all. I'd never considered how Acadia was strange. I guess if it's all you know, you don't really think about it, but there was little bullying or crime, for that matter, in Acadia. We read about it in books and on social media, so we weren't entirely living in a bubble, but we always just thought we were lucky. I guess luck had nothing to do with it...

In the friend group, Ausha was our fearless leader. Every group has one. She had moved from Ohio to Acadia when we were all in middle school, and she'd taken to us immediately. The rest was history. If you aren't familiar, New England winters are cold, harsh, and boring and teens are going to smoke weed, legal or not.

Ausha slumped down at the lunch table and announced, "Hey guys, party at my place this weekend. Efraín, you bring food. Gage, you bring drinks, and Nora, you bring old movies. I had been working at the library for a few weeks now. Ausha had gotten into the old film noir movies, so we all followed her lead that it was a cool fad.

"What are you bringing?" Gage asked Ausha.

“The special herbs, of course. Besides, I’m hosting, so I don’t have to bring anything if I don’t want to.” She grinned.

Between February and March, as we waited for the winter to pass, it would be the same song and dance every weekend. We would go to Ausha’s, hang out in her basement, watch old movies or play Smash Bros, or whatever else we could pass the time away doing. I’d park myself in my resident corner bean bag and read a book.

That weekend is when it all started. We met up in the late afternoon, got settled into our respective places, and the fun began.

I wouldn’t have even thought of the ‘Restricted Section’ had Gage not brought it up. I really wasn’t into video games or mind-altering recreational fun, but I didn’t care that my friends were. The contact high was enough for me.

Gage slammed his controller down passionately. “Damn it, Efraín, why you always gotta play Bowser? It’s unfair. He’s so OP.”

“No, he isn’t. You just suck at this game, my man.” Efraín clapped Gage on the back amicably. “And especially so when you’re high as fuck. Me, on the other hand, the more I relax, the better I get.”

Ausha threw a couch pillow at both boys and scoffed. “You both suck. Let’s go, Gage. I’ll show you how it’s done.”

They picked up their controllers and went at it again, with Ausha playing Peach and coming out on top. She laughed triumphantly. “See, it’s not about the character, it’s about the player.”

After about an hour of grinding away on the console, my friends were pretty exhausted and high AF. I was engrossed in my book. To be honest, I wasn’t paying attention to them. I was jarred out of my imaginary world when a pillow came hurling towards me and hit me smack in the middle of my face.

“Hey! What the fuck, guys!”

“We asked you a question, book nerd,” Gage said.

“Don’t call her that,” Ausha responded defensively.

I don’t know why Ausha was so protective of me, but even when my friends affectionately teased me, she came to my defense.

I smiled sheepishly. “Sorry, I didn’t hear you. What did you say?”

Gage said, “You’re working at the library this year, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, why for?” I asked.

“There’s a town legend that says there’s a restricted section that no one, and I mean no one, is allowed to visit because if you open any of the books in there, bad things happen.”

I scrunched up my nose. “I haven’t heard of that. I think you hit that bong too hard.”

“No, it’s true. I’ve heard the legend too, but a different version,” Efraín said. “I heard Mom and Dad talking about it one time when they hosted their book club. They said a girl died in the room while doing research and now it’s haunted.”

“I’ve never heard anything like that, and I’ve spent a lot of time at the town library. I think you guys are trying to prank me.”

“No, we aren’t,” Ausha countered. “I’ve heard about it too. Just haven’t thought about it in a long time. Thought it was made-up stories like all the other crazy alleged shit that’s supposedly gone down in this town.”

I thought about that for a moment. Acadia was a strange place. There was a lot of purported paranormal stuff that had occurred over the years. I couldn’t lie, I was a believer in strange phenomenon. I’d had some weird, unexplained things happen to me when I was a kid.

Plus, I’d read too many eyewitness accounts on the [r/AcadiaCT](#) Reddit page to discount it all as a coincidence. Some people were probably embellishing or downright lying, but all of them? Didn’t seem likely. I wracked my brain trying to recall some semblance of this so-called tale on the forum, or seeing something in the library that would give proof to their claim.

Then it hit me. As a matter of fact, there was a large storage room down in the basement, and at the very back end. There was a door. It was locked. I always thought it was a boiler room or something. Maybe it was something more. If there was any credence to this ‘Restricted Section,’ then that room would have to be it. I still thought it was more likely a utility closet than a secret room.

“The version I heard was that a librarian back in the 50s was a witch researching the secret to eternal life.” Efraín started up his story.

I saw Ausha stiffen at Efraín’s words. She came from a family of self-proclaimed witches and had mixed feelings about the topic. She kept her mouth closed as Efraín continued.

“This woman was doing spells down in the basement after hours. She was writing them down in books and creating her own library. She had to practice her craft in secret because her family



was against witchcraft, and her coven was against her breaking natural laws.” Efraín stopped talking.

“And...” Ausha prompted Efraín to continue.

He shrugged. “That’s it. Something went wrong. She died, of course. Said it was a fire. They locked up the room she had been using down there. No one really talks about it anymore. There’s a lot of speculation. Like maybe she was doing something worse than trying to find the secret to eternal life. Like she was summoning a demon or opening a portal to another realm. You know how small-town talk goes. Who knows if any of it’s true. You think there’s anything to it, Nora?” Efraín had turned towards me and asked.

I shook my head. “There’s a locked room down in the basement. I saw it once when I had to carry the leftovers from the Autumn Book Sale. A big black door with a small plated sign saying ‘Restricted’ was at the end of a small hallway. It had a big padlock on it. I assumed it’s just a utility closet or the boiler room, though.”

Gage and Efraín’s eyes got wide. “That could be it! You sure it’s a utility closet?” Gage asked.

“No, I’m not positive, but honestly, this whole town has a bunch of stories. Some of them have a kernel of truth, and most of them are just made up by bored teens with nothing to do.” I looked at each of them poignantly.

“Yes, mom! You’re absolutely right!” Ausha rolled her eyes but maintained a light and joking expression.

“You should inspect that door, or ask the librarians about it. I bet you could find out if there’s anything to it,” Efraín said.

“Yeah, ask them, and then next weekend you can tell us about it,” Ausha said.

“Okay, I will.”

The conversation steered to other topics. I was intrigued now. I tried to go back to reading, but I couldn’t focus. I was too curious about that locked room in the basement. It probably was just a boiler room or utility closet and nothing more. Yet something kept nagging at me. Next shift I had at the library, I was going to ask about it.

## CHAPTER TWO

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TUESDAY AFTERNOONS, PER MY NORMAL routine, I got in my car and drove the few blocks down to the town green area, parked in the back library parking lot, and hurried inside. It was an especially cold January that year, and I hated I had to bundle up like an Arctic explorer just to walk all of 50 feet to get indoors. Yet, the wind chill factor combined with 15-degree temps was unforgiving.

As I hung up my coat in the staff room, the oldest member of the staff, Mrs. McCarthy, came up to me.

“I’m sorry dear, but we had an overstaffing incident. We actually don’t need any volunteers today. Can you come back tomorrow, though? I think Jane showed up by mistake today even though she was put down for tomorrow,” she said with a slight Scottish brogue.

I nodded. “Yeah, sure. Since I’m here, though, I think I’ll just spend some time in the reading room.”

Mrs. McCarthy smiled and nodded approvingly. Nothing gets on a librarian’s good side better than a teen bookworm, and one who volunteers to boot.

The original library was a hodge-podge mixture of an old colonial building with extensions of newer architecture. They did a pretty good job melding the newer parts to the original structure, but I still liked the older part better. You could still see the differences if you looked closely.

The original building’s main room had a fireplace. I always thought it odd that we were allowed to use it considering a fire would be disastrous, but apparently, Acadia Library wasn’t

worried. We used it on wintry days like this one. To be fair, it was more for aesthetics, seeing as it would not heat the large building.

The quiet study area and reading room where the fireplace was located had comfy armchairs and antique wooden tables. It was also where the older vintage books were shelved. I loved our library, and working there, even as a volunteer, was a dream come true for me.

I settled into an armchair close to the fire. On a random Tuesday afternoon in mid-January, the library was pretty dead. I had my pick of the open chairs.

I had no sooner settled down in the chair when my mind wandered back to the conversation with my friends about the library's legend of the 'Restricted Section.' I didn't really want to think about it, but I couldn't seem to focus on my book now that it was on my mind.

I sighed. I tried to cozy up in my chair, enjoy the crackling fire, and read, but I couldn't get my mind off that stupid legend. It was nagging at me.

I guess, if I was going to ask anyone, Mrs. McCarthy was the oldest librarian there. She was a spry senior citizen well past retirement years, going into her 80s, but she didn't look a day over 70. I had to admire her. I think the day she planned on retiring from the town library was the day she would be six feet under the earth.

The more I sat there, the more this feeling kept building. I had to know. I wasn't sure when I'd see Mrs. McCarthy again. She was the one I needed to talk to, and she wasn't usually there in the afternoon. It was strange she was there today, considering they were over-staffed.

My curiosity got the better of me, and I hoisted myself from the comfort of my chair and made my way over to Mrs. McCarthy's desk.

"Um," I cleared my throat, and she looked up. "I had a strange question. You aren't usually here, so I thought I'd ask while I had the opportunity."

"Of course, Nora. What can I help you with?" Her face beamed up at me from her reference desk.

"I was wondering if you had any reading material or personal anecdotes on the legend of the library's restricted section?" I laughed lightly as if it were a joke, but my laughter quickly died out when I saw her face fall and she blanched.

"Oh, that was some silly nonsense a long time ago, dear. We don't really talk about that."

My eyes went wide. "Oh, why not?" The words spilled out before I could think about what I was saying.

I'd never seen Mrs. McCarthy look cross, but her face shifted to annoyance and she said, "Because of the tragedy. It was just awful, and now we don't speak of it. The room is kept locked, and it's for the best. Now, that's all I'll be sayin.' It's best you put it outta yer mind." With that, she broke eye contact and looked down at her ledger she was working on.

"Um, okay. Sorry," I mumbled and walked away.

The way Mrs. McCarthy acted, it wasn't just a legend. There was some truth to it! *Well, shit,* I thought to myself. *I wonder if I can find something in the old Acadia Gazette archives on microfiche.*

Yeah, our older stuff hadn't been digitized yet, and we still had to research stuff the old way. Personally, I kinda loved the old nostalgia of it, but if there was anything to the legend; the death of a girl, or a fire, I would likely find it in those archives. Efraín had mentioned the 50s and if anything had been recorded in the town paper, it could take a lot of time to find proof. All the same, I couldn't wait to tell my friends!

# CHAPTER THREE

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THE FOLLOWING DAY AT LUNCH, I told my friends what happened. I also informed them I'd already started looking through the microfiche archives starting in 1945. I went back further than I probably needed to. I'd managed to get through most of the year of 45' when it was time to pack up and go home. As expected, I found nothing noteworthy relating to my search.

They were pretty excited about the legend, and I asked them to talk to their parents or grandparents about what they might remember of the incident. Or look at old family yearbooks they dig up in their attics or basements. They agreed to help out.

That following weekend, we gathered again in Ausha's basement. Before my friends got going with their usual bake-fest, I asked them what they'd managed to collect.

Ausha was close to her grandmother, who was a part of Acadia's underground witches community. It was something the friend group knew, and we looked to Ausha first for her report. If anyone was going to deliver good info, we figured it would be her.

"Grammy said she remembers that incident. She was barely a teenager back then, but it was something her mother and grandmother were very aware of."

"So, what did your grandma tell you?" Gage asked eagerly.

Ausha slugged him on the arm. "If you just shut up and let me finish, I'll tell you what she said. Grammy remembers her name was Ember Reed—"

"Well, if that isn't a hippie name, if I ever heard one." Gage crowed and expected us to join in. Ausha just glowered at him.

“Dude, it’s obviously a *witch’s* name, *not* a hippie name, and if you interrupt me one more time, I’m cutting you off from your share, got it?” Ausha glared at Gage.

“Sorry, sorry, continue,” Gage said penitently.

“Anyway, that’s it. She was doing spells in the basement of the library. She wasn’t supposed to be doing spellwork down there. A fire started, and she died. That’s all Grammy knew.”

“So why do they call it the ‘Restricted Section?’ Seems more like a memorialized site that no one wants to go near anymore, isn’t it?” Efraín asked.

“I don’t know, but having a name really helps. I can search the old yearbooks more easily and that will give me a date to work on. Once I have the year, searching the Acadia Gazette archives will make it easier to pinpoint whether anything was reported in the local news. Did any of you find out anything else?” I asked.

All my friends shook their heads.

Gage piped in. “Did you figure out if that locked room in the basement really is a boiler room or utility closet?”

I shook my head no.

“We should check it out. I mean, it’s probably just sealed off out of respect for her dying there or whatnot. It’s not like they’re housing a monster in the library basement!” He laughed, but none of us joined in. Gage hastily continued. “You have access, right Nora? I mean, wouldn’t it be easy enough to go down there with some bolt cutters and just snap the lock? We could check it out and bring a replacement lock. No one would be the wiser.”

We remained silent. *It would* be easy enough to sneak down there and do exactly what he was suggesting. The basement door was in the back of the library near the non-fiction section, which wasn’t overly busy at any given time. The door wasn’t locked and the only security to prevent patrons from going down there was the big sign on it reading ‘Staff Only!’ No one ever went down there, including the staff!

So why had all the air gone out of the room? It was like something was warning us to back off this crazy, self-driven quest we’d all gotten ourselves into; most especially, me.

“Let’s not be hasty,” I said carefully. “I don’t want to get caught breaking and entering, and lose my job at the library.”

“You don’t even get paid. It’s barely a job,” Gage said.

Ausha slugged him again in the arm. This time harder and he yelped, ‘Ow! Stop that!’”

“Stop being a dick! Just because Nora does community service, and you wouldn’t know what volunteer work meant if it bit you the ass, doesn’t mean it’s not real work!”

“Okay, fair. Sorry, Nora. I just meant that what’s the worst they can do, fire you?”

“No worse. They could prosecute her. For breaking and entering. She’s almost an adult,” Efraín said. His father was an attorney, and he knew better than all of us what it meant if we actually tried to carry out Gage’s crazy idea and got caught.

“It’s Acadia, though. I don’t think they’d do that,” Gage argued.

“I wouldn’t press my luck,” Efraín countered.

“Okay, look, no one is breaking into the basement of the library. Nora can research this over the rest of the winter. See what she comes up with. It will give her something nerdy to do besides her mountain of schoolwork, and hopefully, she’ll collect some cool stories to share with us on weekends. Good? Happy? Alright, let’s get baked and play some Smash Bros.”

That was the end of the conversation. Ausha hath spoken!

The boys turned to fighting over the ‘non-janky-better-working-controller,’ and I settled into my bean bag. I had my nose in my book, but Gage had put the idea there. It would be all too easy to just take a little peek into that room.

Why was I even entertaining these thoughts?

It was so unlike me to want to do anything illegal or scandalous, and yet something about this whole situation kept my mind whirling with questions. I felt a strange, inexplicable pull towards getting answers, and I didn’t know why. Nothing had ever captivated my mind like this before. I was obsessed but didn’t want to admit it because the pull toward finding out what was behind that locked door was becoming unbearable. I had to know what was there.

# CHAPTER FOUR

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FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS, I practically lived at the town library. If I wasn't doing volunteer work, I was in the reference section upstairs doing research.

After talking to my friends that weekend, I couldn't stop thinking about Gage's suggestion. I wasn't going to act on it. However, the thought of it wouldn't leave me.

At some point, I found myself in the back of the library where the non-fiction shelves were located. I looked at the basement door, took a surreptitious glance around, and turned the knob. It was a heavy metal door. I didn't think about how odd that was until now. Why wasn't the door leading down to the basement kept locked if there was a deep, dark secret down there? Perhaps it was because no one in Acadia locked their doors.

I looked at each wall in the stairwell and found the switch, turned it on, and carefully closed the basement door behind me. I made my way down the stairs, a feeling of anticipation or anxiety—I couldn't decipher which—was building inside my chest.

I made it to the bottom of the stairs and wove through the tall archived shelves of books that were no longer relevant, but maybe too valuable or sentimental to simply get rid of. In the back of the basement were boxes on top of boxes. They held all kinds of decorations and supplies for the kiddie library; holiday stuff, craft supplies, puppets, an old wooden theater, trunks, puzzles, and toys. I wondered briefly why we didn't just donate that stuff. Why was it collecting dust down here?

I wove around the boxes and made my way to the narrow corridor. At the end of the eight-foot-long passage was a single door with a plaque on it that said, 'Restricted.' The small hallway



had no lights. I took out my phone and clicked on my phone flashlight. The door was painted black. When I'd brought the boxes down and spotted it the first time, I mistook it for being a black metal industrial door, hence the assumption it was a boiler room or utility closet.

With the light shining on it, I realized it was made of wood! That was odd. The padlock on the door looked ancient, like something from the Victorian era. It had small carvings on the metal that looked foreign. Perhaps runes? I wasn't sure what to make of it, but that wasn't the strangest thing to happen. I suddenly felt something. It was like a force sucking me in, or pulling at me.

Something, or someone, was on the other side of that door, and they wanted me to open it! I was overcome with sheer terror. I found myself shaking so uncontrollably, I nearly dropped my phone. I turned on my heel and practically ran back through the basement and up the stairs. I pushed the door shut and hoped the loud clang of it didn't draw the attention of the other librarians. I decided to slink out of that area as quickly as possible so I wouldn't be spotted.

I wracked my brain trying to come up with a logical explanation, but had no idea what could have caused that feeling. For a few days after the incident, I didn't go back to the library. It scared me too much.

However, after a few days, I shifted back to my old obsession. After putting some space between the memory and there here-and-now, my logical brain rationalized that I'd merely worked myself up and imagined that anything strange had occurred.

More than ever, I felt emblazoned on getting answers.

I dove into the research at full speed, with more gusto than before. It had taken a few days to find the right yearbook with Ember Reed's name in it. She was a freshman in 1954 and graduated in the spring of 1958.

I used that to date the approximate year of her birth and tried to find her in the national census database so I could pinpoint the exact year of her death. It was odd, though. I couldn't find her. I was wondering if the name 'Ember' and/or 'Reed' were monikers that she went by. Perhaps her legal name had been different, and she only went by Ember Reed in the witch's community?

It seemed odd that the school would have allowed that back in the 50s, but I simply couldn't come up with a better explanation. Her picture was there in the Acadia High School annuals, for all four years, so I wasn't crazy. She was a real person, but I was at a dead end. It was too bad that it was so freakin' cold out, or I might have bundled up and perused the many rows of old tombstones in Acadia's local cemetery.

I realized I'd have to do this the slow and painful way. I'd need to comb through the archives of the town gazette and see if I could find any articles about her death. I'd planned on doing that anyway, but I'd hoped that securing the exact month, or at the very least, the exact year of her death, would make it easier to go right to the approximate date of the news articles I was looking for.

I started with the first of June 1958 and worked my way slowly through the articles of each weekly Gazette published. It took several weeks and then I finally got to 1963. It was five years after Ember would have graduated that I found a small article.

It read:

*Local Fire Destroys Basement in Arcadia Public Library*

*At 4 am on June 21st local fire trucks were on the scene at the public library. A fire consumed a small storage closet in the basement. The source of the fire is yet unknown. One person was said to have been extracted from the building during the efforts to extinguish the fire. Medical teams were spotted removing a stretcher from the building. The identification of the person receiving medical care is being withheld by the Acadia Police Department at this time until they can rule out foul play. The status of the individual in question is unknown as well.*

I read the article over several times, feeling sure this was the clue I was looking for. Yet, it was so vague. There was little information, but something in my gut was telling me *this* was the clue leading me to the answers I was seeking.

I panned up and looked at the reporter who wrote it. John Mahner. That name seemed like it could be a pen name or a real surname. I did a quick search to see if John Mahner was a real individual, and if he was still alive. I was excited that he was! Another quick search told me he still lived in Acadia. I scribbled down his address and hoped that he wouldn't be upset with an unannounced visit.

For once, in several long weeks, I planned on not coming to the library the following day.

# CHAPTER FIVE

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THE NEXT DAY, I MADE my way to the edge of town. John Mahner lived in a small New England-style cottage on a semi-paved road near the farmland area. My compact economy car didn't have extremely low clearance, but I also didn't want to take chances on potholes causing damage.

I ambled along at a slow 10 mph and finally made my way to the paved driveway. There was a car in the driveway that looked older than God. I was wondering if he actually drove it or just exhibited it in the annual Memorial Day parades. I wasn't into cars. Ausha probably could have identified it. I was feeling nervous, wishing I'd brought her along. She probably would have come. She was one of my closest friends.

I deliberated coming back the next day with Ausha in tow, but I didn't want to wait. There was an impatience fermenting in me. I rationalized that answers would cure me of this sour feeling. I was unsure if it really would, but I had nothing else to go on.

I took a deep breath and got out of the car. I pulled my shoulder satchel from the passenger side and shouldered the bag. I thought if I had my school stuff with me, I'd look more officious, and my lie wouldn't be questioned.

I knocked and waited. A small dog could be heard barking like mad just on the other side of the door. After a moment, a white-haired gentleman answered. He scooped up the scruffy little dog. The gesture seemed to calm the little canine now that he could inspect me at eye level. He sniffed the air between us and seemed to be satisfied I wasn't a genuine threat.

"Good evening," I said. Before I could get in my question, the man addressed me.

“If you’re selling religion or cookies, I ain’t buying. Though you seem too old to be selling cookies, and too young to be selling religion, so what are selling, young lady?” His tone was not unkind but more pragmatic.

I made a snap judgment to get straight to the point. “I’m not selling anything. My name is Nora Bradley, and I was hoping you could help me? If you happen to be Mr. John Mahner, who used to work as a reporter for The Acadia Gazette?”

He arched an eyebrow. “Yes, that’s me. What kind of help are you looking for?”

“I’m doing my senior report and I need some first-hand accounts on a particular point of the town’s history.”

His face shifted slightly. “That so? Well, c’mon in before you freeze to death.”

I reached out a hand to the little dog that was a mixed breed mutt, looking like a cross between a Terrier and a Shitzu. He sniffed at me, then let me pet his head, nuzzling into the attention.

“This here is Scooter. He’s old as me but doesn’t want you to know that. Don’t be fooled by his puppy ruse. He still thinks he’s two years old sometimes. Have a seat. Can I get you any coffee or tea, Ms. Bradley?”

“Oh, just call me Nora, and tea would be nice.”

Mr. Mahner directed me to sit at the kitchen table and I pulled out my legal pad and pen to take notes while he made us two cups of peppermint tea and we made small talk.

He sat my cup down in front of me, then sat across the table from me. “So, what information would you like to know that the library can’t supply?”

“Oh, I need actual testimonies for the report. It’s part of the assignment to interview a few people.”

He nodded understandingly.

I pulled out a photocopy of the small article he wrote and pushed it across the table. His eyebrows furrowed as he read the short piece. Then he asked me, “So, how can I elaborate on this?”

“I was wondering why there was no follow-up to the fire?”

“What’s the subject of your report?” He asked me warily.

I felt sweat pooling in my pits. I hated lying but felt I had no other choice. I was just glad my thick sweater over the top of my undershirt wouldn’t show how nervous I was.

“I’m reporting on local legends and researching back to whether there is any truth in the legend or if it’s all just made up. And if it’s a tall tale, where the origins might have originated from.”

Mr. Mahner leaned back in his chair. “Well, that’s an interesting topic. So, you’re looking into the legend of the library fire that created the infamous ‘Restricted Section’ that purports no one has ever been in or out of. They keep it locked, and no one even has a key?”

“Yes! That’s the one! You know it?”

“I worked for The Acadia Gazette for just over forty years. I’ve heard just about every legend and lore this town has to offer. Sorry to say, I don’t know much about the origins of that one in particular. I was a junior reporter back then. Fresh out of college, only 25 years old. I had the unfortunate assignment of reporting on seemingly insignificant events. All I know is that a young woman not much older than you had been doing some research down there. Some say it was witchcraft. She accidentally tipped over a candle. The door became blocked, and she burned up inside the small room, but the concrete inside kept the fire from spreading to the rest of the building.

“If you’ve lived here your whole life, you know how superstitious the residents of Acadia are. Far as I know, they locked up that room out of respect for the deceased girl. If her spirit lingered, they wanted to make sure she didn’t get out. That’s all I know.”

“Was the young woman’s name Ember Reed?”

“I believe it was. Can’t say for sure as that was a long time ago. You’d have to look it up in the Social Security database to be sure.”

“I did, but I couldn’t find a record of her birth or death. Are you sure it was her? Or maybe she used that name as a moniker. I’m trying to find her real name.”

“Huh, that is odd. You can’t find a record of her? Pretty sure that was her legal name.” John scratched his chin and looked up thoughtfully. “We were about the same age. We grew up here in Acadia together, but she was two years behind me in school. Her family and mine didn’t have anything in common. I knew of her, but didn’t really know her, if you take my meaning.”

“I do,” I said. I understood perfectly. In a small community like Acadia, you could name every person in the yearbook without looking at the printed name, but to say you knew intimate details of each individual wasn’t possible. Acadia was a small New England town, but not that tiny.

“That is quite odd that you can’t find a record of her. I’m sure that was her name…” John mumbled. Then, as if shaking it off, he looked at me. “Is there anything else I can help you with?”

“Yes. Was there anything that night of the fire that seemed strange to you? Why do people say that she was summoning a demon or opening a portal? Was she really a part of the underground witches community?”

“Well, as I stated before, people in Acadia have always been a superstitious lot for the most part. And as for Ember being a witch, I suppose it’s possible. The name certainly fits. I doubt she was into the kind of witchcraft that was dark and evil. She didn’t seem the sort, but looks can be deceiving. Perhaps she was, and I didn’t know it. If she intended to do anything nefarious, I don’t think she succeeded.”

I nodded. I felt utterly dejected. None of what Mr. Mahner said gave me more than what I already knew.

Maybe he read my body language and said, “Have you tried talking to Mrs. McCarthy, who works reference desk at the library?”

I raised an eyebrow. “Not exactly. Why for?”

“She was there the night of the fire. First librarian on the scene. Seemed really upset about the whole thing that night. I think she knew Ember better than I did. They worked at the library at the same time. I think they were friends. At the very least, colleagues.”

The shock on my face must have been apparent.

“You look surprised?” Mr. Mahner asked.

“Actually, funny you mention it. I tried to ask her, but she was reluctant to talk about it.”

John nodded solemnly, then said, “Perhaps even after all these years, she still feels the pain of losing her friend?” He offered an explanation for clearly getting blown off by old Mrs. McCarthy. However, down in my gut, something was telling me it was beyond that. I felt she knew something more and just wasn’t telling me. My mind was reeling with the biggest question, though; why?

I thanked Mr. Mahner and gave little Scooter one last scratch behind the ears before leaving. I felt like I was at a dead end—again.

I wanted to approach Mrs. McCarthy, but her reaction to me broaching the subject before was so uncharacteristically brusque, that I was afraid to try again. I was certain she wouldn’t answer any of my questions. I would only press her as a last resort. I went back to the drawing board, trying to see what else I could research.

I spent several more weeks digging up news archives and town history books. We were nearing the end of February and hoping for an early spring, but winter would not be so forgiving this year. The cold weather and late snow continued to plague us.

It was late one evening. I wasn't paying attention. Mrs. McCarthy laid a hand on my shoulder and I nearly came out of my skin.

"What are you working on, dear? Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare y—" She stopped mid-sentence. She must have seen my notepad on the desk and glimpsed the ramblings.

In my frustration, I'd written in big letters, "*WHAT'S BEHIND THE DOOR?!?!?!?*" and circled it again and again.

I looked at her and quickly flipped over my notepad, mumbling something about a big school project, but it was too late. She'd already seen it.

"Nora," her tone was sharp, "You need to listen to me, child. Nothin' good will come of this obsession you've developed concernin' that damn door. You need to let it go. Do you understand? Let—it—go!"

I nodded and watched her walk off. She called back over her shoulder, "And pack up, we're closin' in five."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, even though she was out of earshot now.

What the hell was behind that door? What did Mrs. McCarthy know, that she didn't want me to know?

I understand human nature. I read a lot. I'm an ace in school in almost every subject. I know that when people are told 'No, you can't have it,' the psychology of the brain makes us want it more. Experts don't even exactly know why this is, but it's something experts can agree is a fact.

To say I'd fallen prey to the human trappings of mere ego was beyond what I was actually experiencing. This, of course, added to my growing obsession, but it wasn't merely my ego driving me. It was this need, this primal urge, maybe? I couldn't place it. I just felt compelled to know what was behind the door. I had to have my questions answered, and they were all behind that damn door!

It was after that night Mrs. McCarthy told me to stay away, I formed a plan. I should have listened to her, but I didn't.

I was determined to break into that door, and I had a plan for exactly how I would succeed.

# CHAPTER SIX

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I KNEW I NEEDED TO come to the library first thing Saturday morning, and camp all day down in the basement. My family wouldn't suspect anything. I'd say I was going to be at the library all day, then lie that I'd be at Ausha's for a sleepover. Mrs. McCarthy wasn't there on Saturday, so I wouldn't have to worry about her.

Being in the library basement *would* suck ass, and it would be creepy as fuck, but it was the best plan I had. I planned to bring a ton of supplies; warm blankets, flashlights, snacks, an iPad stocked with endless books and games, extra battery packs, and, of course, bolt cutters.

I didn't just happen to own a pair of those, so I'd have to purchase them. I was afraid of being seen in the local store buying a pair. If I somehow ran into Mrs. McCarthy by some god-awful luck, she'd know what I was up to for sure. So I got up extra early and drove about twenty minutes outside of Acadia to another larger town. I strode into the big box hardware store the minute they opened, found what I was looking for, and did self-checkout as quickly as possible. Since they opened at 8 am and the library opened at 9, it was perfect.

Bolt cutters are long and bulky, so I had to pack a duffle bag with my backpack. It would look strange, but if anyone asked, I'd say that it was my brother's gym bag with his baseball equipment, and he was stopping by to pick it up. Hopefully, they wouldn't notice that it was still too early for baseball season. My only sticking point was Mrs. McCarthy, hoping she would stick to her routine and not show up at the library.

Luck was in my favor because I got in, walked straight to the back of the library, and slipped into the basement, with barely a nod from Janet, the fresh-outta-college newbie who was tasked



with paying her dues as the newest librarian. That meant working Saturday mornings. She looked especially glum, and instead of chit-chatting with her, I smiled and kept on going.

I clicked on my phone flashlight and made my way down the stairs as quietly as I could. I knew no one was down there, but sifting through the darkness made the place radiate with a sinister vibe. I almost backed out, but that pull kept my feet firmly going forward, one step after another, and another, until I was at the bottom.

Something about stepping down onto the concrete floor caused a feeling of finality that was irrationally ominous. I quickly brushed it off though, chalking it up to the darkness of the room, choosing to focus on the other part of my emotions. There was elation and excitement that I was mere hours to finally getting the answers I felt certain I would obtain.

No one ever came down into the basement, but on the very off chance they might, I set up a little fort with the holiday boxes near the hallway of the padlocked door. I wanted to take cover and hide if someone were down there for some random reason. I set up a little nest within the walls of the boxes acting like a strange Minecraft-looking hut.

If I wasn't scared shitless, the whole thing might have been cozy. I had my back to the wall, and with the boxes surrounding me like a child in a small castle, now all I had to do was make the long, excruciating wait until 5 pm when the library closed. On a Saturday, the staff would have already done the closing duties and been out the door by 5:10. I wouldn't have to wait long.

A few times, the waiting, combined with the cloistering darkness, I nearly bailed on my own plan. I wanted to just cut the lock and say, to hell with it, if someone finds me, then they do. However, something kept me rooted to my spot. I'd come too far now to blow it. I'd spent weeks researching Ember and her mysterious death. I sat in the dark with my measly iPad illuminating my face. I kept my ears strained in one direction for any staff entering the basement, and for some irrational reason, the other direction aimed at the locked door. As if there might be a monster trapped in there, and if something was going to come hurtling out at me, I'd want some forewarning.

No sounds emanated from the locked room. However, that feeling I'd experienced some weeks ago grew stronger by the second. With each passing hour, I felt more and more compelled to open the door and get my answers. It was likely the single reason I didn't turn tail and run away from the crazy situation I'd put myself in.

Finally, at 5:15 pm, I could no longer hear footsteps above my head. It was completely silent. I was certain everyone was gone. I rose from my spot and stretched. It had been a while since I'd done this, and I was achy and stiff.

I didn't spend too much time working my sore muscles out. I walked into the short eight-foot corridor, stood in front of the door, and set up the flashlight on the ground with the beam pointed up toward the lock. I removed the bolt cutters and positioned them on the lock. I'd never done this before. I wasn't even sure it would work.

I closed my eyes and pushed the levers together. The lock snapped with an unexpected softness. I was certain there would be resistance, and yet the feeling was like sharp scissors cutting through a soft marshmallow. My eyes popped open in surprise, wondering if I'd not cut through it at all. No, it snapped in half. It was cut and dangling on the hook.

I was hesitant to touch it. Although, I can't say why. I carefully pulled the lock off the door and clicked the latch on the old door handle. It opened easily. I braced myself for squeaky or stuck hinges, but neither was a problem. This surprised and unnerved me. Something about the ease of breaking the lock felt disquieting.

I don't know what I was expecting when I walked in, but it wasn't what I was met with. The room was not big, probably about six feet by six feet. In the center of the room, there was a single wooden table with a chair pushed in. On top of the table were two ancient tomes lying flat, one resting directly on top of the other.

I shined my light around and saw there were candles in the four corners of the room sitting atop simple wooden pedestals. I inspected them closer and saw a box of matches near the base of the pillar near the door. The box didn't have as much dust as I would have thought. I struck a match and lit each of the four candles, noting they seemed to be ritual candles. Ember was definitely working on some sort of magick in this room—the kind Ausha had explained to me once was spelled with a 'k' at the end. The room lit up well, bathing everything in a soft orange glow. The four walls were concrete, painted white.

Until this point, the anticipation of what I would find was so overwhelming, that the most obvious thought had not occurred to me. Then it suddenly hit. This room didn't have any traces of a fire. The walls should have been scorched and black if they'd simply locked it up, as Mr. Mahner had suggested. However, the room was intact. Perhaps someone had cleaned and restored the room, but that seemed unlikely based on the legend and Mr. Mahner's information.

I felt confused but turned to the books on the table. I was certain that they would answer my questions.

I sat down at the table and inspected them. I pulled the top book towards me and wondered why it was not more dusty. The book was indeed a tome, bigger than most. It was several inches thick, bound in old leather, with pages that looked to be pressed in the way old-fashioned paper was made. The front cover was embossed with the title 'Book of Fate.' I gently pushed that one aside, inspecting the second book. It was very similar to the other one except it read, 'Book of Folly.'

I pulled the 'Book of Fate' back towards me and opened it. I was ready. I knew this was it. All that I had been feeling and searching for would be answered right now. Except when I opened the book, the pages were blank. An irrational desperation filled me as I practically tore at each page, turning one after the next.

"What? No, this can't be," I said, mumbling the words out loud.

"You can't read them because they are enchanted," Mrs. McCarthy's voice was soft, but I nearly came out of my skin. My head whipped to the entrance of the door. She stood there looking at me with an expression of pity.

"I can explain," I groped for something to say that would, in fact, explain why I'd broken into the library and why she shouldn't call the cops. However, taking a closer look at her face told me she would not report me for breaking and entering.

"You don't need to explain yer'self. I, on the other hand, do. You need answers, and you won't find them in either of those damn books. At least not right now." There was no mistaking the anger in voice, but I got the distinct feeling she wasn't angry with me. "Come with me. Let's go up to my office and we'll talk."

I nodded, glancing behind me, wondering if I should extinguish the candles.

As if Mrs. McCarthy could read my thoughts, she said, "Leave it all. It will return to the way you found it the moment you leave this basement."

I stared at her incredulously. I wasn't sure I believed her, but also I wasn't in any position to argue. If I didn't want to go to jail, I needed to be compliant.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

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I LEFT ALL MY BELONGINGS behind and followed the older woman up the stairs. She moved slowly, as if lifting each leg up the stairs was a painful trek up a steep mountain. When we reached the top, she continued on in the same slow manner towards her office. The light was already on, and she motioned for me to sit in one of her chairs across from her desk.

I'd never been in the principal's office for disciplinary action in school, but I was certain this was exactly what it felt like.

She sat down and steepled her hands in front of her. She blew out a long breath.

"Nora, I'm dyin.' I have maybe 3 or 4 months at best. I have a terminal illness and much to my friend's and sister's chagrin, I've opted not to do the chemo."

If there was any way I imagined this conversation starting, it was not like this. I was rendered speechless. All I could seem to mumble was, "I'm so sorry to hear that."

"Don't be. I've lived a good life. Would have been better if not for the curse, but that is why we are here. We must discuss it because it now affects you in ways I wish it had not. But here we are."

"Curse?" I said dumbly.

"Why couldn't you just listen to me and leave well enough alone," she said, not so much to me, but more of a lament of our fate that she'd resigned to. She sighed heavily. "I even worked as many hours as I could handle when I realized it was you. I realized you were the next one that had been chosen, and I foolishly thought that if I made you stay away, prevented you from discovering it, that it would break the line."

I could tell she was working out difficult emotions. In a matter of moments, my life had changed. I could feel that, but I was unsure how. I wanted to scream at her, “What’s going on!” But some sense of compassion or respect for her as my elder prevented my outburst. Instead, I waited for her to explain. Hopeful that she would get on with it sooner rather than later.

It only took a moment longer. She was deep in thought, then finally looked up. She wore an expression as if she’d forgotten I was there.

“Nora, I’m so sorry. I tried to stop this. I think the world of you, lass, and you are such a sweet, kind girl. I guess you’ll be wantin’ answers to all of your questions now.”

I nodded, and she inhaled deeply again.

“In order to understand what has happened, you must understand the Enchantment of Acadia. Some call it an enchantment, some a curse. I tend to lean toward the side of it being cursed. This all started many years ago. People know about the witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts in the 1600s. Hollywood has made movies, plays, songs. It’s become infamous. Did you know that the witch museum up there is one of the most visited tourist attractions in America during Halloween?”

I shook my head ‘no,’ hoping this was all going somewhere, and wasn’t just the ramblings of a sweet old lady.

“History rarely depicts events accurately in fiction, and even when it is more spot on, it’s just a wee sliver of the truth. The witch trials actually started here in Connecticut. Bet you didn’t know that?”

I shook my head, ‘no,’ again. For all my love of academia, I’d not studied local history as much as I should have. That struck me as odd. *Why didn’t we study that in school?*

I must have mumbled that last part out loud because Mrs. McCarthy said, “Because it’s part of The Curse of Acadia. The truth is meant to be suppressed to protect the books. Or in other words, the books are also The Wards. They protect the town.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I know. It will all make sense when I’m done. You see, back in 1647, the first large-scale witch trials within the American colonies occurred. It was actually pre-dated 30 years before the infamous Salem trials. Few people know that either. Even most here in Connecticut aren’t aware. Only history buffs, librarians, and,” she paused, poignantly—“witches know about this little crumb of truth in history.”

“The history books list 34 people convicted, but in truth, there were 38. There were four who went under the radar. The important one was a woman by the name of Felicity Ames. Most of the upheaval about witches was scandals concerning politics, land grabs, and whatnot. Most of them weren’t even witches. There were only a few who actually were involved with the craft. Even fewer authorities involved knew that there really were witches. Even though these witches only used magick of protection and healing, humans fear anything they can’t wrap their brains around.

“Felicity Ames was the most powerful of the four women. She was a coven leader if you will. Her coven of about ten or so women lived on the outskirts of Acadia. Despite Acadia being more of a village than a full colony at that time. The little community thrived because of the symbiotic agreement between the sisters and the village. When a farmer’s cow got sick, Felicity or one of her sisters would make a magick poultice and bring it to the farmer. The farmer, in turn, would provide milk to the coven. The woodsman would bring them lumber, and the sisters would ‘*sharpen*’ his ax in a way that was beyond his own skill. The villagers suspected what the sisters were, but they turned a blind eye because they were prosperous and did no harm to the villagers.

“Then the Reverend Jude Carmicheal was traveling through. He couldn’t help but notice the heathen women livin’ alone in the woods on the outskirts of the village. I’m sure you see where this is goin.’ He felt called to bring *God*, good and proper, to the “*poor ignorant*” folks of Acadia. It wasn’t right they should be minglin’ with these pagan women and their “black” magick.

“He rallied the men and women against the sisters. Some villagers defied him to support the sisters’ kindnesses they’d shown them throughout the years. These were killed to make an example of, or taken to trial as pagan supporters, heathens against God. One night it was coordinated that they would storm the encampment, round them up, and bring them down to the courts in New Haven where all the witches were being tried.

“However, Felicity knew this was coming. She had the gift of sight. She’d already managed to evacuate almost all of her sisters, getting them to move and disperse. It broke her heart to disband the coven. They were her family, after all, but it had to be done to save their lives. Three of the women would not leave Felicity. When the raid took place, they were rounded up and brought to a barn cellar. They were thrown in and given three large bibles. The Reverend thought himself merciful to give them a chance to find God before they were tried.

“While they were locked up in the cellar, Felicity used the last of her magick. You may not realize Magick does not come in endless supply. She’d already used quite a bit to covertly evacuate

her coven in the previous days. In her desperation, she sought to create three magick books as a measure of protection to save the people of Acadia. She was not angry with them. She loved them as family, too. She truly believed the Reverend had corrupted and cursed them with his stringent orthodox beliefs.

“She knew she was going to die, and she wanted to put one last measure in place to protect all the generations of witches and non-magick folk that may come after her in Acadia. The coven had settled in that area because it was already brimming with natural magick. She knew it was inevitable that other witches in generations to follow would migrate there again. She wanted to ensure they would not be persecuted and they could live symbiotically with the townsfolk again. She created the Book of Fate, the Book of Folly, and the Book of Fear, but it came at a price to do so.

“Wait, there were only two books down in the basement, Book of Fate and Book of Folly. What happened to Book of Fear?” I couldn’t help but interject.

“Ah, I’ll get to the part soon enough. There were four women, and each of them wasn’t so naïve to believe they’d have even half a chance. They knew they’d be found guilty in their trial and would die. Felicity was initially against the idea of creating the books the way it had to be done, but the other women insisted it was the only way. In order to create these books, they had to use blood magick, and the blood of a human is the most potent.

“They were white witches and didn’t commonly use these practices. The only way you can know your true enemy is to learn of them and their practices, so they were aware of the ritual in theory only. Felicity had her athame strapped to her thigh. Each sister in turn slit her wrist, and the blood was used to enchant the Bibles. Felicity, in her tears and her sister’s blood, created the cellar of protection, and the tomes which are powerful wards.

“They also sought to purge Acadia of the evil that had fallen on them through the Reverend. When the cellar was opened, The Wards were activated through a great ring of fire around the border of Acadia. It burned unyieldingly until the Reverend, Felicity and her sisters, and each villager involved in the capture of the coven died off. The books are now known as The Wards of Acadia. However, only Keepers know of this curse.”

# CHAPTER EIGHT

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“KEEPER? WHAT’S A KEEPER? THIS still doesn’t make much sense. Is the town protected or cursed?” I asked. It was all I could do not to spill out every question on my mind.

“It’s both protected and cursed. Protected through a curse of a witch’s making. Not a natural curse of the land. Remember, I said that Acadia has magick running through her; natural ley lines of power. Magick folk are drawn to this spot because of these energy sources which run through the earth. Some places hold more natural magick than other places. Acadia is particularly strong because all five elements of earth, wind, water, fire, and soul run through here. It’s a very rare place to have all five elements present, and nearly completely balanced.

“So, Acadia was already naturally enchanted, but by way of Reverend Carmicheal spilling so much blood, combined with Felicity’s attempts to preserve her traditions, and using blood magick, the land also became cursed. When the land was settled again, the first to discover the cellar was a young girl named Abigail Dunham. She read the books and secretly buried the bones of each of the four witches in the four corners of Acadia, as the book instructed her to do so. She was compelled in much the same way you were towards the books’ existences. Eventually, the town library was built right over that cellar, and the new village became a town. It exists as you know it today.”

“So the books are wards?” I mumbled, trying to process all of it.

“Yes, Felicity created The Wards in the form of books because she intended them to not only be a means of protection but a record of the past, present, and future serving as a warning and guidance system for future witches finding their way to Acadia, with Abigail being the first.



However, using blood magick gave life to the books in a way that Felicity did not anticipate. Remember, she was only versed in blood magick by theory, not by practice. She didn't know that blood magick practices are volatile.

“Each of the personalities of the women, along with their traumas, and the energy stain on the land were imbedded into the books, creating something new. The books have personalities of their own. Yes, they act as powerful wards, with the cellar room being the hub of that power, but they have a mind of their own now. You will realize as you work with them, they are fickle and prone to rebel. It is now your job to ensure you keep their orneriness in line.”

My head jerked up and my mouth bobbed wordlessly for a moment. “Wait, what? What do you mean—my job?”

“As I said when I started this conversation, Nora. I am dying. I was their previous Keeper. The mantle is now passed to you. When I die, you will be able to read this story, in all its grand details, that I have already told you. In Felicity's own blood, scratched out on the pages with her athame as a pen, it was the last act before she died. Abigail took up the mantel and added her own stories, and so on, with each Keeper. You will read the notes of all the other Keepers of The Wards.”

“But, I'm not a witch! I don't have any magickal abilities.”

“You do. Or you wouldn't have been drawn to the room at all. In fact, everyone living in Acadia to some degree or another has magick in their blood. Most are unaware. Those who are cognisant of it are like Ausha's grandmother and her underground coven. Just as the origins of Acadia began, the residents who are unaware of their own seeds of magick, rely on those who are stronger, and turn a blind eye to the practices they engage in.”

“I haven't been trained, though! Ausha would be better than me.”

“It doesn't matter, Nora. The book—The Wards—chose you! I thought to break the curse by allowing myself to die as quickly as nature would take me. If you had not discovered the books by the time I passed, then perhaps the magick of them would die as well. If they were locked up with no one to sustain their power and resupply it, the curse might at the very least be weakened. It was folly.” She laughed. “Fate, folly, or fear,” she shook her head ruefully.

“Where is the third book? Book of Fear? There were only two down there?” I asked again.

“Ah, well, you see all magick is rooted in three motivations. We seek to change our fate. We want to undo a mistake of folly. Or we desire something because of fear and lack. Felicity created

wards around these desires using the emotions that we inherently hold, thereby creating a self-generating ward of protection. See, while the intention was pure, the execution was rushed, and it created a comingled effect of both enchantment and curse. The Book of Fear is presently missing. It's not been seen since the 90s. A woman by the name of Susan was likely the last person to have encountered it. That particular book seems to have learned to generate its own source of power based on what I read."

"If you know *that*, then how do you know it's still missing?"

Mrs. McCarthy laughed. "You wanted to be a librarian? Wish granted. It's good The Wards chose you. As librarians we read, we research. As a Keeper, you keep an ever-present vigil, watching and recording. I happened upon a book that was self-published by a person under the pen name Mary Black Rose. It was written in the first person point of view about a girl named Susan who encountered the Book of Fear and what it did to her. It was published under the guise of fiction, but knowing what I know, it was not fiction."

"So, it's still just roaming around? Out there—" I groped for words, "—on the loose!"

"In a manner of speaking. Fitting for its personality. Fear often eludes us, does it not?"

I couldn't even answer. I was still in shock.

Mrs. McCarthy plowed on with her speech, ignoring my blank expression. "It's a lot to take in, but you need to know what your new job entails. As the Keeper of The Wards, you will record all magickal happenings that occur in Acadia as far as you are able to discover these incidents. This will keep The Wards intact. Recording the happenings is like fuel for the fires of protection. It keeps the magick supplied, so the protections will remain."

"What are we protecting, though? It's the 21st century! No one is going around burning witches or forcing religion on anyone anymore."

"Well, not in the 1600s fashion, but if you think that's true, then I've got a bridge running over the great town of Canada to sell you."

I sighed. "I guess that sorta tracks. Ausha's family still has to practice somewhat *underground*, so to speak. She was complaining about not being able to get the day off for Yule at her job, even though everyone else gets Christmas day. Even so, it's not like people's lives are in danger!"

"It's true that persecution is more subtle these days for minorities and *fringe* spiritual beliefs." Mrs. McCarthy sighed, then took on a pensive look. "But people's lives are in danger. Here is the part of the job that you won't like, Nora. The part I've been putting off telling you because it's

truly the cursed part. But you have to know at some point. Once a person comes to live here in Acadia, they can never leave. They are bound to this area, and if they try to, they will die. The land draws them in, and The Wards bind them to the land. Sure, they can leave and take vacations, but The Wards know if you are trying to permanently escape. The books protect the residents from themselves. If the books stay intact then no one is even inclined to leave. They are enchanted or cursed to never leave. Choose your semantics—enchanted or cursed—if you will.”

She stopped talking, watching me closely as this heavy bit of news sunk in.

All of this talk about the books made me forget the original reason I’d even started this whole quest. A heaviness hit me as it was all coming together. “What happened to Ember?” I asked slowly.

“She died trying to save the people of Acadia in the way she thought best, but The Wards were havin’ none of it. They are powerful magickal entities with agendas of their own.”

“Ember was trying to break the curse, wasn’t she?”

Mrs. McCarthy nodded, solemnly. “Yes, dear. Only Keepers know that the residents of Acadia are really trapped here.”

“What happens if, by some anomaly, someone tries to leave for good?”

“They will die.”

“And what happens if the books are destroyed? Is that what Ember was trying to do?”

“She was, but as I said, the books are alive with just as much inclination towards self-preservation as any other living thing. Felicity got what she wanted. The books—The Wards are tied to the residents of Acadia forever living symbiotically. Because The Wards are now a living, breathing entity, if they die, so do all the residents.”

“So the wards are like some kind of enchanted bubble, meant to protect, but in reality, it’s a prison?” I pulled my hands through my hair. I could barely believe what I was hearing.

“Yes, dear, and the only ones aware of it are the Keepers of The Wards. Ember thought it unfair. She had a sister who wanted more than anything to live in Europe and study art. She went off to school but came back. Ember found it infuriating. She spent night after night locked in the cellar, trying to talk to the books, researching other books on how to break the curse, and disconnect the residents from their tie to it, but she failed.

“In the end, The Wards saw her as a threat to their own existence, and they—” she paused, “—killed her.” Mrs. McCarthy closed her eyes for a moment. I could feel her reliving that awful

night and my heart ached for her. Mr. Mahner had been right about one thing. Ember had been her friend.

Mrs. McCarthy's voice was quiet as she continued. "The fire was found burning hotter than a crematorium furnace. The firefighters couldn't get in. They had to let the fire die out. I was a young librarian back in the day, and I was chosen next, I guess you could say. Only fragments of that night remained in the memories of the residents of Acadia, even the very next day. The Wards made it so. Only, I alone, knew what really happened."

"How? How did you know what Ember was doing, and how she died?"

She looked surprised by this question. "It was recorded by The Wards, in the Book of Folly. They rarely record incidents of their own accord, but this one was. It was meant to be a warning for anyone who attempted the same path of folly that Ember did."

I sucked in my breath. This was so much. I was between wanting to scream or cry. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I thought back on my little town, my childhood, and how all of fit together; the peace, the abundance, the lack of crime or bullies. The unexplainable, paranormal things I'd experienced, the perfect balance of economic prosperity. It all made sickening sense. I didn't want to accept it, but I didn't have a choice. If I wanted my entire town of loved ones to keep on living, apparently I had to take up the mantle of being the next Acadia Keeper of The Wards.

Mrs. McCarthy must have noticed the shift in my demeanor. She stood, came around to the other side of her desk, and placed a hand on my shoulder.

"It's not so bad after a while. Like I said, it's good you wanted to be a librarian. It will make the job easier. Very likely why they chose you. You'll see many of the residents in here, or around town, and by way of the Enchantment of Acadia, they will just open up and tell you their woes. Or more like their stories.

"I know you don't remember, but you even told me one of your own when you were a little girl, and you'll find it recorded in the Book of Fate. You won't have to search the residents out to record the details of the strange occurrences that take place. They will just find something inexplicable need to talk. Then they'll start to word vomit all over ya. It's inconvenient at times, but ya get used to it. You settle into the strange job that is yer place in the world. I'm sorry, I couldn'a prevented it. For what's it worth, if the mantle had to be passed to anyone, Nora, I don't think The Wards could have chosen a better candidate as the next Keeper."

I nodded, choking back tears. I don't know why I was so upset. I'd planned on going to college and returning to Acadia to work in the town library, anyway. Maybe knowing that my choice had been made for me and that fate had destined me to this position made a difference. It was hard to say. Maybe I was mourning for my loved ones, trapped in a prison they had no idea they were bound to. I just felt devastated, and I couldn't explain why.

"Take some time. I won't be dyin' for a few months. You've got a bit to process all of it. Unlike me, at least you have a mentor to help you ease into this. I had to figure out everything on my own after Ember died."

"I'm sorry Mrs. McCarthy. For everything. That you're sick, that I didn't listen to you. I'm so sorry."

I guess I couldn't hold back. I did burst into tears then, and she scooped me up into a standing position. She was shorter than me, but her embrace was firm and comforting.

When I cried out all my tears, she released me and we wordlessly shut down the lights and left to go home.

Right before we got into our cars, another question popped into my mind. "Mrs. McCarthy?"

"Yes, dear?"

"How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't. As the damn Book of Fate would have it, I had forgotten my satchel from Friday night, and it had my pain pills in it. I came back to get em,' and saw your car parked in the back lot. By habit, I park back here too. I knew when I saw yer car, it was too late."

I nodded. "I'll see you Monday."

"See ya then."

# EPILOGUE

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*Four months later*

MRS. MCCARTHY GOT TO SEE one last glorious spring in Acadia. Springtime here is just wonderful. After the trees, grass, and ivy have all been withered and brown for months, it's simply amazing to witness the world waking up again, with lush green trees and grass, pink cherry blossoms adorning the branches like spring ornaments, and daffodils dotting the edges of lawns in buttery yellow and cream white. It's just heavenly.

I was told by her closest friend that she passed quietly and without pain, which gave me a small amount of comfort. I mourned her in a way I don't think I will ever mourn any of my other loved ones because she understood me unlike anyone I ever knew and anyone I will ever meet again.

She taught me that Keepers are fated to be asexual and alone in life. And just like Ember Reed, The Wards would erase my name from the legal database making it hard to trace back other Keepers—a measure of protection against 'would-be' threats tracking down living friends or family of past Keepers, seeking to break the curse. All part of the self-protecting measures of the curse. She reserved these bleak details for later on when she mentored me, filling me in on other details that weren't outlined that night my whole life changed.

The asexual part was something I already suspected about myself, as I'd never had an interest in boys, or girls, for that matter. Again, I was upset and put it down to feeling like I had no control

over my life. However, I've learned that all of us are fated to play certain roles in life, whether we fall into that role by our own choices, or by the hand of some unseen force, it happens to each of us. You can fight it, or you can embrace it, make the best of it, and find joy no matter what lot in life you are dealt.

Mrs. McCarthy regretted fighting it at the end. She confessed to me some days before she passed, that she wished she'd gone ahead with the chemo so she could have lived through one more beautiful New England autumn—her favorite time of year—but she'd chosen to try and save me from the same fate as her own. She realized too late that it wouldn't have made a difference. Fate was fate and there are some aspects of life you simply can't control. Not all of life is carved out in stone. But some parts are. Especially when it comes to other people. You can only let fate take its course and make the best of it.

I took that as the greatest piece of many wisdoms she shared with me in the short few months she mentored me. I will never forget it. I will never forget her.

And now I sit here, alone in the cellar, recording the first of the strange enchantments of Acadia's stories that have been shared with me. I wasn't surprised when it involved Ausha, her witchy grandmother, and her grandparent's famous Acadia pies.

# About The Black Rose Brands



## MARY BLACK ROSE

Studied writing at the "School of Hard Knocks" and "University of Life" getting my degrees in "Fine Arts of Common Sense" with a minor in "Epic Ass-Handing."

Being pansexual, I enjoy writing a variety of LGBTQ characters with diverse backgrounds and sexual orientations. Throw in a dab of magical realism, and romance for good measure, and some real-life conflicts to overcome, and you get 'Black Rose' original stories.

I read a lot to keep the voices in my head quiet. I write a lot to keep the voices alive.

When I'm not writing, I'm supporting my husband and wife, (I'm polyamorous), and taking care of family minions. You might also find me crocheting, hiking, watching Deadpool or South Park yet again, or just reading a good book.

## BLACK ROSE READS

Black Rose Reads is a brand created by Mary Black Rose to facilitate writing and narrating speculative paranormal and horror fiction on their [YouTube channel @Black Rose Reads](#), and publishing horror anthologies such as the Twisted Tales Series, and original works of short paranormal horror novelettes such as the Eerie Acadia Series.

## MISTRESS BLACK ROSE

Here in my imagination, lesbians wield whips and flogs, tie you up and leave you breathless. Naughty subs enjoy a little bondage and spanking.



In my Erotic Lesfic, you will always find happy endings and sweet romance, blended with steamy bondage and submission.

My characters go on a journey, learn valuable lessons, and come full circle, all within the realm of the BDSM Lifestyle.

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