

# **CURSED AT FIRST SIGHT**

Lyna Lopez

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*Lyna*

To My Childhood Sisters,  
Laura and Amanda.

Without those ghost stories growing up, I'd  
never be in love with the paranormal and  
fantastical like I am now.



Watching the paint of my home age through the years is a lot more entertaining than watching these people walk in and out of my house as if they owned it. The new tenants continue moving their furniture into the old Victorian without sparing me a second glance. I stand quietly, behind one of the ancient columns that holds up the opening between the foyer and the main living room. The intruders march around with boxes in their hands, past the wall's peeling yellow paint, which had once looked vibrant like the sunshine on a warm summer's day. Nobody has ever really gotten as far as unloading all of their boxes, so I shrug from my spot—hidden from view of the others. I'm just going to let them unpack all of their boxes and then have 'em pack everything back up in no time.

My plan *seems* foolproof.

Quietly moving from my spot behind the column, I make my way around it, slowly walking towards the parlor room with its dark, aging wallpaper. The original thick, velvet curtains hang from the top of the windows, gathering a century of dust. Through the parlor window is the best view of the sunset. My father built this Victorian home with his bare hands on the top of a large hill, with our only neighbors sitting at the bottom of it, past the small mountains bend. The thought of that old witch made me shudder.

Sensing the wild emotions begin to bubble up inside me, I move towards the center of the room for

a change of pace. I purposely place my weight on top of one of the boxes marked *fragile*, feeling the box give way underneath. They aren't the first to use cheap boxes, and probably wouldn't be the last. My attention shifts to the two old men, trying to walk into the parlor with a leather covered couch in their arms. It is quite humorous watching them attempt to get it through the door opening. One man with round spectacles, his hair combed to one side is arching and bending, while the other ding-bat who resembles political leader Eugene Debs' stoic features and balding head, swings his body back and forth in a thrusting motion.

I almost giggle.

The comedy show almost gives up my position on top of the box, so I get up and head towards the kitchen where the wife is putting away the pots and pans. I take a gander at the older woman who is gussied up like a cheap old floozy. She is unlike the typical women that paraded around in this house as if they own it. She has vibrant, bright red hair, which I've learned can come from a bottle, dark kohlrimmed eyes, and bright red lips. She looks ghastly in appearance. There must be an earpiece attached to her ear because she is ranting and yelling at someone and it most certainly isn't me. I gingerly peek further into the room to hear her tirade.

"You were supposed to be here hours ago Nicky!"

She is silent as the other individual speaks.

She grabs the spatula in her hand and smacks it on the counter like a fly swatter. "I'm not kidding, kid.

Either you get here within the hour, or I'll make sure your bedroom is right next to mine."

The woman presses the button at her right ear and sighs as if a weight heavier than her has sat upon her ginger curves. "What am I going to do with that kid?"

For a brief second, she shows such vulnerability that I feel sorry for her.

*Only briefly*, I think as I shake it off.

A loud crash has both of us jumping in place this time. Loud curses follow and once again I fight the urge to laugh. The woman runs toward the parlor room where more cursing ensues. This time, I can't help it and laugh, the tinkle of my voice echoing throughout these old walls. I run over to see what happened, only to find *Spectacles* surveying the damage to the wall and the *Debs* look-alike to the couch. Each of the men looks equally dumbfounded.

A snort escapes. This family *is* strange. The one scrutinizing the wall squints, looking around for the source of the sound.

When the silence becomes more than they can bear, *Spectacles* goes back to surveying the harm to the wall and couch. I too watch, tallying all the damage the strangers have caused inside my home, equaling the cost I will inflict on their mental state. Ignoring me, like everyone always did, the woman turns to yell at one of the men. His hands go up in surrender as she cusses at him like a seasoned Navy man. The mother stops berating him when she spots the box I just vacated. Turning to see what struck her

speechless, I notice my bottom has left a beautiful imprint on the top.

“Taylor, no! Who sat on this box?” The woman is ripping the tape off to inspect the contents as the sun continues its descent outside. They all start to argue.

“No, oh no! Taylor, look at these.” She holds something out in her hand, her gestures making it too hard to notice what it is. “They are ruined.”

Leaning over to take a peek inside the box, I see several little ceramic cows in different bogus positions, barely wrapped in newspaper.

I watch her with wide eyes, *Lady, I did you a favor*. Is she fighting with her husband about these creepy little things?

The front door slams open, making me jerk up once more. What in Sam Hill is going on in this place?

“Mom!” A male voice shouts from the foyer.

I straighten when a young man comes around the corner with eyes the color of jade and hair a glossy, inky black. He wears a crisp white shirt, partly tucked into a pair of faded blue jeans. Stomping all over the old, wood floorboards in colossal combat boots, he saunters towards the parlor door. When he passes right through me, he makes my body erupt in tremors.

For the first time, the person who shivers is me. He doesn't even seem fazed. The usual reaction for the *living* brings shivers and goosebumps, because, as one can already imagine—I'm dead. People



always feel sensitive when I am around them, but this boy walks through me without a care in the world.

Clutching the cow pieces tightly in one hand, the woman stares at the boy. “Nicholas Warren, where in the world have you been?”

*Nicky.*

For some reason, the nickname she gives him didn't fit the sheer terror that stomps through my home. I detest young men, the curse the only blessing that keeps them away from me. No man deserves my sympathy. This time, I'll share in camaraderie with the mother, hoping she'll hand him a new one.

Nicholas grabs the spectacles that fell earlier on the floor from behind the couch and hands them over to the man that is squinting at the creepy cows.

He blinks and smiles. “Thanks, son.”

For a brief instant, I feel my heart thump loudly. The boy projects a menacing outwards appearance yet is kind enough to help his father. Wait, this is their son? The Nicky whose room will be next to his mother's? Is he going to be living here? There is a weird flutter inside of my stomach. One I never feel in my spectral stage.

Nicholas has his arms crossed in front of him; ready to take on whatever his mother could dish him. “I was at Farah's.”

The woman's face pinches. The dark room grows more ominous with, a metaphorical black cloud hovering above their heads, rising like a brewing storm. She takes deep, measured breaths.

“Nicky, you know how we feel about Farah. The last time you guys were dating, you ended up in jail. The girl is bad news, kid.”

The gorgeous boy runs a hand in his slick hair. My fingers itch to touch it, so I stuff them inside of my front dress pockets.

“I knew you guys would say something about it. That’s why I didn’t want to tell you we started dating again.”

The mom drops a cowbell on the wood floor. “You what?” She roars.

The balding *Debs* look-alike comes around to place a comforting arm on Nicholas’s shoulder—a show of unity. “There, there, Josie. Leave the grown boy alone.”

The woman has a finger pointed at Nicholas but immediately switches it over to the man who speaks, throwing the last remaining cow pieces in her hand at him. “Mind your own business, Joe. This is *my* son, not one of your homeboys.”

Joe ducks just in time to avoid the pieces pelting him in the noodle.

*Good for you, Josie!*

I pump my fist in the air. My mother would have disapproved of meddling adults. Seeing Josie defend her role as a parent, brings back sweet memories.

Nicholas gives his mother a hard stare, making a fist with his right hand.

I frown.

“Stop talking to Joe like that. You are always getting in my business. I’m sick and tired of all this shit! I’m eighteen years old,” he roars at his parents.

My back goes ramrod straight as Nicholas turns away from his parents and storms up the stairs, the groaning steps crying out in agony. Joe shakes his head but grins when he turns around, out of sight of the others. My jaw drops at his pompous audacity. How can he enjoy seeing the woman suffer like that? Without a second thought or hesitation, I rush my leg out. I trip the old, scheming geezer, taking some satisfaction in seeing his smile slip as his rotund body heads towards the floor, taking a hit on his large nose. In all my years living here, this is the first time I’ve ever seen a dysfunctional family move into the old Victorian home I reside.

The usual families consisted of the perfect American dream. Mom, dad, and two kids. The good ones came with a family dog—which saw me in both corporal and spectral form. I grin. The constant non-stop barking drove the residents insane. I have an internal mute button. They never bother me. I silently walk the corridor towards the stairs, hearing bits and pieces of the adults’ argument. I might not even have to do a thing. They would end up splitting and leaving on their own. In the meantime, I can check out the tenant’s son, just now realizing that he was heading towards my old bedroom not the empty room by his parents. The stairs are an integral part of my haunting as they creak and groan under my

weight. I could be cliché and float up the stairs as any ghost would, but I prefer the audio.

Her husband, Taylor, adjusts his glasses as he walks out of the parlor room, frozen at the bottom step. He hears the noises the steps always make when right enough pressure is applied. Joe is rubbing his nose as he walks out behind Taylor. I can't see Josie.

Waving a hand to Joe, he asks, "Joe, do you hear that?"

Joe turns towards the steps just as I make it to the landing. "No, I don't."

"Those stairs are making sounds as if someone is walking on them." He shakes his head. "I thought I heard a female voice laughing earlier too."

Joe makes a face at Taylor. "You're crazy. The truck's unloaded, so I'm outta here."

Before I can gladly watch him leave, I walk away from the two men. I head towards the loud rock music blaring from the attic. The attic at one time was my room before the curse, and I had been a living, breathing mortal girl. To think that I should be over this resentment thing already. For some reason, it hurt more now than it did back then. When I first started out haunting, I couldn't do much but walk through walls and give people the creeps. As time went by, I learned to change my form, when to be heard and not be heard, or when to be seen and not be seen. I can go wholly weightless or impact my full weight, which is very beneficial when I sit on the edges of their bed. In time, it became easier to scare the humans running around my house.

This Victorian is *still* my house.

The music is louder now as I enter the room that once belonged to me. Nicholas is throwing things around the empty, open space, searching for something inside of a moving box. Keeping my distance, I stand back and observe. The deeper Nicky explores the contents in the box, the more his muscles bunch and flexes underneath the cotton of his shirt. My lips pull into a frown. Now, why in the world am I ogling him? Boys of all varieties irk me. Men are nothing but trouble.

The phone in his pocket shrills loudly. “Hey baby, what’s going on?”

Disgusted by his nonchalant attitude, I push the closet door shut. His shoulder tightens, turning around to face the door. He is silent. Then his features relax, and he goes back to his conversation.

Interesting! A formidable opponent I see.

“Nah, I’m tired of all this shit. I’m eighteen. Mom needs to get over it.”

He adds, “I’d love to, but I’m going to take the rest of the night to unpack and get settled.”

There is a mixture of emotions crossing his face, curious I lean in. “Farah, I was just at your house not too long ago, it’s not like I’m out screwing another chick.”

The words aren’t for me, but I feel the tingles from my head to my toes. It’s as if his words wrap me in a sensual embrace. I shake it off. *Wow, that’s weird.* A vast, black, bean sack lay in the corner, so I take advantage of its location and sit. What I didn’t

expect is the loud swoosh of Styrofoam beads and air.

“Babe, hold on,” Nicholas tells his girlfriend as he faces me.

The phone hangs limply in his hand as he takes two steps closer to where I sit frozen. Weirdly, my body wants him to touch me, while my mind wars with me to move. Nicky stops. He is staring dead at me but seeing nothing at all.

Luckily, I am freed from the trance when Farah yells over the receiver. He puts the phone back to his ear with a grimace. “Farah, stop screaming. Look, I don’t have time for your shit either. We’ll talk later.” He hangs up the call, turning to throw the phone on his bed.

I let out a large breath of air. Nicholas turns around again. I didn’t even realize I did it out loud. He walks over to the closet door to yank it open. Each step he takes is like a crushing blow to my sanity. Will he discover me? Will he be just as scared as the rest? Why in heavens do I care? I shouldn’t even let it bother me. Come tomorrow, I’ll scare the group, and they’ll leave my home. Simple as that.

But, why did that notion make me feel sick to my stomach?



**T**he next night, I decide to haunt Josie, who is in the bathroom removing all of the makeup from her face. Whenever I take corporeal form, it is with the help of the electricity around me. That in turn, makes the lights flicker, and I tune in as

a static being. They don't quite see a ghost, but an image of me through the visual white noise. The tactic scares the bejeezus out of people. I mostly fight to keep a straight face through it all. I walk into the room that once belonged to my parents. This is a large room with lots of windows around the steeple point in the ceiling. The tenants have a very large bed frame and mattress in the center of the room, with a plethora of duvets lying on top. Half-empty boxes fill the room. The only other pieces of furniture are an accent chair with geographic patterns in one corner, a dresser on one side, and a small glass table with a flat-screen television attached to it. The room has the aroma of lingering nail polish.

I begin to absorb the energy around me, flickering behind her. I start to manifest as white noise. Josie sees me in her mirror and screams. The pitch is high and guttural as she turns to face me. Her makeup smears. Her flaming red bangs are clipped up off her forehead.

“Leave my home,” I hiss in a rough, threatening voice.

When tears roll down her face, her skin turning to an ashy gray, I take that moment to disappear again. Just as if I had never shown up.

“Pussycat!”

“Mom!”

Both her husband and Nicholas run into the bedroom that adjoins the bathroom.

“What the hell happened?” Nicholas asks first.

Today he is wearing a black t-shirt that has a yellow duck with multi-colored punk rock hair on it with sweatpants, his hair disheveled as if someone is running their hands through it. My fingers twitch, so I make a fist to stop them from shaking and doing the same.

Josie's struck silent. Her face is pale, smeared with leftover lipstick and dark mascara. My plan has worked. I step aside to hear them discuss, intrigued by her version of how things went.

"It is a ghost. A huge ghost. She is...is s-standing behind me. The lights went crazy."

Taylor gently pets his wife's hair; making shushing sounds to soothe her panic.

Nicholas has his arms crossed over his chest, nostrils flared. "*You* saw a ghost?"

She stares at her son, crossed between beating him and shaking him. I'd like to do both. Removing her husband's hand from her head, she grabs the washrag she is using, throwing it at her son. Nicholas quickly dodges it, smirking at his mother.

"Don't worry, Pussycat," her husband interjects. "I believe you. I heard sounds coming from the stairs as if someone was going down them."

*Except, I was going up*, I think as I cross my arms.

"When we were in the parlor room, I had heard a female laugh too," he adds.

Josie starts to cry.

For an instant, I see Nicholas look around the room as if searching for me, a sign of remorse on his face when he sees his mother cry, and then the bad



boy with drama resurfaces, and he snorts. “You guys are crazy. I’m outta here.”

I watch Nicholas’s back until he is out of sight. Josie is standing over the sink, removing the rest of her makeup, while Taylor keeps guard at the door. A throaty laugh escapes when I see how quirky he looks. Leaving tonight as it is, I walk out of the room, thinking that tomorrow is another day.

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**H**er husband sits at the breakfast table drinking a cup of coffee, while Josie fiddles through the refrigerator. She is a lot calmer today than yesterday, but then again, she came home from the library with a massive amount of ghost books. She bends down further to find something in the back. I can’t help myself. Rearing back my arm, I let go with a sharp slap on her rear. She yelps and jumps up. Taylor spews coffee from his mouth.

“Please tell me that was you.”

He shakes his head.

Josie bites her lower lip and frowns, looking around the room for me. “Uh, are you in here?”

I want to laugh at the seriousness of her features.

She shakes her head. Very typical behavior. The living will instead go insane than admit something supernatural lives among them. I lean against the door jamb. Loud booted feet catch my attention, so I turn my head to see Nicholas coming down the stairs. He stops on the opposite side of me, leaning on the wall with his shoulder. Today he is wearing a black novelty shirt with the image of a long-deceased

starlet wearing a bunch of ink on her exposed body, dark jeans, a chain hanging from the side that clips to a wallet, and a backward cap that covers his thick hair. The fresh just showered scent permeates the air around me.

“I’m heading out. Don’t wait up.”

Taylor grimaces as Josie frowns. “Nicholas, its Sunday. Where will you be?”

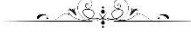
Nicholas shrugs. “Don’t worry about it.”

I, almost, kind of, feel sorry for the poor woman. Frowning at my thoughts, I divert my attention to what I do best.

Mischief.

Stepping on Nicky’s loose shoelace, I wait till he uncrosses his booted feet and loses his balance. His arm whips out to gain his footing, landing right on my chest. The momentum pushes me against the wall, both of our faces expressing our shock. My entire being explodes. His hand lurches back, but I feel him. Nicholas looks bewildered. He feels me too. He leaves behind his handprint on my chest like a cattle prod. The sensation is overwhelming. I double over trying to breathe!

Nicholas shakes out his hand, stuffing it into his pocket. “Ah, hell, I gotta go.”

  
**I** spent the next few days hovering over Josie as she pours over all of the ghost books. She tries everything to get my attention, but I remain silent. For some odd reason, I have this innate urge to console her after the enormous fights she has

with *Spectacles* over Nicholas, but I can't bring myself to do it. I cause my usual mischief: dropping items on the floor and closing doors, but no one grabs the keys to run. It is already late at night, close to two a.m. with the entire house silent. The only noise is coming from the body spread eagle on the bed breathing heavily.

"I'm such a lost cause," I whisper to the dark room.

Nicholas shoots out of bed with his chest bare. Muscles flex as he uncurls his body. "I heard you."

I rise up from the bean bag. Nicholas is looking around the bedroom. Seeking. Searching. His hair is like a wild dark halo around his head. If I were alive right now, I'd walk right over and kiss him. My eyes crack open. Where in heavens did that thought come from?

I smirk when I see the flashlight in his hand. "My parents think ghosts exist. Prove they're crazy."

Call it a spiritual blunder, but I couldn't help myself. "Your parents aren't crazy."

"Jesus Christ!" He yells to the dark bedroom, his flashlight lighting on everything in the place but me. Jumping out of bed, he loses his balance, tripping over his discarded jeans. His body flips over the bed.

I smile, able to contain my laughter. "Common misconception, but I'm not Jesus. Never even met the guy."

Nicholas throws the flashlight in my general direction. "I knew I shouldn't have smoked that shit. I'm hallucinating."

I frown. “You want to end up like me?”

His back slams into the wall. “Are you like the grim reaper? You here to harvest my soul or some shit?”

“I live here. Also, would you quit saying that word?”

Nicholas’s eyebrows dip towards his nose. “Shit, shit, shit,” He murmurs in defiance.

Pursing my lips, I gather some energy around me—enough to make me shimmer and the room lights flicker. Nicholas sees the burst of light, zeroing on my exact position.

“Why are you haunting us?”

“You’re trespassing. This home belongs to me as the last remaining heir of the Cromwell’s.”

“Yeah, but you’re dead,” he reaffirms.

I almost growl. Studying the same ‘Mary Janes’ I’ve been wearing for the past hundred years, I add, “I’m not dead. I’m cursed.”

I plop back down on the bean bag, while Nicholas pulls at his hair. “Oh, shit this is not happening.”

The lights flicker.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. It’s just mind-boggling.”

A sigh escapes me, suddenly tired of all the hauntings and hatred I’ve carried with me for all these years. “You’re not scared of me?”

Staring at where I’m sitting, but seeing only empty air, he grins. “I’d love to actually see you. Do that light thing again.”

I feel butterflies invade my stomach. Does Nicholas really want to see me? Or is he enthralled

with the novelty act? Not seeing any reason why I shouldn't, I pull from the energy around me. The electricity, his flashlight. I even drain his cell phone battery. The lights flicker before settling into a dull hum. His wide eyes are the only expression on his face. It's been a long time since I went full power. I didn't know what he saw, but I am dying to know what he thinks. No pun intended.

Nicholas takes one step forward in awe. "Oh, wow. You're beautiful."

I blush. I never get hot or cold, but for some reason, I can feel the blood rushing to my cheeks. "I'm a ghost."

He is shaking his head. "Not from where I'm standing you're not."

What is he talking about? Confused, I turn towards the dresser mirror.

What I see is enough to shock me. The person standing in front of the mirror is me. Not the static corporal form, but the actual living form. The only difference is for the fact that I'm slightly transparent.

"See? Beautiful." Nicholas stands behind me, not close enough to touch. I stare at myself again. I am wearing a pale blue cotton dress with a dropped down waist and a thick yellow ribbon cross-stitched at the hem. White stockings pass my knees, and a large blue bow sits on my long auburn hair. My hair is fashionably braided to one side with frills and bangs all askew. My cheeks are rosy, matching my lips.

“I haven’t seen myself like this in a very long time,” I whisper.

Nicholas feels daring because he steps closer to me. I turn around to watch him, enjoying the bliss and astonishment on his face.

“Can I touch you?”

I withdraw and surprisingly bump into the dresser. “No, don’t touch me!”

His hand drops to his side. “How long have you been dead?”

Scooting off to the edge of the dresser, I walk towards a giant pile of clothes. “It’s been one hundred years since the curse had been cast.”

Barefoot, he walks back over to his bed to sit down. His long pajama pants ride low on his waist with his exposed chest begging me to run my fingers over it. “What curse?” He shifts, pulling an old notebook from his nightstand.

My expression turns to shock when I recognize my old diary in his hand. “Does it have to do with that neighbor of yours killing herself over your brother?”

The room begins to pulse, floating in and out of my vision. My energy plummets.

*Don’t let go.*

Bile rises in my throat. Nicholas begins to gnaw his lip. His eyebrows draw together.

He jumps up from his bed. “Oh, shit. You are going pale. What’s going on?”

The room spins as the blood drains from my face. It feels as if gravity is putting all of its weight on top of me as I struggle to remain upright. “I-I’m fading.”

“Fading? You aren’t going to disappear right? I’ve never met a ghost before.” The room sways slowly enough that I can see him run a hand through his hair. “Skyler right? That’s your name isn’t it?”

I open my mouth to speak, but words won’t come.

“I’ll help you, Skyler. I promise.”

The weight crushing me is too much to bear. I give in to the pressure and drop to the floor.

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**E**ach time I use too much energy, I wake up in the parlor. The exact location the witch had cast her curse, angry that her daughter, who was with child, killed herself after my brother left her. She threatens that their daughter is cursed in all matters of love, until that day when my most significant pain became my blessing.

Sitting at the desk, the new tenants have strategically placed in the corner; I lay my head on my hands remembering what happened. A year after her daughter’s death, I fell in love with a boy in town. Then, he stopped talking to me. I didn’t know what I had done wrong. A few days after that, I saw him sharing more than a kiss with Fabiola Brans, the witch’s youngest daughter. Betrayal is filling, receiving a massive serving of it. Little by little, I felt invisible to everyone else. I felt weak. Tired. Then one day, I was gone. I could see my family, but they

couldn't see or hear me. The curse trapped me in this home.

The house is quiet, most of the boxes unpacked. How did this happen? I go upstairs. For some reason, I missed being around Nicholas and wanted to see him. I float through the door leading to the attic. My heart skips a beat. I find Nicholas propped against his headboard with a bunch of books and notepads around him. He is wearing a pair of gym shorts and a cotton shirt. His hair is slicked back and wet from the shower.

I plop into the bean bag. Nicholas's eyes jump up from his reading. "Skyler Cromwell, are you here?"

Vaulting up from his spot on the bed, he runs over to the bean bag, kneeling down in front of me. His eyes seek me out, but I'm not in corporeal form, so he sees nothing but the chair and wall behind me.

"I am so glad you are alright. I mean, considering the circumstances. You've been gone for two weeks."

Two weeks? "That long?"

He nods. "Yeah, it was so weird. One minute I could see you and then you dropped to the floor and dispersed in a cloud of smoke. Like a magic trick."

I begin to play with my fingers. It is better than making a fool of myself and trying to touch him. "I spent too long in corporeal form; I lose a lot of energy."

Nicholas licks his lips. My fingers reach up to touch his face. He freezes but doesn't pull away.



“Why don’t I hate you?” I whisper more to myself than anyone else.

He closes his eyes as my fingers continue to feel the day’s growth stubble on his face, outlining the most impressive pair of lips I’ve ever seen. “You’re right, Skyler. I don’t think you’re dead either,” he replies, remembering our last conversation. “So, I found out that you disappeared around May of 1918. Your parents searched high and low and couldn’t find traces of you anywhere, going as far as accusing your neighbor, Flora Brans, of witchcraft, but the charges never held.”

His phone starts ringing, but he ignores it. My hands rest again on my lap.

The phone starts ringing again. Grabbing it, Nicky frowns and answers, “Farah, I’m busy. I’ll call you back later, okay? Something came up.”

Aggravated, he gets up from his spot in front of me. “Shit, Farah. Yes, alright. Yes, I’m seeing someone else. Could you blame me?” His eyebrows dip towards his flared nose. “Farah Flora Duncan, I’m hanging up now.”

Nicholas makes a big show of removing the battery from the phone and placing it back on his nightstand. He leans over to one of his notepads, pulling it up to his face. “Are you still here, Sky?”

A nickname. How sweet. “Yes, I’m here.”

One side of his face lifts in a sort of half-grin. “Good.”

He rereads the paper. “Anyways, in your diary you also talk about Tobias and what he did, breaking

your heart and all with that witch's daughter, so I did more research with some help from my mom."

"Here's the kicker." He sits up straighter in his bed.

Before he is about to tell me the rest, the door of his bedroom swings open. I turn to see who has arrived, while Nicholas looks up. His mother stands at the entrance with her wild red hair in a knot on top of her head. "Nicky, you need to come downstairs."

"Why, what's up?"

"Your girlfriend is downstairs making a scene. I am trying to be nice, kid."

I feel the blood drain from my face as he runs behind his mother down the stairs. I fight with either staying put or being intrusive. Intrusive wins. I float through the beams, down to the first floor. Standing in the foyer of my home is the spitting image of a younger Flora Brans. Nicholas is a ball of fury as he jumps down the steps of the staircase, while my stomach tries to unknot itself.

"Farah, what the hell?"

Farah looks up as Nicholas descends the stairs, but it is when she looks over at me, and her eyes go wide that I realize how closely related Farah is to Flora. She can see me even in my spectral stage. The two begin to argue. I watch her every move like a hawk as she sneaks surreptitious glances at me. My fury builds. I step forward. Farah sees me, grabs Nicholas by the face, and kisses him.

I bite my lip, hoping to divert the tears. Nicholas shoves her away, searching for me. He looks everywhere, but can't see me unless I let him.

“What are you doing, Nicky?”

He moves her hand off of him. “Sky?”

I freeze.

Farah's small hands beat at his chest. “You can't! Tell me you don't see her. You're supposed to be in love with me!”

Nicholas grabs her hands, holding her away. “No, I can't see her right now, but apparently you can.” I can see Josie at the top of the stairs staring down at the mess below, while Taylor peeks from out of the kitchen doorway.

I step forward to speak. “Your Farah is a direct descendant of the witch who cast the curse.”

She sneers at me. “I know all about you, Cromwell. He won't break the curse. This man is as corrupt as one can get. He isn't faithful to one woman.” She yells out again, “He won't break the curse!”

Farah charges me with a feral grimace plastered on her beautiful face. The fury is at odds with her feminine beauty. She isn't a woman I can ever compare to no matter how much I feel for Nicholas. He now stands between both women in his life—an alive, flesh breathing woman and a ghost. With his hands around Farah to keep her in place, I realize a lot more than I want to from this situation. Feeling a repeat performance of the century before, I move to turn and walk away from them.

“Disappear from his life,” she yells.

“Farah, you know nothing about me.” He drops his hands from her waist.

With my back turned, I wait and ache to hear what he has to say. For a hundred years I spent it in this house, watching family after family try to make it their own. In all of this, all I can hope is to want a piece for me too. A space that belongs to me.

With all the fury of a hundred years pent up inside of me, I send a blast of energy through my body. The entire house lights up. Light bulbs shatter. Their glittering crystal shards are falling to the ground like drops of rain. Farah screams, huddling with fear. I watch from a distance as Nicholas covers his head. Gasps come at me from all directions. With anger unlike any other at my fingertips, I send items flying across the room. One vase painted in orange and red flowers aims true against the far wall. A chair splinters against the parlor room doorframe. I pull the area rug from under Farah, watching as she reels back and lands on her behind.

Farah cries out. She turns her body, tripping in her haste to get back on her feet. She takes one last look at Nicholas and runs out the front door. My body suddenly appears in the doorway as if wanting to run out after her and then coming back to terms with the fact that I will never be able to leave this house.

“Sky, calm down, please.”

I turn to face Nicholas. My entire being fills with the hope that this time things will be different when Nicky says, “Skyler, the kicker of this whole thing is

that I am a direct descendant of Tobias Mansfield. My name is Nicholas Tobias Warren Mansfield.”

My insides tremble.

Everything blurs.

Noises run around me.

I can't decipher a thing.

The world around me shifts into a flurry of kaleidoscope colors that blend into one solid artistic piece. I don't know what is up or down, in or out. I have been stuck within these walls for far too long and still can't figure out what is going on around me. Movement catches my peripheral. I glance up just in time to see Nicholas running upstairs. He is calling out my name.

*'Your biggest pain would be your blessing.'*

I bound up the steps after him and bump into Nicholas's robust and firm chest. He wraps his arms around me, kissing the top of my head. "I knew there had to be a reason you fascinated me, Skyler. Not because you are a ghost, but because I had a connection to you."

Without a chance to doubt myself, I hold him close to me. His warmth is seeping into me, burning me from the inside out. "Tobias hurt me," I cry.

He holds me tighter to him. "He is weak, Sky. I'm the one you are meant to be with."

There is movement going on behind us, but I am way too comfortable to move.

"Uh, Nicky. What are you doing?"

Nicholas looks up at his mother, refusing to let me go. "I'll let you know if it works mom." She seems

confused for a second but then something dawns on her, and she nods.

“Good for you, kid.” She turns to walk away, “Oh, and tell her that she owes me a few cows and a helluva lot of groveling after those stunts she pulled a couple of weeks ago.”

I stiffen.

“Yeah, mom knows about you, Sky,” Nicky confesses.

If anyone can see me right now, they’d see how embarrassed I am. I can feel the blood pooling in my cheeks. My entire body erupts in goosebumps. Nicholas’s mother knows about me and doesn’t care? Having these people in my home has been more of a blessing rather than a curse. I hold Nicky tighter to me, afraid I will fly away the moment we let go.

However, Nicholas lets go of me and grabs my wrist instead. He drags me up the attic stairs. The moment we are in his room, he turns me around to face him. “Sky, let me see you.”

My heart is hammering behind my ribcage as his crisp, ‘fresh out of the shower’ scent engulfs me. I pull the energy from anything I can. When his eyes catch mine, smiling, he places one hand on my cheek to let me know he sees me. Nicholas leans into my face, his breath fanning my lips. Instead of waiting, I throw myself at him, claiming his lips for my own. Afraid he won’t enjoy the real me, I begin to pull away. The smile I feel on his lips tells me different. He draws me closer and takes the kiss deeper.

## CURSED AT FIRST SIGHT

After what feels like an eternity jammed into a small moment, Nicholas pulls away, grinning as I come back to my senses. “Have I mentioned before how beautiful you are?”

My body begins to tingle. My skin feels tight around my bones, a sensation I haven’t felt since being alive. Nicholas stares at me, pressing his lips to mine once more.

“Look in the mirror, beautiful. I think the curse broke.”

Tears pool in my eyes as I walk over to his mirror. Hope flares finally inside of me. I stare at my reflection as tears cascade down my flushed cheeks. It is me staring back. The real me. Nicholas comes from behind me, wrapping his arms low around my waist. He kisses my shoulder as we stare at each other in the mirror. I’m alive again. This rule-breaker broke the curse that has haunted me for a century.

I am cursed all right. Cursed to have fallen in love with this man at first sight. Both Nicholas and I are destined to be together. That was my curse all along. One I’m happy to live with for a century more.

The End