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👤 BOOK FOUR: GHOSTED 👤

GIRL'S GUIDE  
TO VOODOO BOUNTY  
HUNTING

## CHAPTER ONE

“I’m going to burn it, I swear. Come closer and I will.” The man waved an old-school Polaroid-style photograph in one hand and a lighter in the other.

Nessa skidded to a stop, both hands out, “No. Don’t, please. *Please.*”

“Help,” called a tiny voice. “Help, help.”

Barely visible in the photograph a woman wearing a Unicorn Onesie was jumping up and down beating against the film.

The day was not going well. Not at all.

Her boss, Roman Barracuda, owner of Barracuda Bail Barracuda and Voodoo King, had handed her a new case this morning. Human Court. Not Infernal.

Peg Porter was charged with disturbing a burial site. Grave robbing, not to dress it up. The cops hadn’t found any objects on her besides a polaroid camera which she claimed was to take pictures of ghosts. She wasn’t charged with theft, but they’d hung trespassing on top of disturbing a gravesite. Her court date was yesterday afternoon. She had not shown up nor phoned her lawyer.

It was a low-level bond which was why Roman Barracuda had given it to Nessa and Pim. The formidable and only marginally human sisters Pansie and Rose Marie La Rue got the toughest bonds. Though now they divided some of the work with Jun Hee Kim. Jun Hee was from a rival supernatural Bail Bonds office in Denver who had decided to try his luck in Los Angeles. Since Jun Hee was both adept at martial arts and magical arts, Mr. Barracuda was delighted with the addition.

Barracuda handed Nessa the paperwork on Ms. Porter. “Just a simple...”

“Don’t say it!” Nessa interrupted, putting a hand up to stop him.

“...apprehension.”

“You said it.”

He’d jinxed it for sure.

In Nessa and Pim's short careers as novice bounty hunters for Barracuda Bail Bonds every time her boss said 'easy' or 'simple,' Nessa had nearly gotten killed. First by Skinwalkers, then zombies, followed by the Loa of the Dead, a hit and run, more zombies, then kidnapped by warlocks, and finally claimed by the Faerie Court of Air as their newest Princess. Though to be honest, the last one wasn't entirely Mr. Barracuda's fault.

"Her address is in there. Boyle Heights. No place of work given. Though I've included a list of cemeteries. That's most often where she can be found after dark."

Ms. Porter had been arrested on this charge twice before. She should have gotten away with an ankle bracelet until her court date, but the judge said he was tired of her bull and imposed bail.

According to Mr. Barracuda, people hired Peg to circumvent burial wards to find enchanted objects or bones or God knows what.

He pointed at the file. "Read the sticky notes."

Nessa held the file so Pim could see. Despite his invisibility curse – only his witch and a few select others could see him in his feline form – her Familiar was an intelligent cat. Pim wasn't her pet; he was her partner and, transformed into his werecat form, her protector.

The sticky notes let them know Peg was a Diviner. She used her divining talent to locate lost objects, specifically those tied to burial sites and corpses. She wasn't a necromancer; she didn't reanimate or manipulate dead flesh. However, her magic seemed to blur a little into that dark art.

"Have shovel, will travel?" Nessa said, surprised. "For real?"

"For real." Barracuda shook his head, "Stupid girl. Flipping off the dead has consequences. She's going to pay for her disrespect one day."

As Nessa left the office, she sincerely hoped it would not be today.

She had hoped in vain.

Boyle Heights was conveniently close to Evergreen Cemetery. Los Angeles' largest, oldest, and currently most neglected graveyard according to various sites suggested by Google that Nessa looked through on their way over.

Fiona drove her and Pim there in the witch's sleek silver Audi. Fiona was currently working off a Community Service sentence from the Infernal Court at the bail bonds office. Fiona had used black magic to compel the price down on a house she'd wanted to buy in

Glendale. Assorted acts of mayhem with some unfortunate side effects had resulted in her official censure by the Infernal Court.

Nessa did not understand how pursuing felons for Mr. Barracuda translated to Community Service, but no one had asked her opinion. Mostly Fiona drove Nessa and Pim around greater L.A. as the two of *them* did the pursuing. Nessa did not have a car and as she had learned the hard way, transporting felons on the back of a 40cc scooter was no easy task.

Boyle Heights was about ten miles from the office in Compton. Nessa noted a KFC on and a McDonald's on the way. Summoning spells was hungry work. She and Pim had stopped at Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf for some espresso and breakfast on the way to Barracuda Bail Bonds. She filed these away for later. She had a feeling today was going to be hungry work.

Peg Porter's house was a tiny white cottage on a postage-stamp-sized yard. It was neat and pretty with violet hydrangea bushes blooming all along the front wall. The door was painted a dusky gray.

An electric blue Ford EcoSport sat in the driveway. Nessa knew cars. Deadbeat Dad had taught her to recognize and remember the make of cars since she was a toddler. His career as a magical con artist meant they had to be vigilant for vengeful victims and/or plainclothes police.

Nessa looked at the papers again. Peg Porter owned the house, it wasn't a rental. Ditto the car. A nice car *and* a house? Grave robbing must pay well.

As soon as she got out of the car, she gagged. The sidewalk smelled like rotting meat. Pim sneezed repeatedly, rubbing frantically at his nose with one paw.

"Oh my god. Shut the door!" Fiona shouted.

Nessa did and the Audi sped away, stopping near the end of the block.

She pulled her shirt up over her nose, not that it helped much. Her eyes were watering from the ferocity of the smell. Since no neighbors or police were outside exclaiming over the stink, Nessa assumed it was supernatural in nature. Probably it only affected magic users.

She walked the border of the front yard. The smell stretched from one side of the yard to the other. Taking a few steps more, the stink abruptly dropped off to nothing.

Only the house.

"Pim, check around the back."

Gagging, Pim scampered off.

When he returned, she asked, "All around the house?"

He nodded.

Something had marked the property boundary but not ventured inside. Maybe because it couldn't. Peg Porter was a witch who played on the dark side of magic. She'd have powerful magical wards to protect her home.

"Does it go anywhere else?"

Pim gave a meow of protest, still sneezing, but tracked the scent in one neighbor's yard up a tall oak.

The tree faced a picture window in Peg's house. Judging from its placement, Nessa guessed it was the bedroom.

Nessa had no trouble crossing the protective wards. They must be set up against someone or something with malevolent intentions. From the prickling along her skin, she knew she'd set off the house's supernatural alarm system. Anyone at home would know she was here

She went up to the front door to knock. It swung open slightly at her touch.

Not good.

She stood to one side, pushing the door all the way with her elbow.

Deadbeat Dad had taught her never to stand directly in front of a door if you didn't know who was on the other side.

"Hello?" she called loudly from the far edge of the little concrete step. "Miss Porter? Barracuda Bail Bonds. It's about your court date."

No answer.

Pim slipped by her gliding soundlessly inside.

She waited until he returned meowing an 'All clear.'

Something had happened. That was immediately obvious. The open plan of the cottage let her see the living, dining room, and much of the galley-style kitchen from the doorway. Glasses and plates were broken and scattered on the floor. Wine bottles tipped over on the table. One had spilled its contents leaving red puddles. One dining chair was overturned.

Directly in front of the entryway down a short hall was another door, and one more to the right. The hall door turned out to be the bathroom. The other door was open. A bedroom.

Nessa was careful not to touch anything in case the police became involved.

There was no lingering stink from the entity that had circled the outside of the house. Whatever it was hadn't caused this mess.

She followed Pim into the bedroom. Blankets, sheets, and pillows lay strewn around the bed and floor. An ashy, smokey smell lingered that wasn't present in the rest of the house.

“Do you smell blood?”

Pim shook his head.

They looked around the bed. She checked the closet and bureau. Pim meowed an alert pointing with a paw.

Nessa squatted down, looking at his find. A burned *something* lay crumpled near the window. Not paper or it would have been ash. This was where the smokey smell was coming from. That was a lot of smell for such a small thing. Nessa held her hand over the crumpled black object. The tingle was unmistakable.

Magic.

Pim crawled out from under the bed pushing a set of keys with his nose.

Nessa walked back to the front of the cottage, pressing a button on the black key fob. The blue Ford beeped and flashed its lights.

She closed the front door, got in the car, and turned it on. This was a deluxe model with all the bells and whistles. Her dad had rented one a couple of times. She flicked through the onboard navigation and entertainment display screens looking to see what apps had been installed.

Nessa crossed her fingers and said, “Hey Siri?”

Nothing.

“Siri?”

Silence.

“Hey, Alexa?”

“Uh-huh,” came the chirpy reply.

Nessa fist-pumped the air. Ms. Porter had taken advantage of connecting her cell to the car's onboard system. Hopefully, she had taken it one step further.

“Alexa, find my phone.”

“Give me a moment,” came the reply. Shortly a map with a blinking light appeared on the screen.

Nessa called Fiona.

“Are you dead?”

Last week Nessa had gotten kidnapped by a gang of warlocks fighting Baron Samedi, the Voodoo Loa of the Dead, for a cursed sword. Since then, this had been Fiona's annoying stock answer to Nessa's calls.

"Will you stop that? Geez. No. Not dead. The lady isn't here. Something bad happened. Pim found her car keys. We're going to track her phone. According to the map, she's not far. Will you follow?"

"I guess," she said after a lengthy pause.

Nessa backed out of the driveway, pulling in front of Fiona's Audi.

Technically she was sort of stealing Ms. Porter's car. It was for a good cause, Nessa reasoned. The woman had probably been kidnapped. Or worse.

The AI guided them to Evergreen Cemetery. More precisely, a beat-up, old Scion sedan parked at Evergreen Cemetery.

Nessa pulled in next to it.

Fiona parked close by. She stayed inside the car with the windows up and the engine running. Fiona was all about quick getaways. Usually without Nessa.

She peered inside the Scion's dusty windows. There was a handbag in the backseat.

Maybe whoever took Peg Porter was going to bury her in the cemetery. Pretty good hiding place except the sun was still up. People might notice someone dragging a body and carrying a shovel in broad daylight. Even in L.A.

Nessa drew a question mark in the air for Fiona to ask if she was coming.

Fiona made a gesture back.

Clearly not.

Pim ran ahead scouting for Miss Porter. Living or dead.

The drought had not been kind to Evergreen. The grounds looked like a schoolyard in a poor neighborhood. Lots of bleached dirt with scraggly patches of dead brown grass brightened only occasionally with a well-tended plot of green. There were a few skinny palms and some other hardy evergreens that were managing to hold on despite the neglect.

They spent about fifteen minutes wandering around grounds before spying a solitary man standing by a new grave talking to himself.

As Nessa came closer, she realized he was talking to a Polaroid-style instant photograph.

A little closer and she heard the photograph talking back.

A shiver ran down her spine.

“Hey,” she said waving a hand. “Barracuda Bail Bonds. Um, bond recovery agent.” She always forgot to add that. “I’m looking for Peg Porter.”

Though she had a horrible feeling she knew where Ms. Porter was.

The man jumped.

“Go away,” he shouted, waving the photograph.

“Do you know where Peg Porter is?”

He looked directly at the photograph.

Nessa rolled her eyes. What an amateur.

“What’s your name?”

“Keith.”

“Okay, Keith. I need Ms. Porter to come with me. She missed her court date. My boss will help her get a new one.”

Which might or might not be true. Mr. Barracuda probably wouldn’t want to take another chance on Peg Porter. Though looking at the current tableau, Nessa thought missing court might not be Ms. Porter’s fault.

The man was bouncing nervously up and down on his feet looking from the photograph to Nessa and back again. “You can’t have her.”

“Why?” Nessa asked moving closer.

He held up a cheap lighter in his other hand. He flicked it on waving it under the photo. “I said stay back.”

Nessa backed away slowly. “Take it easy, Keith.”

He moved the lighter closer. “She has to pay for what she did.”

“Wait, don’t. Burn the photograph and the Infernal Court will have you in for homicide.”

“Homicide,” screeched the tiny figure in the photo, waving a fist.

“Justified,” said the man.

“Homicide is never justified,” Nessa said righteously.

Keith seemed to think about that. “Unless it’s a troll. Or a ghoul.”

Nessa rolled her eyes. “Okay, okay, I admit, ghouls and trolls are evil.”

“And zombies,” said the guy warming to the subject. “No such thing as a nice zombie.”

“Granted. But not girlfriends or boyfriends. Past or present.”

Keith frowned. “Not even when you catch them having sex with a car salesman from Irvine? *Irvine* for chrissakes.”

“He’s not a salesman,” the tiny woman said, shouting to be heard. “He owns the dealership.”

“Not anymore,” Keith said in a grim voice.

Nessa saw now he had a classic instant camera slung around his chest.

Oh crap. That must have been the burned something on the floor. Another instant photo with poor Brad in it.

Pim was creeping closer to the man. His invisibility curse was a real advantage in their new line of work. Almost a hundred years ago he’d been cursed by a gypsy witch after romancing her winsome Calico on the Atlantic crossing with Nessa’s Great-Grandmother. Since then, he could only be seen by his witch and a few others. Except, of course, when he transformed into his werecat alter ego. Then everyone could see him. More often than not, his teeth and claws were the last things they saw.

“Why, Peg? Why?” Keith was looking into the photo at the little woman. “What could Brad give you I couldn’t?”

“Mortgage payments,” said Peg firmly.

“Besides that.”

“A car.”

“Besides that.”

“Hot s...”

“Stop,” Nessa yelled, “enough.”

“Yeah, enough,” said Brad. He lit a corner of the photograph.

The tiny woman screamed shrilly.

Pim sprang. He transformed to his werecat form in mid-jump clamping his jaws around Keith’s wrist holding the photo.

Keith yelled in surprise and pain. Nessa dove for the Polaroid catching it before it hit the ground. She slapped it against her hoodie to put out the flame.

Keith was on the ground clutching his wrist. Pim took up an aggressive stance in front of the man.

One corner had completely burned away.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“It broke my wrist!” yelled Keith.

“Not you, idiot,” Nessa said. “Besides, it’s only sprained. If he’d broken it, you would have heard the snap.”

She held the photo closer. Peg Porter was crouched in the far corner, her arms over her head, sobbing. Nessa could see now that the room in the picture was her cottage’s dining room. She must have run in there trying to escape Keith. That’s why it was a mess in the real world.

“Hey, hey, Ms. Porter, are you hurt?”

The woman lifted her face. She had a lot of dark brown hair. She was pretty, Nessa saw. Or would be if she wasn’t three inches tall.

Peg wiped her nose on her sleeve, “I’m okay.”

Nessa turned back to Keith. “The Infernal Court is going to have you for one murder today. Did you really want to make it two?” She didn’t wait for an answer. “Tell me how to get her out.”

“Um,” he hesitated, stammering a bit. “Uh, um.”

Nessa rolled her eyes. “You don’t know, do you? Why am I not surprised?”

“Uhh…” was the reply.

She looked at the photograph, raising an eyebrow.

“I don’t know either,” Peg said, sniffing wetly and wiping her nose on her sleeve.

Great. Just great.

## CHAPTER TWO

She called the one person who might have the information she needed.

“Dad, I’ve got a cursed instant camera that shrinks people and puts them inside a photo. I need to get someone out.”

“Give me a couple of minutes,” he said. “I’ll call you back as quick as I can. Are you safe?”

“Nope!” she chirped.

“That’s my girl.”

Dad was at Aunt Emerald’s hiding since he’d shown up after a phone call two days ago. Belencourt, a powerful L.A. demon who dealt in rare supernatural objects, was after him. For what he had not explained, though Nessa suspected it had something to do with her dead mother’s damned bargain with a Fallen Angel.

Her mother, Genevieve Chevalier, had been born without magic to a clan of powerful Elemental Air Witches. Consumed by jealousy, she’d made a dark and dirty deal with a Fallen Angel not knowing that Nessa was already nestled in her womb. Like most wagers of this kind, the House always wins. Genevieve had died in childbirth. The Fallen Angel felt Nessa was part of that dark bargain. Nessa’s father disagreed.

As usual, her Dad had problems completely unrelated to Nessa and her fallen Angel. Aunt Emerald, his older sister, had powerful wards around her house. One reason Nessa was living there as she attended Santa Monica Junior College. Her Dad reasoned if the wards could hide Nessa from a Fallen Angel, they could certainly cloak him from a powerful demon.

So far, he’d been right.

Next, she called Fiona. The only other person she knew who dabbled in dark magic.

“Are you dead?” Fiona said.

“Damn it, you just saw me like fifteen minutes ago.”

Fiona snorted. “As if that wasn’t enough time to die.”

Nessa winced. “Could you *not* say things like that?”

Fiona made a contemptuous sound instead.

“I am not dead. However, my skip is trapped in a cursed instant photo from a camera she dug out of a grave. I want to know if you ever heard of a spell to get someone out of that situation.”

“Why do you want to get her out? If she was stupid enough to get herself trapped an all.”

“Because getting her back to the police is the only way I’ll get my money.”

“Oh, right. You’re poor.

Nessa took a deep breath.

‘Stay calm,’ she told herself. ‘Breathe in and out. In and out.’

“Fiona, can you help me?”

“Maybe.” She hung up.

Pim paced back and forth in front of Keith. He was still in werecat form which meant he was fully visible.

“The camera is cursed?” she asked Peg Porter.

“Yes,” shouted the tiny woman.

“Did you know?”

She shook her head emphatically. “No. Or not precisely. It had to be magic because somebody contracted me to find it and dig it out.”

“That’s when the police caught you?”

She nodded. “Right. When I got out on bail, they gave the camera back.”

“And the stink around your house? Was that the guy who contracted you to get the camera?”

She winced. “You smelled that? No,” she went on not waiting for an answer. “Something came to the house night before last. I have strong wards around my place. Disturbing graves can rile up some nasty things. It couldn’t get on the roof or through the doors.”

“It climbed your neighbor’s tree.”

She looked surprised. “Yes. It talked to me from there. Told me where to put the camera.”

“Not return it?”

“No. I was to bring the camera here to Evergreen Cemetery. Gave me the geolocation of one of the plots. Made sure I wrote it down and repeated it several times. The thing said to place

the camera in the hands of the angel statue. Or it would..." she paused, looking down, "do things to me. Bad things."

Nessa threw one hand up in the air. "And after that graphic warning, you decided to have a fling with Brad before going to the cemetery. Because sex was on your mind rather than returning an obviously cursed object?"

Peg shrugged. "He came over, one thing led to another. We were drunk. And high. And Brad is very persuasive. Was. Was very persuasive." She sniffed and wiped her eyes with a sleeve of the unicorn onesie.

"What was Brad's last name?"

"Zwingley."

She knew that name. Everyone in Greater L.A. with a television knew that name.

"Swing a deal with Zwingley Ford, Zwingley?"

"Yes. Number one on the 101."

"Number one on the 101," Nessa repeated. He was going to be missed big time. Guys like him didn't just disappear. The Infernal Court would not be pleased.

Keith took a deep breath. "Do you smell that?"

Pim looked up, growling.

Nessa sniffed the warm air.

"It's the entity that told Peg to return the camera. If it's here, we better start walking toward the grave. Pim, get the camera."

Keith, who was still on the ground, swung the camera away.

Pim bared his fangs, crouching low, ready to spring.

"You better give it to him," Nessa warned.

Keith, proving he was not as stupid as he looked, reconsidered and tossed the camera to Pim.

Pim jumped, catching the strap in his teeth. He brought it to Nessa.

"Tell me where to go," she said to Peg.

Peg had memorized the numbers but had no idea what to do next. Nessa Googled how to enter the GPS coordinates into her map app.

Keith, who was following them at a distance, kept shouting directions as he tried to do the same thing on his own phone.

“Stop helping,” Nessa yelled at him as her cell buzzed.

Fiona.

“Look on the back of the photo,” Fiona said.

Nessa looked.

“There should be a circle of sigils.”

“There is.”

“Right. You need to draw those sigils on the ground. In the dirt is fine. Exactly as they are in the photo. Make it big enough for a person to stand in.”

“Then what?”

“Not sure. Still looking.” She hung up.

Nessa went back to the instructions. She typed in the numbers and zoomed in on the map that came up. Hoping she’d done it right, she began walking, following the arrow.

Pim kept himself between her and Keith, so she didn’t worry about turning her back on him.

“Tell me more about the camera. Did you find the camera in a grave?”

“Not the one we’re going to. Which is weird, right? Different grave. Different cemetery. Inglewood. That’s another big graveyard. Not as big as this. Someone was looking for the camera. A man. Or at least a man’s voice on the phone. He paid half upfront for the job. Good money.”

“Why didn’t he go himself?”

She shrugged. “Didn’t think to ask. I have a reputation and he had money.”

“But you got caught.”

She shrugged. “It happens. I said the camera was mine. When I got out on bail, they gave it back. Nothing happened for a while. The guy who contacted me never called back. Then that thing showed up.

“How did Brad end up in the photograph? Did Keith do that?”

She shook her head. “Brad came over like I said. We were playing around. He saw the camera on the bureau and said let’s take pictures old-school style. I took a picture of Brad. Naked in bed with his...

“Do not need details,” Nessa said quickly.

“And it just happened. One second, he was there. The next he was in the photo, yelling. I was frantic. Holding the camera, trying to figure out what to do. That’s when *he* came in.”

“Keith grabbed the camera and took a picture of you?”

“Eventually. Yeah.”

“In your unicorn onesie.”

“We were role-playing.”

Nessa shook her head. “Again. Don’t need to know.”

Keith must be a magic user as well since he understood exactly what was going on.

“He called me names,” Keith said.

“Who?” asked Nessa.

“Brad. He shouldn’t have called me names. Especially standing there naked with his…”

“I get the picture.”

“So, I burned the photo.”

Peg gestured around her. “And here I am.”

Pim growled, his fur rising. He was looking beyond Keith, back along the way they had come. Nessa started walking faster.

“We’re going to need the camera to get you out. Whatever’s following *wants* the camera.”

Peg pressed against the film, staring out.

“I don’t want to stay here forever. You’ve got to help me.”

“I’m trying.”

The directions took them to the opposite side of the cemetery. It was a little better cared for. Big headstones here and a few statues. One must be the angel they needed.

Her phone buzzed.

Dad.

“I know about the ring of sigils on the back of the photo,” she said before he could speak.

“We’re supposed to reproduce them in a circle on the ground.”

“Right. Good. Put the photo you have inside the circle. You have the camera, yes?”

“Yes. Then what?”

“I’m still checking. There’s another photo involved somehow. Emerald is helping me translate the text from Latin. Either you burn the copy or the original. Not sure which.”

Peg gave a tiny yelp of fear.

“Sort of an important point, Dad.”

“I’ll get back to you.”

A whiff of rotten meat floated by on a current of hot air.

“Hurry.”

It turned out the angel wasn’t hard to spot. It stood higher than all the gravestones ringing it.

The apparition appeared as Nessa dumped her backpack. It was a swath of darkness. That’s all Nessa could make out. No form or face.

It began to circle them.

She took out a sharpie and used it as a pointer to carefully copy the sigils from the back of the photo in the nearest plot of dirt.

Pim kept pace with the entity, placing himself between it and them as it circled.

Nessa was no lightweight with magic spells. Air answered her call. But air was all about movement. If she summoned a tempest, it would blow away the runes. She had no way and nowhere to draw them except here in the dirt.

She was pretty accurate with her lighting strikes, lighting being all about combining elements already in the air. The flint bracelets she wore let her activate those elements with a spark. The thing was so fluid though, it would be hard to hit.

She completed the circle. Still, she didn’t know what to do with the photograph once the runes were drawn.

“Come on Dad,” she whispered.

The thing wanted the camera.

She swung the camera around. It hissed. Moving forward. Pim reared up on his hind legs and swatted at it with his claws bared. Werecat claws resembled scimitars. Curved and vicious. The thing screeched and pulled away.

It must have a body if Pim had hurt it.

Her phone buzzed and her nerves jumped.

Dad. A Facetime call. She tapped the app.

“On the picture with the person, write this rune,” he said without preamble.

He aimed the camera at a drawing. Nessa knew that one. It meant empty.

She wiped the dirt off her pen and copied the symbol on top of the photo. Peg squeezed herself to one side.

“You have to take the film out of the camera and aim it at the circle. Before you fill in the last rune to close it, light the photograph on fire. Close the circle and take a picture with the empty camera.”

“Okay,” she said, tapping off and shoving her phone in her back pocket.

“Keith,” she called, “give me the lighter.”

“No.”

“Keith, we don’t have time for this crap. Give me the lighter!”

“She cheated on me.”

“That doesn’t mean she should die, you idiot. Stop thinking with your dick.”

Pim, who had been following the conversation while keeping pace with the entity moved so that Keith was suddenly in its path.

The thing gave an unearthly howl.

Keith screamed like a little girl, tossed the lighter to Nessa, and dove behind Pim.

Nessa couldn’t see what happened next. Though judging from Pim’s yowls and Keith’s screams, the entity was attacking.

She ejected the film pack, knelt in the dirt, and put the picture in the center of the circle.

“Go to the far side of the room,” she ordered Peg. “It’s going to get hot.”

Praying her father was right, she lit the edge of the polaroid, nudging the magic circle awake. She pictured it glowing in her mind as she closed the last rune. A shimmer of silver let her know the circle was active.

The picture began to smoke and burn.

Peg started to cry loudly.

Nessa jumped to her feet, aimed the camera, and pushed the lever, chanting, “Please, please, *please* work.”

A burst of light inside the circle made Nessa shield her eyes.

Coughing and crying, Peg stood large as life.

Scrambling over, half-crouching, half-standing, she swept aside the runes, releasing the magic. The trapped energy in the circle burst out knocking her head over heels. She fell onto her back and into the entity. For a millisecond she saw a man’s face. Handsome in the way Frank,

the dark angel lusting after her soul, was handsome. His body was wreathed in magic and she was suddenly sure the smell, like the cascading darkness, was a spell.

Then Pim pounced, jumping on its very solid back and biting hard.

The thing twisted around trying to grab the werecat.

Nessa rolled forward and tossed the camera at Peg.

“Put it in the angel’s hands.”

Peg blinked at Nessa. The camera at her feet.

“Pick it up,” she shouted. “Put the camera where it told you.”

Wavering uncertainly, she picked up the camera. Keith looked like he was going to try and stop her.

Nessa jumped to her feet and tackled him. They rolled in the dirt on top of a grave. His heart wasn’t really in the fight and he stopped struggling with her almost immediately.

Peg walked to the angel statue and set the camera in its hands.

Nessa pushed away from Keith, rubbing her elbow. She’d hit it hard on the edge of the headstone.

The entity levitated as if it was weightless. One second it was in a face-off with Pim, the next it was by the angel. Darkness enveloped the statue.

In a heartbeat, the entity soared into the air, out of sight.

The camera was gone.