

THE LAST WITCH II

Free Chapter I

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'Come with me. I can take such good care of you. No one will ever hurt you again.'

He waits. His eyes never leave me. His smile doesn't falter for a second and his confidence and authority fills the air. I can almost taste it. But Grayson's sweet words aren't done.

'We can keep you safe,' he promises me. 'There will be no more bars on your window. No more chains around your wrists. You will never go hungry. No one will strike you. There is nowhere safer than with me. You will be Free.'

'I'll be Free?' I ask in a stunned whisper.

'Yes, Lilly Hooper. You will be completely free.'

'STOP IT!' I scream, pulling against Hendrix and his impossibly tight grip. I claw at his hands. I pull and yank. I screech as desperate and hate-filled tears stream down my cheeks and blood drips down my chin. 'STOP! PLEASE! FOR GOD'S SAKE, GRAYSON! STOP HURTING HER!'

Amara continues to writhe and judder in Grayson's arms as he releases his lightning into her body. He stares at me almost bored as he tortures my best friend in front of me. His blue lightning erupts from his hands in short and sharp bursts, making sure the pain Amara suffers is fresh and new.

And I'm powerless to stop him.

I curl up my fist and hit Hendrix's arm over and over. Each impact makes the crisp white bandage protecting the stumps where up until two days ago my fingers were, slowly start to turn red. I

know I've ripped my stitches. It's excruciating. But my desperation to get free and stop Amara's torture outweighs the pain a hundred times over.

Hendrix just laughs at my feeble attempts to inflict any form of real pain on him.

'I'll ask you again, Miss Hooper. Are. You. Ready?' Grayson asks, with his eyebrows raised and his lips in a tight line. He has Amara's arms pinned across her chest. Another sharp blast of his lightning shoots through her body before I can even respond. But this time, he doesn't stop. It carries on.

And on. And on!

Her screams get louder, higher and more desperate.

'Waiting for an answer, Miss Hooper,' Grayson calls out over her cries of agony. Her eyes start to roll back into her head. My attempts to get free of the vampire turn feral. My fingernails claw at his face and draw blood. Hendrix grunts before spinning me around and giving me a backhand, splitting my lip. He doesn't let me go, but grips my shoulders tighter and continues forcing me to watch on helplessly.

The door to Grayson's office smashes open. Splinters of wood explode over us all, and Collins charges into the room. He sees Amara. He sees me, and the hate-filled look he throws at Grayson is terrifying.

'Get your fucking hands off-'

With a simple swipe of his hand, Grayson sends Collins to the wall with such force it cracks the plaster and sends the portrait above his head crashing to the floor. But Collins is back up and ready to charge in a matter of seconds. Only to get slammed once more into the wall. Hendrix wraps his grubby fingers over my brand and squeezes.

I howl and crumple to my knees, fighting the urge to vomit or pass out as the burnt flesh feels once more alight.

Grayson stops his torture. Amara slumps in his arms, her hair falls over her face as she sobs. He doesn't let her go, but simply looks at Collins, daring him to take another step.

'If you make another move,' Grayson warns him in an eerie calm. 'I'll send my lightning through Amara's body so it shatters her bones, tears her muscles and pops her pretty eyes like water balloons.'

I'm on my knees with my mutilated arm being crushed by Hendrix. I'm trying so hard not to scream from the unbelievable pain, and Amara, sweet Amara, quietly sobs in the devil's arms.

Collins can't help it. His compulsion to protect Amara and get her away from Grayson is too strong. Stronger than his sense of reason. He goes to get to his feet.

'DON'T!' I plead. 'Collins... Please, don't. You'll only make it worse.'

'Finally,' Grayson sighs, a condescending turn appearing on his lips. 'You've said something sensible.' And with that, he drops Amara like a sack of rocks at his feet. I flood with relief. She rolls onto her back and her big, tear-filled eyes land straight on me.

Grayson steps over her and slowly, purposefully, makes his way towards me. My relief is quickly overridden by apprehension. Hendrix lets me go and steps back. Grayson's footsteps echo all around us. No one says a word or moves an inch. On my knees and cradling my arm, I look up at him. He straightens his cufflinks as he gets closer, that confident and cruel smile hitching the corners of his mouth. His dark eyes look into mine with triumphant joy.

He has the most powerful witch in the world on her knees at his feet.

And that makes him very happy.

Crouching down, he runs his finger gently along my jaw. I know that if I pull away from his touch, more pain will follow for all of us. So I let him touch me. The feeling of his skin caressing mine is hot and searing. The same as it always is when unwanted hands touch me. His most of all.

'Do we have to go through this again?' he asks me sweetly. His focus lingers on my mouth and with his thumb, he catches a bead of blood. I look at him with such contempt. I'm shaking with it. 'I thought I was very clear on how I expected you to behave when I branded you and brought you to heel back at the barn.'

'I'm doing everything-'

'Shall I go upstairs? Hmm?' he asks. 'Go and check on Gabriel? Perhaps I'll do to him, what my father did to you and your lovely fingers.'

He stands and makes for the door, ready to carry out his threat. I grab his wrist to stop him. 'No. No, don't. Please, leave him alone?' I ask, desperation shaking my voice.

He takes my hand, leans down and kisses my knuckles. I hate that I have no choice but to let him.

'Let me remind you, Miss Hooper.' He keeps hold of my hand and gives Amara and Collins a quick look, making sure that they're listening too. 'Let me remind you all of the way it works in this house. In *my* house.' I'm yanked to my feet and shaken. 'Until the Veil is down, the Arcane is mine. Her magic is under *my* control. She does as *I* say, when *I* say it. And she does it with a pretty smile on her face. If she does not, one of you will pay the price. And you...' Grayson points at Amara and Collins with his free hand, anger piercing his calm composure ever so slightly as his grip on my wrist increases. 'You will fall into line and do as you are told. I am your Coven Leader, and I will have the respect that title demands. If you do not obey me, Lilly will pay the price.' He releases a burst of lightning which shoots straight down my arm. I clench my teeth down hard and refuse to let out any noise whatsoever.

My silence is not what he wants.

So he makes it stronger.

Only when I scream does he stop.

'I own every single one of you,' Grayson states plainly. 'I always have. And I always will. I shall do anything to finish the mission we started five-centuries ago. Magic will return. And you will all do as I say, when I say it, or I will hurt the people that you love. Am I clear?'

He gets nothing but silence and loathing from all three of us.

'AM I CLEAR?' he roars, letting loose his lightning on my skin once more and twisting my wrist back, making me yell.

'Yes!' Amara sobs desperately, forcing herself up onto her knees. 'You're clear, Grayson! We'll do what you say. Stop! Please, let Lilly go. PLEASE!'

He looks at Collins.

'And you?' Grayson asks.

Collins is red in the face and rigid with fury. His fists are clenched at his sides and his teeth grind together.

'He's got it, Grayson,' Amara pleads on his behalf, watching me as I suffer.

'I'm afraid I need to hear it from him.' Grayson looks straight at Collins. 'Well?'

'You're tormenting the most powerful witch alive. When she gets her magic back from you, she'll tear you apart,' Collins warns. 'And I'll help her.'

'You will, huh?' Grayson laughs callously. 'If you do, I'll kill Amara before you can blink. I used my lightning on Amara, because Lilly said no to me when I asked her to do something. And because you just threatened me, Collins...' He looks down at me still on the floor. 'Lilly will pay the price for your words.' He scrunches up his face and yanks my hand back hard. The snap echoes around the room and the scream I produce hurts my throat.

'YOU FUCKING BASTARD!' Collins bellows.

'Do you understand now?' Grayson questions. 'Or shall I break another of her bones to *help* you to understand?' The lightning continues to tear through my nerves as he snatches up my other wrist.

I don't think I can take much more. I'm going to pass out.

Amara looks desperately over to Collins. 'TELL HIM!' she screams, as I continue being tortured. 'TELL HIM YOU UNDERSTAND NOW, OR WE ARE OVER!'

There's an internal battle raging behind Collins' eyes. He wants to rip Grayson's head off. But he can't. And he knows it.

Grayson lifts my wrist, his face scrunches once more as he prepares to snap another of my bones.

'COLLINS!' Amara screeches. 'TELL HIM!'

'I understand, Grayson,' Collin concedes, through gritted teeth. 'I'll do as you instruct. Let her go.'

Still gripping my wrist threateningly, Grayson looks down at me. His lightning still shooting into my arm.

'And you, Miss Hooper?' he asks patiently. 'Do you understand how this works? That your disobedience will mean someone else's suffering?'

I nod and groan.

'I'm sorry?' He leans in, his ear going to my mouth. 'I didn't catch that.'

'YES! I GOT IT!' I scream. 'STOP! PLEASE!'

The lightning ends. Grayson lets me go. I fall backwards, cradling my arm to my chest as he straightens his already perfectly straight cufflinks.

'Great,' he says, happily. 'I didn't want it to turn out like this. But if you all refuse to do as instructed, I have no choice but to use violence and threats to keep you all in line. Now. Here's

what we are going to do, Miss Hooper. You and I are going to head outside to the big shiny van that I have had brought here for you. You will submit to any and all tests that the doctors inside that van wish to run on you. And you will do so politely and without complaint. Or your friends will all be very, very sorry. Do you understand?’

He holds out his hand and waits for me to take it.

‘I can’t have a child,’ I tell him, almost desperately. ‘Toby made sure of it. You’ve seen the marks on my stomach. You have an Arcane. I’m right here. I’m doing your spell. I’m doing everything you want. Isn’t that enough?’

‘If the tests come back, and you are infertile, then fine. I will let it go and focus on finding your cousin, Junior, instead. You and I will simply translate the journal, perform the spell to lower the Veil, and then you can all leave. You have my word. I will never darken your doorway again. But, if you *can* have a child, that child could very well be an Arcane. Only your bloodline has ever had access to all seven-realms of power and we cannot allow the extinction of your breed of witch. Arcane witches are essential in the survival of magic. If we lose them for good, we will not be strong enough to fight the enemies we must face. And unless we find your cousin, you are the only Hooper left. So, you and I-’

‘I will never carry your child,’ I snarl. ‘Never. I saw what you did to your own son all those years ago. You pushed him too far in the effort to get him to manifest magic and he died. And I saw what you did to Rose Hooper. How you locked her away for years and forced her to bear your children. I’ll kill myself before I let you anywhere near me.’

‘She’s with Gabriel!’ Collins barks. ‘Your own brother. They love each other. And while he’s upstairs, fighting for his life, you threaten and torture the woman he loves like this? How could you?’

Grayson holds out his hand and points it right at Amara. His lightning glimmers threateningly between his fingers. Collins shuffles and falls very quiet as he watches it.

'Another word... I'll send my lightning through Amara until her heart stops beating. That is your final warning. Understand?' Grayson waits. Collins lowers his gaze and gives a small nod. 'Sadly, Gabriel cannot have children, which leaves me the only suitable alternative. The Kendryk bloodline is superior to all others. Except for the Hooper bloodline, of course. Which is why it is so important that the two come together. So, what is it going to be, Miss Hooper? More pain? More blood? More tears? Or are we going to walk out to that van, do what needs to be done and then after, you can return upstairs to your unconscious *boyfriend*?' He says the word like it tastes vile on his tongue.

'I'm waiting, Miss Hooper.' He stretches out his hand further, twitching his fingers for me to take them. 'Are you ready?'

'Toby did what he did because he had a vision. He saw me die, pregnant. Will you kill an Arcane simply to try and make another?'

He crouches down once more and leans in close.

'He saw you die carrying *his* child. Not mine. So, like I said,' he whispers, his warm breath sending a shiver down my spine. 'I'll do whatever I can to make sure your bloodline lives on. I will not allow you to be the last Arcane Witch to walk this earth. And if you are able to have a child, then you will. I'll see to it. The bloodline, the magic, all that power, it cannot be lost. And since the man you have chosen to love is unable to have a child, it will be my child that you will carry.' There's a look of longing in his eyes as they settle on my belly. A glimpse of want and desire that's been there since the night we met. He doesn't care that I love his brother. And he certainly doesn't care that his brother loves me. Because in his twisted, fucked up way, Grayson loves me. He loves my magic. My power. And to him, that is all that matters.

'You will lower that Veil, return magic, and then we will have a baby. Stay with Gabriel if that's what you wish. I promised I wouldn't stop you. But I'm telling you now that if you can conceive, you will.'

'And I'm telling you, I'll get my magic back from you one day. And when I do, you'll know pain like never before.'

'You will never get the Bloodstone back from me. Never. And if you try, I will torture, maim and destroy everyone you love, my dear. If I even suspect a plot to take it from me, what has happened to you will happen to them. Ten times over. I will lock them up. Scar their bodies. Starve them. Beat them. Cut off their extremities and make them watch as the people they love suffer and die. Now, get off my floor and into that van before I break your legs and drag you out there by your hair.'

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With half my face buried in his pillow, I lay and watch Gabriel's painfully still form. He still hasn't woken up from being shot two days ago. His chest rises and falls. His eyes move back and forth behind his closed lids as he dreams. The machine beside his head continues to steadily beep, letting me know that his heart, although it has a hole in it right now, is still beating. My fingers entwine with his, but no matter how tightly I hold them, he doesn't give me anything back. Not even a twitch.

My right arm is just pain. I feel nothing but hot, searing agony. The brand is far from healed, and my fingers were only sewn up a few hours ago. After hitting Hendrix, being grabbed and electrocuted, the pain is so much worse than it was. And my left hand is now in a cast from Grayson snapping my wrist.

I've had two fingers brutally removed with rusty pliers. On the very same arm, I have a brand that still feels hot to the touch. And I'm covered in so many cuts and bruises I can't tell who put which ones where anymore. I'm also stuck with the disturbing image of me on the floor of that horrible, dirty old barn, pleading with Toby not to do what he did.

He killed our baby.

My hands settle over my empty and scarred belly. The two large marks by my pelvis have suddenly become a source of hope.

Please, don't let me be able to carry a child.

I shuffle, trying to ease the discomfort between my legs from the invasive tests carried out in the state of the art, portable medical lab Grayson forced me into a few hours ago. Tests which will determine if Toby has rendered me infertile by his butchery in the Miller's barn. And right now, I hope to hell he did. Because otherwise, I'm in for the same fate as Rose Hooper. Locked up and forced to have Grayson's children to further a cursed bloodline.

I continue watching Gabriel sleep. I breathe in his scent and feel his magic humming all around me. I still have no idea what I'm going to say to him when he does open his eyes. Gabriel will learn that I was pregnant with Toby's child. That Toby beat me till it was no longer there while his other woman held me down. That his other brother kidnapped and drugged me after he was shot. That Grayson tied me down in the very spot I lost that baby, so he could brand me. And that we're all prisoners.

His brothers are evil. And his father is psychotic.

Theo wants to kill all the Nomads, so only his "Traitors" are left alive. All in the hope of stopping a war between witches and humanity.

He murdered Rose Hooper, who was pregnant with his own grandchild.

Gabriel's entire family are heartless, manipulative monsters. He's the only one with a soul. With a good heart. But no matter how big and loving that heart of his is, I fear that when he does finally wake up and learn the truth, that heart of his will break. And turn dark. Vengeful.

If he wakes up.

A tear slides down my cheek and lands on my pillow.

I will him to open his eyes. To move. To call me Beautiful and smile his wicked half-smile. But he doesn't.

I haven't slept a wink since I returned from the Miller's barn, despite feeling exhausted. I've barely eaten. I feel nauseous all the time. I can't slow my heart rate no matter how hard I try. It's like my body is continuously producing adrenaline. I feel like I'm coming down with the flu. My skin is clammy. My body aches. And I'm unbelievably tired.

The beeping of his heart monitor starts to fade. My eyes grow too heavy. I can't keep them open a moment longer. I squeeze his hand, but my fingers don't move. My chest feels tight. Each breath is a chore. I can't move or call out for help.

I'm not falling asleep.

I'm falling unconscious.

Did Grayson do something to me in that van? When I wake, will I be in chains?

In a sudden jerk, Gabriel sits bolt upright with a huge gasp and clutches his chest, looking at the thick bandage covering his wound. He sees the pads and wires and notices the heart monitor beside him.

'What the fuck...'

He looks around the rest of the room, checking to see who else is there with him.

He sees me.

'Lilly,' he beams. Those beautiful blue eyes flood with relief and love. But I don't sit up. I don't move. I can't. With each blink, my eyes stay closed for longer, and his smile quickly disappears. 'Lilly?' He sits over me, tapping my cheek. 'Hey, hey, wake up!' I manage the slightest smile, so happy that he's awake. The back of his hand feels my forehead. 'Christ, you're on fire. What's happened?' He checks my pulse. His eyes widen in horror. He sits me up and holds me, but I'm dead weight. 'You need to stay awake, baby. Keep your eyes open. Keep breathing.' He holds

me close, brushing my damp hair out of my face. 'Lilly... Lilly keep your eyes open. LILLY!' He shakes me. 'HELP... SOMEONE... HELP ME! FOR GOD'S SAKE... SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH HER!' He looks at my hand and rapidly unravels the bandage covering my stitches. 'Oh no. It's infected. Your blood is poisoned.' His yells for help fade and my eyes close. He pleads with me not to die. Not to leave him.

Am I? Is that what this is?

Am I dying?

But... I want revenge. I want to see my enemies burn.

I guess if I die, I'll just have to crawl out of hell to deliver my wrath.

Nothing will stop me. Nothing will save them.

They're going to pay.

They're going to die.

Thank you for reading

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