

◆ The Coven Gathering ◆

~ Part 02 ~

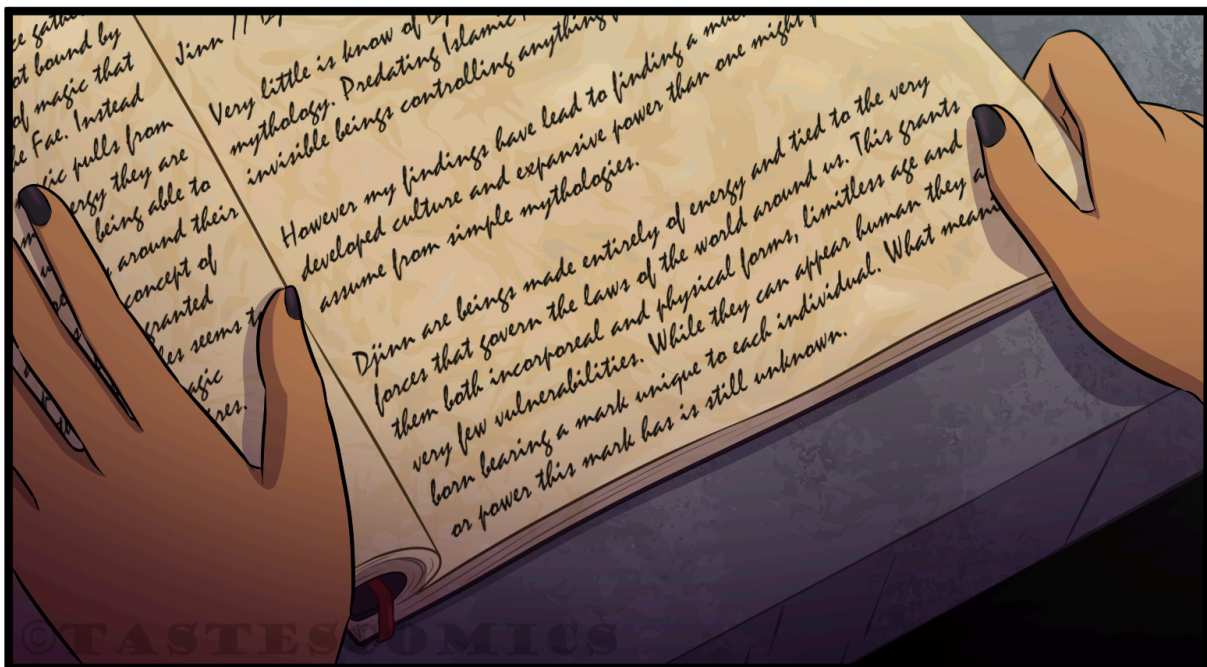
Past the foyer and beneath the stairs to the upper floors was a heavy door, locked and hidden away. Once inside, darkness consumes the passage of a stone staircase that winds down to Alys' personal work space. Shelves line the stone walls, filled with books and ingredients. A desk and a few tables carefully littered with research papers and more. In the dim light, Alys stood before her cauldron in the center of the room deep in thought.

There must be a way to recover Tedrick's memories. But, if they were covered by a Djinn that's easier said than done. With power from a djinn though... it might be just what I need to finally perform the ritual- to see mom again... There's no proof that a djinn has that power but if I took it and combined it with my own... it might be enough.

She pulled out her phone to text the coven.

'I have something to discuss. Please come to the mansion ASAP.'

Repocketing her phone, Alys reached over to a thick book and flipped to the marker she had left earlier. Within the pages held a small description of Djinn- the **only** one she had found in her library so far. She needed more information...



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Caspian was busy making dinner for himself when he received the text from Alys. Sighing, the rotund witch pulled a casserole dish from the oven and removed his oven mitts to check his phone. He had a bad feeling about what she might want to talk about, but he *always* had a bad feeling when Alys wanted to talk. Tonight, something felt particularly off, though. He shouldn't leave her hanging.

Across town, Wisteria was approaching her bar when Alys' message pinged her phone. She wasn't one to ignore Alys, especially not when she says she needs to talk about something. She hadn't even started prepping to open the bar yet, so she supposed she could just take the night off and see what her girlfriend needed.

The two witches had such impeccable timing that they met each other at the Carridio mansion coming from their separate directions at the same time. Wisteria had a colorful smile while Caspian scowled.



"Do you know what this is about?" He asked, not bothering to use any formalities with her.

"Good to see you too, Casp. And no. You're just as in the dark as I am," Wisteria said, still smiling as the two walked up the stone steps.

Caspian followed behind her, trudging up the driveway and the stairs to the entrance. He hated stairs- *Why did I have to come all the way here to meet Alys? And why is their entrance so big- so many steps up- and just as dinner was ready!* He was huffing by the time he reached the front doors.

"Well, I'm sick of being in the dark. If Alys wants my help this time, I'm going to demand to know why she needs it," he managed to say between breaths as he folded his arms over his chest.

"You'll have to tell that to Alys, sweetheart," Wisteria said gently. She looked a little concerned over how tightly wound Caspian already seemed. "Are you alright? You seem upset."

"Well, Alys is cutting into my mealtime. I was just about to have supper," Caspian griped. He didn't want to tell Wisteria he felt like something bad happened. He wouldn't call himself prophetic, per se, but his gut was rarely wrong.

She giggled a little at that. "Oh, *that* would do it. You should have brought a snack, we may be here a while."

Caspian didn't shy away from letting out a groan as they made their way inside to meet Alys.

"Alys, darling~ We're here~!" Wisteria called out as they entered the foyer.

Alys heard her girlfriend's voice ring down into her basement. Closing the old tome, she quickly came up the stairs, opening the wooden door that led to her basement and locking up behind her.

Wisteria beamed at the sight of Alys, the brooding look on her face not phasing her in the least. Alys leaned up to give the bright witch a peck on the cheek.

"Thank you for coming," Alys knew that Candi and Jack were usually always late. "Let's go to the dining room where we can talk," she added, looking at Caspian carefully.

He glared back but stayed quiet for now, once again following behind Wisteria as she took Alys's hand and walked ahead.

Wisteria took a seat near the head of the table, crossing her legs and making herself comfortable. "So, what did you want to talk to us about, Alys?"

When Caspian sat, the chair creaked underneath him. "Yes, please enlighten us," he said in a drroll tone, leaning forward to rest his elbows on the table as he propped up his head on his hand.

"I'd rather not repeat myself- Jack and Candi still aren't here-" Alys started but then the sound of the front door echoed out, followed by laughter. "Never mind..."

Candi entered the dining room. Her movements caused her hefty body to wobble all over as she waved ecstatically and sat beside Caspian. "There you all are! Hi Alys!!" she gushed.

"A new coven meeting, how exciting~" Jack mused with a smile as he came in just behind her.



He took a seat down beside Wisteria as Alys was at the head. "Now, come on and lay down the tea!

Alys nodded, quietly hoping they wouldn't show up. Yet here they were... "I'm sure some of you know, Tedrick recently went to Meriden for some business of our Fathers," she started. "On that trip, he informed me that he had a run in with magic."

As Alys spoke, Jack leaned in with interest and Candi's eyes widened. "What?? But how could that be? Magic isn't something to be run into, especially in the likes of Meriden!"

"Hmmm, I dunno, you can run into magic in the strangest of places. It's a wonder most of Barastone still refuses to acknowledge it," Jack added with a wink.

"Maybe it's because common folks are scared by it." Caspian said, still stone faced even as the more joyful witches eagerly chatted. "There's a reason magic is strictly prohibited in our

region. People don't trust what they can't understand and I'd say a majority of humans aren't willing to understand..."

"It's a shame really," Wisteria sighed. "I like having regular human clientele. I think they're fun~"

"You think *Ferris* is fun," Caspian huffed with a roll of his eyes.

Wisteria just giggled again. "I do. And he is. But Tedrick can take care of Ferris now that they're together. I trust him~"

Caspian sighed heavily. "This is irrelevant. Cut to the chase, Alys. What happened with this magic run in?" He asked, tapping his pudgy fingers on the wood of the table.

Alys nodded to Caspian. She did appreciate how to the point he was. "*As I was saying*, Tedrick had a run in with some magic. On his first night he and Ferris ran into some of Ferris' old friends and dined at the Gourmand together. Token and Cole. They went to a house party of theirs a month ago as well."

"The name Token seems familiar..." Jack mumbled, scratching his chin thoughtfully.

"Hmm, yeah..." Wisteria agreed, racking her brain to try and remember why.

"That night Tedrick informed me that Cole had a vial of what seemed to be potion that he shared. It caused them to eat in a stupor," Alys continued, "From what Tedrick learned from him, there is someone giving out elixirs and potions."

"And Cole is a regular human?" Candi asked with a head tilt.

Alys nodded. "Cole is a regular human. One that took Tedrick to a shop with even more magical items. He learned there is a being there who grants abilities to others. It is my understanding that this must be a djinn based on what Tedrick showed me..."

"The problem is... I think Tedrick had a run in with the Djinn. Because his memories of that night have been altered. He has no recollection of anything he shared with me about the potions, the shop, none of it."

"A run in with what...?" Wisteria muttered, looking increasingly more worried as Alys spoke.

"Oh, poor Tedrick!" Candi said worriedly. "Is his head ok?"

"He's fine. We need to keep looking into this problem in Meridien though-"

Jack waved his hand at that. "Why is it our problem? I'm sure the djinn is just enjoying itself or whatever."

Alys rolled her eyes with a sour look.. "I **expected** you to not understand."

Ignoring the chatter through the room, Caspian frowned deeply as he sat up in his seat at full attention. "A djinn? Seriously? **A djinn?** Do you know what the stakes are for a run-in like that? You're not going to send Tedrick back out there, are you?"

Wisteria uncomfortably put her hands in her lap, withholding her words. Candi and Jack got quiet during Caspian's rant. Alys paused in her reply, making Caspian press his concerns.

"The way you left off that sentence concerns me as well. 'His memories have been altered-' but oh, **he's fine**. Well, have you managed to retrieve them? And **how much** of his memory was affected? If it's djinn magic, is there even a way for us to counter that?" He rattled off questions of increasingly poorly hidden irritation. He couldn't believe how reckless Alys was- and to her own brother-!

Alys stared at Caspian, her expression as unmoving as ever. "I want him to go back and continue investigating. He could learn more about the djinn and maybe even get his memories back." She stated, her gaze on him unwavering. "Tedrick has a lot to learn as a witch. He can't be babied by you all the time, Caspian," Alys finished, crossing her arms.

"Since when is making sure he's safe babying him? '**And maybe get his memory back?**'" Caspian quoted. He did not like the sound of that. "I can't believe you. **Really**. His well being could be jeopardized and all you care about is getting to know more about wild magic? So *what if Tedrick runs across the djinn again?* **He** might not remember, but the **djinn** certainly will! And do you really think he'll get away with a little smudge in his memory twice? Because I don't.



I'm not going to let you make Tedrick take that risk. If you're so adamant about getting to the bottom of it, why don't you look into it yourself, instead of getting him to do it for you?" He spoke quickly and fervently. It was rare to see him so animated, but nothing boiled his blood quite like the way Alys talked about her little brother.

Jack whistled a little and fidgeted with his hair. Candi looked a little worried, she was never sure how to respond when they got heated like this... She loved Alys, but she was difficult to understand.

Alys never took her eyes off Caspian as he spoke. "Tedrick **wants** to help me. You can ask him yourself. He **wants** to be useful. Don't you want him to join the coven? Besides, I'm busy helping my father with his company. Tedrick just works at a flower shop. It's perfect for him to go."

"I **do** want him to join the coven. But you know, it's funny. When **I joined** it was thanks to the good graces of Wisteria, not because I jumped through hoops to prove something in a

frivolous trial of your design. I'm sure there are other ways for Tedrick to help that don't involve him getting tied up in unpredictable ancient magic that we don't have access to. The only thing keeping him from being an official part of this coven is **you**," Caspian argued, his deep red eyes staring right back into Alys', unblinking.

Wisteria rubbed her neck. This was bad. "Maybe we should just focus on trying to regain Tedrick's memory for now," she suggested with a sheepish smile as she attempted to break the tension.

"We'll have a **real** fun time with that," Caspian sneered sarcastically. "I've never even seen what djinn magic looks like. Though, if it's a matter of mind, I think a sloth demon may be able to get it sorted..."

"You're scolding me for wanting to get him to work, yet you want to use demon magic on him. **You know** he hates demons," Alys scoffed, rolling her eyes. "I just don't think Tedrick is ready to join the coven yet, he still barely has a handle on what little magic he has."

"He has a bit of magic though, I think that counts for something," Jack spoke up, earning a glare from Alys that made him sink back into his seat.

Caspian still couldn't believe what Alys was saying. Putting Tedrick's somewhat 'lousy' magic skills on his own shoulders to make it his fault. "Have you ever thought that he would have a **better** handle on his magic if he was actually able to work **alongside us** so he could get more hands-on experience?"

Candi sighed a little bit, "Why must you two always fight... Have either of you considered asking what Tedrick thinks?"

"It would be good to help him get more practice in..." Wisteria said gently, trying to bridge the gap between Caspian and Alys without a major crash.

Alys looked to Wisteria as she spoke, her expression softened. She looked uncomfortable, pressing her lips together at everyone's comments. "He's not in the right state of mind for that right now..."

"*Not in the right state of mind?* Gee, I wonder if that has something to do with it being **magically altered**," Caspian spat as he slumped back in his chair. "At least I'm **trying** to come

up with a solution rather than just giving up on it the moment it becomes convenient. I know he's not a big fan of demons, but I think it's better than doing nothing."

Wisteria looked down and picked at her fingernails in her lap.

Candi, now frowning, huffed. "I really wish we- no, **you two**, wouldn't argue **every** time," she said.

"I wouldn't argue with Alys so often if she would be more **reasonable**..." Caspian retorted. He glared back at Alys again and resumed his slouching over the table.

"Fine. Let's go talk to Tedrick then. He's out in the garden," Alys said, standing suddenly, her eyes looking directly at Caspian. "I'm tired of discussing this- he's an adult. He can make his own decisions. You... may be right. It might be time for him to join the coven..."

"I don't think we should all go talk to him at once, that will overwhelm him," Wisteria added with a sheepish smile.

"Will you fetch him then, Wisteria?" Caspian asked. He looked at her with a less harsh gaze than the one he gave Alys, but it was still intense.

"Me?" Wisteria tilted her head. Her eyes looked between him and Alys. "Alright. I'll go find him..." she said and got up.

"You won't walk outside to talk with him? I was intending for just us two to go," Alys said with a glare shot at Caspian, her chair screeching as she stood from her seat. "I can't believe you're at the point of being **that lazy**."

Caspian stared at Alys in disbelief. "I thought you **wanted** to invite him back in to discuss his status as a witch in our ranks! I suggested Wisteria because Tedrick likes her and having the entire coven meet him would be stressful for him. You never said it would just be the two of us." Caspian stood, the chair groaning in relief as it no longer had to bear his weight. "And I'm **not** lazy!" he snapped.



Wisteria toyed with the end of her braid. She wasn't really digging the energy they created here today. "Are **you** going to get him then...?"

"I wouldn't mind," Caspian said, taking a deep breath to calm himself down. Tedrick didn't like when he was upset.

Alys rolled her eyes, "I didn't say it would be us, but I said... never mind..." she murmured. "Wisteria can come if she likes." Alys always hated when their conversations got like this, mainly because she knew it upset Wisteria.

Candi sighed heavily and rubbed her temples. "I don't know why I still come to these, you guys are such buzzkills..." she groaned.

"I think I'm going to make us some snacks..." Jack said and headed into the kitchen. Candi sighed awkwardly, deciding to follow Jack into the kitchen.

"I'm... going to make sure kitchen safety is enforced," Wisteria sighed gently, following Candi to prevent Jack from blowing anything up.

Caspian balled his hands in fists at his sides and clenched his jaw. *So it really will just be Alys and me. Am I the one being unreasonable?* He could never tell with Alys.

It didn't help that Jack, Wisteria and Candi all walked on eggshells around her. Caspian felt like if he wasn't here, she would really just do whatever she wanted. They still hadn't reached an agreement on how to deal with Tedrick's memory loss- **that** bothered Caspian more than anything else.

