

REBEL RABBLE

By Roxanne Smolen

CHAPTER ONE

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Brittany Meyer was a seventeen-year-old witch. Her aunt had taught her amazing things over the past year. But what was the use of having magical powers if she couldn't protect the people she loved?

She huffed out a breath and curled deeper in the corner of the couch. The television was on, but she was barely listening. Her thoughts were on Cody, her ex-boyfriend—the way he looked, the way he took her hand. She understood why he broke up with her—he was on the run from some dangerous people, and he wanted to protect her from that.

But it wasn't fair. Cody could be cold and hungry at that exact moment. He could be hurt—and she wouldn't know. If only she could see him again.

At least, she was able to live with her aunt. If she were still at home, her mother would meddle. She'd be setting her up with blind dates and trying to get her to be *sociable*. Brittany didn't want to be sociable. She just wanted to watch whatever this was on the television.

Aunt Lynette came into the living room. "There you be," she drawled. "Watching something?"

“It’s a show about flipping houses. The woman likes to restore old things to their former glory.”

“Learning a lot, are you? Got flipping houses in your future?”

“Hardly.”

“Good.” She picked up the remote and switched off the TV. “Me and you are going to the Farmers’ Market.”

“What? In public?”

“You don’t gotta talk to no one,” Aunt Lynette said. “Get up.”

“I don’t want to. I was watching that.”

“You ain’t seen daylight in a month of Sundays.”

Which wasn’t strictly true. Brittany had taken a trip to Key West less than two weeks ago. “It isn’t Sunday, it’s Wednesday.”

“Just an expression. Come on.”

“Why can’t you leave me alone? I don’t want to go outside.”

“Girl, I’m not taking no for an answer. Now, let’s go.”

Brittany sat up and gave her pillow a good smack. She followed her aunt out of the living room with her arms crossed and her lips pursed.

Brittany lived with Aunt Lynette and Myra, her aunt’s partner and the third member of their coven. They shared the big creaky house Brittany’s grandfather had built. It had an enormous screened-in front porch which Myra called a lanai.

Myra sat there on a white wicker rocking chair with a book and a tall glass of sweet tea. She looked up. “Have fun, you two.”

“Oh, we’re going to have us a good time,” Aunt Lynette said. “I can already tell.”

Brittany turned her glare from Myra to her aunt. Did they think this was a joke?
“Let’s just get it over with.”

Aunt Lynette skipped down the steps and headed toward her car. It was a used, new-to-her Ford Fiesta hatchback with someone else’s *My Kid’s an Honor Student* bumper sticker on the back. Her old Impala had been squashed flat when a tropical storm uprooted the orange tree.

Brittany grimaced at the blue sky and bright sunlight. It was another warm, breezy day—normal for February in South Florida. Shading her eyes, she climbed into the passenger seat. Her aunt started the car, and they were off.

There were several Farmers’ Markets in and around town. Loxahatchee was rural—not much to see but horses and farmland. Of course, Aunt Lynette preferred the market farthest away. She said they had the freshest produce. So, they rode in silence for twenty minutes.

Aunt Lynette pulled onto the grassy parking area and looked for a spot to park. The market was crowded even on a weekday—winter was Florida’s best growing season. They left the car on the end of a row and trekked back toward the striped awnings and milling people. Halfway there, Brittany noticed the many scents of the market—fruits and vegetables and flowers all smelling green and vibrant and fresh. Her spirits rose despite herself.

“Lynette!” A paunchy man with sweat-plastered hair waved to them.

“Morning, Rodrigo,” Aunt Lynette called back.

“Morning? It is nearly noon. You are running late today, my dear. Come. I’ve saved some fresh eggs just for you.” He led Aunt Lynette away.

Brittany wandered in the other direction. When her grandfather was alive, she used to go to a market with him. It was bigger than this one—even so, she knew everyone there, called everyone by name. She didn't know any of these people.

A cart filled with zinnias and snapdragons drew her like a charm. Brittany strolled along the colorful blooms. Her mother always had cut flowers in the house. Maybe she should buy a couple dozen—might brighten her mood. But flowers always wilted and died. She couldn't bear that.

Across from the flower cart was an arts and crafts display of garden pinwheels. They spun lazily in the breeze. Next came a variety of windchimes, some clicking and clattering, others making melodic gongs. One had bells interspersed with cherubs. The cherubs reminded Brittany of the pixies she saw on Fairy Island—but without the bushy eyebrows.

A whiff of citrus drew her next. Brittany ambled down an aisle of lemons and early grapefruit, dodging distracted shoppers. A cart filled with jars of honey caught her eye. She loved fresh honey on warm biscuits. Maybe she should take up beekeeping, start a hive in the back of their property. Myra could use the wax to make candles and—

“Excuse me. Coming through.”

Brittany stepped out of the way of a tall boy with a crate of oranges on his shoulder. He set down the crate, flipped back his long blond hair, and looked at her. His eyes were light brown, almost caramel-colored, and his cheeks dimpled when he smiled. Brittany cleared her throat and hurried away.

“Girl, where've you been?” Aunt Lynette caught up to her. Canvas sacks swung from her elbows showing eggplant, broccoli, and snap beans. “I need me some help with the

squash.” She led Brittany to a stall filled with crates of butternut squash. “Pick out a few of these. Remember, not the shiny ones.”

“I know.” Brittany rummaged through the bin. She chose three that felt heavy for their sizes. From the corner of her eye, she watched the caramel-eyed boy deliver another crate of oranges.

They paid Farmer Ben for the squash, lugged their sacks through the parking lot, and returned home.

As they climbed from the car, Myra stepped outside, the screen door banging behind her. Haff, Brittany’s half-breed dog, crawled out from under the porch and greeted everyone enthusiastically. His collar jangled, and his feathery tail whipped the air.

Myra patted his head then asked Aunt Lynette, “Need help carrying in?”

“You can take this one.” Aunt Lynette handed her a sack.

“Ooh, butternut squash,” Myra said. “Reminds me of the winter vegetable stew you used to make. Remember that? We haven’t had it in ages.”

“That does bring back memories. But we’d be missing some sweet potatoes and parsnip.”

“I can go back,” Brittany put in. “It’s no problem.”

Aunt Lynette scrunched her face as if she was considering it. “No, it’s past noon. They’ll be cleaning up for the day.”

“Then I’ll go in the morning. Just give me a list of what you need.”

Both Myra and Aunt Lynette grinned, but Brittany couldn’t tell if it was at the prospect of stew or at getting her out of the house.

The next morning, Brittany climbed out of bed with the song *The Farmer in the Dell* stuck in her head. She put on blush and lipstick before going downstairs to pick up the

shopping list. The main ingredients for Aunt Lynette's Famous Winter Vegetable Stew were squash, sweet potatoes, gold potatoes, carrots, parsnips, and onions. Brittany climbed into *Baby*, her little, lime-green VW Bug. It felt good to be driving, good to have somewhere to go.

She got to the market early hoping to avoid the crush of late-morning shoppers, but if anything, it was more crowded than before. She chose the ingredients she needed, dawdling over the potatoes and parsnips as if she were a discerning chef—all the while keeping a look-out for the caramel-eyed boy.

Why did she want to see him again? He meant nothing to her. She didn't even know his name. It didn't matter anyway—he must have Thursdays off.

She paid for three large onions, slipped them into her canvas shopping bag, stepped back—and bumped into someone crowding in behind. It was him, standing so close she could see flecks of gold in his yummy eyes.

“Excuse me,” she murmured.

“Ah, hi,” he said. “You were here yesterday.”

“Forgot a few things.” She motioned with her bag. Just then a shopper jostled her and sent her right into his chest. “Oh, sorry.”

“Yeah, it's crazy here today.” He grinned, showing off his dimples. “How about we go somewhere quieter? I'll buy you a coffee. There's a stand right over there.”

“Well, all right. But I only have a minute.” What was she doing?

“Great! Come on!”

Brittany followed him through the crowd. Was she crazy? She didn't even know him.

Relax. It's just coffee. You can have a conversation, can't you?

They reached the coffee stand.

“Morning, Missus Maxwell,” he chimed. “Two please.”

“Of course. Coming right up.” An older woman poured two cups of coffee and set them on a counter.

“Here you go.” He handed one to Brittany. “Don’t say I never gave you anything.”

Brittany glanced at the woman. “You didn’t pay.”

“My little joke,” he said. “It’s free because I work here. Let’s sit down.” He walked to a picnic table and sat.

Brittany juggled the hot coffee and the heavy sack of vegetables. Cody would have helped her, a voice inside complained. But not everybody could be like Cody.

She sat across from him. “So, you work for the market?”

“Nah, I work on a farm. My boss owns Citrus Acres.” He said it like the name should mean something to her. “I’m Jackson, by the way.”

“I’m Brittany.”

“Where do you work, Brittany?”

“I don’t. I’m in school. South University. You know, in Royal Palm. I’m studying herbology. I’m going to be—”

“Herbs like in cooking? Aw, man. I bet you’re a great cook. My mom has gotta be the worst cook in the world.” He chortled. “There was this one time. Thanksgiving, right? And we’re doing the big family thing with lots of people come to eat. And she takes this humongous turkey out of the oven and sets it on the kitchen counter. Just then, a chunk of plaster falls from the ceiling and puts a big dent in the turkey. I kid you not.”

Brittany gasped. “Oh, no.”

“Well, my mom doesn’t blink an eye, just dusts off the turkey with her oven mitts. And she says to me, *Jackson, go upstairs and see what’s amiss*. So, I go up, and there’s

water all over the floor, and there's my brother's teddy bear in the toilet with just its face showing. I had to reach in with both hands to yank it out. And I knew where that toilet had been."

Brittany chuckled. "Do you live with your mother?"

"Me? No. I have an apartment. You should come over. We could watch Netflix."

"That would be nice."

"How about tonight?"

"What?"

"Are you free tonight? We could go out for dinner then go to my place for a nightcap and a movie. Do you like Mexican?"

"Well, yes, I do, but—"

"Great. I'll pick you up at seven. Where do you live?"

"It's a little tricky to get to..." *What was she doing?*

"No problem. My car has a Magellan GPS. It can find anything. Just give me your address."

She recited her address.

Jackson wrote it on a napkin with a mini-golf pencil he pulled from his shirt pocket. "Okay, then. See you tonight." He regaled her with his dimpled grin and strode into the crowd.

Brittany looked at her cooling cup and shook her head. She must be insane. She tossed the coffee into a nearby garbage can, hoisted her bag onto her shoulder, and left the market.

By the time she got home, she was in a thoroughly bad mood. Why on Earth would she make a date with a stranger? He manipulated her. Trapped her. With his disarming

smile and his yummy eyes. She hauled the sack into the house and plopped it onto the kitchen counter.

Aunt Lynette appeared in the kitchen doorway. “Get everything all right?”

“Fine.” Brittany sighed. “Are we having the stew today?”

“I thought I’d let it simmer all night and have it for lunch tomorrow.”

“Good. Because I have a dinner date for tonight.”

“Met someone new, have you? What’s his name?”

“Jackson.”

“That a first name or a last?”

Brittany shrugged, keeping her gaze turned away.

After a moment, Aunt Lynette said, “Well, why don’t you help me cut up these veggies? I’ll show you how it’s done.”

“I know how to cut up veggies.” Brittany stomped up the stairs to her room.

What was she thinking, making a date with another boy? Okay, he was cute, but he wasn’t *that* cute. Besides, she had a boyfriend.

A boyfriend who told her to get on with her life. A boyfriend she would probably never see again. She folded her arms and huffed out a breath. This was Cody’s fault. And he probably didn’t even miss her.

She spent the day in her room, grateful that both Myra and Aunt Lynette left her alone. She couldn’t explain to them why she agreed to go out with someone she’d just met. Couldn’t explain it to herself. In a fit of panic, she went so far as to look up Citrus Acres on the Internet and dial the number listed there, desperate to call off the date. But it was a business phone—the office closed at two o’clock.

As the sun went down, she dressed for her date. She chose a beige dress with a modest neckline and a row of pearl buttons down the front and swapped her boots for a pair of lace-up sandals. She even wore eye make-up—something she hadn't bothered with for a while. Clutching an off-white silk purse barely larger than her cell phone, she went to the porch and waited.

Jackson drove up in a gleaming black car. The engine rumbled so loudly, it vibrated in her chest. As she approached, he leaned over and popped open the passenger door.

"Told you I could find you," he said.

"Yes. You have a very smart car." She strapped herself in.

"She's more than just smart. This is a genuine 2006 Pontiac GTO. You ever been in a muscle car before?"

"Can't say I have."

He pulled a three-point turn in the driveway. "She's one of the last ones made. I almost cried when they discontinued production. I mean, GTO. They're a classic, am I right? I found her in a used car lot. Needed a little work."

"You like to work on cars?"

"Absolutely. They speak to me, you know? Besides, I'm not going to spend the rest of my life on a farm."

He drove down Okeechobee Boulevard to West Palm Beach, talking the whole time about his car, how beat up it had been when he bought it, and how difficult it had been to get the parts he needed. Brittany nodded appropriately, although she didn't understand half of what he said. She was glad when they reached the restaurant. Maybe they could talk about something else over dinner.

The restaurant he'd chosen was called *Amigas y Amigos*. It was a small place with an even smaller parking lot. Jackson opened the bright red door and ushered her inside. An aroma of refried beans and corn chips greeted her. The yellow walls were decorated with sombreros, silk plants, and mock graffiti.

"This is nice," she said as they were seated.

"Yeah. The food's good."

"Anything you'd recommend?"

"Get whatever you want. Money's no object." He dimpled at her.

A server approached. "Drinks?"

"How about a margarita?" Jackson asked Brittany. "It's their specialty."

Brittany's cheeks warmed. He must think she was older than she was. She didn't want to admit to being only seventeen. Neither did she want to embarrass herself by being carded on their first date. "I don't think so."

"Come on. One margarita. It will relax you."

She looked up at the server. "Just an iced tea for me. And I'll take the Loco Tostada."

"Your loss." Jackson blew out his breath as if disappointed. "I'll have water and a beef burrito."

The server smiled and walked away.

"So," Brittany said, "you like movies?"

"Hmm?"

"Movies. You said you have Netflix."

"Oh. Oh, yeah."

"I used to work at the Video Stop in Loxahatchee. It was—"

"Really? Did you ever watch the *Fast and Furious* movies?"

“Well, no, I’m more of a—”

“I love racing. My boss has a racecar. A real sweet machine. He races it at Mad Hotrods here in West Palm Beach. Sometimes he goes to Palm Beach International over in Jupiter.”

“I know of that place,” Brittany said. “My little brother used to go there to see monster trucks.”

“That’s not racing,” he said. “I wouldn’t waste my eyes looking at monster trucks.”

“Oh,” she said. “I just meant that—”

“I worked the pits there a couple of times.” He raised his eyebrows and nodded.

She bristled. “The pit crew is kind of like old-fashioned gas station attendants, right? They put gas in the car. Wash the windshield.”

“They do more than that,” he said, obviously misreading her jibe for interest. “They change the tires, buff out the fenders. You have to be quick and precise. They don’t coddle slackers.”

“How exciting.”

“I got to meet the drivers.”

“Is that what you want to be? A racecar driver?”

He scoffed. “I don’t think I have the stamina to do what they do. I’ll be at Daytona with the other fans, though.”

He went into a fifteen-minute dissertation about Race Week at Daytona Beach and how it would kick off the NASCAR season. The server brought their meals, but Jackson was so busy talking he barely ate his burrito. Brittany, having nothing else to do except nod politely, finished her tostada. It was delicious.

“How about dessert?” Jackson asked. “Their fried ice cream is the best.”

“I don’t think so, thank you,” she said. “This has been fun, but I’d like to go home now.”

“All right.” He tossed his napkin onto his plate, motioned to the server, and paid in cash.

They went out to his GTO. Brittany hurried into her seat. Jackson started the car and backed out of the parking spot without buckling in. Once on Okeechobee Boulevard, they headed west, passing by strip malls and gated communities. Jackson seemed miffed and didn’t say much, which was an improvement.

Brittany sighed. The date had been a disaster. Jackson was a nice enough guy, but who was she kidding? She would never be happy with anyone but Cody. She just wanted to go home and forget the night had ever happened.

She gazed out the window at the quiet town of Royal Palm Beach then sat up straight. “You missed the turn.”

“What?”

“The turn to get to my house. You missed it.”

“Chill out, will you? We’re just taking the scenic route.”

Brittany went rigid. An alarm claxon went off in her mind. She clutched the seat belt with both hands. Outside, the night became darker as they passed through farmland and ranches. They got off Okeechobee at Cheetham Hill Road. Brittany recognized the area. They were near the safari park, a kind of drive-through zoo. But the safari was closed at this time of night. Where was he taking her?

“Jackson?” she said. “I want to go home.”

“I’ll take you home. If you ask nicely.”

“Please,” she said.

He made a sharp turn onto a side road.

She clung to the seatbelt and cataloged the contents of her purse. She didn't carry anything she could use to defend herself—not even a pencil. If she lived through this night, she'd never again leave home without packets of knockout powder. Or something more intense. Maybe she could concoct a potion that would give her assailant acute and immediate diarrhea.

He left the road. The car lurched and jounced across a field. The headlights shone on a chain-link fence. He pulled up and turned off the engine.

She said, "What are we doing here?"

"Do you know where we are?"

Her voice wavered. "The safari park?"

He cracked open his window. "Shh. Listen. Sometimes you can hear the animals. The call of the wild."

She gathered her courage. "I don't like it. Take me home!"

"No. I bought you dinner. Now you're going to be nice to me."

He lunged at her, all hands and lips.

"No!" she cried. "Stop!"

She tried to fend him off, but he pinned her against the door. His mouth smashed against hers. She pressed both hands against his chest. White light shone between her fingers.

"Stop it!"

Light flashed, filling the car. He flew off her and struck the driver's side door.

"Oh, no." Brittany sat upright.

Jackson's head lolled to the side. His eyes were closed.

“Oh, no!” She patted his cheeks. “Don’t be dead. You can’t be dead.”

He stirred and in a faraway voice said, “I am not dead.”

What? Had she blasted him into some sort of trance?

She said, “You will, uh... never attack a woman again. You respect women. In fact, you worship them.”

“I worship women,” he murmured.

Brittany unbuckled the seatbelt, grabbed her purse from the floor, fumbled with the door lock, and scrambled from the car. Her legs shook. The *door ajar* light blinked and dinged. She peered inside as Jackson raised a hand to his head.

Quietly, she closed the door and stepped back. She stumbled across the pitch-black field, cursing her sandals. Cursing her stupidity. What possessed her to go on a date with a stranger? She must be insane.

When she reached the road, Brittany walked briskly toward town. There were sandy driveways and mailboxes but no houses. No streetlights.

And no service on her phone. Typical. She’d have to get out of the dead zone before she could call her aunt and ask to be picked up.

Brittany walked as quickly as possible with the sand and the sandal straps biting into her feet. Crickets trilled from the surrounding brush. An owl screeched. She had the odd sensation of being watched and glanced back half expecting to see Jackson. He wasn’t there, of course. Just paranoia.

Calm down, she chided herself. There were bigger problems to think about. Like, what was that light that shot from her fingers? It wasn’t the first time it had happened. Once, it was against Surgat, one of Queen Imogene’s demons. He called it star fire and was outraged that Brittany had used it against him. But she didn’t know how she’d done

it then and had no idea how she'd done it this time. Perhaps it only happened when she felt threatened.

She reached an intersection. The new road was flat and straight. Brittany walked down the center where the sand was packed, checking her phone for service. It was a clear night. The waxing moon silvered the landscape. A breeze teased her hair. It smelled of flowers and muck. Except for the chirruping of insects, the area was silent. A sudden splash told her a canal ran parallel to the road. She must have heard a fish. Or a gator.

Her heart leaped as headlights shone behind her. Was that Jackson? Maybe her post-trance suggestion didn't take, and he intended to finish the job he started. What should she do? She glanced at the canal on one side of the road, the sporadic trees on the other. Just as she decided to crouch behind a skinny tree, she heard faint music. It wasn't Jackson, then. He was too in love with the sound of his engine to play music. She would keep walking. Maybe the person would stop and offer her a ride.

She moved to the side of the road. The headlights threw stark shadows around her. As the car approached, she recognized the music as being heavy metal. Her stomach dropped. This might not be the rescue she'd hoped for.

The car slowed beside her. The window rolled down, and a puff of marijuana smoke escaped. *Stoner boys.*

"Hey there, cutie," the passenger said. "What you doing out here all by yourself?"

Brittany kept her face forward, her chin up.

"Now, don't be like that," he said. "We're just trying to be friendly."

"Get her," the driver said.

The door clicked.

Brittany gasped and spun toward the sound just as the car rose into the air. She glimpsed the two boys' faces. Their eyes were wide, their mouths agape. As smoothly as if in the hands of a giant, the car moved backward and dropped with a splash in the canal.

She froze, trapped between the need to run away and the impulse to help them. The car sank until all that was visible was its roof. In the moonlight, two figures crawled up the opposite bank.

Amid coughing and wheezing, a voice cried, "My car! My car!"

"My weed!" cried another.

She turned and continued walking. A short distance away, a hulking shape appeared. She recognized him. Tusks. One of the queen's demons.

Queen Imogene reigned over all the witches in South Florida. She ruled with the proverbial iron fist. No one liked her, but she was so powerful, no one dared to tell her so. Several demons worked for her—she'd killed them but kept a piece of them for a trophy. Horns. Tusks. Eyeballs. Their spirits were enslaved to her will as long as she had possession of the trophies. Brittany didn't think the demons liked the queen either, but she was so powerful, they did what they were told. In a way, Brittany almost felt sorry for them. Some afterlife they were having. But on the other hand, they were demons. They weren't the good guys.

And now one of them stood facing her. His piggy eyes glowed a dull red.

Brittany gulped in a dry throat. With her head high, she approached. "Hello, Tusks." She didn't know his real name. She called him Tusks because of the two broken tusks protruding from his jaw. She motioned at the submerged car. "Did you do that?"

“I did, Miss. Yes.” His voice was surprisingly high-pitched for such a large creature. “I was tasked with watching you and reporting your activities back to my mistress. But nothing was said that I could not intervene when your life was in peril.”

Tasked with... Then it struck her—Tusks was Queen Imogene’s spy. The local covens suspected the queen had spies and used them to keep tabs on the witches living in South Florida. That way, she had information to hold over their heads and keep them in line. She was using the demons as spies.

But what had he said about... “My life?” She looked back at the stoner boys. “They were going to kill me?”

“In seven out of ten timelines.”

“Oh.” A chill swept through her. She wobbled.

“Perhaps you will allow me to escort you home.”

“Yes,” she murmured. Her head swam. Those boys were going to kill her. “Yes, all right.”

She and the demon set off together. Brittany limped—the gritty sand was rubbing her feet raw.

“Tusks?” she said. “Can people see you?”

“No, Miss. At this moment, only you can see me.”

She nodded. That was good. She didn’t want to frighten anybody. His size was alarming enough, but if they saw his pig’s snout...

“Tusks? Why did the queen send you to spy on me?”

“I’m afraid she sees you as a threat, Miss.”

“Me? But, why?”

“Latent power.”

“I have latent power?”

“Indeed, you do. In addition, she feels that people... *like* you more than they like her.”

“Well, that’s her fault. She’s a tyrant. No one likes her. Do you like her?”

His voice dropped two octaves as he growled, “I would kill her if I could.”

Brittany blinked, and her step faltered. She glanced sideways at him. They walked in silence for a time.

Then he said, “You have impressed me this night. You dispatched that ruffian most handily.”

She scoffed. “You mean Jackson?”

“Indeed. First, you use star fire to wipe his memory, then into the void of his mind you tell him that he must worship females.”

Tusks made a squealing sound. After a moment, she realized he was laughing.

“He deserved it,” she said.

“Worship females. He will be burdened with your retribution for a very long time.”
The demon squealed some more.

Brittany frowned. She imagined Jackson as the pastor of a church that worshipped and revered women. It could be the start of a movement, a new respect for women everywhere. What was so funny about that?

“Here we are.” Tusks stopped walking. “Safely home.”

She gasped. She stood in her front yard, damp grass cooling her feet. Light streamed from the windows of the silent house. “But we were miles from my home. It should have taken hours to walk here.”

“Forgive me, Miss.” He bowed his head. “I have no concept of time.” His image wavered then faded into nothing.

Brittany stared at the spot where he had been. Was he still there? Still spying on her? It didn’t matter. She was home. She hurried up the porch steps and through the front door.

Aunt Lynette and Myra sat together on the couch each with a glass of wine.

“How was your date?” Aunt Lynette called.

“Oh, it was okay, you know,” Brittany said, one hand on the banister. “I’m going to take a shower and go to bed.”

“All right, dear.”

“Goodnight,” Myra said.

Brittany hurried up the stairs and into the bathroom. She stared at herself in the mirror. Her make-up was smeared beneath her eyes, and her bottom lip was bruised. The row of pearl buttons on her dress was ripped. She stripped off her clothes and threw them into the wastebasket then added her strappy sandals. Her feet were red and tender. She turned on the shower and stood beneath the stream until the hot water turned cold. Then she climbed into bed and cried herself to sleep.