

**PROLOGUE**  
**THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY**  
**KINGDOM OF ADEHYA**  
**SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS**

It was nearing 2:00 a.m. as Aldred Kinsley paced around a circular stone table, the base of a steel blue spirit fire. In his fist, he clenched a piece of torn parchment, and he glared at the fire, The Flames of Eldrich. It was not behaving the way it should have. Normally, the fire pulsed tranquilly on its hearth, boasting the kingdom's prosperity. Aldred had come to expect this foretelling of peace, despite what the kingdom's top Seer had predicted seventeen years ago. She warned that one day, a legendary evil would come to Adehya and unleash a plot that would bring about the collapse of the cosmos.

For seventeen years, The Flames of Eldrich had defied the Seer's prophecy of doom and gloom. Then, two hours ago, a crimson wisp rose from the heart of its blue blaze. Neon white symbols turned on the hearth to spell out the same threat, of which the Seer had warned.

Aldred backed away from the fire. While it usually burned a constant seventy degrees, the foreign flame stealing into it did not. As a result, the temperature of the room ticked up several notches. Aldred must have cast a dozen spells, but none of them could remedy the rising heat.

Impatiently, he popped open the first few buttons of his green doublet. He had to cool his body, and his nerves. He'd sent for Silas, his trusty advisor, over an hour ago. Where in the name of Wicca was that man? Wiccans could travel anywhere in the world in seconds with the simple turn of a key. Consequently, Silas' delay set Aldred on edge. Could the Emperor have discovered that The Flames of Eldrich's prophecy had come to fruition, and called on Silas, demanding answers? If so, Silas was now attempting to smooth things over. He may not have been popular amongst his fellow Council members, but his knack for diplomacy had won him many battles, as well as the Emperor's respect. The thought that Silas might now be using his skill on the Emperor in Aldred's name made Aldred's gut clench in a panic. But then came the rhythmic sound of approaching footsteps. In mid-pace, Aldred spun to face the doorway. A thin dark-haired man breezed through the open frame.

"Sire," said the man, a little breathless. He doubled into a bow.

Through a dramatic exhale, Aldred replied, "Silas. . .at last."

“I apologize for the delay, Sire. . .” Silas hesitated, and Aldred suspected why. The reason Silas was an ace at diplomacy was that he usually kept his private life private and never allowed it to affect his work. “My wife and I were celebrating our anniversary. We were in the midst of. . .” Silas gave a suggestive tilt of his brow in place of naming the activity that had delayed him, and, in Aldred’s opinion, left Silas looking like he’d done a half-dozen laps around the kingdom. Silas’ face was flushed and drenched with sweat. His hair was mussed, and the hem of his chemise jutted out from under his black doublet. This was unlike him. He was usually a snappy dresser. “Had I left any sooner. . .”

Aldred frowned, but not in disapproval. When he’d messaged Silas, he’d simply noted that an important matter needed tending to. He hadn’t mentioned The Flames of Eldrich, for fear the Emperor would intercept the note.

Regardless, Aldred wouldn’t fault Silas for dawdling. Aldred remembered what it felt like to be in love. When every kiss, every touch from your lover set your nerve endings in a glorious tizzy you never wanted to end. He loved that feeling. He missed that feeling. But he’d made his bed, and most nights he slept soundly, though not entirely without regret.

The foreign wisp raging at the heart of Eldrich crackled loudly, calling Silas’ attention to the fire. When his gaze dropped to the glowing symbols revolving on the hearth, he let out a long hiss. “Sire, we must act now. Should the Emperor find out before we contrive a solution. . .”

Aldred cursed under his breath. The Emperor had long been searching for an excuse to seize control of Adehya. The idea that this was the second catastrophe to hit the Wiccan world because of Adehyans—well, former Adehyans—gave him all the reason he needed to usurp Adehya’s throne. As if his reign over the Council and four continents didn’t grant him enough power! He had to have Adehya too?

Silas cleared his throat. “Have you had confirmation?”

Aldred, his expression grim, unclenched his fist and passed Silas the message Nikolas had sent. It explained the event that had set the prophecy in motion: Abigail Stone, a magically binded witch living in exile on present-day Block Island, had illegally recovered her powers. She mustn’t have realized that doing so would unleash an evil The Flames of Eldrich hadn’t foretold since the Salem Witch Trials. At least, Aldred would like to think she hadn’t.

Sure, evil had since made regular appearances in the form of good magical entities gone bad. After all, the universe relied on a balance of good versus evil to function. But, only the

foulest Wiccan evils, those that threw off that balance, registered with The Flames of Eldrich. Thankfully, such wickedness only came along every few-hundred years, because it took great pains to extinguish. During the Salem Witch Trials, many innocent men and women died before the balance of the universe was repaid and peace restored to the cosmos. Aldred shuddered to think what this latest travesty would cost the Wiccan people should it play out to the end.

Silas took a step closer to Aldred, his eyes black and penetrating. “Sire?” he said. “You know what you must do.”

Aldred sighed deeply. Nothing he could say would excuse the catastrophic effect on the cosmos that Abigail’s act had set in motion. No amount of stalling would lessen the severity of her punishment. For the sake of his fellow Wiccans—for the sake of the world—Aldred had to see her through this ordeal, to the end, whatever the cost.

Slowly turning to Silas, he said, “Have Nikolas fetch Abigail at once.”