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# THE LOVERS THREE

SHANNON PAGE • BOOK THREE OF THE NIGHTCRAFT QUARTET

# **THE LOVERS THREE**

**Book 3 of the Nightcraft Quartet**

**Shannon Page**

THE LOVERS THREE  
BOOK THREE OF THE NIGHTCRAFT QUARTET  
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# PRAISE FOR SHANNON PAGE'S THE NIGHTCRAFT QUARTET

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*For Mark  
Always and ever*





## — CHAPTER ONE —

Naturally, witchkind does not observe Christmas, but let no one say we don't have important mid-winter festivities.

When the days grow short, and darkness covers the land—even in bright, urban San Francisco—our kind gather to banish this darkness with warmth and cheer and good company.

Yule was still over a week away, but already my parents had decorated their lovely Pacific Heights home. When I was a child there, I'd wondered why we couldn't just have a brightly ornamented tree in our front window like all our neighbors—with, of course, big shiny presents *for me* underneath it. Once I grew a little older, I began to appreciate the house-wide festooning of real, living fir boughs woven everywhere, braided with red velvet ribbons accented with golden chains, coins, and beads. Our house always smelled so fresh; the humans' trees, being dead, would slowly fade, turning brittle and dusty through the long weeks of their seasons, culminating in a bunch of brown, spidery tree carcasses littering the sidewalks in the first week of January, stray bits of tinsel blowing in the wind.

No, the witchkind way was the best. When the Yule celebrations were finished, Mother would coax the fir boughs back outside, where they would resettle as a few tidy trees in our backyard.

This year would be my first in a house of my own—though I was in my mid-forties, I had lived communally in a coven house since attaining my majority at the age of twenty. There were no fir trees in my small back garden, so I used the excuse to visit Mom and ask her for ideas on how I could decorate my home for the season.

Of course, Rosemary and I visited her a lot these days. Mom always enjoyed spending time with her brand-new granddaughter.

Now we sat in my mother's cozy breakfast room over cups of hot chocolate. A cutting of fir bough was tucked into my purse, which I would coax to life when I got back home. That would be a good start, though I'd need a lot more decoration than that. A fire burned in the room's small, tiled fireplace; Rosemary sat on Mom's lap, trying to reach her hair so she could pull it. Mom's hair, worn loose today, gently pulled itself out of my baby's hands, moving to curl and twine around Mom's face. My mother looked like a pre-Raphaelite portrait—no way old enough to be a grandmother, though she politely kept her apparent age a bit older than I did mine.

I smiled at the picture they made and sipped my cocoa. "So, should I just encourage the ivy vines to come in? That's the greenest thing I've got."

Mom shook her head vigorously. "No, no—never ivy. Trust me: ivy is the last thing you want to invite into your home." She frowned, thinking. "Surely you must have some other evergreen back there?"

*She can't remember because she hardly ever visits me,* I thought. Well, her strength wasn't what it used to be; she'd had a brush with illness last year and had never quite fully come back from it. It was just easier for her to stay home. As a witch with a botanical focus, she gained strength from her house and garden. "There's that tall one that makes the crazy flowers in the springtime—it's still green, even in December," I said.

I could see her eyes go vague, but I couldn't tell if she was searching her memory or casting her vision over to my house, a half-mile away. Then she brightened. "Oh! Of course, the red flowering gum tree. That's perfect; you might even be able to encourage a few blossoms, if you play your cards right." Her smile grew. "Speaking of cards—did you bring them?"

I had thought about it, but decided not to. "I'm working with them every day at home," I told her, "but today, I just wanted to talk to you about Yule decorations and drink hot chocolate." Rosemary reached for her hair again; it evaded her tiny grip again. "And give you some grandbaby time."

Mom gave Rose a little squeeze and rocked her gently on her lap. "And such a sweet precious cutie she is!" She gazed down at the baby, her eyes filled with love. Rose blinked back up at her, looking for all the world like she was communicating with her.

I smiled to watch them, even as my heart gave a little hitch. I knew Mom loved our visits, and adored Rosemary...and yet, I also knew that Mom had mixed feelings about being a grandmother. I hadn't realized, until the day I gave birth, that Mom had wanted another daughter of her own. She and Dad had seemed perfectly happy just as a couple; I'd asked about a sister many times when I was younger, and had been told *Maybe, someday*.

In theory, *someday* could still come to pass. Witches and warlocks lived far longer than mundane humans; Mom should remain fertile until well into her second century, many years from now. Yet we were also, as a species, far less fecund than humans. The fact that I'd gotten pregnant without consciously trying was still a bit mysterious to everyone.

And that's where my thoughts always went fuzzy. It seemed to me that there was something even more mysterious about my beautiful daughter...yet my new-mom brain kept sort of sliding away from whatever it was. Hormones, let me tell you. And

nobody else had even known what I was talking about when I'd asked.

So, I'd stopped wondering, mostly. But it was strange.

*Sad*, came into my mind. Not my own thought: a message from Rosemary. She'd started using a few more words in her mind-speak to me, though nothing like full sentences. I understood her well enough. She wasn't sad; she was realizing that her grandma was sad.

Which was plain enough. I reached out for the baby. "Shall I take her now?"

Mom gave me a relieved, tired smile. "She's probably getting hungry."

"Or she's curious about what cocoa is going to taste like," I joked, getting the baby settled in my own lap before opening my blouse.

"Would you like some more?" Mom lifted her hands above both our mugs, sitting on the small table between us.

"Sure." I glanced through the tall windows behind her, looking out at the cold winter sunshine, wishing it would ever snow in San Francisco. Wouldn't that be cozy!

Mom moved her fingers, bringing my attention back into the room. Both our cups filled anew. I watched her carefully, while trying to disguise the fact that I was doing so; she didn't seem taxed by the small magic, but once she was done, she did lean back and cradle her mug, as if absorbing its warmth.

I picked up mine with my free hand and took a sip. "Delicious."

She smiled back at me. Was there a bead of sweat on her unlined forehead? "My pleasure. I'm happy you could spare the time."

"Of course."

We sipped in silence for a minute as Rosemary suckled: three generations, drinking a warm beverage together. Soon my daughter began to nurse less energetically. She'd fall asleep in another minute or two.

All right, I supposed this was cozy enough.

Mom set her empty mug down on the table and cocked her head slightly. "Any more thoughts on your wedding ceremony?"

"It's not a wedding," I said, automatically, but she just waved her hand in dismissal.

"You're signing a romantic, domestic, and financial contract with the father of your child, in front of witnesses and guests in fancy clothes, at a ceremony involving cake and Champagne," she said. "I could say all that every time, or I could just be efficient and call it a wedding."

I gave her a helpless grin and a shrug. Point taken. Even so, we were *not* getting married. Witchkind does not do that. "We're still working on the final details of the terms," I told her.

She frowned, just for a moment. "I thought you were in agreement several weeks ago?"

"I thought so too." Rosemary had completely stopped nursing by now, but I didn't want to ease her off the nipple and wake her back up. I leaned back a bit so my arm didn't have to hold all her weight. Amazing how much a tiny body weighs, especially at rest. "But every time we send a new draft back to Gregorio's people, they find one more thing they want to tweak."

"Ah." Her frown ghosted back again, but then she shrugged. "Warlocks and their *procedures*."

I laughed softly. "Yeah. Anyway, once we get a final agreement worked out, we'll set a date. It would be nice to do it in the spring-time, have the party outside, maybe."

"That would be nice. But you know you're welcome to have it here. I'd be delighted to—"

"Yes, yes, I know." We smiled at each other. "We'll talk, once Jeremy and I really have an agreement."

At my feet, I felt a nudge. Elnor, my familiar, had been sleeping under the easy chair I sat in; now she was awake and wondering if I'd forgotten her mealtime.

Mom noticed the movement. "I have tuna here, you know."

“I know—but I really should get on home, before she needs changing.” I started to unlatch Rosemary and button myself back up. “Plus, I have a lot to do today.”

This was a fib. I hadn’t done any meaningful work since the baby was born a month and a half ago. Unless you counted, oh, *raising a newborn* as meaningful work. Which of course I did; I just hadn’t done any of my biological research since Rosemary had come along.

Mostly this was because taking care of a tiny, nearly helpless creature was pretty all-consuming. But also, I had to admit, I was finding it blessedly hard to remember exactly where I’d been in my research. I’d never been super diligent about my lab notes, but my level of scattered distraction for the last few months was truly above and beyond. The one time I’d been up to my third-floor lab after I got back from my Old Country retreat, I hadn’t been able to make heads or tails out of the scattering of petri dishes and vials across my lab bench, or the scribbles in my current notebook.

But that was fine. Gregorio Andromedus—Jeremy’s father, Rosemary’s paternal grandfather, and my mentor—was fully on board with my taking a good, long maternity leave. Not that he was my employer or anything; my research was my own, meant to benefit all of witchkind. And nobody paid me for it; my coven resources and my parents’ long-ago gift of the house I lived in saw to my support. I could go back to work whenever I wanted to, whenever it made sense.

Whenever I felt drawn to do so. I still expected the urge would come back...someday.

I got to my feet, tucking the newly awakened Rosemary back into her little sling-carrier. In just over a month, she’d already grown so much, she was nearly too big for it already. I’d have to get the next size up; for now, I just loosened the side straps. Mom got up too and helped me fasten it in back, where I couldn’t see. By

now, Elnor was twining around my ankles. "Yes, kitty," I told her. "We'll be home in five minutes."

Mom saw us to the door, then closed it gently behind us. I walked down the front path, glancing automatically up and down the sidewalk to see if any humans were about before slipping onto the ley line that opened up a couple of doors down from my folks' house. Nobody saw us; there were people going by in cars, but to them, it would merely have looked like I stepped behind a tree. They would not notice that I failed to emerge from the other side.

I would see to that.

Once back in front of my house, I stopped on the porch and reached out with my magical senses to touch the wards. They were set, but not from outside. I released them and walked in. "I'm home!" I called out.

Petrana, my golem, walked up the hallway from the kitchen. "Greetings, Mistress Callie," she said. "Would you like a hand with the baby?"

"Thanks," I said, handing Rosemary over. Petrana took her expertly; Rose cooed and giggled at her. They'd really bonded on our trip. I trusted the golem completely.

Yes, it was weird to have a golem in the first place, and it was particularly weird to use her for childcare. But a lot of how I lived my life was considered strange by the rest of witchkind. Hey, it worked for me.

And nasty diapers didn't bother golems one bit.

I heard footsteps on the stairs coming down from the second floor. "Hello, darling," green-eyed Jeremy said, following me into the second parlor.

"Hi," I said, stopping to give him a kiss. Then I sensed the other presence in the house. "Is your father here?"

"Yes. He came to help me with a few things, and I think he was hoping to see the baby. He's upstairs in the study now."

"Ah. I wish I'd known; I wouldn't have left."



“Quite all right.” He smiled. “Did you have a nice visit with your mother?”

“I did,” I said as I sank onto the plush sofa. Elnor immediately jumped up next to me, clearly more concerned than ever about mealtime. I patted her absently; she nudged my hand, impatient. “I got some ideas for our Yule decorations.”

“Oh, excellent,” he said, politely.

I knew he didn’t really care about this sort of thing. Warlocks loved to focus on business, leaving the domestic realm to witches. So old-fashioned, so many of them. “Mom still seems tired to me, but she did do some household magic, several times.”

“It takes a lot of time to recover from a serious illness,” he said. “Particularly at her age.”

I gave him a quizzical glance. “She’s not even a hundred.” *She’s barely older than you are*, I didn’t add.

Jeremy smiled, looking apologetic. “No, of course not—but she’s no longer in the first blush of youth either. My father’s research has long indicated that as we advance into early middle age, many of us fail to notice a physical decline, particularly as our magical strength grows.” He then seemed to catch himself. I’d had to remind him more than once about warlocksplaining. “Of course, I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know from your own research.”

“Of course,” I said, gently. Elnor batted at my knee. “Petрана?” I called out.

“Yes, mistress?” she answered from the top of the stairs on the second floor.

“My cat is starving to death, perishing right at this very moment in fact. When you’re done with the baby, would you be so kind as to set a bowl of tuna down for Elnor? Assuming she has the strength to get to the kitchen, that is.”

“Of course.”

In a minute, Petrana appeared at the doorway, clearly aiming to hand me the baby, but Jeremy intercepted her. "I'll take the little munchkin," he said.

Rosemary happily settled in her father's arms. Jeremy cooed at her and made all the goofy little noises people do at babies. She blew spit bubbles in his general direction—a clear sign of affection.

I leaned back on the couch to enjoy watching them together. Jeremy was such a natural father. I wondered why I had been so reluctant to sign a contract before she'd been born...I did remember that we'd, well, not argued exactly, but debated the issue several times. Maybe I had just needed time to get used to the idea. As I mentioned, the whole thing had been something of a surprise, even though that's not supposed to be possible for witches. I had just recently moved out of my coven house and had been imagining living alone for a few years. I'd had big plans; I was going to get some serious, solo work done.

Just more ways in which I was weird.

Jeremy sat down in the easy chair across from the sofa, bouncing the baby gently on his knee while she reached for his ponytail. He let her grab hold of it. "We're making progress upstairs," he said to me. His sentence was punctuated by a faint bump from above us.

"Oh good." He still had a rental house in the Marina, but he'd been spending more and more time here, in preparation for us combining our households. I'd given him the front second floor sitting room to use as a study. He'd assured me that was enough space, though I felt stingy, giving him only one room in a three-story house, and feeling like even that was a sacrifice. I'd originally envisioned that as a room I would lounge and read in, a more private space than the formal first-floor rooms; but the truth was, I'd probably sat in there three times in the nearly-a-year I'd lived here.

Still. This was *my* house; any contract we signed was going to make that clear.

Which he was perfectly okay with! Yet another sign that this was a good move for me, this not-a-marriage. And the more I watched him with the baby, the better I felt about it all.

I really was lucky.

"I'm not ready to show you yet," he said, after cooing at Rosemary for a minute. "But soon."

"No rush." I smiled at them both. "I mean, I'm excited to see what you do with the space, but it's entirely yours." If I needed a reading nook, I had the whole third floor. It wasn't like I was using the lab, after all.

Elnor sauntered back into the room, pausing just inside the door to sit and wash her whiskers. "That was a close one, eh?" I teased her. "Thanks be to the Blessed Mother that we managed to save your life, yet again."

She pretended not to hear me.

Jeremy grinned at me. "And this is why warlocks don't keep familiars. I'd be hard pressed to say who owns whom here."

"Nobody owns anybody; it's a partnership," I said, smiling back at him. This was another conversation we'd had more than once; it wasn't getting old, either. Was this what having a life partner felt like? I'd had relationships before...but none of them had reached anything near a moving-in-together level of seriousness. Much less a baby. There had been one...my mind struggled to recall the details. A nice fellow, but...there was something not quite right about him. I didn't even remember what.

It was a long time ago.

"Well," Jeremy said, getting to his feet, lifting Rosemary high into the air as he did so. She squealed with delight as he pretended to toss her, while never loosening his grip on her. She still had hold of his hair, pulling it up over his head. It looked painful, but Jeremy didn't flinch. He just brought the baby back down and gave her a little squeeze before turning to me. "I should see what my father is doing up there, unless you need me...?"

"Of course I need you, but not at the moment," I said lightly, reaching out to take Rosemary.

He handed her over, kissing the top of her head, then the top of mine. "You know where to find me."

"That I do."

Once he'd gone back upstairs, I just sat there for a few minutes, holding my daughter and feeling at a bit of a loss. Yes, I had told my mom a fib; I really had nothing to do today, besides work on some Yule decorations, but I hadn't wanted to tire her out further. I reached into my bag and pulled out the sprig of fir, turning it over in my hand as I thought about it. Probably I should get it into some water, let it refresh itself before I pushed magic into it. I set it on the table beside my chair.

Mom kept seeming so determined to prove she was well, insisting on doing magic and continuing to teach me tarot and all the things that...well, tired her out.

Maybe it was time to talk to Dad again. I'd brought this up with him before, but he'd insisted he was monitoring her carefully, and that she was on the mend.

I supposed I'd have to be happy with that.

With a small sigh, I got up, hefting Rosemary onto my hip. "Such a big girl!" I said to her. "Good thing you have such a strong mommy!"

She made little nonsense sounds back at me. It melted my heart; she was so adorable.

I carried her down the hallway to the kitchen, at the back of the house. Petrana was standing over the stove stirring a pot of beans. I hadn't asked her to cook beans; it seemed like she was taking more initiative every day.

"That smells good," I told her.

"Thank you, Mistress Callie," she said. "I'm going to use half of them for bean and cheese enchiladas for dinner tonight and keep the rest for later use."

Bean and cheese enchiladas? “Is that something Jeremy wanted?” I asked.

“Not specifically, but I know he enjoys Mexican food a great deal. He has mentioned more than once that there is nothing like this in the Old Country.” She turned to look at me, and I could swear she gave a small smile, though she was still nearly as expressionless as my cat. “It seems he didn’t explore Balzst nearly as thoroughly as we did, mistress.”

I smiled back at her. “That’s the difference between being a tourist and being a native. He probably ate most of his dinners at home. The Blessed Mother only knows what sort of traditional old-world fare his cook or housekeeper or whoever prepared for him.”

Jeremy was the son of a San Francisco warlock, but he had been raised by foster parents since a very young age, after his mother had died of a strange illness. He hadn’t told me a lot about her—he didn’t remember a lot about her—but he’d had a happy childhood, nonetheless. He adored his foster parents and visited them whenever he traveled back to the Old Country. They were both in the diplomatic corps and had raised him to do similar work. I looked forward to meeting them; they would certainly be invited to our contract-signing ceremony, and given enough advance warning so they could make the journey easily.

Now I was sorry I hadn’t sought them out when I’d been there, just last month. Well, I’d been on retreat, recovering from childbirth, and had still been thinking over the whole contract question. It would have been deeply awkward to establish a connection with them only to come home and decide not to move forward with the relationship.

So it was all for the best, I supposed.

“Was there anything you needed, Mistress Callie?”

*Yeah. Something to do.* “No, thank you, Petrana,” I said. “I was just going to head upstairs and...” I didn’t finish the sentence. I didn’t

know what I was going to do. Check on Jeremy and his dad? No, I should let the warlock at least have control of his own space. “Oh, wait, yes there is—I left a bough of fir in the second parlor. Can you find a vase for it and get it in water?”

“Of course.”

I climbed the stairs to the second floor, glancing up the hall to the closed door at the front of the house. Jeremy and his father were working some magic in there; I could feel it. Were they stretching the space a bit? I again felt a twinge of guilt for my miserliness. Heck, this floor also contained a largely unused guest room as well as Rosemary’s nursery, where she’d yet to spend a whole night—we were still co-sleeping, even when Jeremy was in the bed with me. Us. He hadn’t made a murmur about it, but the truth was, having a baby in bed did tend to curtail certain...other activities.

It probably shouldn’t, but clearly we both felt weird about it. Jeremy and me, I mean; Rose was obviously far too young to be aware of such things, even if she did seem unusually alert and attentive, even for a witchlet.

She still communicated with me only in single words mind-to-mind, and even then not all that often.

She had also still never cried.

I’d been at first relieved and then, pretty quickly, worried by this. Babies cry: that’s the one thing everyone on the planet knows about them. They cry when they’re startled, when they’re hungry, when they’re tired, when they’re wet. They cry for no reason, just to exercise their lungs.

But Rosemary Leonora did not cry.

The healers at the clinic had checked her over very thoroughly, both magically and physically, and said that she was in perfect health, completely well-developed. Her magical channels were smooth and open, developing exactly as they should. My friend Sebastian, a research biologist who was studying to be a healer,

had gone over her systems quite intensively as well, and said he'd never seen any witchlet so robust and strong. I'd probed her magic too, and her biology, as much as I could without endangering her. My birth mother and father had both examined her; my coven mother and nearly all of my coven sisters had looked her over thoroughly. Even my familiar appeared to take her measure on a regular basis and seemed entirely content with her health and well-being.

The only person who hadn't examined her was her grandfather, Gregorio Andromedus. He greatly enjoyed seeing her, but proclaimed himself, at eight hundred, too ancient to be trusted to hold an infant. "Delicate creature that she is, I'd be afraid my old rogue magic would confuse her systems." That made some sense to me, but it also confused me a bit, because...well, I wasn't a hundred percent sure why. I seemed to remember something weird about an interaction between them on the day she was born, but I'd not been myself then—exhausted, filled with pain drugs and spells, worn down from the lengthy labor and the difficult birth. Maybe it was just a strange dream artifact.

Busy as he was, Gregorio still made time to visit us regularly. Rose seemed to appreciate his presence—she followed him with her eyes whenever he was in the room. Probably she sensed something about his great age and power.

Nobody was sure exactly how much a newborn witchlet or baby warlock understood of the world around them. Fortunately, they matured quickly, developing silent, mind-to-mind communication even before their little mouths could handle spoken language.

Anyway, I told myself to just be thankful for her placid, happy silence.

But it was still weird.

I turned away from Jeremy's closed door and thought about heading to the bedroom. Maybe a nap? But no, I wasn't tired; I was...restless. And the baby clearly wasn't sleepy.

My feet carried me up the next, narrower flight of stairs, almost without my conscious decision to do so. Maybe it was because I'd been thinking about it at Mom's...not that I wanted to do any lab work. But I did feel drawn to go inhabit the space, at least for a minute.

Maybe I was trying to talk myself into giving Jeremy (and his father) more space. Not that he'd asked for any. I wondered how long it would take him to do so.

*Not till you sign a contract*, my mind snickered at me.

I gave a quiet snort back, as I unlocked the door at the top of the staircase. It was pretty obvious that Jeremy was in "best behavior" mode. I mean, he had always been a very marvelous boyfriend, the sexiest warlock in San Francisco and beyond, and a perfect gentleman; but there was an additional sort of—was it wariness? No, not that dramatic, but—carefulness in his behavior. He was thoughtful and attentive, unceasingly apologetic every time his father's people returned the contract for another round of negotiations, and always bringing me little treats—flowers, chocolate, baubles for Rosemary.

And, when he didn't think I was watching, he oh-so-carefully watched *me*.

That was the part I wished I could ask him about. Had I done something to make him think he was on eggshells with me? Had I been unreasonable, or overly demanding, or bitchy? I didn't think so; I didn't remember anything, at least.

But as I stepped into my lab room, I again had that fleeting sense that I was missing something.

*Strong*, Rosemary said, sending the word to my mind.

"That's right, sweetie," I said, jiggling her a little on my hip. "Your mommy is so strong, she carried you all the way up to the third floor without any help! Now let's see where she can put you down." I looked around the musty-smelling room, its bare hardwood floor with the magically carved pentacle in its exact



center, the long lab bench lined up against one wall, the windows at the back letting in the afternoon sunlight. No comfy chairs, no mattresses, no playpens or anything.

*Floor,* said Rose.

I chuckled. "I'm not putting you down on a nasty filthy floor. I'll see if I can clear some space..."

*Floor!* Her "voice" was louder this time, more insistent.

It startled me. This placid, uncomplaining baby was suddenly ordering me around? Surprised, I knelt, still holding her, and ran my hand over the floorboards. Okay, it was a bit dusty, but really not so bad.

*Middle!* she said.

Middle? "You want me to put you in the pentacle, sweetie?"

I felt a strong sense of satisfaction beaming from her as she turned her little head and smiled up at me.

I shrugged and carried her to the pentacle, where I again knelt and felt the floor. "All right," I said, and sat in the middle of the pentacle myself, letting Rose down between my legs.

She immediately started trying to roll away from me. She was far too young to be crawling yet, or even trying to, but that didn't stop her from being a squirmy worm—particularly at diaper time. And bath time. And right now.

"Hey!" I said, grabbing the back of her onesie. "Where do you think you're going?"

She stopped trying to escape and grinned at me again, blowing spit bubbles. Her new favorite trick.

"Fine," I said. "Happy now?"

Still looking up at me, she reached out for my hair, which was in a long braid down my back. It twitched away from her.

A movement at the doorway caught my eye. Elnor pawed the door open slightly wider and sidled in, nose busy sniffing around this room where we'd spent so little time recently. She checked all the corners, as she always did in new spaces, then came to join us

in the middle of the pentacle. I could almost see her wondering if we were here to do some spellwork.

"Not without my familiar, kitten," I assured her, petting her on the back, enjoying the feel of her soft fur. Rosemary reached out for her tail, which she flicked away from the baby's grasp.

"You're a force of chaos today, witchlet," I murmured to my daughter. "I wonder what goes on in that fresh little mind."

But the next voice in my head was not that of my daughter. My friend Sebastian said, *Hey, Callie?*

*Hey!* I answered, happy to hear from him. *What's going on?*

*Nothing much, I was just—well, I hadn't seen you or the baby in a while, and I wondered if I could stop by and see how you're both doing?*

I thought a moment. Jeremy had never objected to my friendship with the young warlock—for one thing, Sebastian only dated men—but he never seemed all that comfortable around him either. Plus, Gregorio was here. Sebastian obviously wasn't looking for a work meeting. *What about meeting somewhere outside?* I sent. *The baby is restless as all get-out. I was thinking about taking her to a park.*

*Sounds good to me. Buena Vista?*

*Sure. Be there in ten—I have to grab a blanket.* I pondered again. *And a snack—make it twenty.*

*No, ten—I'll bring the snack.*

I smiled. *Deal.*

I closed the connection and started to pick up Rosemary, in preparation for getting to my feet. She squirmed again, nearly making me drop her. I had to add a bit of magic to my strength and balance to save us both. "I promise you will not like it if you land on your head on a hardwood floor," I said to her, once I was safely standing and holding her firmly.

"Ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba," she babbled, again reaching for my hair.

Yipes, this child *had* to burn off some of this energy.