

## **Jessa and the Curse of the Gypsy Wagon**

Waking from my sleep I stared up at the celestial stickers that decorated my bedroom ceiling.

“Today’s the day, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009. I’m finally a responsible adult.” I thought to myself as today marked my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. My mind quickly corrected me with my own intruding judgmental thoughts “Adult? Yes. Responsible? Eh...I’m still working on that.” I took a deep breath, wiped the sleep from my eyes, and rolled out of bed, breaking free from the grasp of my fuzzy merlot colored comforter.

“Jessa, are you awake?” I hear my mom yelling from the kitchen.

“Yes, I’m up” I shout back as I slowly drag myself down the hall. Upon entering the kitchen, I notice my mother standing near the sink with her strawberry blonde tendrils pulled back into a low ponytail and her black knock off designer purse glued to her shoulder as if she’s about to walk out the door. “Off to work?”

She looks over at me and nods.

“Yes, the shops very busy with Halloween right around the corner, Tarot card readings have been selling like hotcakes.” She squealed.

Our blue merle Australian Shepard named Feral greeted me by resting his head on my lap as I sat down at our kitchen table, I greet him back with a few pats to his head.

“That reminds me, can you drop Feral off at the groomers? I didn’t hear my alarm and simply don’t have time before work.” My mother asks.

“Sure, why not...it’s not like I had plans today or anything,” I responded sarcastically.

“Oh Jessa, you know how I detest sarcasm. Please see that you drop him off and I’ll see you at the shop around three o’clock for your shift.” She says as she rushes out the door without so much as a “Thanks” or “Happy Birthday”.

For running a psychic shop my mother surely had no insight into my mind or even her own to remember things like her own daughter’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

After I dropped Feral off at the groomers, I decided to grab a bagel from Early Bird's brunch stop and go sit out on the riverfront wall near the old St. Augustine Spanish fort to watch for dolphins. Surprisingly, the Florida weather was nice today and not blistering hot like it normally is. While enjoying my bagel and my legs dangling off the stone wall over the river, I saw two bottlenose dolphins playing and chasing each other in the bay. The sight of the dolphins was a welcome mood booster and made me feel like maybe my birthday wouldn't be so terrible after all. A memory triggered in the back of my mind to remedy any optimism I had about today. At that moment I was back at my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday dressed in a dark purple maxi dress on the side of my street with tears pouring from my cerulean colored eyes while cradling my boyfriend Caleb's motionless body.

I had been sitting at my vanity doing my makeup and listening to *Panic at the Disco!* when an image had flashed in my mind of Caleb getting hit by a car down the street near my house. Snapping out of the disturbing vision, I dropped my lipstick and frantically ran outside. Stepping out onto my front porch, I saw Caleb walking down my street, still a few yards away with a bouquet of lilies in his hand, his eyes met mine and he lit up with a smile. For a moment I smiled back at him, putting my worries at ease, but then noticed a black Challenger with darkly tinted windows rounding the corner, it was the car from my vision.

I screamed "Watch Out!" as the car sped towards Caleb.

Caleb went to turn around but not soon enough, as the car struck him in the back throwing him up into the air with his body landing harshly back onto the side of the street as the car sped off. For a moment it was as if time had stopped, but then the reality of what I had just witnessed poured over me.

I shrieked yelling, "Caleb!"

I ran towards his body and looked for the black car that was speeding off, but they were already out of sight. I kneeled down beside Caleb and pulled out my flip phone to hastily dial 911.

“It’s going to be okay; you’re going to be fine.” I say to him while also directing the 911 operator to my address.

Caleb looks up at me,

“Happy Birthday, love. You’re something special please remember that.” He mutters.

“No, I’m not. I’m nothing, you’re the special one. You’re going to be fine. I don’t need to remember anything.” I say with tears glistening down my cheeks.

“I love you more than anything I have ever loved in the 18 years I have spent on this earth. Please don’t cry over me, you have made me so happy. Dying is not as scary as I thought, it’s quite peaceful.” he said.

“Don’t go, they’re almost here. I can hear the sirens now. I love you.” I whimpered back to him.

“Remember, Jessa.” He whispers as he fades away.

Cradling his now lifeless body I cry out in agony “No! I love you, stay with me!”

The sound of my cell phone ringing brings me back to the present. I flip my phone open,

“Hello?”.

“Happy birthday, Chica! You’re coming to Eclipse tonight to celebrate, right?”

I hear my best friend Amy shout into the phone. Still in a daze from the flashback, I respond

“Thanks, wait what?”

“Eclipse tonight at 10 pm, you know for your birthday celebration. There will be dancing, fun, and hot guys. You in?” she said cheerfully.

“I don’t know if I feel up to going to a club tonight, Amy.”

“Jessa, you have too. I mean what else are you going to do, stay home and read one of your fantasy novels? Come out it will be fun!” she whined.

“Hey, don’t hate on my fantasy novels, I like them. Fine, I’ll be there after my shift at the shop.” I muttered.

“Perfect, See you later Chica. Oh, and wear something scandalous, you’re eighteen now!” Amy said, then hung up the phone.

After running a few errands and getting lunch I walked down St. George Street in the historic district and stopped in front of my mother’s shop, which had a big black and purple glittery sign that read “Madame Renee’s Gypsy Wagon.” I let out a sigh and walked into the store where the bell on the storefront door jingled “I’m here for my shift” I yelled. I saw a hand push back the blue beaded curtain in the back and my mother appeared.

“That’s what you’re wearing?” she scoffed.

“Yes, what wrong with a black t-shirt and jeans?” I said, defending my outfit.

“You just don’t look like a gypsy fortune teller that’s all. There is a black beaded bohemian maxi dress and a gold coin headpiece in the back, go put it on.” She said.

I rolled my eyes and went to the back bathroom to change, after throwing on the ankle-length black dress I walked over to the mirror and clipped on the gold coin headdress, then combed my fingers through my long ebony waves. I walk out of the bathroom and my mother instantly shrieks in excitement.

“Much better!” as she admires my outfit.

“You’re so beautiful Jessa. You look so much like your father; God rest his soul.” She says softly.

“Mom, dad lives an hour away...he’s not dead.” I reply.

“He’s dead to me. Anyway, I must go get Feral from the groomers. Don’t forget to lock up when you leave.” She said as she headed out the door.

I nodded and waved goodbye.

I had stayed pretty busy doing readings at the shop until around nightfall, when it had slowed down enough for me to slurp down the Ramen noodles that I had fixed. While I was in the back, I heard the front doorbell ring and yelled “Be right there”, as I tossed my ramen cup in the trash. When I moved

the back curtain to see who was upfront, I noticed an insanely attractive man admiring the multi-colored crystals that lined the shelves in the shop front. He looked like he was in his mid-twenties and was around 6-foot-tall, with a toned athletic build, black shoulder-length hair, light olive-toned skin, and electrifying pale green eyes.

“Welcome to Madame Renee’s Gypsy Wagon, how can I help you?” I stammer.

He turns around and smiles.

“Hi, I’m here to get a psychic reading.” He replied.

“Great, are you visiting from out of town?” I asked.

“No, actually I just moved here from Scotland.”

“No way, I thought I recognized your accent! I’m Scottish too, well I was American raised so no accent for me, but my mom is a full-on Scot and was raised in Edinburgh.” I said, trying not to sound too excited.

“Edinburgh, you don’t say! I am from Inverness which isn’t too far from there. So, are you thee Madame Renee?” he smirked.

“No, I’m her daughter Jessa.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you Jessa. I’m Jaxon but most people just call me Jax.” He said with a half-smile.

Lost in his eyes I stared at him for a moment before speaking,

“Anyways, I don’t mean to hold you up, you can have a seat at my table over there and we can get started on that reading for you.” I said gesturing to the black square table with a crescent moon printed in the center and tarot decks lining the edge.

Jax followed me over to the table and sat down in one of the blue velvet chairs across from me.

“General readings are read by palm and are \$30, so can I see your left hand first.” I said, as I offered my hand out to his.

As he reached his left-hand out, I gently laid it in mine to examine his palm lines. His hand on mine sent electrical currents throughout my body like I had been awakened by his touch.

“The left palm represents your past and who you are.” I said softly.

As soon as my index finger made contact with his life line, I had a vision of a gray wolf running through the woods in what looked to be Scotland. The wolf stopped then looked in my direction, it had familiar green eyes that looked right through me. Those eyes, I recognized them, it was almost as if they were the eyes of the man sitting right across from me. I gasped then let go of Jaxon’s hand as I slid my chair back away from him.

“Are you okay?” Jax said looking concerned.

I meant to say yes, but instead the words that fell from my mouth were,

“What are you?”

Jax looked confused.

“What do you mean, what did you see?” he replied.

“I saw you, but it wasn’t you.” I said cautiously.

He looked taken aback and I could sense that he was trying to think of something to say, when I heard the bells from the church down the block ring 10 times.

“Oh no, it’s ten o’clock, I’m late! Sorry, you must go, no charge.” I say frazzled.

Grabbing my purse as I walk towards the front door to wave him out. Looking lost and confused, Jax stands up and walks to the door. I follow behind him. After locking the door, I turn around to see that Jaxon is inches away from me, his sea-green eyes meet mine.

“Happy Birthday, Jessa! It was interesting meeting you.” He said with a perplexed look and grin.

I responded, “Thank you, it was indeed interesting.”

Jaxon nodded then walked in the opposite direction of where I was heading. I started walking hastily towards the direction of Eclipse to meet Amy, with the vision and everything that had just happened replaying in my head. Then it hit me,

“Jaxon wished me a Happy Birthday; how did he know it was my birthday?” I thought to myself as a chill went up my spine.

Finally arriving at the club, I saw Amy waiting out front impatiently wearing a pink spaghetti strap mini dress that matched her lip gloss.

“You’re late.” she said disapprovingly.

“I know, I’m sorry it’s been a long, strange night and I lost track of time.” I apologized.

“I’ll forgive you but only because it’s your birthday.” She said looking pouty then putting on a big grin.

“You’re the best.” I say back to her.

“I know, now let’s go inside and get this party started birthday girl!” she responded while hip bumping me.

Once inside the club, Amy flirted with the bartender and grabbed us some drinks. We danced for a bit then sat back down at the bar when Amy was invited back to the dance floor by the owner of Eclipse Steve, who had always had a crush on her. Amy looked over at me for approval to go and I nodded, as she got up and grabbed Steve’s hand then headed to the dance floor. I smiled and turned back to my drink.

“May I have this dance?” I heard someone speak from behind me in a deep Scottish voice.

When I turned around there was a man with short black hair that was combed back neatly, brown almost black eyes, a tan olive complexion, and a five o’clock shadow, standing there with his hand extended out towards me, his face bearing a devilish grin. He was attractive, but I got an eerie feeling that I knew him from somewhere.

"I'm sorry, have we met before?" I asked curiously.

"No love, I don't believe so. I'm just in town on holiday from Scotland" he said.

The man calling me "love" stung, as the only person to have ever called me that was Caleb.

"Come dance with me, love." The man insisted.

Curious as to who he was, I placed my hand in his and he pulled me out onto the dance floor.

"I hope you don't mind; I heard your friend mention it was your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Happy Birthday. How does it feel to be an adult in society's eyes?" he inquired.

"I honestly didn't think it was going to feel much different, the same as any other birthday, but I actually feel quite different...like an energy in me has awoken. I know that probably sounds a bit strange." I said.

"Not at all Jessa, it sounds like your powers have awoken. Powers that will soon belong to me." He said with a grimace.

"Excuse me?" I say while trying to take a step back, but the man pulled me in closer to whisper in my ear.

"Now let us not make a scene Jessa, do yourself and your friend Amy a favor and follow me out through the back so we can have a conversation. If you don't comply, I'll kill her, as well as everyone else in this club." He whispers.

Paralyzed in fear, I stood there staring at him in disbelief with his dark hollow eyes staring back at me. I want to back away, run, and scream but I can't. I look over at Amy and see her dancing without a clue as to what is happening. I turn back to the dark-haired man,

"Okay, I'll go with you, but you have to promise me no one will get hurt, especially not Amy." I demand trying to sound as fierce as possible.

"Of course!" the man says as he grabs my hand and leads me through the back of Eclipse, out to the back-alley way.



Once outside in the dark lonely alley the man stalks around me like a Jaguar about to pounce on its prey.

“Who are you and what do you want?” I ask sternly.

“Oh yes, how rude of me. My name is Balor or King Balor to most. I’ve waited a long time for you, Jessa.” He replied.

“Waited for me, what do you mean?” I said confused.

“Yes, well you see many moons ago, your grandmother pleaded to the Gods for a baby, she was growing impatient, and I could feel it. I appeared to her one night and promised her a baby in exchange for the life and soul of her first female grandchild. That grandchild being you.” He said walking closer towards me, backing me into the brick wall behind me.

“I knew my grandmother she would never do that to me. She would never let anyone hurt me, let alone take my soul. I mean, my soul. Really? Who are you the devil?” I scoffed.

“No, I’m not the devil but you’re close. I’m a demon, a very old one at that. Your grandma would and did promise me your soul because I assured her that you would come to Scotland with me and rule as my queen. I told her that I would not take your soul until after you had died naturally. She didn’t think her granddaughter becoming a queen sounded like too bad of a life.” Balor replied.

I looked at him in disbelief,

“You’re crazy, I won’t do it, I’m not going anywhere. You’re probably just some psycho and have never even spoken to my grandmother.” I say trying to push him away from me.

Balor pushes me back into the wall and is now inches away from my face.

“I knew Annette and you will come with me, or I’ll kill every one of your loved ones. You have power and it belongs to me! If you don’t believe me then put your hand in mine and read me.” He replied as he stuck his left hand out.

I reluctantly put my hand in his and closed my eyes, suddenly a vision of a younger version of my grandma appeared. She was talking to Balor,

“I don’t want this if you are going to hurt her.” She says to him.

“Annette, I won’t hurt her. I’ll protect her, she’ll be a queen, my queen. I’ll even wait until her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday so that she can have a normal childhood and all that nonsense.” He assures her.

“A queen, and she’ll be safe?” she responds.

“Yes, a protected queen.” He says with a nod.

“Alright, I’ll agree to it. I’m not a bad person, it’s just I’ve been trying for a baby for over five years now.” She says looking ashamed.

“Of course you’re not. Perfect, let’s shake on that to make the agreement final.” He says as he grabs my grandmothers’ hand, shaking it.

“What now?” she asked.

“That’s all, Congratulations Annette, you’re now an expectant mother to a beautiful baby girl.”

He says smiling mischievously.

“I’m pregnant? Just like that?” she asks, looking perplexed.

“Just like that.” He replied.

Then with a snap of his fingers, he disappeared from my grandmothers’ sight. I gasp as I’m brought back into reality.

“My mom?” I say inquisitively.

He rolls his eyes.

“Yes, your mother is my creation. My demons have been keeping an eye on you over the years through your mother.” He stated.

“You mean her multiple personalities were actually demons and not dissociative identity disorder?” I said.

“That’s right.” He says with a wicked grin.

“My mother suffered and struggled so much with that, she thought she was crazy, everyone did. How could you do that to her?!” I yelled at him.

“It’s just business dear. I had to make sure my investment was being taken care of.” He remarked.

“Well forget it. I won’t go with you; I will never be your queen!” I declare while crossing my arms.

“That’s where you’re wrong, love. You will or I’ll make you.” He growls.

“No!” I shout back.

Balor then grabs my arm bending it back painfully “I guess I’ll have to make you then.” He snarls. As his grip tightens on my arm I wince.

“Stop it, you’re hurting me.” I say through my teeth.

Out of nowhere a gray wolf lunges and attacks Balor. Allowing me the chance to break free.

I sprint back into the club, but Amy is nowhere to be found. Frantically pulling my cell phone out I discover that I have a missed text from Amy that read “*This club is lame, I’m going home. I can’t believe you ditched me Chica.*” I sighed a sigh of relief knowing that Amy went home and was safe. Once I’m out of the club I find an alleyway to stop at for a minute and close my eyes to take a deep breath. Suddenly, I felt a hand reach out and grab my arm, causing me to jump.

“I’m sorry Jessa, it’s just me. I didn’t mean to startle you.” A familiar voice says calmly.

“Jax? What are you doing here?” I asked hesitantly.

“I’m the wolf.” He responds while scratching the back of his head.

That’s when it hit me, the vision of the wolf I had when I was doing Jaxon’s reading, the wolf’s green eyes were Jaxon’s.

“How?” I asked.

“There’s a lot of things you don’t know, but no time to explain right now. Balor will be catching up with us any minute. We have to get you out of here, Jessa.” He said.

Jax grabs my hand and nods at me, as if asking for approval then starts leading me down the alleyway. Out of nowhere, we slam into Balor, it was like he appeared out of thin air. I fall to the ground from the impact of running into him.

“I believe you have something of mine, Jaxon.” Balor says while glaring at Jaxon.

“You can’t have her, Balor! She’s not your property.” Jax replies.

Jaxon jumps up and as he lunges, he shifts into the gray wolf I saw attack Balor earlier, he sinks his teeth into Balor’s neck, but then is thrown into the wall in the alleyway and yelps falling to the ground, shifting back into his human form. Balor lifts me off the ground by my throat.

“You ready to go with me or should I just rip your soul and power from you now?”

“Never!” I say.

Balor squeezes my throat tighter.

“You are mine and will always be mine. That’s why I had to get rid of that little boyfriend of yours a few years back. He was planning on marrying you. Even asked your mom for permission.” He sneered.

“He killed Caleb; it was Balor in the black car!” I thought.

I was gasping for air now when an image of Caleb flashed in my mind.

“Remember, Jessa. You’re something special.”

His words sparked a fire in me.

Just then I focused on the newfound energy I had felt coursing through my body since I had turned 18 and imagined it expelling from my body like a sound wave. At that moment it was like a burst of electricity left my body hitting and throwing Balor across the alley. As soon as I was free, I crawled over to Jax.

“Wake up, Jax. Come on wake up.” I said while frantically shaking him by his shoulders.

Jax opened his eyes and placed his hand on my cheek.

“Hey, you’re okay.” He says.

“I’m okay.” I say with a half-smile.

Seeing that Jax was okay I stood up and focused my attention on Balor who was getting up off the ground.

“It’s time to finish this.” I think to myself.

“What? You think you can get rid of me that easy?” He says then shoots a fireball towards me.

I manage to dodge the fireball.

“Yes, I do. After all, I must be pretty powerful if you want my power so badly.” I respond.

I saw a hint of worry in his eyes as he tossed another fireball at me. This time I caught it though, expelling energy through my hand, building the fireball even bigger then threw it back at Balor, causing it to hit him in the chest. While Balor was on the ground I walked towards him, standing over his body with my eyes shooting daggers into his.

“This is for Caleb, who I had already given my heart and soul to.” I said as electrical currents escaped my fingertips, zapping Balor into oblivion as he screamed,

“No, you can’t do this!” then vanished into thin air.

Watching the morning approach, Jax and I sat on the riverfront wall near the old Spanish fort.

“So now that it’s all over are you going to go back to Scotland?” I asked.

“Actually, I thought about sticking around here for a while.” he replied.

“Really?!” I shrieked, trying not to sound too excited.

“Yeah, it turns out there is this girl I met who’s kind of psychic, super powerful, and just all around pretty amazing. I’d like to stick around and get to know her more.” He said with a big smirk.

“That sounds good to me.” I replied trying to hide my blush, then leaned on Jaxon with his arm around me, as we sat gazing out at the beautiful tangerine Florida sunrise.