

“Breathe...”

Mara’s hands trembled while the orb hovered between her open palms. She’d been working at it for an hour and she’d finally manifested one, but particles of loose, sparkling magic dust tickled her nose and fingertips. It was losing its integrity.

“Hold together...” she cajoled the warm ball of light. “Just a few—”

****Knock, knock, knock****

Startled, she flinched her hands—the bright orb bursting into a cloud of blue dust. “No!”

“Everything alright in there?”

“Dean,” she muttered between clenched teeth. She got up from her cross-legged position in the chair and went over to the door. She swung open the door, grousing at her smiling friend, “You made me burst my orb,”

“I did?” He held out his hand—light tracing over the lines in his palm. The light grew and expanded until an orb twice the size of the one she’d conjure appeared. “Here, take mine.”

“Show off.” She flicked the top of the orb and watching it pop in a kaleidoscope of color. “Multicolored? Really?”

“What can I say? I’ve got skills.”

“Well,” she said, walking away from him, the sound of her apartment door closing behind her, “it’s the last conjuring skill I have to possess to be accepted into the program—and it can’t take me more than hour.”

“What do you need from me? I’ll do anything to help.”

“You will?” she said, turning and walking toward him. “Anything?”

“Sure,” he said, taking her in his arms. “Anything.”

“Thank you.” She snuggled into his chest and squeezed him tight, ignoring his struggling and choking when a red glow enveloped them—holding him in her embrace until he stilled.

Mara released him, letting his now emaciated form crumble to the floor.

She held out her hand and smiled when a large blue orb immediately appeared in her palm. “You’re a good friend.”