

SHELBY MCCRALEY



A WITCH'S LOVE

A CAPTRIX CHRONICLES STORY

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www.shelbymccraley.com



THE JAR OF dried rose petals fell on the wooden kitchen floor with a loud clang, rolling as far away from me as possible. Maybe it could sense my desperation wafting from my body as I piled more glass jars containing the herbs I needed in my arms from my storage rack.

“Shit,” I whispered, trying to not wake the sleeping teenage girl in my living room as I struggled to keep all the jars in my arms.

I turned toward the dining table and froze, waiting to hear if Atalanta had stirred. When she didn’t pop into the doorway ahead of me, I let out the breath I had been holding in.

Atalanta.

The name still rang foreign in my mind. I never thought I would see the day where Artemis’s daughter, the one whose name I hadn’t known before this morning, would turn up on my doorstep. Atalanta had clutched a scrap of paper, scrawled with Artemis’s messy handwriting, giving her my address.

She only wrote like that when she was in a hurry. Otherwise, she took the time to write clean, beautiful, and controlled lines. If Artemis Capp was described in one word, it had to be control. She kept her emotions close to her chest and never let you know if you had the upper hand. Everything she did was a well thought out and executed plan. I almost felt bad for the witch creatures she came across because they never really had a chance against her. Every now and then though, I witnessed the mask slipping, and I got to see into Artemis’s heart where she would be soft with me and tell me about her feelings. I liked to believe we had an intimate relationship that wasn’t comparable to others.

When I didn’t hear Atalanta stir, I sat the jars of herbs down before reaching to collect the runaway rose petals. I took into account the items laid across the table before me. One full tea kettle, a large bowl, fuzzy weed, rosemary, caraway, and the dried rose petals was all I needed to perform the spell to find a lost lover. The only thing I didn’t know was if the spell would work. However, I was out of options and I needed to find Artemis fast. Not only for the teenager, but for myself, too.

Because I loved Artemis Renee Capp, even if it was forbidden.

Taking my seat, I grabbed the kettle and poured the water into the bowl. The morning sunlight glistened rainbows into the water from the sun catcher in the window above the kitchen sink. I normally would have taken a moment to appreciate the brilliant colors as they crossed over my glittering skin. The multitude of colors along with my skin sheen made me feel beautiful. It was one of the few things that made fighting off an inner evil voice and remaining a Domum worth it. But instead of taking the time to enjoy the light, I opened the jars of various herbs. In order for this spell to even have a chance of working, I needed to set my intention and ignore the world around me. Otherwise, all the effort would be for nothing.

Breathing softly, I calmed my heart rate. I grabbed a few sprigs of rosemary first, feeling the wooded stems and tiny

leaves in the palm of my hand. The herbal smell infiltrated my nose as always and I allowed myself the brief moment to enjoy the scent.

Thank you for providing assistance in this incantation, I thought before dropping the plant into the water bowl. I followed the same pattern with the fuzzy weed and caraway. The rose petals were last, and I held them delicately in my hand to not crush them.

Thank you for providing the love needed for this spell to succeed.

I sprinkled the rose petals into the bowl, creating a dirty pinkish water and nodded, content with my spell work. Now came the hardest part of the spell.

This should have been the easiest portion. All I had to do was place my hands on the side of the bowl and think about all the positive memories I had with Artemis and how I felt about her while repeating the spell's chant to find her. A picture of her location would materialize in the vessel, and then I would know where she was if our love was strong enough.

I swallowed, choosing to believe that we had a mutual enough love connection for this to work before putting my hands on the side of the bowl. My power surged through my fingertips immediately, feeling the call from the herbs charged with my magic. A small voice tickled the back of my brain that I recognized as my call to indulge in Venefica power. Normally, I would shudder and second guess performing the spell, but this time I pressed forward. It was the only option.

I closed my eyes, searching for my memories of love to find my intention for the chant. Darkness was all I saw and felt as the bowl warmed in my hands. I pressed harder, searching for something, and then my psyche tumbled forward into an ocean of memories.



IT FELT LIKE free falling through mist, while looking for road signs in the sky to direct you to the right spot, until your bones crushed into the ground. Disorientated, I opened my eyes to find myself sitting at the kitchen table, but without my bowl of spell work before me. Instead of morning light, it was dark outside and volumes of Captrix reading material stretched before me.

Artemis was sitting beside me, head down, reading a book. Her blonde pixie cut was grown out and looked shaggier than normal. My mouth was dry as I clung to the paper in my hands.

"Artemis?" I whispered, barely able to get the words out.

Her crystal blue eyes looked up and met mine. Even though she had been reading, her body posture was softened, like she had taken off her figurative armor and laid it to the side.

"Did you find something?"

I looked down to see what I was reading. A quick skim told me I was reviewing newspaper articles, specifically the business section. A woman with cascading black wavy hair's smiling face was on the front page, showing her new storefront in downtown New Meadows. To the side of her, a teenage boy stood with his eyes low and his hands in his pockets, avoiding the camera flashes. The town's mayor was holding cartoony large scissors to cut a red ribbon in front of the shop's door.

Racking my brain, I tried to figure out what memory I had stumbled into. My body felt tingly as I attempted to move my fingers, but nothing happened. I tried something more subtle, like moving my toes, but the Bridgette my mind inhabited didn't flinch. No matter what I tried to do, I couldn't change what had already occurred. I was a puppet, dancing around on strings, but with the consciousness to know what was happening as I became an actress in my own memories. My heart caught in my throat as the memory took over what I was supposed to say next, since I was taking too long to play the part.

"There's a new artisanal spice shop opened downtown." My eyes glanced up from the paper.

"We're trying to figure out what type of witch creature could have slipped in from the ports, not the newest opening downtown." Her eyes turned back down to the book she was reading.

"Yes, but where do new witch creatures need to go first?"

"You tell me," said Artemis, setting her book down once again.

"If you were a witch creature that had been on a boat for a few weeks, needing to get started in a new world, you would go to a local apothecary to gather supplies."

"We don't have an apothecary in New Meadows."

"But we do have an artisanal spice shop," I said, tapping the picture in the newspaper article. "Basic spells are performed with everyday herbs that witches can get at a spice shop."

"If the witch can blend in. It's not like they can go shopping in the daylight without me noticing. And they definitely can't go into a human run store."

"I guess you're right, but I think you might want to consider it for the future." The words felt thick in my mouth as I wanted to scream that I was right and she was wrong. I, of all people, should have been the expert on the subject, but my ideas were cast aside because Artemis didn't want to listen. My brain melded deeper into the memory and I lost track of my current thoughts as they mixed with the thoughts of my past self.

"I feel like this used to be easier. I would see something off, find the creature quickly, and then take care of it. My intuition could get me anywhere I wanted to go."

"And now it isn't?" I asked. We had been hunting together almost a year, and this was the most vulnerable she had ever been with me.

It wasn't often when I saw the mask of control slip, but I wanted to see it more. I wanted to know everything about her. I needed to know everything about her.

"Between the witch creatures getting more organized, taking care of an aging father, and trying to raise a teenager who doesn't want this lifestyle, not really." Artemis paused, contemplating her next words carefully. "I'm also not as sharp as I used to be."

"You ever thought that maybe it was time to retire? To have a normal relationship with your daughter?"

"What would I even do with my life?"

"I don't know Artemis. See the world. Write a book. Live here with me and crochet something. Bring your family." I shocked myself with my intrusive thoughts coming out of my mouth.

Artemis tilted her head, considering me in her regal way.

I hadn't told her that I felt something romantic for her. We had never kissed, but something about her soul drew me to her. I couldn't exactly place when my feelings of hatred morphed into attraction, but it was something about the way she carried herself with pride. The way she protected the ones she loved with a fierceness so great, she wouldn't even reveal her daughter's name to a friend. The way her crystal blue eyes shined when she found the answers to her questions in a book. Or maybe it was the way her hand grazed mine when we filled blessed water vials that changed my mind.

No matter what combination of the small things she did, they made me feel stomach flips, and I wanted to love her. I wanted to take the armor she wore and throw it away to fix her in a way I knew only I could.

My mouth opened to take back my comment, but Artemis reached out and touched my hand. Warmth flooded over my cold fingers and I struggled to keep myself breathing.

"Bridgette, being a Captrix is a responsibility, not a choice. People need me," said Artemis.

"But haven't you given enough of your life?" I dared to interlace my fingers with hers.

Artemis squeezed, rubbing her thumb back and forth on the side of my hand. My heart was giddy at her acceptance of my affection.

"My life is to protect humanity from witch creatures. It was what I was born to do and what I will die doing. It was what my mother was born to do and every Capp before her." Artemis squeezed my hand again before pulling her hand back. "It was never up to me to decide what I wanted to do. Hell, I only went out and found a man for a while as a distraction during a slow witch season and to carry on the Captrix legacy."

"That's so sad," I said, not knowing what else to say.

"I always knew what my life would be and what I would be allowed to have."

"And so there is no room for love or retirement?"

I wanted to break out of the glass this memory held me in to beg her to give me a different answer, but I knew without a doubt what she was going to say because I had already lived through this before.

"I barely have room for a friend. Me being here is a testament to how much your help and companionship means to me." Artemis looked back down at her book, ending the distracting conversation.

A wave of nausea took over me and as I prepared to hurl, I fell back into the blackness of my mind.



I FLOATED IN the darkness, focusing on the feeling of falling for a new crush the memory gave me. When everything Artemis did made my heart hurt or my stomach do flips, and how I wanted nothing more than her approval. It was a sweet time I knew was never meant to last, but I clung onto that feeling anyway as I prepared to say the finding spell's chant.

I need you to complete me, I thought, pushing my magic through my hands that I could feel clinging to the bowl even though my mind was lost.

Please show me where you are.

I started the chant again. *I need you to complete me.*

Before I could say the next line, my mental floating sensation vanished, and I was free falling once again. This time I knew I would hit the ground with a smack, but I opened my eyes as my hands made contact with the floor.

I analyzed the wood, realizing this was my living room, as I took in the sound of a light rain outside. Like before, my body tingled, and I had no control over anything. I felt like I was living inside of a movie where the script was predetermined, but I was still trying to figure out the plot I tripped into.

"Ugh, it's been raining for days," I said aloud to no one.

My eyes glanced under my recliner as I searched for the thread I had dropped while cross stitching. Reaching deep under the chair, my fingertips found the thread I needed.

My mind acclimated to the knowledge as I stood, trying to figure out what memory I was a prisoner in as I tossed the thread into my cross stitch basket next to the recliner. A loud banging erupted at the front door, and I walked on autopilot to answer it.

Artemis stood on the other side, damp from the rain and looking more downtrodden than I had ever seen her. It had been days since we last spoke, but that wasn't out of the ordinary for us. What was strange was the tears I saw welled in the corner of her eyes.

"What's wrong?" I said, ushering her in from the weather.

"He's dead Bridgette." Artemis walked to the living room couch, sniffing along the way.

"Who's dead?" I sat down next to her, grabbing her hand.

Artemis cried quiet tears, interrupted with sniffles from her nose. I was speechless since I had never seen her cry before. I dared to reach up to touch her face and wiped a tear away. She surprised me by leaning into my hand, allowing her cold damp skin to be warmed by my fingers.

"Do you want me to get you a tissue?" I dropped my hand, wiping the wetness on my maxi skirt.

She shook her head no, so I nodded, waiting for her to tell me what I needed to know.

"My father is dead. A Mortia killed him last night." Artemis's tears ran faster down her cheek.

"I'm so sorry." I pulled her in for a hug and allowed her to cry on my shoulder. "How did she get to him?"

Artemis leaned up and dried her face. "He went out to get ice cream apparently, and she murdered him. I don't know how she knew or if it was by chance. The Mortia almost killed my daughter too, but I got there in time."

"Did you kill her?"

"No, she got away." Anger swept across her face. "And I haven't been able to find her."

"Do you want me to look for a tracking spell? It will be harder without something tied to her magic, but I can try." I moved to stand up.

Volunteering my magic for a spell guaranteed to go wrong without something of the Mortia was risky. An unnecessary risk I normally tried to avoid, but every time I was with Artemis, I was willing to risk everything, even death, to help her.

Artemis shook her head. "I don't have anything to track with. She's probably long gone, searching for another place to strike now that she knows I'm looking for her. Mortias prefer the element of surprise."

"How can I help then?" I knew she was right about the Mortia, but I needed to try and find a way to take away her pain.

"I need a distraction." Artemis's hand grazed mine. "You don't have to be it, but I realized I want you to be. I think I've wanted you to be for a while."

Her eyes looked up at mine, glossy with tears. My breath hitched. It was what I had wanted her to say for months, even if I wanted to be more than a distraction.

My lips parted, trying to find the words to say as she leaned in closer, tilting her head to the side. It was up to me to close the distance between us.

I could settle with whatever I got as long as her lips remained on mine.

Our mouths slammed together, sealing our fate with a desperate kiss.

Time was lost as we moved together in sync, allowing months' worth of pent up attraction to come forward. We were no longer witch and huntress. We were lips, tongues, and crashing teeth, building to something we could never take back.

I pulled away and reached my hand up to touch my swollen lips. "I think I love you."

Artemis sighed. "I know."

And then she pulled me back in, running her fingers into my hair to hold my neck into place, leaving me no choice but to continue kissing her.

I felt the pull of my mind, tugging me back into the darkness to leave the memory. *No, I begged. Please let me stay here a little longer.*

My magic didn't listen.



I NEED YOU to complete me.

Show me where you are.

The finding spell warmed in the bowl as I pushed more desperate magic to it, focusing on the feeling of desire I gathered from the memory of our first kiss. I didn't know why my magic was forcing me to go back to different memories instead of letting me focus on one to perform the spell. Every time I searched for Artemis, I felt pulled in different directions like I was lost in a maze. Normally this spell was instant and I should have had an idea of where she was by now. Instead, I was lost and the only way for me to find her was to keep pushing onward.

I opened my eyes to peek at the contents of the spell. The bowl glowed pink now with ripples along the surface, but there was still no visual.

"I need you to complete me. Show me where you are," I whispered.

I closed my eyes again, searching for my feeling of desire, but felt the familiar feeling of free falling washing over me. My magic hummed, feeling the need to dissect one more memory.

Flashes of light sparked behind my eyes as pictures of Artemis and I flew by like I was flipping pages in a photo album. Pictures of us reading books at the table, snuggling next to the fire, and looking for witch creatures flashed by, book ended by images of us kissing. My brain flipped through them all, not settling on a single memory until everything stopped and I was in darkness again.

I opened my eyes, expecting to see the spell at work, but realized I was pacing the living room. Artemis stood at the opening of the room with her arms crossed in front of her.

Please, not this one, I pleaded with my mind and magic. I recognized this memory as our last conversation we had days ago, and I didn't want to relive it again so soon. The magic didn't listen, forcing me to fall in line with the events that already happened. I pushed at the boundaries of my mind, trying to escape this memory film, but my body kept pacing as the anger overwhelmed me.

"What do you want me to say, Bridgette?" asked Artemis.

"I want you to say that I'm more than a distraction. I want you to say that you love me." I paused in front of the fireplace, balling my hands into fists to control my anger.

"And if I told you I loved you, would it change anything? I would still be a Captrix with a daughter you can't meet and a life we can't share." Artemis dared to walk closer.

"Do you love me?" I bit my lip, not sure if I wanted to know the answer.

"That's not fair."

"I need to know." My voice quivered.

Artemis crossed the room and grabbed my hands. I tried to yank them away, but she held fast, using her strength to keep my hands where she wanted them.

"Let me go."

"No." Artemis's grip got tighter, pinching my skin.

"Artemis, please--."

"I need you to promise me something first before I tell you."

I rolled my eyes.

"I mean it. I know you owe me nothing, but please." Artemis loosened her hold on my hands, but still kept them.

"Fine. Tell me."

Artemis sighed. "There's something coming for me. I can feel it in my intuition, but I don't know how to stop it or

when it's going to happen. When it does, there's no one left to take care of my daughter."

"Artemis--"

"Let me finish. My daughter is old enough to begin hunting on her own, but she isn't ready. She stopped studying after my parents died and I'm afraid she is going to get herself killed. If I'm not here, she will be alone. She needs someone who is compassionate and can give her the love I haven't been able to."

"And you think that's me?"

"I need you to promise me that if she turns up here, you will protect her. You're the only person I have."

I took into consideration her request. How was I supposed to help a blossoming witch huntress who was a stranger if she turned up on my doorstep?

"How exactly do you want me to accomplish that?" I asked, pulling my hands away from her.

"You'll know what to do. You always do. It's in your nature to love and protect people." Artemis stared into my soul. "Please don't make me beg."

"I promise to protect your daughter, who is a stranger to me if she ever turns up on my doorstep."

I watched as relief flooded over her body, envious of the feeling. My body remained taut, needing certain words to release the tension I had built up.

You could always force her to love you, or kill her so no one else could have her, said the power hungry voice in my mind. I shook my head.

"My answer? Please?" I asked.

Artemis glanced down at the ground, not able to meet my eyes. "I don't know if I love you like you love me."

"So, I really am just a distraction, then?" My heart sank and all the anger I felt faded into a deep sadness.

"No." Artemis hesitated. "I don't know."

"I see." Tears began escaping from my eyes, but I kept myself silent.

"Bridgette, it's not that I don't love you. It's that I can't love you the way you need me to. I'm never going to give this lifestyle up. You can't leave this cottage without fear of being found out."

I swallowed hard, trying to keep myself together.

"No matter how much we want this to be, it will never work." Artemis reached up to touch my face, but I tilted away. "And now I see how much this hurts you."

"None of this is fair." I sniffled and wiped my damp face with my arm.

"You're right, and I've been ignoring it this whole time because I'm selfish." She ran a hand through her hair. "I won't do this to you anymore."

I met her eyes with mine and refused to speak.

"This is the last time I'll bother you."

"What do you mean?" My voice cracked with every word.

Artemis leaned in and planted a soft kiss on my forehead. "I love you."

It was the three words I always wanted her to say, but these were tainted with farewell.

Artemis walked away, heading to the front door. I remained frozen in place, words choking in my throat. Was I supposed to beg her to stay or let her go?

When the front door slammed, I ran after her.

"Wait!" I rushed onto the front porch, but Artemis was at her truck's door.

"Goodbye Bridgette." Artemis got in her truck, not looking at me again.

“Please don’t go! I can be a distraction.” I fell to my knees as she backed out the driveway. “Please.” Her truck kept backing away, and I knew in my bones it was the last time I would ever see her again.



MY GRIP ON the bowl tightened as I pushed through every feeling my memories had conjured. First, I focused on the feeling of having a crush, then the passion in our first kiss, and then the desperation of watching her leave. I needed to see her again. I just knew that if we had one more talk now that I knew Atalanta, I could convince her we could work.

Show me where you are, Artemis, I thought, pushing my magic to its limits to make the spell work.

That’s it. Use more. Become who you were meant to be. My inner voice that normally stayed quiet pushed itself to the forefront of my mind.

I ignored the voice in my head that wanted me to transform into a Venefica to gain untapped power. Normally, if I heard it, I would pull back in order to remain safe. But my desperation to find Artemis outweighed the danger my power was becoming.

Staring intently at the spell in the bowl, I pushed more power to it, recanting the incantation in my mind until whatever was blocking me fell away. The water in the bowl rippled, showing the same bright blue sky as outside my window. I kept my grip steady as the image changed to show trees, realizing wherever she was had to be outside. The image tried to change again, but the water remained stuck.

“Come on.” I infused the magic I had left into the spell, begging it to bring me closer to her.

We had to have the required connection, otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to get this far. I only needed a little more to be able to see her clearly, but the spell refused to move, becoming stuck behind a magical barrier. The more magic I pushed to try to break down the wall, the more I felt the spell crumbling below me. Something was preventing me from finding her. I couldn’t be sure if our connection I thought we had was fading or if another witch’s spell was to blame.

More desperation flooded through me as I watched the pink hue of the bowl turn black, with the image disappearing. The spell had failed, and I knew better to try again. If I pressed forward, I risked using too much magic and I would transform into a Venefica before Atalanta even knew I was a Domum.

My cheeks became moist from tears. Artemis was gone, and I failed to find her in the easiest way I knew how. I had no choice, but to try to heal the girl in my living room and figure out a different way if I ever wanted to see her again.

The promise I made Artemis rang in my head loud and clear.

I promise to protect your daughter.

And even with Artemis’s goodbye fresh in my mind, it was a promise I intended to keep no matter where it took me.