



# Awakened

By Cassie Laelyn

I rapped my knuckles on the door, stepped back and waited. Brisk night air blew down the deserted street while snow flurries danced before my eyes. A red closed sign dangled in the shop window.

Maybe I had the wrong time? The wrong day?

No, I'd counted down the days for the past seven months. I wouldn't get the timing wrong.

As I lifted my arm to knock again, a lock disengaged from inside and the door opened, pulling the security chain tight.

"Did you get everything on the list?"

I recognized Vera's voice through the gap.

"Yes," I replied.

The door closed before reopening enough for me to slip inside.

Even though I'd decided this path, *pursued* it, my heart still pounded with each step as

I followed Vera to a small room at the rear of the shop.

Candlelight flickered across the room, landing on an old table covered with bunches of herbs and various tools. Nothing too scary. Well, except for the pentagram drawn on the floorboards in a chalky white substance. That made my breath shaky.

It also made my situation real.

Vera spoke, making me startle. "It's time."

I gave her the bag, and she emptied the contents on the table, murmuring to herself as though mentally checking off the items. Everything she told me to get was there, I'd made sure of it. The rare herbs took weeks to find, but I still found them.

I'd scour the earth for him.

I didn't dare move as Vera chanted in a strange language while muddling the herbs in a mortar and pestle. Next, she added drops from various old medicine bottles. Instead of freaking out, I focused on her methodical movements, letting her voice lull my nerves and steady my legs. The last thing anyone needed was for me to faint.

Mortar in hand, Vera turned to face me. "An item that belongs to him?"

Without thinking, my fingers brushed the pendant around my neck. He'd told me where to find it, and I'd worn it ever since.

Using her thumb, Vera scooped the thick concoction from the mortar and wiped a line down the center of my forehead, followed by another at the hollow of my neck. Vera was the only one who agreed to help me. I'd asked so many, traveled far and wide searching every city. Every other witch told me dark magic wasn't worth the risk.

Wrong answer.

I'd do anything to be with him.

*Anything.*

Vera placed the mortar back on the table and motioned to the pentagram. "Stand in

the center.”

I did as instructed, my throat too dry to speak.

Once in position, Vera handed me a small, black antique dagger.

My gaze shot to the door, panic threatening to rise. Instead, I pulled my thoughts back to *him*. My soulmate. Sensing him with me, seeing him, but never able to touch him, was too much to bear. My heart couldn’t take it any longer.

We deserved a happily ever after.

I tightened my grip on the dagger as Vera circled the pentagram, pouring what resembled salt on the floor. Once finished, she stood before me outside the circle, her arms outstretched as she chanted again.

Vibrations rippled in the air. Invisible power pulsed through my middle. The pendant glowed, heating against my chest. I closed my eyes, embracing every sensation, rejoicing in the thought of finally being with him.

An icy shiver skated down my spine a second before a familiar warmth whispered along the nape of my neck.

“He’s here,” I murmured.

My heart swelled as soft lips gently kissed the junction between my shoulder and neck.

Vera paused her chant. “Are you sure about this? Once the spell is complete, I cannot undo it.”

I opened my eyes. From behind, translucent ghostly fingers curled around my hand, giving me the only reassurance I needed. “I’m positive. I want this.”

I couldn’t endure this hell any longer.

Vera nodded. “The last step is to bleed for him. Share your life.”

Using the dagger, I sliced my palm. Blood welled to the surface before spilling onto

the floor. Tremors shook my feet, my vision blurred, blacking in and out. Red hot pain flashed through my blood.

The dagger tumbled from my hand.

I screamed, only no sound came out.

Something thudded on the floor as weightlessness bloomed inside me.

The pain vanished.

I blinked a few times, trying to clear my vision. Vera stood before me, though now she looked distorted, as though I saw her from underwater.

Strong arms snaked around my middle. Not ghostly. Real flesh and bone.

I spun and peered up at familiar deep blue eyes. "Wes."

He cupped my face in his hands. "I've waited so long to kiss you."

Dipping his head, he lowered his lips to mine. After months of longing, countless nights of wishing we could touch, finally, we had our happily ever after. I surrendered to our kiss, the feel of him in my arms, how the tender moment bled into my heart, fusing our souls together.

Breathless, he eased back and kissed my forehead, lingering for a moment. "We're really here, together."

I brushed my thumb along his smooth jaw. "Finally, we can start our forever."

Wes slipped his hand in mine and we stepped free of the pentagram, heading to the exit. Passing Vera, I reached out to thank her, but my hand ghosted through her shoulder. I shuddered. Vera didn't react, just stared wide-eyed at something on the floor behind me.

I turned, following her gaze, until it landed on my lifeless body inside the pentagram.

*The End!*

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*The theme for January was New Beginnings.*

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