

Chapter 3

Since we were all gathered right in front of the Old Town Hall, I made sure that everyone was aware of its significance in *Disney* film history and that only the exterior was used in the filming of the cult favorite *Hocus Pocus*. Other film locations in Salem included the Salem Witch Village and the Ropes Mansion.

“Later, we will all visit the famous *Bewitched* statue that was dedicated to the filming of the classic television show and the presence of the cast during the filming of their famous Salem episode.” I pointed to where we would be going later on in the tour. “But for now, we are going to make our way toward the Witch Trials Memorial.”

I led them all down to Essex Street and I pointed out many of the great places that they could shop for just the right thing to take home as a souvenir to remember their trip to Salem. *Who doesn't need a crystal ball or a t-shirt that screams you visited Salem?*

“For those of you that are magically inclined,” I paused and gave my audience one of my best smiles while indicating the storefront. “This store specializes in just the right wand that will choose the witch or wizard.”

This got a few giggles from all the fans of *Harry Potter* since they all understood the reference and I continued to lead them past the Witch History Museum. I made sure that I included several of the stories that the tour guide handbook suggested while I marched my group of minions toward the Witch Trials Memorial. I was killing it! The best part was, I was actually enjoying myself.

“In the year 1692, fourteen women and six men found themselves accused of being witches. The court tried, convicted, and executed them. These granite walls with twenty matching benches, were dedicated by Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel in 1992 for those poor souls who lost their lives during Salem's darkest days.”

I watched while everyone broke out their phones and digital cameras and began to take pictures of all the markers put there to memorialize the accused witches killed during this tragic time.

Those two handsome guys stayed toward the back and I couldn't help but notice that they were not taking much interest in the places on the tour, choosing instead to train their eyes on me. Every once in a while I would sneak a peek in their direction only to find them staring back.

I had to admit it was a little unnerving because I couldn't ogle without getting caught. I couldn't figure out why I was the center of their attention. A notion crossed my mind that they could be with law enforcement and trailing me because of my father, but that was ridiculous since I had nothing. I sure wouldn't be leading a tour for minimum wage if I still had money stashed away. Their presence began

to make me nervous and I stroked my mother's necklace while trying to ease my edginess. For some odd reason, my new bauble gave me a sense of security.

"Hey, look at this!" shouted one of my tourists excitedly while they ran over to show me their digital camera screen.

Everyone gathered around us far too closely. I felt as though I had been shoved into a cattle car and fought off my rising impulse to moo.

"Isn't that a ghost?" one of the pretend vamps said.

"I'm not sure but that is most certainly an orb!" another exclaimed while pointing to the other's digital camera screen.

So many fingers were pointing at the screen and there were lots of ooohs and aaahs while they all agreed that there was some ghostly presence in the picture. Curiously, my two handsome guys hung back and seemed to have no interest in this paranormal experience that had everyone else twittering with excitement.

"Do the rest of you feel that?" another person from the crowd asked. "It feels like it has dropped twenty degrees."

Darn if they weren't right. It did feel chillier!

Everyone started snapping pictures and it seemed as though they were all experiencing identical results. They were all acting like giddy school children. If I hadn't known better, I would say they had imbibed on two for one margaritas at *Rockafellas* happy hour before joining the tour.

"Oh my God," a woman exclaimed and pointed toward what one would describe as a freeform floating apparition, at least I recall that's what they described it as in *Ghostbusters*.

"I-I'm sh-sure that this is just a ha-hologram or something folks," I stuttered, scrambling to figure out an answer that made sense. "I'm new, so maybe I don't know anything about this entertainment feature."

"Are you okay, miss?"

His voice whispered soothingly and seductively in my ear. It reminded me of a fountain filled with warm liquid dark chocolate and it made me shudder that he had appeared at my side in a heartbeat. I knew he was a stranger but yet, he seemed delightfully intimate and familiar.

I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply because I knew without looking that it was that new drool-worthy guy and I didn't want to come off like a frightened deer. Attempting to center my calm, I cleared my mind, and before I had even had a chance to open my eyes the rest of the tour attendees seemed resoundingly disappointed that the apparition and orbs had disappeared. Nothing was turning up in their photos, despite the fact that they were snapping pictures furiously and they all expressed their disappointment.

Opening my eyes I found myself looking straight into his and I was mesmerized by how deep and sensual they appeared to be.

"Thank you," I replied in a mouse-like voice. "I was feeling like the tour was spiraling out of control."

"You looked like you needed someone to help you focus," he replied. "You should sit down for a moment."

The dulcet tones of his voice lulled me into a sense of security and I found myself wanting to do exactly as he suggested. I'd never been hypnotized before, but if I had, I imagined it might have felt like this.

"This is only my first night and I have to admit, I'm a little anxious. Even before all this odd stuff started happening." I sat down on one of the twenty benches and tried to collect myself.

He smiled and it might have been a mere coincidence, but that recent temperature drop suddenly felt as though it had skyrocketed quickly in the opposite direction. I found myself sweating and I felt a little dizzy. *How can you become intoxicated just by standing next to a handsome man?*

"I'm feeling much better," I lied.

"Quinn," the other man called from across the memorial.

"Excuse me. I'd best go see what my friend Henry wants."

Heaven help me, he even had a scorching hot name to go with the rest of him.

I tried not to notice that they were talking about me even though it was obvious. There were a few whispers that I couldn't make out and then both of them would glance in my direction forcing me to look away quickly. I wasn't sure if I should be flattered or concerned by their attentions.

"Okay everyone," I said, forcing a nervous laugh and rubbing my hands together. "Whew, that was exciting, wasn't it? But the night is young and we still have so much to see. So let's get on with the tour, shall we?"

Everyone looked disappointed that their ghostly experience was over. But even if they had been real ghosts, they weren't going to stick around forever.

"Beyond these stone walls, you will be exploring the Old Burying Point Cemetery, which is the second oldest cemetery in the country and dates back to 1632. This cemetery is also often referred to as the Charter Street Cemetery and there are many historical figures from Salem's history including John Hathorne. He was one of the witch trial judges and the great-great-grandfather of writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. Most of you probably don't know that Nathaniel Hawthorne was so embarrassed by his family's participation in the Salem Witch Trials that he put the 'w' in his name to distance himself from his relatives. Also interred here are Samuel Bradstreet, who was a Governor of Massachusetts, and Captain Richard More, the sole Mayflower passenger buried in Salem."

One by one, all of them filed into the cemetery and I kept watch while the tourists traipsed through the tombstones via the flashlight on their phones. They talked, pointed, and shot photos, and fortunately for me, no more ghosts were showing up on their cameras.

I backtracked to the benches in the memorial so that I could sit down for a moment to try and soothe my shattered nerves. After all, my charges were enjoying themselves so much that they wouldn't miss little old me. It wasn't like I was alone because I had my new friends, Quinn and Henry to keep me company from about forty feet away.

I took a deep breath and released it while trying to figure out what had happened earlier. I had to admit, it certainly was odd, even for Salem. Stroking my necklace, I took a few moments to ponder what had transpired. Little did I know that was the only quiet moment I was going to get this evening.

Just when I had tricked myself into believing that the rest of the night would remain calm, terrified screams began to fill the night air and it seemed to be coming from my group. They all began to shriek and stampede in every direction as long as it was away from the middle of the cemetery. Tombstones toppled and the earth began to open up some strange fissures.

I leaped up from my bench and tried to figure out the focal point of the panic and that was when I saw them. The dead were climbing up out of the ground. *But that's impossible! The dead were just... dead. Weren't they? These had to be actors or kids or something having a laugh at the expense of others!*

The dead actors looked plenty scary though and they were definitely freaking everyone, including me, out. Everyone that is, except for those two hunks. They didn't seem unnerved by the disturbance at all. Maybe they were in on it? They appeared to be tense and on alert but that was about it.

I felt myself beginning to panic because these actors didn't give the appearance that they were going to back down, pull their masks off, or start laughing at all the scared tourists. They looked plenty scary and I think I even heard them growling. I had to admit, it sounded pretty believable.

When one of them got within twenty feet of me, that was when I could smell it. Death.

And when I say death, I mean the smell of rotten flesh. It was unmistakable. Even though my only exposure was to some smelly roadkill once, it was a smell you never forget. I panicked and took off running blindly and when I turned my head away from my pursuers I only had a hot second before I ran smack into Quinn and knocked us both to the ground in a tangled heap.

He rose with the grace of a dancer and helped me to my feet. The other dark, handsome guy looked like he was on the verge of laughter and I thought that seemed inappropriate given the circumstances. The air surrounding us was filled

with sirens, shouting people, and flashing red lights. It reminded me of what a war zone might look like. I took one look at the dead closing in on us and I fainted.

