



THE  
SUMMONING

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### *Excerpt*

I sighed and lowered myself into the water. There was something alienating about being able to communicate with souls no one could see. It was hard to relate to real people while being linked to those the majority of the world couldn't hear, feel, or even truly believe in. Not even my kind, patient grandparents, who'd raised me after I'd been orphaned, could fully comprehend—or even want to comprehend at all, really—my reality, and what it was like for me to live in it.

The awareness of being silently watched distracted me from my self-loathing. I sat up and called out again, with less patience this time. “Who’s there? Is there something you want to tell me?”

Still no response.

I shook my head at my own silliness and concentrated on stopping my limbs from trembling. A spirit couldn't hurt me. Each one I'd come across was generally harmless. But something about this encounter was different than the others. Something more menacing, yet oddly familiar. Intimate. As if this one was personal. For weeks I'd felt as if I were being stalked. Not just curiously observed as was usual with those on The Other Side, but genuinely stalked—perhaps even preyed upon. Like I was desperately sought after to fulfill some critical need. But some need like what?

I tried to tell myself that maybe it just wanted some company. A friend. I could certainly relate to that. I released some of the tension in my shoulders and lathered myself up, drawing slow, soapy circles all over my neck and shoulders. For a few moments I imagined there was a

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sexy guy in the tub with me, massaging my breasts as he washed them. My nipples grew erect under the bubbles.

Too bad me and dating just didn't work out, and I was doomed to die as a spinster. So many things in guys' homes triggered unintended "sightings." The last guy, Kris, mistook my refusal to visit his place as a sign that I was a commitment-phobe. But in reality, I was uncomfortable at his place because the impression left on the cream-colored sheets of his bed by the chocolate-colored beauty who spent *many* nights under and on top of them was strong. And quite fresh. So fresh, in fact, as to have been left within hours of the very day that I first — and last—visited his place.

The guy before that, Mike, had an entire house contaminated by his hordes of sexual conquests, both male and female. Which might not have been too big of an issue if he had been honest with me about it.

"So, you've had quite a number of lovers, huh?" It was more of a rhetorical comment I meant to mumble to myself, but he heard me.

Mike gave me a wide-eyed, innocent look. "Who, me? Nah, I don't really get down like that. I've only had two or three girlfriends in my whole life."

"Only two or three?" I laughed. "Come on, you don't have to fudge your numbers for me. I'm not judging you."

"I'm not fudging, I really haven't slept with more than a handful of women."

"And what about men?"

Mike scoffed. "Never! I don't go that way, I'm strictly into chicks!"

Again, I laughed. Bisexual men, I didn't particularly have anything against. But I definitely did not like liars. So I had nothing to lose when I replied with, "Did I forget to mention that I'm psychic?"

Apparently what he meant to say was that he was strictly into chicks who were *not* psychic.

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The guy before that had a deceased grandmother whose spirit came along on all of our dates. She told me about how her grandson was not a good catch—James was spoiled, selfish and she wished she'd never left a dime of her money to him.

A guy must be a creep if his own grandma will adamantly badmouth him. Even after she's dead!

Thus I was convinced that I wasn't going to ever find a guy I could both tolerate and be tolerated by. But I was lonely. My only source of affectionate contact was in my dreams. My nights were consistently full of abnormally intense, vivid, erotic dreams which I always remembered clearly the next day. Including every real, full orgasm I experienced in my sleep. But as wild and erotic and *hot* as they were, dreams were no replacement for the real deal of person-to-person intimacy and friendship. My relationships with the dead didn't count, either. No offense to any spirits, but I needed someone alive and present to share my life with.

*I could so use the touch of another's hands right now*, I thought to myself with a groan as I swished in the tub.

Just then, a chilly breeze made me shiver. But there was no window open and it was early on a hot and humid summer day in Chicago. Again, I listened. Suddenly my bath water suddenly dropped a few degrees, and I had the distinctive sensation of not being alone in the tub. The coolness wrapped around me, brushing my skin, caressing my body, giving me goosebumps and making the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Both from arousal and alarm.

"I don't know who you are, but I know you're here," I called out. "Either tell me what you want, or leave me alone."

Silence.

As I sat there trembling, a cool touch came to my lips. Lightly at first, then the pressure increased, lingering. Unmistakably a kiss.

This was strange. And it completely freaked me out.

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The water in the tub sloshed around violently as I jerked backward then leapt to my feet. I grabbed my towel and hurried out of the bathroom.

No spirit had ever touched me like that before. Not ever.