

THIS IS A ROUGH PORTION OF THE ORIGINAL CHAPTER 1...

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### Colorado, Morning

Ever since those wretched sounds had entered her life, she'd had bad dreams. She pressed her hands to her galloping heart. Andrew was fine. She'd spoken to him just the morning before and he'd sounded happier than usual, talking about the current computer game he was nearly finished creating.

The phone rang and her breath hitched. Andrew? No, he slept in mornings and lived on the west coast where it was an hour earlier.

Her garden apartment was small, the wall telephone no more than thirty feet away, but she couldn't summon the strength to rise. Voice mail would take a message. She sensed that it wasn't someone she wanted to talk to, anyway. Huh. Must be all that magic Golden Raven had told her was inside her. Marian managed a weak chuckle.

After her pulse steadied a moment later, she slid from the bed to pad to the bathroom. On the way, she checked the alcove where her hamster Tuck curled up in a corner of his plastic cage, a half-chewed piece of carrot within paw reach. All was well in his small world.

Marian only wished it was the same for her. Today the couple of big mistakes she'd made in the last year haunted her. Lingering effects from the dream, no doubt.

The rings of the shower curtain rasped as she hauled it around the metal loop suspended from the ceiling above the old claw-footed tub. It reminded Marian of the chimes and gongs that peppered her dreams. She shivered in the cool air and set the temperature high. The heat would

comfort her, settle the quivering fear that zinged down her nerves. She sang a ribald song to cheer herself up. The lovely water steamed around her, rinsing her body, affirming her life.

Instead of breakfast, she crossed to the built-in bookshelves of her living room, looking for volumes on rituals.

Golden Raven had mentioned a full moon ritual. To Marian, that meant a wiccan-pagan ritual, a path she'd followed a while last year. A ritual was the expression of hopes and a method of focusing the mind on what she truly wanted to occur. Active prayer.

She hadn't tried a ritual on her own for some time. She'd pulled down her favorite volume of wiccan ceremonies and carried it to her kitchen table -- desk. After making a list of supplies she'd need, Marian sighed. This ritual was too important to just be copied from a book. She never liked doing that, anyway. Prayers or spells or treatments – whatever you called them – should always be personal. Three days to draft her own ritual and get the paraphernalia.

During the ritual, she'd set things in motion, ask for guidance for herself and for Andrew. Perhaps she'd learn how to handle his disease better, improve his quality of life or extend it.

Since Golden Raven mentioned a teacher, Marian would ask for a mentor, too.

The universe worked slowly, the right teacher would come into her life in a couple of months, perhaps as soon as the summer semester. She smiled sourly. Maybe with a mentor she wouldn't make as many mistakes in her life.

Her alarm clock buzzed. Marian hustled to turn it off. Seven-fifteen a.m. Time to dress for her work-study job.

Right before she left, she listened to the voice mail message from her mother. In clipped tones, Candace insisted Marian call her.

She didn't have time now, but she'd have to do it today or Candace's mood would turn

very nasty and her demands would escalate.

Marian glanced at the clock and realized she'd missed her bus. She'd have to walk fast and would still be late. She grit her teeth. She already knew the day would go downhill.