

## Imprisoned to a Witch

*This is a draft of how in-line notes look as I go through a WIP. These notes help to lay the foundation to the editorial letter. In your real letter the notes will appear in the margins so there is no need to scroll to see them. PDF saving will not allow me to show you this in practice unfortunately.*

I stared with a helpless glower at the dirty walls, the dirty bars, the dirty prison.

[a] The water falling from the ceiling with a steady drip, drip, reminded me my life ticked away.<sup>[a]</sup>

Away from freedom, Away from humanity.<sup>[a]</sup>

The door beyond the bars opened and a crack of light lit up the cell, the cage casting long shadows against the floor, the teasing freedom meters from reach. I shielded my eyes from the glowing light which highlighted a large, dark figure. He bore shoulders like an ox, and a stern expression that didn't suit him. I knew his body as well as my own, the way it moved, the way it felt.

Damien.

His eyes like green fire, stared at me, my curves, my lips. I felt naked, exposed and rage boiled in my stomach.

Even after everything he had done, he led with no apology; just stood there, as if this wasn't a kidnapping. As if I wasn't trapped down here with the endless dripping water.

I flung myself at the bars. "What are you doing?"

"I didn't have a choice, Blake. The witch council, they decided it." He said.

"Yes, yes you did," I ran my hands across the gritty steel. "You could have declared me dead, Damien. They never would have known."

"They found you. The council found you." He took a step closer, his spicy scent filling my flared nostrils. "We found you<sup>[a]</sup>."

"You always cared about that stupid council more than me. But it was your job to protect me." I pointed my chipped nails at him and he turned his face away.<sup>[a]</sup>

Heat and anger radiated from my eyes, as if I could burn him alive where he stood. The drip, drip of the water echoed over my heaving breath.

"I'm not meant for this world. You knew that."

"When you signed our marriage certificate, Blake, you made the choice to stay. You knew you couldn't live as a human the second," he rubbed his forehead where wrinkles formed, "the second you signed it."

"I changed my mind." At my response he let out a guttural groan.

"There is no changing your mind," he threw his hands into the air and I wanted to reach out and hit him. But the cage stopped me; all I had were my words and a burning that grew in the pit of my stomach<sup>[a]</sup>.

"There is if I don't fit into this world, I'm not one of you." Damien winced. He rocked back on his heels, wiggling his jaw, his eyes roaming about in search for an answer that fit.

"I came in here to convince you to come to my room and do this nicely." He said.

"Do this nicely?" A wretched tearing ripped through my stomach and leapt to my hands. It pulsed with fire and primal rage until I slammed them against the bars, over and over. "How is locking me in a prison nicely?" When sharp pain reached my hands I gaped at my then, long red marks imprinted into the skin.

The shudder of Damien's breath brought me back.

"This is pointless," He said. He reached out behind him grabbing the handle and marching out of the room. Closing the door behind him, he plunged the cell into darkness, leaving the arguments of our marriage playing in my head like a carnival, the same arguments and this same feeling like I couldn't escape.

How could I escape if he just brought me back to the coven again?

Why did he bother dragging me back to this world of magic anyway? I was happy as a human, happy with my own people. At least I understood their darkness.

But I had to try. I had to try to leave him. This time I'd hide better<sup>[a]</sup>.

[Overall, this has great emotional depth. The characters feel lived in, and there are many curiosities that keep the reader asking. But this scene is doing two jobs at once — establishing the world and establishing the central conflict — and it's not quite managing either because it's fighting itself. The confrontation with Damien arrives before the reader has any emotional stake in Blake, which means the argument lands as an info dump, when it could be tension.

Damien is also flat here in a way that will cost the book later. He needs to feel complicated from the first moment we see him, think layered. How does he feel in this scene? What is he wrestling with inside of himself? How can you show the reader?

Blake wants freedom, but freedom is abstract. There's no concrete before life.

This may be better served with a scene that comes before this, one where we see the comfortable life she's been able to build for herself. What she actually has to lose. Full of tension, and foreshadowing, where we can discover more about her past relationship through thoughts, and moments, and watch her jump, scared she might get caught and brought back. Or maybe even not scared any more, and them bam, she is kidnapped!

The walls were sealed tight, no windows, and the bars stuck with a padlock. There was only one way to escape this prison— play nice with my idiot husband and infiltrate back into the world of magic.<sup>[a]</sup>

At least long enough to say goodbye for good.

I didn't know how much time passed between the stone walls but I tasted dirt and my hands shook with cold; it must have been an age. When the door finally opened sending with it a flood of unexpected light, I readied myself for Damien.

Instead Brian peered in, looking around the corner as if anticipating an escaped prisoner.

With a lopsided smile he waltzed into the room. I sighed, at last somebody who would listen to me.

"Blake. Long time." He greeted me.

"About a year." I nodded flattening my hair, I must look like roadkill.

"You never said goodbye." He reached into his pocket and potion bottles jangled.

He pulled out a vial and fingered it, a light pink fluid floating up and down.<sup>[a]</sup>

Brian was right, I hadn't said goodbye to him. I wasn't sure if I thought it would be too painful, or I didn't want him to talk me out of it. Brian had a way of making everything seem safe somehow, like we could change the world together one potion at a time.

"So are you coming up to your room or not, lass? Don't just sit in here all stubborn." He said.

I gulped. "You're not going to use, whatever that is against me are you?"<sup>[a]</sup>

He let out a merry chuckle, spun the bottle in his hand, and slipped it back into his pocket where it fell with a clink.

"It's a healing balm, so no. I've been experimenting with potions; I've even created some new ones. You wouldn't believe how complicated it all is, but I've managed it." He stopped, his cheeks flushing pink. "I know you don't really want to hear about magic."

"No, it's fine. This is the first pleasant conversation I've had in awhile."

"My cousins bothering you?"

"He's, he's Damien."<sup>[a]</sup>

"Why don't you come out of there? Get a warm shower? No one wants you locked up in this cell. We just want to know you won't run away again."

I folded my arms and slumped down to the brick-covered ground. "I don't want to."

"Don't be like that. It's not so bad here."

"I want my freedom Brian."

"You sort of forfeited that when you fell in love with a witch. None of us supernatural are truly free." He chuckled. "Can't run around doing what we want when we want, and let humans find out can we?"

"I was young and foolish and didn't know how much I would lose. And," I stopped, biting my tongue.

Brian tilted his head, his eyes sucking the information out of me, as if he knew the answers already, but asked. "And?"

"And I thought we were forever." I felt the sting of fresh tears pressing at my eyelids. "Isn't that what we all think when love begins?"

"I guess. I've never been in love." He smiled and crouched down to my level.

Reaching his hands through the bars, he took hold of mine. "Your life isn't over, Blake. It's just different than you thought it would be."

"It sure feels like it's over."

"What could you possibly have been doing in the human world that was better than hunting with fireballs and me?"<sup>[a]</sup>

I laughed.<sup>[a]</sup>

"There's a laugh," he jumped to his heels and pointed a finger at me with a wink.

I rubbed my hands against the ground, feeling the cold stone and realizing my body felt better already. I heard a jangle of metal; in his other hand he held a set of keys.

"Now," he said, placing a serious expression on his face like a mask. "If you agree to play nice I've been given permission to let you out, so you can shower. You sort of stink."

"Thanks," I rolled my eyes.

"Come on. You'll feel better once you eat and bathe. Let's talk about this."

"Fine." I brushed the grass and mud from my jeans where several witches had literally dragged me from my apartment.<sup>[a]</sup>

He placed the keys in the lock and the bars swung open. I took a deep breath, my lungs filling with the smell of mildew and castle walls; then I stepped outside the cage.

"See, you can do this. One step at a time," Brian said.<sup>[a]</sup>

[Brian is a character that shines off the page. I'm curious about him. He's layered and seems like he's going to bring a lot of fun to the story. This will also make the reader ask, why do we care about Damien when we have Brian? With this in mind, it's important we consider ways to make Damien feel more alive in the previous scene. We could use tropes to get there quickly. Does he think he's a monster, but really he's good? Is he burdened with power? Did he betray her, and she doesn't know the reason? This scene also struggles with more dialogue than movement.

Can we include memories, thoughts. What internal and external goals does Blake have and how would she think about them? The scene also ends without cost.

What does this decision cost Blake, what are her emotions? How will this affect where she perceives her story will go?]

I thought over time that our room would have changed, that others would have slept there, that maybe even Damien himself would have removed any memory of me. But like a shrine to what was, everything remained exactly as I'd left it. Even shirts I wore still strewn on the carpet, the bed un-made, and the mirror knocked over in my haste, still lay there. Like the year hadn't passed, like I hadn't ever escaped my marriage.

Even though escaping my marriage proved to be the only option I had left<sup>[a]</sup>.

Being human in a witch's coven had no perks. They looked down on you for not possessing magic, whilst refusing to let you leave. After a while, I couldn't take being a lesser person, a person that didn't matter in the eyes of the world.

A person who didn't truly matter in the eyes of Damien<sup>[a]</sup>.

I was expendable, and that was something I always swore I wouldn't be.<sup>[a]</sup>

Brian pushed me into the room, placing his hand on the small of my back.

"It's a mess. I can help you clean," he said. I looked at the disarray of my life and shook my head.

"I don't know if I'm staying yet<sup>[a]</sup>."

I wandered the room, my hand finding my childhood music box on the mantelpiece above the fireplace. As I touched it, the box jingled the last three notes of 'my little sunshine' before shuddering to an end, punctuating the silence. Next to the garish pink design, lay a letter with a dark, red seal. The seal showed two crossed wands, and Latin around the edges, a language I couldn't speak and had no idea what it meant. What I did know was where this letter came from. The council, the leaders of this witch coven, and receiving any sort of summon or letter from the council was never a good thing.

A slight frown creased Brian's brow as I lifted the envelope.

I ripped it open, shook the contents, and pulled out one sheet of paper. I recognized the layout of the letter almost immediately.

Pain seared through my chest like someone had set it on fire; I clutched the paper until the words creased between my fingers, still gasping for breath.

Brian leapt to my side, holding me up as my legs buckled. He snatched the paper from my hands and read it, his eyes flicking back and forth, up and down.

"A warrant to remove your death sentence," he whispered.

If I signed—if I agreed to stay with my husband, and stay with the coven—they would spare my life<sup>[a]</sup>.

I knew this day would come for me the second I ran; one does not simply walk away from a coven without consequence. But to see it in black and white, as simple as crafting a letter, as if a witch ordering a human's demise was as easy as writing a thank you note. It stung, deep in my stomach leaving a warped numbness in its wake<sup>[a]</sup>.

"I have a pen," Brian's voice shook.

"That won't be necessary," I straightened and walked to my dresser, placing the paper in the draw and slamming it closed.

"Blake, this is a no brainer."

"Leave me," I said.

Brian hesitated, his blonde hair falling floppy over his face.

"You know, you're the one who left us a year ago. We had no idea if you were even alive." His voice came so quiet, I could barely hear him over the sound of my own rage.

"Brian, you're a good friend to me. Your family. But my life means more to me than magic. Than any power in the world. Do you understand that?"

His eyes flickered to the side, confusion casting over his eyebrows.

"I don't understand Blake. I don't understand why you can't just be one of us. It's not like we don't want you around. You know, you're all Damien has talked about, when he does talk to me that is, which these days is so rare." He grunted. "I lost both of you in this marriage."

"I think we lost ourselves too. Which is better I can't stay Brian. I can't lose any more of me."

The usual spark in Brian's eyes distinguished, and he lowered his stare to the ground. He pressed his thick lips together. "I wish you would re-consider. But I can't force you."

"No, you can't."

"Please be careful. The council are powerful they will find you, and if they do, they won't give you a second chance."

"I have to try something, Brian. I'm human, this isn't my world. Just give me one night to think, please don't try to control me like Damien."

He winced, "I'll be close by." He teetered on his boots nodding as if agreeing with a voice in his head then trudged away, leaving me alone with my death sentence.

[For this scene, I would consider pacing and the dominoes that need to fall for the reader to be as devastated about this letter as Blake is. By building a stronger overall story goal, a stronger internal goal (what trauma or experience has led Blake into being sure she needs to be in the human world?), and a visible "before" world that shows where we are in time and space, will make this story pacing feel urgent.]

## Tier 1 Feedback

Thank you so much for sharing this story with me. It was very fresh and exciting, and I loved the idea of marriage/love as a metaphor for adventure, especially in a fantasy based romance. Below is some feedback to consider during your revision, please take and leave whatever will work for you. Hopefully this will inspire you to polish this wonderful story to completion. At that point, if you need further help, I'd love to see what you have and read the entire piece.

Let's dive in!

Building a strong overall story goal (i.e. a strong internal goal, what trauma led to this? And a stronger internal goal, what is Blake clinging to exactly?) will make this opening really pop. One way to achieve this is by building a "before world". Showing the reader Blake's everyday life that she really needs to change (even if she thinks she doesn't).

Another goal to consider is a stronger Damien in these opening scenes. Keep Damien's secret in the forefront of your mind as you write his dialogue, think, how would a character with this secret respond? How would he act? How does someone desperately in love portray that behavior in subtle ways? Insert those quirks into your current opening scene and Damien will shine.

Consider adding more internal dialogue for Blake. What is she thinking and remembering as she walks through these scenes? What feelings contradict what she wants and how she thinks? By adding these little threads, especially at high-emotional beats, you will keep the reader hooked, and make Blake even more likable.

Finally, take all of that momentum and build up to the death warrant. The scene with the death warrant should revolve around it. Add foreshadowing, maybe in Blake's "before world" she receives an eviction letter, how does that letter make her feel compared to the death warrant? Maybe Blake remembers the kinds of letters she used to receive and how this eviction letter isn't nearly as bad. Maybe before she opens this letter she is terrified it is the witches. Hold on emotionally to the death warrant in the scene, feel all of it, and keep Blake's thoughts there for a few beats so the reader understands the stakes.

Ultimately, this story has a lot of promise and an exciting premise. I hope you keep at it. Please let me know what becomes of this story in the future and good luck with all your endeavors.

Melissa x

[a] I like that this opening shows intrigue; however, it feels distant for the reader. Helpless and glower could work if this really shows the character's personality, otherwise it's an oxymoron.

Maybe experiment with senses and other descriptors (other than dirty), that play with the theme of the story. I do like that this opening immediately leads with the theme of being trapped. Later I give you more on where else this story could start that could give the reader a better sense of doom.

[b] Using a ticking clock for the reader is a great way to hold tension, and give the scene momentum.

[c] Great for curiosity.

[d] I love how alive the dialogue feels, but it is doing a lot of worldbuilding that the reader hasn't earned. We first need the reader to care about the character being trapped, before we give them details. This way they will be explosive details with an emotional response.

[e] The idea of protection might be a better way to open the conversation. It helps the character's backstory feel lived in, an argument they've had many times before, and gives us an emotion the reader can likely relate to. What other layers are there under it all that Damien might know (like the fact he's trying to turn her into a witch) that can play out secretly in everything he does and says?

[f] The dialogue is doing a lot of the heavy lifting. What other ways can we show the information we need to know. Do we need this much information this early?

[g] This is a great micro goal for our FMC and gives the reader a reason to keep going, good job!

[h] This could be a much stronger opening line for the last scene. Here, it feels repetitive. It tells the reader that we're repeating the scene again.

[i] This could be a great point to slow down or pace the story, and give the reader more info. As it stands, we're not sure where in the world, or what kind of world we're in. The reader has no clues if this is modern-day or medieval fantasy.

[j] Here could be a great time for Blake to tell the reader a story. Maybe a small love drop about the colors of potions, or why it would float and look as it does. As it has a use right away, the reader will latch on to these rules. What can this foreshadow?

[k] This section about Damien isn't needed for the reader to understand there is tension between the three of them.

[l] Brian is lots of fun! He's a great character who doesn't feel flat.

[m] Would she laugh here? Would she give in so easily? It's hard for the reader to tell as we're asking this same question. What is better? An opening scene explaining this would help us ground into this moment better, and may even help you as a writer consider their layered responses better in this scene.

[n] It's a shame to miss that scene, it sounds alive, and fun, and a little quirky. It could set the tone that this is a light hearted urban fantasy, with true heart under the current of it.

[o] You do a great job of ending your scenes with momentum!

[p] You're great at internal thoughts that notice details, and tie together with movement. The reader likely needs more of this earlier on, this is what will make them care.

[q] This information feels a little late. How could this be tied into new first scene that gives us her "before" life, before she is kidnapped again?

[r] Showing this in a real world scene, maybe at work? Or with another friend? This could do a better job of showing this internal belief Blake has, and why she fights so hard for her freedom.

[s] We need more of this conflict. Her staying doesn't feel earned, even her half deciding doesn't feel earned. Why would she even consider it? Is she exhausted from running? Is she scared to get hurt? What are the stakes?

[t] The pacing on this isn't quite right yet. We've barely settled into the idea of Blake staying. This revelation should add to that idea, making it more layered, and complex. Giving the reader time to digest Blake's decision, and Blake time to make a plan to escape again, before this twist, could help set up a chain reaction of events based on Blake's decisions. As it stands, things are happening to Blake, not because of her. We can either leave this a little later, or add it sooner with big emotional layers where the scene eventually revolves around it.

[u] Because we now get a lot of backstory here, it takes away from the moment with the letter. This moment should need to be explained. Currently, it does as the setup work hasn't been done yet. This is easy to rectify, and doesn't take away from the great work you've done with the bones of the story.