

The first rays of the sun found Delia Hunter contemplating Jacqueline Masson's front door. A lot had happened the night before, and it was very likely Jacqueline was still sleeping; most normal people would be. Delia had long ago given up on being normal. Jacqueline was not a morning person under the best of circumstances, and being woken up by a teenager was far from the best. Raine or Wylie would not have hesitated to wake her, but Delia didn't figure she had the right, especially not for something so purely personal. Jacqueline was the group's general, Wylie and Raine were her charges, her lieutenants; Delia was just a grunt.

Finally, Delia decided on a compromise. She tapped lightly on the door figuring if Jacqueline were awake she'd hear it, but it wasn't likely to wake her from sleep. When there was no response to the second light tap, she pulled a pad of paper from her pocket. She scribbled a quick note, slid it under the door, and then tucked pen and paper back in her pockets.

Her restlessness sent her running off, she found herself standing in front of Dare's house frowning at the darkness within. Trim's house was similarly lifeless. Finally, inexplicably, she headed back towards Main Street. Although she'd run by earlier, in the dark it had not looked so bad. The earthquake that had harkened the creation of a Hellmouth in Farmingham High had made quite an impact on the town. It would be a long while before the damage was all cleaned up and even longer before tongues stopped wagging about it. But at this hour it was mostly her, the garbage men and the poor shop owner's surveying the damage. It looked like Farmingham was in for a long and interesting summer.



## Redemption Seeking

By Jill Irving

Jacqueline called an hour before the scheduled debriefing at the Double R. Delia made it to her house in record time. Jacqueline answered her perfunctory knock with her usual business-like manner.

"You wish to discuss something?" She prodded as she ushered Delia into her living room.

"I wanted to ask your opinion on a personal matter, if it's not too much of an imposition."

“You may ask.” Jacqueline sat in a wing chair and lifted her tea cup, waiting patiently for Delia to settle herself.

Delia’s hands clenched and unclenched in front of her as she paced behind the couch. “I was trying to puzzle out whether it would be best to tell Maryann immediately what happened last night or if perhaps I should wait until she has her strength back...”

“Shall I assume you are referring to the spell that you and Trim cast rather than the creation of the Hellmouth?” Jacqueline jumped to the heart of the issue.

Delia swung around to stare at Jacqueline’s forthright question. “Yes.” She threw herself down on the couch in a gesture more reminiscent of Raine’s mannerisms than her own. “I don’t want to tell her too soon and have her get all upset and hurt her recovery...but I don’t want to wait too long and have her think I’m trying to hide something.”

“Are you?” Jacqueline’s wise eyes bored down on Delia.

“No. In fact, I want to tell her as soon as possible.” She jumped back off the couch and resumed her pacing. “I feel dirty somehow. I want to see if she can help find a way to ‘cleanse’ my magic or my soul, whatever, of this feeling.”

“Dark magic can leave a stain on you; however, atonement is a very personal thing. It’s possible that as your teacher, Maryann can help you find ways to repair the damage. However, it may be something that you will need to learn to live with.”

“I’m living with so much already. I don’t know how much more I can handle.” Delia leaned her elbows on the couch back. “I don’t suppose you found anything in that book I loaned you on how to return the power that my ancestor took?”

Jacqueline sat her tea cup down in front of her and leaned forward. “Is that something you really would want?”

Delia shook her head. “I don’t know. It would make life easier, I suppose. Sometimes I feel like every time I tap into my power I’m letting the demon loose. I fear that at some point I’ll lose control of it. I’m afraid that tapping into that dark power brought the demon closer to the surface. I’m terrified it will make me...not me.” Delia’s brown eyes nearly glowed in their earnestness.

“When you were down there racing to stop the opening of the Hellmouth, do you think ‘your demon’ pushed you into using that spell?” Jacqueline posed.

Delia’s forehead scrunched up in concentration for a moment before she shook her head again. “No. I made that decision. I didn’t see another option. We were standing there, staring at that magically locked box that we needed to get in, and we didn’t have time to waste. We needed the most powerful spell we could blast at it, and that was the most destructive thing that we knew. It was the only solution I could see. I didn’t want to do it, but I didn’t see another solution. I made the decision.”

“Have you ever tapped into your magic to do something that you knew was wrong?”

“Just that spell.”

“You used the spell for a good purpose. It was the spell itself that was dark. Sometimes it is necessary to do things that you would not normally do when the stakes are high.”

Delia stood again. “Good intentions don’t make an act good. I’ve been raised to believe that.”

Jacqueline stood up and walked to her bookshelves. “And that speaks of how you’ve been raised and who you are. It sounds to me that you are afraid that the tinge of demon in your blood is your true nature. There are countless studies that prove that nurture is much stronger than nature in guiding a child’s principles. I can loan you a few if you doubt it.” She gestured to her books.

“Then if it wasn’t the demon, I made the decision to do something that I knew was wrong, and not just once. We used the spell twice.”

“That makes you practical above all things. In the same situation, I might have made that same choice.”

“Really?” Delia’s surprise was evident in her voice.

“The need was great, and time was short. You used what you had access to. What is important now is that you raise the bar; that you make sure you aren’t in the same position again. You need to continue your studies to give yourself more options.” She lifted the tome that Delia had loaned her from her desktop. “If you back away from your studies in fear of ‘your demon’ it may end up winning.”

“I could have Maryann bind my powers.”

“You could. You’ll have to make that decision. Give it some thought and talk to her before you make it. This has been a strange and traumatic year for you, but it hasn’t broken you. I believe that you are strong enough to control the power, and I believe that Maryann does as well.”

“Should I tell her today?”

“Give her another day to recuperate. You may also want to give Trim a chance to tell her first or at least at the same time. She will have a lot to say about him having the book in the first place.”

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**D**elia rode to the meeting with Jacqueline. The Double-R had suffered some damage, but not enough that it couldn’t open.

While waiting for the others to arrive, Delia sipped her coffee as Jacqueline glowered at what could only loosely be called ‘tea’. Trim stopped at the counter on the way in and placed an order for breakfast. Raine arrived covered from head to toe in leather, a walking advertisement for Harley-Davidson or Slayer’s Weekly. The group was somewhat subdued, the usual banter diminished to the weakest attempts at humor.

“Are you planning on eating that or inhaling it, Trim?” Kate asked.

Trim parried, “I need to keep up my strength for all the...um...work I’m going to do at the cleanup.”

“You’re going to help out? So who’s holding your leash?”

“Zip it.” Raine interrupted. “After all the weird behavior changes because of the iPods we ended up following all the kids to the gym...”

Jacqueline listened intently to the recap of events provided primarily by Raine with surprisingly few interruptions except about the ‘battle’ against the safe.

As they wound down the narrative, Jacqueline dove into the details of her call from the principal that morning. “Due to earthquake damage, school had been cancelled until all the schools could be inspected. A special school committee meeting is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon to discuss what can be done about finals and finishing up the school year. Either way it seems unlikely any kids will be attending Farmingham High for the remainder of the scheduled school year. But, I wouldn’t be surprised if some accommodations were made so that finals take place elsewhere.” She finished.

Delia remarked, “I’ll take that under advisement and continue studying.”

“I’m gonna hope for the best and act as if they will cancel school for the summer.” Trim announced.

Jacqueline looked back at Wylie, “In the meantime, I think redoubling our efforts at patrolling might be wise for the time being. We don’t know what affect the Hellmouth will have and how quickly it will start to work.”

“You don’t know what it will do?” Zoe asked.

“Not exactly. It is convergence of the mystical forces of the universe. All sorts of supernatural creatures will be drawn to it. Nearly anything could happen. It will be difficult to prepare for what comes next. The best thing we can do is be vigilant.”

“Does that mean we’re not going to the Vault tonight?” Wylie asked.

“I’d say you make a couple sweeps around to see what’s up before you make any decisions about that.” Kate suggested. “Why make assumptions? All the power that went into making the Hellmouth may keep things quiet for a while.”

“From your mouth to God’s ears.” Zoe murmured.

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“Trim, wait a minute!” Delia called out as she rushed out the door of the Double-R. The meeting had broken up and everyone had rushed off to their various pursuits.

“What’s up, Deal?” Trim asked turning around to greet her.

“I wanted to talk to you for a few minutes.” Delia placed herself between Trim and his goal, her hands resting on her hips.

“Sure, I was just gonna see how they were doin’ at getting all those shop windows boarded up. Wouldn’t want stuff to go missin’.” Trim commented looking up and down the main stretch of road.

Delia took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I wanted to let you know that I’m going to see Maryann tomorrow morning. I want to tell her about the spell we cast. I thought we should tell her together. I want to find a way to cleanse myself of its effects. I thought maybe it was something we could do together.”

“I don’t know why you need to tell her. We just cast a spell. No big.” Trim’s features hardened into a mask of resolve.

Delia glanced around them before taking a step closer. “It was evil. Couldn’t you feel how it crawled across your skin?” Delia shivered with the memory.

Trim backed away. “It just felt powerful to me. I don’t need to be cleansed. We should just let her be so she can recover.” He started to turn away.

Delia grabbed his arm, stopping his movement as her expression shifted to a deep frown. “If we don’t tell her, Jacqueline will. We’re better off telling her ourselves and explaining the dire situation. Contrite behavior could help keep from killing us.”

Trim shook off her hand. “Whatever. I’m not contrite; we did what needed to be done. We used powerful magic to fight powerful magic. We didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Apparently we don’t see it the same way.” Delia brushed her fingers through her brown hair, pushing back a tendril that had escaped her ponytail. “I doubt your Grans is going to see it the same way either.”

“Jacqueline took the book. I’m really sick of both of you hounding me about it.” He began to storm away in his own personal thundercloud.

“Whatever.” Delia shook her head and raised her voice to follow him. “I’m going to tell her tomorrow morning at 10. You can be there then or not, your choice.” Spinning on her heel, Delia stormed down the sidewalk. Seeing Dare and Wylie speaking intently, she shifted directions again and crossed the main street.

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**T**rim wasn’t at the hospital when Delia arrived. Maryann’s skin had roses back in it and there were no longer any tubes connected to her.

“You are looking much better.” Delia crossed the room and placed a plant on the table awkwardly.

“Thank you, child.” Maryann looked at the plant with pleasure. “Mint?”

“Grams always said it was good for everything, in food, or just for chewing.” Her hands fiddled in front of her like she didn’t know what to do with them.

“It is more than a that.” Maryann looked up at her young charge. The girl had gone from peaked back to a natural tanned glow over the past couple weeks. Today she looked a bit peaked again, further she seemed nervous. “What is a wrong?”

“You are really doing better?” Delia asked looking around the sick room, her voice tinged with concern.

“Yes. The doctor he a say I might a leave today.” Maryann answered emphatically.

“That’s great.” Delia nodded then began to pace the room, glancing at random objects without seeming to truly see them.

“Come a child. Sit a here.” She patted her bedside. “You must a tell me.”

Gazing at her mentor, Delia crouched on the barest corner of the bed, her hands fisted nearly into white balls. “Yes, I know. It’s just difficult.”

“You must a do it fast.” Maryann placed her hand on top of the girl’s.

Delia breathed deeply. “That’s what dad always said too.” She turned her and grasped Maryann’s hand. “Okay...”

The door flew open and Trim sauntered in.

“Hey Grans!” he announced barely acknowledging Delia.

“Timothy. Finally you come a see your Grans. Why a you wait so long?” Maryann question observing the coldness between the friends.

“Been busy with the earthquake and stuff.” Trim shuffled over to his grandmother’s side and shot a glare at Delia.

Delia shot off the bed and started pacing again.

“Timothy, you must a wait outside for a moment.” Maryann ordered.

“No, it’s okay, Maryann. It’s best if Trim is here.” Delia corrected as she contemplated the door herself.

Maryann gazed at each of them for a moment before turning her attention back to Delia. “You must a tell me now.” She patted the spot on the bed Delia had vacated.

Delia trudged back and sat focusing on her hands in her lap. “The other night, when we were trying to stop the opening of the Hellmouth, Trim and I used this spell, it was dark magic. It was the most powerful thing we could think of throw against the box, but it was...it felt...wrong.”

"Eamagodthejackass!" Maryann cried out throwing her hands in the air. Her eyes narrowed and her lips pressed together into a line, her head was slightly shaking. She turned her full attention to Trim. "I told a you to stay away from that book. I told a you, not because a grandma like to tell all the time 'Do this a do that,' but so a you no get hurt. You no listen! I tell you, I tell you but you no listen!"

“Grans we needed the power.” Trim exclaimed his arms folded across his chest.

“You no should a known the spell. You should a found other ways.” Maryann emphasized each statement by slapping her hand against her knee.

Delia grabbed Maryann’s flying hand desperately. “Maryann, please. I don’t think getting this upset will help your recovery.”

“Do a you know what a you have a done?” Maryann looked back at the girl. “A stain you a have on you now.”

“I know” Delia whispered, her gaze shifting back to her lap. “I want to clean it up. I don’t like feeling like this.”

Maryann looked at the girl’s bent head before studying her grandson’s insolent expression. “You?” She spoke at Delia. “Did a you read the book?”

Delia lifted her eyes to meet Maryann’s fierce expression. “No, I joined my power with Trim’s to cast the spell.”

Maryann tipped the girl's face toward her and looked at her eyes carefully. "Stupido!" She spat out before patting the girl's cheek. "Domani sera, you will come to my house. We will see what we can do. Now a go!"

Delia stood quickly and rushed out of the room, barely sparing a concerned glance for her friend's predicament.

"You! Stupido..." The tirade began as Delia hurriedly shut the door behind her. She didn't wait for Trim to emerge.

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"First a, you must cleanse the place of negative energies." Maryann guided her earnest student the following afternoon. "Infuse spring water with fresh parsley. Sprinkle the water the room. Create a circle around you with salt. Light candles around you to make a star in the circle."

The two sat in Maryann's super clean, plastic covered, living room. Delia followed Maryann's directions and found herself sitting within a pentagram on a board on the floor.

Maryann directed her young charge as she sat in her rocking chair. "There is no single spell you can cast to cleanse your magic."

"Then what do you suggest?" Delia asked her hand fidgeting with the lighter.

Maryann stared at the girl's hand until the fidgeting stopped. "You must focus all your attention on what your insides are telling you. You must listen."

"Listen to what?" Delia questioned as she carefully tucked her hands into her lap.

"Sit quiet. Be still. Just listen. Listen and you will hear." Maryann demonstrated by taking a breath and then letting go of everything.

Delia sat for a moment before she started to complain. "I don't..."

"Hush! Listen!" Maryann repeated. "When you are quiet, you will know what must be done." She became stillness itself.

Delia felt that Maryann had somehow 'left the room'. She took a deep breath and then sat quietly and tried to listen. When she looked up later to find Maryann reading, she noticed the clock, a half hour had past.

Delia stretched her legs before asking "How long will it take?" Maryann set aside her book and shifted in her chair.

"As long as it takes, child." Maryann reached her hand to Delia. "Every day you must listen. When it is time, you will hear. Then you will know."

Delia squeezed Maryann's hand briefly before getting up from the floor. She turned her attention to blowing out the candles and breaking the salt circle. "So it could take a very long time?"

"Possibly. Such things are personal." Maryann stood and picked up a broom.

Delia put the candles away on the shelf. "What do I do in the mean time? I feel so dirty." She took the broom from Maryann when she turned back.

“If it a feels bad, don’t a do it.” Maryann instructed. “Do not use your a gift.”

Delia swept quietly for a few moments, letting her tumultuous thoughts tumble through her brain. Stopping her busywork, she suggested, “Maybe you should bind my powers?”

Maryann pinned Delia with a look “Do you a not control whether you use a majick or not?” she demanded.

“So far.” Delia replied hesitantly, her eyes shifted to the pile of salt on the floor.

“So it a will be.” Maryann responded definitively.

“I’m not so sure.” Delia nearly whispered to the broom.

Maryann reached out and grabbed Delia’s arm. “You must a believe. You must a have control.”

“If you were to bind them for a while…”

“No! If I a bind them, bound they will a stay. Either you control or you don’t. Which?”

Delia closed her eyes and thought for a few minutes. “I control them.” She nodded her head affirmatively as she spoke.

Maryann dropped her hands from Delia’s arms. “Buono! You will a listen everyday. You will a no use your majick.”

“Yes.” Delia agreed, pausing for a moment thoughtfully. “Maryann, I will be away for most of the summer.”

Maryann frowned at the girl. “This is no a good time.”

“I know, but a lot of people went to a great deal of effort to get me into boot camp this summer. If I suddenly say I’m not going, it would seem ungrateful.”

As Maryann lifted her eyebrow, Delia continued quickly starting to sweep again. “I’m not ungrateful to you either. I can call you regularly to check in. I can write too. I’ll keep a journal of my progress.”

“Bello. Until a you leave, you a must come here everyday.”

“I will.” Delia agreed reaching for the dustpan. “I promise.”

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Delia stood outside of Trim’s house glaring at the still-closed door. Extremely loud music resonated from within, loud enough to make her ears bleed, loud enough to assure her that Francesca was not around. The music was something Delia was sure she’d never heard before. Despite Trim’s normally eclectic taste, to be kind, the music didn’t sound like anything he would normally listen to either. Delia put a bit more strength behind her knocking.

Finally Trim answered the door surprise evident on his face. “Hey D, What’s up?”

Delia stood in the doorway shaking her head. “Trim what IS that you’re listening to at that God-awful decibel?”

Trim had to raise his voice and enunciate. “It’s…Alice…Cooper.”



“Huh?” Delia focused, trying to sort out his words from the noise.

“I like this one song.” Trim explained as the lyrics became more clear....

*“School’s out, school’s out for summer. School’s out for ever. ...”*

Delia opened her mouth to speak, but Trim’s interrupted by holding up his hand and said, “Wait for it...”

*“School’s been blown to pieces”*

Understanding dawned across Delia’s features.

Trim nodded and smiled. “That’s my favorite line. Hey, maybe we should consider that...”

“Excuse me?” Delia asked in a loud roar, surprised that even Trim would consider something as horrible as blowing up the school.

“Hey...I’m just saying...” Trim shifted his weight and started to explain.

“Can you turn it down before I pass out?” Delia yelled over the din.

Trim moved back a couple steps into the house and clicked the stop button on the remote in his hand. “Sure” he answered very reasonably.

Delia leaned against the open doorframe. “Now what’s this about blowing up the school?”

Trim threw his hands out in front of him. “I’m saying it might not be such a bad idea. Now, we both realize that nothing would make me happier than to have good old FHS disappear in the deepest, darkest hole in the universe...” Trim held up his hand again to stop Delia’s instant comment. “But from the evil fighting perspective it might not be such a bad thing.”

“How do you figure?” Delia asked shaking her head nearly constantly as she listened to his enlightened madness.

“Well, if the Hellmouth were physically sealed by something like a mega-ton explosion that brought down the entire weight of the school crashing down on top of it, then it would be really hard for the big bads to try to open it. Wouldn’t it?” His earnestness was nearly palpable.

Delia’s brow furrowed as she attempted to puzzle out the problem with Trim logic. Suddenly she shook her head to clear it. “I think we’d be better off finding another way to seal the Hellmouth, one that won’t cost the taxpayers millions of dollars and required us to be bused to another town until we graduate.” Delia lifted her hand to pause Trim’s response. “Anyway, that’s not why I’m here. I just wanted to see how things were going between you and Maryann.”

Trim went stock still and his expression icy cold. Without immediately responding, he grabbed his backpack, which made a strange jingling sound, and shoved the remote into its pocket. Before he had zipped the pocket closed Delia noticed some work tools in his bag, things she sure she’d never seen Trim carry. He stalked towards Delia forcing her step out of the doorway. As he pulled the front door closed behind him, he finally replied. “Let. It. Go.”

Without waiting for a reply he turned and stomped off towards town and the on-going cleanup efforts. A shocked Delia remained at his door watching his retreat until he was out of sight.

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Delia exited the Vault when Mychael's band finished up. Some of the music had been a bit loud for her ears and they were ringing a bit. Still she enjoyed the majority of what they played and thought Mychael a very talented singer.

Dare and Trim had disappeared earlier, before the last set. Dare and Wylie had danced up a storm and started tongues wagging something fierce. Delia smiled at all the people choking over their own stupid rumors.

She was contemplating the walk back to her car over at the Double-R when she thought she heard something above the ringing in her ears. Glancing around, she saw two thugs harassing a girl across the parking lot. Her first reaction was to say something until she caught sight of the game face on one of the attackers.

Slipping her cell phone from her pocket as she moved down the steps, she speed-dialed Wylie.

"You just left a minute ago, you missing me already?" Wylie asked as she answered her phone.

"I NEED YOU OUTSIDE NOW!" Delia pronounced into the phone as she pulled her knife from her boot. "It's slay time."

"Got it!" Wylie responded, already in motion.

Wylie erupted through the outside door as Delia halved the distance between herself and the bad guys. "HEY UGLY!" She yelled to them.

The vamps turned around, the one who had been feeding, raised its head. Delia's KA-Bar made a graceful arc through the air and hit him mid-forehead. As he grabbed the knife from his head, the girl fell to the ground and scrambled away from them.

The vamps were in motion towards Delia when Wylie launched herself into the uninjured one. Delia kicked herself into the air and knocked the knife from her opponent's hand. Though he slammed her back with a force that would have knocked over someone twice her size, Delia barely moved from her stance. Her next kick sent the vamp sprawling, but he swung a leg out and tripped her. As the vamp flipped to a stand, Delia rolled forward and slammed her stake into his chest. He exploded into a cloud of dust.

As she looked around, she saw Wylie wiping dust off her own hands.

"Look at me...this was a new dress! Now it's a mess." Wylie complained.

Standing up, Delia surveyed the minor damage. "I'm sure your drycleaner can fix it."

Wylie's brow wrinkled, "Why didn't you just fry them both with a spell?"

Delia stopped mid-motion remembering another fight in the Vault parking lot. "What? You are actually upset that I called for help?"

Wylie shrugged.

“Besides I’m on a no Magic Diet.”

“Huh? Wylie attempted to right her hair.

“Long story. Reader’s Digest version: no magic for Delia until Maryann says so.” Delia started walking towards where she’d last seen the vamp’s victim.

“That kind of sucks.” Wylie remarked following her friend.

“It is what it is.” Delia knelt to examine the girl who had been hiding behind a car. She was crying and her neck was bloody, but she appeared to be okay. Delia cleaned and inspected the wound, which had nearly stopped bleeding.

“Are you okay? Did they make you drink?” Wylie questioned as she crouched beside the girl.

The girl shook her head.

“Do you want to go to the hospital?” Wylie inquired.

The girl shook her head again.

“Do you want a ride home?” Delia asked.

Shaking her head again, “No, I want to go inside and call home.”

“Good idea. Let’s go.” Delia stretched out her hand to help the girl up. Her first steps were rather shaky so Delia continued to hold her up.

After leading the girl inside the Vault, the two girls crossed the parking lot. “This no magic thing could make the summer battles...um...interesting for you.” Wylie observed.

“I don’t expect I’ll need too much magic at Boot Camp.” At Wylie’s glance, she continued, “I’ll be in California most of the summer.”

Wylie canted her head to one side and asked “Did I know that?”

Delia shrugged. “I talked about trying to get in, but with everything that happened I hadn’t gotten around to telling everyone that I had. I’ve been spreading the word.”

Wylie slid into her car, “I guess I can give you a hand with that.”

Delia grinned, “Somehow I thought you might.” She patted the car’s roof and turned away.

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**D**elia knocked on Maryann’s door promptly at three.

She heard “Come you in.” from the recesses of the house.

Delia entered and followed Maryann’s voice to the kitchen. Fresh herbs were spread across the counter and dining table.

“Today we a study the herbs.” Maryann announced importantly.

“Grams was working on teaching me about herbs.” As Delia wandered around the kitchen, she picked up a couple familiar herbs. “This is Rosemary, used for protection

against negative energies; it's also good for the memory. This is Hyssop, useful for protection and healing.”

“Buono” Maryann spread her hands to indicate the whole kitchen. “Before you leave today, you will know all you see here.” She picked the closest herb and passed it to her student. “Sage, purifies and heals. Sandalwood.”

“Improves meditation.” Delia added threading the herb gently through her fingers. “I wanted to tell you about last night.”

Maryann turned to look at her pupil, resting her elbows on the counter.

Delia held her gaze, while her hand continued to gently hold the delicate herb. “I ran into some vamps last night at the Vault. I confronted them without magic. I called Wylie for backup.” Delia’s face held the glow of pride in her accomplishment.

Maryann nodded. “I tell a you so. You listen. I tell a you.”

Delia grinned, “yes, you did tell me. I just wasn’t sure. I am now. Should I meditate now?” She put down the Sage she was holding.

“When you a finish learning the herbs.”

“What’s this one?” Delia asked lifting a flowering herb.

“Thistle. Aids in the a recuperation from illness or injury.”

Delia fingered the spray. “I should keep some of that around.”

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**J**acqueline invited Delia into the apartment and led her to the living room. “I made tea. Come sit down.”

“You wanted to see me?” Delia asked sitting across from Jacqueline.

Jacqueline leaned over the elegant tea set and poured fragrant tea into delicate cups. “I was wondering how your search for redemption was going. You haven’t spoken of it since the morning after.” She looked up as she passed one cup to Delia.

Delia took it and sipped. “I hadn’t thought of it as redemption.” She wrinkled her brow, “but I suppose it fits. Maryann has given me the tools to find my way. It’s up to me now to find it.”

“Or not.” Jacqueline shot her a look over her own teacup.

Delia nodded and lightly set her teacup on the saucer. “That’s a possibility, but I believe I will. The other night when Wylie and I dealt with the Ugliers in the parking lot of the Vault, I didn’t feel the need to use my magic. I used my martial skills. It felt good, it felt right. I think that’s what I need to do.”

Jacqueline studied the young woman in front of her. The girl was back to her contained self. Her posture was stiff military and her hands were casually resting on her knees. The anxiety she’d exhibited of late was replaced by her normal calm efficiency. “Wylie says you are off magic.”

Delia agreed reaching again for her tea. “Maryann and I think it would be best. For now.”

“You decided against having your power bound?” Jacqueline queried.

Delia nodded and met Jacqueline’s eyes. “What we do is dangerous. My magic is tool that can be used. I just need to find the best way to use it.” Her tone rang with the confidence it had been lacking.

Jacqueline leaned comfortably back in her chair. “I believe you will.” She lifted her tea cup. “So are you looking forward to your trip to California?”

“Some people might think looking forward to boot camp is sick.” Delia grinned. “Let ‘em.”