

©BANCHEE

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Banchee

Shayla lays naked on the ground at a local cemetery on the Harvest Moon night. She looks at a bag of clothing in its usual spot at her gravestone. She dresses quickly, ties the last shoelace, and grabs her wedding band from her jeans. Shayla takes a deep breath seeing her spouse and daughter exiting the tree line. She opens her arms as her daughter runs toward her.

"Mommy, I missed you."

Shayla winks at her husband.

Jack, a supernatural hunter, met Shalya in high school during their junior year. A few months after their meeting, Shayla became pregnant with Ava, and they married. Jack's secret life revealed itself when Shayla changed into a banshee; her screams continue to haunt him nightly.

Shayla's initial transformation was on her eighteenth birthday at sundown and every Harvest Moon in October after.

"Ava, you are getting so big," Shayla says, looking

at her daughter.

"Let's go home," Jack says, reaching for her hand.

Shayla accepts, and they walk together to his truck. Shayla brushes her daughter's hair as they drive home in silence. She sees the new houses on their street, knowing more homes mean fewer secrets and more dangers to her family.

Jack parks the truck in the driveway of their two-story cabin nestled in the mountains of Gatlinburg.

Shayla carries her daughter upstairs, where she tucks her in for the night. She kisses Ava on the cheek before joining her husband downstairs.

She stands in the living room doorway, watching her husband placing logs into the fireplace. She notices that he has scars on his back that were not there the last time they were intimate. She closes her eyes, listening to the crackling of the wood, breathing in the smoke, and taking a deep breath to calm herself.

Jack turns around, looks at his wife, and motions for her to join him on the couch.

"Shayla, I love you more than I can express."

"Tell me everything. How is the hunting? How is Ava? How are our parents?" she begs.

Jack hands Shayla a photo album of daily pictures of

Ava over the last eleven months. Shayla flips through the pages smiling in excitement.

After she reaches the end of the photo album, he rests his hand on Shayla's hand, comforting her as he clears his throat.

"Your parents died in a storm off the coast of the Outer Banks last year. I am unsure why they were sailing in bad weather conditions."

Tears swell in Shayla's eyes, and she clinches her fists.

"I am truly sorry. I found a witch from the old country who can help us with your family's curse," Jack informs. "We can leave for Cassadaga in the morning."

"It has been six years since the curse appeared. The only option I have is leaving you and Ava."

"Shayla, did you not hear me? I found the descendants of the Culloden covenant who can reverse the curse."

"You are living in a fairy tale. We do not have the privileged of having such happiness. You know Ava may turn into a banshee on her eighteenth birthday." Jack reaches for Shayla's hand, but she pulls away. "What are the marks on your back?"

"It's nothing. We only have three days together."

"Where was Ava during your hunts? You promised to stop hunting!"

"My calling is hunting supernatural beings."

"Like me, you mean." She crosses her arms.

"Shayla, you are tired." He gets to his feet, walking away, but stops. "We made a promise not to fight when you return. Can we do this another time?"

"You said you would protect Ava! Who will protect her if you get killed? Are you seeing someone?"

"What? No!" Jack says.

"Tell me about this witch in the old country? Is she trustworthy? Does she know about this curse?" Shayla asks.

"Yes, she is trustworthy. She can't practice magic outside of Cassadaga, so we must travel to her."

Jack returns to Shayla. "I love you," he whispers.

"I love you too," Shayla says.

"I will do everything in my power to stop this curse from destroying our family," Jack promises. "Please rest. We can drive to Florida tomorrow."

He watches the fire as he holds his wife in his arms. He knows she doesn't recall seeing him at her parents' house a year ago. She arrived in banshee form, and he recalls every second of the encounter. Her parents sacrificed themselves to protect him, knowing death was lurking for one of them. He can never tell her the

great depths of pain he carries with him.

He receives a text message alert.

"It's our most profound sorrow to inform you of the loss of Sister MaLorina. Please keep our community in your thoughts during this difficult time."

He lays the phone back down on the coffee table. He chokes on his tears, trying to gain enough courage to tell his wife that the last known member of the Culloden covenant has passed away.

He gets off the couch, covering his wife up with a blanket, before sitting in his favorite chair by the window. He takes a drink of Gin, listening to the howls of the werewolves. He will need to call another hunter to investigate the death of MaLorina in the morning. Something tells him MaLorina's murder has something to do with the curse.

THE END

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