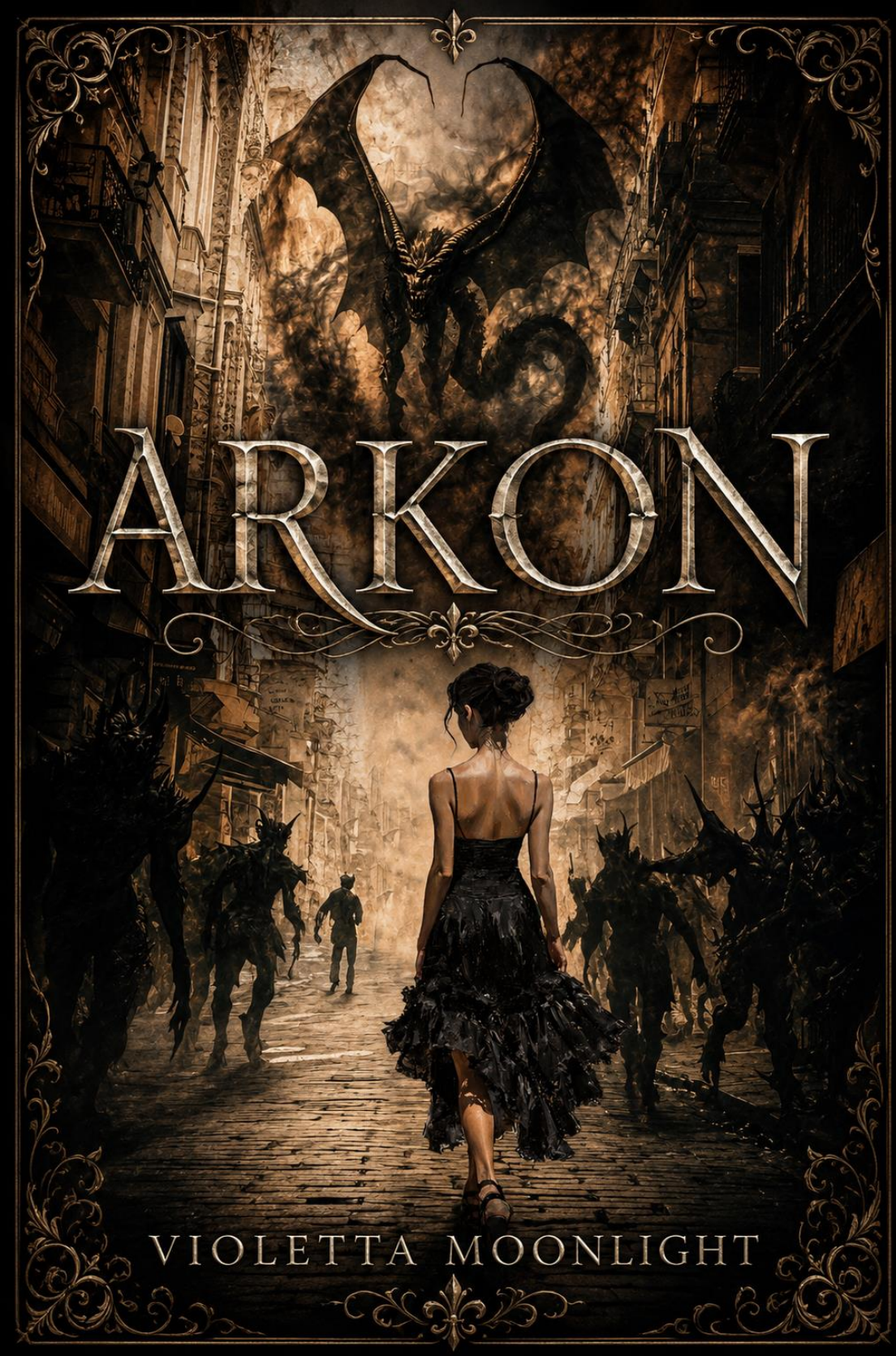


A movie poster for 'Arkon' featuring a woman in a black dress walking away from the viewer down a dark, gothic street. The street is lined with tall, ornate buildings and filled with dark, winged creatures. In the distance, a large, winged dragon or demon is perched on a cloud. The title 'ARKON' is written in large, ornate, metallic letters across the center.

ARKON

VIOLETTA MOONLIGHT



ARKON





INTRODUCTION

Have you ever met witches? No, not mothers, healers, or kind of fairies, but those dreadful ladies with hooked noses, crooked and sly smiles, and hoarse, almost masculine, screeching voices. Those who bring terror to the villages offer live blood sacrifices and consort with demons. Their outward appearance may not be remarkable compared to ordinary people, but with good practice, one can observe such details. Just imagine, before you sit a creature, literally wearing human skin on the outside! Although, in Arkon this is a common occurrence...

Arkon is a place where worlds intersect, so the city is not only full of light and goodness but also teeming with witches, wizards, trolls, werewolves, demons, and various impurities. Here take place the strangest miracles, temptations, prophecies, trials, and most importantly – the battle! The battle between Good and Evil, the struggle with one's dark side, the fight for Truth! Here you can peacefully enjoy the landscapes and pass the time, only never getting used to the fact that anyone you meet may not be who you see before you.





Field of daisies

Since early childhood, Diya has not spent a single evening without girlish divinations, fun rituals or spells. For every life event she found secret runic signs, which she inscribed on her hands and sheets of paper. Growing up, they continued to accompany her in all her endeavors and life situations.

With each day Diya felt more and more the presence of something supernatural in her life. Looking at the starry sky, she felt the power, the scale of power, and boundless mystical warmth, understanding that she was seen and heard more clearly than it might seem. She realized that everything visible and invisible is absolutely real, there just aren't always keys to every door. She knew that the body is a mechanism with gears, which people exploit for their benefit throughout their lives, and it had nothing to do with the otherworldly nature of who she truly was.

Diya turned fifteen when she moved to the city of Arkon. Having changed five schools and four places of residence, nothing had surprised her for a long time. It had become quite common to see new faces, to seek new acquaintances, and not to get attached to anything. She did not understand what it meant to live your whole life in one city, in one house, to have





lifelong friends, and to love it all at the same time. And once again, for the umpteenth time, the past remained behind her forever, and she started life anew.

Despite life's hardships, her young mind was full of illusions and relentless persistence. She had never lived in a megapolis before, so her brain was captivated by everything it wanted to see, regardless of the weather or time of day. For a slightly naive and modest, but not lacking in imagination girl, everything was done, seen and felt with a belief in a bright future and, of course, eternal love. In a word – daisies...

In her eyes the new city lived in colors, breathed with moisture and shone with the sun! Majestic oaks against the backdrop of high-rises rustled the song of the soul, silvery fountains shimmered with rainbow colors, diverse parks inspired admiration, ancient buildings reminded of the value of centuries, and deserted cemeteries spoke in whispers. The aura of Arkon created absolutely everything around it, including its inhabitants. This city had a heart, a soul that Diya felt stronger and stronger with each passing day.

No, she didn't consider herself special; life was just full of colors, and she really wanted to learn how to paint this picture, not just with her fingers. Probably she needed a real artist to finally learn about painting brushes.

In two years of living in Arkon she managed to change





two schools and then enroll in a correspondence department of economics while also completing small computer courses.

Just think, soon the true gates of Arkon will open in front of her – the gates to a world of new opportunities! But it wasn't meant to be...

Dedicated to getting caught up in the whirlpool of urban life chaos, she had to temporarily stop her studies to obtain some unseemly means of existence, which the whole city seems to be obsessed with to this day. Her first serious job was at a nightclub, where she learned to carry trays through the densely smoke-filled hall. The menu items were often missing due to poor organization in the kitchen, for which Diya had to frequently endure "polite" speeches from the customers. But none of that mattered much.

Soon, the "golden child" (as she was nicknamed by the staff) replaced this place with a couple of other ambitious places, where life literally sped along a racetrack. So the field of daisies slowly turned into a field of mud and fertilizer.





The Job

And now she was already nineteen years old... The hot summer heat was intense. Her high-heeled shoes echoed on the granite floor of the underground metro passage, and her long black hair, tied in a high ponytail, swayed slightly from side to side.

Stopping at the bustling platform, Diya adjusted her elegant dark gray business suit, consisting of a knee-length pencil skirt and a fitted short jacket, underneath which was a white silk blouse.

Preparing for another job interview and composing a combination of runes for luck, she repeatedly went over her memorized resume in her head, which should in no way be a problem.

The girl looked around, vaguely observing the bustling glints of people. She only needed to travel three stops, so upon the arrival of the train, she entered the carriage, stood closer to the door and, like everyone else, stared at the floor, practically burning a hole in it with her gaze.

In a matter of minutes, the train smoothly stopped at the station with a beautiful ornamental trim. Due to the overwhelming rush, the crowd immediately surged forward and, so to speak, carried Diya up the steps. There she was,





finally on the surface of the city.

Crossing the road, she began to follow the necessary address, carefully reading the house numbers and venturing deeper and deeper into the most remote part of the street.

"I found it!" she said cheerfully out loud, then squinted suspiciously as a large but completely empty office building stood before her as if someone had cursed it despite the posters hanging everywhere advertising the rental of premises.

Entering inside, a chilling sensation and loud echo enveloped Diya, coming from the sound of her heels. There was absolutely no one on the first and third floors, and only on the second floor did someone rent out two lonely offices. In one of them, she had an interview...

Taking a deep breath, the girl knocked on the door.

"Come in!" a pleasant female voice said.

Diya lowered the handle and stepped inside.

The room was spacious and empty. Among the furniture, there were only two desks and a couple of wooden chairs, with a few rare blinds on the windows. Behind the desk was sitting a beautiful woman of forty-five in black pants and a jacket, with almost buzzed white hair and a perfectly straight nose, giving her a somewhat unearthly appearance. Her gray eyes seemed transparent, like silver water. She looked attentively at Diya





and smiled slightly.

"Hello, I am here regarding the position of assistant manager."

"Please, have a seat."

Suddenly, an unremarkable redhead girl around twenty-four years old entered the room. She was wearing worn-out jeans and a white t-shirt. Judging by her appearance, she was already employed, as she confidently walked towards her desk on the left side of the entrance door.

"Your resume!" the woman inquired, bringing Diya back to reality.

"Yes, of course. Here it is," Diya handed it over, not understanding why this company was seeking help when there was not even a place to sit.

The boss took a sheet of paper and began reading it carefully.

"Hmm, it seems you have no work experience at all."

"I understand, but I assure you that I can handle any tasks you assign to me. I am knowledgeable, attentive, responsible, hardworking and proficient in PC skills."

"That's good," the woman said, making a minute-long thoughtful pause without looking at Diya. "Well, as you can see, I don't have a computer here, so you're hired. My name is Tanaleya, and over there at the table is Alexandra," she



pointed to the unremarkable employee. "You will work together until I solve a few issues." "Oh, Alexandra, go and buy me some coffee!"

Alexandra nodded, got up and hurriedly left the room. A long silence fell, and Diya couldn't bear it.

"So, what are my responsibilities?"

"What do you think about magic?" Tanaleya abruptly interrupted.

"It's always with me," Diya answered instantly.

"Excellent! Tomorrow at eight in the morning be at this place," the woman said, handing Diya a piece of paper with the address. "And now you can go," she said, turning her face to the window and fixating her gaze on the green oak growing right outside.

Diya got up and, feeling bewildered, quietly left the office.

Everything was so strange... What just happened? It felt like she had fallen into a different reality, and she had to wait until tomorrow to clarify it.





A new day

Diya stood at the exact address of the semi-basement premises and stared straight at the hustle and bustle of passing people. Suddenly, right in front of her eyes, as if out of nowhere, Tanaleya appeared. How did she manage to be completely invisible?

The woman nodded silently.

"Well, shall we go?!" she said and immediately headed down the stairs, opening the door with a key.

Diya followed her.

In a small elongated room with bare gray walls, it was dim. There were no windows here. The dense air was covered in haze and smelled of wax and incense. At the end of the room was a wide office desk, on which there were a crystal ball, an antique deck of fortune-telling tarot cards, aromatic sticks and a solitary wax candle. Behind the chair, back on the wall, hung huge wings made of white fluffy feathers with neon lighting. On the nearby wall there was a massive rectangular mirror, two stools, and a tall candelabrum.

Tanaleya lit the candle, sat down at the table, and smiled.

"This is a magic salon, and from now on, this is your place of work. You are required to memorize everything I do





and say. You will be the link between me and the visitors, no matter what form they take. Can you handle it?"

"Yes," Diya smiled.

"Excellent! Now, let's get to work! Here are your rosaries with sixty-four beads and a mantra. Learn it by heart by tomorrow. And now, sit on the chair and look at that black circle over there, without blinking. Practice. Try to pass through the wall."

"Is that even possible?"

"I didn't choose you for no reason."

Diya concentrated and, holding her breath, began to look at the wall. Half a minute passed, and she saw a hole with a blurry halo, into which she immediately fell. Her heart skipped a beat – she was flying through the wall into some unknown space. Here was darkness all around, and in the distance, the brightest light could be seen... and emptiness everywhere. It was so cozy and nice there that she didn't want to come back. She kept flying, approaching the light, and colors, silhouettes, and images started to appear... What was this place? Could it be another reality, another dimension? She was just about to put together the pieces of what was happening, to explore this new world, but suddenly something stopped her and pulled her back. The light ahead disappeared, and darkness reappeared. Diya flew back at tremendous speed. Suddenly she came to





herself and began to breathe heavily and unevenly.

"It's too early! You can't go there! You won't come back!" Tanaleya said, "You are natural, genuine. Not everyone passes through walls so easily the first time. Congratulations, you passed the entrance exam."

"Exam? What for?"

"You'll find out when the time comes, and for today that's enough. Go home and do what I told you."

Diya pretended to understand, although she didn't understand anything at all. Was this an illusion, a game of her imagination? Millions of questions swirled in Diya's head as she returned home on the subway, once again scanning the dot in the floor of the train with her gaze.

The Ritual

"...tham nasvena sadanirasta, guhyakam satyam param thimahi," echoed the final lines of the mantra, which Diya repeated over and over until the count reached sixty-four – the exact number of beads on the rosary given to her by Tanaleya.

Sitting in her small room, she diligently recited the spell by heart, doing so very quietly as not to attract the attention of





her family, who already had too many worries. Diya was cooped up with her family of five in a two-bedroom apartment, but she didn't pay much attention to it, trying to spend less time at home. That's why working from morning till late evening suited her like never before.

Finally, the long-awaited morning arrived, and, instinctively dressed in black attire (a fitted flamenco-style gypsy skirt with ruffles and a light strappy top), Diya stepped out onto the street and clicked her heels on the pavement. Her light tan, neatly gathered hair in a bun, and graceful gait made her resemble a ballroom dancer, a dream of Diya's that she could never achieve.

Half an hour later, she was already at the basement office, the door of which was open.

"Come in, come in," nervously spoke Tanaleya, seeing the girl at the threshold. "Have you memorized the spell?" she asked, staring intently at the spread deck of Tarot cards.

"I have... Is something wrong?" Diya timidly inquired.

"Excellent! This will help me greatly," Tanaleya disregarded the question. "Listen closely – they should be here in five minutes. Quickly light 8 black and 8 yellow candles and arrange them in a circle. Fill a copper bowl with water. There are fresh eggs in the cupboard by the door; take three and place them carefully on a plate. They're already coming!"





A woman in her fifties with a scarf tied around her head entered the room. Beside her, an older, balding man trailed along, who was presumably her husband. They were dressed modestly and unremarkably, and looked at the floor the entire time.

Tanaleya threw on a black cloak with a hood, covering her jeans and lace top, then immediately handed Diya a gray cloak and headed towards the visitors.

"I've checked the information," she turned to the woman. "If the doctors are helpless, then your husband is in a dangerous state. His stuttering and convulsions are surely connected to the events preceding your recent acquisition. Your husband, Antipa Sergeyevna, needs an urgent ritual – a cleansing, just like the whole house! He is scared to death, and we need to figure this out. Please sit over there by the door, and Ivan Ranokeyevich will come with me."

The woman in the scarf nodded and stepped back. Tanaleya immediately took the stooped man by the elbow and seated him on a chair in the middle of the room. Only candles were burning around them... Silence and tension ensued. Tanaleya concentrated, closed her eyes, and with both hands grasped the head of the sweating man. Then she placed one hand on his temple and the other – on his forehead, starting to whisper something in Sanskrit. The candles crackled loudly,





the flames flickered, and the wax rolled down in tears onto the plate, forming grotesque, distorted shapes.

At first, Diya stood frozen, but suddenly, as if awakening, she took a black candle in her hands and slowly, as if in a trance, began to walk clockwise around both of them. The chant poured out of the girl's mouth, which she had been reciting all day, and with each word, it sounded louder and more insistent. Diya made three circles and then took a wax candle and passed with it three times counterclockwise. By this time, Tanaleya opened her silver eyes, which shone like the moon, and reached for a raw egg, starting to roll it from the temples across the surface of the man's scalp.

Diya again filled the room with the mantra, feeling a surge of strength and energy. The room vibrated, and the air whirled around all three of them in a wild stream...

"Nima!" Tanaleya shouted the last word and threw the egg into the bowl. The shell cracked, and the black slime spread out at the bottom.

Suddenly, the man felt a sharp nausea. Tanaleya held a bucket in front of him and waited for the vomiting to stop. It was a normal phenomenon, as after the ritual the remnants of dirt left his body, purifying the organism and the whole shell. After that, he burst into tears like a child. Antipa Sergeyevna immediately ran to her husband and began to calm him down.





"I need to smoke," Tanaleya said quietly, took off her black cloak, and went outside.

Diya stayed with the couple to make sure they were okay. Ten minutes later, Tanaleya returned.

"Ivan Ranokeyevich, how are you feeling? Look at how much filth I pulled out of you! Can you talk?"

"I can, Tana, I can. God bless you," the man replied with relief.

"So what now? Should we sell the house?" Antipa Sergeyevna asked anxiously.

"I don't know yet. We need to see what the hell went wrong," Tanaleya said.

"My husband is afraid to go back there, but we have nowhere else to live."

"Let's go," Tanaleya decisively said. "Diya, you're coming with us!"

The man and the woman got up and headed to their car. Diya was impressed. She was so eager to unravel the otherworldly mysteries that she joyfully followed them without hesitation.





The House of Death

The house of Antipa Sergeyevna and Ivan Ranokeyevich was located forty minutes from the city – in a small village with freshly built country plots. The couple bought the house from a Romani family. The deal was done in a hurry; the owners didn't negotiate at all, so the spouses were immensely happy with their purchase.

The car stopped at the tall cast iron gates with a spiral-shaped handcrafted ornament. Diya got out of the car and gasped. In front of her stood a three-story brick mansion with multiple rooms, verandas, garages and a separate summer house in the garden.

"What could be so frightening in such a beautiful building? What scares the owners so much?" Diya thought to herself but continued to stay silent and only carefully observed everything.

Tanaleya also got out of the car and headed towards the house, starting to skeptically survey the area. She touched every wall she passed and went into every room. Her brows were constantly furrowed, and for some reason, Diya felt a shiver. Everyone followed Tanaleya in a stupor. They descended into the basement, went up to the attic, inspected the living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, garages, and





backyard, and even opened the sewer lid, where Ivan Ranokeyevich saw the body of a dead child.

When the inspection was complete, Tanaleya went to the kitchen.

"I need cooking salt! Do you have salt in the house?" she asked the owners. "Quite an unpleasant story, of course..."

"Here you go," Antipa Sergeyevna handed her the salt. "What happened here? What story?" she asked back.

"Sometimes, ignorance is bliss."

"But we must know what we bought!" insisted the woman, standing next to Ivan Ranokeyevich.

Tanaleya sighed heavily.

"There are several imprisoned souls in your house. It's a sad story, in general. The bedroom on the third floor belonged to a young pregnant girl, but the family did not want a child from a gadjo. They were also against having an abortion, so when the girl gave birth, the baby was taken from her and smothered in the summer house. As a result, the girl was driven to suicide and jumped out of the bedroom window, cursing all family members. Soon after, the wicked old gypsy woman, who orchestrated everything, passed away. She refused to admit her guilt and died in agony. They even tried to lift the roof so that, according to beliefs, her soul could easily leave the house, but in vain. She was so grounded and





immersed in darkness that her soul could not find relief. Later, the remaining family members hastily sold the house, which you bought."

Antipa Sergeyevna and her husband recoiled in fear, clamped their lips and swiftly left the house. Diya knew they wouldn't stay here for long – the trauma was too deep, beyond help, but cleansing the house, where darkness and curses reigned, was necessary, so Tanaleya got to work without hesitation.

"Diya, help me!" she called out, pouring cooking salt into the hot frying pan. "Light this candle and keep it constantly behind my back!"

Diya nodded. Tanaleya took the smoking skillet and began to walk along the walls counterclockwise, loudly reciting some Sanskrit prayer. At times, she would stop to catch her breath and regain her strength. This was exactly why Diya was there at the right time. Her energy shield and counter-spells helped Tanaleya overcome the obstacles.

It took five hours, a dozen wax candles and a ton of spiritual power to finally stop and breathe freely. It was here that Diya first felt the clear resistance of an invisible force. The smell, the atmosphere, the penetrating sensations of the otherworldly, its touch, ghostly breaths, drafts, cries and glances. The dark presence, turning souls into its prisoners,





left these possessions too heavily, but it finally happened...

Several hours later, Diya and Tanaleya took a taxi and returned to their basement dwelling, to the underground world, which was gradually beginning to open up to the girl in a new light.

"Diya, I'm impressed by your focus on the ritual! You didn't lose your composure. This day was your initiation. Do you wish to learn more?"

"Yes! Very much!"

"Good. So first and foremost, humility. Do everything I tell you."

For the next three weeks Diya absorbed all the information attentively. After the initiation ceremony as a disciple, Tanaleya gave Diya a white ritual mantle and shared everything she knew... Soon Diya effortlessly stormed through the vast deck of tarot cards with sixty-four Arcana, skillfully navigating the life situations of clients who came to seek answers. She already knew the runes by heart, but creating her own living pocket runic signs was a novelty, which far exceeded the power of store-bought ones. Tanaleya gave her pieces of leather fabric, from which the girl sewed a special pouch. The teacher also presented Diya with a necklace of a massive gilded cross with the image of the dying Christ, which promptly fell off, leaving only sacred straight intersections. She





was trained to work with mirrors, protective symbols, communicating with spirits using a pendulum, and rituals for all occasions and situations, including lifting ancestral curses. Diya's strength grew with each passing day. The only problem was that all the dirt that was removed from the person stained those who performed the rituals. There were days when the girl couldn't get out of bed due to terrible headaches... Yes, the dirt drained into the earth; it was necessary to constantly set up mirror protection, every minute, every second. Dark forces in the Arkon never slept and very often surrounded them in the form of pseudo friends, whom Diya would meet in the near future.

The Dark Visitors

Outside, it was a hot summer day, but inside the magic salon it was always dim. Three clients entered through the door, responding to an advertisement for tarot reading courses that were popular among the locals. Of course, it was impossible to convey esoteric abilities to everyone, but if the clients were paying good money, Tanaleya would conduct superficial lessons with them. However, this didn't sit well with





Diya, because she felt that she was not capable of helping for money... and for Tanaleya everything around her had long turned into a business.

"We want to sign up for the tarot reading courses," said the boldest and youngest one in a long calico dress.

She had squinted swamp-green eyes, a twisted mouth, and dyed reddish hair that fell on her shoulders. Next to her was standing a plump old woman with short, curly hair. She was dressed in perfectly pressed blue trousers and a white blouse. And the third visitor was a sullen man in his thirties, broad and tall like a wardrobe. It later turned out that he had come straight from his job as an office security guard, which explained his dark trousers, black shirt, and polished shoes.

"Come in!" came the commanding tone of the woman with a black shawl on her head from the end of the room.

Tanaleya, as if in a trance, sat at her table with a lit candle and shuffled cards, casting a mystically eerie look at the newcomer from the underworld. Diya immediately understood that her teacher had put up invisible walls, as she felt the threat.

"My name is Ksenia and this is Margarita Petrovna, and Alex," the red-haired guest said, deliberately brushing against Diya's shoulder on the way to the table.

Diya smirked, realizing that she represented some kind





of obstacle for Ksenia.

Tanaleya stared intently at the red-haired woman.

"You are a gypsy. What do you want from me? Can't you tell fortunes yourself?"

"We all came together. Margarita Petrovna predicts, and Alex has hidden potential, but we need a teacher, a mentor. When I read your advertisement, I felt something."

Tanaleya relaxed, her eyes lit with intrigue and greed.

"Well, you know how much this will cost. Diya will process you now, and we will begin."

Ksenia proudly opened her purse, approached Diya and handed her money for three. After that, there was no turning back.

Now, every evening without exception, Tanaleya taught them how to read Tarot cards and even performed a ritual to unlock their hidden abilities. The room was constantly shrouded in darkness, and candles burned at any time of day or night... When Diya went home in the evening, Tanaleya often continued her lessons. It seemed that mystical music played in her head, and she behaved differently, as if dark forces obscured the clarity of her mind and consciousness.

After a few weeks, with Tanaleya's permission, Ksenia began to visit the basement more often, sitting here for hours without reason... Diya felt her hateful gaze and soon





understood why. It turned out that Ksenia was an orphan, and Tanaleya was the perfect fit to play her mother. The gypsy selfishly attached herself to her mentor, wanting to get rid of Diya, as she saw that she was like a daughter to Tanaleya.

Margarita Petrovna was a sycophant to Ksenia. The old woman savagely wanted to marry Ksenia to her unsuccessful son, who sat at home, although the gypsy was seeing someone else. And Alex was just a regular squirrel. Once, when Tanaleya performed a ritual with him, he suddenly became possessed. His eyes rolled back, he began to convulse, and a bestial roar burst from his mouth.

Diya watched closely and realized that Tanaleya was crossing the line with her clients. In a moment, her teacher stood at the crossroads of darkness. Then came the coven and later – intimate relations between Tanaleya and Alex, which ultimately played a cruel joke.

Meanwhile, Diya, an innocent and pure soul, was in the middle of all this chaos, between the light and the darkness.





Darkness thickens

Soon, Tanaleya was completely lost in reality. She spoke with the spirits of darkness, legions of evil forces, deceiving her mind and insisting on collaboration. Now, the names of demons were more present in the rituals, and the trio of pseudo-disciples simply used and drained Tanaleya's lost soul's energy.

Diya couldn't just watch these monsters. Every morning before work, she walked in all black through monasteries and churches, trying to find strength to resist the evil. Imagine her surprise when she saw an image of the devil on one of the church's window. But the girl didn't give up. She lit candles, said prayers, performed cleansing and protection rituals – anything to help her teacher return to the light.

Unexpectedly, Tanaleya quarreled with Alex, and everything began to crumble. Hatred flared in his chest, and he poisoned Ksenia and the old woman with his spiritual venom. A real battle raged on an invisible level, and Tanaleya once again sought solace in Diya's soul.

"I have never had a daughter," she said to the girl, "You are like my own child. I want us to always be together. Keep growing in strength. I want you to replace me in rituals and divinations, take clients independently and become a





full-fledged true witch.

"But I can't do readings for money. When I get paid, I feel trapped and obligated to satisfy the client. I don't feel like I'm helping them, and it troubles my conscience!"

"Money is a means of survival, and we need it to pay for the apartment where you will live. Just don't think about it and disconnect; focus on helping the person and your craft, and let the payment be their gratitude."

"What apartment?" Diya interjected, "Are we leaving?!"

"Yes, it's not safe here anymore, and it's inconvenient. In the apartment we can set up a full-fledged house of esoteric services that won't need to be abandoned, and clients will feel much cozier than in a basement office space."

"Alright," Diya replied briefly, continuing to maintain her opinion of not wanting to use magical abilities for selfish purposes.

Meanwhile, the tension between the trio of students and Tanaleya was growing. Diya didn't know what her mentor had done to offend them, but she suspected it might be Tanaleya's refusal to go along with them in their scheme.

One day, Tanaleya informed Diya that she wouldn't be able to show up at the esoteric salon until after noon. Therefore, Diya had to start working with the parishioners on her own in the early morning. Some simply inquired about the





services and prices; others wanted her to look their fate on the cards; and some begged for rituals, love spells and curse removals, all of which Diya categorically refused to perform. As the calm finally settled closer to afternoon, Diya relaxed. Tanaleya was expected any minute, but instead, Ksenia burst into the room with her pathetic allies.

"We want payback!" the old woman shouted.

Diya sat silently at the table and calmly raised an eyebrow, observing the outburst of fury. Their indifference only seemed to enrage them further.

"Where is she?!" Ksenia yelled, approaching the table and knocking over the candelabrum.

"She will come soon," Diya replied calmly, with a slight smile.

"You're nobody here to be smiling!" the gypsy continued to scream, almost getting into a fight.

"Yes, of course," Diya replied unwaveringly, looking her straight in the eye.

Perhaps the girl didn't know much about this life, but she could confidently say that it was pointless to talk to the nastiness. Diya was even a little amused by this circus. Bursting in like a herd of cattle and shouting as if they were powerless, narrow-minded creatures – such a sight was definitely not for the faint-hearted.





"Tell your Tanaleya that we'll settle this score later!" Alex said, approaching Diya with hatred in his eyes.

"Are you making threats? Well, well..."

"You!" he growled, clenching his fists.

"Alex!" Ksenia interjected frightened, grabbing his hand. "Let's go! Take this from her!" she said, pointing to Tanaleya's memo book on the table. "The witch will come crawling to us herself!"

The gypsy, the old woman and the demon once again looked at Diya and then loudly slammed the door behind them. Diya stood up from the table and picked up the candlestick...

Immediately, almost instantaneously, the agitated Tanaleya entered the room.

"What happened?"

Diya became wary. How did she guess that something had happened? Did Tanaleya know about their arrival and simply wait to avoid confrontation, setting Diya up to take the fall?

"A trio came by to settle a score with you. They took the memo book from the table. Am I missing something?"

"I broke up with Alex, and he didn't take it well. Then that old woman added fuel to the fire – spread rumors about my charlatanism, so Ksenia stopped talking to me."

"So you befriended a gypsy?"

"Ksenia called me. She wants us to work together, but





she's emotionally unstable," Tanaleya paused. "Hold on! Are you saying the notebook was taken? There was money inside!"

"I don't know anything about the money."

"No, no. I was always hiding money in there! I'm going to the police tomorrow – let them arrest Alex! You know there was money in there! I will need your statement! We'll temporarily close the magic salon."

Diya stared at Tanaleya, as if she were rooted to the spot. What happened to her teacher? She was delirious and burned with hatred just like those three. Could Diya have been wrong about her? No! She decided not to lie, especially when the consequences were personal.

"I need to step out until the end of the day," Diya said.

"Go, go. I'll call you and tell you where to meet."

Tanaleya waved her hand, obsessively plotting the course of her imminent revenge in her mind.

The girl's heels clicked on the sidewalk; her long black skirt fluttered in the wind, which tangled her loose, thick hair. Diya smelled of magic, otherworldly and ethereal, and keenly felt the emptiness, because she had just been pulled into a pitiful human adventure.

She slowed her pace, not knowing where to go, and just walked, hoping that the city of Arkon would show her the way.





Time for silence

Cemetery... it's always quiet here, and only black crows with a barely noticeable purple shimmer fill this place with a mysterious and captivating meaning.

Autumn has come, and the faithful companion wind has not left Diya's side. The story with Tanaleya had faded on its own, leaving the girl to live a normal life as much as possible. Diya continued to light candles every evening, laying out tarot cards. Sometimes strangers came to her to learn about the future, and sometimes they asked for help and rituals.

It was funny how rumors spread among the people, and suddenly she became the person in the neighborhood that everyone for some reason wanted to communicate, despite the fact that this modest girl was just seeking inner peace and a place for contemplation.

That's exactly how her habit of going to the cemetery on weekends began. In Arkon, she had visited them all, reading strange stone slabs and examining the dreary crosses overgrown with weeds. Here, time stood still and gained a sense of otherworldliness.

On another windy and chilly day, Diya put on her jeans, a fitted leather jacket and, tying her hair in a high ponytail, stepped out onto the street. Nautilus was playing loudly in her





headphones, and there were a few people at the trolleybus stop. Boarding the transport, she rode to the final stop and, getting off quickly, headed towards the cemetery.

It was the outskirts of the city. The rusty, low-carved cemetery gates were chained. Such places were even better because they didn't foretell visitors. Making sure no one was around, the girl climbed over the gates and strolled into the depths of the dead field with graves, feeling a sense of comfort and release. Finding an unsightly bench made of flat planks, Diya lay down on it, tucked her hands in her pockets and simply looked up at the gray overcast sky.

She didn't want to think about anything earthly or material. Here she was just resting. She felt like she was understood. Probably because some of the dead were seeking answers, just like her... because her soul felt empty and cold, just like the ghosts. But no one disturbed each other. Diya was here for herself; she was a lost soul, searching for something very important...

*The crows' cry is heard – no one around,
Come to me, the one dearest I haven't found.*

*Who are you? I call to you through the mist of ages.
I'm here! Reach out to me from dreams and pages...*

