

When One Door Closes

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Chapter One

Roarke slammed the door on yet another group of shiny faces, princess dresses and Pokémon costumes. Hearing his creaking gate close, he flipped off the porch light and hurried through to the back of the house; tugging the plastic fangs from his teeth, and shrugging off the voluminous cape. Fortunately, his remote location meant he didn't get a lot of trick-or-treaters; having to smile, or growl and flash his fangs as the case may be for the past three hours had drained his energies.

And he needed it; his energy. Because tonight was an important night. Ignoring the slight pang in his heart, Roarke's eyes scanned the kitchen table. Everything he needed was there; the flowers and fruit for the altar; his picnic basket filled with his meal to honor the dead. The photo the only glaring difference to his preparations in years past...*No, now is not the time.* He wondered if he should shower. Roarke often magicked himself clean, simply because it was the quickest and easiest way of doing things. But tonight was too important. *I must be cleansed inside and out. Anything less would be disrespectful.*

Tugging at his shirt, Roarke headed to his bathroom; the solitary toothbrush on his double vanity top a silent mockery of how barren his life had become. Throwing his clothes into the hamper, he stepped up to the mirror, running his hand over his bristly chin. *Definitely need a shave.* Running warm water into the basin he used, Roarke fished about in the cabinet for shaving cream; rubbing it over the bristles, his eyes noting how gaunt his face was. Green eyes, dull; a straight nose despite its many breakages, and full mouth. Charlie once claimed he loved his mouth....

Slicing his razor through the foam with ruthless efficiency, Roarke finished shaving before taking off his glasses and setting them on the counter. He splashed his face, and then pulled the plug in the sink, giving it a rinse. Stepping under the shower, he focused on the night ahead.

Samhain. The night when the veil between the living and the other side dropped, and spirits walked the earth. As a solitary warlock, it was Roarke's favorite time of year. A time to give thanks for the harvest and to honor those who no longer stood in flesh beside him. Not that Roarke interacted with people much; at least not on a social basis. His little house saw a steady stream of visitors despite its remote location. His neighbors were a superstitious lot and sought protection charms, love spells and the healing potions Roarke offered. He was well set for the winter chill.

Ignoring the way his mind teased him with images of winters past, Roarke rinsed the shampoo from his hair, and stepped from the shower, a simple spell warming his towel. Dropping it into the hamper, he picked up his glasses, straightening them over his face as he strode into the bedroom.

It's not something you have to get dressed up for – no one will see.

Tonight is special, he argued with himself. He opened the closet, reaching through the racks of suits, jeans and shirts until his hand rested on a velvety warmth. His ceremonial robe. *I haven't worn this since Charlie...* Ruthlessly squashing his fears, Roarke slipped the robe over his naked body, memories flooding back. The garment was custom made and as comfortable as his skin.

This is my birthright, he reminded himself as he stroked the deep burgundy velvet; sigils and wards etched in fine gold around the cuffs, collar and hem. In the hallway his clock chimed once. Ten thirty. It was time.

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Roarke didn't want to eat, but it was an essential part of the ritual. His altar was decked out with candles lit at each compass point, flowers in a small vase, some ribbons and bright red apples framing a beaten metal bowl. He was sitting to the side, his meal laid out on his picnic table, a solitary lamp casting shadows on the three place settings; his, Charlies, and one for those who had passed

with no one to honor them. Roarke always considered himself a kindred spirit to those who'd passed unnoticed. It wasn't as though anyone would care if he left the mortal world. The air was still, chilly, as though the world held its breath waiting for something. Roarke felt a shiver run across his neck, and he snuggled deeper into his robe.

Crumbling the last of his bread and cheese, Roarke bowed to the chair for the unknown.

"Tonight we remember the fallen," he said softly. "Regardless of who you were in life, I will remember you, acknowledge you and know you watch from the other side. Your life had meaning, and while your passing may have been unnoticed, know that I am aware of you and honor you this night."

A sudden breeze rustled the trees behind the altar, and Roarke smiled, knowing he'd been heard. He stood; his chilled knees making him stagger for just a moment. Once he regained his balance, he took the plates and cups from the table and set them on a shelf above his altar.

"Tonight is a time of thanks. Those who hear me accept my offerings; the food and drink are symbols of my gratitude for the bountiful harvest. As winter draws close, may the wisdom of my ancestors keep me safe until we meet again."

Another breeze caused one of the cups to jangle against the plates. Roarke knew he wasn't alone, but he never expected to be. He took a deep breath. *Now for the hardest part.*

"Tonight is also a time for reflection," he said facing his altar. "The wheel of the year has come full circle and as we cycle into darkness, we rejoice, knowing that light will follow and soon enough it will be time to celebrate again."

He picked up the photograph hidden by the bowl, Charlie's arrogant face shining in the candlelight. He stroked his finger across the

page. "Oh, Charlie, if only..." he muttered. But now was not the time for regrets.

"It is time to move on," he said in a loud, clear voice, casting his words at the night sky. "It is time to let go of those who no longer meet our needs; those who've gone from our lives leaving nothing but destruction in their wake. It is time to forgive and to give thanks for the lessons learned. Go in peace."

Flicking fingers, Roarke watched as flames curled across the photo, Charlie's image blackening then distorting as the flames took hold. When he could no longer hold on, he dropped the flaming mess into the bowl watching as the last traces of Charlie's image disappeared.

"Goodbye Charlie," he whispered as the flames flickered and died, leaving nothing but blackened ash. He was surprised. He felt nothing; his heart thumped in its regular beat, his pulse steady. Taking another deep inhale, he picked up the ribbons; one white, one red and one black.

"White for life; I celebrate the life I have," he chanted as he plaited the three ribbons together. "Red for rebirth; I am open to opportunities to come my way. Black for death; for as all things live, so too will they die. It's time for change." He tied off the ribbons and dropped them into the bowl. "Blessed be." The ribbons flamed, threads of red, white and black smoke rising from the bowl, twined together as they disappeared into the night sky.

"Blessed be. Blessed be," Roarke repeated. He slumped over the altar for a moment, feeling strangely tired and yet as if a huge weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He snuffed out the candles and pressed his hands together, sketching a quick bow to the altar before stepping away. In the distance he could hear the town clock chiming. It was midnight. The witching hour. Perfect timing.

"You finally did it," a voice came from the shadows. "You have no idea how happy that makes me."

Chapter Two

"Who's there?" Roarke tried to see past the lamplight, but it was difficult with the glare reflecting from his glasses. "Who disrespects the rituals of my kind by spying on me?"

"No disrespect intended," the voice said, and Roarke thought he saw a dark shadow step away from the trees. "I merely watched, waited, as I have done these past five years for you to show some sign."

"Sign, what sign?" Roarke said, feeling vulnerable. He was wearing nothing under his robes, and his only weapon was his magic. "Show yourself, if your intentions are honorable. Show your face."

"Oh babe," the voice seemed to warm as it got closer. "I'm not sure you can call my intentions honorable, but I have waited a long time for this moment."

A figure stepped into the light and Roarke gasped. "Mahon. What are you doing here?" Mahon stepped closer and Roarke took a step back. The demon looked as rugged as ever; the lamp highlighting his chiseled cheekbones and strong chin. His blue eyes sparkled and Roarke felt his blood heat and his cock thicken under his robe.

"I told you. Five years I've waited for you to acknowledge your relationship with that abusive halfwit was over. Five years! And that's not to mention the countless fucking years I waited for you prior to that." Mahon's eyes took on a hard edge.

"I...er...I...I don't understand." Roarke knew Mahon; had known him since he was a kid. As a teenager his nightly trysts with his right hand were often spurred on by thoughts of what the demon could do with his body although he never mentioned those dreams to a living soul. Mahon worked closely with his dad for years, and Roarke had no idea how old the demon was. Mahon disappeared when Roarke was fifteen, and by the time he surfaced again, Roarke was in college, blinded by a new relationship with Charlie.

"You were always meant to be mine," Mahon insisted, stepping closer. Roarke felt the back of his thighs hit his picnic table. He had nowhere to go.

"You left," Roarke said, struggling to find his breath. Mahon's presence always had that effect on him. He pushed his glasses up his nose and raised his chin. "You never gave any indication you wanted anything to do with me. I was just a geeky kid you couldn't stand to have around."

"Never geeky, not to me," Mahon promised. He was standing so close Roarke could feel his body heat and he was grateful for the bulk of his robe. "I had to leave," Mahon's voice got lower. "I had to leave because I could not trust myself to be around you, to control my urges. You were so young, just coming into your powers. My gods," Mahon groaned, "you were everything I could ever hope for."

"I *was* everything you ever hoped for?" Roarke hated Mahon's use of past tense.

"You were, you are, you always will be." Mahon's long thick coat had opened, revealing a smooth skin Roarke's fingers itched to touch.

"Why didn't you ever say anything? Why didn't you tell me when you got back?" Roarke couldn't face the intensity of Mahon's face, and found his eyes riveted by the leather thong and amulet hanging from Mahon's neck.

"Because your precious Charlie warned me away. Told me you loved him, was going to let him claim you. Your father told me you had the right to choose; that simply because I felt that way didn't mean...." One inch. That was all that separated their bodies. Roarke yearned to lean forward, but Mahon's words put a chasm between them.

"Charlie warned you away?" Roarke felt the surge of anger that often accompanied thoughts of his ex. "And you let him?"

Roarke felt Mahon's exhale caress his hair. "I didn't know. Nobody knew what he was doing to you. Every time I heard from your father I expected news of the claiming announcement, telling myself I'd be happy for you if it fucking killed me. But time went on, then when your dad died...."

"You didn't come then," Roarke said. "You didn't come to the funeral, you didn't come afterwards, when Charlie left."

"I did." Roarke felt his chin lifted and he stared into eyes swirling with more emotions than he could count. "I did come. I was here when you let go of your father at Samhain five years ago. I've been here every time since, waiting."

"Why? Why now, why Samhain." Roarke jerked his head away, unwilling to admit to the tears in his eyes. "Five years I've been alone, thinking everyone had forsaken me. Five years I've never caught a whiff of your existence. Why now? Why didn't you come at Beltane, Yule or Mabon?"

"Because magic is your life," Mahon said gravely. "It's how you process things; your rituals are a gauge of your feelings. I've been here; been here for every one. Every time you've stood in this garden, made your offerings and communed with your ancestors I've been here. Waiting for some sign that you were finally over Charlie and ready to move on."

"Don't you think I might've moved on a little faster if I knew I had someone worth letting go for?" Roarke didn't know if Mahon had that much power over him, but now he'd never know. Mahon never let his presence be known and Roarke had coped alone with only his spirit guides for company.

"You weren't ready," Mahon said. "Life, love, it's all a cycle. I had to trust you'd let him go eventually." He looked over to where the metal bowl sat on Roarke's altar. "And now you have. You've let him go, and your heart is willing to embrace new opportunities. I couldn't have asked for more."

Roarke looked over to the altar with its offerings and stubbed out candles. He knew, come morning, the offerings would be gone, the metal bowl would be empty. Charlie's photo was the last remaining token of the four years they'd spent together. He shook his head slightly. He'd spent more time grieving than they'd been together and now, it would seem, he had an opportunity for so much more. It was all there, standing right in front of him. He just needed the courage to grab it.

"It's getting cold," he said, "and I still have my window candle to light. You want to come into the house for coffee?"

Chapter Three

Roarke turned from the window; the single white candle he'd lit a beacon for lost souls. A simple spell ensured it would burn until sunrise when hopefully all those who'd crossed from the other side, would find their way home again. Officially Samhain didn't finish until the following sunset, but Roarke had done all he felt compelled to do for the festival.

Mahon was making coffee; a curiously domestic task Roarke never associated with demon kind. Engrossed as he was, in finding cups and waiting for the coffee to brew, Roarke had an opportunity to study the man who'd been such a strong fixture in his younger life.

On the outside, nothing had changed. The demon discarded his coat and boots at the door, and strode around the kitchen clad only in black jeans that covered strong thighs and long calf muscles. His dark hair was tousled and a few weeks overdue for cutting. His stubble was a slim line that emphasized the strength of his jawline. Roarke always remembered Mahon's eyes as being his most striking feature, but almost ten years on, he was fixated with the demon's lips. Full, with an elegantly shaped top lip, Roarke couldn't help but wonder how they'd feel on his skin.

"Where did you want to sit?" Mahon asked, holding up the two cups.

"The couch," Roarke said after a moment's pause. It was probably politer to sit at the table, but Roarke found himself longing to share Mahon's heat. He looked down at his robes. "I...I should probably get changed?"

"You asking me?" Mahon grinned. "I think you look stunning the way you are."

"Roarke felt his cheeks flush. There was nothing stunning about him. He was well aware of his gangly body, thin build and unremarkable face framed with thick black-rimmed glasses. He walked over to the couch, sitting as close as he dared without

seeming too forward. He'd never been bold or flirtatious; but in the darker recesses of his mind, he wished this was one those times when he was.

The two men sat in silence for a while. Roarke was adjusting to having someone in his space; someone who wasn't making demands on him. He didn't know what Mahon was doing; probably regretting accepting the invitation to coffee. His mind roved over the things Mahon said in the garden. Could it be true? Had Mahon really been waiting for him all this time?

"Why you didn't allow Charlie to claim you?" Mahon's sudden question broke the silence.

"He didn't ask."

"But he...."

"Said all the right things initially. Got into my pants; stole my work; convinced me I was nothing more than a clingy weak idiot who needed to man up, and then dumped me." Roarke didn't want to talk about his ex. He'd gone through the ritual for a reason. He leaned his head on the back of the couch, keeping his eyes closed.

"And since then?" Roarke turned his head and opened his eyes to find Mahon studying him intently.

"Have you been with others since then? Intimately."

Roarke went back to studying the ceiling. "Nope. Seems skinny geeks with more magic than they can handle don't attract guys interested in sex. Face it. Even Charlie couldn't be bothered with me for the last half of our relationship. Not in that way."

"You guys were living together." Mahon sounded surprised.

"He got his jollies elsewhere," Roarke said as dismissively as possible. "Apparently I was supposed to be grateful he didn't bring them home and screw them in front of me."

Mahon swore under his breath and then said, "So all this time, there's been no one?"

"No!" Roarke felt the heat of his anger hit his face. He sat up and put his coffee mug on the table. "I really don't want to talk about this. If you insist on performing a postmortem on a toxic relationship I'm well and truly over and my subsequent lack of them since, you can sit there and talk to yourself. I'm going to bed."

"I think that's the best idea you've had all evening," Mahon said, and his cup joined Roarke's on the table. "But first," he added, "I really want to do this."

'This' involved firm hands – one around his waist and one cupping his neck; coffee-scented breath and a mouth pressed on his, designed to drive Roarke insane. It had been so long; Roarke couldn't remember the last time someone touched him. He moaned under the onslaught; turning and straddling Mahon's thighs, pressing closer, his whole body tingling for more.

Mahon's hand dropped to his now naked thigh, his robe pushed up by his actions. "Are you wearing *anything* under this robe?"

"You ask a hell of a lot of questions," Roarke said, frustrated their kisses were interrupted. "Why don't you find out?"

The demon didn't need any more encouragement. Roarke shivered as a hot hand ran up his thigh, cupping his butt cheek under his robe. Like a brand, it seared Roarke's skin, and he arched into the touch. "Please," he begged between kisses, not entirely sure what he was asking for, but knowing he needed more.

"Bedroom." Mahon stood, holding Roarke's weight with ease. "Point me in the right direction before I do something sacrilegious to this robe."

Roarke barely had time to mumble, "down the hall, first door on the right," before he was carried at a speed that could only be

described as supernatural. He couldn't remember a time when anyone had carried him, and he knew there was some significance there, but he'd worry about it later. At the moment there was hot skin under his lips; acres and acres of it, and Roarke was keen to explore.

"Get out of that robe," Mahon said harshly as Roarke's feet found his bedroom floor. He wasted no time pulling the garment over his head, although, even in his lust, he couldn't just drop it on the carpet. It was Mahon who took it from him, carefully laying it over a chair.

"Fucking hell, you filled out nicely." Mahon's tone was as hot as his stare. Roarke forced himself not to blush and cover himself; standing tall. He wasn't a stammering teenager with his first crush anymore.

"You too," he said bravely. "It's only fair I should see what I've only imagined."

Mahon's grin widened. "Did your imagination cover this?" He quickly unsnapped his jeans and pushed them to the floor, before stepping out of them. Roarke's mouth went dry and he swallowed. Nope. Never in his wildest imagination could he have dreamed up a body so perfect and a cock that was so...substantial. Roarke gulped. Mahon came closer, invading his personal space, and all Roarke could see was muscles, upon muscles, upon muscles, covered with a sinfully hot skin.

"Touch me."

Roarke didn't need telling twice. His mind might be stuttering under the onslaught of Mahon's physical presence but his fingers had minds of their own. He brushed his hands up Mahon's chest, sweeping across his collarbones, tracing the tattoos entwined around Mahon's neck. The mark of a demon and as Mahon pulled him close, Roarke was extremely aware of Mahon's supernatural status. The heat was indescribable.

"You have no idea how many nights I've dreamed of this, longed for you," Mahon whispered against his skin. "Holding you like this is every dream I've ever had come true."

Roarke wanted to protest; to point out he'd never been worth anyone's dreams, but Mahon's touch added proof to his words. Every swipe of his hand was a caress, worshipping yet full of purpose. Roarke couldn't deny his body's response. He arched and moaned and when Mahon brushed against his cock, he'd thought he'd burst. His knees trembled and suddenly he found himself airborne again before the mattress molded around his spine.

Mahon loomed over him. "I have waited for you since the dawn of time." He leaned over, and Roarke felt a pinch and then glorious suction around his nipple. His mind was struggling to comprehend the meaning of Mahon's words but his brain couldn't function. Mahon was everywhere; miles of satiny skin, the scent of earthy male, and the deep rumbles that came from Mahon's chest as the demon found his cock and swallowed it.

Roarke cried out, his eyes tightly closed, his fists clenched in the covers, his hips straining upwards as he sought more of that delicious suction. He'd never...no one had ever...and by all that was holy it was the most sinfully decadent feeling he'd ever known. Within mere moments his balls were tightening and he cried out again, unwilling for the pleasure to end.

"I've got you," Mahon growled, his hair in more disarray than ever, saliva coating his lips. "Come for me, and I promise you, you'll come again before I'm finished."

Roarke didn't know whether to believe his demon or not, but he wasn't in a position to argue. He couldn't remember the last time he'd serviced himself, and any stray thoughts of his only other lover were blown to pieces as Mahon's mouth worked his cock. Slick heat, a strong tongue, the hint of teeth and then Mahon sunk down further and swallowed. The pressure on his cockhead more

than he could stand, Roarke thrust his hips blindly, screaming Mahon's name as he came.

Persistent fingers pierced his afterglow, the wetness coating them warming and relaxing his hole. Roarke spread his legs wide, and then lifted them, holding tight to his knees, giving Mahon more access. Pulling more wetness from his cock, Mahon coated Roarke's hole liberally. Roarke could feel his defense muscles loosening, and a wave of calm swept his soul.

"I knew it," and there was no way Mahon could hide his satisfaction. "Only my mate's body would respond to my fluids so perfectly."

Roarke didn't know what to make of Mahon's mate comment, but the lethargy that had deadened his limbs was being swept away by something more powerful. The urge to be filled; to feel Mahon's body covering his; to be pounded into so hard their bodies melded as one.

"Please," Roarke managed to get one word passed his lips. He didn't have the vocabulary, the ability to articulate what he needed, but he thrust up against Mahon's fingers, his body desperate for more. And Mahon didn't leave him hanging. Fingers were pulled out, and before Roarke had time to mourn the loss, Mahon's cock was pushing at his entrance.

"Breathe out," Mahon rumbled, and Roarke did, and boy was he glad that he did, because within seconds a steaming wet cock was invading his insides and it was freaking glorious. Roarke felt his body ripple around the intruder. There was no pain; none of the discomfort he'd felt in this position before.

"I have you," Mahon said, pushing home and leaning over Roarke's body. "I finally have *you*."

Roarke wrapped his arms around Mahon's neck, the tattoo twitching under his skin. Mahon's eyes were like sapphires and there was a half-grin on the rugged man's face. Joy. Passion. An

intense deep emotion Roarke could only guess. They were all there on the demon's face. "Move," he whispered. "Make me yours."

"You always were and one day you'll know it in your heart." Mahon looked as though he had so much more to say, but Roarke was fighting the demands of his body and it must've shown on his face. Propping himself on his elbows, Mahon bent his neck, his lips caressing Roarke's and then Roarke felt the length in his ass ripple against his insides as Mahon moved. And moved. And moved and pretty soon Roarke couldn't kiss back, his breath forced out in harsh gasps and all he could do was tighten his arms around Mahon's neck and hang on for the ride.

In four years with Charlie, Roarke never felt the passion, the depth of feeling that Mahon showed with every stroke of his cock. The pride, the sheer wonder etched on Mahon's harsh features warmed Roarke's heart, and as Mahon's ruthless strokes stuttered and Roarke could feel the man's cock swell inside of him he pushed up, awkwardly meeting the demon stroke for stroke.

"Will you?"

Roarke tilted his head, fangs piercing his skin as neatly as a doctor's needle. Moments later, Mahon nicked his own neck, pulling Roarke's head to the gash, and while Roarke would've panicked had he time to think, he sucked on the wound as was Mahon's intention, before falling back in a daze, dimly aware Mahon's spunk was trickling down his butt cheek.

He'd come again too. Roarke had the presence of mind to register that. But it was as though every vein in his body was filled with lava and his body was hot enough for flames. Roarke forced his eyes open, and sure enough they were; their bodies were totally enveloped in flames and yet it didn't burn. The coverlets were singe-free, there were no scorch marks on the ceiling. The flames were lit from their passion, slowly dying as his breathing returned to normal.

"How?" He asked, barely managing to get the word past his lips.

"A demon takes but one mate, my precious, and when he does the underworld joins in the celebration."

"Just as well I don't have smoke alarms," Roarke muttered, as darkness hit him.

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Mahon couldn't stop smiling. Twenty-seven years he'd waited for Roarke. Roarke's father summoned him almost twenty-seven years to the day; introducing him to a placid but beautiful baby. One look at that face and the demon lost his heart. Centuries old, Mahon learned the art of patience as he'd watched and waited, only leaving when the teenage Roarke tempted the iron-clad control on his lust.

But that was all in the past. Samhain was the time for change and while winter was approaching fast, Mahon would ensure Roarke would never feel the cold. He had no intention of ever leaving Roarke's side again. Charlie's presence, the only blip in Mahon's plans for his mate, was well and truly gone from every part of Roarke's life and as Mahon closed his eyes, he wondered if he could persuade Roarke to participate in Beltane sky-clad as the gods intended. It would definitely add some spice to the occasion.