

Anita's tale

By Julie Gouirand

JANUARY 1999

The two young necromancers had been waiting to speak with their contact at the new Chapel House for 45 minutes. The male sprawled across the black leather loveseat in the room where they waited, watching the woman, who stood across from him at the other end of the room, pacing and occasionally glancing at her watch.

“So this is where they send us. Of all the cities in the United States, they send us here, where three dirty rivers meet and bad beer and obnoxious accents abound...”

The woman stopped fidgeting and laughed heartily. “Oh, c’mon Chris, it’s not that bad. I mean, minus the Hellmouth. They have some really great libraries and museums here. Plus, it’s closer to your family in New York than St. Louis was...”

Christian flipped his thick hair out of his face. “Yeah, but Anita, your family lives *in* St. Louis...”

“And I wanted to get as far away from them as possible. You know my stepmother and I can’t coexist in the same space.”

“She just doesn’t understand you. You have to be patient with her.”

Anita snorted. “That’s easy for you to say. She adores you. So does my dad, for that matter. After Christmas this year, however, I think they’ve both had their fill of me for awhile. And I sure have had mine of them.”

Christian grinned. “Oh, but if they knew about the things I did behind closed doors with their daughter, they might change their minds about me.” He got up from the loveseat and walked over to stand in front of her, sliding his hands across her petite waist and caressing the small of her back as he leaned down to lay his mouth on hers. Her lips were as soft as silk, and her skin smelled faintly of Chanel No. 5.

Anita pushed him away, playful. “Cut it out, smartass. Let me manage to keep some semblance of professionalism, here.” She smoothed her hands over her ebony hair and ivory cashmere sweater. As she did so, the light overhead caught on the princess-cut diamond that rested on her left ring finger, and its many facets reflected sparkles that danced across her dark eyes.

He smiled as he gazed at her. “You’re so beautiful. Goddamn, Anita, I can’t believe you agreed to marry me.”

She smiled back at him. “Yeah, I know. What the hell was I thinking?”

The door at the end of the small hallway adjacent to the waiting area opened and a large, bald African-American man stepped out and began towards them. His hands were folded in front of him and brushed against the intricate brocade and velvet that adorned his dark robes. When he reached them, he gave a slight bow, before raising his head to meet their gazes with eyes that burned fiery with power. A small smile curved along his lips.

“Mr. Jamison, Miss Blake. Welcome to Pittsburgh.”

MAY 1999

Anita could hardly believe that she was looking at her own reflection in the mirror in front of her. Her creamy gown fit perfectly and elegantly flowed around her. It was a very simple wedding dress, but it suited her. Her cheeks held a rare, healthy glow and her eyes seemed full of light. Beside her, her closest friend, Veronica, had tears running down her face, but she was smiling and laughing as she threw her arms around Anita's shoulders.

“Anita, I can't believe you're getting married! You're the most beautiful bride I've ever seen!”

Anita smiled at her in the mirror as she reached up and squeezed her friend's hand. “Thanks, babe. It means a lot that you came up for the last fitting, Ronnie. I'm sure you have plenty of work back in St. Louis.”

Ronnie was a private investigator, like Anita, who did consultation work for the SLPD and one of the few people who knew what Anita was truly capable of. They had met in college at the University of St. Louis as first-year roommates. Ronnie hadn't had a problem with Anita's knack for occasionally raising dead things, which sometimes decided to wander over the dorm after waking up, so they'd become fast friends and Ronnie became Anita's only confidant.

When Anita told Ronnie that the Twilight Order, a secret society of necromancers and seers who specialized in investigating and handling supernatural goings-on, had extended an invitation to Anita to join their collective shortly before their graduation, she had encouraged her to accept, hoping that Anita might find some comfort in meeting others who were like her. She often seemed sad about who she was, ashamed of her abilities.

Anita's mother had died in a car accident when she was 8. Her maternal grandmother, a practitioner of voodoo, decided to teach her granddaughter how to control herself after Anita raised the beloved family dog from its backyard grave at the tender age of 13. Her father remarried when Anita was 16, and her new stepmother, Judith, wanted nothing to hear about her stepdaughter being able to raise corpses from the dead and talk to spirits. Likewise, as a staunch Catholic she wouldn't abide Anita's magical teachings, despite Grandmother Flores' support of Anita's Christendom.

Despite her best attempts to make friends, the other children at her school found her bizarre. Her father was often preoccupied with work and placating his new wife, who was demanding and difficult, and had little time for his daughter, who quietly slipped into solitude. Things had remained much the same for her throughout middle and high school, up until college.

When Anita brought Christian to Ronnie's birthday party shortly after joining the Twilight Order, Ronnie had been thrilled that it seemed that her dear, quirky friend was finally finding her niche and had found a friend who could understand her.

A powerful necromancer in his own right, Christian was assigned by the Order to train Anita as an agent after she accepted the invitation to join their ranks. He taught Anita about her powers and how to master them, showed her how to use her gifts to help others. Incredibly bright, witty, and stubborn, Chris slowly brought Anita out of the shell she had buried herself inside since the death of her mother, and the two quickly became very close. He soon realized that he was falling madly in love with his charge. Six months after they were assigned to work together by the Order, Christian asked Anita to be his wife, and the two made plans to be married on June 22, 1999, the summer solstice and a day of great power.

As they celebrated their engagement at Christmastime that year with Anita's family, a mandate came down from the Pontifex, the council that oversaw the dealings of the Order, that the two necromancers were to be transferred to a new Chapel House that was opening in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in order to

address the increasing supernatural activity in that area resulting from a Hellmouth that lay underneath the junction of the Allegheny, Ohio, and Monongahela rivers at the center of the city.

“I’m so happy for you. Chris is great.”

Anita smiled. “Yeah, he is.” She fought back the rising terror in the pit of her stomach.

Ronnie noticed her friend’s anxiety. “What’s wrong sweetheart?”

Anita shook it off. “Oh, it’s nothing. I just get scared sometimes, you know. Like that something might happen to him. Like my mom...”

Ronnie hugged her friend’s shoulders again and smiled. “Chris is strong, Anita. He can take care of himself. And now he can take care of you too.”

Anita returned the smile. The fear remained in her stomach, a dull, throbbing ache. She knew it would not go away, no matter how much she wished it.

JUNE 21, 1999, 1:30 AM

The ring of the telephone jerked Anita from well-deserved sleep. She rubbed her eyes and glanced at the clock. Who the hell was calling them at 1:30 in the morning, one day before their wedding? Chris’ arm reached over her to grab the phone that lay on the nightstand beside her.

“Yeah?” he mumbled into the phone. His eyes focused and he seemed to snap to attention as he listened.

“I understand,” he said after a few silent seconds. “We’ll be right there.” He hung up the phone, flew out of bed, and pulled his pants over his legs.

“Who the heck was that?”

“There’s a problem downtown. We gotta go. Get dressed.”

“What is it?”

“Get dressed,” he repeated, “Quickly.” He pulled his shirt on and buttoned it up.

JUNE 21, 1999, 4:30 AM

It was bad. Seven necromancers had responded to the emergency call and three were slain, their minds and bodies broken by the demonic assault. Green electricity crackled from underneath the stone seal that lay over the opening to the Hellmouth. The air around them was thick with energy, restless and angry spirits all around them.

Anita wanted to vomit when she heard Chris’s gasp. She forced herself to turn around. Sheer horror overwhelmed her: the face was the same, but the eyes that gazed back at her were distinctly *not* those of her fiancé. His mouth split into a twisted grin and he cackled maniacally in a voice that was not his own.

Anita leveled her gun, closed her eyes, and pulled the trigger. She was a good shot, and knew the hit wasn’t fatal, but even still her stomach was in knots and the gunshot rang in her ears as his shoulder erupted in gore. He stumbled backwards, knees buckling, and fell to the ground. She rushed to kneel beside him in the damp grass.

Spirits don’t like being in a body that’s injured. Anita could hear his lesson echo in her head. If a medium is injured while hosting a spirit, they will leave and attempt to find a new host.

Shock slammed into her chest like a fist as she rolled him over. When she saw his face, her entire world ended in that moment.

His eyes were open, the light gone from them. His jaw was slack, his mouth open. Dark blood slowly dripped out of his nose and ears, running onto the ground.

It took Anita a good while to realize the high, keening shrieks that pierced the night were coming from her. She gathered her fiancé in her arms and screamed until she had no voice left, until her body and mind passed into darkness from exhaustion. His heart was silent.

She woke the next day in the hospital. Her father, tears shining in his eyes, grasped her hand.

“Baby...”

The voice that came out of her was a little girl’s, not her own.

“Daddy? Where’s Chris? What time is it? They’ll be waiting for us...”

He sighed, his voice caught in his throat as he cupped his daughter’s pale cheeks in his hands. Nothing would make this easier.

“Baby, Chris is dead. He had an aneurism, in his brain. They couldn’t save him.”

She stared blankly at her father.

“His family is here, in the waiting area. We’re going to go down to the church in a few minutes and let the rest of the guests know. Anita, I’m so sorry...”

She began to scream, tears pouring down her cheeks. Her screams brought the nurses running into her room. Frank Blake fiercely hugged his daughter as they slid a needle into her arm and her eyes began to swirl as the sedation once again took effect. She went limp in his arms, her mind tumbling through nightmare after nightmare.

JUNE 24, 1999

Anita gazed at her reflection in the mirror of her vanity. Boxes were scattered everywhere around her. Some had “CHRIS” emblazoned on them, written in big, black letters. His parents would be by later to get them.

His service had been beautiful. The white lilies that had been meant to celebrate their marriage were scattered everywhere in mourning. So many people had loved Chris and had come to pay their respects. A good number of people from their covenant had been there, scattered about the masses. Many stood up to say words about him, what his friendship had meant, how much he had loved Anita... She felt the seeping numbness flowing through her as hands reached out to touch her, words of consolation were murmured into her ears.

She waited patiently until everyone had gone, heading for the reception hall to eat and try to process this tragedy. She closed her eyes and reached out to him with her power, just as he had taught her to do.

There was nothing. She fell to her knees and wept as the grief descended on her in full force.

FEBRUARY 2001

“Hello?”

“Anita, is that you? It’s Rupert Giles...we met at the conference in London last fall...”

“When I was approached to join the Council, I remember. How are you?”

“Good, good. I’m glad I reached you. Something’s happened; the Council asked me to get in touch with you.”

“What is it?”

“It appears another Slayer has been activated.”

“My God, is Buffy—”

“Buffy is fine. It seems that Faith flatlined while in her coma. Just for a few seconds, but apparently it was long enough.”

“Good news that Buffy’s okay. What does this new Slayer have to do with me?”

“She’s in Pittsburgh. Parents are both dead. Her father apparently suffered a psychotic break. He killed her mother, then himself, and the girl found them. She’s been in the hospital for a few weeks.”

“Dear God.”

“Yes. Very sad. She was psychotic, but she’s stabilized now. She should be getting discharged at the end of the week. The council wants you to train her when she gets out. I know you’re new, but you’re the only Watcher in that area at the moment.”

“What’s her name?”

“Katrina Donovan. Goes by Kat. She’s 16. CYF in Pittsburgh should be contacting you regarding obtaining temporary guardianship of her later this afternoon. She has no other family, so she’ll have to live with you. You’ll have to go through their foster parent training and then apply for permanent custody.”

“I understand. Not an issue.”

“Good. Let the council know if you require any assistance.”

“Thanks.”

She sighed as she hung up the phone.

What the hell am I getting myself into?

MAY 2003

The battle raged all around; the Sisters of Jhe had John and Drake cornered, and Drake, their second most powerful warrior next to Kat, had suddenly dropped unconscious. John was alone. Anita turned to Walter, and watched in horror as the man shouted an epithet at the demons, then disemboweled himself with his long-bladed knife. He was dead before he hit the ground, his blood spilling into the Hellmouth.

The blood of a hero. The blood of a hero and—oh, Gods, no...

The soul of a Slayer.

She saw it in Kat’s eyes, as her Slayer turned to the Hellmouth and looked into its welling blackness.

“Kat! Wait! Don’t, please!”

The girl turned, her black hair swirling around her, her face illuminated by the light from the portal at her feet. She smiled at her mother, and a kind of understanding shown in her face.

“Thank you.” Anita could not hear the words, but saw them form on her lips.

“Kat!”

The girl ran at the gateway and leapt into it. An explosive wave of energy rocked the ground, knocking them from their feet.

The rest of the battle was a blur. Drake had woken up, changed, and saved John. Nyarlathotep, who they presumed was the djinn they'd been battling all along, had escaped from the Hellmouth. But the portal was closed, thanks to the tragic sacrifice of two great heroes.

When it was over, they'd found Walter's body on top of the seal. Kat was gone, though, and the seal lay quiet. Anita knelt down, touched her fingers to the cold stone.

A horrible emptiness consumed her.

She's gone. Forever.

The ringing of police sirens sounded in the distance.

John offered her his hand. "Anita, time to go."

JUNE 2003

It was a hot and lazy day at the Hive Arcana. A few regular customers were scattered about upstairs, sipping iced mochas and poring through books and newspapers. A few hippie-ish, college-aged girls were poking around, smelling the scented oils and asking about the properties of various kinds of incense. Anita answered them without even looking up from the book she was reading. She sipped her coffee and let her mind slip totally into its pages, so completely engrossed that she didn't even notice the customer place books on the counter in front of her to be rung up. When he cleared his throat she jumped, almost knocking her coffee all over the text spread out in her hands.

"Oh, God, I'm sorry," she stammered, "Was that all you needed? I'm such a space cadet today." She rubbed her forehead and eyes with her fingers.

He smiled as she struggled to collect herself.

"It's completely understandable," his rich voice rung out with the sophisticated lilt of the British Isles. "You were enjoying your book and I interrupted you. How terribly rude of me."

It was Anita's turn to smile as she recovered her composure and met his gaze. He was gorgeous. Striking dark eyes with long lashes met her own and an amused smile danced across his lips. His chocolate-brown locks tumbled just past his shoulders, framing his face. He continued to smile as his eyes darted to the cover of the book she had closed and set aside to give him her full attention. One dark brow rose as he read its title.

"*Group Sex Magic and Other Dark Cult Practices*. Not exactly what most would choose for casual reading," he murmured. His eyes came back to rest on her again and his handsome, teasing smile returned. "Sounds interesting."

Anita leaned forward, relaxing her arms on the counter.

"It's not Nora Roberts, that's for sure." She gave him her best smile and batted her eyelashes. He laughed and she grinned, picking up the books he'd laid on the counter and examining the backs to find the codes to punch into the computer. God, it felt like such a long time since she'd laughed at anything.

"It comes to...ninety-eight dollars even, after tax."

He reached in the pocket of his stylish jacket to produce a leather wallet and pulled out a platinum credit card. Anita glanced at the name as she ran it through the machine. She wrapped his books in paper and placed them in a shopping bag while he signed the receipt. Anita noticed with interest that his signature included 'Dr.' in front of his name and the Roman numeral for three after it. Fancy.

“Doctor, huh? Scientific types usually balk at anything suggesting the existence of the supernatural. Do you work at one of the hospitals?”

He smiled again and took a brief moment to gaze at her beautiful but weary face before answering her question.

“Not that sort of doctor. I teach at Carnegie Mellon.”

“Ah. What do you teach?”

“I’m in the religious studies department there. My interest and expertise is in ancient religions.”

“Wow. Don’t I feel stupid?” She stifled a nervous laugh. “Well, I have a few, um...rarer texts, so if there’s anything you ever need, let me know and I might be able to find it for you.” *Always good to make connections*, she thought. *Never know when they will come in handy.*

She offered him her hand. “I’m Anita, by the way. Anita Blake.”

He took her hand and shook it.

“Alan Collins. It’s my pleasure to make your acquaintance. I take it then that you’re the Anita Blake of Blake Investigations?” He nodded his head towards her office across the room.

“Yep. That’d be me.”

He smiled. “A colleague of mine was telling me about your practice just the other day. I’ve never heard of a private investigator that specializes in cases relating to the occult and the supernatural before. Very intriguing.”

“Yeah, well, like I said, I’m one of a kind.” She returned his smile, but there was a trace of sadness in her eyes. Recent grief. Daniel had told Alan that she was a Watcher, the guardian of the young Slayer who had recently sacrificed herself to close the Hellmouth.

He debated with himself, then cleared his throat.

“Could I buy you a cup of coffee sometime? I mean, ehm, you probably get all the coffee you want here, but...ehm...”

He stammered and the air of confidence that had surrounded him wavered, his shyness revealed. It was really cute. He was really cute. And also Gifted, Anita noticed as an afterthought. *Interesting...*

“I never pass up an offer for free coffee. Let me give you my number.”

He remained patient as she frantically looked around the counter’s drawers and shelves for one of her business cards. She found one after some tossing and jotted her cell phone number below the printed number for her office line with the pen he had used to sign his charge slip. He tucked her card into his wallet and his mischievous smile returned.

“Enjoy your book. You’ll have to tell me all the details when we meet.” And with that, he winked at her before turning and strolling out and downstairs. Anita was so focused on watching him leave that she didn’t notice Dana slide behind the counter and come to stand beside her.

“He’s cute. New client?” Dana picked up his receipt and glanced at it before sliding it into the cash drawer with the others.

Anita smiled to herself. “No, not quite...”

“I think he’s friends with Daniel, you know, Jamie’s boyfriend. I’ve seen him in here before.”

“Jamie?”

“The girl I hired as an assistant so you and I could get some days off, remember? Anyways, he’s a Rosicrucian, Daniel.”

Interesting...

MARCH, 2005

Rain poured down outside and thunder pounded, rattling the windows. The room was dark except for the occasional flash of lightening and the pale flickering of tea lights adorning the crumbling mantle.

Anita fought to breath as his tender mouth claimed her own, trailed down her neck. His hands lightly traced along her body, exploring her. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, he slid his body upward to entwine with hers. She felt herself approaching release, heard her voice cry out his name as the heat consumed her. She felt his ragged breath on her neck, heard him gasp as it hit them both simultaneously. Her face tingled from the rush, her heart hammering in her chest. She felt completely relaxed, like she was floating through space. He held her in silence in the following calm.

Tears welled up in her eyes and she closed them tight. *What the hell am I doing?! This isn’t supposed to happen. I swore after Chris died, I swore no more of this. Everyone I let get close to me ends up dead.* Guilt seeped through her and her stomach felt tight with familiar panic.

You’ve been seeing him for two years, Anita, her mind whispered in response. *This was going to happen sooner or later.*

She felt his fingers gently brush her damp hair away from her face and neck, sweeping it out onto the pillow beneath them.

“Anita?” he murmured.

She forced the emotions back, put them away deep inside of her as she opened her eyes to look at him. The flickering candles were a thousand stars reflected around the room and across his face. Thunder rumbled in the distance, outside. The smell of rain wafted in through the cracked window next to them.

He pressed his lips against hers, pulled her closer to him.

“I love you.” He closed his eyes and smiled as sleep began to pull him under.

She waited until she thought he was dreaming.

“I love you too, Alan,” she whispered before she gave herself to the dreams as well.

* * *

The voice woke him from sleep a few hours later, as it usually did. Quietly, he slipped from the bed’s silken sheets and treaded with gentle steps into the tiny kitchen, heating water to a boil on the old, gas stovetop and pouring it over golden leaves. He brought his tea into the living room, sinking onto the velvet, plush loveseat. The storm continued to rage outside. From here he could watch her, sleeping in his bed. She lay still, peaceful. He raised the cup to his lips, silent in the dark.

The voice purred in his head.

How sweet. She could be of great use to me...could help our plans...

Alan inhaled the fragrant scents of chamomile and lemon.

“She’s special. I don’t want her harmed.”

The voice in his mind growled.

Do you doubt me now, after all I have shown and given to you?

“No.”

She is...significant to you?

He sighed, irritated by the questions. He wanted to sleep. “Yes.”

She trusts you?

He paused, then nodded.

She will have a very important part to play. She will be the vessel from which the new reality shall be born and recognized. Her place shall be above all other women. She is the Dark Mother.

“I understand,” he murmured, sipping his tea.

You will do what must be done, then?

An icy chill ran through him. He shuddered. He could sense the Taint inside his body, seducing his mind. It was an extraordinary high. His eyes narrowed.

“Through you, we shall all be reborn. Through her, you will come to save us.”

Yes...the voice purred once more, before finally leaving him.

Alan put the tea down and gazed down at his left palm, running his fingers across the skin. A scarlet circle with curved horns. The tattoo always appeared when the voice came. He closed his eyes. The mark slowly faded.

Opening his eyes, he rose and returned to the bed where she lay. He slid across the smooth sheets, wrapping his arms around her, pulling her closer to him. He curled himself against her, buried his face in her hair, and let sleep claim him once more.

APRIL, 2005

The musky incense swam in her head, making her dizzy. She was naked. Icy air was passing over her skin. Red flickering lights wildly danced, and the sound of continuous chanting throbbed in her ears.

She tried to move, couldn't. Metal restraints cut into her wrists and ankles, warm blood trickled down.

The man in black was there again, leaning over her, sliding between her spread legs. He filled her with himself and the pain cut into her like a knife. His hands slid along her slender body as he pushed into her, caressing her. Terror and pleasure washed over her in constant waves, building...

Hot tears spilled down Anita's cheeks as she curled into a ball and began to whimper. Alan's eyes darted around as he pulled her into his lap, hugging her to him. The room smelled of antiseptic. He knew she hated hospitals. Not the best place for a medium to be. He felt sick to his stomach.

I can't take much more of this, he thought.

“It's going to be alright. You'll get through this.” He smoothed her hair away from her tearstained face and met her gaze.

“But what if it's true? What if I am pregnant? What am I going to do?” Fresh tears began their flow. She looked helpless, lost.

“You have...options, Anita. You're not alone in this. You have a choice.”

“Please don't leave me,” she begged him.

“I'll do whatever I can,” he lied.

Cyan looked over at them from her seat across the room. *He must really love her*, she thought. *He's taking such a risk, being here, with the Rosicrucians hunting him. I hope we can uncover this cult soon, so he can go back to his normal life.*

After what felt like an eternity, a medical student came into the waiting area. She pointed at the door she had come through to an exam room. "In there, please."

Alan waited till the door shut behind them, then looked at Cyan. She nodded in understanding.

"I'll call if she needs you."

Oakland reeked of alcohol, sex, and cigarettes. The nausea hit him again as he exited the hospital and stepped onto the street. He raced into the first alleyway he passed, braced himself against the wall, and threw up. He wiped his mouth with the back of his shaking hand.

The voice cackled with glee, echoing in his mind. It was pleased.

JUNE 2005

"I'm sorry you had to find those, Anita. You weren't ready for this revelation, yet."

Anita was as pale as death, as fragile as glass, like she could shatter at any moment. She held the ancient book, the very copy of the John Dee *Necronomicon* that had been stolen from the Rosicrucians over a year ago, the copy she herself had delivered to the Covenant and that Alan had told her their enemies had stolen, with shaking hands.

"Alan?" She trembled. "What are you doing with this?"

He's the Black Sorcerer. Her mind went numb, refused to acknowledge the horrible truth.

His dark eyes blazed. He smiled, taking the book from her and caressed her cheek with gentle fingers.

"Anita...you could join me."

"What?" She was confused, lost. "I don't understand. Why are you doing this?"

"Why not? The Djinn—Leviathan—has given me everything I ever wanted, and more. All you have to do is ask. He can give you anything you want, Anita. Anything."

Tears spilled from her eyes. "All I want is to be with you. Do I have to sell my soul for that, too?"

"I want to be with you, too. We can be together. Just accept Him and we can be. We can make the world what we want it to be. We can end the suffering. We can have anything we want."

He smiled at her. Her stomach twisted as she sensed the Taint emanating from him.

"Listen to me," she pleaded, "You're sick, baby. I can help you. Let's just get out of here. Forget about all of this. I can help you," she repeated. She put her pale, trembling hand on his chest, over his heart. His face darkened and a wave of fear crashed inside of her as she sensed his anger.

"Will you join me or not?" he growled.

"Alan, you know I can't do that. I'm sorry. Please, let me help you. Don't do this."

He sighed. "I had hoped that you would see things differently."

Even as she sensed the Taint building, she knew it was too late to get out of the way. Her head snapped back and she was lifted off the ground, smashed into the wall from the blast of Tainted energy he unleashed on her. She slumped over. He knelt down beside her broken body.

He's going to kill me.

She gazed into his eyes one last time as he leaned over her. He looked sad, conflicted.

“I really do love you,” he whispered, gripping her tiny wrists and binding them together. Blood dripped from her nose, mixing with her tears, staining her face.

“How could you do this to me?” she choked, then fell silent. He gathered her in his arms, and descended into the darkness below.

* * *

“Anita?”

She opened her eyes. She was shaking. It was pitch dark, cold. The strong smell of must and mildew filled her nostrils.

Is this Hell?

After a few moments, she realized where she was.

Alan’s tenement building. The basement.

She tried to move and realized she was chained to the furnace. Bastard.

“I’m so sorry, Anita,” the voice rang out again in the darkness. She realized it was Daniel, not Alan, speaking before the curse rolled out of her mouth.

He went on to tell her everything: that the Rosicrucians had suspected Alan was involved with Leviathan. Then he had disappeared months ago without a word. Daniel had been ordered to find him but had not been permitted to tell anyone of his mission.

“I knew you wouldn’t believe me, anyhow. I’m so sorry, Anita. He was my brother, my best friend. I loved him, too.”

I can stop him, she thought. He’s confused. Unsure. He could have killed me, but he didn’t. I have to figure out what he’s doing. What his plans are. I will stop him. I won’t lose him like I lost Chris. I won’t let him destroy this world, the world Kat sacrificed herself to protect.

The sounds of fighting erupted upstairs. She could hear shouting, familiar voices. Kay. John. Drake. If only Cyan hadn’t become a magic addict. If only she weren’t in England. If only she were here.

Then the distinct crash of something else echoed throughout the building, shaking its walls. Dust from the floors above fell down into her face.

“My God, Alan,” she murmured, as the sick sense of Taint filled her stomach again, “What have you done?”

A few minutes later, a shaft of light appeared as the door blasted off its hinges, and the familiar silhouette and voice of Drake ringing out in the darkness. “She’s down here! And Daniel!”

Anita fell back into herself and quietly waited for the world to end. Again.