Praise for the Sisters of Light and Shadow Duology

"*Spells, Strings, and Forgotten Things* is a sublimely atmospheric, starlit story about the power of magic, love, sisterhood, and memory, and the sacrifices they demand. If you love sentient grimoires, complex families and friendships, eerily magical forests, ancient altars, and simmering enemies-to-lovers romances—and the protective power of mismatched socks!—get ready to fall under Breanne Randall's gorgeous, ineffably charming spell."

—Lana Harper, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Payback's a Witch*

"Breanne Randall is a phenomenon!"

—Sarah Addison Allen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Other Birds* and *Garden Spells*

"Breanne Randall once again proves herself to be the queen of small-town magic that packs a huge emotional punch. *Spells, Strings, and Forgotten Things* is a feast of complex family dynamics, whimsical witchery, and the most irresistible romance with my new favorite shadow daddy. Absolutely enchanting from start to finish."

—Sydney J. Shields, *USA Today* bestselling author of *The Honey Witch*

"Absolutely irresistible! *Spells, Strings, and Forgotten Things* is a captivating story about loss, love, and sisterhood. I was enthralled!"

—Sarah Beth Durst, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Spellshop*

"As sweet and spicy as a freshly baked ginger biscuit drizzled with honey, *Spells, Strings, and Forgotten Things* is witchy romantasy at its finest. I flew through it, delighting in every page."

—Bianca Marais, author of *The Witches of Moonshyne Manor*

"By turns sweet as sugar, sinister as shadow, and sexy as sin, *Spells, Strings, and Forgotten Things* is a feast for the senses. Randall has deftly woven a spectacularly magical story I will not soon forget."

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"From the first page, Randall weaves a tale infused with the power of memories, love, and legacy. Fans of *Charmed* will adore the strands of sisterhood, romance, and resilience that Randall threads together in her latest book, a captivating blend of small-town magic and urban fantasy. Be prepared to stay up late into the night reading this one because you won't want to put it down."

—Stacy Sivinski, author of *The Crescent Moon Tearoom*

Praise for *The Unfortunate Side Effects of Heartbreak and Magic*

"Debut author Randall explores the courage it takes to deal with grief and dare to love."

—*Publishers Weekly*

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—*Booklist*

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—*Red Carpet Crash*

"An enchanting tale of love and loss, heartbreak and hope, that bewitched me from the get-go! Fans of Alice Hoffman and Sarah Addison Allen will flock to this enchanting novel."

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"Heartbreaking and enchanting in turn—readers will want to climb into this book and never leave!"

—Hazel Beck, author of *Big Little Spells* and *Small Town, Big Magic*

The Sisters of Light and Shadow Duology

Spells, Strings, and Forgotten Things

Curses, Keys, and Secret Societies

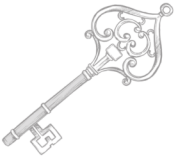
Also by Breanne Randall

The Unfortunate Side Effects of Heartbreak and Magic



Curses, Keys, *and* Secret Societies

A Sisters of Light and Shadow Novel



Breanne Randall

First published in the US by Dell, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC

First published in the UK in 2026 by Head of Zeus,
part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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9 7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (PB): 9781035915392
ISBN (eBook): 9781035915361

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited,
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

HEAD OF ZEUS LTD
5–8 Hardwick Street
London, EC1R 4RG

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.headofzeus.com
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To all my Dean Winchester–loving girls, this one's for you.
Get some pie (or pudding) and settle in.

Author's Note

I always want to ensure my readers protect themselves first, and as such would like to present a list of warnings for what you'll find within. This is an adult book with adult themes such as violence, strong language/profanity, sexually explicit content, blood, murder, mentions of torture (does not go into detail), emotional manipulation, psychological trauma, death of loved ones, abuse of power, parental manipulation/dysfunctional family dynamics, and trauma recovery, and themes of betrayal and deception. Take care of yourself, please!

Suggested Playlist

- "Eat Your Young," by Hozier
- "Roslyn," by Bon Iver, St. Vincent
- "The French Library," by Franz Gordon
- "Je te laisserai des mots," by Patrick Watson
- "In the Woods Somewhere," by Hozier
- "O Children," by Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds
- Nocturne No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 2 "Saudade," by Joshua Kyan Aalampour
- "Lover, Please Stay," by Nothing But Thieves
- "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?" by Taylor Swift
- "WONDERLAND," by Neoni
- "I'm So Sorry," by Imagine Dragons
- "you should see me in a crown," by Billie Eilish
- "Enemies to Lovers," by Joshua Kyan Aalampour
- "Lose You to Love Me," by Selena Gomez

Chapter 1

Every night, without fail, Eléa Deniz dreamed of home. She'd glide along the fields in front of Château d'Ancy, the grass a rich candy apple green so bright she could almost taste it. As she passed the meticulously trimmed topiaries, she could hear the bubbling waters of the River Serein. The pull into the château was an insistent ticking that echoed in her chest like a clock running out. The lion's head doorknob was cold to the touch. The door pushed open easily, lighter than a feather despite its towering height. She would barely register the harsh lines and gilded opulence, the marble columns and mosaic floor, and the familiar smells of wood polish and citronella, when her father would appear at the top of the sweeping grand staircase.

"Abomination," he would whisper. "You are not welcome here. This is no home of yours." And then, with a lazy flick of his hand, as if she were nothing more than a gnat, he would kill her.

The dreams rarely varied, though sometimes she would have time to traverse those old corridors, sneak into her

room or beloved library before he appeared and whispered those damning words. And always, she'd wake sobbing and disoriented. This time, though, her mother appeared beside her father. Their cold gazes sent a stake of ice down her throat, freezing her insides.

"The girl does nothing but read and draw in her room all day, Ahmed. Whatever your father is doing, it's not working."

"Have patience, Céline," Ahmed responded. "This has been generations in the making. Everything will come to fruition. Bana güven," he added in Turkish. *Trust me.*

He waved a hand, and the floor opened beneath her. Then she was falling, falling, falling . . .

Eléa woke on a scream, her stomach dropping as she remembered she wasn't in her own home. The plane dipped, and her stomach went with it. It had been four years since she'd flown, and seeing the storm clouds out the window did nothing to calm her nerves. Scrabbling frantically, she pulled out her sketchbook and opened to a blank page. The weight of the pages on her lap, the binding pressing into her knees, comforted her. She swept her charcoal pencil across the page, and soon Château d'Ancy began to take shape despite her trembling hand. She focused her breathing, remembering the details. The row of dormer windows, the sweeping front lawn, and the moat. She hadn't been home for four long years, and the closer she got, the more her skin tingled, and the magic yawned inside her like it was waking up after a long nap.

Goddess above, she thought. *I'm doing this. I'm going back.*

She'd packed a bag, left a note for her brother, Lucien, and left Gold Springs, California, her home for the last four years. She knew her departure would make her brother worry, but she'd be back soon, and life would resume its predictable pat-

tern. Sarai was the only one who knew what she was doing. And Eléa was shocked when her best friend, the constant worrier that she was, hadn't cautioned her against going.

"I understand," Sarai had said. "You have to do this for yourself." It was such a Sarai thing to say, full of compassion and empathy. Eléa had stayed in Gold Springs, getting her degree in art history by night and working at the Petridi sisters' Tea and Tome bookshop by day. Sarai, meanwhile, had continued her job as a prolific curse breaker, traveling around the world and helping anyone who needed it. Eléa didn't see her often, but when she did, it was as soothing to her soul as chamomile tea on a winter evening.

Eléa trailed a finger over the page of her sketchbook. On the outside, it looked like any other notebook with its plain black cover. But this one was charmed with endless pages and filled with not just charcoal sketches but recipes, spells, and journal entries. It was more of a scrapbook than anything. Seeing Château d'Ancy on the page, she felt the ache in her heart shimmer with empty longing like a mirage in the desert. The house, if it could be called that, had always been like another family member to her. When her mother would scold her, a mug of hot chocolate would appear on her bedside table as she cried silently into her pillow. Sometimes books would appear on her dresser. Novels she was certain her father would never allow in the library. As she got older, the château grew thick, sturdy vines up around the lattice outside her bedroom window, so she could climb down them without having to sneak through the halls. Other times, a fire would appear in the grate before she'd even said she was cold. Those stone walls offered more warmth than her mother ever had.

And now her mother was dying.

The captain's voice crackled over the speakers. Time to arrival was now one hour. A flight attendant came by with a cart, pouring coffee and handing out water bottles. Eléa squeezed the flimsy cup of wretched black coffee too tight until some of it spilled over and burned her fingers. It was true that those stone halls were riddled with bad memories, but there were good ones, too. Birthday tea with her father, the one time of year when she could be sure of his undivided attention. Learning his Turkish traditions and laughing together as he taught her the language. French was her first language, but Turkish came naturally, and she practiced English with her brother and Malik every chance she got. By the time she turned seven, she was fluent in all three.

And then there was playing with Alejandra, the daughter of a Shadowcraft family that sometimes had meetings with Ahmed. The comfort of the library. Midnight escapades with Alex.

Her stomach dipped again. She'd been trying so hard not to think of him. To put him out of her mind. He probably wouldn't even be there. But still, his image was burned into her retinas like she'd been looking at the sun.

She remembered the first time she'd ever seen him, on the banks of the River Serein. She'd been crying over a panicked duckling that'd lost its mother when, as if by magic, the mother duck appeared out of nowhere to soothe the soft, shrill whistles of her duckling. Alex had been tall and gangly but breathtakingly beautiful, and she quickly wiped her eyes, not wanting to appear weak.

"It's okay," he'd said with a kind smile. "Tears just mean you care, and there's nothing to be ashamed of about that." They swam together after that, jumping into the river fully clothed and laughing as the ducks circled them. She could

still see the carefree way he shook the water out of his eyes on that hot summer day.

With years and distance between them, it was easier to admit that she'd been in love with her childhood best friend. The enduring, heart-wrenching, life-altering kind of first love that made your world a kaleidoscope of light and color. Until he'd left without explanation.

She'd simply woken up one day and he was gone. The sting of his sudden departure had dimmed over the years, but she still felt it even now. A bitter flavor in her mouth that tasted of arugula and peppercorns. She was only seventeen the last time she'd seen him, shortly before Lucien had whisked her away. And yet she could still perfectly conjure the dimple in his right cheek, the soft curls of his dark blond hair. She rarely allowed herself to think of Alex, the anger at his disappearance always warring with the fond memories of growing up alongside him. Even now, one of those memories tugged at the fringes of her mind. They'd been lying under a blanket of stars talking about something important, though she couldn't remember what. *But he won't be there,* she told herself. He'd dreamed for so long of going to Le Cordon Bleu, the prestigious culinary arts school in Paris. Of opening his own patisserie or chocolaterie. The only thing that would be left of him at Château d'Ancy was the ghost of memories from their misspent youth.

Her coffee gone, Eléa began to fill in some of the shading on her sketch, losing her thoughts until the flight attendant made the announcement to put up the tray tables.

Half an hour later, the plane landed, and she disembarked. The bustle of the Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport settled into her bones. There was the cacophony of a dozen different languages being spoken all at different volumes and the sound

of the loudspeaker in French detailing departure times. She stopped at Paul's, a boulangerie chain, and ordered a croissant and an espresso, moaning indecently as she consumed both at a standing table while watching families rush by.

In Gold Springs, she had been living in borrowed space with Lucien and his new bride, Calliope Petridi. And the more time went on, the more Eléa ached to set her feet on French soil, to return to a place where she belonged and that belonged to her in return. She was grateful that she had packed light when she had to take the RER B train to Gare du Nord and then transfer to the D line to get to Gare de Lyon. She boarded another train to Montbard and wished fiercely that she had her brother's ability to simply appear where he wished to go in the span of seconds. But of course, shadow walking was yet another thing Lucien had refused to teach her. "Too many things can go wrong," he'd always say, giving her that look she hated. Like she could easily break. His eyes tended to cloud over when he looked at her, as though he still saw her pale and drained and dying in that clearing in the Forgotten Forest four years ago.

With a sigh, she exited the train and called a taxi to drive her the forty-five minutes to the village of Lucida.

It was nearly noon when she arrived, and despite the cool autumn breeze, rivulets of sweat beaded down her back. She stood in the shade of a copse of trees at the end of the drive and took a deep, steadying breath. The crunch of tires against gravel as the cab pulled away echoed in her bones. She picked up her suitcase and bag, the long strap digging into her shoulder. Her eyes were puffy from too much sleep and her fingers were still swollen from flying. Her pleated skirt had a mysterious stain on it, and though she'd tried to finger-comb her long hair on the drive over, it was in a hopeless state.

Finally alone, she breathed in the peace of the trees and dirt and wind, letting them sink into her. She dipped into her well of magic to fuel a series of little spells that cleaned the stain off her skirt, polished her leather Mary Janes, and smoothed her long dark hair. Clothes were like armor, and she needed the full suit for what she was about to face. With a last little charm to smooth the wrinkles from her silk blouse, she buttoned her blazer and straightened her beret.

She strode forward, her heart beating faster with every step. As her anxiety rose, so, too, did the whispers that had been plaguing her ever since that fateful night in the Forgotten Forest. She could never quite make out the words, but anytime her magic flared, or her emotions heightened, the whispers returned like an old friend. She'd never told anyone, least of all Lucien. He worried about her enough already. But she'd grown accustomed to them by now, and when those voices fanned about her, something inside her settled.

The birch trees that lined the drive seemed to sway in welcome. Their leaves were already turning brown. For some reason, her magic stirred in time with their rustling. Like her parents and brother, she was a Shadowcrafter, which meant she drew on the well of self, using what was already inside to fuel the magic. Lightcraft, meanwhile, drew on the power of nature. It was strange indeed that the whistle of wind through those trees would stir the magic within her. Perhaps she'd spent too much time around the Petridi sisters, Lightcraft witches all. But the thought flew from her as the château came into sight.

Home was as imposing and beautiful as it had ever been—the sweeping front lawn, the emerald grass that had played so often in her dreams, the hedges shaped with such precision the edges could cut you. The south side of the château

abutted a small forest. The north perimeter was surrounded by a moat, fed from a large, snaking stream that led to the River Serein. If she strained her ears, she could hear the waters, and oh how she ached to run to the shore and splash into it. Now that she was so close, wading in that icy water seemed like a better choice than facing her father and her memories.

There, standing on the front steps between two gargantuan stone pillars, was her father, Ahmed Deniz. Behind him stood a towering beast of a man, his face hidden in the shadows.

As she approached, her father stepped forward. Still handsomely weathered, Ahmed had so much of Lucien in his features it almost hurt to look at him. The last time she'd seen him, he'd held her hostage in the Forgotten Forest, had tried to trade her life for the ancient power that he believed rested in the Dark Oak back in Gold Springs. But it had been so at odds with whom she'd known him to be growing up. He had been distant, true, but never unkind. She rarely saw him, but the memories she held in her heart . . . they were good ones, weren't they?

She never told Ahmed about her grandfather's experiments. She'd been too weak. Too afraid her grandfather would follow through on his threats. So when she saw her father, she smiled as Grandfather told her to. Discussed her progress. But never told the truth. Honesty would only bring more pain. And even to this day, a fake smile felt safer than the truth.

She suffered through those experiments that were supposed to increase her weak Shadowcraft magic. And she did it willingly, gladly, even. For years. Because all she had wanted was to honor the Deniz name. To make her father proud.

She faced him now, desperately wishing she didn't have this aching need for his love. His approval. But in the hollow of her soul was an unhealed little girl still hurting from the trauma of her past.

"You came," her father said quietly, his eyes darting to the ground. "But I'm afraid you're too late. Your mother is already gone." Words lodged in her throat. Up close she saw that her father's skin looked gray. There were dark circles under his eyes and a yawning sadness that stretched over his features like a mask.

Eléa pictured her mother's thin, angular face, a contrast to her own round features. She saw the purse of her lips as Eléa, age six, littered croissant crumbs on the table linen. She thought of the times she'd gone to her mother, pleading for softness, only to be met with distance and coldness. It had only caused Eléa to long for that warmth even more. Determined that she would never become like her.

Eléa didn't mourn her mother—she mourned what her mother could have been. The relationship she'd always dreamed of. Staying up late and drinking hot cocoa and sharing secrets instead of the looks of disapproval and silent treatment. But for all her mother's faults, she had been the one who balanced Ahmed. Without her there, how far would he go in his quest to destroy Lightcrafters, and who would stop him? She stared at her father with a lump in her throat and her eyes itching as she tried to hold back the tears. Not for the loss of her mother, but for her father's broken heart. He might be a monster, but he was still a man.

When she dropped her bag and closed the gap between them and threw her arms around her father, she was as shocked as he was.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. He was stiff, his arms at his

sides. He smelled the same. Like old books and apple tea and the curling, sweet scent of nargileh smoke. Slowly, stiffly, he gave her a brief squeeze, kissed her lightly on both cheeks, and then stepped back with a terse nod.

Eléa had many questions, but Ahmed raised a hand as if sensing this. "I'll tell you more later, my daughter. First . . ." He beckoned to the man in the shadows whom Eléa had all but forgotten.

Eléa finally looked at the man, really looked, and his dark eyes shuttered as he stared back. The muscles in his square jaw clenched, his thick brows furrowed. Her heart jumped, and she let out a sharp breath of disbelief.

"Alex?"

He'd been tall when they were young, but he was towering now, his once lanky body filled out with lithe muscle. His dark blond curls were cropped short, and his beard was shaved close, little more than a five-o'clock shadow. His hands were clasped tightly in front of him. He spoke not a word of welcome. Memories crashed through her. The feel of his hand in hers as they ran pell-mell down to the river in the dead of night, midnight forays into the kitchen, hide-and-seek in the cool halls of the château during high summer, searching for four-leaf clovers for hours in the field, whispered dreams and solemn promises. And now, he was here. Had she wished him into existence?

A knife twisted in Eléa's chest. The memory of his disappearance settled in her gut. He offered no explanation, no apology. Merely that blank stare, as though he was seeing straight through her. Her cheeks flushed with anger.

"I see you remember Alexandre," Ahmed said, and there was a flat tonality to his words that made Eléa's heart lurch.

"Unfortunately," Eléa said, refusing to look at Alex. Though it was harder than she thought it would be.

"He is my second-in-command at the Shadowcraft Academy."

Eléa started. "Academy?"

"A graduate school for Shadowcraft practitioners," her father said. Shock coursed through her, followed immediately by suspicion. What was her father up to? Was he going to force her to join? Before she could ask, he said, "I know you have questions, and I will answer them soon. For now, Alexandre will escort you to your rooms."

"I think I know the way to my own bedroom," Eléa said, affronted.

"I am aware, my daughter," Ahmed said, and he sounded so, so tired. "But the Academy is officially in session tomorrow, and the students have already arrived. We have expanded certain parts of the château over the last few years to accommodate the faculty, students, and classrooms. So, everything is not *quite* as you left it. And some of the students can be, shall we say, antagonistic to newcomers. I would feel better if Alexandre accompanied you."

"Why can't you do it?" Eléa asked, fully aware she sounded like a petulant child.

"I have Academy matters I must attend to. And Alexandre is the only person I truly trust here."

He was? Eléa wondered. Her father's second-in-command. Alex, working for Ahmed. What happened to his dream of a chocolaterie? She couldn't connect the dots.

"I will be finished by the time you are settled. Alexandre will wait for you and bring you to my office. After we have talked, you can be on your way tomorrow morning. But I do

not want you traveling at night alone. Understand?" The irony of his wanting to protect her after trying to barter her life for magic four years ago was not lost on her.

Eléa's eyes finally slid to Alex, who did not look happy about playing babysitter. Ahmed's eyes, meanwhile, were distant, though Eléa barely registered the look before he vanished on the spot. And she was left alone with her former first love turned stranger.