

Heist

KIRSTEN WEISS



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By Kirsten Weiss

Brayden grinned, his green eyes crinkling wickedly. “You look good in black.”

My heart lifted, because my husband still noticed the details. We hadn’t been married long, and I couldn’t stand the thought of the magic—the little things—fading.

I did a super-model pivot in Mrs. Steinberg’s living room, which smelled faintly of mothballs. Sleek V-neck sweater and leggings hugged my curves.

Standing on tiptoe, I reached up and stroked the tips of the midnight hair coiling at the nape of Brayden’s neck. It was still damp from the shower, and he smelled of soap and cedar. I loved that smell, and I kissed him, my heartbeat quickening.

“Ugh.” Mrs. Steinberg blew a stream of raspberry-scented smoke. The old lady crossed one arm over her old-fashioned black gown. “You’re married already. Get over it.”

Brayden and I broke apart, a little breathless, and he winked. Mrs. Steinberg was an old hand at magic, but for me, she was more terror than mentor.

The three of us stood around the table in her cheery yellow dining room. Doilies covered nearly every surface and anchored spider plants, aloe veras, and peace lilies. They were all plants that helped clean the air. Was there was some magically protective reason for them?

I opened my mouth to ask.

“They’re all hard to kill,” she said.

Startled, I snapped my jaw shut.

Mrs. Steinberg grinned. “Everyone asks. And they purify the air.” She leaned over the table. With the tip of a gnarled finger, she tapped a set of architectural plans, their corners

weighted by dusty crystal stemware. “The window on the Historical Association’s second floor doesn’t close properly. That’s your way in.”

Brayden frowned. “We’re not exactly cat burglars.”

“Then you and Jayce had better learn fast,” Mrs. Steinberg said. “Those volunteers think that disk they have is just a curiosity. In the wrong hands, that disk could destroy the entire town. Doyle is on the precipice of utter annihilation.”

“Again,” Brayden said resignedly.

“Hey,” I joked, “magic happens.”

“Ha, ha,” she snapped. “It’s all fun and games until someone accidentally summons a demon.”

“They’ve had that magic disk for years,” Brayden said. “What are the odds they’ll trigger something now?”

“Next week is a solar eclipse, and five planets are going to be in alignment,” Mrs. Steinberg said. “All sorts of magical artifacts are going to be popping off, and that disk is a prime candidate. Do *you* want to clean up after a demon-related accident?”

I shuddered and folded my arms. “No.” Because I was guessing it wouldn’t be your usual clean-up-on-aisle-five.

Mrs. Steinberg nodded. “I thought so.” She stared for a long moment at the plan. “No,” she said softly, her brow furrowing. Her gaze went distant, as if she was remembering something she’d rather not. “No.”

She shook herself. “All right. A witch like you shouldn’t have any problems. There’s an overhang beneath the window, and an oak tree with limbs that extend over it. You can climb from the oak to the overhang and go through the window. You’ll find the storage room at the

back, here.” She pointed with her e-cigarette to the plan and to a small blue square, attached to the room with the window.

I nodded. That oak tree was broad, with limbs low to the ground. It would be an easy climb for us both. “No problem.” The window, we knew from an earlier recon, didn’t shut right.

“Sounds simple enough,” Brayden said.

“It will be, thanks to these.” Mrs. Steinberg rummaged in a carpet bag on one of the dining chairs and pulled out a set of odd-looking goggles. “Thermal binoculars.”

“For...?” Brayden asked.

“The lasers.”

I goggled. “There are lasers in the Historical Association?” This was a small town, not CIA headquarters.

“Thank that goofy friend of yours, Arsen Holiday,” she said. “He’s been trying to drum up business for his security company, and he gave them a freebie.”

I groaned.

“With any luck,” she continued, “the old fogies at the association will have forgotten to have turned them on. Half of them can barely remember what day it is.”

I shook my head. My luck hadn’t exactly been at its personal best lately.

“Is there anything else we should be on the lookout for?” Brayden asked.

“I got you architectural plans and thermal binoculars,” she said. “You’re taking a witch with you. What more do you want?”

“We’ll be fine,” I said quickly.

“Bring that disk straight back to me. And *don't* touch it with your bare hands.” She shooed us out the door. “And have fun breaking into the Historical Association!”

The door banged solidly shut behind us.

We walked down darkened residential streets. Fog skimmed the tops of the pines and elms, blotted out the streetlights. Dried leaves skittered before us. I shivered and squeezed Brayden's hand.

Confession time. I kind of *was* looking forward to some morally sanctioned breaking and entering. But I knew Brayden was less enthusiastic.

Don't get me wrong, he was all for rescuing our tiny mountain town from future rampaging demons. He's a paramedic, so saving people is what he does. But he's also a by-the-book kind of guy. The fact that he was taking this leap into crime was a huge deal. But he always had my back.

We reached the old Victorian that housed the Historical Association. Brayden eyed it askance and shook his head. “The things I do for love.”

“And to stop demons.”

“And to stop demons.” He helped me over the low, picket fence. In the yard, he touched a button on his watch. It glowed blue, cutting eerie shadows on his chiseled face.

“Two o'clock exactly,” he said.

I smothered an uneasy laugh. “I hope you don't want to synchronize our watches. You know I don't wear one.”

“I want to keep this expedition under fifteen minutes. That's how long it will take for the cops to get here if someone anyone calls them.”

I nodded, my mouth suddenly dry. My heart was racing way more than it should have for a historical association break-in.

He smiled down at me. “Let’s climb a tree.”

Breath steaming the chill, night air, we crept to the side yard. Pyramids of pumpkins lay stacked on the association’s porch, a reminder Thanksgiving was on its way.

Brayden strode around the corner of the house and stopped short. I stumbled into his solid form before I could stop myself.

“Oh. Damn,” he said.

My stomach plummeted to my black sneakers. The side of the oak tree had been trimmed. Its branches were nowhere near the window or the overhang. “How are we going to get up there now?”

He shook his head. “This is no good. We’ll have to come back another night when we have a better plan.”

My chest tightened, my breath constricting. “But it’s a new moon, *and* it’s overcast. This is the darkest it’s going to get for a while. And what if that astrological thingy next week does set it off? There’s got to be another way up to that window.”

I scanned the three-story house and pointed to the porch railing. “There. What if I climb onto that and from there to the overhang?”

“You’d have to be an acrobat.”

“Not if you give me a boost.”

He grimaced, but nodded.

Adjusting my backpack, I clambered onto Brayden's shoulders. He lifted me the extra foot I needed to wriggle onto the wide, shingled ledge.

I stood, took a step. A pinecone skidded from beneath my foot. I gasped, stumbled forward on the shingles, and landed hard on one knee. Pain rocketed through my leg, and I smothered a curse.

"You okay?" Brayden whispered from beneath me.

I bent, gripping the shingles with my gloved hands. "Fine," I gritted through the pain. That was going to leave a mark.

I crawled to the dusty window. It was cracked open at the bottom, just wide enough for me to slide my fingers through. I pulled it open. The window screeched, and I winced at the noise.

Brayden's voice floated up to me. "I'm starting the clock. Fifteen minutes."

I looked around. No lights had winked on. No one shouted, *stop, police!* No one seemed to have noticed the sound. The distant street was still empty, and half-shrouded by pines. Blowing out my breath, I slithered into the windowsill, then remembered the binoculars.

I rummaged in my backpack and pulled them out, strapping them onto my head. Everything was black. What the heck? And why had I trusted someone who had zero tech skills about night-vision binoculars? I mean, that was just on me.

"Jayce?" Brayden called softly. "What's going on?"

"I can't see anything through these binoculars," I hissed. "I think they're broken."

"Did you turn them on?"

My face heated. *Oh. Right.*

I found the switch, and the room in front of me glowed green. Lines of paler, brighter green swung back and forth in a complicated pattern. They crisscrossed between the bookshelves and filing cabinets in a tightly bound plaid.

Drat that Arsen! The floor was blanked in a hemlock-green plaid of moving lasers. Did the security consultant have to do *such* a good job?

“Problem?” Brayden called up.

“Nope,” I said, voice higher than normal. “No problem.”

I rubbed my arms and looked around. This was *totally* a problem. I studied the room. There was a keypad on the opposite wall, beside a door. I guessed that would turn off the security system, which would be useful if a) I had the code, and b) I could get to it. Another door on the wall to the left led to the storage closet.

But I’d need levitation skills to get across that floor, and this witch couldn’t fly.

I set my backpack atop a nearby bookcase. My mouth puckered. There *had* to be a way past.

The lasers moved low to the ground, six to eighteen inches off the thin carpet. But the tops of the bookshelves were maybe five feet off the ground, and the bookshelves looked sturdy. All I had to do was walk across them... and not knock anything off and into the laser system.

I retrieved my backpack and shimmied into its straps. Stomach churning, I clambered onto the nearest bookcase. I crawled along its top until I reached a stack of loosely bound papers. Holding my breath, I picked them up and turned, placing them behind me.

The bookshelf wobbled. I froze. Inch by inch, I made my way to the end of the shelf and stood. The end of the next was about three feet away.

Light as a feather. I took a deep breath and jumped.

The bookshelf rocked beneath my feet.

I sucked in a breath, windmilling my arms. The moment slowed, lengthened. My pulse thudded in my ears. The bookshelf steadied.

“Ten minutes,” Brayden hissed.

Breathing slowly to still the thudding of my heart, I took a moment to center myself. I walked across the shelf, jumped to a third. I hurried along that, stepping over stacks of books, to the end.

The storage closet door was in front of me. Lasers swiveled beneath me. There was a gap of about a foot between the lasers and the door.

I pressed my curled knuckles against my mouth. *This is impossible.* The odds of me jumping from the shelf and landing against the wall without tripping the security system were... not good.

I jumped anyway—because that’s the way I roll—hit the wall too hard and fell backward. Wildly, I grabbed for the doorknob. My fingers touched metal. I yanked it toward me, pulling myself upright.

Exhaling shakily, I looked behind me. A laser skimmed behind my ankle.

I pressed my forehead to the door and closed my eyes. Another half inch, and I would have set off the alarms.

But I didn’t have time to congratulate myself. *Less than ten minutes left. But how much, exactly?*

“Five minutes,” Brayden called, as if he’d read my mind.

Five minutes? I clawed my hand through my hair. How had *that* been five minutes?

“Please let this door be unlocked.” I turned the knob, and the door opened inward. If it had opened outward, I’d have been totally screwed.

Maybe my luck was turning?

I stepped inside and shut the door behind me, flicked on the light. Cupboards and cubbies lined the walls. Boxes filled the small, windowless room. A bare lightbulb swayed gently above me.

The disk could be anywhere. It would take ages to go through everything...

...if I wasn’t a witch. Witch’s can sense energy, and especially the energy of dark forces.

I closed my eyes and felt outward with my other senses. Something dark slithered against my aura to the right, and my hands went clammy. I edged in that direction and stopped in front of an antique cupboard.

A wave of putrid mustiness emanated from the closed cupboard. Something cold and... I don’t know how to explain it, but... *evil*, shivered against my skin. I licked my lips. Fighting evil is all well and good... in principle. *Encountering* actual evil left my legs shaking, my heart pounding. I blinked sweat from my eyes and tried to focus.

The disk.

I opened the cupboard doors onto a bottomless well of darkness. A hiss escaped. Two demonic red eyes glowed in its shadowy recesses and grew larger.

“What the—”

A monstrous gray creature leapt out at me.

“Whoa!” I stumbled backward into a stack of boxes, and they tumbled to the linoleum.

The creature—a possum— bared its fangs. It raised up on its hind legs, front claws extended.

The hair lifted on the nape of my neck. I'm an earth witch. All God's creatures are supposed to be my bag. Except possums, which look like oversized rats. Creeping, treacherous, waddling rats.

I *hate* possums.

I swallowed. "Hey, little guy," I said soothingly. "I'm just here to—"

"Two minutes," Brayden called, and we started.

The possum launched, attaching itself to my leggings. Wicked claws dug into my thigh.

I flailed, kicking. "Get off, get off, get off!" I shrieked.

There was a tearing sound, and the little fiend fell free.

It didn't take its eyes off me. Growling, it hunched on the linoleum floor.

A trickle of sweat dribbled down my forehead and stung my eye. I blinked rapidly, unwilling to make a move.

Did possums get bubonic plague? We had that in the mountains. I gulped down a breath. What if it was rabid?

The possum snarled, its feral eyes glowing.

I jerked open the door. "Get out."

The possum bolted for freedom. An alarm shrieked.

I smacked my hand on my forehead. "Broomsticks!" *The lasers.*

I whirled and stared into the open cupboard. A bronze disk gleamed dully on one shelf. I grabbed it and shoved it into my backpack, then raced for the window. I dove through it, tumbled across the sloping overhang, and plummeted over the edge.

Brayden caught me. He always caught me, always had my back, and my heart overflowed with an impossible warmth.

We gazed into each other's eyes for an infinite moment, not speaking, not having to speak. I was suddenly hyper-aware of the feel of his muscles against mine, of the rise and fall of his broad chest.

A siren wailed in the distance, breaking the spell.

"Time to go." Brayden set me on the ground, and we ran.



Mrs. Steinberg examined the disk with white-gloved hands and shook her head. "It's amazing it's been lying around all these years, and no one accidentally called forth a demon."

I examined my shredded leggings. "Maybe someone did," I muttered. If any animal had demonic tendencies, it was that stupid possum. He'd had an attitude. It couldn't have been a coincidence it had chosen that cupboard to hide in. *Stupid forces of evil.*

"What?" Mrs. Steinberg asked.

"Nothing," I said quickly.

She eyed me over her spectacles and set the demon disk on a doily. "Any trouble?"

I swallowed. "Nope," I said. "For a witch, it was no problem at all."

Author's Note:

If this is your first visit to the world of the Witches of Doyle, welcome! After I'd written the novella, [Stone](#), I realized I'd left something hanging. Rather than writing an epilogue, however, I decided to write it as a short story instead. If you'd like to read more Doyle Witch stories, start with book 1, [Bound](#), and meet Jayce's more responsible sister, Karin.

