

# FOUR

FOUR SISTERS.  
FOURS WITCHES.  
FOUR EXECUTIONS.  
FOUR DIFFERENT DEATHS.



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## PROLOGUE

Medieval England, 1359

**E**vil lurks about in the shadows eager to take its rightful place in a small village located in the West Midland region. But it must wait for human hatred to take its course . . . .

“KILL THE WITCHES! KILL THE WITCHES!”

The priest’s lips twitched at the glorious chant. The muscles around his mouth in full restraint as he saw the mob begin to gather. So long he had waited for this moment. Everything in his life had led him to this moment. Every torturous self-inflicted blow to his body sang today. Every wound finally sealed. The Grand Master had told him that only by coming back to where it had all begun, by facing the horrendous hold the she-demon held over the pulsing fire rushing in his veins, would he find freedom from it all. Finally, his day of redemption had come. Closing his dull brown eyes, he breathed in the sweet smell of victory close by. Her perfume teased his senses as his chest expanded.

A hand clapped him on the back, breaking the spell of pure physical pleasure of this moment, his moment. His tall, ghostly figure lunged forward. Apologizing, the village peasant grasped his hand, pumping it up and down vigorously as he congratulated him on their victory over the evil that threatened their village. God would surely be pleased with them, the man said with a frenzied glow. The priest nodded his head in fatherly approval. His mouth came alive with a smile. The enthusiastic man walked away satisfied, shouting in time with the gathering mob. The priest watched the peasant leave, restraining himself from wiping his hand on his clean black robe. Peasants were always so dirty he thought, *and* always so easily led. Again, he smiled as his eyes caressed the tower from its base to the top. His body shivered with excitement. Unconsciously, he licked his lips in a sensual manner. The day of reckoning would come soon enough. Just one more night, then, and only then, would his sins and the one responsible for them no longer exist.

The door leading to the inside of the tower was violently pushed open. The sound of it hitting the wall echoed in the dark, damp chamber. The shuffling of eight female feet was barely heard in the circular room as the hems of their skirts caressed the wooden floor, disturbing the dirty abandoned hay. Their quiet presence was overshadowed by the loudness of their jailors' metal armors. A small ray of light shyly crept its way into the tower from one of the four windows of the prison cells. The small particles, reflected in the light, eagerly stroked the armors of the six guards accompanying the female prisoners. The sheriff, a man of many years, smiled as he heard the sound of the iron doors closing one by one. Their echo was followed by the jiggling laughter of the keys as they locked away the precious prize. The town bell rang four times in honor and celebration of the arrest of the four women as the cheering of the crowd below made its way to the top of the tower for its new occupants to hear.

“KILL THE WITCHES! KILL THE WITCHES!”

The guards made sure one last time that the locks were firmly in place and closed tight. The sheriff, leader of the small troop, stood close to the prison cell into which the one called Nostra, the eldest of the four sisters, had been pushed into. The man's grey eyes squinted as he was barely able to see the outline of her body in the darkened, enclosed space. Wearing a smirk on his weather-beaten face, he snickered and turned his attention toward his soldiers, grabbing the lock and rattling it.

“This should hold them till morning.”

The men smirked, nodding their heads in agreement. The man in charge foolishly turned to the shadows, his eyes focused on the shape of the woman inside. Cocky and full of confidence he screamed into the darkness: “LET US SEE HOW YOUR GREAT GODDESS WILL HELP YOU NOW! COME ON; CALL UPON THAT BITCH TO SAVE YOU, YOU DEVIL-WORSHIPPING, PAGAN WHORE!”

The shadow stayed mute. Arrogant, the man came to stand closer to the iron bars keeping the evil at bay. Feeling safe and in the right to do as he pleased, he spit up his own views of the situation.

“I always knew you would end up here. This is the result of you wanting so hungrily to be a man! Always wanting to prove you were better than the rest of us. Look at you now! They should have burned you and yours a long time ago.”

He waited for a fighting reply and was somewhat disappointed by her silence. He teased her some more, fully enjoying himself. He took the iron bars in his strong gloved hands pushing and shoving them to show their strength. They never moved.

“See how strong this is. You have no chance of escaping! Have a good night as it is your last ... I almost forgot, I have asked our Lordship if I could have the honor of lighting the fire under your feet. I believe he will grant me my wish seeing that I was the one who brought you all here.”

A tiger like claw shot away from the shadows striking the man's face and tearing the flesh open. He screamed in searing pain and horror as blood came gushing out, dripping off his chin. He fell to his knees holding on tightly to the remains of his features. The guards took out their swords and brandished them excitedly toward the prisoner, confused as to what to do next. The shadows hid the satisfied smirk on the prisoner's soft lips. Her golden brown eyes sparkled in the dark. The sheriff screamed out to his men in fury.

“THE WHORE RIPPED MY SKIN OFF!”

Blood dripped from his black leather glove that held the remaining skin of his cheek. He looked toward Nostra with venom spewing from his lips.

“I will enjoy seeing you die. You damn whore.”

A chuckle left the shadows. Nostra came forward. Her face touched the bars of her cell, her wild gaze bored into his, as she caressed the blood of her victim on the tips of her fingers, making them dance around the red sticky liquid. Her voice teased him.

“Just a small memento to remember me by when I am gone, Marcus.”

Marcus heard movement coming from the prison cell behind him and jumped, noticing Alicia, the youngest of the four girls, sporting a demented look like her sister, Nostra. Known as the most beautiful of the foursome, due to her curvaceous body, the luscious woman shook her head in pity. Sighing, her deep cobalt blue eyes stared into his wickedly, she spoke softly.

“A wound given by a witch should give you cause for concern, Sheriff.”

Marcus threw a look of worry around him, needing to have his growing fear put to rest by the other occupants of the tower. Seeing none come forward, he tried to put on a brave face. Disgusted by his own cowardice he squared his shoulders and took a step toward Alicia. He knew how to fight men and armies but witchcraft was something he knew nothing about. Sticking out his chest in a final show of bravery, he swallowed hard against the throbbing pain as he surveyed the blood on his black glove. Marcus summoned his courage to look toward his female prisoner.

“Why..., why should I be worried?”

Alicia chuckled without a care. The frightened men huddled closer together toward the door, desperate to leave this place. The sister named Cina, the second oldest of the foursome, came forward. Her movement was quiet and undetected; she startled them as she spoke. The small light of day at her back adorned her petite frame; her blond hair, crisscrossed into hundreds of tiny braids, seemed of gold.

“You might want to see a witch to help you heal that wound or I am afraid you won’t see another day.”

Alicia turned her back on the situation, retreating and disappearing into the shadows. She warned him of the fate that awaited him should he not do as she told him.

“If I were you, I would put manure on my wound immediately and drink goat’s blood mixed with urine if you wish to be in attendance at our murder!”

The injured man looked toward the huddled mass of fear near the door as they held their swords high in front of them. He threw his hands up angrily at them. His voice filled with urgency and worry, hesitant for a

moment, the man's fear won over his senses, he bellowed: "Don't just stand there, you heard her. Move quickly and find me a goat, hurry!"

The men ran out of the room, not even bothering to close the door. Obeying its natural instinct, the heavy wooden door simply closed itself lazily, leaving an inch of freedom between it and the door frame. The laughter of the four women echoed in the round tower. Cina wiped away her tears of laughter and looked to Alicia's cell.

"Manure on his face and goat blood mixed with urine will surely make him ill!"

Alicia lifted her shoulder not caring as she tiptoed, trying to peek out her window.

"If the man is naïve enough to try it then he deserves to get sick."

An angry scream rushed the walls of their new *home* as Nostra grabbed onto the bars of her tiny window; she focused her attention on the man wearing a black robe standing and smiling amongst the chanting mob below. Her gaze held imaginary weapons that could cut through his bastardly flesh while her hands itched to harm the one responsible for their present state of misery.

"DAMN YOU BASTARD. I WILL KILL YOU IF IT IS THE LAST THING I DO! DO YOU HEAR ME? THE GREAT GODDESS WILL GRANT ME THAT ONE WISH BEFORE I DIE! I SWEAR IT BY YOUR GOD AND MINE!"

Nostra's eyes followed her target until her vision blurred. The pain in her right shoulder intensified. She felt weak from the loss of blood after having been deeply wounded by an arrow earlier that morning. If only she had been more vigilant. If only she had thought of the danger. If only ... breathing hard, she let herself glide down against the cold damp



wall of her cell, trying as best as she could to remain calm. She needed her wits about her if she was going to find a way out of this mess and exact her revenge. They needed a way of escaping, but how? She and her sisters were locked up in the village tower: the place where only the criminals with death sentences were kept. A tower that reached so high up into the sky that no one had ever been able to break free from their captors. The windows were not wide enough to fit through and try to climb your way down. The only passage out was through the main door where you would be met by fifteen guards at the bottom of the tower, day and night. *Think Nostra, think; there had to be a way out of this!* Cina opened her eyes, jumping in surprise as Nostra yelled out her frustration from deep within her cell. She could foresee no way out. Not ready to give up, Nostra slowly stood, grunting in pain as she looked at her sisters. Her voice commanded their attention.

“I won’t let that bastard win. Find something, anything you can think of that could be used as a weapon.”

Alicia and Cina searched their cells for anything that might help them escape this nightmare. The fourth sister, Kelsa, stayed inert in the shadows as she watched them moving about. Nostra screamed for her to be of use.

“SEARCH KELSA, PLEASE DON’T GIVE UP ... NOT NOW! DAMN YOU, SEARCH FOR SOMETHING ... ANYTHING!”

The inert shadow calmly replied “Our time has come Nostra. No use fighting it. We die at dawn.”

Nostra gnashed her teeth together before lashing out in full force.

“NO! DO YOU HEAR ME! THIS IS NOT THE END! NEVER! NOT LIKE THIS!”

Kelsa sighed, breathing in painfully as her silver eyes closed softly. Dull and dead, her eyelids lifted, tired.

“It’s never been a question of winning or losing Nostra. This is the cycle of life. Our time has come.”

She was happy to have a chance to get rid of her anger and frustration towards her sibling: her rival in life and death. Seizing the moment, Alicia did not hesitate in giving strength to Nostra’s argument while sending a withering, disgusted look toward Kelsa. The results of her youth and innocence, Alicia could not resist taunting and baiting her rival.

“No use fighting with her Nostra, you know how she is. She’s looking forward to dying! Aren’t you Kelsa? That way you’ll be with all of your friends in the mist. You will at long last be with those you desire most. If you wish to die so much, then do so, but don’t expect the rest of us to follow.”

With her own levels of frustration rising and being a witness to these types of arguments between her sisters for so many years, the peacemaker of the family, Cina, intervened. She pleaded with their youngest sister to have pity on Kelsa. After all they had been through, Kelsa deserved to feel and know a little bit of peace and comfort from her own blood before they left this realm and entered the next.

“Enough, Alicia please. You’ve no right to say that.”

Holding a wooden stool in her hands, Alicia hurled it toward Kelsa’s cell in resentment and anger. The improvised weapon bounced off the iron bars as Alicia turned to Cina, her eyes a sea storm of cobalt blue, a testament to her fury. Her hands shook with the power of it all.

“WHY NOT CINA? WHY SHOULDN’T I SAY WHAT WE ALL THINK OF HER? ALL HER LIFE, SHE HAS SPENT UNDER THE COVER OF

DARKNESS. RUNNING INTO THE WOODS EVERY NIGHT, DISAPPEARING INTO THE MIST, WALKING IN THE GRAVEYARDS, SPEAKING TO THE DEAD; SCARING THE VILLAGERS TO THE DEPTH OF THEIR VERY SOULS. I HAVE SEEN THE FEAR ENTER THEIR EYES EVERY TIME THEY SAW HER STANDING OUTSIDE THEIR HOMES. SHE IS THE REASON WE ARE HERE. IF ONLY SHE HAD BEEN NORMAL LIKE THE REST OF US LIVING, BREATHING, MORTALS NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED!”

Having heard enough Nostra bellowed, darting a quick look towards Kelsa’s limp body. Her guilty conscience made her lash out.

“STOP IT ALICIA! NO MORE, YOU SPEAK OF THINGS YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT. KELSA CANNOT DENY WHAT WAS GIVEN TO HER! NONE OF US CAN.”

Cina took a step back, flinching, never having seen Alicia so upset. Her eyes veered to Kelsa who had failed to react to the flying stool; Alicia’s outburst being answered with silence. The sisters looked to each other, their growing worry showing. A low growl emerged from Kelsa, her temper rising, the rage in her veins awakening her soul once more. With dried, bloodied hands she grabbed onto the bars of her cell and with what little strength she had left in her body, she proceeded to lift herself up. Hanging onto the black metal, unsteady on her feet, her legs were weak and shaking. Sounds ripped away from her throat as she struggled to fight back. Her pale grey silvery eyes glowed as her forehead rested on the cool, hard surface, focusing on her target: Alicia’s insolent glare. So long she had kept quiet; so long she had stood by while others feared her, so long she had been an outcast even in her own home, a stranger amongst her own family. Her own flesh and blood! She would be silent no longer, what was there for her to lose, death was ready to come and

there was nothing any of them could do to avoid it. Like a dam breaking free, Kelsa spoke up outraged.

“LIVING, ALICIA? Don’t you mean spreading my legs for every male who stared my way? A whore more likely! WHERE IS YOUR KNIGHT, DEFENDER OF YOUR VIRTUE? WHERE IS HE, ALICIA? The man who pledged sanctuary to you and yours for his pound of flesh! Every night he asked for you, every night you went with a smile and a wave, looking down on everyone. Look at you now, used and discarded. You were foolish enough to think he would keep his word.”

All were stunned by such a direct attack from Kelsa. Even Alicia’s eyes filled with tears at such harsh words of retaliation. Lifting her head with pride and holding her honor high, Alicia promised Kelsa:

“He will come to me. You wait and see; *HE* won’t let me die.”

Kelsa could not hold herself back as she laughed at her sister’s foolish innocence, her siblings were now all positive that she had finally gone mad. Feeling the strength leave her body, Kelsa did not let her physical weakness stop her from speaking her mind, as she glided back down to the floor, her back to Alicia.

“You’ve a fool’s head to put so much faith in a man’s word. He’s a man! You are still so young and naïve! He won’t come for you. You were nothing to him but a pair of warm thighs. You were nothing Alicia, just a body to be discarded once he was done with you.”

“He’ll come for me, you just wait and see. He will ... .”

“He’ll what Alicia? He’ll save you just like he did William?”

Kelsa raged back at Alicia her every breath filled with anger. Never had she cut through her sibling with such harsh words refusing to let

the young girl be victorious in this argument. Alicia needed to face a few truths before they all passed on. Alicia opened her mouth for a rebuttal but was shocked as she stayed mute. She was beautiful and gifted in the arts of healing and brought hope and happiness to people who had none. The peasants loved her, why would anyone want her to die?

“You were his whore and he tired of you. Accept it, you die tomorrow.”

“At least I’ve lived Kelsa, in the light of day for all to see. I never lied about enjoying the pleasures of the flesh. I stand with no shame. Yes, a whore I may be, but what of you? The peasants, they see death around you. They fear you. *YOU* are the reason we are going to die tomorrow. I blame you. You are the cause of all of this!”

Kelsa was thankful for the semi-darkness of her cell as she closed her eyes. The tiniest ray of light kissed her cheek, like the gentle caress of a mother’s hand, it being the only witness to the rolling tear. She sat with her back to the other occupants of the tower, her voice weak and defeated, she answered Alicia’s truth.

“My birth has made me into the person that I am; it is something that none of you have ever understood.”

Why deny it? A sigh of resignation escaped her lips as she gathered her knees up to her chest. Soon, soon she would have release. Soon there would be peace from all of this. Unaware of her sister’s defeat, Alicia opened her mouth to launch another vigorous verbal attack. She lunged forward with an accusing finger held up. Knowing the true reason they were to face their deaths in the morning, and feeling extreme guilt, Nostra and Cina stepped forward, sensing Kelsa’s weakness. Nostra bellowed from her own cell.

“ENOUGH! I’ve heard enough from the both of you. This bickering won’t get us out of here.”

Annoyed by Nostra’s interruption, Alicia walked back to her small window trying to catch a glimpse of the people below as the chanting crowd began to slowly disperse; her eyes scanning the crowd eagerly for anyone who could help them. The light of day caught a glimpse of her red pouty lips that had known so many hours of laughter and stolen kisses from so many men. There had to be one of them who would try to help her escape; hadn’t she meant anything to any of them?

Cina, stood on her stool near her own window, amazed at the view. She could see so far into the distance. Her emerald green eyes strained as she tried to see beyond the horizon. She breathed in the sun while listening to the song of a lone bird in the distance. Her gaze fell onto the village church. She gave voice to the worrying thoughts that had gripped her soul so many years ago when she had been but a girl and Alicia still in their mother’s womb.

“I hate to say this, but Kelsa is right. Mother warned us years ago this day would come. She said our fate would be sealed when men stopped believing in the Great Goddess, falling to the praises and words of the black robes. She said the day would come when their hearts closed themselves to her and our way of life.”

She looked to the building of worship with its grey stones, standing tall and dark, with its wooden doors tightly closed. A chill ran through her, everything about that building had always scared her. It reminded her of a prison, holding the many secrets of its sinners. *This was a place of worship? What kind of God lived in such a house?* Closing her eyes, Cina’s memory traveled to another time. A time when her mother was still alive and she didn’t have a care in the world.