

Excerpt from the 1951's Edition of the Commission of Magic
Management's Warnings on Necromancers...

Necromancers are a rare breed of witch, prone to dark magic, hellraising, and general troublemaking. Raising the unwilling dead, of course, is illegal and highly frowned upon. To avoid a sharp finger-wagging, and a fine of 150,000 dollars, all raising of the dead requires the agreement of the corpse being raised, however temporarily. The deceased must either agree to being raised from the grave prior to its death, or this may be obtained from a certified Speaker to the Dead.

All American witches suspected of necromancy must attend the New England Academy of the Dead. There are no exceptions.

Liches, of course, are a serious problem in the necromancer community. Though the death witches have an extended lifespan of a few hundred years, this is not enough for some. Liches are soulless, power-hungry, undead creatures that will live forever unless disposed of properly. How liches are made is currently unknown. Only known reference was the Tome of the Undying, the infamous book of the dead, which has been missing since 1893.

Remember, only purchase hellraising services from certified graduates of the Academy of the Dead.

PROLOGUE

ACADEMY OF THE DEAD

Only the image of Atticus Blackwell, completely defeated and lying prone underneath her hand-me-down, black heel, kept Maddox Abernathy from stuttering over the final words of her graduation speech.

She despised public speaking as it included the only thing she abhorred more than talking—the public. Even if she didn’t know that this crowd of well-bred, privileged witches all despised her for defeating their sons and daughters, Maddox would have dreaded this speech, anyway.

Her farewell and insincere well wishes fleeing her mouth, Maddox stumbled to return to her seat next to the Salutatorian of the New England Academy of the Dead. Atticus watched her struggle with her shoes across the stage, a ghost of that trademark smirk she despised along his lips. For eight years the man had viciously competed with her, and finally, after hundreds of late-night, solitary study sessions, she had emerged victorious.

Sure, some of those nights spent with her nose in books filled with Latin phrases like “*dissect an idyllic heart*” or “*roast human marrow before attempting to use in potions*” hadn’t been quite as solitary as she had wanted. Not after Atticus had found her preferred study room, a spot she refused to abandon just because her nemesis would occasionally storm inside, claiming one professor or another said he could copy her notes, and would stay long past his welcome.

Despite the large crowd, Maddox could hear her family cheer her on, lost somewhere in the wave of excited bodies. The Abernathys were a full-on unit. Her grandfather, parents, all four of her older sisters, and every single one of her cousins had traveled from the Pacific Northwest just to see her triumph.

This would be their first and final time visiting the prestigious Academy of the Dead. Maddox was the sole necromancer in her happy druidic family. All thanks to a great-great-great-grandfather that had a knack for raising the dead and getting chased out of small-minded villages, Maddox had spent years amongst her nature-inclined family, watching them heal and nurture while she battled

the dark urge for the unnatural that hummed in her veins.

There! She found her family amongst the crowd, wearing blue jeans and flannels, and sorely sticking out from the otherwise somber, grimly dressed hellraisers.

Atticus stood just before she was about to scoot past him. He still had a single, annoying inch of height over her—though she was tall herself and wearing heels. He was lean and unfairly charismatic, and he opened his arms as if he was about to embrace her. Maddox froze before awkwardly placing a single arm around his back, and she resisted the urge to send one of her four-inch heels through the toe of his black dress shoe.

Luckily for him, the touch was brief and completely appropriate, though it still startled her. Perhaps he had matured between finals and graduation.

“Congratulations, Maddox,” he whispered with bright, amber eyes that did not quite match his smile. A familiar tinge of red circled his iris, a warning to other witches and warlocks that this man was a necromancer. Maddox, despite sharing a magical proficiency with him, didn’t have that red-eyed feature. Her eyes were clear and blue—the red of her necromancer’s mark showed up at the end of her thick, chocolate brown hair instead.

Atticus, as usual, ruined everything as he continued to open his damned mouth. “I’m surprised you managed to get through that at all. Listening to you practice in the courtyard wasn’t exactly awe-inspiring.”

“That’s *funny*,” she scoffed, for once ready with a comeback to his insult. “I find it really helps to imagine my heel stepping into your chest.”

“That’s *funny*.” His voice thrummed with his dark laughter. His attempts at humor were always at her expense. “I imagined the same scenario last night.”

Nope. The man was just as infuriating as he’d been in class. That lame hug was surely performative. After finals, Atticus had quickly accepted a teaching position at the Academy. Clearly, he was trying to convey to his new colleagues that he was no longer the cutthroat student he’d been for so many years.

Any other day, Atticus’s teasing would have tipped her over the edge. Today, on the stage as her class’s Valedictorian, Maddox smiled up at Atticus, her words as sickly sweet as black licorice. “I look forward to never seeing you again, Atticus Blackwell. Goodbye.”

That smirk twitched, and his perfect, fine eyebrows pinched together. “What about the librarian position?”

Right, that rumor was still going around. The Academy had a tremendous, multi-level library filled to the brim with North America’s most deadly literature—grimoires, tomes, carvings, and scrolls from all over the world. And hardly any of it was properly categorized or even translated.

Maddox had been all but guaranteed a position amongst the over-worked library staff. It had been a dream come true—spending her career surrounded by knowledge no other witch would ever see.

It *was* a dream until Atticus had been selected as the new Apothecary professor. While she was sure he deserved it, potion-making had been the one class he always bested her in, Maddox couldn't bear the thought of spending any more of her too long life near the man.

“I withdrew my application.”

The class threw their pointed witch hats, those that were wearing them, into the air as the band played Chopin’s *Nocturne* in C-Sharp Minor. Maddox turned away from her suddenly pale, former rival and, laughing, tossed her hat into the crowd.

She had won. It was time to go home.