

Three
Kisses,
One
Midnight



A Novel

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHORS

ROSHANI
CHOKSHI

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SANDHYA
MENON

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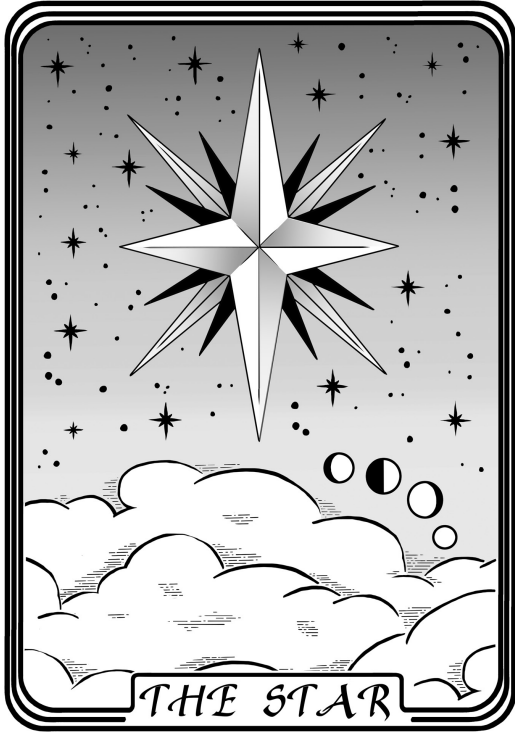
ROSHANI CHOKSHI

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SANDHYA MENON



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*A*pollonia “Onny” Diamante walked into fifth-period biology with magic tucked into the back pocket of her jeans.

Carrying around magic was nothing new to Onny.

At Moon Ridge High, she was voted “Most Likely to End Up as Your Friendly Neighborhood Witch.” This was . . . fair. Onny dressed like she was trapped in a Stevie Nicks music video and smelled like the weirdly pleasant love child of a fancy floral boutique and a New Age store that might exclusively sell rare crystals dug up by endangered goats. If she wasn’t carrying a tarot card from her daily reading in her pocket—alas, not all dresses cooperated with the universe’s divine will—then it was somewhere in her chic leather backpack tucked along with a satin satchel of rose quartz pebbles, a jade carving of a tiger for luck, and, as always, her silver notebook. That notebook, her *lola*’s last gift to her before she moved on from this world, never left Onny’s side.

Some people thought Onny’s notebook was stuffed full of spells, but it was really full of star charts, astrological predictions, and the occasional documentation of things that *felt* like omens. Onny wasn’t so much a witch as she was “witchy adjacent.” She didn’t want to wield magic so much as know that it was there. She wanted to close her eyes and hear the subtle music of stars

shifting in the sky . . . not stare at empty corners and hiss about seeing dead people.

Most of all, she wanted proof that when things felt bleak or when her world felt wildly unmoored, she could find reason in the stars, and she could use that light to find her way out of any dark.

Letting the supernatural guide her was, Onny believed, a family inheritance passed down from her tiny, extremely eccentric Filipina grandmother. Her grandmother used to flaunt her *pamahiin*, or superstitions, as if they were precious diamonds, and she was never seen without her own leather-bound, sometimes-magic-potions-and-sometimes-recipes book. Onny's mom, Corazon, chalked up her grandmother's "magic" to a wild imagination and convincing charisma . . . , but whenever they used to visit Lola's house, Onny noticed the deferential—and sometimes bewildered—looks the neighbors cast her grandmother. Plus, it was hard to miss the tiny presents appearing in her foyer: flowers from a couple who thanked her for curing their colicky baby, a casserole from a local librarian thanking her for adding her "magic touch" to the school rose garden, and, on one occasion, an angry Post-it note from a neighbor convinced that Lola had hexed her boyfriend.

Why'd you do that? Onny had asked.

Because he was noisy, smelly, rude, and her dog didn't like him! Never trust someone your animal doesn't like! her lola had said, dismissively tossing the note. *I did that woman a favor.* Hmpf.

All her life, Onny had wanted to be like her *lola*. In the third

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grade, Onny even brought her own “grimoire” to class, but that just ended with her in the principal’s office after she threatened to turn Oliver Bergen into a lizard and he’d started crying about it. The fact that the grimoire was really just her mother’s fancy address book might have gotten her off the hook at school, but her grandmother had been furious.

The only true power are words, anak, and how we make people believe them! her lola had scolded. We cannot use them lightly! Don’t waste your magic words on foolish occasions. Save them for something special.

What did you use them for? Onny had asked.

Onny would never forget the sly, delighted expression in her lola’s eyes. They were sitting in her living room. On the nearest table stood one of the many photos of her grandfather. He had passed away long before Onny was born, but she’d grown up on tales of how he’d serenaded her teenage grandmother by moonlight and smuggled love letters to her house disguised in baskets of jackfruit and mango. They were together for fifty years before he died. Her lola picked up his picture, smiling at it wistfully.

I used it for love, anak, said her lola, winking. If I could do it again, I would. Magic is never wasted on true love. When you’re ready, I’ll share the secret with you.

When her grandmother died six months ago, Onny felt like the world had gone quiet without her. Before she’d passed, she’d given Onny her old spells-and-recipes book. For the longest time, Onny couldn’t open it. It was too hard to look at her grandmother’s soft, slanting handwriting and not feel a well of grief opening up inside her. But one October morning a few weeks



ago, Onny accidentally knocked down the book . . . , and when it fell, she found a letter addressed to her.

There, in her grandmother's beautiful script, these words:

A love potion for my Onny. May it bring you the magic it brought me.

In that second, the air around Onny felt electric, the stars outside drew a little closer, and she imagined the whole world was holding its breath and craning its neck to look at her and find out what she would do next.

Onny had immediately consulted her tarot. With shaking hands, she flipped her card over and found The Lovers card staring back at her. She ran to her astrological journal and read the words that were supposed to capture the entire month of October: "*You're feeling charged with a new idea. Are you ready to accept the universe with open arms?*"

This had to be a sign from the universe. *This* was what those magic words had been waiting for. And *this*, thought Onny with a pang of grief, was her grandmother's last gift to her: love. A love like the kind she and her grandfather had shared. A love that summoned magic into the world.

In a way, it was perfect timing. All Halloweens felt a little magical, but *this* Halloween was a huge deal in Moon Ridge, and not just because of her parents' extravagant midnight "gala." Onny didn't really know why they were calling it that, but the fact that it combined her two favorite things of "bougie" and "spooky" made it an automatic win. This Halloween celebrated the four-hundred-year anniversary of the town's founding.

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Local legends said that on every hundred-year anniversary, magic woke up in Moon Ridge and all things became possible, which made the midnight gala the *perfect* opportunity to use her *lola's* spell.

And of course, like all good magic, it needed to be shared.

The moment Onny started planning, she'd informed The Coven, which consisted of her two best friends, Ash and True. The Coven's nickname was rooted in dark origins, beginning when Onny's boyfriend in seventh grade had dared, over text, to dump her. One night soon after, some of the students saw Onny, Ash, and True in the woods, cackling over a fire. The next day, the ex-boyfriend got mono from the girl he'd kissed at band camp. It was official: The Coven had cursed him.

In reality, the three of them had been toasting marshmallows and trying to rid Onny of her heartache. But no one believed them, and so the nickname stuck.



Five minutes before biology class started, Onny unlocked her phone and scrolled to “THE COVEN” group chat. For weeks, she'd been working on her *lola's* spell, perfecting its ingredients and recipes and even incantations. Today, exactly one day before Halloween, *everything* was ready.

Onny: DOUBLE, DOUBLE TOIL AND TROUBLE! THE LOVE POTION IS OFFICIALLY BREWWWWED. Followed all of

Lola's instructions, including stirring in the clippings of a dead man's toenails :D

True: NOPE.

Ash: Please say that's a joke.

Onny: Duh. The potion called for teeth not toenails.

Ash: . . .

True: Well, hopefully he brushed before he kicked the bucket.

Onny: Alright fine. It was calamansi juice, jasmine petals plucked at the full moon, ginger, and alchemical whatnot that I refuse to share because the NSA is watching and I can't risk this becoming government knowledge.

Ash: Idk. Feels kinda wrong to make someone fall in love.

Onny: We are not MAKING someone love us! We are, as the spell says, "awakening" the potential seedlings of love in another person. Like, if it's there, then it'll be love. If not, then NO MEANS NO, even in magic.

True: Wtf. I can't believe I let myself, a future scientist, be talked into this.

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Onny: We is making ze magic . . . for science.

Onny: AND ALSO FOR UNDYING LOVE! BECAUSE ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN TOMORROW! EVEN THE APOCALYPSE! BUT! HOPEFULLY! NOT! THAT! 🍷🍷

Ash: Sigh x 2

True: Brb, brewing up a v humane tranquilizer.

Onny grinned as she quickly typed out a message:

Also, I stole some fancy paper from the art studio and wrote down the “magic words” on 3 sheets of paper, one for each of us. Will drop off in your lockers. Get ready to ensorcell ~*~tRuE lOvE~*~

True: I’m assuming for you that means “Alexander the Great-Looking.”

Ash: 😊 haha.

A dopey grin slid across Onny’s face at the mention of Alexander the Great-Looking. True’s text was, well, *true*. Alexander was the apple of her eye . . . and he had just walked into class.

Alexander Abernathy—whom Onny had first dubbed Alexander the Great-Looking—had the appearance of a missing



Hemsworth brother and sounded—because the universe was a saucy minx and intent on having her fail this class—like a Scottish laird. Sometimes when he talked, she wanted to just fling herself into his arms and proclaim, *Yes, take me away to a heather-strewn moor!*

Alexander was funny, smart, dreamy, and her perfect zodiac companion. Which, to Onny, meant that their love was written in the stars. . . .

At least, it should have been, if not for their disastrous first conversation.



The first time they “officially” met was at last month’s Homecoming game. Moon Ridge High’s team had just won, and everyone was busy catching rides to the after-party at Cassidy Rivera’s house. Ash and True had gone to grab True’s beast of a car known as Miss Hocus-Pocus while Onny waited by the curb.

It was right then that all the stars aligned (as Onny knew they would because . . . horoscope), and when Onny turned to her left, she saw Alexander the Great-Looking standing next to her. Onny had noticed him plenty of times during biology class. Mostly: the shoulders. Secondly: the face. Thirdly: the accent. Honestly, if he was just shoulders and face and accent, he’d still be in her top-ten ranking for “Humans I’d Like to Repopulate the Earth with in Case of Apocalypse.”

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“Looks like the stars aligned, eh?” Alexander had said.

Onny felt the air rush out of her lungs. Did he somehow *know* that was her horoscope reading, too?

“For the game,” Alexander clarified.

“Oh,” said Onny. “Yes. Totally. Go . . . Moonbears.”

It was a sad name for a team, and truly the only way they could get around it was by being an unbeatable athletic force. Pretty smart tactic, actually.

“I can’t speak for my own stars, sadly,” said Alexander. “My sister put a peculiar zodiac app on my phone, and I think the last thing it said was ‘beware of sandwiches.’ Deadly stuff, sandwiches.”

Onny grinned. “You’d be taking your life into your own hands with a single bite.”

“Hang on, now I’m wondering what it’s saying about today,” said Alexander, pulling out his phone. He swiped the screen, squinted, then read aloud, “‘This is the time of love, Sagittarius! Communication for the week is likely to be honest and dynamic. Open your heart and enjoy where the journey takes you.’”

He made a *hmpf* sound. “S’ppose the bit about sandwiches was a lie then.”

But Onny was barely listening. He was a Sagittarius? That was a perfect pairing to her air sign!

“I’m an Aquarius,” she blurted out.

“Is that so?” said Alexander. He winked, then lifted up his phone. “Well, according to this thing, that means you and I are a perfect match.”

It was, in all honesty, a beautiful moment that Onny wished

she could somehow smooch between glass. The late-September air smelled like woodsmoke. In the distance, she could see the school's apple orchard, where the ripe, shiny fruit hung from dark branches like gems fashioned out of individual sunsets. This was the time of year when Moon Ridge really came alive. In every season, Moon Ridge was a jewel box of a town. Some businesses and farms—like Blush Apple Orchards—had been in people's families for generations, and the city was rich with parks and fountains and kissing benches under the old willow trees. In the winter, Moon Ridge wore the snow like rich buttercream frosting on a cake. In the spring, the flowers on Robocker Avenue swayed like they were dancing. And in the summer, the streets turned hazy in the aftermath of fireworks. But fall was special. In autumn, Moon Ridge crackled with magic: banked fires roared, the trees rippled with gold, and the wind whispered the distant promise of frost in the year's last golden laugh.

At the time, Onny had been leaning against one of the bike racks. Her shoulder-length black hair was waved in a vintage Hollywood style, and she had on a faux-fur shag coat that made her look—and feel—like an underworld queen.

She had completely planned to tilt her chin up ever so slightly, maybe even shoot Alexander a saucy wink (she'd been practicing her winks on True and Ash, and over the summer True had finally conceded that she no longer looked like a creature in its death throes, so hooray), but then . . . of course, Byron Frost had to ruin it.

Onny caught the dark stretch of his shadow right before he shattered her perfect moment.

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Oh no, she thought. *No no no no—*

“Looks like your human sacrifice worked, Onny. Congratulations.”

Alexander had frowned. “Human sacrifice?”

“She wanted to guarantee the team would win, so, you know, the human had to go. She was quite brutal about it, if I’m being honest.”

Onny was seriously considering sacrificing Byron next if he uttered another word.

Alexander’s gorgeous smile started tugging downward. “Uh—”

I can fix this! thought Onny valiantly. She flashed him her most dazzling grin, then brushed the hair out of her eyes.

“Ha. Byron is being silly, what he means is—”

But just then, True and Ash rolled up. True, in typical fashion, had smashed the horn twice and hollered out, “C’MON!”

“I’ll tell you about it later! It’s a really funny story actually—” started Onny, when True honked again.

“CLEARLY I FORGOT THE ROYAL INVITE,” shouted True. “THE MAJESTIC MISS HOCUS-POCUS AWAITS YOU, APOLLONIA DIAMANTE!”

It was times like these that Onny desperately wished she had telepathic powers. But by then, Alexander’s friends had shown up in their car.

“See you at the after-party?” Onny asked.

“Uh, no, got other plans, actually,” said Alexander, looking distinctly disturbed. “See you Monday.”

Onny watched Alexander disappear into a sleek car.

Byron waited until that moment to step beside her, a sly smirk on his face as he said, in mock wonder, “Hmm. I wonder if he knew that ‘Human’ was the name of the tulip we dissected in class last week. Aptly named, and then sacrificed, of course, by you.”

Onny could feel the cosmic force of her glare rising up from her toes. Maybe it was a little over the top to imagine a flower being sacrificed to the greater good . . . like the Homecoming game. But Onny had felt kind of bad about tearing apart a flower just to look at its pistils and whatever else, and it sounded so much better in her head to pretend there was a grander purpose to “Human’s” sacrifice. Byron, of course, thought she was being ridiculous and had merely stared at her when she began the “funeral procession” to the trash can.

Onny glared at him. “Thanks for ruining that.”

“Try sacrificing another flower,” said Byron, turning on his heel. “That should fix it.”

While Onny eventually explained it to Alexander, who laughed off the whole thing, all of her attempts to get him into another perfect moment had failed. Alexander would smile at her, but it seemed like every time she tried to go over and talk to him, one of his friends would show up and refuse to get the hint. Once, Alexander tried to get her attention, but Onny was already in the car with Ash and True on the way somewhere urgent. Timing was flat out *not* on her side. Fail, fail, fail.

But Onny knew things were bound to change.



This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the authors' imaginations or are used fictitiously.

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