

USA TODAY BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF NO REST FOR THE WICKED

# KRESLEY COLE

"A unique take on  
paranormal romance."  
—Meredith Kavanon  
on *The Ranger's Wife*  
—*So City*

*Immortal  
enemies . . .  
forbid  
temptation.*

## WICKED DEEDS ON A WINTER'S NIGHT

The Immortals After Dark Series



**Wicked Deeds**

**on a**

**Winter's Night**

**Valkyrie 04**

**KRESLEY COLE**

cover

*This book is dedicated to the warm, witty, and amazing Beth Kendrick, because we're good enough friends to say, "Isn't it about time you dedicated a book to me?" and "How 'bout that book dedication?"*



# Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the wonderful short poem “The Witch in the Glass” by Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt (1836–1919), which I use within this book, and which inspired the character of Mariketa the Awaited, as well as her unique talents.

## Glossary of Terms

from the

*Living Book of Lore*

## The Lore

*“... and those sentient creatures that are not human shall be united in one stratum, coexisting with, yet secret from, man’s.”*

## The Lykae Clan

*“A proud, strapping warrior of the Keltoi People (or Hidden People, later known as Celts) was taken in his prime by a maddened wolf. The warrior rose from the dead, now an immortal, with the spirit of the beast latent within him. He*

*displayed the wolf's traits: the need for touch, an intense loyalty to its kind, an animal craving for the delights of the flesh.*

*Sometimes the beast rises... ”*

- Also called werewolves, war-wolds.
- Enemies of the Vampire Horde.

## **The Talisman's Hie**

*“A treacherous and grueling scavenger's hunt for magickal talismans, amulets, and other mystical riches over the entire world.”*

- The rules forbid killing—until the final round. Any other trickery or violence is encouraged.
- Held every two hundred fifty years.
- Hosted by Riora, the goddess of impossibility.

## **The House of Witches**

*“... immortal possessors of magickal talents, practitioners of good and evil.”*

- Mystical mercenaries who sell their spells.
- Separated into five castes: warrior, healer, enchantress, conjurer, and seeress.
- Led by Mariketa the Awaited

## **The Valkyrie**

*“When a maiden warrior screams for courage as she dies in battle, Wóden and Freya heed her call. The two gods give up lightning to strike her, rescuing her to their hall, and preserving her courage forever in the form of the maiden’s immortal Valkyrie daughter.”*

- Take sustenance from the electrical energy of the earth, sharing it in one collective power, and give it back with their emotions in the form of lightning.
- Possess preternatural strength and speed.
- Without training, they can be mesmerized by shining objects and jewels.
- Also called Swan Maidens, Shield Maidens.
- Enemies of the Vampire Horde.

## The Vampires

*Two warring factions, the Horde and the Forbearer Army.*

- Each vampire seeks his *Bride*, his eternal wife, and walks as the living dead until he finds her.
- A Bride will render his body fully alive, giving him breath and making his heart beat, a process known as *blooding*.
- *Tracing* is teleporting, the vampires' means of travel. A vampire can only trace to destinations he's previously been.

## The Horde

*"In the first chaos of the Lore, a brotherhood of vampires dominated, by relying on their cold nature, worship of logic, and absence of mercy. They sprang from the harsh steppes of Dacia and migrated to Russia, though some say a secret enclave, the Daci, live in Dacia still."*

- Distinguished by their red eyes, a side effect of drinking victims to death.
- Enemies of most factions in the Lore.

## The Forbearers

*“... his crown stolen, Kristoff, the rightful Horde king, stalked the battlefields of antiquity seeking the strongest, most valiant human warriors as they died, earning him the name of Gravewalker. He offered eternal life in exchange for eternal fealty to him and his growing army.”*

- An army of vampires consisting of turned humans, who do not drink blood directly from the flesh.
- Kristoff was raised as a human and then lived among them. He and his army know little of the Lore.
- Enemies of the Horde.

## **The Demonarchies**

*“The demons are as varied as the bands of man...”*

- A collection of demon dynasties. Some kingdoms ally with the Horde.
- Most demon breeds can *trace* like vampires.

## **The Furiae**

*“If you do evil, beg for punishment—before they come...”*

- Ruthless she-warriors bent on delivering justice to evil men when they escape it elsewhere.
- Led by Alecta the Unyielding One.
- Also called Furies, Erinyes.

## **Berserkers**

*“A berserker’s lonely life is filled with naught but battle rage and bloodlust...”*

- A cadre of warriors who swore allegiance to Wóden, known for their merciless brutality.
- Though some are immortal through resurrection, most are mortal—one of the few human orders to be recognized and accepted by the Lore.
- Able to conjure the spirit of the bear, and channel its ferocity.

## **The Wraiths**

*“... their origin unknown, their presence chilling.”*

- Spectral, howling beings. Undefeatable and, for the most part, uncontrollable.

- Also called the Ancient Scourge.

## **The Turning**

*“Only through death can one become an ‘other.’”*

- Some beings, like the Lykae, vampires, and demons, can turn a human or even other Lore creatures into their kind through differing means, but the catalyst for change is always death, and success is not guaranteed.

## **The Accession**

*“And a time shall pass that all immortal beings in the Lore, from the Valkyrie, vampire, Lykae, and demon factions, to the phantoms, shifters, fey, and sirens... must fight and destroy each other.”*

- A kind of mystical checks-and-balances system for an ever-growing population of immortals.
- Occurs every five hundred years. Or right now...

*Love spells are a lot like platform diving. Once you start the process, there's no going back, and the end will be fugly if you don't know what the hell you're doing.*

—Mariketa the Awaited Mercenary of the Wiccaae,

Future Leader of the House of Witches

*Witches are good for one thing and only one thing. Tinder.*

—Bowen Graeme MacRieve

Third in line for the Lykae throne



# Prologue

## *The Forest of Three Bridges*

### *Winter 1827*

*It wants to mark my flesh...* The full moon beat light down on a canvas of snow and barren trees, making Mariah's hunter green dress glow as distinctly as a beacon for the beast pursuing her.

*Mark me with its teeth,* she thought wildly as she leapt across an icy rivulet. When the beast's frenzied roar echoed through the forest, she stumbled at the embankment. Frantically scrambling up, she continued her flight for home.

Birch branches clawed at her hair and raked her cold-numbed face. As she twisted from their grasp, snow began to fall once more, blurring her vision. Another bellow in the dark silenced night creatures; the sound of her ragged breaths became deafening.

Bowen, the man she'd loved since she was a girl, had warned her of the full moon, preparing her: "I will change, Mariah. I canna control it. And you are vulnerable to harm still..."

She'd insisted on meeting him this night, because she'd known how critical this time was for him—and because she was anxious to make up for denying his desires again and again. But then, at this last hour, her courage failed her. She'd looked upon the face of her beloved, and the moon had revealed a monster in his place.

It had known she was horrified. Its eyes, glowing ice blue, had been filled with an animal-like yearning until they narrowed with comprehension. “Run... Mariah,” it had grated in an unfamiliar rasp. “Get to the... castle. Lock yourself away... from me.”

She could hear him crashing toward her, ever nearer, but she was almost there. Reaching the edge of the forest, she saw her home in the snowy plain below her—a castle towering amidst the confluence of their kingdom's three great rivers. *So close.*

Mariah raced for the familiar winding path that would lead her down. As soon as she alighted upon it, movement exploded before her eyes. Suddenly the air teemed with ravens, shooting up all around her, wings batting her numbed face. Swinging at them blindly, she stumbled and lost her footing on the icy, root-strewn path.

Weightlessness... falling... tumbling down the side of the

ravine... The impact wrenched the breath from her lungs and made her sight darken. Falling still...

When she landed at the bottom, it was to a sickening wet sound as some force punched through her stomach. Unimaginable pain erupted through her. She gaped in incomprehension at the sharp stump jutting up from her body. *No... No... cannot be.*

As the pain dimmed to only a chilling sensation of pressure within her, she weakly grasped the remains of an axed -down birch, felled by one of her kingdom's woodsmen.

With each breath, blood bubbled from her mouth. It dripped from her face into the snow, as softly as tears.

Mariah of the Three Bridges would die in the moon's shadow of her own home.

In a daze, staring at the sky, she listened while the beast crashed toward her impossibly faster, as if scenting the blood. Before it could reach Mariah, she recognized she was no longer alone.

Just after she spied more ravens circling overhead, icy lips met hers. Emptiness and chaos seeped through her like a disease. As she writhed futilely, a voice inside Mariah's head

spoke of this night, a wintry eve brimming with purpose.

*“Die,”* the voice whispered against Mariah’s bloody mouth. Immediately, she perceived the stillness of her heart. Her lungs ceased their labors and the mask of pain on her face slackened.

The presence faded, replaced by another. Mariah’s last sight was the beast, roaring in agony to the moon, clawing at its chest with wild sorrow.

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***Present day***

***Tomb of the Incubi, the jungles of Guatemala***

***Day 3 of the Talisman’s Hie***

***Prize: Four Mayan sacrificial headdresses, each worth seven points***

“Stalking me, Mr. MacRieve?” Mariketa the Awaited asked the Lykae behind her without turning around. In the dark of a corridor leading to a burial chamber, Bowen MacRieve had been following her silently. But she’d *felt* him staring at her—just as she had at the Talisman’s Hie assembly three nights ago.

“No’ likely, witch.” How could such a rumbling Scots’ burr sound so menacing? “I only stalk what I want to catch.”

Mari did turn to slant him a glance at that, even knowing he couldn’t see her face under the hood of the scarlet cloak she always wore. But by the light of her lantern hanging over her shoulder, she could see his, and used the cover to disguise her long, appreciative look.

She inwardly sighed. Lykae males were notoriously good-looking, and the few she’d seen had lived up to their reputation, but this one was heart-poundingly sexy.

He had black hair, stick straight and thick, reaching to the collar of his obviously expensive shirt. His body—which she’d found herself thinking about frequently over the past few days—was sublime. He stood a good bit over six feet tall, and though the corridor was wide enough for two normal-size people to pass, his broad shoulders and big, rangy build filled the space.

But even with all his many attractions, his eyes were what made him so unique. They were the color of rich, warm amber, and yet there was a kind of sinister light to them, which she liked.

She was a little sinister, too.

“Look your fill?” he asked, his tone scathing. Yes, he was sexy, but unfortunately, his dislike of witches was well known.

“I’m done with you,” she answered, and meant it. She didn’t have time to pine after brusque werewolf warriors if she planned to be the first of her kind ever to win the Hie, an immortal scavenger hunt à la *The Amazing Race*.

With an inward shrug, she continued on toward yet another burial chamber. This was the tenth she ’d investigated over the hours she and several other competitors had been down deep inside this never-ending Mayan tomb.

She might have surprised him with her curt dismissal because a moment passed before he followed her. The only sounds in the echoing space were his heavy footfalls, which he no longer bothered to muffle. The silence between them was grueling.

“Who opened the stone slab to the tomb?” he finally asked, trailing far too closely behind her.

“The three elven archers and a couple of demons.” The archers, two males and a female, were deadly shooters with lightning-quick speed, and the male rage demons were

incredibly powerful—second in physical strength only to the Lykæ. Yet even for them, the stone portcullis sealing the tomb's entrance had been nearly impossible to budge.

They'd realized the entire pyramidal structure had shifted from time and earthquakes and now rested on the portcullis, making it weigh tons. Raising it had taken all of the others cooperating—with the two demons lifting it and the archers shoving an enormous boulder under it to prop it open.

“And they just let you enter after their effort?”

She stopped and faced him again. “What should they have done, Mr. MacRieve?” The others had not only allowed her to enter.

Though she barely knew any of them, they had wanted to work together since there were four prizes. Cade, one of the demons, had even helped her climb down the dozen feet from the outer entrance into the first anteroom. Then they'd all split up to cover the maze of chambers and vowed to the Lore to alert the others of a find.

MacRieve's smile was a cruel twist of his lips. “I know exactly what I would have done.”

“I know exactly how I would have retaliated.” He seemed

surprised that she didn't fear him, but the truth was that she didn't spook easily—when not faced with heights or unnecessarily large insects. And she was well aware of how vicious the Hie competitors could be as they raced around the world for prizes.

This ruthlessness in the Hie was why Mari had been sent by the House of Witches to compete, even though she was only twenty -

three and hailed from the shady New Orleans coven, the slacker Animal House of witches. And even though she had not yet made the turn from mortal to immortal.

But Mari was not above trickery, and unlike many witches, she would not hesitate to use magick to harm another if they deserved it—and if she could manage it with her volatile powers.

MacRieve closed in until nearly seven feet of seething werewolf male loomed over her. He was at least a foot taller than she was and hundreds of times stronger, but she forced herself to stand her ground.

“Watch your step, little witch. You doona wish to anger one such as me.”