

Western Waves
The Compass Series
By: Brittainy Cherry

Western Waves

Western Waves
Copyright © 2021 by Brittainy Cherry
All rights reserved.

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the author of this book.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, media, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

This eBook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eBook may not be resold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return it and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the author's work.

Published: Brittainy Cherry 2021, BCherry Books, INC

Editing: Jenny Sims at Editing for Indies, My Brother's Editor, Virginia Tesi Carey
Cover Design: Hang Le
Photographer: Wander Aguiar
Cover Model: Sam Myerson

For Flavia and Meire,
My fairy godmothers

For any soul whose heart has been broken, yet still believes in happily ever afters.

This one's for you.

Prologue

Stella

Six Years Old

“This isn’t our problem,” Catherine said from inside the house. I sat on Kevin’s back porch swing with Grams beside me. Everyone else called her Maple because she was so sweet like syrup. Mama always said Grams was like a grandmother to the world because she took care of any and everyone who needed it. I was the luckiest girl, though, because Maple let me call her Grams—since she was pretty much like a grandmama to me.

For the past few days, she’d been taking care of me because I needed it, I guess.

We sat there staring out at the ocean as the waves crashed against the shore. Kevin and Catherine’s house was my favorite, and I always loved when Grams let me come with her to work. When Kevin was a little boy, Grams was his nanny, and after he grew up, he kept her around as his house manager. Kevin met Mama when she started cleaning his house. The two were only a few years apart, and they became best friends. I ain’t ever known a life without Kevin or Grams in it. They were both there the day I was born at St. Michael’s Hospital, too, Mama once told me. Kevin and Grams were the two people outside of Mama who meant the world to me.

I even had Grams’s nickname as my middle one.

Stella Maple Mitchell.

“What do you expect me to do, Catherine? Stella is family. Sophie was my best friend, for goodness’ sake!” Kevin hollered at Catherine. I’d never heard him yell before. I didn’t even know he knew how to.

“I’m supposed to be your person! Your partner!” Catherine shouted back. I wasn’t surprised by that. Catherine was always yelling when she wasn’t too busy doing her makeup and stuff. “And I do not feel comfortable raising a girl who isn’t my own.”

“We wanted a family,” Kevin told her.

“Yes, our own family. Not someone’s leftovers,” Catherine yipped back.

“Bitch,” Grams muttered, shaking her head in disgust.

“Bad word,” I told her.

She smiled over at me and nodded. “Yes, sweetheart. But sometimes in life, bad words are the only way to express how awful something—or someone—is.”

“Is Catherine mad at me?” I asked as I played with the seashell necklace she made for me. Grams was a collector of seashells, and ever since I could walk, we’d go up and down Kevin’s property, collecting seashells as Grams told me stories about the ocean.

Grams knew a lot about gods and goddesses and always told me all the stories about them. The gods of the land and the gods of the wind, and the gods of fire. I liked all those stories, but my favorites were the ones about Yamiya—the goddess of the ocean.

Grams and Mama both believed in gods and goddesses. When they met, they loved sharing their traditions and beliefs with one another. They taught me songs and dances of Yamiya at a young age, and we'd always bring the goddess offerings of love and light to the ocean.

Grams said I liked Yamiya the best because I was a water sign like her and Mama. I didn't know much about what that meant, other than Grams going woo-woo weird during the full moon and new moon each month. But since my birthday was in March, Grams said that's why I felt called to the water.

Sometimes, I think it was just because I liked to splash a lot.

Grams shook her head. "Oh, no, sweetheart, she's not mad at you. She's just..." She narrowed her eyes as she listened to Catherine scream and cry from inside. "She's just..."

"A bitch?" I asked.

Grams laughed and nodded her head. "Yes, but let's keep that between the two of us."

I lowered my head and looked at the necklace. "I wish Mama was here."

"I know. Me too."

"You think she misses us?"

"Oh, sweetheart. More than you'll ever know." Grams reached into her purse and pulled out a giant seashell. "Here, listen to this." She placed the shell against my ear. "You hear that?"

"It sounds like the ocean!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, it does, and that's where your mother is now. She's now a part of the ocean, of the other realm."

I frowned. "Can she come back?"

"Not in the physical, but when you step into the water, I swear you can feel her. Remember how I told you about Yamiya? How she protects us all?"

I nodded.

"Well, your mom has joined the goddess in the ocean, and whenever you need to feel her, you can go stand in the water and breathe in her love. Plus, you can make wishes in the ocean, and they will help make them come true."

I narrowed my eyes. "I can feel her in the ocean and make wishes whenever I want to?"

"Whenever."

"Like... now?"

Grams hopped up from the porch swing, then held her hand out toward me. "Right now." I took her hand, and she pulled me up from the chair. She lowered herself until we were eye to eye. "I'll race you to the water. The first one who gets there gets to pick their favorite dessert for us after dinner tonight."

"What's your favorite dessert?"

"Liver and onions."

I made a face. "Ew! I don't want that!"

"Then you better run fast. One... two... three... go!" she shouted.

I took off running toward the water as the sun began to get sleepy and the sky looked like cotton candy. My arms flung in the air as I dashed as fast as my legs allowed. I fell into the water. It hit my toes, then my ankles, then my knees. I swung around as the waves splashed against me, and Grams joined me not long after. We laughed and danced and felt Mama's love as the water moved with us.

Maybe Grams was right. Maybe Mama was a part of the ocean. That made me happy because that meant I could talk to her whenever I needed to just by walking into the water. Plus, Grams said I could see Mama when I looked at myself, too. From my natural coiled hair to my brown skin. Every piece of me looked just like Mama, even my eyes and nose.

We stayed in the water for a long time. It wasn't until Kevin came walking toward the shore that we stopped our splashing. He seemed tired and a little sad, but he'd looked that way for a while now, ever since Mama became a part of the ocean.

Grams said he was sad because he lost his soul mate in Mama. Even though they weren't married like Kevin and Catherine, Grams was convinced that a soul mate could be a person's best friend. And when a person lost their best friend, it felt like their own heart stopped beating for a while, too.

I hoped Kevin's heart would beat again.

I didn't like him being sad.

Kevin wasn't wearing any shoes as he walked through the sand. His white button-down shirtsleeves were rolled up, and his hands were slipped into the pockets of his blue pants. He gave me a kinda-smile. A kinda-smile was when a person tried to turn their lips into a full smile, but they got tired halfway through, and it fell down into a kinda-frown.

Grams and I stood in the water as Kevin's kinda-smile looked our way.

"Is everything okay?" Grams asked.

He nodded.

Grams raised an eyebrow. "And Catherine?"

His kinda-frown turned into a full frown. "Won't be a problem anymore."

"I'm sorry," Grams said.

"I'm not," Kevin replied. He turned to me and gave me a real smile. "Hey, kiddo. I have a question for you."

"Shoot, buckaroo!" I shouted as the waves knocked me back and forth.

"What do you think about staying with me forever?"

My eyes widened, and I felt as if my heart was going to explode. "Really?"

"Yeah. I think you and I would make a good team, don't you? And Grams, of course, staying in the guesthouse?"

Grams nodded. "If you'd like me to stay, I'll stay, Kevin."

"I'd love that," he replied. "I'll need you."

"All of us will be living here?" I asked. "Like a family?"

"Yes. A family. What do you say about that?" Kevin asked.

“Forever?”

He nodded. “Forever.”

I didn’t even have time to give him any more words because I ran toward him and leaped into his arms. Grams joined us in a big group hug, and I held on to them both as tight as I could.

“Thanks, Mama,” I whispered as I hugged Kevin.

Grams and Kevin didn’t know it, but when I was in the ocean, I wished for a family again. That was how I knew that the ocean really did have powers—because my biggest wish came true.

I

Stella

Present Day

“You have got to be kidding me,” I huffed to myself as I stood in a remarkably long line for Jerry’s Bakery.

I wasn’t a woman who enjoyed waiting in lines. Not for concert tickets, not for food, not for Black Friday deals. As a matter of fact, I went out of my way to avoid lines to the best of my ability. If more than ten people were in front of me, there was a solid chance I wasn’t sticking around to try the new popular chicken sandwich. Oh, those new sneakers I’d been dying to get? Awesome! A line with twenty-five people? I’d get them next season, thankyouverymuch.

Yet that Saturday morning, I found myself standing in an extremely long line. I needed two things and two things only from Jerry’s: one blueberry scone and a black coffee with two sugar cubes. No substitutions, no matter what. There was an issue with going to Jerry’s on a Saturday morning because the whole world seemed to show up for the fresh goods. The line was wrapped around the building by eight in the morning, and I didn’t reach the front door until 8:35.

Normally, I showed up at the bakery during the week, when rush hours died down during my break from work. No part of me ever wanted to show up at Jerry’s early on a Saturday, but I didn’t have much choice that morning.

The line inched closer moment by moment, and soon enough, all that stood between the mission and me was a very tall man dressed in designer clothing. I was so close that I could almost taste the blueberries. So close that the darkened coffee was seconds away from burning the tip of my tongue. I saw my goal in the display cabinet right in front of me: a beautiful, thick blueberry scone. The last one, too. I felt as if the universe had looked down on me and kissed my cheek with its love.

Unfortunately, the universe had a sick sense of humor because it went ahead and bitch-slapped me as the gentleman in front of me ordered the last one.

“No!” I shouted, shooting in front of him as if I were trying to stop a bomb from exploding. I blocked him and the display as if it were my own mission in life. My heart pounded wildly against my rib cage as my brown eyes bugged out of my head. The cashier and the man looked at me as if I were insane, and, well... fair assessment, but I didn’t care how crazy I appeared.

All I cared about was getting that freaking scone.

“I’m sorry, I mean no harm,” I said to the terrified-looking cashier, clearing my throat. She couldn’t have been older than seventeen. Eighteen on a heavy makeup day. I turned to look at the gentleman in front of me, and when my eyes met his, I almost passed out. He looked so much like...

No.

Focus, Stella.

I pushed out the friendliest smile I could muster up and shook off my nerves as I met the coldest blue eyes I'd ever seen. They looked like the ocean—if the ocean froze over and was unwelcoming. They also delivered an icy chill down one's spine when they were fixated on you.

My whole body shivered as I stared into his blues. His posture remained strong and stable. I guessed my eyes didn't hold the same effect on him.

"I actually was going to get that blueberry scone," I said. "I've been waiting in line this whole time for that."

"That has nothing to do with me," he grumbled. His voice was deep and smoky. Was there a little New York twang in his accent? Maybe Queens? Or Brooklyn? When I was a kid, I had an odd obsession with daydreaming that I was from New York City. I'd watched one too many episodes of *Sex and The City* and practiced the different New York accents I'd hear on YouTube.

Some kids hung out with people; others mimicked accents in their bedrooms.

The stranger held his card toward the cashier, and I smacked it out of his hand, sending it to the floor. His eyes glanced down at his card, rose to meet my stare, back to the card, then back at me. I felt a wave of nausea hit me.

"Sorry," I muttered.

"Are you fucking joking?" he shot back, irritation dripping from his existence.

The poor cashier looked uncomfortable as she glanced toward the back of the shop as if hoping for someone to rescue her from the awkward situation. "Um, ma'am, I'm sorry. I'm going to need you to—"

"I'll pay you!" I cut in as I ignored the girl and looked at the man, pulling my wallet out of my purse. "How much for that scone?"

"Stop talking to me," he said, bending down to pick up his card. He went to hand it to the cashier, and I hit it out of his grip once more. His voice lowered to an annoyed snarl, and I felt the heat of his rage hitting my skin as I took a step backward. "Listen, lady," he growled.

"No, you listen. I need that blueberry scone. I called dibs!"

"You can't call dibs," the cashier said.

"Stay out of this, Julie!" I snapped at her. Then I leaned in and whispered, "I'm sorry, that was harsh. I apologize for my tone. I'm not a yeller, I swear. I'm just—"

"Very unwell," the man muttered.

I frowned. "That's rude."

"Don't care," he replied.

"That's fine. I don't care that you don't care. All that I care about is that scone."

"Then you should've shown up earlier," he shot back.

"I was going to, but I got stuck in traffic and—"

“And no one asked for your sob story.”

“You don’t understand. I—”

“Again. No one gives a shit,” he coldly stated, crouching to pick up his card once more.

“He’s right. You’re holding up the line!” a stranger shot out from the ever-growing queue behind me.

I turned to the person and said, “This is a private situation I am having with—”

“Herself,” the coldhearted man said after paying for his blueberry scone that was meant to be mine. He picked up his coffee and scone and headed toward the exit.

My chest felt as if it had been set on fire as I watched the final blueberry scone walk out of the building. Was this what Romeo felt like after losing his Juliet? I now understood how he felt when he said, “Here’s to my love! O true apothecary. Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.”

What I wouldn’t give to kiss that dang scone with my lips.

I would’ve liked to say that was my last interaction with said man, but no. I was far too unstable to allow it to end right there. Like the unhinged individual I was becoming at that moment, I chased the stranger out of the store and shouted, “Hey! Hey! Wait up!”

He looked over his shoulder at me, and I saw the annoyance that shot across his face. He turned forward and kept walking, forcing me to break out into a slightly awkward jog. How tall was that guy? His single strides were double the length of my awkward run.

“Excuse me!” I hollered as he opened the back door to his car—a very pricy-looking vehicle with his driver sitting in the front. Before the door fully opened, I hopped in front of it. “Excuse me, hi. I was actually calling after you.”

“I don’t have time for California weirdness, lady.”

Oh, so you’re not a California native. Obviously, Mr. Accent.

I smiled that “you can’t help but love me” smile. “My name’s Stella.”

“Didn’t ask.”

Okay, perhaps he could help but love me, but alas.

I wanted to continue my crazy mode, but I shifted gears into trying to come off as more approachable since I still needed that freaking scone. “Yes, but I figured it would be easier if we were on a first-name basis. Then it would make this interaction more personal.”

“I don’t do personal.”

“Well, I’m glad to announce that I am a professional at personal. So I can take the lead, and you can follow. We can do a little one-two-cha-cha-cha tango of conversation.” I cha-cha’d in front of him. He wasn’t amused.

He blankly blinked six times in a row. “Move.”

“But!”

“I have places to be, all right?!” he snapped. “So move.”

“I will, I swear. After you give me the blueberry scone.”

“You’re a psychopath.”

“Yeah, okay, cool. Call me whatever you want. As long as you give me that scone.”

He grimaced and grumbled with narrowed eyes, “You mean this scone?” He looked down at his package with the scone. He pulled it out slowly and rubbed his fingers all over it.

I didn’t care. I had a public education and survived bobbing for apples in grade school. Germs didn’t freak me out.

“Yes, that one.”

“Oh, okay.” He held it out toward me. Right as I was about to grab it, he shoved it into his mouth and ate the whole thing in three bites. *One, two, three.* Crumbs dropped to the ground as he aggressively chewed the food in my face. Honestly, most of it didn’t even make it into his mouth. The poor, sweet blueberries fell to the sidewalk, and I felt as if he’d kicked me in the privates from the simple act of caveman-ness.

“Now can you move?” he asked with a full mouth, spitting crumbs in my direction. He dusted the tidbits off his custom black suit and arched a cocky eyebrow.

“You’re a...you’re a...you’re a major asshole!” I blurted out, feeling rage, and disgust, and sad. Mostly sad.

So unbelievably sad.

“I’m not an asshole. I just have asshole tendencies,” he muttered, then sighed. “Why are you doing that?”

“Doing what?”

“Crying.”

“I’m not.”

“Your tear ducts are leaking fluid. That’s called crying.”

I touched my cheeks and shook my head. *Well, will you look at that.* I was crying. “You shouldn’t have eaten my scone,” I blurted out, becoming a blubbering mess. What was wrong with me? I knew I was an easy crier, but this was a bit ridiculous, even for me.

He cocked an eyebrow and looked more concerned than angry. His mouth parted as if he were going to offer me comfort, but instead, he shut his lips, reached into his front pocket, and handed me his perfectly folded handkerchief.

“Thank you,” I mumbled, blowing my nose in it. I held it back out to him.

He grimaced. “Keep it. Now, for the last and final time, can you move away from my car?”

I stepped to the side.

He climbed into his car and slammed the door behind him. Then his window rolled down, and he looked at me. “If it makes you feel better, it wasn’t even good,” he remarked before raising his window back up.

His driver drove away, leaving me standing there on the curb, surrounded by nothing but crumbs as the reminder of the oddest interaction. The interaction that I, clearly, made uncomfortable.

I did my best to pull myself together even though my nerves were shot. Then I climbed into my car and drove to my next destination. The part of my day that I was dreading the most. I wished I could've simply gone back to bed and skipped over the remainder of the day, but life did not come with pause buttons. Sadly enough, each day continued—no matter how much a person needed a break.