“But now I shall bind him with these love-charms. If he still torments me, I swear by the Fates it’s Hades door he’ll beat upon.”
— Idyll 2, Theocritus

When the police took Karin’s sister, she knew.
Jillian had been practicing magic.
The knowledge shuddered through her, inexplicable. No sensible person believed in magic. It wasn’t real, didn’t exist, and the curse was just a family fairy tale — unlucky in love, unlucky in magic. Well, the Bonheim women were certainly unlucky in love, marrying louts and wanderers, and not one had survived childbirth in the last one hundred and fifty years.

But bone deep, she knew.
Perhaps if Karin had listened to the thunder rolling off the mountains, she would have guessed sooner. But she was do-the-right-thing Karin. Practical Karin. Dependable Karin. So all she could do was warn Jillian when her sister had opened her shop that she was straying too close.

Careless, her sister had sworn others would read the tea leaves, not she. “Divination isn’t really magic anyway,” Jillian had said.

Karin’s brows lowered. “Rules are rules. It’s not the divination I’m worried about.” Her sisters might think her a dull sort of lawyer — all wills and business contracts, no courtroom drama. But the idea of arguing before a judge froze her marrow. Besides, in her own small way in her own small town, she’d garnered a reputation for writing unbreakable contracts. Her practice was limited — she didn’t even have her own office, renting from one of those temporary office outfits. Her hours were irregular but light. When she wasn’t in her rented office, she sat in the window of her sister’s cafe, oblivious to the longing stares from the men passing the window, and writing romance novels published under elaborate pen names and filled with throbbing and sighs and cries of passion. Karin’s own love life was DOA. She’d never known love herself, preferring her own company, but her fantasies were poetry.

“Besides.” Jillian tossed her dark hair. “Curses were made to be broken. Haven’t you studied your fairy tales?” And that was Jillian all over - bold and reckless.

So Karin watched, perched in her window seat, her long legs crossed beneath the casing of her pencil skirt. And she saw nothing alarming. Even if she had seen, she would have said nothing. She loved her sisters, Lenore and Jillian, too deeply. Jillian sold coffee and tisanes and herbs she’d gathered in the mountains, while fortune tellers from far and wide came to her coffee shop, Ground, to read the grounds and cards and stars. If there was real magic twisting through the cannisters that lined Ground’s shelves, Karin had stifled any ability to sniff it out.

Until that day.
But I should start properly, from the beginning.
Once upon a time…
Two sisters stood in the rain.