

Blood of the Fey

- Excerpt -

Legends say that, in the beginning, angels were free to roam through all planes of existence. Some chose the physical world and became so enamored with it that they could frequently be found roaming about in nature and interacting with its inhabitants. But when the War broke out, and the Fallen Ones were cast for ever out of Heaven, these angels found that they'd been locked out of Paradise as well.

Not evil enough to be sent to Hell, they were forced to spend their nearly eternal lives on Earth, where they became known as the Fey People. But living with near-unlimited powers amongst mortals brought about inevitable abuse and subsequent retribution from those they had oppressed.

The Fey saw their fortunes reversed, and their dominion gradually diminished until only one place was left for them to escape to—Avalon.

For the Fey, only a completely selfless and noble act could change their fate...

CHAPTER 1

The truth of the matter is, when you're in deep shit, there is no Prince Charming who'll come to your rescue, let alone one who'll do the dirty work for you. A precept that's been pounded into my head with a twenty-ton mallet since I first saw the light of day. Still, as I stare at the detritus¹ floating around my calves, I wish this wasn't the case.

Gritting my teeth, I wade deeper into the frigid waters of Lake Geneva. I stifle a sneeze. Despite the ungodly hour, I don't want to draw anyone's attention, especially when I'm supposed to be safely tucked in bed back at school. Last time I got caught on a little outing, Sister Marie-Clémence had me do penitence at four every morning for a month. Not that I dislike my dates with the Lord—I sign myself in case He's listening—but at the ripe old age of seventeen, I need all the beauty sleep I can get.

¹ Loose accumulation of silt.

The reeds sway with every one of my movements in a sleepy waltz, oblivious to the small knife in my hand.

"I'm so very sorry," I murmur to them as I go about my reaping, "but it's for your own good."

Or at least the good of the school's greenhouse. For two weeks now, I've seen our plants—those precious beings I've tenderly watched grow—inexplicably wilt and darken, and nothing either I or Sister Marie-Bénédicte have done has helped.

"And so you must understand," I tell the alga as I snip off one of its tendrils.

As I reach into my pocket, the glass container slips out and falls into the water.

"Saint George's balls!" I mutter through clenched teeth. "That's all I needed."

Thankfully, I find the vial floating amongst the rushes and fish it out without any other incident. My sample safely stored away, I plow through the weeds in search of my next victim. I sigh. Doesn't look like anything here has been infected, which brings me back to square one.

I stare up at the Alps, wondering whether I should check uphill instead for the source of the disease. The sun peeks over the Rochers de Naye, firing its blood-orange rays at me, like a prison guard on an escapee; a definite sign I've been gone too long.

I put away my tools and make for the shore, when something catches my eye. Amongst the rushes' thin stems is a dark patch of algae I've never seen before. Intrigued, I make my way over and pick a few strands. Odd... The algae have the same consistency as moss...

As I reach for my knife once again, something big and round pops out of the water a foot away, gelatinous eyes staring straight at me.

I gasp, let go of the knife, and stumble back. I slip on the muddy floor of the lake and fall into the reeds, gulping down some of the foul water.

"Help," I squeak. I lurch for the lake's bank and manage to make it to solid ground. "Help!"

My weak cries must have gotten someone's attention, for the next thing I know, a gendarme's² standing next to me while another's fishing out the body.

"Your name?" the potbellied officer asks me through his thick mustache.

"M-M-Morgan," I manage to say.

"Last name?"

"P-P-Pen..." I sneeze, and some of the water that has filled up my hip boots squishes out.

"You want to write it down?" the gendarme asks, handing me his notepad.

Teeth chattering, I shake my head. "D-D-Drag-g-gon," I manage to say.

The man's eyebrows lower dangerously, blotting out his beady eyes. "Listen, missy, if you think you're being funny..."

"Pendrag-g-gon," I say again, tearing my eyes away from the scene below, where an ambulance has arrived. But I can't get the sight of the bloated body out of my mind, the girl's porcelain skin striated with black veins as if she's shot herself up with ink. I shiver.

"Do you need another cover?" the officer asks me.

"N-No, th-thank you." I don't think anything can dispel the cold I'm feeling, and, never having gotten ill, I'm not afraid of sickness.

"What were you doing here?" the officer continues, licking his pen.

"S-Sampling."

"The water?"

I shake my head. "Macrophytes. For p-pollution."

"And that's when you found it," the man says, taking copious notes.

"Agnès," I say, my voice catching.

² Police officer.

“Excuse me?” The gendarme’s pen has stopped over his notebook.

“Agnès Deschamps,” I say, watching the people pack her body up. “She was my classmate.”

I don’t have to see the gendarme to know what he’s thinking. I’ve never been very good at making friends, concentrating instead on not getting bullied all the time. A little investigating and he’ll find out how, just last week, I broke down and punched a molar out of Agnès in gym class after she’d slammed the volleyball in my face, twice. An act I came to regret immediately with the relentless retaliation that followed. An act I regret even more now.

For there’s no doubt I’m going to be their suspect number one.



The room is small, gray, with a camera stuck in one of the ceiling’s corners like some fat spider. The desk is cold under my fingers as I wait, wait for the detective to come question me again, to accuse me of doing the worst of things, things I’ve never even imagined, as he waits for me to break down. But what he doesn’t know is that I’m used to this type of treatment. All I need to do is keep my mouth shut and wait for the nightmare to stop.

Except this time, it’s not ending, and the hours creep by while images of Agnès’s corpse float about in my mind.

You could always plead guilty. I’m sure they’d move you then.

“And be in jail for the rest of my life?” I retort. “For something I didn’t do? No thanks. I just need to survive through this, like I have with everything else, and then I’ll be free. I won’t let you jeopardize this, so shut up.”

For once in my life, my alter ego—the one I like to pretend is my guardian angel—complies.

The door slams open, and the inspector strides in. He slaps his file down, and a few pictures jump out onto the table.

Without meaning to, I find myself staring once again at Agnès’s ballooned body as it lay on the shore like a stranded blowfish. I swallow the bile that rises up my throat and force myself to look up into the little man’s steely eyes.

“Consider yourself lucky,” he says, his fetid stale-tobacco breath wafting over to me.

Lucky? I stare at him, wide-eyed. What happened? Did Agnès miraculously resurrect?

“I don’t know who your parents know,” the inspector continues, “but you can tell them that when I find definite proof of your involvement, I will come for you.”

My parents are here? I straighten up in my seat. My parents actually came to see me? For the first time since I found Agnès’s body, I feel my heart pound against my rib cage like a boxer on a sandbag.

“A mute lawyer,” the cop growls, glaring past my shoulders. “I’ve seen it all.”

A tall shadow makes its way through the still-open door. I look around in time to see Dean, my family’s lawyer, walk up to me. My heart leaps at the sight, and I want to rush to him, throw myself into his arms where I know I’ll be safe, but I hold myself back.

Despite the circumstances, he seems collected. But then, in all my years knowing him, I’ve never seen a single hair of his stand out of line. He motions for me to get up, and, like a good soldier, I obey at once.

Without even acknowledging the seething detective, he shuffles me down the hallways under the other officers’ disapproving stares. I hunch over, hating all those judging looks, but Dean sets his arm around my shoulders protectively, and I know I’m going to be all right.

It’s not until we step outside and the late summer breeze tickles my face that I open up.

“Are they here?” I ask Dean, following him down the steps toward a black car.

He pauses and looks down at me, his dark eyes inscrutable, then shakes his head. My shoulders slump. No. Of course not. My parents have never bothered to come see me in all my years at the boarding school. Why would a little incident like the murder of a classmate make them change their *modus operandi*?

I try not to show how much this hurts, however expected it may be, and smile at Dean as I pass him to get into the open car. The leather sighs as I slump into the seat, and I slide over to let Dean sit next to me. God knows what's going on inside that elegant head of his. Something brilliant and devious, I'm sure, or he'd never have been hired by my family. Yet somehow I feel like he understands me, that he knows me like no other person does, and for that I'm grateful.

"Back to school?" I ask.

Dean shakes his head, and I let myself unclench my hands. I don't think I'm up to facing Sister Marie-Clémence's wrath or the accusatory looks of the rest of the school. The momentary relief vanishes, however, when I realize what this actually means.

I swallow hard. "H-Home?"

Dean gives a curt nod. As I feared.



Lake Michigan at our back, the limousine that's taking us from the airport to my parents' house is eating the miles at a solid clip. I stare outside the windows without paying attention to anything. I can't keep my thoughts from returning to the daunting prospect of meeting my parents for the first time since being sent away, despite spending a whole day flying over the Atlantic to get used to the idea.

Once upon a time, I would have been brimming with anticipation, but something tells me that, after having been accused of murder, hugs and kisses are not what's on the *menu du jour*.³

"You don't think they've prepared a surprise party for me?" I ask with a tense smile.

Without looking at me, Dean pats my hand while remaining focused on whatever business my parents have for him. I look over at the foldable table before him, strewn with papers and maps, and lose interest. There are more important things at hand, such as preserving my own life, however others might disagree.

I clear my throat. "Does Wisconsin have the death penalty?"

I redden at the squeakiness of my voice. But when faced with the possibility of the electric chair, I'm afraid it's hard to keep up my composure.

My question, however mousy it might have sounded, draws Dean away from his work. His eyes look me over carefully. Then a tiny smile lifts a corner of his lips, and he shakes his head.

The Gordian knot that my stomach's become loosens somewhat. I return Dean's smile, then look back out the tinted windows at the rolling hills of yellow grass, the sharp angles of the city of Fond du Lac rising behind them like uneven teeth. I wipe my hands on my jeans as the car speeds past the first rows of Monopoly houses that ring the outside perimeter of the town.

A large, dark monolith of a residence rises before us. The gates open before the car can even stop, and a few moments later, I find myself standing before the empty porch steps.

Heart thumping, I follow Dean inside the quiet hallway, where a minuscule, ghostlike servant awaits. Eyes downcast, she presses her tiny body against the wall as Dean walks by, as if afraid to be seen.

"Nice meeting you," I whisper before Dean and I make a turn into another, wider hallway.

My words echo in the still air, and I repress a shiver. What is this place? Are people not allowed to talk here? Do my parents only hire mutes? I grimace. All I know about them is what everyone else knows,

³ Menu of the day.

which is to say not much. They're very rich, and travel lots, and from the limousine and private jet we used, I would assume in style.

Looking around the mazelike house, I think "eccentric" is a better term. Displayed along every wall are hundreds of artifacts from all over the world. If it weren't so quiet, I'd think we were in a museum. As it is, the whole place is more of a mausoleum—an apt setting for my demise.

We make another turn and find ourselves before a large, dark wooden staircase. The plush carpet muffles our footfalls as we go up to the second floor. As I step onto the landing, I get dizzy and waver. I fling out my hand to catch myself on the wall, but knock down the bust of some long-dead bearded man instead.

In a blur of movement, Dean catches both the old man's head and my arm before either of us can crash to the floor.

"Thank you," I breathe.

I didn't think the idea of finally seeing my parents after all these years was going to affect me this much. I thought—I hoped—I would be immune to all feeling for them by now. But no matter what I may tell myself, my body can't lie.

After a pause, Dean lets me go, though he keeps close to me. I force air back into my lungs as we arrive before a set of imposing doors. With a final look in my direction, Dean knocks on the wooden panel and opens it.

My mouth runs dry. After a moment's hesitation, I follow the lawyer into a library, the parquet floor reflecting the multitude of lights from the chandeliers above. Lining the red-papered walls are ceiling-high shelves filled with books.

Two dark shapes in the back of the room draw my eyes away from the threatening volumes. I wish I were brave enough to run over to them and finally hug them, as I always do in my dreams, but I'm too scared of their reaction and remain frozen.

"I do believe your daughter's here," says the man, leaning against a high-backed chair in which a small woman sits reading.

"You married me. Hence, she's yours as well," the woman replies.

They're both wearing matching black clothes that look straight out of one of those Victorian romance novels some of the girls at school sometimes snuck in. Frilly blouses cinched in tight jackets, tight pants for him, and a billowing skirt for her with so many ruffles one might mistake her for a doll—except for the leather army boots.

The man's upper lip twitches. For a split second, I see disgust etched in my stepfather's features, and I try not to flinch.

"Well, what have you got to say?" says my mother, her black-lined eyes never leaving the pages of her newspaper.

I feel the sting of tears despite myself. I take a deep, shaky breath, pull my shoulders back, and raise my chin. "I didn't do it."

Mother looks up then, her unblinking stare boring into me. After having the time to do two Paternosters and an Ave Maria in my head to calm myself down, she finally speaks again. "Just go to your room."

Not exactly the warm welcome I'd imagined, but at least they haven't executed me on sight. Which, relatively speaking, is a rather good turn of events.