

CHAPTER 1

I strut up the grassy hill, biting on my lower lip like I can't wait to sink my teeth into a frosted chocolate cake, tall and confident in a way I've never felt, long hair swaying in tandem with my hips. And there Arthur lies, looking beautiful in his sleep, peaceful, his long lashes casting shadows on his stubbly cheeks. Completely unaware of my presence.

Worry flashing in my violet eyes, I look around the moonlit field. But all around is quiet, undisturbed by my sudden presence. I am a shadow within a dream. If only a strange dream.

I kneel beside the sleeping form in a rustle of clothes. My fingers brush against his temple, lightly trace the line of his jaw.

I frown. I wouldn't dare something like that, would I? Even though...

I lean down, brush my mouth against Arthur's, hands slipping in his hair. I smile wickedly as he instinctively turns his head towards me, enjoying the effect I have on him, even in his sleep. I graze his shirt hesitantly, as if afraid to touch him.

Or afraid to touch his knight's uniform, a small voice says inside me.

Arthur's eyes fly open, ghostly grey in the moon's silvery light. I pause briefly as his face registers surprise. Then my smile grows warmer, lips parting slightly.

"What—" Arthur starts, but I lean down again, cutting his question off with a second kiss.

His arms are suddenly around my waist, wrapping me into a tight hug.

A wave of cold fear washes through me. This should definitely not be happening!

With a satisfied laugh, I press his hands back down, practically pinning him beneath me. I bite playfully on my lower lip, then motion for him to take his shirt off. Arthur tries to kiss me again, but with a predatory grin I push him back down. Even in the moonlight I can tell his cheeks are flushed. My tongue darts over my lips, showing a glimpse of fangs.

"No, Arthur, it's a trap!"

But Arthur can't hear my silent warning. I hear his quick intake of breath, heart beating wildly at the jugular. Despite my fear for him, I can't help but feel absolutely disgusted by him. How could he even think for a moment that I would—

With a low grunt, Arthur kicks his leg out, pulling me down at the same time, then rolls us over until he's the one straddling me, a vicious-looking dagger at my pale neck.

"Who are you?" he growls.

The creature snarls, its jaws unhinged as a pair of saber-toothed incisors push through from behind the first row of teeth. Then, quick as a snake, the Fey wrestles itself free, and strikes.

CHAPTER 1

I wake up with a start, my warning cry still echoing in my head. It takes me a moment to realize I'm not on the grassy hill anymore, but inside a dark and narrow cave, the rocky floor hot against my back. My home.

"Sounds like you had an interesting dream," Keva's sardonic voice says across from me.

With a grimace, I push myself into a sitting position, my fraying dress clinging to my sweaty body like seaweed.

"Did you dream of Arthur again?" she asks.

"None of your business," I mutter.

"That means yes."

My gaze slides outside to the wide desert that separates us from an uninterrupted line of rolling hills. All grey. All seemingly empty.

But Keva and I both know better.

"What was it this time that it got you moaning and rolling on the floor like a demented woman?" Keva asks.

"Any signs of the portal being used?" I ask instead, despite knowing the answer already. We wouldn't be talking here right now if there had been.

"I asked you first. What did you dream about? What did Arthur do to you? Or what did you do to him?"

I feel myself blush, and the stones that litter the ground between us burst into thousands of pellets.

"Morgan!" Keva shrieks, diving for cover.

"I'm sorry," I say, mortified. I force my thoughts to calm down, willing the rocks to keep still. "I didn't mean..."

Keva grunts. "You never do, do you?"

"You know I can't control my powers since—"

"Stop using that excuse all the time," Keva says, sitting back up. "It's getting real old."

I wince at the sight of the tiny cuts bleeding down the left side of her face. "Well, it's all I've got," I say. "Besides, this is your fault."

Keva's jaw drops. "My fault?"

"You're the one who keeps...keeps making all these unladylike innuendos."

"Well, it's not like there's anything better to do around here," she says, prodding her face, and turning white as her fingers come back bloody. "You've completely disfigured me!" she shrieks.

I cringe, wishing the cavern's walls could swallow me whole. Keva's here because of me. And if it weren't for her, I'd have languished down here, alone for all eternity, feeling...empty. "I said I was sorry," I say lamely.

Keva breathes forcefully through her nose. "It's OK," she says with great effort. "I'm willing to forgive you this time. If you tell me what I want to know."

I repress a defeated sigh. "What does it matter if I dreamed of him or not? It's not like it's going to change anything."

Not after what I've done to him. Not when he could be—

"I knew it!" Keva exclaims, sounding like a fan who's just obtained her idol's favorite boxers. "What did you dream you guys were doing together, then?"

"It wasn't me," I mumble.

"What do you mean it wasn't you?"

"Exactly that," I say. And, because I know she's not going to drop the subject until I've told her everything, I blurt out, "It looked like me, but it wasn't. It moved differently, talked differently, even her kiss was different, and so—"

"Wait, hold on. The one that was you—"

"But wasn't," I emphasize, annoyed.

"—was kissing Arthur?" Even in the cave's dimness I can see Keva's eyes sparkle. "But it wasn't like yours, so that means..." She gasps. "You guys have kissed before! When? How? And why did you never tell me?"

I look away, wishing we'd never broached the topic, and grow suddenly still. My eyes narrow on a dark pinprick smudging the dirty-white sky above the distant hills. Surely it can't be a flying demon? In all our time down in Hell, neither Keva nor I have ever seen one. Then again, we haven't dared explore very far, either. Blinking owlishly, I lean slightly forward, but in the span of a breath, whatever it was disappears.

"How could you have done this to me?" Keva continues, her rant building up steam. "You know how I've been rooting for you two from the very start, or at least since I found out you weren't actually related. And here you are—"

"Shhh," I tell her, all senses alert. If it was a demon, and it somehow spots us, it'll take it no time to fly over to our lonely mountain spire. And our tiny cave won't give us any protection then.

"Don't you shush me!" Keva explodes, voice bouncing off the stone walls like gunshots.

At this point, there's no reasoning with her anymore.

"I didn't tell you anything because it didn't mean anything," I say in a harsh whisper. "We were out past curfew with a stolen pickup, and there was a cop. We needed a distraction, so he kissed me. That's all there is to it."

And all I want to say, I silently add, rubbing at the tight knot in my chest that appears whenever I think about Arthur.

"That's all there is to it, huh?" Keva repeats, oozing sarcasm. "Funny. It took you over twenty words to explain that to me, which, in your case, means you were rambling. And that, Morgan, implies that the kiss did mean something. At least to you."

"Drop it!" I say sharply, and immediately regret my tone of voice at the hurt that flashes on Keva's face.

I lean back against the wall, feeling suddenly tired. At this rate, we're going to drive each other completely crazy. We need to do something. I need to do something.

I stare at Keva's smudged face, pale beneath the grime. She's sacrificed her life in the human world to save me from myself, and now I need to return the favor. Even if it's not in the way she imagines. Whatever it was that I saw in the sky may have been a false alarm, but it may not always be so.

I take a deep breath, my mind made up. "The Gates haven't opened since you've joined me here—"

"Joined?" Keva snorts. "You mean forced, contrived, threatened, coer—"

"—and whoever carved those journal entries on the steles outside hasn't returned," I continue. "Which leaves us at an impasse."

My fists clench and unclench on my lap as my gaze slides over to the large rock that stands halfway to the edge of the cliff. It is one of ten such carved boulders we've

discovered, telling of someone's investigations into the human abductions which I know my brother Mordred is involved with. I had hoped that whoever authored these accounts would know why Carman decided to open the Gates to the underworld. But he or she hasn't shown up since we decided to squat this cozy little piece of Hell.

Keva snaps her fingers together, drawing my attention back to her. "You're scheming on your own again," she says accusingly. "Tell me what kind of insane plan you're hatching, so I can tell you how crazy you are, before you do anything stupid."

I nod slightly. "I was thinking that we can't keep wasting our time waiting here," I say. "Not while Carman's out plotting to do...whatever it is she wants to do."

The witch may have imprisoned me down here, but that doesn't mean I'm totally hopeless.

"So, if our Sherlock, for some reason, doesn't want to come to us," I say, "I'm going to find Sherlock instead."

"The fact that Carman thinks you beaten could play in our favor," Keva says thoughtfully after a long silence. "She won't expect us to be going around, looking for trouble. Especially not trouble for her."

"You mean...you'd come with?" I ask, surprised.

Keva snorts. "Have you not been listening to me all this time? I am bored out of my mind in here. Any excuse so I don't have to stare another second at these walls is good enough for me."

Her eyes go round in shock, and she points outside. Fear coils in my stomach. The flying demon's back! But when I follow her shaking finger, I find myself staring instead at a column of smoke that stretches up into the distant sky like a dark scar.

"Definitely not a good sign," Keva says, betraying a hint of fear and excitement, "but a sign nonetheless. And I bet my panties that it's the one we've been waiting for."

CHAPTER 3

Darkness surrounds me, shadows shifting as I move deeper into the woods, heavy footsteps following in my tracks. I duck under an overhanging branch, and a red light flitters around me before settling momentarily on the remains of a rusty car. I watch the pixie as it admires itself in the car's broken sideview mirror before taking off again, straight up into the forest's thick canopy.

The hum of whispered prayers swells around me as I finally emerge into a wide clearing. My footsteps falter at the sight of the crowd gathered under the cloudy night sky, Fey and humans standing uneasily together, heads bowed respectfully. Someone nudges me forward and I start walking again, the throng parting at once to let me through. And as I draw closer to the glade's center, my eyes fall upon a dozen large mounds of stacked wood that have been erected there.

I've seen plenty of these not to know what they are: Funeral pyres. My throat grows suddenly tight with repressed tears. I have witnessed too many of these rites.

A sudden breeze chases the low-hanging clouds across the sky, giving the world below a glimpse of a scattering of stars. The crowd suddenly grows quiet as the stars wink out of sight, only to reappear a second later, closer than before. I watch, entranced, as scores of pixies make their descent in a solemn dance, their warm glow slowly revealing the bodies that lay atop the pyres, before finally alighting upon them like giant, shimmering mantles.

And for a moment, I picture Percy again, the way he looked when I dreamed of his funeral—peaceful despite the dark, gaping wound in his chest.

The pixies' lights suddenly vanish, as if snuffed out, leaving the assembly in total darkness. Then, a couple of heartbeats later, innumerable pops, like those of firecrackers, blast through the clearing, and the pyres burst into flames, taking our fallen soldiers with them.

I look away from the blaze, feeling sick, and find myself staring instead at the grieving faces around me.

I easily pick out other Lake High survivors among the gathered Fey, their iron-threaded uniforms reflecting the fires' light. There's fewer of them than the last time.

Lady Ysolt's there, standing in the midst of a flock of scared pages, Laura and Elias the oldest and tallest of them now. The cousins, Gareth and Gauvain, their usual mirth and bantering replaced by a double mask of pain and fury, are a few paces behind, while Hadrian, now sporting a moustache, silently cries beside them.

I tear my gaze away from the group, unable to bear their raw grief etched into every line of their bodies, and find myself staring instead at Lugh's still form. The once impeccable Fey Lord is covered in wounds and bruises, his left eye shut for good. What could have done that to him, and made it so bad that not even Blanche fleur could heal him?

Of course, there is but one answer.

Carman.

A voice I know all too well suddenly breaks the silence, spreading goosebumps down my arms.

"We are gathered here to mourn and to give thanks to our lost brothers and sisters who fought bravely at our sides," Arthur intones, his words sadly familiar.

I look frantically about the somber crowd for a glimpse of him, needing to make sure he's alright. But as almost every other time I've dreamed of him, I have to settle for simply listening to his voice.

"I would like instead to speak of their just cause, and of the courage they demonstrated in the face of adversity," Arthur continues. "For no matter how dire and precarious their situations were, never did they falter in the line of duty. Because they knew, as we all do, that we are the only ones standing between Carman and our worlds, the last hope humans and Fey alike have against her unquenchable thirst for destruction.

"It is therefore not only our obligation, but also our honor, to keep the same, unfaltering determination, and to fight until her plans are laid to waste, once and for all. But this cannot happen unless we put aside our differences and work together, Fey and knights, side by side, as our forebears did once before.

"I thus entreat you, with our fallen brothers and sisters as witnesses, to consider each other, from this day on, not as foes, but as friends and allies. Our very survival—"

A long, guttural cry cuts his speech short. "Don't make me laugh, you puny boy!" a bedraggled woman screams, spittle flying from her dry lips as she wrenches herself away from a stunned nurse. The woman points straight at me, her greying hair falling out of a loose ponytail in greasy strands. "My son died to pay for your sins, and now you're asking us to share in his fate? For what else is there for us but death, now that we can only fight with sticks and swords? Though death is all we deserve."

"Lady Elise, please," Lady Ysolt says, her voice strained.

The old woman whirls around. "I won't let you shut me up again, you filthy traitor. You know as well as I do that we're all tainted, yet you continue to parade around as if you're so bloody perfect. But no more. Percy's death should be emulated by all of us here." The woman turns her feverish gaze on the rest of the crowd. "We will cleanse this world of our ilk! Just pray that it will be enough to redeem us all."

And with another cackle, she sweeps her hand towards the fire, before whipping it back around. Bright embers follow her fingers in a sweeping arc, shooting straight into the assembly. Shrieks and startled shouts erupt as people push each other to avoid getting burned, the grass bursting into flames wherever the live coals land.

"Take the children to safety," Lady Ysolt commands as a second figure jumps into the fray—a man, looking as disheveled as the strange woman.

"We will burn away the corruption!" he shouts, a demented gleam in his eyes that reminds me of Myrdwinn.

"I really don't think a funeral is the right moment for you to make a show of yourself," Lady Ysolt says, flexing her fingers until her ogham-encased rings sparkle in response.

The man laughs. "At least these fools died before they could commit the ultimate crime," he says. "Philandering with the Fey is what got us here to begin with. It's sacrilege!" He turns to look at me, left hand held out as if asking me to join him. "And for that, we must all die," he finishes.

With a wild grin, the man snaps his hand closed, and my vision turns white as all the pyres explode, setting the whole clearing on fire.